

## **Challenging Corruption and Sexism in John Maher and Maged Raafat's *El3osba*: Between Comics and Facebook Literature**

*Amany M. Elnahhas\**

The 2016 United Nations Arab Human Development report (AHDR) drew on the Arab Spring as a context that has been seen through binary extremist debates: either as a platform that opened up venues for a better tomorrow of peace, democracy and stability, or a threatening self-serving western-engineered devious plan that is compliant with neo-colonial and imperialist-driven agendas. While estimating the number of what the report calls “the unprecedented demographic mass of young people” between 15 and 29 years of age at over one hundred million, it drew attention to a conflicting reality that has to be taken into account to reassess what this revolution means and what it holds for the future (United Nations Development Programme<sup>1</sup> 2016, 7). With this number in mind, the report stressed a three-level reform agenda that includes rechanneling macro-policies that regulate the relationship between the state and its citizens, enhancing sector-specific services related to employment, health and education as well as addressing national youth policies in a way that actively resolves youth-related problems (2016, 8-9).

While addressing issues of civic participation, self-expression, education, marginalization, unemployment, democracy, national and secular identity, disability, digital connectivity, and gender equality, the report points out that young people’s consciousness of their abilities and rights that clash with a substantial but incongruous reality that denies them active participation, a decent standard of living, and self-expression would have a lethal effect on the region (2016, 8). The widespread corruption has negatively impacted human rights in a way that is translated into not just lower levels of satisfaction (2016, 47), but, most importantly, a tendency towards violence which the report claims to be “a form of resistance” that “may reflect resilience under challenging circumstances rather than resignation. Resistance and resilience imply agency, but resignation connotes despair” (2016, 143). In the middle of these extremely shaky and

---

\* Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Helwan University.

*Cairo Studies in English* – 2019(2): <https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/>

violence-conducive conditions, *El3osba*<sup>2</sup> comes to present a highly engaging, youth driven and youth directed visual counter-narrative that is part and parcel of a long line of comics, graffiti, still photos, videos, documentaries and Facebook literature that capture, not only images but also panoramic stories, featuring young people's outlook of both the state of affairs, and a future that engages them as a vital and driving force.

This study engages with postcolonial theory as a platform that tackles alarming issues impeding social and institutional justice, particularly corruption and sexism. While the study sheds light on both print books and Facebook as different and complementary venues of publication, it highlights how comics, whether Facebook comics or print ones, have come to present a renewed battle for justice and self-determination that is deeply embedded in recreating the Egyptian superhero as a character whose development as a response to Western colonial legacies and values shrouds deeper and more vitally recognized influences of Egyptian culture and history, both past and present. The second part of the study explores postcolonial feminism as an intellectual and theoretical approach that works towards critiquing, relocating and exposing sexist tropes in postcolonial Egypt through exploring sexism as manifested in the problematic constructions of gender in relation to super heroic comic characters, the intersections of body and gender as well as the everyday practice of sexual harassment, as one of the most rampant, divisive, and highly contested manifestations of sexism in Egypt.

Postcolonialism (also known as postcolonial studies or postcolonial theory) is one of the most influential and rapidly growing late twentieth century cultural, economic, and political critical approaches in modern academic discourse. It is also a broad term that is used to describe a theoretical approach and a critical practice that examines issues of "marginalization," "subjugation," "representation," and "oppression" that are deeply embedded in long years of colonial and neocolonial rule. Postcolonialism emerged in the mid-twentieth century, before it acquired a more historical, political, cultural and academic significance with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. Postcolonial studies found its roots in the decolonization politics that originated in the second half of the nineteenth century and gained momentum after the first World War. It resurfaced in the thirties, and progressed post the Second World War when independence movements and anti-colonial struggles brought about official independence from Western powers to most colonized nations (Go 2016, 5-6). While it began as a broad field of study that addresses, questions, and challenges the whole legacy of colonialism as directly or indirectly impacting

colonized nations including issues of language, culture, identity politics, power, and history, postcolonialism has extended far beyond these parameters. The end of colonialism was not translated into concrete terms; therefore, socioeconomic imbalances, dominant values, and grand narratives rooted in Western-Eurocentric ideology have continued to maintain the power dynamics within colonial/imperial powers. Pseudo-independence was clearly marked by broad and persistent spectrum of imperial/neocolonial practices: direct as well as indirect interference in domestic affairs, economic assistance, trade and defence agreements, foreign aid, loans and grants, installation as well as support of western-backed governments, education, mass media, religion, and language.

Egypt is one of the postcolonial countries that fits the definition of Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton as they lump successive totalitarian puppet regimes that were installed by dominant colonial and imperial powers to refer to “the effective continuation of the authority structures of the colony in the post-imperial nation despite ‘flag independence’” (quoted in Niemi 2017, 218). Luke Gibbons asserts the same idea as he manifests that colonialism cannot “be defined by its excesses or by military conquest, but also by the forced march of modernity, or its new global, postmodern manifestations” (2013, 15). Despite political independence, Egypt has continued to display social, economic, and political marginalization resulting from deeply rooted colonial structures and neocolonial ties that remained intact.

### **Facebook Versus Print Comics: A Postcolonial Analysis of Corruption**

Seen in postcolonial terms, the ongoing digital revolution which has witnessed massive human, and therefore ideological, migration into the virtual world, has also negatively impacted postcolonial nations. Facebook has moved beyond the philanthropic human-centred goal of having “connectivity” as “a human right” that brings people together, and therefore, helps enhance their overall lives as Mark Zuckerberg repeatedly asserts (quoted in Watters 2015). Instead, Audrey Watters argues,

The content and the form of “connectivity” perpetuate imperialism, and not only in Africa but in all of our lives. Imperialism at the level of infrastructure – not just cultural imperialism but technological imperialism. And as always, imperialism as ideology. Empire is not simply an endeavour of the nation-state – we have empire through technology (that’s not new) and now, the technology industry as empire. (2015)

In other words, in the act of tracking people's thoughts, ideas, likes and dislikes, addresses, purchases, beliefs, interests, and hobbies, Facebook has turned into a surveillance tool that maintains, monitors and dominates people's social, economic, and political lives.

However, modern writers have embraced social media, in general, and Facebook, in particular, as new alternatives for self-expression, as well as social and political engagement, mobilization, and change. Facebook is no longer simply an online forum for social interaction, networking, entertainment and sharing of news, everyday interests, and current events. More importantly, like Twitterature, Twisters, Twiller, tweet fic, Twiction, cyber-narratives, auto-fiction and other terms that express the influential impact of technology on literature, Facebook has become a platform where writers have managed to cross boundaries, challenge bureaucratic systems and find access to millions of readers unhinged by the mechanisms of the book publishing industry. In Egypt, like elsewhere, writers have taken to Facebook to voice both their personal and public frustrations. Between traditional views that stress the chaos and unprofessionalism of a medium that is free of the basic confining, yet regulating, principles of the industry on the one hand, and the more progressive ones perceiving Facebook as a medium of communication, creativity, and intellectualism that enables writers to have direct, spontaneous, and uncensored communication with their readers on the other, Facebook literature has turned to be one of the basic and most popular means of engaging readers in an increasingly fast-paced and tech-focused world. It challenges the barriers that conventional types of text/book/paper-based literature no longer provide to young readers who are always on the go.

Since *El3osba* was initially published on Facebook as comics/short stories in 2012, it can be read as a means to respond to a world that is constantly and rapidly changing. Facebook, as the largest and most widely used social networking site, has provided writers with an accessible, simple, entertaining and engaging reading medium. It is no longer used to simply construct relations, connect with friends and family but also to craft digital identities, mobilize people, voice deep grievances and crusade against serious violations of human rights. Besides using Facebook to advertise the release or publication of new books/publications/comics, announce events, and post links to the contents of Facebook pages, writers use Facebook to challenge the constraints posed on the publishing industry, to transcend the restrictions of production, circulation, and censorship, as well as to diversify the readers, by broadening the scope of the issues covered in order to interact with more social, political, and intellectual

readership. Besides these characteristics, e-comics or comics published on Facebook, unlike print comics, involve an interactive dimension that enables the readers to engage with the writers directly, to ask questions, express concerns, receive answers and even change content depending on the interests of the readers. *El3osba*, as such, is a good example of what literature has brought into this radically changing digital world, and what the latter has been capable of facilitating.

In addition, Facebook facilitates the integration of popular cultural elements: music, for example. *El3osba*'s Facebook page incorporates a hip-hop song that sums up hours of reading and analysis through the powerful, interactive, and popular medium of hip-hop. Through the effective and viable interaction between visual slide images, textual captions, and simple rhythmic beat patterns, the song describes two disparate social and political narratives. While the first narrative recounts corruption, hopelessness, frustration, anger, loss, and even death; the second one advocates revision, dream, change, perseverance, resilience, activism and hope (*El3osba* 2018). Using a politically and culturally charged music genre like hip-hop that is generally associated with representing the voices of the underrepresented (including African-Americans and Latino-Americans among other minorities in the States) has equally turned hip-hop music through the narrative of *El3osba* into a youth-based potent tool for social and political engagement.

However, despite the undeniable significance of Facebook as a venue to publish comics, interact with readers, and incite positive change, switching from the online version of their comics into a print form has much to do with the overall condition of digital and information technology in Egypt. Though the numbers of internet users in Egypt have been estimated as 50 million and the total number of Facebook users in Egypt has reached 35 million, internet penetration rates in Egypt are far from their counterparts in the Arab region (Digital Marketing Community, n.d.; "Focus on Egypt"; Statista, n.d.). Ranked among the slowest Internet speeds in the world because of poor infrastructure and telecommunication systems, costly services, poor quality, and low income has made Internet usage for the vast majority of users far from an easy ride (Speedtest Intelligence 2017).

