

VIRGIN POLITICS: AN IDEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF “VIRGINITY” IN THE
EGYPTIAN VIRGINITY TESTS

BY

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Communication

May 2013

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Alessandra Beasley Von-Burg for being the best thesis advisor a graduate candidate could ask for. You taught me how to write, critique, and be a rhetorician more so than all the other instructors in my life combined.

Second, I'd like to thank Dr. Allan Loudon for being the chair of my committee and keeping me sane amongst the uptight crazy academic crew you brought me in with.

Lastly, I'd like to thank Dr. Angela Kocze for being a third reader and offering support and advice that kept me going. Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

In March 2011, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, Egypt's interim military government, violently interrupted protests from their civilian population. Litanies of allegations of abuse, torture, and murder arose. One particular abuse happened to seventeen female Egyptian protesters, virginity tests. This thesis analyzes the military's justification and Samira Ibrahim's discursive response to the virginity tests. I analyze the military's use of "virginity" in their justification for the virginity tests, through the theoretical framework of the ideograph. I argue that "virginity" functioned to stifle public dissent in Egypt. I utilize both a synchronic and diachronic analysis of the ideograph "virginity" in Egypt, and argue that it is structured in both a religious and patriarchal meta-discourse used to demarcate the role of the "good women." I also analyze Samira Ibrahim's response to the virginity tests and argue that her use of a rhetorically rich counter-cultural discourse interrupted the operationalization of "virginity" in the military's response. My thesis adds to previous research on the ideograph by evaluating how it operated in a contemporary revolutionary setting in Egypt. It also has implications for social conflict theory, technology, and identity studies.

CHAPTER ONE:

Introduction

The Ideograph of Virginit

In March 2011, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), Egypt's interim military government, cracked-down on its civilian population while they carried out peaceful protests. Litanies of civilians were detained and tortured, among which seventeen were women (Watson, Ivan and Mohamed). As Samira Ibrahim, a female protester, indicates in a YouTube video she released in an effort to draw attention to the human rights abuse, “they were trying to make us regret the 25th of January, trying to make us regret that we started a revolution” (2011). Ibrahim identifies that she and other captured female protesters were forced to submit to virginity tests, while male officers took pictures and laughed. Any dissent resulted in the women being beaten until acquiescence (Ibrahim). Ibrahim’s strategy of drawing attention to the event with her video succeeded in inviting domestic and international backlash by human rights groups and protesters. The military responded releasing a justification for their actions. As an anonymous general noted, “We didn't want them to say we had sexually assaulted or raped them, so we wanted to prove that they weren't virgins in the first place...None of them were (virgins)” (Qtd. in Ivan and Fadel). A trial eventually ensued. The military court swiftly rendered a verdict of innocence, and the doctors who had performed the virginity tests were set free.

As Naomi Wolf, a leading feminist scholar indicates, “The imprint of the equation of a female ‘virgin’ with someone who is ‘good’ and ‘pure’ is so deep we scarcely think

about whether those terms have any actual relationship” (Kindle Location 2232). These assumptions about virginity construct a notion of femininity that can be appropriated for political reasoning. In the case of “virginity” in Egypt, the government used the pre-constructed cultural narrative through the topos of the “good woman,” which is embedded in a religious, and to a lesser extent, bourgeoisie ideology that was (re)produced by the governmental discourse to stifle public dissent. This intersection of discourse and ideology has been demarcated, in communication theory, as the ideograph. Michael Calvin McGee introduced the ideograph over three decades ago. The ideograph is an ideology that operates through “a political language, preserved in rhetorical documents, with the capacity to dictate decision and control public belief and behavior” (McGee, p. 5). In this thesis, I analyze how “virginity” was presented to the Egyptian people, through press releases by the SCAF, and argue that nonconforming against the governmental justification for the virginity tests meant to dissent against institutionalized ideological normativity. This was done in two ways. First, by positing themselves as the “defenders” of “virginity,” the SCAF places itself as the chivalric institution defending Egyptian society against the horde of heathen protestors attempting to disrupt the everydayness of their lifestyles. Second, the SCAF argues that the female protestors “weren’t virgins” to begin with. This strategy closes discursive space for oppositional arguments, as facts are not subject to contestation, and presumes a position of benevolent objectivity. The rhetorical strategy employed by the SCAF places a presumption of guilt upon the women as they now have to start the discussion by defending their character to a conservative Egyptian public. However, one woman found a successful strategy of redefining the SCAF’s narrative fidelity (Fisher).

Ibrahim, through her YouTube video, creates what Michelle Celeste Condit and John Louis Lucaites define as a counter-cultural discourse (Condit and Lucaites, 15). A counter-cultural discourse publicly highlights the incongruities within an ideology that allows for oppression to continue, thus challenging the hegemonic framework. In the Egyptian case, inconsistency is created through the insertion of a discourse that falls outside the constructed perimeters of Egypt's sovereign institution, the Military Council. Ibrahim's discourse, through her public video, interrogates the underlying assumptions of the SCAF's defense of the virginity tests. As the first revolutions to encompass a technologically savvy society, Ibrahim was provided a medium that could potentially reach a broad range of people.

I argue that the ideological tropes that the SCAF brings when discussing "virginity" rest upon the construction of the "role of the woman" in both religion and patriarchy. As McGee argues about Marxist skeptics:

Though I agree that Marx probably overestimated the influence of an elite, it is difficult *not* to see a 'dominant ideology' which seems to exercise decisive influence in political life. The question, of course, turns on finding a way accurately to define and to describe a dominant ideology. (p. 15)

This thesis attempts to add to the task McGee sets forth by demarcating the way "ideology" operated in Egypt to disavow the virginity tests conducted by the government. I attempt to extend McGee's work of the ideograph through isolating how a particular rhetorical strategy complicated the ideograph's operationalization. I also analyze Ibrahim's response to the "virginity tests," and argue that she produces a discourse that

problematizes the SCAF's deployment of "virginity." Through YouTube, Ibrahim generates an emotional response that creates identification with the Egyptian public.

In this chapter, I first identify the two main artifacts for my thesis, the SCAF's discursive defense of their actions, and Ibrahim's YouTube video in response. Second, I introduce the theoretical framework of the ideograph. Next, I review existing scholarship on the ideograph, and discuss how my project is unique in its operationalization of the ideograph.

Artifacts

My project evaluates both Ibrahim's speech and the SCAF's justification, as they are inexorably tied to one another. First, I evaluate the SCAF's usage of "virginity" in their public statements defending the virginity tests to the media. All of the military councils statements happened within a year (March, 2011- March, 2012), and there are only a few, all of which hold the similar goal of disproving Ibrahim's and the other female protesters' virginity. The court decision was not available for analysis as the Egyptian military court held a closed trial, allowing them to bypass releasing their justification to the public. This provides further evidence that the SCAF's use of "virginity" in their public statements curtailed dissent without detailed justification. I also look at the historical development of the ideograph "virginity," and analyze the meta-structures that have shaped the Egyptian interpretation of contemporary "virginity" (e.g. religion, patriarchy). For religion, I start my analysis at the Qur'an and the specific passages that speak to the woman's role in society. Existing scholarship (e.g. Arlandson, Kianfar, Rahman, Roark, Stowasser, Wadud) works to isolate the relevant sections of the Qur'an to evaluate how Islam constructs a frame to evaluate "virginity." I use a translated

text found at quran.com, which was created by the organization Sunnah, whose “Arabic text” is “sourced from al-eman.com and hadith.al-islam.com” (Sunnah.com). Thus, an analysis of the Qur’an provides necessary insight to the Egyptian populous understanding of “virginity.” As Samuel Huntington notes in his book, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (1996), “Muslims in massive numbers were simultaneously turning toward Islam as a source of identity, meaning, stability, legitimacy, development, power, and hope, hope epitomized in the slogan ‘Islam is the solution’” (Kindle location 2023). The recent parliamentary election of a 72% Muslim Brotherhood, which is a conservative Islamist group that campaigned on a platform of peaceful incorporation of Islam into the state, provides additional evidence that a majority of the Egyptian populous is persuaded by religious tropes. The SCAF’s statements pertaining to the virginity tests provide a contemporary example of how discourse is still used in an oppressive manner, justifying archaic patriarchal praxis.

Second, I analyze the discourse produced by Ibrahim’s YouTube video. The YouTube video is twenty-two minutes long and has subtitles. It is posted by an anonymous group under the username, TahrirDairies, and describes the goal as to, “end the military trials for civilians.” The group consists of, “several active members of the ongoing Egyptian revolution.” The group (TahrirDairies) interviewed Ibrahim and removed their questions from the video to only show Ibrahim’s response. No information exists on how Ibrahim came into contact with the group. This video is instrumental to this analysis as it provides an instance in which an ideology that was operationalized institutionally was successfully countered by a discursive strategy, providing further insight on the intersections of patriarchy and rhetoric.

Method

The basis for my analysis is rooted in McGee's theoretical work on the ideograph (1980). I use the ideograph to analyze "virginity" during the Egyptian revolution, as a patriarchal means to suppress female protest, through both a vertical and horizontal analysis of the SCAF's rhetoric of "virginity." A vertical analysis is a diachronic analysis that evaluates how the text has evolved over time, and looks at where its demarcating historical basis is rooted. A horizontal approach evaluates the outcomes of the discourse at the time of its operationalization. A horizontal analysis assesses how "virginity," interacts with other ideographs (e.g., "purity", "innocence", "piety"). The diachronic analysis operates under Huntington's theory of the "clash of civilizations," which identifies religion as a key trope in defining mass cultural values (1993), thus my examination of the Qur'an and interpretations of the Qur'an provide insight into current understandings of contemporary Egyptian interpretations of "virginity." This is done by analyzing the sections of the Qur'an that pertain to "virginity" or notions of "virgin(ess)" that have implications for current understandings of "virginity" in Egypt, thus explaining public reactions to the virginity tests. Next, my analysis of Ibrahim's YouTube video and discourse uses Condit and Lucaites' (1990) framing of the ideograph, as both cultural and counter-cultural. My analysis differs from Condit and Lucaites' work, however, by arguing that cultural discourse acts as the means of oppression rather than a route to liberation, and that Ibrahim was forced to act counter-culturally since cultural rhetoric would place her in a submissive role. The framework for analyzing Ibrahim's response is through Condit's work on universalism in public argumentation (1987), as Ibrahim appeals multiple times in her YouTube video to show her character and qualities are

similar to “any other girl.” Placing her in a similar rhetorical position the SCAF attempted to do for itself, by arguing on defense of all women, that confrontation with the SCAF was necessary to ensure safety for all Egyptian women. A unique aspect of my analysis evaluates how Ibrahim’s use of YouTube worked as a unique medium that bolstered her ability to speak to a large public audience in a manner that other forms of text based social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) couldn’t capture. This case study provides data as to how a YouTube video contributed to a revolutionary setting to create social change.

