

Voices for Change

Hopes and costs for empowerment - a study on women's claims in the Egyptian revolution

Christine Bendixen

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Abstract

This study investigates women's possibilities to actively participate in societal change in Egypt. It aims at enhancing the understanding of structural conditions for women's agency and how these enables and/or restrains women's participation in the aspiration for societal change as well as their aspiration to live a 'full life'. Egypt was chosen as a field for studying women's understanding of their opportunities of participation and empowerment before and during the revolution. The informants in the study are all consciously working for awareness and equality in society. Formal education in Egypt is criticized and the country suffers from a high illiteracy rate, making informal education an important way to attain knowledge that can assist women in their quest for societal change. The acknowledgment of participation as a human right is one of the issues women are fighting for in Egypt today. A specific interest in this study is what motivates some women to oppose social, cultural and political structures despite the often high personal cost, and how informal (educational) channels are being used in the quest for societal change. The theoretical construction in which the analysis is carried out is based on frictions between societal structures and agency, using the Capability Approach (Sen, 1999) which aims at understanding what agency women have in societal change. The concept of functionings is used to indicate what someone is able to *do* and *be*. By analyzing women's valued functionings, their conditions and thus their sense of empowerment and their experienced opportunity costs emerge. Central to the analytically framed societal structures and how agency can be perceived within each structure are the social conversion factors, the norms that allow or hinder action. To frame the complexity of women's conditions for active agency and the outcome of their actions, I use a theoretical framework that will comprise both goals and processes. Sen's (1999) ideas on social choice along with Archer's (1995) theory on social change, using her model of structural elaboration / reproduction, have proved useful when investigating women's valued functionings and attained social changes. The results of the study show that when formal education is not adequate, knowledge is obtained outside the formal educational institutions. This is done through both non-formal and informal learning. However, to get access to informal learning, a number of valued functions have to be gained. These functionings are thus both conditions for change and an end in themselves. I try to show that the costs involved in transgressing the prevailing norms are high, but lack of hope, agency and empowerment are also experienced as a high cost for those who have, in fact, imagined another better life and are in opposition to the inhibitory societal structures. This is, however, a part of what motivates some women to continue to be involved in societal change in order to achieve a life they have reason to value.

Keywords: *Women, empowerment, agency, structure, functionings, capability, social conversion factors, narrative imagination, opportunity costs, societal change, Egypt.*

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“Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society
can be understood without understanding both.”
C. Wright Mills (1959, p.3)

Acknowledgments

The Greek historian Herodotos traveled around the world about 400 BC and is reputed to have expressed surprise over women's and men's equal position in Egypt. Today many aspects in women's everyday life looks very different. However, people are once again raising their voices for freedom, equality and democracy. On Mohamed Mahmoud Street in central Cairo, there is a huge mural painting by Mohamed Alaa Awad¹, an Egyptian artist. In his painting, Alaa Awad made a slight change by portraying the figures as women instead of men, and the women are holding papyrus in their hands, communicating the meaning of wisdom and knowledge. The mural conveys women's active participation, both in Egypt's history and today and their quest for equal opportunities and equal rights. I dedicate this work to all the women in the world who still do not enjoy basic human rights.

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¹ Shown on the front cover of the printed thesis. The mural is based on an original pylon (a monumental portal painting to an ancient Egyptian temple) in the Ramesseum temple in Luxor.

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Sollentuna, January 2017
Christine Bendixen

Contents

Acknowledgments	7
Introduction	11
The study's place and time – Egypt at the beginning of the 21st century ...	12
Getting Access to Democratic Values	13
Women in the Social Sphere and in the Legal System.....	15
Attaining a 'full life' – Framing women's conditions and actions taken.....	15
Disposition of the Thesis	16
1. The Past in the Present	18
Bread, freedom and social justice.....	19
Opposing the prevailing structures	19
Women's roles and positions.....	23
The importance of education.....	24
Women's social movements – platforms for new knowledge.....	25
2. Previous research	31
Gender and Leading Positions.....	32
Democracy and Equal Rights.....	34
Feminism and Traditional Societies.....	36
Summary	37
3. Conditions, Claims and the Cost of Change	39
Theoretical key concepts and how they are used in this study	40
The relation between structure and agency	41
Structural change – Elaboration or Reproduction	44
Capability and the use of valued functionings	45
Connecting Capability and Structural Elaboration.....	47
Opportunity Cost	49
Summary – Theoretical Concepts	51
4. Methodological considerations	53
The relationship between theory and data	53
Design of the study.....	54
Entering the researched field	55
The empirical data.....	57
Ethical considerations.....	59
Processing the data.....	61
Issues of credibility, dependability and transferability.....	64
5. The Social Structure	68
Conditions for Women in the Social Structure	69
'To be respected as an equal by family' (1)	69
'To be equally educated' (2).....	70

'To be backed by family' (3).....	72
'To be able to develop personality' (4).....	73
'To be safe from physical violence' (5).....	75
Summary – Social Structure.....	77
6. The Cultural Structure.....	80
'To be active and safe in the community' (6).....	80
'To be recognized as equal' (7).....	82
'To become knowledgeable' (8).....	84
'To be a professional and a leader' (9).....	89
'To be able to help others' (10).....	90
'To have affiliation' (11).....	95
'To have a voice' (12).....	102
Summary – Cultural Structure.....	104
7. The Political Structure.....	107
'To have access to quality education' (13).....	108
'To engage in democratic values' (14).....	110
'To be equally represented' (15).....	114
'To have security' (16).....	117
Summary – Political Structure.....	118
8. Societal Change – Rhetoric and Reality.....	120
Conditions, claims and costs of a 'full life'.....	121
Interpreting 'a full life' as lifelong learning.....	124
The study in relation to previous research – Hopes and costs of progressive change.....	124
For continued research – The possibility of learning for progressive change.....	126
Concluding note.....	133
Summary.....	136
Svensk sammanfattning.....	144
Bibliography.....	152

Introduction

He might or might not educate her, for he was the one who paid the fees. He could marry her off or not marry her off, for he was the broker, even though she had never authorized him.

(Nawal El Saadawi, *Two women in one*, 2005, p. 96)

Nothing is more important than ownership of women's bodies, for men should never have any doubts about the origin of their progeny. The father of every child should be known to all, and legitimate children separated from those born of unknown fathers. Since fatherhood depends on the father's consent, without this consent a child has no rights and all he can do is pray, fast, and repent of his sins, and if the child is a girl her sin is double that of the boy, but she only has half the rights he is permitted to enjoy.

(Nawal El Saadawi, *The fall of the Imam*, 2009, p.181)

Contemporary novels can capture glimpses of society and give an understanding of the different positions in which people are incorporated. The excerpts above, written by a contemporary Egyptian writer, give an idea of the different social positions of men and women in a patriarchal society. The novels convey a feeling of how the community organizes norms, values, roles and role positions to guide social interaction. They show that women who transgress these cultural boundaries often pay a high price. However, they also tell us stories of strong women opposing the social, cultural and political structures they encounter in everyday life, thus reflecting resistance to prevailing inequalities.

A focus in this study is on the way women's empowerment guide their actions in everyday life within a timeframe of 18 months during the Egyptian revolution. The study will demonstrate their extensive resistance to the unequal conditions for women, and throw light on the strong voices for change of those who were interviewed. Development of an adequate understanding of gender mainstreaming requires a clear picture of the related concepts of gender and equality, which establish dominant conditions in everyday life. Gender is part of the broad socio-cultural context. Gender equality means equal opportunity regardless of being a woman or a man. The term *gender mainstreaming* is part of a United Nation strategy for promoting gender equality, to highlight gender equality in for example policy development, resource allocation and monitoring of programs (UN5).

In this study, gender as one object of analysis provides a prominent example of citizens' different conditions for equal opportunities. Women's conditions, the claims for equal opportunities women are making and the cost of making these claims in their quest for societal change are objects of research. By discussing these three entities, I aim to highlight women's possibilities to influence the process of change in a society that is undergoing transformation.

The study aims at enhancing the understanding of the structural conditions for women's agency and how this enables and/or restrains women's possibility to participate in societal change, and women's possibilities to influence decisions concerning their own lives. The specific center of interest is what motivates (some) women to oppose political, cultural and social structures despite the often high personal cost, and how informal educational channels are being used for the purpose of learning in the quest for social change. The research objective comprises three research questions:

- How are the conditions for women's agency, in relation to the social, cultural and political structures, as perceived by the informants?
- What are the possibilities and obstacles for empowerment in the three societal structures?
- What are the costs for women involved in this challenge?

The study's place and time – Egypt at the beginning of the 21st century

To understand how structures affect the conditions for women's agency, I chose Egypt and the country's ongoing revolution. This gave me a chance to study women's experiences of the possibilities for participation and decision-making in society when societal structures are undergoing change. To get knowledge about the question at hand, I interviewed women in Cairo. A focus group interview with men concerning their perception of women's agency was also conducted to broaden the understanding of the situation for the women in the context. These men were all active in male-led campaigns for anti-violence against women. The persons interviewed are referred to as informants because of their role as main witnesses with much knowledge of the matter (Kvale, 1997). The interviews captured opinions on women's agency in relation to structures, both from a perspective within, the views of women, and from an external perspective, the views of men. The benefit of getting women's and men's separate statements on women's agency is that this generates a broader understanding of women's conditions. The informants were all activists in that they were all consciously working for awareness and equality in society. They all have a higher education and are familiar with the complexity of transforming a society.

Getting Access to Democratic Values

In many parts of the world, women are not equal to men; women meet severe obstacles in their pursuit of equal opportunities to organize for themselves a life they have reason to value. Enabling people to become stakeholders in their own lives will lead to improvements in health and security, and as a consequence, learning, through both formal and informal education channels. The opportunity of a 'good life', (viz a full life experience) increases both individual well-being and societal development.

Traditional societal structures seem to be a strong impeding factor for many women who wish to live a life in which they themselves are key persons. Unequal opportunities prevent many individuals from arranging for themselves the life they have reason to value, causing great distress. Thus equal possibilities are an important aspect of any democratic societal change, and this has contributed to the emergence of an important movement for equal rights and equal opportunities which is growing strong alongside old traditional values. When a person's past experiences do not correspond with current beliefs, imbalance and disharmony become prominent. This imbalance in a person's everyday life can be seen as a call for action.

The focus in this thesis on women's conditions, claims and costs highlight equal opportunities for a group that is a cross section of individuals overlapping several other subsets of society. In Egypt, misogyny (hatred of women) (Eltahawy, 2015), and gynopia (female invisibility) are in some sense predominant features. In the social, cultural and political structures in Egypt, misogyny and gynopia contribute to the aggravating circumstances that women endure. Direct violence is an efficient way to keep women from participating, but obscuring women also reduces and complicates meaningful participation on various structural levels in society. Thus, women's (equal) opportunity to arrange for themselves the life they have reason to value involves all structures in society.

The possibilities of equal opportunities to contribute to and achieve changes are intriguing factors for inquiry in a world where more and more people (for example through the Internet) are exposed to alternative ideas to that of the traditional society. Traditional societies often guard cultural and religious values, making societal change difficult to achieve. This kind of reproductive cultural socialization permeates Egyptian society in general and thus also the education system. Transformative learning, based on critical thinking within the school system, is considered difficult to attain (Loveluck, 2012). However, learning is never confined to formal educational settings. This might be especially true in societies where the education system is considered inadequate.

The inventiveness of people, once they are aware of an inadequate situation, is immense. Informal education channels become important for introducing and supporting new ways of thinking. Social movements², representing various realities, can be a way to understand society through new perspectives. Social movements accordingly represent a platform for knowledge, where people connect and share information and where democratic values and critical thinking can be fostered. This of course calls for networks that would be identified as diverse, autonomous, open and connected, thus helping to convene rather than control its participants (Shirky, 2011). In closed (undemocratic) societies, these networks are often prohibited making it even more difficult to claim equal conditions (Tadros, 2016).

The extract above from the novels by Nawal El Saadawi have been selected to point out the struggles of a woman in her everyday life in Egypt today. They have also been selected, however, to illustrate the ontological basis of this thesis, where humans are understood to be social beings with an innate sociality, meaning that we are born to experience the world intersubjectively (Schutz, 1962). Children are born into a society where the culture pre-exists and will most probably outlast them. This culture is experienced as something objective that has to be adopted in order to survive, because humans' ability to survive is dependent on belonging (Schutz, 1962). We simply need to explore the world together. However, to be able to *live together* (in communities), humans create social structures that condition social life (Elder-Vass, 2010). By a process of socialization these conditions are internalized by humans, so the structures will continue unchanged (ibid). It becomes important for humans to follow these conditions since they provide a recognizable place in the community (ibid). They may prove to be different depending on whether you are a woman or a man, and they therefore create unequal sized 'space of action', that is, a different agency.

A person's agency indicates (among other things) her possibility to participate in different spaces, to be able to express herself freely, and to be heard. The above texts from Nawal el-Saadawi's novels 'Two women in one' and 'The fall of the Imam' both illustrate that in the given contexts the 'role of women' has subordinated agency to that of the 'role of men'. The result is that on any structural level the voice of women will not be heard as clearly, nor as loud, as that of men.

² A social movement is explained by Sharp (2012, p. 277) as: "[a] group of people held together and motivated to act by a shared set of idea, beliefs, or objectives. These views explain the cause of their painful present condition, and point to a way in which changes in the society, or a whole better life, may be achieved."

Women in the Social Sphere and in the Legal System

Egyptian society is a complex society. The legal and policy framework is inadequate and discriminatory (Amnesty International³, 2015). The divided society has a hierarchical order that is distinct. The divisions cut through, for instance, gender, socio-economy, social status and occupation. Women are subordinate in political as well as in social and cultural structures (Halim, 2015). The Egyptian authorities' failure to punish or address the underlying causes of violence against women and girls has resulted in a culture of impunity in which sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls is pervasive (Amnesty, 2015). Such violence affects all aspects of women's lives, both in the family and in the public sphere. For most women this means living under constant threat of violence, whether they are participating in public and political life or not. The gap between law and norm is wide in Egyptian society, as are the differences between what applies to different groups (Eltahawy, 2015).

Awareness of the gap between traditional piety and the right to autonomous choice generates action. This is evidenced in the growing participation in social movements that have become platforms for co-created knowledge, based on informal and non-formal learning.

The individual's inviolable human rights make people endorse a more pluralistic way of life and many of them require societal change. These actions however, are always followed by costs. These will in some cases be in the form of violence and individual suffering. Nevertheless, not to act can also be connected to substantial costs. The lack of hope, agency and empowerment might be experienced as a high cost for those who have in fact imagined another life and are in opposition to the inhibitory societal structures. The situation is very like when you have learned a new skill; once you have understood that there is a possibility for change, there is no going back.

Attaining a 'full life' – Framing women's conditions and actions taken

The desire for change derives from the informants' aspiration for wellbeing, in their own words, 'a full life'. 'A full life' comprises many things according to the informants, participation in social events and influence (to varying degrees) being two of these.

³ Amnesty International (2015) Annual report on Egypt showing that the human rights situation in the country is continuing to deteriorate. The report show that women are both subject to discrimination and inadequately protected against violence.

To frame the complexity of women's conditions for agency and the outcome of their actions, a theoretical framework that encompasses both the goal and the process is needed. For this purpose, key concepts from the Capability Approach⁴ and concepts derived from Critical Realism⁵ have proved useful to highlight enabling and impeding factors in women's societal participation and their work for change. From the capability approach the analytical use of valued functionings is used together with the concept of social conversion generating women's real capability (opportunity freedom) to do and be what they value. In order to understand the processes of change this conceptual framework has been strengthened with Archer's analytical dualism (1995). Archer's analytical dualism points out the necessary analytical separation of structure and agency in which she states that (1) the structure is conditioning (2) social interaction, which in turn is (3) reproducing or transforming structures. Analytical dualism is used to frame the informants' actions and their outcomes in the three analytically separate structures.

Disposition of the Thesis

This thesis, organized in eight chapters, begins with an introduction outlining the research problem. Chapter One gives a brief background of the social, cultural and political structures in Egypt and women's agency related to these structures. This is provided in order to introduce the reader to the Egyptian context, giving an account of events in the recent revolution as well as a brief historical background. This will facilitate understanding of the society the informants are talking about and give a framework for notable existing boundaries.

Chapter Two is set in relation to previous research. Three theoretical domains focusing on, gender and leading positions, democracy and equality, and feminism and traditional societies are included. These domains are all set in relation to three structural societal arenas, providing an account of women's agency.

Chapter Three outlines the theoretical framework and places the study in human development research. The theoretical key concepts used in the analysis are drawn from the Capability Approach and Critical Realism, and are introduced and explained in terms of their usage in the thesis. These concepts are: structure, agency, roles and role position, functioning, capability, social

⁴ The Capability approach is developed by Amartya Sen, (current Thomas W. Lamont University Professor and Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University), and further deepened and developed by, amongst others, Martha Nussbaum (current Ernest Freund Distinguished Services Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago).

⁵ Critical Realism is an ontological framework associated with Roy Bhaskar, Margaret Archer and others.

conversion factors, narrative imagination, structural elaboration (analytical dualism) and opportunity costs.

Chapter Four gives an account of how the research field was approached, how data was constructed and how the data has been processed analytically. The selection of informants and the method of interviews are described. Ethical aspects and considerations of the study are also discussed.

The analysis is organized in three chapters. The first chapter in the analysis, Chapter Five, presents the social structure. It provides an analysis of the social structure in relation to women's agency, women's claim for increased agency and the costs for these claims in the family and the domestic sphere.

Chapter Six gives an account of the cultural structure and provides the analysis of the cultural structure in relation to women's agency. Here women's conditions in the public sphere are exemplified, as are their claims for greater agency in the public domain and the costs involved in making these claims.

Finally, Chapter Seven presents the political structure. Here, an analysis of the political structure in relation to women's agency is made. The discrepancy between laws and regulations and the actual support women get will be accounted for by the informants. Women's claims for greater agency in the political domain and the costs involved will be analyzed.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis, bringing together the findings in Chapters Five, Six and Seven to discuss what is actually possible (over time) when actively seeking societal change. In discussing the concepts of structure, agency, role-, and role positions that together with valued functionings and social conversion factors generate agency, women's conditions in the above-described three structures in society are outlined. This provides an understanding of the circumstances these women work under in their quest for changes in society. Thus the analysis of the informants' claims for change starts in their understanding of, and approach to, change in the three societal structures. In the pursuit of a 'full life', the possibilities to bring about societal change become visible in terms of whether intended structural elaborations are achieved and if so, at what cost. This cost, analyzed with the concept of opportunity cost, refers to the costs involved when revolting against the established structures. This is done to gain better understanding of the structural boundaries within which women are enclosed.

1. The Past in the Present

This chapter provides a brief background of Egyptian society and women's position, starting with a short account of some key events of the recent revolution as from January 2011. In order to do so, a few key names in the narrative of the recent revolution⁶ in Egypt are highlighted. The background to the country's cultural and social structures is described by some well-versed writers, by reports from the United Nation and from the work of domestic non-governmental organizations, and by international and national media.

Through the eye of an observer, Jeffery Alexander (2011) has made a sociological analysis of the uprising, using activists' narratives and media reports. He argues that the uprising was not foremost an opposition over material concerns but an uprising over meanings. The demand for bread, he claims, can be interpreted as a demand for justice (*ibid*).

Wael Ghonim (2012) is one of several public faces of the revolution and one of the facilitators organizing the revolution. In June 2010 a young man by the name of Khaled Said was beaten to death by the Egyptian security forces and through a Facebook page called 'Kullena Khaled Said' ("We are all Khaled Said"), Ghonim brought attention to the brutality of the police and the bad practices of the regime. He set up the Facebook page as an anonymous webpage administrator in order to protect himself and his family. This page contributed to the growing discontent and helped the organization and the communication required for coordinated resistance (El-Bendary, 2013).

Another voice is that of Ahdaf Soueif (2012), an Egyptian novelist based in London who returned to Cairo during the revolution to participate in the protests. Her report from the revolution gives an account of the struggle both for a better personal life and for a different society (*ibid*).

⁶ Revolution according to Sharp (2012: 256) is 'An accelerated change in social, political, or economic life and institutions, or a combination of these, accomplished by mass population action, initially at least, a redistribution of power, and does not simply place new personnel into new positions. This redistribution includes increased participation in decision-making and a popular restructuring of institutions.'

Bread, freedom and social justice

Throughout President Hosni Mubarak's almost thirty years of rule, people had restricted mobility and no freedom to express either political or other views, and the government exercised arbitrary power through the police. According to Sharp (2012) a government occupied by one person or a small group of persons claiming the right to control the political system is a dictatorship. Egypt has been run for years without constitutional limits, division of powers or any real opportunity for the population to select state officials. The citizens have restricted civil liberties and all kinds of opposition are dealt with by repression. With the resurgent emergency laws enacted in 1958, Egypt is once again a police state dictatorship (Sheira, 2014).

Taking into account that much resistance to prevailing oppressive structures had been cracked down for decades, what happened in 2011 is considered historic. On January 25th 2011, 'the day of revolt', there were massive anti-government demonstrations throughout the country (Aljazeera, 1). On Tahrir Square in Cairo, tens of thousands of protesters gathered to make their voices heard. There were several causes of the uprising, among them corruption and unemployment, but also political censorship and police brutality. One event that led to the organized demonstration on the 25th was the police's brutal killing of Khaled Said in June 2010 (Ghonim, 2012). This incident mobilized people against the brutality and torture that had been carried out by the police for centuries.

Jeffrey Alexander (2011) argues in his book *Performative Revolution in Egypt: An essay in Cultural Power*, that the revolution was in fact a cultural revolution. It started as a dispute over meanings with a series of intellectual shifts forming 'collective representations' which raised the demands for liberal values (ibid). During the revolution's first 18 days, these demands were expressed by clear signs and symbols, and word pairs such as chaos/order, good/evil and sacred/profane helped escalate the protests. People were encouraged by the Tunisian uprising, which resulted in the departure of President Ben Ali. The Tunisian uprising was started by one man's protest through self-immolation, which triggered the revolution. This Tunisian street vendor set himself on fire in protest against having his goods, the sole source of income for him and his family, confiscated by a corrupt police officer. This incident sparked a revolution in Tunis and several other countries followed suit.

Opposing the prevailing structures

In February 2011, Hosni Mubarak was overthrown after 18 days of protests across Egypt, and power was handed over to the army council (BBC 1). The methods used by the protesters were many and the revolution cannot be said to be an entirely Internet based revolution (AUC). Activists included liberal,

anti-capitalists, Islamic, national and feminist segments, all of which were participants in different networks. These networks comprise both networks of social gatherings and digital (social media) networks. Even if it can be said that the revolution was in part organized online, the resistance was shown on the streets by thousands of mobilized protesters as well as by graffiti expressing strong messages across the city of Cairo (Soueif, 2012).

After the resignation of Mubarak, the protesters became impatient over the slow pace of political change (BBC 2), despite the fact that Gamal Mubarak who had been groomed to inherit his father's power was arrested on suspicion of corruption (Ahram 1). Islamist groups which had not been in the forefront of the revolution were moving forward. In November 2011, protesters and security forces clashed when the protesters accused the military of not loosening their grip on power as promised. The parliamentary elections began and proceeded over the New Year. In January 2012, the Islamist parties sailed up victorious from the parliamentary elections. In May, ahead of the presidential election the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohammed Morsi emerged strong from the country's first free presidential election (ever), and the military leader announced the end of the state of emergency that had been in place since the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat in 1981 (BBC 3). The state of emergency was lifted on May 31, 2012, but this relief did not last long. Each of the three (interim) governments that have held power since the overthrow of Mubarak in February 2011, the military, Morsi and then the military again, have all re-imposed a state of emergency at some point in their terms of office.

In July 2012 Muhammad Morsi was appointed President, and one of his first actions was to dismiss the Defense Minister Tantawi (Aljazeera, 3). He then started to draft a new constitution (BBC 4). In December of the same year, the Islamist-dominated constituent assembly approved a draft of the constitution increasing the role of Islam and restricting the freedom of speech and the freedom of assembly. This was approved by the people in a referendum but opposition was also heard predominantly amongst women's groups, secular opposition leaders and the Coptic community (BBC 3). During his short time as leader, President Morsi made a number of less successful decisions, leading to his dismissal in July 2013. During mass demonstration at which people chanted for Morsi's resignation in the same way as they had opposed Mubarak 18 months earlier, Morsi was ousted by the military and arrested. A few days later Adly Mansour was appointed interim president (BBC 5). This led to street riots and hundreds of protesters opposing the ousting of Morsi were killed when security forces assaulted Morsi supporters in Cairo (Reuters).

Despite the massive violence – the killing of over one thousand people, over six thousand injured and more than 12 thousand arrests over the last few months – people began to believe that it was possible to have influence on changes in society (HRW, 2013).

A divided revolution with feminist pretensions

During the first 18 months of the revolution, women played a major and decisive role. From the very beginning, women were a driving force and active organizers of the revolution. They also actively reported on events, by posts and tweets, as well as supporting protesters in Tahrir Square with medical aid and food.

On International Women's Day (March 8th 2011), women raised their voices, pushing for rights that had perished during the first phase of the revolution after bad arguments and violence. One young woman, Samira Ibrahim was detained along with 16 other women at a protest gathering on March 9th 2011; she was held in custody for four days. During these four days she was beaten, tortured with electric shocks, physiologically violated and virginity tested by a man in military clothes. Later the former head of Egypt's armed forces (now the incumbent president), told Amnesty International (Amnesty International, June 2011) that this had to be done to female detainees to protect the army against future allegations of rape by the military. Samira Ibrahim later filed a lawsuit standing up for her rights as a woman and a human being. This led to several threats including death threats from the public. These reactions are an expression of the stigma (for the victim) that sexual abuse still generates.

A patriarchic society is male domination over women (OECD). In Egypt, the societal structures promote this domination, making the society unequal, giving one group legitimate power over another.

The recent revolution in Egypt is a revolution about many things, among them fighting the patriarchy (Aljazeera 2). In the recent history of Egypt, women have lived through various conditions for participation in the different spheres of society. In this study, the focus is on women's role and their role position before and during the revolution.

Historical volatility

During the Nasser regime, women were encouraged to participate politically but their right to full citizenship was restricted because of the patriarchal construction of family life (UN 1). During the 1950s and 1960s the state passed laws that transformed women's public lives. After a long struggle since the 1920s, Egyptian women gained the constitutional right to vote and to stand for political office in 1956 (IDEA1). Women became citizens in their own right and were given the vote (Botman, 1999).

In 1974, Anwar Sadat⁷ adopted the economic 'Open Door Policy', which resulted in less need for women's participation (Kassem, 2004). Women's do-

⁷ Anwar Sadat, president of Egypt from October 15, 1970 until October 6, 1981, when he was assassinated.

mestic role got stronger support and some verses from the Quran were reinterpreted to justify male dominance. This made it possible to adapt Article 11 of the 1971 Constitution, which declares:

...the state's commitment to help reconcile women's family obligations and their equality to men in the public sphere.

with an addition that hold:

...providing that this does not infringe on the rules of Islamic Sharia.

Thus the 1971 Constitution represented an important divergence from the secular discourse of the sixties, creating opportunities for Islamic groups to oppose women's rights (Chatty & Rabo, 1997, p. 149). In 1979, women had been granted legal rights in marriage, polygamy, divorce- and child custody (Al-Ali, 2000). This was implemented by presidential decree and was called the Jehan law, after Sadat's wife, Jehan Sadat.

'When Mubarak came to power, the regime attempted to recruit the support of middle and lower-middle class women, and depending on circumstances, women could be mobilized as members of kin, ethnic, or tribal groups, as members of a class or gender, or as individuals' (Joseph and Slymowics, 2001, p. 34). This was partly done with the help of Susan Mubarak, who as First Lady, was entrusted with, setting up the Regional Center for Women's Health and Development (Salhi, 2013). Some progress for women was made thanks to the work of Susan Mubarak, but unfortunately, this progress was reversed after the Mubarak regime was ousted in 2011.

Recent history has proved that it is difficult to make use of women as a uniform group as Mubarak set out to do. However, even if the resistance from different women's groups has been strong, the violence against protesters has escalated, making it increasingly difficult to achieve the intended results. Tahrir Square continued to be the space where protesters met, but since the military took power, the revolutionary (non-violent) potential of the Square has step by step been overshadowed by violence, increasing internal fights and sexual harassment (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Today, clear signs of a police state are appearing again. A few examples are the government's declaration of emergency laws, anti-protest laws, mass arrests and detentions of journalists (Human Rights Watch, 2013). This is all defended by the government through the 'war on terrorism' now also enshrined in the Constitution. A view in 2013 that is quite common is that the situation is worse now than under Mubarak (Ahram 2). A security state is once again emerging; the democracy that activists were hoping for is fading. The transition from a dictatorship into a democracy will no doubt take time, and events lately show that the concerns of pro-democracy activists' about unsuccessful attempts at democracy might prove to be true (Masoud, 2015). The continuous struggle for democracy,

equality and human rights is still strong, even though mass arrests and mass killings are a testament to a more restrictive police force (HRW, 2013). Newspapers and television stations are also in the line of fire (Daily News Egypt). Several journalists have been detained and a few have been arrested without prosecution (Amnesty, 2015). These people have not been given permission to contact their families or even given access to a lawyer. The Cairo office of Al Jazeera has been shut down, accused of threatening stability and national security (Al Jazeera 5). To turn on journalists is just one part of the government's campaign of threats.

Women's roles and positions

Women in Egypt constitute of course, a diverse and heterogeneous group. Macro-level factors set women's legal framework for participation in civic society, but individual and socio-economic positions differ enormously in the country (Kabeer, 2011). Women are also, ideologically and politically, spaced across a wide horizon (Chatty & Rabo, 1997). However, the cult of domestic, 'womanhood', is the prevailing value system in Egypt (Daniel & Akanji, 2011). Historian Barbara Welter (1966), argues that *true* women are traditionally expected to hold the four cardinal virtues, piety, purity, submission-, and domesticity. These virtues can be seen in all the societal structures that this study addresses.

In Egypt where tradition and modernity exist in parallel, the most difficult obstacle to tackle concerning equal participation is the cultural dualism of modernity and tradition. The faces of dualism are, on the one hand, modernization, also referred to as 'the contemporary' and on the other hand, tradition (inherited culture) also referred to as 'authenticity' (Mustafa, Shukor & Rabi, 2005). 'Authenticity' has not undergone renewal at all according to Mustafa, Shukor & Rabi. The contradictions are that one face is connected to basic human rights and the other draws its beliefs from the patriarchal system, where decisions are made from the top by men who have inherited their legitimacy of power (Mustafa, Shukor & Rabi, 2005; Al-ali, 2000). Women's participation in public and political life is facing a number of obstacles. The lack of general agreement is generating the spread of cultural dualism, where values such as freedom, democracy, rationalism and women's rights are being overthrown in favor of a more patriarchal culture. This is not consistent with the core of equality, that is, the equal treatment of *all* individuals or groups of individuals, independent of gender, for example. Opposition to this trend is sometimes called the 'cultural attack', *al-hagma al-thaqafiyah* (Chatty & Rabo, 1997, p.174).

In Egypt the culture of modernization runs as a parallel system alongside the traditional inherited culture (Botman, 1999; Mustafa, Shukor & Rabi',

2005). Women's political participation in Egypt is closely linked both to modernization and to the division of the public and the domestic/private sphere (ibid). The political climate and the social / cultural aspects, together with the legal constitution are the main factors that enable but also to a large extent prevent women from participating. Thus, cultural norms and political populist currents, along with the legal constitution are setting the frame of what is seen as acceptable for women, among others, to do.

The importance of education

Formal education (education provided by the government) is progressing in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA), which is very important for women in their struggle for more equality (Cochran, 2008). Literacy makes it easier for a person to become knowledgeable, thus also giving her the possibility for a better understanding of her own life situation.

In 1957, the Nasser regime understood that to unify the country and its people, education had to take place (Cochran, 2013). Nasser initiated a program of education reform to improve literacy and as a way of providing young people with training for prospective careers in the burgeoning public sector (Nassar, 2011). Nasser's regime emphasized education for all. Within this program, the government instituted compulsory education for boys and girls through the primary level (six years of schooling) and made instruction free of charge at all stages. The benefits to girls were demonstrable: in 1953, primary school enrolment stood at 37.7 per cent; by 1960, the figure was 56 per cent. Literacy for women rose from 12.3 per cent in the 60s to 16.2 per cent in 1976. This gain might seem quite modest, but literacy for men remained practically unchanged during the same period (Cochran, 2008). Literacy is defined here as 'people over the age of 15 that can read and write'. There are different figures for the literacy rate from different sources and the true figure might be hard to find. However, there are indications that illiteracy is quite high compared to that in some other Arab countries (Hammoud, 2005). The female population in Egypt is still characterized by high illiteracy rates. The gender gap in education may decrease over the coming years, but when resources are scarce, male education still take precedence over female education (Hassanien, 2010).