Facebook, as such, was just a steppingstone through which *El3osba* creators were trying to engage readers with some of the major contemporary issues in Egypt and in the world at large through the new literary medium of adult-catered comics. In the most recent and detailed study on the rise of adult comics and the vital function they serve in the society, Jacob Høigilt argues that these adult

comics were relatively new to the world of comics in the Egyptian society that witnessed a long and rich history of children's comics (2017, 111)<sup>3</sup>. Hence, resorting to print was another giant step forward to reach out to more youths in order to communicate the writers' messages in simpler and more affordable terms through the entertaining, concise, easy-to-read and brief, yet intriguing and insightful, narrative medium of print comics. In an interview with the author who introduces himself as an engineer and an iOS developer, John Maher asserts that through *El3osba* comic book, the creators are attempting to solve the "reading dilemma." He explains, "people no longer read, for the one who has missed out on reading as a child does not read as an adult. Therefore, we have this comic book that addresses a target audience between the age of 15-29. This age can read the kind of issues we tackle: bribery, corruption, tyranny, sexual harassment and all sort of similar issues" ("*El3osba* Pitch during riseup17", 2017). By addressing new, controversial, serious, and often overlooked topics, *El3osba* aimed to reach to not only a wider public but also a different and diverse type of audience. John Maher asserts the didactic value that his comics carry by stating that there is a strong need for superheroes who would guide people and "would teach and inspire ordinary people to be heroes themselves" (Thayer 2018). The writers of *El3osba* take this value further as they aspire to reach global readership by pushing the world of the comic book industry further in order to establish the first Egyptian comic book company ("*El3osba* : Egypt's Comic Superheroes", 2018).

As such, *El3osba* was an indispensable component of the newly burgeoning trend of a counter culture arts scene that was marked by a growing interest in underground music, graffiti, photography, stand-up comedy, and adult comics among other alternative art forms attempting to open up channels for freedom, self-expression, as well as peaceful protest and defy traditional or mainstream modes of artistic expression. Jacob Høigilt traces back the beginning of adult comics to Majdi al-Shafi'i's *Metro* (2008) which he considers to be a major contribution to the field as it presents a blunt and trenchant critique of crime, violence, and corruption in Egypt (2017, 114). Similarly, *Tok-Tok*<sup>4</sup> (2011) is a bi-monthly independent magazine that features a wide variety of adult-related topics that are integral to the Egyptian cultural and political landscape: patriarchy, police brutality and authoritarianism (Høigilt 2017, 120-21). Other adult comics that tackle similar issues of concern include *Shakmagia*<sup>5</sup> (2014), *Garage Magazine* (2015), *Eldoshma*<sup>6</sup> (2012), *Autostrade*<sup>7</sup> (2011), and *Foot 3alena Bokra*<sup>8</sup> (2014). Besides adult comic magazines, there are also other significant initiatives that include Cairocomix (2015), the first Comics festival

in Egypt, and Koshk Comics (2015), the first Cairo-based startup to promote adult comics on mobile phones (Williamson 2016); both of them bring together comic artists and creators with audience and fans (Williamson 2016; Høigilt 2017, 114) into a space that acknowledges and celebrates the interplay between commoditization and change in a way that turns comics into an empowering industry/art form that is totally engaged with Egypt's current social and political reality.

Adult comics, however, can be traced to a substantial archive of children's comics that have been woven into the fabric of generations of Egyptian children and even adults (though the comics mainly targeted children). These comics were mostly published through state-owned newspapers or magazines in order to instil moral, spiritual, religious, and social values through the entertaining medium of comics. Despite the abundance of comics published in Egypt at the time, including *Al-Atfal* (1936)<sup>9</sup>, *Dar El-Ma'arif's Sindbad* (1952), *Al-Ahram's Alaa Eldin* (1993), *Akhbar El-Youm's Bolbol* (1998), and the Egyptian *Maged* (1977), most of the comics were either translations or adaptations of Western comics. *Al-Awlad* (1922), for example, is an Egyptian magazine that relied on translating Western comics into Arabic (الموسوعة 26-27); *Dar El-helal's Meeky* (1959) takes after Mickey Mouse, one of the most famous characters in the Walt Disney Franchise; *Tintin* (1971) was more or less an Egyptian translation and adaptation of Hegré's<sup>10</sup> famous comic character, Tintin, that first appeared in 1929 in French (الموسوعة 46), and *Dar El-Helal's Tom we Jerry* (2004) is directly adapted from Warner Bros' famous American animated cartoon series *Tom and Jerry* (1940). Although *Dar Elhelal's Samir* first appeared in 1956, the magazine developed in the seventies and all the way to 2002; *Samir* took the comics industry into a whole new level as it resorted to politicizing children through adding a section that was specially designated for politics. This section attempted to enlighten children to the most heated political events including the first gulf war and Intifada. (الموسوعة 86).

Egyptian editorial cartoon art has also impacted the field of comics. Leading Egyptian artists used editorial cartoons, also known as political cartoons, to provide a caricature of people's social and political realities as a means to document history and raise awareness. Salah Jaheen is a pioneering caricaturist whose works represent a sharp critique that is deeply infused with social and political concerns. George Bahgoury who is widely known as the grandfather of Egyptian caricature, is also a prominent artistic figure who had been a pioneering satirist of Islamism, Nasserism, cultural depravity, ugliness, and social stratification (Viney 2013). Mustafa Hussein is another influential artist who

collaborated with Ahmad Ragab, a renowned Egyptian satirist, to take up politics as a means to propelling society into change through Egyptian caricature art. Together, they created the innovative characters of Kamboora Bah, Al-Kuhhait, and Al-Aleet that were mainly introduced to reflect the political and social complexities of their time. For example, Kamboura, the corrupt Parliamentarian, whose legislative immunity prompts him to violate the obligations of his political post exposes not only the beginning of the multi-party system in the seventies in Egypt, but also a whole world of political manipulation, moral corruption and religious hypocrisy through which people (constituents) are exploited by the very same people who are supposed to be their representatives (El-Ayady 2014). Ragab and Hussein's Al-Kuhhait, Mr. Have not, and Al-Aleet, Mr. Snob, on the other hand are two sides of the same coin: class conflict. While the first is too oblivious to understand the true nature of his extreme poverty, the latter is too arrogant to see beyond his superfluous, inordinate wealth. Other notable names in the field of Caricature art in Egypt include Mohammad Anwar, Qandeel, Amr Selim and Islam Gaweesh who have fought a fierce battle over censorship and freedom of speech across successive regimes since Mubarak's era (Marroushi 2014).

Similarly, Western comics have maintained a primary and profound influence on Egyptian comics. *Katzenjammer kids*, by Rudolph Dirks, is the first and "longest running" classic newspaper comic strip that appeared, for the first time, in 1897, during the Platinum Age of comics (1897 – 1938). This age was followed by four major eras that have witnessed the development of comic books, in general, and comic books featuring superheroes, in particular. Gina Misiroglu identifies these ages as the Golden Age (1938-1954), the Silver Age (1956-1969), the Bronze Age (1970-1980), the Late Bronze Age (1980-1984), and the Modern Age (1985-present) (2012, 1).

The Golden Age began with the publication of *Superman* in Action Comics #1 which introduced the major characteristics of the modern superhero comics genre and the superhero comic figures as we know today (Gavaler 2015, 87). These superheroes were not simply bigger than life characters but paragons of social justice, heroism, patriotism, equality, truth and revolution that reflected the age in which they were produced. The Golden Age that coincided with World War II featured superheroes that dealt with the war and struggled against the German Nazis (Hatch 2006, 16). Comic books featuring superheroes such as Captain America, Sub-Mariner, The Amazonian Wonder Woman, The Black Angel, and The Human Torch were just a few examples of superheroes who spoke openly against Nazism (Packer 2010, 17).



The post- World War II era witnessed the end of the Golden Age of comics and ushered in the Silver Age during which the interest was no longer in real-life concerns, but in commercial success. In the late forties to mid-fifties, comic books capitalized on crime, gangster, monster, and science fiction stories that got trendy during the time. Despite their overwhelming glamour and their satisfaction for a quenchless and deep hankering for violence and horror among their target audience, these stories also gave a heavy blow to the industry. The vicious attack on comic books and the values represented by these stories led to the almost demise of the comics publishing industry with the publication of Frederic Wertham's book and the passage of the Comics Code which set a plethora of restrictions on the comic book industry.

The Silver Age witnessed the resurrection of superheroes with the Vizier of Velocity, the Sultan of Speed, and The Flash. Moreover, publishers ushered in some of the most popular and iconic superheroes of all time: Spider-Man, the Hulk, Iron Man, the X-Men, and Thor (Petty and Craker 2006). The Bronze Age signalled the gradual loosening of the restrictions imposed by the 1971 revision to the Comics Code which helped the re-emergence of previously banned horror elements including ghouls, monsters and vampires as well as the addressing of more social and real-life concerns including drug abuse, social inequity, and racial prejudice. Despite the presence of African Americans in the Silver Age Comics, African American superheroes crossed over into the mainstream of the comics industry in the seventies with the introduction of the first black superhero to have a comic book series that carried his name: Luke Cage (Weiner 2010, 11; Duncan and Smith 2009, 59). The Modern Age (also known as the Iron Age or the Diamond Age) which began in the mid-1980s and continues through the present day witnessed the adaptation of more real-life themed comics into the wider and more entertaining space of motion pictures (Petty and Craker 2006; Booker 2014, 1853).

While maintaining the same entertainment element of Egyptian children's comics, *El3osba* draws on Egyptian, editorial cartoons and Western comics alike to present an artistic form to examine issues of marginalization and human rights, raise awareness, and rekindle hope in people's power to bring in change. Like editorial cartoons, believed to be a "politicized" art, (Hammond 2005, 103) and Western comic books of past periods, from the Golden Age to the Modern Age, *El3osba* is not simply a significant cultural product, but one that fills a void that has been mainly initiated by similar circumstances to those that introduced superheroes in the first place. In the same way that American comics were direct products of the Depression era and World War II, comics in Egypt mirrored the

social and political changes that were taking Egypt as well as the Arab world by storm. Like western comics which Brigid Alverson claims to have been “historically .... an excellent means for engaging with politics and current events” (2017, 26), *El3osba* has been directly involved in current affairs. In other words, in the midst of highly turbulent, shaky, and difficult-to-grasp changes that ranged from Facebook calls and organized peaceful protests advocating bread, freedom, and social justice to outright violent clashes, anti-government uprisings, armed rebellions, and cosmetic regime changes, comic books have been a cheap, easy-to-read visual narratives to engage readers with volatile issues that were raging inside the Middle East and North Africa.

