Discourse of empowerment

Women's empowerment in Egypt in the online public sphere

Josephine M. E. Vos

s2104792

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of MA Middle Eastern Studies

Leiden University,

Faculty of Humanities

2020

Course code: 5854VMATH-0000FGW

Number of EC: 20 EC

Wordcount: 19.862

Supervisor: Dr. H.H.M. Taha

Date: 16-6-2020

Table of contents

Introduction

In 2017, the president of Egypt Abdul Fatah al-Sisi launched a campaign entitled 'The Year of Egyptian Woman' (SIS 2017). It is part of a national comprehensive development vision for 2030. This campaign focuses on economic and political empowerment, societal protection, and cultural and legal pivots. Egyptian women need to become more visible in public society, proclaimed the campaign, and it sought to achieve this goal through various projects, funded by the government. For example, the National Council for Women (NCW) has been appointed to submit a draft law aimed at improving and protect the rights and freedoms of women in society. This NCW is also responsible for campaigns such as "Knock the Door" to support women (SIS 2017). This campaign is literally knocking on doors of houses, mainly in rural areas, to talk with women to spread awareness on social issues that are harmful to women, such as early marriage and female circumcision (NCW 2020).

The government could no longer publicly ignore the importance of women's empowerment in Egypt since it is ranked as one of the most gender unequal countries in the world (WEF 2019; The World Bank 2018; SIGI 2014). According to the Global Gender Gap Report, Egypt is ranked at place 135 of 150, of which 150 is the worst (WEF 2019, 11). On all the components, politics, economics, education, health and survival, the difference between men and women is extremely high (WEF 2019, 87-88). For instance, women have significantly lower literacy (65% literacy for women vs 82% of men) and lower participation in the labour force than men (26% vs 79%) (WEF 2019, 88). These examples illustrate the extent to which women remain marginalized in Egypt.

Egyptians, particularly the youth and women from a lower class, have been disproportionately disadvantaged by neoliberalism, which has continued to expand under the

current government (Singerman 2013, 1). Popular movements that have called for a more inclusive development path, aiming to provide women citizens a stronger voice, government accountability, and social and economic freedom, are banned. While the campaign of president al-Sisi may discuss the empowerment of women, the government's highly repressive political environment is a keystone in the oppressed situation of women (Brechenmacher 2017, 51-52; Sharma 2014, 143; Vishwanath et al. 2012, 1). This thesis therefore, will aim to contextualize the intersection of concepts such as empowerment, gender and neoliberalism for a deeper understanding of these concepts in Egypt.

Many local, national and international organisations in Egypt are working on women's empowerment (UNDP 2013). The fact that gender inequality in Egypt has remained the same while so much women's aid has been ongoing for decades may question the work of the development industry (UNDP 2013). Indeed, within the development industry, research on women in Egypt tends to rely on quantitative questionnaires, rather than incorporate the views of women themselves, qualitatively (The World Bank, 2018; SIGI, 2014). As a result, factors that are important and determinative for women within empowerment could be missing (Samari 2018, 460; Abu-Lughod 2013, 221). It is important to critically evaluate what women themselves argue, instead of filling in their opinion (Mahmood 2005, 5-6).

This made me wonder how women themselves in Egypt portray the notion of empowerment, as well as how social structures, including neoliberalism and patriarchy, interact with this discourse of empowerment. Therefore, this thesis focuses on women in Egypt from a qualitative research perspective with an in-depth approach in order to enrich academic literature. The thesis has a cognitive nature and, therefore, sees women as embodied actors whose experiences, thoughts and beliefs are central to development (Eysenck 1992, 14). This

approach is based on the discipline of cultural sociology. The research question is: **how do women in Egypt portray 'women's empowerment' on social media under conditions of political repression, patriarchy, and neoliberalism?**

The case study of this thesis is the social media platform 'Women of Egypt' which is active in multiple ways on social media. This platform has a Facebook page, closed Facebook group, website and a digital magazine. I chose the platform based on its popularity (most popular), amount of followers (542,140) and activeness (an average of seven posts per day) of the Facebook page, and relevance (talk about women's empowerment) and accessibility (accessible via the internet) of the platform. I conducted a discourse analysis on the basis of the posts of the Facebook page, the articles of the magazine, and posts of the closed Facebook group. I looked at all material published and posted during January and February 2020. In total, this contains 310 posts of the Facebook page, 103 posts of the Facebook group, and five articles of the magazine. This thesis is not meant to form any conclusive statements or generalisations about the discourse of empowerment of Egyptian women online, but rather, to explore this discourse on the social media platform 'Women of Egypt' in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of how women discuss empowerment in the online public sphere.

Words can, in any discourse, have multiple meanings in different contexts. They can be used for different kinds of political ends (Alcoff 2011, 161). Therefore, my focus on a discourse analysis of empowerment enables a deeper understanding of how the notion of empowerment is portrayed, experienced, and understood by Egyptian women nowadays, under a neoliberal system, patriarchy, and political repression. The thesis focuses specifically on social media. Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, the importance and popularity of social media, especially Facebook, has emerged in new movements regarding women's empowerment in

Arab countries, such as Egypt (Tufekci and Wilson 2012, 363). The influence and prominent role that social media has these days, in societies such as Egypt regarding women's empowerment, provided the reason to collect the data from a social media platform. Through qualitative analysis of the messages on the platform, I interpreted what Egyptian women themselves understand as 'women's empowerment'. Within this discourse, I focus on concepts such as neoliberalism, class, gender, and patriarchy and I describe this mainly through the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, key thinkers within the discipline of sociology that informs this thesis.

The analysis shows how neoliberal and patriarchal ideals seem to be internalised by these women through the focus on self-empowerment. Through this internalisation, they stimulate the idea of success and failure that is due to one's self, which takes away the responsibility of social structures and the government. Class also influences and determines the discourse of empowerment. The platform shows that the posts are mainly from and for women from upper-class. These women, who have a certain degree of financial and cultural security, speak to one another and often use the notion of empowerment in the pursuit of their own commercial objectives under a neoliberal platform of self-development. These underlying goals seem to be internalised by the women that are active on the 'Women of Egypt' platform. These wealthy women seem to play a mediating role within international development through the internet, between the national and international values in the discourse of empowerment.

The thesis is structured as follows. First, I introduce the recent history of Egypt. Subsequently, I present the theoretical framework followed by the methodology of this thesis.

Thereafter, I discuss the results of the data collection. Finally, I present the conclusion with recommendations for further research.

Chapter One: Historical background

To clarify the current situation in Egypt, I will give a brief summary of the most significant event in Egypt of this decade: the Arab Spring. The uprising, called Arab Spring, began in 2010 as a response to oppressive regimes and the low standard of living (Skinner 2011, 2). It started in Tunisia and spread over five other Arab countries, including Egypt. Social media, such as Facebook, played a crucial role in gathering people together to protest (Tufekci 2017, 10). For this reason, governments shut down certain websites or even blocked the internet service entirely (Skinner 2011, 3: Tufekci 2017, xxii). In Egypt, a military coup in 2013 brought an end to the democratic transition. The architect of the coup, General al-Sisi, who subsequently became president, reinstated various repressive measures (Brechenmacher 2017, 43-44). Egypt has faced, after the 2011 uprising and the coup, one of the most repressive environments in decades. Among other things, this has resulted in travel bans for activists for human rights, partial prohibition of NGOs and for the oppression of freedom of speech. People face harassment and prosecution if they openly share their opinion about politics and human rights (Brechenmacher 2017, 39, 51-52; Hoyle 2016, 194-195). The Arab Spring has also affected the position of women in Egypt (Bargain et al. 2019, 1). During the protests, women also went out on the streets to promote more equal rights. After the coup, these protests were suppressed again. The Arab Spring has raised awareness and slight improvements in women's final say regarding decisions on health, socialisation and household (Bargain et al. 2019, 13). However, significant changes in the woman's position still have not occurred.

Chapter Two: Theoretical framework

Various scholars, such as Naila Kabeer, Saba Mahmood, and Lila Abu-Lughod have written about women's empowerment in Egypt. This chapter will give a general introduction to the literature on neoliberalism, patriarchy, gender, equality, orientalism, class, empowerment, empowerment factors, public space and the use of social media in Egypt. Definitions, terms and theories that are frequently used within the academic discourse around these topics will be presented and discussed. After each topic, I indicate how I used these theories during my research and analysis and highlight the possible areas of contribution to this thesis.

Neoliberalism

From the 1970s, neoliberal reforms were implemented in Egypt, under pressure from the United States and Europe, together with The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Roccu 2013, 43-44). The World Bank and WEF and are therefore only used for the concrete figures in this thesis, due to the lack of concrete numbers from non-neoliberal influenced institutions. This set the foundation for social discontent. Neoliberalism is one of the important structural backdrops of the uprisings in Egypt after 2011. The neoliberal system can, partly, explain Egypt's vulnerability and the susceptibility to rebellion (Singerman 2013, 3). Since this system has such a clear influence on Egypt and the social processes in the country, I will explain this concept.

Neoliberalism is a broad and complex concept, defined by social science professor David Harvey in the following way:

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practice that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual

entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework, characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practice, but beyond these practices the state should not venture (Harvey, 2005, 2).

His definition shows that freedom, individualism, free markets and trades are key concepts in neoliberalism, including a more minimalist role of the government. These concepts can be found in the Egyptian government too. Notably, the idea of freedom and individualism are promoted, with campaigns such as 'Year of Egyptian Woman' (SIS 2017).

In addition to this definition, Timothy Mitchell argues that neoliberalism is 'a triumph of the political imagination' (Mitchell 1999, 28). It ignores the concrete concerns from the collective community and encourages the personal dreams of private accumulation. This way of thinking has led Egypt to economic success, for mostly the upper class, from the 1990s (Mitchell 1999, 28). This neoliberal capitalism in Egypt has also led to an increased role for the state security apparatus and the market for private security firms flourished. Individualism within the control of the state security is promoted by the state. The state has managed to derive a degree of legitimacy that is based on a discourse of populist nationalism and its promise of security and order (Abdelrahman 2017, 197). Partly due to the security and order, the Egyptian population tolerated the neoliberal politics of the government for a long time.

However, we have to stay critical with terms such as neoliberalism. This term is often used as a shorthand for indicating all that is wrong with the present. Such usage of the term can foreclose our ability to imagine different futures (Elyachar 2012, 76). Neoliberalism is a multi-complex term and we have to see it as such (Elyachar 2012, 91). This is important to

keep in mind. As can be seen in Egypt, the government plays an important role, while according to the ideals of neoliberalism this should be less. This indicates the complexity of the concept.

Nevertheless, we need to understand the political debates and conceptual conflicts that shape the political and economic imaging of today in Egypt. While being critical about terms such as neoliberalism, it is, for this reason, relevant to stress the political situation and the structure behind it in Egypt. It is important to keep this situation in mind while studying a phenomenon such as empowerment. The government of a country and how they portray reality has an influence on the people and how they view their own reality. It influences social processes in society (Alcoff 2011, 161). For example, neoliberal ideas influence people that struggle with problems in their work, their love life, etc. These people can get self-help in which they learn to monitor and reflect on themselves. Self-help books are at the top of best-selling booklist worldwide and are an example of a social process that comes from worldwide neoliberal ideologies (Fernandes 2018, 155). The political authority has an influence on the construction, practice and meaning of words, differently put: the discourse of a word (Alcoff 2011, 161). The influence of a political system has therefore been included in the main question and the research.

Patriarchy

In addition to neoliberalism, there is another social system that influences the structure of society and the position of women, which is patriarchy. The origin of patriarchy can be understood from different points of view. Since I wrote my thesis from a cultural sociological point of view, I applied the social perspective on this concept. Sociologists see patriarchy as a primarily social product and focus on the gender roles in a society that affect power

difference between men and women. According to sociologist James Henslin patriarchy means that 'men hold the primary power in the social system and predominate in roles of leadership and social privileges (...) which is an outcome of gender roles that affect the power differentials between men and women' (Henslin 2012, 65). This social product, that influences the position of women, also plays a role in Egyptian society. The property and title are inherited by the male lineage. Men dominate in economic, political, religious and social positions in Egyptian society (Nazier and Ramadan 2018, 166; Pollert 1996, 64). According to sociologist Sylvia Walby (1990, 20) patriarchy occurs in status, household, harassment and violence, paid work, sexuality and culture. For example, women are unlikely to have formal status, formal power, earn a lot of money and are more likely to do the housework, be abused, do unpaid work and be presented negatively sexually (Walby 1990, 20). These uneven structures are intertwined in societies, such as Egypt, and can be considered normal by the citizens (Nazier and Ramadan 2018, 167). This social product influences other social systems, such as neoliberalism and gender. Men can be valued higher in these systems because of patriarchy. This social structure also emerged during the analysis of the social media data. For a deeper understanding of the different values between men and women, the concept of gender and gender equality needs to be explained.

