

Oct-2012

# “Today I have seen angels in shape of humans:” 1 An Emotional History of the Egyptian Revolution through the Narratives of Female Personal Bloggers

Susana Galán

Follow this and additional works at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Cover Page Footnote:

The data presented in this article were gathered in the framework of an MA thesis in Political Analysis at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. I would like to thank my MA advisor, Prof. Agnès Vayreda, for her academic and personal support, insightful advice and continuous encouragement during the process.

## Recommended Citation

Galán, Susana (2012). “Today I have seen angels in shape of humans:” 1 An Emotional History of the Egyptian Revolution through the Narratives of Female Personal Bloggers. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 13(5), 17-30.

Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol13/iss5/4>

---

# “Today I have seen angels in shape of humans:” 1 An Emotional History of the Egyptian Revolution through the Narratives of Female Personal Bloggers

## **Cover Page Footnote**

The data presented in this article were gathered in the framework of an MA thesis in Political Analysis at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. I would like to thank my MA advisor, Prof. Agnès Vayreda, for her academic and personal support, insightful advice and continuous encouragement during the process.

## **“Today I have seen angels in shape of humans:”<sup>1</sup> An Emotional History of the Egyptian Revolution through the Narratives of Female Personal Bloggers**

By Susana Galán<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

This article examines the intertwinings between emotion and political protest in the 2011 Egyptian revolution through the narratives of Egyptian female personal bloggers. Drawing from scholarship in the *emotional turn* of social movement theory and using Deborah Gould's concept of *emotional habitus*, it aims at describing the dominant social moods at different moments of the revolutionary process, in order to address how these emotions fostered or, on the contrary, inhibited protest for social change. For this purpose, the article considers personal blogs as a modified form of Lauren Berlant's *intimate publics*, alternative spaces through which affect circulates and a shared understanding of reality is constructed.

Through qualitative content analysis of 11 personal blogs written by Egyptian women, the article tracks the different *emotional habitus* through their narratives. It will shed light on how a pre-revolutionary mood of frustration and resignation gave way, after the revelation of Khaled Said's murder by the police and the success of the Tunisian revolution, to an *emotional habitus* characterized by hope that opened a political horizon of change and culminated in Mubarak's resignation after 18 days of protest. Once the regime was toppled, however, the personal discourses published in the selected blogs testify to how the economic difficulties and the political instability of the reconstruction time contributed to modify the euphoric mood of the uprisings and turn it into an affective state of frustration and disappointment.

*Keywords:* Personal blogs, emotions, Egypt, women, revolution, qualitative content analysis

### **Acknowledgement**

The data presented in this article were gathered in the framework of an MA thesis in Political Analysis at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. I would like to thank my MA advisor, Prof. Agnès Vayreda, for her academic and personal support, insightful advice and continuous encouragement during the process.

### **Introduction**

The 2011 Egyptian revolution can be explained in many different ways, but even the most systematic account of events will fail to convey the emotional intensities of that time and its affective impact on its participants: the dreams and aspirations, the hope, the pain, the confusion and the disappointment. Although emotions have been traditionally banished from political analysis, I follow Gould in considering that feelings and emotions are central to politics, “providing stimuli and blockages to political activism” (2009, 3).

In a revolution that will go down in history for the participation of women in the uprisings and the role played by social media, I want to focus on the narratives written by anonymous Egyptian female personal bloggers in order to learn, through their own words,

---

<sup>1</sup> This quote belongs to a post written by *Insomniac* after a visit to Tahrir Square on February 3, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Susana Galan, is Ph.D. candidate in Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers University. The data presented in this article were gathered in the framework of an MA thesis in Political Analysis at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. The author would like to thank her MA adviser Professor Agnes Vayreda for her academic and personal support, insightful advice and continuous encouragement during the process..

how they lived the revolution and participated in the protests.<sup>3</sup> It is my contention that personal blogs –in their double configuration as safe spaces for self-expression and sites for online social interaction– are privileged channels for the transmission of all kind of messages, also political ones. Yet, unlike more politically oriented forms of online communication, in personal blogs emotions are embedded in the narration of events.

Drawing on social movement theory from the *emotional turn* and considering personal blogs as examples of Lauren Berlant's *intimate publics* (2011), I aim at piecing together the “constellations of affects, feelings, and emotions” (Gould 2009, 10) that circulated in the blogosphere around the revolutionary days. Through qualitative content analysis of the posts published in 11 personal blogs before the revolution and since the beginning of the protests until March 31, 2011, I want to reconstruct a collective affective chronicle of the Egyptian revolution made of the ordinary narrations of an extraordinary time.

### **The Centrality of Emotions in Protests**

The *emotional turn* that irrupted in the study of social movements in the late 1990s is based on the premise that emotions are key for activism, since they “accompany all social action, providing both motivation and goals” (Jasper 1998, 397). Following Jasper's consideration of emotions as “culturally constructed” rather than “automatic somatic responses” (1998, 399), Gould has developed the concept of *emotional habitus*, understood as the “socially constituted, prevailing ways of feeling and emoting, as well as the embodied, axiomatic understandings and norms about feelings and their expression” (2009, 10). Drawing on Bourdieu's *habitus*, Gould aims at capturing a group's “collective and only partly conscious emotional dispositions” which, through a generation of shared understandings about what and how to feel, work as a way of “generating and foreclosing political horizons” (2009, 32), encouraging activism or, on the contrary, dissuading it.