In addressing these issues, *El3osba*, among a growing body of digital and print literature alike, exposes the troubling low art/high art power dynamic in a way that expands the parameters of what academia has denigrated as unworthy of scholarship to include “popular culture.” This strict power dynamic which Walid El Hamamsy and Mounira Soliman believe to be more vivid in the Middle East and North Africa relegates popular culture to “the less respected, more commercial, and less representative form of cultural production,” where the “assumption is that the same person cannot appreciate canonized literature and equally enjoy reading a comics book on the subway” (2013, 1). However, *El3osba*'s tackling of critical issues of economic and political exclusion that are mainly rooted in structural and institutional marginalization challenges the strict division that separates comics from high art as much as it disrupts the cultural hierarchy within the academia that assigns comics a lower academic status requiring less research and scholarship.

Corruption lies at the very heart of these critical issues as it represents one of the most pervasive issues of concern in modern Egyptian history. It has been one of the most constant and rife phenomena that has continued to impede any form of economic, social, or political development of independent states in the postcolonial era. Corruption does not have a single definition. Despite the extensive research on corruption, it remains a widely contested, complicated, and multi-faceted term. Rick Staphenurst and Sahr Kpundeh describe corruption as a “complex” phenomenon that is “grounded in a country’s social and cultural history, its political and economic development, and its bureaucratic traditions and policies” (1999, 127). It is generally defined as the abuse of power by either individuals or organizations in order to acquire some form of private gain and/or benefits. Corruption takes various practices such as bribery, nepotism, patronage, graft, money-laundering, extortion, and political repression. But besides these heinous forms of institutional or state corruption, the paper also

addresses moral corruption as well as intellectual corruption that involves holding on to falsified truths about one's self and culture, marginalization, as well as cultural and identity loss.

The roots of corruption are as equally contested as its definition. While some claim that corruption is an integral cultural and traditional constituent of indigenous cultures that is manifested in gift-giving, guanxi, business entertainment practices and other forms of social customs; others assert that it is a phenomenon that is closely connected with a vicious and manipulative colonial history (Nguemegne 2011, 74-5). However, the fact that it is a pervasive social and political global problem that has more threatening implications on developing countries than developed ones is undisputable.

*El3osba* presents a world that is inhabited by heroic figures who have power over an unruly and highly unpredictable world that is dominated by both inner challenges and Euro-American/ Western/Zionist hegemony. In order to manifest a universal outlook on corruption that connects people, beings and worlds together, *El3osba* introduces Alpha as an extraterrestrial being whose awareness that his more advanced planet feeds off the conflicting energy emanating from earth urges him to gather a group of modern vigilantes to save the planet. Alpha decides to renounce his world and descend to our world to recruit his own band of superheroes from Earth: Horus, Microbusgy, Elwalhan, Mariam, and Kaf. Horus, named after the ancient Egyptian falcon god who is also the avenging son of Isis and Osiris, is our modern-day superhero who is determined to fight social injustice and corruption in Egypt. Microbusgy, a microbus driver who loses his microbus in an accident, has transmogrifying powers and control over fire and dust. Elwalhan's life contradictions are manifested in the switch he makes from his early rearing in a tough environment in a mercenary Bedouin camp into a new life where he becomes an adamant modern-day fighter who is determined to seek justice for others. Kaf is an Egyptian intelligence officer with magical powers that enable him to cast spells and control Arabic letters. Mariam, the only female superhero, is a doctor with extraordinary healing powers and unbending faith in women and human rights.

This universal outlook is stressed further as *El3osba* manifests the erosion or misinterpretation of our moral values, which constitute the real source of our current downfall, as the beginning of a socially, politically, and morally corrupt world. *El3osba* introduces this idea in the story of two men (rather than a man and woman) who offer their baby to their infertile leader. The latter brings instructors to instil all his political values in the child who grows up to have disciples who have turned from people into "justice-based values.... [or]

symbols” of “sublimity,” “energy,” “judgment,” “dream,” “love,” “profoundness,” and “progress.” Once in contact with the real world, however, those values have turned into: “the hunter,” “the teenager,” “the weaponry,” “the soldier,” “the widow,” “thunder,” and “the destroyer” whose fault lies mainly in turning a blind eye to some of the major crimes against humanity: “Zionism” and “Nazism”, for example (Maher and Raafat 2016b, 10-11). Kaf sees the roots of this corrupt world along the same lines as he links the beginning of our corrupt existence to the illusion of “victory”. He states that Egyptians “have been living the illusion that we “crossed” whereas the fact is that we have been stumbling, and stumbling, and stumbling one year after another” (Maher and Raafat 2016c, 12). Though the reference to the Suez-canal crossing in October of 1973 highlights Egyptians’ restoration of a long-lost sense of self-worth, dignity, and pride, it should have acted as a catalyst for future achievements. In other words, in Kaf’s point of view, in the process of misinterpreting or rather overestimating the meaning of “victory” as a moral value, Egyptians have fallen into treating it as a fixed point of reference rather than a driving force or a historically transforming moment that should have driven us towards further examination of our strengths and weaknesses.

In order to manifest the connection between corruption and the overall decline in the Egyptian society, the writers begin *El3osba* with a specific reference to institutional corruption manifested in Hussein Elzaatarawy. Elzaatarawy is a corrupt government employee who works for one of the top legal institutional entities that supposedly represents one of the highest forms of justice: South Cairo Courts Complex which belongs to the ministry of Justice. Featured at the front of the courts complex is the scale of justice logo signifying an unbiased, balanced, and fair distribution of law that acts in utter contrast to what is happening inside. Hussein Zaatarawy is a corrupt official who never finalizes any paperwork without bribery (Maher and Raafat 2015, 9).

From this clear example, *El3osba* moves on to another aspect of corruption that extends the meaning beyond the unfair distribution and appropriation of public or private office and resources for private gain and the economic instability that follows, into a grave phenomenon that erodes people’s trust in the legal system, hampers the application of law, and enhances violent extremism (Keuleers 2017). Defined in broader terms, a corrupt society is perceived as one that impedes inclusion, tolerance and diversity as seen in the story of Elwalhan<sup>11</sup> whose life represents a long history of persecution, marginalization, and injustice that have been openly and consistently practiced against Bedouins in Egypt. Constant crackdowns on Bedouins, arbitrary detentions, house demolitions, land

confiscations, forced evictions, and an overall economic and political alienation manifested in official denial of their basic human rights: decent jobs, access to tourism and energy development projects, have been constant markers of the lives of thousands of Bedouins who were pushed further into despair, lawlessness and poverty<sup>12</sup> (Breen 2013). Elwalhan, whose marginalization has left him with nothing but to become a mercenary, is portrayed as a young man who is overwhelmed by a smoldering, yet justified rage that can only be tempered through “terrorism” (Maher and Raafat 2015, 15-16). He is a result of decades of pervasive brutal marginalization that has been translated into an incessant urge to inflict violence on the state whose corrupt practices have led him to his marginalization. Teaming up with *El3osba*, however, gives Elwalhan a second chance in life.

This substantially strong connection between corruption, marginalization, and violence is corroborated by Azfar (2005) and Azfar and Gurgur (2005) who state that “high rates of corruption lead to more thefts from personal property, more homicides, more car theft, more burglaries, and a lesser willingness to report crimes to the police” (quoted in Uslaner 2010, 81). In other words, while recognized by the UN as one of the “biggest impediments” to the fulfilment of 2030 sustainable development goals, corruption has taken its toll on the marginalized masses in the form of poverty, unemployment, social injustice, and glaring inequalities (Johnson 2018).

Microbusgy (also known as Mostorod Al-Sayed) is one of the characters who represents those glaring corruption-based inequalities that are clearly ripping through the Egyptian society. In Microbusgy’s case, corruption is not manifested in the misuse of public resources for private gain, but in the more glaring and epidemic inequitable allocation of wealth and resources which has resulted in massive economic gaps between the rich and the poor<sup>13</sup>. Microbusgy represents the repercussions of a corrupt system denying the majority the minimum levels of a dignified life that secures a safety net to provide social and economic protection for the masses. He shares the same anger that Elwalhan feels towards his society. Through Microbusgy’s character, *El3osba* presents a world where lawlessness abounds, thuggery, street fighting and bullying have become the only way of survival and social violence has turned into “the” way to get back at society. When Microbusgy decides to stand up to one of the most powerful thugs in the alley, Ellabat, it was out of pure anger. Microbusgy is mad at the dirty alley where he lives, at the sewers mixed with drinking water and the country that has put them on the same par with dog’s piss (Maher and Raafat 2016a, 11). He is mad at the conditions that turned him into one of the “forgotten

marginalized” masses in a dirty alley where poverty, violence and thuggery prevail (Maher and Raafat 2016a, 19).

In his article entitled “This Feisty Egyptian Comic Wants to Be the Next Marvel,” Skot Thayer acknowledges the influences that major and pioneering comic-book artists like Jack Kirby<sup>14</sup>, Frank Miller<sup>15</sup>, Alan Moore<sup>16</sup>, and Mike Mignola<sup>17</sup> have on *El3osba*. *El3osba* carries on the same theme of the ongoing cosmic battle between good and evil that is indispensable to Mike Mignola’s masterpiece *Hellboy* (1994) as much as it continues the superheroic trend of the vigilante crime-fighter superhero who is part of the unnerving origin story of Frank Miller’s iconic *Daredevil: The Man Without Fear* (1993). Moreover, like Kirby’s *X-Men* and Moore’s *Miraclemen* who confront real-life issues meant to inspire tolerance, justice, co-existence and equality at times of fear, racism, discrimination, bigotry, and persecution, *El3osba* comes to reflect as well as challenge a complete and utter sense of loss, fear, and hopelessness that are clearly symptomatic of an intellectually and morally corrupt society.

