

Reasons May Vary, but Travel Ban is always Patriarchal

A Feminist Analysis of Experiences of Women Human Rights Defenders in Egyptian Airports

Introduction

The year 2011 witnessed a massive flow of women and younger girls into the public sphere after the January 25th Revolution, in view of the high level of mobilization at the time. Many among these women and girls engaged with the public and political spheres, particularly issues pertaining to women's rights in both private and public spheres. Many women and girls developed a feminist consciousness, in different forms, which had a positive impact on their participation in the public sphere, through affiliation with political parties, or human rights and feminist groups. These women and girls encountered major hardships in pursuing their journey in the public sphere, facing various forms of discrimination, including on the basis of gender; origin, for those hailing from provinces outside Cairo; race; or class. Undoubtedly, the political mobilization of young women and men and the formation of political groups and parties gave these young women - who subsequently joined the ranks of Women Human Rights Defenders - the chance to engage in the public sphere.

Many Women Human Rights Defenders faced numerous violations, both by State actors or society, over the past few years. In the past two years, the list of such violations has come to include cases where Egyptian authorities detain Women Human Rights Defenders at airports and do not allow them to travel.

Throughout this period of two years, travel bans have become a preoccupation of the human rights community, nationally and internationally, especially after a number of human rights activists, both women and men, were banned from traveling in the context of Case no. 173/2011, publicly known as the "Foreign Funding Case". Against this backdrop, Nazra for Feminist Studies found it necessary to document the experiences of a number of Women Human Rights Defenders who have been detained at airports, and to try to provide a feminist analysis of the violations they went through. This study emphasizes the importance of documenting and analyzing the varying experiences of Women Human Rights Defenders, as well as examining how these experiences point to discrimination, based on gender and on being Women Human Rights Defenders. The objective is not only to expose how young Women Human Rights Defenders were denied their freedom of movement and

travel, but also to provide feminist interpretations which address the issues underlying violations by State actors and societal actors alike. Nazra also stresses the importance of understanding these experiences in light of the close link between the violations they involve and broader attempts to shut down the public sphere by targeting civil society organizations and human rights defenders in general, and Women Human Rights Defenders in particular. The aforementioned Case no. 173/2011 is a flagrant example, involving decisions by the Public Prosecutor to impose a travel ban on, freeze the assets of, and initiate proceedings against a number of Human Rights Defenders, both women and men.

Research Methodology

This study relies primarily on qualitative analysis of testimonies and narrative accounts by some Women Human Rights Defenders who were detained and not allowed to travel. The approach used is based on direct documentation through personal interviews with Women Human Rights Defenders. In order to keep the identities of these women confidential, and protect their privacy, all names have been withheld and only initials are used (even in the case of previously published testimonies). Details regarding specific locations, or information through which interviewed Women Human Rights Defenders could be identified, were also omitted. Nazra for Feminist Studies did not interfere with the contents or wording of testimonies.

Further, the study offers feminist analysis of the testimonies, to shed a light on the experiences of Women Human Rights Defenders and how they were influenced such experiences from their own point of view. We believe that detaining and harassing Women Human Rights Defenders at airports, and not allowing them to travel, is not separate from other forms of discrimination they face in their daily lives, at the hands of both State and Society.

The Relationship between the Role of Women Human Rights Defenders in creating a Safe Space for Women, and their Right to Freedom of Movement and Travel

The involvement of many young feminists and Women Human Rights Defenders in establishing and joining young feminist initiatives which embrace the values and rights in which they believe, has allowed them to mature in the public sphere on the local level, but also internationally. This was as a result of the radical shift they managed to achieve in their communities, by being able to provide much-needed

support in, and raise crucial awareness of, controversial issues which affect women in these communities. It was therefore necessary for them to acquire tools and skills through exchange of expertise with peers in other communities and countries, with the aim of enriching their work and the discourse they use in defending the rights they seek to protect. Firm belief in, and passion for, the rights and causes which they pursue lead them to a head-on collision with the reality of a public sphere which is being shut down to them in several ways. Some of these young feminists are condemned by their families for what they do, others become target for defamation by certain actors in society. They have to shoulder a significant burden to ensure the continuation of their work. Moreover, some are also targeted by State actors through limitations imposed on their activities and their right to freedom of movement and travel.

