

## Editorial

For years, there has been a debate on the role of youth in changing Egypt and their participation in political events, and this has been accompanied by increasing numbers of women joining these events.

We should not be surprised at the participation of Egyptian women. We are, after all, a nation in which women have participated in politics, economy, art, and other areas of life for decades. But the role of women continues to raise pressing questions. This has been accompanied by numerous crises among social movements, including the feminist movements, which for years have been tied to civil society groups instead of the citizenry, elite movements engaged only with activists. At the same time, the term “young feminist discourse” has emerged. The question is whether this discourse targets those under 30 or whether it

differs from the discourse adopted for years and is initialized by them.

Nazra for Feminist Studies raises issues from a new perspective, from that of youth who take part in the public sphere and politics. This is a discourse that adopts women’s issues and their problems as part and parcel of issues of concern to the nation as a whole, one that does not forget the dilemmas facing women in our nation. The discourse is based on the belief that creating a social movement that involves both women and men of this nation is the path to change.

Through its work, Nazra attempts to address open spaces to women and men to integrate our issues into a society facing numerous challenges and to work on creating more expansive spaces to citizens who dream of a better nation.

Nazra Team

## About Us

Nazra for Feminist Studies is a group that aims to build an Egyptian feminist movement, believing that feminism and gender are political and social issues affecting freedom and development in all societies. Nazra aims to mainstream these values in both public and private spheres.

Nazra’s team, which includes both women and men, believes that integrating gender and feminism will be achieved through the efforts of believers in the validity of these values and in the necessity of their implementation in both spheres.

Nazra believes that the youth, in their diversity, struggle to integrate their issues, which include gender-related issues, in their societies. And so Nazra generally works to provide all actors who strive to achieve gender related causes with all forms of support needed; and focuses, specifically, on supporting youth groups who strive to achieve those causes.

In achieving these aims, Nazra employs different programs, initiatives and activities such as:

1. Working on production of knowledge based on research, documentation, monitoring and analysis of methodologies.
2. Producing and developing Arabic terminologies, to form a glossary of the issues we work on.
3. Supporting Women Human Rights Defenders through legal and psychological interventions.
4. Supporting women in the political arena.
5. Strategic litigation for gender legal cases locally, regionally, and internationally.
6. Advocacy to integrate gender issues in the political, legal, social and cultural context.
7. Networking with movements and stakeholders to build a strong feminist movement.
8. Using artistic tools in the context of gender and feminism issues.

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## Quote of the Month

*”Feminism is a choice...Some of us may be born with it, but I chose it as a principle and a course of action. I realize very well what kind of challenges I am facing, that’s what we normally call ‘social consensus or various forms of power and oppression. In the end, it means bearing the consequences of one’s choices”*  
- Doaa Abdelaal

## Women Political Participation Academy

<http://nazra.org/en/programs/women-political-participation-academy-program>



One of the candidates during a field visit

**About the Academy:** The initiative was launched by Nazra for Feminist Studies in July 2011 to offer the necessary legal, technical, and moral support to women who decided to run for office in parliamentary, local Municipalities, syndicates, or Trade Unions elections and participate in politics, by supporting their electoral campaigns and cultivating their skills and those of their campaign members.

**Why Now?:** Nazra for Feminist Studies realizes the importance of building women cadres capable of engaging in politics, competing, reaching the public, and representing all segments of their communities. Women's electoral history has shown that political experience and practice is what creates genuine female politicians and representatives able to reach out to voters.

Of course, there is no better time to begin than now, as Egypt has just completed one of the most fair elections after 60 years of dictatorship, bringing in the first parliament to emerge out of the January 25 revolution and the parliament that will write the new constitution.

**Work Methods:** The Academy's team works with female candidates, both independents and party members, their campaigns, and their affiliated political and partisan bodies by offering legal and political training and mentoring on the ground with candidates in their districts.

**Communities with Whom the Program Works:** The Academy defined a set of eligibility criteria for potential enrollees:

- She must not have run for office with the dissolved National Democratic Party.
- She must be no older than 45.
- She must have experience in social, advocacy, or labor work, and be less empowered within her community.

**Geographic Scope:** The program began with eight governorates and is slated for extension to the remaining governorates in the country.

## Women Human Rights Defenders Program

<http://nazra.org/en/programs/women-human-rights-defenders-program>

**About the Program:** The initiative was launched by Nazra in June 2011 to address issues linked to women human rights defenders, who had been emerged as a force since January 25 revolution. Although Egyptian women have a long history of participation in public sphere and politics having a long struggled against discrimination and violence, issues of concern to women human rights defenders were not a priority for Egyptian civil society.

