EFFERVESCENT EGYPT

Venues of Mobilization and the Interrupted Legacy of 2011

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From Social Mobilization to Political Organization

In the wake of the 2011 uprising, hundreds of thousands in Egypt mobilized in campaigns, movements, popular committees, independent cooperatives, professional and labour unions, local councils, and art activist networks to express their grievances and claim their rights to expression, organization, and access to work and basic services. These mobilization cycles demonstrated the vibrancy of Egypt's civil society, yet they were often ephemeral in nature and either disrupted by state authorities or stigmatized as violent collective action.

After General Abdel Fattah Al Sisi's electoral success in May 2014 and the promulgation of a series of laws restricting public expressions of discontent, the dynamics of social mobilization were increasingly under threat. This was also compounded by a new wave of political apathy and a general sense of fatigue and hostility towards the mobilizing movements that so far dominated the public sphere. While pressure groups continue to appear and mobilize, repression has escalated to unprecedented levels. The authorities have imposed a tight grip on public space: they banned human rights defenders from travelling and froze their financial assets and those of human rights organizations, reactivated the NGO foreign funding court case, reformed the Egyptian Penal Code, and had a new law targeting all local development organizations and individual initiatives approved in parliament. These measures have considerably limited the repertoire of civic action and dramatically reduced the possibilities of organization. Many organizations have since restricted, or even halted, their activities. Development civil society organizations say the new law will severely inhibit their work and services delivery. In this context, creative ways of building platforms are badly needed for civil society initiatives to continue to operate.

In order to take stock of the proliferation of social initiatives and mobilization in Egypt in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, and in order to build a sound strategy of coordination among Egyptian social actors with the aim of transforming the heterogeneous social movements into more sustainable networks and structures, ARI carried out from 2013 to 2016 its multi-phase programme, *From Social Mobilization to Political Organization*, directed by Dina El Khawaga. This included detailed background papers and 13 case studies on a diverse set of social and political movements that arose post-25 January 2011. The second phase of the programme involved direct action with existing activist constituencies to assist their move from a rationale of popular mobilization to a strategy of political institutionalization. They included policy dialogues with 50 opinion-leaders (moderators, experts, legal advisors,

media professionals and policy researchers) around central policy issues related to the right to organize, including the legal structure for NGOs, the legal framework for independent labour unions, and the laws and decrees linked to student mobilization. The aim of these dialogues was to federate the groups and their potential political role through exploration of the following questions: what are the prerequisites for policy negotiations? What are the areas of agreement among stakeholders and what are the areas of disagreement?

The research and final results produced through this programme are presented in two volumes in Arabic. The first presents 13 case studies of different social movements and organizing efforts and the second comprises four papers stemming from the policy dialogues. In the English edition, we highlight five case studies in particular: Amr Adly's study of the unionization process of street vendors; Aya Nasser's study of the Rights to the City emergent activists; Habiba Mohsen's investigation of the Tahrir Doctors group; Sherif Mohy El Deen's analysis of the Rab'a sit-in; and Fatma Ramadan's report on the mobilization efforts of transportation workers.

These volumes are also accompanied by an Arabic-language *Dictionary on Social Movements*, translated from French by Omar El Shafei and reviewed and edited by Dina El Khawaga. It provides the first comprehensive overview of the key concepts and theories in social movement studies in Arabic.

In publishing these studies in 2018, we both reflect on the past and the future in Egypt. This wide array of dialogues, roundtables, studies, and policy papers during the three years of the programme present a vivid and exceptionally rich picture of Egyptian civil society in the period of 2011-early 2014. These volumes also provide a broad snapshot of an ephemeral moment, when autonomous mobilization, organizational experimentation, and the demand for rights and equality were generalized across the enlarged public sphere. Yet, in the face of renewed and deeply encroaching repression, the closing of political opportunities for social movements and the extinction of oppositional voices, this moment of opening and expression has passed – at least for the time being.

With the upcoming presidential election in 2018 and the efforts by the al-Sisi regime to stamp out any potential rivals, these two volumes provide an invaluable input on mobilization-related issues in today's Egypt, and how civil society can effectively resist and push-back on the encroachment on rights and self-organization. In this sense, these two volumes provide timely insight for social and political actors in Egypt and further afield, with reflections on what worked and what didn't, as well as new strategies for the achievement of rights, including cause lawyering and strategic litigation. Looking forward, the effervescence in state-society relationships that these two volumes present, as well as the lessons-learned and insights for the future of social mobilization and political organization efforts, are a source of optimism and inspiration for the Egyptian polity as the country enters a critical election year.

Arab Reform Initiative

The Paradoxical Dynamics of Egyptian Civil Society

Claire Talon

"The time has come to archive, to record, to collect. Then, (...) let us search from inside for a new revolution, a new path."

Ahmed Naji, *Life: A User's Manual*.

Although the unprecedented attacks against civil society have drastically restricted organizational capacities, civil society in Egypt has continued to mobilize since 2013, especially on health, public services, education, and housing issues. More than social movements, such initiatives are a sign that it is still possible to subtly act within the increasingly restricted public sphere. Indeed, the research and testimonies in these two volumes suggest that the main issue in building politically motivated platforms or organizational patterns out of heterogeneous social movements has not been to resist the state's unrelenting efforts to undermine political strategies, but rather to maintain or even establish sustainable relations between civil society initiatives and their base. In this regard, the period of 2011-2014 can be considered a foundational moment, when remarkably efficient coalitions were built between new heterogeneous stakeholders, leading to the spectacular transformation of many social movements into politically motivated organizations or initiatives.

The Arab Reform Initiative's (ARI) research gives precious insights into the dynamics that have enabled such processes of transformation to occur. These include the ability to "judicialize" (*taqnin*) and enlarge the framework of basic socio-economic demands into rights claims, and the capacity for organizations to meet local needs. The research also suggests that strategic litigation has proved the most appropriate tool to articulate these two dynamics, highlighting the crucial role played by NGOs in such evolutions. The research has also revealed that specific issues have impeded these inclusive dynamics and organizational

efforts, namely a chronic lack of representativeness and legitimacy, a certain isolation from social bases, and the prevalence of reactive short-term strategies. Such insights provide clear guidelines for Egyptian civil society to confront the current crisis.

These studies also afford a remarkable understanding of the paradoxical dynamics of Egyptian civil society by giving first-hand accounts on successful, mitigated, and/or aborted experiences of small scale or *ad hoc* organization since the 2011 revolution, and on the ins and outs of such experiences, their shortcomings, the conditions for such processes to occur, and the specific obstacles posed to their stakeholders. The papers explain the terms of the dynamics which arose among civil society organizations (CSOs) and informed the large instances of mobilization that dominated the public sphere from 2011 to 2014. They also reveal the specific obstacles – beyond the undermining role played by the state –which have prevented the creation of efficient and non-co-opted institutions able to represent Egyptian civil society groups.

A Growing Sense of Agency

One of the primary themes explored in these two volumes is the then spectacular mutation of ad hoc social movements into politically motivated organizations or initiatives during the period of 2011-2014. In his study, Amr Adly (Volume One) recounts the emergence shortly after the revolution of a professional identity among scattered groups of street vendors, despite the fact that they faced strong economic and spatial rivalries and had no previous experience of labour unions. To legalize their presence in public spaces and force the Egyptian state to recognize the ground that they had gained when the police withdrew, street vendors attempted to change the very structure of their relationship with the state, by replacing their former clientele relations[1] with labour unions able to represent them as a professional group of around five million members. In her study on the Tahrir Doctors (Volume One), Habiba Mohsen recounts a similar process of evolution. The group, first formed on Tahrir Square during the revolutionary uprising, expanded its original mission to include reporting crimes against protesters, demanding the right to healthcare, campaigning against torture, and even calling for a general reform of the public healthcare system. Similar processes have increased the number of civil society organizations, especially in the field of "urban activism" and the "Rights to the City," as recounted by Aya Nasser in her case study (Volume One).

As the studies reveal, these developments have all been made possible through intense co-ordination between civil society organizations, with human rights NGOs playing a crucial and strategic role. The role of NGOs, and particularly human rights NGOs, in framing trade union movements is not new in Egypt. Since 2006, human rights NGOs have worked in co-ordination with labour leaders and independent unions to extend workers' demands to include union rights, minimum wages, and profit sharing. This co-ordination has had extremely practical aspects: as Fatma Ramadan recounts in her study (Volume One), eminent jurists helped road haulage workers file the statutes of a new independent union in 2011. But the revolutionary

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1 Such relations were knit with NDP deputies, the *marafiq* and governorate police, with local authorities, and in parliament.

period also saw unexpected actors seeking the good offices of such organizations, such as Cairo's street vendors whose union initiated contact with the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) to assist with their unionization process and further mobilization efforts. The post-2011 period has seen unprecedented encounters between actors from extremely diverse fields (professionals, activists, humanitarian sector workers, jurists, academics, etc.) and especially between spontaneously formed, self-managed groups and long-established organizations. Against all expectations, it was frequently the groups of ad hoc mobilized social actors who sought contact with civil society organizations and human rights NGOs to ask for advice and support. This dynamic gives an idea of the credibility enjoyed by Egyptian human rights NGOs in spite of the state's propaganda to tarnish them. In other cases, well-established civil society organizations took the initiative of contacting local populations under threat to consult them or call on them to mobilize for or against a state project, thus taking advantage of the moment of freedom to bring broader legal or political mobilizations to successful completion.

The predominant imperative in these processes was a dual co-ordination (tansiq): among civil society organizations, and between these organizations and new spontaneous actors that frequently acquired sudden legitimacy through the former's social networks. The creation of networks and platforms were established as the natural format for these processes of dual co-ordination. The most striking example of the potential of this loose-networking is described in Aya Nasser's study on developing a "field" (majal) for defending the right to housing. The author describes the construction of a network of actors (architects, urban planners, academics, human rights workers, activists) centred on the issue of urban life and housing, who were able to promote new issues on the public agenda and implement joint projects, although they remained divided on strategies.