Kaf, the word servant, as he presents himself to Alpha, believes that part of confronting reality is to acknowledge its hopelessness as he states “the difference between me and you is that I’ve witnessed Egypt’s reality. It is the way we handle reality that sets us apart because the reality is that you insist on placing the corpse on artificial respiration systems that give it a fake life.” Kaf adds that he seeks a “bittersweet solution” that the rest of *El3osba* have purposely ignored. He is disillusioned with what he calls “fake saviors” who offer no more than “temporary solutions” or “tranquilizers” whose “impact will dissipate with the same speed [*El3osba*]’s naïve project has spread” (Maher and Raafat 2016c, 11-12). For Kaf, death is the only way to life or as people constantly repeat, “a nuclear bomb is the only solution for this country” (Maher and Raafat 2016c, 12) and “mass destruction” is the only way that could save us from “grand officials who claim to be changing Egypt for the better while, in reality, they leave her worse than it had been” (Maher and Raafat 2016c, 10). This view, while extremely immersed in despair, mirrors the findings of the 2016 AHDR that stresses the correlation between unemployment, unfulfilled political aspirations, conflict, poverty, gender inequality, and tolerance on the one hand, and lower levels of satisfaction among youth in the Arab World and in Egypt, in particular, on the other (UNDP 2016, 31, 47, 49).

More importantly, this view taps into the same prevalent orientalist readings of Egyptians, in particular, and Arabs in general as unfit for democracy, human rights, freedom, equality, modernity, and secular enlightenment. Though Kaf is a member of the vigilante squad that attempts to expose the corruption and

sexism at the heart of the Egyptian society, his ideas expose the same sense of frustration, despair and dejection that have infested the minds and hearts of Egyptians as a result of Western imposed labels as well as serious and continued Arab failures to implement any long-term democratic changes in their Western-supported autocratic regimes.

In order to challenge this exploitive, morally, and intellectually corrupt society, *El3osba* presents superheroes who contest a Eurocentric or colonial past by drawing on Egypt's cultural heritage, both ancient and modern. The interaction between the past and the present, young people's hopes and a grim and violent reality in the construction of these superheroes, represents what Jason Dittmer calls "the geopolitical concept of assemblage" (quoted in Atia and Houlden 2018). Nadia Atia and Kate Houlden explain the meaning of "assemblage" as it relates to postcolonial comics as

a whole defined by its relations, where component parts are never reduced to their mere function but are understood as part of multiple wholes at once, 'the assemblage' originally served as a corrective to earlier theories of the nation state, where it highlighted capacities (and their contingency) rather than properties. As such it offers not only an apt model for conceptualising collectivity but also, as Dittmer suggests, the cultural products that give it dissuasive shape.... By showing how different elements exist in a relation of domination/subordination within a system, they reveal how the nation state or community as an assemblage works to suppress some cultural subsets in favor of others .... Read this way, the postcolonial comic can query society as an organic whole that comprises the 'sum of its parts.' (2018)

In this sense, postcolonialism goes far beyond being "a memorializing project" (Durrant 2004, 8). Sam Durrant argues that postcolonial writers use postcolonialism differently. He says, "Instead of seeking ....to wrench the other into the light of day, to render her fully present, they teach us how to remember the other's irretrievable difference" (2004, 14). By featuring a variety of characters that represent a complicated assemblage that lumps together different elements of Egypt's history, culture and politics, *El3osba* engages with the idea of "representation" that lies at the very heart of the postcolonial critique of images and stereotypes of the marginalized or the voiceless. Postcolonialism as such takes "difference" to refer to "a subjectivity which is denied or rendered alien by colonial and imperial discourse. At the same time, difference is about a

subjectivity which is an identity and agency to be affirmed and asserted as alternatives to the representations of colonialism” (Lee 2014, 46). *El3osba*, as a vigilante squad that stands up to a mix of inner and outer corrupt practices, challenges western-based politics of defiance through a superheroic character assemblage that acknowledges western impact on the construction of the modern Egyptian character at the same time that it celebrates the distinctiveness of our Egyptian roots.

This “assemblage” or “difference” is clear from the very beginning, in the writer’s choice of characters who defy a society that is strongly immersed in cultural corruption as manifested in identity loss. Though inspired by a long and well-grounded history of Western comic books and superheroes, *El3osba* presents a superhero comic book that features six Egyptian superheroes who mostly draw on ancient Egyptian culture and heritage. Horus who is one of the first characters to be introduced in *El3osba* is a superhero who brings back an ancient past, but more importantly a dignified one. Horus, the god of the East and the rising sun, fights with his uncle Seth for the Kingdom of Egypt. During this fight, he loses one eye. The Eye of Horus (also known as “the Egyptian Eye” or “the All-Seeing Eye”) is one of the most powerful amulets that symbolizes protection, power, divine providence, good health, and restoration of justice. Similarly, Horus, the superhero, is presented as an eye that “sees it all.” At first, he is presented as a lost soul who is unable to know who he is or to identify his identity. He is originally a foundling who is found and saved by Murad Samy, a public prosecutor, who gives him the name “Amin.” Amin continues to suffer in order to discern his real identity. It is only when one of the closest people to him is killed that he knows who he really is, guided by the advice of both Murad Samy, and Mr. Refaat, the owner of the orphanage where he was raised. It is extreme loss that turns Amin, the little powerless orphan, into Horus. Amin starts wearing a mask and introduces himself as Horus, “the guardian and protector of Egypt,” who “will never yield and whose war against corruption that has spread like cancer will never come to an end” (Maher and Raafat 2015,16). Horus is a powerful figure who is adamant on restoring justice in the midst of a highly corrupt and fallen society in which his basic role is clear: “I see and punish. I acquit the guilty, I accuse the innocent” (Maher and Raafat 2015, 12).

Seen in postcolonial light, the most significant part about Horus’ mythic story is that his dilemma began with Seth. In ancient Egyptian history, Seth is “the foreign god, the lord of foreign countries, ... [who] function[s] in the pantheon as representative of gods who were worshipped abroad. The chief god of the Libyans, Ash, the chief god of the Western Semites, Baal, the chief god of the



Hittites, Teshub, were recognized as forms in which Seth revealed himself” (Veldt 1977, 109). Seth, as a foreign god, the murderer of Osiris (Horus’ father), and the god of chaos, darkness, confusion, thunder, desert, wind and evil, represents the western colonial interaction with the East in general, and Egypt in particular. The conflict between Horus and Seth reinforces the continuity of the never-ending, age-old East-West, colonial-colonized division. Horus’ final overpowering of Seth and the former’s success to restore his dominance over the throne of Egypt, symbolizes our modern colonial, imperial, neocolonial experiences. In this sense, the return to the past is a way of engaging with it as a moment of strength and power rather than “buried memories of colonial trauma” (Rukmini 2002 xi).

In the same way that the superhero in American superhero comics “continues the established tradition of the mythical American hero as outlined by Lawrence and Jewett in *The Myth of the American Superhero*” (Miettinen 2011, 1), the superhero in *El3osba* is the extension of the widely recognized character of Elfetewwa in Egyptian history or what could be translated into “the ethical bully.” Unlike the widely distributed image of the bully in Egyptian movies as a cunning, self-centered narcissist who lacks conscience, moral qualms, empathy for others and remorse; someone with a general disregard for others as well as an unquenched capacity to manipulate others, both physically and psychologically, to get what he wants; the cultural and historic characteristics of elfetwwa are quite the opposite. In Emad Abdul Rady’s article “Elfetewwa,” the writer provides a different definition of “ethical bullies” and the historical role they played in Egypt. He states:

Elfetewwat were the popular police who were tasked to protect Cairo, with the knowledge of the official police; they had a national role in the resistance of the French campaign against Egypt between 1798 and 1801. They were among those who led the Egyptian people in their revolt against the French colonizer, after the Mamluks failed the Egyptian people in protecting the country and leading it to salvation from the French, so the fetwwat rose, led the masses of the people, confronted the colonizer with their ‘batons’ and they did well to the point that upset Napoleon Bonaparte, the leader of the French, who called them “junkies” and warned Egyptians against following their example. (2015)<sup>18</sup>

Ahmad Amin takes the origin of elfetewwa way back into the era before the advent of Islam. He refers to the different historical roots of the definition of

“elfetewwa.” For example, he uses Abu al-Qasim Mahmud ibn Umar al-Zamakhshari’s<sup>19</sup> definition of “elfetewwa” as “freedom and generosity” (Amin 1952, 8); other traits that were used to describe elfetewwa is nobility, a sense of honour and a lack of affectation (1952, 30). Amin also adds that “elfetewwa” is a system that was characterized by "achieving justice, taking from the oppressor to serve the oppressed, no matter what the noble origin or the descent of the oppressor is” (1952, 28).

In this sense, the superhero as a reincarnation of “elfetewwa,” represents the same moral, as well as political and historical attributes. Like “elfetewwa” who is an “everyday hero” whose circumstances have led him to stand up to colonialism, corruption, persecution, and discrimination using both physical and mental power, *El3osba*’s heroes, and our modern-day heroes can be perceived similarly. Horus, Microbusgy, Kaf, and Mariam were not born heroes; rather they are ordinary, everyday people with typical human frailties, foibles, and blunders. It is only corruption, as manifested into the smallest details of their lives, that transforms their lives, giving them unexplained superpowers. Seen in postcolonial terms, the moment of transition from a human into a para-human figure with extraordinary abilities and magical powers becomes a moment of “rebirth” or “reinvention” of one’s self and a “reconstruction” of one’s world. This moment clearly reflects the transformational moment at the very heart of the “revolution.” In other words, the transformation from an everyday human being into a super-heroic character (who suffers the daily frustrations of corruption) symbolically recreates the same moment of transition from an everyday Egyptian into an autonomous, thinking, challenging, and disruptive subject who is capable of reaching a dignified life. The latter transition signifies everything that the revolution stands for and advocates: freedom, power, and control over one’s environment. In other words, they are not heroes by birth; the moment they transition into “heroes” indicates a moment of frustration; the peak of their grievances that turns into a positive power for transformation.

