Civic participation and gender institutional legacy since January 25, 2011

La participation civique et l'héritage institutionnel du genre depuis le 25 janvier 2011

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MARTA AGOSTI

CIVIC PARTICIPATION
AND GENDER INSTITUTIONAL LEGACY
SINCE JANUARY 25, 2011

ABSTRACT

Civic engagement has become a threat to the current *state of affairs* since Egypt's 2014 presidential elections. The blooming of motivated and active organisations, informal groups and social entrepreneurs had definitely not been foreseen in the Mubarak era, and is still rarely accounted for in current political analysis. The daily ordinary practice of mundane people, not always linked to consolidated NGOs, development organisations or state institutions, has given birth to a very organic *non-movement* that has proven its ability to deal with diversity (in the many possible combinations of class, religion, gender and age) for the betterment of their communities in successful ways. Youth participation and young women's involvement has been important in challenging the previous nation-State narrative and in the genesis of this movement. Nonetheless, youth engagement and their potential have seriously been constrained by stagnant old regime structures, difficulties in accessing funds, bureaucracy and heavy repression. All of these were elements manufactured and controlled by Mubarak's regime, that have found continuity in the current State committed to restoring the *status quo ante*, prioritising security over rights, and not allowing civil engagement outside its strict paradigms. As such, the public sphere has been assimilated as the exclusive domain of the State/Government.

This paper will address the particularities of this organic non-movement with regards to young women's civic engagement in addition to the specific constraints that derive from its interaction with gender politics, with a particular focus on conventional forms of advocacy by state institutions and consolidated NGOs, and their links to international funding.

INTRODUCTION

Civic engagement of young people in Egypt is very weak in terms of participation in groups or organised activities and voluntary work. Their social networks are limited to few friends and family, and these networks decline as young people age. However, young people are aware of Egypt's social problem and rated highly issues such as poverty reduction, economic growth, and health and education reform. Nonetheless, they do not invest time to learn more about the social and political issues from the available media.¹

SYPE's final report was distributed at the beginning of January 2011.² In the light of historical events that happened, rather than a *weak* and *disengaged* approach to civic participation, this quote reveals the discomfort and rejection that young people felt toward the institutions that were supposed to represent them. A month later, these same young men and women were on the frontlines among those who shook the *status quo* in the country and who overthrew Mubarak, ending his thirty-year rule.

Different analyses have pointed out the structural, socio-economic and political problems that prompted the 2011 uprising. Neoliberal policies, structural adjustment plans, youth unemployment, corruption and nepotism are unquestionably deeply rooted in the genesis of this *critical event*.³ However, this analysis *from the sky*⁴ has neglected the involvement of 'ordinary people' as dynamic actors of change. As Bayat⁵ explains, the nuances and manoeuvres of the ordinary people have often been forgotten by social movement theorists and by political science analysts. Usually portrayed as politically passive recipients, ordinary citizens have gained a place as a unit of analysis after the multiple popular uprisings – in Egypt but also in the whole region; this has made the significance of their daily activities very apparent. However, the articulation of these activities in movements that can potentially gain leverage had to confront pre-existing and stagnant state institutions that carried on with different power dynamics and narratives that ordinary citizens had to contest.

This paper looks at the controversies that arise when ordinary citizens involved in peaceful civic engagement and activism during the uprising

1. Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE) 2010, p. 145.

2. The Population Council conducted the Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE) in collaboration with the Egyptian Cabinet, Information and Decision Support Centre. The Ford Foundation; the Canadian International Development Agency; UNFPA; UNICEF; the World Bank; the Embassy of the Netherlands; UNDP; UNIFEM; and the Swedish International Development Agency supported the survey.

3. See Das, *Critical Events*. Veena Das defines a critical event as "*an event par excellence because it instituted a new modality of historical action which was not inscribed in the inventory of that situation*" (p. 5).

4. See Singerman 2011, p. 11. Singerman points out how traditional analyses of neoliberal policies that mainly focus on power structures, tend to neglect individuals' relational forces as a successful form of resistance.

5. Bayat 2010.

At an awareness-raising event about sexual harassment on Dec. 5, 2015 in Cairo.

intersect with social institutions in the specific domain of the women's movement(s). This aims at exploring the articulation of *everyday feminism*⁶ to argue the importance of organic non-movements investing in social change. Civic engagement as latest developments have demonstrated, has become a great area of concern for the regime's plans of restoration. As such, it deserves a

6. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

closer look. For this purpose, the paper addresses these questions for the period between 2011 and 2014.⁷

THE 8TH OF MARCH: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Women's participation in the uprising is undeniable;⁸ their capacity to react and organise was demonstrated during the 10.000 women's march against military violence⁹ in response to the brutal episode known as *the Blue Bra*¹⁰ in the non-Arab media. Yet the events that took place during the celebrations of International Women's Day in 2011 exemplified many of the historical controversies that characterised the women's movement(s) in Mubarak's time. At the peak of civic and peaceful mobilisations, the first time International Women's Day was celebrated, free of old regime tactics and manoeuvres, it was a fiasco. Based on my own observation, among around 200 participants in Tahrir Square, there were young women and men familiar with NGO work, some informal initiatives, well-known figures from the women's movement, some UN officials, a few National Council for Women officials, a few journalists. In addition, for the first time since the beginning of the uprising, a noticeable amount of Western women were also present and could be easily spotted among the few people attending the celebrations.