This tendency to prefer the diversity of collectives (networks, platforms, committees, etc.) to more structured organizations can be read as an expression of a long distrust of political parties, in a context where the political is often considered a factor in dis-unification, co-optation, and compromise. As shown by the studies, this attachment to flexible and decentralized collectives, that has even been adopted by various political entities such as the Revolutionary Front or the Strong Egypt Party founded by the Muslim Brotherhood's dissident Abul Foutouh in 2012, has increased significantly since 2011. This decentralized model is clearly seen as an empowering tool and a means to valorize micro-structures and foster participatory politics.

The choice not to institutionalize an organization, and the refusal of the majority of civil society organizations to register officially as such with the authorities, is also a means of circumventing the restrictions imposed by the Egyptian state on contact with locals (i.e. the need for lengthy and multiple authorizations, including by the Ministry of Social Solidarity). The actors involved in the Rights to the City initiative emphasize the difficulty of working directly with society and the need for creative strategies to gain local confidence and access to isolated regions. Such processes reflect the "social non-movements," as described by Asef Bayet: the absence of leadership, ideological factors, and organizational structure make resistance practices less vulnerable to repression than is the case with traditional social

movements, but nonetheless enable them to promote social and political reforms.[2]

Facing the Crackdown: A Crisis of Association

However, in spite of the fact that Egypt has a civil society of long standing whose first forms of association go back to the late 19th century, it remains an exception for organizations to be co-ordinated and networked by sector. The intrinsic weakness of organizational co-ordination is particularly striking in the workers' unions. Despite the unprecedented magnitude of the strike movements between 2011 and 2013,[3] the independent labour unions created after 2011 have not managed to position themselves as the workers' representatives. The main consequence of these weak organizational structures is that any victories achieved are fragile. Farah Ramzy (Volume Two) comes to similar conclusions in her study of mobilizations, which have, for instance, seen the cancellation of the reform of Decree 79 on the organization of students' activities and of the free elections of student unions that had been obtained by student unions in 2012.

As the various studies show, several factors explain this organizational unease. The first is linked to the great struggles for legitimacy which have long undermined the establishment and work of civil society organizations. The main hindrance to mobilizations in favour of independent unions has been the historical importance of the official unions and the fact that pensions are conditioned on the adhesion to the General Union of Workers. Unlike in Tunisia[4] the state has co-opted those workers organizations since the 1960s and instilled a divide between "professional" and "workers" unions. The deficit in representation encountered by independent union organizations is also aggravated by the large disparity in awareness of union issues between old and new factories. On recent sites, such as the city of 10th of Ramadan – which has more than 1,450 companies but less than 24 union committees – the majority of workers have never heard of unions nor of the role they play. Such difficulties combine with strong internal rivalries (generational, personal, socio-economic, sectorial) and affect the way the new post-2011 representative authorities have worked.

In parallel, personal rivalries undermined the mobilizations to create new labour federations, leading to the creation of more than four competing unions. Taking advantage of these rifts between the Egyptian federation of independent labour unions (2011), the Egyptian workers' democratic conference, and the general federation of Egyptian workers' unions,[5] the Egyptian government rushed in February 2015 to promote the leaders of supposedly independent organizations as an alternative. This include the national federation of Egyptian workers, the general federation of worker's unions Free Egypt, and the patriotic federation of unions. These measures are a mere reproduction of the co-optation policy adopted by the

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2   Asef Bayat. *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010.

3   222 strikes were recorded in 2006, 1,969 in 2011, and 1,655 in 2013, followed by a sharp drop after 30 June 2013.

4   See Hala Yousfi, *L'UGTT: Une passion Tunisienne*, Paris: IRMC, 2015.

5   Founded after a split in the Egyptian Federation of Independent Labour Unions over a vote count dispute.

state during Gamal Abdel Nasser.[6]

Some activists describe this phenomenon as a "crisis of association". Amira Abdelhamid from the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, for example, explained in an interview with ARI that, "What I mean by a crisis of association is that there has been systematic dilution of structures of solidarity and resistance. Partly on account of neoliberal policies since the late 1980s, but especially recently. The 'system', reflected by Egyptian state practices under direct military rule, is aware of the rising sense of agency of the so-called 'population'. Agency was manifest in the events of January 2011 and what followed, but is also evident in the way public space ('real' or virtual) has been utilized by various social groups over the past few years. In a profound manner, the Egyptian state has been disempowering representative association, for example in the case of local government or lack thereof. There has also been a direct attack on outsider associations or pressure groups, such as the upcoming NGO law that works to discredit and defame the legitimacy of opposition voices, especially ones with international clout. On the surface, we are distracted by grand narratives and financial threats, unable to support our target groups because we are not focused on the real issue, association. The result of this crackdown was doubly negative: it has pushed us (local human rights organizations) to seek constantly the support of the 'international community,' instead of aiming to mobilize the support of local agency grassroots."[7]

The Egyptian government's general policy of co-opting social movements, which it pursued first in the 1970s and subsequently in the 1990s, has a lot to answer for in this phenomenon. Since 2011, successive governments have devoted substantial resources to the surveillance of civil society organizations, which they hold responsible for the 25 January revolution. The diversity of state services and agencies involved in this surveillance (the Planning, International Cooperation, and Interior Ministries, as well as the various security services, among others) speaks volumes about the influence attributed to CSOs, the financial stakes of repressing them, and the expertise acquired by the intelligence services in this area. Internal government documents consulted by ARI researchers identify the challenges inherent in CSO dynamics and express concern that some associations try to establish a link between people's complaints and their political choices.

More generally, a variety of means has been used to subvert and restrain the social movements of all stripes that emerged from the revolutionary uprising as well as the various representative bodies. This went as far as the creation of a parliament entirely manufactured by the secret services,[8] and has been accompanied by significant efforts to disperse social movements. Since General Al Sisi's arrival in power, the government has, for instance, favoured the expansion of development and humanitarian organizations to the detriment of human rights organizations or those it perceives to be politicized.

The permanent surveillance by the security services of all labour unions and workers'

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6   Samer Soliman, *Argent de l'Etat et politique : la sortie difficile de l'Etat rentier en Egypte sous Moubarak*, PhD dissertation, Paris: Sciences Po, 2004.

7   Interview with Amira Abdelhamid, November 2016.

8   See Hossam Bahgat, "Anatomy of an Election," *Madamasr*, 14 March 2016.

organizations, from the railways drivers' to the doctors' union, continues. The large unions, in particular – such as the road haulage or doctors' unions – are followed by specific services within the different security agencies. The latter use all the means at their disposal to intimidate and divide workers, including physical aggression, arrests, layoffs and the harassment of union leaders. Some of the most effective measures are the systematic infiltration of independent unions and ultimate control over them, and the corruption and co-option of collectives as soon as they acquire a certain capacity for mobilization.

The restrictions on freedom of organization have largely contributed to undermining the legitimacy of the new unions. The recent history of the formalization of independent trade unions thus reflects a succession of tensions and splits due most of the time to the intervention of the state apparatus and its intermediaries among the workers.

A further factor preventing the creation of strong organizational structures is the great diversity of approaches adopted by civil society organizations to any given problem. According to official estimates, the number of CSOs registered in Egypt in October 2014 was close to 47,000.[9] This number does not take into account the hundreds of unregistered not-for-profit organizations and thus cannot specify the real total of CSOs or their precise sectors of activities. But it is certain that they now form "a sector consisting of plural and diverse organizations (…) made up in part of individuals who have acquired their legitimacy in the streets, on the internet and on social networks."[10]

These groups may be distinguished by the reach of their demands, which can be broadly divided into short-term versus long-term goals. This prevalence of temporary short-term strategies is also dominant in the workers' movement, which has not adopted the freedoms of association and organization as a top-priority demand since 2008. The grand causes that have mobilized workers since 2011 have been the issues of privatization and early retirement, whereas the main problem remains the lack of legislation guaranteeing union rights.

The experience of the street vendors union, recounted by Amr Adly, is emblematic of the difficulty of going beyond short-term and segmented demands. Negotiations with the authorities were carried out in an unorganized and non-centralized way by several groups, each of which negotiated separately with the government to obtain official decisions on reserved places in precise locations. In this sense, immediate socio-economic interests prevailed over a collective strategy, which, by contrast, would have necessitated changing the negotiation framework itself and obtaining government recognition for street vendors' right to work as a distinct professional category.

The proliferation of development organizations until 2014 can also be seen as a symptom of the prevalence of short-term strategies. As Yahia Shawkat[11] states in an interview:

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9 Against 26,000 in 2010 – official report presented to the UPR in 2014.

10 Romain Stadnicki, "De l'Activisme urbain en Egypte : Emergence et stratégies depuis la révolution de 2011," *EchoGéo* 25, 2013.

11 Architect and activist working with the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.

"development associations and charities are a double-edged sword. While they start with good intentions, they do not set themselves to address long-term goals or the objective of informing or changing policies. They limit themselves to improving living conditions. Some of the housing activists believe that this developmental discourse creates an economy based on dependency: each association creates a balance of power or networks of interests or a configuration of some kind or other. Everything done or acquired on the ground can be erased, even if it involved long efforts and many people. And the developmental discourse absolves the state from its responsibilities. As a result, the priority is to wholly revise the way public policy is organized on the basis of social justice and realistic relationships."

Alongside these approaches are a number of strategic disagreements on which mobilization methods are best adapted to each context. Although there is a strong push to depoliticize demands, different groups have adopted different strategies, ranging from negotiation to litigation to confrontation. Yet the question for civil society organizations remains: it is advisable to put aside their political demands and concentrate on a sectorial discourse instead, to better preserve their options?

Is There Still Room for Political Organization?

