Cyberculture and Agency in Salmawy's *Butterfly Wing*'s Elkheshen's *Sabʿat Ayyām fil Taḥrīr* Soueif's *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*

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Abstract

The "Digital Revolution" attracted much scholarly attention and production. Scores of works has been done on the revolutionary events of January 25th, 2011, in Egypt and on Cyber activism that led to it. However, this comparative study offers to explore three literary texts to analyze the impact of social media communication in the world of the texts, whether in fiction or in memory, on changes in relationships and social bonds that made collaboration and trust possible among fictional/non-fictional characters. Mohamed Salmawy's novel *Butterfly Wings* that was published in January 2011 predicted the 25 January Revolution in Egypt. As for Hisham Elkheshen's novel *Sabʿat Ayyām fil Taḥrīr* which translates in Arabic to *7 Days in Tahrir*, was written after the ousting of Mubarak. Both are political novels that revolve around socio-political conflict and upheavals in Egypt from 2010-2011. The third work, Soueif's revolutionary memoir *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution* was originally written in English in 2012. In her Memoir, she focuses on the eighteen days of the Egyptian Revolution and her active participation in it together with the participation of some members of her family and friends. The three works reveal how weak and strong ties created relationships and social bonds across the socio-economic diversity of Egyptian population through communication technologies. Agency as a thematic preoccupation is analyzed from a feminist and a Cybercultural perspectives. The countless violations of (women's) rights, which lead to the masses calling for freedom, justice, and the overthrow of the regime are juxtaposed to the new forming bonds and relationships captured in the writings selected. The works are analyzed from a feminist cultural perspective regarding women's rights, with reference to critics including Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi, and Sally Engle Merry among others; and from a

cybercultural perspective with special emphasis on the work of Daniel Miller, Broadbent, Castells, Rheingold, and Sherry Turkle.

Keywords: *Cyber theory, Digital revolution, Feminist issues, Agency, Arabic Fiction of 2011 Revolution, Memoir, social media.*

الملخص العربى

ثقافة السيبر و الفاعلية فى اجنحة الفراشة لمحمد سلماوى و ٧ ايام فى التحرير لهشام الخشن و القاهرة:مدينتى و ثورتنا لاهداف سويف

اثارت "الثورة الرقمية" الكثير من الاهتمام الأكاديمي والإنتاج العلمي. وقد تم إنجاز الكثير من الاعمال الأدبية حول الأحداث الثورية التي وقعت في ٢٥ يناير ٢٠١١ في مصر، وحول النشاط السيبراني الذي أدى إلى تلك الأحداث. إلا أن هذا البحث يتعرض إلى دراسة مقارنة لثلاثة نصوص أدبية من أجل استكشاف توثيق الأعمال الأدبية فى تحليل تأثير التواصل عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في عالم الكتاب الثلاثة، سواء في الرواية أو في السيرة الذاتية، على التغيرات في العلاقات والروابط الاجتماعية التي جعلت التعاون والثقة ممكنا بين شخصيات ليس بينهم سابق معرفة و لم يجمعهم الا الأحداث. شخصيات خيالية و غير خيالية معا".وقد تنبأت رواية محمد سلماوي "أجنحة الفراشة" التي صدرت في يناير ٢٠١١ بثورة ٢٥ يناير في مصر. أما رواية هشام الخشن "سبعة أيام في التحرير" ، فقد كتبت بعد الإطاحة بمبارك. كلاهما روايتان سياسيتان تدوران حول الصراع الاجتماعي والسياسي والاضطرابات في مصر من ٢٠١٠ إلى ٢٠١١. أما العمل الثالث، وهو مذكرات أهداف سويف الثورية "القاهرة: مدينتي، ثورتنا"، فقد كتبته في الأصل باللغة الإنجليزية عام ٢٠١٢. وتركز في مذكراتها على الأيام الثمانية عشر للثورة المصرية ومشاركتها النشطة فيها إلى جانب مشاركة بعض أعضاء عائلتها وأصدقائها. وتكشف الأعمال الثلاثة كيف خلقت الروابط الضعيفة والقوية علاقات وروابط اجتماعية عبر التنوع الاجتماعي والاقتصادي للثوار والشخصيات المصرية من خلال تكنولوجيات الاتصال. يتم تحليل الفاعلية باعتبارها انشغالًا موضوعيًا من وجهة نظر نسوية وثقافية عبر الإنترنت. إن الانتهاكات التي لا تعد ولا تحصى لحقوق (المرأة)، والتي تؤدي إلى مطالبة الجماهير بالحرية والعدالة والإطاحة بالنظام آن ذاك، تقع جنبًا إلى جنب مع الروابط والعلاقات الجديدة

التي تم التقاطها في الكتابات المختارة. ويتم تحليل الأعمال من منظور ثقافي نسوي فيما
يتعلق بحقوق المرأة، مع الإشارة إلى بعض النقاد بما في ذلك ليلى أحمد، وفاطمة المرنيسي،
وسالي إنجل ميري وغيرهم؛ ومن منظور الثقافة السيبرانية مع التركيز بشكل خاص على
أعمال دانييل ميلر، وبرودبنت، وكاستيلز، ورينغولد، وشيري تورك
الكلمات المفتاحية: ثقافة الانترنت ، الثورة الرقمية، القضايا النسوية، الفاعلية، الرواية

Introduction

The Arab Spring in Egypt was one of the most exciting yet petrifying times in Modern Egyptian history. Quite a few Egyptian writers depicted this period in history in Arabic novels, plays, memoirs and poems[2]. There were also several works written in English. One of the most crucial periods of Modern Egyptian history, some critics refer to this revolution as the Arab Awakening, while others, disapprovingly, refer to it as the "Digital Revolution" or "The Facebook Revolution". In Kenneth Pollack's book *The Arab Awakening* (2011) he points out that

> No one could have predicted that the match struck by Mohammed Bouazizi [Tunisian street vendor] to set himself afire … on December 17, 2010, would ignite the entire Arab world, but the kindling had been laid and was there for all to see years before (2011, p. 3).

What erupted in Tunisia soon spread to Egypt, then Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

Pollack further elaborates,

> What happened in the Arab world in 2011 was stunning, Wondrous things happened. Tragic things happened… [and] only time will tell if they were good, bad, or something else entirely. The result is that the Middle East will never be the same. And because the Middle East through its energy supplies and central location – affects every other part of the world, neither will anything else. As breathtaking as the events of 2011 were, they are only the beginning of the changes that will likely take place in the region in the decades ahead (2011, p. xi).

Indeed, the movement affected almost the entire Middle East especially Syria, Libya, and Yemen and till this moment conflict and civil war are still raging. In Egypt, the tremors and aftershocks were felt almost daily

since 25 January 2011 until the new regime came to power. Gilbert Achcar is of the same opinion as Pollack as he writes: "the bursting of the masses onto the political stage…had no precedent in …the land of the pyramids…It is too soon to pronounce the consequences" (2013, p. 15).

