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Reflections of Feminism in Contemporary Mural Painting between Occidental and Oriental societies

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Abstract

Feminism as a global movement was and is still working on achieving women rights & liberation in different ways and by using different tools. Art in general and mural painting as a public art in specific, are very eloquent tools to help present feminist causes to different societies. These societies vary from a nation to another, from a culture to another, depending on the extent of suffering that women endure and also depending on how strong the feminist movement is in that particular society.

Despite the fact that feminism is a global movement, each society's identity is reflected differently in such kinds of arts, especially when looking at occidental and oriental worlds where ethics and traditions are distinctly different. These differences shall be normally reflected in contemporary public art, like in subjects, messages, styles, and even concerning the amount of the architectural or structural available areas for such kind of arts.

This is what the researcher will try to clarify through a kind of analytical comparison between occidental and oriental societies concerning the feminist movement. This includes its murals as a public art, especially in Egypt where feminist public art can be considered limited, the matter that may lead to some significant conclusions about the importance of such art, its role and its effect on the society.

1. Introduction

Feminism is a group of different social theories, political movements, and moral philosophies, driven by motives related to women's causes and rights in the aim of reinforcing developed, stable and strong societies. In general, feminism doesn't, in any way, mean to stand against men as much as it means standing by oppressed women worldwide until they get their rights, equally to men, especially in education and employment. It is worth mentioning here that there is no unified global version of feminism to represent all feminists, thus, feminist causes can vary from a nation to another, from a culture to another, depending on the level of suffering and social ethics and beliefs. Of course, what some activists are seeking for in one society may be rejected by other activists in another society and it also depends on how strong feminism itself is as an active movement in this society. In general and logically, global feminism has a number of common goals like stopping all kinds of violence against women, demanding for equality in voting, education and employment.

There is no need any more to talk about the importance of women as communities members or as pillars in society, they represent one half of a society and talking about axioms in this research may be considered a loss of time. On the other hand and despite these mentioned axioms, it is common in the Eastern societies to think that feminism as a movement is against men, religion and ethics, which is not right. This misinformation may be diffused on the hand of anti-feminist groups or freedom's enemies to frighten societies from the feminist idea as if it's pure danger

to life. Therefore, more transparency, awareness and knowledge are needed to enlighten people in these countries and to facilitate the efforts of feminist activists and art as visual arts especially can play a very eloquent and important role in doing this job. It is also necessarily to mention here that this research should be considered as just a minor spotlight on feminist arts in oriental societies ,especially Egypt, because the subject is full of details and worth more studies to cover the whole story for a better understanding and to ensure its continuity.

2. Feminism history

2.1. Brief western feminism history

They say art is the mirror of societies, they also say that art can be the inspiration for a society. Between this and that, one cannot imagine talking about a certain trend of art without talking about the political, economical and social circumstances that were beyond this art, especially when it's an activist art. From now on, this research will delve deeper into historical details that represent the start of feminist art, which is a form of activist art.

Charles Fourier, a Utopian Socialist and French philosopher, is credited with having coined the word "féminisme" in 1837, as an expression (Goldstein, Leslie F.,1982). It was first known in France in 1872 and later in other European countries and the United States of America.

Three waves were historically known about modern western feminist movements, the first was during the 19th century and early twentieth century. Its focus was on giving women rights to vote and one of the most important productions that came after this wave was the remarkable book 'The Second Sex' of the French philosopher *Simone de Beauvoir* who gave within it a Marxist solution and a wide view on many of the questions of feminism in 1949.

The second wave was during the late 1960s and it was known by the "Women's liberation movement" in the United States, United Kingdom, and other developed countries. The wave continued to fight for voting rights, the reform of family laws which gave husbands control over their wives, and to abolish marital exemption in rape laws which precluded the prosecution of husbands for the rape of their wives. As a wave, it is considered the most significant one among the three feminist waves concerning its impact on women's rights achievements, as well as on art. Thus, this wave had another significant phenomenon called 'the feminist art', through which a different type of art was rising on the hands of female artists to highlight a woman's life, art and achievements away from patriarchal art that failed to represent women's causes or express their suffering worldwide. The researcher intends to delve deeper into this matter given the direct relation it has with the topic of this research.

As for the third wave, it began in the early 1990's in the United States of America, and despite the fact that this recent wave is closer to our contemporary time, it was demanding a higher ceiling for women rights especially concerning sexual issues, as well as stopping 'glass ceiling' practices that impede women's advancement in developed economies. Even though it was mainly raised to perceive failures of the second wave and to avoid its mistakes, the third wave was widely open to internal debates between different feminists. There were arguments about equal treatment for women compared to men, in addition to what was called post-feminism. All together are not considered as significant points to highlight in this research which only focuses on the art side without delving deeper in the feminism debates nor its theory

In general, the fear of feminism in conservative societies, especially closed religious ones, has acquired its magnitude from the focus on the difference of opinions regarding specific points like issues concerning sexuality for instance, while feminism is much more than these issues. Basically, feminism is a human call for stopping all kinds of violence against women, demanding for equality in voting, education and employment and such basic social rights, and these basic human calls can't be a threat to any society, but on the contrary, it's a reinforcement for a better society. The feminist concept may have found difficulties on its way into the Eastern part of the world, especially in the Middle East where misunderstood or misinterpreted religious concepts and old traditions still represent an unwritten constitutions. Thus, and as previously mentioned, this misinformation about feminism may have been diffused on the hand of freedom 's enemies to frighten societies from the feminist idea as a whole. Therefore, more transparency, awareness and knowledge are needed to enlighten people in these countries. So, what is probably more powerful than arts to do this mission? That is what this research tries to explore and therefore, in the following parts, the researcher will highlight feminism in the Middle East, where Egypt is to be our example for its important location as a gate between the North and the South, the East and the West. Egypt also has a cultural influence on the whole area and its currently living an ongoing feminist experiment, even though the movement started very early in the history of global feminism.