Gender

The concept of gender plays an important underlying role in the discourse around women's empowerment in Egypt. It is necessary to understand how gender is constructed before gender inequality resulting in empowerment is understood and defined. Besides, the concept of gender is used during the analysis. Therefore, it is necessary to define which definition of gender is used in this thesis and why. To begin with, gender has multiple definitions. It is a complex and broadly studied concept. As sociologist Raewyn Connell (2009, 10) describes,

gender is a social structure. It is a pattern in our social arrangements and in our everyday activities or practices in which those structures govern. It focuses on a broader understanding of what gender in society means (Connell 2009, 10). This research focuses on the social perspective of the concept of gender.

Following this perspective, historian Joan Scott (2018, 8) describes the ongoing redefinition of gender in our political and cultural vocabularies. She states that political and social categories are fundamentally shaped by gender. It is important to include the voice of women in society, research, and politics to get a new view on these perspectives and stimulate us to think critically about our 'fixed' terminologies that already exist (Scott 2018, 10-11). The voice of women is important. Scott also describes the importance of not seeing women as a separate subject (Scott 2018, 39). Thus, gender is not only about women and men separately, according to Scott. This goes against the approach of binarism. This approach means that gender is a concept in which masculine and feminine are distinct, opposites and disconnected by social or cultural structures, such as patriarchy (Garber 1997, 2). Men and women are two concepts of their own that do not intertwine with each other. On the contrary, Scott's definition of gender is 'gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power' (Scott 2018, 42). The social concept 'gender' could, for this reason, be seen as a power relation between men and women and these genders are seen as two concepts that are inextricably linked.

Within the idea of power lies an image of opposition: the one with power and the one without. As Michel Foucault describes as well, power is not a concept on its own, but a relation (Calhoun et al. 2002, 212). It is exercised throughout the social body and culture and

used in a strategic way. Power could be seen as a cultural opposition between two groups (Calhoun et al. 2002, 213). Men and women are, from this perspective, a cultural opposition within a power relation. This means that there is a difference between men and women within the culture, but that they are related and only exist because of each other. Women's empowerment is, therefore, related to empowering the group called 'women' until they have equal power to their cultural opposite group 'men'.

It has become clear from all that is described above, that it is difficult to give a clear definition of what gender is. This thesis follows the approach of gender from Foucault and Scott: gender is a power relation between men and women. There is a conception in which women and men are separate from each other, but inextricably connected to another. Subsequently, this thesis focuses on how Egyptian women online portray this power relation and cultural opposition between men and women.

Gender equality

Within this power relation, there is a difference in the distribution of power. The concept gender equality means the overall quality of life and expanding of freedom, a balance and no gap within educational, social and economic chances between men and women (Sharma 2014, 144; Fennell and Arnot 2008, 57). This goes against the social structure of the earlier described patriarchy. D'Agostino and Ruben state that genuine gender equality is more than parity in numbers or laws on the books. To get power, they need positions of power, in for example politics and businesses. Money and influential places in society need to be equally divided (D'Agostino and Ruben 2017, 15).

Lila Abu-Lughod (2013, 208-211) states that she is worried about gender equality in Egypt. The law and the view on women in society and in families in Egypt must change dramatically to provide powerful positions to women and achieve gender equality. She describes equality between men and women as 'troubled fiction' (Abu-Lughod 2013, 208). Women undergo many sorts of suffering, only some of which might be traced to religious traditions or cultural formations. Abu-Lughod (2013, 221) explains that it is important to try and deeply understand these factors of suffering in the fullest to change them. This legitimises the importance of research and attention for this topic and this thesis once more. This 'troubled fiction' affects social structures in society and, therefore, also on the discourse of empowerment. The way gender inequality is portrayed shows how women's empowerment is portrayed by the Egyptian women on the platform 'Women of Egypt'. It gives an in-depth understanding of the discourse of women's empowerment in Egypt by Egyptian women and, thus, supports gender equality.

The image of women in the Middle East

For a long time, and even until this day, there has been an orientalist fascination with women in the Middle East. The veiled and oppressed Middle Eastern woman, who is the victim of a misogynist religion, has been one of the most enduring images of the region in the minds of the general public (Meriwether and Tucker 2018, 1). According to Saba Mahmood, this image is even stronger: Middle Eastern women were, and still are, portrayed as passive and submissive beings shackled by structures of male authority (Mahmood 2005, 6). Travellers, diplomats and even scholars have often perpetuated the accepted image and through that stimulated the Orientalist tradition (Meriwether and Tucker 2018, 2). Edward Said (2003, 10-11) defines orientalism mainly as the Western attitude that views Eastern societies as exotic, primitive and inferior. It could be summarised as a condescending attitude from the West to

the Middle East. This stereotyped image of women and the Middle East is important to be aware of when studying the Middle East (Meriwether and Tucker 2018, 2).

This orientalist image has been increasingly criticised by scholars since the book 'Orientalism' of Edward Said in 1978. Through new theoretical frameworks, nontraditional sources and innovative methodological approaches by scholars, there has been a great development in the complex and controversial issues in which the 'woman question' remains a highly charged political and cultural issue (Meriwether and Tucker 2018, 2-3). By using holistic approaches that incorporate the perspective of women, we can discuss gender and women in the Middle East without succumbing to orientalist stereotypes. For this reason, this thesis focuses on these new methods and works from a sociological perspective and a cognitive nature. The objective is to capture the discourse of empowerment of the women in Egypt themselves.

Class & capital

When we talk about gender inequality, we have to take class dynamics into account. According to Bourdieu, classes are theoretical groups of people, which are defined by their amount of cultural, social, and economic capital. These are abstract groups: they don't need to know each other, and they only share the same amount of economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1979, 105). Capital is strongly linked to class. Bourdieu, therefore, explains which forms of capital he has observed in society and which determine class. Economic capital is directly interchangeable for money and can be institutionalised in the form of property rights (Bourdieu 1986, 244-245). Social capital is the connections with other people in one's network (Bourdieu 1986, 247-248).

Cultural capital is a bit more complex, as it consists of an institutional, objective and embodied state. The institutional state contains educational and credential diplomas. The objective state is portrayed in objects that show class status, such as books, art, music taste, etc. The embodied means the way someone behaves in real-time and real space. It implies norms, skills, and cultural goods. This happens unconsciously, for example, etiquette while eating (Bourdieu 1986, 243). Such capital is subjective and abstract. Concrete measurements of this capital can be done by either belongings or institutionalised properties such as diplomas, the amount and quality of books someone owns, the languages they speak, the number of people in their network, and so on. For example, the cultural capital can be shown on social media in the way of writing the post, the subjects of the post, etc. In addition, Bourdieu describes the theory of 'space of position-taking'. This theory describes that positions are relative to others and are defined by the amount of someone's economic and social capital (Bourdieu 1989, 16). In other words, the amount of influence in social space someone gets depends on social and economic status. This is what gives someone power in social space. Bourdieu's theory about the place you occupy in the social field based on the amount of economic, social and cultural capital is useful to explore class dynamics in Egypt (Hanna 2016, 42). This thesis focuses on class, the capital and the influence this has on the discourse of empowerment in the online public sphere. It analyses which forms of capital were used in the online public sphere and how they possibly shape the discourse of empowerment.

Empowerment

Empowerment is necessary to achieve gender equality and decrease the class differences between men and women. Therefore, it is identified as an important development factor. It is fundamental for the realisation of human rights and the key to sustainable and effective

development (Sharma 2014, 143). It is also essential to view empowerment as a collective concept. Since the thesis focuses on discourses of empowerment online, a definition of empowerment is necessary.

Deepa Narayan (2005) did extensive research on the measurement of women's empowerment in the Middle East. She uses the following definition:

> Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of women to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives (Narayan, 2005, 5).

Empowerment could ensure, among other things, further balanced developments of a country in the financial, social, and political aspects (Narayan 2005, vii). It is basically an outcome of social or cultural systems rather than of individual experiences and traits (Narayan 2005, 90).

Naila Kabeer (1999, 436), who wrote multiple influential books and articles on women and empowerment in the Middle East, gives a more provoking definition. She defines empowerment as the purview of people who have been shut out of power but who then acquire the ability to exercise choice. It entails a process of change (Kabeer 1999, 436). The concept of empowerment includes three components: agency, which is an individual's capability to make and act on their own choices, resources, to make decisions, including the authority to make decisions, and achievements, which are the outcomes of decision making (Kabeer 2005, 15-16).

Furthermore, Elhum Haghighat (2013, 274), a scholar on women and empowerment in the Middle East as well, states that empowerment is a result of a process whereby women can freely develop themselves, analyse and voice their needs and go after their interests without being obstructed by the government, religion or social norms. She emphasises freedom in her definition and the importance of access to resources for women is essential to gain more power and higher social states (Haghighat 2013, 274). This definition seems to focus more on economic empowerment and less on changing social systems like patriarchy.

There are a few characteristics that most authors see as essential to the definition of women's empowerment in the Middle East: free participation, control, development and influence. It is a process of change. The concept 'empowerment' is also about power relations, which indicates the underlying link with gender. This view of empowerment is used in this thesis.

Empowerment factors

Empowerment is a sizable concept with multiple factors. Organisations and companies often focus on just a few factors of empowerment. For example, The World Bank and WEF mainly focus on economic empowerment (The World Bank 2018, 12). This thesis analyses the factors of empowerment that were described by Egyptian women online. Therefore, a general overview of the meaning of various factors within the concept of empowerment is necessary. The main factors of empowerment are social empowerment, economic empowerment and legal empowerment. Both have multiple categories.

Social empowerment could be understood as a process of developing a sense of self-confidence, autonomy, and acting individually and collectively in order to change social relations, institutions and discourses that exclude the women and keep them in poverty (Stark

et al. 2018, 18-19). It includes social belonging, leadership relations and a sense of identity in relation to others (Schutz 2019, 20). Collective, psychological, physical and self-empowerment are included in social empowerment.

Collective empowerment means people's collective assets and capabilities. For example, as a voice, organisation, representation and identification of the group (Schutz 2019, 48).

Psychological/mental empowerment consists of self-confidence, self-esteem, the ability to imagine and pursue a better future. Basically, the mental state (Spreitzer 1996, 484).

Self-empowerment is taking control of your own life by setting goals, making positive choices and reflecting on yourself. Essentially, it means understanding your strengths and weaknesses and believe in yourself (Martin 2014, 233-234).

Physical empowerment contains the physical state, such as good health, the condition and abilities of the body (Velija 2013, 525).

Economic empowerment is the capability to make and act on decisions that involve the control over and allotment of financial resources (Golla et al. 2011, 4). Cultural and individual empowerment are included in economic empowerment.

Cultural empowerment is parental education and socialisation from the classification a person is in (Martin 2014, 224). It is closely connected to what Pierre Bourdieu described as 'cultural capital'. This implies the social assets of a person, like education, style of speech,

intellect, style of clothing, etc., that could promote social mobility in society (Bourdieu 1977, 73-74).

Individual empowerment includes the things that belong to a person. It gives a sense of security and power. Examples are housing, livestock, land and savings. It could include the capabilities of all types of belongings (Schutz 2019, 32).

Legal empowerment includes the laws and rules that the country provides to their people to get access to the other forms of empowerment (UNDP 2013, 7).

Political empowerment the possibility, access and fulfilment of political positions (WEF 2019, 8).

All these factors are connected to each other and help each other to achieve general empowerment. For example, to increase the economic empowerment, legal and social empowerment need to be worked on as well. This shows how important it is to work on all the factors and how complex it is to reach general empowerment.

