Egyptian Women Fight Back

Hegab

December 10, 2013

LEAD-IN:

Women Rights, a topic often underrated and put on the bottom shelf. “It’s not a priority now,” they say.

In this project, amazing and empowered women were interviewed discussing women’s rights issues in Egypt, and how the youth fights back after the revolution. The documentary also features “Imprint” movement and the BuSSy project.

Every time I read Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë, this quote haunts me:

“I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will.”

MUSIC: “Ena 3ayech” by Badiaa Bouhrizi (:06) (fades out)

I’m Salma Hegab, a 22-year old Egyptian blogger who is always keen on asking questions.

And for this documentary project, I wanted to shed highlight on some of the struggles that Egyptian women face nowadays, and how they manage to fight back!

So first, I started asking about the most prevalent challenges that Egyptian women face.

SHABAYEK: “For me the strongest challenges are the challenges that you get to face on daily basis.” (fades in and out) (:06)

MUSIC: “Abali” by Lemonada (fades in and out) (:07)
This is Sondos Shabayek, a 28-year old Egyptian who works as a theater director and she’ll tell us the story of the Bussy project.

ZAGHLLOUL: “Being on the street is a challenge, being on a public bus is a challenge, being on a metro is a challenge.” (fades in and out) (:07)

MUSIC: “Abali” by Lemonada (:10) (fades in and out)

This is Nihal Saad Zaghloul. She works in a training and capacity company. She co-founded “Imprint” for fighting sexual harassment on the streets.

ZOHNEY: “Violence is a huge problem. On a general frame, violence in Egypt is increasing. The absence of security is alarming. The absence of trained police who can cater to the needs of women survivors of violence is very minimal…” (fades in and out) (:15)

MUSIC: “Abali” by Lemonada (fades in and out) (:13)

And this is Sally Zohney, a 28-year old Egyptian who works as youth initiatives associate at UN Women in Egypt. She works as well in programs that deals with violence against women, and the political participation of women and youths.

ZOHNEY: “It's personal more or less. You'd be lucky to run into a police officer who would understand that you have been harassed. The normal is the police officer would think you are being just a girl or there is no actual crime happening. The rates of abuse are really really high. I would speak of domestic abuse. And It's still a taboo. Especially in middle classes. Women in middle classes would not talk about personal abuse. They would not speak of their husbands, fathers, brothers abusing them.” (fades in and out) (:26)

SHABAYEK: “Gender discrimination, of course. Because still there is this idea that a woman is not as good enough as man is whether this was an education or work, there’s still a very obvious preference for males.” (fades in and out) (:14)
ZAGHLOUL: “Most of the women for example are unable to get high paid jobs. They can’t become managers. They can’t become a president of a university for example. Because the mentality is why do I put a woman as a president of a university if I have enough men in the country?” (fades in and out) (:21)

MUSIC: “Lazem Nem” by Tania Saleh (fades in and out) (:15)

Egyptian women have been considered nearly equal to men in the society. Ancient Egypt had female rulers such as Cleopatra and Nefertiti. The woman who achieved the greatest prominence in the ancient world for her learning, was Hypatia of Alexandria, who taught advanced courses to young men and advised the Roman prefect of Egypt on politics.

Women had also taken part in religious activities, and those who were priestesses. In the Sixth Dynasty, Nebet became a minister.

SOUND of women chanting in 1919 revolution. (fades in and out) (:12)

They protested and fought alongside with men against invasion throughout history.

But in the modern ages, to limit contact with men, practices such as veiling and gender-segregation at schools and work were common.

Lower class families especially in Upper Egypt have tended to withdraw girls from schools when reaching puberty, to minimize their interaction with males.

MUSIC: “Abali” by Lemonada (fades in and out) (:09)

Gamal Abdel Nasser advocated for women's rights when they were guaranteed the right to vote and equality of opportunity in the 1956 Egyptian constitution forbidding gender-based discrimination. Labor laws were changed to ensure women stranding in the workforce and maternity leave was legally protected.

However, during Sadat and Mubarak’s eras, women's status deteriorated. Unemployment for women changed from 5.8% in 1960 to 40.7% in 1986.
Moreover, in a 2008 survey by the Egyptian center for women's rights, 98% of foreign women and 83% of native women said they have been sexually harassed. Two thirds of men said they have harassed women.

MUSIC: “Sout El Houreya” by Hany Adel and Amir Eid  (fades in) (:27)

NATSOUND of women chanting in Tahrir square (:07)

Egyptian women were active throughout the 2011 revolution. Some took part in the protests and were part of the leadership. They chanted beside men asking for Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice.

But three years later, women's status still lacks many of their basic rights.

What changed for Egyptian women?

ZOHNEY: “Women were not that much concerned about their rights. About the challenges that they would face. And after the revolution, or with the revolution, the image changed. the time is strict, the constitution drafting, women political participation, the raise of violence, the participation of young women in the political process. All these elements have changed our type of work.” (fades in and out) (:22)

TAHA: “What have changed from my point of view is that youths have started taking initiatives to solving these problems.” (fades in and out) (:07)

Sulaf Taha is an adjunct professor teaching a human rights course at the American University in Cairo. She thinks that the new sense of empowerment the Egyptian youths have has more influence on the ground than the NGO's traditional model.