Over the course of the last two years, many young Women Human Rights Defenders faced detainment in Egyptian airports and were banned from traveling or delayed without any legal grounds or court decisions banning them from travel, under flimsy pretexts pertaining to obtaining announced travel permits. Yet that was not the end of their ordeal, as they also suffered insults by airport staff, sudden and illegal interrogation without the presence of a lawyer, confiscation of passports, and a series of illegal interrogations and summons by Security. The experiences of these Women Human Rights Defenders clearly reveal the intersection of the patriarchal nature of practices undertaken against them by State actors, with the social roles assigned to them for being women in general, and Women Human Rights Defenders in particular. Moreover, they also reveal the intersection of such practices and violations with perceptions of inferiority based on occupation, provincial origins and socio-economic class, reflecting stereotypes about women who are entitled to engage in public activities.

Patriarchal Practices in Airports

Women human rights defenders faced harassment and violations based on their gender, through questions directed to them by airport officers, the way they were treated...etc. The questions directed at Women Human Rights Defenders point to disapproval of the fact that they are women traveling alone for work or recreational purposes. In some instances, officers asked if the woman was married or engaged, and how the husband/fiancée/father would allow them to travel on their own, as if women are not allowed to travel unless chaperoned by a husband or a father. This has gone beyond mere expressions of incredulity or dismay, reaching the extent of

clear moral judgment in some cases, whereby women involved in the public sphere are profiled as "deviant" women or women of questionable behavior. In her testimony, H.A. recounts: "He asked me: 'When you travel on training, do you stay in an apartment?' I said: 'No, sir. A hotel room is reserved for me. 'He asked:' And then who stays in the room with you?' I said: 'All rooms are single.' "¹ Some Women Human Rights Defenders were also indirectly harassed with unnecessary question about irrelevant matters, in a manner which indicates that agents of the State were trying to belittle and irritate them. W.A. narrates: "He asked a type of questions which hurt. He asks politely, but asks hurtful questions. He knew so many things about me, some of which even my friends may not know: 'Why were your mom and dad separated 14 years ago? Has your mom signed an IOU?' Details about family: 'Why did your mother get married?' In addition to questions about the color of my lipstick, why I smoke, why I take my coffee mildly, rather than strongly, sweetened."²

In one testimony, the situation deteriorated to the level of sexual harassment of Women Human Rights Defenders while in the airport or waiting to be interrogated. A.D. recounts: "Then, they called out our names and took us to a high rise building in the new airport [terminal]. One of them called us. He started to too close and intentionally bump into us. He asked me why was I traveling, then said: 'You are really hot.' I replied: 'Is this sexual harassment?' He laughed, and took me to an office occupied by a chubby bald guy with a protruding potbelly and a gruff voice." A.D.'s story points to the violations Women Human Rights Defenders face due to their gender. In this testimony, there was no prior intention or systematic plan to harass the Women Human Rights Defenders. However, their bodies are still violated as collateral damage. It is "okay" that an officer would sexually harass a Woman Human Rights Defender while she is awaiting her interrogation, particularly as such women are treated with some suspicion due to their traveling on their own.

More than Mere Patriarchy: Intersection of Patriarchy and Other Structures of Discrimination

As mentioned earlier, the harassment of Women Human Rights Defenders at the Cairo International Airport was not only related to their gender. Patriarchy intersects with other forms of oppression based on class, race, political affiliations or activism in

¹ Testimony of H.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies.

² Testimony of W.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies.