It is no surprise, then that Egypt witnessed a plethora of significant fictional works and memoirs written on the 2011 Revolution in Egypt. Examples include Mohamed Salmawy's novel *Agnehat Alfarasha* (2011) which was translated in 2014 *as Butterfly Wings*, Hisham Elkheshen's novel *Sabʿat Ayyām fil Taḥrīr* (2011) [*7 Days in Tahrir*] and Ahdaf Soueif's revolutionary memoir *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution* (2012) which is a *tour de force*. There were also Ezzeldein Fishere's Dystopia *Bab elkhoroug* [*Exit Door*, 2012], Donia Kamal's *Cigarette Number Seven* [*Sigara Sab3a*, 2012], Wael Ghonim's memoir *Revolution 2.0* (2012), Yasser Ahmed's *Gomhoriat elkerd alahmar* [*The Red Ape Republic*, 2014], Omar Robert Hamilton's *The City Always Wins* (2017), and Alaa Al Aswany's *Gomhoriat Ka'na* [*The as If Republic*, 2018]to name only a few.

Broadbent reported in 2012 that studying social media reveals that users will start addressing themselves to audience with weak ties. However, the January 2011 events already took place with users addressing weak ties, consolidating friendships, and creating an avalanche of information that led to transformation. Therefore, this study attempts to explore three texts on the Egyptian Revolution in order to track developing social bonding and relationships among the characters using social media and in the heated context of events.

From a Cybercultural perspective, scholarly work covered activism and social network platforms includes Amira Abdelgalil's *Cyber-feminism and facebook: A comparative study of Arab Women's Organization activity in Tunisia, Lebanon, and Egypt* (2018), Rita Stephan's "Arab Women and Cyberfeminism" (2017), Maha Tazi "The Rise of Fourth-Wave Feminism in the Arab region? *Cyberfeminism and Women's Activism at the Crossroads of the Arab Spring"* (2020) as well as John Palfery's "Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere: Politics, Culture, and Dissent" (2014). However, from all the literature on Cyberculture and political activism we choose *Digital Anthropology* by Horst & Miller (2012) and Immanuel Castells *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (2012) because they offer

means of describing collaboration online and how relationships lead to transformation.

At the time of writing, scholarship is wide and expansive intersecting the political events with social media, socio-political issues, the role of women and the marginalized among many other themes and issues. Our aim in this paper is to elaborate on the previous scholarship on Cyberculture but studying the literary text instead of social network sites (SNS). In addition, our study is quite unique as it focuses on two different genres, two novels and a memoir, offering a more in-depth analysis of accounts of communication technologies in the three selected texts that were hardly compared in an earlier study, from a Cyberculture and feminist perspective.

This study focuses on two Egyptian novels and a Memoir; Mohamed Salmawy's latest work *Butterfly Wings* which was published early January 2011 and which in fact predicted the 25 January Revolution. Salmawy's choice of title reflects the theory of Edward Lorenz in 1972 which explained how one small event in one corner of the globe could turn into an atmospheric phenomenon in another part of the world. Thus, the flapping wings of one tiny creature like a butterfly may cause a tornado. This is exactly what happened in Tunisia; one man's rebellious action started a whole wave of revolutions that ignited the Arab Spring. As for Hisham Elkheshen's novel *Sabʿat Ayyām fil Taḥrīr* [7 *Days in Tahrir*] was written immediately after the ousting of Mubarak; therefore, it is one of the early novels to depict the Egyptian Jan 25th events. Both novels revolve around socio-political upheavals in Egypt in the wake of the Arab Spring. Thirdly, Soueif's compelling Memoir *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution* was written in English in 2012. In this Memoir, she focuses on the eighteen days of the Egyptian Revolution and her active participation in it together with the participation of some members of her family, friends, and other demonstrators she became acquainted with. The three works reveal how agency was built up during the action via communication technologies and they also portray countless violations of human rights in the country in order to justify their call for a change in regime. There is special focus on women's rights, the oppression and sexual harassment of women as well as men's rights and that of demonstrators who were peacefully calling for freedom, justice, and the overthrow of the Mubarak regime.

The rationale for this selection of works is that they represent three different phases of the Revolution; *Butterfly Wings* was written prior the Revolution, *7 Days in Tahrir* was written after the Revolution (March 2011) and Soueif's Memoir was published in 2012, after the Revolution. The three works offer different selections of the events and comparing them reveals shared preoccupations and interpretations of the events from the writers' perspectives which is far from identical. The two novels were written by male authors mostly scanning the events and kinds of relationships forming online and offline, and interactions that made it possible. They are written in Arabic to address the Egyptian reader who lived through these events. They offer an invitation to think and reconsider; to relive and relish a culture of trust and warmth that quickly developed while occupying the soft spaces on social media and the urban space of Tahrir. The last work, namely the memoir, is written in English, published in England, and addressed to global readership. While Ahdaf Soueif is known as a powerful novelist, she chooses to weave the events as a memoir highlighting the aspect of documentation of events and insisting on the originality and subjectivity of her experience as an activist-writer, participant- observer and reporter of this important historical moment. Therefore, this paper is a comparative study in all sense of the word attempting to read the actions and passions in the making of events and how evolving bonds of trust and exchange were boosted through communication and urban space occupation. The study is particularly sensitive to the digital stage revolutionaries made use of as they promoted access to information, and interactive participation, deploying the online social media, and the new digital technologies which had a significant role in communication by virtue of their immediacy, and high possibilities, wide outreach, and connectivity. This enabled the Arab youth, in general, and Egyptian *shabab* (young people) to find alternative means of expression aiming towards social and political transformation.

On Social Media

Analysis of social media use reveal how it created social bonds in the selected works. It attempts to explore how it was understood as a means of creating individual/social agency. Communication media circulated information and impacted relationships leading to mobilization; and it was captured in works of art, to unfold

cooperation models and the demography of its users. Research continues to explore thematic components of the revolution in relation to feminism and human rights only to deepen the discussion on agency as an impact of communication technology on the role of communication technology as the means of weaving around relationships of trust and collaboration as implied in the three writings selected.

Tahrir Square, Soueif states, has been "our Holy Grail for forty years" (2012, p. 10). She uses the Arabic word for Square which is 'Midan' throughout her memoir. Soueif states "And the Midan feeds us, nourishes us." (2012, p. 57) Moreover, she in this Memoir speaks highly of the young people "the shabab" in her family and at large in Egypt who filled Tahrir Square, as well as other cities in Egypt, and were undoubtedly the *tour de force* behind this Revolution and so well versed in technology. This young generation she writes,

> are more clever and cool and effective than we ever were. We, the older revolutionaries, have been trying since '72 to take Tahrir. They are doing it. They're going to change the world. We follow them and pledge what's left of our lives to their effort (2012, p.24– 25).