Theoretical Introduction

The Arab Revolutions have widely been known as the technological revolutions (e.g., Eelman, Martin, Riley, Serageldin, Srinivasan, Stepanova). There are persuasive arguments both for and against equating the success of the revolutions with technology. Hina Samnani and Lolla Mohammed note about technology and social media, “Twitter and Facebook have played a crucial role in providing disenfranchised Arab citizens with a space to pressure regimes to democratize power and increase transparency.” In a techno-savvy society, the importance and influence of YouTube, and other technological mediums (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc...) cannot be glossed over. As Utsav Bains, a political activist speaking about YouTube in India, notes, “Portals like YouTube can prevent those in authority from misusing their power. It's a revolution” (Qtd from Gill). While Ibrahim’s video placed “pressure” on regimes, as she was awarded a court case, it also shows how social media isn’t inexorably linked to successful “transparency,” as the military council who were on trial oversaw Ibrahim’s case. More importantly, no scholarship exists, as of now, on how YouTube independently influenced the Arab

Revolutions. I evaluate how Ibrahim's video on YouTube served as a unique tool to galvanize the Egyptian public and the international community.

YouTube isolates a unique instance where a "cyber-community" was informed and created social change (Watts and Mitra). YouTube provides a space where a rhetor is able to get a mass-mediated message to a large segment of society, which wouldn't have been possible due to "hegemony's" power over the media (Watts and Mitra, p. 485). Ibrahim's use of YouTube allowed both her literal voice and a symbolic voice to be produced and authenticated. Portals like YouTube can show the audience the rhetor speaking to create persuasive effects that other social media cannot generate. I evaluate how Ibrahim's use of voice through YouTube galvanized social change.

Counter evidence also exists that technology has the ability to hamper revolutions, as Ulises Mejias notes:

The neoliberal discourse behind the trope of a "Twitter Revolution" (a revolution enabled by "liberation technologies" which empower oppressed groups) continues to function—especially in Western media and academia—as a utopian discourse that conceals the role of communicative capitalism in undermining democracy.

(1)

Technological media may ignore the material oppression within a country, as advocates of technology assume persons operate in a "free space" outside of their material presents. Those in authority can use social media as surveillance of populations that are rebelling (Clark). Ibrahim acknowledges the danger she faces from going public. Her recognition of the harm she might face and her willingness to continue fighting for the Egyptian people, however, places her as a heroic figure willing to sacrifice everything for justice

(Ibrahim, 19:20-20:25). I focus on the case study of Ibrahim's video within a particular context in which technology, specifically YouTube, provides a medium to challenge authoritarianism.

My argument builds on the existing scholarship in two ways. First, it analyzes a discourse that is resisting oppression, adding to existing scholarship on social movements (Della Porta and Diani, Stewart et al., Welsh and Chesters), and adds to the theoretical work done on Olson and Goodnight's (1994, p. 251) "oppositional argument" within social movements (e.g., Beasley Von Burg, Mitchell). Second, it deconstructs the term "virginity" to identify its multiple connections to religion, patriarchy, and women's role as both a sexual and culturally defined discursive phenomenon. Ibrahim was presented with two options. She could acquiesce to the status quo and remain silent, or speak out, thus endangering herself and her friends, in an attempt to motivate an Egyptian public that remained complicit.

The SCAF's use and defense of the virginity tests reinforced a patriarchal and oppressive ideology in an effort to stifle public dissent. I argue that the construct of "virginity" is an ideograph. I contribute to the study and application of the ideograph in two ways. First, McGee and other scholars (e.g., Connelly, Condit, Ewalt, Gutierrez, Lucaites, Rogers Franklin and Rogers Mary Ann, Strassen) have employed the ideograph for analysis of domestic examples and issues. I look at how the ideograph is deployed in both a revolutionary (amidst governmental upheaval) context, and in Egypt, in an international location where culture, religion, and gender roles interact in different ways than the US. Second, while scholars have analyzed "virginity" as a construct (e.g., Bersamin, Carpenter, Colton, Loughlin, Schwarz, Wolf), I argue that it *is* an ideograph

that develops horizontally, vertically, and is culture-bound, as the language we use directly constructs our reality (Rogers, 145). This is particularly true for representations of the vagina, as Wolf indicates, “The way in which any given culture treats the vagina—whether with respect or disrespect, caringly or disparagingly— is a metaphor for how women in general in that place and time are treated” (Kindle Locations 55-56).

McGee indicates that it is important to define what *is* an ideograph (p.15). Failure to demarcate the rhetorical boundary creates a hollowing out of the ideograph, because if it is everything, then its potential for advanced theorization is destroyed. McGee argues that an ideograph is:

- (1) An ordinary language term found in political discourse.
- (2) It is a high-order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal.
- (3) It warrants the use of power,
- (4) excuses behavior and belief which might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or antisocial, and
- (5) guides behavior and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable. (p.15)

I argue that the SCAF’s usage of “virginity” meets all five requirements. “Virginity” is a term often evoked in the SCAF’s political discourse. “Virginity” is also a political term used by conservative, religious, and bourgeois society to instruct women about how to act. It operates as the “high-order” abstraction because of its contextual usage. The deployment of “virginity” by the military means more than the material question, “Have these women had sex?” but implies something about their personal character. The usage of the term “virginity” is associated with notions of purity, piety, and innocence (Wolf, Kindle Location 2064). “Virginity” also warrants “collective commitment” to and “ill-

defined normative goal.” The SCAF creates identification with the larger Egyptian public through the use of the term “virginity” by upholding the view that women in the “collective commitment” should constitute herself in a particular manner that adhere to patriarchal subservient characterizations. The SCAF’s deployment of the term “virginity” justified the power deployed upon the female protestors, in the form of the “virginity” tests. It also “excused” the individuals who committed the tests in two ways. Their use of “virginity” allowed them to posit themselves as the protectors of Egyptian civil society removing the “bad women” from the streets. It also excused them on a juridical level, as all parties (who committed the tests) were found innocent. Lastly, it posited the SCAF as a benevolent actor. The deployment of “virginity” tests allowed the SCAF to rearticulate their position as the institution that upholds the values of the Egyptian culture.

The ideograph also operates within meta-narratives. Condit and Lucaites note, “narratives are the storied forms of public discourse that extend the network of a community’s public vocabulary by structuring the particular relationships between and among various characterizations” (p. 7-8). Therefore, the larger the narrative the ideograph of “virginity” is rooted in, the more concretely the characterizations and tropes that are being operated are solidified. In the case of the virginity tests, the larger narrative is one at the intersection of religion, patriarchy, and high society. The women being deemed as “non-virgins” evoked a narrative of the dirty and heathenish women, who upsets their cultural codes and standards causing societal denigration.

Condit and Lucaites argue that there are two types of actors in these narratives, cultural-typal and counter-cultural. They claim (in the context of American civil rights leaders Martin Luther King and Malcolm X) that both cultural-typal and counter-cultural

rhetorical strategies provide the means to create a new political discourse. I argue, however, that Condit and Lucaites' use of cultural-typal and counter-cultural rhetoric is contextual. Condit and Lucaites analyze a culture where the cultural-type rhetor has the ability to use discursive agency. In Ibrahim's case, she cannot act culturally as she would be forced to submit and be silenced by the patriarchal state. The counter-cultural rhetorical strategy describes the discourse Ibrahim used in her YouTube video.

Discussing the counter-cultural type, Lucaites and Condit note that, "those rhetors who introduce new – and thus culturally unauthorized – characterizations and narratives to the public vocabulary and who challenge existing characterizations and narratives are masters of counter-cultural rhetoric" (p. 8). Ibrahim acts counter-culturally to complicate the hegemonic narrative. Her universalist discourse, in arguing that this could happen to any other girl, simultaneously queues a larger narrative of justice and directly stands against the hegemonic narrative of her own culture.

Ibrahim's discourse, however, functions dualistically as it *is* cultural-typal within the on-going revolution. Her counter-narrative is situated to interrogate traditional institutional forms of oppression (virginity tests), which would resonate with an Egyptian public that revolted against Mubarak. For a cultural-typal rhetor, "already has culturally authorized characterizations and narratives in place which link and support the community's key values" (Condit and Lucaites, p. 14). Her discourse is situated to "challenge" what culturally constituted an Egyptian woman, while simultaneously queuing "authorized" characterizations of revolution.

Diachronic and Synchronic Analysis

An ideographical study must evaluate both the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of the terminology (McGee, p.15). I analyze how “virginity” is operationalized in both frames of evaluation. A synchronic analysis views an “event” through a neo-Aristotelian framework with particular attention paid to the performative dynamic of the speech (Black). My analysis begins with Ibrahim’s YouTube video, as the response to the exigence (Bitzer) created by the virginity tests. I analyze the specific content of Ibrahim’s discourse, in her video, using the theoretical work of Condit in her essay on “universalism” in argumentation to discuss the strategies Ibrahim employs to create a rupture in the dominant metanarrative (The role of how a “good woman” should act). Her deployment of universalism creates a counter-cultural narrative that finds identification (Burke) with the Egyptian people. The way she galvanized the people to create motivation for a court trial was done through claims such as, “this could have happened to any other girl” (00:19), when she speaks about her regular life (00:28-35), and when she recounts her childhood assignments in class (50-1:10). Condit’s work on universalism analyzes the discourse used by the abolitionists in the South during the civil rights era (p. 1). She concludes, “We might expect similar outcomes under similar circumstances to other controversies” (p. 16). My thesis discusses the case study of Ibrahim’s video for a “similar outcome,” and shows that universalization in public argumentation is also an Egyptian phenomena, as Ibrahim’s discourse, in her YouTube video, used a universal rhetoric to galvanize the Egyptian people. Ibrahim’s response in a purely synchronic analysis might be viewed as positive, as it resulted in international and public attention, but would ultimately be deemed a failure, as there were no corrective actions taken at first against the virginity tests.¹

¹ Virginity tests have been described as a patriarchal practice, by parents and husbands that suspect their

Diachronically, however, the reverse is true. When studying Ibrahim's response (posting of the YouTube video), in contrast to the ideographical use of "virginity" deployed by the Egyptian military, I argue that she is able to reclaim agency against the hegemonic patriarchal institution of the state. Through the introduction of a discourse based upon "equality" for all women, she provides a language/framework for others to join the fight against patriarchy, regardless of the outcome of the virginity test trial. A diachronic analysis looks at the cultural tropes where ideology resides, and attempts to formulate how Egyptian formal responses to "virginity" have become conditioned through religious, patriarchal, and bourgeois rules and standards of behavior.