With reiterated pressure put on civil society organizations and the relentless repression of political initiatives, the room for political organization in Egypt under the current circumstances is non-existent. Yet, as the studies in these two volumes show, a more subtle trend that amounts to changing political practices and norms, far from the traditional venues for policy making (parties, elected bodies, law drafting committees, among others), is in progress. With new *ad hoc* forms of organization and renewed investment of local initiatives, a new generation of stakeholders is imperceptibly working to gradually modify people's approach to policy issues and the political framework prevailing between the state and local populations.

This phenomenon, which has not been a main point of focus for observers and analysts of the post-revolution period (unlike more traditional objects of studies such as constitutional reforms or transitional politics), gives precious indications on struggle for policy reforms in the years to come in Egypt, suggesting that the role of critical masses has been largely underestimated. Indeed, analysis through concepts such as "individual trajectories" and "continuous socialization" can enable us to seize and understand the strength and potential of *ad hoc* forms of organization, such as loose networks.

At a time when continuous obstacles prevent freely elected local leaders from emerging, such as the adoption of a winner-takes-all closed list system, these studies point to youth initiatives eager to rehabilitate defunct structures like the Palaces of Culture (*Qusur al Thaqafa*), youth centres, and co-operatives, or invent informal ways of practicing politics in order to maintain and preserve local grassroot initiatives and to sow the seeds of a future decentralization process. As various studies in these two volumes suggest, an important part of the work of CSOs and youth initiatives is about fostering participatory decision-making.

One of the recurrent issues these studies depict is the need to strengthen links between organizations working on public policy, which like to see themselves as outsiders, and those working on the ground in order to build upon their complementary strengths. There is a dire need to grow and maintain strong networks among development and legal organizations, on the one hand, and to encourage the creation of local representative groups, on the other. In the same vein, it is necessary to encourage the creation of local representative groups. This is indeed the goal that some youth initiatives have set for themselves, such as *Mahalliyat and Decentralization* founded in 2011 with the aim of encouraging the survival of people's committees beyond the revolutionary moment to articulate the demands of the local population and put pressure on governorates or the government. The group was able to make several proposals to the constitutional committee in 2012 and 2014 on the challenges of decentralization and civil society organization. However, while co-operation with the district and area leaders worked well until 2013, since 2014 the initiative has been confronted with growing difficulties in its relationship with locals, to the extent that such collaboration no longer exists today.

There has been a strong tendency in a very large number of Egyptian civil society organizations since the revolution to make the government recognize the new local urban communities and give them a voice. Initiatives that are emblematic of this great urgency to establish links and networks (both decentralized and rooted in each relevant locality) between CSOs and local populations include the *Madd* platform, the *Takween* research unit (which specializes in rehabilitating informal housing), the NGO *Remal* (which promotes participatory planning), the collective Cairo from Below, and the creation of internet sites and newspapers that give a voice to locals (Cairobserver, Cairo Resilience, etc.).

This imperative also entails documenting local needs and generating shared knowledge that makes it possible to articulate these needs and define political strategies. This approach can be found in several new youth initiatives, such as Shared Knowledge, founded in April 2011, which originally intended to raise awareness amongst inhabitants of isolated regions of the revolutionaries' demands and their political rights. Given the responsiveness of those populations and the productive discussions, the initiative was transformed into a project to document dialogues, needs, and activities, conceived as the creation of a space of knowledge that is shared in both directions, as recounted by Sherif Mohyeldin (Volume Two).

Strengthening the links between CSOs and their base also means promoting a discourse that de-compartmentalizes and widens the social and political approaches of the mobilization processes. While the revolution showed that Egyptians have acquired true organizational and political experience, in practice the actors involved in the mobilization processes are often not aware of the importance of the legal framework under which they operate. Developing an awareness of the political and legal character of sectorial struggles requires hard work and de-sectorializing knowledge. As Aya Nasser's study (Volume One) suggests, university teaching offers a space that is favourable to creating future activist networks that know of these problems. Several interviewees highlight the role of lecturers in their mobilization and the attempt to break with the dominant academic models.

Finally, the studies in these volumes suggest that the privileged meeting ground between civil society organizations and the new social movements is the law, or more accurately strategic litigation. In fact, even if it often ends in failure due to the lack of independence of the judiciary, this legal strategy has the merit of providing an alternative space for deliberation in the absence of an independent parliament, and an answer to the workers' and population's specific preoccupations, while enabling NGOs and CSOs to implement their demands.

This strategy is remarkably popular in Egypt. Since the revolution (including since General Al Sisi assumed power), the new social movements have placed an undeniable emphasis on recourse to the legal system. This remains true even though the legal system has, especially since 2013, been seriously compromised and lost almost all independence. Examples are legion, and sometimes successful: for example, the legal proceedings launched by the inhabitants of the island of Qursaya in Cairo, with the help of the EIPR and the group No Military Trials for Civilians (which ensured that the inhabitants got substantial media coverage) against the army, which had tried to dislodge them by force in November 2012. The proceedings ended in the acquittal of dozens of the island's inhabitants in April 2013.

This phenomenon confirms the observations of Asef Bayat that the main concern of the various social classes which make up the "social non-movements" is to establish social justice and human rights, with a focus on dignity, rights, and freedoms, and that this concern and silent struggle continue whatever the magnitude of the repression may be.

Using legal proceedings has several merits. They offer an exemplary opportunity to link short-term socioeconomic challenges with wider legal and political issues. But they are also extremely unifying: the social actors involved in the legal proceedings had little hope of seeing their cases succeed, and were as such required to pull their resources and energies together for the cause. This contributed to bringing together social movements that were often divided by strong rivalries. As such strategic litigation can be seen as a strong cohesion factor. Strategic litigation is slow, but it is a good opportunity for gaining ground, especially when the state does not have the required legal competences. Above all, many activists consider it an essential tool for combating what is qualified by some lawyers as the phenomenon of "legal banditry" practiced by the state and the private sector.

Conclusion

Although there is currently no room for political organization in Egypt, there is room for the mobilization on policy reforms and work to undo the new anti-constitutional legal arsenal that has been issued since 2014. This mobilization is made possible through the co-operation of social movements, CSOs, independent unions, and their wider circles of allies among the newcomers to politics. Recent experiences show that such efforts can pay off, as seen with the rejection by parliament of a new civil service law in January 2016 and the late Supreme Administrative Court's ruling on Egypt's sovereignty over Tiran and Sanafir islands that nullifies their transfer to Saudi Arabia following the law suit filed by lawyer Khaled Ali and a group of lawyers and activists. The upholding of these dynamics/initiatives entails informal

and creative ways of mobilizing in favour of policy reforms, demonstrating the resilience of Egyptian civil society and the transformation of the Egyptian political arena since 2011. Despite the relentless efforts of the government to curtail social movements and unions, to close the political space, and to prevent the formation of an oppositional force, Egyptian civil society has been continuing its pursuit of rights and carving a niche for advocacy and lobbying. Through the publication of these two volumes, ARI not only provides in-depth insight into the experiences of this diverse set of civil society actors, but also contributes to the de-sectorialization of knowledge and the sharing of lessons learned across Egyptian civil society as well as more broadly.

Challenging Spatial and Economic Order: The Rise of the Street Vendors Movement

Amr Adly

Introduction

During the tumultuous political crisis of November 2012, when then-President Mohammad Morsi granted himself extraordinary powers in a bid to pass a new constitution, a presidential decree was issued that increased penalties for street vendors working without official permission or causing traffic congestion in streets and public squares. Decree No. 105 went largely unnoticed by observers engaged in commentary and analyses of the controversy surrounding the new constitution, but some knowledgeable in the rights of street vendors – specifically those working in the legal field – expressed surprise at the issuance and timing of the decree by the executive.[1] For others, however, the decree was understood as merely another element in the Muslim Brotherhood's broader attempts to construct a new political authority in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. Rebuilding state authority after a popular revolution doesn't primarily require imposing a new constitutional order on political opponents to maintain control of the state apparatus; rather, it requires the re-establishment of state domination over the daily lives of citizens after the loss of control by police and authorities. In this way, seeking to remove transgressions and side appearances in the squares and streets of Cairo and other major cities represented the restoration of state order, with new rules to end what many citizens saw as utter chaos after the revolution.[2]

Indeed, in the months and first few years following the 2011 revolution, the issue of public space usage dominated public concern and caused lifestyle changes for millions of average Egyptians across the country, especially in larger cities. Large numbers of street vendors

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1   See the statement of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights for the issue of street vendors, December 2012, available at http://eipr.org/pressrelease/2012/12/09/1553

2   Maha Abdelrahman, "Ordering the Disorderly: Street Vendors and the Developmental State," *Jadaliyya*, 4 January 2013, available at http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/9542/ordering-the-disorderly-street-vendors-and-the-de

took to the streets and public squares to display goods and offer services, redefining public space usage in cities in a way that provoked conflict and often led to outrage and discontent between street vendors and local authorities as well as with drivers and local shop owners.

This appropriation of public space split public opinion, especially since street vendors constitute the most noticeable component of the informal sector. Whereas many considered the expansion of street vendor activity as complete disorder – and perhaps bullying – resulting from the collapse of the state and its performance of security and organizational functions, others expressed that the issue was contingent on rising unemployment rates due to economic downturn following the revolution. The latter argued that street vendors are for the most part underprivileged or unemployed individuals looking to put bread on the table, and that dealing with their issues requires a degree of reconciliation among conflicting interests in public space usage.

This case study stems from in-depth field work conducted with different sectors and street vendor organizations in Cairo, Alexandria, and Suez between mid-2012 and early 2013, and specifically within the context of my work with the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR). Over a roughly six-month period, I spent extensive time in one-on-one discussions and group meetings with street vendors and their union representatives, all while the matter played out in public media. From this fieldwork, the paper tracks the Street Vendors Movement following the January 25 Revolution, the demands they made, the organizational structures they employed, and the networks they relied on to shape their status as political actors. The paper also explores their interactions with central and local authorities and other social movements and political powers, and their pursuit of social and economic demands through policy change and amending legal and organizational frameworks to enable the use of public space to practice their activities.