One of the reasons, Al-ali (2000) argues, is that equal rights and equal opportunity have to be provided, not only in *access to education* but also in responsibilities for childcare and childrearing. This would give women the necessary platform to be able to complete an education. In her view, education and morality should not be based on religion but on universal human values (ibid).

From the Nasser era up until 2008, girls were educated to become secretaries, for the service industry and as government workers. After middle-school

graduation, government employment was guaranteed and women could become government bureaucrats and contribute to the family income. The most significant educational problem, according to Cochran (2008), is the withdrawal of the Egyptian tradition of a guaranteed government job after graduation. This change affects women more than men, and poverty is higher among women and children than among men (Cochran, 2008). One of Egypt's major political crisis is that females are facing severe economic problems.

With the general growth of education and equality awareness women have started to play a bigger part in the official space, but they are still not educated as much as men are and not hired as often as men (Cochran, 2008). Education does, however contribute to a participant political culture (Almond, Powell, Ström, Dalton, 2003). Through equality in education and other information sources, women should be able to play a more active political role on their own terms. Basic rights leading to literacy and further to political literacy empower people to act, making it important to inform and raise consciousness about women's issues within society. This issue is linked to the battle against growing conservative religious tendencies (Al-ali, 2000). Even if some Muslim leaders argue that the Quran grants women both political and economic rights, the opposition is loud and the reality for women is difficult. *Bayt al-ta'a* is still in use in Egypt. *Bayt al-ta'a* means 'house of obedience' and refers to the right of the husband to force his wife to return home. He can make it a police matter if he chooses to. (Al-ali, 2000).

Parallel educational systems preserving an unequal society

There are several challenges facing the Egyptian education system. Today, three cultural heritages run parallel in the education system, the international private language schools with a Western curriculum and instruction in a foreign language, the Egyptian education system based on secular values and the traditional Egyptian education system based on Islamic beliefs.

What is common for the teachers in all three systems is that the salaries are low, making it difficult to support a family by working as a teacher. The fact that teachers are underpaid and that the quality of the education is low results in a parallel private tutoring system. Sometimes the system of parallel tutoring is enforced by the teacher so that they can earn a living wage (Sobhy, 2012). Approximately 60 per cent of investment in education is on private tutoring (Osman, 2011), which of course adds to the already existing social inequalities.

Women's social movements – platforms for new knowledge

When the education system fails, other platforms providing information become important for developing useful knowledge. The Egyptian Private Voluntary Organizations movements (PVO) go back to the nineteenth century

(Chatty & Rabo, 1997, p.162). However, women's movements independent of the state are still considered a threat because they challenge the state's rigid control of women. In 1954, the regime dissolved all political movements and feminist organizations that challenged patriarchal values. As from that date, women could only engage in the political arena on Nasser's terms (Botman, 1999). Many laws and regulations, culminating in Law 32 of 1964, have been formulated to organize and categorize the various activities carried out by women's voluntary organizations. These laws compel women activists to operate either as informal groups or as officially registered organizations, which are subject to the control of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Women's political participation may be revoked by the state, by rulers and by politicians or others in authority. Women are made participants without any real opportunity for involvement or influence. This easily makes women the subject of mobilization and the targets of political action programs, easily identified on the basis of their citizenship; they are turned into political followers (Joseph & Slyomovics, 2001).

However, there are many strong opponents. Within contemporary Egyptian discourses, Nawal El-Saadawi, who has emerged as a courageous and secular activist for women's rights since the publication of her book *Al-Mar'ah wa Al-Jins* (Women and Sex, 1971), is associated with the new radical movement of feminism. She founded the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA) (Shatty & Rabo, 1997). Nawal El-Saadawi attacked the patriarchal control of female sexuality, and she has been a firm voice in the debate on women's rights and freedoms (Al-ali, 2000).

National laws, religious decrees and human rights treaties

Secular women activists do not accept sharia as the sole source of legislation. They also refer to civil law and human rights treaties as stipulated by the United Nations (Al-ali, 2000). Even though Islamist forces continue to form a powerful constituency within the Egyptian state, up until the revolution there have been increasing demands on the Egyptian government to adhere to various UN treaties concerning women's rights. Nevertheless, there is a tendency that those who are engaged in the struggle for women's rights are reluctant to identify themselves as feminists (Al-ali, 2000). Feminists run the risk of being stigmatized as anti-religious and anti-nationalist by Islamist movements and conservative nationalist forces, as well as by leftist nationalist women activists. Recently, however, some Islamist women have become more outspoken and confrontational about how they see the role of women in an Islamic state. They stress that Islam can be compatible with UN-stipulated standards of women's rights. They rather point to persisting traditions of pre-Islamic times as being responsible for the discrimination against women (Mahmood, 2005). Another ongoing debate has been the question whether women's issues constitute a concern independent of a wider struggle for justice. Whether conceptualized as the *women's movements* or the *feminist movement*, women's rights

activism has increasingly been linked to the debates about authenticity as opposed to the Western cultural attack. A very interesting assertion that Al-ali makes is that:

the struggle for women's civil rights in Egypt puts those activists who are at the forefront of the battle in a nearly untenable position. Caught between Islamist, government, and the nationalist discourse and interests, they are constantly under attack, and often attack one another in their attempts to gain legitimacy and secure resources. Nevertheless, some activists are challenging these homogenizing discourses by constructing new terms of reference. It is within this confrontation that women activists are emerging as a force of democratization in contemporary Egypt. (Al-ali in Chatty & Rabo 2000, p.191)

Al-ali (2000) discusses secular contemporary women's movements and a quote from an interview in her book points out the difficulty to break through the boundaries of old rigid patterns:

Our struggle dates back much longer than Huda Sha'rawi. I would not frame it in a specific time, nor Western or non-Western. People all over the world have been fighting against injustice. Framing it into this kind of dichotomy is harmful. It mirrors how both the Islamists and the West look at these issues and create their identities. Secular liberal thinking is portrayed as ownership of the West. We need to break through this. (Al-ali, 2000, p.60)

However, Al-ali also touches upon another important issue; whether Arab nationalist, socialist or liberal, several secular thinkers and politicians up to now are to be characterized as authoritarian, intolerant and oppressive. Consequently, we have to bear in mind that secular thinking is not obviously democratic.

In contrast to Al-ali, Saba Mahmood (2005) discusses in *Politics of Piety, the Islamic revival and the feminist subject*, the replacement of the revolutionary by reformism and pragmatism. She analyzes the conceptions of self, moral agency and politics that are undermining the practices of this non-liberal movement. By doing so, she elucidates an understanding of the historical projects that create it (Mahmood, 2005). She not only provides an ethnographic account of the Islamic revival but also looks into the normative liberal assumptions that humans have a desire for freedom, that they need autonomy and that they seek to challenge social norms instead of merely upholding them. This challenges the secular view of freedom of choice and opens the door for a broad understanding of freedom of choice.

Hesitant Progress – Cultural Inertness or Lack of Political Will

After the 1952 revolution, the state developed a comprehensive strategy based on social justice and self-reliance. This required full mobilization of human resources. The new constitution in 1956, adopted a secular approach granting:

‘equal opportunities to all citizens, men and women, regardless of gender, ethnic origin or religion, to participate in realizing the goals of development’ (Chatty & Rabo, 1997, p.148). Even though women’s position and thereby their perception of themselves were greatly improved gender equality was not realized. This is much due to the state neglecting to change the oppressive family status law, which led to continuing inequality in the private sphere, restraining women’s equal participation in the public sphere.

The concept *secular* refers to ‘the acceptance of the separation between religion and politics, but does not necessarily denote anti-religious or anti-Islamic positions’ (Al-ali, 2000, p. 4). To separate state functions and personal beliefs is according to Al-ali the only possible framework for political struggle. Moreover, to become politically literate takes more than just the ability to read and write; you also have to have the skill to critically analyze the information.

Attitudes and values inevitably affect how we act (Baylis & Smith, 2001). This also applies in politics. Political institutions reflect the norms, attitudes, and expectations of the citizens. Cultural norms can change slowly and reflect long-lasting patterns of political actions. This means that understanding the political culture is central for understanding politics whether across nations or across time. Achieving political literacy involves the family, schools, social (communication) media, religious meeting places and other political structures that develop, reinforce, and change attitudes that will affect politics in society (Almond et al, 2003). Although political parties in Egypt claim to have social and political agendas that are sensitive to women, there are few that have well-developed programs. One reason might be the relatively new conservative political and economic interpretations of Islam that have been adopted by large social movements. The struggle between secular and Islamist middle class groups amongst women has divided them and undermined their capacity to confront the conservative violations of women’s rights. Given this and the fact that the state, at large, is unwilling to defend the rights of women, women’s organizations are untiringly continuing to struggle for their rights (Mahmood, 2005; Mustafa, Shukor & Rabi, 2005).

A constitution with reservations

The 1971 Constitution redefined the meaning of citizenship. This was done by defining gender equality, applying it only when it did not contradict the rules of sharia law. This was a big setback for women and it gave the fraternity system a major advantage. The Constitution gives government officials, private sector employers, husbands and fathers the opportunity to detach women from their previous gains in the public arena.

The new constitution of 2014, drafted during President Morsi’s term in office, is based on the constitution from 1971 and replace the constitution of 2012 (IDEA 2). In the preamble to the constitution of 2012, women were referred to as ‘the sisters of men’. The 2014 charter states (more clearly) that

women are equal to men, and Article 11 expresses ideas that include equality, political rights and protection from all forms of discrimination (Women Alliance). Article 11 states that 'The State shall ensure the achievement of equality between women and men in all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution'. The rights of the child are set out in Article 80, which states that 'anyone under the age of 18 shall be a child'. This makes child marriage prohibited by the constitution. Egypt was the first Arab country to ratify, albeit with reservations, the Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in 1987 (CEDAW). However, although the introductory text states that the constitution 'will be consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' ratified by Egypt (Constitution Draft), the principles of sharia law remain the main source of legislation.

Ann Elisabeth Mayer (1995) has examined some of the reservations of the Egyptian government with regard to CEDAW. In her study, she frames the reservations in a more general pattern of hypocrisy among male politicians who encourage women's equality, yet resist or even openly oppose its implementation (ibid). A quite clear example of this is that in 1983, Law 114 stipulated that there should be a female candidate on every list presented for the 31 districts, which meant that women would inevitably get 31 seats. In 1986, this led to Law 188, which found this provision to be unconstitutional with regard to the principle of equality between men and women. Because of Law 188, women won 14 seats in 1987, seven seats in 1990, five seats in 1995 and seven seats in 2000. This decrease in the number of women candidates, and in the representation of women in the public sphere, has increased the level of public cultural illiteracy, which further strengthens the negative image of the role women are given (Mustafa, Shukor & Rabi', 2005).

Although women's citizenship is usually included in the larger body of citizens, at the same time there are often rules, regulations and policies that are specific for women (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Citizenship is thus two faced both a set of juridical, economic and political practices that often appear equal and a set of social and cultural practices that are not at all equal (Joseph, 2000). Citizenship models have been built around gender-specific qualities that have deliberately excluded women (Botman, 1999).

Participation in the governance of one's community is participation in the governance of oneself. Those who are governed but do not govern are not citizens but subjects. (Sapiro as cited in Botman, 1999, p.112)

Botman (1999) uses gender as an epistemology to explain what we know about social relations and how we know it. Botman's study clarifies how women's citizenship has been created and recreated. She examines the inter-relationships of women and men in Egypt and draws the conclusion that knowledge generated by experience is socially constructed. The knowledge

about social relations between the sexes, she explains, is made up of a set of ideas, and this is maintained by both groups interactively (ibid).

Islamists, Botman argues, locate gender at the center of their ideology and base their views on a literal interpretation of sharia. Social harmony and a healthy family life depend on women's commitment to husband and children, and this directs women to remain in the privacy of their homes, and distance themselves from public life. To back up conservative cultural practices, Islamists manipulate gender relations to advance their ideological and social positions. However, when, in the light of publicity, the discussion revolves around God, the prophet Muhammad and their teachings, they do not necessarily acknowledge the centrality of gender to their arguments (Botman, 1999).

This is part of what makes it difficult to talk about women's participation in social / public life. The situation actually calls for a third platform, a platform that does not divide citizens into men and women, or modernization and authenticity, but something completely different.

2. Previous research

This chapter frames the study and places it in an established research field, providing an overview of previous research with particular focus on women's agency in strong patriarchal societies. I have limited the previous research presented here to studies concerning women's factual possibilities for increasing their agency, in respect of achieving freedom to adjust their lives according to their own preferences.

Women's agency and empowerment as a research field in previous research has been approached from several disciplines showing the multifaceted potential of different starting points for the field. Here, research from sociology, economics, political science, law, education and cultural anthropology will be included. Within these fields, there is a large variety of inputs. There are studies focusing entirely on gender policy issues, while others try to identify complex patterns of culture that in different ways affect the implementation of political decisions. Based on the idea of empowerment as development, education becomes central. Education, however, has to be understood in a broad sense, where upbringing, formal education and informal learning can be seen as equally important aspects.

A large amount of development research has been conducted in the wake of the recent revolution in Egypt. In reviewing the literature, three areas have been particularly interesting relative to empowerment through development. These three areas will represent the themes in which the previous research has been subdivided. They are Gender and leading positions; Democracy and human rights; and Feminism and traditional societies.

The previous research presented here does not attempt to do justice to the wide literature on women's agency and empowerment, nor to the broad feminist scholarship on the political and historical role of women's movements. It is drawn from a smaller body of research examining women's agency from a perspective of social wellbeing through collective action, for instance in a revolution, in terms of the possibility to arrange for yourself 'a good life' according to Sen's (1980) definition. He defines the 'good life' as an individual's influence on, and ability to arrange her/his own life in a way she/he has reasons to value. Examining the circumstances for women's agency does include their conditions of learning in the given context. The intention with this selection of themes is to highlight women's possibilities to contribute in various ways to the development of society through their own learning.

Gender and Leading Positions

Women's empowerment is one of the most crucial concerns of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations (UN5). However, empowerment is difficult to measure, partly because it is not clearly defined, consequently leading our thoughts on empowerment in several different directions.

My study draws upon Sen's (1999) idea of development as the expansion of people's choices. The idea that human development is preceded by the freedom of every person to live the life they have reason to value can be apparent with Kabeer's (2005) three-dimensional model. Kabeer explains the pathways through which empowerment occur, putting forward a few dimensions of empowerment. Control over resources such as human, intellectual, physical and financial, and ideology such as attitudes, values and beliefs form the first dimension. Women's agency, the right and the ability to make choices in situations involving themselves and their families, constitutes the second. The third involves the process of control, that is, moving from having no power to having power, thus a process that involves change over time. Finally, empowerment is also studied as outcome, for example, education, health and political participation. These dimensions of women's empowerment are often used interchangeably with gender equality (ibid). This may pose a problem because gender equality sets women's status in relation to men's while women's empowerment shows women's opportunities to exercise control and make choices concerning their own lives (Grown, 2008). In much of previous research women's empowerment has been promoted as a central development issue with no or only vague discernment of the separate entrances to the understanding of empowerment.

In her study, Kabeer (1999) summarizes examples from several studies measuring 'decision-making agency', finding a wide range of indicators. Examples are the household budget, childcare, child discipline, child education, child marriage, family planning methods, whether the wife works and gets visits from friends and relatives. In Kabeer's study (2005) agency has both a positive and a negative⁸ bearing. The above indicators include both positive and negative agency; however, the result suggests that measures often leave out women's possibility to influence in the surrounding community.

Measures of women's autonomy include, for example, their decision-making, mobility, incidence of domestic violence, access to and control over economic resources (Kabeer, 1999). Kabeer (1999) notes that in societies where measurement indicators relating to family and the household, gender roles

⁸ The positive agency refers to the 'power to', thus people's possibility to freely act according to their own choices, whereas the negative agency seeks to explain the 'power over', that is one actors domination over another.

tend to be more narrowly defined and resources are more often controlled by men.

This claim is supported by Malhotra, Schuler & Bender (2002), where the measures are broadened to include women's empowerment as a variable in international development. They include psychological, familial/interpersonal, political, legal and socio-economic dimensions, and state that women can be empowered in one or several spheres of life, yet nevertheless, be without power in other spheres of life.

Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) have by means of an analytical framework, developed a tool which is rooted in conceptual discourse and measurement practice. This is used to measure and monitor empowerment processes and outcomes, by measuring a person's capacity to make effective choices against the capacity to transform these choices into desired actions and outcomes.

Similarly, Marilee Karl examines, in her study *Women and Empowerment: Participation and Decision-Making* (1995), the diverse issues involved in women's struggle to gain control over their own lives and influence in issues concerning their surroundings. The scope of her study is vast, going far beyond policy to include economic development, and giving an account of the quite limited progress made. In doing so, she manages to present a wide range of activities in which women came together to act for the common good, including expanding women's rights. The results show that if gender-based oppression is to end, women have to organize and mobilize themselves. This mobilization, of course, presupposes different strategies across different cultures.

Few studies have been made on women and leader positions in patriarchal cultural contexts. Some studies related to women's autonomy in the Middle East have, however, been conducted. One study carried out by Al-Lamky (2007) on perceptions of working women in Oman investigated the obstacles facing working women in leading positions. Through in-depth interviews recognizing early socialization patterns, personal traits, work and family role conflict, and perceptions of the challenges facing professional women in Oman, there is a discussion of the stereotypes of Omani women in leading positions. The results show great support from early socialization processes concerning equal education (such as male siblings) and supporting parents (especially fathers). The challenge for these women begins when entering the civil society where their role as female leaders is incompatible with the surrounding cultural values with strong expectations of women's traditional role in society.

The understanding of empowerment should thus include several power dimensions. Power over, power to, power with and power within become relevant when discussing empowerment in any context, but perhaps even more so when looking at societies with an uneven distribution of resources and opportunities. From the perspective of fairness and equality, these aspects of power cannot be overlooked. For people to understand their rights and the system it is essential for change to take place.

Democracy and Equal Rights

Participatory democracy aims at establishing opportunities for a larger number of people to participate in and contribute to decision-making bodies. In many countries, there is a discrepancy, however, between formal democracy and the practical democracy of everyday life. To understand participatory processes, the socio-economic disparities have to be accounted for. Democratic processes are often understood to be fully assured by elections and frequent opinion polling (The report of the global commission on elections, democracy and security, 2012).

Spierings, Smith and Verloo (2008) analyze determinants of women's labor market participation (LMP) in the Muslim world in *On the Compatibility of Islam and Gender Equality*. The results of their study indicate that modernization in Muslim countries may lead to empowerment of women because their absolute LMP increases, but for gender equality to be obtained, a revision of the political opportunity structures is important. The formal democracy was found to differ significantly from the practical democracy in some countries. The results of their study show that Islam, democracy and gender equality are not obviously incompatible. However, there is a need for a more complex model in which economy and women's agency are important explanatory factors.

Similar results have been demonstrated by Rizzo, Abdel-Latif and Meyer (2007) in their study *The Relationship between Gender, Equality and Democracy: A Comparison of Arab Versus Non-Arab Muslim Societies*. They compared societies and found significant differences. Their findings feature higher support for gender equality and women's rights in non-Arab Muslim countries. These countries were also more prone to support democracy.

There are some basic steps that have to be taken for a country to be considered a democracy, one being freedom of speech (Dahl, 1989). Sherbiny (2005) describes Egypt as a closed society, deeply divided, where proxies have emerged out of necessity. Examples of these proxies used to reach people are cartoons in printed media, editorials, radio and television (such as soap operas), graffiti and public lectures. These are for the most part neither coordinated nor orchestrated; on the contrary, they often appear randomly on the sociocultural scene.

Similarly, Abu-Lughod (1990) describes changes of power in Bedouin women in the Egyptian desert in a non-organized way. In her research, she shows how resistance in different arenas can make clear power structures in society. Based on her fieldwork, her study uses resistance as a diagnostic of power, making important observations about resistance that highlight the weaknesses of partial or reductionist theories of power where cultural contexts, for example, are not included.

Sherbiny (2005) also points out an important aspect of the division of groups in society. On the one hand, there are the 'elite', well-educated, intellectual leaders and agents of change. On the other hand there are the 'street' (ibid), ordinary people, uneducated or semi-educated. The democratic aspect and who is allowed (and able) to enjoy the benefits of the democratic tools is for Sherbiny obvious. Sometime the 'street' erupts and the 'elite' step in after offering their explanations of the events, but more often the 'elite' lead and the 'street' follows. Since the early 1950s', a third group has emerged in Egypt's body of politics. This third group is the military-backed government with a distinctly divergent political view, both from the 'elite' view and from the view of the 'street'. Thus this notion of 'elite' and 'street' is important for understanding the multifaceted nature of a study on women's agency.

Nevertheless, gender aspects cannot be ignored. By analyzing the outcome for women in the Egyptian revolution (over time) through the focus on women's bodies, Hafez (2014) has shown that the woman's body is disciplined and regulated through discourses of patriarchy. She analyzes three events, all noticed in the media. The first is the legal case of the young woman who sued the military for being subjected to a virginity test; in the second case, she explores the brutal attack on the woman referred to in the media as the girl in the blue bra; and the third case is a young member of *Femen*, exposing her naked body on YouTube, claiming the ownership of her own body. Hafez asks what the shift that has taken place tells us about how gendered bodies are represented in masculine places. While women were welcome to march against state violence, women seeking to transgress the boundaries placed on their bodies often ended up outside an equality discourse and paid high cost.

Through multiple case studies, Ruta (2012) has studied the development of women's political roles and rights throughout the progress of the recent revolution. The empirical material consist mainly of cases from Egypt, with a comparative analysis of women's activism in movements in Algeria, Morocco, Iran, South Africa and Chile. She highlights the strategies adopted by women by which they have succeeded in being recognized and included politically in the transitional periods. The results of the study show that for women to achieve political rights and agency in transitional politics, women activists and women movements should show engagement through visibility, for example by their presence in the streets.

Using semi-structured interviews, Rahbari (2014) explored victims' experiences of violence in public spaces and post-victimization actions in Teheran. The results show that even though sexual harassment is illegal and the perpetrators should be prosecuted, few women contacted the police after experiencing molestation or rape. Three main explanations were found: (1) the perceived threat of incultation: most women thought they would be held responsible because of their appearances or merely because of their gender; (2) distrust of male police officer: many were afraid of re-abuse by the police; (3) fear of being accused of lying: women are afraid they will not be able to prove

their claims. Thus the violence in society continues due to lack of perceived safety and lack of trust and credibility.

Bhattacharjya, Birchall, Caro, Kelleher & Sahasranaman (2013) have carried out a case study based on three social movements, investigating how they prioritize women's rights and gender justice. The result is surprising since it shows low investment in these exact issues even in the social movements where women are active and driving members.

However, as Sorbera, (2014) describes, in Egypt there is a clear shift from feminist activism before the January revolution to feminist activism after. She describes feminism as standing out as a resilient revolutionary force, and as a long historical process. Despite great difficulties and obstacles, feminist activists have an 'optimism of the will' that keeps them struggling for their rights and against the cultural and political antagonism they encounter. The shift occurs mainly among women far from the urban, upper or middle class educated women, where the revolutionary resistance used to start.

Feminism and Traditional Societies

Feminism, Badran (2002) argues, is not at all Western. She argues it is neither American nor French, although the term was coined in France in the late 1880s by Hubertine Auclert. The term was first written in Auclert's journal *La Citoyenne*, when she criticized male domination. Her writings were an early claim for women's rights and emancipation pledged by the French Revolution. The term feminism has since then been given many meanings, and has been used differently in different countries and cultural settings (ibid). The Egyptian feminist movement was first formed in the 1920's emerging from internal encounters with patriarchal nationalist movements (Badran, 2001).

There is a significant difference between what might be called liberal feminism and Islamic feminism. Although Badran (2002) offers a clear definition of Islamic feminism saying it is a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm, this has been highly contested (AbuKhalil, 1993). Badran (2002) argues that Islamic feminism derives its understanding and mandate from the Quran, seeking rights and justice for both women and men.

AbuKhalil (1993) has analyzed the Islamic determinants of the status of women in Arab societies. He studied the interaction between the culture and the religion in order to determine their respective roles in the oppression of women. He expresses strong criticism of both the antifeminist and the Islamic feminist viewpoints. The debate is important because:

Feminism is now increasingly under attack because Islamic fundamentalists (like Christian and Jewish fundamentalists) have chosen to focus on women's issues and to discredit feminism by linking it to Western political interest. (Abu-Khalil, 1993, p.19).

Literature from Egypt on gender mainstreaming⁹ is hard to find. Thus, Shash's study (2012) on gender mainstreaming in the rise of conservatism is of particular importance. The results of her study support the understanding that there are several prerequisites for equal rights policies to be implemented. She suggests that the most urgent are: political will, accountability and the involvement of men in the process of change. There also has to be consensus about the definition of gender equality and the need of a cultural sensitive model.

Through cross-national data, by examining discrimination in family and national laws Cherif (2012) analyzes the influence of Islamic culture and the factors that advances citizenship rights. Her findings suggest that women's citizenship rights are limited in Muslim countries but that the problem is not unique to the Arab world.

This makes the research of Jónasdóttir (1991) interesting in the debate on gender politics. She tackles the question why men's social and political power persists even in Western societies where women have, to some extent, an equal socioeconomic position. In her study *Love, power and political interest: towards a theory of patriarchy in contemporary western societies* (1991), which takes its point of departure for gender power relations in sexuality, she seeks to conceptualize how power, sexuality and gender are implicated in one another. In this way, she provides an explanation of the underlying mechanisms for the power-position that men hold over women.

Summary

The epistemological position of this thesis is that the individual has different relations to different structures, which in turn conditions her agency of the inter-subjective interaction and thus the individual's actions. The review of previous research stresses possibilities as well as obstacles for women's agency in strongly patriarchal societies. The reasons pointed out are both of an individual and of a structural character. However, in current research women's agency is often interconnected with empowerment in a more general sense.

The notion of women being inferior to men permeates most religions and practically all cultures (Raday, 2003). Furthermore, although numerous development studies have examined women's agency, less analytic attention has been paid to different structures in society. My study seeks to fill this gap by examining these structures and women's perceived agency in each of them, providing an understanding of women's own possibility of analyzing their conditional agency.

⁹ A United Nation strategy for promoting gender equality globally.

Based on my object of research the themes have been selected from a multitude of studies. A common denominator for the studies accounted for here, anchored in different disciplines, is that they give different inputs on women's (gendered) conditions and claims and the costs women have to accept in order to reach any progressive changes. The themes of *Gender and leading positions*, *Democracy and equal rights* and *Feminism in traditional societies* are linked to the research questions in that they constitute important aspects of women's conditions and costs in their quest for progressive change.

In this thesis, the focus is on the possibility for active agency in three structures in society. The informants' perceptions of girls' upbringing, formal education and informal learning are understood to be different but equally important factors for reaching the changes that they work for.

3. Conditions, Claims and the Cost of Change

In reviewing the literature on women's agency and empowerment in patriarchal societies, the need for a wider scope in which women's understanding of their opportunities of life choices can appear seems evident. In order to capture both women's claims and their given conditions within the different societal structures in the community and the cost of transgressing these, a wider view on both society and women's own conceptions of well-being is needed.

Traditional patriarchal societies have a societal structure that gives males primary power over females. These gendered conditions, which in modern societies usually lead to the quest for change are the focus of this study, and constitute the unit of analysis. The different conditions, thus women's *actual* possibilities to learn, develop and achieve changes in their lives, can be approached by the Capability Approach and Sen's ideas on well-being and social choice (2011). The Capability Approach is a theoretical framework that in contrast to other theories of development prioritizes someone's actual possibilities to *be and do* what she or he has reason to value. These *beings and doings* are delineated into someone's *valued functionings* (Sen, 2011). This alternative way of accounting for well-being describes freedom as prominent for achieving the goal. Many development theories typically deal with welfare economics, which means that they miss an important aspect of development. The missing aspect concerns both societal and personal development, linked by people's freedom to choose.

Despite some philosophical disagreements about the best description of the Capability Approach, it is generally understood to be a conceptual framework for a range of normative exercises, including most prominently the following: (1) the assessment of individual well-being; (2) the evaluation and assessment of social arrangements; and (3) the design of policies and proposals about social change in society. In all these normative exercises, the Capability Approach prioritizes certain of peoples' beings and doings and their opportunities to realize those beings and doings (such as their genuine opportunities to be educated, their ability to move around or to enjoy supportive social relationships). This stands in contrast to other accounts of well-being, which focus exclusively on subjective categories (such as happiness) or on the material means for well-being (such as resources like income or wealth).

Robeyns (2005) argues that the Capability Approach is a tool with which to conceptualize and evaluate inequality, however in order to understand the processes behind inequality, an additional theory explaining the causal conditions is needed. For that reason, Sen's concepts of capability and functioning are linked in this thesis with parts of the ontologically explanatory theory of Critical Realism in order to examine in what way women's actions are guided by societal structures.

In strengthening the explanatory potential of the Capability Approach in investigating societal change, Archer's (1995) theory on social change has been found particularly useful. In her study, the process of agency generates a structural elaboration over time, either as a structural transformation or as a structural reproduction. In her terminology, a society undergoing change is either morphogenetic (transformational) or morphostatic (reproductive). Structures affect agency and agency affects structures, thus giving *actual* possibilities for change (Archer, 2003). An account of the theoretical key concepts and how they are used in this study follows.

Theoretical key concepts and how they are used in this study

A presumption in this study is that human beings are creatures who are dependent on each other in social relations (Schutz, 1962). Being able to participate in social settings is also said to have great importance for human health and development (Feldman, Darmstadt, Kumar and Ruger, 2015). This is partly because participation can create and establish connections with others, which can affect the health of people, and their possibilities to develop. Participation may also permit you to make your voice heard, as well as to be involved in various contexts such as education. Being able to participate therefore has a major impact on people's experience of themselves in a given context, and it is an important phenomenon to relate to in any study involving societal change.

To be able to live peacefully together in communities, humans create structures that facilitate life together. These structures set boundaries for human agency, allowing some agency and preventing other. These boundaries provide the limits for agency, thus the framework in which people are allowed to act. For societies to function, humans have also created different roles (Archer, 1995). These roles have different positions in relation to each other. Roles with higher positions have greater agency in relation to roles with lower positions (ibid). That means that some roles have power over others. In patriarchal societies, the structures give men greater agency and greater power in relation to women, making it easier for men to be recognized (in their role) as, for instance, community influencers, than it is for women.

Thus, women's role and the related role positions become a central object of analysis, since understanding the underlying ideas of gender will clarify women's conditions in the given context.

An individual's influence on decisions concerning how to arrange her own life defines her life choices, and accordingly the possibility to live the life she has reasons to value: *a good life* (Sen, 1980). This discussion is based on Sen's conceptual framework of functionings and capability. The capability framework allows data to be analyzed without false pretenses of among other things, being gender-neutral. An important feature of the Capability Approach is its focus on individuals' actual freedom to achieve these valued functionings, so important in everyday life (opposed to focusing on accessing resources or possessions). Thus the Capability Approach's specific focus on the importance of human diversity provides opportunities also to analyze women's specific conditions, giving women's own understanding of their conditions greater impact.

When the given structural boundaries do not correspond to individuals' ideas of a good life, the agency will appear to be too small. This is manifested in an awareness of the possibility of another kind of life. This awareness referred to here as a person's 'turning point' is explained with Martha Nussbaum's concept of narrative imagination (Nussbaum, 1996).

When the agency of a person is too limited, seeking others in the same situation may provide solutions. A narrative imagination can lead to an elaboration in thought of what changes are possible, making the primary agent seek others and allowing a collective pursuit by the corporate agent.

Together with others, networks are created and knowledge is shared about other possible ways to live a life, and how to proceed with societal. Through these networks, women can revolt together against the prevailing structures and the existing agency. They seek structural elaboration (Archer, 2007). This means that the structural power is questioned and that an altered structure with changed agency is sought.

Revolts can, however, always backfire because societies seek to keep known structures and given agency. Any resistance to prevailing structures can therefore generate costs (Archer, 2004) to varying degrees for those challenging the boundaries of the given structure.

The study at hand has been carried out in a society that has undergone rapid societal changes. The particular setting for the study was in part chosen in order to get deeper knowledge of whether women are given the same, or similar opportunities as men to influence changes in society.

The relation between structure and agency

The relation between structure and agency is explored by using parts of Margaret Archer's theoretical approach (1985) and Danermark Ekström, Jakobsen, Karlsson (2003). Both Archer and Danermark et al, build their theoretical

arguments on the relation between structure and agency. According to Archer (2003) structure and agency are linked to each other in a dualism, meaning that structure and agency are located on different levels, making them analytically distinguishable but not ontologically separable. The social reality is structured and the agency is active. By separating these entities, Archer makes it possible to analyze the relation between the two at the same time providing the ability to distinguish transformation (morphogenesis) from reproduction (morphostasis) of a given structure.

On the one hand, structures precede social conditioning for agency and our actions. However, on the other hand, in opposing these structures there is always room to elaborate the structures, giving a temporal possibility for change, allowing agency to precede new changed structure by the use of their imaginative capacities.