A diachronic analysis requires an historical or vertical interpretation of discourse (McGee, 16). A historical evaluation is also a necessity to avoid the trap of synchronically analyzing the "other" from one's own socio-epistemological sphere. As Condit notes, "We simply cannot say the 'same things' to different audiences because different audiences take the 'same words' to mean different things" (p. 15). Edward Said wrote about the construction of the oriental other in his 1978 book, *Orientalism*. Said argues that the way the West constructs its epistemology of the "Orient" is rooted in a Western understanding that not only misinterprets "the Orient" (motivations, culture, etc...) but also otherizes "the Orient" as something of a lesser/inferior being, as a

daughter(s)/wife(s) of having sex before marriage (Ghanim, p.43). Analysis of virginity tests describes diverse opinions of why they are used for upholding traditional cultural ideals, and as a bio-political tool to allow the state more control over its citizen's bodies (Parla, p.66). Virginity tests have been performed in both "Western" countries, particularly by immigration officers on behalf of men who have women arriving for wedlock (e.g., Smith and Marmo, p. 149), and in "Eastern" countries (e.g., Parla, Ghanim). Virginity tests have also "made a comeback" in countries (e.g., South Africa) that encounter HIV/AIDS epidemics (Vincent, p.17). For the scope of this thesis, I analyze the virginity tests as an exigency for an ideograph ("virginity") to function. For a more in-depth analysis of virginity tests see Louise Vincent, "Virginity testing in South-Africa: Re-traditioning the postcolony," Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo, "Uncovering the 'Virginity Testing' Controversy in the National Archives: The Intersectionality of Discrimination in British Immigration History," Ayse Parsla, "The 'Honor' of the State: Virginity Examinations in Turkey."

Western epistemology assumes itself as the correct ontological stance in the world (p. 2-3). In his book on American Orientalism, Douglas Little identifies about United States hermeneutical deployment of the Orient:

That intellectual shorthand, reflected in everything from feature films and best-selling novels to political cartoons and popular magazines, has had a profound impact on Main Street and in the nation's capital. Over the years the public and policymakers in the United States have frequently employed what historian Michael Hunt has termed a "hierarchy of race" in dealing with what used to be called the Third World. (10)

Little's quote implicates all knowledge production based upon Orientalism. Orientalism is so pervasive that even seemingly trivial things, like political cartoons, have ramifications for how policymakers craft their orientation towards "the Orient." This has ramifications for academic work that pertains to "the Orient," as Said has indicated, "Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist (3)." In my thesis, I analyze the ideograph of "virginity" within its historical context, which allows me to avoid the trap of reproducing an epistemologically flawed notion of "virginity." Using Huntington's theory of the "clash of civilizations," Daniel Wallace posits that, "religion reflects society's deepest impulses, its defining values, and its motivating forces; and it promotes a world governed by conflicts that ultimately are irreconcilable" (Wallace, p. 519). The act of tracing the historical dimensions that created the conditions for the present may create a better epistemological starting point for research, to engage in discussions about "the Other." I

argue that a diachronic analysis provides a space for consubstantiality (Burke) and understanding between cultures, as systems of power become identifiable and thus open to critique.

Conclusion

During the Egyptian protests of March 2011, a grave human rights abuse occurred. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces performed virginity tests on seventeen female protestors. Justifying the tests, the SCAF deploys what I argue is an ideograph that appeals to larger notions of the “role of the woman,” which is inexorably tied to patriarchy and religion. The case study of Ibrahim, and the female protestors, provides fertile ground to advance scholarship on the ideograph (McGee), as the Egyptian revolution is one of the first political revolutions to exist in a technologically savvy society.

Ibrahim’s discourse, through her YouTube video, used a cyber voice (Watts and Mitra), based in universal argumentation (Condit) that identified this “could happen to anyone” (00:19). Ibrahim inserted a discourse into an Egyptian public space that had previously been demarcated by the status quo’s patriarchal framework for men only. Ibrahim created a counter-cultural narrative (Condit and Lucaites) that challenged the larger narratives and produced a way to confront her oppression. Ibrahim complicated the politics of “virginity.”

In the next chapter, I evaluate how the ideograph functions synchronically. First, I analyze the SCAF’s defense of the virginity tests, and their deployment of “virginity” to justify their positioning. I look at the way the SCAF communicates their justification to the public, and the reasons why a majority of the public would be accepting of the

SCAF's claims. I also analyze the ideograph diachronically, in particular, how the Qur'an constructs a particular way for the Egyptian people to interpret "virginity." The third chapter focuses on Ibrahim's response to the virginity tests. This chapter analyzes how her YouTube video complicates the Egyptian people's understanding of "virginity." I analyze the way in which she promotes social change through the discourse of her YouTube video. I conclude this thesis with a discussion of the implications of my analysis. Ideograph studies should take place in an international arena as they can provide a political roadmap for how and why a public reacts. Most work has focused on ideographs that happen within the United States, while my work expands the field to the Middle East, specifically Egypt. "Virginity," as an ideograph, illustrates the ways in which patriarchy intersect with religion in the 21st century to form new modes of oppression.

CHAPTER TWO:

Politics of “Virginity”

A Virgin by Any Other Name: A Synchronic Analysis

“A woman’s body should not be used as a tool for intimidation, and nobody should have their dignity violated.” - Samira Ibrahim

Egypt was a country stuck in turmoil after Mubarak’s disposal. For thirty years, the country had been led by a man who characterized his social position as the traditional “patriarch” in the classical formation of the family (Hafez, p. 38-39). In this family formation, disenfranchisement mixed with “limited” agency and political mobility contained a female’s autonomy (Hafez, p. 39). The overthrowing of Mubarak was rooted in a symbolic gesture for all oppressed voices to have agency and political autonomy in Egypt. However, As Sherine Hafez notes:

Although women made up 20 to 50 percent of the protesters in Tahrir Square, not surprisingly, the events immediately following the uprising of 2011 revealed that women would not be part of the political deliberations between various contending parties and the Supreme Military Council in charge of the country.
(p.38)

Lack of political support for women in Egypt signified a new form of patriarchy that found its place inside the revolution. The new liberal patriarchy was not germane to democracy in Egypt, but a more universal phenomenon.

As Susan Moller Okin argues in her work on how liberal democratic social institutions provide space for patriarchal multicultural relativism to emerge, “most cultures have as one of their principal aims the control of women by men” (Okin, p.5).

Okin's discussion opens and challenges academic dialogues about the ways in which patriarchy continues to operate in the twenty first century. Her work argues that all cultures are inherently gendered and we must critically interrogate how social formations can "subordinate" a woman's autonomy (p.14).

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) emerged as the new patriarch in Egypt. They conducted the virginity tests on the female protesters in order to stifle their revolutionary and political potential. McGee's (p.15) work on the ideograph illustrates how language may operate to excuse, in this particular case, the SCAF's use of "power," and "warrant" their "anti-social" behavior of virginity tests. The SCAF rhetorically utilized the inherent gender norms in Egyptian culture (Okin), through the use of literal and symbolic reference to "virginity" in their public justifications for the virginity tests.

Viewing "virginity" as an ideograph, I illustrate the "recursive relationship" of the continual cultural subordination of women (Lucaites and Condit, p.7). As Eric Connelly writes in his work on ideographs and silence, "Ideographs are central to the structure of the culture they constitute, and, thus, can sometimes change the perception of a rhetorical situation when used" (p.240). My analysis of the ideograph of "virginity" explains the linkages between gendered culture and the ideology that sustains it. As McGee notes, "an analysis of ideographic usages in political rhetoric, I believe, reveals interpenetrating systems or 'structures' of public motives" (p.4). Using the ideograph to frame the SCAF's defense of the virginity tests illustrates their attempts to reify a patriarchal order.

The first half of this chapter analyzes how "virginity" functioned horizontally in the SCAF's discourse. I analyze how patriarchy operated in the formation of new social

relations. The SCAF's discourse constituted them as the new patriarch and stalled the female protestors' attempt for autonomy. Their use of "virginity" is rooted in a patriarchal message that placed Ibrahim and the other female protestors in a subservient role. The second half of the chapter analyzes "virginity" vertically. I argue that "virginity" is stationed in Islamic narratives that created the characterizations of how a woman *should* act. The Egyptian public would judge Ibrahim and the other female's performance of these characterizations if they accept the SCAF's use of "virginity."

The cultural narrative that best explains the characterizations of Ibrahim and the other female protestors, in the SCAF's discourse, is a traditionalist reading of the Qur'an's conceptions of a "virgin" woman. The SCAF utilizes a "role" for Ibrahim that is similar to the "role" originally described in Islam. This "role" forces her to be either a "virgin" who is "pure" and "naïve" (Roark), and wouldn't dissent against the patriarch (SCAF), or to be a flawed woman who doesn't deserve the empathy of the Egyptian public.

After the virginity tests occurred, the SCAF's response (in interviews) was rooted in a similar theme, to protect the male soldiers from allegations of rape against women who were not "virgins." This public argument provides insight into cultural standards of the "role" of a girl/woman. A female who is not a "virgin" *should* refrain from protest as she would lie about rape claims to unfairly slander the SCAF. Not only does the statement utilize the patriarchal trope of the "lying woman" (Bennett and Yarbrough, p.629), it also means women who have lost their "virginity" do not constitute valid voices in raising dissent against the SCAF.

Being a “virgin” and dissenting is a more complicated relationship that reveals cultural gendered norms. A woman who normatively fits the SCAF’s description of “virgin” would not be a political or revolutionary agent. Valentine Moghadam characterizes this relationship in traditional Egyptian families. She writes, “it is she who plays the affective, ‘expressive’ role of nurturance and support, and it is the husband who plays the ‘instrumental’ role of earning the family's keep and maintaining discipline” (“Patriarchy in Transition: Women and the Changing Family in the Middle East”). In the SCAF’s use of “virginity,” an Egyptian citizen that accepts the political “virgin” signifies a rejection of part of their Egyptian culture. The “affective” role of family upkeep would prioritize the home and leave the “instrumental” political action to the husband. The SCAF’s use of “virginity” utilizes the cultural trope of the subservient woman. A male protestor is emasculated if he is willing to accept the “political virgin,” as she is not serving her subservient cultural role. The rhetoric in the SCAF’s response thus keeps both “virgins” and “non-virgins” out of being culturally acceptable political agents.

“Virginity,” as an ideograph, operates as a controlling rhetoric to demarcate *how* Ibrahim and the other female protestors *should* act. As McGee argues, “the end product of a states insistence on some degree of conformity in behavior and belief, I suggest, is a *rhetoric* of control, a system of persuasion presumed to be effective on the whole community” (p.6). The sovereign state institution in Egypt (SCAF), attempts to keep Ibrahim and the other women from being able to protest by controlling how the Egyptian public would view the dissenting “virgin.”