The "Roaring Flow" of the Impoverished

In the initial stage of their collective action, the activities of street vendors following the January Revolution shared several common features with Asef Bayat's concept of "social non-movements": the political action of thousands of like-minded individuals that occurs in the absence of formal structures of collaboration, collective consciousness, or political declaration of more traditional social movements.[3] Such political phenomenon is created by millions of people acting simultaneously, yet without any sign of coordination.[4] In the immediate period following the 2011 uprising, the movement was characterized by groups of street vendors moving to extend control over new locations on a daily basis, with the anticipation of the inevitable return of the state to reclaim this space. Lacking any sort of collective consciousness, these actions nonetheless represented a political challenge to the previous spatial order.

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3   A similar phenomenon exists in the prevalence of headscarf use in a given society, as a byproduct of religious messaging, or the spread of illegally constructed houses known as *ashwa'iyat*.

4   Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East,* Cairo: The American University Press, 2010.

The collapse of the Ministry of the Interior in the wake of the 25 January Revolution opened the door for a large increase in the number of street vendors, corresponding to the rising levels of unemployment and the slowdown in economic growth, all in the context of continuous political turmoil. This trend resulted in the increased occupation of streets and public squares. Prior to the revolution, public spaces were inaccessible to many street vendors: the police force was capable of organizing repression along the lines of what the state or the formal authority saw as politically, economically, or socially appropriate. Yet, in the prevalence of disorder and the absence of law, the "quiet flow" – as described by Bayat – of the impoverished class, which began in the cities' backstreets, slums and vital facilities like metro stations and the doorsteps of governmental buildings, allowed the passing crowds to transform into potential customers for the street vendors.[5] And in this particular case, the flow of street vendors wasn't quite "quiet," but rather was swift, self-conscious, and intense, due to the general realization by many vendors that the lack of authority was temporary and that the police and local authorities could soon come back to reinforce laws of public space use.

Acutely aware of the small window of opportunity that the collapsed spatial order provided, the street vendors sought to occupy and take hostage public space, with the express intention of using it in negotiations once the state authority returned. The street vendors' occupations of public space were not individual acts; rather, they occurred through unofficial networks based on kinship and prestige, or friendship. In this way, public spaces in squares and streets were taken over and assigned through networks that competed and conflicted for a number of reasons, primarily the novelty of vendors in these areas, the extreme competitiveness between them, and the scarcity of available time.

One significant example is the clashes that occurred among street vendors in Talaat Harb Street, downtown Cairo, which was inaccessible to street vendors until after the revolution. The confrontation there was violent and extreme, and many were wounded in frequent fights involving knives and firearms. This can be contrasted by the largely prevailing calm in areas where street vendors – though lacking official permission and permits – had an established presence, such as downtown Cairo's Kasr al-Nil Street, where their decades-long presence, acquaintance with each other, and pre-existing social relationships created unofficial rules for the distribution of public space and conflict resolution. Such areas were also unofficially distributed, but remained stable, as the pre-existing relationships allowed for a higher degree of collaboration and solidarity.

Despite these differing dynamics, the need for increased organization and collective action for the purpose of claim-making only truly emerged as legislation specifically designed for constraining the practices of street vendors came to light. In the face of new laws restricting their space of commerce and, hence, claimed rights, the street vendors took to collective

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5   Places where protests and pickets accompanying the January Revolution were occurring, either in Tahrir Square, in front of the Maspero television building, or in Abbassia Square, became street vendor attractions for serving foods, services, and cheap merchandize. Tahrir Square in particular turned into a battleground for a number of clashes among street vendors themselves on the one hand and between street vendors and pickets on the other.

organizing in a bid to institutionalize gains.

Organization, Protest, and the Struggle for Recognition

Prior to the revolution, street vendors' tacit rights were built on either local arrangements or familial/regional relationships based on where they worked and/or lived. Among many, these relationships served client-like, non-representational functions with members of the National Democratic Party (NDP) in governorate councils and the parliament.[6] Such links worked in principle on the unequal distribution of licenses (that most street vendors lacked), exposing them to an extensive list of penalties under the Labour Regulation Act of 1957, largely structured on an earlier law from 1943. This law had never been amended, except for the penalty clauses, which had frequently increased during the 1980s, without a reassessment of the licensing system or the practice of space allocation.

The bill to amend street vendor legislation – with the intention of increasing punishments for illegal use of space – was purposely leaked in early 2012. This coincided with the initial recovery of police authority and its attempts to reclaim control over some of the vital facilities street vendors had occupied since the beginning of 2011. From the outset, contestation with the police saw a fall in street vendor casualties, together with the demolition of the fencing on Nabi Daniel Street in Alexandria – where used-book vendors were mostly located – as street vendor activities became locally collectivized, in accordance with the state governorate divisions. With the new bill of 2012, however, awareness emerged of the dire need for a representative union with a degree of legitimacy and formality that surpassed the informal links to authorities that street vendors had worked under previously. Indeed, in spite of the seeming similarity between pre-revolution links and connections and the post-revolution union, the statements of the street vendors indicate that their unionization represented a categorically different type of organization.

While the pre-revolution links involved small groups, and did not aim to produce a collective identity for street vendors, the post-revolution project of unionization had a specific representational aim. And whereas in the period prior to 2011 streets vendors interactions with authorities were immersed in patron-client relationships, focused on securing the interests of immediate members through non-official agreements with the central authority (the parliament) and the local authority (the constabulary or the governorate), the formation of a union after the revolution sought to break the dominance of the pre-existing links and the logic of unequal privilege distribution. In this sense, the movement and the formation of a union did not seek to simply replace the pre-existing relationships between street vendors and authorities, since the state was too weak and impaired to build new patron-client relationships; rather, the main aim of union formation was to provide an alternative that dealt with authorities by representing street vendors as part of the working class and not merely local groups endowed with personal networks.

6   Patron-client relationships refers to the patterns of interaction between the street vendors and the authority representatives, whereby the client obtains material privileges (a licence, a certain space area in a street, or a kiosk, etc) in exchange for political loyalty (collecting votes in the election season for instance).

This move to increased organization demonstrates how non-collective street vendor activity gained collective consciousness as authorities attempted to confiscate the gains made during the time of the authority's weakened power.[7] Indeed, the success of street vendor mobilization, especially in 2012, can be described as an organized effort to access formality. This materialized when seasoned pre-revolution street vendors, together with newer vendors who entered the streets after, sought to legitimize their positions in order to secure them from eventual crackdown. This was accompanied by a new awareness of the necessity to change the state's management of public spaces, and to legalize their new-found status following the revolution. This was manifest in frequent demands to assign spaces to the vendors and grant them practicing licenses.

At some points, proposals – especially by older street vendors – focused on legalizing their status, based on their long history in specific areas, and granting them licenses that guaranteed they would not be removed in the future. At other points, such proposals were stretched to include negotiating with local authorities to secure new spaces for street vendors such as parking garages and marketplaces (or bazaars), or even assigning spaces for them in public parks. These demands by newer vendors, however, who occupied considerable areas in streets and squares, were impractical and impossible to keep in a non-emergency setting, as they caused traffic congestion or ongoing conflict with storeowners, residents, and drivers.

These attempts to seek recognition mark a transformation in the street vendors' post-revolutionary awareness of their struggle with the state and over their right to earn a living free from police repression and blackmail. This transformation replicates Bayat's conceptualized move from "citizenship de facto" to "citizenship de jure." Yet beyond the attempt to reshape and formalize relations with the state and local authorities, the street vendors' struggle for recognition also marked their boycott of the economic arrangements that had prevailed before the revolution, characterized by informality, the subsequent costs of job insecurity, and the need to make unofficial payments and bribes to local officials.

The social contract that emerged during the 1980s after the collapse of the populist socio-economic system saw the state tolerate informal activity in its most extreme examples. As explained by Harders,[8] this tolerance was part of a broader strategy adopted toward the urban impoverished population. By ignoring illegal construction, the takeover of government land surrounding major cities, the illegal utilization of water and electricity networks, and the occupation of streets for unofficial economic practices, the state sought a reversed welfare-giving procedure. This essentially allowed the impoverished population to utilize some resources to sustain themselves, but did not demand official status, nor put an extra burden on the state in times of financial crisis and expenditure reduction. For street vendors, these economic arrangements were further compounded by the local authorities' refusal to issue licenses since the 1960s. As a result, most street vendors lacked official papers

7   Asef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran,* Cairo: The American University Press, 1997.

8   Cilja Harders, "The Informal Social Pact: The State and the Urban Poor in Cairo", in Kienle, Eberhard, ed. *Politics from above, politics from below: The Middle East in the age of economic reform,* Institut de Recherches et d'Etudes sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman (IREMAM), 2003.

acknowledging their right to practice, despite some having operated for two or three decades and even inheriting the business from their fathers or grandfathers. And as the state had neither the willingness nor the ability to ban street vendor activity, the use of legislation became limited to penal law by which street vendors would be punished for unlicensed activity – despite it being impossible to obtain a license by any means – or penalizing them for street utilization and causing traffic congestion.

In the aftermath of the January Revolution, however, these economic arrangements collapsed totally. The explosive spread of social and economic protest following the resignation of Mubarak and the loosening of traditional police power led some sectors to seek recognized status to enable a certain level of security and avoid possible fluctuations resulting from the return of the state authority. In addition, the increase in the number of street vendors following the revolution, alongside the dissolution of the NDP and hence the dismantling of traditional patron-client networks, saw older street vendors find themselves in constant competition for public space and customers. They thus sought to enhance their position by obtaining a license, lest they should lose whatever unofficial gains they had made through decades of practice as a result of a renewed crackdown on street vendor activity, especially the activity of newcomers.