Feminism in Egypt

As an artist, one has a number of friends from the East where the Arab gulf extends, and to the West where the Moroccan countries exist. It is widely known that when one Arab from one of those sides meets another from the

latter side, they speak in the Egyptian dialect in order to understand one another. From this, the impact of the Egyptian culture appears on what is called "The Arab World", which is not really Arabic in its different roots nor parts, but it is usually referred to as such because of the common used language after the rise of Islam. Its worth mentioning here that each country in the Arab world speaks Arabic in its own way that may differ widely from one country to another depending on its historical, cultural and ethnic roots. However, the Egyptian dialect is very well known to all the Eastern countries due to the modern historical influence of the Egyptian cinema and music industries since the beginnings of the 20th century. This is why Egypt was chosen as a model for the feminist movement in this research, noticing that this choice doesn't necessarily mean that this model was applicable in other countries of this part of the world where women might be suffering from different kinds of problems, thus different aspects of activism from here to there are also available.

In comparison to the western feminist movement with regards to its date and demands, Egypt was almost on a parallel track with this global movement especially during the first two waves. In the year 1805, Egypt started to get rid of the dark age of the Ottoman occupation and its oppressive feudal system on the hand of *Muhammad Ali Pasha*, the Albanian commander who is considered the founder of modern Egypt due to the enormous military, economic and cultural reforms that he was responsible for. This resulted in more social movements, more opened windows to the western world, especially concerning education and scholarships for Egyptian students to Europe in almost all fields. After that, Egypt has fallen under the British occupation with its capitalist system in 1882, which in spite of its brutality and barbaric exploitation to the country, it has more or less continued to put Egypt on the map. It's worth mentioning that although the occupation was British, the cultural tendencies of the ruling class in Egypt by this time has always been French. This was evident in the life of the elites, elegant men and women French "etiquette", language, fashion and of course in their French schools in all Egypt's big cities. This all had an effect on the feminist activity in Egypt due to the aspiration of this ruling class to make Egypt similar to Europe, especially France.

Given the aforementioned reasons, Egypt was on the track of modernity where the feminist movement was a necessity to establish this modernizing goal. It was not easy for Egyptian women to transition from one era called the "Harem" established by the Ottoman culture, where women were not allowed to leave their homes except under certain conditions and after the permission of their "men" (fathers, brothers, husbands or even sons) to the era of education, science, art, employment and enlightenment. However, this change was inevitable and convictional, not only by patriot women, but also and more importantly by the help and support of the enlightened regime as well as progressive Egyptian men who were aiming to get back a strong advanced Egypt after too many years of darkness, colonization and occupation.

On the internet, there is false information that claims that the modern feminist movement in Egypt started between (1923–1939), as the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) was founded by the former leader of the women's committee in the *Wafd* party, *Hoda Shaarawi*. This was after her participation in an international feminist conference in Rome in 1923 along with *Nabawiyya Moussa* and *Ceza Nabarwi* (Jayawardena, Kumari, 1981). However, one can say that the feminist movement has seen the light in Egypt long before that date. Going back to the year 1873 when *Jeshem Afet Hanimefendi*, *Khedive Ismail Pasha's* wife has inaugurated the first girl public school in Egypt using her own money, this school could be considered the first light of feminism in Egypt because before that time, girls were not allowed to get educated, except maybe some girls who were home schooled. It is worth mentioning that *Jeshem* was a slave one day before being liberated then married to *Khedive Ismail*, which might explain where her determination was been born. This initiative has encouraged other numerous elites to send their girls to schools, and later to sponsor and support education for girls. The school was inaugurated after the publication of the book of *Refaa El-Tahtawy*, the well known Egyptian writer, teacher, translator, Egyptologist and renaissance intellectual who has spoken about this concept in his book "Al-Murshid al-Amin lil Banat wa al-Banin" (The Faithful Guide for Girls and Boys) published in 1873 (Labib Rizk, Younan. 2002).

It is now clear that feminism in Egypt rose far before the famous revolutionary books of *Kassem Amin*, the well known Egyptian intellectual writer, "Liberation of the Woman" in 1899 and "The New Woman" in 1901. These famous books were considered by some historians as the first action of feminism in Egypt while they were actually preceded by the enlightened perception of *Refaa El-Tahtawy* in 1873, who was himself one of the first scholarship beneficiaries to Paris.

The Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) was founded after 1923 in an environment that was previously groomed and prepared for major feminist changes since the end of the 19th century. Even though these changes were not fast nor accurate, it was obvious that a new era was about to begin for the Egyptian woman much before other women in the Arab region. These changes spread in almost all kinds of fields, from literature, cinema, theatre, visual arts, journalism, universities, law, sports and eventually to politics.

However, after considering Egypt' feminist history and now looking at the present situation, it seems like something is unbecoming. How could there be such a powerful modern start but still a large number of women

who suffer in Egypt and the Arab region in general? By Egypt or the Arab region, this research refers to women and girls in low, poor and uneducated levels in the social pyramid of these countries.