Public sphere
The place where these empowerment factors are mainly visible is the public sphere. The public sphere is the space that everyone has access to. These are the places where people meet, eat/drink or just move through, like streets, squares and parks. It is a place where people could meet as well. During the last years, the public space in Egypt has become an increasingly unsafe place for social interaction (Auga 2015, 61). Violence concerning class and gender has emerged (Auga 2015, 50). Especially people who question the government

and human rights in Egypt are in danger. The government targetedly harasses and defames Egypt's human rights activists and organisations. It can limit their freedom, detain them, or worse like torturing (Brechenmacher, 2017, 37; Mansour, 2015, 2). The monitoring of the public sphere, and with it universities, religious groups and activists, has increased (Meringolo 2015, 2-3). Funding and approval for human right organisations are also restricted in Egypt (Meringolo 2015, 3-4). Speaking openly about human rights is, therefore, dangerous.

Not only the increase of monitoring changed the public sphere, the rise of social media added a new component to this as well: the 'online public sphere'. The online public sphere is relatively new and turns the previously described public sphere into the 'offline public sphere'. Tufekci (2017) did extensive research on the influence of social media on the public sphere during the Arab Spring. She showed the increased influence of social media on bringing people and groups together (Tufekci 2017, 5). Women, who feel trapped in their situation in the Egyptian society, especially tend to go on social media (Tufekci 2017, 9). It offers the opportunity to connect with people and share opinions (Tufekci and Wilson 2012, 363). The Egyptian government is aware of this trend and has accordingly increased its surveillance of online activity after the coup (Kidd and McIntosh 2016, 792).

Bonilla and Rosa (2015, 4) show in their research on the twitter hashtag #Ferguson how social media users who feel excluded from society feel the opportunity to create an atmosphere of being united in both time and space through social media. The social media users get a sense of commitment, community and collective effervescence (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015, 7). Multiple social media groups on Facebook, where opinions and ideas about the society are shared, are active in Egypt nowadays (Mansour 2015, 7-8).

Due to the importance and the possibility of bringing people together at social media, this thesis will focus on the online public sphere. The social media platform 'Women of Egypt' will serve in this thesis as the online public sphere for Egyptian women. The women can share their opinions and discuss new concepts or ideas through this platform that provides insight into the way of thinking about women's empowerment. On the other hand, social media is also monitored by the government which influences the discourse of empowerment since criticism can not be fully expressed. The perspectives on empowerment will be drawn from the posts of their Facebook page, the group and the magazine. This thesis provides new insights into the use of social media by women and how women's empowerment is characterised in the online public sphere under political repression and neoliberal and patriarchal structures.

.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In the introduction, I presented the following research question: **how do women in Egypt portray 'women's empowerment' on social media under conditions of political repression, patriarchy, and neoliberalism?**

Now that I have presented the theoretical framework, I will explain the research design and method. In addition, I will show a brief example of how the posts and articles are analysed. Thereafter, I will argue why social media are used as the data collection source and I will present the social media platform 'Women of Egypt' in more detail. I will do this more extensively since the use of social media as primary data is relatively new. Finally, I will discuss ethics and limitations.

Research design

The thesis is based on grounded theory. This means that it involves collection and analysis of data and after this, a theory arises (Bryman 2012, 567). In this thesis, this is done by first analysing the posts and then inspecting which discourse of empowerment arises. The online discourse of empowerment is analysed in a descriptive and qualitative manner with a cognitive approach. This analysing strategy emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman 2012, 568). In this research, this includes not only the posts itself but also the number of likes, comments and shares on the posts. The research design is a case study. The case study in this thesis is the online platform 'Women of Egypt' which consists of a Facebook page, Facebook group, website and magazine. The aim of this research is not to generalise the findings to women in Egypt in general, but to get an in-depth understanding of a discourse of women's empowerment from Egyptian women, active on the online platform 'Women of Egypt'. Therefore, it is a case study that is focused

on analytic generalisation. This means how well the theory is generated out of the findings instead of whether or not the finding can be generalised to a wider population (Bryman 2012, 71).

To analyse this case study, critical discourse analysis is executed. Critical discourse analysis seeks to link language and its modes of use to the significance of power and social difference in society (Bryman 2012, 528). This analysis method emphasises what women themselves say, which guarantees the cognitive nature of this thesis. The key point in this analysis method is coding. I coded the posts and sentences of the magazine. Thereafter, the codes are used to determine which themes are discovered. Finally, I gave theoretical labels to component themes that seem to be of potential theoretical significance for the discourse (Bryman 2012, 575). Patterns and themes will emerge from the analysis. This is an example of the data analysis of the Facebook page posts:

Encoding and theming

Date	Likes	Com-ments	Shares	Fragment of the post	Code	Theme
16-2	946	10	381	My dear Laila My daughter who has not yet come…	Art	- Initiatives of women - Promotion of the work of women
16-2	311	7	50	Shameidaan dancers - Cairo 1980	Initiatives Women	- Initiatives of Egyptian women

				Photographer: Robert Ezy…	past	- Tribute to influential Egyptian women from the past
15-2	319	122	149	Mrs. Sherine Fawzy, Director of Public Relations of the Al-Zahraa Women's Association invites you to attend the Assembly and Exhibition…	Art	Advertisement for an event/organisation from/about women and empowerment
15-2	406	22	66	Marina Azer, Artist, Graphic Designer and Founder of Facebook Group, Beautiful Exchange for Girls…	Personal story Art	Promoting the achievements of Egyptian women
15-2	237	31	55	Mariam Hishem ElHodeiby won first place and the National Title at Ismailia Table Tennis Tournament. Her twin sister Marwa won third place in the same	Sport achievement	Promoting the achievements of Egyptian women

				competition…		

Labelling

Label	Theme	Code	How many times used	Popular Yes/No*
Empowerment Self-empowerment Space of position-taking	Promoting the achievements of Egyptian women	Personal story: *Art* *Political* *Science* *Education* *Sport/body* *Literature* *Media* *Social charity* *Business* *Physical* Sport achievement Documentary/article	178x	Yes
Space of position-taking	Initiatives of women	Initiatives	4x	No
Bringing down	Tribute to influential	Women past	8x	Yes

the Orientalist image	Egyptian women from the past			

* Popular: when it contains a post with over a thousand likes

In the first table, the post is coded and themed. The posts are very long, so I chose to put a fragment of this post in the tables. The whole post can be found on the platform. After a close reading of the full post on the platform, I summarised the main message of the post in a code. After I had coded all the posts, I looked over it again and identified themes. I incorporated several codes into one theme. When a post is posted, other people that are active on Facebook and follow the page or are in the group can 'like the post' by pressing on 'thumbs up' under the post. These people can also react to the post and share this post on their own private page on Facebook. The number of times a post is liked, shared or reacted to gives an impression of how popular a post is and is, for this reason, included in the table. In the second table, I went over all the codes and themes and connected these to the literature by giving a theoretical label to the themes. The number of times the code was used and whether it contains popular messages is included to indicate the popularity of the code. Due to the large size of the coding, which contains a total of 110 pages, and the limited word count I chose to make this available on request via my mail: j.m.e.vos@umail.leidenuniv.nl.

As can be seen in the example, the codes and themes are inductive. This means that the codes are linked to the text of the post or fragments of the article (Bryman 2012, 26). Some posts on the Facebook page were entirely in Egyptian Arabic. I personally translated these and had this translation checked by an official Egyptian Arabic-English translator. I analysed data from the Facebook page, Facebook group and magazine, which are all the components of the social media platform 'Women of Egypt' and are active online. The Facebook group and

page can be found on the social media platform Facebook, the magazine can be found on the website: www.womenofegyptmag.com. The magazine discusses topics around women and Egypt, written by the employees of the platform. On the Facebook page, everyone can share a message via the main administrator. In the Facebook group, the emphasis is more on 'women only'. These data sources are interrelated. The magazine's articles are sometimes shared on the Facebook page and group. The women active in the group sometimes share their messages on the page too and usually also follow the page. For the data collection, I conducted data from the page, group and articles from their magazine between 1st of January and the 1st of March. In total, this contains 310 posts of the Facebook page, 103 posts of the Facebook group, and five articles of the magazine.

From this analysis, the discourse regarding empowerment is researched that prevails on the social media platform. Language is characterised in the discourse analysis as constituting or producing of the social world. Texts from, for example, newspapers, books and social media can be used to discover the discourse (Bryman 2012, 528). Which message the text has and what this message says about the social world indicates the discourse of the word. Within this thesis, the critical discourse analysis looks at what the message is behind the post and articles and what this says about the social reality of Egyptian women. The results are elaborated in the result chapter.

Case study: online platform 'Women of Egypt'

The platform 'Women of Egypt' is an online social media platform with the aim to empower Egyptian women (WoE Mag 2020). Their belief is that the road to empowering women begins with strengthening and development of the individuals' core values and self-worth. This principle is the guideline and has been incorporated in all the activities, posts and

articles shared from the organisation. The platform 'Women of Egypt' has been founded in 2016. The organisation consist of a Facebook page, Facebook group, magazine and website. The women can post their message by sending a private message to the owner of the platform. She posts the message on the Facebook page. On the Facebook group, women themselves can post directly their message in the group. The articles are written by women who work for the online platform. The website refers to various NGOs but not to the government or the government's 'Year of Egyptian Woman' campaign (WoE Mag 2020).

The social media platform 'Women of Egypt' is chosen as a case study for this thesis based on the purposive sampling technique. In this technique, a case is selected in a strategic way, so that the case is relevant to the research question (Bryman 2012, 418). Therefore, the choice is based on three components. The first is the popularity of the Facebook page. This page has the most amount of followers (542,140) in the category of women in Egypt and is active (an average of seven posts per day). Second is their relevance. The goal of the platform 'Women of Egypt' is to empower Egyptian women, which is in line with the aim of this research: determine the online discourse of empowerment. The third component is the accessibility of the platform. Everyone can follow the page and read the articles and Egyptian women can join the Facebook group.

Social media

In addition to the above reasons for choosing this platform, I want to stress why I specifically chose social media as the source for the data collection. Social media is relatively new and is not often used as a primary data source. Nevertheless, scholars argue that considering media as a primary source for researching social reality is of great importance in order to understand the social reality (Tufekci 2017; Bonilla and Rosa 2015; Ginsburg and Abu-Lughod, 2002).

Media is active in societies nowadays and can provide new insides of social reality (Ginsburg and Abu-Lughod, 2002). Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, the importance of social media, especially Facebook, has emerged in new movements regarding women's empowerment in Egypt and is still active nowadays (Tufekci and Wilson 2012, 363). Groups were formed on Facebook, sharing ideas and opinions about society. Even though the effectiveness of social media on democratic innovation has changed after the Arab spring, due to the state surveillance, citizens still use social media as a platform to share events and opinions (Lenze et al. 2017, 3). I wanted to include these new developments in Egyptian society and the new data collection techniques in this thesis. The influence and prominent role that social media has these days, in the society of Egypt regarding women's empowerment, is the reason to collect the data from a social media platform.

Ethics & limitations

The platform was informed in advance about this master thesis and that the online data of the platform is used. The names and photos used on the Facebook page are not anonymised, as this information is already public. The names and photos on the Facebook group are anonymised since this is a closed group, only when they posted their message also at the page the names are given. The other personal stories in the Facebook group were not used as an example in the result chapter for privacy reasons and are anonymised in the data collection.

There were some limitations in the research for this thesis. The first limitation is the time constraint. This allowed me to focus on two months, January and February, for the data collection. Other information that has been discussed earlier or later on the platform is, therefore, not included in the data collection. Social media is also a constantly evolving data source. For this reason, a specific moment has been chosen: the first two months of 2020. It

may be that the discourse regarding empowerment on the platform has slightly changed at this moment since it is a constantly evolving data source. In addition, I focused especially on the use of empowerment in relation to the political system of Egypt. Due to this specific view, the posts and articles have been analysed less holistically. In the results chapter, the data related to answer the research question are elaborated. Less relevant results from the analysis have been omitted due to irrelevance for this thesis and limited word count. The reactions on the posts were, due to the time constraint and the number of reactions omitted as well. Finally, I want to emphasise that I am a young woman that lives in the Netherlands. Due to this fact, I might have overlooked certain implicit messages within the posts and articles. However, I master the Egyptian Arabic dialect and I am a woman, which might reduce this disability and provides me access to the closed Facebook group.