According to different participants, preparation for the celebrations was rushed, which could have been merely a consequence of the turbulent days that preceded, which did not leave much scope for organisation. However, the usual display of slogans and petitions, announcement of the meeting point, and the Facebook event did not gather popular support; neither did they meet with spontaneous adherence at a moment when it seemed easy to find. As Sally Zohney, a young woman activist, explained: *"a task force prepared for the International Women's day, we were alongside other groups, planning for this, very informal... it was very poorly organised... it went very wrong, people got beaten and chased."*¹¹ As the Square at that time was always full, tension grew slowly, a group gathered next to where we were standing and the participants were first chased and later dispersed. As in a subsequent discussion of why it went wrong, Zohny pointed at controversies previously recorded and

7. Efforts to regulate and punish civic engagement happening outside State control have dramatically increased since November 2014, date of the ultimatum for groups carrying out activities classified by the government as falling under the Ministry of Social Solidarity's mandate. Therefore, this paper differentiates between two phases, before and after the NGO ultimatum, and focuses on the first one.

8. See Hafez 2012, p. 38 and Winegar 2012.

9. See Shukrallah, "10,000 Egyptian Women March against Military Violence and Rule", *Ahram Online*.

10. RT, "Shocking Video: 'Blue Bra' Girl Brutally Beaten by Egypt Military."

11. Interview.

noted that the emergent informal groups were in the process of understanding, deconstructing, fighting and rebuilding themselves in different forms:

There was no collective voice of what this day is for [...] We looked very upper class, a lot of people didn't speak Arabic, a lot of foreigners, less Egyptians, for the mass streets this is something they didn't want. Who knew of international days back then? Media was all over the place. [...] It was accused of being something that was international, non-Egyptian. I remember very well, there was this woman in complete veil that they were carrying on their shoulders, and they were saying "*this is an Egyptian woman, you are not Egyptian women.*" They weren't against the demands as much as they were against the image.¹²

This episode illustrates many of the particular controversies in the articulation of women's rights demands. The mix of informal groups and old actors in the women's movement(s) reflected on the lack of coordination and leadership, which was translated into a fragmented message. This fragmentation hampered mobilization of potential adherents, which was also reinforced by the idea that the women's movement(s) was/were something alien to the popular masses. Also, the presence of noticeable foreigners on an international day evoked an uncomfortable relationship with what it is considered as the *Other*, and a way to denounce an event seen as not emanating from Egyptians' own culture. This explained the need to reclaim the image that the media present at the scene would use to portray what a real 'Egyptian woman' is. As a result, although many demands made in Tahrir Square in January-February 2011 involved issues that deeply affect women's rights, and although men and women showed inclusive and egalitarian practices, principles and desires in the Square, many informal groups and secular¹³ activists were reluctant to join demonstrations specifically for women's rights. The popular blog *The Arabist* rightly asked: "*Where were the opposition parties? Why wasn't this publicised by the Kullena Khaled Said group?*"¹⁴

These controversies have previously been highlighted by different academics in different forms. Badran¹⁵ referred to gender activism as "invisible" due to the controversies, stereotypes and misconceptions generated by the adherence to feminism in the public arena. Ahmed also relates to this idea arguing that "*questions of fusion and encoding have been critical for*

12. *Ibid.*

13. Regarding the term *secular*, I refer to Al-Ali (2000) who elaborates about the multiplicity of secular activists, who are in favour of separation between politics and religion, but can differ greatly on other issues.

14. For more details on this event, see: Lindsey, "International Women's Day in Cairo"; NWRC, "On International Women's Day, Egyptian Women Demand Revolutionary Role."

15. Badran 2009.

SANDRA FERNANDEZ

At an awareness-raising event about sexual harassment on Dec. 5, 2015 in Cairo.

women”¹⁶ which has deep implications for women’s empowerment and the avenues available for their civic engagement until today.

