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Perrine Lachenal

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Revolutionary Cairo (Egypt)

Perrine Lachenal

Doctoral fellow and teaching assistant, Department of
Anthropology, Aix-Marseille Université, IDEMEC (UMR 7307),
Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme, Aix-en-
Provence, France.

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Abstract:

January 2011, Egypt: a huge revolutionary movement began. Since this moment, the perception of insecurity has clearly increased among the upper class. This feeling of vulnerability has opened the doors to new market opportunities related to personal security. In charming neighborhoods of Cairo, offers of self-defense training for women flourished. These training classes offer a valuable and fascinating ethnographic field for addressing the way emotional narratives shape social mobilizations. In class, self-defense participants confirm their shared social belonging while expressing feelings of anxiety in specific terms. Through the Egyptian case, I illustrate that anxiety constitutes a relevant analytical tool to better understand the social and emotional dynamics playing out in revolutionary societies.

Keywords: revolution, anxiety, elites, Egypt, self-defense, women

Introduction

Revolutions can be seen as both consequences and causes of anxiety. Many examples, taken from European history, illustrate that when countries face severe upheavals, the whole social structure is shaken. In times of crisis, fear circulates and people - from one social extreme to the other - express feelings of anxiety and choose scapegoats to blame. Depending on their localization on the social ladder, each one aims at contesting or confirming the social hierarchies (Harrison 2004). In 1750, rumors spread in Paris that many children had been kidnapped in few weeks. The people said that it was the policemen who took and killed the children in order to use their blood to cure a sick and powerful prince. This new suspicion regarding the people in power and the resulting violent riots can be seen as precursors of the French Revolution, which finally beheaded the king (Farge and Revel 1988). Similarly, the biggest Cholera epidemics, which preceded a wave of revolutions during the 19th century in Europe, were also affected by violent social accusations. Poor people imagined that doctors purposely poisoned the water while elites blamed the decadence among the working class (Bourdelaïs and Raulot 1987). Anxiety and its circulation seem to have political and social roles and meanings. The case of the Egyptian upheaval confirms that feelings of vulnerability and fear-mongers are inherent components of historical

mobilizations. How do revolutionary events - including the anxiety that is connected to them - affect powers and social attributions in Egyptian society? Throughout this paper, I will show that "anxiety", as an analytical tool, can be used to reveal the social dynamics at stake in our contemporary revolutions.

On the 11th of February 2011, Hosni Mubarak finally resigned after weeks of massive protests asking for the overthrow of the system (*îsqât al-nizâm*) and his departure ended a 32-year reign at the head of the Egyptian state. Masses of demonstrators came out to celebrate the so-called "25th of January revolution". A new and unsteady era started in Egypt, in which the thematic of legitimacy - of power and of violence - was fundamental. It is still the case as I am writing this paper, almost three years after 2011 people fear that the street fights following the removal of the last president by the army, in June 2013, will turn into a civil war. The Egyptian "revolution" (*thawra*)¹ has deeply shaken the political, social and economic alliances and structures of the country (Winegar 2012). It has affected the whole society including the most privileged groups, as I show in this paper. This event is a "total" one, as all social actors are forced

¹ Many anthropologists claim the engaged dimension of using the concept "revolution" to qualify the Egyptian political uprising (Schielke 2012). From my side, the choice to use this expression is motivated by my will to speak with the words used by my interlocutors and myself, in the field. Therefore, I have written "revolution" throughout this paper, although this expression could certainly be further problematized.

to take it into consideration (Pieke 1996:12). Neutrality is not an option, even for "very peripheral" individuals such as foreign anthropologists. Indeed I had no choice, since I was actually in Cairo, but to discuss the Egyptian uprising through my own research which was about self-defense training for women. At the very beginning of this work, in 2010, I planned to focus on the way gender identities are re-formed through the self-defense practice. I naively considered my research area, Egypt, as "motionless", given that it was strongly controlled by an autocratic power. I even assumed that this dictatorial situation would offer a relevant frame to question hierarchy and power dynamics - and especially the gendered ones - in Egyptian society. I did not expect such historical events. It surprisingly turned out that my topic offers an interesting and uncommon way to question the emotional and social dynamics at play for the Egyptian upper class during this revolutionary period. Since January 2011, self-defense training has burgeoned in the richest neighborhoods of Cairo. This new interest of upper-class women for this unusual kind of activity, which is both physical and violent, shows to which extent their lives have been perturbed - at least symbolically - by the political events. The social order, which includes hierarchical dimensions, appears undermined. As are the lines that used to separate Cairene elites from the rest of Egyptian society. Among the upper-

class women, perception - and fear - of social change gives birth to a growing feeling of vulnerability that shapes their practices and affects their behaviour. Exacerbating their protection and distinction strategies, the "revolutionary" anxiety contributes to reveal them. In this paper I focus on different self-defense training courses taking place in charming areas; I attended most of them as a participant during my fieldwork. I demonstrate that for the female participants, trainings are occasions to signify that they belong to a certain social rank associated to specific emotions and perceptions.