The ideograph clusters of “virginity” illustrate the gendered normative interpretations of the term. As McGee notes, “An ideograph, however, is always

understood in its relation to another; it is defined tautologically by using other terms in its cluster” (p.14). A cluster analysis of “virginity” functions in a “horizontal” framework, which evaluates how the ideograph is being contextually used in a discourse. The SCAF claims that the women were “in tents” with men, drugs, and weapons, and therefore could not be “virgins.” As Naomi Wolf indicates that “virgins” are traditionally and culturally defined as “pure,” “good” (p.131), and “naïve” (p.64) women. The SCAF’s use of “virginity” connotes all of the above terms. Ibrahim and the other protestors could not be “pure” as there were drugs, weapons present, and they were sleeping with men, they were not “good” women as they were defying their gender roles and no longer staying subservient to the new patriarch, and they couldn’t have been “naïve” as they were “assaulting” the ruling patriarchal institution.

The ideograph of “virginity” in the SCAF’s justification indicates that this is the trajectory for the “new” Egyptian woman, if the Egyptian population accepts Ibrahim and the other female protestors. As McGee indicates about ideographs, they “refer to and invoke a sense of ‘the people’” (p.15). The “people” constituting power of “virginity” is true in Egypt, as Liat Kozma indicates in discussing a public record of a rape trial:

In this process, as Khaled Fahmy argues, a girl's loss of virginity was no longer a private or even a religious matter: "It was the city itself that was being defended, and it was the security of public life per se that was at stake. Both the *shari'a* court and the councils of adjudication were not concerned with "rape" or with sexual assault per se, but only as far as a woman's virginity was at stake. (p.58)

Kozma illustrates that “virginity” in Egypt has historically been more important than the material female body.² The protection of a female populous’ “virginity” to uphold patriarchal gender relations of how a woman should act, justifies the SCAF’s actions of stripping down Ibrahim and the other female protestors to clarify that these women were *not* the traditional cultural females. The SCAF, in using “virginity” as a demarcating standard of womanhood, argues that the Egyptian public should not care what happened to these women, as they did not constitute the accepted definition of “woman.”

When a culture goes through a transformative period, institutions that protect the status quo can potentially use old signifying terms to re-galvanize collective commitment to the past. As McGee indicates, “society will inflict penalties on those who use ideographs in heretical ways and on those who refuse to respond appropriately to claims on their behavior warranted through the agency of ideographs” (p.15-16). The SCAF commits a rhetorical gamble by using “virginity.” Conceptualizing the strength of “virginity” inside of Egyptian culture illustrates the force of the social narratives that maintain the persuasive appeal of Egyptian cultural conceptions of “virginity.” The older and more resilient the narrative highlights the stories which are the most pertinent. An historic look at Egyptian culture illustrates a source of highly controversial narratives, the Qur’an.

A Virgin Diachrony

The historical operationalizations of an ideograph are important to know for what is being signified when an individual speaks within an ideology. As McGee indicates, “each ideograph has a history, an etymology, such that current meanings of the term are

² This example shows an Egyptian only context, however, these claims aren’t rooted in only Egypt. Many patriarchal examples highlighting the role of the woman’s importance being subservient to men can be found in all cultures.

linked to past usage of it diachronically. The Diachronic structure of an ideograph establishes the parameters, the category, of its meaning” (p.16). While all language functions in a similar fashion, ideology is unique as it implies a “collective commitment” to an “equivocal and ill-defined normative goals” (p.15). While the goal of patriarchy is to continue the hierarchy of men over women, it exists through narratives to justify its existence to socially aware publics. The Egyptian public must have a warrant as to why it allowed the SCAF to act unethically upon Ibrahim and the other women. Investigating the narratives that construct “virginity” is insightful to understand how Ibrahim’s constitutive characterizations were created.

Narratives are the foundation for the tropes that operate in a synchronic analysis. As Condit and Lucaites argue, “narratives are the storied forms of public discourse that extend the network of a community’s public vocabulary by structuring the particular relationships between and among various characterizations” (p.7-8). The larger the Egyptian cultural narrative “virginity” is placed within, the more concretely it solidifies the characterizations of actors. It also functions to tie the agency of the actor to the cultural characterizations. In the case of Ibrahim and the virginity tests, she is viewed in the SCAF’s justification as a culturally unacceptable woman who erodes the maintenance of Egyptian culture as she acts outside the “character” of an Egyptian “virgin.”

The main historical narrative that evokes contemporary characterization of “virginity” in Egypt is Islam. First, As Wallace Daniel identifies, “religion reflects society’s deepest impulses, its defining values, and its motivating forces; and it promotes a world governed by conflicts that ultimately are irreconcilable” (p.511). This is a logical relationship as the mainstream religion’s (Christianity, Islam, Judaism) fundamental goal

is the ethical orientation of populations for their spiritual good. Second, a majority of the recently elected officials, in Egypt, are of the Islamist Freedom and Justice party, which argues that religion and Egyptian democracy cannot be separated from one another. Their election provides evidence of the cultural importance of Islam to contemporary Egyptian politics.

Viewing Islam as the narrative that constructs the power of “virginity” explains the animosity that is held against Ibrahim by the SCAF. In violating the way in which a “virgin” should act, Ibrahim and the other protestors were assaulting the spiritual dimension of Egyptian culture. A diachronic analysis of traditionalist interpretations of Islam explains why a majority of the Egyptian public did not backlash at the oppressive “power” used by the SCAF against Ibrahim and the other women, as ideographs dictate a “mass conscious” response. Understanding why the Egyptian public did not dissent against the virginity tests as a human rights abuse allows Western cultures to understand why the event occurred instead of justifying assertions of Egypt’s cultural “backwardness.”

A diachronic conceptualization of “virginity” avoids the trap of synchronically analyzing “the Other” from one’s own socio-epistemological sphere. It would be easy for those of us in the West to condemn the Egyptian population of their archaic treatment of their women without investigating how we could have a similar response as the Egyptian public, particularly because Christianity’s track record with women and conservative interpretations of religion are all too similar (Okin, p.5). Knowing “the Other’s” culture as an outsider typically relies upon mediated discourse produced for a particular political reasoning. Deeper reflections of how events and terminology have historically unfolded

protects against stereotypical framing from another cultural standpoint. As Condit notes, “We simply cannot say the ‘same things’ to different audiences because different audiences take the ‘same words’ to mean different things” (Condit, p.15). The understanding of the ways in which Western media has historically constructed “the Oriental Other” has dramatically expanded post Edward Said’s 1978 book *Orientalism*. James Tyner and Stian Rice argue about current uses of Orientalism in the event that Western media have named the “Arab Spring”:

“The Arab” is constructed as a person with unshakeable individual faith, but delinquent in the political, social, and technological arts: A person willing to commit to violence before dialogue; a person whose actions in the face of adversity tread that fine line between courage and stupidity. This postcolonial narrative is not limited to the Libyan rebel, but finds traction in the portrayals of both protesters and security forces in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Syria, where protests invariably start with “violence” and security crackdowns end in “brutality.” (p.131)

Locating the historical construction of “virginity” in Islam highlights why the Egyptian public did not prevent or protest against the virginity tests at first. It allows for the challenging of the orientalist framing of “that’s just how they act,” and locates Egyptians as a people that are acting in defense of their culture.

Conservative religious cultural defenses happen in most cultures. For example, Jason Horowitz notes of the recent United States republican primary about Michelle Bachman:

“He is her godly husband,” said Peter Bachmann, Dr. Bachmann’s oldest brother, who lives on the family dairy farm across the eastern border in Wisconsin. “The husband is to be the head of the wife, according to God.” It is a philosophy that Michele Bachmann echoed to congregants of the Living Word Christian Center in 2006, when she stated that she pursued her degree in tax law only because her husband had told her to. “The Lord says: Be submissive, wives. You are to be submissive to your husbands,” she said. (p.2)

Drawing connections to the cultural importance of religious discourses and narratives, such as how a “virgin” should act, provides evidence as to how discourse can be used to galvanize “collective commitment” to archaic understandings of all religion.

Traditionalist Interpretation

The traditionalist view of the Qur’an is critical to understand the intersections of “virginity” and the role of what a “good woman” *should* do in contemporary Egyptian culture. As Dallas M. Roark notes, “The life of women in Muslim countries today cannot be understood apart from reflecting on the Qur’an first, and then hadiths (traditions) and laws that have been created due to the influence of the Qur’an” (“Women in the Qur’an”). Synchronic interpretations of the Qur’an justify the SCAF’s treatment of Ibrahim and the other female protesters. Various scholars have interpreted specific parts of the Qur’an that deal with how a “woman” should act (Hamdani, Roark, Shirkat, Syed), and have attempted to reinterpret the meaning of the narratives (Gade, Reynolds, Wadud). These scholars direct the sections of the Qur’an I evaluate.

In the Qur'an, upon entering heaven, a man "will be reclining on thrones lined up, and We will marry them to fair women with large, [beautiful] eyes" (52:20).³ This translation is emblematic of most verses in the Qur'an that view heaven from a man's perspective, as there is no mention of what a woman will receive upon entering (Roark, "Women in the Qur'an). George Sale's translation identifies that "fair" is coded to mean "virginity" (p. 506). Thus the Qur'an illuminates "virginity" as an "ideographical cluster" for "fairness." Synonyms of "fair" include terms such as "just," "equity," "honest," "fine," "beautiful," and "clear," in other words, perfect. The term signifies that a woman's role is to be so immaculate that she becomes synonymous with the divine itself.⁴

"Virginity" is also directly associated with heaven. When a male makes his way to his throne, he is rewarded with a virgin. In this instance, "virginity" is directly synonymous with heavenliness. Sura (56:22-23) brings mention of women waiting with "the likenesses of pearls well-protected."⁵ This symbolization of virginity as something that must be protected signifies that it is something we must "fight" for, justifying violent reactions to threats that encroach on the sanctity of "virginity." The physical response of violence to threats to "virginity" justifies the violence conducted on Ibrahim and the other women who may "deserve" their torture in a world where they threatened the purity of

³ Qur'an Translated by Sahih International, Date Accessed May, 7, 2012, quran.com/52

⁴ Reflecting on the immaculate "role" of the woman in the Qur'an complicates the feminist idea of "woman as goddess" that doesn't need men to awaken their female sexuality. As Naomi Wolf indicates, "These two cultures viewed the vagina as life-giving and sacred, and, as I noted, they believed that balance and health for men depended upon treating the vagina— and women— extremely well sexually" (p. 239). These claims of treating the feminine as the goddess maybe re-appropriated to uphold traditionalist standards of the women's societal role to be the "godly" figure. The "goddess" becomes a figure that easily recodifies into a larger patriarchal structure or narrative.

⁵ Qur'an Translated by Sahih International

“virginity.” There are many more examples within the Qur’an presenting the argument that “good women” are virgins and fully subservient to men (Roark, “Women in the...”).