Structure

A structure consists of different items that are dependent on and related to each other. These interrelated items making up the structure might have features independent of the agents' intentions. The internal relations between the items in a given structure are what characterizes to the phenomenon, making it what it is. As an example, family structure is composed of a number of members that together constitute the entirety of this given structure. Different structures are thus constructed by different items interrelated in various ways. This thesis involves three structures in society: the *social structure* in family life, the *cultural structure* in the public sphere and *the political structure* in which people are involved at different levels to effect policy developments.

Social structure is the internal relationship between a practice, roles and role positions (Danermark et al, 2003). In a family, the practice is the family life. The roles are: husband, wife, father, mother, brother, sister, son and daughter. In a patriarchal family structure, the positions between the roles are set so that, for example, the man has power over women and children.

This thesis also addresses the cultural structure and the political structures in society. The cultural structure is the internal relation between norm and values (Archer, 2003). This can be exemplified by the ways in which customs and religious practices are organized in society. The political structure is the internal relation between laws and regulations (Archer, 1995). In the regulatory political system, the political structure involves, for example, how the government is run. However, the political structure also involves interest groups and their interactions with the leading political bodies.

These structures are created by humans and once they are established they create both opportunities and barriers for human agency (Archer, 2003). We are not always aware of them, and it happens that we experience them differently (ibid).

Agency

Agency is visible through an individual's possibility to make choices based on his or her own desired outcomes. To have the possibility to participate, to influence and to have authority over one's own life is, to varying degrees part of an individual's agency. This includes a person's imaginative capacities, and the extent to which an individual is enabled to pursue his or her agency and use his or her imaginative capacity.

Agency is thus the influencing factor by a group or an individual, giving the capacity to act in the world and the ability to create and react to structures (Danermark et al, 2003). Accordingly, the agency of the individual or the group creates the structures and puts the structures in motion (Archer, 2003). However, human agents are both formed by their society and at the same time have the ability to transform the same society. Agency produces, reproduces or transforms structures, though once a structure is established, it also conditions agency. Thus, all structure both creates barriers and provides opportunities for agency, which the group or individual can use in their actions. This space is the individual's or the group's agency.

Role and role positions

As shown above social structures include internal relationships between practice, roles and role positions. This means that a practice cannot exist without its different roles and vice versa. These roles have different positions in relation to each other, providing different agency for the roles and thereby coming with various possibilities and restraints. Thus, some roles will end up in a position of authority in relation to others. Sometimes we are ascribed to the role we hold, for example the role ascribed to women, and sometimes the role is one that we choose to enter, for example an activist.

Individuals who enter a practice have to hold a role of the specific practice. Thus, structures divide people into different positions, and the holder of a given position will be given a position of interest to relate to (Danermark et al, 2003).

Through these different role positions people are divided and involuntarily placed in different segments in society (Archer, 1985). This involuntary placement does not mean an inability to change the situations. Nevertheless, making a change, and thus escaping one involuntary placement, will always involve another placement.

The impact of involuntary placement is that society is divided into sections, each comprising different vested interests consistent with the specific situations, and thereby setting the ruling agency. The dialectic of structure and agency involves looking at how a given structure may benefit one agency and discriminate against another. This is highlighted through the roles and their consequent positions that humans are grouped into. Accordingly, these different roles provide different agency, and thus dissimilar conditions for seeking

and achieving change. These vested interests stipulate different opportunity costs for the holders (Archer, 2004). Opportunity costs and their consequences will be discussed below.

Even though structures to some extent make individuals act according to a given agency, the actions are never predetermined. To some degree, this gives room for resistance and thus opportunity for change, as seen above. However, depending on different conditions, people have different capabilities to influence their everyday life in the desired direction.

Structural change – Elaboration or Reproduction

By separating structure and agency, Archer makes it possible to analyze the relation between the two and thus, distinguish structural transformation and structural reproduction of a given structure, which is described as analytical dualism (Archer, 1985).

Archer (1995) seeks to give structure and agency the position of separate but interconnected entities, in order to be able to analyze the two separately. This is done when the relationship between the two entities is analyzed over time. This analytical cycle sets the structure / agency problem; that the structure precedes action and elaboration of the structure always occurs after an act, into a time dimension based on these two preconditions. The time dimension is important in this study because the acts of resistance will undoubtedly culminate in either structural elaboration or structural reproduction (*see Figure 1 below*).

Structural conditioning

T1

Socio-cultural interaction

T2

T3

Structural elaboration (morphogenesis) or
Structural reproduction (morphostasis)

T4

Figure 1: Archer’s analytical cycle of the interaction between structure and agency (Archer, 1995, p. 157)

The initial phase T1 assumes structural influence on our actions. Actions are conditioned by structures, restricting some actions and enabling others. Between T2 and T3 an interaction between individuals or groups takes place.

Individuals intentionally make these interactions, which makes the outcome difficult to predict (e.g. women's protests against the political structure). To give an example the intentions of a corporate agent might be difficult to predict or even to guide in a determined direction, since the corporate agent is dependent on the commitment of primary agents with individual intentions. (Archer, 1995, p. 264).

However, the interaction (always) achieves structural elaboration. In this study, the interaction that takes place between T2 and T3 is the individuals (intentional) way of obtaining new knowledge to achieve intended changes. At T4 the structures are either transformed (giving intended or unintended changes) (morphogenesis) or reproduced (morphostasis), both leading to a new cycle, where T1 is either elaborated or reproduced. These cycles can only be seen through the individual's or the group's actions.

If given the possibility to elaborate the structural position of a role, the holder of that role can oppose the structure. However, both the transformation of role position and any action outside the given agency will always come with an opportunity cost (Danermark et al, 2003).

Capability and the use of valued functionings

Quality of life in this study is, as indicated previously, analyzed in terms of 'capability' and 'functioning'. Capability refers to the specific set of functioning that someone has effective access to. According to Sen (1987, p.36) "A functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve".

The functionings are *beings and doings*; something someone can actually be or do. The capability refers to the actual set of a person's specific valued functionings that are attained, thus a person's effective freedom to act. The capability is someone's specific set of valued, and achieved, functionings, thus the opportunity of freedom to choose. This partition allows focusing analytically on different sets of functionings associated with certain aspects of everyday life. In the present study, the focus is on the capabilities (effective freedom) of education, autonomy, respect, influence and safety.

Sen (1999) considers that if anyone is to achieve a 'good life', she has to have the freedom to arrange for herself a life of well-being, and this freedom has to be understood in terms of her individual set of capabilities. These capabilities are a person's *real opportunities* to do and be what she has reason to value and not just her theoretical rights, making it interesting to study the discrepancy of women's rights and actual conditions in different societal contexts. Sen's Capability Approach thus focuses directly on the quality of life that individuals are actually able to achieve.

The distinction Sen makes between the freedom to well-being and agency freedom is important. While well-being freedom has full attention on a person's well-being, agency freedom is broader involving freedom to achieve whatever is considered to provide a 'good life' (Sen, 1984).

This means that a person's capability represents the effective freedom of her choices between different combinations of functionings, making it possible for people to choose the kind of life that they have reason to value.

The analysis draws on Sen's theory aiming at understanding what agency women have when trying to provide *greater* agency-freedom for themselves. Thus, the study focuses on women's capabilities by examining three structures in society (social, cultural and political) and women's real opportunities to act within them.

Nussbaum (2000a) has developed a model where she elaborates the concept of capability further, dividing capability into three capacities essential for the development (in her terms, cultivation) of humanity. She argues for the need of greater understanding for cross-cultural norms, claiming that 'capacity for critical examination of one's own traditions is essential for development and that this requires developing a 'capacity to reason logically'. The knowledge of a wider world and the possibility to imagine a change is what she refers to as 'narrative imagination' (Nussbaum, 1997). This means that an individual has to have the ability to think what it might be to live the life of another person. This creative thinking simultaneously requires and presupposes both spatial and intellectual agency.

To be able to examine critically your own everyday life is important if you are to be able to be part of societal change. Put simply, this means the need to be aware of what might be the problem; then to reason logically, by thinking about what needs to be changed, and imagining something different, thus looking beyond and acting according to what can be done in order to reach the set goal.

The idea of narrative imagination (Nussbaum, 1996) can be used to interpret perceptions of our social life. Narrative imagination's most prominent quality is a sound ability to see our social world with great skepticism, and think anew. This perspective involves awareness of the connection between societal structures and agency and between current knowledge and its socio-cultural contexts.

What is relevant in this discussion are the conversion factors (Sen, 1992) which determine if the valued functionings are actually possible to attain. Robeyns (2005) further categorizes the conversion factors into three separate units: individual, social and environmental. This highlights the fact that it is not enough to have access to a valued functioning; there are additional factors to be taken into account. The individual and the environmental conversion factors are not central in this study. Central to the analytically framed societal structures are the social conversion factors (the norms that will allow or hinder actions).

Even if a valued functioning is available the social conversion factor, for example a social norm preventing women from moving freely in society, will preclude her from action. An example: even if a woman is well educated, thus enabling capability to practice a profession, social conversion factors might prevent her doing so in reality.

The expectations in the structures might influence people's intentions, however it will not be identical with actions taken. A person socialized into a specific society will know what desired behavior is. If the desired behavior does not agree with a person's beliefs, this person might oppose (or revolt against) the given societal structures.

When a person reacts to inequality and finds her role position involuntarily placed in society, and she does not have access to the capabilities she needs in order to arrange for herself a 'good life', she might protest against prevailing structures.

Connecting Capability and Structural Elaboration

The Capability Approach seeks to broaden our understanding of human well-being from a measure of economic resources, to an understanding of human capabilities that is the opportunities (or freedoms) people have to achieve a life they have reason to value (Sen, 1999).

Sen (1981) conceptualizes poverty in terms of the absence of certain basic capabilities to function. Understanding it in this way makes poverty alleviation, in a double sense, one of the reasons for people in Egypt to fight for change. Poverty should be understood as what we can and cannot do, thus our opportunity freedoms or capabilities, the commodities requirement for these capabilities, which will differ between societies and individuals, and over time, and what we are doing and not doing, thus our valued functionings.

In this perspective, human poverty, in comparison to income poverty, represents the absence of some basic capabilities to function as a person in society, highlighting the denial of opportunities and choices of arranging for oneself the life one has reason to value.

Women's empowerment is in this sense both a process and a goal, entailing critical awareness, self-esteem and agency (or a sense of agency), and the use of one's imaginative capacity. Agency is, as we have seen, to be understood as the ability to define one's goals and act upon them, thus constituting the basis for action. This however, requires (some kind of) knowledge. Empowerment should therefore involve addressing recognition of women as equal to men on different levels in society, providing women with the means to take control and stay in control of their own lives.

Social justice according to Sen (1981) has to accommodate both redistribution and recognition, thus providing greater opportunities for participation

on equal terms. To participate on equal terms is for women important in several respects. If it fails, women have no power over decisions that will affect their lives. Even though equal opportunity to participate is not a reality in any society, the claims for it seem to be growing and as a result societal change can be seen in some parts of the world. To better understand changes in societal structures Archer's (1995) thoughts on structural elaboration are used.

When women want to make their voices heard but feel they are not allowed to raise their voice, they can oppose the prevailing structures by protesting, for example against that they are not being recognized as equal to men. This was one of the issues protested against in the recent revolution in Egypt. The opposition to the prevailing structure will result in either a reproduction of the structure (no change) or an elaboration of the structure (some kind of change). The result of the potential elaboration might be either intended or unintended. Human activity (agency) is also dependent on an altering factor on the prevailing structures, making it difficult to predict the outcome of an action taken. Society changes in accordance with the changing nature of human actions, and human actions are dependent on structural order, as shown above using the social conversion factor on obtained capability freedoms.

During a revolution, the societal structures are questioned and challenged. Since the structures affect actions it is interesting to study the possibilities for women to act before and during a revolution. A revolution accelerates the processes of change in a society and therefore provides an opportunity to study these changes and possible changes in women's agency. This subject matter is important since women's conditions to be equally recognized in society and their possibility to have influence on decisions concerning their own life are important aspects of any societal change.

Primary and corporate agents

A presumption here is that an agent has an intention (Danermark et al, 2003). This is the most significant difference between structures and social agents. Agents are the only effective causes of society with the ability to change societal structures (ibid). To understand the nature of the achievements of change Archer (2000) provides a distinction of agents, it is drawn between primary agents and corporate agents.

The primary agent constitutes the basic conditions for the enablement and constraints we encounter (Archer, 2000). For the purpose of this study, this is interpreted as the primary agent holding the role he/she is born into, for example girl, which is constrained by the cultural and the political structures.

The corporative agent additionally conditions the social roles available to us, structured on a shared project (Archer, 1995, 2000). This is interpreted as a meaning that, a corporative agent holds a role constrained by a social structure. Thus, the corporative agent is the role a person enters when engaging in a shared practice, for example an activist.

Archer's framework allows a distinction to be made between the intentions of women's primary and/or corporate agents and the actions based on these intentions. Since the social agent and the social person are only analytically separated, the persons, as the inhabitants of roles cannot be grasped without invoking agency. In the question of 'who' will pursue the struggle for societal change, we need to look at what 'space' people are able to move in.

If primary agents lack the imagination and awareness required for them to seek forums of corporate agents, the necessary reflexivity and creativity for elaboration of structure and agency will not occur, and the role positions remains unchanged.

Without these qualities, the primary agent will only contribute to reproduction of the structures. In order to see the possibility of, and to claim increased agency, personal reflexivity is useful. This resourcefulness might best be described as personality, where role positions are internalized rather than just mimicked (Archer, 2000) giving individuals greater power over their own situation.

These solidarity acts often come at personal cost. As this study focuses on women's conditions of learning in societal changes, the cost, that is, the resistance women face in their pursuit for change, is an important aspect to take into account.

When studying women's conditions in society and their claims for change, the cost of these claims became visible. In their quest to be recognized as equal human beings, citizens, and equal in decision-making, women often meet strong opposition from traditionalists who find changes in society difficult.

Opportunity Cost

Opportunity cost (Archer, 2000; Danermark et al, 2003) is tied to the role position possessed, giving higher opportunity costs and lesser agency to certain positions whereas others will enjoy lower opportunity costs and a greater agency. Thus agency has different degrees of freedom according to the role position. An authority has a greater degree of freedom and lower opportunity costs than someone with a subordinate role position.

One way of understanding this is to look at it as an ongoing series of interactions based on the calculation of punishments and rewards. This social exchange takes place in a cultural context where the cultural norms set boundaries for all social interactions. The spaces in which citizens are able to act are thus defined by constant estimates of possible costs for transgressing prevailing boundaries. The prediction is that an approved act, which is rewarded, will be repeated, making disapproved acts, which are punished, less prevalent.

In a patriarchal society where men hold both power and resources, women more often end up with less bargaining power, making it more difficult for

them to influence any changes. Nonetheless, the costs associated with transgressing the set boundaries are sometimes considered worth taking.

Women are involved in various issues in their everyday life and wish to have influence on these in order to achieve a life they have reason to value (Sen, 1999). If the context they find themselves in is structured by a cultural norm that has an actor-perspective on women, that is when women are expected to be able to reflect on their situation and convey their views, which will also be taken into account in a natural way, a mechanism of recognition is easily induced. This will make the process of participation easily started in the interactions that occur when women want to express their opinions. Their voices will be heard and taken into account. These women will experience increased agency, giving them greater possibilities to make choices in their own lives.

If, in contrast, the context is structured by a cultural norm that has a perspective on women as subjects, women will be considered subordinate to men. The mechanism of recognition will only be induced if women act within the given agency permitted by the structure. These spaces for women are often smaller than the spaces for men. If women in this context would like to protest against the prevailing situation and act outside the given agency, the mechanism of reification will be activated instead of the mechanism of recognition. This means that the women will be regarded as an 'it' (thing), as someone that can be handled (without empathy) as an object. When regarded as a something rather than someone, she can (more easily) be excluded or abused, for example. When a woman transgresses the boundaries of the agency set for a specific structure, she will be punished. Transgression will therefore always be associated with a cost.

Thus, a prerequisite for the participatory process to occur is that the mechanism of recognition in the structure can be activated by human actions. Another prerequisite for participation to occur is that individuals can handle the requirements of the context that the situation imposes on them. Thus, participation in a given context puts demands on the individual 'capability' and 'functioning' (Sen, 1987). If the individual wishes to change a situation, she can seek knowledge to enhance her capability set. This enhanced capability can help her understand the situation better and increase her ability to handle it.

Violence is a threat to every capability in a woman's life, which makes arguing against cultural relativism and in favor of context-sensitive universalism easy (Nussbaum, 2005).

Summary – Theoretical Concepts

The theoretical arguments presented above form the framework used to analyze the findings. These concepts will guide my exploration of the process of change within the three described structures in society, as expressed by the informants.

By dividing their everyday life into three analytically separate parts, social structure, cultural structure and political structure, women's conditions in different life situations become visible. It also became possible to detect in which structure women are striving for increased agency.

By understanding the informants' perceptions of women's roles and role positions in the social structure, norms and values in the cultural structure, and laws and regulations in the political structure, this study aims at contributing to knowledge about women's actual opportunities to increase agency (not only legal rights), in the three different structures.

The ideas of freedom of choice (Sen, 1999) and allowing people's active participation in their own life decisions, are decisive elements in achieving individual freedom as well as societal change. When understanding 'agent' as "someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives" (Sen, 1999, p. 19), women's agency becomes a decisive matter in analyzing women's participation in different structures in society.

Archer (1995) argues that the significance of involuntary placement consists not in an inability to change our situations, but rather in our being born into pre-defined life chances, and that any alteration entails confrontation and liberation, which is always followed by costs.

With the focus on the conditions for women's agency, for women to obtain a 'good life', that is 'a life they have reason to value', this study is closely connected to informal learning. The work of pursuing and sharing knowledge is understood through the assumption that there is continuous exchange within a society. This exchange can be more or less organized.

The social role, the cultural norms and the political regulations all set boundaries for social interaction. By ascertaining the valued functionings and looking at the social conversion factors the opportunity freedoms become visible. Knowing your rights and that other ways are possible is the beginning to every change. Actions transgressing impeding structures will certainly meet with some resistance making women's agency defined by constant estimates of possible rewards or punishments.

There is always a cost for transgressing prevailing structural norms and regulations. These costs for the informants are explored not only by the cost for the individual activist but also as costs for the larger group. The cost of submissiveness for women resulting from not claiming increased agency due to the high personal costs will also be discussed.

The ability to make informed life choices includes three interrelated measures: resources (including access), agency (including the process of decision-making), and achievements (outcome in terms of e.g. well-being). Several studies of women's empowerment have been carried out to highlight these measurements of empowerment. There are however few studies that highlight the notion of choice by emphasizing the possible consequences of that choice. This study is an attempt to contribute to the contemporary research by incorporating the structural elements into the analysis of women's agency in contextual societal development over time.

4. Methodological considerations

This chapter begins with an account of the relationship between theory and data. It continues with the outline of the design of the study, how I got entrance to the field and how the data has been constructed. Then ethical considerations concerning both contextual issues such as the safety of the participants at the time of interviews, and content-related issues such as data and writing up the thesis will be discussed. The chapter also discusses how the data has been processed in order to answer the research questions and concludes with an account of the credibility and dependability of the study.

The relationship between theory and data

Theories about everyday life cannot pinpoint how people in a specific context perceive and experience their reality. Facts of everyday life and theories of everyday life are dependent on each other as different sides of the same coin. Archer's theory (1985) of structure in relation to agency is a theory of everyday life, providing a tool to approach women's agency in their quest for change. For this women work very hard. Unfortunately, androcentricity in society makes it more difficult than it need be for women to attain what they seek. The concept of androcentricity means emphasis is put on masculine interests. Taking the male point of view makes masculinity the norm and femininity the 'other'. The two forms of androcentricity, misogyny and gynopia, both in different ways, trivialize problems that may be experienced by women. Confronting a misogynist (which means 'hate of women'), requires special knowledge since misogyny opinions are often proclaimed loudly. Gynopia, on the other hand, is the view that women are not fully human beings, thus making women invisible in decisions concerning important human standpoints. Examples include all forms of subjugation women suffer just by being women (Eichler, 1991).

The difference between the theory of everyday life and everyday life itself lies in different forms of knowledge (everyday knowledge and scientific knowledge) and language (everyday language and scientific concepts and norms) (Gustavsson, 2011).

In daily life, there are actions that are based on practices which are founded in a practical-oriented form of knowledge. Daily life is interpreted by its members and is captured in everyday concepts. Information in this thesis about

people's everyday life has been collected through interviews that are transcribed and thereby made into data. The researcher converts data into text and addresses the text in an interpretive process that identifies patterns. Interpretation concerns everyday language and everyday understanding within the context that is being studied: it is, however, also within a scientific context. Different contexts get their meanings within the discourses of which they are a part. The shift that the researcher makes between the different contexts constitutes the change of aspects. This change of aspects allows the text to indicate things that with everyday concepts alone would not be visible. By using theories and linking these to the data, something new can be recognized and expressed. In this way, theory can actively work in knowledge formation (Danermak et al, 2003). This method is called abduction. In the analysis of this study, abduction is used on the basis of an interpretation of the empirical material as a whole. The abduction approach takes into account both the logical and the innovative character of the phenomena studied. This helps the researcher to see things in a different light and make new discoveries through a dialectically ordered set up. Abduction is supposed to give the researcher an instrument to be able to see new things in the empirical material in a methodologically ordered way (Peirce, 1990). However, abduction is a mental leap, bringing together the obvious in a data set with things discovered and interpreted as important along the way. Peirce's concept of abduction refers to both the empirical facts and the construction of a theoretical framework to facilitate an explanation of these facts (Sjoberg & Nett, 1968). By bringing together phenomena that have not been associated with one another before new knowledge can be found.

Design of the study

This study is an ethnographic study (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The purpose of ethnography is to describe and interpret structures, patterns and processes (ibid). In a given context, the relation between structure and agency can be studied. The intention is to depict how the informants perceive women's agency. This was done through interviews. The interviews comprise 18 separate interviews with ten women and one man, and a focus group interview comprising six men.

Interview

The interview is a specific form of conversation and interaction (Kvale, 1997). In interviews, the direct encounter between the researcher and the informant allows a unique conversation to occur between the two parties (ibid).

There are many interview techniques; this study used open-ended interviews emanating from an opening question. The opening question was:

How would you describe women's conditions for participation in society and their opportunity to influence decisions concerning their own life?

This introductory question framed the issue of interest and gave a direction for what I wanted to know. On the basis of this framed question, the informant was free to bring up issues that were of particular interest and importance to them concerning the agency of women. This more open interview technique resulted in a conversation rather than a question/answer situation. The breadth of the problem addressed allows the informant to express both anticipated and non-anticipated reactions theoretically (McCosker, Barnard & Gerber 2001), giving room for both memories and feelings.

The conversations were of the same nature in all the interviews throughout the eighteen months the data was collected. The responses, however, and above all what the informants were willing to and/or interested in talking about changed as society has changed.

Using interviews as a research technique provides a range of personal experiences on a shared topic, which gives the researcher a diversified description (Denscombe, 1998). This has given me, as a researcher, insight into how the informants' perceive the agency of women related to different structures, why they want to change their agency, how they go about changing it, and at what costs.

Focus group interview

A focus group is set up to gain understanding of how people as members of a certain group, rather than as individuals, discuss a given topic (Bryman, 2004). The interaction between the members of the group and the collective thoughts are the real value, thus giving each individual's point of view less space (ibid). A focus group is made up of people with some common characteristics and moderated by the interviewer, to gain information about the given topic (Denscombe, 1998).

The focus group situation in this study provided an opportunity for the participating men to discuss openly the agency of women. As moderator I had the opportunity to follow the discussion and, when needed, direct the conversation with open follow-up questions that served as suggestions for additional topics rather than questions expecting an answer (Flick, Kardoff & Steinke, 2004).

Entering the researched field

When seeking to gain access to the research field there are two important initial factors to consider. (1) How to gain and obtain contact with the informants and (2) how to position oneself in order to secure factual, temporal and social conditions in order to complete the planned research (Flick et al, 2004). Before undertaking a study like this, the question whether it would be at all possible

to meet people who would like to share their experiences was of course central. To enter the research field and find people willing to participate as informants and gather reliable data requires trust in both the project and in the circumstances in which the project is undertaken. With the help of two gatekeepers, the process of gaining access became less difficult. A gatekeeper is a person who introduces you to the field and assists in getting contact with informants (Mauthner et al, 2008).

From an ethical perspective, this is important to consider because it suggests that the gatekeeper has potential power by pointing out *suitable* interviewees and neglecting to point out others (ibid). During my first trip in November 2011, I met one of my gatekeepers. The second gatekeeper I got in contact with, prior to my second trip to Cairo in April 2012, was through an organization in Stockholm with a democracy project in Egypt. These two gatekeepers, one woman and one man both Egyptians, were activists and well versed in the process of change for women's rights. They both became very important in the sense that they introduced me to the society and were themselves key informants in my study. Through them, I also came into contact with the informants, who then agreed to meet me for interviews.

This was a very busy time for every activist person in the country. Between the country's preparations for the first election in the fall of 2011, the outcome of the presidential election in June 2012 and the ousting of the new president in July 2013, life has changed dramatically for many people in Egypt. During this time, I made three visits to the country in connection with three important elections.

My first visit was in November 2011 before the parliamentary election to the People's Assembly (the lower house) of Egypt, held from November 28 2011 until January 11, 2012. During this first visit, I had the opportunity to meet people I had had previous contact with via email, but new contacts were also established.

Four months later, I went back to make the first interviews. This second visit to Cairo was made in April 2012 before the presidential election held in May and June of the same year. The time was chosen in part because of the country's simmering activity for the presidential election, and in part because the gatekeepers I had made contact with in preparation for the trip were in Cairo and would be able to help me make contact with other informants. This time I had the opportunity to stay a month. Although this seemed plenty of time to conduct the interviews I had set out to do, it turned out to be quite limited. Both in terms of doing what I had actually intended to do, and for getting insight into the society in which the questions were asked. It was only at the very end of my stay that I felt I had started to grow accustomed to life in Cairo.

In March 2013, I visited Egypt a third time. This was in connection with the Egyptian parliamentary election that was expected to start in April and put a parliament in place by June. This election, however, was postponed on

March 6th, and in July 2013 after the Egyptian military coup, the interim President Adly Mansour issued a constitutional declaration which postponed the election once again to 2014. This third visit was made to conduct follow-up interviews with some of the informants I had met the previous year and to conduct a focus group interview with a group of Egyptian men. The trip was made possible due to a workshop on education and democracy that I attended at the Swedish Institute in Alexandria. This was a great opportunity for me to meet scholars from both Egypt and Sweden, all interested in the role of education in democratic societies. The trip gave the opportunity to spend 8 days in Cairo with some of the informants and to conduct the focus group interview. The activity amongst activists was very high during this period, and it was an important personal experience to come back and witness it once again.

The fact that I have been able to visit the country three times within eighteen months, at times that have been of great importance for the informants in my study, has been very interesting from a research perspective. The change in the community has been enormous and the moods of people I have met have gone from great optimism about the future to something rather more vague and diffuse. The time that elapsed between my meetings with the informants, I see as of great value for the analysis. My meetings have become documents that describe major changes in society and in the informants themselves. All through the data collecting, I have had contact with the gatekeepers and some of the other informants. This gave me opportunities to get information and updates throughout the changes in Egyptian society.

The empirical data

The informants were all secular and activists - secular in the sense that they advocate a separation of religion and state. This was consistent whether they were religious believers or not. They were activists in the sense that they were all active in opposing the ruling regime that during the relevant time has been both military and religious. The sampling of informants is a combination of convenience sampling (i.e. gatekeepers) and snowball sampling (i.e. informants) (Bryman, 2004). Owing to the two gatekeepers' similar social ideologies, the obvious outcome was that I made contact with women and men with similar basic ideological ideas. The women and men I interviewed are all educated persons who were also critical of the prevailing political system, the cultural norms and the opportunities for women in society.

My data consists of eighteen interviews and one focus group interview. I have met ten women, some of whom I interviewed more than once. I also made one interview with a man who then also helped me arrange the focus group interview, in which he also participated. The focus group consisted of six male informants. The informants for this study are all activists, and all in

some sense belong to the ‘elite’ as opposed to the ‘street’, using the terminology of Sherbiny (2005) presented in Chapter two. This means that the informants are all educated and in many ways may have greater personal opportunities than most women and men in the country. Below is a list of the informants and the number of interviews made with each.

Informant	Sex	Age (approx.)	Interviews
Salima	F	35	1
Zarah	F	45	4
Rose	F	45	2
Ana	F	45	1
Leila	F	40	1
Aisha	F	30	1
Hannah	F	30	1
Natalie	F	25	2
Amina	F	45	2
Salma	F	45	1
Samir	M	45	2
Focus group	M	30-45	1

Figure 2: List of informants

The interview situations: dynamics and setting for the interviews

The interview situations differed in location and length. The atmosphere in the society set the primary imprint on the interviews. On several occasions, activists were, literally marching outside the window. Sometimes the interview situations were quite chaotic, which probably contributed to the participants’ emotional state (both informants and interviewer) during some of the interviews. The interviews were between one and a half and three hours long. Most of them were recorded, using a smart phone kept on the table. My aim was to make the interviews around one and a half hours long, but sometimes the informants had lots to share, and they took longer. Most of the interviews were held in coffee shops or hotel lobbies. Once I was also invited to one woman’s home. One interview was held on the phone, and on a couple of occasions, I went to the workplace of the informant. These places provided a safe, comfortable space that the informant herself had chosen. The chosen spot could have been picked out for convenience and for other reasons. I experienced a change in the way the women looked at safety between my first and most recent visit to the country.

Fifteen of the interviews were recorded and transcribed, three were not recorded, one because it was conducted on the telephone and the other two because the informants were reluctant to do so, in one case due to fear of further persecution and in one case due to shyness of speaking in English.

The focus group interview was set up in March 2013 with a group of six men. Five of them are engaged with democracy and equality issues and work to promote gender equality and to end all forms of violence against women. The sixth was the man whom I had hired to drive me to the meeting. The interview was held at a small office on the outskirts of Cairo and the workplace of one of the participants. Right after the interview was finished, three of the men went to join a march against President Morsi. The focus group interview was three and a half hours long. It was recorded and transcribed in full.

All the interviews were conducted in English, which is a second language for the informants as well as for me.

Ethical considerations

The ethical implications of social research are numerous. Ethical guidelines (CODEX - Rules and guidelines, *The Swedish Research Council*, 2011) are multifaceted and complex and do not always apply to all contexts. To follow these guidelines to the letter is very difficult. However, some basic considerations that will be raised here are; voluntary participation, informed consent, risk of harm, confidentiality, anonymity and consent for use of data.

One of the main ethical considerations in my empirical study that I will account for here is the protection of the confidentiality and anonymity of the informants (Mauthner et al, 2008). Another is consent for use of data. The informants were informed before participating in the interviews about the objectives of the study, and that their statements will not be used for any other purpose than the original intentions of this study.

During my first visit to Egypt, I learned that there is an obvious risk that the regime may persecute and arrest people on uncertain grounds. To protect the informants from this risk in connection with the study I was very careful when writing e-mails, both before leaving Sweden and when in contact in Cairo. On arrival, I always suggested that the participants should choose a meeting place where they felt safe and comfortable. To record the interviews I used a mobile phone with a recording function. This was to draw as little attention to us as possible and to make it look less like an interview situation and more like a regular social meeting. Mobil phones are quite common and used by many, if not all. I had no written statements of any kind with me in most cases I did not even use a notebook, this also to protect the informants by making it appear more like a social meeting. In handling the material, it is important to protect the informants' identity and their real names will not be used.

I was directly dependent on my gatekeepers who in turn picked informants from among their acquaintances. I had no knowledge of the relationship between the gatekeepers and the persons who were asked to participate. The dilemma I see here is that the authority of the gatekeeper can be intimidating for

the ones chosen (Edwards and Ribbens, 1998; Mauthner et al, 2008). The persons who are chosen might find themselves in a situation where they feel obliged to participate against their will. On the other hand, persons not chosen can feel alienated (Mauthner et al, 2008). The informants were all given an introduction to the research project over the phone prior to the interview and when we met, I tried to give more detailed information about the project and to get informed consent from the participants. They all had a chance to ask additional questions about my work and the project. However, many of them did not have the time or interest. In all meetings but one, the informant interrupted me when I told her/him about my research and the project and start talking about the questions at hand. I interpreted this as meaning that the informants felt they were informed about my intentions and their own part in participating. However, informed consent implies not only what the informants are consenting to, or where participation begins and ends (Mauthner et al, 2008); it also has to consider whether the informants understand the possible implications of participation, both from a research perspective and in this case, as a citizen of a new (semi-) democracy. On two occasions, I had appointments with women who did not show up. I tried to reach both of them directly and then again later, unfortunately without success.

Because of the violence against and disappearances of activists, and the killing of dissidents, I have chosen not to present my informants more closely, that is, with their real names or backgrounds.