Thus, the superheroes of *El3osba* were not only the extension of a long list of historical figures whose traits of strength, power, toughness, and cruelty, at times, did not exclude their justice, chivalry, generosity, and warm heartedness, but also the product of a time that demanded a leader, a revolutionary figure, or “a superhero” at a precarious time that was calling for a Super figure to lead the masses, provide inspiration, and unify people to live and strive for a common goal.

It is critical here then that these superheroic comic characters have appeared to pave the way for the future, a future where heroes are routinely discredited as

foreign agents serving suspicious foreign-funded agendas. However, *El3osba* does not deny the claim but attempts to engage with it. Foreign imported heroism, or “heroism that has been economically and politically manipulated abroad doesn’t prove heroism wrong” (Maher and Raafat 2016b, 11). In other words, while challenging concepts and representations of what subjectivity, identity, heroism, and modernity should or should not be about, postcolonialism also acknowledges those “vexed subjects of contemporary neo-colonialism, the identities and relations of .... hybrid subjectivities of various kinds. These subjects who slip between the boundaries of the grand narratives of history and nation, are becoming an increasingly important constituency for postcolonial studies” (Ashcroft et al. 2007, viii). In postcolonial terms, the comics invoke a different redefinition of anti-corruption based “power” and “heroism”. Rather than a top-bottom or West–East, developed-developing binary terms through which the colonized is destined to see, translate and empower him/herself, *El3osba* offers a new definition of power that is embedded in agency as “non-surrender to [one’s] reality” (Maher and Raafat 2016a, 19). Though influenced by and deeply entwined with the practices and legacies of colonialism, the definition that *El3osba* presents of heroism in general and of an Arab Egyptian hero in particular is different:

[Their] hero does not succumb to circumstances. He tries to draw his way through obstacles. He challenges those who surrender to their whims. He applies justice where law has failed. He writes history with his words. The hero is the one whose poverty is a motive rather than a weakness. He pulls off the impossible to give life. He seeks truth by bringing together all those who attempt to reach part of it to restore the universe... and fix it. (Maher and Raafat 2015, 6-7)

Alpha furthers this outlook on what “a hero” means or what he stands for as he presents a globalized vision of the urgency to address corruption in a global sense that acknowledges local/native strength. Recast in a postcolonial light, this vision identifies the need to reach “righteousness” and fight “corruption” as a universal goal for whose sake he is willing to rebel against his world to collaborate with ours towards “one universe” (Maher and Raafat 2015, 8). Identifying as an alien whose mission is to lead and recruit a group of vigilantes underscores the globality of our shared human concerns, including but not limited to corruption and sexism. Meanwhile, the diversity of the group of vigilantes that mainly emerges from the specificity of our cultural and historical

roots represents a postcolonial stance that reinforces the idea of a native-based agency.

Through this peculiar and diverse composition of the Egyptian superhero who fights both institutional and moral corruption, the paper extends its postcolonial critique to the imperialist project of capitalism, or what Jean Chesneaux calls “a shift towards the Global South, which seeks ‘to find in the South a new historical subject which would defeat the “Great Satan” from the North’” (1991, 88). *3osbet elm3adeyeen*, another name for *El3osba*, does not simply challenge local problems related to social injustice or corruption, but also exposes the link between corruption, on the one hand, and monopolization and global capitalist policies on the other hand. Mariam is not only a doctor with superhuman healing powers, but she is also a woman on a mission. Being a doctor herself, Mariam has witnessed the corruption in the health care system. She is determined to expose the deterioration and almost lack of proper preventive care as well as disease and crisis care and the monopolization of prescription drugs as a result of the joint heinous collaboration of global capitalism and inner corrupt pharmaceutical companies which, combined, have led to soaring drug prices and increased mortality rates.

As such, these superheroic examples that expose the perpetual struggle and resistance against dominant forms of corruption (moral, social, intellectual, and institutional) as integral to people’s daily lives manifest what Dalia Said Mostafa perceives to be “a culture of protest.” Mostafa asserts that

one of the most important achievements of the 2011 Egyptian revolution thus far is that it has consolidated a culture of protest that is proving hard to contain or ignore. The revolutionary “dynamic” in Egypt has become so pervasive that the counter-revolutionary discourse is unable to crush it. (2014 122)

*El3osba*, therefore, reflects this revolutionary dynamic which Walid Elhamamsy and Mounira Solimon believe to be clearly demonstrated in youth-based creative forms of expression that are “activist” in nature. This constant and perpetual shifting between Facebook and comic books, the virtual and the material, the figurative and the literal, or digital and print spaces reflects this “innovation of form” which represents “an instance of culture resisting the violence of regimes constantly trying to contain it and the revolutionary spirit behind it” (El hamamsy and Soliman 2013, 13) or what Mostafa calls “a culture of protest” (2015 122).

### **Postcolonial Feminism: Integrating the Question of Gender and Sexism in Comics**

Postcolonial Feminism (also known as Third World Feminism) is a critical intellectual approach and theory that is widely considered as a subdivision of both postcolonial and feminist discourse. In shifting away from the totalizing frameworks of Western Feminist Theories that tend to homogenize and universalize the experiences of women worldwide as that of the Western woman into an alternate paradigm that acknowledges the intersectionality that cuts across all aspects of a woman's life, postcolonial feminism has come to endorse the idea that while women are directly engaged in countering Western Eurocentric gender stereotypes, they are simultaneously challenging colonial and authoritative ideological agendas, as well as fierce economic and political constraints.

Taking as its starting point, the marginalization of women across history and literature, postcolonial feminism has sought to shed light on issues that have been at the forefront of the experiences of women, in general, and of non-white women, in particular. In Egypt, contextualizing women's experiences and advocacy against sexism as part of the overall struggle for democracy, freedom, social justice, dignity, equality, and human rights for all has been a significant part of years of women's activism since the 80s. Halal Kamal refers to one of the most memorable incidents in the history of Egyptian women's activism during Mubarak's era: women were sexually assaulted by so called "karate squads" or what Kamal calls "the sexual harassment squad" (2016 15) which turned previously assumed individual incidents of sexual violence into an intentional, systemic targeting of female protesters as a means to silence them.

Though women's political mobilization has been a significant part of Egypt's colonial and postcolonial era that has unfolded into four waves of advocacy for social, economic, and political rights for women, the revolution was a monumental point in time that has brought women's issues to the forefront (Dabashi 2012; Kamal 2016). Women's active participation has been a conspicuous feature of the Egyptian revolution that brought about hopes of change, freedom, social justice, and equality for all. Women took to the streets, marching side-by-side with men, pioneering and engineering political change, to speak out against dictatorship, authoritarianism as much as sexism and gender violence. But despite its initial promising steps, the revolution failed to bring about justice and equality for women as much as it failed to reach the promised democracy, stability and freedom for all. Things took a downward spiral when a crackdown on female protesters who had the courage to speak out took a violent

turn. This was manifested in a series of brutal sexual attacks (including acts of sexual harassment and gang rape) by security forces, Egyptian riot police, Egyptian army soldiers as well as regular harassers which continued against female protesters in anti-government protests. In its efforts to address violence against women in Egypt, Amnesty International states:

Egyptian human rights organizations have reported they have documented 500 cases of gang rape and sexual assaults between June 2012 and June 2014. The phenomenon of mob attacks was first documented in May 2005, when groups of men were reportedly hired by the authorities to attack women journalists taking part in a protest calling for the boycott of a referendum on constitutional reform. Since November 2012, mob sexual assaults, including rape, have become a regular feature of protests in the vicinity of Tahrir Square in Cairo. New attacks in June 2014, as protesters gathered at the square mark the inauguration of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, spurred the authorities to promise measures to combat violence against women. The attacks came just days after outgoing president Adly Mansour issued a new law aimed at combating sexual harassment. (2015, 10-11)

Despite the severity and recurrence of these attacks as well as others (including mob attacks on Egyptian women on official holidays), what was noticeable was the failure of successive governments to adopt serious and enforceable legal prohibitions and effective reparation measures for women's physical and psychological abuse (Amnesty International 2015, 5-6); “[n]o one is ever arrested or held accountable, and elected officials shrug their shoulders and blame the victims” (Burleigh 2013). As a result of these systemic incidents, an anti-sexual harassment movement, made of anti-harassment groups and anti-sexual harassment university units, was established not just to receive complaints and document cases of sexual harassment but also to advance gender equity, raise awareness on sexism and gender-specific challenges, and offer assistance to victims of gender-based violence (Kamal 2016, 14-15).

Whereas print comics were a means to expand readership, gender was a key characteristic of the diversity of this audience. *El3osba* sought to capitalize on predominately gendered segments of the comic book industry as well as of the Egyptian society. Though preceded by a long line of comics that have been inspired and written by female writers including, but not limited to, Hilda Terry's *Teena* (1941), Trina Robbins' *Wimmex Comix* (1972), June Tarpé Mills' *Miss*

*Fury* (1941), and Runiko Takahashi's *Urusei Yatsura* (1978), *El3osba*'s significant contribution lies in being written and illustrated by a number of male writers and artists. Despite the depth, distinctiveness and warmth that female writers bring about to the comics industry when they recount their experiences through their own voices, having male writers detailing, highlighting, and relating experiences that lie at the core of women's lives, moves these experiences beyond the gendered parameters mapped out in Arab/Egyptian consciousness into a wider social and political arena. In other words, male writers' willingness to take on the female point of view, to express their feelings, vulnerabilities, daily challenges, insecurities, strengths, and overall lives, have moved women's experiences beyond the confines of their gender, without denying it, into the vastness of human experience. Moreover, the writers' constant attempts to seek readability and exposure of their comic book do not only aim at increasing their popularity as much as they seek to extend contemporary scholarly discourse of fictional comics to include, analyse, and support feminist issues as social and political concerns rather than individual and private ones.

