

THE
TRIALS
OF
SPRING



Discussion Guide

Women, War, and Social Change in the Arab Spring

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ABOUT PEACE IS LOUD

Peace is Loud uses the power of media to amplify women's voices for peacebuilding. Our organization envisions a future in which women are central to building peaceful, secure, and prosperous societies.

To request a DVD for a public screening of *The Trials of Spring* feature film or short films, visit: trialspring.com/screenings

All short films are also available for streaming online: trialspring.com/stories

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO THE TRIALS OF SPRING

The Trials of Spring is a cross-media project that tells the stories of nine women who played central roles in the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings and their aftermaths in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen. It includes a feature-length documentary, six short films, articles by *New York Times* journalists, and an outreach campaign to raise awareness about women's struggles for social justice and freedom in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

WITH YOUR HELP, WE CAN . . .

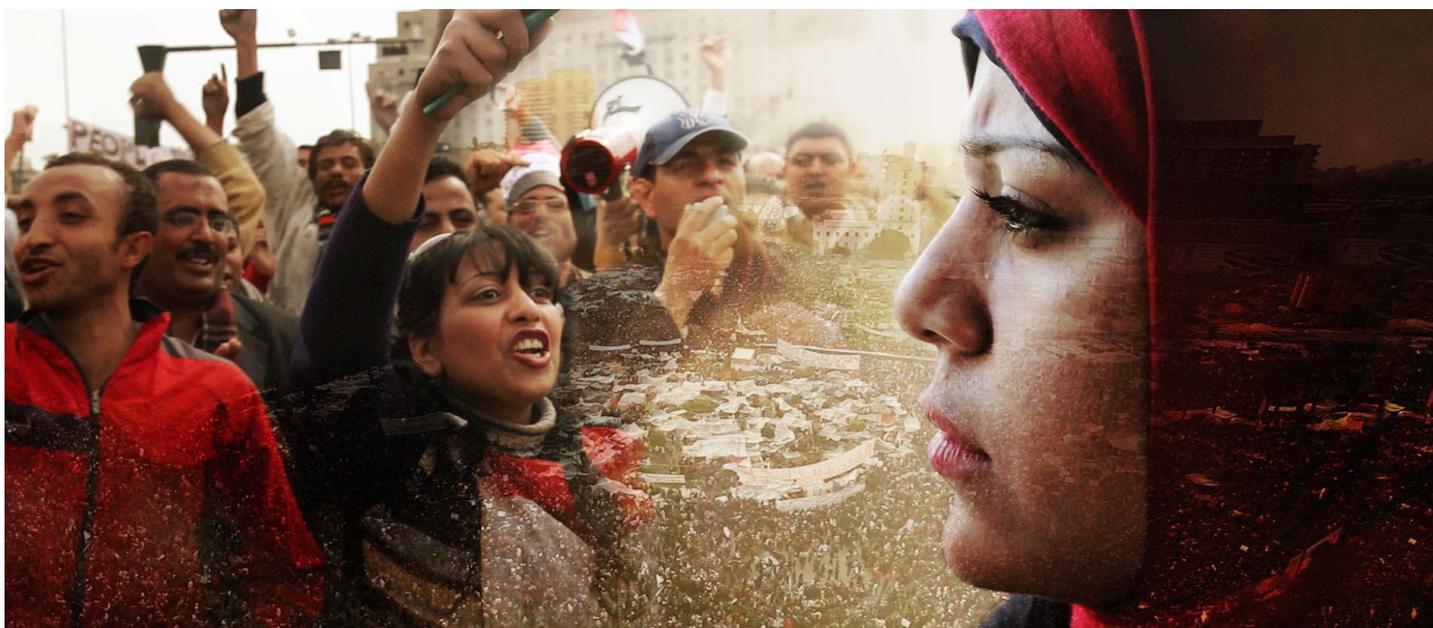
Raise awareness about women's roles in the Arab uprisings and, in particular, the leadership and demands of women activists in the MENA region;

Motivate media-makers to feature a plurality of women's voices in international coverage of the MENA region;

Heighten awareness of the use of sexual violence as a political tool in Egypt;

Catalyze a discussion about the connection between women's rights and civil liberties;

Spark a discussion about government suppression of dissent in the twenty-first century.



MESSAGE FROM THE FILMMAKER

It has been said that the world knows little about its greatest heroes. It knows even less about its heroines. When the Arab Spring erupted, I watched with enormous curiosity as country after country joined the universal call for “bread, freedom, and social justice.” I was curious about the role of women in these extraordinary revolutions. I wasn’t surprised to find that they not only participated on the frontlines, but, in many cases, they were pioneers. I wanted to know more about their stories.

During numerous scouting trips, I met woman after woman who stood in utter contrast to the stereotype of Arab women as voiceless and downtrodden. They challenged widely held assumptions about gender, religion, the veil, and political participation of women in the Arab world. In making this film, I have come to learn that Arab women are more than powerful agents of change in their own communities. In a region gridlocked between religious and military conflict, women do not need saving; women are the saviors. They just might be the best answer to the violent radicalism that plagues the region and inspires fear and prejudice around the world.

Gini Reticker, New York, NY

Gini Reticker is the Oscar-nominated and Emmy-winning producer and director of *Pray the Devil Goes Back to Hell*, *Asylum*, and the celebrated PBS television series *Women, War & Peace*. She is the executive producer of *The Trials of Spring* and directed the feature documentary layer of the series.