I will firstly introduce the political context of my ethnographic research: this context engenders and frames emotional narratives which are dominated, for the Egyptian upper class, by disquiet and anxiety. I will secondly describe the way I collected and apprehended my data concerning "VIP" training of self-defense for women. I will then demonstrate that while punching, kicking and shouting, the participants of these classes reveal that their urban experiences are shaped - symbolically and concretely - by their fears. Their words outline the figure of the enemy, the one they imagine in front of them when they learn how to fight: a man from a poor social background, who embodies their fear of contact and disorder. I will finally show that the self-defense field, through the way the revolutionary period has transformed it, discloses the

anxiety with which privileged Egyptian social groups deal with the potential of social and political change.

Political (and emotional) context: the Egyptian uprising

On the 25th of January 2011, the emblematic first day of the Egyptian revolution, thousands of demonstrators gathered in the middle of Tahrir square bringing their anger and claims and with that, a powerful wave of hope of social changes. The following weeks, the situation got disturbing: the police was no longer present in Cairo's streets, leaving the inhabitants alone to face insecurity and abundant stories of violence, both realistic and imagined. A deep feeling of insecurity spread among the neighborhoods of Cairo, still visible two years later. In the bourgeoisie of Cairo, this new feeling of vulnerability has given birth to a huge security market.

The first weeks seem especially traumatic, since the inhabitants of Cairo had to face several weeks without any security force devoted to their safety. Only a few days after the start of the massive demonstrations, police were removed from the streets of Cairo. While the army was concentrated around Tahrir square. Many stories were circulating that prisons had been opened, weapons stocks had been stolen, and plunders had begun. The orchestrated nature of this insecurity has now been proven: the pro-Mubarak camp had clear interests to disorganize the country in order to discredit the

revolutionary movement and justify a return of strong power. All over Cairo, people had to organize themselves to protect their families and houses. In each neighborhood, people organized themselves into groups called "popular committees" that were devoted to the protection of the area night and day. In upper-class neighborhoods, the organization seemed particularly obsessed with the idea of the intrusion of "foreign" people inside the quarter (Lachenal 2012). Mustafa explains: "The situation was really dangerous. Without any police, it was like anyone could enter the neighborhood to steal our cars or rob our houses. We own a lot of stuff that people envy". More than in other places, many ploys were invented in these rich neighborhoods to control who entered the quarter. Thus, in Maadi, a rich part of Cairo, filtering barriers were built and any driver who wanted to cross the area had to stop and present his identity card, each car being systematically inspected. In Zamalek, a rich island in the middle of Cairo, the inhabitants of the area shared a password that was modified each day, to prove that they belonged to the quarter. These examples highlight to which extent the people of the Cairene bourgeoisie felt threatened by the fact that the borders which separated their privileged neighborhoods from the rest of Cairo could be challenged and crossed by outsiders. During these first weeks of the uprising, most of the women had to stay at home alone since their men were

protecting the streets. They became easy prey for fears and panic; Shayma remembers: "I was spending the night alone with my child. I could not sleep! I heard shotgun fire down in the streets. I did not know what could happen to us. It was terrifying!". Even months after the police came back to Cairo's streets, the expression of vulnerability has not disappeared from these women's speeches. The social order has been undermined and the trauma remains deep. Rumors do not help stabilize the situation. The media has a complicit attitude, insisting on the omnipresence of weapons and on the high frequency of attacks. By now, insecurity seems to be everywhere: ill-intentioned and armed men would be walking around in rich neighborhoods ready to attack, rob or rape. Fear has become a new partner in these women's daily lives; shaping their practices and constituting the starting point of their will to learn how to defend themselves. "It's clear for me that this feeling appeared after the start of the revolution. I told myself for the first time that I needed to know how to fight!" as Marwa, a 40-year-old-attende, explained. It appears that going against the consensual bourgeois model of femininity by adopting violent conduct is acceptable since the circumstances are exceptional: a kind of emergency. Examples of similar tolerable gender transgression are abundant in history: for instance, during the European Middle Ages wars, aristocratic women had to learn how to use

cannons in case their husbands would leave the castles. The perceived danger against their social privileges allowed them to contest gender attributions: their social rank turned out to be more important than their sex (Dufournaud 2011).

