1 Dignity as Faith

For the theme of dignity as faith, it is important, first, to clarify the use of the term "faith" as opposed to "religion." Religion includes the ritual practice in a particular belief system, whereas faith defines a form of personal connection to this belief system. An alternate title for this chapter could have been "Dignity/Karama as Islam" or "Dignity as Religion." However, the choice of the term "faith" attempts to emphasize the personal connection some feel with the dignity that accompanies their belief system. The notion of dignity/karama is not just related to Islam, but also to a social class that is embedded in one's religious status and the accompanying process of socialization. Seeing that the structures of religion and faith practice are more than belief systems and are, rather, processes of socialization is very important to comprehend that, similarly to the concept of dignity, people do not have a clear and monolithic understanding of religion and faith. Each person's social experiences play a significant role in shaping their approach to faith. The findings of this investigation of dignity as faith, thanks to the interviews with protesters and the analysis of some approaches to adapt religion to the state apparatus that are relevant to Egypt, precisely show the multiplicities in understanding the value of human life through dignity when it is connected to faith. There are notably two diverging positions in which dignity, because of one's faith, is a universal endowment that humans have and that they should unlock, versus one in which dignity is valued through one's active faith individually and in her society. The chapter also exposes confrontations between religious and secular actors in Egypt historically, as well as contemporaneous, as when they occur in the interviews. It is important to remember that these different actors remain similar in engaging with structures (religion or

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secularity) that become their own personal experience through a particular socialization process.

The discussion of a human's worth, central to understanding dignity/karama, is often related to religious studies. Given the broad context of this relationship, the focus here is to look only at the scholarship suggested from the interviews: notably dignity for Spinoza, for Pico della Mirandola and for the secularists versus Islamists debate. This gives a signpost for the understanding of the discussion of karama and faith/religion in the interviews presented in this chapter.

BACKGROUND

Most interviewees had some knowledge of Abrahamic religions (i.e., Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and recognized in them the centrality of dignity/karama as what distinguishes human beings from other creatures. The centrality of dignity helps in these religions to distinguish humans as creatures of God with divine blessings, and in order to keep those blessings, they need to keep a close relationship with their creator. Indeed, there is evidence in the three religions of the relationship between the human condition and dignity (El Bernoussi, 2015), but can religion celebrate forms of dignity and still cause indignation? According to Baruch Spinoza's critique of religion, it can (Strauss, 1965). The philosopher, who was brought up in Judaism, became dissatisfied with religion and spirituality. He was particularly dissatisfied with the religion's obstruction, in the name of gratitude and satisfaction with being the favored godly creature, of one's feelings of indignation. For Spinoza, these feelings of indignation are needed to trigger a revolutionary wave in the face of increasing injustice (Stolze, 2014). Political philosopher Leo Strauss's reading of Spinoza revealed that despite Spinoza's virulent criticism of religion, he remained a strong believer in God. Spinoza was in some way able to distinguish between his faith and the understandings of religion and spiritual practices (Strauss, 1965). Conversely, it seems that it is Spinoza's belief in God that could suggest an

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anti-humanist drive in his philosophy on the centrality of human dignity and could even suggest a definition of dignity as what distinguishes human beings from other animals. Philosopher Yitzhak Melamed supports this argument by focusing on how Spinoza presented humans as marginal constituents of the vast universe and by critiquing anthropomorphism as baseless arrogance from humans (2010). It is important to note, however, that there seems to be no use of the term "dignity" in the translated work of Spinoza – based on my own search for the terms "dignity" and "indignation" in *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) and *The Ethics: Concerning God* (1677). This brief section on Spinoza relies on readings and interpretations of the philosopher's work to give an example of confronting issues of dignity and religion.

In this same vein of confronting religion and dignity, one of the respondents in the interviews mentioned the work of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola – whose *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486) is credited as the most famous Renaissance speech on the nature of humankind – to showcase an example of a non-Muslim scholar who looked at the religion of Islam to explore the challenging concept of dignity. Indeed, Pico della Mirandola's early work, similar to Cicero's, acknowledges the egalitarian dimension of dignity as intrinsic to human nature and as independent from the quality of the actions of an individual. This is quite different from an understanding of dignity as measured by virtue (in Confucianism) or by professional achievement (Roman army, for the Latin *dignitas*). Interestingly, Pico della Mirandola's oration starts with the assertion by a Muslim that the greatest gift in nature is Man (human beings) itself.[1] This statement is central in Pico della Mirandola's oration to support the claim that human beings are already inherently endowed with dignity. Pico della Mirandola also explored several other understandings of dignity, not only as human worth, but also as the human's abilities to be whatever

[1] The quote is: "I once read that Abdala the Muslim, when asked what was most worthy of awe and wonder in this theater of the world, answered, 'There is nothing to see more wonderful than man!'" from *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486) by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.