The answer has to be in the time period between these two ages, there was an interruption in the rhythm of feminism in Egypt and that might have started during the sixties and seventies of the 20th century. In general, the feminist activity in Egypt deteriorated after 1952 when the army seized power in Egypt as "The Ruling Revolution Command Council" ordered the dissolution of all political parties including all independent women's movements. Despite that, and despite the fact that Gamal Abdel Nasser initiated "state feminism", more rights were gained by women during his regime, like the right of voting and running for elections in the 1956 constitution for the first time. It seems that at this time, there were remaining strong solid activists like *Dorria Shafik* who were the reason why such gains were obtained. However, with the obstruction of the feminist activity itself, things were not continuing on the same previous track. In time, there were no longer enough groups, parties or coherent entities of activist voices to stand in the face of deterioration that appeared later, there was always some individual voices here or there, but there weren't any strong built feminist movements. During the seventies, a stringent Islamic trend started to invade Egypt due to a lot of reasons and circumstances. In general, it started to happen when Egyptian presidents reconciled with Islamists, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. *Gamal Abdel Nasser* was the first to do it, but then he disagreed with them and began to arrest a large number of their leaders especially after their attempt to assassinate him in 1954. After that, president *Al-Sadat*, who opened the prison doors, allowed the Brotherhood to move in streets and villages and rural areas where they could gain control on the majority of the simple poor people across the religious and political platforms. During this time, some Egyptians emigrated to the Arab Gulf land for oil business and big money and later returned with severe religious ideas and life concepts. Their return was also within the new political circumstance provided by *Al-Sadat's* reconciliation with Islamists. All of these events, situations and more have come together to put the Egyptian woman under a kind of focus, "oppressive focus" if the expression could be used. Thus, the woman in the eyes of severe Islamists is a kind of probable danger, which means she has to be pulled back to her home one way or another; it's one of the most patriarchal communities in the history of humans. Earlier on there was an article in the feminist journal "L'Egyptienne" published by the EFU, written in French by *Ceza Nebarawi* where the journal editor stated in 1927: "we the Egyptian Feminists have a great respect for our religion and we aim to see it practiced in its true spirit" (Jayawardena, Kumari, 1981). However, things have been different in the seventies and upcoming years.

In the absence of this enlightened vision of *Ceza* and her colleagues as a strong structure supported by the regime itself, the ruling class of Egypt and the elite, which is the main idea in here, the beginning of the 20th century with the radical Islamic culture in the seventies of the same century, feminism in Egypt as a movement has lost a lot even in terms of "Islamic Feminism." There were different attempts from different individual voices or civilian associations or national councils to reverse this, not to mention the efforts of the presidents *Al-Sadat* and *Mubarak's* wives, *Gehan Al-Sadat* and *Suzanne Mubarak* who despite the corruption that was running during their regimes, have offered some privileges to Egyptian women especially on the personal status code and social developing levels. If there wasn't the continual economic crisis, the invasion of the radical Islamic culture, selfishness of the "new rich" class, the rising age of marriage, the depression of youth etc, one can say that Egyptian woman could definitely have had more rights by our time. Women could have definitely suffered from less depression or domestic violence, female genital mutilation or street harassment.

In spite of the aforementioned, Egyptian women could start over because they didn't lose all of the rights they managed to acquire in earlier times. In European, and other advanced societies, women still suffer from inequality in salaries, while in Egypt, most of women, especially in governmental jobs, have the same salary as men in the same job post. In comparison to some Arab world countries, the Egyptian woman doesn't have to get her husband's permission nor her father's to have her own passport or to leave the country. Similarly, wearing a veil is not obligatory along with the existence of other kinds of social and civil rights. The Egyptian woman is in almost every field of work, employed or managing, not to mention the presence of a lot of active feminism militants and associations. This gives hope for a better continuation, on both levels, regional and global, a better appropriate continuation of the ancient history of Egypt where the woman was a respectable and enabled society member in all living aspects.

3. Feminist art

2.2. The Feminist Art Movement in the Occident

It has to be clear first that the idea of drawing or painting or sculpturing female figures by male or female artists is not necessarily a feminist trend or activity; there is sometimes a kind of confusion about this. So many artists have been inspired by the woman's world and its visual beauty, her body, her hair, and this is not necessarily feminist art, actually, it could be sometimes considered as an anti-feminist art especially when it tends to show the woman as an object for sexual pleasure. On the other hand, any art created by a female is sometimes considered feminist art because it helps reinforcing women in the field of art. The researcher, however, tends to think that a

female artist who is presenting marvelous pieces of still-life paintings for instance can't be considered a feminist artist; thus, in this research a feminist female artist or a pro-feminist male artist is the one who is presenting a feminist cause through his or her art. This is true even if it is in an indirect symbolic and unseen way; in this research, there will be a kind of focus on female feminist art.

The most important change produced by the war, however, had less to do with the jobs women held and more to do with the identity of the women who went to work (Chafe, William, n.d.).

In the 20th century, when men came back home after war, whether in World War I (1914-1918) or World War II (1939-1945), but especially after the World War II, they found out that their women have taken a new road of life. Many of them had jobs, they were left alone for the whole life's responsibility and it must have been hard of course, but one way or another, every independent woman started to rediscover herself and her own identity as a society member. Some women have also become artists and were recognized in the field. Thus, before this time, almost everything about women in art was expressed and presented by men. Sometimes in men's art, women were represented as evil being who were the reasons behind any troubles and even Satan's allies, but in women's art, things were different; a female artist shall treat her own story, memories, life difficulties as a woman as well as a mother with an eye of her own self. She shall also present her causes and announce her demands in the name of other women in her society. In the ancient or middle ages, even when women created their own arts, they were probably anonymous, meaning that their art productions were not signed. For instance, the studies about the Paleolithic cave paintings which often have human hand prints, 75% of which are identifiable as women's (National Geographic TV, 2013).

The postwar periods witnessed the brilliance of female artists, like the feminist German Dada artist Hannah Höch (1889-1978) as an example of post World War I. She was one of the group's pioneering photomontage artists. Höch critiqued the role of women, beauty standards, marriage, the politics of her home country, Germany, and the misogynist Dada group itself (Nastasi, 2014). Another artist of the time is the American visual artist, Nancy Spero (1926-2009) as an example for the post World War II feminist female artists who chronicled wars and its apocalyptic violence. Thus, women were living wars, maybe in the second line after men as warriors, but their experience was never less horrible or bloody. As a human experience, it shall always be a motif for an artist to express hard times and misery. This transaction phase for female feminist visual artists was not easy nor too fast, but one can say that the whole circumstance had created the convenient atmosphere for feminism art movements to grow and develop all around the whole world. Therefore, during the seventies of the twentieth century, and as mentioned within the second western feminist wave, there was a flourishing real feminist art movement, not only in the visual arts, but also in different fields especially in music and fortunately in the music industry. This was a real jump in the world of feminism because of its ability to support feminist music to cross borders and reach people, especially women who were hopeful, encouraged and enthusiastic about the movements. These feminist art movements aimed to connect feminism activists globally due to their compassion and understanding spirit and of course the effects of art itself as a common human language. There are too many female artists to mention on this occasion, but one cannot drop names like the Mexican painter *Frida Kahlo* (1907-1954) whom her work at her time wouldn't be considered feminist, but was later seen as one of the most important images of feminist art in this time and this spot of the world. Later with the feminist art history's beginnings in the late 1960s, one should mention names like the Yugoslavian-born performance artist *Marina Abramović*, the French multi-media artist *Niki de Saint Phalle*, the American female artists *Barbara Kruger*, *Sherrie Levine* and *Judy Chicago* and others. These artists did not only special in traditional visual arts, but also in different new art medias like video, performance and installation arts.