Since the strict anti-protest law was passed,¹⁷ familiar forms of street activism such as strikes, demonstrations and sit-ins have almost disappeared. According to several sources, the number of persons detained from July 3, 2013 to May 2014 exceeded 41,000;¹⁸ women detainees are no exception and their numbers increase day by day. The cases of imprisoned human rights defenders Yara Sallam and Mahienour al-Massry among many others, were – and still are – of current concern for national and international human rights organisations.¹⁹ The intense crackdown on political dissidents has provoked a strategic – and perhaps only temporary – withdrawal from the streets. However, the original demands and principles of the uprising are still very relevant and present in citizens’ everyday lives, as none have been the subject of a serious and inclusive national debate.

Political activism was – and still is – the most present and visual image of the uprising; however, the involvement of these same activists and many other citizens in community and social initiatives should not be underestimated. This involvement existed previously and kept growing in the years after the

16. Ahmed 1992, p. 129.

17. See AhramOnline, “Full English Translation of Egypt’s New Protest Law”; Human Rights Watch, “Egypt: Draft Law Would Effectively Ban Protests.”

18. Middle East Monitor, May 2014.

19. See Elbadawi, “Yara Sallam”; Ali, “Run Mahienour Run”; Amnesty International, “Urgent Action--Activists Remanded in Jail, Trial in September.”

uprising. For instance, Osman²⁰ pointed out how young people used to participate in cultural activities as their main realm of expression and engagement. Moreover, by the end of 2008 the Ministry of Trade was processing more than 2000 company registrations per week, in addition to the fact that by the mid-2000s, for the first time since decolonization, more Egyptians were employed in the private sector than the public sector.²¹ Many of these newly created companies had a social and/or non-profit component. Since the NGO law implemented during Mubarak's rule imposed heavy State controls and constraining bureaucratic processes on NGOs registered as such, many of these initiatives registered as private businesses, law firms, etc. or did not register at all. This reveals a great expansion of the 'private' domain (outside the hands of the State) to answer the expectations and aspirations of young entrepreneurs who come on board with a different ethical and moral landscape. This landscape is clearly aligned with the principles that young men and women reclaimed in Tahrir.

This entrepreneurial boom, which includes social entrepreneurship, was – and still is – accompanied by a general inclination to avoid contact with the State and a strong sense of suffering, which has been repeatedly recorded.²² Furthermore, in the months following the uprising, young citizens and organisations were very active in their attempts to collaborate with such initiatives to mobilise the increasing demand for volunteering. I can recall how just some months after the Uprising, one development partner I was working closely with at that time, gathered more than 200 small NGOs and community associations in one meeting to discuss partner agreements and collaborations. Also, on the celebration of "Youth Day", for example, which was organised by different UN agencies at *al-Sawy Culture Wheel* in 2012, more than 1.000 volunteer applications were collected in one day.

On the other hand, civic engagement initiatives were also present and took part in the media revolution that was recruiting newcomers every second. From March 2008 to July 2012, Egyptian Facebook users increased by 372% (from 822,560 to 3,581,460).²³ Ranging from waste collection to fund-raising and activities to reclaim public space through art exhibitions, cinema screenings, talks, lectures, book launches, concerts, sports activities, organized tours around the city, theatre, etc. were organised through Facebook, bypassing State clearance or registration. Since January 25, 2011 the number of cultural, sports, business and community participation initiatives that reclaim ownership over *citizenship* have involved as many citizens as the numbers that we saw in Tahrir Square.

20. Osman 2012.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 316.

22. See Elyachar 2005; Hafez 2012; Ismail 2006; Ismail 2012.

23. Herrera, 2012.

Therefore, rather than announcing the end of the uprising, as some academics have done,²⁴ this article suggests that the battlefield has shifted to the domain of social or community activism(s). This explains the government's plans for screening, controlling, codifying and instrumentalising old and new social initiatives of different natures.²⁵ It also sheds light on the security apparatus' close monitoring and heavy repression of the receipt of foreign aid, registrations with the Ministry of Social Solidarity, as well as the activities of law firms, research centres, clinics, etc. and of course individuals since the ultimatum for NGOs to register was announced.²⁶

FEMINISM AND THE ORDINARY CITIZEN

Feminists' values, along with many other preoccupations, certainly form a part of '*the emergence of a youth culture with intrinsic ties to an electronic and mediated world*'²⁷ that has citizenship as its battlefield. It claims an alternative *habitus* that is intended to be diverse, and inclusive of all the marginalities found in the Square. What are the chances that this youth culture may be expanded and consolidated?