According to the upper-class women I met in self-defense courses, the revolution that has been shaking Egypt for more than two years has led the country into an era of fear. For many of them, it was the first time in their lives that they felt so anxious and vulnerable. The emotional dimension is fundamental in their narratives relative to revolution and that is why it seems important to address them. Feelings are understood here, not through their personal and psychological aspects but through a social prism. Intimate and collective levels are deeply linked and emotions are indeed specifically shaped according to one's status and position in the social hierarchy. Focusing on them, as a social phenomenon, shines a new light on the way that social dynamics and conflicts are designed and individually embodied.

Ethnographic data: "VIP" women self-defense training

No official data concerning the self-defense field in Egypt exists since there is no federation nor organization framing the practice. Anyone who wants to can offer a training course and call it "self-defense for women". This did not help me find informants when I conducted my initial field study in

Cairo. To achieve my ethnographic project I had to ask around, visit cultural centers and gyms and make wide researches using the Internet. I finally managed to document the way self-defense training started and succeeded in Egypt. The slow but steady development of self-defense courses for women in the Cairene urban landscape initially belonged to the many answers civil society found these past few years to fight "sexual harassment" (*taharush gansî*)². A teacher told me that the first demonstration of self-defense techniques took place in an NGO in 2006 during a campaign against sexual harassment initiated by an American volunteer involved in the organization. The first regular training of self-defense for women seemed to be organized the same year in a cultural center close to downtown. Year after year, these kinds of offers flourished in social centers and NGOs concerned with the issue of sexual violence in Cairo. It is worth mentioning that self-defense classes for men did not exist, or at least not under the name of "self-defense", which seems to imply the acceptance of being a potential victim.

The current revolutionary period has increased the reasons for which people choose to learn self-defense, and has thus altered the social background of the participants. Soon after

² "Sexual harassment" is considered a "social disease" in Egyptian cities. The report "Clouds in Egyptian Sky" (Abul Komsan 2008) established that 83% of Egyptian women had been victims of sexual harassment at least once. Although it could be important to question the way this survey was conducted - and especially the definitions it uses - this document contributed to build "sexual harassment" as an alarming phenomenon and a public cause (Kreil and Monqid 2008).

January 2011, new kinds of training, increasingly focused on insecurity and urban disorder, burgeoned in Cairo to a rapid success. The characteristics of the places where these self-defense training courses are currently held in Cairo - their location, the session price, the audience's social characteristics - are meaningful: the self-defense phenomenon seems by now largely confined to the bourgeoisie. For the past three years, I have carried out my ethnographic work in different training classes for women all over Cairo. I will focus here on two self-defense courses I attended in 2012 that took place in two rich neighborhoods of Cairo, Mohandessin and Zamalek. Both of them have been created recently, about one year after the beginning of the uprising. The training course in Mohandessin, designed by Mahmood, a 36-year-old Egyptian karate instructor, occurred two times a week in a dojo which belongs to a chic cultural center. This course took place in the morning, a time which allowed stay-at-home mothers to join since they usually are quite free during the day. The group I trained with was composed of five Egyptian women, from 35 to 42 years old; all of them were stay-at-home mothers. I attended 19 trainings with them. Each one hour and half class cost 60 Egyptian Pounds (around 10 dollars). The training course in Zamalek was founded by a 23-year-old American named Peter, who was staying in Cairo for a while. It took place twice a week, at night, in an intimate and cozy gym on the

island of Zamalek. I attended eight courses with a group of about 10 Egyptian women, all between the ages of 16 and 30 years old. Each one-hour class cost 100 Egyptian Pounds (around 15 dollars). It is worth mentioning that the prices of the classes I attended are considerable with regard to the Egyptian economic context, especially since 2011³. My observations of these classes, which consisted of about 40 hours of practicing self-defense, are supplemented by around 15 interviews with attendees and teachers.

My involvement on the ground allowed me to share an ethnographic and analytic description of self-defense training and elite anxiety in this paper. I focus here on what happens in classes: what is done and what is said by the female attendees. The violent physical dimension is what first captures the most attention: during one hour, some stay-at-home mothers turn into heartless warriors. In self-defense classes, female participants are definitely testing their gender identity and challenging the classical repertoires in which they generally perform their social roles as beloved mothers and wives. This transgressive dimension must not hide another important aspect of the practice that becomes more visible when, closing her eyes, the anthropologist starts to listen to the words. Self-defense classes are not only about

³ In Egypt, 40 percent of the population is estimated to live on less than two dollars a day and more than 20 percent of the population is estimated to live on less than 1 dollar a day (African Development Bank 2013).

learning physical techniques: a large part of each class is devoted to conversations. Focusing on narratives, I show that courses allow the participants to underscore their upper social status. Their social class belonging seems to be translated into emotional terms: they express and share, both physically and verbally, anxiety regarding the "others". The need for self-reassurance - paradoxical because I show that it engenders even more uncertainty - must be connected to the revolutionary process which has led to insecurity among the Egyptian upper class and accentuated the search for social conformity.