In brief, women artists, motivated by feminist theory and the feminist movement, demanded for equality in representation which was codified in the Art Workers' Coalition's (AWC) Statement of Demands, which was developed in 1969 and published in a definitive form in March 1970. The AWC was set up to defend the rights of artists and force museums and galleries to reform their practices and encourage female artists to overcome centuries of damage done to the image of the female as an artist by establishing equal representation of the sexes in exhibitions, museum purchases and on selection committees (Harrison, 2000). Feminism has shared some interest with postmodern art philosophy which could be seen in speech acts, and this has probably helped the diffusion of the feminist art movement, not only on the hand of female activists, but also with the help of pro-feminist artists. This took place especially in the contemporary art era, as we can see in the words of *Jeremy Strick*, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, who described the feminist art movement as "the most influential international movement of any during the postwar period" (Blake, 2007).

2.3. Feminism in Occidental Contemporary Mural Painting

Visual arts in general may be the most expressive arts about human life since the primitive era when man started to create different forms using mud under his feet to create symbols and magical protection totems in the wild environment. The start was also marked when man created drawings or mural paintings on the walls of caves to

reflect the various creatures and the wildlife around them. This was long before humans started to read and write, which shows the importance of visual arts and the relationship between humanity and their need for expression. Visual communication helped, in one way or another, to establish different languages around the world.

Mural painting is one of these communication tools through time and space, through which an artist can bring his or her idea or their group's ideas to the whole world around. Mural painting, especially in public areas or as a street art, has doubled the effects on people and societies. Thus, it's not to be imprisoned in galleries nor museums where too many people have no access; therefore, mural painting as a public art can play a great role to bring the feminist cause to the street and to the whole society. It can awaken minds, release freedom and inspire women around the world to revolt and to demand their rights as well as remind the whole society about the women's rights as humans. Feminism shall find a new way to people through murals, mural painting, graffiti, street or public arts, whatever is the name of this art, it shall be an eloquent medium to express all women's demands around the world after too many years of ignorance and injustice.

Not too far from the previously talked about history of the feminist art movement, actually, within the 2nd feminist wave, in the late 1970s, *Sandra Fabara* or as known *Lady Pink* or "first lady of graffiti" originally from Ecuador, has been known as one of the first graffiti and mural female artist based in New York City, (figure1).



Figure1. Lady Pink, Graffiti artist. (False Prophet Blog)

Despite the fact that graffiti's beginning as an art history has nothing to do with the "hip-hop" music that appeared in the United States in the 1970s, so many historians, especially music historians have considered graffiti as one of 'the four elements of hip-hop: rapping, break-dancing, graffiti art, and deejaying (Brown, Kwakye, Lang, n.d.). It's worth mentioning that *Lady Pink* herself says: "I don't think graffiti is hip-hop. Frankly I grew up with disco music, she was saying that as an objection to what was said, that graffiti is understood as a visual expression of rap or hip-hop music. As a researcher, I think that hip-hop is too young to be considered as graffiti's source; in fact, graffiti has always been there since the dawn of human activity especially when we notice that the "graffiti" meaning as a word is just scratching or random drawing or painting on any unprepared surface with any coloring or writing technique and with the permission of no one especially in streets and on walls. This makes it an act of vandalism, but one can conclude that with the new era of hip-hop music that grew fast and worldwide, graffiti has become more known in all societies as a street art practiced by people who were longing for change and interaction in their societies, especially youth. Graffiti as a street art has more or less flourished, and with the widespread of this type of arts, a graffiti association was established in 1972 in New York on the hands of *Hugo Martinez*, and even though it was and still is considered as vandalism, it has helped to diffuse a lot of common causes among societies (Nour, 2008). Graffiti gave marginalized people a voice to be heard by politicians and other in power. Feminism was among the most important causes that graffiti has helped, and despite the fact that the identity of the artist is usually kept secret in graffiti works, some names have seen the light as icons in their field and to become legal muralists who have their own mural company. Slowly, with the worldwide contemporary art concepts especially the freedom of expression, some ideas had to change and people were more ready to see more arts on their streets. The "act of vandalism" represented by graffiti has sometimes become considerable pieces of art, especially in the contemporary arts when mural painting with all its techniques has become a legal form of graffiti. Urban galleries, governments and authorities started themselves to hire street artists for legal and technically prepared murals in public or chosen areas or to open more spaces, events, competitions for such kind of arts and activities. Feminism in graffiti it has grown faster and even reached the level of organizing some female street art events as it is the way in the annual event "Femme Fierce" in London, on the occasion of the International Woman Day. Some graffiti female artists even have their works featured in exhibits in galleries and museums, and even though it was and still is known as a man's corner due to the hard circumstances artists should work under,

