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**Freedom of Expression in Egypt:**

**How Long Hair, Pink Shirts, Novels, Amateur Videos and Facebook**

**Threaten Public Order and Morality!**

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**Abstract:**

Freedom of expression suffers from a ferocious crackdown in Egypt because of gaping narcissistic injuries to a chauvinist, patriarchal national psyche that has been repackaged in Egypt's early post colonial years. Decades of cultural and socioeconomic decay has torn Egypt's stereotypical psyche between claims of grandeur and righteousness on the one hand and a reality of failures and debasement on the other hand. Dislocated, many Egyptians are desperate and willing to submit to any comforting system of meaning. Their alienation and sense of shame drive them to seek a clean origin and to disavow reality, a state that is conducive to an obsession with blaming the other, or the minority or the neighbouring communities, for instigating this shame. There is a symbiotic deadlock of the impossible return to an imagined past and the feared submission to an ill-defined new. This creates a state of neurosis where the two essentialist "selves" propagated by the religious and neo-liberal elites are meant to preserve a status quo under the benevolent hand of the father/dictator. A challenge to this setup means also a challenge to the father whose protection is sought and loathed in such a torturous neurotic state whose end or dissolution could mean to many the end of the world as they know it. For Egypt to get out of this quagmire, deep political and institutional reforms will have to evolve through social resistance and transformation. This will take time because ultra-nationalism and patriarchy are instrumentalized and integral to deep vested material and psychological interests.

*“We live in a time warp, torn between a desire to become an Other on the one hand and desperation of becoming one's own true Self on the other hand. We consequently end up in a confrontation of two impossibilities”* Fethi Benslama (2008, p 34).

I was a young 25-year old reporter, when a managing editor summoned me after a professional dispute with my manager. Sitting in a cliché three-piece gray suit and a dark red tie behind a huge desk, the editor grew visibly annoyed as he looked at me. Instead of the customary “sit down, please”, he said coldly: “Is this the way you behave in your father’s presence?” I was surprised and wondered what he meant. My disagreement with my boss centered on how to distribute work among team members. Seeing me befuddled, the editor bellowed: “Take your hands out of your pockets! And go get yourself a decent hair cut suitable to our respectable organization.” I moved from shock to incredulity and resisted exploding back in his face or laughing. What stood between us was not only his unchecked authority over a trainee reporter who could be sacked at will but, more important, an unbridgeable gap of world views. There was no point in even starting a discussion. What is left of this incident almost 25 years later was the question of why (or better ‘how’) would simple gestures of difference (most men then carried their hair short in Egypt) constitute such an offense to such a man. He looked visibly angry. Why did he and many men like him in positions of power still feel perplexed and undermined by others, usually younger women and men, who handle their bodies in a different way or write in an uncommon fashion. What makes this an insult, even a personal assault, thus leading to harsh reactions and institutionalized restrictions on exercising one’s own right to freedom of expression?

Putting one's hands in his pockets in front of a superior could demonstrate a level of relaxation and lack of fear that is unacceptable in a hierarchical society, while wearing one's hair long is seen by some as an "emasculating" act. This could have partly explained my former editor's remarks, but why the visible anger and deep upset he demonstrated!

This 1992 incident was not an isolated affair. As poet and academic Iman Mersal recounted, another long haired young man was walking home in a northern Egyptian city in 1995 when the police stopped him, dragged him to the station and kept him there overnight. The officer later explained the reasons for his absurd detention: "Why didn't you cut your hair ...[A]re you a khawal (fag) or something?" On the same night in Cairo, a "police officer stopped a 24-year-old painter, asked for his ID, took it, and without looking at it said, "What do you think of yourself, you son of a bitch, shaved hair and a pink shirt?" (Mersal 2016). For the former policeman, long hair may have signaled the socially unacceptable homosexuality, while shaved hair signaled the same for the latter policeman. For both this was a challenge to a norm of masculinity. And both were also quiet upset. These stories had relatively good endings, but many others did not. Prominent Egyptian academic Nasr Hamid Abou Zeid, who researched Islamic theology, was divorced from his wife by a court order in the mid 1990s after some of his colleagues and religious establishment officials claimed his writings made him an apostate who should not remain married to a Muslim woman.

