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BONNIE ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, first, sexual assault in the Egyptian uprising, then women silenced in movies. Behind the headlines, poverty moves to the suburbs.

(Musical break.)

MS. ERBE: Hello, I'm Bonnie Erbe. Welcome to *To the Contrary*, a discussion of news and social trends from diverse perspectives. Up first, sexual assault in the Egyptian protests.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. ERBE: For days, millions packed Cairo streets and Tahrir Square awaiting what they hoped would be Morsi's resignation. As during the Arab Spring, there were numerous reports of sexual assaults on women protesters, protesters whose voters helped bring Morsi to power. The women's group Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment reported at least 44 cases of sexual assault on just the first day and more as protests continued during the week.

A BBC journalist tweeted that women were taking refuge in his building to avoid sexual assault. Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment is asking for volunteers to protect women during the protests.

Egyptian activist Dalia Ziada is fighting back against this latest round of assaults on women's rights in Egypt.

DALIA ZIADA: We have a big problem of sexual harassment and recently this problem is not only a social problem, but it was politicized. And as – (inaudible) – the politicians started to use this to keep women away from participating in protests. So as a solution, in Tahrir Square, for example, we had – the men there made a circle to keep the women in while they are protesting, so they can move freely, but at the same time, they could not be harassed.

MS. ERBE: Ziada says women are at the forefront of the movement to oust Morsi.

MS. ZIADA: This time, we are revolting against a regime that sees women as – I'm sorry to say this – but as a sexual object. They don't see her as a leader. They don't see her as an essential participant in public life. And they did not try to say this out loud in public. All the times, they claim – Morsi, in particular, when he came to power, he kept claiming that we support women rights, but in fact, he did not do anything for women, anything.

So by women participating in this right now, they are guaranteeing their own rights as well.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So Congresswoman Norton, should guaranteeing women's freedom from sexual assault become a principle of U.S. foreign policy.

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON: I sure hope so, Bonnie. Women were at the forefront of the Egyptian revolution. I have to assume that this is the work of counterrevolutionaries or perhaps thugs.

HADLEY HEATH: Good for those women standing up for their right to protest against what's been a terrible regime. You know, lawlessness and chaos is not good for women anywhere in the world, but Morsi hasn't been the right leader for Egypt either.

KIM GANDY: Yes, and there's also some element of gangs in that sports team, fraternities, you see individuals will do something in a gang that they would never consider doing on their own. But the fact that there's so little bystander intervention also says something about the culture.

RINA SHAH: Let's be honest. There's this culture that's pervasive of women being objectified. And with that, you have religious conservative clerics and government officials who've come out and said that this is the women's fault, that they should not be mixing with men in society. So there's this underlying nature there that we are not going to be able to correct overnight.

MS. ERBE: Well, I think it's – I think everybody would agree it's fabulous that the women are standing up there now and fighting back against these assaults, but how did they – they were also voters, not just protesters in the Arab Spring, how could they elect a guy who would turn out to be so completely different from what they thought they were voting for?

MS. GANDY: It wouldn't be the first time voters have voted for someone based on how they presented themselves during an election, and then turned out to be something different afterwards.

DEL. NORTON: No, but women didn't elect this leader. This – the only organized political grouping in the society, after the Arab Spring, in Egypt was the Muslim Brotherhood. And they took advantage of that and they've not been able to have the kind of parliamentary government where the minority has some say and they did a takeover and they're paying for it.

MS. HEATH: You know, obviously Morsi hasn't been a good representative of how Egyptians should feel about women's equality, but that's not the only reason he's being protested. He's been bad for economic opportunity in the country. He's had

nothing but disdain for civil society in Egypt. And so it's not just a failure on his behalf to recognize women's rights, but a failure across the board.

MS. ERBE: Of course, no. And he's trying to become a dictator. I mean, he threw out the constitution and tried to put one in that made him, you know, commander in chief and supreme leader.

MS. HEATH: Right. But I think we make a mistake sometimes when we think that women's only interest in politics is so-called "women's issues." But a lot of these women in Egypt who are protesting are seeing the broad bandwidth of issue where he's a failure.

MS. ERBE: Right, but it's manifesting itself. I mean, if you listen to the woman we interviewed, he is – Morsi is creating these gangs of thugs who go out and try to – and assault women actually as a tool. You know, talk about rape becoming a tool of war, here it's a tool of, you know, of what's attempting to be a theocracy. And so how do you fight that? What's the best way to fight that?

MS. GANDY: Well, obviously, the women are standing up and fighting it, and they're engaging men in supporting that fight, which is absolutely critical. You need both women and men to stand up against sexual assault.