many women have found themselves in this field. They were and still often subjected to all kinds of harassment, but they continued to prove themselves. Women in the field were called female writers, like male writers were called, because they were usually using tags and words as brief messages and letters in their paintings. These were usually applied by aerosol can paints which is faster and easier in such moments when avoiding the police. One can mention other female subway writers after *Lady Pink* and her continuation during the 1980s, such as *Lady Heart*, *Abby*, *Chic*, *SS*, *Dawn*, *Anna and Bambi*, and *Lady Bug* in the USA (The Cyber Bench, n.d.). As for Europe, while hip-hop was closely linked with graffiti culture, punk also adopted the idea of graffiti to help spread messages. UK anarcho-punk band Crass regularly had stencil-like images on their releases and undertook a graffiti stencil campaign on the London Underground system in the late 1970's and early 1980's, with anti-war, anarchist, feminist and anti-consumerist messages being popular (Graffiti & Punk, n.d.). In another spot of Europe, the German street art scene with its overwhelming numbers of experimental, highly innovative and perfectionist artists, has always been keeping up with those of New York, Paris and London. The city of Berlin, with its rich graffiti history (just think of the 1980s graffiti decorated Berlin Wall with its politically engaged murals and bubbly lettered slogans), is one of the most 'bombed' cities in Germany or even in Europe (10 German Artists whose Street Art Will leave You Breathless, n.d.). Therefore, Berlin was once called "Graffiti Mecca of the urban art world" by the art critic *Emilie Trice* (Arms, 2011). Even France that seems sometimes less interested in graffiti, some graffiti artists had their names shining such as *Miss.Tic* with a thirty-year long career as a female street artist (Figure2) (Pursley, 2012).



Figure2. (The man is the past of the woman).



Figure3. A "Stick Up Girlz" mural, Australia 2010

Lucy R. Lippard (writer, art critic, activist and curator from the United States) argued in 1980 that feminist art was "neither a style nor a movement but instead a value system, a revolutionary strategy, a way of life." This quote supports the fact that feminist art affected all aspects of life.

By time, more feminist female artists have joined this cause. New contemporary groups have gathered themselves, especially through the internet, which made connections easier from the East to the West. One can mention the "Stick Up Girlz" feminist muralists group (Figure3).

Actually, in occidental societies and in Latin America as well, feminism and feminist art, including mural paintings, public and street arts, has rapidly escalated after the nineties of the twentieth century. It is difficult for this research paper to present all categories and styles concerning feminist mural painting in the occidental world, but one can say that, in their works, females used many traditional feminine symbols including hearts, red lipsticks, and other known visual female symbols (Figure4). They also used unconventional symbols or imaginary themes (Figure5), like poems and literature texts especially from some iconic works like the "The Second Sex" book of the French philosopher *Simone de Beauvoir's*.



Figure4. Traditional symbol of feminism, Latin America

Figure5. Untraditional graffiti, unknown artist

Female graffiti writers have knocked every closed door behind which lays a problem in silence, almost all occidental women sufferings have been treated through female muralists, especially sexuality issues which took a lot of attention by European and American feminist activists. Sometimes, some of their works were bold and hard to accept by ordinary people or conservative families, and this is a point that the research would come back to later especially in the feminist mural painting in Egypt, but it must be considered that art isn't always about soothing and calming, sometimes it has to be disturbing in an aesthetic way that could awaken people and push them to think and react in a certain way. However, this doesn't mean that art, especially public art, should cross the line and become an offense or a cause of hurt to anyone on any level, otherwise, it's psychological vandalism. Lady Pink once said: "Public work has a responsibility... It has to be family friendly, you have to take the community into consideration" (False Prophet Blog, n.d.). Maybe this difference between ultimate freedom of expression and calculated aesthetic visions can be seen in two kinds of murals: the first as a night fast graffiti with the permission of no one, and the second as a prepared mural painting design under the permission of any authority. The second would not probably allow a message that could potentially cross a moral line.

In general, it is understandable that what could be accepted by occidental societies could be hard to accept or even left in peace in oriental societies. Even when it comes to some graffiti works executed by *Lady Pink* herself despite of her quote, directly depicting the woman's intimate body parts or sexuality (figure 6), these works cannot find a place in the Orient streets. Even if a graffiti writer is courageous enough to do it, it shall be erased instantly the day after. Sexuality issues in feminist art in the occident are not too far from similar issues in the orient, but it is the way of looking at these issues that matters. Religions and traditions in the East are still so strong and dominating that we can consider them as an unwritten constitution. If a painter has a nude piece of work in a private gallery, he couldn't and wouldn't paint a similar one on any of the street walls. Thus, oriental graffiti writers should always use indirect and smart ways to handle sensitive subjects in their street arts, and that's what we are going to talk about in the next part.



Figure6. Christina Angelina, a Venice-based multi-media artist (Nastasijevic, n.d.)

2.4. Feminism in Modern and Contemporary Art in the Orient (Egypt as a model)

If anyone types "Egyptian feminist art" on Google search browser, one shall find so many results for a specific period which almost has began in the year 2011 with the January 25th public revolution. It's almost all about street art including public mural paintings and graffiti, which we will talk about later, but before doing so, we must pose a few questions: What about the years before this date? Were there any kinds of feminist art movements in Egypt since the decline of feminism activity in 1952, as previously explained in section 2.2? If yes, what kind of arts?

When it comes to feminism in modern visual arts in Egypt, one can say that there was a kind of trend of feminism, not so clear or conspicuous and not as strong as the occidental case, but it did exist.

For instance, those Egyptian artists who were depicting women as a mother, as a muse or as a lover and of course as a symbol for any abstract positive or good ideas like fertility or generosity or tenderness, may be considered feminist artists too. This is because they aimed to present the woman as a source of power or inspiration or even as a national symbol by depicting Egypt as a female figure, starting for example with the famous sculpture of *Mahmoud Mokhtar* "Renaissance of Egypt" "Nahdit Misr" in 1928, in which he imagined Egypt as a local woman who stands up while leaning against a sphinx as a symbol of a rising nation while being based on a great history. In the researcher's opinion, such visual treatments don't handle feminism in a direct way like we can see in the occidental societies, especially concerning the direct depiction of shapes or forms of female and male sexual organs. These Egyptian artists don't seem to be activists or feminist artists for some critics especially occidental ones, but they may be, especially in the opinion of the researcher, militants for the woman's rights movement. This is because they were standing by the woman's side until she gets rid of any kind of oppression, negative discrimination or injustice but only in an indirect way that may be more appropriate in an oriental society, which

is known for its love of symbols and indirect expressive arts. This is a society that may alienate any explicit visual messages which can lead to a reversed result against the feminist cause itself, as if feminism would be the reason of any social degradation; it's a society that has a special respect and sacredness for religions and traditions.