Chapter Four: Results

In this chapter, I will outline the findings of the critical discourse analysis of the platform 'Women of Egypt'. To do so, I will describe the five notable features as the outcome of the analysis. The first describes the way personal stories of women are portrayed by the platform 'Women of Egypt'. This section describes the neoliberal structure within the discourse, the marketing ideas behind the posts and the possible improvement of the position of women in Egypt. Secondly, I will describe the depoliticisation of empowerment and the influence of art businesses on their position in society. Thirdly, I will present the class dynamics of the people on the platform and how they are portrayed by the platform. The expression of class difference from Bourdieu's theory is described in more detail. Fourthly, I will illustrate the focus on self-empowerment and the global neoliberal ideology, which stimulates this form of empowerment. Lastly, I will discuss the omitted factors within empowerment on the platform together with the influence of gender roles and patriarchy active in Egypt are discussed. The five notable features are selected based on striking remarks from the analysis of the discourse of empowerment in a neoliberal system. Also, the popularity of the posts within the platform, such as likes, shares and how many times this type of message is shared are taken into account. These topics together show the discourse of women's empowerment on the platform. Therefore, these five sections were the most relevant to discuss. Since the aim of this thesis is to discover and possibly link empowerment to neoliberalism, patriarchy and political repression in Egypt, each section will focus on a specific part of these concepts.

Sexual harassment is not discussed during this analysis since it is not in the scope of the research question. In addition, sexual harassment was sometimes discussed on the Facebook page and group but only through a photo or video, which requires a different technique of analysis. Once again I want to stress that the aim of the critical discourse analysis was to find

significant components regarding empowerment in words. I have analysed this from a social scientific perspective with the neoliberal and patriarchal policies of Egypt's government in mind.

Fairy tales

On the Facebook page, most attention went out to personal stories of Egyptian women who build their own small business, mainly in art. The stories were all written with the same storyline. First, they name their title and sometimes where they are born. Then, a brief explanation of their educational route, how they found her passion, which steps or chances they took to pursue their passion and achieved success, how they found her internal motivation and, sometimes, how their family supported them. It ends with a promotion of their work and how successful these women became because of their hard work. Then they show websites and pictures of the work, together with a picture of that specific woman. To illustrate this, I present an example from the Facebook page:

N., MD, dermatologist and cosmetologist & owner and founder of "Hadoota Gallery"
N. graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at Ain Shams University. She has always been passionate about art, painting and colors since childhood, but she has not had the opportunity to practice it. After graduating, she started her career practicing medicine, then she got married and raised her 3 children, in addition to her work.

After practicing medicine for 15 years, she decided to pursue her passion and polish her talent. She took several different art classes and courses with highly professional art specialists.

After mastering many arts and handcrafts, she set up her small company and a Facebook page to display and market her products that included of decoupage, handcrafted woodwork, carving roses, walls painting, and refurbished furniture.

During the year and a half since its inception, the company achieved remarkable success, Noura participated in many bazaars and exhibitions. She appeared in magazines and as guest on several TV shows. Her products became known and were purchased by customers in Arab and European countries.

With the success of her art project, Noura continues to practice medicine, and has no intention to give it up. She says her profession is the source of her inspiration and an integral part of her personality. Every piece she designs is a story that reflects part of her soul.

Visit Instagram and Facebook page to view full collection and orders (followed by multiple links to these pages).

This type of message was mostly posted to the Facebook page. These posts had the most likes, shares and reactions. Also, in the private group and in the articles of the magazine, posts of personal success stories regularly appeared. These stories were popular posts in general on the social media platform 'Women of Egypt'. The storyline is also represented in this example and it emphasises how successful she is. This is how the personal stories on the Facebook group were presented:

Interior designer T. launches a handmade brand to support her initiative doll for every girl, and donate dolls and toys to underprivileged children

T., interior designer, mom of three, philanthropist and founder of Tassi.interiors, dollforeverygirl initiative and the handmade brand tassi.madewithlove.

T. launched her handmade brand one year ago, inspired by her two daughters H. and H. H. who is an angel in heaven now, had shared with her mom the love handmade products, flowers and colors. Tassi launched her handmade brand with the encouragement of her daughter Hania because she believes it is a very special project.

Embroidery is very therapeutic, T. stated. In spite of her successful career in interior design, embroidery was a comforting tool in dealing with grief due to the heartbreaking loss of her beloved daughter.

Handmade embroidery scarfs, shawls and throws, designed and sold as one piece each and made with so much love. Wool in winter and linen collection in spring and summer of 20% the profit goes to support "Doll for Every Girl", an initiative to donate new dolls for unprivileged girls created in the loving memory of H., and fulfill her dream for each girl to have a doll

Visit Instagram and Facebook page to view full collection and orders (followed by multiple links to these pages).

This example shows the same storyline again. The story of the lives of these women and how they achieved success reads as if it were a fairytale. The women are portrayed as smart and educated but missing their passion. It focuses on success and 'following your heart'. Failures are hardly ever mentioned. It seems to be more than a promotion of their work; it gives the

impression that everyone can achieve their dream and prosperity by following their hearts and working hard. Following this path can bring success. The social media platform 'Women of Egypt' describes empowerment as 'strengthening and development of the individual core values and self-worth' (WoE Mag 2020). This is clearly reflected in the posts.

The focus on personal success characterises neoliberalism. It is in line with the global neoliberal philosophy: personal success as a marketing strategy. Under neoliberalism, individual cases of hard work are perceived as an indication that success is achievable (Mitchell 1999, 28). The post seems to relate to this indication of success. Neoliberalism praises individual self-responsibility and entrepreneurialism. Through concepts such as 'freedom', 'empowerment', and 'choice', which are highly promoted in neoliberal societies, individuals are made responsible for their own success in lives. The role of the government is to create an institutional framework that is appropriate to such practices (Harvey 2005, 2-3; Larner 2003, 511). This could be the reason why this page and this type of posts are allowed by the government since it stimulates the neoliberal ideals and why women adopt this idea, since self-empowerment is a global neoliberal trend to which they have access via the internet.

In order to understand neoliberalism, it is important to not only study the state structure, but also the non-state structure. This can be done by studying the ways in which people have internalised neoliberal principles, along with institutionalisation in various structures. We need to take the way people behave into account in order to fully understand what neoliberalism means, according to Larner (2003, 511). Therefore, this research focused on people's behaviour online and these posts show this neoliberalistic philosophy. Neoliberalism has a political and economic approach. This is shown in the personal stories. Not only is

individual success promoted, at the end of the post several links to the small businesses and photos of the woman's work are added. The fairy tale could be read as an individual success story that not only inspires but is also used as a marketing strategy to stimulate small businesses. In this way, neoliberalism appears to influence the discourse of empowerment.

This focus on personal success in the field of art does not apply to all personal success stories. Occasionally a personal success story from another field was posted. There was less difference in appreciation on Facebook, these posts received the same amount of likes, comments and shares. This was only clearly different in a certain field: journalism. This is an example of a personal story from journalism:

Women Literature - Maspero Stars Talk, part 2, by Soha Said.

S., journalist for radio and television magazine and author of Maspero Stars Talk. She is the first young female journalist to conduct a series of interviews to document the journey of media pioneers in Maspero "Radio and Television"

In her first book, "Maspero Stars Talk", she features 32 media pioneers who worked in the Egyptian TV, and whom she had interviewed. The book was a great success and was praised by senior media professionals and journalists as the first book to document the career of media professionals.

She continued to interview more media pioneers who worked for the Egyptian "radio and television" which were published the magazine with the same name. The new series of interviews became part 2 of her book "Maspero Stars Speak", published by Dar Al-Nokhba

for publishing and distribution. The book features 15 figures who opened their hearts are talked for the first time about their upbringing and their career.

As can be read, this post also follows the same storyline but is in a couple of ways different from the art stories. First, the emphasis is on a woman's career that is in line with her field of study. Instead of a career switch, as in the art stories, career success is emphasised. Second, these messages were significantly less shared on the page and not shared at all in the Facebook group. Third, these messages received fewer likes, comments and shares. For comparison, the two examples of art stories mentioned above were more appreciated. The first one was liked 128 times, commented on 55 times and shared 11 times. The second example was liked 246 times, commented on 19 times and shared 64 times. The most popular post in art stories received even 1,1 thousand likes, 128 comments and 280 shares. All the personal stories around art received above a hundred likes on the Facebook page. This post got 13 likes, 1 comment and 3 shares. This is clearly less. This obvious difference occurred only in journalism. The personal stories about for example sports, politics and education, had the same amount of likes, comments and shares as the art stories. The only difference, in comparison with art stories, is that these stories were less shared on Facebook.

This clear undervaluation of journalism on the online platform could be related to the danger of journalism in Egypt. Organisation 'Committee to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) reported that over the last ten years, 11 journalists were killed, 159 were imprisoned and one is missing (CPJ 2020). Several studies have shown that journalism in Egypt is highly complex, corrupt and dangerous. The government limits media freedom and can create threats aimed at individual journalists and media organisations (Lohner et al. 2017, 17; Nankervis 2017, 1). Expressions about journalism, and thus perhaps also critical statements about women's

empowerment, in Egypt is dangerous in both the online and offline public sphere and may be the reason for the unpopularity of these posts. It is also possible that this woman's book, which is about television pioneers and in which she interviewed mainly professors and government employees, is seen as obvious government propaganda and therefore receives fewer likes, comments and shares. The reason behind the unpopularity of journalism on the Facebook page is therefore hard to determine but remarkable enough to mention in the discourse on women's empowerment with a view on the political situation.

These posts, that portray an individual success story on a Facebook page and with the aim to empower women, create the image that women can achieve empowerment by any educational background, following their own passion and working hard for it themselves, with the exception of journalism. This aligns perfectly with the goal of neoliberalism: stimulating personal success to create a stable economy. Besides believing in this theory, acting on it is equally important. It is a contribution to the political imagination that only you are responsible for success. If you are not successful, it is due to personal failure, not the collective, but you yourself are responsible for happiness and success in life. This gives the government the power to exonerate itself from responsibility and possible failure. The Egyptian government prefers not to hear criticism from journalism and if something fails, this is due to people themselves.

The focus of the platform 'Women of Egypt' seems to be mainly focused on personal success and self-empowerment that can be achieved by the women themselves which comes from a global neoliberal trend. The duty for women's empowerment, therefore, lies in the female individual and, thereby, exonerated the government of this duty. The question is whether the

aim of this platform is to improve the position of women in Egyptian society or to stimulate the ideological neoliberal image given by the government. Both together may be the case.

<u>Depoliticisation</u>

The second element that emerged from the analysis was the focus on the women's 'small art businesses'. These are businesses that are built and run by one woman. They are focused on a specific creative aspect, such as painting, knitting, flowering, cooking, etc. This example of the Facebook page illustrates this:

'A. founded Dibayo Gallery in Marsa Alam to display her paintings. Dibayo means peace, safely and art, in the tribal language of the people of Halayeb and Shalateen.

She considers the gallery as a complete encyclopedia to introduce the unknown part of the southern Red Sea. She also organizes workshops and drawing classes for talented children in the south. The gallery also exhibits the works of artists for free.'

In her story, the woman explains what the meaning of her artwork is. Also, her passion for art is displayed and promoted. The women build their businesses on their own. Almost all the personal stories on the Facebook page were about these types of small personal businesses. It is in line with the aim of the platform. They want to promote women who 'broke the gender barrier and social taboos' to inspire other women and connect these women with each other (WoE Mag 2020). Posts about small art business seem to be doing particularly well to achieve this goal. Another example is the handmade gifts shop:

'As a self taught artist, S. used tutorial videos on YouTube to develop and polish her hobbies. She improved her skills and mastered the craft in a short time. Her art received positive reviews from her friends and family, who also gave her their support, especially her mother. Using the new skills she learnt, S. started her small project Gifts Gallery to design and make handmade gifts, like memory boxes, cards and paintings. She launched a Facebook group to display and market her products. Her followers are very happy with her products.'

In this story, the artist describes how she developed her art work and why she continued working on her product. These small businesses can make a difference in women's lives and independence. They have their own business and income. If women's empowerment is presumed to be a result of accruing economic improvement, then these projects do empower women. This also seems to be the reason why the Facebook page creates room for these examples: to motivate other women to also build a small business to empower themselves and have an independent source of finances. The question arises: do these small businesses indeed create a more equal position for women in society?