Her nieces, nephews (Alaa, Salma, Mariam, Sana, and Mona) and her two sons (Omar and Ismail) play a significant role in the events together with millions of young people in the country (2012, p. 117). Ahdaf Soueif's son Omar conversing with her remarks on February 1st 2011;

> "'Would you have imagined the revolution would look like this?' he says. All the ills which plagued our society in the last decades have vanished overnight. Young men, who a month ago could have been thought a menace to any woman on the street, were chivalry itself. People offer each other biscuits, dates, water. People chat, people pick up litter. We revel in the inclusiveness, the generosity, the humour that come so easily to us. Students, businessmen, waiters, academics, farmers, civil servants, unemployed – we are all here together, all doing what we've not been able to do for decades: each and every one is speaking, acting, expressing themselves and insisting on being counted." (2012, p. 56)

There was an amazing sense of unity, solidarity and amongst demonstrators revealing patterns of bonding and collaboration made possible via digital communication and beautifully captured in the fictional and non-fiction writings on the revolution. Of all the three selected works in this research Soueif's Memoir is the most riveting and heart-wrenching. As Soueif is standing in Tahrir Square she runs into acquaintances, and reporters and she states, "Another journalist is in tears and tells Ahdaf: 'For thirty years we've been discussing revolution – and if a revolution can be "good". And – here it is you've just done it' (2012, p. 57). Sherine Mazloum comments that the 2011 Revolution "revived the Egyptians' sense of belonging and commitment to their country" (2015, p. 207). The Notes at the end of her work are particularly useful for all readers who want to understand thoroughly all the details of the Egyptian Revolution as well as the important digital links. According to Roger Bromley, "The Notes at the back, full of references to YouTube, the internet, Facebook and blogs, give the sense of immediacy and urgency with a stress on the highly mediated nature of the experience" (2015, p. 225).

In all the selected works in this study there are myriads of references to the internet, all social media, and mobile messages. The narrator plainly states in *Butterfly Wings* that mobile messages and the internet were used by a political activist like al-Zayni even when he is detained in prison to communicate with the protestors.

> It was through *texting* that Dr. Ashraf al-Zayni's *messages* [emphasis added] were transferred by the political activists to the masses, and it was through *the internet and telephone* [emphasis added] that events of *torture* [emphasis added] against the detainees were circulated (Salmawy, 2014, p. 179).

The above extract from Salmawy's novel highlights the importance of the internet and mobile phones in communicating with the protestors vital information to mobilize and unify their action. It was not communication at their leisure, violence on site created an urgency for intense communication that led to public mobilization and therefore political transformation. Some of the various references to the digital world occur when the narrator writes that some of the young protestors: Ayman, Hala, Salwa and Hassan were accused of the following by a pro-regime newspaper: "along with other volunteers…were *sending out text messages*…whenever an activist used *the Internet: the emails* that the security agencies saw were not the originals, but had been rewritten automatically to mislead. (Salmawy, 2014, p.173). This information

further inflamed the situation. The masses were not content "to stay at home, but took to the streets in demonstrations that spread throughout Cairo…" (Salmawy, 2014, p. 173).

A few pages later the narrator adds, "The fight moved to the *electronic realm: the Internet* [emphasis added] and *SMS messages* [emphasis added]. The foreign press reported that cassette tapes had brought down the Shah of Iran in the 1970s, and *the cell phone would bring down the regime in Egypt* [emphasis added]" (Salmawy, 2014, p. 176). The last extract reveals the powerful role and impact of mobiles and the digital world in mobilizing the masses and achieving political change which will be further elaborated in the second section of the paper.

Back in the early 2000s, Pierre Levy describes the impact of information transaction online, in its overwhelming intensity and uncensored variety, as a "second deluge" (Cyberculture, pp. ix-xvii). In his extended metaphor, he tried to question the roles of Noah and the ship, referring to a locus of leadership and orientation as well as a hub hosting the survivors, respectively. He is one of the earliest Cyber theorists to posit that the internet does not create change all by itself, but when the conditions are set for transformation, it magnifies and complexifies the experience speeding up change. Within the dichotomy of arguments, whether social media is totally used for entertainment versus the deterministic view that it fosters westernization and capitalism everywhere, Levy's views are summoned to reveal that it is the context of each case that reveal the impact of internet use in its social context. Analysis here attempts to unfold how the role of social media was mediated in writings about the revolution.

Hisham Elkheshen's novel also captures how communication channels (both online and the traditional landlines) developed and intensified relationships over the course of the 18 days in Tahrir. The novel captures the common communication networks and allows for an exploration of how networks boost human cooperation as a classic argument in Cyber- culture studies (Broadbent, 2011; Castells, 2009; Rheingold, 2002). It begins on 24 January and depicts how "digital youth" like Shereen and Bassem are preparing on Facebook for the demonstrations of 25th January and the novel ends on 19 of March with a referendum on the constitution. There are numerous references to communication channels and social media in Elkheshen's novel such as Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook as well as landlines, national

television, TV News channels and the Radio. Elham and Abdallah react to direct mobile phone messages as means of mobilization (Elkheshen, 2011, p. 13,14, 26, 31, 51, 104, 116, 117) when the government attempts to control the revolution through severing internet and mobile services for more than a day are also documented amidst demonstrations and violence (Elkheshen, 2011, p. 51). This blockade aggravated and inflamed the masses even more.

Severing the internet and mobile phone connections by state authorities was a common event reported in two of the selected works (Elkheshen's 2011, p.51-52, Soueif, 2012, p.27-29). This implies that it marks a turning point and a major attempt to contain the socio-political situation. Young social media users take to Tahrir, downtown Cairo and site of the 18 days of the revolution, and act or react according to the messages, tips and calls from influencers or high nodes of action. When the connection was lost, orientation was disseminated, and they lost the link that made mobilization possible. Interestingly, the absence of communication and connection created a gap that was only filled with more people from different age groups joining the Tahrir demonstrations. Only Soueif attempted to explain that "fear for the people in [Tahrir]" instigated the crowds to join them to ensure demonstrators' safety. It is ironic, in this case, that more people went to Tahrir Square instead of safely surfing the net or Facebook for news from the social media. In other words, the internet fueled the course of events both ways, when connected and when severed.

However, despite the role of digital technologies and their contribution to political organization, we are by no means suggesting that the digital stage had been the sole tool of transformation or the only force the instigated social and political action. In fact, such a claim would risk ignoring both the history of political action way before the advent of the "Arab Spring", and the political organization of Egyptian masses like the workers, trade unions, ordinary people who took to the streets demanding justice and freedom. In her paper, "E-Orientalism: Tweeting Western Human Rights and Hacking the Arab Spring" (2014), Rasha El-leithy argues "that Western Journalism and Media exaggerated the role of the former [social media platforms] as they are the products of Western Civilization and underestimated the role of the protestors as they were still regarded as the Other. The West may be unaware of how word of mouth, landlines, and mobiles in a country like Egypt is by far faster than any kind of electronic social [m]edia" (p. 5).