Facebook was part of this engagement with gender-based concerns as much as it was part of the overall national- and regional-based drive for an anti-capitalist, anti-American, anti-Western, anti-corruption, and pro-democracy change and reformation. The growing market for superwomen in comics corresponded with the growing numbers of social media women users, particularly Facebook, and the increasing awareness generated by Facebook groups and pages that specifically address female-fronted projects. Popular Facebook pages/groups include Mabrouk, anta mota7arresh mashhour electroneyyan (Congratulations, you're an electronically famous harasser), 7ad Ye3raf (Does anyone know)<sup>20</sup>, She travels<sup>21</sup>, Shoft Ta7arosh (I Saw Harassment<sup>22</sup>), Women of Egypt, Confessions of a Married Woman<sup>23</sup>, Nazra for Feminist Studies<sup>24</sup>, and Khareetet Elta7arosh (Harassmap)<sup>25</sup> among others. These Facebook pages promoted the idea that women's experiences and identities are clearly shaped by gender as much as they are impacted by the political landscape. In posting, advocating, and mobilizing against chauvinism, sexual battery, unfair parental rights, sexual abuse and rape through Facebook pages and groups, among other social media outlets, writers, thinkers and activists, were trying to change deeply entrenched beliefs on women and gender rights.

This growing concern with women's issues is manifested in *El3osba*'s presentation of the character of Mariam. Mariam belongs to a long line of female

comic superheroes who have challenged gender stereotypes and managed to draw attention to feminist and gender-related concerns. Like Kitty Pryde, Blackcat, Ms. Marvel, She-Hulk, Wonder Woman, Wasp, Zatanna, Mystique, and Invisible Woman, on the one hand; or Qahera, a female Egyptian superhero, in a webcomic released by the same name in 2013, and Jalila, an *AK Comics* character, Mariam represents the same perfect mix of vulnerability and strength. Like other female superheroes, she is an independent, goal and detail-oriented, intelligent, ambitious, highly skilled, strong-willed woman with a strong sense of self, pride, and character. Moreover, like her counterparts who have immortal and unique abilities that range from enhanced physical strength and shapeshifting skills to telepathic, psionic, precognitive, telekinetic, teleportic, and bioelectric, illusion-casting and healing powers, Mariam is a superwoman with authentic superpowers.

Despite Jalila's first appearance in 2004, the superhero, like other characters in *AK Comics*, was merely "a clone" of "their American counterparts" (Manning 2006). Moreover, though Mariam's superheroic character's first appearance is contemporaneous with the debut of Qahera in the first superheroic hijabi-niqabi webcomic with the same name, Mariam maintains a substantial edge over Qahera. Though *AK Comics*, *Qahera* (2013) and *El3osba* tackle gender-based violence, misogynistic beliefs and sexual harassment, the latter perceives gender as intricately implicated in contemporary complex debates over colonialism, politics, and imperialism that are deeply ingrained into the Egyptian society. *El3osba* keeps a close link between corruption and sexual harassment. Rather than a separate issue that should take a back seat to the hot and raging social and political concerns, on the one hand, or a prime issue of concern that should solely be focused on, on the other (as in *Qahera's* case), *El3osba* treats sexual harassment as part and parcel of the inevitable battle for the advancement of this society. Eliminating sexual harassment cannot and should not be separated from tackling unemployment, discrimination, thuggery, and terrorism. Women, in general, and Muslim women, in particular, are part of a bigger society struggling to reach justice for all. Therefore, unlike the hijabi/niqabi Qahera, Mariam is not affiliated with a specific religion. Moreover, unlike *Qahera* which is mainly geared toward Western audience, and, therefore, addresses Islamophobic animosity toward Muslim women or FEMEN's<sup>26</sup> radical attempts at "liberating" Muslim women in a direct authoritative and oratorical manner that verges on preaching and lacks the imaginative, symbolic, and intellectually-stimulating approach of *El3osba*, *El3osba* is immersed into the streets and alleys of Egypt, both ancient and modern.



Mariam's outfit is an essential part of the representation of the female body in superhero comics. In the second issue of *El3osba*, for example, Mariam is featured wearing different age-appropriate clothes that range between sporty hooded fleece Jackets and regular long collared doctor's white coat. On other occasions, Mariam wears a solid tank-top jumpsuit with a low neck that yields a deep V cut cleavage that reveals a sexy, sensual design that exposes her structured collar bones and overall fit physique. However, the semi-revealing outfit still maintains an undeniable class and self-confidence. In other words, Mariam's overall wellness and fit look manifest the virtual demonstration of "a woman" whose apparent femininity is clear enough to accentuate her "womanliness" while not degrading her into a sexual object.

Sexual harassment is one of the most notorious manifestations of sexism that is directly addressed in *El3osba* in the very opening pages of the comic book series as an everyday occurrence. In the second panel in Issue 1 of *El3osba*, for instance, the scene is divided into two parts: a woman shaking out a rug using a rug whipper on the left hand side, while a man standing outside a tire shop holding a tire inflator is clearly staring at the woman who is on a higher floor. The scene introduces visual harassment as part of women's everyday life in Egypt.

More importantly, sexual harassment is featured not only as a "moral epidemic" that has been rapidly growing in Egypt and has widely impacted millions of women in a country where 83% of women have been subjected to sexual harassment and where Cairo is identified as one of the "most dangerous" cities for women (El-Faizy 2017; Thomson Reuters Foundation 2017), but also as a pervasive social vice that demands the collective intervention of the whole society rather than the individual. Therefore, in the third issue, Horus is seen recollecting a past moment that has put a smile on his face though in solitary confinement in Abu Zaabal prison. Despite his incarceration in one of the most notorious prisons in Egypt, Horus' recollection of a bloody altercation with a group of young men who were sexually harassing a woman has stirred feelings of honour and pride in him. Horus remembers a whole scene of violence and justice: the harassers pleading for mercy while being badly beaten by him, the sense of overwhelming fear that the girl felt towards Horus, but also the more rewarding sense of "justice served" or "punitive justice" because he "made a difference in someone's life.... [He] steered her away from a moment that would have tormented her for the rest of her life" (Maher and Raafat 2016b, 3). Through this scene, the writer challenges the widely circulating and accepted misconceptions about both harassers and victims. Rather than weak and helpless

victims, with explosive, uncontrollable, God-given sex drive, who deserve sympathy and understanding, harassers are presented as nothing but “dogs” and “pigs” for whom “mercy” is a “pearl” that such animals do not deserve (Maher and Raafat 2016b, 3).

But more importantly, sexual harassment is presented as an epidemic that manifests a morally and legally corrupt “system.” In other words, sexual harassment is not only a widely growing phenomenon that demonstrates the decline in the moral stature of Egyptians, but it also exposes the failure of the legal system to provide a restraint for the perpetrators as well as a protective shield for the victims. When Mariam attacks Horus for violating the law by badly beating four sexual harassers who were about to assault a girl, Horus states that “if the law [she] is talking about had been able to protect people, he would not have interfered” (Maher and Raafat 2016b, 28). He adds that “there are girls [her] age that suffer every day in traffic, in transportation shit, and their utmost hope is not to encounter another animal on the bus or the microbus, so a kid like [Mariam] should not be lecturing [him] on humanity and law” (Maher and Raafat 2016b, 28).

In contrast to the negative light in which sexual harassment is presented against the positive light in which Mariam (as a character and a representative of superheroic females) is portrayed, the overall tackling of sexism is far from being progressive. Despite the apparent outright condemnation of women’s marginalization and subjugation, *El3osba* presents what Florence Denmark and others call “ambivalent sexism” (2017 420). This concept suggests that “hostile attitudes can actually exist simultaneously with more positive attitudes” (2017 420). While not openly discriminatory or derogatory, ambivalent sexism refers to sugar-coating gender-based oppression by promoting the same traditional beliefs as positive. This is clearly manifested in the way sexual harassment is presented. Despite the agency and sense of social or communal accountability that the scene of Horus’ altercation with the harassers portrays, it also accentuates the same traditional sexist gender power dynamics. The sexually harassed woman is portrayed as a defenseless victim with no actual participation. She is featured covering her eyes with her hands in a pure expression of weakness, delicacy, and fear. Next, she is seen walking behind Horus while he is instructing her on how to avoid street harassment by “not walking in this street alone again” (Maher and Raafat 2016b, 3).

Through this portrayal of an Egyptian woman as a passive helpless victim, *El3osba* replicates the same dominant beliefs on women and on Egypt in general. This idea is further asserted in one of Elwalhan’s encounters with a group of

criminals to save another woman. The criminals reflect on a sexualized image of Egypt as “a whore ... who has lots of resources, but she’s selling herself cheap. So we’re raping our right in her. We’re raping her” (Maher and Raafat 2015, 25). Though Elwalhan sees Egypt differently, the same objectifying norms are replicated. Egypt is perceived by Elwalhan as a woman who “though at times may be cheap, and though he may be weak and unable to reach her at times, he’ll do his best to give her what she deserves, even if she has no appreciation for herself. He’ll be a superhero for her. He’ll be infatuated, infatuated with her” (Maher and Raafat 2015, 25). As such, sexualizing Egypt becomes a perpetuation of the same dominant sexist beliefs through the discourse of patriotism and nationalism that reiterates prevalent patriarchal sexist norms of a weak woman waiting to be saved. But more importantly, this sexualized image also reiterates the dominant sexist representations of what it means to be a hero or superhero as defined by Western comics. Carolyn Cocca states that in the superhero comics genre “the hero in question is male, and white, and heterosexual, and able-bodied” (2016, 6) in the same way that the Egyptian hero is expected to “generally” be a domineering, easily angered, uncompromising, chauvinistic, and hypermuscular male figure. Compared to this dominant Western patriarchal nationalist discourse that reinforces the image of a “male” figure as “the image” of heroism, women always play secondary roles.