TAHA: “So rather than the traditional model of having women's rights NGOs, taking the lead through structural organization sometimes in bureaucratic campaigns and so on, we have scattered movements by young persons may be who didn't even study what is meant by discrimination against women in the legal sense, and neither did they read the shadow reports that NGOs submit, but they have experienced
the problem first hand, and they have decided to take action to solving these problem.”(fades in and out) (:31)

MUSIC: “What Child is This” by Lindsey Stirling (fades in and out) (:22)

Indeed, the Egyptian youths, empowered by technology and a sense of civic engagement, are trying to combat several issues that women face.

One of these initiatives is “Imprint” which started in 2012. Imprint aims to collectively mobilize the society against sexual harassment.

   NATSOUND of boys shouting and harassing girls (fades in and out) (:07)

For those who doesn’t know, In 2013, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women reported that 99.3% of Egyptian women had experienced some form of harassment.

   ZAGHLOUL: “The idea was not mine in itself. It was a collective idea between me and my friend Hassan and my other friend Abdel Fattah. We all co-founded this movement, and the idea came not just about documenting harassment incidents. It’s also about the intervention. About the fact that we want to stop it from happening. And this is when our first idea came of security patrolling. And we did that in the metro and we stopped few harassment incidents, and now we’re working in Talaat Harb..” (fades in and out) (:30)

   MUSIC: “What Child is This” by Lindsey Stirling (fades in and out) (:17)

Imprint uses the internet as a very vital tool to inform the community of their activities in addition to empowering some female volunteers who have very little access to public space to participate online and express themselves. They had awareness campaigns in Cairo university, in the metro and Talaat Harb.
ZAGHLOUL: “We can’t always be there with every single incident happening. What you can do is do awareness and talk to people about the importance of them standing against sexual harassment.” (fades in and out) (:11)

MUSIC: “Filmed BuSSy Monologues Demo Song” by Hany Adel (fades in and out) (01:15)

Stories can be a force for good as a society examines itself and sets course for the future. Storytelling taps into our imagination, engages those around us, and gives voice to the voiceless. This is what the BuSSy project works on.

The Bussy Project is an annual performance of stories. Each year they collect different number of stories, and they are performed in the form of monologue on stage.

It started in 2006, and the idea was to offer women a free and open space to express anything they feel it’s not allowed to talk about or that the society considers a taboo.

SHABAYEK: “It's women talking to women basically. Of course the performance is not just for women. It's for both men and women.” (fades in and out) (:07)

Two AUC students co-founded “Bussy” which is an arabic word that means “Look” addressing females.

Last year, they performed testimonies of sexual harassment that occurs in Tahrir square. The project was in collaboration with harassmap. This year, they are having performances from women on their perception of their own bodies and how it's affected by what society tells them.

Their stories reflect the real issues of both genders, from a wide variety of classes and backgrounds.
SHABAYEK: “We try to reach out for women from different classes and different educational backgrounds and different cities. And when we fail to do so through our call for stories, we individually try to reach out for them. Whether we try to meet them in places or... we know someone who knows someone so we kinda follow the traces till we end up with that. And sometimes we fully dedicate performances for a different class, like when we go and perform in the metro.” (fades in and out) (:27)

MUSIC: “Lazem Nem” by Tania Saleh (fades in and out) (:22)

We know pretty well that women are not the only ones suffering from discrimination and injustice in Egypt after all. The society needs massive change and development, yet in order to achieve that, the Egyptians has got to recognize the significance of asking for fair and equal rights for all.

TAHA: “The main point here is for people to understand that speaking for women's rights is not for women per say. Women are half the society. So, if half the society are not empowered enough, how can we expect this society to move forward? So this is very important. Women rights are human rights. And they have to be always presented and reinforced from this perspective.” (fades in and out) (:23)
ZAHGLOUL: “Most of the women who join us believe that they can fight for themselves. Essentially when we have the men fighting with us, it’s not because they are the guardians, but because we are partners in this country. Women cannot fight for their rights alone, and men cannot fight for their rights alone. It’s only when together joined forces that we truly become stronger. So when we all believe that we’re all human, We’re all equal, regardless of gender, age, or social background then, it’s only then that we believe we can excel and become better.” (fades in and out) (:32)

MUSIC: “Girl on Fire” by Alicia Key (fades in and out) (:12)

This documentary was produced by Salma Hegab

MUSIC: “We Had Today” by Rachel Portman (fades in and out) (:40)

Special thanks to Nihal Saad Zaghloul, Sally Zohney, Sondos Shabayek, and Dr. Sulaf Taha.


Music by:
“Ena 3ayech” by Badiaa Bouhrizi
“Abali” by Lemonada
“Lezim Nem” by Tania Saleh
“Sout El Horeya” by Hany Adel and Amir Eid
“What Child is This” by Lindsey Stirling
“Filmed BuSSy Monologues Demo Song” by Hany Adel
“Girl on Fire” by Alicia Key
“We had today” by Rachel Portman

Sounds from soundcloud and youtube

Thank you for listening to “Egyptian women fight back”