Questions of how women should represent themselves to a public are also addressed in the Qur’an. Dallas Roark notes a patriarchal justification in the Qur’an for a woman’s appearance:

We have observed many Muslim cultures in which women cover themselves almost completely. The inspiration for this is in the Qur’an. Sura 33:59 declares, ‘O Prophet, say to thy wives and daughters and the believing women, that they draw their veils close to them; so it is likelier they will be known, and not hurt’ (“Women in the...”).

Sura (33:59) argues the veil is practically a virginity belt. It is provided as a defensive mechanism to fend off male aggression towards conquering the woman’s “virginity,” thus providing additional evidence as proof that it is the woman’s sole responsibility to protect her “virginity,” alleviating all male responsibility. Under this interpretation we can witness the SCAF’s defensive justification of claiming the women were in “tents with men,” actively placing themselves in a compromising position in which they were not able to defend themselves against masculine aggression. Another verse which indicates that a woman’s “virginity” is something she must solely protect is Sura 24:30-31, which identifies:

Say to the believers, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts; that is purer for them. God is aware of the things they work, and say to the believing women, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts, and

reveal not their adornment save such as is outward and let them cast their veils over their bosoms, and not reveal their adornment save to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husband's father, or their sons, or their sister's sons, or their women, or what their right hand own, or such men as attend them, not having sexual desire, or children who have not yet attained knowledge of women's private parts; nor let them stamp their feet, so that their hidden ornaments may be known.⁶ (Roark, "Women in the...")

The displacing of responsibility solely of the female alleviates men of their role in oppressive patriarchal practice, justifying "virginity tests" as the women weren't "good" enough to place themselves in strategically better positions, making smart and cognizant decisions.

Strict interpretations of the Qur'an also justify physical violence in response to disobedience. Sura 4:34 provides guidance as to what a man should do to their disobedient wife:

Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance – [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if

⁶ Translation for this verse is by A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, New York: The Macmillian Co, 1967

they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. (Roark, “Women in the Qur’an)⁷

The highest authority of all, God, sanctioned the men and women that conducted violence in the virginity tests. A distinction occurs based upon the woman’s status as a “girl” or a “virgin.” As Colin Roark notes:

While striking a married woman should only be done by a husband, if the woman isn’t married “and “guilty of ‘indecent’ (Arberry) ‘whoredom’ (Sale) and four witnesses can be produced against them, they are to be detained in their houses until ‘death take them or God appoints for them a way.’” (Woman in the...)

Ibrahim notes, in her video, that the SCAF categorized the women into two separate camps as both “girls” and “women” (10:40), based upon their “virginity” and marital status. The SCAF was operating under the religious characterization of treating the women differently based upon their “virginity.”

Rationalist Interpretation

There are two main methods of interpreting “virginity” in the Qur’an, as a traditionalist or as rationalist. As Wallace Daniel argues,

The Rationalists, who believed that religious truth must be accessed through human reason, and the Traditionalists, who saw reason as unstable and claimed that eternal truth could only be known through divine revelation. To the Rationalists, all knowledge, including religious knowledge, came mainly through use of reason, through the mind, which gave human beings the freedom to act, to

⁷ Translated by Sahih International, *The Qur’an*, 4:34.

choose between good and evil, belief and unbelief, and “what is sweet and what is bitter.” In this school of thought, the individual had much of the responsibility for his salvation. (p. 517)

A traditionalist would view the characterizations of “virginity” in the Qur’an as the ultimate truth, and maintain their cultural standards of how a “virgin” should act through a strict interpretation of the narratives in Islam. The rationalists would view the meta-narratives in use, and interpret the Qur’an more holistically to reflect 21st century cultural changes. The rationalists would reflect on Muhammad’s pluralistic teachings and would care for, “the poor and the oppressed,” as Muhammad “called for an end to exploitation and he excoriated the practice of usury and the shameful contracts that enslaved people and reduced them to misery” (Daniel, p. 515). The traditionalist and rationalist binary demonstrates how the Egyptian people view the characterizations of the “virgin,” in the SCAF’s defensive statements pertaining to the virginity tests.

Traditionalist interpretations have currently garnered political support in Egypt. First, the Freedom and Justice party is a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, a group of Islamists that wish to place religion into political life. The Brotherhood originally gained political support after Western colonialism and Christianity were viewed as assaulting Islam (Daniel, p.517). The recent success of the Brotherhood in Egyptian political life reveals that a majority of the Egyptian public was supportive of a traditionalist religious institution. The characterizations that are employed in the Qur’an on “virginity” thus shape the way in which the Egyptian population views Ibrahim and the other female protestors actions.

Explaining the rhetorical power of the traditionalists, Wallace Daniel notes that they “divided the Muslim community into two groups: the ‘people of heaven,’ who held their views of the divine Muslim community, and the ‘people of hell’, who did not” (p. 517). The “us versus them” rhetoric deployed by this community placed the “fire and brimstone” of religion into Islam. As Austin Tutt argues of old English texts that may uphold Christian and Pagan values, “at the same time as the rhetoric of fear establishes these rigid lines, the fear expressed in these texts often reflects anxiety about the stability of the traditions and practices that create them” (“The destroyer of souls: The rhetoric of fear in Old English literature”). Creating a motivation through fear politics shuts down deliberation amongst practitioners of the faith. For Ibrahim and the other protestors, the SCAF’s rhetoric attempts to create a similar silencing, or as McGee would indicate, “excusing” of public thought and reaction.

The goal of this chapter was to answer the question, how does “virginity” function rhetorically in Egypt, as deployed during the virginity tests. I argue that it functions as a patriarchal tool to alleviate blame on the SCAF by engendering a larger religious narrative that holds significant value to many in Egypt. Understanding the SCAF’s rhetoric as based on the ideograph of virginity, I argue that the SCAF is able to “excuse” their “anti-social” behavior by claiming that the women “weren’t virgins in the first place,” warranting their use of “power” on the female protestors to the Egyptian public. This standard for “virginity” applies solely to women in this context. It also places the political “virgin” in the inherent paradox. She is not able to assert her agency against the status quo because she would be violating the way a “virgin” *should* act. The political “virgin” becomes an impossibility based upon this structural system of religion and on an

Egyptian mass consciousness rooted in traditionalist interpretations of Islam. This also explains women's lack of success in recent parliamentary elections (Hafez, p.38).

Current traditionalist success in Egypt provides evidence that the limited backlash that occurred after the virginity tests were acceptable to a populous majority. The Egyptian's who accepted the SCAF's discourse would adhere to a synchronic interpretation of the Qur'an. The traditionalists are also the reason why particular scholars view Islam as "oppressive to women" (Moghissi, p.76). The traditionalists attempt to change the foundations of civil society back to their "good old days," which uphold flawed archaic notions of a woman's role in society. My investigation of the Qur'an provides the religious background to the understanding of women's place in Egyptian society and into the contemporary Egyptian public consciousness. In the next chapter, I evaluate how Ibrahim spoke to complicate the SCAF's use of "virginity." I contend that she created a counter-narrative, which is placed in a universalizing public argument to create a persuasive message.

CHAPTER THREE:

Reconceptualizing a “Virgin”

Ibrahim created a discourse that complicated the SCAF's use of “virginity” and the narratives and characterizations that were associated with their justification of the virginity tests. She achieved this on three separate levels. First, I attempt to answer the question of *why* Ibrahim spoke, so that we can understand her motivations. I argue that she wished to have her voice (Watts) publically authorized, so that the Egyptian public could hear her story and ensure that the revolution continued successfully. Second, I look at *where* she spoke from, and argue that it was from a counter-cultural location that created a revolutionary discourse. A cultural-typal discourse is problematic in a patriarchal system as it implies that a female “should” be quiet, however, the ethos of the revolution allowed her voice to operate as a culturaltypal discourse although Ibrahim was a counter-cultural rhetor. Lastly, I answer *how* she spoke, or her means of persuasion. Ibrahim created and produced a counter-narrative that increased the fidelity of her claims and detracted from the SCAF's story, as their account relied purely on abstract symbolic cultural terms. Once her story gained credibility, she made the Egyptian audience empathetic to her cause through universal rhetoric (Condit), letting the Egyptian populous imagine themselves, family, or friends in Ibrahim's situation, thus galvanizing the populous for political change.

Voicing Dissent

“They can't talk, they can't utter a word.” – Samira Ibrahim

The Egyptian revolution, part of the larger Arab Revolutions, had largely been trumpeted as democracies' inevitable triumph over authoritarianism, both in intellectual circles (Lynch, Hanau, Hasan, Kabli, Panara, and Wilson) and in popular news media (Aljazeera, CNN, CNBC, and Fox News). This framing continues as Fareed Zakaria, one of CNN's most renowned journalists, writes about the "messy" nature of the revolutions, "It takes a while to consolidate. But for the first time in perhaps a millennium, the Arab people are taking charge of their own affairs. So let's cut them some slack. It's only been a year⁸ ("Zakaria: Democracy takes time"). However, the "slack" that is "cut" legitimizes the oppression that Ibrahim and the sixteen other female protestors faced during the transition, and allows for patriarchy to reposition itself into a democratic Egypt.

Marc Lynch writes about the potential dangers in his book, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (2012), "the Arab liberation may give birth to a resurgent populism focused on identity, resentment, and externally directed rage" (pp. 22-23). The Egyptian virginity tests can be viewed within the frame of "resurgent populism," more specifically, as a patriarchal means of silencing women's revolt in Egypt. The SCAF's attempt to remove the feminine voice is incompatible with an egalitarian democracy, and counterintuitive to the impetus of the Arab Revolutions (Lynch, p.7).

After the traumatic event of the virginity tests, Ibrahim argued that nobody (Egyptian citizens, Media, Judicial system) listened to her story (22:00). She was functionally voiceless to communicate her concerns about the status of the revolution and her anxieties of the military continuing the practice of virginity tests. Ibrahim found a

⁸ I acknowledge the use of paternalistic discourse Zakaria uses when speaking about the "Orient," however, an analysis of Orientalism in the Arab Revolutions is beyond the scope of this project.

forum, in YouTube, that was able to reach a large audience (domestic and international) and created the conditions for social change. Ibrahim was able to constitute her voice into the larger spirit of the revolution. Eric King Watts identifies that academics have largely been concerned with an individual's voice, but have differing interpretations of the terminology (Watts, p.179). Recent operationalizations of the term are used to describe anything from the ability to create a signifying sound to authentic communication with transformative potential (Watts, p.179-181). As Watts indicates, "If 'voice' is to be meaningful to rhetorical studies it has to be capable of salvaging the *communal* features of discourse for the challenge to rhetoric over the horizon is to find new ways to 'keep it real' in a fast-approaching virtual reality" (Watts, p.192). Ibrahim's use of YouTube provided a "communal" discourse that kept "it real." Her video was situated as a public argument for the best interests of the Egyptian people.