Uncertainty and disquiet: seeing the world and practicing the city from "the top"

The way the social actors perceive the city depends on the position they have in society (Hannerz 1980). In class, when women speak about their lives and urban experiences, they indirectly outline their own territories by tackling who is "in" and who is "out"; they define boundaries between safe and unsafe places and together draw the enemy's face. This enemy, called "*baltagi*", embodies the risk of social chaos: he is a social intruder. His presence on their own territories and the contact they may have with him constitute evidence that social boundaries are less efficient since the beginning of the upheaval and that they are now more exposed to the "others".

This part focusses on what the women say about social order when they learn how to hold a knife. I show that categorization work is at the height of their anxious and gendered performances.

Dealing with the city and negotiating contacts: anxiety and performativity

The upper-class women I met in self-defense training feel weak in the city. They said it was already the case before the revolutionary uprising, but their feeling of vulnerability increased with the political troubles. If in their daily lives they ensure that they spend most of their time in areas that they consider safe, they have to face other territories from time to time. My informants move in the city: they have to cross it to bring their children to school, to go to work in a few cases, to visit family or to leave Cairo for the weekend. Although the territories they target are all considered safe, they are not located in the same area and there are "gaps" between them. The women have no choice but to face those threats, with the help of many strategies aimed at protecting them. Anxiety, connected with their upper social status, makes them feel and act as strangers in the city. I show that it is a performative feeling: it creates otherness. As it is mentioned in the introduction of this special issue, the possession of financial means to build exclusive environments

finally seems to exacerbate fears about the unknown; the protection strategies actually engender anxiety.

The middle and upper classes in Cairo generally have access to private transportation and a large majority of the women I talked to about this have their own car and use it every day. The few younger women who do not have a car use a taxi every time they travel. These possibilities deeply influence urban experiences by allowing these women to avoid using public transportation, which is considered by them as the worst place to be. Taking the bus, the microbus or the metro, even in the women's wagon, is like being forced to be in physical contact with the crowds, thus offering their bodies to men's hands. Sexual harassment in Egypt is generally associated with public transportation⁴. Most of the time the women I interviewed have never tried to take any bus or metro in their lives. When they did, they talk about it as an exotic experience: they face the crowds with braveness and curiosity like an explorer landing in an unknown country. Gehad, 28 years old, remembers:

"I took the metro once, it was maybe 5 years ago but I cannot forget! I was with a friend... It was so crazy: the crowds, the atmosphere, the smell! There were so many people that I could not enter properly and the metro's doors closed on me! I was screaming and my friend was

⁴ As we can see in the movie *678*, a film about sexual harassment occurring in a public bus by Mohamed Diab, screened in Cairo in 2010.

laughing! You can easily understand why I never tried again".

The women are often surprised to hear that I always travel with the metro in Cairo, which is actually very reliable and cheap⁵. Upon becoming aware of this situation, many of the women offer to drive me back home in their cars after class.

The fact of going through the city inside a car is not enough to reassure my informants because they have heard a lot of frightening stories about car attacks. The stories are all similar: armed men wait for a nice car, stop it, beat the driver up and steal the car. Shayma explained to me: "they especially target the women drivers. It is easier for them". The rumors they hear lead them to imagine worst case scenarios in which for instance the attackers threaten their children. Scary stories, even if nobody knows if they are rumors or not, play an important role in my informants' daily-lives: they are the rational justification for feelings or actions that may appear irrational or exaggerated from an external point of view. Rumors constitute evidence that these women are right. Because even if the fact is not verifiable, the situation is seen as critical enough since it allows invention of such stories (Bonhomme 2009 and Das 2010). In order to prevent attacks from happening, these women have strategies that all relate to the notion of impermeability. The systematic wearing

⁵ Fahim, Kareem. 2012. "Underground, Every Thing that Life Above is Not", *New-York Times*, May 30. Retrieved August 10, 2012 (<http://www.nytimes.com>)

of sunglasses symbolically strengthens the feeling of being insulated from the outside. To feel safe, these women surround themselves with reassuring objects. Many women make the choice to carry weapons in their cars, like Marwa who, since January 2011, drives with a baseball bat on the passenger seat. When she drove me home I always had to carry it and looked like her private bodyguard. A taser, a pepper spray or more rarely a gun can also be put in the glove box.