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she chooses and limited only by the boundaries she herself defines. This empowering understanding of dignity, as presented by Pico della Mirandola, was often shared by respondents in the interviews, who united a religious sense of karama as a human feature and a universal sense of karama as a human right.

The empowering characteristic of dignity, in the sense of being special to individuals endowed with a human spirit that must be respected, works well with the approach of international development focusing on agency (Haq, 1995; Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000, 2003, 2009). On the other hand, secularists' and Islamists' points of view on development and progress seem to be at odds. Adding to this are feelings, for both some secularists and Islamists, of nostalgia for the past Golden Age of Arab and Muslim cultures (sometimes presented as spanning from the eighth century, with the start of the Abbasid caliphate, to the thirteenth century, with the Mongol invasion of Baghdad) due to feelings of increasing internal weaknesses in many Muslim societies today. It is important to note here that these mostly widespread feelings of nostalgia can be seen in so-called vanquished civilizations, like the Arab and Muslim, and this nostalgia can actually be a social force that operationalizes time and an affect, like that used by different political entities from the Egyptian neo-Wafd party to the Chinese Communist Party (Ajami, 1981, p. 213; Benabdallah, 2020). Nonetheless, one can also see an orientalist understanding of history associated with such feelings of nostalgia, but it is still interesting to see how nostalgia as a social force plays a role in shaping imaginaries of people in the Arab world[2] because of their perception of being part of a so-called vanquished civilization, which can lead to an instrumentalization of the past to build the future. Considering nostalgia as a structure of feelings (Combs, 1993; Tannock, 1995), one can see how

[2] In his book, *Hizbullah and the Politics of Remembrance* (2016), Bashir Saade shows that remembrance is an active social and political enterprise for Hizbullah to engage with its environment and plan for the future using a systematic archiving of its human agency, particularly as a resistance to Israel. This active attribute of remembrance seems to contrast with a reactive one of nostalgia.

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nostalgia's referent object becomes this emblematic desire for the past that is contrasted with a unsatisfying present (Greene, 1991, p. 305), and that is a point of agreement for some secularists and Islamists whom I talked to when they discuss faith in their current context.

For those expressing nostalgia, some causes of internal weaknesses in the context of the Arab and Muslim world are corruption, superstitious beliefs, ethnic divisions and weakening faith. Various responses to these weaknesses were presented in pre-modern reform movements, especially Wahhabism, in the forms of rejecting the societal order of eighteenth-century Arabia and advocating for a reform that would bring back the order of the *salaf*, that is, the societal order during the first three generations of Muslims. The Islamic Modernism of Mohamed Abduh was also another reform attempt that attempted to marry Islamic faith with the process of modernization in the region. Between 1803 and 1818, the Wahhabis controlled Mecca and established a literal interpretation of the Qur'an and the Sunna. They called for *ijtihad* (meaning "effort of interpretation" and the utmost effort an individual can put forth in an activity) and opposed *bidʿa* (meaning "innovation" and any changes to an imagined original form of Islam), such as Sufi practices. This shows that there was a major debate about reforming society between Islamists (of different sorts) and secularists in societies like Egypt where religion, and particularly Islam, is central. This debate attempted to confront different trajectories of comprehensive reform for developing those societies, but both Islamist and Secularist projects were equally a reaction to modernization and an attempt to blend into local and foreign cultures. These trajectories spanned radical secularism to radical Islamism[3]. In the case of Egypt, those conflicting trajectories could be seen, for example, in the complex

[3] In her book, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition* (2009), Samira Haj presents some of those several attempts to modernize Islam by Al-Afghani, Abduh, etc. The book is an example of some of the great literature about Islam, Tradition, and Modernity, especially on the relation between all these seemingly unconnected currents of Islamic reform and how they reacted to orientalist visions of the region.

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relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the State. In this brief background presentation, we will not delve more deeply into analyzing this relationship. We rely, instead, on the interviewees reporting on the Muslim Brotherhood in discussing the relationship between karama and faith/religion.

