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REAL-WORLD DEMOCRACY—
AN EGYPTIAN FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR'S VIEW OF EVENTS IN EGYPT

Contributed by Samah El Saied

To begin with, I was really excited to go back home after spending a full year in the U.S. I couldn't wait to share my wonderful American experience with my fellow Egyptians. My role as a Fulbright scholar was not just teaching Arabic, my native language, to my lovely UNH students. Part of my scholarship is cultural — both in the U.S and Egypt. It is like being an ambassador there in the U.S and here in Egypt after coming back. I left the U.S. on June 1, 2013. I knew things had changed in Egypt since I left in 2012, and were not the way I would wish, but I was returning to family and friends and would have to live in the present reality of Egypt, at least for a while. I would also miss, I knew, the land of my dreams: America.

I kept hearing in my Fulbright conferences and orientations about what is called "culture shock." They kept telling us that this culture shock might happen to us both in the U.S, as a new country we have never been to before, and back in Egypt as well, after getting accustomed to living abroad for a not-so-short period of time.

And they were right! Immediately upon my return, I felt kind of estranged from the entire Egyptian community; everything was a new experience for me. I was exploring everything that was going on around me and comparing it to what was going on in America and what my life was like there. Sometimes the comparison was hard and bitter at the same time. Bitter in that I left my country with great hope that it would change and I returned only to find everything the same as I left. That lack of change was really hard for me to face.

Three weeks passed with me trying to accept the status quo. On June 30th, there was a demonstration. I was so excited about getting involved in this, not having missed one since January 25th, 2011—except for the events that led to the end of the Morsi regime, while I was at UNH. So June 30th felt like an amazing idea of restoring our revolution of January 25th. I found people in the streets asking me to sign the "Tamaroud" (Rebellion) document, inviting me to go to the streets in protest. I signed gladly. My feeling is that June 30th is a second wave of January 25th revolution.

It is not a counter revolution like what most people here say; neither is it a coup d'etat like the Western media call it. It is kind of a special case and a new lesson in democracy. Voting is not the only indicator of a democratic state; it is just one part of the process. The person who gets elected must be honest to the people who have placed their trust in him. He must be a guardian of minorities and their rights. He must be a president of every single citizen in his nation without belonging to any political party or organization. If he fails in fulfilling these promises, then his people who have elected him can also demand that he leave. They can just impeach him. So what happened in my country was a kind of "democratic impeachment" or a "popular impeachment" — no more, no less.

As a woman, my main goal was getting rid of the Muslim Brothers and their rule, which might have had a disastrous impact on women's rights. This was clear from the constitution they created in 2012, depriving women of their equality with men, imposing more restrictions, increasing men's privileges and decreasing those of targeted groups of women. That's why I was very eager to participate in the demonstrations of June 30, 2013.

Still, I am not supportive of the idea of exclusion. Over the past two months, the idea of including Muslim Brothers again in

both the political and social life of Egypt, has been controversial. Especially after committing many acts of violence, and being denounced by the current government as a "terrorist" organization, the Muslim Brothers are not wanted by the people anymore—anywhere. Personally, I try to be more objective. We cannot just generalize and call an entire organization a "terrorist" organization only because of some violence committed by some members who once belonged to it. Still what really hurts me is the blood that was shed during these two months of clashes between security forces and Muslim Brothers. Lots of people died or got killed someway or another. The crackdown of the two sit-ins in Rabaa and El Nahda was not in the interest of anyone. It resulted in more hatred and violence. I believe that a political solution would have been much better than a security one. The Muslim Brothers are, for better or for worse, part of our society.

Nevertheless, the Muslim Brothers have missed many chances to negotiate and offer positive initiatives. Those that they did offer, only sought to find an outlet for them to return to the political scene, insisting on their legitimacy. I agree with them that the ousted president Muhammad Mursi has legitimacy, but there is a more powerful legitimacy— that of the people. The people who elected him later found him disqualified for his position and finally decided to impeach him. He should have resigned, admitting his failure in ruling the state. I know that this might sound chaotic: if people do not like a president in the future they could just go to the streets to revolt against him, resulting in instability. But this will never again be the case. I do not think any other party would discriminate against Egyptians the way Muslim Brothers did. Under Morsi, Egypt was divided into two groups: Muslim Brothers and Non-Muslim Brothers. This was untenable.

Today, I feel optimistic that we are moving forward in the right direction. The constituent assembly was formed recently. A new constitution is on its way, a constitution that will represent all Egyptians with no exclusion. After having a referendum on the new constitution, there will be parliamentary elections and then presidential elections. I believe that the military is not seeking to hold power. I believe they will keep their promises about the roadmap and, to be honest, they are doing well so far.

I am very optimistic too that Egyptians have learned the lesson that there must be a separation between politics and religion. The two should absolutely never mix. It was a really hard lesson. I look at it as a kind of "religious reform" something similar to the religious reform of Europe long time ago in history. Today there is no other choice for Egypt but a civil democratic modern state.