Ibrahim argued that the "revolution" is dying (21:00), thus losing its voice and created an exigency out of the "virginity tests" to launch a new interrogation of Egyptian authoritarianism. Watts indicates that voice is both a "pre-discursive, physiological phenomenon bound to the human body," which "announces one's immediate relation to, and inseparability from, the world of others" that gives way to "cognition" (Mitra and Watts, p.481). Ibrahim's video created "cognition" on the virginity tests to garner enough commitment for a trial. Her video indicated that she was given multiple excuses for not receiving a trial for her complaints against the SCAF (19:10). Only after the production of her YouTube video she received one.

Ibrahim's YouTube video was able to create a coalition by the use of the Internet. As Ananda Mitra and Watts identify, that voice in cyberspace changes the nature of how

power operates, providing room for individuals who have been marginalized to authentically communicate, while redefining the role of those who traditionally control the narrative; as they lose their hegemony on controlled media (Mitra and Watts, p.488). The SCAF lost their ability to control what media was produced about the virginity tests online, which provided Ibrahim an avenue to widely spread her message.

Ibrahim indicated she used the Internet to get her message out since all other media refused to help (22:00), placing the video as a call of conscience (Hyde) to a larger Egyptian audience:

We have to wake people up the revolution is dying. This is the last gasp of the revolution these days. These lawsuits, I'm not scared, not when the revolution is at risk. Everyday revolutionaries are dying. They're eliminating them every day.

(20:51-21:04)

Ibrahim situated the larger Arab Revolutions into a struggle for voice. By arguing that the political stakes of silence was the revolution, Ibrahim's voice was positioned to revive fears in the Egyptian public of a new authoritarian government.

Ibrahim indicated that the revolution has a literal personified voice by clarifying that they're at their "last gasp," showing the "physical" stress that has been put upon the revolution by the hegemonic SCAF. She indicated that the SCAF went further than causing the revolution to gasp; they "eliminated" members of the resistance and caused the ultimate act of silencing, death. In arguing that the deaths of revolutionaries drove her discourse, she placed the phenomenon of voice as one that is greater than death. This rhetorical move indicates the utility of voice as a construct, as it has self-acknowledged

importance for material female bodies, which is innately tied to discussions of voice as it is a “pre-discursive” ontological term (Watts, p.180).

Second, Ibrahim referenced how historically the normative sovereign institutions in Egypt in-authentically asserted voice and failed to provide an answer to the Egyptian people’s criticisms. Ibrahim provided an example of the government’s inauthentic voice when discussing Israel, “No Arab minister has even said anything to the Israelis, even that has never happened” (1:09-1:12). Ibrahim indicated that voice had become a hollow construct from a sovereign standing, justifying a revolutionary ontological stance that would soon engulf the Arab Revolutions, providing additional evidence that the impetus for the revolution was rooted in a struggle for voice. The framing echoes what scholars equate as the impetus of the Arab Revolutions, Mohamed Bouazizi self-immolation (Lynch, p.7). She indicated that raising concerns at the age of fifteen, she was “treated like a child” and was offered a drink by an “educator” instead of a response (1:26). Her instructors also claimed that her voice was not her own in this instance, it was her “family inciting” her (1:50), showing the systemic silencing of voice that occurred throughout Ibrahim’s life.

Ibrahim discussed the arrests that culminated in the virginity tests. She argued that a “decent looking man” told a military council general to let them go because they didn’t have any evidence of the women breaking laws (4:02), but the general refused to hear the claims of the female protestors, not only silencing them, but recreating a new voice for them (3:09). The general proceeded to bring in a new group of women, who Ibrahim indicated, acted “vulgar” toward the soldiers by “insulting” them. The SCAF general positioned the new women in with Ibrahim and the other original female protestors

(4:17). The SCAF brought in women that fit the characterizations of the narrative that they were trying to place on Ibrahim, so that she and the other protestors would look as if they were part of the new “vulgar” group (insulting the soldiers) of women that better fit the SCAF’s narrative of disobedient uncultured women.

Ibrahim indicated that they were told to remain silent (7:07, 7:23, 8:07), noting that there was no space for her voice in their ranks, and that dissention meant the SCAF would “bury them” (7:21). Whenever Ibrahim asserted her voice she was beaten, assaulted, and berated until she complied with the SCAF’s requests. When asking a question about the new photo of disposed Mubarak, she was scolded (7:42). When she requested if they would close the doors and window blinds, once she was told to strip naked, she was beaten (8:49). As the tests were being conducted, she again asked for the window to be closed and a male officer proceeded to enter the room and electrocute her (10:14). She indicated that this whole process was so, “you don’t even think of asking for Egypt’s rights” (11:50).

Ibrahim argued that the voices of the revolution were opposed to the normative existence of the Egyptian state. She indicated that the Military council’s soldiers yelled at Ibrahim, “You’ve ruined the country! What do you want from the country?” (5:36), the soldiers’ resentment of these women was situated in contempt of social change, indicating the feminine voice was the cause of their problems. As Mitra and Watts note, “in a discursive space, power structures are more closely tied to the ability to create a voice than in real life where other factors such as geographic location, military superiority, and financial capital could become the sources of power” (p. 487). The inherent masculine power that the SCAF was used to speaking from in “military

superiority” was interrupted and threatened by Ibrahim and the rest of the female protesters, causing them to lash out. It became a functional competition between voices.

The use of technology was instrumental in the process of communicating Ibrahim’s voice when all other outlets failed. She argued that the other women stayed silent, “because of what they’ve seen” (13:58). Ibrahim indicated that while she refused to remain silent, most individuals, organizations, and institutions ignored her call due to the same fear that silenced the other female protestors. She attempted legal recourse, and “expected the prosecutor to ask me what had happened to me. He should be defending me...I thought I’d speak to him, tell him what happened. But he was like them” (15:26-16:06). She hoped the lawyers representing her would be able to help, but “the lawyers they have for you can’t even talk” (17:57). After she was released from the hospital, she filed two lawsuits and still she received no response (18:36-19:20). Ibrahim then proceeded to ask the media for help, who responded with, “Sorry, but this is the military council! We can’t release your material, or support you. We can stand here in the shadows, while you advance” (21:37-21:50). She tried garnering political support, but “nothing, nobody...nobody helped” (22:00). Ibrahim eventually got people to listen, through the mediated use of YouTube, allowing her to advance her message to the Egyptian public. This was necessary for Ibrahim voice because, “only the people will bring me justice” (22:36). Ibrahim, through her YouTube video, resituated her silenced voice back into where the revolution began, the people and their desire for democracy.

Ibrahim, through the use of cyberspace, was able to form a “cyber-community” that created enough revolutionary motivation to garner a trail. Her discourse was inherently rhetorical as she motivated a public through a persuasive “communal”

argument to care for her cause, albeit the SCAF attempted to subordinate feminine agency by conducting virginity tests. Ibrahim situated her voice into the larger Arab Revolution to re-propel the revolutionary commitment of the Egyptian peoples to fighting institutional forms of oppression, by arguing that the virginity tests were a manifestation of institutional subordination of voice and agency, she is able to cast the SCAF as a silencing apparatus that is similar to Mubarak's authoritarian Egypt.

Virginity and Counter-Cultural Rhetoric

Ibrahim acted as a counter-cultural rhetor who challenged the larger narratives and characterizations the SCAF employed to justify the virginity test. Ibrahim acted as an unapproved feminine voice that disrupted the SCAF's defense for the virginity tests. She was able to obfuscate the SCAF's use of "virginity," by producing a new personal narrative that created new characterizations of her political life. By presenting a counter-narrative, Ibrahim normatively fits into cultural characterizations of an Egyptian woman (Islamic, refers to herself as a girl/"virgin"), while simultaneously being a political agent; she created a more coherent and ethical narrative for the Egyptian public. Speaking as a counter-cultural figure during a revolution meant her discourse simultaneously functioned cultural-typally, which magnified the persuasive appeals of her messages.

Condit and Lucaites' define cultural-typal and counter-cultural rhetors, as they look at "equality" in civil rights discourse through the theoretical framing of the ideograph. Condit and Lucaites write:

Rhetors who successfully rearrange and revivify the culturally established public vocabulary to produce social change are masters of culturetypal rhetoric. Those rhetors who introduce new –and thus culturally unauthorized – characterizations

and narratives to the public vocabulary and who challenge existing characterizations and narratives are masters of counter-cultural rhetoric. (p.8)

Condit and Lucaites argue that it's a "dualistic discourse which acts independently on both sides of a discursive paradox" (p.6). Their use of a "dualistic discourse" presumes multiple discourses are being presented to create persuasive effects. In the case of Ibrahim, there is only one discourse that is being utilized, however, the revolution makes Ibrahim's singular discourse dualistic by having an inherent discourse of upheaval already associated in the revolution.

Ibrahim acted out against the oppressive use of "virginity" in Egypt, functioning as a revolutionary who operated outside of traditional Egyptian characterizations. She was able to create a new discourse that allowed for a redefining of narratives (traditionalist stories used in the Qur'an that define culturally accepted "gender roles"), characterizations (how a woman/girl *should* act), and patriarchal goals (hierarchy of men over women) by producing a discourse in a space that had been demarcated for men. Ibrahim defied cultural standards by being a political "virgin" and not "passive," by producing a discourse in lieu of death threats, and by finding a medium (cyberspace) when, as Ibrahim recalls, the media, the other women, and the judicial system would not confront the SCAF (21:45).

The SCAF's discourse relied upon the subjugation of revolutionary woman to retain its coherency (Fisher). Ibrahim acted as a counter-cultural figure as she was "one voice, generally lacking legitimacy and maintaining a shadowy profile" that reworked the "public vocabulary" through "transforming life-experiences into characterizations and narratives that reshape existing ideographs" (Condit and Lucaites, p.6). She spoke out

against the SCAF on the issue of “virginity tests,” when all other voices had backed down (Ibrahim, 20:00-22:-03). Ibrahim, however, did not give up in the spirit of the ongoing revolution. She indicated that she was “not scared, not when the revolution is at risk” (21:00). Ibrahim’s discourse operated from a point of revolution.

Ibrahim acted as a traditional cultural-typal rhetor in a normative Egyptian narrative (such as the SCAF’s justification), which would have culturally silenced her discourse. As Anna Therese Day notes of the support for women during this transitory time period:

Dissatisfaction with women's roles in the new Egypt emerged just a month after Mubarak's ouster, when International Women's Day demonstrations were met with harassment and little support from Egyptian men. Security for women protesters continued to degrade when SCAE subjected detained women to "virginity tests," later defending the systematic rape with a public statement that "these girls were not like your daughter or mine. These were girls who had camped out in tents with male protesters." Despite efforts by outspoken survivors of these assaults, the prosecution of Egyptian security forces involved in the "virginity tests" was dismissed in March. (“Unfinished Revolution”)

The cultural-typal position of the female rhetor was left with little support and remained outside of the political realm. Ibrahim’s discourse, however, was able to position itself inside the Egyptian revolution to create change.