the public sphere. As the Intersectionality Theory³ argues in feminist literature, discriminatory structures such as racism, classism and patriarchy usually converge to expose women to further discrimination. Many women reiterate in their testimonies that airport authorities discriminated against them on clearly classist grounds, which caused them in many instances to feel inferior. Most Women Human Rights Defenders reported that passport control officers looked them "up and down" disdainfully, or asked them incredulously: "Do you have [enough] money?" A.A. recounts the story of being banned from traveling to Beirut: "He did not check the entry visa, or the card, or the security approval I had. He just checked how I looked and told me to step back [and talk] to officer [...]. He said: 'So you are from [...]? I know that area, I served there for a while. Since when did this area come up in life and got residents who travel to Lebanon?'"⁴ This was not the first time that A.A. was harassed at the Cairo International Airport. In a previous occasion, she was detained and questioned despite the fact that she was in the company of another female colleague traveling with the same papers who did not suffer the same. A.A. then became aware of the dynamics of class-based discrimination at the airport, but in the end, she was allowed at that time to travel, and as a result, did not dwell on it too much. However, after she was detained and questioned again, in a manner that was not free of sarcasm or disdain, and on that second time was not allowed to travel, the interaction between gender-based and class-based discrimination became clearer to her. She explains: "When they did not allow me to travel, I had many feelings, including how one must have money to buy the right clothes for looking decent, to hide that one belongs to the middle class. I felt that he was insulting me and I could not reply. When I went home, I decided to change the profession stated on my National ID, maybe the job title will make a difference. We even agreed to get an "airport outfit", saving a thousand pounds to buy an outfit that is good enough to wear to the airport."⁵ She adds: "All those around you make you feel inferior, not only the officers, but also close people and family. It is as if we are not meant for these things. We are not like these better others and can't be. Our betters are born better, and their offspring automatically better, and that's it."

A.A.'s testimony exposes the class-based discrimination that prompted the officer at the airport to give himself the authority not to allow her to travel, as if there is a certain image of women who can travel abroad, an image she did not fit. This was not the only testimony pointing to class-based discrimination. In another testimony,

³ Intersectionality usually refers to the interaction or convergence of social categories and types of oppression based on different grounds including gender, class, race or sexual orientation, exposing women to additional oppression and abuse.

⁴ Testimony of A.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies.

⁵ Ibid.

an officer refused to believe that B.A. is a university graduate, even though her passport confirmed that. When the officer checked her laptop, "there was a video of a friend's defense of her Master's thesis. He asked: 'What is this?' I answered. He asked: 'What Master's?' I answered. He did not believe me and asked: 'You know university graduates?' I said that I am a university graduate myself, currently working on my Master's. He did not believe me despite the fact that my passport stated that I have a Bachelor's degree."⁶ A.D. recounts how she was banned from traveling to Tunisia: "The woman checking my passport looked me up and down. I said: 'Traveling for tourism. 'She looked at me as if she does not think I am good enough, then clicked her fingers and said: 'wait here.' "⁷In more than one testimony, the incredulous question of whether they had money or not was reiterated. N.A. says: "As soon as I told him I was traveling for tourism, he asked: 'Do you have money?' I said: 'yes.' He asked: 'How much?' I said: 250 dollars, the bank would not give me any more due to the limitations on foreign currency. He looked me up and down. I said: 'I have a credit card.' "⁸ She adds: "For us, the issue was not as much about our papers as it was about how we look, where we are from, and how the officer perceived us."⁹ S.A. says: "The officer was speaking to us with the rationale that it was too much for girls hailing from the provinces to travel abroad, and to Lebanon! He sees you as someone from a certain social class, and does not want to let you travel."

The experience of not being allowed to travel created a real shift in the consciousness of Women Human Rights Defenders, and in their awareness of the forms of discrimination they faced. The link between classism and patriarchy became ever clearer. As testimonies show, class-based and gender-based discrimination do not merely converge as if classist and patriarchal structures are initially separate then meet at a later stage. The way officers at the airport treated Women Human Rights Defenders pointed to suspicions about their behavior; that their travel was so questionable as to prompt the officers to use their power, as men and agents of the State, to illegally prevent these women from traveling. For example, A.A. was questioned in a manner that indicates the officer was suspicious of her: "He kept on asking: 'How much do you make? What do you do for a living? Cut to chase [...]' I said: 'I have a good job, and my family are well-off and they pay for my expenses. I save all of my income to travel. 'He asked: 'I make more than you, and even if I save all of it, I still can't afford to go to Lebanon.' "A.D., on the other hand, recounts that

⁶ Testimony of B.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies.

⁷ Testimony of A.D., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies.

⁸ Testimony of N.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies.

⁹ Ibid.

upon returning from Morocco, the officer asked her: "You were in Morocco? Why, my daughter?" These questions reflect that officers suspect the motives behind the travel of these women. Their suspicions could be of moral nature, or could be security-related.