Thus, to talk about feminism in Egyptian contemporary mural painting, one must go deeper into modern art history. Briefly, there was a big feminism trend in the modern history of Egypt, starting with *Mohamed Ali's* successors and declined with *Gamal Abdel Nasser's* regime. Between this time and that, there was a lot of reflections of feminism in many living sides, but visual arts were not really this engaged in the idea of fighting for women rights. This situation has continued within and after *Gamal Abdel Nasser's* time, except maybe in some individual artists works, such as the well known Egyptian painter *Inji Aflatoun* (1924–1989) who was a female Egyptian painter and activist in the women's movement. She was a “leading spokesman for the Marxist-progressive-nationalist-feminist spokeswoman in the late 1940s and 1950s”, as well as a “pioneer of modern Egyptian art” and “one of the important Egyptian visual artists.” She was arrested and secretly imprisoned during Nasser's roundup of communists in 1959. Besides her passion for nature and her concerns that appeared in her paintings about women in the Egyptian society, her paintings in prison were the most captivating and the portraits of women inside the prison have the most expressive faces with eyes full of horror (Taher, 2011).

In a fast review of the history of Egyptian female painters starting in the 1st half of the twentieth century, and apart from the work of the feminist *Inji Aflatoun*, there were a lot of female brilliant artists that maybe the man's history hasn't been fair to. Among them and concerning our subject "feminism art", we can mention: *Tahia Halim*, *Zeinab Abdel Hamid*, *Gazibiah Serry* and *Zeinab Al-Seguiny*, they were all very important and remarkable female artists in their ages. However, as a researcher in their arts, one couldn't feel them as clear feminist artists, except maybe for *Zeinab Al-Seguiny* whom in her paintings we could see and feel the inner psychological struggle of women on their unique faces, between tenderness, women concerns and emotions, she could possibly be considered on the track of feminism. One can also mention the originally Bulgarian female artist "*Visella Farid*" who lived in Egypt and was a fan of the Egyptian woman with all her concerns and hard life, especially in the countryside (El-Saadi, 2007).

Later in contemporary Egyptian arts and within the nowadays open space thanks to the internet and the different calls of freedom there was a return of independent civil associations, the appearance of individual militants in the domain of feminism, politics and literature such as the activity of someone like *Nawal Al-Saadawy* since the 2nd half of the twentieth century. Art academies in Egypt also started looking forward to contemporary arts concepts and other global political and economic factors. We can say that there is a new era for Egyptian feminism in many life sides: literature, theatre, politics, arts etc. between male and female visual artists, but especially among female artists from different art specializations. Concerning male artists, one can mention *Ebrahim El-Dessouky* and *Walid Ebeid*, the first is using the world of the woman and her body as a visual icon, the second is going deeper through her inner space, whether psychologically or physiologically, as well as her relationship with the man and it's a quite interesting vision to focus on, but not in this research which should focus on female artists and mural painting. As for the female contemporary artists, a lot of them are concerned with Egyptian women case, whereas, each one of these artists is one of these women, living in a society that has been, for approximately 30 years, under the stress of a severe religious trend and a lack of feminist support, as previously explained in the end of 2.2 section. Their concerns are mostly general, meaning that in their art we cannot see them engaged directly with the suffering of the Egyptian woman including cases like domestic violence, female genital mutilation, street harassment, prostitution, sexism, etc. Despite that, we can say that the idea of militancy in their work exists as there is a kind of compassion with the woman in general, especially the Egyptian woman in her total struggling life, sorrows, resistance and hard duties (mentioning here that at least 35% of Egyptian families are supported by women). All her problems and causes, through their works, their treatment for the woman's body, eyes-look, positions as a body language, through all of this and that, a viewer can imagine seeing an indirect regard for something like the harassment problem for instance, or for the female genital mutilation or other sexual issues to a woman, who is always bearing burdens and concerns about her body and her life. In this regard, we can mention some of these female artists such as: *Hend Adnan*, *Fayrouz Samir*, *Reham Al-Saadany*, *Asmaa Al-Nawawy*, *Randa Fakhry*, *Mervat Al-Shazly*, *Shaimaa Sobhy*, *Eman Osama* and *Hend Al-Falaflay*. In their works we can see the woman and sometimes her partly naked body as a visual icon and it's a kind of feminism too, but not in a direct way. It's worth mentioning that almost all of these male or female artists exhibit their works in Egyptian private galleries or enclosed museums, not in public.

As for other artists like the Egyptian contemporary artist *Ghada Amer*, who was born in 1963 in Cairo and immigrated from Egypt in the age of 11, she is a multimedia artist and her work frequently addresses issues of femininity, sexuality, postcolonial identities, and Islamic culture. Her work is feminist, subverting the traditionally masculine genre of painting, and its rejection of the norms of female sexuality. One can obviously notice that she could have managed to free her mind from all kinds of censorship to express her ideas boldly and sometimes in a transparent way. Whether we agree or not with the artist's point of view regarding some issues, it would be logic

to understand her openness of expression in multiple different ways probably because she lived in occidental societies where such total freedom of expression is available and where subjects can be treated "directly" and with no fear nor embarrassment, and most important where people themselves are ready to see, accept and admire her work.

2.5. Feminism in Oriental Contemporary Mural Painting (Egypt as a model)

Apparently, what modern and contemporary visual art in Egypt has presented for and about women wasn't enough for serving the causes of feminism in the orient or specifically in Egypt, despite how strong, coherent or passionate it was. This was just was not good enough for the feminism causes themselves, maybe that was due to the new era with its requirements and challenges facing the woman of the age or maybe because this modern and contemporary art was presented only for the elite, enclosed inside galleries and museums, while there is a burning situation in the streets of Egypt. Nobody on the streets had the courage to talk about women's problems or their suffering.