MESSAGE FROM HEND NAFAEA

I'm often asked after [The] *Trials of Spring* screenings about what has happened to me since the events shown in the film. In some ways, my life has remained the same in that I've continued to advocate for human rights and to work to document the human rights abuses that are still rampant in Egypt. In other ways, my life now is very different: I now live in the United States in Washington, D.C., where I work with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

The Trials of Spring feature film tells the story of how I was sentenced to life in prison in February 2015 for joining a protest three years before. At the time I was sentenced, I had been working at the Hisham Mubarek Center for Law documenting the experiences of victims of human rights abuses in Egypt, including the horrific conditions they face while imprisoned. After I was forced to flee Egypt for my own safety, I continued to work closely with my colleagues to ensure that there is documentation of, and hopefully accountability for, the abuses committed against peaceful protestors. Currently, there are more than 23,000 political prisoners in Egypt, and at least 280 people have died as a result of prisoners being denied food and medical care. Women human rights defenders have been specifically targeted, and I'm dedicated to prominently featuring their stories within my reporting.

My fellowship with NED allows me to continue this important work in the hopes of one day seeing justice in the country I love. The aim of my work is to expose these atrocities to the outside world and to make international human rights organizations aware of the degree of systematic violations and state-sanctioned violence taking place against human rights defenders both inside and outside Egyptian prisons. It's also my hope that this documentation serve as a database of the crimes committed by the Egyptian regime and as a tool for activists and human rights defenders working to generate global awareness of the atrocities taking place. It's been heartening to see some progress, such as the release of 100 prisoners in September of this year, including women human rights defenders Yara Sallam and Sanaa Seif. However, much work remains to be done before we can truly see justice.

I long to return to my friends and family in Egypt. Although my family initially was not supportive of me during my arrest and sentencing, in recent months they have changed their views and expressed support for me and for my work. It's very difficult to be separated from the people and the country I love. What carries me through it all is the knowledge that I'm working to honor my fellow Egyptians who have dedicated their lives to peace and justice and that together we are building a more peaceful future for all of Egypt.

Hend Nafea, November 2015, Washington, D.C.

FEATURE FILM SYNOPSIS

When a young Egyptian woman travels from her village to Cairo to add her voice to the tens of thousands of Egyptians demanding an end to sixty years of military rule, she is arrested, beaten, and tortured by security forces and later punished and imprisoned by her family for daring to speak out. Unbreakable, she sets out in a search for freedom and social justice in a country in the grips of a power struggle where there is little tolerance for the likes of her. Buoyed by the other activists she meets along the way, Henda Nafea's story mirrors the trajectory of the Arab Spring—from the ecstasy of newfound courage to the agony of shattered dreams. In the end, despite crushing setbacks, it is resilience that sustains the hope for reform even in the darkest hours of repression.

WOMEN FEATURED IN THE TRIALS OF SPRING



Henda Nafea



Mariam Kirillos



Khadiga Hennawi
(Mama K)

KEY ISSUES

The Trials of Spring will be relevant to a wide range of audiences, including people interested in:

ACCOUNTABILITY

ACTIVISM

ARAB SPRING

CIVIL LIBERTIES

CIVIL SOCIETY

DEMOCRACY

DIGNITY AS A HUMAN RIGHT

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

EGYPT

FEMINISM

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

GENDER ROLES

GOVERNMENT

HUMAN RIGHTS

ISLAM AND WOMEN

ISLAM AND WOMEN

JOURNALISM

JUDICIARY / LAW ENFORCEMENT

JUDICIARY / LAW ENFORCEMENT

LAW

LEADERSHIP

MEDIA COVERAGE

MENA REGION (MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA)

MILITARY POWER AND CULTURE

PEACE STUDIES

POLITICAL ORGANIZING

POLITICAL PROTEST

POLITICAL SCIENCE

PROTEST

SEXISM

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

SOCIAL CHANGE

SOCIAL JUSTICE

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

WOMEN'S STUDIES

DISCUSSION

OPENING QUESTIONS

- Imagine telling a friend or family member about this film. What would you say?
or
In a tweet or text, how would you summarize the main message(s) of this film? How does your summary compare/contrast with what others in the room wrote?
- If you could spend a day with one person in the film, whom would you choose, and what would you want to talk about with that person?
- What single word best describes how the film made you feel?
- Describe a moment from the film that you found particularly inspiring or disturbing. What was it about that moment that moved you?



Salwa Bughaghis (Production still from Libya - Wake up, Benghazi!)

PERSONAL LESSONS

- Choose one of the women featured in the film and complete these sentences:
 - Your story is important to me because . . .
 - I identified with the part of your story about . . .
 - I was angry that you had to . . . and impressed when you . . .
- Did you see anything familiar in the experiences of the women? How are their lives similar to and different from the lives of women you know?

Did any of the women say anything that “spoke truth” to you?

WHAT ARE THEY FIGHTING FOR?

- According to the women, the goals of the revolution were “bread, freedom, and social justice.” What do those words/goals mean to you? What do you think they meant to the Arab Spring revolutionaries?
- The film opens with Hend saying, “In the small village where I was raised, they think a girl should stay home and raise the children. But I think girls have a right to their freedom.” What’s so revolutionary about this idea?
- We then see activist Asmaa Mahfouz declare on YouTube “we must go down on the twenty-fifth” to “demand our fundamental human rights.” What is the link between Hend’s statement and Asmaa’s vision for the protests?
- Mama K says that “freedom and social justice do not differentiate between men or women.” Has this been your experience?
- Hend, a practicing Muslim, says, “I want to liberate minds from ignorance, from outdated customs and traditions.” What specific traditions and customs do you see both in the film and in your community that prevent women from fulfilling their full potential? How does one “liberate minds” while still honoring one’s heritage?
- Hend says of the brother she raised, “My brother acts as if I bring him shame.” Why do you think her brother would feel shame?
- What did you learn from the film about
 - the things that women across the globe have in common?
 - the consequences of institutionalized sexism?