As Gould notes, while an established *emotional habitus* tends to reproduce the *status quo* (through satisfaction with a given situation or fear of change); a “strong affective state” can disrupt this stability by: “puncturing the dominant emotional habitus with its prevailing attitudes, norms, and ways of feeling and emoting, and inaugurat[ing] a new constellation of feelings, emotions, and emotional postures” (2009, 39), thereby eventually fostering protest and the creation of a social movement.

An example of a *strong affective state* that can trigger activism is, for Jasper, a *moral shock*, which occurs “when an unexpected event or piece of information raises such a sense of outrage in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action” (1998, 409). However, proclivity does not mean inevitability: the “emotions that spur action” are according to Jasper (1998, 399) the result of “both preexisting affects and shorter term emotional responses to events, discoveries and decisions” (Jasper 1998, 405). These *preexisting affects* (hatred, love, loyalty, suspicion, trust) can channel the emotions fueled by the shock into at least two directions: grief and resignation versus outrage and indignation (Jasper 1998, 409).

While this *channeling* takes place spontaneously at the individual level, social movements, through frame alignment, can also shape it by “achieving a common definition of a social problem and a common prescription for solving it” (Jasper 1998, 413). In this sense, social movements are for Gould “sites of collective world-making,” in which “the ongoing interactions of participants continually produce sentiments, ideas, values, and practices that manifest and encourage new modes of being” (2009, 178). Building on this, I

---

<sup>3</sup> By “anonymous” I mean that, unlike cyberactivists like Asmaa Mahfouz, Gigi Ibrahim or Esraa Abdel Fatah, these bloggers are not recognized figures of the revolution nor do they self-identify as activists. I don't mean, however, that they necessarily write under a pseudonym, although some do.

argue that personal blogs perform a similar function, albeit in a virtual environment. It is therefore through the sharing of online narratives in the blogosphere that an *emotional habitus* emerges –shaping “one's affects, effectively altering one's feeling experience” (Gould 2009, 37)–, is sustained, and eventually challenged.

### **'Intimate publics' in the Egyptian blogosphere**

Since the 1990s, Habermas' (1962) concept of *public sphere* has been challenged by feminist scholars like Nancy Fraser, who coined the term *subaltern counterpublics* to denote the “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (1990, 67). With the advent of the Internet, and the emergence of a new virtual space –the cyberspace– that blurs the boundaries between public and private sphere, alternative discursive arenas proliferate in the online sphere.

Despite the usefulness of the notion of *subaltern counterpublics* for the analysis of blogs, Fraser's term does not capture the emotional intensities that circulate within the personal blogosphere. It is for this reason that I consider personal blogs as a form of Berlant's *intimate publics* (2008): a “porous, affective scene of identification among strangers that promises a certain experience of belonging and provides a complex of consolation, confirmation, discipline and discussion about how to live as an *x*” (Berlant 2008, viii). Particularly, I am interested in Berlant's articulation of the concept in her conversation with Jay Prosser (2011), where *intimate publics*, akin to Foucault's *heterotopias*, are understood as “counterconventional” spaces, “laboratories for imagining and cobbling together alternative construals about how life has appeared and how legitimately it could be better shaped” (Berlant and Prosser 2011, 181). That way, I argue, Berlant's notion approaches Fraser's *subaltern counterpublics* while emphasizing the “affective registers of collective life that keep people loosely knotted together” (Berlant and Prosser 2011, 183).

The relation between affective networks and political mobilization is for Berlant (in dialogue with Prosser) ambivalent, as she recognizes that *intimate publics* “usually flourish to one side of politics, referring to historical subordinations without mobilizing a fundamental activism” (Berlant and Prosser 2011, 184). However, Berlant nevertheless suggests that “in times of crisis” these publics can “redirect their attention to transforming the terms of the political, converting the collective insider knowledge about injustice to political labor-power in struggle against the dominant terms” (idem).

This politicization process is for me even more apparent in personal blogs where, unlike in the cultural products for women studied by Berlant, narratives “circulate according to *network* rather than *broadcast* theories of transmission” (Morrison 2011, 37). Instead of passive receivers, bloggers are producers of texts as well as frequent commenters of other blogs within the community. These modified *intimate publics*, based on interaction and the development of a sense of collectivity, facilitate the articulation of political messages that can foster activism.

### **Young Egyptian women blogging to let off steam**

For the selection of blogs, I have reviewed more than 50 Egyptian blogs (located through blog aggregators and other blog's blogrolls), discarding those that were either not personal, not written by a woman individually or not updated. Following Hossam Ismail (2007) I define personal blogs broadly as:

a window to express freely personal points of view, sharing private experiences, criticizing social values, culture, economic laws, social behaviors, and political

restrictions among others; delivering new thoughts, personal literature, poetry, novels; searching for new knowledge, promoting explorations, analyzing social concepts, sharing travel experiences, etc. (3).

I have then reduced the selection to 11 blogs that extensively addressed the revolutionary events and whose authors gave me consent to quote them (see the list of links at the end of the article).<sup>4</sup> The resulting blogs are, according to the authors' self-description, written by young women in their late twenties and early thirties, students and young professionals (as engineers, teacher assistants, market researchers, computer specialists, NGO researchers or architects), most of them single, but also divorced and a mother of two.