The emphasis on art could be seen as a part of reaching and elucidate of empowerment. Art itself can have a great impact on society and on the opinions of humans. It can trigger and challenge the viewer to reconsider their opinion about a certain social situation. Vanina Serra (et al. 2017, 108) argues that it is important to recognise the value artivist work has in effecting political change. Women all over the world use art to make a statement about their position in society and about the gender gap between men and women (Serra et al. 2017, 108). The emphasis on art, especially on the Facebook page, could, therefore, be a call to reconsider the position of women in Egyptian society. The form of art that is mainly promoted on the Facebook page, however, does not seem to be this critical form of art. Social situations are hardly ever challenged in the art form promoted on the FB page. The focus is on promoting their small business, gaining more customers and enabling them to have more economic freedom. It contributes to more economic freedom, but less to triggering the art public to reflect on the position of women in society.

This form of art seems to focus more on increasing economic freedom instead of challenging social situations or challenging conventional thoughts. It is understandable why they do not

promote 'activist art'. Women who are openly critical about the position of women in Egyptian society face severe consequences. They could be banned from travelling or even be imprisoned (Brechenmacher 2017, 39, 51-52; Hoyle 2016, 194-195). This could be the reason why 'neutral art' is mostly promoted on the Facebook page and magazine. By neutral art, I mean a form of art whereas a political influence or control is taken out of the purpose of artwork. This might be another indication that the government is also controlling social media. It may also be associated with a professionalised hobby. This is also shown in the stories about how these art companies started: it was as a hobby and then they started to invest more time and effort in this. Removing the political aspect in art can depoliticise art and perhaps their business and the underlying idea of empowerment: empowering women to achieve gender equality.

While one could argue that the economic freedom that this creates can also contribute to gender equality, it is nevertheless debatable whether these small art businesses actually generate enough money to support the woman and her children and truly work on the economic position of women in Egypt. There could be several reasons why women, with a high educational background, choose to start their own art business. First, these women could experience workplace gender discrimination. In Egypt, gender discrimination in workplaces is a significant problem. However, this problem receives little attention. Some scholars attributed this disproportional representation of women in high positions in any type of business to keeping women in dead-end, lower-paying jobs (Saad 2019, 12). Several studies indicated that, in comparison to men, women in Egypt were underprivileged on almost all financial indicators, in salary and salary progression (Burress and Zucca 2004; Wentling 2003). Gender discrimination can manifest itself in, for example, denial of opportunities, financial discrimination, stereotyping, disregarding underestimation, and segregation (Saad

2019, 12). It is possible that gender discrimination is one of the reasons to start their own business; it is more difficult to find a job and they want to avoid discrimination. Nevertheless, these small businesses seems to generate an extra income, next to that of the man or family, rather than a full salary that they could have earned in their field of study. Second, this type of work ensures that household duties and raising children is combined with the career. It is done at home, which means that household work, expected from a woman, would not be affected. This could be a reason for a man to accept this type of income since men also have a say in the choices of the women. Egyptian women can be forced to follow the wishes of the community, rather than following their own goals and wishes (Zakarriya 2019, 3). The most influential choices are largely made by men. Research also showed very little agency in Egyptian women, as less than 15% of women make independent decisions regarding household and healthcare (Yount et al. 2014, 189). Besides, skills such as cooking, making clothes and creating objects are often seen as 'women's work'. Egyptian women are disproportionately represented in the informal sector, where they work at lower-paying and lower productivity jobs (The World Bank 2017, 31). Finally, it may be that education has been imposed on these women from their families. Education is greatly valued, especially in highly educated families (Nazier and Ramadan 2018, 167). Perhaps these women had a different career in mind, within for example art. These examples show that there could be several reasons for a highly educated woman to start a small art business. Either way, these highly educated women do not improve their personal financial source and economic position in society with starting an art business. It depoliticises their jobs and position in society.

In sum, small art businesses do not seem to be used to challenge the social situation of women, but to give women a small financial source and fulfilment of a personal dream. Multiple reasons can ensure that a highly educated woman does not claim her deserving place

in society, such as gender discrimination in their field of study, being able to continue to perform 'female tasks', and the pressure on studying from the family that was not necessarily the desired career of these women. Therefore, these women seem to focus on self-empowerment, but not on collective empowerment of women in Egypt, as the platform claims. Or challenging the image of women and thus their position in society. By choosing to build an art company without a political statement and after a university degree, depoliticises both the job and the position of the woman.

Class dynamic

The position of women in society appeared from another aspect as well. The class position of the women who were active on the online platform was remarkable. For example, the language in which communication took place. On the Facebook page and Facebook group, it was in both Egyptian Arabic and English. The magazine was completely written in English. Another example is the promoted art products. The art products that were promoted were mainly for wealthier citizens who can afford these 'extras'. Such as 'Penny Fruit Bouquets' on the Facebook page:

She became infatuated with the far east and spent her time there visiting museums, attending workshops and watching the making of different handcrafts, specially in Japan, Thailand and India. That's how and where she learning flower arrangements and vegetable and fruit carving. Recently she also learned 3D gelatin art.

She's been famous for her unique presentation of food and desserts on every family occasion, she was encouraged by family and friends to display her art on a Facebook page. That was the start of her small business Penny Fruit Bouquets. She makes savories, birthday cakes,

fruit baskets, figures for cake toppers, gelatin dry art and desserts. She also gives classes on gelatin art.

In this post, she describes where she learned the technique and found inspiration for her business. She goes to museums, follows workshops, etc. These activities are mainly done by people with high cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 248). It is part of the objective state of cultural capital, which means objectification of the cultural capital. It is about preferences in books, music and activities. For instance, people with high cultural capital will choose certain types of books and music that are linked to high intelligence and financial status (Bourdieu 1986, 246). Her choice to go to museums and attend workshops can be linked to a high cultural capital. Thereafter, she describes her success and the several items that she sells. The name of her company 'Penny Fruit Bouquets' is in English as well. The English title for the company can also be linked to a higher cultural capital. Not only does she seem able to communicate in English, but her clients are also likely to be upper class citizens who prefer the English language. The English language in Egypt has status. The language is linked to higher status and prosperity (Schaub 2000, 225). Also, the items she sells are mainly available to citizens who have enough money to afford these 'extras'.

Next, the topics of the magazine seem to be mainly written for higher educated people as well. For instance, the article 'Transcending gender barriers in academia' which begins with:

'To be an academic is a dream for many people, a sense of achievement that yields recognition and satisfaction, and an opportunity to pursue passion for and contribution to their captivating sciences'

The writer of the article emphasises the academic dream, which is mainly a realisable dream for people from a wealthy bourgeoisie. This is due to the Egyptian school system, which consists of three levels. The first level is basic education for children from 4-6 years old. The second level is a primary school and preparatory school for children from 6-14 years old. The third level is three years of secondary school, followed by the tertiary level. All the levels are free in every governmental school. According to research of The World Bank, there is a significant difference in educational attainment between the rich and poor. It is also known as the 'wealth gap'. The children of wealthy people graduate much earlier, have more job opportunities and have a higher income (The World Bank 2017, 5-14). They are more likely to dream about an academic career since it is a realistic dream, which is an example of economic capital. This is capital that is directly exchangeable for money and can be institutionalised in the form of property rights, such as a job and loan. Earning an academic diploma is a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 244). Because of the education and income of the parents with a high cultural and economic capital, these children are more likely to have an academic diploma. The article ends with the following sentence:

'Finally, what it takes to make good leaders proves to have no relationship with the gender issue. It has to do with possessing basic leadership skills such as having a vision, ability to

make hard decisions, ability to get the best of the resources available, among other credentials.'

The author names certain skills that are required to be a leader or academic. This is also an example of cultural capital. These types of skills are not only learned at school but also during the upbringing. Parents, who are already leaders or academics, are more likely to teach such skills to their children (Bourdieu 1986, 243). It makes it more likely that the children will have high positions too, that require these skills.

Finally, the events that were promoted on the Facebook page and group were mainly literature, art or wellness events. An illustration is the event: 'Pranayama Yoga Weekly Class, Rohana Yoga Studio in Cairo, Egypt':

These types of events are an example of social capital. According to Bourdieu, social capital means ' the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu 1986, 248). In other words, the social connections to and membership of certain groups. Like-minded people get to know each other through such events. In the

Facebook group, many events around literature are promoted. The code 'literature' was used 33 times during the analysis of the Facebook group. Not only like-minded but also upper class people seem to be the target group for such events. It increases social capital.

Women that achieved personal success portray themselves as women that claimed their own position and space in society. This refers to Bourdieu's theory of 'space of position-taking'. This means what a person does in the social field and what is it does to create their own space and privileges (Bourdieu 1989, 16). To understand this idea, I need to further explain the concept of 'field' from Bourdieu which is also entangled with the class concept 'capital'. The field is described as a subspace in society with its own rules, codes, norms and values (Bourdieu 1989, 14). One's capital plays a role in which position you have in the field. The more capital a person has, the more access and influence it has on the field. The field is thus a system of social positions, such as a profession. Creating space and position for oneself in society is, according to Bourdieu, closely connected to your class and the height of capital that you have. Creating a place and improving your position as a woman in society is, therefore, strongly linked to your class in society. Within the platform, there seems to be less emphasis on the improvement of women from a lower class, but rather on stimulating their own class. This class has a lot of capital, which means that it already has a clear place in society according to Bourdieu. Contradictory, they, the women who are active on the platform and the platform itself, want to improve the position of Egyptian women that have already created a position. To take this even further, the question is whether they stimulate or downplay each other by stimulating to take a part-time job in mostly a private art business. These upper class women could work on empowerment for all women by intellectually challenging each other. In this way, they could make topics in society open to discussion.

Yet, intellectually challenging other women on the platform, for example, by posting a critical message on the page or group, hardly ever happened.

The question is why they portray their platform in this way with only upper class women who seem to be active. Possibly it is because of the background of the target group they want to reach, or possibly because they want to propagate status. In any case, it seems clear that the events, messages, articles and promotions from this platform are mainly accessible to highly educated Egyptian women. If we go back to the main goal of the platform, which is to empower other women, it is questionable which class of women they want to empower. This seems to be a target group that is already highly educated and economically stable. Is it not the goal of women's empowerment to encourage women who do not have opportunities, in education, financial resources, etc.? This makes it interesting to explore which purpose this platform, and the women who are active in this, actually have with empowerment.

The women who share information in the group, on the page or write the articles seem to be from an upper class. The target group they want to reach seems to be their own group: highly educated and economically stable women. The aim seems to be increasing the empowerment of this target group and less to inspire women from lower classes to get empowered through their page/group/magazine. The aim of this platform concerning empowerment seems to be mainly focused on increasing self-empowerment of highly educated and economically stable women without intellectual challenging each other, for example, by being critical on the government or social structures within the society.

Self-empowerment

The focus on self-empowerment did not only emerge in the description of the platform, but also in the posts and the articles. Well-being for oneself and with that for your surrounding was a message that the platform made clear repeatedly and in different ways. Initiatives, achievements from women in Egypt and events that could help with the focus on oneself, were promoted and shared the most in every component of the platform. To illustrate this, I will start with examples from the magazine article 'Year of the Self: Make Your Well-Being A Priority', which focuses on how to take care of oneself:

'I decided to make my well-being a priority'

Not only the well-being of oneself seemed to be important in this article. The analysis showed that the focus was rather on the effect on the surrounding if someone take care of oneself. The code 'Effects on your surrounding', 'Well-being everyone' and 'Show everyone' that were used multiple times show that there is, besides the focus on oneself, a focus on the well-being of others as well:

'Because a BETTER YOU is better for everyone around you, especially those you love. A better you is better for this world.'

'It matters to you, and how good you feel, but it also matters to everyone and everything connected to you… which is the entire planet. Your energy affects everything.'

These sentences almost give the impression that the person itself is responsible for others well-being. If someone takes care of oneself and their loved ones, the whole world will be

better, the writer claims. This could be due to a collective culture, that is also seen in Egypt. In collective cultures, the emphasis is on the needs and goals of the group. This is more important than the desires and needs of the individual. Relationships and interconnectedness between people play a fundamental role in a person's identity (Schwartz 1990, 139). Elsaid and Elsaid (2012, 7) did extensive research on the society of Egypt in comparison with 62 other societies. Egypt had the third-highest score in in-group collectivism (El Said and El Said 2012, 7). There is social control within the groups and their own identity is based on their position in the group. The interest of the group is paramount. This is a overall perspective and cannot be stated about every citizen of Egypt, but it does say something about the overall social structures between people in the Egyptian society. This seems to be the reason why the benefits of the group are so clearly emphasised. The individual and self-empowerment are stimulated through the benefit of the group:

'If you are at your happiest, your most positive, your healthiest, your wealthiest – that example and that energy will be seen by those you love and will lift them up.'

