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- So, you are really trying to work on understanding the idea of using 'Ahha' in the community?

-Yes, I do

-Ahha!¹

In 2015, [za2ed18 website](#) published a short video on YouTube titled "How do Egyptians insult?²", the 1:29-minute video shows short scenes of different Egyptian TV programs and talk show presenters and their guests using the crudest and most vulgar words in the colloquial Egyptian Arabic language. They all are very well-known, their programs were and still, are the most watched, their prices the highest, and they all discuss and analyze the political situation in Egypt on a daily basis for years now. Egyptians who always introduce themselves as religious people, accept to get their information and daily life analysis while listening to words they would never accept their kids using.

On 21 December 2017, The Supreme Council of media regulation has decided to prevent the podcasting of Abla Fahita's Vodafone advertisement³ because it contains phrases and scenes that don't suit the public decency, go against the Egyptian community principles, and encourage bad behaviour, in addition to the degeneration of language (Ashour, 2017).

¹ From a conversation between one of my friends, a 29-year-old man and I in December 2016.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mp61BT-JS-A> (Accessed January 2018)

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSgnQUaXQdk> (Accessed January 2018)

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Those two scenes represent the contradiction around how the Egyptian government and the Egyptian community define the community principle and the meaning of its moral code. In the first video, we see the soldiers of the regime, who defend every and each action the government does, and attack the revolution and whoever is taking its side dare to use or allow their guests to use the rudest words in the Egyptian-Arabic language to describe their foes. While in the second video you can't stop yourself from asking what is the Egyptian principle that was threatened because a doll used the word Ha'a?! 'Oh really?!' because it rhymed with Ahha, the word that is not acceptable and considered as an impolite word.

1- Ahaa, the Egyptian deafening three-letter yell

The expression Ahha, which is also spelt a7a to better represent the sound of strong and deep haitch and an Arabic letter, has been referred to as "Egypt's deafening three-letter yell". Yet the term, whose etymological roots are very difficult to disentangle, remains a salient part of Egyptians' expression of which expresses disdain, shock, agony, anger and a plethora of other hyperbolic emotional states (Iskandar, 2012).

The term is not a newcomer to the Egyptian vernacular. Anecdote and testimony suggest the masses pleading with former President Gamal Abdel Nasser not to abdicate after the humiliating defeat of 1967 shouted Ahaa, Ahaa, la tatanaha! 'Ahaa, Ahaa, don't abdicate' (ibid)

Since the 18 days of the Egyptian revolution in January 2011 a gargantuan 'Ahha!' marks the turning point between, absolute fear of Mubarak and his regime and full control of



Figure 1 Ahha in Arabic letters

everything. Since then, Ahha turned to be the word that is the most popular amongst youths who witnessed the revolution and it is gradual failure that was parallel to the degeneration of their dreams and hopes about more democratic home country.

(Iskandar, 2012) Although Ahaa was once the explosive, screeching, unnerving, alarming and deafening yell of the “vulgar” poor, it became one of the prominent vernacular after the class consciousness was shaken to its core under the feet of a mass revolutionary movement. Ahaa now permeates all social classes with fervour, shattering social norms and elite mores as Iskander goes on with his argument.

Ironically, this generation once believed in its ability to shape the future for a better image, then witnessed its friends either killed in different occasions following January 2011 till the infamous 2013 Rabaa massacre⁴ and the demonstrations that decried the military violence that resulted in even more killings, or as thousands were prisoned starting from day one of the military coup in July 2013 till this day. Estimations of political prisoners in el-Sisi’s era are ranging between 40-60,000 thousand (AlewaaNewspaper, 2016). Ahha is used widely in Facebook posts and comments, I can't miss a day scrolling down on my Facebook newsfeed without seeing this word by both male and female friends.

In November 2011, the song “Ahha, oh revolution⁵” by Ahmad Elsayy was released on YouTube to its producer Maged Helal’s official channel. I translated part of the lyrics so non-Arabic speakers can get the sense of the contexts where the word can be used. Ahha for the revolution and for the military council

⁴ Thousands of supporters of former President Mohamed Morsi were attacked by police and army troops Wednesday in Cairo's Rabaa al-Adaweya Square-Cairo (Langlois, 2013)

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LenYxDEhlpY> (Accessed January 2018)

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Ahha for every politician who used religion for self-privilege.