Ibrahim’s discourse functioned as a cultural-typal discourse, as her rhetoric was in the spirit of the revolution. As the African Research Bulletin notes of the time period, “There is a battle consuming Egypt about the direction of its revolution, and the military

council that is now running the country is sending contradictory signals” (p.18771). Ibrahim’s discourse while speaking from a revolutionary counter-cultural position, located itself in an activist space, thus making it a culturally “authorized” discourse. As Ibrahim argued, at multiple points in her video, the “revolution is dying” (3:53, 20:51), implying that the SCAF and a regressive authoritarian Egypt will symbolically win if the virginity tests remain unchallenged.

Ibrahim acted as a revolutionary counter-cultural rhetor speaking in lieu of cultural standards that implied she remained silent. Her discourse has a “dualistic function” as it simultaneously operated as a cultural-typical discourse, in line with the spirit of the revolution. Ibrahim spoke at a time when an Egyptian populace was interrogating traditionalism, thus placing her feminine political discourse in a culturally acceptable revolutionary conversation. Her arguments, combined with the inherent discourse of the revolution, created the effect of redefining both cultural narratives (Islam and the role of the “virgin”) and characterizations (“virgins” should not be political), while simultaneously utilizing a culturally approved revolutionary message (opposing institutional oppression).

A Universal “Virgin”

Ibrahim’s YouTube video used a universal rhetoric (Condit) as a persuasive means to motivate the Egyptian public. She characterized herself in her narrative as a typical Egyptian girl. Ibrahim recounted her political life from the start of grade school, her family’s ties to Islam, and her life as a political agent to create a narrative with fidelity that complicated the SCAF’s framing of Ibrahim as the “un-virgin” woman. After building her credibility as an Egyptian citizen, she retold the story of the virginity tests to

interrogate the SCAF's culturally vague narrative about the female protestors. In doing so, she is able to recast the story of the virginity tests as a human rights abuse that could threaten any Egyptian girl or women.

Ibrahim, through her YouTube video, was able to galvanize energies that had been lying dormant in the Egyptian population. Part of her persuasive success was due to the revolutionary time occurring in Egypt that allowed her message to gain narrative fidelity. As Khaled Kateb notes, the "grievances" that caused the Egyptian population to dissent, include "legal and political issues, including police brutality, the state of emergency laws, lack of free elections and freedom of speech, and uncontrollable corruption, as well as economic issues, including high unemployment, food price inflation and low minimum wages" (p.34). Deteriorations of public life made the status quo no longer tenable for a large section of the Egyptian populous.

The public space that she engendered through her video was a crucial step towards an egalitarian democratic polis that treated women with respect. Olsen and Goodnight, leading scholars on public argument, argue the utility of public space as it, "provides an arena for spokespersons, parties, and institutions to advocate and shared concerns using the available means of persuasion" (p.250). Public space is inclusive of an entire public at large (Olson and Goodnight, p.250), including Ibrahim and the other female protestors. For Ibrahim, her controversy against the SCAF was rooted in defining what constituted this "public." Accepting the SCAF's justification would place the public as a masculine entity that ruled out women's agency, while Ibrahim's public was a more inclusive sphere that constituted all Egyptian citizens, including women.

In this newly found “public,” Ibrahim presented her story in opposition to the status quo and the SCAF’s patriarchal narrative that characterizes how “virgin” women act. Oppositional arguments, as defined by Olson and Goodnights, “work outside and against traditional practices of influence” (p. 250). Ibrahim’s story operated as a set of oppositional arguments combating a traditionalist interpretation of Islam. Ibrahim situated herself both “outside and against” the influence of how a woman “should” act as per a traditionalist interpretation of the Qur’an. Ibrahim set herself against the ruling institution in Egypt, the military that had operationalized religion to define how Ibrahim’s conduct was unbecoming of a woman. For Ibrahim to be successful, she had to galvanize an Egyptian public to critically interrogate age-old institutions, narratives, and characterizations.

To place herself as a universal subject, Ibrahim first had to reframe the narrative that the SCAF had created to increase her credibility (to the Egyptian public) to speak on the issue of the virginity tests. As Condit argues, narratives “provide an understanding for how material reality holds together and functions...narratives also provide the bridge to the final step by incorporating the ideal cultural values or ideographs that constitute a community” (p.8). The understanding of how “material reality holds together” supported Ibrahim’s claims, so that her audience can imagine a scenario where the virginity tests could be conducted in the malicious manner in which she argues they were handled.

In the start of Ibrahim’s video, she tells the audience her age, where she is from, and what work she does. Ibrahim argued, “I used to work as a marketing manager at a private company. I’m 25 years old, born in Sohag” (00:27-00:35). By arguing that she has had a normal middle class job and a residence in Egypt, she had begun the process of

creating identification with the Egyptian public. She proceeds to inform the audience of her childhood and the beginning of her life as an informed citizen. Ibrahim states, “My start in politics was with a composition topic we got when I was in high school. It was about Israel, or you could choose to write about the environment. I chose to write about Israel” (00:39-00:48). By informing the audience about her childhood, Ibrahim notifies the YouTube spectators that she grew up and received the same education that most Egyptian citizens do. Ibrahim also positioned herself as an informed and politically aware citizen by raising a concern most Egyptians have, their tenuous relation to Israel. The audience is now informed that Ibrahim had similar political concerns that a typical Egyptian citizen would have, placing their fears, goals, and motivations in a similar frame.

Ibrahim next notes that sovereignty in Egypt has empirically had disdain for her and her family. Ibrahim had argued, in a previous composition, that the Egyptian government had been passive when dealing with Israeli aggression. She noted that the response was:

Because of my dad, and because at the time my uncle was detained they’d had cases against my dad, for being an Islamist. At the time Islamists were always under attack, him and my uncle were both in the Gama’s Islameya, so they got detained a lot. So they thought my family was inciting me. (1:26-1:50)

Coming from a religious family, Ibrahim indicated that Islam is something that is important to her. She disrupted the meta-narrative of religion that is being used against her. The SCAF’s claims of her character (she was taken from a “whorehouse” and doesn’t respect traditional Egyptian values) loses coherency if the audience imagines her

as a respectable Islamic female, reframing Ibrahim from a threat to Egyptian culture to a heroic woman fighting for the Egyptian people.

Ibrahim recounted how the SCAF attempted to control and construct the narrative of the “virginity tests.” This shows the audience the artificial nature of the SCAF’s defense. The first general who spoke to the protestors argued “he got us (the women) from a whorehouse” (3:12). Beginning the process of characterizing the women as the heathens who don’t respect their “virginity.” Ibrahim next recounts the bringing in of new “protestors” to be placed among the women, “I saw an army officer, let in a bunch of women all dressed in black. He got them out from inside the museum, and motioned to them like this and he put them amongst us. These girls would then insult the army soldiers in a most vulgar manner” (4:06-4:20). The SCAF had brought in women who fit into the narrative that they were trying to tell and mixed them in with Ibrahim and the other female protestors. The SCAF also attempted to mix in weapons that violent protestors would use to make the women seem more threatening, Ibrahim notes, “At C-28, they put us all in one row, they got empty bottles, and the bottles that looked like Molotov’s. They got all these things, and lined them up in front of us. They photographed us next to these things, as though these things were ours” (4:50-5:00). Ibrahim showed the audience how the SCAF constructed the narrative that they were trying to sell to the Egyptian people.

Ibrahim argued against the SCAF’s allegations and denigrated the coherency of the SCAF’s narrative, decreasing the fidelity of the SCAF’s story to the Egyptian public. Ibrahim showed the audience the absurdity of the SCAF’s claims and narrative by recounting the charges the SCAF had waged against her:

Now listen to the charges. Attempting to assault army officers while they're on duty. Second? molotov cocktails, carrying blades, breaking curfew, even though I was arrested at 330pm. At the time, curfew was at 2am and I was arrested at 330 in the afternoon, obstructing traffic, even though traffic was flowing freely at the time, we were on the pavement, with others near Kentucky, we facilitated traffic 1446. That's one thing. Destruction of pavements. These pavements were destroyed when the Security Forces attacked us. The central security forces broke it to throw pieces at people it was already broken. Destruction of private vehicles, if that were true. Show me one citizen whose car was destroyed in Tahrir. (14:11-15:09)

Magnifying Ibrahim's argument is her physical stature, which is another reason why YouTube was a crucial medium. Ibrahim is of a tiny, non-threatening physique. She looks like an individual that would live in a middle class suburb, rather than the woman the SCAF attempted to portray. Ibrahim's counter narrative created her own ethos to speak about the virginity tests, while simultaneously disrupting the SCAF's credibility. Through the re-telling of her story, Ibrahim is able to argue her discourse is authentically communicating the truth about what had happened on the 9th of March.

Building the credibility to speak on the virginity tests, Ibrahim used a universal discourse to galvanize an Egyptian public on the fear that the SCAF will continue to conduct virginity tests on other girls/women. Ibrahim's video both begins and concludes with the remark, "what happened to me can happen to any other girl in Egypt" (00:12, 21:26). Ibrahim is able to place any girl, woman, daughter, sister, mother, or friend in her

position. An Egyptian civilian could imagine herself/himself in the position of being Ibrahim or having a relationship with someone who could be the victim of virginity tests.

The exigency (virginity tests) for Ibrahim's discourse was placed well within the voice of the revolution. The ruling body in Egypt (SCAF), attempted to silence her voice and the voices of the revolution through virginity tests and the use of a culturally accepted traditionalist narrative (how a "virgin" should act based in the Qur'an). Ibrahim's discourse was able to overcome the oppressive status quo and get her voice authenticated by a larger Egyptian population, through the use of cyberspace. Her discourse was situated as a struggle, to bring "rights" and "freedoms" to the Egyptian people, acting as a revolutionary counter-cultural agent advocating for change. By creating new characterizations and narratives by retelling her story and placing herself as "any other" Egyptian girl, Ibrahim was able to disrupt "virginity" in the SCAF's discourse, and the narratives (Islam) and characterizations ("political virgin") which were used to stifle her as a revolutionary agent and political "virgin."

CHAPTER FOUR:

Conclusions and Implications

March 2011, in Egypt, a new patriarch emerged after Mubarak's disposal. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) attempted to silence the dissenting female protestors through the conduction of virginity tests. To justify their actions, they claimed the female protestors had not been "virgins." Playing upon inherent gendered cultural norms; "virginity" was used in the SCAF's discourse to characterize the protestors as "bad" Egyptian women, which enthymematically argued that the acceptance of Ibrahim and the other female protestors set the trajectory for a new uncultured Egypt.