Analysis of the engagement of young women with the uprising can be analysed from two different angles. The first focuses on the involvement of young women as political and social activists for different causes, which may explain bloggers' specialisations (for example, see Mona Seif and Nawara Negm on the issue of military trials) and the reluctance of many activists to be identified with specific initiatives that may carry political connotations in an attempt to remain organic and inclusive. As a senior UN staff person, who was looking for strategies to engage with them, put it:

*The Uprising gave room and ways for movements that are young, that were not represented, that were not by-products of the system, and that ask for things that were not elitist. They ask for very legitimate demands, that were a taboo to ask for in the past and that is mainly the set of rights in general.*²⁸

24. El-Ghobashy and Sabra, "Egypt After Raba'a: An Interview with Adam Sabra and Mona El Ghobashy".

25. For more information on the content of the law and the reaction from CSO, see: Mada Masr, "Civil Society Law One More Link on Chain to Shackle Dissent in Egypt"; FIDH, "Egypt: New Measures to Further Obstruct NGOs' Work"; EIPR, "Proposed Government Law Makes NGOs Subordinate to Security and Ministry Control."

26. For more details see MadaMasr, "With Latest Crackdown, State Dissolves 380 NGOs in Just 2 Months" and EIPR, "Proposed Government Law Makes NGOs Subordinate to Security and Ministry Control."

27. Abbink 2004, p. 17.

28. Interview. Some interviews have been anonymized, upon request of the relevant interviewees.

At an awareness-raising event about sexual harassment on Dec. 5, 2015 in Cairo.

The second angle is that of specific youth claims – including those of young women – with regard to “*how youth are (in behaviours [and principles], outfits, ways of speaking, and moving around within private and public spaces).*”²⁹ This depicts the collective existence of a non-movement in daily contestation and conquest of an alternative and marginal presence, and the intersection of this presence with political and social activism. Yet its intangible outcome is the reclaiming of values and principles of citizenship. In Bayat’s words, this

*account[s] for an everyday feminism that may rarely employ organisation and networking, mobilising strategies, street marches, picketing, strikes or disruption, and yet is able to extend [women’s] choices.*³⁰

My understanding is that while an *everyday feminism* is present at the genesis of secular revolutionary demands, in both young women and men activists, the traditional political articulation of these demands has not gained

29. Bayat 2010, p. 111.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

endorsement. This feminism has also been unable to establish solid networks and alliances with other movements, such as political parties, trade unions or human rights organisations, capable of mobilising support and influencing the public. On the other hand, young social and political activists are leaning more towards organic and inclusive initiatives that not only share their political views but also claim a specific *habitus*³¹ underpinned by their condition of marginality, both within city dwellers and within youth. As a consequence, women's rights activists may have felt divided between a long-established structure that does not represent them and an organic movement that could potentially dilute their particular claims.³² Mariam Kirollos (human rights' activist and co-founder of Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment/Assault) expressed this dilemma in an interview at the Global Uprising Conference:

I always believed and dreamt of a *strong feminist movement in Egypt that fights everything that we are against; fights capitalism, patriarchy, racisms, nationalism, homophobia, the long list of things that we are against*. The Egyptian revolution continues, and without women and the resistance I do not think the revolution will mean anything. And honestly what keeps me so positive are Egyptian women, basically, and how they are resisting so much because no one recognises how hard it is. *Their very own presence in a demonstration is a form of resistance*, they [the State] have been trying so hard to marginalise us and they know that if they stop them [women] from going to protests, next day they will stop them from walking on the streets, the next time they will stop them from working... we keep on resisting.³³

What I find enlightening in this statement is the use of an inclusive *we* to address a long list of claims that include a different set of values within a *feminist movement*. This goes beyond the traditional Egyptian claims of the "women's movement" and directly challenges the constituency imposed by old state narrative. She is not addressing women's participation in a nation-building capacity by asking for quotas, education, and any other field in a vertical structure; she is addressing participation by *presence* and *resistance*, which implies a horizontal integration that demands a very inclusive movement – pertaining to women as much as to men – capable of addressing all these questions. Therefore, what kind of a political structure could actually articulate these claims and values?

31. Bourdieu 1977.

32. A third angle of analysis – that ought to be contemplated – has become very relevant since the start of Sisi's presidency: the emotional fatigue that can be experienced after several years of confrontation, loss, and exposure to violence. In my recent interviews, this has been expressed in the need to withdraw, reflect on lived experiences and mourn.

33. Kirollos, "Fighting Sexual Assault in Egypt."

When the SYPE inferred that *'only 4.9% of Egyptian young people are members of a group or organization – almost twice as many males (6.4%) as females (3.4%) are members'*³⁴ – as one way to measure civic participation, they were taking for granted that the current set of organisations and social institutions were inclusive of youth values. On the other hand, little attention was paid to questions pertaining to values and principles: *"only 1.4% think that values definitely exist in society [and] the wealthiest 40% also have the highest percentage who believe that social values are absent"*.³⁵ Although the questions raised by the survey did produce data, in my view this data was the reflection of youth's alienation from social institutions, rather than *lack of will* or *interest* in civic engagement; it depicted a youth that had shifted and created different spaces of participation. Implicitly, the youth were being analysed as *'agencies in the process of being'*,³⁶ so they themselves were the ones subject to change in order to integrate the social structures. SYPE's analysis neglects their involvement as part and a consequence of the social and political constitution of a society.³⁷ The picture drawn by SYPE would have been quite different if they had taken issues pertaining to the political and social agency of youth into consideration, in phrasing their survey questions. Essentially, did young people believe that social institutions shared their values? And if not, where were they expressing those values?