Doing justice to the participants – ethical aspects of the writing up

At the very beginning of a research process it is easy to be misled into believing that once the research plan is figured out and the interviews booked things will progress smoothly. This is not at all the case. Numerous unforeseen events will come up along the way.

The concrete interview situation has been described above. The fact that the informants were all active in the ongoing revolution that literally was taking place outside the window has to be considered when analyzing the data. Many of the informants came directly to the interview from a protest somewhere or were going somewhere directly after our meeting. This had an effect on their state of mind and on the dedication and commitment with which they described the situation. On several occasions, the informants were strongly affected by what they told me and sometimes I had to adapt the questions so as not to leave them in a state of dejection.

Some of the interviews were quite unpretentious and the degree of confidence between the informant and myself was high. Others had a much more businesslike tone, with the informant certainly answering my questions straightforwardly enough, but in a polite way, implying a certain distance to both the subject and to me. I have interpreted this in two ways. Some of the informants saw my presence as a favor to somebody (e.g. the gatekeeper). They might not have been genuinely interested in participating in my study.

Others (this might interlink) had a very busy schedule between work, family and other obligations but were also at the time of the interview exceptionally busy because all the informants were in different ways involved in paving the way for women's rights in the society.

One of the ethical considerations that is often brought up is that a certain distance should be kept between the research and informants to avoid equating the process of 'doing rapport' with the insincerity of 'faking friendship' (Mauthner et al, 2008). Hochschild (1983) discusses 'management of emotion' in that it concerns both unanticipated ethical and emotional difficulties that can arise during the interview, and the necessity of professionalism in keeping a balance between good 'rapport' and appearing to be a friend.

When studying a topic involving much emotion on several levels of an individual's life, keeping a distance as a researcher is very difficult, probably impossible. As a researcher, the intention is not to aid or support the informant, but involvement in people's situation and predicaments is difficult to avoid. The feeling of helplessness lingers and the urge to help when you can sometimes prevails.

The implications of an interview study and the possible impact of a research report are both ethical aspects to be taken into account. Kvale (1997) discusses the importance for the interviewer to be sensitive to how far the questioning can proceed, especially in situations when the informants are in a vulnerable position. This was important for me to be aware of at all time, since the situation in the society changed from day to day, and no one knew really what would happen or what the future might look like. On a few occasions, the length of the interviews was because I could not leave the informant in an agitated state of mind. This is a difficult and important issue when compiling the research results. The research report has to be presented with respect for the informants that shared their stories with me and at the same time considering the report's possible impact on the daily life of the women in an oppressive society.

Processing the data

Data processing involves several steps. The data processing used here consists of:

- Recording the interviews
- Transcribing the recorded interviews
- Abduction: theoretical concepts used when processing the text
- Abduction resulting in three principal themes
- Themes organized in three parts making up the analysis section

1. Recordings of the interviews

Kvale (1983) defines the qualitative research interview as:

the purpose of gathering descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena. (ibid, p, 174).

These descriptions can be accessed in several ways. To meet people and have a conversation is one. When recording these conversations, some aspects of the meeting will unfortunately be lost. Facial expressions and other nonverbal communication are examples of that. Most of my interviews were conducted in quite noisy premises resulting in some loss of information on tape because I could not hear what was said when playing the tape back later. The advantages, however, outweigh the disadvantages. By recording the interviews, I felt that I could be present at the moment and listen attentively to what was said, giving opportunities for any necessary follow-up questions.

2. Transcription of the recorded interviews

Tape recordings of the interviews were transcribed and made into text. The text thus became the source of the data (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). All eighteen interviews and the focus group interview were transcribed in full and printed out. This work proved to be time-consuming as the recordings often had strong background noise due to the locations in which the interviews took place.

A transcription is understood as ‘the graphic representation of selected aspects of the behavior of individuals engaged in a conversation’, for example an interview (Flick et al, 2004, p. 248). The process involves a transcriber and a system of notations. The product is the text needed as a solid ground for making the analysis. I have used a transcription system where only the phrases have been transcribed. This means that sometimes-eloquent silence, and other sounds have not been put into the transcripts.

3. Abduction: theoretical concepts used when processing the data

Abduction is used to analyze data. In this method theoretical concepts are linked to the empirical data. From the linkage, something new emerges from the data, and this can in turn be expressed. In this way, theoretical concepts can work actively in new knowledge formation (Peirce, 1990). The concepts I have used are social, cultural and political structures in relation to agency, functionings, capability, social conversion factor, narrative imagination, opportunity costs, and structural elaboration. Using these concepts in the analysis provides a shift of aspect between everyday language (data text) and the language of science (theoretical concepts) (Gustavsson, 2011).

- When using the concepts of social, cultural and political structures related to agency of women, the informants' experiences of the agency of women emerge, thus the *conditions* for women in the given contexts. The informants' perceived agency shows how they experience the constraints and enablement of the valued functionings. Accordingly, these valued functionings are defined when the *claims* are expressed.
- The valued functionings set against the social conversion factor clarify the *actual* capability (opportunity freedom) a person has. When using concepts of capability, they will describe a person's actual opportunities to arrange for herself a life she has reason to value.
- When using the concept of narrative imagination, the informant's ability/inability to understand that the context she / he lives in is organized by structures that enable and restrain their actions will emerge.
- When using the concept of opportunity *costs*, factual obstacles for performing these actions will emerge.
- When using structural elaboration, the understanding of changes in women's agency over time become more prominent.

4. Abduction resulting in three principal themes

The outcome of processing the data by means of theoretical concepts resulted in three themes. These themes are conditions, claims and costs.

Theme 1: Women's conditions for participating in daily life, in three societal structures.

Theme 2: Claims women are making for equal possibilities. These claims are presented throughout as valued functionings.

Theme 3: Transgressing boundaries. Steps taken by the informants to pursue knowledge to increase agency in various societal structures involves competence to traverse social networks. However, they also often lead to challenging prevailing structures and consequently to opportunity costs.

5. Principal themes organized in three parts

To be able to investigate the three main themes in the informants' statements, they are organized in three analytical parts. These parts are the social structure, the cultural structure and the political structure. Separating analytically the

informants' understanding of daily life makes it possible to explore what constitutes the elements and how these elements are related to each other. These analytical parts constitute the analysis chapters. Each chapter examines one of the three societal structures: Chapter five, the social structure, Chapter six, the cultural structure and Chapter seven, the political structure. The three analysis chapters are all concerned with the conditions, the claims (valued functionings) and the costs of making these claims.

By presenting the structural spaces, women's agency and thereby the conditions for women's positions in each structure become visible. The analysis then deals with women's claims for increased agency in each of the three societal structures. This includes both awareness of unequal structures (i.e. imagination) and opportunities for acquiring adequate knowledge. When awareness of unequal structures, knowledge and action converges, the actual opportunities to claim increased agency become visible. The boundaries set for women's claim for increased agency indicate the opportunity costs women pay for transgressing allocated space.

Analytical dualism will be used in Chapter eight to discuss the changes (societal and individual) that are analytically possible. The gap between what appeared to be possible and what is achieved is discussed as part of the result.

Issues of credibility, dependability and transferability

The usual terms of validity, reliability and generalizability will be discussed by using the alternative concepts of credibility, dependability and transferability (Bryman, 2004). This is done because the prevalent validity and reliability techniques are difficult to apply to qualitative interview material (ibid).

Credibility

The ability to distinguish scientific theory from other systems of beliefs lie in secured credibility. This credibility is connected to the actual empirical observations providing facts (Sjoberg & Nett, 1968). Since there can be several possible accounts of an aspect of social reality, establishment of the credibility of the findings depends on the research being pursued correctly and that the findings are presented to those who have been investigated to ensure that the researcher has understood the informants correctly (Bryman, 2004). Letting credibility permeate every stage of the research process (Kvale, 1997) enhances the accuracy of the study.

To secure credibility two questions have been asked: How do I know that I have understood the information correctly? How do I know if my transcription complies with what the informants intended to say?

By being prepared to ask additional and follow up questions during the interviews, my initial question was answered in such a way that during the interviews I felt that I had really understood what the informants meant. On the

other hand, the informants never read the transcriptions, for several reasons. One was that none of the informants responded positively when asked if they wanted to read the final draft of the interview. This can be seen as an inadequacy; however, it can be related partly to the informants' personal security. By sending the transcript by e-mail, for example, both the informant and the context of the statements could be revealed. Another weak point in the dataset is that not all interviews were recorded. Two interviews were not recorded due to the unwillingness of the informants. One interview was conducted on the telephone making it difficult for me to manage the recording.

Another credibility concern is that I met the two gatekeepers several times during my three visits to Egypt. This resulted in their contributing more information than the other informants, thus being more visible in the material. This can be seen as a misallocation but it should be viewed as reliable information from informants well versed in the situation. One strength of the study's credibility is precisely that the choice of informants reflects the knowledge of informed individuals. Thus, the interviews were carried out with informants that had an opportunity to reflect on the issues.

When collecting the data I tried to be very specific and clear, making sure the informant understood what I was asking for and also that I understood their answers correctly. When transcribing the interviews it was sometimes hard to hear every word said because of loud background noise. My belief, nevertheless, is that this has not affected the credibility of the study since only a few words were affected and only on a few occasions.

Credibility in the analysis process

The work of processing the transcripts is an abstract process that involves moving elements back and forth, but by doing so, the credibility of the text has been ensured. My interpretation, based on the informants responses, the theoretical framework and previous research constitutes the analysis. An interview guide was constructed to allow the informants to provide a full and descriptive answer to the questions. However, it also allowed elaboration around matters that they considered particularly important. In the interview situation, the statements should constantly be questioned and verified (Kvale, 1997). This makes the interview situation more like a conversation with clarifications and follow-up questions, which increases the credibility. The data was transcribed in full, and the transcriptions were read and reread to deduce the themes in the material.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative studies is difficult to achieve due to the different situations in social studies. In interview situations where the researcher's most prominent tool apart from questions, is herself, it is difficult to obtain the same results as those of a prior study (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). In my study, the changing situation in the society also contributed to the difficulty of obtaining

the same results later. In this study, however, the dependability lies in the conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis. This is done by using theoretical inference like transferability.

Transferability

In interview studies there is typically an in-depth study of a small group of informants. These studies tend to be set in a unique context with a significant inclination towards the social world that is being studied. This often makes transferability to other settings difficult. There are, however, two main forms of generalization in ethnographic research; empirical generalization and theoretical inference (Aull Davies, 2008). Empirical generalization is criticized in ethnographic research because it is difficult to extend the results to other cases in additional studies. Theoretical inference however uses the context of the theoretical framework to secure a valid transferability. The design of the concepts and how they are used, constituting the theoretical framework, should work as a transparent guide to understanding the agency of women in three societal structures, ways of gaining knowledge and the costs in a given society. This has been studied through a clearly drafted theoretical framework, providing a few distinct themes presented in the three following analysis chapters.

By means of thorough documentation throughout the thesis showing how it has been conducted, the process by which the results have been attained and the presentation and discussion of the results, both credibility and transferability are ensured.

The result of the study

The following three chapters present the analysis of the interviews. As described above, the societal structures are analyzed separately, making it possible to analyze the data from different aspects.

In the analysis chapters, 16 valued functionings have been outlined through the informants' statements. These 16 functionings are discussed in the three societal structures: social, cultural and political. (*see Figure 3*)

Structure	Valued Functionings
Social	'To be respected as an equal by family' (1)
	'To be equally educated' (2)
	'To be backed by family' (3)
	'To be able to develop personality' (4)
	'To be safe from physical violence ' (5)
Cultural	'To be active and safe in the community' (6)
	'To be recognized as equal' (7)
	'To become knowledgeable' (8)
	'To be a professional and a leader' (9)
	'To be able to help others' (10)
	'To have affiliation' (11)
	'To have a voice' (12)
Political	'To have access to quality education' (13)
	'To engage in democratic values' (14)
	'To be equally represented' (15)
	'To have security' (16)

Figure 3: outlines the sixteen 'valued functionings'. Arranging the functionings in this way allows an analysis of the conditions for women, their claims and the cost for these claims, in each structure.

5. The Social Structure

This chapter and the next two present the analysis of the study. The Capability Approach is used as a framework for analyzing the informants' statements made in the interviews. The informants describe their views on women's conditions based on possibilities and constraints (thus available resources) for participation in the three outlined structures. Considerable changes took place in the country within the period of the study. To elucidate these changes in society, the explanatory potential of the Capability Approach is supported by Archer's theory on social change. The changes in society and the informants' perception of women's agency throughout the societal change during the revolution will be discussed in the last chapter.

In all the interviews conducted in this study, the informants show a clear desire for profound and lasting change towards a more equal society. The informants are all critical of the regime. That is why it was decided to de-identify the informants' statements in the analysis in order to prevent any retaliation for the statements made.

As will be shown, women meet obstacles in many areas of everyday life. Everyday life is analytically divided into three structures, each representing different areas that together constitute daily life.

Through the informants' own stories of their possibilities and limitations for participating in various situations in everyday life, the conditions for women, described here as capabilities (women's substantial freedoms), become visible through the women's described *valued functionings*. These constitutive valued functionings will be discussed from the perspective of each societal structure.

This first analysis chapter presents the informants' perceptions of women's conditions and women's agency in the social structure. The informants' predominant valued functionings when describing these conditions in the social structure are 'to be respected as an equal' by family and extended family. This may mean, for example, being educated to the same extent as the male family members; to be equally educated, however, also has other significations. To be able to grow and develop a personality is seen as one of the consequences of literacy as well as one of the prerequisite for the functioning of being safe from physical violence.

Conditions for Women in the Social Structure

The use of the term agency, that is, a person's capability to act independently and to make free choices, allows us to examine possibilities and constraints for women in different societal structures. Further, it makes it possible to examine women's actions for increased agency and what implications this brings to transgressing the existing boundaries in the wider society.

A social structure has internal relation between a practice, roles and role positions. Within the practice of 'family', there are different roles. The role of daughter, mother and/or wife is conditioned by the structured project that the role comprises. While individuals might be controlled by the same set of norms and practices in a society, the specific direction and vision of the future of each person will vary significantly, depending on her specific opportunities and circumstances. These conditional circumstances start in the family. The informants' statements testify to the conditions in which women try to make for themselves a 'full life'. These statements must be understood against the background of prevailing societal structures, making the description of their conditions before any action is taken important.

As the introductory chapter of the thesis points out, Egypt is a patriarchal society with religious beliefs, moral codes and cultural values passed down for generations. Consequently, it is not surprising that the roles and role positions are described as traditional in terms of equal rights for women and men.

Through the informants' stories describing various situations in everyday life the similarities but also the differences within what appeared to be a quite homogenous group, became visible. The following presents the informants' most valued functionings within the social structure.

'To be respected as an equal by family' (1)

All the informants gave a great deal of emphasis to the importance of the family. The family's care and a child's upbringing will be the most important aspect of how a woman's opportunities in life will unfold.

The informants' concern revolved much around what responsibility the family has for their children's future. Parents have great responsibility for their children's future. The previous generation, both the mother and the father, are responsible for bringing up their children. How this should be done is a common source of disagreement amongst many couples today.

The female informants all give much emphasis to their struggle for greater possibilities to participate as equal citizens. The home and the family are described as the first barrier to cross.

I had problems with my family. My mother worried all the time and if I came home late, it would be a crisis. I had to fight both my mother and my grandmother, even though my grandmother was the one that always was backing me up. Her support changed my life dramatically. (Zarah)

This increasing disagreement, which more and more shows signs of resistance to traditional values, indicates a small window of change in the social structure. It is becoming more and more common for parents to support their girls, meaning that families that have only girls or both girls and boys, now more often push their girls to be responsible for many more tasks outside the home than before. To be active outside their homes is one way of preparing girls to become leaders in society. That also young girls and women can become something great was in 2012, the year after the Mubarak regime was ousted, a common view among the informants.

‘To be equally educated’ (2)

An important aspect of girls' opportunities later in life is education. Education is a human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Despite this, many children do not attend school in Egypt due to several factors. They are needed at home to help with household chores, and the parents do not always realize that an education might be helpful and good for the girls. This can be connected to the fact that the education in Egypt is considered inadequate. It might also be that many parents have not had the chance themselves to go to school, or that parents want to protect their children from the violence they meet at school. The credibility of the quality of the education in the public schools is problematic. Many children enrolled in state schools do not participate.

They don't teach them anything at governmental schools, and it is necessary to take private lessons if you want to learn anything. This means a child's education depends very much on your family. If you have an educated family, you will be a very educated child. (Rose)

The result is high illiteracy. Older people that want to learn how to read and write are sometimes given the chance. This requires encouragement, however. Support from the close family is still important and it takes time for this to be practically manageable. Motivation to learn is not always high because the use of broader knowledge is not always fully understood.

Education in general is described as inadequate. This puts the family in the center, giving it the main responsibility for a child's nurture and education. When ranking the important factors for girls to improve their opportunities to make changes and to participate in social life and in public life, several of the informants put the family first. This is explained by an understanding of the

family as the creator or supporter of a person's character building. School and formal education are understood to be the second most important factor and society (e.g. the media) the third.

However, the educational channels are few, and there is no formal way to prepare girls or women to participate in the public arenas of society. On the contrary, it seems to be entirely up to the parents' good intentions, leaving the issue of women agency entirely up to family tradition and inherited values. In line with a traditional society Egyptians have a strong tradition of being very protective of their girls, making it more difficult to bring about the development of equality.

They used to put women and girls in, how can you say, in a box of glass and she didn't have to face people, or face problems, this is in general, but actually in the twentieth century it has become different, so we are much more educated. They understand that they do not have to do this, that ladies or girls are like boys and can face everything. (Aisha)

Even though this quote gives hope for greater equality, it is still more common for boys to be trained as leaders. Most parents in Egypt today are still educated in the old system. This is reflected in the traditional view of boys and girls. However, it is also reflected in how parents treat their children. It is common to give punishment of different kinds. If harsh punishment occurs, the family is failing to encourage their children to realize their full potential and consequently to back them up as potential leaders. This is done out of ignorance, one informant says. Several of the informants assured me that Egyptians (of course) love their children, but many parents just do not know that this harsh way of treating children will affect them in certain ways.

I would never do that with children because I suffered from it myself. But my brother does that, all this shouting all the time is basically a different way of seeing upbringing. (Rose)

Thus the family is the very core of a girl's opportunities later in life, because even if the schools (occasionally) encourage girls' personal development, the family also has to support a girl's growth in order for her to make any progress. According to the informants, many people in the community think women should be able to work and operate outside the home, however, in practice women are not given the same educational opportunities as men. This makes it difficult for them to reach any equality in reality even though some say a majority, as much as 70 percent of the men and 82 percent of the women are in favor of equal opportunity, one informant said. Through the support of the family girls can realize their options.

‘To be backed by family’ (3)

It is considered very difficult or even impossible to participate in anything without social support. Since the role positions for girls, mothers and wives imply weakness, involvement in anything without social backing is complicated. This support, the informants explained, have to be social and practical, as well as psychological, which is highlighted as a fundamental aspect of who will be able to enjoy any kind of change. The women’s stories reveal that nothing can really be achieved by a woman without support from everyone around her. This means that the immediate family of husband, father, mother, even a woman’s children if they are a bit older, and other members of the family clan, are crucial for a woman’s possibilities for life choices.

The men in the focus group all agree about this. The male informants spoke about a common view of women as children, allowing husbands or fathers to have control. The overall traditional view of a woman’s position, and the associated importance of controlling women’s bodies and women’s voices, makes it difficult for woman to achieve change and to reach leading positions.

But if we are to change anything – we have to change the kids! You have to start at home. (Leila)

Both the women and the men state that a common opinion of women is that they are weak. The men also state that women are seen as pure, though at the same time with the sole role of being a reproductive body. Defining someone this way - what is permissible and not permissible - lies in the hands of the defining party, and is expressed in explicit rules and codes of what is acceptable and can thus be practiced without punishment.

When a group (here ‘women’) is made to accept an image of themselves that is not consistent with the self-image but still give others the legitimacy to exercise power over them there is no equality, and violence is always present one informant said.

It is a very difficult society in that way. If you want to control women, you just say that whatever she wants to do is against our tradition. (Rose)

This quote shows that there is an awareness of women’s human rights: it also shows, however, that there is a high barrier against these rights in women’s daily family life. The lack of support is associated with a cost if a woman chooses to cross the boundaries and claim increased agency.

One informant told her family she would like to live on her own and that she wanted to study abroad, but she did not tell them it was because she did not like their way of thinking or that she did not want to live their kind of life. Every time they want to meet her at her home she makes up excuses not to invite them. On the one hand, she is afraid they will interfere and try to control her if they know how she lives her life. On the other hand, she does not want

to have to change things just because her family is coming over, so she avoids inviting them.

Her brother's children are the only ones from the family that occasionally come to her house. She often takes them on excursions and talks about things they might not talk about at home. The revolution is an example; they have looked at the demonstrations together and talked about what they mean for the country. She also took them to the Egyptian Museum and they had never been to the pyramids before going with her. This, she says, is quite typical of children in Cairo. Most of them, although born in Egypt, have never seen the pyramids. To be backed up by family might help them to see injustice in society; however, to revolt against the prevailing structures requires a well-developed personality.

'To be able to develop personality' (4)

The informants believe that it is possible for women to gain leading positions (and accordingly greater agency), even if this always has to be done by putting up a massive fight. These fights have to be taken against the family, close and extended, against people in the close environment and against the whole system.

As well as emphasizing the importance of the family and the support it can bring, great emphasis was also given to the importance of the development of a person's personality for her to succeed. In Egyptian society, the view of what a woman can and cannot do comes from the deeply-rooted, traditional gender norm which gives women and girls responsibility for the children and the household work. According to the informants, the community (at large) thinks it is the woman's place to take care of the household duties. This deeply-rooted idea is difficult to redirect, which means strictly reproductive structures not giving much space for deviation of any kind. Thus an uneducated/illiterate parent might have difficulty in seeing the potential in her/his child, which results in a reproductive circle where some parents do not encourage their children to engage in processes of personal or societal development. They might even tell their children to stay at home from school, arguing that since the children do not learn anything there, it is better that they stay at home and help with household chores. This leads to additional new generations where illiteracy is high, and where the daughters' awareness of their rights and opportunities for greater empowerment remains small.

To break this pattern, courage and strength are said to be two necessary characteristics. They are considered two main factors for success and were seen by several informants as a gift from God. Nevertheless, the child needs support from the family to develop these personality traits. On the other hand, the same family can equally easily suppress a child's personality, so the child's potential is not realized.

The building of personality takes years so there has to be perseverance to it, and there is no book on how to do it. You have to think, you have to express your point of view, make visions, express how you see the problem and so on. If we can do this, we are teaching them how to think. (Aisha)

Much like many of the informants' statements, the above quote describes the importance of passing on a way of thinking critically. The informants seem to agree that a fundamental change in society is needed. For this change to take place there have to be changes in attitudes, information and education. The most critical place for this change to start is in the family, at home, where the cultural norms and values are often established.

If, for instance you tell your son to clean his room and not let your daughter do it, the father will be angry. (Salima)

The above quote illustrates how difficult changing social structures can be. The family is understood to make the foundation for a person's personality and therefore has the responsibility to be encouraging. This means that the children's possibilities for a better life are literally in the hands of their parents. However, they may not always understand that they have a bright child with potential.

Sometimes there are children who have a real personality, but family can kill it. (Aisha)

In this respect, there is equality between boys and girls, even though there is still a clear hierarchy in society.

The solution to the problem, according to several informants, is to share knowledge and never to give up. Children that are given the opportunity to spend time together with reflecting adults are given new perspectives. This time gives children the possibility to relax and the opportunity to be curious, to ask questions and discuss matters that are sometimes difficult to discuss with their parents. To be able to discuss ideas openly encourages curiosity, thus promoting learning.

My duty as an educated person is that I have to inform and educate others, less fortunate. (Leila)

This exchange of ideas and new ways of thinking is described as an important but difficult way to achieve actual and long-lasting transformational change. Meetings amongst women and girls are not that unusual, but again, they are never easy or particularly common. If the parents like a friend of their child, they will take her along for things the family are doing, but they can also easily interfere with whom the children talk to. As a result, a common discouragement within the home is women's friendship outside the home. A husband

might not think his wife has time for friendship if she has children, perhaps a job and on top of that, also the household chores. To have the chance to meet other women and discuss things is therefore not easy. The role of women in the family is clearly described and unanimous. It is clear that women have to be very strong at every level, in the home, around the extended family, in the neighborhood, at work, in school, in the community and dealing with the law and government. Everyone around her will have his/her own opinion and disagree with everybody else.

New ways of thinking around this are connected to education and information based on a legal system separated from religious control. Several of the informants state that it is easier to fight in the political sphere than in the private sphere, because in the political sphere there can be clashes but you always have the choice to leave. In the private sphere however, there are your children and your family (close and extended) limiting what you can do.

You cannot get rid of your children and you cannot easily get rid of your husband. The whole family with your mother, your mother-in-law, your father, these are all your family and whatever they do, whatever you do, you still love them. This will stop you fighting for your space, and they can also quite easily stop you. (Salima)

Several factors have been of importance for people's new awareness. The current revolution is important for the mindset of people, the informants say. With the revolution people began to see that they could influence change. The revolution seems to have created awareness among a larger section of the population, not only the educated few.

After the revolution the situation is completely different. Everyone would like to understand what is going on, but to different degrees. To a different degree and in a different way, I may stay in any of the coffee shops here and talking with you, I may find another (kind of) people here and suddenly change tables and then talk, all of them to girls and together. (Zarah)

For women engaged in change, this new knowledge leads to some kind of action, and thereby often a disturbance of the social arrangements. These actions are often associated with costs.

'To be safe from physical violence' (5)

Many aspects of the informants' stories highlight the difficulties they face in fighting for equal opportunities of life choices, even in the private sphere (the social structure) where recognition of equal respect has to start. One of the difficulties is the prevalent violence. Violence in the family is common.

The violence is everywhere, even at home where you are supposed to feel safe.
(Focus group)

As described above, Egyptian society is hierarchically ordered. Where you are on the ladder of this hierarchy provides different agency in the various structures in society. This is because the different levels are slightly distinguished from each other in their views on the status of women. Status is divided into rich and poor, where the poor, often illiterate people, have less possibilities of reflecting over and planning for future life chances for their sons and daughters.

The informants all believe that the most common way to educate children is the old approach, even though many informants themselves had a firm conviction that all the punishment this approach entails, is wrong. However, the informants agree that violence molds new generations, and that it constitutes a difficult environment for learning.

There is an agreement amongst the male informants that if a person is against violence, he should be against it all the way. They continue to say that the contradiction in people's views is why beatings can continue. Beating in the homes is sanctioned by the violence condoned in the culture.

That's why we beat our wives at home all the time... and nobody talks about it. Forget about politics and differences, we beat, a lot of us beat, I am not saying us...I mean us, (sitting here) but Egyptians beat their women to death in their houses. (Focus group)

Educated individuals from so-called "good families", high-level families in society, have the opportunity to think slightly different. They might encourage their daughter to challenge themselves and society by becoming leaders. This happens, even though it is most common that leadership for women still occurs in a lower socio-economic segment of society, not in the top, leading positions.

They don't support girls, plus they can't see, they can't imagine women in leadership positions. (Aisha)

Some women will nevertheless protest against how the structures are organized and thus, how the structures condition their allocated agency. For example, they will participate in the revolution to bring about a change so that the recognition mechanism is more easily discerned in the structures.

Hence objecting to the normative occurs, which results in various types of punishment. This punishment may become noticeable as gossip, rumors and common contempt. As a primary agent, this kind of refined punishment is often hard to fend off since it comes from many different sources and those who act do not have to take responsibility for their actions.

Many men believe it is OK to beat a woman up. Men in general think they are better than women. I think everyone, including us sitting here; perhaps think we are better than women in some way. (Focus group)

The above quote embodies a strongly entrenched belief, since it is expressed by a group of men who made it clear that their position was for a more equal society. It shows that the basis for women's achievements for increased agency is already weighted by the limited choice of functioning.

Violence, however, is targeted against anyone in society, anyone who a person thinks is inferior or weaker. This means that anyone might bully or abuse whomever they might be able to get control over. Women are traditionally seen as equivalent to children when it comes to autonomy, which puts them in an inferior position. If a woman does not listen, she will be beaten. Women are receivers of care the male informants say, but often with a very violent hand.

Because she doesn't listen. It is like a kid, you harm yourself, I will beat you. A woman is like a child, we protect them. By the way, we all love our women, but still, love is so much... We use violence to protect them, because they don't know their own good, they don't know what's good for them. Because it's a paternal society, from the top all the way down. (Focus group)

Unfortunately, it seems more difficult to fight for your space and your rights in the private sphere where change primarily has to start. The home is supposed to be a safe space, but since violence is condoned by culture and not prohibited by law, it is always present. Several structures in society have to change.

If a person commits adultery, shall he be thrown with rocks till he is dead? Shall he be stoned to death or shall he be hanged? There are different schools about this, and here we are in the third millennium. (Focus group)

Corruption is blamed for many things that have gone wrong in society and sharia is very difficult because each person will explain the incidents from his point or his ideology in Islam, the informants in the focus group said. This means that everyone will have different opinions and judgments.

Summary – Social Structure

In Sen's writing, well-being is conceptualized as certain basic capabilities to function. These functionings are a person's possibilities to actually be and do something he or she values. In the analysis of the social structure, it becomes clear that for girls and women, there are high expectations that certain functionings should be cultivated while others should not be developed.

The women in the study were more open about family life (thus the social structure) than the men were. This might not be all that surprising considering that the family structure is within the private sphere, and talking about the family largely involves your own experience (and behavior) in contrast to commenting on women's conditions outside the home. This depicts the situation for women in a more nuanced way. Female and male informants describe the role of girls and women in a similar way. However, there is a difference of opinion about how this role and the position of the role of women can be developed.

To change the relation between women and men, it is widely understood that it has to be done early in a child's life, with upbringing. For this to happen, attitudes, through education and information, have to be updated.

Functionings that women seem less encouraged to cultivate are described in five valued functionings within the social structure. These are; 'To be respected as an equal by family', 'To be equally educated', 'To be backed by family', 'To be able to develop a personality' and 'To be safe from physical violence'.

Both equal upbringing (thus equal respect) for girls and boys in the family and being able to attend school (equal education) are important. Without formal education, such as the ability to read and write, it is more difficult to be part of a wider discourse, and accordingly, more difficult to develop a mind of your own. These functionings pre-suppose the functionings both of being backed up by family and being safe from physical violence.

The primary agent (Archer, 2000) constitutes the basic conditions of women's role positions and generates certain possibilities for agency. When these role positions, through involuntary placement (Archer, 1985) of the position of the role, are perceived as too narrow, awareness of the unequal capability sets available to women is described by the informants. This is expressed in the claims of the above listed valued functionings.

These valued functionings show the informants' desire to develop the traditional role of women by expanding their role position. To be able to claim increased agency is described by the informants as being conditioned by two aspects: support (being backed up) and personality (being able to develop personality). These two characteristics are seen as basic for being able to imagine other possibilities (Nussbaum, 2000). Thus both narrative imagination and education are important to spark off change.

By means of valued functionings, women are seeking greater agency. However, several social conversion factors (Sen, 1992, Robeyns, 2005) are hampering any elaboration (Archer, 1995) of the social structure. Violence in the social sphere is one factor reducing women's freedom to act and why roles and role positions can be retained (Archer, 2004).

After considering the social conversion factors of the valued functionings, women's real capability sets rise, thus their substantial freedom. This substantial freedom is the women's real possibility to act (Sen, 1985), and the actual space women have to actively seek change.

In Egypt, the opportunities to choose from different capability sets connected to the social structure are limited for a number of reasons. The patriarchal system makes it difficult to activate the mechanism of recognition that is required for females to be treated as equal to males. Seen over time, the changes in women's agency and the social structure are described as an unprogressive elaboration.

As described above, the traditional gender norms are at the center. The description of women's conditions in the social structure gives an indication of where girls and women begin in their quest for equal possibilities to be part of life outside the home.

6. The Cultural Structure

This chapter presents the informants' perceptions of women's conditions and women's agency in the cultural structure. A cultural structure is the internal relations between norms and values, both worldly and religious.

The informants' predominant valued functionings when describing the conditions in the cultural structure are to be active and at the same time safe in the community. This seems to be a common problem for women, because of a perceived lack of recognition as their being equal to men, making violence ever-present in society. In order to raise their voices to gain change, women are seeking knowledge. To become knowledgeable is an exceedingly valued functioning. Through both affiliation and non-affiliation, the informants are seeking knowledge that will assist their claims. By helping others, many informants work for long-lasting changes in the community, both for others and for themselves. The fact that many of the informants aspire to be professionals and leaders in some way support this claim. A leading position is a way to be able to have influence.