The so-called emphasis on the person itself is mainly good for the social environment. It goes even further than that: if you do not take care of your own happiness and success you could take away those of others too. The importance of the group is again emphasised:

*'A happy mother will make her family happy.'*

'The immediate effect of you living your greatest life, and setting the best example has a huge impact and flow on those you love.'

As can be read, the mother role is also addressed. When the mother is happy, so is the environment. This refers back to gender and patriarchy patterns. Women are recognised worldwide as 'caring people' by nature. For this reason, tasks and professions that involve taking care of a person or space seem to be stimulated towards and mostly performed by women. It is also the professions that get the least salary and appreciation (Burress and Zucca 2004; Wentling 2003). This can be a pattern from patriarchy; the man holds power, privileges, status, and money (Henslin 2012, 65). This article seems to appeal to the gender role of 'caring woman'. This suits the patriarchal system well. The women take care of the household and rasing the children, and put time and energy into achieving this, while subsequently no status, money, privileges or power is achieved.

The accent in this article is on self-empowerment and its effects on the environment. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, women's empowerment is one of the key development goals in Egypt. Free participation, control, development, and influence are considered as the characteristics of empowerment. According to the form of empowerment, promoted by this platform, these goals can be achieved by focusing on personal happiness and success (WoE Mag 2020). Self-control is control over oneself and the environment, is the idea. Self-empowerment and empowerment, in general, seem to imply the same thing.

To see if that is actually the case, we have to take another look at the definition of self-empowerment. According to Martin (2014, 233-234), self-empowerment is considered as taking control of your own life by setting goals, making positive choices and reflecting on yourself. This definition seems to correspond with the goal of the platform. This concept does help achieve general empowerment, but other forms of empowerment are needed as well. For example, economic empowerment can help with financial necessities in order to accomplish

personal happiness. Mental empowerment is necessary to get a good mindset to actually work on self-empowerment, and so on. Therefore, it is difficult to state that self-empowerment equals general empowerment. Yet the platform focuses mainly on self-empowerment in every component, so the magazine, Facebook page and Facebook group. An example of the accent on self-empowerment on Facebook are the events:
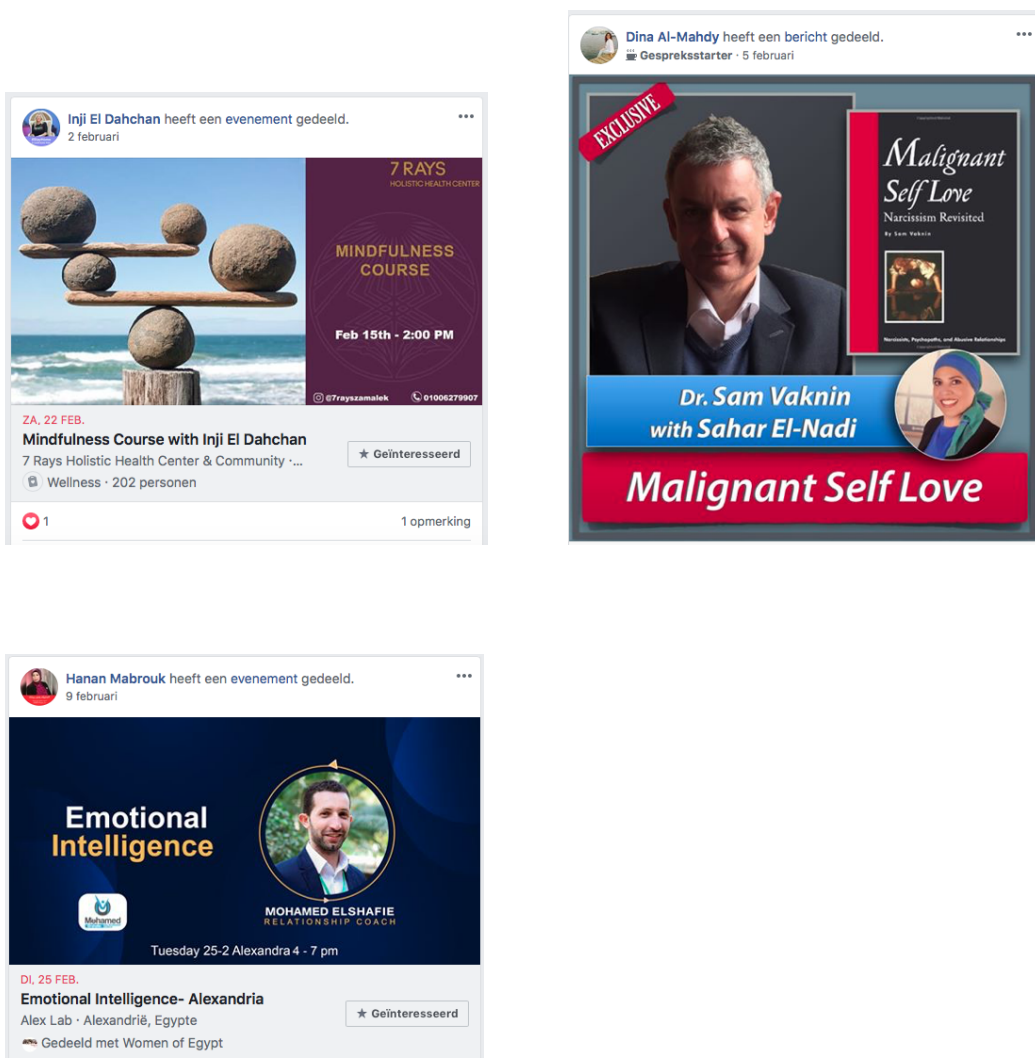
In these events, the focus is on the self. The aim is to find peace and self-awareness. The focus on the self is in line with the neoliberal philosophy. Jeff Sugarman (2015, 103) did

research on the psychology of neoliberalism. Psychologists are connected to the neoliberal agenda, which especially emerges in treatments around social anxiety disorder, positive psychology and educational psychology. He showed that in neoliberalism, the emphasis is not only on economic enterprise and other forms of institutional organisation but also on personal attributes. These attributes are aligned with enterprise culture, such as self-reliance, self-mastery, initiative and risk-taking (Sugarman 2015, 104). Neoliberalism associates economic success with personal success. One way to achieve personal success is through self-empowerment (Martin 2014, 234). Mary Wrenn (2014, 503) goes one step further. Neoliberalism cloaks the execution of the business agenda behind rhetorical manipulation that advocates for limiting the government. The absence of the government contributes largely to disarming the means of social redress for the individual. The individual has to be strong, which creates identity crises and uncertainty. Therefore, people adopt a social identity in order to create a sense of personal identity and connection with others. Personal success is pre-determined by an economic system and this system associates financial shortcomings with a failed individual identity (Wrenn 2014, 503). This sense of personal failure can have major consequences, such as depression, social isolation and, in the worst case, suicide (Frantzen 2019; Nevid et al. 2014, 160-161). As was shown in the article above, prosperity and happiness for the individual and its environment can be achieved through personal success. Thus, the platform, possibly subconsciously, contributes to the neoliberal ideal. Within events and articles like these, the neoliberal agenda can also appear. It goes even further than that, they seem to contribute to the neoliberal illusion: success and failure are their own personal responsibility. The background and class position are a minor or no factor in achieving success. As explained in the section 'class dynamics', the position of class does play a major role in achieving success. This illusion can lead to psychological consequences.

For this reason, the question is: who profits from self-empowerment? This can be the individual, the social surrounding and/or the government. The platform emphasises that mainly the women themselves and their environment benefit from self-empowerment. The analysis shows that the emphasis is mainly on environmental and governmental benefits. The government wants to give the impression that the individual and the social environment profit from self-empowerment. If we put it in a larger context, it can be assumed that the emphasis on self-empowerment increases the chance for personal success, which supports neoliberalism. However, as Wrenn (2014, 103) stressed as well, a strong personality is needed to achieve success. To accomplish this, other forms of empowerment, such as economic, legal and social, are necessary. Therefore, the position of someone in society does indeed play a role (Wrenn 2014, 103). By creating the idea that someone is responsible for success itself, failure will also be connected to itself. Self-empowerment seems to be a cover for the emphasis on personal success and is in line with the government's neoliberal approach. It gives the impression that one does it for oneself and his or her social surroundings, while the one who benefits the most from self-empowerment are, contradictorily, the government and upper class people. Self-empowerment is a worldwide phenomenon that passes the burden onto the people. It keeps lower-class people in the same class but with the idea that it is their own fault. This can cause, for example, psychological problems and it blocks real changes in social systems, for example, gender equality.

Missing factors

Perhaps the most striking result was that a number of fundamental components of empowerment were hardly mentioned. The economic prosperity and situation of women are barely addressed, the position of women by law is not mentioned, the comparison with the position of men in society is not made, and so on. These are a few examples of important

components of the concept of empowerment that were completely omitted. The themes that were most related to the position of women in Egyptian society from a legal or economic perspective, did indeed collaborate on this but did not criticise the government, men, upper class and so on. I will illustrate this with the following examples from the data.

On the Facebook page, concrete data about the position of women in Egypt is shared. This happened occasionally, there were only two posts about factual information of women in Egypt, for example:

3.3 million women-led families, equivalent to 30% of Egyptian families - photo by marwa already smoke

The results of Egypt's 2017 report showed that the number of families is looked after by 3.3 million families, equal to 30% of the total female heads of households, followed with an average qualification of 17.6%, then with 8.5% university qualification, most women heads of families in the 2017th widows count, reaching 70.3%, followed by married women by 16.6, then separated by 7.1%.

In March 2019, 87.9% of single women in Egypt were widows and 58.3% of these women were mothers and 89.9% of them were married.

In this post, they show facts about women and their family. How many females are heads of household, educated, single, etc. These figures are presented in a neutral manner, they are just facts. An opinion about these facts would be expected from an empowerment platform on social media with mostly highly educated women, such as 'Women of Egypt'. However, this

is left out. Apart from the lack of position from these facts, the possible cause of these facts is not mentioned either. They do not go beyond or more in-depth than spreading these facts. In the Facebook group, there was no post that was in any way connected to the economical or legal position of women in Egypt. The component that was the most critical about the position of women in society was the magazine. They more extensively paid attention to these facts and described their position. Sometimes, the factual rates were compared with men as well and the position of men and discrimination against women were stressed. An example is the article 'Transcending gender barriers in academia. Why male academics outnumber females?' which made statements such as:

'Officially, all academics are equal; in reality woman are robbed of their rights to equal opportunities in the hiring and selection process for senior positions.'

'Some men cultivate negative attitudes against female expertise, considering it a threat.'

'... they (men) ruthlessly create an unfriendly, rather aggressive rhetoric, based on faulty reasoning and the entrenched, toxic stereotype that women are less and not enough, to attack women colleagues and curb their chances for featuring in higher ranks and garnering due recognition.'

Only the magazine pays attention to a more critical approach concerning the facts of the economical or legal position of women in Egyptian society. However, concrete causes, criticism, and solutions are missing. Apart from that, the economic or legal position of women is also not stressed at all in any article in the magazine, although these are among the important components of empowerment. Economic and legal empowerment are also one of

the important components of empowerment, according to the government's campaign (SIS 2017). Therefore, it seems to be a well-known part of empowerment. For the definition of empowerment in the Middle East, we return to the theoretical framework. Empowerment is a process of change within a power relation, according to Kabeer (1999, 436), Narayan (2005, vii) and Haghighat (2013, 274). It refers to the possession of enabling resources, which, in turn, may enhance agency. Thus, empowerment is meant to change the power relation between two groups and to divide this power equally between these groups. The group with less power in this relation will get extra support to achieve this change. This is called 'empowerment'. The question is, which factors need to be stimulated to get this extra support? The most important are: the social environment, financial resources and legal rights. Also called social, economic and legal empowerment. Since some components seem to be missing in the publication of the platform and play an essential role in the general concept of empowerment, I describe these components more extensively with examples from the data.

Social empowerment is understood as a process of developing a sense of self-confidence, autonomy, and acting individually and collectively. From this position, social relations, institutions and discourses that exclude women and keep them in poverty can change (Stark et al. 2018, 18-19). The platform seems to focus mainly on this part of empowerment. Self-empowerment is strongly encouraged, as I described in the previous section. Also, connections with family members are stimulated, events to meet like-minded people are promoted, and so on. This is all part of social empowerment.