Fast forward. In the 5 years following the upheavals of 2011, Egypt has legally harassed, arrested, or sentenced to harsh prison terms writers, bloggers, social media influencers, journalists, members of religious and sexual minorities, and many others whose acts for which they were sanctioned or severely punished were merely expressing a different view/belief that was unacceptable to the dominant social, political, religious or patriarchal frameworks and/or interests.<sup>1</sup> This repressive attitude defended by the upper patriarchal

echelons (police, media and judiciary) is becoming increasingly harsh and violent at the same time that the country moral and value systems continue to erode. State bureaucracy (especially security agencies) and other institutions such as the judiciary, state-owned media, Al-Azhar and the Coptic church, not necessarily in a concerted fashion, all deploy a variety of tools to control public space, shape what is said, worn, and exhibited with a view to conserve the nation/religion and cease its alleged decline. These tools defend a conservative, chauvinistic, paternalistic, and patriarchal code of conduct, which is being challenged by an increasing number of people, especially young women and men.

Several recent flagrant cases portray these absurd attempts to control freedom of expression in Egypt:

1. Novelist Ahmed Naji was sentenced in early 2016 to two years in prison for “undermining public morality” after he published a chapter of his novel in a weekly literary magazine.<sup>2</sup>
2. Amr Nohan, who was serving compulsory military service, was sentenced in late 2015 to three years in jail by a military court for superimposing Mickey Mouse ears on the image of Egyptian president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. Nohan was charged for mocking state icons and attempting to overthrow the regime.<sup>3</sup>
3. Four Christian teenagers received prison sentences in February 2016, for producing a 32-second video mocking the extremist violent group ISIS, showing members praying and then holding one of their hostages to cut off his throat.<sup>4</sup>
4. Kerolos Shawky, a 32-year Christian man, was sentenced to six years in prison in June 2014, for simply liking the Facebook page of the “Knights of the Cross”.<sup>5</sup>

Egyptian law contains no articles requiring young men to trim their hair to a particular length, not a specific way that academics should talk about Islam, nor certain banned body language, but still, the legal code provides judges with a surfeit of ambiguous articles that can be interpreted to incriminate and punish “violators” for undermining “public morality”, tarnishing the nation’s reputation or icons or defaming monotheistic religions. For example, Shawky and the young video producers were convicted under Article 98(f) of the Egyptian Penal Code, which forbids "ridiculing, or insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife”. The law does not specify what constitutes an “insult” or amounts to “inciting”, leaving it almost fully to the judge’s discretion and, hence, the dominant cultural influences. This could lead to such absurd situations in which the Egyptian state is a member of an international military coalition against ISIS but its judiciary jails people who mock ISIS.

But it is not only draconian and elastic laws or convoluted Victorian-like cultural norms, whose observance is fueling a ferocious backlash from conservative defenders, that could explain this crackdown on “dissent”. One of the major driving motives for the disciplinarians in all these incidents; the editor, the policeman, the judge, etc., seems to be a beleaguered self whose ego seeks constant reaffirmation through banishing (and punishing) the other, whose mere presence and whatever symbolism he or she exhibits constitute a direct challenge/threat. A strict public submission to a code of conduct, speech, dress (a whole discourse/way of being) helps in a devious way justify the erosion of this very code in private encounters. This fluid separation between the public and the private realms does not merely indicate a state of hypocrisy but rather a mutually reinforcing co-existence to stop inexorable waves of loss: the loss of religion’s golden age (real or imagined), the loss of patriarchal control, the loss of nationalistic dominance over the subjects of the state, etc. It is like a diabolical pact in which the id can be let loose in private, while a mercurial superego, rooted

in an imagined political and cultural past, can reign supreme in public. Their logic seems to adopt the following reasoning: We will fight ISIS but we would also defend a conservative version of Islam, which cannot be criticized in public, especially if the criticism comes from a member of a minority.