The quest of at least some street vendors to win recognized status through licensing their activity and registering their assigned spaces symbolized a form of struggle for recognition, where a social group tends to mobilize its resources and power to gain the recognition of formal institutions and the authority. In the case of street vendors, the struggle was enlarged to build a collective identity for the impoverished class, or at least for workers of the informal sector. That being said, their awareness of their identity was still limited locally to the street where they practiced their activity, or to familial and/or regional ties. As such, a considerable portion of the attempt to gain recognition was still largely driven by competition among different groups over patron-client relations and public space – a factor that decreased the ability to mainstream a career-based identity of "street vendor."

As a result, the attempts to gain formal status were not related to the struggle for citizen rights per se. Rather, they represented the quest for administrative, procedural, and legal recognition in order to secure gains obtained during the period of political disorder. In this sense, the obvious economic dimension to the pursuit for recognition, connected to job security and being freed from bribes and blackmail, make the Street Vendors Movement distinct from the struggles for recognition that some ethnic and religious groups have pursued (such as the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, or LBGT movements). It also means that the Street Vendors Movement differs from those of the urban unemployed, being more short-term, highly local, and class-based in nature.

It is worth noting that certain groups of pre-existing street vendors in downtown Cairo –particularly those on the streets Kasr al-Nil, al-Azbakeyah, al-Ataba, and July 26 – were among the first to start planning and networking with other organizations, societies, and activists to help progress their goals for recognition and consolidate their gains against newcomers. For example, a street vendor group in Kasr al-Nil Street sought to collect

signatures of pre-existing street vendors in the area with the aim to establish a union in Cairo. In interviews, these vendors spoke of their presence in the area for over two decades, and about the good relationships they had with the storeowners and the locals. And indeed, some storeowners also found a reasonable means of subsistence and co-existence through street vendor activity. Agreements were made whereby street vendors would sell goods that belonged to the storeowners at a cheaper price, so as to reduce competition between the two parties. They also emphasized the registration of their names and locations with the constabulary when they paid fines, thus proving the record of their presence in the street. This distinguished them from newcomer neighbours who had moved into the area after the revolution.

To this point, part of the Kasr al-Nil group's discourse was directed at the newcomers, considered thugs who often resorted to violence to get new spots in streets and squares. Due to the novelty of their status, newer street vendors did not have the local relationships of old street vendors, and therefore resorted to more informal forms of conflict management, including repeated incidents of violence among themselves given the absence of police authority.

Human Rights Organizations on Demand

The efforts towards collective organization created opportunities for joint activity between street vendor representatives in the Cairo, Suez, and Alexandria unions (among others), as well as other legal and technical bodies working in the field of social and economic rights, labour rights, and urban planning. The street vendors' early outreach with formal bureaus and other networks, such as human rights organizations working on the right to work, public space access, and the city, is noteworthy. Such institutional overtures came at a time when street vendor union members did not see potential allies in the independent unions or any other union organizations representing the interests of workers in factories and official establishments, public or private. Nor did they see opportunities to rely on new patron-client networks with the rising post-revolution political parties, such as the Freedom and Justice Party or the al-Nour Party, who did not attempt to establish contact with street vendor societies, despite the legacy of this form of informal linkage under Mubarak. The choice to reach out to human rights organizations seems to have caused a break with the economic arrangements that had prevailed between the state and impoverished classes. It also seems to have caused a break with the unofficial nature of the demands of street vendors, as they found an opportunity to demand public policy changes at a local level, such as municipal-level decisions to grant licenses or assign markets.

Of particular note are the formal institutional ties established between the street vendor unions and EIPR, whose department on social and economic rights issued a statement supporting the legalization of street vendor status. Following contact by the president of the Cairo union, active cooperation between the two groups took place over a period of several months, with EIPR offering legal assistance and training on union organization and registration to union members. Afterward this initial collaboration, meetings at EIPR's head

office resulted in the mobilization of representatives of a number of street vendor unions in governorates to raise two demands:

First was the amendment of laws related to street vendors, with a focus on building markets and gaining licenses. In this case, it was EIPR who raised the demand, not the unions or vendor representatives. EIPR then drafted an amendment to the law following examples in foreign legislation, such as laws organizing street vendor activity in India. Indeed, EIPR would come to act as a clearinghouse for street vendor groups. For example, a few non-organized street vendor groups, which later joined the Cairo union, established an early contact with the urban planning office, which in turn made a connection with EIPR a few months before a law was issued.

Second was the establishment of architectural plans for the spaces allocated to street vendors. This involved designing stands and kiosks that could provide architectural solutions to the various usages of public space in streets and squares. Unions were expected to produce achievable designs to be proposed to municipalities. In this regard, EIPR contacted an urban planning firm specialized in the development of impoverished areas. This firm was the early link between EIPR and non-organized street vendor groups in downtown Cairo. It became clear, after having contacted the street vendor union in Alexandria, that similar efforts had been made and some designs finalized for both the marketplaces and kiosks. A meeting took place among the three unions of Alexandria, Cairo, and Suez at the EIPR head office to discuss the designs and share negotiation experiences with governors and executive authorities.

In addition to the firm that brought the street vendors together with EIPR for legal and technical support, the network expanded to include political activists and non-official groups working on public affairs. Early contact by the Kasr al-Nil group with EIPR led to a new connection with the activist and photographer Philip Rizq in the summer of 2012. Within one week of contact with the street vendors group, Rizq was able to produce a short YouTube video depicting the state and conditions of street vendors and validating a legal stance for tackling their status as an urban impoverished class.

Such forms of collaboration were not limited to EIPR; on the contrary, the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) was already in contact with other street vendor groups as well as others who joined the effort to provide legal assistance to the street vendors. The involvement of the ECESR in January 2013, together with EIPR, was instrumental in providing legal expertise to produce a draft bill to amend the law.

Beyond these forms of institutional ties for the sake of advocacy and lobbying, the street vendors also made use of a tool borrowed from political activism – the media. Street vendor representatives, both those working with unions or from broader civil society, aimed to present the street vendors' viewpoint in the media. The media often paralleled the urban middle class's perceptions of the regime and resistance to chaos as the first steps to rebuilding authority. In this context, EIPR offered assistance through the appearance of some of its members on a number of programmes, with and without street vendor representatives, to

discuss proposals and counter the government's discourse on the issue. EIPR also produced two high-quality independent films on street vendors with the purpose of talking about the right to the city as well as about the frequent violations by the police against the city's impoverished population, particularly street vendors. [9]   Such topics had been a focus of human rights work in Egypt since the Mubarak era. Yet, though EIPR was influential in the early stages in bringing street vendors and their union representatives to satellite channels, this diminished relatively quickly as union representatives found their own way onto these channels, acquiring direct contact with programme presenters on different channels.

Overall, sections of the Street Vendors Movement – including unions, unofficial groups, and networks connecting representatives from different areas in neighbourhoods and governorates – were the focal point for interactions with the authorities. This is an extremely significant feature as the traditional role of "educated middle class" organizations in shaping the discourse of social and economic demands was diminished. Instead, the focus for street vendor representatives was on negotiating gains that recognized their status in the streets and squares and secured their achievements. Street vendor representatives also succeeded in limiting the role of supporting groups, such as human rights societies and activist networks, to only offering technical and legal assistance (without any financial aspect). Financial independence is a weak point for newly formed street vendor unions, as members at times expressed distaste at the lack of alternative funding to collecting membership fees from members. Financial independence may, however, explain part of the independence this movement enjoyed in shaping its discourse.

Negotiation and Discontinuation

Alongside protest and group organization, occupying public spaces in neighbourhoods and cities while resisting attempts by the police to reclaim them contributed to setting the stage for negotiating the conditions for recognition and securing street vendors' gains. This negotiation process took different forms that reflected the decentralized nature of the Street Vendor Movement. Similarly, their highly localized distribution reflected the administrative divisions of the state at the local level as well as the pragmatic discourse that street vendor representatives adopted for negotiations. The negotiation process also showed how this discourse was dominated by demands for administrative and economic gains derived from the street vendor networks, which underpinned the representative organizations negotiating with the authorities.

As such, negotiating on public space utilization – as well as finding compromise formulas allowing street vendors to practice their activities and earn a living within the state's vision for public space usage – were the main aim of mobilization, protests, and organization. This negotiation process was initially unorganized at the governorate level, as the main aim was to persuade city authorities to allocate spots in streets according to certain standards. Street vendor representatives – particularly in Cairo, Alexandria, and Suez – submitted economic

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9 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKKc4-LRYl8&feature=youtu.be

designs for vendor stands, and even sketches for multi-floor market areas, empty space installations, and public parks as a foundation for negotiating with the local officials.

Such practical demands in the negotiation process increased the union's influence on the Street Vendors Movement. Securing the interests and gains of those involved in union work then came at the expense of workers outside of the organized groups. Organized vendors were more capable of obtaining recognition-derived gains or were able to enter into business on better terms in the future. This is a persistent issue facing the formalization of organized labour through the procedure of registration and licensing.

It is too early to evaluate the future or possible demise of the Street Vendors Movement. Negotiations are still active and there are reports that some gains have been achieved as a result of the negotiations with governorates in a number of cities and neighbourhoods – even if protests have been on the decline. It is unknown whether this decline is a result of successful negotiations that might put an end to the movement. In this case, the movement's success would mean its end.[10] It is also unknown whether the decline of protests stems from the turbulent political conditions the country has been undergoing since June 2013, and the continuous crackdown on contestation. These are future questions to be answered by analyzing what gains have been obtained and what political factors proved most influential on the opportunities for organization and expressing social and economic demands.

Repertoires of Contention

The above has shown that the structure of political opportunities changed significantly following the January Revolution, allowing more space for collective action by street vendors – either by protest or by union organization, thereby allowing them to abandon patron-client type relationships. As such, street vendors were able to pursue official recognition, rendering their relationship with the state subject to general legal rules. This represents a divorce from the prevailing economic logic of the informal sector. As such, the question must be asked: where did this repertoire of contention come from between 2011 and 2013? Two sources can be identified.