'To be active and safe in the community' (6)

If a woman wants to participate actively in society, people are often interested in her personal situation, according to several informants. The questions women are asked can revolve around whether she has children, how old they are and how much time she spends with them. Questions like this are not necessarily asked of a man. If a woman wants to participate outside the immediate social sphere, she has to be prepared to answer questions like this. Women with ambitions to do something outside their homes have to be able to argue for themselves. These arguments have to turn the light away from questions about children and housing and on those about her contribution to society.

The culture norm compels women to stay at home. (Zarah)

Both women and men in the interviews testify that many problems women meet are merely because of their gender. Before the revolution, it was difficult for women to participate in the public sphere, or even express opinions concerning matters outside the family sphere, owing to the traditional view of a woman's place being in the home with her foremost duties in the family.

Egyptian society is portrayed as a divided society with divisions running through religion, social classes and professions as well as gender. The differences in society between a traditional view of women and a more open view run through all these divisions, making it complicated to reach coherent transformational change. Traditionally, women are seen as weak, making tradition an obstacle for many women to participate in the civil society. Not all women experience discrimination at work, though most women have experienced a change of attitude concerning respect for women in the public space. Talking about harassment and violence before, during and after the revolution, the informants agreed that Egypt has become a more violent society.

In discussing general challenges for women in society, the men in the focus group claimed that thirty to forty years ago, society was in a better era concerning women's rights and human right than it is today. They affirm that women today are seen as weak and pure, and at the same time as objects with, in fact, their only role to be a reproductive body. By viewing agency through different power dimensions, it becomes clear that women are being given mixed messages.

Violence against women is condoned by culture. (Focus group)

In the dichotomy of legitimate / illegitimate power, what is accepted as tolerable and what is not is dictated by the legitimate group. For this reason, the illegitimate group holds less leverage in influencing its situation.

In a patriarchal society, the legitimate power is held by men and since the legitimate power over the oppressed group (i.e. women) covers almost every aspect of their lives, things are further complicated.

Violence is in the culture, not because we are bad or vicious, it is because we are raised that way. It is embedded in our culture since a very long time ago, and has nothing to do really, about before or after the revolution. (Focus group)

Violence strikes both men and women, but it is directly targeted against women as a group. This (collective) punishment aims at women as primary agents, making it impossible to escape violence for any woman participating in society.

A general opinion among the informants appears to be that violence has increased, though it has always been part of society. Violence can be divided into a structural level and an individual level.

I think there was a clear message that any kind of woman that tried to protest against us, we will execute or we will do all kinds of violence against, and it is like they try to make the women stay at home and not be a part of the protesters. (Focus group)

There is agreement among the male informants that it is going to take a long time for society to refrain from violent behavior. With growing frustration, street violence is increasing and the youth will continue to go into the streets and pursue what they call festivities. This is when they capture a woman and gang rape her while the other men in the circle have a meal. This is their language, how the perpetrators talk about it, as if they were eating.

These kids are 14 or 15 years old. Imagine what these men are capable of when they become 30 or 40. (Focus group)

The sexual and gender-based violence that women face daily in Egypt is in Amnesty International's report *Circles of hell* (2015) described as rooted in multiple and interconnected forms of discrimination, as well as by historical and structural inequality. In the focus group interview, the conversation revolved very much around violence against women, both in the private sphere and in the public space.

'To be recognized as equal' (7)

The boundaries for women in Egyptian society are numerous. The taboo of the body of women has become obvious throughout; however, men also speak about the voice of women as something shameful.

Women should not be speaking in public. In fact, she should not speak at all. (Focus group)

This is the view of the men in the focus groups on how women are regarded in society. They state that the message to women is that they should be quiet. According to several informants, this is a religious norm rather than a tradition. However, this is only one interpretation of religion; in general, the men in my study are quite negative towards many of the religious customs arguing that many traditions concerning women are outdated.

The covering of women's bodies and the lowering of women's voices is an effective way of obscuring women. Omnipresent is the confusing idea of obscuring women on the one hand and elevating them on the other.

All three religions that are present in the Middle East (Islam, Judaism and Christianity) are described as having left their marks on the culture in the focus group it was said that a large number of people believe in fear of God. Various fractions in society and people in power use this to their own advantage.

If I tell you, do this and you will go to Heaven and if questioned, I'd say God said that, and many will go along with it. The illiteracy rate is about 40 percent

and many poor people think that only poor people will go to Heaven. This elevates the situation of the poor, making a foundation for the hierarchical society with many poor, illiterates making way for the powerful few. (Focus group)

The focus group gives an example of the view of woman as ‘pearls’ and men as ‘beasts’ by describing the metro system. There are separate metro carriages for men and women in the subway. Three cars in the middle of each train are exclusively reserved for women. This, according to the focus group, sends a message to the men that they are not to be trusted to ride in the same carriage as a woman. Being a traditional society, norms and values in Egypt are deeply rooted and transferred through generations. To exemplify, the men in the focus group make a parable to slavery when a religion still allows a man to marry more than one woman. They also express their opposition to the custom of veiling.

Why don’t men cover their face? Why women? I mean you see some handsome boys, why women? (Focus group)

The veiling custom is exclusively for women, however. On the one hand, women are seen as pearls that have to be kept away so as not to be harmed; on the other hand, women can be used in different ways, for example in the front-line to take part in politics. This is common when the party leaders either want to have some women from their own group to communicate with other women like a logistical tool, or because they want to purify their own image (looking more modern). In the focus group interview, there was a good deal of emphasis on the inability to perceive women as equal to men, and in the discussions, this was equated with gynophobia (fear and silencing of women).

Traditions and customs play a strong part in women’s possibilities and opportunities to participate in society. The men in the focus group stress that men in general see themselves as superior to women and the male informants claim that this is condoned in the culture. This gives men an essential superiority over women; therefore men are also given legitimacy in matters directly related to women themselves, making it difficult for women to claim their equal rights.

The difficulty of attending meetings because of these fixed gender norms in society is one of the obstacles women meet. When women attend meetings in the hope of taking part actively, many of the other participants will think of them as bad women whose husbands do not check them properly. There is, however, a positive change happening. Recently, revolts have been led by women even when their husbands threaten them in different ways. Nevertheless, even though this seems more common, it is still quite rare.

Women can become leaders but they shouldn’t become bosses for example, this is deeply rooted in our society, that women should do more traditional tasks. (Aisha)

Referring to tradition is merely an easy way for whoever, for whatever reason, to control women, as several of the informants pointed out. The fact that women theoretically can be quite wealthy, but in practice do not have any power either over money or over the decisions affecting her situation demonstrates a strong patriarchal society.

‘To become knowledgeable’ (8)

As described in the previous chapter, the four main sources of gaining awareness are the family, education, the media and social movements. They are however all in different ways insufficient.

Awareness of the importance of an education is uneven throughout both social-economic and other social divides. People’s mindsets might differ even in the same neighborhood. The differences in how people perceive things can vary enormously.

Many efforts are made to run projects that generate greater awareness amongst people in general. One example is one informant working as a teacher, who together with a friend tried to launch a project in the school to start a center for the workers employed on the campus (e.g. the men bringing tea and caretakers) to teach them the alphabet. The Dean objected loudly, claiming they were all literate. Then again, she says, having a certificate does not necessarily mean knowing how to read and write. The project was never launched because the Dean cannot officially teach them, since they have to have the certificate to be employed, and it would in the end mean that the Dean did not do his job properly when he employed them. The informant seems uncertain whether in fact this is because he did not want to help them, since she is sure he knew that he was hiring people who were illiterate.

As it is handled, this becomes a vicious circle with no end to the stupidity. (Ana)

There is a huge challenge to make people aware of the benefits of knowing how to read and to write and so get their certificate and not the other way around. This applies to both ends: both the providers of knowledge and the receivers, must understand the importance of learning, the informants say. One problem, however, is the common lack of understanding among a large part of the population of the advantages of an education. Education is seen as a luxury that maybe can be done when the problems of everyday life are solved. There are many other things in people’s everyday life that get priority. Children have to be fed and family members have to be taken care of, so motivation is often low. For women there is also the issue of the use of an educa-

tion. Since men are still seen as the main breadwinners and women are supposed to stay at home, education is still often considered an unnecessary waste on women.

One of the informant's, Ana's house cleaner does not read, so Ana started to spend a half an hour teaching her basic facts every time she came to clean the house. When the house cleaner goes back home, her husband makes fun of her because he does not understand the use of his wife learning basic things like telling the time. This can of course be unmotivating, Ana says. Often people even feel that they are betraying their family because of the time they spend on schooling instead of working or serving their family.

To be able to freely participate (if you want to) in different arenas of society, is difficult without a certain level of knowledge (e.g. basic literacy and knowing your rights), and since awareness and information are intertwined, what is considered adequate knowledge by the informants is not always easy to obtain. Corruption ruins chances to get knowledge through both formal education and the media, according to several informants.

Although the state channels for getting information and knowledge are weak, there are other paths to take in order to get the information you need. These informal channels might be harder to find and they require personal involvement, engagement and perseverance.

The informants all seem to agree about the impact of the revolution on people's prospects for information and awareness leading to a positive future. A more open society that allows people to share experiences over the social divisions, made up of both informal meetings and organized gatherings, has proved to be an important way to gain both awareness and knowledge.

Ideally, it is from this awareness you get engagement. (Zarah)

As discussed in chapter five, one important source for gaining awareness is supposedly formal education. The education system, however, is a poor source and it is heavily criticized. Another important source is claimed to be the media, but the media are said to be corrupted and often biased, even though, with recent, independent media, the situation is getting a little better (Statement from April 2012, before the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi (2013) and later SCAF and Al-Sisi (2014).

When describing the situation of formal education and free media, many informants argue that there are a few things that have to be put together and understood, in order to gain the awareness that is needed to see and understand the maladministration of society.

When formal sources of information and knowledge do not work an increasing number of people break traditional divides and get together through common interests and goals. Reaching information outside the traditional channels of information and learning from each other is becoming increasingly common according to several informants.

There are ways to get informed (even when you are illiterate), but access to information was described by the informants as limited prior to the revolution. The first 18 days of the revolution in Tahrir Square were described as a new beginning. During these 18 days, when people were camping in Tahrir, women and men participated side by side. People started to see each other and talk directly to each other. This became a process whereby people learned from each other.

If people cannot read, they will not always know about their rights so they...let the people of religion give them false information about something, you know.
(Ana)

“It does not matter where you get the information and knowledge; it is whether this information is positive or negative”, one informant said. The information can be both positive and negative in all of the sources of information that are seen as important. One dilemma for people educated in the Egyptian school system, however, is described as the difficulty to evaluate the information. To examine the information critically is not always easy if you do not have experience of this she said.

One informant who has studied women’s engagement in social movements in Cairo is interested in why women are participating in the revolution: whether their participation comes from a religious viewpoint or not. Most studies about Islamic women put women’s religiosity at the heart of things, however, she believes that it is often of a more political character. Her focus is on the Muslim Brotherhood as a strong movement against Mubarak and how they want to change the system to get a better life in the social structure as well.

Some things are obviously difficult to discuss openly, according to the informants, making Egyptian society puzzling. There are strong cultural norms and values that people often find themselves obliged to follow. One example is that money presupposes marriage because of the need to be able to buy an apartment and decorate it. This leads to the age of marriage being quite high, which in turn leads to late sexual debuts. This is altogether cultural, a matter of tradition and customs, said one of the informants. This makes young men go to Saudi Arabia to earn money. They then come back with enough money to get their own apartment, giving them the possibility to marry, pushing the age for men to marry to around 38. This custom is often questioned and sometimes refuted today according one informant. She described herself as a very difficult daughter when growing up and in the end when she told her family she was leaving, she said she did not want to stay in the country and suffer.

A male dominated society that has to be fought with women solidarity. (Ana)

Open discussion is the key to critical thinking; however, it is rare that children are encouraged to think about and discuss critically social and political matters at home. When asked by her daughter if the apartheid system in South Africa was actually legal or if it was illegal, one of the informants showed signs of resistance. She answered that this matter could not be answered in terms of legal or illegal because in the eyes of the authorities, it was legal, but in the eye of the opposition it was clearly illegal. Morally, if not at the time according to the law, she used the term resistance rather than illegal or legal.

Resistance to change authority, to change a regime, is always the right of the people. (Zarah)

However, she thinks the way her daughter is growing up is quite exceptional. She says only a few children of a small minority will have this chance. Slowly they are becoming more numerous, but she does not see a trend. There is a need for serious changes in the education system and the media coverage for anything to happen. In addition, policies need to change. She speaks about a new attitude among the masses that has to be implemented if a change is ever to occur.

To change the policy we need to change the system, we need to change the education system; we need to change the media policy. (Zarah)

The importance of the Internet and social media is discussed, some giving it great importance while others claimings it had much less importance than it was getting credit for. Some informants assert, however, that the Internet is an important source of information, even though it is not available to the majority of the population. The Internet has broadened the perception of how different issues are discussed in other countries, and this has given people courage to address issues and new ways of solving various problems. One example mentioned is that some time ago it was not possible to discuss democracy. Before the revolution, democracy was a topic people did not openly talk about.

Democracy used to be a taboo subject, equal to sexuality. (Rose)

Now there are various forums available to everyone, and people are even discussing subjects such as sex, which would have been completely unthinkable a while ago. It is certain that the Internet has helped many activists participate in the revolution. Information became accessible to more people and even if the formal education is poor, the Internet enabled people to find out things for themselves. Now you can go out on the Internet and see what other countries have done, including Third World countries, an informant said.

In the old days we used to have only two TV channels, Egyptian One and Egyptian Two, and they only reported what Mubarak had done or was going to do. Now, in the last ten years since Al Jazeera started, there are more than 200 channels sending all types of programs, also information about sex and democracy. (Rose)

There is definitely more opposition now and people have more options for getting information, which means it is easier to make up your own mind about what is happening. The newspapers are still very important, and no matter how big the Internet or Twitter is, the newspapers in a way still direct the information. Some are very Islamophobic and others are pro the regime. There are many varieties in the media and television, many of my informants do not watch TV any longer because the media are corrupt and you cannot trust what is said.

It was not only on Tahrir the revolutionaries were. The revolutionaries were everywhere. (Natalie)

One informant took a taxi once, and the car had stickers everywhere with revolutionary messages and she asked him if he was a revolutionary. He said: ” - Yes, but I have never been to Tahrir.” She asked him why and he responded that he was a Muslim living in Shubra (a neighborhood in Cairo with a large Coptic population). He is the only one in the neighborhood that can read and he usually reads the paper to the others, talking about what was in the news and letting his neighbors hear information he gathered. He had protested against the police before January 25th (2011). This is also a definition of a revolutionary: not just to go around and watch but also to spread the information. Another example is a group of revolutionaries that has an office somewhere close to Tahrir, showing a film every Tuesday. It is always some documentary film, or a film from another country that has gone through a revolution. The group is known for always being in opposition. They had an awareness campaign that was called Kathab (meaning ‘Liar’). They show Powerpoint presentations exposing violations of SCAF and how these violations are occurring all over Egypt. There is a website where these videos can be downloaded. Then people show it on projectors on the street. This is a source of information for everybody, even people without reading and writing skills.

One informant has collected testimonies from people active in the revolution and she says the best or at least the most active ones are those that have never been online. Some of the informants argue that it is not at all a ‘Twitter revolution’ as some media claim. Facebook was a medium but not the message. Blood made people want to go out on the streets to protest, many of them were illiterates. Revolutions in the past used letters to communicate and bring people together, but nobody called these previous revolutions poster revolutions or paper revolutions, one of the informants exclaimed.

A very common view amongst the informants is that the Western world called the revolution a Facebook Revolution. Because, they say, the West owns Twitter and Facebook.

Social media become very important if you do not have any education. It is a huge problem here because if some activist that is really famous on Twitter with several thousands of followers is arrested, there is a big fuss about it. A lot of people will stand up for him. (Hannah)

Graffiti, according to several informants, is another source for becoming knowledgeable. Especially for an illiterate, graffiti is important for disseminating information. It is easy to recognize someone by his face and the graffiti will tell a story about what has happened to him. It does not really matter if there is something written under the picture; the message will come across anyway, one informant said.

Journalists and others who come to Egypt to report on the revolution seldom speak to people from the outskirts of Cairo or taxi drivers who might not be that familiar with Twitter. These people just park their cars, go into Tahrir and ask others what is happening. This is how they get to know things, how they understand it is a revolution and what it is about.

‘To be a professional and a leader’ (9)

Despite strong antagonism against women in the public sphere, the position of women started to improve some years ago. Girls in Egypt are increasingly getting better educated and women are raising their voices and slowly increasing agency. A decision to allow women into high legal positions was taken even before the revolution. However, it is still the general understanding that it is difficult for women in some professions. The example is given that if someone is sick and needs to see a doctor, most people will still choose a male doctor. Some women choose a man even as their gynecologist, one informant said.

There are a number of brave and innovative women in society, the female informants said. Examples are given of female doctors who are leading health reforms within the doctor syndicate. This is one example of strong leaders in society who often pay a high personal price. However, their achievements and dedication are invaluable for societal change.

In many ways, Egypt is a very traditional society, but it is becoming more flexible. Things are slowly opening up for change and women are more accepted as leaders and professionals now than before, one informant said. Still, if a woman gets a high position in a company and is the manager of men, she will meet a lot of problems. In general, men do not accept a woman as their director or their president. This specific situation at a workplace will bring

many problems for a woman. For a woman to manage a high position in a workplace, she has to have a strong personality and be a very hard worker. Women leaders will face many problems and obstacles, putting them in a more difficult position than their male colleagues when realizing their goals.

But yeah, socially, it would be hard. She can't go out, meet with people and come back very late, invite men, and meet with men, people who are working with her, and most of them, most of them, they are men. (Zarah)

As shown previously, it is immensely difficult to participate in the wider society without support from your immediate family. This support has to be psychological and social as well as practical. However, even with family support, it is difficult to claim increased agency outside the home, owing to other power factors in the cultural structure.

'To be able to help others' (10)

One informant and his team at the organization where he works, were faced with a problem when they were working on a project about consciousness raising amongst women in a small village in Upper Egypt. The project was about informing women about their human rights. They needed to reach these women but did not understand how. This was a major problem because it was difficult just to go to someone's house and ask for his wife. If I ask for his wife, he may kill me, one of the informants said.

They solved the problem by first building up a small group of women who would go to people's houses and if then asked why they came, they would say that they wanted to teach his wife to be beautiful for him by offering makeup classes, or teaching her how to make good food with cooking lessons. The men would usually accept this offer and the team could come into the women's (or young girls) homes and teach them makeup and cooking and at the same time tell them about their rights. The result is, they claim, that every time the women and girls put on make-up or cook a meal they will remember about human rights. This is the kind of fieldwork that is required to reach out to the women that need to be reached, according to the male informants. They are quite skeptical about big non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which, in their opinion, do not put efforts in where they are needed nor in a way that works. Egyptian society is still a quite divided society, they say. However, they all agree that men and women are much the same and that separation of the sexes does not help cooperation between the two.

We will fight and as a man, I would think that every right you will gain, it comes from one side, so it will be an ideology, a strategy to work. We have to find a good strategy; it is how we can reach women, Egyptian women in Egyptian style, not by any kind of other style. (Focus group)

There is a great deal more needed than traditional education to change society. The informants are convinced that there has to be a change in awareness amongst women about their rights. Many women in society do not know they have rights. Then again, others know about their rights but need to be strengthened to act on the rights they have. Women's rights to equal education, their right to health, their right to be free are important for these men. Women are being discriminated against just because they are women, they say. Women can do as men can do, but they need to know this. They argue that men need to get this awareness too, but it will not be effective unless women themselves start fighting for their rights, and they have to do so in large numbers. No one can actually fight for anybody else. The fight has to start from within.

You need to fight for yourself, and then you can convince me to fight with you.
OK. (Focus group)

The male informants give an example of how awareness is raised in men in the work they are doing. The question they often ask is: Would you let another man abuse your daughter? They say that this can be a very delicate discussion and that unfortunately the ordinary Egyptian often believes that what has been passed on to him is right. That is how he was raised; the way his father treated his mother is the right thing to do.

Neither critical thinking nor rational moral thinking is there. (Focus group)

According to the focus group, there is an awareness among men in general that there is something called equal rights. Men are aware that a woman can work outside the home, that she can make decisions and that she can run an office. However, moving from awareness to a true establishment of equality in people's minds requires active work.

My vision of seeing change is, even if I made only 1 percent of the change, I'd be grateful. (Focus group)

The men talk about how to bring about change in society and agree that it has to come through a dialogue between different sectors. Two of the participants start telling the story of how they had been working together for six months when a third man came to the group. This new man began to ask questions and after a while, it became clear that he was a Christian and he hated Muslims. They laugh at the memory of this episode because neither of them (telling the story) had realized before that one of them was Christian and the other Muslim. It had never dawned on them because it was just not important for the work they were doing. This (new) contribution to the group dynamics made them realize that an open dialogue is important and that working with (or for) someone who is racist is very different and in many ways difficult.

We started to realize; Oh! You are Muslim, and I am Christian. And we laugh about it, yes, we realize this, but it was good to realize this that hey, it's not you or I, it's the system, so we need to get out of here! (Focus group)

They all agree on the importance of creating a dialogue. Opening the door for dialogue helps people have an open mind and breaks down the walls that people have been building up. Because, they say, in the end we are all the same, we are all human beings and we share many things. What is important in supporting women's rights is to create cooperation between men and women.

Because if you support women's rights you support half of your society too, and if you use this half of your society's power, you can be on a good level and you progress. (Focus group)

Billions of dollars are spent on support for women's rights in Egypt by different NGOs, unfortunately with very little return, several informants said. The experience gathered from working with informing and empowering women is that despite the money invested, the information does not reach that many women. It is like out of a supermarket, the male informants said. Everyone talks about women's issues but nothing happens. They are quite critical of the results of all the efforts made. They also talk about feminism and agree that there is a difference between feminism and women's rights. The approach is for them very important and connected to the 'Egyptian style', the culture that Egyptian citizens seem to share regardless of religion and background.

The informants argue that change has to come from within, not be forced upon anybody; however, this has to be done through improved education and free media. The information has to be embedded in training, in workshops and in strategies. In addition, messages sent out by the media, or even religious leaders, have to be (should be) that we are benefitting from each other and that the whole family has to be involved. The reason, they all agree, is that their society differs from the West. They have a strong family-oriented society whereas the West is more of an individual-oriented society. An individual-oriented society can be very good in many ways, the male informants agree, however, the way Egyptian society is built the family structure is very important. If you need help of any kind, it usually comes from the family and extended family, not from the government. Over time people have lost this community involvement and are beginning to complain that whoever needs help does not get it from either close family or other social structures.

Our culture has both bad and good aspects, but we need to include everyone. We have the Saudi attire (long robe) next to tight pants. We eat at Mc Donald's sometimes instead of having Egyptian food. We are able to include everybody, so why do we have all these problems? (Focus group)

They agree that Egypt has terrible problems, a lot of extremism and racism, which have become magnified in recent years. Motivation for change is rising however.

People have seen they can actually contribute to making a change. (Focus group)

The only way to participate on equal terms, however, seems to be to fight for it. In systems of discrimination girls and women often fall short, and the continuous challenge for women in Egypt is (apparently) never to stop pressing for their freedom and for their right to participate in the public sphere. This is the only way for women to gain the experience needed to be able to get influence. Anybody can be prevented from being a part of society, but it is even more difficult for women to participate. It is difficult for a woman to prove herself in a short period of time, and that short period is often the only time she gets.

We have a motivation to follow up, and now we have this feeling like this is our country! Before the revolution, the feeling, in general, was that Egypt was their (the state's) country. Mubarak country. Yeah, big people country, not our country. Now everyone, mad, sad, happy, worried, whatever his situation, is talking and caring about his country or her country. So this is my country, I am worried because of that. So it's a huge and vital change. (Zarah)

Through the process of the revolution, the people of Egypt have gained valuable understanding. The focus group thinks that Europe and the United States were not that different from Egypt 40 years ago. The need to protect the rights of the individuals and at the same time understand that Egyptian society evolved around the family is considered one of the biggest challenges for transformational change. They agree that someone can be a feminist, because it is good that many women are getting their rights, but at the same time, there is no need to be an extremist in that sense or in any sense, one of the informants said. It is important to learn from experience and that the outcome of the ways of the West is perhaps that they are trying to do it in a different way. Since there is plenty of money coming from various organizations and these often try to impose a specific way of looking at issues, it is important to consider the balance and the tension between these two poles..

Our country has regressed, that's why we are talking about the 50s and 40s, and women and such, we regressed, we could have been better now if we were at the same level as the West started at, we would have been even better right now, so why did we regress? So why do we have all these issues, when we didn't have these issues 50 – 60 years ago? That's a question that has a lot of answers, a lot of justifications, and a lot of explanations. (Focus group)

Not only whether it is possible to participate but also what kind of participation is a matter of debate. Women's civil or political participation comprise two different things, and even civil society participation is split in two: the charity part, where you want to help individually, and the more politically driven, where the drives and beliefs are engaged in a group, movement or political party.

Politics is for some people seen as a difficult task, and they are reluctant because they believe it is serious – and that politics is subjected to many dangers. Politicians are driven by something different from what drives people working in civil society and with charity. However, charity has also become a way of making a career; as in every other business, there is an opportunity to make a career where there is money. For ambitious people it is an attractive way to get ahead. No special degree is needed, but doors open for persons that have become or claim to be specialists in a field.

NGOs working with Human Rights, for example, attract people who want to work for their career, and many NGOs do not see the difference between human rights and women's rights. They do not see that the one does not include the other, but they tend to say that they are working for human rights and that this will give everyone rights if called for. This is not the case, the informant said. By default, they say everyone will enjoy human rights, which is not true.

There is now some training to become a volunteer and you can get a certificate, but many who come and want to be trained ask first: Will I get a certificate? It is a merit to put in your CV, so they complete the training without even listening and then they get their certificate. The more certificates you have and the more different training programs you have attended the better for your CV. Some people have a CV full of lots of skills, but in reality, they are just no good. There are no exams to test your knowledge in those programs the informant said. You can be a specialist in civil society work, without formal training, and still have a good record on your CV. This has been going on for the last 10 years.

International companies come here and address issues that Egyptians find quite trivial but that international companies find important. Still, that is where the money will go, one informant said.

I am a romantic! But I believe in volunteering, working with small goals in the beginning, costs will be small, but results will be satisfactory because small steps are taken – but millions of steps. You cover your nearest surroundings so there will be very little expense for the people involved in the work, but the bigger projects will take place and the money will come. (Leila)

Someone becomes a member of a specific NGO, and after years of volunteering, which is seen as an informal job, he or she might become a staff member. This is sought after. The NGOs has been more secure as employers than the

private sector. The government woke up and thought that the essence of rebellion in society was here, in this movement working for some kind of change, by training people, by documentation and so on. The government allows the activity, providing it is under controlled circumstances, for example work involving the environment, childhood and the like, and not explicitly political.

There is much bureaucracy, annual evaluations, financial reports, strategic plans, all has to be written in a certain way, on certain forms, a lot translated from Arabic, which is often done by a professional at a high cost. The whole thing is just a heavy burden of administration. Many employees sit in the office writing reports instead of working with whatever the organization's goal is. The whole economy is devoted to administration and rent. What the grass roots civil society finds trivial, the organizations often find very important because this is where the money is.

This is how social work and charity work become business. The organizations will go and do things even if they are very trivial. The money goes to the wrong things; 70 % of the budget goes to salaries, which can be the salaries of persons from the giving country and the remaining 30 % goes to administration and some activity. Leila started working for the civil society in 1993 and she says that the voluntary organizations have suffered. The tourist business has also suffered, and millions of people formerly employed in the tourist industry or the NGO's (many women) are now unemployed. However, although women have a great deal of experience, this does not mean that they can easily be employed in civil or political commissions.

'To have affiliation' (11)

As discussed previously it is difficult for women to engage in what for them are meaningful activities and to participate outside the house. Girls and women meet a lot of resistance within the social structure. Some informants suggest that a woman will meet less resistance from family and others if she can prove herself successful. There is an agreement that women will continue to be pressured and everyone will let her know that she is not quite free to do as she pleases, which makes it difficult to be successful. However, small changes have been experienced with the revolution.

Lots of things have happened since the revolution. Before the revolution, it (the society) was the men's business. After the revolution, it is a business for everyone, particularly young people. (Zarah)

The possibility (for everyone) to participate has increased but education, together with some other factors is still important for women to be able to be affiliated in different organizations.

Meeting with friends to discuss politics is, however, something women are starting to do. The critical factor, according to several informants, is not whether women can meet and be active citizens; rather, it seems to be in what way they can be active and start to get involved in political issues. It has been more common to be involved in personal family life than to engage in political issues although women are not entirely excluded, just inexperienced.

Before the revolution, this classification was very clear. We have two sorts of people, (1) those who are active or care about politics like me and all my friends and (2) normal people who are just taking care of families, like my sister; she was active before but nowadays she is focusing 100 % on her family and that's it. So this is normal, they have enough education and everything, but they just don't care. (Zarah)

The above quote suggests that many women are inactive and not at all engaged in political issues. However, the civic engagement of helping people by, for example, cooking for the protesters in the Square is another way of supporting change in society. This social involvement might not always be actively political, but it is an active effort to contribute to change in society.

Besides the challenges that women meet at home, there are a great many challenges outside. One of the most pressing issues to fight for, according to several of the informants, is the Personal Status Law¹⁰. This is urgent, though very difficult. There is a problem when gender inequality is inscribed in the legal system, where the men are the main players, several of the informants said. Women who want to change this law are not (specifically) fighting against men. The targets are rather the social and cultural structures and other women who do not approve of what women who want to change things in society are doing.

To be an activist means you will meet challenges. From your family, from outside your house and from within. (Leila)

If a person is allowed to be an activist, she will be followed by a set of conditions, which means that she has to succeed in her private sphere first, with her house, her children.

It becomes a battle of warriors. And usually you have to fight; it is a chain of battles till you get what you want. (Salima)

The experiences of resistance by the informants are that challenges met during the course of increasing activism make a person strong. Since there have been

¹⁰ Personal Status Law organizes all aspect of family life, including (among other things) child marriage, polygamy and unequal divorce laws. The Personal Status Law has been on the agenda of the feminist movement since the late 19th century.

so many challenges, they have had plenty of practice of fighting all the time, trying to overcome injustice and inequality.

We are fighting to be visible. We are trying to participate which requires that we fight, either fight or stay at home. So women who do not want to stay at home and play the traditional role, are fighting hard. (Zarah)

The fights these women take, they take for themselves, for their principles and their daily lives, but also for the lives of others. It becomes a double fight one informant said. She explains that in the building where she lives, besides fighting the *usual fight*, she also has to fight for the children of the janitor.

He has two very young children and the neighbors ask them to do things all the time. They have to carry heavy things up the stairs and run errands for the tenants. It is against children's rights to use them like that. (Zarah)

She adds that it is not only against children's rights and against basic human rights, it is against logic, motherhood and everything in the world, meaning that people need to realize that these children want to study just like their own children. This is a huge challenge and a lot of work is done in daily interaction with people to make them understand this.

The fact that someone stands up for a child and tells him/her that he/she matters, and that they are human beings like everyone else, that they are normal and strong, is very important for these children she said: giving these children a sense that they can actually make a change for themselves. These battles become constant because the fight is for yourself, to be (become) a person, making it a personal fight, and at the same time the fight is for others less fortunate, which means that they are really trying to fight the system. With the revolution, the intentioned effects of vested interest are dissolved, opening the door for new opportunities, including groups marginalized in the past.

And we might find that they are active in any of the new political groups even if it is not a political party it is a new group of interest. Then they invite us to go and after a while we will get active in some. This is very common now, and you can see it everywhere, particularly with young girls. So young girls after the revolution are very active, they didn't take a position, but they are very active and actually they are like a powerful force these new groups. (Zarah)

The low level of education in the country has made it critical to seek knowledge outside the formal education institutions and the media. Non-formal and informal learning channels are beginning to provide different sorts of information. However, there are still not many youth organizations in Egypt, which makes it more difficult to engage, especially if, as a young person, you do not know what you are looking for. One informant considers herself lucky because she was selected to participate in an EU project where she got the

chance to go on a course and travel to Turkey. This was the first time she understood there was knowledge to acquire outside the formal system. It happened when she was a little bit older, at the age of 24. Before that, she could not afford to go because part of the course had to be paid for by the participants. There are also often problems with travel permits. Later when she began to work as an organizer, she met difficulties with the travel permits for the other young participants as well. For young people this is often for financial reasons but also problems with visas. For some it was very difficult to get a permit to travel. She considers this is a huge problem because these exchanges are important for understanding the contemporary world. The young people that had the opportunity to join had the chance to try something new and different and came back with new-found knowledge. This non-formal education works well; however, it is very important who organizes them, she said. Intercultural learning and team-building are important, but also informing about rights and citizenship opportunities.