She raises a dichotomy of media versus protestors to deconstruct much of El-leithy the literature reiterating the central role of media in the Egyptian Revolution as tackled in *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (2012) by Manuel Castells as one of a multitude of writings on the subject. El-leithy posits, "focusing on and exaggerating the role of the internet and social media sites in the Arab Spring is an Orientalist discourse that comes as part of the systematic (misrepresentation of the non-Western Other as backward and helpless" (2014, p. 3). However, we believe that social media played an undeniable and "uncontestable [sic incontestable] role… as tool of control and manipulation, on the one hand, and a mode of resistance on the other" (El Hamamsy, 2011, p. 454).

Literature about the role of social media in the revolution is brimming with Cyberfeminism, citizen journalism, agency, transnational/globalization, liquidating state control and political transformation. Therefore, apart from analyzing the events themselves or the tools and platforms of communication, this study addresses artistic accounts and writings on the events which allow for zooming in on how communication technologies were understood to impact users and their agency and events mediating the story of January 25th events in Egypt.

Demography and Communication

There are several stimulating characters in *7 Days in Tahrir* who live on the same street (near Tahrir Square) and who are also searching for their identities just as in *Butterfly Wings*. There is Ramez, the young Christian, who was the top of his class in the Faculty of Law and has not been appointed as an instructor or as a public attorney as he is a Copt. Nevertheless, he takes part in the demonstrations, wears a big cross, and disregards his parents' wishes not to participate. He struggles to achieve his rights together with his other neighbours: Abdullah who belongs to the Islamic Brotherhood and does not know at first where his loyalty should lie with the Brotherhood or with the protestors? There is also Sherif the Police Academy cadet - whose brother is a high-ranking officer- and is torn between his allegiance to police policies and the Egyptian civilians. Another major character is Khaled, the businessman, who fluctuates between his economic interests and the revolution. Bassem and Shereen are the only two characters who know where their allegiances lie from the beginning of the novel that is with protestors in Tahrir. Ultimately almost all the

characters overcome their conflicts and go to Tahrir Square to call for an end to corruption and demand freedom and justice. The writings depict the feelings and oscillating perspectives of youths, social media users, and how communication intensities allowed for choice, bonding and expanded the digital gap as well as the generation gap at the same time. The only site of violence was in Tahrir and on the streets, but both online and in the context of their families, characters were allowed to entertain ideas and arguments safely boosting their sense of agency for choosing their own political engagement.

In other words, the three works imply that online communication was intense and consistent but safe enough for users to change views and shift perspectives whereas Tahrir was brimming with young people in a state of urgency and self-defense to counter violence from state bodies or from other civilian groups. Both spaces, online and offline, created a context for choice, agency, and transformation.

Agency: Abstraction, Normativity, Liberation

There is an association between virtuality and empowerment/agency. In an attempt to understand how virtual communication created quick transaction and opened up possibilities for wide collaboration (i.e. user agency), Cyber theorist Daniel Miller (2011) contemplates the possibilities brought about by the normativity of communication technologies insisting on its implication of agency and liberation for users. As a digital anthropologist, he insists that the move from kinship to individualism (a much-reiterated feature in the literature on Cyber communication) does not compromise prospects for collaboration and transformation. Many emphases are on individualism, choice, and liberation with implications to power and agency rather than social fragmentation. He resorts to understanding money as a possible historical precedence to the power of virtuality: "[the] prior and established anthropological debate about the consequences of money for humanity …help[s] conceptualize the consequences of the digital" (Miller & Horst, 2012, p. 5). In *Cairo* and in *7 Days*, there are many instances of Facebook and Twitter users joining the demonstrations on site because they had the "virtual experience" of giving their attention to the events and collecting information about it including following the leading figures online. Under the urgency of the moment and the heat of events, people who just met bonded easily for they shared tips, slogans, and chants as well as warm and cheering hugs.

A possible explanation appears in the *Philosophy of Money*, Keith Hart (2000) in this early writing, he taps on enlightenment ideals of liberty and agency through virtual transaction. According to him, money was always virtual expanding possibilities of abstraction around geographical localities. It marks the reduction of quality to quantity laying down the foundation for differentiation. In other words, bringing all users to the same space reveals their differences. When everyone is on Facebook (the same plane of interaction), patterns of socio-cultural context of use become distinct on this same plane. Alakhdar relates the culture specific Facebook use of offering condolences and announcing death in the family for Egyptian users (2018, pp. 50-53). Different cultures develop their own norms in virtual space.

Similarly, money is abstract, deterritorialized, cheap and only efficient in carrying out transaction. Hart observes that a potential for human liberation reunites money with social bonds so the digital can work both ways, exasperates the problem or forms part of the solution allowing for free transaction away from capitalist and state mainstream systems. Just like commodification leading to increase in material culture, the digital leads to an increase in visual culture, but escapes commodification through allowing cheap and more complex knowledge engagement and experiences. User agency is highlighted through the ease of accessing knowledge and forming social bonds in ways that interact with reality instead of mirroring it. Pierre Levy (2000) referred to the "complexification" of experiences through the digital leading to liberation and empowerment. Classic examples include art culture with a rise in sharing commodified music to an extent of de-commodifying it. Open software and networking platforms, wikis and SNS (Social Network Sites) have implications on patterns of production, ownership, choice and accepted cultural norms (pp 103-110).

By all means, the artistic depiction of SNS and their role in the Egyptian revolution was explored in relation to the formation of bonding among weak ties and emotional engagement at the time. However, the mediated documentation of media use in the three works revealed interesting implications in relation to generation-based digital gap and new social normativities. New normal social interactions like sending out calls for help or sharing resources among strangers under the urgency and heat of the moment. Later these behaviours became social norms with strangers collaborating on Facebook pages and groups to paint and restore Tahrir after the 18 days. This is how social

normativities were   brought about by communication technologies in Egypt. We have seen how individual agency is activated through the choices of Elham and Ramez to break away from their socio-economic (almost deterministic) choices. Agency slowly developed for female characters in the selected works on various levels starting with Sherine the Facebook pro-revolution enthusiast to Doha. And transformation that was brought about and ushered by a normativity in communication and bonding that was only made possible via communication technologies. Literature on Cyberculture back in 2000 to 2012, reveal that female users are the smaller population of content creators and software developers; however, they are the most intense users of SNS to bond with their families across distances and for information exchange. In other words, feminism and counterculture meet in the spectrum of individual agency and collective transformation best captured in the revolution. Known as the "Digital Revolution", the virtual aspect of agency was covered in the above section in juxtaposition with the "body" in our exploration of agency.

Marriage and Communication: A Political Allegory

Another aspect of agency that was captured in the selected works is domestic dysfunctional relations that were revealed and encountered. Whereas communication technologies created momentum and bonding during the heat of events, the two novels, *7 Days in Tahrir* and *Butterfly Wings*, underpinned unhappy marriage and personal sense of insecurity in order to double women's sense of oppression and then emancipation. In all three texts some characters are politically active while others are inactive or just beginners. During these events, some characters shift their perspective highlighting the importance of constant communication constructed around different channels to circulate Tahrir events. The writings reveal communication, of all kinds whether digital or otherwise, as an integral part for consistent personal growth of characters and plot momentum. For instance, Khaled in *7 Days in Tahrir* completely shifts his opinion and even the location of his political activism. Moreover, both female protagonists Doha Elkenany in *Butterfly Wings* and Elham Abdelhameed in *7 Days in Tahrir* do not show any interest in politics at first but gradually they begin to take part in the demonstrations that led to the revolution. Similarly, in Soueif's autobiographical book some members of her family are and have been political activists before the 2011 events while

others were totally novice. Yet almost all fictional and real characters in the three works take part in the Revolution.