Big Ahha and important Ahha. Ahha for those who are killing us and deluding us that we are alive.

Ahha for the "temporary" military council, and a big Ahha for the marshal!

Ahha and a million Ahha and Ahha, I scream but I can't hear my voice.

Ahha, I forget that I am a human! Ahha, and I say it everywhere.

Down with military rule. Down even with Ahha!

My mother, her sisters and her friends who are in their late forties and older see such word as a horrible sign proving the degeneration of the morals and values institution.

I asked my mother how she finds seeing Ahha almost on a daily basis through her Facebook, when we, her children, share something or comment on a post and the comments are then open for every mutual friend:

“Everything in the community is falling apart, no belief in anything, when hope was killed belief turned into anger. It is all connected, young people are angry with God (Allah) and with the state, they're just trying so hard to go to the extreme side, away from religion, tradition and convention”⁶ (January 2018, personal communication)

Although my mother was always on the revolution side and was with us in the square from day one in 2011, she is a conservative Muslim and she sees that a good Muslim should not use rude words and should be polite and respectful.

2- How did Mubarak's policies end up with a revolution?

The situation in Egypt was on fire years before 2011, during Mubarak's time and due to the policies, society was dissociated from its basic educational, health, agricultural,

⁶ All the conversation on this paper ran in Arabic and the translation is mine.

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and economic needs, plus the traditional familial and societal values and norms. It was deliberately made clear, through the court and media systems, that the police were “above the law” and could “operate with impunity” (qtd. In (Helmy & Frerichs, 2013). “On Sunday, June 6th 2010, Khaled Said was at a cyber café at around 11:30 in the evening. Two policemen asked him for money and when he said he didn’t have any, they beat him,” Muhammad Abdel Aziz, a lawyer with el-Nadeem, told al-Ma’sry al-Youm. “As he was beaten up, his head hit a marble table and he started bleeding” (ElAmrani, 2010).

Khaled’s violent murder triggered waves of protests and solidarity, independent youth groups established organised demonstrations nationwide. It all started with chanting for bread, freedom and social justice, for Habib el-Adly, the interior affairs minister to step down and immediately the same for Mubarak himself!

The police’s humiliation of the people was significant during the first days of the revolution, too. Basically, it is good to mention that 25th Jan was the police national Egyptian day and callings were intentionally targeting their day to show them that the people can’t accept their attitude anymore. In 28th January, known as the Friday of Anger, the reaction of the police sector towards the chanting and anger was to drawback from the whole country in a few hours after opening the prisons, all of them⁷ and the military soldiers and tanks filled the streets to replace the absence of the police. From a revolutionist’s view; this is a coward action and a plus to the negative records of the interior affairs.

⁷ You can find different scenarios if you check the official journals and the regimes supporters’ institutions story. They blame the Muslims brotherhood, Hamas, Iran and Qatar for the events of 28th January.

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May 2011, was the first official presence for the police to secure an event during the Egyptian Premier League matches. The Ultras White Knights who supports [Zamalek SC](#) welcomed them in the match that was between Zamalek and Tala`ea El Shorta SC with this yell:

“We did not forget el-Tahrir, oh sons of a filthy woman,
The revolution to you was a defeat,
Who do we turn to?,
Our policemen are pimps,
You took a beating for the first time in years.”⁸

By looking at the words that were used in this yell we see how the Ultras used two of the insults that are well known for being so unacceptable, welad elwesxa ‘sons of filthy women’ and mi’aarraseen ‘pimps’ loudly on the stadium is a sign of courage and fear breaking. That courage did not pass peacefully, it is believed that what had happened in Port Said stadium in 1st February 2012 was due to the deliberated absence of police and military. As (news, 2012) quoted the FIFA President Joseph S. Blatter said "This is a black day for football. Such a catastrophic situation is unimaginable and should not happen"

3- Post-revolutionary chronology through ‘bad’ words

The bastard Supreme Council of the Armed Forces

Ramy Essam, who left Egypt in 2014 heading to Sweden was 23 years old back in 2011 with his guitar singing for the revolution lionized for helping to overthrow a dictator. By the end of the 18 days Essam was singing on the square's stage (Peisner, 2015).