INSTRUMENTALIZING RELIGION

Only one of the respondents in this study had presented himself as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood (in an interview prior to June 30, 2013, which was considered by protesters a second revolution of the Arab Uprisings in Egypt and that led to the overthrow of the Mohamed Morsi government). To compensate for the lack of direct accounts from members of the Muslim Brotherhood in this study, the group's official portal, *IkhwanWeb*, was a useful source for some of the members' statements and comments on the 2011 protests in Egypt and also on the subsequent events. On the website, the Brotherhood members state that their leader, Hassan al-Banna, "strove hard to restore the national rights and to save the Arab dignity" ("karama" in the original Arabic form and "dignity" in the English translation) and that one of their principles, as a political body, is to seek "internal and external reformation and [plant] the seeds of dignity within the souls of the citizens."[4] The Muslim Brotherhood is, therefore, presented as the guardian of righteous dignity. Further statements about the Muslim Brotherhood are discussed in the following sections. Similar to the difficulty of reaching out to members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the "political society" (Chatterjee, 2011), being defined as the most marginalized socioeconomic group of individuals in a postcolonial[5] society, is also not

[4] Found in article 24 of Section One on "The History of the Movement" by Muhammad Shawqi Zaki (2007). Source: www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=806.

[5] Here the term "post" is used to suggest that even if several decades passed after acquiring independence in some countries of the Global South, there is a particular focus on the lingering colonial structures appropriated by authoritarian and dysfunctional states in these decolonized societies.

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directly represented in the interviews. Instead, this political society is discussed through the lens of secondary data of interviews with people from the most economically deprived groups in the Egyptian society, which are found in many news outlets.

In the case of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the group seems to include a wide spectrum of individuals from various socioeconomic backgrounds. This configuration is portrayed in the movie *The Yaacoubian Building* (2006), directed by Marwan Hamed and adapted from the novel of the same name by Alaa Al Aswany (2002), in which a new member of the Islamist group, Taha, notices immediately that the group comprises people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, but that they all left their status at the door of the mosque because they were all equals in front of God. This contrasts with Taha's first day at the university, where he feels marginalized by some of his rich classmates because of his low status, despite his stellar academic records. The movie showcased how Taha's transformation into a Jihadist Islamist was a way to regain a sense of dignity and worth, which was stripped away from him in his own country, because even his hard work could not help him in a corrupt political and social system where crony capitalism and nepotism prevailed.

In Egyptian cinema, the portrayal of the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamists is often negative. Indeed, political Islam is presented in negative terms in several movies. For instance, Adel Imam's *The Terrorist* (1994) is a case in point. The movie portrays the conversion of Brother Ali away from Islamic radicalism. He moves from his brutish and violent ways to learn tolerance when he encounters a family of moderate Muslims. In the movie, the radical Islamists are presented as ruthless, irrational, confused individuals, and sometimes borderline idiotic. The opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood often operates by dehumanizing the Islamists to deprive them of any dignity.

When looking at expressions of karama as faith in 2011 and afterward, in the case of the Arab Uprisings in Egypt, there are some

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symbolic examples of processes of humanization and dehumanization that prompt the issue of karama/dignity. As an example of humanizing religions, the coexistence between the Christian faith and the Muslim faith in Egypt is presented as a pledge of a religious tolerance and acceptance in today's modern state. However, it is obvious that this statement should be qualified, as there are frictions between the two religious communities. Fears of an escalation of tensions between the two religious communities during the revolution that could lead to sectarian divisions were first disproved by images of unity shared by people observing or taking part in the protests in early 2011. One image that beautifully expresses the resilience of this coexistence shows a circle of Copts delimiting a serene prayer zone for Muslims.

In partnership with the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies in Cairo, the Dominican priest Benoît Vandeputte organized a six-day cultural trip with the theme "Cairo: Between revolution and Chaos." The trip aimed at giving participants a hands-on experience of the situation in Egypt after the 2011 revolution, and the trip was also an opportunity for participants to meet with both Christian and Muslim parties in Egypt to engage in a dialogue. The participants, including the priest Vandeputte, reported their enthusiasm with the resilience of solidarity between different religious groups in Egyptian society, as witnessed in the streets and squares of Cairo. Another Dominican priest, Emilio Platti, who is partially based in Cairo, gathered a collection of photographs that can be accessed through the website of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies in Cairo (IDEO), and in which he covered the events of the 2011 revolution from January 2011 to January 2012.[6]

The images are very telling: some of them show revolutionaries celebrating the conviviality between the different religious groups in Egypt, even showing politicians who claimed religious diversity as a

[6] The collection of photographs of the revolution, by the Dominican priest Emilio Platti, can be accessed through this link in the IDEO's official website: www.ideo-cairo.org/reports/Thawra25Janvier_Emilio_Platti(2012).pdf.