Ultimately, however, there is a clear judgment that women from such background cannot afford to travel, hence, there must be a "pernicious" reason for their traveling. The intersection of class and gender places these Women Human Rights Defenders in a certain position in society, on the basis of which they are discriminated against. The way officers at the airport treat them goes beyond "harassment" or "obstruction", as banning them from traveling without legal reason or basis is a clear exercise of patriarchal protection, as if their traveling will eventually lead to something corrupt such as "deviance" or "treason".

Women were not only targets of class-based and gender-based discrimination; as the testimonies clearly show that they were targeted because of their activism, and for being Women Human Rights Defenders. In most cases where airport authorities were clearly advised that the traveling women were on their way to attend a "conference" or a "training", the travel ban was clearly on security grounds, given that the work of Women Human Rights Defenders is necessarily harmful to "national security." On being questioned upon her return from Morocco, A.D. says: "When we arrived, the officer checked my name on the system and I could see his screen. It said 'Rioter.' The officer said: 'wait here.' ¹⁰Then he asked: 'What is it that you have done? Do you know where you are heading now? To the State Security office.' I said: 'Oh, really? Tell me what's the deal.' He replied: 'Are you a trouble maker or active in politics?' I said: 'No.' ¹¹We went to an office with glass walls occupied by an officer dressed in white. He gave my landing card to that officer, who turned it over and started writing '1, 2, 3, 4, 5' He said: 'God help you, are you affiliated with political parties or do you participate in demonstrations?' ¹²

Security interrogations where officers dealt suspiciously with Women Human Rights Defenders because of their activities are quite common. W.A. recounts the story when she entered the officer's room: "I said: 'Before anything, has the plane taken off?' He said: 'No, not yet.' Someone asked him whether they could take off or not, he said: 'Let them simmer for a bit.' It made me understand that they are in control of

¹⁰ Testimony of A.D., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

everything. I said: 'This trip is important for me and I want to catch my flight.' He replied: 'Why are you traveling to Tunisia?' I said: 'I am going there to represent my country [...], and I am honored to do so.' He was annoyed, and shocked, by my response. He said: 'Ok, tell me about your trip.' I said: 'It's not a military secret [...]. I got a visa, which means the country of destination agrees of my traveling, and I have the implicit approval of the country [of origin] since I have a passport.' He said: 'Sounds good and reasonable [...]. It looks like you travel frequently.' "¹³ In the testimonies of B.A. and W.A., they were not the only ones targeted. Most of those traveling to attend the same training/conference were detained and, questioned and had their passports confiscated. This confirms that they were targeted because of the same activities. Targeting Women Human Rights Defenders because of their activities did not stop at detaining them at the airport and not allowing them to travel, but rather extended to later times in many cases. For example, passports of Women Human Rights Defenders have been repeatedly withheld for several months, with continued harassment even after they get the passports back. For example, B.A., whose passport was confiscated for several months and was repeatedly summoned to the National Security Agency premises, says: "The policeman I spoke to said: 'I am supposed to investigate you, but I won't do that. Just write down the names of your siblings and family members.' He meant my uncles and their children; where they work and live. Afterwards they called me to tell me to collect my passport. The policeman was being too friendly, and kept telling me: 'We are doing this for your sake, to protect you and protect the country.' When I went to collect the passport, he said to me: 'Going forward, let us know before you travel.' I took my passport and realized that my exit visa was marked 'canceled'."¹⁴

H.A. faced a similar pattern, receiving multiple calls from the National Security Agency for interrogation: "Someone calls and says: 'I am Major A., please come to the State Security office.' I informed some people, so that they know where I am in case something goes wrong, then I went. They took my ID and mobile phone, and kept me waiting for an hour. Afterwards, they took me to the office of the National Security Agency Head, who was accompanied by another officer of lower rank. Both were in plain clothes. When I entered the office, the Head told me: 'Do not be afraid or nervous.' I said: 'I am not afraid. Only criminals should be afraid. Why should I be? I did not do anything. We were detained despite the fact that our papers were in order and we had entry visas.' He said: 'We are protecting you, and the President has entrusted this task to us to protect youth. You could go there, and they brainwash

¹³ Testimony of W.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies.