Regarding their blogs, bloggers describe them as spaces: “of a very personal nature” (*Nermeena*), “my comfort zone, where i can write what i feel with no fears at all of being judged” (*Ze2red*), a place to “throw my rambling thoughts” (*Mayada*) and to “get things out of my system” (*Insomniac*, *Nermeena*) or, as *Ze2red* eloquently puts it, “my number one tool to let all my feelings out in the open away from my tiny little brain, so it won't explode.” For others, like *Sina* and *Deppy*, blogging is a sort of therapy. While *Sina* considers writing “the only form of human communication that I am actually good at,” *Deppy* reportedly blogs “to put my mind on ease, to get rid of my rivers of thoughts, to express my emotions.” The 11 selected blogs have been started between 1999 (*Rou* has the oldest entry) and 2011 (*Ghada's* blog is the more recent) and all of them are still active.

### **The 'emotional habitus' Before the Revolution: Between Frustration and Resignation**

A cursory look at the posts published before the revolution in the selected personal blogs hints at a generalized mood of depression among bloggers. It is not uncommon to find references to the ills of Egypt, materialized in the “bald-faced youth standing on the corners of the street waiting for any passing female to sexually harass her ... the street children ... the burned hospitals, the crashed trains, the drowned carriers, and the corruption everywhere” (*Rou*, 4/26/06). Suffering from a stifling situation, bloggers persuasively expressed their frustration, their lack of hope, their distrust and their helplessness. A sense of “indifference or estrangement” (*Nermeena*, 4/4/06) towards the country was often evoked (*Deppy* and *Insomniac* mentioned feeling “like aliens” on 12/6/09 and 12/28/10, respectively), while expressions of patriotism –like those following Egypt's victory in the 2010 Africa Cup– were bitterly criticized:

In this country people die of hunger, they die of torture, they simply die because they don't have half the basic humane standards of living and medical attention ... There is corruption in our daily lives ... But not today ... One goal, and one championship made us winners... Happy celebrating Egyptians everywhere, enjoy and savor the moment, for you will desperately need it on so many horrible days to come (*Insomniac*, 1/31/10).

Paradoxically, however, blame was not unequivocally focused on the government but diffused in society. In many posts, Egyptians themselves were held responsible for the deteriorating situation, if not through their behavior (like bad driving, sexual harassment or aggressiveness), then for their lack of motivation for change. As *Sina* noted, “every breath we

---

<sup>4</sup> I agree with Rutter and Smith that online narratives that are publicly accessible in the Internet are not necessary public –and therefore available for their use in research without consent. As they note, “those involved have a recognition that their words and actions are viewable by others but this does not mean that everything that goes on in the groups is essentially public discourse and as such ethically available to the online researcher” (2005, 90). Moreover, since blogs are indexed and their content can be easily googled, researchers cannot guarantee the blogger's anonymity using a pseudonym.

take, we waste it on talking, rather than doing something about it. We can not blame one person or one organization for this ... but we can blame ourselves” (7/15/06). This resulted in an *emotional habitus* characterized by depression and resignation, two moods that, according to Jasper, “discourage protest by dampening hopes for change” (1998, 406). In a context where “the air in Egypt smells of frustration” (*Wild*, 5/28/10), emigration often seemed the only way out:

Our country is turning into a suffocating monster, forcing everybody to leave.. Exactly like the house of the family when you live there more than expected. However you have mixed feelings towards both – you love, and sometimes curse- and more importantly you call both “home” though you ask yourself “for how long one can bear it?” (*Lasto Adri*, 8/13/10).

Yet, bloggers also rebelled against this mood, criticizing “that everybody thinks we should get used to all the bad things” and wondering “if we all do that, then when will change happen???” (*Ze2red*, 1/11/11).

Within this situation of immobilism, the murder of Khaled Said by the police in June 2010 provoked a *moral shock* that shattered the existing affective state.<sup>5</sup> For *Mayada*, Said's death was “just SHOCKING!,” unleashing in her not only grief (“my heart falls to pieces”) but also rage (“I want to tear those monsters to pieces!,” 6/14/10). Following Said's case, other instances of police torture and abuse –until then only denounced in political blogs– started to appear in personal blogs, with bloggers like *Wild* boldly denouncing the “mad cruelty, insane brutality Egyptian police are exceptionally capable of” (11/14/10). The popular indignation reached the streets, leading to demonstrations of “mostly non-activists” showing the “spirit of discontent rising in Egypt” (*Wild*, 6/27/10). While the protests didn't have an immediate effect, in retrospect *Wild* pointed at this factor as key in leading to the revolution: “if Khaled Said hadn't been killed, and his horrific postmortem photos hadn't been published, who knows, maybe this revolution wouldn't be happening” (2/5/11). Following Jasper, the shock produced by Said's murder fueled anger, which was “channeled” through its coverage in social media into outrage. Building on emotions, bloggers identified a culprit – the police, and the government as its last responsible– who was “to blame for what [was] wrong” (1998, 410).

Amid a climate of growing popular discontent towards the government (exacerbated by political corruption and a deteriorating economic situation), an unexpected external event radically transformed the *emotional habitus*: On January 14, 2011, the Tunisian revolution succeeded on toppling the Ben Ali regime. A day later, *Wild* opened her post with a “VIVAAAAA LA REVOLUCIOOOON!” and a selection of tweets from the “brilliant Tunisian revolution” (1/15/11). The mood shift is best illustrated by *Lasto Adri*'s post “2011 and Hope” (1/14/11):

I have NEVER been that excited! ... Nothing in my life made me that happy! I never stood between people to ask everyone I saw “Did you know what happened today in Tunisia?” ... Some neighbor nation did it: Despite oppression. Despite power, corruption and misfortunes. A nation said it out and loud “Enough is enough. We need change.” And they did it!