I am educated and everything, and had worked for many years before joining the youth program, but I had never heard about human rights or citizenship. Never. (Hannah)

At her university, there were never any courses or even discussions about human rights or women's equality. However, for the last ten years, people have talking about Human Rights more and more, she said. When the youth programs were launched, they offered the first opportunity for young people to talk to others from other countries. This is developing on a personal level as well as on an academic level. Most young people are very open to new knowledge and they are curious. They want to travel because they are interested in meeting new people. They engage and something happens. The exchange is imperative; it is much about meeting something new and different, which gives these exchanges an educational value. It is great with parties and the fun bit, she said, but there has to be something more. That is why it is difficult to maintain these exchanges, and why it is so important who is organizing them.

Even if there are youth centers in Egypt, they are few, not well organized and not very good. They do not organize activities that could develop knowledge or skills at all, one informant said. In Egypt, many organizations are religious organizations. They are very skilled but in a different way. Mosques are not that skilled, some informants said, claiming that they mimic what the churches do but with religious pretensions. They just try to develop religious interests, but never anything about citizenship or human rights. These organizations are driven by people that do not know anything about human rights. Furthermore, they would avoid the subject even if they did know anything about it because they grew up in the religious environment.

Their upbringing makes it more difficult for them to leave everything they have been taught and just go and proclaim something else.

In addition, there is a good deal of corruption. People are granted money for a program, but then it is not organized or it is organized badly. The evaluations that are made are not doing anything, because they put the wrong person in the wrong place one informant said, arguing that national coordinators are sometimes also corrupt.

There is growing opposition to this kind of inequality where women come together in a strategical way, making the intentions for change work through common intentions. This is understood as a reason for the increasing engagement in social movements. Social movements are considered the fourth source to gain awareness, spaces where it is possible to engage consisting of different channels in the community, including formally or informally supported social movements. Women's engagement in civil society and in social movements is increasingly seen as something positive. It is becoming more accepted, and sometimes men are even proud of their active daughters or wives.

As for me personally I grew up listening to my mother talking about the first Egyptian revolution, talking about capitalism, talking about socialism, talking about when the revolution kicked out the king, talking about many things. So this first piece of information helped me a lot to understand, or to develop my, at least my desire to read more, to know more. (Zarah)

This informant became an active citizen when she was 15 years old but the start was very difficult. Every Saturday she had to convince her mother and grandmother to let her out of the house so that she could attend the meetings which they knew nothing about. Her organization was informal, meaning it did not have formal official permission. The government refused to give it, but they continued with their meetings anyway. This was a social movement that was developed by a few friends and became a spark for further engagement. They were a small group of young women meeting regularly every Saturday afternoon.

I can easily say that this was my main and my first and second and third source of information, that changed my attitude, that opened my eyes, that taught me research, that taught me politics, that taught me sociology, that taught me gender of course, and feminism, that taught me everything. (Zarah)

These gatherings are perhaps particularly important for women because they provide a space for women to develop their ability to get information and knowledge and to frame their attitudes.

I discovered myself there, I discovered who I am, I discovered what I want, and discovered what I like. (Zarah)

Society is still dominated by men, and whether you succeed as a woman or not, is all about how you organize yourself, Zarah said, how effective your group is and how effective you are at cutting a space for yourself in public and political life. Society is not used to women taking space, so it will be a difficult task to make a change.

I think any women's initiative has to fight with this socially established tradition of male domination; this might not be, this might not mean that men are [actively] fighting women but it is just that society is organized like that. And it [society] doesn't recognize women's agency. So I think it is a huge challenge first to prove that you are doing this, that you are capable of doing this, and this is huge and I think this is where a lot of women give up, and return to where they came from. Because you are not just fighting for your cause, you are first fighting to break through and I think this needs... this needs a lot of fighting.
(Ana)

One of the informants takes her sister as an example. She has been constantly asking about what is going on. She wanted to learn more about the presidential election and to understand what is happening in the country. The two sisters have had many discussions lately and it is the first time ever her sister has shown any interest in politics. It is the same for many women in Egypt. They want to understand and get involved. People are in a way educating themselves, getting information through discussions with friends and through media, mostly social media since the media here are still corrupted. People have to meet others and see that there are differences of opinion. It is the only way to become open-minded and this is what the religious institutions are against, one informant said.

This openness towards women engaging in civil society seems quite new. It has changed in the last couple of years. Today, many people are even encouraged, but the old way of thinking still lingers on in some people. Some people in society still view women as they did in ancient times, thinking that they should not be in public space at all, one informant said. This view is widespread in society, according to the informants. Many people in society think that women should stay at home with their kids and their husband, but this way of thinking by half the population is becoming increasingly rare several informants said. This mentality is not connected to generations but rather to upbringing, personality and external influences, making it difficult to identify how a change can best be achieved.

Meetings for talking about and discussing politics are arranged all the time. This did not happen before the revolution. However, even now it depends much on an initiating force. When the interviews were conducted, this force was said to be young girls. The groups that meet are mixed, with both young women and young men most of the time. One informant states that it is rare to find separated groups with only young men or only young women. Then she corrects herself and says that it is rather difficult for her to know because she

was an activist before the revolution and had a different platform to start from. Still, she thinks that in general people are more aware now and that the political agenda plays a more prominent role than it used to. Before, middle-class women cared about their family and enjoying life. Even though many do not have a theoretical basis of politics, they are acquiring information and building knowledge to be active in contributing to change. If women are to be able to fight for themselves and their principles, they have to know about the rights to which they are entitled.

At a school where one informant works, The students have come out in protest more than ever during the past year. Lively debates are going on among students, something that would never have happened before the revolution. It would not happen before that a student talked about her or his religious affiliation. People kept their identities to themselves and did not talk about it. This is seen as a problem but nobody would speak up and announce that she/he belonged to a minority. However, since the revolution things have changed and people are starting to open up for discussions of these issues.

I think it is quite huge for this to happen! (Ana)

People are not afraid anymore and as a result, they feel more empowered and more creative. Before the revolution, this informant thought that the students were not capable of anything, but it turned out they had many interesting ideas, which they had kept to themselves before. Either they were just bored, or the revolution has created new opportunities to say something for those who have something to say. This gives them energy and a feeling that they can serve the community.

This is what happens when you are less afraid. (Ana)

The possibility to discuss everything, even things that previously were taboo or prohibited is important for strengthening democracy and equal rights. Rose says that when she was abroad people asked her if she thought that Egypt would ever enjoy democracy. She says that it is not a matter of democracy *or* human rights, for her it is her human right to decide what to do and how to live her life.

It is my human right to walk in the street and have nobody approach me or speak to me. It is my human right to drink what I want, to respect my mother and the wife of my brother who wear a full veil. For me it's not Western, for me it's Human Rights. (Rose)

Many young people that join different organizations do not have any previous knowledge of human rights or the opportunities they have as citizens.

‘To have a voice’ (12)

There is a change in attitude and a high level of resistance from women in all segments of society that is starting in women’s small, everyday gestures.

Women are no longer silent. (Leila)

One of the informants once attended a conference. She explained that she was engaged and well informed about the topic. The other participants (all men) were shocked by her attendance. They thought she should go home, that she did not have the time or the smartness to be as persistent as she was. She stayed until the conference ended, but it was a difficult ordeal and it took both courage and high spirits. These women work with great tenacity and will never give up. To use equal refutation in their everyday meetings is one way of slowly changing the scene. The change in people’s attitude towards the prevailing gender norms has gradually become noticeable since around the year 2000.

If my husband sometime is out and does not call to say when he will be home or where he is, I will do the same later. I will answer if he calls and say I am out, I will be back later. This is my way of showing that I am not any different, whatever the men can do, I can do too. (Leila)

There is unity in believing that the situation will not change without a new cultural way of thinking. There has to be a way of thinking without the conviction that a person has to be patient and suffer until he/she dies, because only then will he go to heaven, one informant said. Without this awareness for the possibility of societal change among people, nothing will change.

Since women are seen as less powerful than most men just because they are women, the community finds it harder to trust that they can take on the burden of leadership.

Leadership issues are a cultural predicament. (Aisha)

It is possible for women to be leaders and have influence in every domain, however. Higher social status may help to increased possibilities. There are no legal or other restrictions for women to hold leading positions in society. However, this is not common and the informants testify that it is never easy. There are several obstacles to overcome before having real influence and control over decisions. One informant explains that in a rich family, women can theoretically have money, but this money is never under her control. It is under her father’s, her husband’s or her brother’s control. So she can be part of the wealth, but she does not have any control over any big issues. This means that she might enjoy the benefits of the money but not the capital. The benefits might be a nice house, a car, traveling and access to a wealthy life, but not the

decisions as to what to do with the money. She does not have access to the decision-making or the capital. If a woman wants, for example, to take all her money and build a hospital for children, she cannot do that. Generally speaking, she does not have the right to make that decision. This means that most rich families have businesswomen in the family, but they are not decision makers. There are a few exceptions, but in general, it is not possible. The power and the decisions are with the family males. This clear hierarchy in society is primarily a matter of class, related to the wealth and education level of the family members (giving a family some level of status in society).

One common view among the male informants is that feminist groups scare women because they are either too liberal or extreme in some other way. Women dare not approach feminist groups, thinking that feminists are perhaps the enemies of men. The belief is that since many women in Egyptian society are family-oriented mothers, wives and daughters, the feminist approach will not work. The men in the focus group believe that bringing the whole family and thus the whole of society into the debate would be a more successful approach. The strategies they have been using to inform women about their rights have been criticized for not being very straightforward, but they refute the critics and say it has to be seen as a win-win situation. Their skepticism towards feminism is interesting from the perspective of what they call the Egyptian style. They seem to agree that women too are scared off by feminist groups and that the way to get any change in society has to come from something else.

I think people now think that the (whole) family, or sometimes the children approach is better to get women's rights than being a feminist in the old type of way. It is actually sometimes repulsive and it puts a lot of men off. It also scares women sometimes. (Focus group)

The female informants however, think differently. Several of the informants in the study are themselves actively engaged in various feminist organizations. There has always been racism and bigotry and all that, but it has gotten worse. All the informants talk about the importance of experience and good role models.

You know if you give them a good model, that's to give them hope. When you give them hope, they will change. (Focus group)

There is agreement that for change to take place, you have to be able to approach women, which means you have to get the men with you, and that is a problem. However, there is a belief that with access to information and education, through fieldwork targeting both women and men, the change will come from within people.

Summary – Cultural Structure

When analyzing the informants' statements regarding what they valued doing and being most, 'to be active and safe in the community' was the most prominent desire. This valued functioning is in many ways basic for achieving other valued functionings in the informants' everyday life in the public sphere.

The fact that women are expected to stay at home makes it difficult and less likely for girls and women to get involved outside the home. This makes it difficult to attain a number of valued functionings within the cultural structure. To be a professional and a leader is an often discussed valued functioning in the cultural structure. In the analysis of the informants' statements, being a professional and a leader often involved both having affiliation and being able to help others. To some extent, it also precedes the functioning of having influence.

Violence against women in the public sphere, something that families feel they need to protect them from, is at the same time condoned in culture. This is to be understood as an underlying social conversion factor (Sen, 1992, Robeyns, 2005), making the functioning of 'an active participant in society and still be safe' difficult to achieve. It is in the culture that women have to be protected in different ways, and accordingly girls and women are faced with both justifying their contribution through participation and assuring their family that they are safe while away from home. This is seen by many of the informants as of a way of being controlled.

The conditions for women to participate in the cultural structure are difficult, in part because of the violence highlighted throughout the informants' testimonies. This violence can continue because violence against women and against children is part of the culture. Misogyny (hatred of women) manifests itself in many ways in women's everyday life. The informants talk not only about direct violence but also about belittlement, discrimination and objectification. The women's statements in the interviews bear witness that this is an effective way of silencing women.

There are some general criteria, socio-economic and personal, for participation in the civil society. One general criterion is that the support of your family and clan is of great importance. Recognizing women and men as equal will facilitate the support needed. A woman (unlike a man) needs the support of her husband and from both their families, even from the children if they are grown up. This means that many women who are active in civil society are middle-aged. When the children have grown up, women's support might be higher due to fewer burdens at home; the women themselves can argue they have the time and that they would like to spend this time serving the community.

One often raised valued functioning is education. Since the formal education system is failing, a great demand for informal channels has arisen. The informants' claims for greater agency have come about through the growing

informal networks of knowledge. These networks are spaces in which the corporate agent (Archer, 2000) agrees on shared projects and engages in shared practices.

Not only organized movements are active in sharing information and knowledge; people on the streets, revolutionary educationalist are also active in getting a deeper understanding of cultural and political phenomena and sharing it with others. Communication that is more open is seen in the community, where subjects that recently were taboo are also discussed and understood in a new light.

This corresponds with the valued functioning of being a professional and a leader. Powerful or significant families more often support their women and most (the majority) of the women holding a position in society come from a family with a good name. The status of the family is not always dependent on wealth however. A family can also be in an eligible position through good contacts with the right people. This makes a narrow pathway for women that have an agenda, support and a strong personality. Their contribution might start with a career in voluntary work. Intentions to make changes for individuals and society are understood to have a solid threshold in the NGOs, with voluntary work as an awareness process for the beneficiaries. The valued functioning 'To be able help others' is connected to equal respect, knowledge in democratic values, and affiliation.

According to Archer (1995), interaction always achieves structural elaboration. This elaboration, however, does not always develop intentionally. Violence has proven to be an effective way to suppress women's voices, thus effectively preventing structural elaboration from taking place. A new partial openness in society could be observed with the overthrow of Mubarak in 2011, making it possible for people to meet and exchange ideas and experiences between different divides in society, which is a great way of spreading information. However, since Al-Sisi became president in 2014 it has once again become more difficult for people to gather together. The incipient openness in society has been withdrawn. The possibility to meet is important as it gives an opportunity to acquire the skill of critical thinking and sharing critical knowledge. Opportunities to exchange knowledge generate a stronger feeling of common goals among people, with the result that people have more courage today to speak up, despite the harassment and violence that is still common on the streets. Some men also show solidarity, even though it is still quite rare for them to support feminist organizations openly, according to the focus group.

The problem of women's possibilities to enjoy safe participation in the public sphere is twofold: there is both a cultural inertness and a political unwillingness to recognize women as equal. Egyptian society seems to be facing two types of challenge, one on a cultural level and the other on a political level. In both cases, however, the conservative religious government (which was in power 2012/2013) and their more conservative interpretation of Islam, and the

non-democratic takeover in July 2013 by the military government are seen as part of the problem of the advancement of women's agency in society.

The informants' claims for increased agency are to be understood as a political act, founded in opposition to the traditional values that are deeply rooted in Egyptian society.

7. The Political Structure

This chapter will give an account of the informants' perception of the conditions and agency for women in the political sphere. In Egypt before the revolution, it was very difficult, and sometimes even illegal, to make your voice heard. This applied to both women and men. A general feeling conveyed by the informants is that before the revolution, things were just happening. People accepted many things without reflecting on how they would affect them in their daily life. For some time after the uprising in 2011 it was easier for people to raise their voices; now, however, it is again difficult.

One of the most prominent valued functionings when describing conditions in the political structure is to have access to education of quality. Quality formal education, the informants seem to agree, may also give access to democratic values. To be able to engage in democratic values is another valued functioning among the informants. These democratic principles involve being equally represented as well as being equally protected. These four valued functionings both presupposes and affect each other. To have access to quality education that is based on democratic values may provide the prerequisites for representation and thus, to a certain extent, security.

Some improvements for women started in the legal enactments even before the revolution one informant said. In the last ten years or so before the revolution, there was an increasing tendency for women to take an active part in civil society movements and in unofficial initiative to work on certain issues. This was made possible in part thanks to Suzanne Mubarak, the wife of ex-president Mubarak; these laws are often referred to as Suzanne Mubarak's laws. Suzanne Mubarak was in favor of women's empowerment and started some projects to enhance the position of women. These were not necessarily intended to *really* improve things, but in general they contributed to women's empowerment, giving women additional agency to have influence over various decisions. This resulted in some changes in legislation that seemed to be in favor of women. Even the ban of female judges was lifted, though this has not yet resulted in many women judges being appointed in practice.

The informants do not feel that women are entitled in reality to have influence on decisions concerning their immediate sphere or the policy decisions concerning women. However, as a result of the improved rights for women, many women started to play a more active part in society and to feel that there were in fact, real opportunities for change. The recent revolution is in part due

to women's increasing demands for social and personal changes through greater equality in the political structure.

'To have access to quality education' (13)

The formal education in the public schools is heavily criticized and several informants say that it is not advisable to enroll a child into a public school if you want them to learn anything.

You will actually put an end to your child's brain if you place them there. (Ana)

The Egyptian educational system is divided into several different lines of schooling. These are the public (state) Egyptian schools, the international schools teaching in a foreign language and the religious schools.

The informants are unanimous in their statements about the quality of public (formal) education. It is far below the mark and the whole education system in the country needs to be changed if the society is to change.

Everything comes back to education. (Amina)

It is difficult to create space to talk about the differences between different fractions in society. It is still a challenge to get people to understand the importance of education several of the informants say. If they do send their children to school, the education is often of bad quality. This is something that people in general are aware of and suffer from. This bad quality results in education not being seen as the first and foremost means to learn and improve oneself. Egypt is not a society where you learn and improve yourself through education. One reason might be the widespread corruption.

Education is not linked with 'a good life' in people's minds. (Ana)

The men in the focus group all agree that there is a problem with education in the whole country. The teachers need to learn the basic, one of the informants said.

Because they are the ones teaching our children how to behave and it is important that the adults in school do not take their own ideology or thinking and feed it to the children. We need to stick with the book, and of course, we need to work on the book. (Focus group)

According to several of the informants, education is intentionally bad in order to control resistance from the citizens. There is agreement that the former government (the Mubarak regime) had a deliberate strategy to keep the people ignorant. There are many signs that Mubarak was not especially interested in

letting the Egyptian people take advantage of a good education. The word ignorant is used intentionally with the explanation that ignorant people usually stay poor and poor people are easier to control by the government. They have fewer, or no means to object. Their everyday life is based on how to get food and where to live, giving very little time for thinking about politics or any inequalities.

Yes, ignorant, and they don't have to think about anything, they are seeking food, seeking a wife, and that's all, so they are like sheep. (Aisha)

This way of seeing others is common; the hierarchical arrangements run deep in people and it is difficult as an individual to break the structural patterns.

When people are busy getting food to put on the table, they do not have time to be politically engaged, one informant said. Thus keeping people uneducated is a way of oppressing them, because illiterate people do not have the means to resist as easily. Control is retained by cutting information and destroying formal education. There is, however, optimism amongst the informants, and many are quite certain that change will happen, even though it will take time. This is also apparent in the school system: people who can afford to, enroll their children in private schools. Nevertheless, education has failed even if there is a difference between private and public schools. Most schools have a system of rote learning in which the teachers do not teach, and sometimes do not even show up.

We are missing a political will to have change. But after the revolution we have to push for that. Yes, this is number one. Number two; our education needs another revolution. And everything in the process, the educational process, is from the beginning preparing your child to be a student, they go to school, for the classes, for the places you sit in, for the books you read, for the way of your educating, how you educate them, for what you want him to be. (Salima)

Change in the system is sought for, but, the political will seem to be missing. There seem to have been little interest in the education system in all the various regimes in power. Many informants share the experience of insufficient teaching at school. There is also an agreement among the informants that there are several aspects to a good education. Students that have learned how to read and write by the end of a course cannot be said to have obtained a full education. To be literate is much more than just knowing how to read and write. Independent and critical thinking is not part of the current curriculum in the public school in Egypt (Loveluck, 2012). The teaching method is based on memorization, so the students often have difficulty in expressing their own standpoints. This substandard education affects both boys and girls, but since girls are more often the one that lack an education altogether, it is they who draw the short straw.

If you are poor you don't necessary think poorness is a good thing, and because we have bad education we don't believe that it is good education. We know it is bad education, and we suffer from knowing. (Rose)

Often there are about 80-90 students in a class. Teachers in public schools can sometimes barely read and write themselves, and they often know very little about the subject they are appointed to teach. Teachers are generally under-paid, making them unmotivated to do a good job. The average monthly salary for a teacher is about 300 L.E.¹¹ (app. 30 Euro in 2012), which is not enough to support a family on. This has generated a parallel educational system, a tutoring system whereby teachers give private lessons after school hours to students whose parents can afford the fees. This system does not promote a progressive society.

'To engage in democratic values' (14)

It seems that the view on women is changing; increasingly women can be seen as leaders. The contradiction is still present, however, and many of the informants express various difficulties involved in participating in the community. Society seems to be divided between those who believe in traditional gender norms based on religious rules and those who believe in a society founded on national secular laws based on human rights.

There is, however, a noticeable change that appeared with the revolution. Although there are still some people fighting this change and the new ways, the new way is slowly getting broader acceptance. During the first 18 days of the revolution women were there, some to bring food, some to help in health units and others to make statements. In the election in November (2011), the women were there at the election stations in the sun to make their voice heard.

The only solution is to keep going, even in hard times. (Salima)

If a woman would like to participate or express her opinion in the community, she has to fight for it, the informants say. The reason is that this is seen to collide with women's obligations in the personal sphere as well as the expectations of her in the community sphere. But then again, the revolution has changed something at its core.

Before there used to be a phenomenon based much on class. But now things are also getting fragmented within families. There are no norms any longer. We are heading towards a new and difficult era. (Leila)

¹¹ From an interview in 2012.

A common idea amongst the informants is that the revolution has been building up for many years, but it was not until during the revolution itself that people started to realize what they were working towards. When opposing the military regime there were massive efforts to try to get the four biggest liberal leaders to join, but these efforts ended into nothing, leaving the opposition very shattered and unwilling to compromise and pull together. All the liberal parties believe they are different, but looking at them from a wider perspective, they all want the same thing: freedom and democracy. The informants all confess to being 'secular activist', making the opposition against the regime within the group quite similar. They were unanimous in what they did not want but disunited what should replace the ousted government.

One informant is involved with coordinating a feminist correlation. This is an openly feminist correlation not just a women's correlation making it harder on the employees. This has caused problems, but they insist on continuing to work and face every challenge, and to widen the space for themselves and for the organization. They also have on their agenda work on economic and social rights for women, especially rights for working women. The work to empower working women is active in many areas. Now they are also dedicated to campaigning against violence against women. Harassment in the streets has increased, and they are now working on productive health and sexuality.

During the revolution, the possibility to be part of development processes changed; now there are voices saying participation is for everyone, although there is still strong opposition to this. However, the way society is divided has changed. Although political Islam increased during the revolution, ideas concerning women's place in society can differ even within one family. The increase in the number of men showing solidarity with women's struggle has also become apparent since the revolution.

The men in the study are active in different political movements, all of which are working towards building a free and democratic country for all groups in society. One of the informants talks about the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization through his own experience, as an ex-member. There is sadness in his eyes when he says he has friends on both sides, both on the religious traditionalist side and on the side where the adherents support a division between religion and state affairs. His conviction of the need for a free and democratic (secular) country makes him keep up the struggle.

They all agree that the new awareness and change of mindset for the Egyptian people has to be connected to what they refer to as the Egyptian style. There are things that work in other countries that will not work in Egypt. They point to misguided international aid projects that just do not work out.

Many of the informants believed that the country would be better off if the military (SCAF) were to win the election in 2012. They believe that this would facilitate the establishment of democracy in the country.

If the Muslim Brotherhood wins the Islamic trend will rule Egypt for the next 50 to 70 years. We will need a hundred revolutions to get them out. It's not like Mubarak, it took us thirty years to get Mubarak out, it will take another 90 years to get them (the Muslim Brotherhood) out. (Focus group)

By letting the SCAF choose the president, many activists believe that they (the people) can remove him sooner. However, the activists also believed that the Mursi regime would legislate against women's rights, especially in the constitution. This was also in fact the case. After the presidential election in March 2013, decision-makers tried even harder to make women stay at home, rooting their arguments deeper in traditional values and women's role of reproduction.

They try to make the women just a body, without any thinking. (Focus group)

Women have to take seriously the few chances they get until they can get better chances, making it a question of struggle. The changes of opportunity have already started, but there are still several obstacles in the way.

Definitely you can never give up. If you want to be in the political field and the public sphere, you will be, but definitely you will meet challenges, definitely, but if you have the will, you will get it! (Salima)

Many informants say this is the first time they will go to an election. Several of them have never voted for anything. In their case this is not because of lack of interest or that there have not been opportunities to do so, but rather because it was not possible before.

It wasn't possible, OK, if I want to go I can go, but there were people who hit you when you go, you have to fill out a lot of administrative papers to go and it wasn't easy, and then in the end they choose the one they want anyway. (Aisha)

There were two reasons for people not to vote: bureaucracy and violence. There are many problems involved in trying to attend an election and the outcome is considered not fair anyway. That is why this last election was a victory because the people were there.

The social interaction that the revolution brought about has changed the agency. Despite difficulties, changes are happening. The activists came from all social classes. The call for change appealed to many women whatever their socio-economic or other social belonging. Many groups in society that were not politically active before the revolution are now more able to participate in various ways. Political engagement in the civil society has increased with the revolution. In addition, the women within the Islamic movement, which is a patriarchal, hierarchical and male dominated group, have become a much more visible sub-group.

The situation was different, because at this time, they were very hidden, they didn't want to show themselves, and when I met them there was a lot of security, but now because of the revolution, you have democracy, they go outside and show themselves. (Rose)

There is a distinguishable change for several groups in society, according to several informants. Since the revolution, the engagement is of a political and not solely of a religious nature, several of the informants say. The Muslim Brotherhood is making a strong statement against the Mubarak regime. The Muslim Brotherhood understands itself as an opposition movement that wants to change the society and the state, and women have done a lot to reach this goal.

Since the revolution started, there have been projects that specifically aim at the poor communities in Egypt to end illiteracy by 2015. There are many programs like this, but illiteracy is still high, especially amongst women. The challenge seems to be as much a political as a cultural gender issue.

One of the informants ran for a higher position at her workplace and asserts that the reason why she did not get appointed was that she is an activist against the former regime. She claims she was not stopped because she is a woman but rather because she has a history as an opponent of the Mubarak regime. This may be seen as evidence that there are, in fact, opportunities for women to make a place for themselves in the public space.

Now, when people have seen that there are possibilities to make changes and that their action gives results, there has been a change in attitude. During the few years since 2011, there also seems to be a decrease in fear. The security system, the police and kidnappings are still the same issues as before the revolution but people are more defiant. The SCAF is much worse than the Mubarak regime according to some of the informants. One of the informants tells the story of a friend of hers who was arrested in Mohammed Mahmoud Street and spent two days in prison. When he got out he stated that everyone is sexually harassed in prison, men as well as women. The police are still killing people but somehow people manage to stand up against all this repression.

Now we have agency. A revolution is also...people have started to feel that they have agency because before they did not feel they had agency. (Ana)

Women have realized with the revolution that they are threatened and that the few changes that were made before the revolution are weak and fragile. Within the process of activism, something new has been established, coming from a new solidarity and understanding for women's predicaments. There is also great deal of support from male activists for female activists. Women working on projects especially targeting harassment are getting plenty of support from

men activists. This is also a way of processing fear, when revolutionaries support one another. Revolutionaries are supporting one another and perhaps later the social support will come from ordinary people in the streets.

I think it is the support of women for women; it is not really family or society, because that might need more time to change. You know, for families to be ok with talking openly about harassment, for example, or about homosexuality or something. For women the support comes from women, from the idea of solidarity, and that's also linked to political activity. (Ana)

Women have to set their own priorities and express themselves. Many of the informants assert that the only way to move forward is to face the personal challenges.

'To be equally represented' (15)

There is agreement among all the informants about the importance of women's representation on different levels. The informants all, to various degrees, see the possibilities for women to become anything they want to be. Society seems to have become more flexible with a change in people's mindset and mentality. However, even if open-minded men support women, this does not guarantee the support they need to run for office, for example. People do not care about what their contribution might be or about anybody's right to be in the public sphere. The concern is mainly about women's traditional place in the social structure.

Women have a problem because they are women. (Salima)

In 2012, Bothania Kamel, was the first woman ever to run for president in Egypt. However, a president candidate needs 30,000 names (signatures) collected from all regions of the country if she is to present herself as a candidate. Bothania Kamel did not manage to get them, partly because no one thought she would win anyway, and partly because of corruption one informant said. Without financial support and with no great social support on account of being a woman, it is difficult to get on in politics. This describes the reality for some of the informants, when it is very difficult to become part of the system, and in the long run, of the political structure.

The revolution has empowered people to oppose the unequal structures. Several of the informants are certain that if it had not been for Mohammed Bouazizi from Tunis who set himself on fire, there would not have been a revolution in Egypt. Before, people (both women and men) would not have really dared to believe that they could do it.

There is some disagreement amongst the informants as to whether the constraints women meet, when opposing the current regime, for example, are

mainly political or cultural. Egyptian society is traditionally a male-dominated society and the political system does not support women (Bauer and Dawuni, 2016). This is evident in several political fields.

The quota system is one (al-monitor, 2015). This system clearly shows the link between the cultural and the political structures. Quotas were offered to help women ahead, but these were withdrawn. The last time there were withdrawn was only one month after they had been launched. The reason for withdrawing this opportunity for women was said to be the revolution.

Corruption is seen as another major problem and is said to be the root of many of Egypt's problems. The corruption results from both economic issues and acts that somehow may benefit some people. Egyptians are a very religious people; this goes for Muslims and Christians alike. One recurring reflection among the informants is that the most corrupt people are at the same time very religious people.

There is a hypocrisy that has become somehow grounded in society. The same laws and norms that are taught and preached are at the same time often transgressed, sometime with ease. (Samir)

The hypocrisy rooted in the cultural norms is blamed on the government. The government, which should be distinguishing between right and wrong, has not clearly implemented this function in any form for decades.

Women have a tendency to deal with corruption less than men. This is global, by fact, this is statistics. So, and another part is that sometimes we don't have access to corruption. Because one of the accesses is power and money, and women don't have power and money. (Zarah)

Corruption in the political ranks, much as in the cultural sphere, is an example of an apparent discrepancy in behavior between women and men. The widespread corruption in society makes it difficult for women to participate. As a result of corruption, there is none or very little support from political parties for women who want to stand as candidates. It becomes a vicious circle.

Women also lack both power and money, both needed in making a successful political campaign. (Zarah)

Women's lack of resources is one of many issues that distinguish women's opportunities from men's opportunities. Political parties (even those with democratic values) prefer to support men because they are much more likely to win an election.

There is no political movement living up to its own party platform. Every party talks about equality, diversity and citizenship but this is not reflected in

the parties' own activities. When the democratic parties practice their manifestos and beliefs, the leaders do not seem to believe that they have to be embedded in opportunities for their members.

We need to fight the culture, the economy and the political system. (Zarah)

Another obstacle is the support women must have from others in order to take part. This makes it much more difficult for women to get involved in and contribute to matters concerning (amongst other issues) women. Both men and women need the support of the larger family and the clan, but women need to be very strong in order to get past the barriers that might be set up by both their husband and their extended family. Women need to have a very strong personality to even consider becoming a part of the political scene.

Personality is, as described in Chapter five, very important for any leader, male or female. Charisma, for example the ability to communicate your thoughts to the community, will help to solve problems well and that is a priority for any leader. If a person has all that and also has the ambition to be seen and to participate and is smart enough she (or he) can do it. However, some have all that but still will not do it.

I will not run for election under any circumstances . That is because I am against the regime and against the system and the corruption and I don't want to be part of it. (Zarah)

Some people consider Zarah to be a perfectly capable person, and some have tried to persuade her to run. She continues to say no, because she knows it will be hard and that it will hurt her in some way or another.

It will hurt me also psychologically and when it comes to that I am not sure how strong I'll be. It's a huge personal fight for women, a huge personal fight, and I am not very well supported, I am not married, I don't have a partner. I don't have someone beside to me. (Zarah)

It is difficult to continue be strong if someone humiliates you, keeps saying bad things about you or threatens to hurt your children. This means it is a tremendous battle for anyone to take on a task where you find yourself constantly worked against.

Even though personal support is immensely important, economic support is also vital. Not having enough money makes it impossible to play a part.

I don't have the money and I don't have the strength. It is a very special situation here (the political situation in Egypt), you have to be ready to play dirty. (Zarah)

Moreover, she continues, even if we could women seem less willing to participate in the foul game that politics entails. Women need to fight 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

‘To have security’ (16)

That there has been increased discrimination against women since the revolution is something both women and men agree about. As a result, harassment, violence and rape of women have increased.

During the 18 days between Jan 25th and Feb 18th 2011 there was no harassment in Tahrir Square, and then we went back to “normal”, the informants say. This harassment has deterred women from participating because it was also used by the regime. Women were kidnapped and sexually assaulted by soldiers, and they were virginity tested by soldiers who claimed that this had to be done in order to safeguard the soldiers’ reputations in case they were accused of rape. This is not the normal kind of assault, the informants in the focus group say, but an expanded form of sexual harassment. It was in a way aimed at the whole population. It is understood by the informants to have been administered by the state and aimed at the revolution itself. It was a way for the regime to scare people, everyone, not only the women. It was a signal sent from the regime to keep women off the streets and an attempt to keep half the protesters at home.