DISSENT AND SUPPRESSION

- What did you learn from the film about
 - activism?
 - how to shift power without using military force?
 - the tactics used by people in power to disempower or discredit dissenters?
- In addition to the women who were arrested, the film notes the crackdown on “civil society” organizations, including the imprisonment of people involved in human rights work and the head of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information’s newspaper. Why would the government target these particular people? What’s the threat they represent and to whom?
- Mariam says, “In the moment, we weren’t thinking about what would come next.” And Hend acknowledges that, “The revolution doesn’t have a roadmap.” Is it possible to create such a map, or is protest and response unpredictable by nature? If it is possible, what would a roadmap for revolution look like?
- Hend’s family was so opposed to her participation in the revolution that they literally locked her away. What were their objections? Why do you think they blamed her rather than holding accountable the authorities that had brutalized Hend?
- Despite significant differences between the Mubarak, Morsi, and Al-Sisi governments, each uses similar tactics against their opposition including assaulting, killing, and imprisoning protesters; charging victims with inciting the crimes committed against them; endlessly postponing trials, etc. What are the political benefits of these tactics? What sorts of governments or leaders fear their own people, and do these tactics help solidify their power both in the long run and the short run?
- Despite her deep opposition to the Morsi government, after the attacks at Rabaa, Hend acknowledges that she and the country will suffer for years “because of the way the security forces dealt with the Muslim Brotherhood.” How does the military’s treatment of those she opposes affect her own hopes for freedom and security? Is it possible to achieve the just society that Hend envisions if any group’s civil rights are denied? If you could be guaranteed security in exchange for giving up your civil rights, would you take the deal? Why or why not?

ACTIVISM AND GENDER

- How was women’s experience of protest (including risks, strategies, and goals) different than men’s? As you look at the images of the crowds, what do you notice about who is present and what they are doing? Do you notice any differences between the actions of men and women?
- Mama K reports that, “Women were at least 50 percent of the revolution, maybe more.” Was this reflected in the coverage of events that you remember seeing or hearing? Who was interviewed? What do you know about the Arab Spring from listening to the women in the film that you wouldn’t know from reports that only told men’s stories?
- Mariam gets her information about the protests from Facebook. How have digital technologies (the Internet, cell phones, social media, etc.) changed political protest? How have they provided women with access to public spaces that had previously been off limits?
- What did you learn from the film about leadership?
- What did you learn from the film about the role of men as allies? How can men step up without robbing women of their voices?
- After the defeat of Mubarak, Mariam remembers “seeing a guy in the square, holding a sign that said: ‘I used to be afraid. Now I’m Egyptian.’” What would have to happen for a woman to confidently hold that sign up?



Ghazala Mhmadi (Production still from Tunisia - Keeping the Promise)

WOMEN'S BODIES AS POLITICAL BATTLEFIELD

- Mariam says that, after initial victories, “women’s bodies became a political battlefield.” What do you think she meant?
- Consider this (partial) list of intimidation tactics:
 - calling protesters “prostitutes”
 - pulling off women’s veils
 - tearing off clothing / forcing women to expose their naked bodies
 - “virginity tests”
 - groping / molestation

Why do you think the authorities choose to use or permit these particular tactics?

- The army admits to subjecting female protesters to “virginity tests,” claiming that they were just defending themselves against accusations of rape. To whom would the army’s explanation be credible? What, if any, impact did the virginity tests have on the direction of the protest movement?
- Hend believes that “the regime was trying to break down the people by assaulting the women.” Why would the government assume that humiliating women would weaken men’s resolve to resist? How, if at all, does the regime’s strategy reflect and reinforce a patriarchal worldview?
- One girl at the protest complains of a man’s hand inside her blouse: “These men quoting the Prophet and the Quran are the same men who sexually harassed us!” Why didn’t the ascendance to power of the Muslim Brotherhood, a fundamentalist religious party claiming moral authority, protect women from sexual assaults?
- Mama K scolds those who are arresting her: “Shame on you. I’m as old as your mother.” What makes it possible for soldiers or police officers to stop seeing women as mothers or daughters or even simply as people?
- Mariam says that every Egyptian woman “knows that she can be assaulted at any time” with impunity. How does acceptance of sexual harassment undermine the possibility of a free society? Can men in a society be free if women are routinely subject to sexual harassment?

POLITICAL REALITIES

- Hend says, “My whole family is military and pro-regime, regardless of which regime is in power.” How does this sentiment undermine democracy?
- The Muslim Brotherhood’s candidate, Mohammed Morsi, became Egypt’s first democratically elected civilian president. He then moved to institute an interpretation of Islamic law that restricted women’s opportunities. So, if democracy isn’t the answer for Egypt’s women, what is? What are the alternatives that would protect women’s freedom?
- What is the relationship between protesters and the military (and police)? How and why does it change over time? What aspects of military culture lead soldiers to protect women and also to violate them? What’s the likely long-term outcome when significant segments of a population lose trust in society’s designated protectors?
- General Al-Sisi’s military government treats all the revolutionaries as terrorists. How does this framing of protests influence Egypt’s relationship with Western nations?
- The United States wants a stable Egypt that will cooperate in its war against terrorists and adhere to peace agreements with Israel. What should the U.S. government do if Egypt’s government meets those demands but sacrifices women’s rights in the process?
- What did you learn from the film about the importance of accountability and an independent judiciary to guaranteeing women’s freedom?