---

<sup>5</sup> Khaled Said was purportedly murdered because he uploaded a video in YouTube where two policemen appeared sharing the spoils of a drug bust. Following the release of Said's postmortem pictures on the Internet, activist and Google executive Wael Ghonim created the memorial page “We are all Khaled Said” in Facebook.

The Tunisian case, using Jasper's model, represents an example of *cognitive liberation*, which causes action “more through its emotional impact than its cognitive message” (1998, 416). Similar to the Bolshevik revolution in relation to the socialist movements in Western Europe, the *Jasmine Revolution* “inspired mobilization, not as an objective or as a cognitive indicator of the odds of success, but as ... a symbolic reminder of a joyful utopian future” (idem). As *Wild* noted, “the Egyptians saw a live and practical example of how to get rid of dictatorship ... Now was the time to emulate them and let the domino effect work” (2/5/11).

### **Hope, Joy, Fear and Pride: Turmoil of emotions at the Beginning of the Revolution**

The uprisings started on January 25, 2011, the date set by the “We are all Khaled Said” Facebook group for the celebration of a Day of Rage.<sup>6</sup> On that day, thousands of protesters gathered in Egypt's major cities, from Cairo to Suez and Alexandria, to protest against poverty, unemployment, corruption and police brutality on the occasion of the National Police Day. Attempting to silence the revolt, President Hosni Mubarak forced a communication blackout between January 27 and February 2. This measure, instead of diluting the uprisings, further stirred up outrage, as *Sina* noted: “tomorrow, people are planning to go out in the streets after prayers and blocking all the social media and communication channels will result in more people in the streets” (1/27/11). Using her blog as a loudspeaker with global reach, *Mayada* accused the regime of attempting to “kill and slaughter us as they wish with no witness to their crimes,” asking her readers to “spread the news” and “help us make more pressure” (1/27/11). Before the service was disrupted, those bloggers who were in the protests managed to inform about the dramatic events:

Within minutes another group was chanting outside the cordon and the police closed the street to cars and pedestrians. They started to abduct people from the other protest, with the help of thugs. It was awful ... We could only scream, cry, or watch in horror (*Wild*, 1/27/11).

The period between the re-establishment of the Internet on February 2 and Mubarak's resignation on February 11 is one of the most intense in the personal blogosphere. As the Internet was back, bloggers poured out in their posts all the repressed emotions accumulated in the days of forced silence. Expressions of joy were generalized, a mood graphically conveyed by *Mayada*:

I feel that only now I can breathe. Before this, the whole repressive regime was sitting on my chest. Imagine when Mubarak, the ministers, parliament and all the security authorities are sitting on my chest! I was barely breathing... just a tiny whiff of air that kept me living. But now, I can fill my lungs with air.. (7/2/11).

The tension between the urge to narrate the events and the impossibility of capturing the

---

<sup>6</sup> The call for the January 25 protests appeared first as an event in Facebook on January 14. The announcement spread rapidly through social media and online networks. In YouTube, a video posted by activist Asmaa Mahfouz encouraging Egyptians to join the protests played an important role in sparking the participation (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgjIgMdsEuk>). The Day of Rage was supported by oppositional movements like Karama, the 6th of April Youth Movement, the National Association for Change, the Popular Democratic Movement for Change (HASHD), the Justice and Freedom Youth Movement, the Revolutionary Socialists and the Muslim Brotherhood Youth. Besides this, thousands of non-affiliated Egyptians participated in the protests.



magnitude of what was happening is best reflected in *Lasto Adri*'s words: "I have so much to say. So much to write to behold the memory, but words stand so small in front of what I am experiencing now" (2/6/11). Feelings of hope fused with calls for dignity, freedom and justice against a regime that now was unquestionably labeled a dictatorship and held responsible for poverty, brutality, humiliation and corruption. Expressions of patriotism and national pride – long banned from the Egyptian blogosphere– popped up in almost all personal blogs, as expressed by *Deppy* (2/6/11):

[Y]esterday, I was a girl who stood on the verge of hopelessness, who lost faith in a better tomorrow, who was living like a zombie at one time. I am a girl who used not to trust, who used not to dream, who used to curb her free spirit, and silent her rebellious voice. But today, I am a girl with a fresh born patriotism, with a full tank of enthusiasm, with a handful of bubbly dreams.

Fellow citizens, observed in a more positive light, were now trusted: "Egyptian are brilliant heroes," wrote *Wild* as the youth organized themselves to protect the neighborhoods (2/4/11). Similarly, *Sina* admitted: "[D]espite all of the corruption, ill-education and economic problems, even illiterate Egyptians are knowledgeable and well cultured, before the 25th of January, I didn't know that" (2/6/11). As a result, a new "we" appeared as the subject in many posts: "We surprised ourselves," wrote *Mayada* (2/3/11), while *Sina* claimed: "The Egyptian people have spoken and it is time we are heard" (2/2/11). Yet, pervading the contained joy was a sense of disbelief, as *Lasto Adri* noted: "sometimes I wake up and tell myself 'I must be dreaming'" (2/6/11). Likewise, *Nermeena* confessed: "I have to admit that before the 25th, I was one of those who didn't believe ... Yet on the 25th when I saw the humongous number people pouring into Midan El Tahrir ... I broke into tears" (2/8/11).