When they are done with her, they just leave her lying in one of the tents, and you would never believe the story ever happened, because who would do that?
(Focus group)

Women are targeted, but the focus group talk about incidents where those who do not agree with some person will use the same methods, or different methods, to silence some person. This makes it common among different groups. Some activists also use the same methods whenever it benefits them or just to get their opinion across, the male informants say.

The conditions for women are in general hard, making the claims for change difficult but immensely important. To be politically active is particularly difficult for women due to high personal costs. If the others in the community feel that a woman does not belong in a certain context, they will punish her. This can be done psychologically or physically, either violently or just by lack of support, by ignoring her or by spreading bad rumors about her. This makes a strong personality even more important for women.

I think we are still a male dominated society, and any kind of women’s initiative has to fight that basic fact. (Ana)

The costs for opposing prevailing structures are often high. According to the men in the focus group, these costs are often directly targeted against women as a group. However, this is done in the form of threatening messages to a wider group of people. The men claim that the violence towards women sends a message to women to be careful but also to men that they should control their women and make them stay at home. Nevertheless, despite many obstacles within the political structure, the female informants seem to agree that it is possible for women to be part of the political scene.

You can do anything you want. You just have to fight for it. (Ana)

The demand to influence the political structure has been one of the forces drawing women together.

Summary – Political Structure

When summing up the analysis of the political structure, the result shows that from an equality standpoint it is weak. The legal system constitutes a ‘regression sanctioned by law’ as one informant expressed it. Much of the active opposition is aimed at the political structure. Several informants argue that the most important thing to work for is a change of the new constitution draft and Law 28. Law 28 is a civil society law that violate many freedoms and rights of women. The challenge is that the family laws regulate the status of women and hence their role and role position. Since the constitution, more clearly than ever expresses equality between man and woman, the problem it seems, is the lack of political will and policy implementation. This makes the inertness of political will a social conversion factor impeding the functioning ‘To engage in democratic values’. This valued functioning presupposes not only a political system of free and fair elections, and laws and regulations that apply equally to all its citizens, but also the opportunity for active and safe participation in both civil life and the political arena. The process of engaging in democratic values thereby becomes an educational issue, running through the social, cultural and political structures. In society today, where the formal education is inadequate and parallel education systems operate, the students are not being educated either in a democratic spirit or about democratic principles. Having access to quality education is a highly valued functioning among the informants. Democratic values can be fostered by quality education and it may also have representation and a safer society as a result. Violence has escalated, according to the informants, so structural change has occurred in an unintended direction. Without safety, few of women’s valued functionings are actually achieved. Having representation in parliament that corresponds to the population is for the informants crucial if the changes demanded are to occur. Because violence against women was also a strategy used by the regime,

women have met even harder antagonism in participating for progressive change. Women have been kidnapped and sexually assaulted. Several women have been virginity-tested by soldiers, who claimed that this had to be done to secure the soldiers' reputation in case they were later accused of rape. Impunity against these crimes is exacerbating the situation further for women, making violence an integral part of the way political communication is made. This politically induced violence plays a part in making frequent, socially induced violence possible.

The informants did not agree whether inequality in participation for women is a political issue, a problem of tradition/culture or a socio-economic issue. The answer to the question is partly dependent on the role position of the interviewee and partly because the problem of participatory parity lies in a mixture of many factors.

Despite the conditions and the costs, there is strong, ongoing, more and more active opposition to the prevailing societal structure. The growing resistance from the people is meeting harsh counterattacks from the current regime. This violence is in part structural and targeted against women, giving the revolutionary acts dual implications for women. The revolution has had a significant positive impact on women's empowerment and the opportunity to make their voices heard, but it is also making women retreat. In the light of the recent events in the country, the frequent violence against women was in part due to increased control by conservative Islam on the political scene (before July 2013); however, violence against women is also the result of increased structural violence against women. This structural violence can be understood as being both socially and politically induced.

The revolution itself, support from family and clan, personality and narrative imagination, all are seen as important factors for raising awareness and knowledge and for gaining motivation amongst people to begin fighting for increased agency. When this is achieved, it initiates acquiring knowledge in various new ways, for instance through family, formal education, the Internet and social media, graffiti and social movements. This new awareness and newly acquired knowledge has resulted in a sense of empowerment among the informants. It has, however also resulted in personal costs. These costs seem to follow almost all actions taken by the corporate agent in the shared practices for structural elaboration.

8. Societal Change – Rhetoric and Reality

In the present study, the desire for societal change derives from the informants' aspiration to live 'a full life'. This full life is described in Amartya Sen's (1999) notion of a good life. Sen argues that the good life derives from a person's opportunities to arrange for herself/himself '*the life she/he has reason to value*'. Central to Sen's idea of a good life is the necessity for the person to be an active participant in change, rather than a passive and docile recipient of instructions or assistance (Sen, 1999, p. 281). This means that participation in society and influence on decisions concerning their own life is of the highest importance for people's ability to live a full life. In this process, critical awareness should be emphasized, which gives conditions for learning a prominent role.

In this final chapter, I will discuss the study's findings, giving a voice to the informants. The findings help to identify the processes of empowerment for women in different spheres of society. The analytical approach of disconnecting the different spheres in everyday life allows us to understand the obstacles for equal participation that women face in different arenas in their everyday lives. While individuals are essentially controlled by the same cultural and political structures, the results show that the social structure might be a factor leading to a variation of the perceived agency.

The statements given by the female informants give an account of women's comprehension of the social, cultural and political structures in relation to agency, providing an understanding of the conditions women live under. It is evident that equal possibilities enforced by law can be restrained by cultural norms and values. This is manifested for some in a perception that the specific roles and role positions that people are allotted are in fact considered to be the truth and that the structural boundaries are natural and undisputable. This would mean that people's agency is affected by structures without their knowing it. Other individuals may intentionally wish to maintain their position. Others wish to change the structural positioning because they experience the restrictions as being greater than the possibilities, so they oppose the prevailing structures. The women's statements describe their experiences of how knowledge that will assist their claims can be obtained, thus accounting for the 'turning point' in their lives.

Conditions, claims and costs of a ‘full life’

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the possibilities for women to take part on equal terms in societal change. This involved enhancing the understanding of the structural conditions for women’s agency, and in what way these structures enable and restrain women’s possibility to participate in societal change that benefits women. Of special interest in the study are the factors, motivating some women to be in the forefront of this change, despite high personal cost.

An attempt to answer the first research question: How are the conditions for women’s agency, set in relation to social, cultural and political structure, perceived by the informants? – led to an overview of these three structures presenting the conditions for women in everyday life. The results provide a clear pattern of women not being equal to men in any structure.

The three structures are analytically equivalent; however, to be able participate in the change processes and take part in informal learning, the cultural structure is of particular significance.

The female and the male informants had similar experiences and testimonies of women’s agency. However, they used different ways of communicating this. The women are more careful using words that somehow give greater hope for themselves and for the future. The men, on the other hand seem to be more direct when talking about structural violence and its negative implications on all three levels.

According to Archer (1995), structural conditioning influences our actions. During the 18 months within which this empirical study was conducted, the conditions for women shifted from ‘revolution for a common cause’ and accordingly for a sense of equality, to ‘a desire to increase the unequal space for action’, that is, a feeling of the need to guard and expand the position of women.

Thus the structural conditions changed, which had an effect on women’s actions and the outcomes. This change was from the newfound freedom before and after the ousting of Mubarak at the beginning of 2011 to the sense of being silenced once again through the escalating violence directed against demonstrators in general, and against female demonstrators in particular. The violence directed against women is described as politically induced.

At one point in life, the informants have all reached a ‘turning point’ from which new knowledge is gained. This awareness involves various aspects; it encompasses the understanding of another possible life situation (Sen, 1999), and the capacity to critically examine the traditions and norms setting the boundaries for what is considered acceptable in society (Nussbaum 2000). Support and strong personality, enabling the narrative imagination that is important in order to be able to imagine a different life as well as different ways to obtain required knowledge are all part of the raised consciousness. Several informants describe the turning point as inevitably leading to a request for

increased agency. Based on various life situations, they have described the claims for increased agency and the cost of these claims in different ways.

This turning point shows an understanding of the possibility of 'another life situation', thus imagining change. Narrative imagination (Nussbaum, 1997) presupposes the knowledge needed to critically examine the traditions, thus the structural conditioning that you yourself are a part of. When the structure that is conditioning agency is narrow and violent, developing the capacity to act progressively not only requires logical reasoning but also courage.

The unequal conditions for women to participate and to be represented on equal terms have led to a number of claims. These claims are analyzed in the results as valued functionings describing the informants' aspirations and aims. These valued functionings, acclaimed by the informants as important features for agency, are described throughout the three structures. Both possibilities and obstacles for empowerment exist in all the three societal structures. Thus the three structures together constitute the conditions for agency. In summary, the informants perceive women's agency in relation to the social, cultural and political structures to be limited.

The answer to the second research question: What are the possibilities and obstacles for empowerment in the three societal structures? – was found in the informants' statements that concerned how women's actions changed during the time of the study. It is the described actions that the informants take throughout the period of the empirical study that tell us about the possibilities and the obstacles for empowerment women face in daily life.

These actions have developed from being apparently completely free to being much more cautious. The societal climate can be described as going from difficult and unequal to violent and even more unequal. The structural elaboration that the revolutionary acts did in fact achieve unfortunately did not always bring about the intended changes.

Much of the change was difficult to predict. This was evident in my study in the way women spoke about the situation throughout the 18 months. On my first visit, all of the informants were positive and believed in a democratic change. On my second visit, only a few months later, the informants were less optimistic. On my third visit, one year later, the informants were careful not to speak about change as something they would necessarily experience themselves: they now worked for this for the future generations.

As shown, misogyny and gynopia are both dominant features in the social, cultural and political structures, which make it easier to ignore any specific interests women may have. The 'hatred of women' that permeates society provides incentives for not treating women as equals, in the sense of equal human beings. This is evident in all structures. In the cultural structure, which in one sense applies to everyone, it is evident in many ways, for example in the media. In the social structure however, it is experienced with greater variety by the informants because of the greater variety in family compositions. In the

political structure, inequality is clearly stated in law and regulations. This becomes obvious in the 'invisibility of women' in the political structure. The conversion factors in the political structure are also spread through the cultural structure and to the social structure. When serious violations against women go unpunished, women's actual capability is diminished further. In summary, the conditions for women have changed over the time of the study. There has been a clear change of the informants' state of mind from a strong belief in a real progressive change in society to something vaguer, where hope for stability and security became more pronounced.

If a person claims a valued functioning, and by that is challenging impeding structures, costs will follow. Thus an important aspect of women's actions for change is the third research question: What are the costs for women involved in this challenge?

'To be active and safe in the community' is shown to be a valued functioning preconditioning several other valued functionings. Violence (in the public sphere) makes it difficult to access the channels women need in order to get the knowledge required to be part of the changing process. Accessing informal learning channels is described as vital, and it is through affiliation that influence on the political structure can be achieved. In summary, one valued functioning that is clearly perceptible throughout the empirical study is the aspect of being safe. To be safe has implications in every structure, and is an aspect that the informants have to take into consideration in almost all action taken in everyday life. As accounted for earlier in the results, the costs for women involved in the challenge of societal change are sometimes high. These costs can be both psychological and physical.

Corruption is another problem permeating the whole of society, from the education system to the way international aid money is handled. This problem is clearly present for all the informants. For some it is the problem of access to where the help is really needed, because if you do not have the money, it becomes more difficult to set up, for example, a NGO that can officially work on location. The women especially testify that corruption puts them in a difficult position. Without support, it is not possible to participate effectively and safely with political significance. Corruption occurs both through money and through power, with one of the power assets being good contacts.

As the analysis clearly shows, the female informants experience high personal costs. These costs result from active participation and through direct violence; the cost for not claiming valued functionings, thus not actively pushing for change, is also expressed as a cost. The changing threats directed against all the informants make it difficult to know what must be done. The study has illustrated how the conditions, claims and costs for women can be perceived in an environment of extensive change in society.

Interpreting ‘a full life’ as lifelong learning

A key finding in the interpretation of the results is the range of valued functionings that the informants consider important to actualize a ‘full life’ and thus a democratic status. The male informants discuss the democratic approach to gender equality as an important factor for societal progress, peace and human security. In closed communities, with extensive social control, poor formal education and a disadvantageous legal system, the informal learning settings needed for lifelong learning are often unsafe and associated with considerable personal cost. In this study, the changes in the informants’ lives are described through the perceived empowerment and the calculated costs women must be prepared to take into account when actively participating in revolutionary actions.

The changes in outlook and attitude concerning their everyday lives and their belief in societal change became very visible. There was a remarkable change in thought around possible prospects, especially before and after the presidential election. The design used made the interviews in the three separate periods unique in the sense that the impact of the changes on the women’s lives became very clear. The study was conducted in a unique period owing to the societal changes taking place during the revolution. Changes in society happened almost from day to day. Before continuing the discussion of my findings in the light of previous research, I would like to discuss the dependability and the transferability of the study once again.

Dependability in this study lies in the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the three analytically separated structures in everyday life. The way of collecting data over time that has been used in this study is methodically interesting because the changes in the informants’ lives became very distinct as I met several of them more than once. As discussed in Chapter four, it should be pointed out that some theoretical transferability of this study may also be of significance in other contexts. Since the aim of the study is of a qualitative nature, transferability is discussed as a theoretical approach to the research interest. By using the theory as a framework, the theoretical inference becomes the transferable measure. Thus, transferability is seen through the lens of theory (Aull Davis, 2008).

The study in relation to previous research – Hopes and costs of progressive change

When reviewing previous studies, I found a few areas prominent for understanding the specific circumstances of women’s empowerment in societal change. Earlier research suggests a few dimensions needed for empowerment to occur. One important outcome is that for gender-based oppression to end, women have to be able to organize themselves. As the results of this study

show, gender mainstreaming is vital in traditional societies for girls to engage in and have influence on the changes that take place in society. Formal education is a crucial factor for gender mainstreaming. Learning, however, is described as something people engage in outside formal education settings, mainly because the formal education is often inferior. As shown, a key finding in this study suggests that lifelong learning, through informal settings, is crucial for being able to play a part in societal change.

By adopting Birgitta Qvarsell's (2000) comprehension of pedagogy, the findings in this study contribute to an understanding of life-long and informal learning as a continuing process, both following and affecting the changes in society. Qvarsell (2000) discusses pedagogy as the study of learning and processes of influences and the conditions of such processes. This starts with the learner's living conditions, both as an individual and as a member of a collective community. These valid educational situations and processes are available inside and outside school in different social contexts. Education is thus about social, cultural or environmental conditions and processes studied in relation to various stakeholders and from different perspectives (Qvarsell, 2000, s. 130). By viewing educational settings in this broader way and by analytically separating societal structures, it is possible to investigate different aspects of gaining empowerment.

Neither in social nor cultural structures does everyday reality seem to be consistent with the regulatory framework for women in Egypt. The rights of women in the legal regulatory framework give greater opportunities than the cultural norms and traditions allow, making the political structure weak from an equality standpoint.

Women's perceived real possibilities and agency stand in contrast to their valued functionings. The focus on the ends rather than on the means is the difference between what are perceived as valued functionings and the ability to convert these valued functionings into capability sets.

One key finding in the analysis is that the informants' claims for greater agency, that is their valued functionings, result in increasingly narrow capability sets when social conversion factors are taken into account.

The social conversion factors are especially visible in the discourse of feminism and traditional society. The discrepancy between Islamic feminism / gender mainstreaming, and limited citizenship rights is evident and shows the problems of progressive change when there are strong references to traditions in society. The personal status law and corruption are also to be understood as social conversion factors. These conversion factors have increased and changed over time, making women's agency difficult to predict. In the finding, the social conversion factors are captured by individual differences amongst the informants.

In the light of previous research 16 functionings have been identified, all valued by women in order to make for themselves a 'full life'. The analyses

of this study show how the valued functionings are in various ways inconsistent with women's actual everyday life.

The results show how 'being safe' is a prerequisite for the other valued functionings. It also shows how important it is for research to move beyond current hierarchical structures of traditions and provide means for all humans to contribute to the society of which they are a part.

For continued research – The possibility of learning for progressive change

The present research has led to inquiries about further research. If, for example, the claims women are making were to be seen as universal rights rather than as controversial claims, the conditions for women to reach their valued functionings would perhaps be different.

As the results show, the constitutive conditions and the costs women pay through claiming their valued functionings generate the conditions for learning, thus changing the ways of understanding the processes of informal learning. In the light of the results, these valued functionings seem to be essential for the informants in their claims for greater agency. The results in this study have generated new questions to be considered in further research. In an attempt to understand what these claims might mean, the 16 functionings have been organized in four broad categories. These broad functionings can be found throughout all three societal structures, making it possible to see the significance of each within each of the structures. The most prominent broad functionings identified are: to be educated, to be autonomous, to have influence and to be safe.

The valued functionings have been inserted in broader functionings on the basis of the three principal themes that are an outcome of processing the informants' statements by means of theoretical concepts. The valued functionings are thus also analyzed in the light of women's conditions, strengthening the importance of the broad functionings, be educated, to have autonomy, to have influence and to be safe. The conditions for education, autonomy, influence and being safe can be understood as constitutive for structural change to take place. The broad functionings, after the social conversion factors are accounted for, are the actual capabilities (opportunity freedom) that women experience, thus their actual agency. These broader categories in this study are consistent with some Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹², and thus consistent with both human rights and human freedom.

¹² The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, articles; 7 Right to equality before the law. 18, Freedom of belief and religion. 19, Freedom of opinion and information. 20: Right of peaceful

An area for future development identified in this study's valued functionings for empowerment is the set of four broad functionings that the valued functionings have been grouped into. These broad functionings constitute basic functionings for gaining empowered action, giving both an overview and a detailed knowledge of women's perception of their conditions and costs for gaining greater space for themselves. Research on what these broader functionings might mean for women in their everyday life, would give further significance to the results presented in this study.

How controversial are the claims the informants make? To investigate what the informants are really asking for, there follows a discussion of the four broader functionings and what they could mean. How the broader functionings follow the valued functionings, can be seen in *Figure 4* below.

assembly and association, 21, Right to participate in government and in free elections. 26
Right to education. 27, Right to participate in the cultural life of community. 29 Community
duties essential to free and full development.

Broad Functionings Structure	To be educated	To have autonomy	To have influence	To be safe
Social	To be equally educated (2)		To be respected as an equal by family (1)	To be safe from physical violence (5)
			To be backed by family (3)	
	To be able to develop personality (4)			
Cultural	To become knowledgeable (8)	To be a professional and a leader (9)	To be recognized as equal (7)	To be active and safe in the community (6)
		To have affiliation (11)	To be able to help others (10)	
	To have a voice (12)			
Political	To have access to quality education (13)			To engage in democratic values (14)
			To be equally represented (15)	
				To have security (16)

Figure 4: Sixteen valued functionings organized into four broader categories.

To be educated

The desire to be educated is recognized in all the three societal structures. In the interviews, it became clear that education is seen as a decisive matter for a person's future, giving a person agency and thereby a voice. What it means to be educated is, however, discussed from various perspectives.

Formal education is considered to give basic knowledge making it an important basic prerequisite for development. However, the school system works unsatisfactorily, making access to quality education a major claim of the informants. To be equally educated is a basic matter in the social structure, whereas to be knowledgeable is important for women in the cultural structure. These aspects of education are different ways of looking at what it means to be educated.

The possibility to become knowledgeable presupposes other functionings. The valued functionings presented all appear to be important for the informants if they are to make informed choices and reach greater agency.

Formal learning is understood to be structured and to have an agenda. In Egypt however, the school systems have been strongly criticized for not having a minimum standard. When formal learning fails, non-formal and informal learning have stepped in. This makes non-formal and informal learning particularly important and interesting in the context of societal change.

Apart from being organized, formal learning is intentional, meaning that the objective is for the student to gain knowledge, skills and/or competence. Informal learning on the other hand, is never organized, and no certificates are issued; it is learning from everyday life activities, from the learner's standpoint often referred to as learning by experience. With a few exceptions, these definitions of formal and informal education are quite consistent. Informal learning can, however, also be seen as an adaptive process whereby the learner is guided by her/his need in the specific situation. Through their connections, people obtain knowledge in everyday life by talking, observing, taking advice from more experienced persons and making mistakes of their own. Given this slightly broader understanding of informal learning, the learner might in fact organize herself, giving intentionality a space even in informal learning.

Aware and active citizens form one basis for a functioning democracy. A democratic political system has five minimum key elements: effective participation, equality in voting, gaining enlightened understanding, exercising final control over the agenda and finally, inclusion of adults (Dahl, 1998). Dahl argues that the education programs that are introduced in emerging democracies should reflect these five core elements. If they do, education will be the single biggest force contributing to a politically stable culture. If education fails, however, the risk that there will be non-participatory citizens with fewer means to influence decision-making bodies in society becomes much higher.

In Egypt, informal learning through social networks is increasing. The informants describe how knowledge is gained through formal and informal networks. These networks help raise awareness and as a result the discussions among people become more open. However, society is based on positional power relations, ensuring that institutions and norms are constructed to carry out the values and interests of those in power (Castell, 2011). This makes the ability to see things with skepticism important.

The powers are part of networks manifested in different ways through social networks. In networks, power is exercised by the imposition of rules of inclusion rather than exclusion. This makes networks important platforms of *belonging* for humans in different spheres of their lives.

The social networks can look exceedingly different, beyond the basic condition of being a platform where people with similar ideas can meet. The examples are many. In Egypt, a society where formal information and media flow have been thwarted, knowledge acquisition through various networks, both non-formal and informal, has become increasingly important. These are platforms for social involvement and civic engagement and, for learning.

To be autonomous

To be autonomous means to have agency, and to have the choice to participate in various activities in society. Several of the valued functionings running throughout the societal structures are interpreted as the desire to be autonomous. To be respected as equal and thus to be able to be a professional and a leader and have affiliation are three functionings that give opportunities for joining various networks and for learning.

Women who experience their agency as a natural truth take their situation for granted; they accept, for example, that they are beaten by their husbands just because they are said to be ugly (stated by one informant in the study). Other women acknowledge the structures enabling these actions. However, they do not protest against them because they are afraid of opportunity costs in terms of social retaliation. Those who choose to protest against the boundaries of their space of action have reached the limits of what they can agree on. There are, however, informants that have not continued their protests after experiencing the costs arising from their action, as well as informants that calculate the costs and weigh in the pros and cons of what they aim to achieve with the action taken. For them to be autonomous, hence be able to act freely, is an important part of gaining greater agency.

Through awareness and knowledge, they seek to change and enlarge their agency in order to achieve a 'full life'. Every person has the right to participate in decisions that define his or her life, and autonomy is to be considered one aspect of getting one step closer to a 'full life'.

Paula England (2010) discusses liberal and liberating power thus concerned with power to and power within. Liberal empowerment secures room for individual change, by focusing on, for example, transformational learning and change. Liberating power, on the other hand, deals with change in deeper structures, enabling changes to be made in a cultural and political structure, changing power relations by them on a wider scale.

This means that in patriarchal societies, where unequal structures in the social, cultural and political structures are often internalized by women, creating awareness is both difficult and important. In societies where one group dominates another, empowerment has to be induced from the outside, motivating a reflection on the life lived. These external agents can spark awareness and illuminate hidden or internalized oppression.

Accordingly, participation and space are two keys for empowerment, where different power models generate different spaces for participation, which in turn generates different outcomes of the actions taken.

The degree to which a person is empowered is linked to two things, personal agency (the degree of freedom to act) and structures of opportunity (the social, cultural and political contexts).

Transformation of primary agency allows a transformation of the various structures in society. The role and positions (thus the view) of women are

probably the most important factors for development. The personal empowerment gained through information, awareness and new knowledge is the single most important factor for community development.

In the complex environment of a society undergoing fundamental changes, knowledge is vital and *learning for life* has dual significance.

To have influence

Participation and influence are essential for 'a full life', and the informants in this study are all interested in participating in the wider community and in democratic change. To be able to participate on equal terms, there has to be equal respect. To be respected as an equal gives a greater possibility to participate and thus to have a voice. To have a voice, an often found as a valued functioning among the informants, gives a possibility to have influence. Traditions and customs, as shown in the study, often have an inhibitory effect on women's participation in society, which means that women's influence is limited.

According to Sen (1999) it lies in human nature to gain enough freedom to be able to develop abilities and opportunities to achieve a 'good life', the life each of us has reason to value. In this achievement lies the possibility to influence decisions that will concern one's own life. Emphasizing the link between social justice and democratization provides an important guide in the structure agency debate. The constructive value of democracy should allow everyone to be able to participate in the collective decision making processes (Sen, 1999). In Egypt, however, the obstacles to this far exceed the possibilities. This is clearly illustrated by the difficulties concerning basic freedoms such as freedom of assembly, freedom of information and expression, and freedom of movement. Democratization should, but does not always, allow people to have better power (control) over their ambient social structure through agency.

However, established structures are difficult to change. Transforming a structure can only be achieved as a community effort in which people organize themselves and work together in the same direction. This is what happens in a revolution. Revolutions occur when the basic needs of people are not being met. The structures within society are questioned and the desire for a new system emerges.

Considering the new aspects of participation, for example in the new technologies and the globalized transmission of information, new conceptions of participation in relation to women's empowerment would be important to investigate in further research. By broadening the concept of participation, it can be regarded as a factor for empowerment, thus an intrinsic goal in itself, but also as a learning process in which interactive participation becomes a vehicle for achieving certain goals.

Participation and influence in society are understood to be among the most basic prerequisites for health (Feldman et al, 2015). The lack of power and ability to influence ones living conditions and the development of society is

closely related to one's well-being. With new technology, the ways of participating in different societal structures have changed. There has been a shift in grading citizens from being non-participatory to being in total control to flexible communicative participation based on connected knowledge.

One tangible example is of a woman as a primary agent who, through new awareness, finds her agency, which is constrained by the cultural structure, too narrow. She engages in a social movement, connecting with other women with the same viewpoint. By doing so, she becomes part of that particular organized collective group as a corporate agent constrained by the social structures in that organization. If the situation clearly demonstrates that they are demonstrating as a group, then they are a corporative agent. However, the police, for example, will choose to view them as women and thus primary agents, and not as a corporative agent. This means that the police will see a woman questioning her agency as a provocation and punish her in her role as a woman.

When a group opposes prevailing political structures, the immediate opportunity costs connected to the action are often borne by an individual since violence and detentions are used to make a statement and to scare a larger group of people. This has to be dealt with at the level of the individual occupying social roles, while at the same time the group is fighting for changes (of these roles) at the level of corporate agent, driven and motivated by the desire to bring about an intentional elaboration of existing structures. In this struggle, a transformation of the role position will take place, thereby generating a new space of action (Archer, 2000). This creates new positions between women and men because the interaction will not leave either the groups or the social context within which they struggle unchanged; as a result, agency is transformed through the process of transforming its context. Empowerment is gained through agency only when the individual or the group has gone through a learning experience. The agency is changed when the structure is changed.

The understanding that structures affect actions implies narrative imagination (Nussbaum, 2000), providing the individual with skills to understand the conditions of the surrounding world. Individuals with narrative imagination experiencing their agency as an obstacle have few options. Either they protest and are willing to take the consequences, or if they are not able or ready to take the consequences, they have to accept restrictions on their lives.

When opposition to structural inequality, for example, results in an intended change and a structural elaboration occurs, we might see social change, but not necessarily empowerment. Narayan (2005) defines empowerment as 'increasing poor people's freedom of choice and action to be able to shape their own lives'. In making an alteration by defining poor as being deprived of certain basic freedoms (Sen, 1999), such as freedom of movement, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech, empowerment is defined as the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. These purposive choices require some kind of knowledge. In using the concepts of asset-

based agency and institution-based opportunities, the framework presented suggests that investments and interventions can empower people by focusing on the dynamic and iterative relationship between agency and structure (Alsop et al, 2005, p.1). This would mean that by improving agency and enhancing opportunities, peoples' capacity to make effective choices increases and social development comes about. However, empowerment involves, by definition, understanding and growth. Thus, learning is always involved in some way. Since participation is a way of gaining knowledge, social involvement and civic engagement are two necessary participatory conditions for gaining empowerment.

To be safe

A revolution occurs when the needs of the people are not met. Opposition to the oppressive structure of a dictatorship (or oppressive government) is difficult and dangerous. What is essential for successful actions towards societal change is safety. As this study shows, violence is part of every structure in society. Violence has been directed at activists in general, and at women in particular. Exercising your rights in this context is very hard and can easily be forcefully blocked. Nevertheless, thousands of people have gone on the streets to make their voice heard. So safety can be understood not only as safety from violence directed against the opposing group but also in the light of progressive change that needs to be made.

When the accumulated knowledge is evaluated and the decision to oppose the prevailing social structures in order to achieve social change is made, the turning point has been reached. The informants in this study have described this turning point in different ways. They have however all described it as an experience of great significance. Some have experienced the constraints as being greater than the possibilities when trying to break through the structural boundaries. When structures are questioned through action, those who want to preserve the structure will fight back. For those whose actions fit in with the conditional agency, the enablement will be experienced to a greater extent, while for those who want to act outside the boundaries of the structure the opportunity costs will be higher.

Both women and men are aware of the importance of working together if real change is to occur.

Concluding note

In this study the signification of participation, both as a means of influence and as an end in itself, thus part of a 'full life', has been examined through women's experience of their possibilities to make informed choices. Participation as a condition for a good life as well as a condition for societal change has, in the context of the Egyptian uprising, proved to be quite contradictory

due to a participation opportunity gap. In order to overcome these obstacles, strategies for empowerment on different levels are required.

Society is often seen as one entity, but it consists of several structures, each with boundaries to be contested. A key finding in the analysis is the importance of being free from violence. To be safe is a functioning that is important if all other valued functionings are to be possible. However, what was considered 'to be safe' changed over the period of my study. What was evident in the interviews made during November 2011 was the optimism and the confidence of being able to make a change. The informants talked openly and acted in a very courageous way. Only a few months later the optimism was more tentative. The violence had escalated and the activist had to be more careful. One year later, in March 2013, many of the informants I had met before did not speak of change for themselves, but they still saw a positive future for the next generation.

The elaboration of structures (Archer, 2005) came about through an interplay between imagining other possibilities in life, informal learning and active joint action, showing that it is possible to influence change. However, structural elaborations are difficult to predict.

One of the aims of the recent revolution was to overthrow a dictator who had been in power for thirty years. There were many strong voices for social and political change. People wanted change from a dictatorship governing by fear and violence. A dictatorship that falls will not automatically become a democracy. In Egypt, the outcome was a situation that can be experienced as worse than before.

Societal change was clearly brought about in all three societal structures; however, the changes did not turn out entirely as intended. What is certain, however, is that when the informants clearly understood that it is possible to influence change, it was impossible for several of them not to continue the fight.

Many of the female informants have focused on changing the political structure, whereas the male informants have focused more on the need for a change in the cultural and social structures. The fact that the female informants had a more optimistic view on women's conditions and possibilities for change, even though they experienced much violence, is explained by the first-hand experience of strong motivational factors they have of changing women's role in society.

An approach to learning about democracy and learning from democracy may generate the social sustainability for balance in society and progressive change and development that the informants desire.

Democracy will take time; it is a process of learning and is not something that can be laid upon a country by enactment. Democracy is a learning process as well as a tool for social sustainability. The learning process of living a life in a democratic way has to be experienced. This learning process will create

understanding of the necessity to change the cultural norms and values in accordance with the changing world. When this occurs, the social roles and role positions will also change. Only then can we talk about democracy and equal agency.

Summary

Introduction

The present study investigates the idea that the desire for societal change derives from the informants' aspiration to live 'a full life'. This full life is described in Amartya Sen's (1999) notion of a good life. Sen argues that the good life derives from a person's opportunities to arrange for herself/himself '*the life she/he has reason to value*'. Central to Sen's idea of a good life is the necessity for the person to be an active participant in change, rather than a passive and docile recipient of instructions or assistance (Sen, 1999, p. 281). This means that participation in society and influence on decisions concerning their own lives is of the highest importance for people's ability to live a full life. In this process, critical awareness should be emphasized, which gives conditions for learning a prominent role.

The active pursuit of societal change, that is, an elaboration of structures, (Archer, 2005) comes about through the interplay between imagining other possibilities in life, informal learning and active joint action, showing that it is possible to influence change. Activists in the Egyptian Revolution included both women and men: liberals, anti-capitalists, Islamics, national and feminist segments, all of whom were participants in different networks. During the first 18 months of the revolution, women played a major and decisive role. From the very beginning, women were a driving force and active organizers of the revolution. Then women started pushing for equal rights that had perished during the first phase of the revolution due to bad arguments and violence. This demand led to violent protests and increased violence against women. Despite this antagonism, women have continued to raise their voice and call for equality, believing that it is possible to bring about change.

Progressive societal change should include all groups in society. The intention here is to highlight the possibilities and/or restraints women have when contributing in various ways to the development of society. To do so I have analytically separated societal structures into social, cultural and political structures. These constitute the informants' everyday life. This makes it possible to discuss the actual opportunities for women when actively seeking societal change.