THE LEGACY OF THE POLITICS OF GENDER

On the other hand, *feminism*, the traditional source of women's movements, had been marginalised for a long time by State-controlled machinery that monopolises Egyptian women's representation in the national and international arena³⁸ and heavily impacts access to funding. The State-gender machinery, under the influence of the First Lady, crystallised into two institutions in the Mubarak era: the National Council for Women (NCW), founded in 2000 and the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood (NCCM), founded in 1988.

However, this bizarre situation did lead to some good, yet controversial results. As had previously happened under Sadat – what became infamously known as 'Jehan's Laws' – the specific reforms carried out under 'Suzanne's Laws' had also started to lead to a backlash³⁹ by the end of 2011. Additionally, during the 'Jehan' and 'Suzanne' periods, Egypt ratified major international

34. SYPE 2010, p. 134.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

36. Ennew 2002.

37. See Comaroff 2005.

38. Hatem 2011, p. 37.

39. See Dawood, "Backlash against 'Suzanne Mubarak Laws' Was Inevitable"; and Reem, "Controversy over 'Suzanne's Laws'."

treaties protecting women and children's rights, although with serious reservations: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990. After Mubarak's departure, the Alliance of Women's Organisations⁴⁰ demanded the NCW be replaced with a democratic transparent body; this later became a demand for an independent body outside State control.⁴¹

In February 2012, Mervat al-Tallawy became Head of the National Council for Women. She was a former diplomat (1991-1997) and Minister of Social Affairs under Mubarak (1997-1999), and had sponsored Law 153 (1999) which, according to Human Rights Watch, was the law that initiated the Ministry of Social Solidarity's micro-management of NGO operations.⁴² With this manoeuvre the same gender machinery – embedded within a nation-building narrative – was renovated, continuing through Morsi's presidency (from 30 June 2012 to 3 July 2013), and regaining its previous position under the current government. Historically, the first efforts to articulate an independent feminist movement were initially hampered by Nasser. Even though he claimed to build *"the State that finally granted women full political rights"*, he *"withdrew the freedom to organise politically"*.⁴³ The feminist movement was then co-opted by Sadat and Mubarak, who imposed gender machinery that preserved State ownership of the women's agenda.

As a result, the dynamics of cohabitation between independent and State institutions have remained very complex. Recent developments pertaining to the issue of sexual harassment provide evidence of this. First, independent NGOs have been working on anti-sexual harassment campaigns since 2005.⁴⁴ Many successful initiatives have taken off strongly since 2011, documenting harassment, mobilising citizens on the streets and on social media against it, in addition to assisting survivors of sexual assaults. This has led to an increase in open, public debates. A tipping point was reached during the celebrations for the inauguration of Egypt's new President Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi (June 7-8, 2014) when brutal episodes of sexual violence took place. Though numerous similar violent incidents had taken place in previous years, it was only when the media exposed blatant visual evidence of a case happening during the official celebrations, that State officials, led by the President himself, reacted strongly for the first time, making a point of visiting one of the victims.⁴⁵ A new law criminalizing sexual harassment was passed and implemented, and several perpetrators of assault were given life sentences.⁴⁶ In this process, independent NGOs made a coordinated statement condemning the assaults and announced

40. OpenDemocracy, "Statement from the Coalition of Women's NGO's in Egypt."

41. See Hatem 2011, p. 38.

42. Human Rights Watch, "Human Rights Watch, World Report 2000."

43. Badran, *Feminism in Islam*, p. 129.

44. Rizzo, Price and Meyer, 2009.

45. MadaMasr, "Sisi Visits Tahrir Square Mob Sexual Assault Victim in Hospital."

46. AhramOnline, "Life Sentences for Sexual Assaults at El-Sisi Celebration."

a protest⁴⁷ on June 14 that had online support of 198,000, plus 25,900 'joining the event' on Facebook (numbers that can only shed some light on people's intention of participating, since the demonstration was only attended by a small number). When NCW announced its participation, most of the independent NGOs withdrew from the march and organised a press conference instead.⁴⁸ The message from these independent groups was strong: *'First verdict in cases of mob-sexual assault and gang rape in Tahrir Square is no end to the story; all previous crimes of sexual violence must be investigated'*.⁴⁹ As Dr Magda Adly from the NGO al-Nadeem Centre explained during the press conference, attacks happen with the Ministry of Interior's complete awareness and they never gave a statement addressing the issue, nor did the National Council for Women.⁵⁰ The press conference was clear on the State's complicity in the incidents of mob-sexual harassment, mob assaults and gang rape that had occurred during demonstrations in previous years. At the same time, all this revealed the polemics about collaborating with State bodies. As Mr. Mostafa Mahmoud, a lawyer working for the feminist NGO Nazra, put it: *"If the State wants to care, it has clear mechanisms and legislative mechanisms [to do so]."*⁵¹