The first is pre-existing and connected to the street vendors' self-perception as individuals and micro-groups as opposed to a distinct social identity[11] formed by the informal economy and usage of public space. This self-perception is less concerned with psychological or psychosocial connotations than the daily life experience for thousands of street vendors

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10   In this case, the movement would be similar to those described by Bayat in revolutionary Iran in the early 1980s, such as the mobilization of the unemployed, which ended with distributional gains in the form of unemployment wages or jobs in public companies.

11   That being said, it is fair to say that the shared experience among many of these vendors is an inseparable part of impoverished classes' experience in large cities in an authoritarian country like Egypt. Classes such as immigrants coming from the countryside – who form the majority of the urban impoverished class – suffer from economic and social marginalization. This becomes clear when talking about these individuals' pursuit of a "halal" income as a way to distinguish themselves from the rest of the impoverished population, which authorities consider a source of crime and moral decay.

throughout many years of activity. There is a certain ongoing daily tension surrounding their economic activity owing to the lack of clear guidelines for occupying public space in the streets. This tension includes internal relationships among street vendors themselves as well as their relationships with the constabulary, public officials in the neighbourhood or governorate, residents, passers-by, motorists, and storeowners. These relationships have been established on the basis of tense coexistence, as well as moments of fierce competition, cooperation, and exchange. Passers-by who are annoyed by the vendors are the same potential customers looking for low-price merchandise. Similarly, storeowners may choose to display a part of their goods in front of the store for an agreed amount of money they pay to a street vendor. This daily experience of street vendors, on an individual and group level, shaped their vision of sharing public space as well as their ideas of organization and the processes of protest and negotiation with the state. In their demonstrations, street vendors justified their desire for recognized status and reformed rules for public space utilization to the media by depicting a "hunger revolution" and maintaining a "subsistence" for millions of the underprivileged, without which they may have turned to drug dealing or functioning as bullies or criminals. Additionally, street vendor union representatives started talking for the first time about street vendors as a socio-economic class of about 5 million members.[12]

This portrayal of street vendors as a social class marked the beginning of attempts to create an identifiable political actor speaking for a largely imagined social mass. Yet at the same time, there was an absence of collective awareness of the structural dimensions of this class's formation, including educational level, the diversity of economic activities, and the frequent entering and exiting of the market due to shifting economic conditions. Many street vendors are people looking for a temporary income while they get a more secure job. This brings us to the second source of the repertoire of contention, which developed after the revolution against the Street Vendors Movement.

The street vendors' modes of contestation also lay in the learning process and expertise in negotiation and protest that emerged from the January Revolution. This was exemplified in the borrowing of union organization tools, the staging of demonstrations, and the threats to organize pickets, all of which were new tools to most street vendors. Looking at the process of union organization in particular is revealing of how these learning processes and adoption of repertoires of contention from other sectors shaped the Street Vendors Movement.

Union Organization

Instances of union organization emerged concurrently in a number of governorates and neighbourhoods, primarily Cairo, Alexandria, Suez, and Hilwan – with no evidence to suggest that these experiences were shared between groups. In 2011, during the "invasion" of public space and before the police moved against the vendors' gains, these unions were registered at the Ministry of Labour as part of the permits and licenses that were obtained during this

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12   This number cannot be confirmed due to the lack of state records on those working in non-fixed location trade sectors.

early post-revolution period and in the context of registration of other independent unions. At the same time, however, it remains unclear how these experiences spread, given that claim-making over public space through protest tactics entails a high degree of politicization. In theory, nothing in the experience of street vendors before the January Revolution favoured union organization or collective protest practices. It is difficult to identify a direct and organic connection between union organization and protest in the public sphere and the street vendors' uptake of these practices after the revolution. As most unionized street vendors belonged to long-standing groups, who moved to secure their gains against the authorities and newcomers, it is unlikely that they brought knowledge of workers' union organization from other industries or facilities where they had worked previously. Indeed, field work with the street vendors indicates that most activist biographies show little political activity in a party context or any revolutionary or protest coalitions that would have facilitated the transfer of protest experience like picketing, occupying squares, or organizing through member networks.

One part of the explanation lies in the shared lived experience of the mass protests and public space occupation during the January Revolution. Being physically present in protest locations, or seeing such events in the media, was a vehicle by which organizational and protest experience was transmitted to the street vendors. Yet it is worth indicating that Ahmad Hassan, the president of the street vendors' union in Cairo, had a political background and had been arrested for revolutionary organization in Egypt in the 1980s. He was also ideologically a Nasserite, worked at a used books shop, and had a higher educational level compared to the common street vendors he wished to represent. It appears that Hassan was trying to bring the experience of workers' union organization – with its political and social dimensions – to the street vendors, despite his awareness of the many existing contextual differences. Indeed, the minority involved in union organization in Cairo were more educated in general and had higher incomes. Nonetheless, they recognized several key obstacles that could hinder such unionization efforts, including the low educational levels among street vendors, the lack of trust between them, and the competitive networks that patterned their economic activity. Moreover, the demands on most vendors to earn a daily living prevented them from allocating time and effort to union organization, and their geographic spread discouraged unionization. The adoption of union organization tools to present vendor interests in an organized way was an attempt to merge with orthodox worker and union mobilization practices. Street vendors, however, are not workers in the economic or social sense and they are not connected by the same relationships as workers in an industrial establishment, factory, craft, or trade. Thus, competition on limited resources among vendors, either as individuals or groups, is in stark contrast to worker solidarity based on a sense of belonging to a particular facility or a particular trade.

In addition, while the union representation that spread through five or six governorates after the January Revolution sought to replace the previous representation tools based on patron-client relationships, especially with the dissolution of the NDP, some street vendors who were involved in union work talked about establishing "client" relationships with 2012 parliament members from the Muslim Brotherhood and the al-Nour Party. It is unclear whether these would have recycled the same distribution patterns that triggered conflict

among street vendors through the informal distribution of resources such as squares and licenses during the short parliamentary period.

In this context, the tool of unionization was closer to performing a representational role. This is not to imply that the obstacles to union organization of the informal sector fundamentally limit opportunities to expand membership of emerging unions or secure financial and other resources. However, the concerns in forming a union that is registered officially with the state are dominated by the priority of recognition – seen as a goal in its own right – and the fundamental problem of representation of a non-organized sector. The union should be considered a legal address for street vendors and a mediator when negotiating with the state or speaking to the media, especially since there are no legal obstacles to more street vendors joining unions.

This does not diminish the importance of union selection, which the more active groups of street vendors promoted for establishing the movement as a whole. This is because the purpose of creating formal unions is to attract more street vendors to join in the future and to earn their trust. As repeatedly expressed by the president of the Cairo union, achieving gains in representing street vendors and negotiating with the government is in itself sufficient to attract more into the movement. In this sense, the purpose of unions is to create a focal point for the movement that transcends the traditional direct membership networks based on local association.

The interaction between street vendors was not limited to political and social change following the revolution, but was also present in the adoption of union representation and collective organization tools. This extended to the practice of class protest, adopted from manifestations within the labour movement in Egypt from 2004 onwards – whose influence spread extensively after the receding role of the police state between 2011 and 2013. Yet it is worth noting that the street vendors' attempt to borrow collective protest tools has differed significantly from the dynamics of the labour movement – as explained by Joel Beinin[13] – in its dependence on informal localized networks with direct economic demands. The fragmented nature of street vendors' work – where workers are grouped in no more than threes, come mostly from the same family, and perform unpaid work – makes it difficult to arrange protest based on a facility or a factory, as is the case with workers in the public and private sectors or government officials.

There is no doubt that local, neighbourhood-based networks resisted police and other groups of street vendors wishing to seize certain public spaces. However, this pattern does not constitute a purposeful protest effort aimed at exerting pressure on the state as much as a direct act of resistance against the authorities' movements on the ground. At the same time, though, a number of street vendors' unions organized vigils in the Cairo, Alexandria, Suez, and al-Gharbia governorates, among others at different points. There was also mobilization for

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13   Joel Beinin and Marie Duboc, "A Worker's Social Movement on the Margin of the Global Neoliberal Order, Egypt 2004-2012", in Joel Beinin and Frederic Vairel, eds. *Social Movements, Mobilization and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa,* Stanford University Press, 2012.

other vigils with demands for status legalization, the ending of police violence, and provisions for a decent life. Warnings of a "hunger revolution" or the outrage of the impoverished also increased, as did demands that the state allow poverty-stricken individuals to earn a living. While such vigils alone did not enable the governorate and the union to communicate, they nonetheless received good media coverage, which improved the image of the unions and their council as representatives of street vendors and the necessity of finding a way to resolve their problems. These simultaneous vigils, which began in a number of governorates, were venues where protest and mobilization tools were used, including threats to block the road and using campaign vehicles to air slogans of social justice and denounce police repression and violence against street vendors.

Such tactics demonstrate how the shape of the protests and the language used were borrowed from workers' protests – even though picketing or protesting in front of the factory or public facility (in case of government officials) was replaced by doing so in front of the governorate or the centre of local authority. These new resources in the street vendors' repertoire of contention can be explained by the revolutionary context, together with the receding authority of the brutal state, the breakdown of the police apparatus, and the explosion of social protest among millions of public and private workers, which provided lessons to workers of the informal sectors. Street vendors adopted a message of themselves as conventional victims to police violence, blackmail, and corruption, and came to see themselves as belonging to the underprivileged included in the revolutionary forces' discourse of the marginalized and impoverished of the Mubarak regime.

Such a process is similar to Michel Dobry's theory of political crisis and the fluidity that occurs as the logic of sectoral division breaks down. In the context of the January Revolution, transitions in political discourse, the spread of union representation, and the diffusion of socio-economic class protest tools passed from workers and government officials to street vendors. Further supported by human rights organizations, activists, and lawyers, the demands of street vendors positions were able to be re-aligned with the broader quest for social justice to become ingrained in the revolutionary project to those on the left of the political spectrum.