Women's conditions in the three above-mentioned structures in society are outlined, leading to a discussion of the concepts of structure, role and role positions that, together with valued functionings and social conversion factors, generate agency. This provides an understanding of the conditions, the claims and the costs the informants have in each structure.

A review of previous research stresses the possibilities as well as the obstacles for women's agency in strongly patriarchal societies. The reasons are both of an individual and of a structural character. The epistemological position of this thesis is that the individual has different relations to different structures, which in turn condition her agency of the inter-subjective interaction and thus the individual's actions. Although numerous development studies have examined women's agency, less analytical attention has been paid to different structures in society. My study seeks to fill this gap by examining these structures and women's perceived agency in each of them, providing an understanding of women's own possibility of analyzing their conditional agency.

Aim of research

This is an empirical study that aims to contribute to our understanding of the structural conditions for women's agency and how these conditions enable and/or restrain women's possibilities to participate in societal change and their opportunities to influence decisions concerning their own lives. When formal education is inadequate, informal education channels can be critical for learning; thus, such channels are of interest in this study. Of interest in this thesis is also what motivates some women to oppose societal, cultural and political structures despite often high personal costs. Women's possibilities to influence the process of change in a society that is undergoing transformation will be discussed by highlighting three entities: conditions, claims and costs. Women's conditions, the claims for equal opportunities that women are making and the cost of making these claims in their quest for societal change are objects of research. In an endeavor to investigate this, the following research questions were asked:

- How are the conditions for women's agency, in relation to the social, cultural and political structures, as perceived by the informants?
- What are the possibilities and obstacles for empowerment in the three societal structures?
- What are the costs for women involved in this challenge?

Theoretical framework

As already mentioned, this study draws upon Sen's (1999) idea of development as the expansion of people's choices by using the conceptual framework of functionings and capability. In Sen's writing, well-being is conceptualized as certain basic capabilities to function. These functionings are a person's possibilities to actually be and do something he or she values. An individual's

influence on decisions concerning how to arrange her own life defines her life choices, and accordingly the possibility to live the life she has reasons to value: *a good life* (Sen, 1980). The Capability Approach is a theoretical framework that in contrast to other theories of development prioritizes a person's actual possibilities to *be and do* what she or he has reason to value.

This alternative way of accounting for well-being describes freedom as a prominent factor for achieving the goal. Many development theories typically deal with welfare economics, which means that they miss an important aspect of development. The missing aspect concerns both societal and personal development, linked by people's freedom to choose.

An important feature of the Capability Approach is its focus on individuals' actual freedom to achieve these valued functions, so important in everyday life (in contrast to focusing on accessing resources or possessions). Thus, the Capability Approach's specific focus on the importance of human diversity provides opportunities also to analyze women's specific conditions, giving women's own understanding of their conditions greater impact.

For societies to function, humans create structures that set boundaries for human agency. These structures provide the framework within which people are allowed to act, and allowing certain agency and preventing other agency. When the given structural boundaries do not correspond to individuals' ideas of a good life, the agency will appear to be too small. This is manifested in an awareness of the possibility of another kind of life, as explained with Martha Nussbaum's concept of narrative imagination. She argues for the value of greater knowledge for a wider world thereby allowing the possibility to imagine a change in one's own life-situation (Nussbaum, 1996).

To think in new creative ways requires and also presupposes both spatial and intellectual agency. To be able to examine critically your own everyday life, it is important that you are able to be part of societal change. Thus for change to happen, there has to be awareness of what might be the problem and the ability to reason logically about what has to change; in other words, imagining something different, and as a consequence looking beyond and acting according to what can be done in order to reach the set goal.

Central to the analytically framed societal structures are the social conversion factors, which are the norms that allow or hinder actions (Sen, 1992) and will determine if the valued functionings are actually attainable. They highlight the fact that it is not enough to have access to a valued functioning; there are additional factors that must be taken into account. Even if a valued functioning is available, the social conversion factor, for example a social norm preventing women from moving freely in society, will preclude her from action. It is after considering the social conversion factors of the valued functionings that women's actual capability sets rise and their substantial freedom becomes visible. This substantial freedom is women's real possibility to act (Sen, 1985), and the actual space women have to actively seek change.

To frame the complexity of women's conditions for agency and the outcome of their actions, a theoretical framework is needed that encompasses both the goal and the process. Archer's (1995) theory on social change has been found particularly useful for strengthening the explanatory potential of the Capability Approach when investigating societal change. Archer's analytical dualism points out the necessary analytical separation of structure and agency in which she states that (1) the structure conditions (2) social interaction, which in turn (3) reproduce or transform structures. Analytical dualism is used to frame the informants' actions and their outcomes in the three analytically separated structures. In her terminology, a society undergoing change is either morphogenetic (transformational) or morphostatic (reproductive). Structures affect agency and agency affects structures, thus giving *actual* possibilities for change (Archer, 2003).

The ability to make informed life choices includes three interrelated measures: resources (including access), agency (including the process of decision-making), and achievements (outcome in terms of for example, well-being). Several studies of women's empowerment have been carried out to highlight these measurements of empowerment. There are however few studies that highlight the notion of choice by emphasizing the possible consequences of that choice. This study is an attempt to contribute to contemporary research by incorporating structural elements in the analysis of women's agency in societal development over time.

The empirical study

In order to answer the research questions, I interviewed women and men well versed in the Egyptian revolutionary work. These women and men I refer to as informants. The study was conducted within 18 months, during three visits to the Egypt. My data consists of eighteen semi-structured interviews and one focus group interview. All interviews have been transcribed in full. The focus group interview was made with men who were all actively working with women's equal rights. The focus group was included to broaden understanding of the conditions for women.

The analysis of the informants' claims for change starts in their understanding of, and approach to, change in the three societal structures. In the pursuit of a 'full life', the possibilities to bring about societal change become visible in terms of whether intended structural elaborations are achieved and if so, at what cost. This cost refers to the costs involved when revolting against the established structures.

In society, all individuals might be controlled by the same set norms and practices; however, the specific direction and vision of the future of each person will vary significantly, depending on her specific opportunities and circumstances. These conditional circumstances start in the family. The informants' statements testify to the conditions under which women try to make for

themselves a 'full life'. Their statements must be understood against the background of prevailing societal structures, making the description of their conditions before any action is taken important. The study is therefore structured in three themes. (1) Women's conditions for participating in daily life, in three societal structures. (2) Claims women are making for equal possibilities. (3) Transgressing boundaries. These three themes are analytically separated in three societal structures.

According to the informants, steps taken to pursue knowledge to increase agency in various societal structures involve the opportunity to *be* and *do* a number of things. In the analysis, sixteen valued functionings were identified. These are understood as claims women make in order to be able to live a full life. Thus, the expressed valued functionings highlight the conditions the informants live under. Women seek greater agency in all three structures by means of valued functionings.

Societal structure

In the analysis of the societal structure, it becomes clear that for girls and women certain functionings should be cultivated while others should not be developed. Functions that women seem less encouraged to elaborate in the societal structure are: 'to be respected as an equal by family', 'to be equally educated', 'to be backed by family', 'to be able to develop a personality' and 'to be safe from physical violence'.

Equal upbringing (thus equal respect) for both girls and boys in the family and being able to attend school (equal education) are important. Without a formal education that gives reading and writing skills, it is more difficult to take part in a wider discourse, and accordingly, more difficult to develop a mind of your own. These functionings presuppose the following: To be backed up by family and to be safe from physical violence. These valued functionings in the social structure show the informants' desire to develop the traditional role of women by expanding their role position. Increased agency is described by the informants as being conditioned by two aspects: support (being backed up) and personality (being able to develop a personality). These two characteristics are seen as basic for being able to imagine other possibilities (Nussbaum, 2000).

In Egypt, the opportunities to choose from different capability sets connected to the societal structure are limited for a number of reasons. The patriarchal system makes it difficult to activate the mechanism of recognition that is required for females to be treated as equal to males.

It is widely understood that to change the relations between women and men, a start has to be made very early in a child's life. For this to happen, attitudes, have to be updated through education and information.

Cultural structure

The conditions for women to participate in the cultural structure are difficult, in part because of the violence highlighted throughout the informants' testimonies. This violence can continue because violence against women and against children is part of the culture. Misogyny (hatred of women) manifests itself in many ways in women's everyday life. The informants talked not only about direct violence but also about belittlement, discrimination and objectification. The women's statements in the interviews bear witness that this is an effective way of silencing women.

When analyzing the informants' statements regarding what they valued doing and being most, 'to be active and safe in the community' was the most prominent desire. This is in many ways basic for achieving other valued functionings in the informants' everyday life in the public sphere, thus the cultural structure.

One valued functioning the informants often raised is education. Since the formal education system is inadequate, a great demand for informal channels has arisen. The informants' claims for greater agency have come about through the growing informal networks of knowledge. However, the fact that women are expected to stay at home makes it difficult and less likely for girls and women to get involved outside the home.

According to Archer (1995), interaction always achieves structural change. This elaboration, however, does not always develop intentionally. Violence has proved to be an effective way to suppress women's voices, thus effectively preventing structural change from taking place. Opportunities to exchange knowledge generate a stronger feeling of common goals among people, with the result that they have more courage to speak up, despite the harassment and violence that is still common on the streets. The lack of women's possibilities to enjoy safe participation in the public sphere is due to both cultural inertness and a political unwillingness to recognize women as equal.

Political structure

The results show that from an equality standpoint the political structure in Egypt is weak. However, the inertness of political will can be seen as a social conversion factor impeding the functioning 'to engage in democratic values'. This presupposes not only a political system of free and fair elections, and laws and regulations that apply equally to all its citizens, but also the opportunity for active and safe participation in both civil life and the political arena. The process of engaging in democratic values thereby becomes an educational issue, running through the social, cultural and political structures. In Egyptian society today, where the formal education is inadequate and parallel education systems operate, the students are not being educated either in a democratic spirit or about democratic principles. Having access to quality education is a highly valued functioning among the informants. Democratic values can be

fostered by quality education, which may also result in better representation and a safer society.

Violence has escalated according to the informants and structural change has occurred in an unintended direction. Without safety, few of women's valued functionings can actually be achieved. Having representation in parliament that corresponds to the population is for the informants crucial if the changes demanded are to take place. Because violence against women is also a strategy used by the regime, women have met even harder antagonism in participating for progressive change. Women have been kidnapped and sexually assaulted. Committing such crimes with impunity is exacerbating the situation further for women, making violence an integral part of the way political communication is made. This politically induced violence plays a part in making frequent, socially induced violence possible.

Concluding discussion

The three analytically separated structures together constitute everyday life. The statements of the female informants give an account of women's comprehension of the social, cultural and political structures in relation to agency, providing an understanding of the conditions under which women live. The focus in this thesis, on women's conditions, claims and costs, highlights equal opportunities for a group that is a cross section of individuals overlapping several other subsets of society; this has given an understanding of how gender mainstreaming has developed with the revolution in Egypt.

The study demonstrates women's extensive resistance to their unequal conditions and throws light on the informants' strong voices for change. Development of an adequate understanding of gender mainstreaming requires a clear picture of the related concepts of gender and equality that establish dominant conditions in everyday life.

In Egypt, misogyny (hatred of women) (Eltahawy, 2015), and gynopia (female invisibility) are to a certain extent predominant features. It is evident that equal possibilities guaranteed by law can be restrained by cultural norms and values. In the social, cultural and political structures in Egypt, misogyny and gynopia contribute to the aggravating circumstances that women endure. Direct violence is an effective way to keep women from participating, but obscuring women also reduces and complicates meaningful participation on various structural levels in society. Thus, women's (equal) opportunity to arrange for themselves the life they have reason to value involves all structures in society.

In this study, the significance of participation, both as a means of influence and as an end in itself, thus part of a 'full life', has been examined through women's experience of their possibilities of making informed choices. Participation as a condition for a full life as well as a condition for societal change has, in the context of the Egyptian uprising, proved to be quite contradictory due to a participation-opportunity gap. The results of the study suggest that in

order to overcome these obstacles, strategies for empowerment on different levels are required.

In conclusion, the valued functionings which emerged throughout the three societal structures have different connotations in each structure. These valued functionings are arranged in four broad groups of functionings, indicating areas of importance for the informants to arrange a life they have reason to value. These broad functionings are: 1) to be educated, 2) to have autonomy, 3) to have influence and 4) to be safe. These should be seen as rightful claims, despite the fierce resistance that women face when they raise their voices for equal opportunities. A key finding in the analysis is the importance of being free from violence. 'To be safe' is a functioning that is essential if all other valued functionings are to become possible. Change has been attained in all three societal structures; however, these changes did not turn out entirely as intended. Despite extensive costs, the knowledge that change is possible gave many of the informants and their networks the incentive to continue to champion progressive change.

Svensk sammanfattning

Introduktion

Den här studien undersöker samhällsförändring utifrån informanternas strävan att leva ett 'fullvärdigt liv'. Detta fullvärdiga liv beskrivs med hjälp av Amartya Sen (1999) och hans begrepp 'ett gott liv'. Sen menar att det goda livet kommer ur en människas möjligheter att ordna ett liv som hon har anledning att värdesätta. Centralt för Sens ide om ett gott liv är möjligheten för individen att aktivt kunna delta i förändringsprocesser, snarare än att vara passiv mottagare (Sen, 1999, s. 281). Detta innebär att det är viktigt att delta i det offentliga rummet och att kunna påverka beslut som rör det egna livet, för att människor ska uppleva att de lever ett fullvärdigt liv. För att uppnå detta bör möjlighet till kritiskt tänkande finnas, vilket gör lärandets villkor centrala. Strävan efter samhällsförändring, det vill säga en utveckling av strukturer (Archer, 2005), åstadkoms genom ett samspel mellan föreställningen om att ett annat liv är möjligt, ett informellt lärande och gemensam aktiv handling. Detta har visat att det är möjligt att skapa förändring.

Aktivister i den egyptiska revolutionen var både kvinnor och män; liberala, antikapitalister, troende muslimer, nationalisterna och feminister, alla deltagare i olika nätverk. Under de första 18 månaderna av revolutionen, spelade kvinnor en viktig och avgörande roll. Från första början var kvinnor drivande och aktiva i organiserandet av revolutionen. När kvinnor senare började kräva samma rättigheter och möjligheter som männen ledde det till våldsamma protester och ökat våld mot kvinnor. Trots hårt motstånd har kvinnor fortsatt att höja sin röst och kräver jämlikhet, i hopp om att det är möjligt att göra förändring.

Avsikten här är att undersöka vilka möjligheter och / eller begränsningar kvinnor möter när de på olika sätt arbetar för en samhällsutveckling. För att undersöka detta har jag gjort en analytisk uppdelning av samhällsstrukturer i sociala, kulturella och politiska strukturer. Tillsammans utgör dessa strukturer informanternas vardag. Avsikten i denna avhandling är att diskutera kvinnors faktiska möjligheter när de aktivt söker förändring i samhället.

När man diskuterar begreppen struktur, roll- och rollpositioner som tillsammans med värderade 'functionings' och 'social conversion factors' som genererar agentskapet, är det kvinnors villkor i de ovan tre beskrivna strukturerna i samhället som beskrivs. Detta ger en förståelse för de villkor, krav och kostnader informanterna har i varje struktur.

Granskningen av tidigare forskning betonar både möjligheter och hinder för kvinnors agentskap i patriarkala samhällen. Skälen som beskrivs är av såväl individuell som strukturell karaktär. Den epistemologiska ställning denna avhandling tar är att den enskilde har olika relationer inom olika strukturer, vilket villkorar dess agentskap i den intersubjektiva interaktionen och därmed individens agerande.

Trots att många studier inom utvecklingsforskningen har undersökt kvinnors agentskap, har få studier gjorts utifrån olika strukturer i samhället. Min studie syftar till att fylla detta tomrum genom att undersöka dessa strukturer och kvinnors upplevda agentskap i var och en av dem. Detta ger ökad förståelse för kvinnors villkor och möjligheter till förändring.

Syfte och forskningsfrågor

Detta är en empirisk studie som syftar till att bidra till att stärka förståelsen av de strukturella förutsättningarna för kvinnors agentskap. Den syftar vidare till hur dessa möjliggör och / eller begränsar kvinnors möjlighet att delta i samhällsförändringar, och hur kvinnors möjligheter att påverka beslut som rör deras egna liv ser ut. När formell utbildning är otillräcklig, kan informella kanaler vara avgörande för lärande, dessa kanaler är därför av intresse i denna studie. Av intresse i detta arbete är också vad som motiverar vissa kvinnor att motsätta sig de sociala, kulturella och politiska strukturer, trots ofta höga personliga kostnader. Genom tre teman – villkor, anspråk och kostnader – kommer kvinnors möjligheter att påverka samhällsförändring att diskuteras. Kvinnors villkor, de anspråk på jämställdhet som kvinnor gör och kostnaden för att göra dessa anspråk, är centralt i studien. I ett försöka att svara på detta har följande forskningsfrågor formulerats:

- Hur ser villkoren för kvinnors agentskap ut i förhållande till de sociala, kulturella och politiska strukturerna enligt informanterna?
- Vilka möjligheter och hinder för självbestämmande har kvinnor i de tre strukturerna?
- Vad är kostnaderna för kvinnor som deltar i samhällsförändringen?

Teoretiskt ramverk

Studien bygger på Sens (1999) teori om utveckling som utbyggnaden av människors val genom att använda den konceptuella ramen för begreppen 'functionings' och 'capability'. Sen konstruerar välfärd genom ett antal grundläggande 'functionings'. Dessa 'functionings' är en persons möjligheter att faktiskt *vara* och *göra* något han eller hon värdesätter.

Den enskilde människans möjlighet att ordnar sitt eget liv definierar hennes livsval och därmed möjligheten att leva det liv hon har skäl att värdera: ett gott liv (Sen, 1980). Capability Approach är ett teoretiskt ramverk som i motsats till andra teorier om utveckling lyfter en individs verkliga möjligheter. Dessa

varanden och göranden beskrivs genom de värderade 'functionings' (Sen, 2011).

Detta alternativa sätt att redogöra för välbefinnande ser frihet som framträdande för att uppnå målet. Många utvecklingsteorier handlar om välfärdsekonomi och missar därmed en viktig aspekt av utveckling. Dessa studier tar inte upp de aspekter som gäller människors frihet att välja, som är av betydelse både för samhälleliga och personliga utveckling. Ett viktigt inslag i Capability Approach är dess fokus på individens faktiska frihet att uppnå de värderade 'functionings' (i motsats till att fokusera på åtkomst till resurser eller ägodelar). Därmed har Capability Approach ett specifikt fokus på den mänskliga mångfalden vilket ger möjligheter att också analysera kvinnors specifika villkor, vilket ger kvinnors egna uppfattningar om sina villkor större genomslag.

För att samhällen ska fungera skapar människor strukturer som sätter gränser för mänsklig handlande. Dessa strukturer ger den ram inom vilken människor tillåts verka, och gör det möjligt visst agentskap och förhindrar andra. När de givna strukturella gränserna inte motsvarar individens föreställningar om ett gott liv, kommer agentskapet upplevas som alltför snävt. Detta manifesteras i en medvetenhet om möjligheten till ett annat liv. Denna medvetenhet förklaras med Martha Nussbaum begrepp av 'narrative imagination'. Hon argumenterar för värdet av en ökad kunskap om omvärlden och om möjligheten att föreställa sig en förändring av den egna livssituationen (Nussbaum, 1996).

Att tänka i nya kreativa banor både kräver och förutsätter fysiskt så väl som ett intellektuellt utrymme. Att kunna kritiskt granska din egen vardag är viktigt om du ska kunna vara en del av samhällsförändring. Det betyder att för att förändring ska ske måste det finnas medvetenhet om vad som kan vara problemet, förmåga att resonera logiskt om vad som måste förändras, att föreställa sig något annat, och därmed se bortom den egna vardagen och agera i enlighet med vad som kan göras för att nå ett uppsatt mål.

Centralt i analysen är begreppet 'Social Conversion factors'. De är de normer i varje struktur som antingen möjliggör eller hindrar en viss handling (Sen, 1992). Dessa kommer att avgöra om värderade 'functionings' är möjliga att uppnå. Detta belyser det faktum att det inte är tillräckligt att få tillgång till en 'functioning'. Ytterligare faktorer måste beaktas.

Även om en värderad 'functioning' finns, till exempel möjligheten till utbildning kan en 'Social Conversion factor', till exempel en social norm som hindrar kvinnor från att röra sig fritt i samhället, hindra henne från handlingen att gå till skolan. Det är efter att dessa faktorer har tagits i beaktande som kvinnors verkliga 'Capability' blir synlig. Denna frihet är kvinnornas reella möjlighet att agera (Sen, 1985) och det faktiska utrymmet kvinnor har att aktivt söka förändring.

För att förstå komplexiteten av kvinnors villkor för agentskap och utfallet av deras handlingar, krävs en teoretiskt ram som inkluderar både mål och process. För detta syfte har Archers (1995) teori om social förändring visat sig särskilt användbar. Archers ide om *Analytiska dualism* visar på betydelsen av

att göra en analytisk separation av struktur och agenskap. Hon menar att strukturen (1) är villkorad av social interaktion (2) som i sin tur antingen (3) reproducerar eller omvandlar strukturer. Analytisk dualism används för att förklara informanternas handlingar och resultatet i de tre analytiskt åtskilda strukturerna. Med Archers terminologi är ett samhälle i förändring antingen morfogenetiska (transformerande) eller morphostatiska (reproduktiv). Strukturer påverkar agenskapet och agenskapet påverkar strukturer, vilket ger verklig möjlighet till förändring (Archer, 2003)

För att kunna göra välgrundade livsval krävs resurser, agenskap och resultat (utfall i form av till exempel välbefinnande). Flera studier av kvinnors 'empowerment' har gjorts för att belysa dessa dimensioner. Det finns dock få studier som belyser begreppet valfrihet genom att betona de möjliga konsekvenserna av detta val. Denna studie är ett försök att bidra till den samtida forskningen genom att införliva de strukturella elementen i analysen av kvinnors agenskap i samhällsutveckling över tid.

Den empiriska studien

För att besvara forskningsfrågorna har jag intervjuat kvinnor och män, alla väl bevandrade i arbetet med den egyptiska revolutionen. Dessa kvinnor och män kallas här för informanter. Studien genomfördes inom 18 månader, vid tre besök i landet. Data består av arton semi-strukturerade intervjuer och en fokusgruppsintervju. Alla intervjuer har transkriberats i sin helhet. Fokusgruppsintervjun gjordes med män, som alla var aktiva i arbetet med att uppnå kvinnors lika rättigheter. Fokusgruppsintervjun gjordes för att bredda förståelsen av villkoren för kvinnor.

Analysen av informanternas vilja till förändring börjar med deras förståelse av och förhållningssätt till förändring i de tre samhällsstrukturer. I deras strävan efter ett "fullvärdigt liv", har möjligheterna att åstadkomma samhällsförändring blivit synlig i huruvida de avsedda strukturella förändringarna uppnås och i så fall till vilken kostnad.

I det offentliga rummet styrs individer i stort sett av samma uppsättning normer och praxis, däremot varierar människors individuella situationer kraftigt beroende på specifika möjligheter och omständigheter. Dessa villkorliga omständigheter börjar i familjen. Informanternas utsagor visar under vilka förhållanden kvinnor försöker göra sig ett "fullvärdigt liv". Dessa uttalanden måste förstås mot bakgrund av rådande samhällsstrukturer, vilket gör beskrivningen av villkoren i de olika strukturerna viktigt. Studien har därför tre teman; (1) Kvinnors villkor för deltagande i det dagliga livet i tre samhällsstrukturer, (2) Anspråk kvinnor gör för att få lika möjligheter, (3) Kostnaderna för att överträda gränserna. Dessa tre teman är analytiskt separerade i tre samhällsstrukturer.

Åtgärder som vidtagits för att uppnå kunskap och för att öka agenskap i de olika samhällsstrukturer innebär möjligheten att *vara* och *göra* ett antal sa-

ker enligt informanterna och därmed deras värderade 'functionings'. I analysen har sexton 'functionings' identifierats. Dessa 'functionings' tolkas som vad kvinnor anser att de måste ha för att kunna leva ett fullvärdigt liv. Dessa värderade 'functionings' som informanterna tar upp belyser således även villkoren de lever under. Genom dessa söker kvinnor större agentskap i alla tre strukturerna.

Den sociala strukturen

I analysen av den sociala strukturen blir det tydligt att flickor och kvinnor har höga förväntningar på sig att utveckla vissa 'functionings' medan andra 'functionings' inte ses som lika angelägna att utveckla. 'Functionings' som kvinnor uppmuntras mindre att utveckla beskrivs genom fem värderade 'functionings'. Dessa är 'att respekteras som jämlik i familjen', 'att få utbildning', 'att stöttas av familjen', 'att kunna utveckla personlighet' och 'att vara trygg och säker från våld'.

Både en jämlik uppfostran för flickor och pojkar i familjen och att kunna gå i skolan är viktigt. Utan formell utbildning som ger kunskaper i att läsa och skriva är det svårare att vara en del av ett större sammanhang och därmed svårare att utveckla det egna tänkandet. Dessa 'functionings' förutsätter både 'att stötta av familjen' och 'att vara trygg och säker från våld'. Dessa 'functionings' i den sociala strukturen visar informanternas önskan att utveckla den traditionella roll som tillskrivs kvinnor. För att kunna göra anspråk på ökat agentskap menar informanterna att det krävs två aspekter: stöd och personlighet. Dessa två egenskaper ses som grundläggande för att kunna föreställa sig möjligheten till ett annat liv för sig själv (Nussbaum, 2000).

I Egypten är möjligheterna att uppnå värderade 'functionings' i den sociala strukturen begränsade av en rad skäl. Det patriarkala systemet gör det svårt att aktivera de mekanismer som krävs för att kvinnor skall behandlas lika som män. För att en förändring av förhållandet mellan kvinnor och män ska ske, menar många att man måste börja med uppfostran mycket tidigt i ett barns liv. För att detta ska ske måste attityder, genom utbildning och information, uppdateras.

Den kulturella strukturen

Villkoren för kvinnor att delta i den kulturella strukturen beskrivs som svåra, delvis på grund av våldet som råder i samhället. Detta våld fortgår eftersom våld mot kvinnor och mot barn är en del av kulturen. Misogyni (hat mot kvinnor) visar sig på många sätt i kvinnors vardag. Informanterna talar inte bara om direkt våld utan också om förminskning, diskriminering och objektivering. Kvinnornas uttalanden i intervjuerna vittnar om att detta är ett effektivt sätt att tysta kvinnor.

Vid analysen av informanternas utsagor om vad de värderar är 'att vara aktiv och säker i samhället' det mest framstående anspråket. Denna värderade 'functioning' är på många sätt grundläggande för att uppnå andra 'functionings' i informanternas vardag då de befinner sig i det offentliga rummet, alltså i den kulturella strukturen.

En värderad 'functioning' som ofta diskuteras är utbildning. Eftersom utbildningssystemet sviktar, ökar efterfrågan på informella kanaler för att nå kunskap. Informanternas krav på större agentskap har möjliggjorts genom växande informella nätverk. Det faktum att kvinnor förväntas stanna hemma gör det svårt för flickor och kvinnor att engagera sig utanför hemmet, vilket i sin tur gör det svårt att uppnå ett antal värderade 'functionings' inom den kulturella strukturen.

Enligt Archer (1995), uppnås förändring i strukturer alltid vid interaktion. Denna förändring är dock inte alltid i enlighet med intentionerna. Våld har visat sig vara ett effektivt sätt att tysta kvinnors röster, vilket effektivt har förhindrat viss strukturell förändring från att äga rum. Möjligheten till kunskapsutbyte ger en starkare känsla av gemensamma mål mellan människor, vilket resulterar i att människor har större mod att höja sina röster, trots de trakasserier och det våld som fortfarande är vanligt på gatorna. Att kvinnor fortfarande inte kan delta i det offentliga rummet beror på både en kulturell tröghet och en politisk ovilja att erkänna kvinnors lika rättigheter.

Den politiska strukturen

Resultaten visar att ur jämlikhetsperspektiv är den politiska strukturen i Egypten svag. Den politiska oviljan kan ses som en 'Social Conversion factor' som aktivt hindrar från 'att engagera sig i demokratiska värderingar'. Denna värderade 'functionings' förutsätter inte bara ett politiskt system av fria och rättvisa val samt lagar och förordningar som gäller lika för alla sina medborgare, utan också möjligheter till ett aktivt och säkert deltagande i både offentliga rummet och på den politiska arenan. Processen att delta i demokratiska värderingar blir därmed en utbildningsfråga. Denna löper som en röd tråd genom den sociala, kulturella och politiska strukturen. I det egyptiska samhället i dag, där formell utbildning är otillräcklig och parallella utbildningssystem är vanliga, är eleverna inte utbildade vare sig i en demokratisk anda eller om de demokratiska principerna. Att ha tillgång till utbildning av god kvalitet är en

högt värderad 'functioning' bland informanterna. Demokratiska värden kan främjas genom utbildning av god kvalitet och därmed ge de värderade 'functionings' 'att ha representation' och 'att ha ett säkert samhälle' som följd.

Våldet har trappats upp enligt informanterna och strukturella förändringar har skett, men i fel riktning. Utan frihet från våld kommer många av informanternas värderade 'functionings' inte att uppnås. En representation i parlamentet som motsvarar befolkningen är för informanterna avgörande om förändringarna som de strävar efter ska inträffa. Eftersom våld mot kvinnor också är en strategi som används av regimen, har kvinnor drabbats hårt när de deltagit i förändringsarbetet. Kvinnor har kidnappats, blivit sexuellt ofredade och våldtagna. Straffrihet mot dessa brott förvärrar situationen ytterligare för kvinnor och våld blir en del av hur den politiska kommunikation sker. Detta våld ses som en del av den politiska strukturen och spelar stor roll i att våldet i de sociala och kulturella strukturerna kan fortgå.

Avslutande diskussion

De tre analytiskt separerade strukturerna utgör vardagslivet. De utsagar de kvinnliga informanterna gör ger en förståelse för kvinnors villkor i de sociala, kulturella och politiska strukturerna i förhållande till agentskap. Genom att undersöka kvinnors anspråk och kostnader för dessa anspråk, synliggörs möjligheter att delta på lika villkor i samhällsförändringen i och med revolutionen i Egypten.

Studien visar kvinnors omfattande motstånd mot ojämlika förhållanden, och ger utrymme för informanternas starka röster för förändring. I Egypten är misogyny (hat mot kvinnor) (Eltahawy, 2015), och gynopia (osynliggörande av kvinnor) i någon mening dominerande drag. Det är uppenbart att lika möjligheter enligt lag kan hållas tillbaka av kulturella normer och värderingar. I de sociala, kulturella och politiska strukturer i Egypten bidrar misogyny och gynopia till de försvarande villkor som kvinnor lever under. Direkt våld är ett effektivt sätt att hålla kvinnor från att delta, men förminskande av kvinnor försvårar också meningsfullt deltagande på de olika strukturella nivåerna i samhället. Följaktligen bör kvinnors (lika) möjligheter att ordna ett liv de har anledning att värdesätta omfatta alla strukturer i samhället.

I denna studie har frågan om kvinnors delaktighet, både som ett medel för inflytande och som ett mål i sig, alltså en del av ett "fullvärdigt liv", undersökts genom kvinnors erfarenheter av sina möjligheter att göra välgrundade val.

Deltagande som ett villkor för ett fullvärdigt liv samt som en förutsättning för samhällsförändring har inom ramen för den Egyptiska revolutionen visat sig vara motsägelsefullt. Detta visade sig i glappet mellan det som bör var möjligt och hur verkligheten ser ut för kvinnorna i studien. Resultatet av studien tyder på att för att övervinna dessa hinder krävs strategier för 'empowerment' på olika nivåer i samhället.

Sammanfattningsvis kan sägas att de värderade 'functionings' som beskrivits i de tre samhällsstrukturerna, med olika konnotationer i varje struktur, har ordnats i fyra bredare kategorier. Dessa bredare 'functionings' visade sig vara viktiga för informanterna för att de ska anse sig ha möjlighet att ordna ett liv de har anledning att värdera. Dessa breda 'functionings' är: 1) Att vara utbildad, 2) Att vara självständig, 3) Att ha inflytande och 4) Att vara fri från våld. Dessa bör ses som rättmätiga krav, trots det hårda motstånd som kvinnor möter när de höjer sina röster för lika möjligheter. En viktig slutsats i analysen är vikten av att vara fri från våld. 'Att vara säker' är en värderad 'functioning' som är grundläggande för att alla de andra 'functionings' ska kunna uppnås. Förändring har uppnåtts i alla tre samhällsstrukturer men inte alltid i den riktning som informanterna önskade. Trots personliga kostnader för informanterna har vetskapen om att förändring är möjligt gett många av dem motivation att fortsätta att kämpa för utveckling och progressiv förändring i alla tre samhällsstrukturerna.

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