Marriage as a typical political allegory is used in the two novels with different intensities. Women oppressed in marriage typically align with the subaltern and the oppressed population. True to the postcolonial roots of feminism, the patriarchal figure echoes the bigger oppressive system in a country. Both Doha and Elham are married to leading politicians in the former ruling National Democratic Party. Doha's name means, the high noon as she was born in the early morning while her surname Elkenany is one of the metaphors that usually describes Egypt (Misr elkenanah meaning an oasis with palm trees). She symbolizes the high noon of Egypt. Doha is unhappily married as her husband suffers from premature ejaculation and blames her for his condition. Her infertile and loveless marriage can be viewed as a symbol of the union of the country - as Egypt is metaphorically referred to as a woman - and the dominant Ruling Party which remained as an unproductive union for decades.

Doha is unable to ask for a divorce or even inform her family because it is considered a grave social taboo. She remains 'imprisoned' in a barren unfulfilling marriage for years as the patriarchal oppressive society does not accept women's complaints of their husband's lack of sexual encounters. Therefore, she finds refuge in her work as a fashion designer. [1]

Although Islam calls for the right to sexual satisfaction for both spouses social oppression of women does not regard this as a necessary right for wives.[4] Doha explains: "There was no warmth of attachment between her and her husband. From the first night of their marriage, their sex life had been a failure…the same thing happened; it was all over before it had begun"(Salmawy, 2014, p. 70). When she read about his condition, she realized that it was not her fault and so she detested him for making her feel guilty. She adds:

> If Medhat had been totally impotent, perhaps her family would have stood by her; shari'a law [Islamic Laws] would have supported her and the law would have treated her fairly. But when it came to premature ejaculation, our male-dominated society considered a woman who complained about such a situation, to say nothing of one who asked for a divorce, as sex-mad and immoral,

her only concern being getting more sexual pleasure than her husband provided. (Salmawy, 2014, pp. 111–12)

Just as Doha is imprisoned in this sterile marriage, the very first scene in *Butterfly Wings* depicts a demonstration in Tahrir Square where the security forces have blocked the surrounding streets and Doha finds herself entrapped in it. She is compared to the moth entrapped in her own cocoon awaiting rain like the tiger butterfly which remains dormant until rain arrives (Salmawy, 2014, 93–94). On the plane to Rome with Dr. Ashraf al-Zayni she feels again like a prisoner in a cell, and asks herself

Or was it being captive with another person and far removed from the real world? Like a prisoner whose cellmate became their closest companion. A cellmate to whom they revealed the most intimate details of their life, irrespective of the barriers that might exist between them on the outside. (Salmawy, 2014, 29–30)

Another symbolic reference, making the novel a political allegory, is that of marriage as prison and the need to break free from it. Both Ashraf and Doha seem to be symbolically imprisoned in a country that is devoid of freedom and justice. They are powerless, imprisoned and through communication, they negotiate their perspectives and claim more power and the ability to impact their surroundings. Dr. Ashraf was in fact imprisoned as a student leader during Sadat's reign. Moreover, earlier on when Doha graduated from a convent school, she was seeking emancipation from the discipline of the nuns and her mother's strict upbringing. Early in the novel, the narrator points out from Doha's point of view; "How could she abandon that for another prison in the form of marriage her mother wished for her?" (Salmawy, 2014, p. 31) Doha recalls how she opposed this marriage knot in the past. She tried to rebel against her mother's "authoritarian control" but to no avail. This sort of forced marriage is against human rights as Sally Engle Merry states (2006, p. 21). With this type of a mother whose "word was law", Doha had no agency (Salmawy, 2014, p.30). Agency promised by protesting and communication technologies, is a thematic preoccupation in the selected work. The domestic issues reflect the public/political authoritarian rule. It is tragically ironic how even older women are just as oppressive as the patriarchal society which in turn reflects the totalitarian regime, they all live under.

Most of the characters in this novel are on a grail search for the 'homeland' and a search for their identities. Ayman, for instance, the

young university student is searching for his real mother whom he thought was dead. Salmawy uses this search for the mother as a metaphor for the homeland. Again, the metaphorical interplay for the woman figure and homeland intensifies the sense of the need to free both. The narrator points out; "Just as the nation was mother, mother was also a nation. People who did not know their mother did not know their nation. They were without origin, without roots, without identity" (Salmawy, 2014, p. 10). Even in Soueif's *Cairo*, there are various references to her own deceased mother, Prof. Fatma Moussa[3], she reminisces about especially when Ahdaf is either physically or psychologically unwell, as in pages 105, 162,174, 175, and 176. Searching for or affiliating to the "mother" is an attempt to boost agency (even psychologically) for Soueif.

Agency and the Struggle against the Abuse of the female "Body"

Preoccupation with the body is third of the feminist tripartite: marriage, agency, and body (Stanford Encyclopedia). Elham Abdelhameed, in *7 Days in Tahrir* is a second wife in an '*urfi* marriage' (not an official marriage as it is not registered legally) and she is well-aware that her husband exploits her for his own sexual gratification only. Her poverty forces her to accept such a marriage. In a telephone interview with the novelist, he remarked that Elham's marriage was a form of "prostitution". In such a marriage the wife has no legal rights and could not file for divorce as it is not a legal marriage. Only in the year 2000 did it become legal for a wife in an 'urfi' marriage to ask for a divorce in Egypt. Throughout the novel there are many references to the fact that her husband perceives her simply as a "body". For instance, the narrator says "Elham has always wondered whether her husband's heart was looking for his soulmate, or whether his body desired a concubine" (Elkheshen, 2011, p. 16). In a similar strain, Soueif's work also tackles some feminist issues such as how elderly rich Arab men marry young poor girls and writes how the City has "started special services to cater for the new Gulf tourists. Including agencies for seasonal marriages to young, pretty, impoverished Egyptian women" (Soueif, 2012, p. 45). Again, agency is ignored or undermined here to give way to semi-legal (urfi marriages) and illegal pleasures.

The body is not just the locus of pleasure, Elham's husband physically abuses her as he uses violence against her too (Elkheshen, 2011, p. 48). He strikes her on the face when he could not perform well (erectile dysfunction) during sexual intercourse. This scene is reminiscent of Doha's husband who has premature ejaculation. Female bodies are sometimes used as a 'punching bag' where some males relieve their sexual frustrations or angst. Fatima Mernissi states Prophet Mohamed "advised against the use of violence toward women" (1991, p. 155). Nonetheless, domestic violence is sometimes used against women in all classes and as one researcher points out "around 30 percent of women aged 18-64 have been exposed…to at least one act of violence perpetrated by any of the three categories of perpetrators: spouse/fiance, other close individuals or strangers in private and public spaces" (UNFPA, 2015, as cited in Rateb, 2017, p. 2).