The environment of fear generated by the new anti-protest law (passed in November 2013)⁵² has played a significantly negative role in the dynamic between the State and activists, as permits are now required to organise advocacy events, which can only be secured with the participation of a State institution, such as the NCW. Furthermore, activists who were operating in Tahrir Square with different purposes and who had been very consistent in raising evidence are now threatened. Still, the controversy of collaborating with the State is no less profound for some of the more consolidated NGOs that have long-standing collaborative relations with State institutions. As a women's rights lawyer involved in the anti-sexual harassment campaign put it: *"independent NGOs should keep putting pressure on government institu-*

47. See the Facebook event: Walk Like An Egyptian Woman: نازلين لرفض كارثة اغتصاب نساء مصر في الشوارع.

48. See the Facebook event: مؤتمّر صحفي | العنف الجنسي ومواقف الدولة خلال عشر سنوات.

49. Nazra. Author for Feminist Studies 2014.

50. Nazra. Author's own audio recording from June 15, 2014.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Kingsley, "Egypt's Interim President Adly Mansour Signs 'Anti-Protest Law'": AhramOnline, "Full English Translation of Egypt's New Protest Law." URL: "http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/egypt-interim-president-anti-protest-law", ISSN: "0261-3077", language: "en-GB", author: [{"family": "Kingsley", "given": "Patrick"}], issued: {"date-parts": [{"2013", "11", "24"}]}, accessed: {"date-parts": [{"2014", "10", "20"}]}, label: "page", id: 463, uris: [{"http://zotero.org/users/1239872/items/7FAW9HE4"}], uri: [{"http://zotero.org/users/1239872/items/7FAW9HE4"}], itemData: {"id": 463, type: "article-newspaper", title: "Full English translation of Egypt's new protest law", container-title: "AhramOnline", publisher-place: "Cairo", event-place: "Cairo", abstract: "Ahram Online translates the text of Egypt's new law on protests and demonstrations", URL: "http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/87375.aspx", language: "English", author: [{"family": "AhramOnline", "given": ""}], issued: {"date-parts": [{"2013", "11", "25"}]}, accessed: {"date-parts": [{"2014", "8", "30"}]}, label: "page", schema: "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}.

tions, however we need to invest in this political momentum to offer the know-how". Yet when I asked which institutions are working on the implementation and reinforcement of the law, the answer was: "*nobody*",⁵³ indicating a lack of institutional commitment.

This example helps to clarify the dynamics of co-optation and rebranding of the efforts of civil society associations and initiatives, by State institutions, which reveals how much the latter's desire to seek social justice is in doubt. The gains achieved over this period thanks to the efforts of a vast network of activists, putting their mental and physical health at risk to advocate for legislation explicitly banning harassment and assault and for the prosecution of perpetrators, have simply been minimised. Instead, State institutions jumped in with their political propaganda when public opinion demanded action, but later abandoned the issue without achieving substantial results. This was highlighted at the independent NGOs' press conference on June 15, 2014 where they stated that over 500 cases of sexual violence in the public sphere had been recorded and reported,⁵⁴ dating back to June 2012, yet the State had failed to react until June 2014.

This historical intertwining of gender issues with 'national machinery' has provoked an uncomfortable cohabitation between State institutions and women's rights activists. It is currently being reshuffled, but the outlook now seems bleak, in view of the new NGO law the government is implementing. As my interview with a senior UN staff person confirmed:

The 2013 Coup – and that's my own understanding – has reinstated the deep State, including the government entities working on gender and the big NGOs monopolising gender issues that were operating during the Mubarak times and before. From 2010 to 2013, you have the movements talking about all kinds of rights. From 2013 to now you have the Mervat(s) Tallawy(s), the Hoda(s) Badran(s), the Egyptian Feminist Union, not only the NCW, but you have these big tycoons that are monopolising the scene again. And the scene is now characterised not only by trends and issues discussed from a gender perspective but also as a generational issue. Those big names are not leaving room to new cattle [sic] to come on board. Their way of dealing with things is mono track and very elitist, the same that the Mubarak era was operating with no interest at all to engage in a dialogue (...) There is no dialogue, because the old guards of the civil society are

53. Interview. Also, it is worthwhile to note here that the question of sexual harassment and assault in Egypt in the public sphere, since incidents were first documented in 2005 (the first recorded incident was in the 1990s), demands a separate paper *per se*, since the dynamics involved touch upon multi-layered structures of power, gender relations and the State. The complex relationships between State institutions and independent activists is similar when we refer to other topics; however, due to the actuality and importance of sexual harassment and assault, I chose to briefly showcase these dynamics through this example.