Hend Nafea (Production still from Egypt - Life's Sentence)

RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

- What is the meaning of the film's title? What were the "trials"?
- In the face of physical risk and grievous injustices, what gives activists like Henda hope and strength? What were her options?
- Why did protesters take up the chant: "*Banat Masr mataat a'raysh* (The daughters of Egypt will never be stripped)?"
- Held captive in her family's home, Henda starts writing statements:
 - "I am not shameful."
 - "I am not a scandal."What statements would you write?
- When the Muslim Brotherhood came to power, Mama K stopped wearing her headscarf, explaining, "I didn't want to be like them. So I took off the veil." What would you do if, like Mama K, your personal faith including wearing a veil, but the public interpretation of that act now aligned you with beliefs that you oppose? Is it possible to separate the veil from its political meaning?
- Henda says, "I was planning to complete my studies abroad. But after what happened to me, I will not leave Egypt until it is the best country on Earth." How do you account for her continued allegiance to her nation despite her opposition to its recent governments?
- When they can't do the thing they initially set out to do, the activists pivot and do something else. For example, when Henda and others were prosecuted while those who tortured them received promotions, they founded Nation Without Torture. Henda explains, "Even if we never achieve justice, at least we are helping others through the same trauma we experienced." Similarly, when no one else was protecting female protesters, Mariam and others step in to form Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment. How does this ability to focus on "baby victories" (and what can be done to impact change) keep the revolution going even in the face of failures? In your community, where do you see examples of "pivoting," and what are the results?
- Imagine that you had been allowed to address the court to speak on Henda's behalf. What would you have said?
- The women talk about being welcomed in the initial protests against Mubarak, but unity disintegrated when women asked that their freedom also be guaranteed by the new government. Why would it be vital to include women in plans to rebuild the nation? What were/are the consequences of excluding women from those efforts?

CLOSING QUESTIONS

- What is one lesson you learned from the film that you wish everyone knew? What do you think would change if everyone knew it?
- What questions about women and the Arab Spring did you have when you walked into the room? What questions do you have now? How/where could you find answers?
- Name one thing in the film that affirmed your beliefs about how to empower women and one thing that challenged the ideas you had prior to seeing the film. What did you learn about empowering women that you could apply in your own community or life?
- Complete this sentence: I am inspired by the women in this film to . . .

AFTER THE SCREENING: LINKING DISCUSSION TO ACTION

The injustices that viewers see in *The Trials of Spring* can elicit feelings of anger, cynicism, frustration, helplessness, or even hopelessness. To avoid having people walk out of your event stuck in those negative emotions,

- Encourage participants to see the women in the film as role models. The women show strength, not resignation, and they vow to continue their struggle until Egypt lives up to their high expectations for their beloved nation. So if the women actually experiencing the events can hold out hope, certainly others can, too.
- Help participants think about the value of what they do locally by reminding them of the end of the film: Hend is seeking political asylum in the United States and is officially documenting human rights abuses that have occurred in Egypt since 2010. Talk about the importance of preserving strong democracies that value gender equity where women like Hend can find refuge and continue their work.
- Help participants plan next steps. Let them know about existing *The Trials of Spring* initiatives and also brainstorm actions specific to their own community needs. The more you can guide people to be concrete and set dates for future meetings or actions, the more likely they are to follow through.

FOR FACILITATORS AND EVENT ORGANIZERS

BEFORE YOUR SCREENING: PLANNING YOUR EVENT

FIND PARTNERS

Passionate partners will strengthen your publicity and outreach capabilities and create a more powerful community screening. Consider collaborating with:

- local affiliates of the film's partners
- feminist organizations
- university departments (women's or gender studies, political science, law, Middle and Near East studies, journalism)
- high schools
- student organizations and youth groups
- faith-based groups
- social justice and human rights organizations (including anyone who provides training workshops for activists)
- professional organizations (e.g., lawyers, journalists)
- civic and fraternal organizations
- libraries

DATE AND TIME

Ask partners which days and times work best for their members. Then check community, school, and religious holiday calendars to ensure that your selected date doesn't conflict with other events likely to draw the same audience.

EVENT LENGTH

You'll probably want to schedule approximately 2½ hours. That will leave time for introductions, screening the film (80 min), a substantive post-screening discussion, and planning for action.

LOCATION

When choosing a venue, consider:

- **Accessibility:** Make sure the venue is accessible to people with disabilities and that the location is accessible by public transportation or within walking distance for your intended audience.
- **Size:** The screening room should fit everyone comfortably without being so large that it inhibits interaction.
- **Neutrality:** Choose a venue that is welcoming. For example, houses of worship might be comfortable for congregants but not for people of other faiths. A university campus might feel right for students but intimidate community members. Examples of neutral spaces might include a public library, community center, or movie theater.
- **Auxiliary spaces:** If you plan to break your audience into smaller groups after the screening, be sure the facility can accommodate this. If you plan to provide childcare, be sure the site includes a safe space for children.
- **Internet access:** If you want to your audience to participate in online backchats or send Tweets or Facebook updates about the film, be sure your venue has an open Wi-Fi network.
- **Access to projection equipment:** Be sure the equipment is reliable and that you (or your designated tech specialist) know how to use it. Don't forget to test the sound quality as well as the picture quality.

PUBLICITY

In addition to spreading the word via every social media outlet you can access, plastering your community with flyers, and announcing the event through partner newsletters and email blasts, consider issuing a press release to your local news outlets and community calendars. To increase chances of the story being picked up, create a local angle that links the film to things happening in your town. If possible, offer interviews with locals who can provide some expertise or share their personal experience. You can also refer reporters to the film's [press kit](#).