During the Revolution, Elham's husband decides to flee abroad - without even informing her - with his first wife and children for fear of persecution as he is a leading figure in the infamous ruling party and leaves Elham behind. After his sudden flight leaving her behind, Elham too starts searching for her identity and her home so she goes to Tahrir Square and joins the demonstrators. As Abouelnaga remarks, "the 25 January Revolution endowed women with the opportunity to initiate the route to agency while struggling over identity construction" (2016, pp. 2–3). Both Doha and Elham resist the corrupt regime through demonstrating and in doing so this helps them to resist the social and personal oppression in their own personal lives. There is an elegant braiding of both public and personal matters. Doha states,

> She *decided to exert her will, which she had so often left to others who pushed her in any direction they wished* [emphasis added]. From now on, nobody would push her around. She would no longer be a caterpillar confined to its chrysalis. She would take control of her life. (Salmawy, 2014, 93–94)

One of the violent scenes that show public violence against women is in *Butterfly Wings* as the narrator describes one of the scenes that demonstrate the violations of women's as well as males' rights by the police forces during the revolution:

> The black vans of the central security suddenly dominated the scene coming from the opposite side of the road. The masses, who were about to be crushed under these huge cars, dispersed quickly. The forces that were inside the vans poured out soldiers carrying

heavy sticks and started beating the heads and backs of the boys and girls amongst the loud screams of some and the great terror of all. *A young lady fell covered with blood, so Doha hurried towards her. To her surprise it was Hala who had taught her the first slogan with which she had cried out.* Doha shouted at the police officer, who struck Hala, "Are you not ashamed of yourself, man? You are paid your salary by these people to protect them, not to protect the ruling party? How can you hit a girl your daughter's age?" *The police officer shouted at her, "Get lost and let us finish our task or I will beat you as I've beaten her*". (Salmawy, 2014, p. 136) (Emphases added).

Public and domestic violence have been practiced by some men against women all over the world. Women's rights, which are part and parcel of human rights, have been ignored and trampled on for centuries, however laws have been set to prevent such violence. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was composed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948. Rene Cassin, one of the main drafters of the document, outlined the central tenets of human rights…Drawing on the battle cry of the French Revolution, Cassin identified the four pillars of the declaration as "dignity, liberty, equality, and brotherhood." The twenty-seven articles of the declaration were divided among these four pillars. (Ishay, 2004, p. 3) These four words "dignity", "liberty", "equality", and "brotherhood." were in many of the slogans which Egyptians chanted during the Revolution. When governments observe human rights, they will also observe women's rights.

The narrator in *Butterfly Wings* adds:

Soldiers of the security forces attacked the young people who were gathering around Ashraf with their heavy sticks, and separated them. Some of the security forces tied Dr. Ashraf down. The officer handcuffed him saying, "Now come with me to the police station to let me hear your empty threats because I did not hear them well in this noise". (2014, pp. 136–7)

The use of violence with peaceful demonstrators aggravated the masses even more; therefore, more protestors took part in the demonstrations as a reaction against violence, abuse, and illegal detention of young and old protestors.

Another violation was of women's rights mentioned in the novel "… some of these forces, who were dressed in civilian clothes, *sexually*

harassed the girls who were participating in the demonstration"
[emphasis added] (Salmawy, 2014, p. 138). Along the same lines,
Soueif writes "women leaving the Midan yesterday were roughed up,
insulted and robbed..and call us spies and whores.(Soueif, p.144)

The three works referred to the many unfortunate incidents of
female harassment during the revolution the aim of which was to
frighten women away from protesting. As Ziad Elmarsafy points out in
his article, the tendency amongst policemen who beat women protestors
was:
 " 'What did she go there for?' and 'women should not mingle with
men' as if to imply that the many women who were beaten…during the
revolution, somehow deserved their fate." (2015, p. 133)

Shifting perspectives for Doha, and political choices, comes
with many details including changes in her love life and activism.
Salmawy juxtaposes her fashion designing, romanticism, and escapism
with the new character she developed after participating in Tahrir
demonstrations and getting emotionally involved with one of the
leaders. Agency comes with virtual communication and rejection to the
physically oppressive lived reality of hers. This is how she experienced
a "transitioning personality" through constant communication and
offering new meaning and interpretation of events.

Transitioning Personalities

During the early days of the Revolution, two levels of spaces
were mediated and attracted productivity in order to result in massive
socio-political change. First, the space of social media which was
incorporated in other existing media channels only to "complexify"
the experience of communication, as Pierre Levy (2000, 103-110) puts
it. And the second space is the Tahrir Square which is the centre of
events and its whereabouts (gates and entrances) to see how it was
attracting attention and productivity over the course of 18 days, the
highlights of which were captured in the three works selected in
attempts to write a story out of the quick and massive changes that
took place in Egypt.

The bridge between both spaces can be understood in terms of
Broadbent's "transitioning personalities", meaning how people take
up communication from entertainment and close ties relevance to
wider scales of communicating and building trust with weaker ties or

even complete strangers. In fact, standing in Tahrir has become an identity to which transitioning takes place. Sherry Turkle's early work based on video-game theory in 1995 focuses on immersive experiences that are so intense and emotionally rich on basis of entertainment. Ironically, in 2011, while she was in pursuit of the impact of collective collaboration on basis of entertainment in her *Alone Together* (2011), new meanings were unfolding in Tahrir with entertainment shifting into sharing grievances, sarcasm and quickly attracted, rather than built, commonalities among users and led to quick coordination. Social media users at the time of 2011 were mostly a demography of young adults with education and social contexts of urbanity. The three works refer to youths in the centre stage of events, protagonists with questions of romance and work prospects, who hoped to take grip of communication and actual spaces to manage future change.

Scrutinizing "transitioning personalities" reveal patterns of social rituals and emotional associations to places and spaces which helped alignments for coordination to take place. The notion of transitioning personalities was first developed with the dichotomy of work versus private persona in mind. It focuses on phrases and communication channels by which people prepare themselves to walk out of work persona and into their private circle selves. The study reported phone calls and messages to family members to denote how their attention and expression shifts. Given that mobile phones are typically used for strong family ties, taking up one's phone intentionally leads to transition in persona. Whereas some of the earliest studies in mobile phone use for Rawanda businessmen (Donner, 2006, 30-33) found out that two thirds of calls and texts were directed to close ties of family and friends and only one third for business related concerns. If this has any implications, it might reveal the depth of meaning and engagement of the Egyptian revolution.