⁸<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9AaAEhbS-Y> (Accessed January 2108)

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After the military council took the power after Mubarak in February 2011, they were encouraged to use power against protestors more violently, much like the police force during Mubarak's regime. Although Essam was tortured on 9th March with



Figure 2 A screenshot from Essam's video clip "Oh council, you bastard"

others in a well-known event that happened at the Egyptian museum in Cairo (shayfenak, 2011), he spent the next three years singing against the military council, Mohamed Morsi and finally el-Sisi himself. First, his song "Oh council, you bastard"⁹ In minute 00:05 of the official video hand-held banner with "kuss umm el-dakhlya; Interiors' affairs mother's cunt. (see Fig. 2)

Using such crude words due to great anger against the police maybe was not so surprising. The attitude of the police sector in Egypt was beyond limits. The regime did not miss any chance to oppress the Egyptians using the police power. No matter what, the regime should be guarded. The ministry of interior affairs, the proverbial "Ministry of Fear", has approximately 1.5 million employees, in the form of National Security, the Secret Service, the police, and 'state bullies', maintained the status quo and quickly clamped down on any form of Random checks, arrests, and 'surprise busts', for no discernible reason, on ordinary citizens by members of the State Security

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjj61p3IO3Y> (Accessed January 2018)

Investigations (Mabahith Amn el-Dawla) or plainclothes policemen such as in the case of Khaled Said (qtd. in (Helmy & Frerichs, 2013)), all created a perpetual atmosphere of fear, oppression and injustice.

Egyptians have two main great conservative taboos, religion and sex. That may explain why they tend to get so close to any of them to humiliate someone to the maximum. The title of Essam's last mentioned song "Ibn haram" hits a nerve because it literally means that the mother had sex outside of marriage, which is religiously forbidden. And because a mother has a special place in the eastern communities in general, she gains a lot of special insults as well, just to make sure that you insult the most precious thing for someone insult his mother or one of her organs! This banner from the square, that is shown in (image 1), explains how Egyptians hate the Police the most. Using very vulgar words during the revolution as in a song or in a chanting here or there was not strange for the angry protests that were basically aiming to contempt the regime. People who used to fear Mubarak and his regime for 30 years, just decided to take control.

Muslims Brotherhood short era.

It was a hard year under the military council's rule, and the time of the first presidential elections was full of hope, again! But when Mohamed Morsi, the Muslims Brotherhood candidate won the elections in June 2012, he was faced by huge protests asking him to step down after an exact year of the elections. Essam released his new song against Morsi in June 2013. The song's title was "Ahha, step down¹⁰" and was watched 555,175

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-XpHG4UIotk> (Accessed January 2018)

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times on Essma's official Youtube channel and the music video was performed by both men and women.

The song's famous quote "Ahha is not expressing enough anymore" got more than 1k comments and every single comment has a minimum of one Ahha plus other crude words. Most of the comments were attacking Essam because they blamed him and his likes of Morsi's stepping down which was the reason that brought Abdel Fattah el-Sisi who is known as the Pimp (el ars).

Abd el-fattah el-Sisi #the pimp

After another year of the military ruling the government in Egypt, on 24 March 2014, el-Sisi officially announced that he will run for president. After two days a hashtag was created by anti-coup Egyptians "vote for the pimp"¹¹ (#انتخبوا_العرص). The hashtag swept Twitter and took the first place in two weeks of creation. In mid-April, the hashtag was used more than 770 million times on Twitter, plus on Facebook, too. It was recorded as one of the most powerful electronic campaigns on twitter history¹². Egyptians use buses, pound notes, walls besides the electronic spaces for telling el-Sisi how disrespectful he is. (Figures 3, 4 and 5).



Figure 3 The hashtag painted on one of the public buses in Cairo

¹¹ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/31/vote-for-the-pimp-egypt_n_5064149.html

¹² <https://www.hespress.com/international/182591.html>

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Figure 4 Egyptians five pounds notes written on it vote for the pimp C.C

Figure 5 A graffiti on one of the Egyptians streets in Cairo- Helwan with a photo pf el-Sisi and the hashtag

Going back to Ramy Essam? Yes, why not, the guy who was called the revolution singer! Of course, he was against the coup, and it seems that he can't miss a chance to announce how he doesn't respect the politics in Egypt. "The age of the pimp"¹³ A perfect title for a new song was released in December 2014, the song was watched more than 981k. times. The lyrics ironically criticises the country's situation and blames el-Sisi for everything who was only mentioned as the pimp (al-Ars) in every line.