MS. ERBE: Eleanor, when you are involved in foreign policy discussions in Congress, does it ever come up that – and particularly the Arab countries are so tricky, because like we see in Syria, obviously what Assad is doing is horrendous, but there – some of his, you know, so-called "freedom fighters" fighting against his regime are members of the Taliban. So you never really know how you go in and who you help. How is that complicated by the fact that sexual assault is involved here in Egypt?

DEL. NORTON: Horrifically so because you will find the women in the Congress who have been impatient as it is with this revolution was a growing number of members of the Congress wondering why we're still contributing this large amount of money to the Egyptians. Here's where geopolitics gets complicated.

MS. ERBE: How much do we give to the Egyptians?

DEL. NORTON: Billions each year. And that's, you know, that was a part of an agreement which is one of the few that helped us settle anything in the Mideast during the Carter administration. And Egypt gets a certain amount and Israel gets a certain amount. And so each administration, Democratic and Republican, particularly where there's been a rule of law and there's been an election here, have tended to at least wait and not to jump in. And here we have a regime that is barely a year old.

So this is tragic because if it's going to happen, I believe that once again, who created order the last time? The military. And frankly, they are the ones who brought

democracy to Egypt. And it looks like they're about to intervene and do the same thing again.

MS. ERBE: You have a problem with military aid going to or humanitarian aid going to a regime that is so clearly massively anti-female?

MS. HEATH: I think we've learned that the United States in foreign policy needs to have clearly defined goals. What is it that we're trying to do here? What exactly is our national interest here and what can we do in the interest of Egyptians? I think now is not the time for us to be involved in either side of this conflict in Egypt.

MS. ERBE: But, you know, and I agree with you for many practical reasons, but it's really hard to sit there and watch –

MS. HEATH: Absolutely.

MS. ERBE: – gang rapes on such a massive scale.

MS. SHAH: But then again, the American way can't fix it overnight. What they're dealing with over there is far different than the culture we have over here. We've a rights based democratic culture here. Over there, it's going to take a long time for women to raise their voices politically just because of the things that are in place culturally. You can't change this overnight, nor should Americans try. But we should certainly take a good look at where we're throwing our money.

MS. ERBE: Yes, definitely so. Let us know what you think. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe.

From women's rights, to women's visibility.

If you go to the movies, as most of us do this summer, you might see Superman, giant robots, or zombies, but one thing you'll less of are female characters with speaking roles. According to a new report, only 28 percent of speaking characters from last year's biggest movies were female, down from 33 percent five years ago.

While, "The Heat" a buddy cop movie written by a woman with two female leads opened last week, that's an anomaly. Women make up only about a tenth of all writers and directors. And according to actor Geena Davis, whose institute tracks women in the media, at the current rate, it will take about 700 years for women to reach parity in Hollywood.

MS. ERBE: Why, Rina, are we going backwards? I mean, this is – we should be moving forward.

MS. SHAH: We should be and what's going on is there is this glass ceiling there for women in film, particularly those who seek to be directors. Where are the women

film directors is what I want to know. I want to look at the actresses, though, for a moment. There're strong women, such as Halle Berry and other women of color like me, a woman like Jennifer Garner, who's from my home state of West Virginia. These women have come to stages and accepted awards upon awards. They shattered these ceilings. And here's what's different. They look at individual merit. They get somewhere not by looking at the collective. They're going somewhere based on their individual merit.

Who are the role models for the role models, right? These women seek to be trailblazers. I think that can happen. I'm optimistic it can happen. I know that this exists right now in the film industry. But us forcing roles and things of that sort can't happen overnight.

DEL. NORTON: Yeah, but what can happen – I was astounded in height of these figures on female roles to find that we are half of the box office. We're taking this? For goodness' sake, that's how we can do something about it. And I'm very concerned that we have helped make this industry into an international industry. So they have found that internationally people want to see men doing these goofy things and they are not catering to these women who are helping to create the industry here, who make the industry run. They are catering to some international – whoever – goofy men around the world who say, well, let the Americans give us what we want and forget what their own half of their population wants.

Women need to rise up as consumers.

MS. ERBE: You know, when we decided to do this topic this week, I went online, and I looked at Lionsgate, which produces some of the most quality films coming out of Hollywood. And I was shocked to see on their website, anyway, all of their top managers are white males. And they're about – I would say seven or eight of those people in that category. And then they showed their board of directors, in their 10 or 12 board of directors, one woman. Nobody – at least – they didn't show pictures, but it didn't seem like anybody of color. How could they be getting away with this in this day and age?

MS. SHAH: I think, again, this is the thing. This has long been the culture – men in Hollywood at the higher and upper echelons. It's societal. They can fix it by letting women into the board room, much like the see switch we had outside in business. Women can have a place, but getting there by collective bargaining is not the way. Women have to take individual responsibility to get there as well.