Beautiful examples of transitioning personalities in Elkheshen's *7 Days in Tahrir* cover a wide range from thinking one's own stance from viewer and critic to participant. It depicts Elham, the abandoned wife watching TV and Facebook flipping through conflicting views on Tahrir events she becomes frantically worried and when she attempts to check on her parents in another area she is struck by the reality of the situation as she hears "crowds of demonstrators, soldiers, drifting smoke, gun shots, and the roar of

protestors" feeling terrified she hurriedly returns to her empty and lonely apartment (Elkheshen, 2011, 51–53). A day later when she discovers her husband had already left the country with his first wife and children, she too decides to join the demonstrators in Tahrir Square to call for her rights. And the complete opposite happens with the Christian family who are scared by the crowds and the Revolution speed up the process of immigration to Canada. However, Ramez, the youngest adult in the family, exchanges glances with his father that he will not depart with them, the father returns his son's passport in silence at the airport and Ramez takes off to Tahrir. The novel creates a sense of transitioning for characters that is both mild and gradual but develops visibility and power with constant communication taking place.

Transitioning personalities could be the means by which characters shift their perspectives in the works under analysis so as to unfold the means by which communication technologies shifted from entertainment to socialization to mobilization bringing about actual socio-political transformation in Egypt 2011. The wide spectrum of youths in the course of the action is best depicted in *7 Days in Tahrir* with Abdallah, Bassem and Sherine, Elham, Sherif and Khaled. Each of them comes from a different social and political backgrounds offering a capture of arguments that were circulated among family and friends (i.e. strong ties) at the time. Abdallah belongs to the Muslim Brothers and finds it challenging to mingle with youths in Tahrir without sect orders, but he gets the passion and driven by curiosity he joins in. Sherine, the most passionate of all started talking Bassem into the possibilities of making changes for a better future, she is always positively associated with the Midan (Tahrir Square) as the future dream of happiness for all citizens. Sherine and Bassem stand for love, expansion and the typical Facebook users of January 2011 who created intense communication of knowledge and coordinated the occupation of urban spaces with spontaneity. On the other hand, the older couple in *Butterfly Wings*, Doha, and Ashraf, are on both ends of the spectrum, she is apolitical, at first, whereas he is a revolutionary head, both communicate intensely enough to weave around an emotional bond and take to Tahrir as agents of change in the novel.

On the other end of the spectrum, Khaled works in the tourism industry and fears for the security of his family and business. Ironically, it was through the conversations with his mother who

supports the Revolution that he started testing his ideas until he physically moved from Mostafa Mahmoud Square (urban point for pro-state marches) to Tahrir (the meeting point and anchoring space for the revolution). Contrary to all other family examples that reflected the typical generation gap with parents pro-state and youths pro-Tahrir, Khaled was the middle aged responsible family man speaking practical alignment with the current regime and his mother is the dreamer and the believer in all claims for liberty in Tahrir. Communication, online or using landlines within each family revealed the preoccupations, motivations, fears, and the prevailing questions in the diverse families in Egypt. Copts, policemen, Muslim Brothers, the Ruling Party, the hybrid family (Egyptian - American) and others identified by their economic status were all in a constant state of flux, real and dynamic, exchanging information, figuring out means to face the challenges in their families and on the public sphere, and quickly figuring out their way within the highlights of the Egyptian Revolution.

Studying the documented modes of communication in the three works allow the readers to trace how relationships were built and trust sustained to bring about this massive transformation. In his paper on digital anthropology relating various empirical studies on mobile phones and social media platform use in several European and African countries, Broadbent pointed out that communication modes will always construct and negotiate relationships. Studying personal and professional networks as well as mapping contemporary studies in a comprehensive paper published in 2012, an interesting recommendation is highlighted in the "conclusions and future directions" section:

Most people [across the world] are still communicating primarily with a close sphere of contacts, and there are clear indications that more and more people are also addressing themselves … to a wider audience with weaker connections… this raises … questions on how weaker relationships are maintained and how different social groups present themselves and engage with much less familiar relations… Anthropology has much to offer to explain the interaction between digital media and the social norms, agency and practices that emerge in their usage" (Horst and Miller, 2012, p. 140).

In other words, the norm for using digital technologies was to communicate across strong ties and only sparingly attempt to address weaker audiences or bystanders, but this was hardly the case one year earlier in Egypt. As depicted in the novels, youths started a spark and digital technologies intensified communication, massively opening spaces for negotiations and emotional engagement reflected in real time occupation of the Tahrir for 18 consecutive days. In his *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (2012), published same year as Broadbent study (2011), Manuel Castells observes that "digital networks and occupation of urban space…[made it possible] for autonomous organization and deliberation… and created the resilience that was necessary for the movements to withstand ferocious assaults from state violence until… out of a self-defence instinct, they became a counter-state" (Castells, 2012, p. 108). Indeed, they created a virtual realm.

Agency and Virtual Communication: Attention and Productivity

Attention was linked to productivity under capitalist hierarchies. High attention giving reveals subordinate status (attention giving) while low attention reveals higher status. Madden and Jones (2008) developed the concept of attention and power while they were studying digital life in Switzerland. They unpacked attempts for individuals to manage their attention and described why men and women prefer text messaging before calling for the different reasons of hating to engage in unnecessary conversations and hating to disturb others, respectively (Broadbent, 2011, p. 132). Daniel Miller, in his article "Social Network Sites", identifies direct phone calls to be the most demanding while Facebook the least engaging of communication channels (Miller, 2011, p. 151) and yet it had a very powerful impact on Egyptians (whether they were pro Mubarak or against him) during the Revolution. Miller embarks on a comparative study noting the difference between regions with respect to their dominant Social Network Site (SNS). His study describes Facebook as semi-public, with no specific audience targeted and no specific response required. However, it tends to reflect an aggregate of individual's private spheres with all kinds of contacts co-present in the same space (Miller, 2011, p. 149). SNS can be used for documenting events (mostly personal but within a community context of interest), tracking movements (such as suppressing dissent in the Green Revolution in

Iran) or help with relief efforts (as happened in the Philippines) (Miller, 2011, p. 150). As such, SNS migrate quickly from their intended base and function to new uses and functions/ roles. For example, Facebook was developed with the intention of bringing business closer to social interaction (as announced in the about section in Facebook newsroom) but it is academically acknowledged as an integral tool to the Arab Uprisings. It develops a new normativity in every context, and this is why it is found relevant and quickly accepted on a global scale. Whereas Facebook aggregates different kin and acquaintance (ranging from family to very weak social ties) into the "friend" link, Twitter forms all posts as citizen journalism allowing for nodes of power, or influencers with thousands of followers, to create orientation and spread ideas within the flux of "by-standard" audience.

This notion can be further developed with tweets coming from the stars or key figures that created dispersed nodes of power, attention vortex and mobilization. Soueif writes about her nephew Alaa's tweets of martyr Mina Daniel:

> I followed Alaa's heartbroken tweets from the morgue: 'Mina's body is here Mina my comrade I can't believe it', 'We lost you as you fought for our country may your soul be safe Mina Daniel my friend', 'I went in and saw them 17 pure bodies and Mina shining in their midst how shall we ever forgive ourselves'. (Soueif, 2012, p. 115)

Among the intensity of communication across weak ties, a new level of individual agency and collective mobilization was brought about. It was powerful enough to turn entertainment and pastime channels to citizen reporting and journalism platforms. Typically, nodes of power, platform topic influencers (771.1 K Alaa AbdelFattah Twitter followers), emerged activating the schizoid property of the internet from entertainment and distant/safe over-viewing of events to accommodating diversity and creating political mobilization.