Where to go out? Leisure practices and segregated urban space

In self-defense classes, participants are invited to enact realistic situations. To find inspiration, they usually share stories, good or bad, that happened to them or to a friend, revealing their urban experiences. All the narratives, put together, draw the map of "their" Cairo shaping places they are used to and areas they fear. The city is thus divided into two categories: the "I go there" and the "I do not go there" (Pain 1997). It is interesting to focus on the places these women appreciate - like malls or coffee shops - to underline the mechanisms of social distinction at work in the Egyptian upper class. I show that these spaces are full of social class signs, like a language which tells anyone different that it is not the right place to be.

The first place which seems important in my interlocutors' social life - during informal interactions in self-defense

training they often talk about it - is the shopping mall. They go there during the week with their female friends or on the weekend with their families to have a lunch or to do some shopping. It is worth mentioning that the mall is a codified place and the codes aim at making clear which kind of customers the place is devoted to (Koning 2009). For example, at the entrance of *City Stars*, one of the biggest malls in Cairo, we can find many banners stating that wearing open shoes or *galabayya* - a long dress worn by men or women from popular area - is forbidden. These kinds of explicit rules to enter a mall constitute an implicit way of excluding a large part of Egyptian society and to protect the social homogeneity of the place (Abaza 2006). The prices of the articles sold in this mall alone could have been enough to discourage people from lower social class in coming. On that point: when they meet for the self-defense training after a visit to a shopping mall, the participants often chat about what they bought, specifying the prices of the items they chose. They sometimes act as though they were ashamed of having spent so much money. According to me, this financial talk has an important role as it is an occasion for the women to feel their common privileged rank and the gap which exists between them and the rest of the Egyptian society. Regarding this gap, these women are surprisingly honest, like Marwa who tells me: "We do not

have the same life as the other. We have more money; we are different".

When I asked the participants of self-defense training where we could conveniently meet, the youngest ones generally suggest going to a coffee-shop. The name "coffee-shop", which includes a clear reference to English, is opposed to "baladi", a more popular, generally open-air place that is dominated by men customers. The access to coffee-shops is also codified, with clear references to the American model: all customers have to pay a minimum charge, people drink American coffee in mugs and on the menu written in English, the Egyptian breakfast is under the category "ethnic food". Coffee-shops choose their customers. In order to temper the marginalization mechanism which appears in this kind of place, it is worth pointing out that for many middle and upper-class young women, coffee-shops are the only acceptable option if they want to go out with friends. The door prevents them from being seen from outside and is supposed to protect them from streets harassers. Before coffee-shops, these young women from the middle and upper class had no place to gather except at home. Moreover, coffee shops succeeded in creating a protected place for mixed-gender socializing outside of the family. In some respects, social homogeneity seems to be the condition that affords young women and men an occasion to mix.

Other places, such as exclusive sport clubs or beauty salons, play similar central roles in upper-class social life, drawing from the same cosmopolitan imagery. These ways of practicing the city - and specifically here the ways to have fun - are emblematic of the settlement of a new leisure culture in Egypt devoted to the wealthiest part of the society (Peterson 2011). Narratives of women who attend self-defense training reflect the mechanisms of social distinction and marginalization at work in contemporary Egyptian urban society. It is necessary to specify that my interlocutors gave high importance to going out and to have fun during the turbulent months I spent with them, even especially during the big demonstration days. For instance, Fatma, a 28 year-old-attendee, explained that she wanted to act as usual: "I am not going to stop my life for-ever because the country is imploding!". She, like others, tries to keep the political troubles away. She is probably able to take this position only because she will not be the one who will be affected by the imminent social crisis.

The bad boy and the social order

During the self-defense training, women attendees think about critical situations they assume they might face in their lives together. They imagine themselves in bad circumstances, moving and miming in front of the group. To make the situation

more realistic, the instructor can propose using some items like a hand-bag, some keys, a knife or a gun. Once we even built a fake bus with some chairs to work on an aggression situation that would take place in public transportation. It was kind of ironic since, as I already wrote, these women do not use public transportation. Once the frame is set, then the female participants come into play: "Let's say I am sitting here and he strangles me from behind" or "I am standing and he grabs my shoulders" or "he tries to trip me over and rape me". Sentences are all built in the same way: the women are doing nothing - waiting, sitting or standing - when suddenly "he" appears to attack them violently. My questions are: who is this "he" who seems to come from nowhere ready to strangle, beat and rape? Who is this enemy who is present in any critical situation as "he" - "hûa" in Arabic - without any indication but his gender?