¹⁴ Testimony of B.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies

you. The whole conference may be organized to cover up for one person. There are things you do not know that we do know.'¹⁵

From the above, it is clear that agents of the State act - or at least justify their actions - on the basis of a protective rationale which motivates them to intervene, as guardians, to stop these Women Human Rights Defenders and prevent them from traveling. Even if these women are not accused of espionage or treason, agents of the State insist that some entity or some people are using them for purposes which may undermine the security of Egypt. It is necessarily the case that agents of the State would be familiar with these entities and ulterior purposes, but Women Human Rights Defenders wouldn't. This implies that these women have no agency, and that their ability to discern and choose for themselves is limited. Such incidents perhaps support certain feminist arguments that authoritarianism has a gender-specific structure; i.e. that violations based on political activism take a different form when the activists are women, as repression does not only relate to the activism but also to the gender of the activist.

The Aftermath: Impact of not allowing Women Human Rights Defenders to travel on their lives in the public and private spheres

Travel bans have had serious effects on Women Human Rights Defenders, ranging from issues of insecurity, self-confidence and perceived image among family and friends on the personal level; to consideration of continuing activism in the public sphere. The testimonies clearly reflect that "the Personal is Political", where private and public issues converge to show that personal and family matters are also political and public, and conversely that public and political issues in many cases affect that which is "personal". The fact that these women are present in the public sphere is a manifestation of many struggles which begin at the level of family and friends, up to the level of the State. Therefore, harassment by security officers and travel bans affect all these interwoven levels.

For many women, freedom of movement is a right which is acquired with much difficulty, and may require a confrontation with the immediate family or husband/partner, as well as the extended family and broader community. As such, any violation of the freedom of movement, or ban on travel to a certain destination or end, transcends the specific incident, and leads these women back to the fundamental question about their freedom of movement, rendering whatever gains they have made subject to doubt and questioning once more."We do not get these

¹⁵ Testimony of H.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies

things easily [...]. When we get them, only to have them taken away again, this deprives us of a lot of what we have achieved. In other words, I had to go through many fights to become able to move and do what I do. Part of the reason my Dad started to let me be was his feeling that I am doing important things, particularly when I travel. He felt that I am a significant person on this planet, and I really do things which matter. When the State, which he considers a representation of safety, bans me from traveling, then [he thinks] I am not doing important stuff, rather, I am doing illegal stuff."¹⁶ A.A.'s expression of how not being allowed to travel is an assault on gains and a violation of freedom, and that it may be used by their immediate circle to restrict their movements in general, is repeated in several testimonies. B.A. echoes the same feelings: "Among the things bothering me is that I really appreciate my freedom. I would avoid a relationship or any friends if they decide to limit my freedom of movement. This time, it is something I can't control, something that limits what I hold most dear, my freedom. For some, this may not be important, but for me, my freedom is a priority."¹⁷ Freedom of movement is not only necessary for practical purposes such as moving within or outside their communities to conduct their activities, but is also related to the development of their feminist consciousness, where their personal fights for their inalienable rights - such as the right to freedom of movement - is interwoven with their role as defenders of women rights in general.

In some cases, these incidents, which targeted Women Human Rights Defenders based on their gender, activism and class, affected their self-confidence, and made them question their appearance and how they reacted to these situations. N.A. says: "The thing is, I think we are the product of a naive upbringing that made me a not so confident of myself and a bit tense in such situations. I was supposed to be stronger, but I am not required to be so. I don't have to pay this price. Some people were paying off the policeman to let them through. I could have taken off my veil, but I will only do that when I want to, not to make the officer let me go. I do not have to give such concessions. The only thing between me and an officer are the papers, if they are not in order, or if there are legal grounds for this. Some people were told: 'we will get in touch with you once you come back, for interrogation.' This is even worse than the ban, because we are judging people based on what they look like, on the officer's gut feeling, and luggage search. I had a feeling he will search my purse [...]. I now have a permanent sense of estrangement, in every aspect of my life, whether personal or related to work in the public sphere, that never fades away [...].

¹⁶ Testimony of A.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies.

¹⁷ Testimony of B.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies.