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central value to their campaigns. Other images show deadly attacks on both Christian and Muslim religious sites.

In the pictures taken by priest Emilio Platti that show an open and peaceful dialogue between Christians and Muslims, another interesting element is the mentioning of the Palestinian cause (with "*musalaha filistiniya*" meaning "Palestinian reconciliation") in this interfaith tolerance campaign. This call for a Palestinian truce may refer to the calls for a ceasefire between Hamas (a Sunni Islamist political party) and Fatah (the leading secular political party and the largest faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization) in Palestine as a sign of pan-Arab solidarity. Given the political differences between Hamas (supported by Hezbollah) and Fatah, the interfaith tolerance campaigns in Egypt attempt to call for peaceful dialogue between different religious entities (interfaith) and within the same religious groups (intra-faith) in the region in order to resolve the underlying political conflicts. Moreover, the recurring theme of the Palestinian cause is present not only under the theme of karama as faith, but also in the discussion of Arab identity.

The attempts for peaceful dialogues are confronted, on the other hand, by processes of dehumanization of the Other that can lead to violent outbreaks, such as the protests near the Rabaa Al-Adawiya Mosque in August 2013. Indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood opposed the celebration of the second revolution in 2013, which ousted their leader, former president Mohamed Morsi, and led to the Rabaa events, because they consider it a crime against humanity that cannot be forgotten or celebrated. So, how can humanity be separated from a person in this dehumanizing process? A possible way is to state that this person has no dignity in order to dehumanize her, punish her and justify her marginalization. One image that captures this utterly negative portrayal of the Muslim Brotherhood showed a Brotherhood member using a niqab-wearing woman as a shield and using an infant as a human bomb, while he faced a courageous Egyptian army officer protecting what looked like an Egyptian woman and her baby.

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INTERVIEWS

During the interviews, the different signifiers that are referred to in explaining people's involvement in the 2011 Arab Uprisings events in Egypt and their understanding of karama were either spontaneous or self-reflective. A spontaneous process seems to be more faithful to the actual feelings and states of mind during the revolution (the respondent looked more emotive and sincere), whereas a self-reflective process seemed to mark a separation between the individual and her past experience (tendency to justify instead of simply utter statements, as seen with more spontaneous responses). As described in the Introduction, I try to separate between what seemed to be a spontaneous answer to defining dignity as something related to one's faith or religion and a self-reflective one in which the respondent may draw from her past experience to present such a definition.

Abdelrahman, who was fifty years old at the time of the interview, teaches both political theory and Western philosophy at a major university and participated in the Arab Uprising protests in Cairo. He could be labeled as a very secular person both in his appearance and in his philosophical thoughts. However, to him, his secular appearance does not conflict with his conservative religious views or, particularly, his sympathy with the legitimacy of the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood. Abdelrahman started by affirming that karama is a "*niʿma min al islam*" (meaning "a gift from Islam"), and that Muslims ought to be proud of their religion and its emphasis on karama. Abdelrahman recited the following *ayah* (Quranic verse) and asked me to look up in which *sura* (Quranic section) this *ayah* appeared. Abdelrahman did not want to commit a "sin" by mixing up the *suras* of the holy book of the Qur'an, which showed his care in providing me with correct information (adding "*astaghfirullah*" meaning, "I beg pardon to God"):

> Now indeed, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam (as a birth right, regardless of where the child is born). And provided them with transport on land and sea and given them decent things

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of life. And We have favored the humans far above a great many of Our creation.[7] *(Ahmed, 2003)*

Abdelrahman proudly uttered that this very *ayah* is the proof of the superiority of Islam over other religions and also a proof of the importance of karama to Muslims. When I asked Abdelrahman to explain more of what this karama in Islam means, he replied that it is the behavior of the righteous faithful (*mu'min*). I then responded that there might be a contradiction between an understanding of karama as intrinsic to the human condition, that is, as in the worth of being human in and of itself, and one of karama that depends on human behavior, that is, in the socially assessed worth of one's actions that can command respect from others. Abdelrahman disagreed with me and added that the two understandings are actually the same thing because the human condition is related to human behavior.