These secondary roles are demonstrated in the lack of gender balance in the comics as well as the choice of the name of the only female character. Despite having five male superheroric figures, *El3osba* presents only one female superhero. More importantly, the nonconventional name choice pertaining to most of the male figures contrasts with Mariam’s name which taps into the same conservative norms expected of women. Alpha’s name denotes strength, power and hyper-masculinity; Horus, authority and protection; Mostorod, a blue-collared district in Egypt that is known for its factories and oil refining plants as well as for people’s street smart, resourcefulness and experience; Kaf, the power of the word; Mariam implies the complete opposite. Mariam is the Arabic equivalent of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus in Christianity, or the mother of prophet Eisa in Islam. By assigning her a name that is directly connected with the values of purity, devotion, innocence, forgiveness, patience and humility, the character seems to be responding to the same gender stereotypes and strengthens the same sexual norms that assign women a distant status of sacredness that assumedly aim at promoting respect and veneration, but in reality they create the opposite. As a holy figure who gives birth without intercourse, Mariam is a blessed woman who signifies renouncing the desires of

the flesh; she is a pure woman with no sex drive and therefore, a repressed sexuality. Moreover, as the mother of Jesus, she is the typical Eastern sacrificial type of woman who prioritizes her son's dreams and aspirations and steers away from challenging the all-male authority. In other words, in idealizing women and discrediting their sexuality, women are disempowered.

### **Conclusion**

Through a postcolonial lens that acknowledges the legacy of colonialism in Egypt, the study has demonstrated how Facebook and print formats have become complementary means of publication and expression. While Facebook has given writers, artists, and thinkers an alternative platform through which to reach a broader and more diverse audience, print books have exceeded their limits to include not just a wider, older, and more intellectual age group, but also larger, more sensitive, challenging, and controversial questions concerning corruption and sexism through a previously child-based literary form.

While drawing on postcolonial theory, the article manifested how *El3osba* as a representative of contemporary literary comics has drawn attention to current social and historical conditions that are far from traditional. The paper challenges orientalist views of Egyptians by drawing on superheroes who, though influenced by a plethora of Western comic superheroic figures and deeply entrenched in the values of western heroism, are as equally a product of their history, culture and time. Egyptian superheroes, as such, present a people-centered dream of governance and autonomy that defies American Eurocentric readings of Egyptians as much as they stand up to internal and external challenges. In other words, comics, whether print or digital, have provided a new space to recuperate a distinctive Egyptian hero whose so-called "violence" (as the AHDR states) is a means to advocate, initiate, and sustain serious sincere changes that address corruption (moral, intellectual and institutional) and sexism given the shortage of institutional outlets to young people's legitimate demands<sup>27</sup>. Meanwhile, coming from all walks of life, this conglomeration of superheroic characters that involves minorities (Elwalhan), global citizens (Alpha), elites (Horus and Kaf), poor people (Microbusgy), and women (Mariam) has created an inclusive futuristic dream. While the status of affairs is grim, *El3osba* offers the light at the end of the tunnel: change is not only possible, but inevitable.

However, despite *El3osba*'s success to present modern Egyptian vigilantes who work against the government to reach a better society, it has failed to include women into the mainstream Egyptian historical narrative in positive, non-

ambivalent sexist terms. Failure to combine apparently antithetical views that reconcile superheroes, as a comic genre, and traditional Egyptian gender norms has heightened the same traditional supportive role models expected by women in Egypt. As such, sidelining women in *El3osba* has reinforced the same patriarchal authoritative discourse that resonates with culturally and politically prescribed perspectives on gender and sexism.

## **Endnotes**

1. El3osba means “the league” in Arabic.
2. All references in the text to the United Nations Development Programme from now on will be *abbreviated as UNDP*.
3. AK Comics, published in 2004, represents a precursor to the outburst of comics toward 2011. Though introduced as the Middle East first Superhero comic book (Rizkallah 2015, 44) and mainly targeted toward children, it has been widely criticized for its Western-focused themes and American-styled characters. Christopher Gratien remarks, “The Middle East Superheroes are stripped of any strong markers of Arab and Islamic identity, beyond names and skin colour” (2008, 111).
4. Tok-Tok refers to a three-wheeled motorbike that is generally used as a means for transportation for lower and middle classes.
5. Shakmagia is a jewelry box made of rosewood.
6. In Arabic, Doshma refers to a place that can be used for shelter and weapons storage during wartime.
7. It means “highway” in Arabic.
8. An Arabic expression that means “Pass by tomorrow.”
9. Al-Atfal is the first publication of Walt Disney’s Mickey Mouse in Arabic.
10. Hegré (the pen name of Gerges Remi) is a famous Belgian cartoonist who is the creator of *The Adventures of Tintin* (1929).
11. Elwalhan means “the infatuated” which refers to the character’s deep love for Mariam.
12. See Amnesty International report entitled “Egypt: Roadmap for Repression” (2014) pages 21-22 for more details on human rights violations in North Sinai in post-revolution Egypt
13. Economic Statistics released by Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) report that the poverty rate in Egypt has noticeably increased to reach 25.2% in 2010/2011, only to rise again to 26.3% in 2012/2013 and to 27.8% in 2015. The number of poor people who live on incomes below the poverty line is estimated at 69%. (Ahram Online 2012; Aswat Masreya 2016).
14. Jack Kirby is a leading American comic book artist and writer who has been dubbed “The King of Comic Books.”

15. Frank Miller is an inventive American comic book artist in the 70s and 80s who is known for *Sin City: The Hard Goodbye* (1991), *Batman: Year One* (1981), *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), *Daredevil: Born Again* (1986)
16. Alan Moore is a pioneering English comic book writer who is known for *Miraclemen*(1985), *V for Ventta*, and *Captain Britain*.
17. Mike Mignola is an inspiring comic book writer and artist who created Hellboy character.
18. All translation from Arabic references is done by the author.
19. Also known as Al-Zamakhshari. He is a Persian Muslim theologian, philologist, commentator and scholar who was known for his controversial and highly renowned interpretation of the Qur'an.
20. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/342108782822123/>
21. <https://www.facebook.com/SheTravelsEG/>
22. <http://www.isawharassment.org>; <https://www.facebook.com/Shoft.Ta7rosh/>
23. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/214760398700926/>
24. <https://www.facebook.com/Nazra.for.Feminist.Studies/>
25. <https://www.facebook.com/HarassMapEgypt/>
26. Femen is an international women's rights and protest movement that is widely considered radical as it follows extreme measures (including bare-chested protests and marches) to call national and worldwide attention to abortion, sex trade, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, Islamism, and Sharia laws among other issues.
27. The 2016 Arab Human Development Report states that civic engagement (basically more active participation in protest, petition-signing, and boycotts) is "lowest in Egypt" among other Arab countries (Jordan, Qatar, and Morocco) (UNDP 2016, 59). The report also adds that this "weak" civic engagement is due to a number of reasons: confined freedoms, the lacuna between legal and practical measures, and the unbalanced distribution of power especially in freedom of expression and electoral participation (UNDP 2016, 63). In addition, the report states that in voting, a gap of about 20 percent separates Arab countries from the global average among all age groups (UNDP 2016, 61).

## Works Cited

- Ahram Online. 2012. "Poverty rate rises in Egypt, widening gap between rich and poor: CAPMAS. November 29."  
<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/59433/Business/Economy/Poverty-rate-rises-in-Egypt,-widening-gap-between-.aspx>
- Amin, Aḥmad. 1952. *Aṣ-Ṣa'āla wa-L-Futūwa Fī L-Islām*. al-Qāhira: Dāral-Ma'ārif.

- Amnesty International. 2014. *Egypt: Roadmap to Repression*. London, England: Amnesty International Publications.  
<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/8000/mde120052014en.pdf>
- , 2015. *Circles of Hell: Domestic, Public and State Violence against Women in Egypt*. London: Amnesty International Publications.  
<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/212000/mde120042015en.pdf>
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. 2007. *Postcolonial Studies. The Key Concepts*. 2nd Ed. London: Routledge.
- Aswat Masreya. 2016. "27.8 Percent of Egyptian Population Lives Below Poverty Lines: CAPMAS. July 27." Accessed June 25, 2019.  
<https://ww.egyptindependent.com/278-percent-egyptian-population-lives-below-poverty-line-capmas/>
- Atia, Nadia, and Kate Houlden. eds, 2018. *Popular Postcolonialisms: Discourses of Empire and Popular Culture*. New York: Taylor & Francis. Google Books.  
[https://books.google.com.eg/books?id=VwxjDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Popular+Postcolonialisms:+Discourses+of+Empire+and+Popular+Culture.&hl=en&sa=X&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q=assemblage&f=false](https://books.google.com.eg/books?id=VwxjDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Popular+Postcolonialisms:+Discourses+of+Empire+and+Popular+Culture.&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=assemblage&f=false)
- Booker, Marvin K. 2014. *Comics Through Time: A History of Icons, Idols, and Ideas*. Santa Barbara, Calif: Greenwood.
- Breen, Heidi. 2013. "Egypt: Freedom and Justice to the Bedouins in Sinai?" Master's Thesis, University of Oslo.  
[https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/39058/Master\\_Heidi\\_Breen.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/39058/Master_Heidi_Breen.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)
- Brigid, Alverson. 2017. "The people's comics: using the graphic format to teach about current events." *School Library Journal* 63, no. 8 (August): 26-29.
- Burleigh, Niña. 2013 "Gang Rape, the Dark Side of Egypt's Protests." CNN.com. Last modified July 3, 2013.  
<https://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/03/opinion/burleigh-rapes-tahrir-square/index.html>
- Chesneaux, Jean. 1991. "From East-west to North-south: from a North-south to a Planetary Perspective." *Interdisciplinary Peace Research* 3(1): 88-97.
- Cocca, Carolyn. 2016. *Superwomen: Gender, Power, and Representation*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Dabashi, Hamid. 2012. *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism*. London: Zed Books.
- Denmark, Florence L., Krystal Lozada, and Talia Zarbiv. 2017. "Internationalizing the Teaching of Psychology of Women: A Feminist