Conclusion: The Train Has Left the Station

The post-revolutionary impairment of the authorities changed the structure of political opportunities available for the movement. Street vendors, making use of workers' experience in the first place, borrowed tools to create an incomplete demand-based movement. This occurred in the context of a continuing process of learning and exchanging expertise between sectors of street vendors as well as with potential allies like human rights organizations, activists, and possibly independent workers' unions. The presence of limited experience and expertise in organization, protesting, and formulating a demand discourse did not prevent learning patterns from previous workers' protests and political activities.

Although this organizational formalization and ties to other sectors of civil society has earned

the street vendors an important degree of recognition, the future of this movement is by no means guaranteed. The political transformations following the military coup of 2013, and the crackdown on all forms of contestation, represent an obvious threat to the movement. Yet beyond the political context, the Street Vendors Movement faced limited resources and a relatively weak membership. Street vendors remain reluctant to engage in political involvement and participation for the purpose of changing the state's policies. And the renewed appetite for repression by the state threatens the limited gains politicized groups of street vendors have recently achieved. This could translate into the revival of patron-client practices between street vendors (as individuals or groups) and representatives of the bureaucracy or a certain party – an extension of the model of the NDP and the former regime's networks. The huge increase in the number of street vendors and their occupation of streets in large cities may also force the government to invent new tools to enforce their goals, including evacuation by force.

In this context, an understanding can be achieved through continuing negotiations between street vendor representatives and local governorate authorities to reassign public space in cities. This could include designs of mobile markets, adapting the use of public parks and pedestrian roads, or architectural designs of stands and kiosks. In such a case, local authorities may tend to adopt a model akin to the corporate state[14] – in which it makes the unions representing street vendors mediators between it and the larger vendors mass. This would limit union pluralism to one or a few bodies recognized by the state. Indeed, this pattern of interaction has already been witnessed between the state and union representatives from the Cairo Vendors' Union as well as in Hilwan. Those unions have stood by the agreements reached with the governorate, while the governorate responds to the body representing the interests of the vendors and contributes to implementing what agreements have been reached.

Street vendors represent both a sector of the urban impoverished population and workers of the informal sector. Yet the vendors' interactions with politics – as a field for expressing public affairs – has been historically poor, due to low education and income levels as well as the confinement of most daily activity to earning a living. Despite this, the sector, or certain groups within it, saw attempts to politicize themselves and produce a self-aware socio-economic class in order to gain recognition by the society and the state under the title "street vendors." As a collective political actor in the post-revolutionary field, they have fought to change the laws and procedures surrounding the usage of public space in cities, to ensure financial security, and to redefine their relationship with authority - thereby challenging the prevailing spatial and economic order, and redefining the terms of their citizenship.

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14   Corporatism is a political and social model based on control and monopoly where the state creates unions and the civil society organzations to act as partners for the negoitaiton of relevant policies. This model acts to tame social forces that might otherwise resort to chaos and instability.

Establishing a Niche for Urban Rights: Activism, Urbanism, and the City

Aya Nassar

Introduction

The 2011 Egyptian Revolution has brought «urban" metaphors to the fore. Despite extreme efforts in the literature to shake off the urban stigma, the «spatiality of politics» remains entrenched as a central narrative of the 2011 revolution. Arguments both for and against this urban dominance are possible, and both demand attention. Stereotypical images of Tahrir Square accompany academic arguments that have always been attractive,[1] and have revived questions of space and place as a political issue, as well as of the city as a place that politics is practiced through, not against.[2] For example, neither Alain Badiou nor David Harvey hesitated to point to this image to attest to their favoured theoretical definitions of "the new event" or "rebellious cities."[3] This set the scene by flirting with the urban narrative of January 2011 and taking on questions of urban mobility in the Arab Spring. Invoking Henri Lefebvre's language of urban revolution also became plausible and familiar,[4] and it became possible to talk about urban injustice as a root cause of the events of 2011.[5] Indeed, 2011 and the period

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1 See for example Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street", *Lecture*, Bryn Mawr College, 2011, available at www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en ; Gastón Gordillo, "Resonance and the Egyptian Revolution", *Space and Politics* blog, 6 February 2011, available at http://spaceandpolitics.blogspot. co.uk/2011/02/resonance-and-egyptian-revolution.html ; Aya Nassar, "The Symbolism of Tahrir Square", *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, 2011; Derek Gregory, "Tahrir: Politics, Publics, and Performances of Space", *Middle East Critique*, Special Issue: The Arab Uprisings of 2011, Vol.22 No.3, pp. 235–46, 2013; Atef Said, "We Ought to Be Here: Historicizing Space and Mobilization in Tahrir Square", *International Sociology*, Vol.30 No.4, pp. 348–66, 2015.

2 Engin F. Isin, *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

3 Alain Badiou, "Tunisie, Egypte: quand un vent d'est balaie l'arrogance de l'Occident", *Le Monde*, 18 February 2011, David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, London: Verso Books, 2012.

4 An example would be the name of the summer school held in September 2012: www.wanacu.tu-berlin. de/fileadmin/f6_wanacu/Calls/Summer_School_Cairo_Call.pdf ; Henri Lefebvre, *La Révolution Urbaine*, Collection Idées No. 216, Paris: Gallimard, 1970.

5 Mohamed Elshahed, "Struggles That Fueled the Revolution", *Jadaliyya*, 2012, available at www.jadaliyya. com/pages/index/4401/struggles-that-fueled-a-revolution

following were golden years for "the city" and its priority in academic discourse. This was not unheard of in the case of Egypt. Cairo, the capital, had long attracted an extensive collection of historical and geographic literature. Instead of being restricted to images of an "historical city" that overlapped with the Orientalist narrative, or an "explosive city breeding violence and terrorism" that flirted with the imaginations of political journalists,[6] Cairo took on the discourse of revolution and activism, albeit temporarily.

Addressing place is a fundamentally political question – even if in a brief, and sometimes awkward collection of readings on revolution and the city in Egypt – and there was a genuine attempt by academics to confront the reality fluctuating before them. Additionally, placing the city as central was essential in beginning to politicize issues of urbanism, and to create a conceptual framework for activism on urban rights and its attempts to repossess place. This academic project, moreover, was buttressed by the trends of the post-2011 era, which witnessed a noticeable increase in initiatives and movements revolving around quality of life in the city and defence of urban rights.

Yet, though much of the emerging literature attempted to cast this activism as somehow new in the post-revolution context,[7] it was not a completely novel development. The struggle for the right to housing, for example, appeared within the struggle for economic and social rights in the early 2000s. Repeated waves of initiatives and movements had crystallized around discourse on the right to the city and the right to urbanization, bringing together the voices of activists, academic researchers, experts in nongovernmental organizations and urbanism, and urban planning professionals.

This paper[8] presents a collection of narratives that tracks the engagement of actors who attempted, through their action and discourse, to politicize the city, based on my own insider (and thus subjective) perspective. The paper observes these actors, their origins, overlapping interests, changes in their perceptions, and changes in their understanding of the meaning of urban activism, especially in light of the post-2011 context. Consequently, the paper follows a fluid and fragile network of actors within an extensive, unofficial network of professionals, architects, academics, and jurists who converge on their shared interest in urban quality of life and urban rights, and whose interests bring forth forms of popular mobilization in defence of rights.[9] I posit that while this activism is not necessarily "post-January urban activism,"[10] the phenomenon is nonetheless deeply coloured by the revolution, which certainly opened the way to more dynamic networking possibilities and the search for capacity-building under

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6   See particularly a criticism of both narratives in the introduction to Diane Singerman, Amar Paul, eds., *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture and Urban Space*, Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2006.

7   Roman Stadnicki's pilot study about new urban activists proposes first and foremost that the beginning of this activism is considered as a new repertoire of collective action, in the sense Charles Tilly envisioned. See Roman Stadnicki, "Post-Revolutionary Cairo: Blocking the City, Un-Blocking the Urban Planning?", *Les Carnets de l'Ifpo*, 23 October 2012, available at www.ifpo.hypotheses.org/4651

8   This paper was written between 2013 and 2014 and was revised for publication in 2017.

9   The overlapping pattern of the Street Vendors Movement with the expertise of architects and rights organizations can be reviewed as an example. See Amr Ismail's paper in this same volume.

10   Roman Stadnicki, "De l'activisme urbain en Égypte: émergence et stratégies depuis la révolution de 2011", *EchoGéo*, 10 October 2013, available at www.echogeo.revues.org/13491

the promises of possible change.

Reconceiving "Urban Activism"

The paper seeks to track the production of meaning and the working strategies of a number of actors representing the trend of urban activism. Of interest here is not only observing the typography of the borders and scope of this network of actors, but also observing how this network came into existence in the first place. In this case, temporality is pivotal and is connected to the extent of continuity and change in this activism, as well as the extent of its future effectiveness. Instead of ascertaining a movement's novelty, I borrow perspectives from Verta Taylor's work on "abeyance structures" that theorizes the ebb and flow of a social movement and its ability to weather periods of passivity and redeploy when the surrounding circumstances are more favourable, at times through a process of transformation.[11] Taylor's approach enables understanding how marginalized movements retain the potential for future protest.[12]

While I borrow some of Taylor's definitions, I avoid two terms common in the literature on social movements and the city. The first is «urban social movements» coined by Manuel Castells[13] which raises the problematic question: did social movements use the city as their operational ground or were they social movements about urban rights? The second is "right to the city." This paper seeks to explore movements whose central claims concerned the right to the city, taking the Initiative for the Right to the City and Public Space as the main thread in order to examine the possibility of framing issues connected to urbanism under this approach. However, I have dropped this term in favour of following the emerging nomenclature "urban activism."[14]

The research relies on one-to-one interviews with seven people connected with several initiatives during the period 2013-2014, five of whom had a background in architecture, and all of whom differed in the form and degree of their engagement in the "rights" approach to urban issues. Of these seven, two worked in a rights organization, two collaborated with rights organizations to develop the urban constitution paper, and three were entering the

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11   Verta Taylor, "Social Movement Continuity: The Women's Movement in Abeyance", American Sociological Review, Vol.54 No.5, pp. 761-776, 1989.