Consensus, however, was not always complete in the blogosphere. On February 1, an "intense" speech (*Deppy*) by Mubarak raised confusion on the streets and also among bloggers (as *Mayada* recognized, after the speech she "did not turn into 'pro Mubarak' but pro 'let's wait and see,'" 2/3/11). In those moments of uncertainty, other bloggers like *Insomniac* harshly criticized the hesitation (2/2/11):

Mubarak conned Egypt yesterday with a speech meant to delude everyone; he spoke to the emotions of people ... he played a psychological trick on all of us and made us have doubts ... To those who believed Mubarak and condemned those peaceful protesters, are you traitors or just plain stupid??? ... Are you suffering from Stockholm syndrome?

Just one day later, as protesters were attacked with horses and camels by armed thugs, doubts faded away in the blogosphere. As *Brownie* recalled: "It was a quiet day in the beginning, then it turned into hell, the NDP [National Democratic Party] thugs started eradicating the protesters by using knives, daggers and sticks ... I was terrified" (2/3/11). After the massacre, the celebratory spirit was tainted by the memory of the "300 martyrs" (*Sina*, 2/2/11), but bloggers managed to transform the mourning into rage and solidarity toward the victims, a positive feeling that "can lead to action on behalf of that group" (Jasper 1998, 406). As *Insomniac* exclaimed: "I wish I died right there defending my beliefs of a better and more decent tomorrow rather than sitting here right now worrying and fearing that the sweat and blood of those who are there would go in vain" (2/2/11).

While violence represented a major moral shock (*Mayada* reported feeling "breathlessly overwhelmed" on 2/3/11 and *Ghada* wrote on 2/11/11: "it hurt me to see [the revolution] go through so much pain"), the traumatizing events also contributed to further demonize Mubarak, who lost the sympathies he had gained with his speech, thereby fueling "powerful emotions" (Jasper 1998, 412). Depicted now as the "symbol of corruption"

(*Mayada*, 2/3/11), Mubarak was execrated by *Insomniac* (2/2/11):

Truth is, he's a pimp who's been pimping Egypt for 30 years and would rather burn it then let it be cleansed of his shit... Truth is, he was robbing our sympathies for the blood he planned on spilling today...

In general, contradictory emotions “from joyful to mournful” (*Nermeena*, 2/8/11) dominated the narrations of personal bloggers, who portrayed a time “filled with optimism and dark sides, confidence in the youth power and confusion, hope and fear, dreamy and cautious, and a lot more” (*Ze2red*, 2/5/11). As days went by, feelings of impatience started to arise (“is it going to take a month like what happened in Tunisia to reach the ultimate goal,” asked *Ze2red* on 2/5/11) and bloggers began to question themselves about the future: “It is difficult to predict what will happen next,” stated *Wild* (2/10/11).

### **The Intensities of Space: Visiting Tahrir Square**

While some bloggers recognized not having participated in the protests (“It broke my heart that I didn't revolt even though I was a supporter from the very first day,” regretted *Deppy* on 2/10/11, “[f]rom my position –in front of the TV– I was dead worried”), most of them went to Tahrir Square, the “place that is witnessing the making of a nation and the redefining of freedom for the entire world” (*Insomniac*, 2/9/11). For those who decided to visit the epicenter of the protests, the desire to be part of history was stronger than their fear of repression. As *Brownie* recalls (2/3/11):

I was home, with my fear eating me alive and I think I have to admit that I never attended a protest, not for anything political, but the fear was the only reason. So I decided that I will enjoy my comfortable home and just help in spreading the word, but everyday I was thinking that I will regret it and this historical moment will bypass me.

Similarly, *Mayada* recognized “I did not know exactly why I went but I felt that I had to be there,” and shared in her blog her state of mind in those moments (2/10/11): “I did not take this decision while feeling courageous and chivalrous. On the contrary, I was afraid... no, SCARED and my knees were literally shaking.” While fear was one of the obstacles that kept bloggers away from the protests, the opposition of their families was another. “The revolution is not only in Tahrir it is in every Egyptian house,” observed *Brownie*, “[my mom] was happy that I was afraid and I did not want to participate, till I decided to change my behavior ... she threatened me that I will not be allowed to enter our house” (2/9/11). Far from extraordinary, *Brownie* notes that many “women fought against their families to participate in the revolution, they were threat to be cut off financially or even that they will curse them and loss their blessings” (idem). To circumvent these impediments, *Mayada* went to the protests on January 25 “without telling my family because I was sure they wouldn't let me” (2/9/11). On January 28, however, she wasn't so lucky: “I was dying to join in 28th January demonstrations but my father forbade me from leaving the house” (2/3/11).

For those who experienced the atmosphere of Tahrir Square, their posts on those visits testify to the emotional intensities that this space contained. Despite the difficulties to “put into words how it felt like to be in the Square” (*Wild*, 2/14/11), *Mayada* tried to share her sensations: “I did not feel I am a society member called Mayada. I felt I am a whole society called 'Egyptian'” (2/9/11). Similarly, *Sina* strove to describe the transformation that the protesters had undergone in the square (2/6/11):

Today, I returned to Tahrir to witness a great change. It has ceased to be a

demonstration and has become –almost– a way of life. People there can dub themselves not only Egyptians, but Tahririans as well, because those who have been there from the beginning have become completely different individuals ... Tahrir has become a miniature Egyptian republic, offering a brighter outlook on a possible way of life for the whole of Egypt.