54. Nazra, "First Verdict in Cases of Mob-Sexual Assault and Gang Rape in Tahrir Square Is No End to the Story."

not speaking to the new generation of civil society. There is big resentment towards the movements that emerged from Tahrir Square.⁵⁵

Some authors, such as Korany and El-Mahdi⁵⁶ go as far as stating that the women's movement in Egypt was orphaned when the State assumed its leadership, which in their view, may explain "*why protesters have chosen to deny the gender dimension in which injustice occurs, framing women's rights in apolitical terms*".⁵⁷ Badran⁵⁸ also argues that

throughout the century, women have placed their feminism within the nationalist context and within the framework of Islam. Through the argument and action they have defended the nation against foreign occupation and economic, political, and cultural imperialism. However, patriarchy has had the temerity to label feminism in Egypt as Western, ipso facto un-Islamic, to discredit feminism by undermining its national and cultural-cum-religious legitimacy.⁵⁹

As a result, State institutions accommodate their narrative under a light, friendly, Islamic discourse that proactively avoids public references to feminist values and principles. On the contrary, it was not rare to see explicit feminist jargon being used by young women activists participating in initiatives emerging from Tahrir Square.

I believe that as a consequence, *feminism* has been disconnected from the State-led women's movement and become a feature in the activities of this wave of marginal young secular activists who want feminism's principles to be lived, not enchainned in institutions and laws. By doing so, they are directly challenging the constituency of State-led women's movements (which includes its affiliated NGOs). Is there any reconciliation possible? Could this organic approach be sustained or will it require a political structure in order to prevail?

ORGANIC MOVEMENT(S) AND "WOMEN'S RIGHTS" POLITICAL STRUCTURE: THE CONTROVERSIES

The historian Sorbera has put forward the four most common challenges that must be overcome for a real shift in gender politics to take place. The Egyptian women's movement(s) will have to address the historical gap between women's participation and institutional representation; the lack of an intersectional approach capable of mobilising and consolidating a

55. Interview.

56. Korany and El-Mahdi 2012.

57. *Ibid.*, 172–174.

58. Badran 2009.

59. *Ibid.*, 135.

grassroots movement; the absence of a unified leadership; and tensions in intergenerational communication.⁶⁰

Though I agree these are real challenges and that addressing them could lead to an increased unity of the different women's movement(s) in Egypt, I would argue that these elements need to be carried further to better understand the movements' complexities. First, the organic nature of this feminism is an intricate and indivisible value that accompanies other sets of values expressed in the emergence of this specific youth culture that has gained visibility with the 2011 uprising. In this sense, adhering to a political structure that does not combine all these values may undermine the political and social agency of their potential adherents.

Secondly, it is important to acknowledge the complex structure and power relations within which the women's movement(s) has to operate and the difficulties that institutions and individuals alike, face if they attempt to change this structure. The same UN official, when asked how they could support these new young movements, clearly explained the strong structure that backs the regime's agenda:

I'm engaging with movements through individuals, and through their own networks, because I cannot continue to work in a traditional way in a very untraditional setting, by doing so I will would continue *de facto* to marginalise youth and marginalise movements if I insist on working with a registered NGO and through the NCW.⁶¹

Regarding the power relations, the official added:

There is a big amount of bullying and the bullying is not only at the local level. They [the government] are very firm and very strong in what they want and they bully their way through. They have a very good lobbying mechanism inside the UN corridors in New York. For example, we have a monthly mechanism since 30th of June called the Inter Agency Task Force on Egypt. The Secretary General chairs it, they meet once a month, (...) [attended by] the Department of Political Affairs, the Secretariat and the members of the country agencies chaired by the Resident Coordinator in Egypt. Video conference. And this is where analyses are shared, Egypt right away managed to implant Egyptians representing every single agency in that mechanism (...) all of a sudden you have people sitting there, giving inputs that are in line with the government's interpretation of things and preventing any other analysis that would come up. So if someone says anything that it is controversial for the government, it is directly reported to the Egyptian government.⁶²

60. Sorbera 2014.

61. Interview.

62. *Ibid.*

This is a particularly important point, since National Councils and consolidated NGOs' budgets for running programs are heavily dependent on international funding, so both independent and governmental institutions working on gender and youth issues compete for the same funds. However, State institutions manage to hamper independent organisations' access to funds through strict regulation and power relations. Additionally, this dynamic of bullying does not foster a cooperative environment in which to articulate an intersectional approach. In my view, movements and initiatives that would like to cooperate together to develop an intersectional approach will not only require networking downward to grassroots organizations, and horizontally between movements, but also networking upward to conquer their legitimate space at the international level. In this regard, networking up will provoke a strong confrontation with the government as explained above, but the other two directions are not exempt of controversies either.