- Perspective.” In *Internationalizing the Teaching of Psychology*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Digital Marketing Community. n.d. "Social Media Users in Egypt: Facebook Insights and Usage of Egyptian Users in 2018." Accessed January 6, 2019. <https://www.digitalmarketingcommunity.com/indicators/facebook-insights-usage-in-egypt-2018/>
- Duncan, Randy, and Matthew J. Smith. 2009. *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture*. New York: Continuum.
- Durrant, Sam. 2004. *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J.m. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- El-Ayady, Nevine. 2014. " أشهر شخصيات أحمد رجب ومصطفى حسين: كمبورة وعبدية مشتاق " المصري اليوم وفلاح كفر الهنادوة." October 20. Accessed June 20, 2019. <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/550377>
- El-Faizy, Monique. 2017. "Cairo Named World's 'Most Dangerous' City for Women." October 16, 2017. <https://www.france24.com/en/20171016-cairo-deemed-worlds-worst-city-women>.
- El Hamamsy, Walid and Mounira Soliman (Eds). 2013. Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa. A Postcolonial Outlook*. New York and London: Routledge.
- El-Rudy, Emad. 2015. "El-fetewwa." Al-Ahram. 11 April. Accessed November 13, 2018. <http://www.ahram.org/NewsPrint/377421>.
- El3osba. 2018. "El3osba." Facebook Video, April 30. Accessed June 30, 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/El3osba.Official/videos/2030183607201791/?v=2030183607201791>
- "El3osba: Egypt's Comic Superheroes." 2018. YouTube video, 2:30, "Al Monitor," July 10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uryqmEgA1-g>
- "El3osba Pitch During Riseup17." 2017. YouTube video, 1:18, "Tolaroid Official," December 6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGtHMPyccf0>
- "Focus on Egypt." Focus on Egypt · Media Use in the Middle East, 2017. Accessed July 04, 2019. <http://www.mideastmedia.org/survey/2017/chapter/focus-on-egypt/>.
- Gavaler, Chris. 2015. *Superhero Comics*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- Gibbons, Luke. 2013. "The Empire's New Clothes: Irish Studies, Postcolonialism and the Crisis." *The Irish Review* (1986-), no. 46: 14-22. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43831472>.
- Go, Julian. 2016. *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.



- Gratien, Christopher. 2008. "‘Man of the Impossible’: Nationalism and Creating New Heroes in Post-Nasser Egypt." Master's Thesis, Georgetown University. [https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/550884/etd\\_crg32.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y](https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/550884/etd_crg32.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y)
- Hammond, Andrew. 2012. *Pop culture Arab world: Media, Arts, and Lifestyle*. Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO.  
<http://literati.credoreference.com/content/title/abcarabpe>.
- Hatch, Joshua. 2006. *Comic Books: From Superheroes to Manga*. Bloomington, Minn: Red Brick Learning.
- Høigilt, Jacob. 2017. "EGYPTIAN COMICS AND THE CHALLENGE TO PATRIARCHAL AUTHORITARIANISM". *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 49 (01): 111-131.
- Huggan, Graham. 2002. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor and Francis.  
<http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=178436>.
- Johnson, Stephen. 2018. "Corruption is costing the global economy \$3.6 billion dollars every year." December 13. Accessed May 15, 2019. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/12/the-global-economy-loses-3-6-trillion-to-corruption-each-year-says-u-n>
- Kaiwar, Vasant. 2014. *The Postcolonial Orient: The Politics of Difference and the Project of Provincialising Europe*. Leiden: Brill.
- Kamal, Hala. 2016. "A Century of Egyptian Women's Demands: The Four Waves of the Egyptian Feminist Movement." In *Gender and Race Matter: Global Perspectives on Being a Woman*, 3-22. London: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Keuleers, Patrick. 2017. "Fighting corruption for global peace, development and security." *UNDP*. December 7. Accessed December 23, 2018. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2017/fighting-corruption-for-global-peace--development-and-security.html>
- Lee, Jae W. 2014. *Paul and the Politics of Difference: A Contextual Study of the Jewish-Gentile Difference in Galatians and Romans*. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1cgf8b3>
- Maher, John, and Maged Raafat. 2015. *El3osba #1*. Cairo: Ketabi Publishing.
- , 2016a. *El3osba #2*. Cairo: Ketabi Publishing.
- , 2016b. *El3osba #3*. Cairo: ketabi Publishing.
- , 2016c. *El3osba #4*. Cairo: Ketabi Publishing.

- Manning, Shaun. 2006. "Special AK: AK Comics and Heroes of the Middle East." *Comics Bulletin*. May 29. Accessed July 16, 2019. <http://comicsbulletin.com/special-ak-ak-comics-and-heroes-middle-east/>.
- Marroushi, Nadine. 2014. "Egypt's Political Cartoonists Say They Won't Let Sisi off the Hook." *The National*. June 12. Accessed June 30, 2019. <https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/art/egypt-s-political-cartoonists-say-they-won-t-let-sisi-off-the-hook-1.604860?videoId=5770738884001>.
- Miettinen, Mervin. 2011. "Superhero Comics and the Geopolitics of the American Identity." Licentiate Dissertation, Tampere University. <https://trepo.tuni.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/76552/lisuri00127.pdf>
- Misiroglu, Gina R. 2012. *The Superhero Book: The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Comic-Book Icons and Hollywood Heroes*. Canton, Mich: Visible Ink Press.
- Mohamed, Deena. 2013. *Qahera*. Tumbler, June 30. Accessed June 25, 2019. <https://qaherathesuperhero.com/post/182896728481>
- Mustafa, Dalia S. 2015. "Introduction: Egyptian women, revolution, and protest culture." *Journal for Cultural Research*. 19 (2): 118-129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2014.982916>
- Nguemegne, Jacques P. 2011. *Corruption and Human Development in Africa*. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation.
- Niemi, Minna. 2017. "Challenging Moral Corruption in the Postcolony: Ayi Kwei Armah's the Beautiful Ones Are Not yet Born and Hannah Arendt's Notion of Individual Responsibility." *Postcolonial Studies* 20 (2): 217-236.
- Packer, Sharon. 2010. *Superheroes and Superegos: Analyzing the Minds Behind the Masks*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.
- Petty, John, and Keith Craker. 2006. "A Brief History of Comic Books." <https://www.heritagestatic.com/comics/d/history-of-comics.pdf>
- Rizkallah, Sara. 2015. "The Visualization and Representation of Gender in Egyptian Comics, what is the Fuss All About?" Master's Thesis, American University in Cairo. <http://dar.aucegypt.edu/bitstream/handle/10526/4480/Sara%20Hany%20Shaker%20PDF%20Thesis.pdf?sequence=1>
- Rosenberg, R. 2013. "The Psychology Behind Superhero Origin Stories: How does following the adventures of Spider-Man and Batman inspire us to cope with adversity?" Accessed Jan. 3, 2019. [http://schragesclasses.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/5/3/12534650/2016\\_superhero\\_articles\\_for\\_informative\\_essay.pdf](http://schragesclasses.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/5/3/12534650/2016_superhero_articles_for_informative_essay.pdf)
- Rukmini, Bhaya N. 2002. *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch: The Idea of Indifference*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Speedtest Intelligence*. 2017. "Egypt Speedtest Report". April 13. Accessed July 9, 2019. *Speedtest Intelligence*. <http://www.speedtest.net/reports/egypt/>.
- Stapenhurst, Rick, and Sahr J. Kpundeh. 1999. *Curbing Corruption: Toward a Model for Building National Integrity*. Washington, D.C: The World Bank.
- Statista. n.d. "Egypt: Number of Internet Users 2019 | Statistic." Hamburg: Germany. Accessed July 12, 2019. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/462957/internet-users-egypt/>
- Thayer, Skot. 2018. "This Feisty Egyptian Comic Wants to Be the Next Marvel." *OZY*. 19 Feb. Accessed March 7, 2019. <https://www.ozy.com/good-sht/this-feisty-egyptian-comic-wants-to-be-the-next-marvel/82748/>
- Thomson Reuters Foundation. 2017. "The World's Most Dangerous Megacities for Women 2017." Accessed June 20, 2019. <https://poll2017.trust.org/>.
- United Nations Development Programme. 2016. *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality*. New York: USA. <http://www.arab-hdr.org/reports/2016/english/AHDR2016En.pdf>
- Uslaner, Eric M. 2010. *Corruption, Inequality, and the Rule of Law: The Bulging Pocket Makes the Easy Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Velde, H. 1977. *Seth, God of Confusion: A Study of His Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Viney, Steven. 2013. "Amid Increasing Censorship, Georges Bahgory Reflects on Bygone Artistic Era." *Egypt Independent*. 6 February. Accessed June 28, 2019. <https://www.egyptindependent.com/amid-increasing-censorship-georges-bahgory-reflects-bygone-artistic-era/>.
- Watters, Audrey. 2015. "Technology Imperialism, the Californian Ideology, and the Future of Higher Education." October 15. Accessed June 18, 2019. <http://hackededucation.com/2015/10/15/technoimperialism>
- Weiner, Robert G., Randall W. Scott, Amy Kiste Nyberg, William T. Fee, and Francisca Goldsmith. 2010. *Graphic novels and comics in libraries and archives: essays on readers, research, history and cataloging*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co.
- Williamson, Rachel. 2016 "Egyptian Superhero Startup Wants to save Comics." August 18. Accessed July 13, 2019. <https://www.wamda.com/2016/08/egyptian-superhero-startup-wants-save-comics>.
- You, Jong-Sung. 2016. *Democracy, Inequality and Corruption*. Cambridge University Press.