**Why Now?:** Women activists are facing increased abuses and a variety of challenges, which requires persistent monitoring, intervention, and victim support. In addition, new generations of female activists and new movements that began to take shape before and after the revolution continue to join various spheres of political and social life.

**Work Methods:** Women human rights defenders program provides legal, moral, and medical support via a hotline for emergency cases. The program also documents violations against defenders and pursues advocacy on various levels to raise awareness of these issues

and highlight the challenges faced by women human rights defenders in Egypt.

**Groups with Whom the Program Works:** young women human rights defenders, female labor activists and members of trade unions, women demonstrators and protestors, female minority and disabled activists, and young women in political parties and youth movements.

**Geographic Scope:** The program currently covers Cairo, Alexandria, Suez, and Mahalla al-Kubra, and will be expanded with time.

"One of the most difficult of my tasks was to document the stories of women and girls who faced the most brutal violence and persisted motivated by their belief in their right to demonstrate, protest, and participate in public life. I continue to learn from every woman or girl who gives me a few hours of her time to tell me her story" - Salma Al-Naqqash, Project Coordinator

## Researches



Vegard Iglebæk ©

When the founders of Nazra began thinking about Nazra's mission and what it could bring to the Egyptian feminist movement, the feminist movement's lack of adequate research led us to consider creating a research unit. Since most feminist efforts in Egypt are directed at advocacy, the provision of direct services, or capacity building, we decided that the research unit would work to produce feminist knowledge to aid and guide the advocacy efforts of the feminist movement. The research unit is

interested in producing knowledge related to Nazra's work, by making research a fundamental component of its activities.

Nazra's research unit focuses on several topics, including religion, ethnicity, class, and age, as well as Nazra's prime research interest: gender. Nazra strives to produce feminist knowledge to help draft legislation, and contribute to feminist advocacy activities and other missions of the feminist movement.

## Initiatives

Initiatives depend on the creation of safe spaces for self- and group-expression, by hosting story telling sessions and workshops to broach various social taboos, and supporting and hosting feminist initiatives that seek to integrate women’s issues in social debates and introduce a feminist perspective to public spaces.

On this basis, Nazra for Feminist Studies supports and hosts the Young Feminist Movement initiative, which seeks to engage with public and private issues from a feminist perspective



Nazra hosts “Female Graffiti”, the first activity of NoonNeswa initiative, which will begin on 9 March - the first anniversary of virginity tests crime

and tries to introduce women’s views in discussions of various topics.

Motivated by a belief in the power and uniqueness of written and visual arts as a means of expression, Nazra strives to support various artistic initiatives. Thus, it hosted “Female Graffiti” the first activity of the NoonNeswa Initiative, which seeks to link graffiti as a street art with the feminist perspective of women in the public sphere.

## Gender Mainstreaming in NGOs and Youth Movement

As Nazra for Feminist Studies believes in the importance of approaching women’s issues from a rights-based rather than development-based perspective (Human rights rather than development perspective), it is concerned with mainstreaming gender into the work of youth NGOs and institutions interested in human rights. After January 25 revolution, Nazra team decided to work with youth social movements formed in the wake of the uprising to integrate gender in these groups as well.

Nazra is pursuing a project aimed to mainstream gender in youth associations and groups and, through this, integrating gender into the organizational structures and internal politics of these groups. In the mean while Nazra is working on

empowering these associations to consider gender perspectives in their activities and programs, so that women’s empowerment becomes an integral part of their framework.

“Feminism has numerous meanings for different people. For me, feminism means struggling for justice for all without disregard for gender”  
- Ahmad Awadallah

The basic message of the project is to foster consideration of gender within associations and youth groups on the organizational level and within their framework of action, to enable them to take serious action on women’s empowerment in their programs and activities as well as in their organizational structures, thus creating a generation of youth institutions and groups capable of empowering women in various fields.

## Testimonies of Women Defenders and Candidates

*Working on the Women Human Rights Defenders Program and Women Political Participation Academy, Nazra team had the opportunity to speak with numerous human rights defenders who faced abuses and female parliamentary candidates.*

### Women Human Rights Defenders Quotes

“They were like Tatars...They came out running and people ran away from them. They were so many who took me, they were army soldiers. I’ve forgotten all the pain in my body, but I can’t even tell you about the terror I experienced...I can’t sleep at all” - R.K.