### **Backlash against Freedom of Expression**

I will argue in this paper that freedom of expression (linguistic or otherwise) suffers from an increasingly ferocious backlash in Egypt not only to serve the prerogatives of social control by a crumbling and hypocritical elite, but also, at a deeper level, because of what one can think of as gaping narcissistic injuries to a chauvinist, patriarchal and glorified national psyche that has been repackaged in Egypt's early post colonial years, especially in the 1950s. Over decades of cultural and socioeconomic decay, an Egyptian stereotypical psyche seems to have been increasingly and violently torn more often than not between claims of grandeur and righteousness by the nationalist state and/or the Islamist movements (those playing politics and these who carry the gun) on the one hand and a reality of failures and debasement on the other hand. And even much earlier, this chasm seems to have opened up when the society and individuals faced their harshest and probably first real engagement with modernity when Napoleon invaded the country in 1799. Since then, old norms and traditions, especially all those related to religion and sexuality, have become extremely contentious and never really stabilized. Benslama argues that Islamic communities have suffered from a collective hallucination about an unblemished origin they can return to as a way of coping with the violent and massive dislocation caused by enforced modernity (or modernization) through the colonial powers, and later, collaborating elites. These dramatic upheavals in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were not accompanied by "the work of culture", what Freud

called ‘Kulturarbeit’), hence the violent and fast uprooting of old established layers did not gradually give space or time to reconstruct common political spaces (Benslama 2008, p 15). A civilization, Bensalama believes, could suffer from a malaise if its resistance to instinctual drives becomes inadequate and without creativity to evolve new patterns to construct a psyche with more appropriate boundaries, thus helping engender a reactionary call for radical forms of repression. Dislocated and disembodied, the Muslim Arab selves Benslama studied, become desperate and prone to hallucination and revolt, willing to submit to any comforting system of meaning. Their alienation and sense of shame drive them to seek a clean origin and to disavow reality. This desperation is very conducive to an obsession with pure identities blaming the other, or the minority or the neighbouring communities, for instigating this shame. Hostility is thus directed towards this other (Benslama, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-110).

Words, gestures and the way people handle their very own bodies and express themselves can pose a challenge to established discourses, but the angry reactions and very irrational and doomed-to-fail attempts in Egypt now to restrict freedom of expression also betray a crumbling of a duplicitous system of values and national psyche especially after the upheavals of 2011 when millions of people, especially young, took to the streets to deeply rattle the social and political establishment.

The latest blow to these decaying patriarchal and conservative edifices have revealed even deeper cracks, throwing more salt into these collective narcissistic injuries. These injuries were muted for maybe only a few weeks in early 2011 when one of the slogans that reverberated throughout Egyptian squares was: “Raise your head high, you are an Egyptian.” The more common public spectacles and slogans in 2013-2015, more often now performed by hired hands rather than by truly pro-government supporters, comprise superficial patriotic songs blaring out of loud speakers to whose tunes people dance while raising posters of the

president. A more powerful signifier usually employed by these pro-government cheering parties are the army boots which one or more of the participants would carry on his or her head. Following massive public protests in 2013, the army overthrew the elected Muslim Brotherhood regime. Less than a year later, defence minister Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was elected president. Shoes in general are viewed as dirty in Egyptian Arab culture. Pointing them at others or throwing them at him (as an Iraqi journalist hurled his shoe at former American president George Bush in a press conference in Baghdad in 2008)<sup>6</sup> is a grave insult. To apparently willingly carry somebody's shoe on one's head means utter submission and acquiescence.