In the narratives that surround self-defense practice and more generally urban insecurity, the main characters seem to be frozen in binary sex roles. The attacker is a male and the victim a female. This role distribution affects behaviors and imagination and deeply influences urban experiences of men and women. Thus, it seems normal for a woman to be afraid to venture out into the city since she is defined as a potential victim. The dichotomy male attacker/female victim is constantly reactivated. Newspapers often indirectly insist on

this gendered repartition by telling women that the urban space is dangerous because of men. The enemy is characterized by a sexual otherness: he is a man. Women thus reveal the existence of a common sexual identity consolidated around the fear of rape (Taraud and Iacub 2005). But, if we listen carefully to the narratives of the women I met in self-defense classes, we find out that the "enemy" is more than only a male. He seems to embody a total otherness: the opposite of who they are; the outsider (Anderson 2003). He is the one who cannot justify his presence in the same places as these women since he obviously does not share their "social grammar" (Théry 2007). Shayma, 32 years-old, provides a good illustration of this social identification process when she remembers:

"I was in a Mall, in a shop. We were waiting in the queue; it was me and my mother. There was a guy behind me and this guy looked ... badly, and very low social class. He looked very weird, I mean he looked like he cannot afford to buy anything from the shop. It was difficult for me to think that this guy can have money. This guy was standing too close to me, he almost touched me."

The enemy is a social intruder and he is considered as a serious threat against the social homogeneity and order. Journalistic discourses fuel this social stigmatization, especially with regard to the sexual harassment issue (Kreil

and Monqid 2010). Newspapers systematically focus on the assailants' origins and identities, establishing that most of them come from Cairo's poor and run down suburbs - territories which constitute fantasist spaces. The delinquents are described as having nothing to do besides acting out their sexual frustration and harassing good girls from downtown. It seems clear that these youngsters should not go downtown: they are simply outside the place they belong. These kinds of narratives also contributed to reactivating the social and spatial boundaries in Cairo (Klaus 2007).

In the women's narratives I collected, the enemy usually has an Arabic name: he can be called "*baltagi*". In their words a *baltagi* can be defined as an immoral man, a thug who is ready to commit crimes for money. He is described by my interlocutors as "dirty" and "badly dressed", having "scars on his face" and "messy hair". Mary Douglas clarifies our reflection around the clean/dirty rhetoric and how it is connected to an ideology of social order: nothing is dirty in itself; it is dirty because it is not in the right place (Douglas 1967). Here again the discourse around insecurity helps reassert the current social order by making visible the potential chaos embodied by the "outsiders". The collective imaginary strengthens the fear of *baltagi*: frightening stories and rumors show him as being cruel and bloodthirsty. In self-defense training, the instructor often tries to motivate the

female participants to punch or kick more strongly by asking them to imagine that they are facing a *baltagi*. To make it real, instructors often embody the attacker. They utter threats, scream, breathe in a strange way and make brutal movements. Mahmood, an instructor, once supported Nermin by telling her: "Come on! You must put more strength in your kick, hit his knee as if you were about to kill a cockroach! And you hate cockroaches, don't you?". The animal comparison, here even with an insect, reinforces barriers and feeds the image of a "Beauty" facing the beast.

This social stigmatization of the *baltagi* is not a bourgeois specificity. Every social group has its own *baltagi*: "people are usually able to recognize who is socially defined as a *baltagi* in their community and work to avoid, control, or defeat him" (Ghannam 2012:34). It is worth mentioning that since 2011, the meaning of *baltagi* has changed considerably and the word is not used in the same context anymore. In fact, it has taken on a political connotation since *baltagiyya* - plural form - are identified as revolution opponents: they are the ones who were paid by the pro-Mubarak camp to attack demonstrators, like in the dramatic events that took place in February 2011 at Tahrir Square. The *baltagi* remains the absolute evil and his violent implications since the beginning of the revolution extended his "otherness" to the national level: he became the enemy of Egypt. I assume that because the

word *baltagi* now refers to both a personal and a national enemy, my interlocutors sometimes feel closer to the revolutionary cause. This can be seen in this sentence from Leila, which expresses the illusion of a common enemy: "I felt angry when I saw the pictures of the camel attack (February 2nd 2011) on Tahrir Square. So violent! It was not a surprise for me since I already faced *baltagiyya*".

In self-defense training, female participants hesitantly disclose their fears, revolving around a mysterious *baltagi* and social chaos that have grown more intense since the Egyptian uprising. I have shown that their narratives reflect distinction dynamics at work in Egyptian society. A class-segmented map of Cairo appears, distinguishing territories of fear and spaces of safety. Places devoted to consumption or leisure can be seen as gated fortified sanctuaries and, needless to say, the gates are the preconditions of this reassuring social homogeneity (Koning 2009). My interlocutors became aware that these gates might not be as solid as they thought and that political regimes, even the most autocratic ones, can change. In self-defense classes, they express an urgent need to confirm that they still belong to the same social group with which they share their anxiety and boxing gloves.