In the three works, 'Homeland' is the bigger context of events and strong family ties host everyday conversations on the political future then another layer of relationships are created and consolidated in Tahrir with sweeping actions and emotions. Ahdaf Soueif's political Memoir revealed many family conversations that raised the attention of the indifferent and mobilized the empathetic. Family-Family conversations were held in the morgue after youths lost their lives under

regime attacks and the scene was intense with non-politically involved families getting convinced to file up for autopsy and the documentation of deaths. In a state of bereavement, they were both losing family members and changing their political stance. The case of Mina Daniel was particularly interesting, because his case was publicized after his death, a young Coptic christian who stands in Tahrir contrary to the Egyptian Church and the State, defying a double-traditional authority, then he was killed but celebrated as someone who dared to hope for change.

Conclusion: Transformation & Empowerment

Ultimately both female characters, rebel against political corruption and male oppression by taking part in demonstrations and rebelling against their husbands and oppressors. Doha is set free by asking for divorce, while Elham in *7 Days in Tahrir* writes to her husband an SMS asking him to divorce her: "leave me and let me be" (ارحل ، ارحل) just as the popular slogan she was using with millions of demonstrators to tell Mubarak to "leave". She refuses to continue being just a "body" for her husband. Sherif withdraws his papers from the Police Academy and enrolls in Faculty of Law after having witnessed police brutality practiced against the people. He refuses to be part of an anti-humanitarian force and rejects his elder brother's belief that violence should be used to control the protesters. Elham and Sherif are two instances of characters who shift their strong family ties and alignment through their use of digital media. As for Ramez, he refuses to immigrate with his parents to Canada and decides to stay in Egypt and fight for his rights as a Coptic Christian Ramez grounds himself among young people who are ambitious and hopeful, again exchanging weak ties for strong family bonds. The last chapter is called "The Beginning" which portrays all the characters taking part in the referendum on the new constitution in March 2011 with conversations among strangers yet full of trust and hope.

In *Butterfly Wings*, Doha is the one that transforms, metaphorically speaking, from being a moth and becomes a fully-fledged butterfly that can soar high and enjoy freedom just like her country. Communication technologies gave her agency and allowed her to strengthen new relationships which in turn helped her to unfold a new character for herself. Thus, the novelist predicts a new beginning for his country with more and more people allowed choices to escape

oppression and develop bonds of trust among peers. The paper covered agency, virtuality, and transitioning personalities to explore this proposition.

Along the same line, Ayman in *Butterfly Wings* who was searching for his mother finally finds her and reunites with her. It ends with a chapter entitled "Sunshine Express" after the release of all political detainees and realizing freedom. The words "freedom" and "set free" are reiterated throughout the last two chapters. All the other characters in both novels achieve a kind of character transformation based on new relationships and bonds. In Soueif's Memoir, the main characters too undergo a sort of transformation in the work as some of her nieces and nephews who were apolitical become politically active and those who were politically active become more active because of the intensity of communication and urgency of events in the first 18 days of the rebellion and its aftermath.

When Mubarak finally steps down Soueif describes the scene in Tahrir Square:

> It's a party; joy cries ring out constantly, people are dancing and jumping up and down on the traffic roundabout, dancing on the roofs of their cars, handing out candy. A man walks around with a tray handing out wedding sherbet…I'm part of the surge of happy humanity flowing across the bridge. Beneath us, our river, alight with sparkling lights, with fireworks, with song. Then, Tahrir [Liberation]. (2012, p. 180)

The celebration and jubilation is felt in every word and in the reiteration of "We've done it!" Her son Omar has the last words in the Memoir as he states the Revolution worked because it was "communal…it was unified and focused" (p. 194), bringing together social media spaces and Tahrir together.

Salmawy's visionary novel, though rather sentimental, has ushered in the actual events. As for Hisham Elkheshen's it is an excellent experience in reliving several days during the Egyptian revolution and elaborately documented viral arguments and channels of communication at the time. Both Elham and Doha are empowered by the means of communication and the urgency of events so are most of the other characters (Ahdaf Soueif, her sister, khaled, Ayman, Alaa, Mona, Sana and all the other characters). Transformation and change are shown to have arrived on the political, as well as the social levels in the country in both novels and Memoir with the aid of communication technologies.

Notes

1. All quoted excerpts from Elkheshen's *Sabʿat Ayyām fīl-Taḥrīr* [*7 Days in Tahrir*] were translated by Mona Radwan.

2. There are several plays also on this Revolution to name but a few: *Tahrir Tales: Plays from the Egyptian Revolution*. Eds. Mohammed Albakry and Rebekah Maggor, London: Seagull, 2016. Mohammed Elghaity's play *Ward Elganaian* [Garden Flowers (Martyrs of the Revolution)] (June 2011) which pays tribute to all the martyrs of the Revolution. Another play was written by Daniel Lazarus and Patrick Lazarus (Lebanese descent) entitled *We Live in Cairo* which won the 2016 the Richard Rodgers Award for Musical Theatre.

   A few poets wrote poems on January 2011 Revolution like Abdelrahman Alabnoudi, Sayed Hegab, Mohamed Helmi Mostafa, Tamim Al-Barghouti, and Hisham Al-Jakh and Ahmed Douma. Alice Walker also wrote a poem on the Egyptian Revolution.

3. As for Memoirs on this Revolution there was Mona Prince's book *Revolution is my Name: An Egyptian Woman's Diary from Eighteen Days in Tahrir, 2014.* It was first published in Arabic in 2012 as *Ismi-*

   Thawra is one of the popular memoirs on the 2011 Revolution in Egypt.

4. Leila Ahmed, the distinguished Feminist critic states:
   A number of Hadith formed the basis of the jurists' opinion that women had a right to complete sexual satisfaction in marriage. In one such Hadith a woman complained to [Prophet] Muhammad that her husband practiced sexual abstinence out of religious zeal, and Muhammed rebuked the husband on the grounds that Islam did not require or even approve of abstinence, and that he had sexual obligations towards his wife. In another Hadith a woman who had

had one husband and was now married to a second came to the Prophet wishing to return to her first husband and asking to be divorced from the second because of the latter's sexual inadequacy. The Hadith reports that others standing by were shocked at her candid speech and rebuked her, but the Prophet, who smiled, responded sympathetically- and his doing so is taken as indicating that women have a right to sexual satisfaction in marriage. (1989, p. 48)

It is interesting how these two Hadiths (Prophet's Teachings) are hardly ever mentioned or quoted by the sheikhs.

5 Fatma Moussa was a Professor of English, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University just like her daughter Ahdaf who was a lecturer at the same Department.

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