One can easily observe how the relationship to the *other* in Egypt is now linked to one's own self-esteem. Consequently, hence the banishment or debasement or punishment of this 'other' becomes somewhat necessary to sustain or regain self regard. The relation to the other can also become double-faced where feelings of inferiority and superiority (or at least behaviours that betray such seemingly contradictory feelings) intermingle. *Otherness* becomes loathsome and desired for, at least unconsciously. This ostensibly contradictory position compounds the anger of local elites, who view difference as a challenge to a psyche that deep within wishes to become like the other that another part of this psyche loathes. It is as if these elite subjects (politicians, judges, editors, policemen, etc., ..) want to defend a "lost" strong and victorious identity (rooted religiously, culturally, or in an imagined golden past or a glorified childhood) but reality keeps reminding them of their 'inferiority' by the mere presence of this other, to which part of the ego attaches signs of superiority. Since the usual other, the western or the Saudi tourist for example, belongs to a privileged part of the social network of power relations, hate remains at the level of well-guarded and hidden

feelings but if an in-group member starts to behave like an other, this would not be tolerated and has to be dealt with swiftly and harshly.

Such a social reaction by the elites (or the mob for that matter that lynched four Shiite Egyptians in a public beating near Cairo in early 2013)<sup>7</sup> could be partly seen as an expression of narcissistic rage including "the need for revenge, for righting a wrong, for undoing a hurt by whatever means" (Ronningstam 2005, pp 86-7). This way a social actor (be it a judge or member of a mob) turns from a "victim" in his or her own eyes into some body who is exacting revenge against the other who has insulted him or undermined his self-esteem.

This can be clarified by a deeper look at Naji's case.

Naji is in prison because of "explicit sexual scenes" in his novel, a chapter of which ran in a Cairo weekly literary magazines that distributes maybe no more than 1300 copies. Why would a court find the dissemination of a work of imagination in a limited circulation publication, however obscene or offensive, a threat to public morality in a 90-million people country, nearly 26% of whom are illiterate to start with. One would have thought for a serious conservative onslaught on "obscenity" the primary target would have been the internet, especially pornographic sites, rather than high literature. And why is the attack targeted at the writer rather than the simple usual measure of banning the written word or the book?

It seems from scanning several cases that harsh and sustained policing and disciplining of expression and speech are invoked more often when conservatives institutions are faced with articulate positions and performances rather than when they are presented with crude, mundane and pornographic material. Freedom of expression as it relates to artistic expression, religious practices and, possibly also, sexual orientation in Egypt become then a

focus of a backlash when it presents itself in an articulate fashion, when it is not hiding itself in a closed room or trivializing itself as a non-threatening delinquency.

The backlash is led by a rising chauvinist nationalism rooted not only in the authoritarian nature of a regime reestablishing itself after the recent upheavals of 2011-2013 but also as a battle between the old hierarchical and paternalistic worldview and the increasing heterogeneity of identities and expressions. This gap between the self-image and the ideal defended by social gate keepers on the one hand and a fast changing reality on the other hand was well captured in a story recounted by Egyptian filmmaker Youssry Nassralla who faced this problematic dichotomy in a discussion with movie censorship officers.

“The censors were pretty upset at the submitted scenario. A kind female censor said: those characters in the movie are not like us at all.’ ... I just replied that life is full of people who are unlike us. I felt she did not get what I was talking about ... They gave me a permit but subject to twenty-something remarks (even when we did not have a single ‘hot’ scene), the producer got worried as the Prime Minister at the time had just banned a movie ... the project was shelved.”<sup>8</sup>

There are articles in the Egyptian constitution that protect freedom of expression but Naji, the jailed novelist, himself once warned that the judiciary, especially public prosecution, has persistently stood against these rights. “They work as guards for social morals and virtues, rather than for laws that protect freedoms. This is getting worse since Abdel Fattah el-Sisi became president. He came to power through an alliance with state institutions such as the judiciary, and together they share the responsibility of guarding their gains. El-Sisi looks after his interests while the judiciary dedicates itself to policing morality and teaching us virtues. Lately, the Syndicate of Musicians and the Syndicate of Filmmakers were given the legal power to police artists and performances. They can, for example, raid a party or a

concert to ask for legal permits. They can even arrest artists for ‘immoral acts’ or performances. The moral code in Egypt is closely tied to the structure of power.”<sup>9</sup>