In a country like Egypt, and as an oriental society, women have a lot of causes to struggle for, like for instance: domestic violence, female genital mutilation, street harassment, prostitution, sexism, marriage before the legal age for girls, especially in rural areas, the general dominance of men and boys on girls' lives especially in low and poor levels where they may be subjected to a huge oppression. Therefore, with such kinds of sufferings and causes, Egyptian arts need to adapt in order to express the aforementioned. It needs to break the silence and overpass the indirect romantic way of expressing such problems, even if not in a total direct way, but at least with more transparency than what the galleries and museums have presented.

Briefly, in 2011, with the Egyptian revolution, all kinds and sorts of self expression were evident where people, especially youth spent days and nights on the street. It was a great chance for them to present and announce their demands, not only to the ruling regime, but also to the rest of the citizens who probably are not in the knowledge stream, who are living simply and sometimes naively, who were suffering in silence without understanding a lot. This is when the need for graffiti art and mural expressions appeared with all their tools: figure drawing, colors, stencils, spray cans, quotes, proverbs, literature extracts and caricature as well, all these tools have helped to make messages clear and direct, even if it seems sometimes as an illustration in a story book, all tools were there to answer the call of freedom and knowledge.

During the years of the revolution and ever since it began, there was a lot of ebb and flow operations between youth in the streets and the different successive ruling regimes as well as their governments. Within these operations, many horrible events happened, some people, especially youth were killed and some girls and women were brutally harassed or assaulted in the crowds of the street manifestations. These events brought to the stage the horror that each girl is living in her life in general, as an oriental girl, she should always keep her virginity and her pure reputation, which has become in these events a weapon against her and as a threat to her for not taking part in the manifestations, because when women take part in manifestations, they become a strong motif for men to do the same. Not to mention the problem of street harassment that almost every Egyptian woman or girl was and still is living in since about 20 years, with the continual economic crisis that caused a kind of difficulty for youth to get married in a society where marriage is the only legal channel for sexual needs. This is besides the lack of ethics and education concerning such issues. All of these were ready to be expressed in the new street arts especially the mural painting and graffiti as a new possible public, fine and even beautiful outlet through which lost children of the street or ordinary people have taken part in. It was a general enthusiastic and exceptional atmosphere that all Egyptians have lived. The most important beneficiary of this situation was the exit of visual arts to the streets in an interactive atmosphere that could never happen through the galleries nor museums. Even systematic or official mural painting which was present in the Egyptian streets before this revolution and starting in the late seventies of the twentieth century didn't have this level of interaction, it was only answering the call of street decorating or national calls or heritage recalls. As for graffiti before this revolution, it was almost all about pilgrim trips and religious ceremonies or sermons. In general, mural painting and graffiti before this last revolution, have never been this active especially concerning women and the feminist causes; they were never this frequent or sincere. Street arts in this revolution were created based on the ongoing events, day by day, to objection and protest. Unfortunately, a lot of these graffiti works, if not all of them, were abolished, but before being erased, they have been documented on the internet on different websites, sometimes with unknown artists' names.

One of the most interesting ripe fruits of this feminism graffiti movement in Egypt is the activity of female graffiti writers in a country that has been trying to reject religious extremism, a country where women were on the top of sacred personalities in its ancient history. With the new revolutions events, more feminist projects were created, more feminist associations have announced themselves as supporters and sources of aid for Egyptian women and girls. Graffiti and mural painting were some of their tools to reach their goals, whether through female artists or pro-feminist male artists and graffiti writers like the well known "El-Zeft" (figure7). This was especially true during the Muslim Brotherhood ruling that lasted for one year and on which fears were burning for the women rights.

In this regard, we can mention some female graffiti writers: "*Miss Azarita*" "*Maliket Gamal El-Azarita*", her real name is *Aya Tarek*, a young Egyptian female graffiti artist and one of the "*Artists Revolution Association*" who has announced herself during the January 25th revolution and was one of the most important organizers of visual street arts activities. We also have other famous female graffiti artists: *Hend Kheira*, *Hanaa Al-Degham*, *Bahia Shehab*; As for *Mira Shihadeh* who depicted the famous mural of "circle of hell" in 2014 depicting the assault incident that happened in 2013, her most recognizable piece is depicting a girl in heels with her hand on her hip and uses a can of spray paint to drown miniaturized figures coming towards her. She has painted multiple versions of this graffiti. Sometimes the girl is veiled, other times her hair flows free, sometimes she's dressed in red, other times in white, and in others she's just a silhouette. But in every edition, she wrote the words "no to sexual harassment" in Arabic beneath the outpouring of paint from her can (figure8) (lindsey, 2016).



Figure7. "Nefertiti" by El-Zeft Cairo, 2012



Figure8.graffiti by Mira Shihadeh

Many of the murals and street artworks created have been supported by newly formed graffiti and street art organizations determined to foster social change with just paint. Artist and activist *Merna Thomas* cofounded the community (Noon El Neswa) in 2012 as a way to combat inequality. the group launched their project "Graffiti Harimi," which means "female graffiti", graffiti campaign that created stencils of powerful Egyptian women alongside text advocating for women's equality. What is really remarkable about this diffused group of graffiti in the country is that they showed positive fame of the most iconic female stars in the Egyptian movies and singing domains. They were all respected and beloved by the Egyptians, all in black and white just like their "belle époque" movies or songs, with a short message below or ahead, the message is usually about empowering girls and women in general. They aimed to remind the whole society how a woman could be strong and great just like a man, raising the value of women in the eyes of the society, not necessarily about a specific incident and that's a good idea, because empowering women doesn't have to wait until a bad incident or a political event takes place (Figures 8,9,10&11).



