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Egypt

Mahienour al-Masry: Icon of a Revolution

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In 2011, Tahrir Square was a space where Egyptian women found empowerment to reject the two models that previously limited their social role. In the Tahrir sit-in, women rejected the pseudo-liberation that invites women to only fight for their individual and personal freedoms, and opted to demand that they become active members of a society that continues to be based on exploitation and injustice, where freedom can only mean the freedom to be exploited, to exploit others and to consume to the best of our abilities.

They also rejected the patriarchal model that aims to transform women into domesticated dependent members of a repressive family structure and reduce their social roles to being good wives and mothers. The result was an abundance of women who were full participants in all the activities that transpired between January 25th and February 11, 2011 and led to the ouster of Mubarak.

Today, even though the Tahrir sit-in no longer exists and the square itself is more often than not circled by army vehicles to bar all forms of dissent and resistance, for many women activists the spirit of the sit-in lives on.

Egyptian women have paid an excruciating price for their participation in political movements of dissent. From as far back as 2005, Egyptian police have been targeting women with multiple forms of sexual abuse that begin at the sites of the street rallies and marches and continue and escalate to full-scale rape in police custody and in prison.

Yet in the face of these horrors, women have continued to work for the goals of the revolution and to exercise their right to be fully engaged with the resistance to all forms of repression. One such woman is Mahienour al-Masry, a young lawyer from Alexandria.

Mahienour was active in the resistance to state repression and police abuse even before 2011. Alexandria activists have known her since the protests to the brutal murder of Khaled Said during his arrest by the police in 2010.

During the last four years, Mahienour has been ceaselessly working with and in support of hundreds of other activists. Besides organizing and taking part in protest action, she has also been visiting jailed activists providing legal and financial support, visiting families of those who lost their lives to the struggle, networking, fundraising and organizing to give these families both the material and moral support they very much need.

Sentenced to Prison

In November of last year, a new “protest law” was added to the Egyptian constitution, which was being amended following the ouster of President Morsi by the military. The law in effect bans all forms of protest assemblies, rallies and marches.

Activists organized several rallies to protest this law and the government, rallies that often ended with the arrest of the participants. Naturally, Mahienour was at the forefront of several of these rallies.

This past May, Mahienour and nine other activists were sentenced to two years in prison on account of an assembly that took place in December 2011 outside the courthouse where the murderers of Khaled Said were being tried. Mahienour’s friends wrote to her every day, messages that at the time she could not read. She has also recently

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received the 2014 International Ludovic Trarieux Human Rights Award, which is annually awarded to advocates of human rights.

From behind bars, Mahienour had become the proof for many that something of the revolution of 2011 refuses to be defeated, that it will not all come to naught. On September 21st, while the mass campaign for hunger strikes in support of the political detainees was escalating both in Egypt and abroad, the court ordered Mahienour's release and suspended her sentence.

As her fellow activist Alaa Abd al-Fattah, who was released a few days earlier while on his own hunger strike, tweeted, there is no real judicial system in Egypt nowadays. All decisions are political and arbitrary. Mahienour's (and earlier Alaa's) release still remain one hard-earned and badly needed small victory for the beleaguered revolutionary struggle in Egypt.