MS. ERBE: A lot of powerful female actors – they want to be called actors now, not actresses – but female actors such as Angelina Jolie are using their power and their finances to produce and direct their own movies. And Jolie did it, what, a year or a year and a half ago, with a movie about rape as a tool of war, that she shot in the former, you know, Bosnia Herzegovina area. And she – but that was a flop. So do women have to – when they go out on their own, do they have to learn more about what becomes a

commercial success, so that they can pump out movies that give women parity, but also make money at the box office?

MS. GANDY: Well, I'm not entirely sure that she was looking for a commercial success. She has money and she was using her money to cover something that she felt was not sufficiently covered.

MS. ERBE: Yeah, but it was pulled a week after it was in theaters. Now, you got to believe that she wasn't looking for that –

MS. GANDY: No, I'm sure that she was disappointed in that outcome. But it really is – in great part, it's about the money. It's what do the funders fund. It's not just the directors. It's not just the actors. You have to have the money for those directors to direct and the actors to act in women focused movies. And there is a belief – I don't think it's true – but there is a widespread belief that women will watch movies about men. But men will not watch movies about women. So if you make movies about men, the whole population will watch them. Whereas, if you make movies about women, for the most part, the men will watch them. The same thing they do, believe it or not, in cartoons. The vast majority of cartoon movies has – the male mouse is the lead, the male pig, the male bear, the male smurf. They actually do this even with children. And I think we've got to take –

MS. HEATH: But not all the Disney princesses, right, like Mulan was a seriously tough woman and she was a great role model, I thought. There's a lot of examples here and there of women characters who we should all aspire to be more like the heroines that they are.

So it's just the number of women characters, but how those characters are represented. Sometimes, maybe it's playing to the bad stereotypes about women, but they do this to men, too. And I think there's this huge interest in how women are represented in the media and we rarely talk about how men are represented because while there are some supermen characters, there's also a lot of fuddy-duddy incompetent men represented in the media. And I don't think that's a fair stereotype to apply to men either.

MS. ERBE: Well, and superheroes are not – you know – I mean, maybe they're something little boys would want to emulate, but they're certainly not – you know – they have their drawbacks, too. But you made a great point, Eleanor, about – that these movies are catering to international sales. So what do we do about trying to get women more powerful and their roles more representative in movies made for American audiences?

DEL. NORTON: Yeah, and that's really where we have to look. Women want stories. The decline of the novel, the decline of storytelling does not help women. You look at where the great movies are. They're not action movies. They are – you know – they – and over and over again, TCM, you know, and people want to see them over and over again. Women – if we make those stories, they need not be about women – if we

take the risk in this risk based economy of making some of those great stories, stories of the 21st century, we will bring – we will teach the rest of the world that there's more to American films than jumping out of skyscrapers and surviving.

MS. ERBE: Exactly. (Laughter.)

Behind the headlines, a very different issue, poverty in the suburbs. Poverty used to be seen as a primarily rural and urban issue, but it's becoming more of a suburban problem and actually rose in America suburbs by 64 percent in the last decade. Elizabeth Kneebone, author of "Confronting Suburban Poverty in America," says many factors cause this shift.

(Begin video segment.)

ELIZABETH KNEEBONE: There're a number of reasons that we've seen poverty growing in the suburbs. Thinking generally, these numbers can increase as either low income people are moving into these communities or as long-term residents are slipping down the economic ladder. And we've seen a combination of both those factors in most of our major metro areas across the country.

MS. ERBE: Foreign born people account for about a third of the population growth in the suburbs.

MS. KNEEBONE: As suburbs have grown over the years – and they've grown faster than cities in the 2000s, they've become more diverse, both economically and demographically. Part of that is the immigration piece, that we're increasingly seeing immigrant families locate in suburban communities. But that's not the driving force here. Overall, across our major metro areas, the foreign born population contributed to about 17 percent of the growth in the suburban poor population. So the bulk of this increase that we've seen actually happened among native born residents.

MS. ERBE: The shift from urban to suburban poverty started before the recession.

MS. KNEEBONE: The typical household income was falling even before the Great Recession hit. And in fact, this tipping point, where we now see more poor living in suburbs than in cities, that happened in the early 2000s, even before the collapse of the housing market.

MS. ERBE: The unemployment rate is leveling out throughout the country, but Kneebone says suburban area will continue to struggle.

MS. KNEEBONE: We tend to think about the recession because clearly that was so severe and touched so many people in places across the country – cities, suburbs, rural communities alike. But in fact, when we look at the shift of the map of poverty in this country. This was a longer running trend. Since the '80s, the poor population has been

growing faster in suburbs than in cities. And that's something that's picked up pace over time.