AT THE EVENT

Set Up: Arrange the room (if seats are movable) to ensure that everyone can see the screen and to facilitate follow-up conversation. Arrive early enough to test the tech, making sure that you have both sound and picture. Have back-ups for everything: copies of the film, batteries, cables, extension cords, etc. Don't forget to check equipment you need for the discussion as well as the screening (e.g., mics).

Refreshments: Everybody likes free food. Including "free food" on your invitation can improve turnout. If your event is hosted by a nonprofit, local grocery stores or restaurants are often happy to donate refreshments. Be sure to respect the dietary needs of your audience (e.g., does the food need to be halal, kosher, or vegetarian?).

Signage: Post signs in and around the venue so people know they are in the right place and can easily find the room you are using.

Registration: Set up a registration desk by the door so attendees can easily sign in. Invite guests to provide their email addresses so they can be notified of follow-up events, actions, or online evaluations. Be clear about what you and your partners will (and won't) do with the information collected.

Time Management: Make the most of your allotted time. Introduce partners, thank funders, and let people know how the event will proceed (encouraging people to stay for the discussion following the film) but do it in "headline" format. Nothing brings down the energy level of a room more than a series of introductions that are too long. And be sure to leave time at the end of the event to plan action steps and/or set up a follow-up meeting.

Discussion: Taking a break between the film and discussion puts you at risk for losing a large part of your audience, so begin the discussion as soon as the film ends.

FOLLOW-UP

Thank You: Send a thank-you email or text to everyone who registered. Encourage them to stay informed by including links to local organizations as well as the Project website.

FACILITATION TIPS

As you facilitate the discussion, your method can model the goal of empowering participants, or it can do the opposite.

Because *The Trials of Spring* is about honoring women's voices, you'll want to show participants that their opinions have value. Be careful not to let your beliefs overshadow theirs by unintentionally implying that they should agree with everything you say. This is especially important when working with girls or women who have been silenced in their families or communities.

Unlike the job of a teacher, a facilitator's role is not to interpret the film for your audience. Your job is to help people probe so they can learn from the film and from one another.

- Focus the conversation on learning rather than judging. Reinforce that approach with the language you use: Instead of “What did you *think* of a decision or action taken by that woman?” ask, “What did you *learn* from that woman's actions or choices?” And, of course, avoid leading questions (e.g., “Didn't you think she made the wrong choice?”).
- Be clear about the difference between debate and dialogue. A debate is about staking out a position and trying to convince everyone else that you are right and they are wrong. A dialogue is about exchanging ideas in order to learn from one another. That means actively listening as well as talking.
- Select discussion prompts that match the goals, interests, and experience of your group. There is no need to work through every prompt in this guide and no benefit to doing so. Typically you'll only need one or two prompts to get the conversation going and a single closing prompt to wrap things up and transition to planning action steps.
- Invite participants to share their honest opinions and not just say what they think you (or others) want to hear.
- If needed, help participants distinguish between disagreement (which can be interesting and productive) and disrespect (which shuts down productive dialogue). Make slurs off limits and stop speakers who use them. Revoke the privilege to speak for anyone who persists in using them.
- Review the film before your event and leave yourself time to reflect on its content. That way you won't be processing your own raw emotions at the same time that you are trying to facilitate a discussion.

- Structure parts of the conversation to ensure that everyone who wants to speak has a chance to be heard. Strategies might include using go-rounds (where each person takes a turn speaking), limiting opportunities to speak for a second or third time until everyone has had a first chance, or dividing into small groups or pairs.
- Differentiate between comprehension questions and discussion prompts. Comprehension questions test for understanding and typically have a clear, correct answer. Such questions can be integrated into a discussion by doing occasional “check-ins” to make sure everyone has a common understanding of events or critical concepts. In contrast, discussion questions are always open-ended. These are questions for which multiple valid answers are possible.
- Encourage people to speak only for themselves and not generalize or presume to know how others feel.
- Follow the lead of your participants, allowing their interests to guide where the discussion goes. If comments stray too far afield, gently remind speakers of the purpose of your event and use a discussion prompt to refocus the group.
- Leave time at the end of your gathering to brainstorm possible actions – or to provide a call to action – and be prepared to help facilitate the action(s) that participants choose.



Belquis Al Lahibi (Production still from Yemen - When is the Time?)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

PRIOR TO THE ARAB SPRING: EGYPT UNDER MUBARAK

Hosni Mubarak ruled Egypt under a state of emergency for thirty years. This allowed him to employ an extensive secret police service to monitor political activity and to use mass arrests and systematic torture as a deterrent to the development of any real opposition to his rule. Protests were banned, and, in 2004, a loose network of small groups around the country known as the Kefaya movement was born. (*Kefaya* means “enough” in Arabic.) They were opposed to the corruption of the political and business elite who openly enriched themselves while poverty increased sharply.

On May 25, 2005, the Kefaya movement protested against Hosni Mubarak’s proposed amendment to the constitution which would pave the way for his son, Gamal, to become president. At that demonstration, a number of female journalists and protesters were targeted and sexually assaulted by people linked to security forces. Those injustices inspired further protests.

By April 2008, labor conditions at state-run factories had deteriorated drastically, and women at the textile factory in the Egyptian city of Mahalla initiated a walkout that led to a general strike in the city. The violence of the police response gave birth to the April 6 Youth Movement, which would organize annual protests on subsequent anniversaries of the event and face arrest.

In 2010, two policemen beat to death Khaled Said, a young man on a street in Alexandria. Images of his mangled face went viral, and his case became iconic, sparking small protests in Cairo and Alexandria over several months, unprecedented for a torture case in Egypt. When Tunisians chanted, “The people want the fall of the regime,” in January 2011, Egyptians were glued to TV screens in coffee shops around the country, watching what had never seemed possible in the Arab world: the overthrow of an Arab dictator through mass protest.