First, as the manager of a well-established NGO which has worked in deprived areas for the past twenty years, explained to me, strong financing and reporting regulations really hamper development programming, as there are a number of "layers" between donors and recipients of development aid, including State Security control. This, in his view, leads to a feeling of mistrust that hampers the achievement of tangible results. Also, State Security presence has strong consequences, since it forces government involvement at every level.

We always work with local officials from the ground, *why?* Because we know that we are in a very strict monitoring security system that means that if we are working [...] where there are many members of the Muslim Brotherhood we have to be very clear, the vision of all the activities has to be very clear. This is why it is very important for us to have direct contacts with the officials. You cannot avoid doing that, even if -and we encountered a lot of that- people [officials] are not very collaborative. Not very courageous people.⁶³

This exemplified the need for professionalization of these new movements to deal with all these layers of bureaucracy to access funds; this is very much at odds with their nature and organic foundation. At the same time, this raises questions about how to deal with security matters in deprived areas in which coordination with the State is required.

Secondly, horizontal networking will mean reaching other movements, whose ideological position may be very challenging, as for instance conservative religious groups. How will this organic approach deal with such an emotional controversy that is loaded with its own history of mistrust, greatly deepened during Morsi's presidency? In this sense, building alliances without

63. Interview.

compromising the organic soul of the movement and adhering to a unified leadership seem to be a hard task.

Finally, regarding Sorbera's⁶⁴ last remark, the intergenerational communication challenge has many roots, but a very important one is that of the dissonant dissident voices – that *happen* to be young. These voices are challenging the constituency of national structures that operated under Mubarak and have now been reshuffled, challenging their traditional sphere of influence. Older generations in positions of power proactively undermine the category of 'youth' to dismiss the idea of a factual dialogue that includes young people in a co-shared responsibility framework. As an Army General brutally stated in 2012:

*we will discipline those kids of Tahrir... We thought we were protecting a revolution, but it turns out that we are protecting nothing but a bunch of non-virgin girls and homosexual kids.*⁶⁵

Moreover, a closer look at what constitutes 'youth' as a category may reveal some surprises, since it will rarely correspond to the strict statistical classification by age (15 to 24 years old) often used by the State. This classification neglects the strong ties of young people with older generations non-aligned with the State or elders who, consequently, are also being silenced by the shadow of "youth" that is wrongly being labelled as '*arrogant, disobedient and impolite*',⁶⁶ as the same women's rights lawyer put it. Through my own research I have come across young women and men engaged in different activities who often seek advice from older generations, and who use the structures that they created in the past to support new activities. In this sense, these connections are giving continuity and visibility to generations of opposition activists, who may not always be in the Square but definitively exist and have a deep footprint in the current oppositional wave. As an example we can take the picture that Gigi Ibrahim took of Nawal al-Saadawi in another women's march organised on April 20, 2012. Her writings have come to the frontline by the hand of her young readers merging both times in a single space and putting the discredited label of 'youth' very much in question. As Bourdieu reminded us "*classification by age (but also sex and of course class...) always means imposing limits and producing an order to which each person must keep*".⁶⁷

64. Sorbera 2014.

65. Abdel Latif in Bayat, p. 424.

66. Interview.

67. Bourdieu 1993, p. 94.

CONCLUSION

The dynamics observed in Tahrir Square and during subsequent events could lead one to think that since women's issues were strongly embedded in a political machinery, many activists perceived prioritising women's rights as divisive. On the contrary, secular activists chose to build on their features as disenfranchised and unrepresented citizens, which combined the ideals of feminism and at the same time, generated inclusive dynamics. This inclusive approach also worked to attract other segments of society who were feeling/being marginalised. In this sense, feminism became a feature of the marginal and was disentangled from its traditional niche; however, how feminism will be translated into practical terms by these new young movements, remains unknown.

At the same time this paper has argued that, in parallel to political activism, there is a strong burst of citizenship initiatives that are challenging traditional spheres of power linked to the State, with particular attention to the women's rights State machinery and its links to development actors, since they are the main funders. These spheres of power are proactively tailoring regulations affecting the public sphere to marginalise and punish private initiatives through legal procedures, a discourse of stigmatisation and fear, and repression. However, this organic non-movement(s) has proven to be capable of combining the expectations of many groups, and as such, it/they represent(s) a threat to the restoration of the *status quo*. In this regard, the expansion of the youth culture results in the expansion of its political structure and potential leverage, since their paths cross in multiple areas.

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