In their posts, bloggers evoked feelings of “enthusiasm,” “love” and “harmony” in the square (*Mayada*, 2/9/11), describing the protesters as “friendly,” “smiling” and “welcoming” (*Sina*, 2/6/11) and stressing the absence of sexual harassment (“People were AMAZING! No sexual harassment ..., and there was no pushing or violence,” wrote *Mayada* on 2/9/11), the generosity of the participants (“everyone gave the other food, a hand, medicine, a kind gesture, a laugh, a cry of empathy or very accurate political analyses,” noted *Wild* on 2/14/11), and the respect for religious difference:

After a while the Christian prayers start ... Muslims and Christians stand side by side ... 20 minutes or so later, someone starts shouting that it's time for Muslim prayers ... all Muslims in the square begin to pray at the same time, while Christians watch over them, and the whole square falls silent (*Sina*, 2/6/11).

Disputing the idea that the protests were led by the youth, bloggers stressed the diversity of ages represented (“children were chanting 'Down with Mubarak!,'” wrote *Wild* on 2/14/11, “[and] you could overhear an old man saying 'Thank God I lived to see this day'”). Moreover, bloggers like *Brownie* emphasized the “extraordinary role” played by women (2/9/11):

When I was in Tahrir, I saw young and old women, veiled women and non veiled women, and politically oriented women and non political women. I saw them side to side to the men, they did not listen to the traditional calls that Tahrir is not a place for women.

Paradoxically, what objectively was a dangerous place became a safe space in the bloggers' narratives. As *Wild* mentioned: “I felt like I was among my family of one million people” (2/14/11). Using very similar terms, *Insomniac* wrote: “I felt like millions of arms were holding my soul safe and sound” (2/3/11). As she expressively described in her post “Square of Angels:”

Despite the ruins, and the massive injuries, I had a very soothing sense that I was in heaven ... I was among ANGELS, not human beings ... One of them asked me and my friend as his face beamed with a smile “why did you come?”... my friend said “because this is our country...”, I looked at him in the eye and resisted hugging him as I answered “because YOU are my country”... and they are, Oh God, they are the country I have been looking for my entire life and I finally found it.

Leaving the square was usually accompanied by sad feelings, and nostalgia set in. As *Wild* noted: “When you are in Tahrir Square, you feel free and feel hopeful that democratic change is imminent. As soon as you leave, you are hit by the mundane normality of other areas” (2/10/11).

### **Ecstasies and Anxieties at the End of a 30-year Regime**

On February 11, vice-president Omar Suleiman announced Mubarak's resignation and handed over power to the Army. As *Deppy* recalled: “I can't really remember the speech, all I

remember is all the screaming (blondy-style screams) and all the dancing with my brother. It was such a victorious moment!” (2/20/11). However, not all bloggers could express their joy. As *Brownie* remembered: “I was stunned, I thought I will cry or I will laugh or run to the street [but] I stay as I am” (2/12/11). Similarly, *Sina* wrote (2/11/11):

I am numb. I don't think my analytical brain has accepted that at 6:00 PM of 11/02/2011 something grand has happened. I can see the relief on my mother's face and for the first time in 18 days, a cheerful smile is drawn on my father's face, while my sister keeps shouting in the phone like a little giggling girl. However, I express nothing.

In their posts, bloggers tried to transmit the euphoria on the streets. “Cries of joy ripped our house and when I ran to the bedroom female neighbors were uttering trills of joy,” explained *Wild* (2/14/11), while *Ze2red* wrote: “Today was the first time for me to see our country so happy, chanting, singing, celebrating because of the same thing –which is for the first time not soccer– we are celebrating our freedom” (2/12/11). In some cases, the expression of happiness acquired sensorial dimensions: “The air got fresher, the sun got warmer and the food I had tasted a hundred times tasted better, dignity having been added to the recipe” (*Wild*, 2/14/11).

Proud of their achievements, *Rou* noted: “The last 18 days of my life, I haven't only witnessed history being written, but I rather took place in writing it myself along with my family and friends” (2/12/11), while *Ghada* claimed: “Our Ancestors built the pyramids thousands of years ago and on [February 11] we built history that will stand the test of time” (2/14/11). Stressing the role played by the youth, *Ze2red* asserted (2/12/11):

Today was just a day that will always be one of a kind to our generation. A generation that never thought to ever witness a revolution, and never thought after years and years of being ruled by one man, that we can be united and decide to change our destiny.

The confidence in the advent of “a new dawn, offering hope, dignity and a bright future for us all” (*Sina*, 2/11/11) was expressed by many bloggers, who daydreamed about the future: “I will know a new Egypt free from racism, sexism, classism and tyranny,” wrote *Brownie* (2/12/11). In order to achieve the revolutionary goals, bloggers emphasized the importance of maintaining the “leap in behaviors and attitude” (*Nermeena*, 2/12/11) that had taken place in the Egyptian streets. Among the changes that *Ze2red* wanted “to see last forever,” she mentioned: “I love how you walk on the streets and find people smiling at you instead of all the gloomy faces. I loved seeing the youth organizing the traffic, and for the first time in years the streets were smooth” (2/13/11). Above all, the need to “remain united” (*Sina*, 2/11/11) was mentioned by many bloggers, along the importance of working together for change, a task to which bloggers wanted to contribute: “it's the time to ... work together to reform our country,” wrote *Ghada* (2/11/11), and *Lasto Adri* noted (2/13/11):

I dream that 2011 would also be the year I'd find a way to directly help in rebuilding my country... I no longer want to work for a foreign organization. I no longer want to live as a mere spectator.

Despite the optimistic perspectives, however, expressions of concern started to gradually emerge in blogs. With regard to the revolutionary values, *Ze2red* wondered: “will this last? Are we going to take a step back and return to our normal life, or will we really seek the change?” (2/13/11).