Egyptian elites, social transformations and anxiety: the security post-revolutionary market

The revolution can be perceived as a potential danger undermining the social structure and jeopardizing boundaries which used to protect privileged groups from their "subordinates". This immediate threat of an unwilling contact - social, symbolic and physical - has lead Egyptian elites to take actions in order to reassure and strengthen themselves. The choice of practicing self-defense is a significant one. The previous section has shown that growing feelings of anxiety and vulnerability influences urban experiences of the Cairene upper class. I will now consider the link between this feeling and the success of self-defense practices. The fact that upper social class considerations intervned in the self-defense field introduced a change in the practice formulation and destroyed the illusion of a homogeneous group of "women" hypothetically sharing the same social experiences. The female participants I met insisted on their special economic and social rank and during this troubled period, it seemed even more important for them to repeat how "different" they are from the rest of Egyptian society. Of course, some social heterogeneity of participants had been present since the beginning of self-defense initiatives but it has finally become more visible in the current Egyptian situation.

Afraid of the revolution? Self-defense instructors looking for a new (and rich) audience

During the revolutionary period, many anxious upper-class women - and men - seemed interested in learning how to defend themselves. For many fitness entrepreneurs, it seemed to be a smart idea to profit financially from this new audience, worried about insecurity and social disorder and ready to pay to fight its fears. There was no need to wait a long time after January 2011 to see the first advertisements targeting the upper class and promoting different ways to fight insecurity. New markets started to flourish. During the time I spent in Cairo, I discovered one new offer of a self-defense course for women every month. Advertisements for this kind of training can be found on Facebook, in some "community" newspapers or in some leaflets that are available in different places like beauty centers, clothes shops or private universities. The rhetoric employed in these advertisements - always in English - uses the social disintegration and fear arguments deliberately. This extract of an announcement for a new class of self-defense for women in Cairo in February 2012 illustrates this exploitation:

"Have you been more paranoid lately about moving around on your own? Every day we hear a new story about what's happening in Cairo - the robberies, the kidnappings and car high jacking. Well - learn to defend yourself! This is

the class all women in Egypt have been waiting for! With this class, learn how to feel confident and how to be strong - you'll never feel unsafe walking down the street again! Sign up now! You won't regret it."

Even during the training, I could observe some instructors manipulating their audience to make them persevere. This can be easily understood by the fact that in upper-class training courses, participants are usually asked to pay each time they come. It respects the beloved principles of flexibility and freedom which seem central in this social class's leisure time. That explains why it is so important for the instructor to generate customer loyalty. Thus, after the first training which is generally quite light and very accessible, I often observed the instructor promoting the next class by using the participants' vulnerability as an argument to motivate them. The rape phobia is at the height of the instructors' argumentation as Peter illustrates:

"Next time you have to be prepared to work on a real and dangerous situation! Have you ever thought that someone can lie upon you? Do you see what I mean? Someone who is taller and stronger than you? Do you imagine...? Next times we will work on that and I will teach you a way to escape from this severe situation."

It is worth mentioning that many offers also target men, but the rhetoric is different. The training programs are called

"personal" or "civil defense" and focus on the man's responsibility to protect others and to defend their honor - for instance in these trainings the fight can start because someone attacks you to steal your watch, a situation which is not imaginable in women's training classes. If performances connected to insecurity seem to be specified based on social "rank", they are also deeply gendered inside the upper social class. Men are supposed to fight off thievery while women face unwilling contacts and potential rapists.

Staying apart: "I am a self-defense attendee, but not like the others"

My interlocutors admit revolutionary events have led them to an era of uncertainty. In that sense they probably know they share a common emotion with the rest of Egyptian society. But the way they choose to react and ensure their protection, especially the financial cost incurred, makes the difference. Their economic resources grant them access to expensive safety "products". The Egyptian security market is going pretty well. An employee of the biggest private security company in Egypt explained to me: "it is the first time in my life that I see people asking for bodyguards in front of their private houses. And right after the revolution, we also sold a big quantity of video surveillance installations! They are so afraid... And rich enough to pay this kind of service!". Weapons are also a big

concern for the women I talked to, especially since they have the feeling that all the bad boys carry firearms. In a rich suburb of Cairo, some firearms training classes exclusively devoted to women are given, since 2011, by a woman. If it is still not very common for one to carry a firearm (my informants usually keep it at home), self-defense weapons such as tasers or pepper spray have become ubiquitous. Even if it is easy to find them in any popular market, my interlocutors do not like to go there and moreover argue that the merchandise, which comes from China, is low-quality. They prefer the imported ones, from the USA, which implies having social connections abroad. This will to be - and to feel - apart is also visible in the places they choose to practice self-defense. According to them, the price of the sessions constitutes a valuable indication of their quality and, therefore indirectly that of the social homogeneity of the group.