People keep on telling me: 'Did you really have to talk back? What's wrong with dressing up in a particular way?'"¹⁸

A travel ban raises deeper questions related to the forms of discrimination women are exposed to in their daily lives by various actors. Certainly, external appearance may be the basis for class-based discrimination against men as well, but for women, it raises different questions. In more than one testimony, how someone is dressed is repeatedly linked to a particular social class, something which may obstruct travel and evoke harassment by airport authorities. At the same time, violating the norms governing how they dress and their external appearance in their provinces may make the work they do in their communities harder, or brand them as too "westernized" or "liberal". For women to be in the public sphere, there are certain, sometimes contradictory, conditions regarding appearance and body. As N.A. says, in some cases, this can result in a "permanent sense of estrangement", as women feel they should always meet the patriarchy's contradictory expectations about their bodies (starting with those of the family and community, and eventually those of agents of the State). This lack of self-confidence and insecurity, accompanied sometimes by constant sense of guilt, has been felt by more than one Woman Human Rights Defender who was detained and not allowed to travel. One of them recounts: "I am in a terrible state of mind. I now feel scared. We do not open windows and stay inside to simmer in the heat. When someone knocks on the door, we are terrified. We are close to finishing a project we have been working on, and I am sure we will not be allowed to hold a closing conference, and that the book will never be printed. I do not mind getting hurt, it is fine, but I do not want the people with me who are trying to help others to get hurt. The sense of guilt is overwhelming, particularly as the girls with me are very close to each other, and are forced into arguments with their partners. They get separated, and called spies. I feel like I have been tilting at windmills for years. I don't want to cause harm to anyone. I have a constant feeling of guilt. My blood pressure keeps fluctuating up and down. I can't sleep. I am overeating. I always have nightmares."¹⁹ This fear is a constant companion of Women Human Rights Defenders whose experiences were documented, as a result of being targeted and the potential impact of this on younger women.

In other instances, the fears that police will target Women Human Rights Defenders whose passports were confiscated materialized. As another defender recounts: "It has been 30 days and I have not received my passport back. After I asked my lawyer, I

¹⁸ Testimony of N.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies.

¹⁹ Testimony of A.D., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies.

went to the Security Directorate of the Ministry of Interior and said: 'I am an Egyptian citizen, and I don't know why I am banned from traveling.' Afterwards, they told me to go to the Intelligence, and there, I spent two hours only to be told they do not have my passport. In Eid Al-Adha, around October 2015, I went to check for my passport in my recorded address. After Friday prayers, I received a call from my mom, who was crying and telling me that the police has been to our house. I live in a large apartment building that has 84 apartments, mine is on the fourth floor. 2 policemen prayed with building residents, then they asked the worshipers if they knew [me]. My brother in law was one of these people, and he replied: 'Yes, she is my sister in law.' When they asked: 'Where is she?' He told them I was at my place in Cairo. My mom was not around that day, my brother in law got stuck with this alone. The doorman told me that they asked the residents of all 84 apartments about me."²⁰ H.A., on the other hand, was summoned to the National Security Agency three times. Passports were used as leverage to pressure women defenders into obeying summons to the National Security Agency more than once, claiming that they will get their passports back.

This was also the case with B.A. and H.A. The questions directed at women defenders were quite burdensome: "Afterwards, he asked me about a specific name, and told me to get information on that person. I said: 'I am not a security snitch.' He got angry and said: 'No, I am not a person with whom you get to use this [expression]. Is it such a bad thing when you serve your country and respond to the National Security [Agency]?' "In some instances, interviews at the National Security Agency carried threatening tones for Women Human Rights Defenders. For example: "The National Security Agency guy told me: 'You know what? We are treating you well because we checked you and know there is nothing wrong. Otherwise, we would have sent a police wagon to get you from your house.' I said: 'Is this a threat?' He replied: 'No, I am just letting you know.' I retorted: 'No, this is a threat that next time, if I do something, you will send the wagon for me.' "²¹ Indeed, this had a significant impact on Women Human Rights Defenders and their ability to move, to the extent that some of them lost hope and decided not to attempt traveling again: "Ever since then, I have not tried to travel again. I am really afraid and worried, and I do not know what is my legal status, and I do not have any way of knowing that. I think it is because I do not have any connections. I thought to try and issue a replacement for my passport, or destroy my passport so that I get one that does not have the "canceled" stamp, but I did not carry out this plan yet. I have a fear inside of me, I

²⁰ Testimony of W.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies.