### **The Aftermath of the Revolution and the Return to 'Normality:'**

Once the reactions to Mubarak's resignation abated, Egyptians started to get used to the new situation, that offered as many reasons for hope as for worry. The contradictory state of mind is accurately described by *Wild*: "I am in some sort of limbo where I fell after the initial euphoria of success has worn off" (3/16/11). Therefore, although *Sina* still reminded her readers that "we are masters of our own fate" (2/27/11) and *Rou* recalled that "we are free... we've changed" (3/27/11), the doubts that had timidly appeared as the regime was toppled, were now widespread in the blogosphere, as captured by *Mayada*'s statement: "I cannot remember a time in my life where everything was blurry as it is now" (3/8/11). Similarly, *Sina* noted (2/27/11):

"If you are confused, then you have reached the second state that most Egyptians are experiencing; great and utter confusion. Questions such as "who should we trust," "Where are we going" and "what in the Lord's Name is happening?" have become regular, everyday questions.

The lack of leaders—a positive aspect during the uprisings— contributed to increase the sense of disorientation, as *Sina* observed: "True, this has been a leader-less revolution, but now, when all people seek answers, we need someone to respond" (2/17/11).

The change of behaviors that was so cherished during the revolution seemed to rapidly degenerate. As *Insomniac* lamented: "All through the week, people have been driving like animals. I have spotted quite a few littering through their car windows, and yelled at enough people driving in the opposite direction" (2/18/11). The spirit of unity was replaced by the old sense of division. As *Mayada* complained, "the freedom that we were deprived of for all our lives, when we've gained it at last, we become offensive, sarcastic and narrow-minded to the utmost extent" (3/8/11). Similarly, *Ze2red* deplored that "people are making the martyrs of the revolution an excuse of being rude and disrespectful to others" (3/29/11).

Although the mobilizations continued in Tahrir, the protesters started to lose the support of important segments of the population, despite the bloggers' effort to defend them. As *Sina* wrote: "let us not misjudge those who are still fighting for our rights ... there in Tahrir are the same people who sparked the revolution and who continue to ask for valid rights" (2/27/11). According to *Sina*, the undertow of the revolution brought "frustration at the lack of knowledge and the lack of a normal life, and anger which is sometimes directed at the pillars of corruptions, sometimes at the protesters in Tahrir and sometimes at themselves" (2/27/11). Powerlessness was also evoked by bloggers like *Mayada*, who found herself "wanting to help out the country in every direction and ending up by doing nothing at all" (3/8/11). Moreover, the growing disappointment was aggravated by a sense of guilt for the death of protesters in the name of what threatened to become a failed revolt, as noted by *Wild*: "The revolution is now at stake, what if I one day realize that the dead have gone down the drain?" (3/16/11).

### **Under the Blessing and the Burden of Choice**

On March 19, Egypt celebrated a referendum for constitutional amendments. Although the discussion between the two options was present in the blogosphere ("we're voting NO because it's messed up," wrote *Sina* on 3/15/11, while *Rou* assessed on 3/18/11 "both decisions include their risks, and it is a personal preference which risk you're willing to take"), the focus of the narratives was rather on the importance of voting, as *Sina* emphasized: "[D]on't be afraid, embrace the burden, go VOTE, live the blessing of choice and no matter what the consequences will be, we will deal with it" (3/17/11).

Emphasizing the uniqueness of the moment, bloggers could not conceal their excitement. As *Sina* claimed: "the act of VOTING itself is shocking. I HAVE NEVER

VOTED IN MY LIFE ... actually, my parents have never voted in their lives. No one I know have ever voted in their lives” (3/15/11). *Lasto Adri*, who had voted in the Egyptian parliamentary elections of 2010, stressed the crucial difference of the new circumstances: “Today was the second time for me to vote, but the first time in a democratic atmosphere” (3/20/11). As bloggers stressed, unlike other occasions this time “our voices count” (*Rou*, 3/18/11). Likewise, as *Sina* put it graphically (3/17/11):

Picture this; rice is tiny, but when put together it is very heavy. The same is applied to voting; each one of us is a single grain of rice, but together we hold a great force able to crush anything that threatens this great nation.

Despite the enthusiasm, however, Egyptians were concerned about this responsibility. As *Sina* explained, “the burden of choice is difficult and new to Egyptians. Some, are ecstatic, others are fearful and a few are still suffering from Stockholm syndrome” (3/17/11). Among bloggers too, the restlessness was apparent: “I am worried about the results,” wrote *Lasto Adri*, “I will pray tonight that my fears are exaggerated” (3/20/11).

### **Women in the Revolution: From Celebration to Disappointment**

On the occasion of the International Women's Day, *Rou* posted a piece honoring women's participation in the uprisings (3/8/11):

One of the very few times in my life that I wished I was a man was during the very first days of the revolution. I was mainly thinking it would give me a better chance to help and participate specially in the days that had so much violence in ... [but] I realized that it didn't really matter if I was a man or a woman, for I did what I had to do.

That same day, a Million Women March was planned in the streets of Cairo. Anticipating possible critiques, *Brownie* justified it in her blog (3/6/11):

Many might say that this is not the right time to talk about certain sectors of the society and we should build a home land to every one women and man, I would say that yes it is time of raising the slogans of equality, justice and citizenship and acknowledge the role of women.