THE ARAB SPRING IN EGYPT: TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

JANUARY 14, 2011

Tunisian president Ben Ali flees to Saudi Arabia after weeks of mass protests against his rule.

JANUARY 18, 2011

Youth political activist Asmaa Mahfouz from the April 6 Youth Group uploads a video calling on people to demonstrate against corruption and injustice on January 25; the clip goes viral.

JANUARY 25, 2011

A planned protest against police brutality on Police Day, a national holiday in Egypt, draws tens of thousands of protesters in Cairo, Alexandria, and Suez who begin to echo the Tunisian chant: “The people demand the fall of the regime.” Over the next eighteen days, more than 800 protestors are killed and more than 1,000 are arrested as police try to quell the demonstration but become overwhelmed by the sheer number of protestors that, by then, had increased to hundreds of thousands. The military declares that it will not use force against the protestors, which is interpreted by many protestors as support.

FEBRUARY 11, 2011

Omar Suleiman, then-vice president, announces that the military, led by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), will replace Hosni Mubarak. Massive celebrations break out in Tahrir Square. SCAF suspends the constitution.

MARCH 8, 2011

On International Women’s Day, a group of Egyptian women gather in Tahrir calling for women’s rights to be prioritized. They are verbally and physically assaulted by a group of men who yell at them to leave.

MARCH 9, 2011

The military violently breaks up a sit-in of protesters who had returned to Tahrir Square, arresting more than 200 protesters and torturing many of them. All of the single women who are arrested are subjected to virginity tests. General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, who at the time was head of military intelligence, tells Amnesty International this was necessary to ensure that “the women would not accuse the army of rape later on.”

MARCH 19, 2011

Seventy-seven percent of Egyptians vote in favor of the military’s proposed amendments to the constitution. The result significantly strengthens the position of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood party.

NOVEMBER 2011

The military maneuvers to control the drafting of a new constitution by appointing the committee ahead of parliamentary elections. Anti-military protests break out near Tahrir Square, calling for an end to military rule and an immediate transfer of power to civilians. Riot police kill more than fifty protesters, and the military sets a date for presidential elections in June 2012.

DECEMBER 18, 2011

Seventeen anti-military protesters demonstrating in front of the cabinet building are killed. Military officers arrest, beat, and sexually assault a number of women, including Hend Nafea. Images of soldiers beating and exposing a woman wearing a blue bra go viral.

DECEMBER 20, 2011

In response to the December 18 events, women and men march through central Cairo chanting, “The women of Egypt are a red line,” in the largest protest focused exclusively on women’s rights ever.

JANUARY 2012

No officers are investigated in connection with the killings, beating, and assault of protesters, yet prosecutors start investigating 269 of the protesters who took part and in some cases were assaulted. Hend is summoned by prosecutors in connection with the Cabinet Clashes case and charged with assaulting military officers, throwing Molotov cocktails, attempting to overthrow the state, and damaging public property.

JANUARY 25, 2012

On the first anniversary of the revolution, thousands of Egyptians return to Tahrir Square to demonstrate their continued desire for fundamental change in Egypt. Unable to go, Hend papers her bedroom wall with slogans claiming that the revolution will not succeed until there is a revolution of the mind in every household.

JUNE 24, 2012

The Muslim Brotherhood’s Mohammed Morsi narrowly defeats former general Ahmed Shafik to become both the first democratically elected, as well as the first Islamist president, of Egypt. The power struggle between Morsi and the military continues.

JULY 29, 2012

The trial of Hend and 268 other defendants in the Cabinet Clashes case begins and is then postponed.

AUGUST 12, 2012

After behind-the-scenes negotiations, Morsi appoints General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi to be Minister of Defense.

OCTOBER 8, 2012

Morsi issues a pardon to all “revolutionaries” with the exception of the anti-military Cabinet Clashes case, which continues to wind its way through the courts and is eventually transferred to the terrorism court.

NOVEMBER 2012

Hend launches the organization Nation without Torture to challenge government cover-ups of abuse.

NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 2012

Morsi issues a constitutional declaration granting himself the power to issue decrees without judicial review in a move that is widely seen as a power grab. The Islamists who dominate the committee drafting the constitution display little interest in ensuring inclusion of the views of minority liberal groups. They attempt to push through language that will ensure Sharia law. In protest, liberal party leaders walk out. The Islamist drafters then rush through their draft, and Morsi puts it to referendum on November 30. Egypt becomes irrevocably polarized.

Morsi’s consolidation of power provokes days of anti-Morsi protests outside the presidential palace, during which many women are sexually assaulted by mobs. Security forces fail to intervene. Young activists organize to protect themselves, forming Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment/Assault.

DECEMBER 5, 2012

Muslim Brotherhood supporters begin to violently clash with protestors.

JANUARY 25, 2013

Demonstrators return to Tahrir Square to commemorate the second anniversary of the revolution. At least nineteen women are sexually assaulted and raped by roving groups of men. Security forces fail to intervene.

JUNE 30–JULY 3, 2013

On June 30, opposition to Morsi unites behind calls for protests. Cairo and Alexandria see the largest protests ever on that day, with some estimates indicating millions of people in the streets. These protests culminate in General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi announcing on July 3 that he had arrested President Morsi and appointed former Supreme Constitutional Judge Adly Mansour as interim president.

JULY 6–30, 2013

Tens of thousands of Morsi supporters set up camp in protest in front of Rabaa Mosque and al-Nahda square. As tensions mount, the military and police kill 161 Muslim Brotherhood protesters throughout the city.

