



# Volunteers in the revolutions

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*Editor's note: Participants in revolutions are usually not paid... The Coyote editorial team launched a call for volunteers to tell us what happened in Tunisia and Egypt and also to send us some photographs to give a larger impression. So we do not reprint images of paid professionals here, but this also gives the images an authentic feel they would not have possessed otherwise. It is probably too soon to launch into deep analyses of the roles of volunteers in the revolutions; what we try to do is at least to give a feeling of the experiences of young people involved and at a distance. Many thanks indeed to all the contributors.*

## MARWA TURKI Sfax, Tunisia

I took those pictures during the Tunisian uprising. Many women were also volunteers. We can, for instance, see women guarding the gates of the demonstration area. We had artistic events to encourage the people to carry on and celebrate the new beginning and to discuss the future in a cool atmosphere.

Between the people who had volunteered, there were not a lot of different roles by age, by gender or by profession. Everyone acted for the best of the country and everyone did what they can do from their position without making the other feel the difference. Well maybe from the profession, maybe a bit for lawyers and doctors — so they took the leadership and others followed and helped.

I volunteered to help children to make a smile for the future by organising artistic events in the streets with my school. I tried to take photos of all the events in my town and I went to demonstrate to ask for democracy and illustrate the moment by my camera. In this experience I made a lot of contacts, with people I never imagined that I can one day live such moments with them.

I will tell my grandchildren to fight for ideas. To really want to achieve something and really achieve it. I will ask them to never ever give up their rights for voting for a president or their freedom of speech, their right to work, to study, to live with dignity and never exchange it with fear and weakness. I will ask them to fight for goals and never give up the will and hope... nothing in life is worth the feeling of real freedom.



## EMILIE PETIT Egypt and France

Three days without Facebook. For some it is far less important than running out of petrol downtown, or for the neighbour whose cat is missing or for someone who just missed his train for a meeting in Paris. Indeed, for someone else who happens to live in Marseilles as I do, it may just belong to an ordinary day-to-day upsetting situation.

Nonetheless, three days without Facebook may also mean a moment where we become aware of those we really love; 'really' in the sense that we can't imagine our life without them. That to be away from them is like having an arm, a leg, a kidney or part of your heart cut out or amputated. It is simply unbearable to think of them as being possibly in danger; that they may just disappear from our everyday lives.

I realised that there are three persons in Egypt who have such importance in my life. One is an Iraqi political refugee, and spent eighteen days and nights on Tahrir square. One is Egyptian, a tall and impressive dancer who spent those eighteen days protecting his neighbourhood, armed, night after night. The last one is a young woman from Alexandria, married to a French man and who was consequently threatened and accused of treachery.

As for me, I spent those eighteen revolutionary days fearing for them, afraid that one might be attacked or kidnapped, or that another might be assaulted, humiliated or harassed.

And then comes all the rest. A country where you used to live, where you still feel at home, where you have friends, links, and future projects. The January events highlighted in a moment the strength of what connects me to this country, the depth of the heartbreak, and the violence of the distance. In constant ups and downs, back and forth movements, feelings of pride and anxiety mingle in your heart, your stomach and your mind. Pride for what those close friends are undertaking, for their courage to confront themselves with risks while standing firm, and the fear to lose them.

In all this confusion, I got closer to those who also have families, friends, history or roots in Egypt, closer to those who experienced geographical rifts. Some are Egyptians, some Algerian and all live in Marseilles.

What else to do than wait for Facebook and phone lines to be operational again, while you're watching a continuous loop of images on Al Jazeera? My feeling of being powerless has never been as strong as during those eighteen days.



Photo by Corinne Grassi

Photo by Taymour Senbel

Photo by Marwa Turki

Volunteers in the revolutions

'People started to gather in big squares of Alexandria, it was clear that there are a lot of new faces like us participating for the first time in their lives, youths between 18 and 40. We all looked the same, no experience in protesting, watching the police around us all the time, curious and for sure undecided whether to keep on or just go back home?! But something forced us to stay.'

'One look behind and I couldn't see the end of the demonstration, we were almost 20000, I have never felt that before: Power and Freedom.'

**TAYMOUR SENBEL**  
Egypt

This was the moment I rediscovered my own brother, he is kind of a shy person and he sits most of the time either reading or on the computer, but then, I was amazed to see how fearless and brave he is, it was unbelievable seeing him attacking when we should retreat, when we were protecting ourselves and there were gunshots twenty centimeters above our heads, he was not afraid, on the contrary.

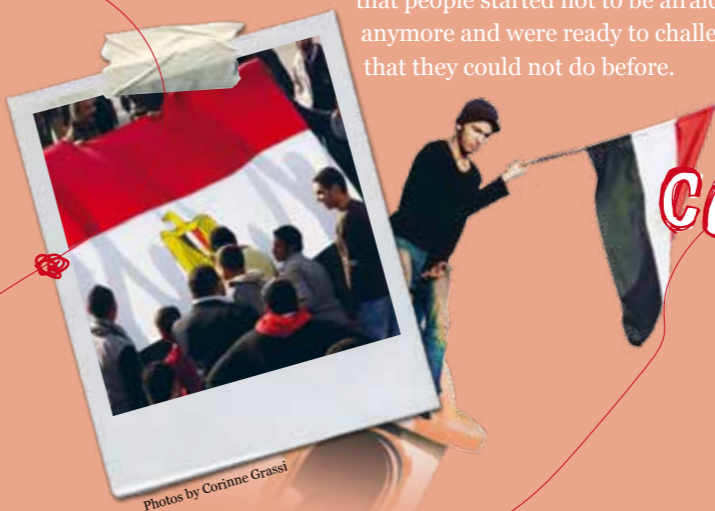
'I hugged and kissed people I don't know, veiled women were dancing in the streets, next to their husbands, and no one objected, before it was their country — Balladhun — now it's our country — Balladna — our country.'



Photos by Marwa Turki



Photos by Corinne Grassi



Photos by Corinne Grassi



Photos by Corinne Grassi



**CORINNE GRASSI**  
Egypt

It was the first very big demonstration after the violent clashes on 27 January. There was such freedom and victory spirit in that peaceful big demonstration after young people made police run away and disappear. The one with a girl in that small police 'box' with a boy sitting on it with his floating flags is for me one symbol that people started not to be afraid anymore and were ready to challenge all that they could not do before.

'A day for our home' (our nation) in Miami was a very strong event because of the place where it took place. It is in the street where a mosque and a church face each other and the church is the one which was bombed on New Year's Eve.

One of the big spontaneous festivals with bands playing for free. During February, March and April there was almost one every weekend in different neighbourhoods. It was the second big festival, two months exactly after Mubarak left. Massar Egabari closed the festival under the rain and you could see that even with very cold wind and strong rain nobody wanted to stop to celebrate with also the public singing all the songs, which have strong meaning related to the social situation and former regime.

The event took place exactly four months after and had several messages for dialogue, peace, an official common promise to take care of the country. As a foreigner this event has been one of the strongest in terms of human relations. From the second myself and a few friends put our feet in the street we received a huge warm welcome from many volunteers and the population along the street. They even gave us the tag volunteers were carrying. Many people wanted to take pictures with us, guide us. This neighbourhood is used to Arab tourists but not really to Western people and we could feel they were so happy we were there. Taking photos, volunteers were dragging me to the stage to be with all the other Egyptians taking photos and videos. As the photos show the volunteers like the mixed population around and were shining and happy like it was really their day.

The most seen and favourite on my flickr albums (more than 1000 times).