The day of the protest, the “first disappointment” was for *Brownie* that “the main stream civil society did not show up” (3/8/11). While at first she felt “powerful and empowered” when marching in the “notorious streets of the harassments,” as she notes, “the happiness did not stay for long time” due to “the anger in the streets and the fierce replies to the chants” (idem):

[T]he misogynist demonstrations which were a combination of thugs or regulars people started to be very provocative, they shouted male protesters that they should wear veil as a sign of their femininity and that they are gays because they are supporting women cause ... the long provocative pathetic dialogues between the protesters and the regular people of the street started to get violent verbally, they started calling them whores, agents of Suzanne Mubarak and the west.

Frustrated by the events of the day, *Brownie* concluded: “Since the beginning of revolution ... I was half skeptical, half optimistic, now I feel there that Tahrir ethics was temporary and we are back to earth, Tahrir and all Egypt streets is not heaven” (idem). These words appeared premonitory in view of the aggressions that female protesters suffered on March 9, when they

were submitted to 'virginity checks' by officers of the army, evidencing what *Brownie* called “the obsession of a whole society by [an] inch of membrane and the rooted tendency to evaluate women according to their sexual activity” (3/31/11).

## Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have traced over time the *emotional habitus* of the Egyptian revolution through the narratives of a set of female personal bloggers. Intertwining the main events of that period with the emotionally saturated discourses that narrated them, I have aimed to show how emotion “is a crucial factor that spurs and shapes political action or blocks it altogether” (Gould 2009, 439). In so doing, I have identified a pre-revolutionary mood of depression and resignation inhibiting action for social change, which was challenged by the moral shock of police brutality and the inspiration of the Tunisian revolution, giving way to a new *emotional habitus*, which expanded the sense of political possibility, allowing Egyptians to dream of a better Egypt. After Mubarak's resignation, and once the initial euphoria diminished, an *emotional habitus* made of frustration and disappointment slowly set in, as the old divisions re-emerged when the country was facing national rebuilding amid economic and political instability.

This trend, which was already obvious at the end of the studied period, late March 2011, has aggravated in the last months, adding grief for a missed opportunity to the already negative mood. At the moment of finishing this article, on June 2012, Egypt just celebrated the second round of the presidential elections that should designate Mubarak's substitute. As the results of the first round pointed to a runoff between Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohammed Morsi and former *ancien régime* general Ahmed Shafiq, *Lasto Adri* wrote (5/25/12):

I want to weep on your shoulders right now. Today is really a sad day. Today, marks the end of our Egyptian Revolution as we know it. A hard decision ahead of us.. Can't vote for our last dictator's prime minister and can't vote for a hard core Islamist. All the ecstasy of last year is gone. Growing feelings of leaving the country and wishing to start rootless somewhere else.. Why does it feel painful this way?

With this attempted reconstruction of an emotional history of the revolution through fragmented online narratives, I do not intend to represent the affective states of the totality of the Egyptian society. For sure, this narrative *patchwork* can only account –if even– for the experiences of a very limited segment of the middle-class, educated, tech-savvy Egyptian youth. However, I am certain that it provides an invaluable close and intimate look into the emotional journey of a generation that not only witnessed but also made a revolution. These personal bloggers are not activists but –as many Egyptians– they have participated in the protests. They do not claim to be citizen journalists, but through their blogs they have transmitted what was happening on the streets, spreading the word through global online networks. And even though they have not attempted to mobilize other protesters with political slogans, their moving narratives have encouraged fellow bloggers to take part in the historical events and to envision the possibility of change.

It is my belief that the emotional intensities of that time exceed any sober and insightful political analysis; yet they can be captured by a phrase in *Sina's* blog, which still resonates in the personal blogosphere: “long lives the united republic of Tahrir, if not in actuality ... then let it be in our own minds” (2/6/11).

## References

- Berlant, Lauren Gail. 2008. *The Female Complaint : The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Berlant, Laurent and Jay Prosser. 2011. "Life Writing and Intimate Publics: A Conversation with Lauren Berlant." *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (Winter): 180-187.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1990. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 25-26: 56-80.
- Gould, Deborah B. 2009. *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Hossam Ismail, Mohamed. 2007. "Layla's Soft Screaming: A Discourse Analysis of Cyber-Feminist Resistance on the Egyptian Women" (paper presented at the International Conference of the IAMCR, Paris, France, July 23-25).
- Jasper, James M. 1998. "The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and Around Social Movements." *Sociological Forum* 13, no. 3: 397.
- Morrison, Aimée. 2011. "'Suffused by Feeling and Affect': The Intimate Public of Personal Mommy Blogging." *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (Winter): 37-55.
- Rutter, Jason and Gregory W. H. Smith. 2005. "Ethnographic Presence in a Nebulous Setting." In *Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet*, edited by Hine, Christine, 81-92. Oxford, UK; New York: Berg.

## Blogs Cited

- Lasto Adri: <http://lastoadri.com/blog/>
- Nermeena: <http://nerro.wordpress.com/>
- Ze2red: <http://ze2red.blogspot.com>
- Deppy: <http://deppys.wordpress.com/>
- Mayada: <http://mydmermaid.wordpress.com/>
- Sina: <http://natural-conspiracy.blogspot.com>
- Insomniac: <http://obliviology.wordpress.com/>
- Brownie: <http://atbrownies.blogspot.com>
- Wild: <http://dustanddreams.blogspot.com>
- Rou: <http://sleeplessrou.wordpress.com/>
- Ghada: <http://theclickofmyheels.blogspot.com>

Note: In the blog quotations, I have maintained the original phrasing when possible. Only exceptionally, when it interfered with the comprehension of the text, I have corrected typos.