²¹ Testimony of H.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies

don't want to go through that experience again or anything that reminds me of it."²²H.A. says: "I have not tried to travel since then. The pressure I felt that day was because of the treatment, those stares of intimidation, [as if they are telling me:] 'yes, we are scaring you.' My mom and sister were on the other side. They could see what was happening and were really frightened when they thought I will be put in the wagon, they started screaming. I was afraid that at the National Security Agency no one will know my whereabouts, that they will abduct me, have me disappear by force, or rape me, and nobody will know. I was drinking the tea they offered me feeling scared that they may have put something in it."

In practice, these experiences directly affected, or may directly affect, the feminist activities of Women Human Rights Defenders. Some of the women involved in feminist initiatives are now concerned over the travel of younger volunteers or activists, fearing that they will go through the same ordeal, and in order for these younger girls not to become wary of the initiative, or doubt its "patriotism." The fact that more than one Woman Human Rights Defender from the same feminist initiative were banned from traveling has led, in some cases, to having the majority of other women defenders refrain from traveling to avoid going through the same painful experience. This creates more than one problem. These fears will either result in wasting opportunities to travel and engage in activities that may benefit feminist initiatives and the activities undertaken by these defenders in the public sphere, or traveling will become the prerogative of one or two members of the initiative who are willing to take the risk. This will also create problems in terms of rotation of responsibilities and opportunities within the initiative or group. S.A. explains such problems clearly: "The ban was not an issue for me personally. I decided to try again. My colleague did not. Some of my colleagues no longer want to travel. It is not right that I should be the one going on all trips. Besides, if I have younger volunteers, I want them to travel, but I will be worried they may face the same thing. I no longer know if I should tell them to travel and inform them that this may happen, or this will make them worried and feeling that we are doing something wrong."

Conclusion

The detainment of Women Human Rights Defenders in airports and not allowing them to travel, with no legal basis, is a violation of constitutional and legal provisions which guarantee the right to freedom of movement. Article 54 of the Egypt Constitution provides that: "Personal freedom is a natural right which is safeguarded and cannot be infringed upon. Except in cases of in flagrante delicto, citizens may

²² Testimony of B.A., documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies

only be apprehended, searched, arrested, or have their freedoms restricted by a reasoned judicial order as required by an investigation." All incidents of travel ban, clearly a restriction of that freedom, which are mentioned and documented in this study were not under a reasoned judicial order, but were left to the arbitrary discretion of airport officers. This is a violation of the aforementioned Article and of Article 62 of the Egypt Constitution which provides that: "Freedom of movement, residence and emigration is guaranteed", and that "no citizen may be banned from leaving State territory, placed under house arrest or banned from residing in a certain area except by a reasoned judicial order for a specified period of time, and in cases specified by the law". Moreover, measures taken against Women Human Rights Defenders at airports, including interrogation, investigation, and travel bans, violate many international charters and conventions, including Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which provides that "Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State", as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The various experiences reviewed in this research reveal obvious convergence and intersection between several factors including gender, class and origin under the umbrella of authoritarian and patriarchal values and practices by actors from the State and from Society against women in general, and Women Human Rights Defenders in particular, only because they are women who defy stereotypes and socially-imposed roles and expectations from them in both the private and the public sphere. Further, those experiences point to the persistence of stereotypical perceptions of women from different provinces, i.e. not from the Capital, as inferior, which entrenches the concept of centralization, thereby reinforcing authoritarianism. Patriarchal societies, by their nature, do not accept women who challenge the roles expected of them or seek to raise their fellow women's awareness of imbalances of power in these societies, especially when it comes to developing a feminist discourse based on which activities are conducted to entrench the feminist consciousness of other women. Consequently, such societies, manifested in actors both from the State and from Society, employ all possible means to restrict the activities of these women, including limiting their movement, detaining them at airports and banning them from traveling with no legal basis or court orders, as clearly shown in the experiences of Women Human Rights Defenders who are founders and members of youth feminist initiatives from more than one provincial area. The history and richness of the feminist movement prove that the more societies try to use their resources of power to keep feminists from pursuing their work and activities, they always find different ways to carry on their struggle to secure their rights and safeguard their

dignity. Indeed, these Women Human Rights Defenders, and others throughout Egypt, did not surrender to these patriarchal and illegal practices, and are carrying on their activities using all possible means.