In a First Instance court, Naji was cleared together with the publisher on 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 2016. The judge stressed that it was difficult to set clear criteria for “obscene words and sentences.” He elaborated that “while the prosecutor found sentences in this writing to be offensive to public morality, novelists and writers disagreed and saw it as part of a work of art.” A Court of Appeals, six weeks later, sharply differed and revoked this ruling. The higher judge concluded that the law was meant to protect public morality, religion, patriotism, and the family. This way, Naji's writing, the judge argued, undermined the society itself. He accused the writer of ignoring the values and ethical boundaries of Egyptians in a “diabolical way” that incited debauchery. The judge called on parliament to increase prison terms for such offenses “because spreading vice in an attempt to destroy the values and the moral code of society is such a grave matter requiring a harsh reprisal.” He then severely criticized all those who think that the moral code is relative and not immutable and unchangeable. It was shameful, he said, to leave “the fate of our nation at the mercy of those who would treat it lightly and scandalously as if they were playing cards.” He concluded: “Down with such freedom that brought to us corruption, loss of ethics, and moral looseness since the incidents that hit our beloved Egypt.” The use of the term “incidents” in the Arab region is a common reference to the Arab Spring upheavals of 2011 by people who often see them as destabilizing developments and/or conspiracies against their countries rather than true expressions of public anger and yearning for reform and change.

The reference to the “diabolical”, however, deserves some more attention. It stems from a view of the human self as an intrinsic force for good and that when a human sins then this takes place under the influence of the devil. We then have to either exorcise the demon,

including punishing the human who fell prey to it. Instead of exorcism and beatings (which are still performed even if rarely) modern legal tools are resorted to.

Richard Jacquemond argues that one of the most hidden effects of the *Nahda* (the Arab Renaissance) of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was that Arab elites imported from Europe “not only nationalism, the novel and plenty of other material and cultural artifacts, but they also imported Victorian values that were alien to Arab culture and strove to impose them on its societies, with the help, a few decades later, of the Wahhabi Islamic model propagated by the Saudi state.” This uneasy juxtaposition of contradictory values generated forms of popular and artistic resistance to what was seen by some as “moral castration” imposed by the secular and religious elites. “Maybe the deepest and the most longstanding effect of the 2011 revolutions lies in that they have shaken and cracked this paternalist, patriarchal and puritan mode of social domination. This is what most frightens the current powers that be and this is why their first enemy is not ‘terrorism,’ whatever that means, but this rebellious youth that took to the streets in 2011, to whom Naji and his peers belong and give voice.”<sup>10</sup>

Not to crack down on freedoms of expression could break a symbiotic deadlock of the impossible return to an imagined past and the feared submission to an ill-defined new. And this symbiosis is similar to a well entrenched state of neurosis where the two essentialist “selves” propagated by the religious and neo-liberal elites are meant to preserve a status quo under the benevolent hand of the father/dictator. A challenge to this setup means also a challenge to the father whose protection is sought and loathed in such a torturous neurotic state whose end or dissolution could mean to many the end of the world as they know it.

Freedom of expression in the sense of allowing individuals to challenge what is presented as an authentic identity is so dangerous especially when it could not replace the old with a complete new but rather question the sacred and open a field of possibilities in which

the adult has to choose and bear the responsibility for his or her choices. It is also a rejection of the hypocritical conservative position by which the dominant guardians use a certain moral code to repress public descent while in semi-public settings this moral code is being violated systematically and in a pervasive manner in corrupt practices, torture in prisons, impunity and the demise of rule of law to an extent that people no longer seriously seek justice through formal institutions.

What makes the state ferocious is the increasing weakness and deepening failures of patriarchal institutions (religious, political and social) in ensuring hegemony over the subjects of the family, traditional institutions and the state. The only way to cover up this failure is to cling to an assumed sacred nature of such arrangements by which an attack against them would be tantamount to an annihilation of the self through sacrilege.