Figure8. I am the one who opened the sluice



Figure9 . Art is not forbidden



Figure10. Long live Free Egypt



Figure 11. The girl is equal to the Boy

One of the most brilliant graffiti of the "Noon El Neswa" organization is the one on which was written "Don't label me". The secret of its brilliance is that it touches upon a taboo in Egypt which caused a kind of negative discrimination between the girl who wears a veil and the girl who doesn't wear it, as if the one who puts it is a decent girl, while the one who doesn't is an indecent one. Not to mention that the girl or woman who puts the face burqaa is considered by others as an extremist. This graffiti calls for stopping this kind of pre-judging people especially women based on their costume, which is from the researcher's point of view, very important to talk about visually (Figure12).



Figure12. Don't label me graffiti

Another influential street art group is the "Women on Walls" (WOW) organization which began in 2013 as women empowerment graffiti initiative in many Egyptian cities. Prior to painting in Mansoura city, the WOW artists engaged the local women in a discussion on the issues that concerned them most, so that the walls could be a direct reflection of the community's needs. This could be one of the most important movement an association can do, because it builds a direct connection between artists and other women.

In 2015, the "Lady of the Wall" project was launched in cooperation with the "D-Caf. Downtown Contemporary Art Festival", an initiative entitled " Decode your Chains " to express women's issues through graffiti with the presence of a number of female and male artists from inside and outside Egypt (Abdel-Wehab, 2015). Through this project, more advanced mural paintings have been executed aiming to empower Egyptian women in the face of all her social, political, economic, sexist and other problems since so long and on the long term. The murals in this project have taken an advanced phase, as there were good technical preparations, designs and enough time to organize among artists, which is to be considered as a mature street art event (figures 13&14).



Figure 13&14. Mural paintings executed within the activity of the "Lady of the Wall" project.

Despite the diffusion of feminist graffiti in Egypt during the last revolution, it has guarded a kind of figurative realistic style as an art in an oriental developing society, meaning that despite the high dose of expression freedom lived by the graffiti artists, they were not using any exaggerated traits or obvious drawings of sexual organs, knowing that the feminism causes they were dealing with were about sexuality in the first place. Thus, one can say that they used their imagination as well as their intelligence to tell a story or to discuss a sensitive problem in a smart way, we can't call this smart way "indirect" like we did in our talk about the modern and contemporary Egyptian feminism arts of galleries and museums as we previously mention in the section 3.3. We can't say that the graffiti writers way in Egypt was "indirect" because the writing, tags and quotes they used, made the message so direct, but we can rather say "smart", smart enough to be accepted by people on the street. Thus, it had to be in a non-provocative tone, otherwise the result shall be the opposite of what they wanted, but a smart message to be understood and appreciated as well. Their messages have probably helped others to talk about the problem and to call for stopping such kinds of persecution against women and girls. Thus graffiti, along with social media, together have created an outlet of expression as well as searching for solutions whether during the manifestations or in the general future. In such occasions, people, especially girls and women learned that hiding the problem is not going to solve it, but discussing it can.

4. Conclusion

1. Each society has its own way of visually expressing its causes and treating its problems, especially in something like feminist cases which are, for some societies sensitive cases due to traditions and the religious atmosphere. This is not to be considered against the universal language which is much appreciated by artists and art as a human common language. On the other hand, art should also respond to people's needs inside a certain society, it should find the best language to reach them effectively. An example for this is the way a girl or a woman is dressed in oriental graffiti. She's always expected to be more prudish than in occidental figurative graffiti, not necessarily wearing a veil, but at least she should be looking prudish and serious, unless a graffiti artist decides to break the unwritten law and that would be an exception.

2. It has to be clear that the visual comparison in this research was not about deciding which is better: the occidental or the oriental visual treatments in mural painting of feminism causes? Actually, this is against what the researcher believes as an artist. Briefly, each street artist is talking to the people, he or she is one of the people, unlike some isolated artists who are expressing their own cases, which means that each artist is free to choose the best visual way to deliver his or her message, and as much as he or she understands the people around him/her, as much as he would be successful in his mission.

3. Graffiti as a form of mural painting and as a street art, is more active concerning hot subjects and events, unlike the arts of galleries and museums. It's like the news information on media tools, graffiti as a street art is instant and responsive, more engaged with the people and the events in a direct way.

4. Feminism in graffiti, whether in oriental or occidental societies, is more active, effective and fast reaching to the highest number of people, especially women who need to feel supported, understood and felt by others. It's also a kind of inspiration for each woman to get over her fears and to demand for her rights. All of this can happen due to a street art, especially when it's creative and eloquent, brief and direct, where there is no need for sophistication or hard philosophy to be understood by simple people, especially in a developing country.

5. Based on the previous point, graffiti and street arts in general should have more spaces in oriental societies, despite the numerous works we could find on the internet. Graffiti, streets arts and mural painting in the orient are considered limited when compared to similar arts in the occident, this matter has to change. Whereas such kinds of arts are important, their role might be very accurate in enlightening people's perceptions. They must be allowed in an organized way whether by governmental authorities or independent artist associations, the matter that leads to think about opening special areas for this kind of arts which will also minimize the vandalism action of some graffiti writers. Thus, governments need to understand that graffiti is not necessarily against regimes, even though it has grown wild in Egypt in the atmosphere of the revolution, which is considered as a conclusion in itself, but it could also be used in an organized way to spread culture, visual delights and art appreciation as well as helping in human causes. Using street arts in feminism empowers women, and empowering women means empowering the whole state. That's what many occidental governments have understood and started to take advantage of the matter that helped also in the progress and the good quality of the presented art, technically and visually. Some critics and graffiti writers would object to such a suggestion claiming that graffiti is only graffiti when it's totally free with no censorship and totally unprepared, but that doesn't prevent the idea of spreading visual arts, meaning that the organized street arts don't prevent the non-organized ones, just like we saw in some organizations' activity.

6. Art in general and street arts in specific are important tools in the face of extremism and different kinds of intimidation and terrorism. We could see that through some Egyptian graffiti with short piercer messages ensuring

that the meaning isn't going to be misinterpreted, and this is a very good and important role for graffiti and street arts to serve feminism which is always facing extremism of all kinds of religions.

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