Because I could not agree that the human condition was the same thing as the human behavior, from my understanding, and I couldn't see how the two seemed to be the same thing from Abdelrahman's view, I thought Abdelrahman and I had reached an impasse. However, I came to understand a bit later that what Abdelrahman wanted to convey to me was that one can lose one's human condition if one does not engage in the proper Muslim behavior. I gave Abdelrahman the example of the behavior of a pedophile and asked him if such a person still has karama, given the fact that the person's behavior is not considered righteous, but even so, the person remains a human being. Abdelrahman shrugged his shoulders and

[7] Both the transliteration and the translation used are by Shabbir Ahmed in his official translation of the Qur'an (*The Qur'an as It Explains Itself*, 2003). Surat Al Isra (17:70). Another translation can be found in the Oxford World Classics series volume, *The Qur'an* (2004), by M. A. S. Abdel-Haleem: "We have honoured the children of Adam and carried them by land and sea; We have provided good sustenance for them and favoured them specially above many of those We have created."

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replied that this is a "*hayawan*" (meaning "animal" in a derogatory sense) who has no karama whatsoever (it seemed here that Abdelrahman assumed that "*hayawan*" practiced pedophilia, but most importantly, Abdelraham seemed to infer that one's action and behavior can lead to one losing her human attribute of dignity). Abdelrahman added that those who engage in "*fasad*" (meaning "corruption") do not have any dignity, and then he quickly reminded me that the creed of the Muslim Brotherhood is to eradicate *fasad.*

Magdy was a twenty-six-year-old journalist living in Giza when I interviewed him in 2015. Despite his parents' disapproval of the first protests, Magdy went to Tahrir Square on January 25, compelled to participate in the revolution as a professional journalist and because he was a young Egyptian. Magdy stated that his parents' savings enabled him to study journalism in the United States. Magdy loves surfing. His perfectly tanned features and brightly colored Hawaiian shirt made him seem that he had just finished catching some waves on a California beach. Magdy's appearance seemed to be in line with his secular views. He also considered himself an atheist, and he claimed that atheism is much more widespread in Egyptian society than people might think. I asked if there were any official data on the number of atheists in Egypt, and he replied that there cannot be any such official data, as people would be too embarrassed to admit their atheism. Magdy is adamantly critical toward the Muslims Brotherhood's leadership, declaring, "The Muslim Brotherhood people do not understand real dignity." He added, "Throughout the history, they destroyed this country (*kharabo al balad*) and they want to do it again today." I asked him how they managed to destroy the country, and he responded, "By pulling the country backwards."

For Waleed, who was a young active student during the protests and who then moved to the Gulf for work, Islam had no place during the revolution. Waleed added that there were young Islamists joining the protests, but that his group, *Kefaya*, asked the young Islamists to be neutral and not to act as they did in the 1990s in trying to hijack the entire group's ideology. He also added that this new generation

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does not care about Islam. When I asked him about the practicing young men and veiled women, for instance, he replied that they act that way more for the "*taqlid*" (in the sense of following trends) and that it is more of a social behavior. I then asked him about the involvement of the Copts in the protests, and he presented two different reactions within this community: those from the countryside who claimed to be more aligned with the religious establishment and those from the Nile Delta region (*el wegha el bahria*) who seemed disillusioned with their current religious leaders and were sometimes even against the church. He cautioned, however, that both parties still need their church because of the political protection it provides.

Hagar, who was a successful thirty-six-year-old financial analyst from Cairo, flew from London to Cairo on January 26, 2011, to be close to her parents and younger siblings in Egypt and to witness this "most important event in the history of Egypt," according to her. Along with having a shiny smartphone cover, Hagar also wore a rainbow-colored *hijab* and adopted a very trendy style that made her look like the coolest kid on the block. When I asked about Islam and karama, which to me was in no way a question about her *hijab*, she directly replied that everyone is free to do what they want to do, including wearing the hijab, and that there was nothing extremist about it because one could be very open-minded and wear it. She continued, saying that she even went to bars with her colleagues in London after work, and in response to the puzzled look on my face, she added that she would always order virgin cocktails as a "*Muslima.*" I first met Hagar in 2008, before she wore the hijab, and I suspect that her upfront discussion of the hijab might have been related to her thinking that I could be wondering about why she had decided to wear it. Hagar's message to me remains important because she used her own case to debunk the misconception that conservative attitudes toward religion would necessarily be intolerant.