Economic empowerment is understood as the capability to make and act on decisions that involve control over financial resources (Golla et al. 2011, 4). The link between women's empowerment and financial resources is mostly made in the personal businesses of women

who build up their own business as seen in the previous examples. Sometimes, a post is dedicated to businesswomen in Egypt, such as this one on the Facebook page:

Eleven Egyptian Women on Forbes List of Most Powerful Businesswomen in the Middle East

1- Mona Zulficar, Zulficar & Partners founding partner and EFG Hermes Chairperson

2- Pakinam Kafafi, CEO of Taqa Arabia

3- Elham Mahfouz, CEO of Commercial Bank of Kuwait

4&5- Yasmine and Farida Khamis, VP Oriental Weavers

6- Hend El Sherbini, CEO of LSE-listed IDH

7- Mervat Zohdy El Sayed Soltan, Chairperson of the Export Development Bank of Egypt

8- Reem Asaad, Middle East and Africa Vice President of CISCO

9- Hoda Mansour, Managing Director of SAP Egypt

10- Abir Lehita, CEO of Egytrans

11- Noha El Ghazaly, Managing Director of Pharos Holding.

What is striking is that this post was very popular on the page: it has over a thousand likes. However, messages like these are rarely shared and no personal story is told, for example how they got this position, as women with small companies do. The need to give more women such positions is also not mentioned, while economic empowerment is also important for overall empowerment. It rather seems to be an advertising list of names, in which they can proudly state that there are women who hold important positions.

Economic empowerment goes beyond financial resources. It describes the capability to intervene in the decision making of how to spend money. Not only for the woman herself but also within the family and the government. How we deal with money and where to invest is a

decision in which women should have as much of a say as men (Golla et al, 2011, 4-6). In the platform, this responsibility seems to be placed primarily on the woman herself and discussed at a micro-level. From neoliberal perspectives, which influence organisations such as The World Bank and IMF, economic empowerment is the crucial and essential component of general empowerment. The idea that investment in the skills and labour of women is the key to stimulating economic growth has become a key strategy of The World Bank and IMF (Hickel 2014, 1355). These types of posts are in line with this strategy. Yet, there are no further posts about how to reach economic and legal empowerment, which is promoted by neoliberalism and the aforementioned organisations. If we take a more nuanced perspective, equal intervention within the decision-making around financial resources by women is also necessary. It is not the only part of empowerment, but it certainly contributes to the general improvement of the position of women in society. This is not mentioned in any component of the platform along with the legal side of empowerment. It is remarkable since the women on the platform seem to react in line with neoliberalism, for example with self-empowerment.

Legal empowerment includes the laws and rules that the country provides to their people to get access to the other forms of empowerment (UNDP 2013, 7). It is about co-deciding governance and creating laws so that the interests of women and men are equally represented. Nothing is mentioned about this in the platform either. The government and the inclusion of women in governance are not discussed in any component. It should be taken into account that this may have appeared on the Facebook page or group at an earlier stage, which is beyond my analysis. However, the components of economic and legal empowerment are not mentioned in the descriptions or information of the platform.

Why have these important components of empowerment been omitted? According to the Egyptian government, that announced the campaign 'Year of Egyptian Woman' in 2017, economic and legal empowerment is one of the main focus within equality between men and women (SIS, 2017). What is striking in this campaign is that the cause of the inferior position of women, who remained stably low in Egypt for decades, is not mentioned in the campaign. It mainly mentions what the government has done for women in Egypt. Also, the fundamentals in empowerment, such as the intervention of women in financial resources and legal rights, are not mentioned at all (SIS, 2017). It is almost doubtful whether there is a need from the government to work on these components. However, neoliberal organisations show that these factors need to be stimulated. The World Bank (2018, 31) showed in their research the strong gender gap between men and women with regard to financial sources and co-determination in the legal system. They cite facts, such as that 23.1% of women have paid work, compared to double the number of men (The World Bank 2018, 31). As described in the theoretical framework, neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practice (Harvey 2005, 2). From this neoliberal perspective, the Egyptian government has to improve the position of women in the economic and political aspects to stimulate the economy. This seems to be the reason why they started the campaign for women's empowerment. Yet, a solution and the cause for this problem remains hidden which discourage general development. The position of women, economically and legally, is still the same. This confirms another social system within Egyptian society: patriarchy.

As illustrated in the theoretical framework, patriarchy means that men hold the primary power in the social system and predominate in roles of leadership and social privileges (Nazier and Ramadan 2018, 166; Pollert 1996, 64). Personal success is stimulated from a neoliberal ideal, but from a patriarchal point of view, this is possibly held back from women.

It shows the intertwining of the social systems of neoliberalism and patriarchy. This complication creates a contradiction in the government's approach. This is reflected in encouraging women to be sent to school, but discourage the pursuit of high positions and stimulate more inferior jobs with less income and political influence, such as an art business. For this reason, education does not play its expected role in developing economic empowerment. Because of the patriarchal system from the government, in which women occupy a lower position than men, this social structure could be adopted by the women that are active on the platform. They seem to internalise this paradox. Partly, they follow the neoliberal and partly the patriarchal approach, who sometimes contradicts himself, in, for example, economic and legal factors of empowerment. It reduces the emphasis on economic and legal empowerment and high, influential positions for women. The political repression, in which the patriarchal system is also intertwined, can also restrict developments on these factors. This may be an additional reason for the platform to focus less on economic and political aspects of empowerment. Consciously or unconsciously, the women active on the platform seems to be part of the interwoven approach between neoliberalism and patriarchy of the government.

So, patriarchy and neoliberalism are intertwined. Neoliberalism promotes individualism to stimulate the economy, while patriarchism stimulates the traditional male-female relations. They both place the infeasible responsibility for change on women themselves: if she wants to change her position, she has to do it herself. This is an unrealistic question since for a fundamental change, social structures need to change. A change that is not a desire from the patriarchy either. As read with the concept of gender: it is about the balance between the oppositions to achieve equal power. To achieve this, both opposites, so men and women, citizens and government, need to change. It is simple and effortless for a government to place

the responsibility on the citizen and for the man to place the responsibility on the woman. The connection between neoliberalism and patriarchy could, for this reason, even be seen as a process in which these two mutually reinforce each other. Both place the possible failure of the system on the victim: the person has less economic wealth or a lower position in society because they did not fight for it themselves. These are embedded ideas that, partly unconsciously, become part of social processes between citizens. The women that are active on this platform seem to have internalised these structures as well. Economic and political empowerment may be omitted because it goes against these embedded ideas. The woman should help the economy but stay in positions with less influence which is the perfect combination of neoliberalism and patriarchy.

Conclusion

The gender inequality in Egypt and their low rate on a world scale provided the reason to write this thesis, to take a close look at women's empowerment. The difference between men and women in Egypt in economic, political, educational, health-related and survival positions is significant. Social media are widely used in Egypt nowadays, especially to share opinions about topics such as women's empowerment. Therefore, the social media platform 'Women of Egypt' was used as case study of the online public sphere. I was curious about the discourse of empowerment by Egyptian women themselves. Therefore, I chose to adopt a cognitive approach and took the influence of government into account, overarching neoliberal and patriarchy ideals and political oppression.

While the conclusions are specific to the platform 'Women of Egypt' during the period of January and February, they can generate a contribution to academic literature due to the use of social media, the emphasis on the perspective of the women themselves, and the qualitative research structure to get an in-depth understanding. First, I reflect on the knowledge that has emerged from this research. Thereafter, I portray the answer to the research question based on the analysis. Finally, I outline recommendations for further research.

The analysis of this research shows that neoliberal and patriarchal ideologies, political repression, and the class dynamics influence and navigate the discourse of empowerment by the women on the platform. I will go through this influence step by step, starting with neoliberalism. The focus on self-empowerment, personal success and the individual characterise neoliberalism. It is used as a marketing strategy. Success and failure come from

the person himself or herself, which creates an impression of a minimal role and responsibility of the government. This idea seems to have been internalised by these women. By mostly focusing on self-empowerment, they participate in the process of passing the burden onto the people. The responsibility for women's empowerment and the failure of equality between men and women depends on the women themselves, and they unconsciously contribute to this by internalising the neoliberal ideologies.

These highly educated women could be seen as actors who play a mediating role in neoliberalism. They can be seen as key figures between national and international trends. The women are active on a platform that is used worldwide, they are fluent in English, and are influenced by the global industry of self-help. In addition, they seem more externally-oriented, reacting to a global audience and phenomena. Through this intermediary role between worldwide social processes and the national focus on Egyptian women on the platform, they stimulate the global neoliberal structure of the process that passes the burden onto the people.

Second, the social structure of patriarchy seems to play an influential role in the discourse of empowerment. It was hardly mentioned that the inequality of women can also be related to the high status of men. The power relations remain the same and are not criticised. In other words, the focus seems on women and self-empowerment which maintains the current gender relations.

In addition, the analysis and literature show that the government seems to be interfering with the discourse of women's empowerment on the platform. It has not necessarily retreated, which is often the case, despite the association of neoliberalism with minimal government

intervention. As stated in the theoretical framework, the government monitors social media and, therefore, critical statements to the government can be risky. This is also what I saw in the analysis. The women on the platform do not express themselves critically towards the government or their policy which could be due to this political repression. Neutral facts about the society and the position of women are occasionally shared but without opinion or interpretation. Debates and critical opinions about women's empowerment, which seems logical for a platform with the topic of women's empowerment with highly educated women, do not appear. Nor do they refer to the government campaign 'The Year of Egyptian Woman' with the aim to empower women. There could be some form of collaboration between the most popular social media platform on women's empowerment in Egypt and this campaign. Since this campaign and their projects are not mentioned or referred to on the platform or website, it seems to indicate that there is no cooperation with the government. This is striking since government policy is necessary, among other things, to achieve systematic changes around women's empowerment. Therefore it seems questionable whether the government's campaign is taken seriously by these Egyptian women. The fact that they do not mention this campaign on a popular platform with the topic 'women's empowerment' could be seen as a critical statement in itself towards the government.

Finally, the class difference is a phenomenon that appeared in the analysis. The discourse of empowerment online, by the platform, seem to be focused on empowering women of the upper class. Due to the success posts of women who have started their own business, it indeed seems to be a platform where women's empowerment is pursued. It is debatable whether women of a higher class empower or block each other through this platform. The women mainly promote following their hobbies after they finished a high study such as medicine, rather than reaching a position in their field of study.

This thesis aimed to identify the discourse of empowerment by women themselves on social media under a system of neoliberalism, patriarchy, and political repression. My findings show that these women, consciously or unconsciously, are guided in neoliberal and patriarchist ideas and internalised them. Neoliberalism, class and patriarchy play a key role in the discourse of empowerment on the platform 'Women of Egypt'. Therefore, they inadvertently stand in the way of gender equality themselves. They live in the idea that the individual is the culprit and the solution to this problem. Other important components of empowerment are omitted, such as the economic position and legal rights that are necessary as well to achieve equality between men and women. This idea of empowerment driven by neoliberalism and patriarchy is hardly a typical Egyptian phenomenon. Neoliberalism and patriarchy are embedded within the state, but this is a social process as well which is internationally known. The notion of self-empowerment is a worldwide discourse that is proposed as a solution for various social struggles. Change of social structures should be sought, basically, to achieve equality between men and women. Now, it seems that the term empowerment is mainly used for other goals, particularly the pursuit of profit, leaving it separate from underlying social structures.

From this analysis, I conclude that the platform 'Women of Egypt' appears to have a discourse about empowerment that focuses on personal success, mostly in small art businesses, driven by internalised global and national social structures, such as neoliberalism and patriarchy. Self-empowerment seems to be the main goal, instead of overall empowerment. This discourse of empowerment is created for and by Egyptian women from upper classes that seem to function as key figures, intermediaries, between this global trend and the national discourse of empowerment.

Based on these conclusions, I suggest producing further research on social media platforms in general to gain more knowledge about social structures and social change. A quantitative study is needed to see whether these in-depth findings can also be generalised to other social media platforms. In addition, a qualitative study based on the offline public sphere or other social media components, from the perspective of Egyptian women, could be conducted to see if this discourse also exists in other public spheres. These types of researches could confirm, build and enrich the conclusions of this thesis. Despite the limits of this research, my thesis contributed to an understanding of the circulation of the discourses of empowerment in the online public sphere.