MS. ERBE: Kneebone says a more strategic use of government resources already available to fight poverty would help end suburban poverty.

MS. KNEEBONE: What we propose in the book is looking at the \$82 billion we're already spending. This is a very fragmented pool of money. It's not necessarily adapted to the current landscape of poverty in this country. But by just repurposing a small portion of it, 5 percent, that would be \$4 billion to create a competitive program that would think differently about the way we channel resources into communities. And this money would also be expected to leverage private funds, so that the impact would be much bigger than just that \$4 billion.

MS. ERBE: Some suburbs have also come up with programs that should serve as national examples.

MS. KNEEBONE: There're a number of really promising models that we've seen across the country in different regions. I think you could look to a place like Houston. It's a growing region. There're a lot of jobs there. But it's a very diverse place. And they saw their poor population more than double in the suburbs in just 10 years. Yet, they have an organization like Neighborhood Centers, which is a human services organization that really works at the right scale in terms of tackling these issues.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So, Kim Gandy, is it that easy to get all the government resources, \$80 billion that are going to fight poverty together in one place and try to fight it more in the suburbs than currently the aim is at the cities?

MS. GANDY: You know, I think that the money got scattered across a lot of different agencies because there's an effort to focus on all of those individual problems. Does there need to be more coordination? No doubt about it. But creating a super bureaucracy to subsume all the small bureaucracies, I'm not sure is a great answer either.

MS. ERBE: So what do you do about poverty in the suburbs? I mean, it's different in that –

MS. GANDY: Well, you know, there're individual things that you can address. Obviously jobs is a huge issue. In my area, we work with domestic violence victims for whom having a job or getting a job means that they might have the economic means to leave an abusive situation. And yet, if they can't get transportation to that job, they're trapped in an abusive household. So creating transportation is a huge part of getting access to jobs when the jobs are in the urban areas and you're in a suburban area of poverty.

DEL. NORTON: And even when they're in suburban areas, they still don't have the terrific mass transportation systems that cities have. But, Bonnie, the only thing worse than poverty is hidden poverty or poverty that is not acknowledged. As some suburbs would rather not even sully their reputation as anything but the place to move. And if you acknowledge that this place is growing with a lot of poor people, they fear the reputation of the suburban community itself. Well, that is called a disaster because they already allowed suburban poverty to grow so that it's worse now than urban poverty.

So what happened to urban poverty? A lot happened to it. Some of it bad. Some of it very good. But most of it was the acknowledgement that these cities were full of people and a lot of things had to be targeted specifically to them. And these suburban communities have got to acknowledge that if they catch it now, there may still be a chance. Though, I think they have already waited a very long time.

MS. HEATH: I think the growth of suburban poverty really illustrates that there's no one average poor family in the United States. They're all diverse. They face a diverse set of circumstances and hardships. And because of that diversity and because of the various needs that individuals may have, I believe that the best poverty relief is the most local poverty relief. And so while there's political pressure for the federal government to want to create programs and to be involved, it'd be better to devolve more of these programs to a more local level, where people can be more interacting with people's personal lives.

MS. ERBE: What about job creation? I mean, to me the best antidote to poverty is job creation. Are we – do we have policies in place that are getting jobs created in the suburbs now that it seems to be – they're needed more just as much in the suburbs as they are on cities.

DEL. NORTON: That's why jobs are being created. That's the irony here.

MS. GANDY: Well, they move to the suburbs. (Laughter.)

DEL. NORTON: The jobs are moved to the suburbs, but if you don't focus on this population, they'll move all around them, and no one pays any attention to them when it comes to making sure that they get some of those jobs.

MS. SHAH: This may not be statistical poverty, but we ought to trace this right back to the housing bubble. People are living in places that they really can't afford. And there's been a real lack of mortgage relief programs. There has also been, if you really look at it, a new wave of folks who are living in suburbs, who may have one out of two in a couple unemployed or underemployed, maybe some responsibility for aging parents, two kids, a garage, a mortgage. This is all really the part of what's happening here. Folks are really suffering under all this. And what's happening is that there's a lack of public and private partnerships. I'm a big fan of those because I think that's what really solves and helps these problems. Only when public and private sector comes together to

say what can we solve locally, and that's the only thing that's going to bring the suburbs right back out of where they've gone.

Being in the suburbs doesn't mean you're economically stable.

MS. ERBE: And a very good thought to end on. That's it for this edition of *To the Contrary*. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe and @tothecontrary, and visit our website pbs.org/tothecontrary, where the discussion continues. Whether you agree or think to the contrary, please join us next time.