Wail Abdel Fattah, a perceptive Egyptian commentator, wonders why public morality (or boundaries of the shameful) remain sacrosanct despite the avalanche of public obituaries. When public shaming is far strongly deployed as a tool for social control by the guardians of virtue rather than leaving individuals to be responsible for how they freely express themselves, then, Abdel Fattah argues, we are undergoing a last ditch attempt at reviving the dead. We neurotically refuse to admit publicly what a majority of us condone or accept privately, that the moral system has become utterly dysfunctional.

These widening cracks among reality, desires, and codes of morality tear the self apart as no compromises seem to be possible, except for the Victorian hodgepodge, where the rich and the powerful ignore public morals within the confines of their compounds and clubs, while the poor are increasingly dismissive of them in actual practice. However, both sides hold the decaying and discreetly disrespected morale codes as a weapon in the public space against each other and against the fast evaporating middle class.

“The Egyptian society,” argues Abdel Fattah, “is now living a Victorian era but devoid of the grandeur and power of the Empire where the sun never sets, secretly practices degenerate and vulgar love and sex games from unregistered marriages to unprecedented commercial networks to sell wild pleasures, all heavily wrapped up under forms of veil, recitation of religious verses before illegitimate encounters to the extent that some professional [prostitutes] thank God in a perceptible voice after they get paid for their services or suddenly stop in the middle of a hot encounter if the call to prayers starts” in a nearby mosque.

This hypocrisy and moral decay is somewhat acknowledged by the self-appointed guardians of the social moral fabric. This explains a rather peculiar word selection by Naji’s prosecutor in his first submission to court. He said that Naji’s novel’s impact on public morality would be tantamount to setting fire to “dry chaff”. This very prosecutor, thus, does see the values he claims to represent and defend not as green and lush pastures with strong and shady trees but as lifeless, empty, hollowed-out mass that can go up in flames if a metaphorical match (one chapter in one novel) is struck nearby. For this prosecutor, Abdel Fattah comments, the Egyptian society would likely be largely made up of disconnected individuals who lack volition and consciousness, trudging blindly in streets where they are preyed upon by devious writers and artists wont to wreak havoc with empty minds and stab these poor creatures using poisonous pens. This society, in this blinkered view, is made up of infantile, impressionable and ignorant individuals, who swallow whatever they are offered. One of Egypt perceptive cartoonists worried that such moral guardians saw Egyptians as very vulnerable individuals “that if exposed to a description of a sexual intercourse would run naked into the street to rape the first person he meets.” A society like that, Andeel continued, would then need “a guardian, such as this prosecutor and the judge who rules in his favor.

These people, god-endowed by wisdom, knowledge, salaries, beach houses, know the right from wrong while the rest of the people are cattle that god set loose on earth to be taken care of by such guardians!”<sup>11</sup>

### **In Summary**

One comment in a social media platform sums up this beleaguered psyche of the moral guardian. The commentator described Naji as “defiled, a crusader, a supporter of the military coup, an imperial semen, ...a dead fool, a grandchild of Louis the IX, a son of a bitch, a pervert, who promotes looseness, permissiveness, prostitution and debauchery in the age of the ruling Sisi-Israel.” The hallucinatory comment puts in two lines derogatory expressions used by ultra-nationalists, Islamists, machismos, and homophobics. This commentator presents a stereotypical angry ‘Egyptian’, who feels much violated by colonialism, from the days of the crusades, and that immorality and Israel, allied with the military-dominated political regime in Egypt, now gravely threaten his identity through a fifth column of intellectuals and writers. This indeed seems like a delusional comfort zone, whose dwellers would become very aggressive if challenged.