“All of sudden a lot of people were surrounding me and my sister from all sides. Things started to escalate...Among the groups that were harassing me were people with beards. I was asking for help from any of the sheikhs that were there, but none of them helped me. The frightening thing was that those who claimed to be trying to save me were also harassing me” - S.A.

### Women Candidates’ Quotes

“I want to get women out of their narrow circles to participate in politics and to have a goal to strive for, instead of just playing a passive role” - Sana al-Said.

“Everyone asked, ‘Where are the youth from Tahrir? The young people who came out demanding freedom, bread, and social justice?’ It was to go out and participate in the People’s Assembly elections” - Theresa Samir.



Nicole Blommers ©

Jane Barry and Jelena Dordevic, through their work with the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights, conducted interviews with 100 female human rights activists on the culture of the women's movement and the conflicts within the women's rights movement.

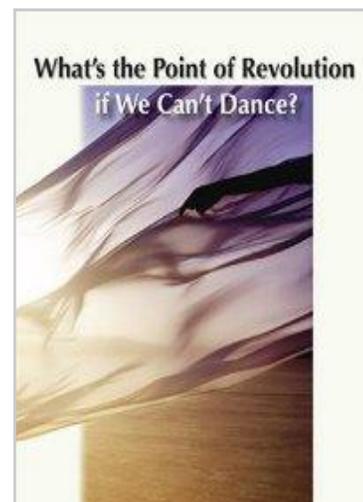
The authors examined women working in human rights, especially women's rights, and the nature of the dominant culture in their movements. They discovered a worrying tendency toward instability and the way this affected their personal and professional progress. Most of the time, these rights advocates endured conflicts and a sense of guilt for their inability to change things they are trying to overcome. The anxiety is caused by several factors, such as time management, choices between the private and the public, a sense of defeat, and the hopes hung on challenges. The biggest challenge for the two writers was encouraging the activists to have a conversation (to accept the dialogue), which they considered extremely difficult.

Through these interviews, the activists were able to arrive at several ideas for overcoming defeatism: mutual contact, discussion, and dialogue among activists, a recognition that to be tired was no embarrassment, an admission of reality (good and bad), a search for personal outlets for spiritual sustenance, and a belief that if we seek to challenge our culture, it is better to begin with ourselves.

At the end of the book, the daughter of a working, activist mother acknowledges that her mother stays up late to dance. Let's dance, the mother decided.

We can celebrate any revolution if we are able to find the freedom within ourselves to dance, whether in celebration or grief, I believe.

**Critical Analysis**  
 "What's the Point of Revolution If We Can't Dance?"



<http://urgentactionfund.org/index.php?id=157>

## This Issue's Woman



Widad Al-Demerdash, Leading Workers  
 Demonstration in November 2009 -  
 Photo By: Karim El-Beheiry

Workers in Mahalla Spinning and Weaving faced many problems in 2006 due to the factory's loss of global competitiveness, then they were taken in erosion of wages through inflation, and workers dismissal. The Workers protested, after which the government offered LE100 for every worker.

At the end of the year, the management broke the government's promise, prompting renewed protests.

A worker woman at Mahalla Spinning and Weaving printed flyers and encouraged workers to take part in the protests, despite their fear of arrest and the loss of their jobs. She convinced them that it would improve their living conditions and bring positive change. She led 6,000 female workers on a strike. Male workers initially refused to join, but women joined chanting, "Where are the men?"

On the fourth day, men joined the protest. They received a bonus and their demands were met. Following these pro-

tests, Egypt witnessed an unprecedented wave of labor strikes all over the country in 2007.

The management of Mahalla Spinning and Weaving tried to fire Widad Al-Demerdash, on the grounds of her refusal to work. The management sent a memo to the police stating that she did not perform her job as a custodial worker. Punishing Widad for the leading role she played in the strikes at the factory, the management had transferred her from production—where she had worked for 26 years—to a job in the library of the company nursery. After Widad won a lawsuit reinstating her in her original position and another demanding her annual bonus, the company assigned her to work as a cleaner. When she objected, the company management notified the police, as a prelude to her dismissal. Widad went to the police and the prosecutor's office, proving the falsity of management's claims.

Widad Al-Demerdash is not often spoken of, and her heroism is not remembered by many. She was one of seven people chosen for a labor delegation sent to negotiate with the parliament and cabinet in 2007. And she continues to defend worker's rights in Egypt.