AUGUST 14, 2013

The police move in to disperse the two encampments and kill more than a thousand protesters in what Human Rights Watch qualifies as a crime against humanity.

NOVEMBER 24, 2013

Interim president Adly Mansour issues a protest law banning groups of more than ten to congregate without prior approval from the police and giving the police broad powers to disperse or arrest peaceful protests. Over the next weeks, scores of youth protest leaders are arrested.

DECEMBER 2013

The Brotherhood is declared a terrorist organization and outlawed.

JANUARY 25, 2014

Hend joins thousands defying the new law in an attempt to reach Tahrir Square to commemorate the anniversary of the revolution. The streets are sharply divided between pro- and anti-military demonstrators. Police violently disperse the anti-military protestors, killing at least sixty-four and arresting more than 1,000. Pro-military demonstrators are allowed to continue.

JANUARY 2013

The new constitution is approved by 98.1 percent in a referendum. The text of it includes stronger protections for women's rights than any previous constitution.

FEBRUARY 4, 2015

Judge Nagi Shehata sentences Hend in absentia to life in prison. The well-known protest leader Ahmad Douma and 228 others are also sentenced to life in prison. Thirty-nine juveniles are sentenced to ten years imprisonment. Hend and many others go into hiding.

MAY 26–27, 2015

Field marshal Abdel Fattah El-Sisi is elected president with 96.9 percent of the vote.

JUNE 9

Hend arrives in the United States seeking refuge after having managed to leave Egypt. She finds work documenting human rights violations in Egypt.

EGYPT UNDER SISI

Human rights in Egypt continue to deteriorate drastically. Protests are banned, and the police forcibly break up any unauthorized protest, often using live ammunition and killing protesters. Torture is rampant, and death in custody cases regularly takes place. At least twenty-two journalists are in prison. Courts issue mass death penalty sentences after trials without due process. Civilians are frequently tried before unfair military courts. The military and police are facing a full-blown insurgency in Sinai against local ISIS-affiliate Ansar Beit el Maqdas. Bombs and assassinations have spread to Cairo and other cities, feeding a general sense of insecurity that the regime uses to justify its repressive measures. As price inflation of basic goods spirals, the majority of Egyptians who were suffering economically in early 2011 frequently say that what they want most right now are assurances of an end to chaos, an improvement in their economic situation, and security.

WOMEN IN EGYPT - FAQs

How common is public sexual violence in Egypt? Sexual harassment in Egypt is pervasive. A study by UN Women in 2013 found that 99.3 percent of women had experienced some form of sexual harassment. Incidents where women are mobbed and sexually assaulted have come to light since at least 2005 when a blogger captured a video of female journalist Shaimaa Abu el Khei being mobbed and sexually assaulted in downtown Cairo. But it was only post-2011 that mobbing became an issue of public debate, and even then the attacks were often minimized or co-opted, depending on who was in power at the time. Over the past five years, a younger generation of women has become increasingly vocal about harassment, as the founding of the group HarassMap in 2010 showed. Mass mobbing of women in Tahrir occurred in November 2012, January 2013, and June–July 2013, when more than 180 women were attacked. In June 2014, the video of a woman being attacked and stripped during celebrations of Sisi’s election went viral, and President Sisi visited the victim in hospital. After that visit, a few successful prosecutions of attackers have taken place, but these are still rare.

For further information, see [Gender Violence Against Women Around Tahrir Square](#) (Amnesty International, 2013) and [Epidemic of Sexual Violence](#) (Human Rights Watch, 2013).”

Is it true that Egyptian security forces have used sexual violence against women activists? Egyptian security forces have at times sexually assaulted women protesters as an additional punitive measure during the dispersal of demonstrations. In 2005, on a day now referred to as Black Wednesday, security forces surrounded a downtown Cairo demonstration of activists and sexually assaulted the women. On March 10, military officers conducted forced virginity tests on all of the single women they had arrested in Tahrir square the day before, which, since they took place in detention, amounts to sexual assault. In November 2011, Egyptian riot police sexually assaulted at least two of the women they arrested during the Mohamed Mahmoud protests. In December 2011, women arrested during the cabinet clashes alongside Henda also reported sexual assault.

What has the government done about it? For the most part, the government has done very little. A limited spate of prosecutions took place in 2014 after Sisi visited a mob-assault victim at the hospital, but there has been little structural or policy change accompanying the ad hoc prosecutions. The current regime protects police and military officers from any accountability for abuses such as sexual assault, torture, and unlawful killings. An additional problem is underreporting by women due to a prevailing culture of shame that tends to blame the victim. With the exception of women in larger cities such as Cairo or Alexandria, women in Egypt rarely find support from their families to speak out about sexual assault. As we saw in Hend's case, village life in particular can be very conservative, with relatives feeling that women who speak out publicly about being assaulted by the military bring shame to the family. An exception is Samira Ibrahim, a young woman from Upper Egypt who chose to take a military officer to court for having subjected her to a virginity test in March 2011.

What's it like being a woman in Egypt? In addition to dealing with sexual harassment, women in Egypt are faced with a society that remains deeply patriarchal. This is reflected in the high rates of domestic violence (often societally justified as a husband/father/brother's right to discipline), and the widespread practice of female genital mutilation. Women who are financially independent often have more freedom to work, and some women have fought their way up government bureaucracies to hold ministries or, in a few cases, to become judges. But most women in Egypt are poor; illiteracy for women stands at 38.5 percent versus 21.2 percent for men. School and university education in Egypt is free, which has increased the number of women entering the workforce, but over the past fifty years, the quality of education has deteriorated drastically. With unemployment rising, a university degree does not guarantee employment or financial independence for women. While women in cities like Cairo and sometimes Alexandria will sometimes move out and live alone despite their families wishes, most Egyptian families expect unmarried daughters to live at home until they get married.