What creative and innovative writers, performance artists and young people are now expressing in Egypt in their daily lives and in their works of art threaten such a fragile identity, especially of the more conservative and usually older generation. Nael Al-Toukhy, a friend of Naji and an awarded novelist himself, describes the situation succinctly: “we thought it was a game. Naji was playing ... his incarceration came as a big shock because the freest amongst us was detained ... we cannot imagine him in a cage and we are now afraid for ourselves.” Toukhi believes that Naji’s actual ‘crime’ was not the use of obscene language, but rather the fact that he was “playful and ... different.” He said that in Egypt:

“you could be detained because you are different, because you are unlike us, impossible to categorize ...”<sup>12</sup>

Therapeutic interventions could maybe help the angry commentator, referred to earlier, or other defenders of 'public morality' but that would require a lot of courage and foresight – and time. But for Egypt to get out of this Victorian quagmire, deep political and institutional reforms have to transpire as a result of social resistance and transformation to end the dominance of a ruling elite anchored in an antiquated and idiosyncratic version of tradition, that many of them themselves do not privately abide by. This will take time because ultra-nationalism and patriarchy are widely and deeply instrumentalized and integral to deep vested material and psychological interests. It is these interests, religious views and moral structures that manipulate the individual into a sworn enemy of free expression.

Individual could die of their internal conflicts (physical and psychological) but also a society could disintegrate due to “unsuccessful struggle against the external world if the latter changes in a fashion which can not be adequately dealt with by the adaptations which the species has acquired” (Freud 1939, p 20).

And that is what blogger and artist Hani Mehanna suspects is happening now in Egypt. He sees a society where he and a small group of his creative friends were saddled by bad “education, unemployment and suffered from malnutrition” while the rest of society has gone far beyond the realm of logic and renamed things and relationships in reality whereby “prostitution became a tradition, smugness just fun, corruption a form of street-smartness, stagnation stability, submission and humiliation a form of governance, and injustice discipline.” For them the upheavals of 2011 rekindled a hope that the state could complete a transformation to become more real “but as wild flowers which grew up seedless on a cloud, we realized that the state was the root of all these evils.”<sup>13</sup> It would have been an easier

challenge if the state's elite and institutions were alone the source of all evil, then political struggle and change could start to disentangle this dilemma, but at a deeper level the root of this malaise seems to lie in a fractured national self, deluded into a state of permanent victimhood, and by burying its head in shallow sand and burying those who express a different view even deeper, it hopes that it can get rid of its feelings of sin, shame, and inadequacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Human rights organizations such as the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (<http://afteegypt.org/?lang=en>) and The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (<http://www.eipr.org/en>) have a wealth of reports on these violations to all aspects of the right to freedom of expression.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-rights-novelist-idUSKCN0VU09I>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2015/12/01/amr-nohans-sentence-upheld-by-military-court>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.eipr.org/en/pressrelease/2016/02/25/2552>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.mcndirect.com/showsubject\\_ar.aspx?id=57108#.Vyx\\_1hVcSko](http://www.mcndirect.com/showsubject_ar.aspx?id=57108#.Vyx_1hVcSko)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duLds-TZMGw>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/06/26/shia-lynching-result-of-years-of-incitement-eipr/>

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<sup>8</sup><http://www.madamasr.com/ar/opinion/culture/%D9%85%D9%86->

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<sup>9</sup> Naji, Ahmed (2016). An interview with LARB: The Persecuted Novelist of Dystopian Cairo, accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> March at <http://ahmednaje.net/>

<sup>10</sup> Jacquemond, Richard. (2016). Ahmed Naji, the Use of Life and the Zombies. Accessed in March, 2016, at <http://www.madamasr.com/opinion/culture/ahmed-naji-use-life-and-zombies>

<sup>11</sup> Andeel. (2016). Alwakeel Altayeb, Aliwai Al-Sharas wa AlMogtama3 Al-Kabeeh (*in Arabic*) (The Good Prosecutor, the Bad Novelist and the Ugly Society). Accessed in February 2016 at

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[%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A-](http://www.madamasr.com/ar/opinion/culture/%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A-)

[%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B3-](http://www.madamasr.com/ar/opinion/culture/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B3-)

[%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B9-](http://www.madamasr.com/ar/opinion/culture/%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B9-)

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[%86%D8%A9-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-](http://www.madamasr.com/ar/opinion/culture/%D8%AA%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-)

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