Bibliography

Abdelrahman, Maha. 2017. "Policing neoliberalism in Egypt: the continuing rise of the securocratic state." *Third World Quarterly* 38, no 1. (January): 185-202.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2013. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Alcoff, Linda Martãn and John D. Caputo. 2011. *Feminism, Sexuality, and the Return of Religion.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Auga, Ulrike. 2015. "Decolonizing Public Space: A Challenge of Bonhoeffer's and Spivak's Concepts of Resistance, 'Religion' and 'Gender'." *Feminist Theology* 24, no. 1, (September): 49-68.

Bargain, Olivier, Delphine Boutin and Hugues Champeaux. 2019. "Women's political participation and intrahousehold empowerment: Evidence from the Egyptian Arab Spring." *Journal of Development Economics* 141, (November): 1-13.

Bonilla, Yarimar and Jonathan Rosa. 2015. "#Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States." *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 1, (February): 4-17.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1979. *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement.* Paris: Editions de Minuit.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. Richardson: 241–258.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1989. "Social space and symbolic power." *Sociological Theory* 7, no. 1 (Spring): 14-25.

Brechenmacher, Saskia. 2017. *Civil Society Under Assault: Repression and Responses in*

Russia, Egypt, and Ethiopia. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International

Peace.

Bryman, Adams. 2012. *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burress, Jay and Linda Zucca. 2004. "The gender equity gap in top corporate executive

positions." *American Journal of Business* 19, no. 1: 55-62.

Calhoun, Craig, Joseph Gerteis, James Moody, Steven Pfaff, and Indermohan Virk. 2002.

Contemporary Sociological Theory. New Jersey: BlackWell Publishers ltd.

Connell, Raewyn. 2009. *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity.

CPJ: Committee to Protect Journalists. 2020. "Egypt." Accessed May 7, 2020.

https://cpj.org/mideast/egypt/

D'Agostino, Maria J. and Marylin M. Rubin. 2017. *Governing in a Global World. Women in*

Public Service. Leiden: Taylor & Francis Ltd.

Elsaid, Eahab and Abdel M. Elsaid. 2012. "Culture and leadership: Comparing Egypt to

the GLOBE study of 62 societies." *Business and Management Research* 1, no. 2: 1-

13.

Elyachar, Julia. 2012. "Before (and after) Neoliberalism: Tacit Knowledge, Secrets of the

Trade, and the Public Sector in Egypt." *Cultural Anthropology* 27, no. 1 (February):

76-96.

Eysenck, Michael W. 1992. *Anxiety. The Cognitive Perspective*. Leiden: Taylor & Francis

Ltd.

Fennell, Shailaja and Madeleine Arnot. 2008. *Gender Education and Equality in a Global*

Context: Conceptual Frameworks and policy perspectives. New York: Routledge.

Fernandes, Leela. 2018. *Feminists Rethink the Neoliberal State: Inequality, Exclusion, and*

Change. New York: New York University Press.

Frantzen, Mikkel K. 2019. "A Future with No Future: Depression, the Left, and the

Politics of Mental Health." Accessed May 29, 2020. https://lareviewofbooks.org/

article/future-no-future-depression-left-politics-mental-health/

Garber, Marjorie. 1997. *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. Leiden:

Taylor & Francis Ltd.

Ginsburg, Faye and Lila Abu-Lughod. 2002. *Media worlds: anthropology on new terrain*.

California: University Of California Press.

Golla, Anne-Marie, Anju Malhotra, Priya Nanda, and Rekha Mehra. 2011. *Understanding*

and measuring women's economic empowerment: definition, framework and

indicators. Washington: International Center for Research on Women.

Haghighat, Elhum. 2013. "Social Status and Change: The Question of Access to Resources

and Women's Empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa." *Journal of*

International Women's Studies 14, no. 1 (Winter): 273-299.

Hanna, Sameh. 2016. *Bourdieu in Translation Studies: The Socio-cultural Dynamics of*

Shakespeare Translation in Egypt. New York: Routledge.

Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Henslin, James M. 2001. *Essentials of Sociology*. Leiden: Taylor & Francis.

Hickel, Jason. 2014. "The 'girl effect': liberalism, empowerment and the contradictions of

development." *Third World Quarterly* 45, no. 8 (October): 1355-1373.

Hoyle, Justin A. 2016. "A Matter of Framing: Explaining the Failure of Post-Islamist Social

Movements in the Arab Spring." *Digest of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 2 (September):

186-209.

Kabeer, Naila. 1999. "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of

Women's Empowerment." *Development and Change* 30: 435–464.

Kabeer Naila. 2005. "Gender equality and women's empowerment: a critical analysis of the

third Millennium Development Goal." *Gender and Development* 13, no. 1 (March):

13-24.

Kidd, Dustin and Keith McIntosh. 2016. "Social Media and Social Movements." *Sociology*

Compass 10, (October): 785–794.

Larner, Wendy. 2003. "Neoliberalism?" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21,

no. 5 (October): 509-512.

Lenze, Nele, Charlotte Schriwer and Zubaidah Abdul Jalil. 2017. *Media in the Middle East.*

Activism, Politics, and Culture. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lohner, Judith, Irene Neverla and Sandra Banjac. 2017. *Structural working conditions of*

journalism in Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa: Empirical findings from

interviews with journalists reporting on democratisation conflicts. Sheffield: White

Rose University Consortium.

Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of Piety The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject.*

Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mansour, Sherif. 2020. "Stifling the public sphere: Media and Civil Society in Egypt."

Accessed February 27, 2020. http://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/

Stifling-the-Public-Sphere-Media-Civil-Society-Egypt-Forum-NED.pdf

Martin, Kimberly, Richard Galentino, and Lori Townsend. "Community College Student

Success: The Role of Motivation and Self-Empowerment." *Community College*

Review 42, no. 3 (July 2014): 221-241.

Meringolo, Azzurra. 2015. "The Struggle over the Egyptian Public Sphere." *IAI Working*

Papers 15, no. 4 (January): 1-15.

Meriwether, Margaret and Judith E. Tucker. 2018. *A social history of women & gender in the*

modern Middle East. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Mitchell, Timothy. 1999. "Dreamland: The Neoliberalism of Your Desires." *Middle East*

Report 29, no. 1 (Spring): 28-33.

Nankervis, Kay. 2017. "Dangerous journalism - who's at risk?" *Fusion Journal* 11, (May): 1-4.

Narayan, Deepa. 2005. *Measuring empowerment: Cross-disciplinary perspectives.* Washington: The World Bank.

Nazier, Hanan and Racha Ramadan. 2018. "What empowers Egyptian women: resources versus social constrains?" *Review of Economics and Political Science* 3, no. 3/4 (August): 153-175.

NCW: National Council for Women. 2020. "الابواب طرق". Accessed 29 May, 2020. http://ncw.gov.eg/News/4175/

Nevid, Jeffrey S., Spencer A. Rathus and Beverley Greene. 2014. *Psychiatrie. Een inleiding.* Amsterdam: Pearson Benelux.

Pollert, Anna. 1996. "Gender and Class Revisited; or, the Poverty of `Patriarchy." *Sociology* 30, no. 4 (November): 639-659.

Roccu, Roberto. 2013. *The Political Economy of the Egyptian Revolution: Mubarak, Economic Reforms and Failed Hegemony.* London: Palgrave Macmillan

Saad, Mohamad. 2019. "Workplace Gender Discrimination and Job Performance in Egypt: The Moderating Role of Equity Sensitivity." *American Journal of Applied Psychology* 7, no. 1: 11-19.

Said, Edward W. 2003. *Orientalism.* London: Penguin Group.

Samari, Goleen. 2018. "Women's empowerment and short- and longacting contraceptive method use in Egypt." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 20: 458-473.

Schaub, Mark. 2000. "English in the Arab Republic of Egypt." *World Englishes*, 19, no. 2: 225-238.

Schutz, Aaron. 2019. *Empowerment. A Primer*. London: Routledge.

Schwartz, Shalom H. 1990. "Individualism–collectivism: Critique and proposed

        refinements". *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 21, no. 2: 139–157.

Scott, Joan W. 2018. *Gender and the Politics of History*. Columbia: Columbia University

        Press.

Serra, Vanina, Monica Enriquez and Ruby Johnson. 2017. "Envisioning Change Through

        Art: Funding Feminist Artivists for Social Change." *Development* 60, no 1-2,

        (September): 108-113.

Sharma, Anju. 2014. "Realizing Gender Responsive Governance & Gender Equality

        Representatives in Democratic Society : A Concrete situation of Women

        Empowerment & Participation in Politics." *International Journal for Informative and*

        Futuristic Research 2: 143-154.

SIGI: Social Institution & Gender Index. 2014. "Results 2014." Accessed March 12, 2020.

        https://www.genderindex.org/2014-results/

Singerman, Diane. 2013. "Youth, Gender, and Dignity in the Egyptian Uprising." *JMEWS:*

        Journal of Middle East Women's Studies 9, no. 3 (October): 1-27.

Skinner, Julia. 2011. "Social Media and Revolution: The Arab Spring and the Occupy

        Movement as Seen through Three Information Studies Paradigms." *All Sprouts*

        Content 483, (October): 1-26.

Spreitzer, Gretchen. 1996. "Social Structural Characteristics of Psychological

        Empowerment." *Academy of Management Journal* 39, no. 2 (April): 483-504.

Stark, Lindsay, Ilana Seff, Asham Assezenew, Jennate Eoomkham, Kathryn Falb, and Fred

        M. Ssewamala. 2018. "Effects of a Social Empowerment Intervention on Economic

        Vulnerability for Adolescent Refugee Girls in Ethiopia." *Journal of Adolescent*

        Health 62, no. 1 (January): 15-20.

SIS: State Information Service. 2017. "2017… Year of Egyptian Woman." Accessed April

20, 2020. https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/108222?lang=en-us

Sugarman, Jeff. 2015. "Neoliberalism and Psychological Ethics." *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 35, no. 2: 103-116.

The World Bank. 2017. "Improving Our Quality, Equality, and Efficiency in the Education Sector: Fostering a Competent Generation of Youth." Accessed April 23, 2020. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/796151468021861883/pdf/428630ESW0P 08910gray0cover01PUBLIC1.pdf

The World Bank. 2018. "Women Economic Empowerment Study." Accessed February 22, 2020. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/861491551113547855/pdf/134846-WP-PUBLIC-march-2-WB-Women-Study-EN.pdf

Tufekci, Zeynep. 2017. *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Tufekci, Zeynep and Christopher Wilson. 2012. "Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations From Tahrir Square." *Journal of Communication* 62, no. 2 (April): 363-379.

UNDP. 2013. "Social, Economic and Legal Empowerment of Egyptian Women." Accessed February 22, 2020. https://www.undp.org/content/dam/egypt/docs/Women%20 Empowerment/Women_Empowerment_Swedish_Proposal_26Nov2013%20(2).pdf

Velija, Philippa, Mark Mierzwinski, and Laura Fortune. 2013. " 'It made me feel powerful': women's gendered embodiment and physical empowerment in the martial arts." *Leisure Studies* 32, no. 5 (December): 524-541.

Vishwanath, Tara, Nga Nguyen, Qui-Toan Do, Thomas Walker, Gabriela I. Comboni, and Nandini Krishnan. 2012. "Capabilities, Opportunities and Participation: Gender Equality and Development in the Middle East and North Africa Region." *Mena Knowledge and Learning* 45: 1-3.

Walby, Sylvia. 1990. *Theorizing patriarchy*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

WEF. 2019. "Global Gender Gap Report." Accessed March 12, 2020.

> http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2018/

Wentling, Rose-Mary. 2003. "The career development and aspirations of women in middle

> management-revisited." *Women in Management Review* 18, no. 6: 331-324.

WoE Mag. 2020. "Women of Egypt Mag. An Advocacy Movement to Empower the Women

> of Egypt." Accessed March 2, 2020. https://womenofegyptmag.com/

Wrenn, Mary. 2014. "Identity, Identity Politics, and Neoliberalism." *Pano Economicus* 61,

> no. 4: 503-515.

Yount, Kathryn M., Sally Dijkerman, Sarah Zureick-Brown, and Kristin E. Van der Ende.

> 2014. "Women's Empowerment and Generalized Anxiety in Minya, Egypt." *Social Science & Medicine* 106: 185–193.

Zakarriya, Jihan. 2019. "Vulnerability, resistance and sexuality in revolutionary Egypt."

> *Women's Studies International Forum* 77, (November): 1-8.