Why do many women wear the veil/headscarf in Egypt? While there are no official statistics on the number of Christians in Egypt, the most commonly accepted estimate is that around 90 percent of the population is Muslim, with Christians forming most of the remaining 10 percent and tiny communities of Bahais and Jews making up the rest. Over the past thirty years, Egyptians have become more religious in the sense of public adherence to Islam, and the vast majority of Muslim women in the street tend to be veiled. While there are many women who have no choice but to wear the veil because of family pressures — or even sometimes just because every woman in their neighborhood does — there are also many strong-minded, empowered women in Egypt who consciously choose to wear the veil.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ONLINE REPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom’s (WILPF) 2012 Report on the Status of Women in the MENA Region

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is a nonprofit peace organization that brings women together to oppose war, violence, and global militarization.

One of WILPF’s projects, “Ending Discrimination and Enforcing Women, Peace and Security in the MENA Region,” seeks to strengthen and challenge the role of women in determining and restoring peaceful transition and security in the region through the use of the UN Resolution 1325 agenda and international human rights frameworks. This report includes highlights from discussions among women human rights defenders from the MENA region.

The Association for Women’s Rights in Development’s (AWID) Fact Sheets, Policy Briefs, Primers, and Reports

The Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) is a global, feminist membership organization working to achieve gender equality, sustainable development, and women’s human rights worldwide. AWID provides research on women human rights defenders, movement-building, religious fundamentalism, economic justice, feminist monitoring, and evaluation.

Amnesty International’s 2014/2015 Report on Egypt

Amnesty International is a global nonprofit that uses research and campaigning to fight abuses of human rights worldwide. This is the organization’s annual report on human rights abuses in Egypt for 2014–2015.

‘Circles of Hell’ Domestic, Public and State Violence Against Women

This report outlines the abuse against women and girls in public and private settings in Egypt since the 2011 uprisings, including Amnesty International’s strategies and recommendations for the Egyptian authorities.

Egypt: Report on Gender-Based Violence Against Women Around Tahrir Square.

This report summarizes the rise in violent sexual assaults against women during the protests in Tahrir Square in 2013.

The Human Rights Watch Resource Page on Egypt

Human Rights Watch is an international nonprofit, nongovernmental human rights organization consisting of human rights professionals, including country experts, lawyers, journalists, and academics of diverse backgrounds and nationalities. It publishes more than 100 reports and briefings on human rights conditions in some ninety countries, generating extensive coverage in local and international media. Human Rights Watch meets with governments, the United Nations, regional groups like the African Union and the European Union, financial institutions, and corporations to press for changes in policy and practice that promote human rights and justice around the world. This resource contains the latest news and updates on human rights conditions in Egypt.

The International Federation for Human Rights’ (FIDH) Report — Exposing State Hypocrisy: Sexual Violence by Security Forces in Egypt

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) is a global, member-based nonprofit organization defending all civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights as set out in the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It conducts fact-finding missions in the field and mobilizes the international community through international and regional organizations, third countries, and other levers of influence. This research report examines the use of sexual violence as a weapon of repression since the military takeover in July 2013.

The International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)'s MENA Briefs: “What the Women Say: The Arab Spring & Implications for Women” and “Extremism as Mainstream: Implications for Women, Development & Security in the MENA/Asia Region”

ICAN is a US-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to support civil society activism in promoting women's rights, peace, and human security in countries affected by conflict, transition, and closed political space.

The first brief highlights common regional trends that threaten basic norms of democracy and equality. It also looks at how those trends affect women's abilities to participate in and influence national and international decision-making processes that will determine their lives and the future of the region. The second brief highlights the pervasiveness of religious extremism in the MENA region; ways its spread has restricted women's freedom of thought, movement, and action; and the methods women are using to counter its influence.

Karama's Publications and Reports

Karama is an NGO based in Cairo that operates throughout the MENA region to raise and expand the influence of Arab women in regional and international contexts. They provide policy papers on critical issues facing women in the region and offer advocacy tools for building campaigns.



Nada Dhaif (Production still from Bahrain - Our Oath)

OTHER WEBSITES

Trials of Spring

www.trialsofspring.com/

The site includes information about the shorts and the feature film, as well as lessons plans, a partner toolkit, and information on hosting screenings of the films.

Peace is Loud

www.peaceisloud.org

Peace is Loud, a nonprofit organization working to amplify the voices of women in peacebuilding, is overseeing The Trials of Spring's outreach and education campaign. Their site includes information on Peace is Loud's film screening program, speakers bureau, social action campaigns, and blog.

UN Women

www.unwomen.org

www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation

UN Women is the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. This site provides information on United Nations' programs and resources devoted to women and girls, including the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and data on women's leadership and political participation across the globe.

Nazra for Feminist Studies

<http://nazra.org/en/about-us>

Nazra for Feminist Studies is a group that aims to build and support an Egyptian feminist movement, believing that feminism and gender are political and social issues affecting freedom and development in all societies. The organization's website provides updates and strategic plans concerning feminist organizing efforts in Egypt and the MENA region.

The Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition

www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/

The Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRDIC) is a network that supports and protects women human rights defenders. Its site provides information regarding action campaigns, statements, and resources regarding women's human rights abuses worldwide.

Women's Learning Partnership

www.learningpartnership.org/

Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) is dedicated to women's leadership and empowerment. WLP works with twenty autonomous and independent partner organizations in the global south, particularly in Muslim-majority societies, to empower women to transform their families, communities, and societies. This site provides training manuals, books, films, reports, campaign information, and other advocacy tools.