From Facebook inbox¹⁴

During the previous pages, I was trying to detect the major change of youth's language during the last seven years. It is not a theory I read about it in books, it is a phenomenon, I, as a 30-year-old Egyptian witnessed it in real time even though I've

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zc7R3iN1nJE>

¹⁴ The posts, comments and chats were in Arabic and I translated them into English.

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live abroad since 2012. Facebook is a live platform for Egyptian young people. I posted on my account asking about the usage of “crude words”, on 11th February.

Good morning folk, I need to talk with someone who lives in Egypt or lived there for a while after the revolution about the usage of “crude” words, if we could call them “crude”, before and after the revolution. Does anyone see that youths tend to use such words more in their gatherings or in mixed (male and female) settings? Or if those words flowed from the private space to public space during the past few years? From cafes to Facebook? From masculine settings to mixed ones? And if this is related to the revolution in anyway? Who is ready to think out loud together?

I got 25 comments, 5 of them agreed on the phenomenon, that crude words tend to be used more than before but because youth are not respectful anymore. The rest of them agreed on the observation, too. They said that of course they can listen to different swear words during their day, read them on their different social media accounts, or use some themselves.

I can sum their reasons up to three categories:

1. The disbelief in the older generations who raised us on refusing those words. The parents who spent their lives educating their children about the moral code of the conservative community and how the behaved child should speak and what words they must avoid but accepts to see people killed in the streets just because they have different political ideas! So what morals are they talking about? What is worse and more savage, crude words or spilled blood?
2. This aforementioned disbelief which led the revolution generation to represent their anger about the whole old institution through social media and gave them the courage to type any word online, also affected the younger generations who

found themselves living in a completely open atmosphere. So, when 15 years ago, a 15 years old school student could hardly listen to a single “crude” word every once in a while, their counterpart now sees it and listens to it tens of times daily. Therefore, it is not a forbidden taboo anymore.

3. The media and film industry. As film themes changed from before, it is said that the recent trend is tending to degenerate the public taste. El-Sobky Film Productions is a good example, as it is one of the main film production companies in Egypt and 9 out of 10 of its movies revolve around the same theme, “The belly dancer, the rapper and a combination of crude words¹⁵”.

Through inbox, 3 close friends offered stories, a young lady (we’ll call her Mimi for confidentiality purposes), and two young men, Mohamed and Ahmad, all in their early thirties.

Mimi said that she uses almost all the crude words that were mentioned on the previous pages, Ahhaa, pimp, son of filthy women, your mother’s cunt, faggot, whore, etc...

“I started to use insults and curse gradually. I can’t remember exactly when, but I remember that a year after the revolution, I was going to the Ultras’s marches, and their yells were always crazily filled with curses, I was shocked and hurt. So, it must have been after that. With time, things all around were falling apart, I was angry as hell, I started to curse, and that was soothing to me. It was soothing to describe the befoul reality where you live everyday with its real words. I only describe reality, I know it is not a good thing, I know that it is bad to be away from the prophet Muhammad’s

¹⁵ <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2015/10/12/791066.html>

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teachings because of my words, and if I stop using those words one day, it will be for fear of God (Allah), not because I am a girl and because society don't accept it, fuck society. I also never use crude word in a fight or when I am angry with someone, in this case it will be vulgar, and I refuse that."

Mimi has different circles and the vulgarities she uses differ depending on whom she is around. She says she also curses in front of her parents and that they were shocked in the beginning, but she thinks they just got used to it.

"Sons of dogs (welad kalb) or sons of filthy women (welad wisxa) are the words I can use in front of my father. Everything else you could imagine I can use when my mother is around. I also only cure among my close friends. Ahhaa for example is not a curse word at all, it is a sign of anger or deride"

Mohamed, who is a father of two young children told me that he used insults and cursed till his first years of university, not for any reason in particular but that he grew up seeing boys his age using such words. Then he developed new ideas as he grew up, refusing every kind of impolite utterance.

"After the revolution the situation changed, everyone I know, especially men, was cursing, I decided to unfriend and unfollow everyone on my Facebook friends list who uses crude words, after a while I discovered that I will have none. So, I gave up. I use few rude words, but not so rude words, and only amongst my friends, but never with my family or in public."