In Egypt, "virginity," is constructed through narratives in the Qur'an that pertain to *how* a "virgin" should act. Islam maintains a key role in the cultural and political standards of Egyptian citizens and crafts the characterizations for how an Egyptian woman is constituted both culturally and politically. Analyzing parts of the Qur'an synchronically (as a traditionalist) that pertain to "virginity" illustrates the impossibility of a political woman. "Virginity" in Islam is linked to subservience and "passivity." Conceptualizing "virginity" as an ideograph provides insight to the SCAF's motivations to rule out Ibrahim and the other women from dissenting, in an attempt to stifle the revolution that was challenging their hegemonic power.

A struggle for voice occurred in Ibrahim's dissent against the SCAF. She found her voice in cyberspace, specifically YouTube, and was able to situate her voice in tandem with the on-going revolution. Acting as a counter-cultural agent by defying traditional gender roles of where/when she could speak, Ibrahim created a discourse that

functioned as a culturaltypal rhetoric within the inherent narratives of the revolution, creating a “dualistic discourse” to persuade Egyptian citizens. Ibrahim’s means of persuasion was a universal discourse that created identification or empathy with all Egyptian people. By telling a counter-narrative that made her seem like any culturally aware Egyptian women/girl, she was able to complicate the SCAF’s narrative, which only used evidence of traditionalist cultural standards of how “virgins” should act. Ibrahim reconstructed herself as a culturally aware Islamic citizen, who fought against an oppressive patriarchal SCAF. In this concluding chapter, I argue that importance of studying international ideographs to combat Orientalist claims from cultural outsiders. Ideograph studies, to date, have mainly focused on ideographs in the United States. Learning about “the Other” is necessary to make smart epistemologically based judgments on their actions. The unique nature of my case study (Ibrahim and the virginity tests) illustrates how patriarchy has attempted to incorporate itself into the revolution and maintain its hegemony through the use of discourse. Ibrahim’s use of YouTube shows the utility of the Internet to combatting cultural oppression.

Theoretical Implications

This thesis expands the scope of current literature on McGee’s ideograph (1980) in an un-theorized international location, Egypt, as I begin the process of charting an operative patriarchal ideology, which was utilized in an attempt to justify a human rights abuse (virginity tests). Plotting the characterizations, narratives, and ideographs used in the SCAF’s discourse begins a process of mapping an Egyptian “public vocabulary,” which is pertinent to create an understanding of Egyptian mass public consciousness. I

study the way, “everyday, ordinary individuals, as well as social and political advocates, draw upon this repertoire in their own public discourse” to make arguments that implicate material bodies (Condit and Lucaites, p.8). It is important to understand how social conflicts such as the Egyptian revolution relate to the operation of ideological discourses that dictate mass public response. Old signifying cultural terms (“virginity”) may be used in attempts to make a re-commitment to cultural norms that are being interrogated.

My research evaluates “virginity” as an ideograph, which is necessary to see how ideology maintains and reproduces itself (McGee, p.4). Patriarchy is a linguistic phenomenon as it doesn’t exist to use symbolic terms, but rather symbolic terms constitute and construct patriarchal norms and practices, which are reified through repetitive operationalization (McGee, p.4). For example, the linguistic use of “virginity” in the SCAF’s discourse reifies in the Egyptian public that a patriarchal ideology still exists and operates in Egypt, which is why Ibrahim’s complication of their arguments successfully challenged how patriarchy operated.

Understanding “virginity” highlights intersectional ties between patriarchy, culture, and public argument. “Virginitiy” is materially more important than its normal demarcation of sexual relations and has cultural significations for whom and how a discourse functions. Patriarchal institutions or individuals may operate symbolic representations of “virginity” to define what voices are relevant to public discussion. Ibrahim’s “virginity” was constitutive of and signified her cultural role as a passive/subservient woman in Egypt. As Maurice Charland argues in his work on constitutive rhetoric, “political rhetorics can reposition or rearticulate subjects by performing ideological work upon the texts in which social actors are inscribed” (p.147).

The SCAF attempted to use a “political rhetoric” to “reposition” the Egyptian political subject as a male, limiting Ibrahim and the other female protestors to justify their “anti-social” (virginity test) behavior. In challenging the SCAF, Ibrahim was able to reveal to the Egyptian public, specifically women, that they are not constituted by the SCAF’s discourse and have the agency to act.

As all cultures have gendered practices and norms that re-inscribe patriarchal social relations, it is important to understand how language is a necessary tool of the patriarch to allow a mass public consciousness to continue the subordination of women. The virginity tests provide insight into why there must be a continual awareness, even in revolutions, of how patriarchy can be included into new discourses. The role of the patriarch was able to shift from Mubarak to the SCAF, illustrating that movements away from authoritarianism don’t ensure pluralism. Democracy doesn’t necessitate women having validated voices, as “culturally endorsed practices that are oppressive to women can often remain hidden in the private or domestic sphere” (Okin, p.14). Ibrahim’s story is evidence of how a culture can attempt to silence a voice/discourse when patriarchal social relations define acceptable characterizations (“virgins” aren’t political).

Virginity Found

Ibrahim’s case study illuminates how public argument can be used to obfuscate oppressive ideologies (patriarchy). Ibrahim was told to remain silent and seemingly “nobody” was willing to help her. She found a means (YouTube) to persuade a large audience and create discussions and dialogues pertaining to the virginity tests and to the recent banning of virginity tests in Egypt (“Egypt Bans Virginity Tests”). Ibrahim’s discourse launched a critical investigation into the SCAF’s patriarchal practice that was

being legitimized through vague notions of “virginity.” Ibrahim was able to achieve her criticism of the SCAF by finding a forum for her voice, activating culturaltypal rhetoric as a counter-cultural rhetor, by placing herself as a universal Egyptian subject.

As an analysis of Ibrahim’s message, this thesis interrogates normative assumptions from Western cultures about Egypt. Understanding “virginity” as a diachronic cultural phenomenon provides warrant as to why the SCAF acted in their unethical manner. For the SCAF, the virginity tests pertained to their survival as they saw the protestors assaulting their way of life and felt the need to stop them. The military’s use of “power” indicates the utility of studying “the Other” and their culture, as it has material ramifications and responses that can be violent. The West is not alleviated from their role in the conduction of the virginity tests as conservative Islamist groups only gained power in response to Western colonialism, which was perceived as attack upon their faith (Wallace), increasing the amount of culturally conservative interpretations of Islam.

A diachronic analysis in ideograph studies contributes to the understanding of the limit of one’s locational bias; it also allows scholars outside a culture to make judgments about events that occur in “the Other’s” culture. A more holistic understanding of how events like virginity tests occur complicates normative Western Orientalist assertions of cultural “backwardness,” and allows for interrogations of similar Western conservative religious practice. Patriarchal events are also sustained by the silence of “the Other” (Said). Ibrahim was successful because she made others who fit and did *not* fit her cultural location empathize and interrogate the SCAF’s discourse.

Ibrahim's study has implications for voice as a theoretical tool in communication. Her study acts as evidence to how voice can garner cultural and political change. Ibrahim's use of YouTube created a narrative that launched the interrogation of the virginity tests. Ibrahim's cyber voice was necessary, as her "only way of seeking acknowledgment" lied "with the internet" (Watts and Mitra, p. 494). This thesis also looks at voice and its revolution building capacity by arguing that the revolution came out of voicelessness. In rejecting Mubarak's Egypt, the revolution was situated as a struggle for voice by the Egyptian people against an authoritarian government that silenced them. By recasting her voice in line with the revolution's voice, Ibrahim is able to form identification and gets authenticated. Studying ideology's commitment to status quo power relations highlights that struggles for voice occur within a revolution. The means of persuasion used by each side (sovereign institution versus the dissenters) are crucial to define which voice wins the metaphorical battle.

Where Ibrahim speaks from adds to the theoretical work of how cultural-typal and counter-cultural discourses work together to form persuasion. Condit and Lucaites (1990) argue that cultural-typal and counter-cultural rhetorics assume two distinct persons working both outside and inside institutional linguistic confinements to produce a persuasive message. Ibrahim's discourse, however, shows that there are inherent discourses that change the way a rhetor operates. Counter-cultural rhetoric is defined by its revolutionary ontological stance towards society, but when that culture is in a revolution, it produces cultural-typal effects that keep its "discursive dualism" creating influential results.

Ibrahim also provides evidence of universalisms utility in a non-Western discourse. Condit argues that the universal nature of public argument was vital to create social change in civil rights legislation. She notes, “we might expect similar outcomes under similar circumstances in other social controversies” (p.16). Ibrahim provided a “similar outcome,” as the universal rhetoric she endorsed created a new successful public space, which was more inclusive than the exclusive discourse of the SCAF. Ibrahim’s story provides an example of how public space and oppositional arguments (Olson and Goodnight, 1994) work within a post-Mubarak Egypt.

Ibrahim is exemplary of heroism as she triumphed in lieu of patriarchal cultural praxis to fight for her community. She was able to create a means of persuasion to generate social and political reform. She complicated oppressive characterizations not only about herself, but for all Egyptian women, by redefining what it meant to be a political woman. Ibrahim’s story has made her an influential political figure. Charlize Theron, a U.N. messenger for peace, argues about Ibrahim, “Samira represents the model of how to stand up to fear, and the impact she has made reaches far beyond Egypt. It takes just one woman to speak out, and thousands of others around the world will listen and feel inspired to act” (“The Worlds 100 Most Influential People: 2012”). The use of “virginity” in the SCAF’s discourse attempted to reify into a culture that it was acceptable to continue a patriarchal praxis. Knowledge of how patriarchy is constituted in cultures is necessary to its continual interrogation in the 21st century. Many of the female protestors who had dealt with the SCAF’s virginity tests were too traumatized to speak, however, “one woman” (Ibrahim) chose not to remain silent and by inserting a revolutionary discourse through YouTube was able to ensure that “what happened to her”

would not again “happen to any other girl in Egypt.”

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EMPLOYMENT

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- **Wake Forest University**, Teaching Assistant and Assistant Debate Coach, Fall 2011- Spring 2013
- **Clarion University Debate Camp**, Lecturer, RA. Summer 2009, Summer 2010
- **Clarion University of Pennsylvania**, Secretary, Graduate Admissions Office. Fall 2007 - Spring 2008. Secretary, Forensic Office. Spring 2008- Spring 2009.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS:

- *Award* - Board of Governors Scholarship, *for African American leadership*, Fall 2007 – Spring 2011
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CONFERENCE PANELS:

Capitalism Versus the Capitalist: A Study of Tautological Argumentation. National Communication Association, New Orleans, 2011.

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PROFESSIONAL SERVICE:

- **Teaching Assistant**, Wake Forest University, Argumentation and Debate, Spring 2012 – Fall 2012.
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