Boutros, whose life was split between France and Egypt, presented another example of this marriage between tolerance and Islam. He started by saying that he was currently going through a midlife

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crisis (as he recently turned fifty years young), which did not seem to have any relationship with the topics of our discussion other than, perhaps, cautioning me about the influence of the so-called crisis in his interpretations of the revolution. Boutros is Christian but "not a very practicing one," in his words. He noted that the relationship between Christians and Muslims is exemplary in Egypt. He quickly added that most Christians in Egypt have a lot of respect for Muslims and their religion. Boutros comes from the upper middle class of Egyptian society, according to him. However, he does not like to be associated with the wealth of his family and stated that his lifestyle is very simple. He thinks that materialism and the passion for money in modern societies is a real problem. Boutros also defended the Muslim Brotherhood and believes that they are the right leaders for Egyptian society. He added that Islamism is natural in a society where a majority of the population are very strong advocates of Islam, and these Islamists should be allowed to govern, as this is the wish of the people. The problem, for him, is continually repressing this will. Boutros added laughingly that people often tell him he defends Islamism even better than some Muslims do. In contrast, Ameen, one of the interviewees who is a PhD candidate in the field of public administration and who claims to be a fervent Muslim, called for continuous rebellion against the system and against the politicization of Islam to distance faith/religion from governance.

From the repeated interviews, it seemed that the need for tolerance and the need to respect individual liberties included the need to respect Islamization of the society, even if it was interpreted as a radicalization. This need to respect and tolerate the Islamizing society in Egypt and around the world was expressed by both Boutros and Hagar. It is important to note that both Boutros and Hagar lived for many years in the West, which could have influenced their views. It is also important to state again that these interviews were conducted mainly in Arabic and two to four years after the 2011 protests. In the last chapter, I go back to interview one of the respondents to ask him what he thinks about the different themes now.

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CONCLUSIONS

The dimension of religion and faith is not only about spirituality but also about affirming political views and constructing a social order. In this sense, it is important to explore the political and social dimensions of instrumentalizing the religious arguments demanded by karama, for instance, the empowerment of an Islamist political party or the justifications regarding gender roles in Islam. The instrumentalization of religious arguments can also serve to humanize or dehumanize particular groups of people, as seen in the section on expressions of karama in the 2011 uprisings and after. In this section, it is important to first contextualize the relevance of confronting the religious theme in Egypt to the karama demands in the 2011 uprisings and to reflect on the struggle between Islamist political parties confronted with secularist and modernizing regimes.

An important question to ask when thinking about karama as a religious dimension is whether there is an attempt, on the one hand, to secularize the uprising and the so-called January 25 revolution or, on the other hand, to Islamize it. This pragmatic questioning helps to understand the forces that tried to shape the 2011 events in Egypt. When looking at human expressions of karama as faith and at the relevant information from interviews, it seems that the protesters, for the most part, aimed at being distant from karama, as a strictly Islamic concept, in order to embrace both a global and a secular understanding of karama. This was meaningful as an attempt to keep religion out of the revolution dynamic. Yet, it is important to note that the events were not univocal, as they were complex and reflective of multiple opinions. For the most part, the answer could be that, yes, there was an attempt to secularize the revolution to some extent, as some people claimed that they did not want the Islamists or the Muslim Brotherhood to steal the revolution of 2011 in Egypt, as seen with the interviews (Waleed, for instance).

The Islamist political parties in Egypt and other countries of the Middle East and North Africa have competed for power for several

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decades, and even secularist leaders were often devout Muslim practitioners (Cammett et al., 2013), for example, the former Algerian president Houari Boumediene and, of course, Nasser. The former ruling Islamist party in Turkey – the Justice and Development Party, or AKP – also stressed Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's devoted practice of Islam despite his embrace of secular values, appearance and political discourse. The problem of Islam and politics in the region has remained, however, a highly controversial subject, particularly due to the battle that opposes secularist and Islamist groups. One needs to add that possibilities of a dialogue between opposing parties is not necessarily facilitated in an undemocratic setting, as found in many countries of the region. Moreover, the international community also had little incentive to reverse this situation. Actually, there are several cases of inconsistencies from democratic countries that supported authoritarian regimes in the region right before the start of the Arab Uprising, but quickly began condemning these very same regimes, as in the case of Tunisia.

This religious dimension of karama that links karama to the humanity of all the children of Adam in Islam is quite similar to the universal dimension of human dignity as a fundamental human right, in its all-encompassing goal (Kamali, 2002), and that follows in the next chapter.

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