Ahmad, who is a father of two young girls and an old friend of mine, sent me a short message.

"Look, you know why we seem as a unique generation with new habits like using "crude" words openly? We went together through a very special moment, the most

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powerful borders were broken at once in front of our sights, that identified the barriers between us. You know when a few men spend their military service together? They are not shy to change their clothes in front of each other ever again. With what happened to us, even if we did not really serve, we're still serving! After 70 years of military rule and one failed revolution, this is what you get."

Conclusion:

It seems that the Egyptian code of ethics is in the middle of a long rewriting process, the past years of political repression were followed by a peak of hope and control between 2011 and 2013, only to be followed by an even worse repression, some would even say worse than that of Mubarak's time.

Years before 2011, the Islamists were playing the role of a controlling instrument which set the community policies, they had the dominance that allowed them to distinguish right from wrong and Halal from Haram. The Egyptian community seemed to choose the Islamist reference as a moral judging benchmark, but if the Islamists have let the revolution down, then is their reference is no longer accepted? This brings up the question if the Islam practiced in Egypt is still valid as a title for this community? The revolution fell out of the Muslims Brotherhood's hands and right into the military's, and the Salafists supported the military coup, so who is left to play that role?

The community is writing their code now more freely and independently, even the conservatives feel no shame to curse if it comes to describing political failure. Which is worse, to use a dirty word or to see the brains of your friend blown up next to you by one of your own country's soldiers?

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The use of cursing, bad language, and offensive gestures is occurring according to a cultural script; it is never a sign of loss of control, but to the contrary, is controlled and placed in context.

Before the revolution, a dominant image and role model of 'the superior Muslim' was propagandized by the Muslim Brotherhood depicting the well-educated, successful young man in both academic and professional career; the polite man who maintains worship, and the polite woman with Hijab; the social person who loves everyone and on top of everything sacrifices himself for his beliefs (Alaa, 2017)

This superiority was undermined when the revolution opened new tracks of dominance, new social imagination, away from this bipolar equation of the superior Muslim and the Muslim who is less religious, was created. Social imagination with new definitions for right and wrong with freedom and revolution as its benchmarks, Alaa added.

When the Muslim Brotherhood was in the position of not being Revolutionary enough, a new model emerged on the scene, opposite to the Islamist, it is the Revolutionary. Sisi's Egypt doesn't like both, it only likes the upstanding citizen who is not very religious and not revolutionary at all. Now the revolution needs to find a way to represent itself; the Islamists' dominance has fallen, and the government did not create any for itself. A new code has to be written.

After 2013, new topics have been brought up to the surface that the public hasn't had the courage to discuss it before, the boundary between flirting and harassment, for instance. Will the superior Muslim consider flirting as a debatable topic in the first place? Social media also created new spaces of freedom where any person can be exposed to new ideas and points of view about anything, it gives everybody the

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freedom of expressing their thoughts, questioning their opinions and maybe announcing their new ones. Many contradictions could be seen in the change of language ideology amongst two versions of the same person before and after 2011. Is it from younger to older? From naive to mature? From conservative to liberal? Or from religious to less religious, even atheist? Meanwhile, these questions are relevant to the generation who were adults, in their twenties, during 2011-2013 years trying to express the anger, disappointment, and the new beliefs they have adopted.

But let me also mention that another generation was moving from childhood to adulthood during this critical time, they were growing up in the 'no-code' era. They are witnessing the critical years of the country and they are having a more open space than our generation, they are using their language a white paper. They don't have to face the elder's dilemma of rewriting a story with a language that doesn't look like their old tongue.

Those 'crude' words that were mentioned in this paper and a few more are slowly integrated into youth's language despite the rejection of elders. While keeping eyes open on different social media accounts and seeing how fast the acceptance of the 'bad' words is happening, it is important to see how long the 'conservatives' can keep on denying that the ideology will never be the same as before both Revolution and Facebook. Only equivalent and reversing cultural and political experiences can lessen the rising tide of sexism among younger generations, but a willingness to 'see' the reality remains a pre-condition to any forms of positive change in future.



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¹⁶ The views expressed in this article are entirely those of the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of EIPSS.