

Chopping Down 'The Poison Tree'

An Interview with *Marwa Rakha*

We know Marwa Rakha as an author, an expert in dating and relationships, a defender of women's rights and a freedom fighter. Additionally, Marwa is mum to be. In light of the recent changes in our country and the changes to come in Marwa's personal life, Insight got in touch with the renowned blogger to discuss her views on the revolution, Egypt and motherhood. We also asked her a few fun questions to discover the woman behind the writing.

By Sameh Ibrahim

Did you participate in the protests?

I went to Tahrir Square only once, on Saturday, January 29th. It was the morning after the massacre on the 'Friday of Anger,' when security officers used expired tear gas bombs, rubber bullets, metal pellets, live ammunition, water cannons and armoured vehicles to run down and disperse peaceful, unarmed protesters.

I was watching that massacre on all the satellite channels in a state of disbelief! My friends were out there among a million other brave Egyptians, fighting for our freedom and basic human rights and I was at home feeling sad and helpless! On Saturday morning I called a female friend who was there and she gave me a detailed account of how she almost got killed several times that day. I felt jealous! I wanted to be a part of the new free Egypt and I wanted to contribute something – even if it was just chanting.

Were you initially pessimistic or optimistic about change?

The outcome exceeded my expectations: I never expected that President Mubarak would actually step down, that the Parliament would be dismantled, that the Shoura Council would be dissolved, that the National Democratic Party would cease to exist, that the constitution would be amended, that the network of corrupt businessmen would face fair trials, that the Minister of Interior would be tried for his crimes against humanity, that the Minister of Information would resign or that Egypt would have any form of democracy! I never expected to see Egyptians come to life again; in Tahrir Square I had a glimpse of the country that I want to live in and belong to.

What do you hope the future of your baby would be like after the 25th of January?

When I was just four months pregnant, I bought a baby outfit that had the peace sign embroidered on the front and the statement "BORN FREE" written

underneath. It sums up what I wished for my baby to have: peace and freedom! I hope that the new Egypt will be free of carcinogenic fruits and vegetables, a decaying educational system, gagged state media, torture and human rights breaches, and discrimination based on religion, gender or sexual orientation.

What will you tell your kids about the revolution?

I will tell them: "I went out there for you!" I'll tell them about my childhood, teenage years and adulthood, and how corruption impacted all the aspects of my life. I will also tell them about those who gave their lives and precious blood for our freedom.

How do you define a good mum? Do you consider yourself one?

I am not a mum yet, and I do not know if I will be a good one or not! All what I know is that I will love my baby as he is for who he is. I have no plans for him and no expectations of him. He could be anyone he wants, I do not own him. I also believe that he is coming into my life to teach me new things – maybe even more than anything that I have to teach him.

How was your childhood and what's the most important thing your parents taught you?

My childhood was happy except for my memories of school: going to school always made me feel tired and stupid. Now I know that there is nothing wrong with me – so it must have been the education system and the school itself. My parents taught me how to independent – they might not have intended for me to as independent as I have become though!

How would you priorities the following: work, family, romance, money, friends, freedom?

Freedom, family, work, money, friends, romance.

Do you describe yourself as rebellious, emotional or a dreamer?

I am a rebel. I don't think there is anything in my life that I have not rebelled against! I am an anarchist and I do not believe in authority.

What's your favourite band or music genre?

Music is background noise for me. [blushes]

Who's the best singer or composer to make a song for this revolution now?

I have no clue. I don't like how we Egyptians tend to turn everything that is so beautiful, deep and meaningful into old, worn-out clichés. I do not want the revolution turned into a song, a street, a newspaper, a bridge or anything of the sort!

Who's your favourite writer?

I have grown fond of Dr. Nawal El Saadawi and Franz Kafka.

What's your favourite movie?

Kill Bill.

What else do you think have influenced you and shaped your character to be who you are now?

People who told me that I cannot do this or that. People who attacked me. People who tried to compete with me. People who tried to keep me locked into social norms and expectations. I took all those people, stepped over them and moved up the personal evolution ladder!

What's your favourite colour? What colour do you see the revolution?

My favourite colour is orange. It is a warm colour that is sensual, sexual, and soothing in all ways. The revolution is a green flag symbolizing the peaceful protesters with tiny little red roses symbolizing the precious blood that was shed.

What's your favourite joke about the revolution?

Mubarak died and met Sadat and Nasser in the afterlife, and they asked him if he was killed by poison or shot on a stand. He replied: "Facebook!"

As a women's rights activist, what's your reaction to what happened to Lara Logan of CBS News?

What happened to Lara is horrible! No woman should ever be violated like that. What makes it worse is that Lara was attacked because she was a woman, a foreigner and presumably a Jew. Looking at the bright side: brave Egyptian women rescued her!

What kind of reform do you think should take priority: political reform, education, economic, poverty, tourism or something else?

Political reform will directly impact education and economics. Tourism always recovers, no matter what crisis Egypt faces. Poverty will take time to eradicate (40% of Egyptian live on \$2 per day) but we will get there once we see the end of corruption. I also want to see the end of censorship in Egypt! No book, movie, magazine, article, picture, or website should be censored. I expect the government to treat me as an adult who is accountable for my choices. I want to see the media set free – no orders and directives from 'above.' I want to see the end of police brutality... and the end of the one-man-show regime! The President should not have all the strings in his hands.

What do you see as the best- and worst-case scenarios for Egypt?

Best case scenario: all my 'wishes' mentioned above granted! Worst case scenario: the old regime finds a way back into power. Like in movies when the bad guy dies but you do not see his body, and then he creeps onto the good guys when they are having a great time and kills them!

How did you celebrate the success of the revolution?

I cried! Seriously ... I called everyone I know and cried!

Tell us about your upcoming projects/books?

Having a baby has taken up all my time and I guess being a mum will take up even more – and I don't mind it at all! I managed to finish my first Arabic book "Life is a cucumber!" It is online now and a print version will be out this summer. I am currently working on the outline of my first fiction novel, but it won't come out for another year.

Check out Marwa's Website:

<http://www.marwarakha.com/>



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Photography by Alaa ElKamhawi