Some of my informants did not want to be confused with the "other women", the ones - perceived as coming from lower social levels - who choose to learn self-defense because they have problems with men in their daily lives. I met some participants who did not even want to take a moment with me in order to discuss self-defense because in their opinion, they are not representative enough. Sara, one 40 year-old-self-

defense-attendee who eventually accepted, explained at the very beginning of her interview:

"You have to know that we are not like the other girls you meet for your research. We do not need to do self-defense for the same reasons. For example, I never take any public transportation, neither bus nor metro, I am not like them (...). Also, in upper class in Egypt, you don't have any domestic violence; there is no husband who beats his wife. We do self-defense for other reasons".

These refusals and precautions may be considered as anxious reactions to being branded as elite and reveals the importance, for my interlocutors, to "keep face". Answering an anthropologist's questions constitutes a potential risk that may undermine valuable appearances. These avoidance strategies highlight the suspicious nature of the relationships the upper class has vis-a-vis the other social groups. It is worth adding that the tranquility and the stability of this social class depend on discretion, concealment and the ability of its members to stay apart, especially from journalists or researchers (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 2005).

Their behavior regarding the Egyptian revolution is also significant. The only occurrence political events have in the talks we had together is connected to the insecurity they have generated. Thus Shayma regrets that roads are not safe enough to travel by car to their summer residence and that she and

her family will have to go by airplane. I also remember a sunny afternoon I spent in March 2012 in a Paint-Ball ground of a rich suburb of Cairo with one of my self-defense groups. One team was dressed in military colors, the other one in black. Mahmood, the captain, was joking: "Let's say that we are the army, and you are the police and we will see who will win in Egypt". This afternoon contained an obvious ironic dimension: in revolutionary Cairo, five upper-class stay-at-home mothers and their husbands, dressed in warrior costume and carrying machine guns, running in the streets of a pretend destroyed city and playing at killing each other⁶.

In the privileged social classes in Cairo, political troubles have contributed to anchor feelings of vulnerability and fear. These feelings, as I already shown, are performative: they engender strategies and practices which contribute to nurturing them back - self-defense is one of them. I assume that anxiety, considered as a part of social identity, is finally strengthened during the training. The perceived threats that motivate the self-defense choice among female upper-class attendees seem less physical than symbolic and more social than intimate. It is worth pointing out that aggression fear does not necessary involve a real possibility

⁶ I sometimes, as a person, feel embarrassed to study Egypt at this historical moment and to focus on people who do not feel concerned by the political events. As a researcher I have to remind myself that there is no social experience which has more value than another, that to understand an entire society it is relevant to spend time with its elites (Pinçon. Pinçon-Charlot 2005) and that the "inimportant" has its importance (Murphy 2011).

of physical violence. Fear has a political meaning here, revealing the ways these upper-class women articulate the revolutionary events and their privileged "rank" and understanding of the world (Roché 2008).

Conclusion

In self-defense training, the female participants express their fears at seeing the social order shaken. Since the revolution, they feel even more anxious about possible intrusions into their closed social world. I show in my paper that the crowds, the harassers and the *baltagi* embody the insecurity these women perceive. More generally, they seem to dread any social transformation which would allow "intruders" to enter their world and question class separation and privileges in society. For example, the part of the Egyptian middle class that has recently benefited from upward social mobility can also be considered as a danger like this extract from my field notes illustrates. The counterfeiting metaphor is telling:

Sara begins to speak: "It is incredible to see how many fake clothes are now available in Egypt. You can barely know if the brand you buy is real or not. Sometimes you can't even see the difference". Leïla replies with energy: "Yes it's crazy. We are not able to recognize to which part of society a person belongs to (...). It is really sad

because we are not able anymore to recognize each other.

But you know that they can't fake very long. With how you look like you can always pretend to be someone you are not but with the way you behave, you can't lie!"".

Social order is possible as long as people remain in position (Anderson 2005): those young men with messy hair from poor suburbs who invite themselves to the wealthiest places, those middle class families who dress their children with knock off brands don't respect this request for immobility simply because it wouldn't benefit them. I argue in this paper that the current upheavals, shivering the separations and the upper class' perceptions of what is safe and what is not, deeply affect the power dynamics in Egypt. Self-defense training for women offers a valuable and fascinating ethnographic field to deal with the elite's symbolic and physical strategies for security and address the more general intersection between space, class and gender relationships in revolutionary Cairo. Through the Egyptian case, I illustrate that using "anxiety" as an analytical tool is relevant to understanding the emotional dynamics playing out in period of social transformation.

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