12   Taylor, "The Social Movement Continuity".

13   The term "urban social movements" is often connected to Castells' approach to demonstrate the possibility for urban conflicts to express structural contradictions that open the way to radical changes if they collaborate with trade unions and political parties. Here, urban social movements occur at a higher level of participation or protest depending on its impact. See also Chris Pickvance, "From Urban Social Movement to Urban Movements: A Review and Introduction to a Symposium on Urban Movements", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 27 No.1, pp. 102-109, 2003 ; Lila Leontidou, "Urban Social Movements in 'Weak' Civil Societies: The Right to the City and Cosmopolitan Activism in southern Europe", *Urban Studies*, Vol.47, pp. 1179-1203, 2010.

14   What can be mentioned here is the recent use of the terms "urban activity" or "urban activism" due to one of the initiatives launched by Omnia Khalil, Egyptian Urban Action, which was received with great interest. Her initiative focused on combatting state policies adopted in underdeveloped urban regions. It also included implicit and explicit criticism of urban practices. For further details about this initiative see www. egyptianurbanaction.blogspot.com.

field of rights through work as experts and urban researchers. As such, the meaning of "activism" differed among interviewees.

Institutionally, the seven individuals all belong to several well-networked and collective, albeit different, initiatives: Takween (initiative for urban solidarity),[15] the Madd platform,[16] and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.[17] These institutional connections, however, are not sufficient to understand networking and collaboration patterns and the partial engagement the actors have in relation to the other initiatives. The circles where these activists come from to build their network and a platform to push forward the "right to urbanization" are diverse. They do not form a single, crystallized advocacy movement and do not necessarily claim homogeneity, organizational "institutionalization," or even agreement on working priorities, although they are close to building their own "hubs."

Accordingly, attempts to describe this as a social movement may prematurely assume the nature and destiny of such networking. The role of these actors comes closer to what Marcelo Lopes de Souza calls "critical urban planning actors," [18] where engaged technical knowledge is used to offer social alternatives to pre-determined state plans and to execute them, either in coordination with state apparatuses or not. Such actors exploit technical knowledge often acquired in institutions connected to state bodies and educational institutions, and criticize or repurpose it. Their engagement and activism benefits from diversity to create different approaches to deal with land use, habitat, or environmental protection.

This paper reveals the networking of these groups over urban rights issues and the establishing of a platform to push such issues forward. It also observes (in the anthropological sense) network formation processes among academics, professionals, architects, and jurors who meet in a fluid context, and the possibilities of activating their demands for change. This process is underscored by increased self-awareness of the importance of network-building by these actors, and of framing issues for a wider audience. As such, the paper explores the moments and spaces where actors in the field of urban activism met; the moments of mobilization and how these reflected their motives for engagement and the mantle of urban rights; and the lengthier processes of networking and developing a record of action and pressure tactics.

Moments and Spaces for Meeting: The Genealogy of the Network

"We always meet in the margins of those events" - Muhammad Abu Tera

Tracing the process of building a network around the theme of urban activism, and my own

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15   www.takween-eg.com/ Interviewees: Karim Ibrahim and Hajar Awata.

16   www.maddplatform.tumblr.com/ Interviewees: Ahmad Borham, Muhammad Abu Tera, and Ahmad Zaza.

17   www.eipr.org/en Interviewees: Hala Makhlouf and Yehia Shawkat.

18   Marcelo Lopes de Souza, "Together with the State, Despite the State, Against the State: Social movements as Critical Urban Planning Agents", *City*, Vol.10 No.3, pp. 327-342, 2006.

role therein, reveals the overlaps between academic interests in the city, activist efforts around the demand for rights, professional pursuits related to architecture and urbanism, and the dynamic and almost daily actions that coalesced around a shared political interest – despite our different backgrounds – in urbanism writ large. It also reveals how the creation of such a network was directed less by a formal attempt at organization than by an informal process of network-building, taking place in the margins of other events and meetings.

My meetings with Hala Makhlouf took place both within urban reclamation projects as well as academic conferences. We met to talk about the initiative to convert the headquarters of the National Democratic Party into a live memorial of the revolution.[19] We also met to prepare an upcoming public lecture on the history of the revolution and its relation to urban space. This was the final in a lecture series "The Revolution and Public Space" held within the Initiative for the Right to the City and Public Space,[20] hosted by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.[21] We also agreed to conduct an interview for the purposes of this research paper. Makhlouf and I had arranged a meeting on the margins of a workshop on the city, held in the French Cultural Centre in the al-Mounira neighbourhood of Cairo, where the German International Cooperation (GIZ/GTZ) organized a workshop on Egyptian Urban Futures. It was the second workshop of its kind, and a mutual friend coordinated the event hosted by the Center for Economic, Judicial, and Social Study and Documentation (CEDEJ).

The CEDEJ had resumed academic activity in relation to the city and organized more than one academic and professional event in which we met. It played a similar role in the past, producing the academic support that inaugurated the Cairo School of Urban Studies launched by Diane Singerman and Paul Amar between 2000 and 2005. Singerman now collaborates with Karim Ibrahim and others on Tadamun, the Cairo Urban Solidarity Initiative.[22] I learned of Singerman's activity while preparing a neighbourhood workshop in Cairo in conjunction with a group of architects and political scientists from Egypt and Germany. I had previously delivered a lecture at the Initiative and I gotten to know Ibrahim's role around the same time. Ibrahim was associated with the Agha Khan project in al-Darb al-Ahmar, where we set up the fieldwork of the workshop.[23] Despite the nature of the workshop - leaning towards businessmen's vision for developing informal settlements - the issue of the state's responsibility was raised during an open discussion on the role of the private sector in the development of informal settlements.

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19   In June 2012, a Facebook page was set up under the name "Converting the Headquarters of the National Democratic Party into a Live Memorial of the Egyptian Revolution" as a reaction to frequent news about selling the previous headquarters and turning it into a hotel. This initiative attempted to connect those interested, including the Initiative for the Right to Public Space, available at www.facebook.com/pages/مبادرة-تحويل-مقر-الحزب-الوطني-إلى-ذكرى-حية-للثورة-المصرية/338596466216367?sk=info

20   Initiative for the Right to the City and Public Space: www.facebook.com/pages/The−right−to−the−city−and−public−space−الحق-في-المدينة-و-الجمال-العام/198635923494088

21   www.eipr.org/

22   www.tadamun.co/?lang=en

23   The Agha Khan Foundation set up a multi-faceted project for developing the al-Darb al-Ahmar region neighboring al-Azhar park, which the foundation also built and ran. For more information about the project see: www.akdn.org/hcp/egypt.asp

I was introduced to Yehia Shawkat by Shaima Ashour, at the "Learning from Cairo" conference. Ashour[24] encouraged my role as a political scientist interested in the city, similar to many architects I met preparing this paper. She recognizes the necessity of breaking down academic silos and networking among disciplines. She has used a number of Shawkat's films[25] to teach a course on the sociology of contemporary Cairo. Shawkat's blog, concerned with the shadow Ministry of Housing[26] has been useful since the start of my research into actors with a critical view of the Cairo 2050 Project.[27]

I also met Rabi Wahbeh who worked with Joseph Shakla in the Housing and Land Rights Network – Habitat International Coalition.[28] I was first introduced to Wahbeh at "Kharita 01"[29] organized by Townhouse Gallery[30] in 2009. It was at that time that I also met Marwan Fayed[31] and Omar Najati.[32] Fayed is a friend of Muhammad Abu Tera, Ahmad Borham, and Ahmad Zaza – who are all in turn friends with Dr. Dina Shuhaib and Dr. Khalid Abdalhalim, the latter a professor at the American University in Cairo. They launched the Madd platform post-January 2011.[33] I came to know both Muhammad Abu Tera and Ahmad Borham through the workshop I helped organize, as well as Dr. Dina Shuhaib who offered advice to organizers and discussed the participants' projects. I began to learn that Madd held "guerilla architecture" activities at a presentation by Muhammad Abu Tera and Ahmad Zaza in the "Learning from Cairo" conference.[34] At the end of the second workshop on the urban future of Cairo, I met Hajar Awata who worked with Karim Ibrahim in Tadamun on networking to produce the urban constitution paper.[35]

The above encapsulates several months of daily activity and reveals the numerous overlaps

24   Shaima Ashour, an architect and independent researcher, runs weekly electronic magazine *The IO Weekly* on events related to urbanism, available at www.paper.li/Shaimaa_ashour/1327336583, as well as her blog *Mansiyat,* available at www.shaimaa–keephuntingphotos.blogspot.com/

25   All video recordings of the "Shadow Ministry of Housing" produced by Yehia Shawkat are on the following link: www.youtube.com/user/IskanAlZil?feature=watch.

26   The official website of the Shadow Ministry of Housing, started in 2008, on which the Initiative for the Right to Housing was also launched: http://blog.shadowministryofhousing.org/ and http://blog.shadowministryofhousing.org/p/blog-page_27.html

27   The Cairo 2050 Project was a project with the aim to develop a comprehensive vision to the planning of Cairo. The whole project can be reviewed at: www.cairofrombelow.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/cairo-2050-vision-v-2009-gopp-12-mb.pdf

28   /www.hlrn.org/arabic/index.php

29   A symposium conducted in January 2009 on urban trends in Cairo: www.pericentreprojects.org/

30   /www.thetownhousegallery.com/

31   Marwan Fayed, an architect, set up, together with Ahmad Zaza, Ahmad Borham, and Muhammad Abu Tera, the Madd Platform. His presentation at Kharita 01 can be viewed at: www.v2v.cc/v2v/Marwan_Fayed%3A_Legalising_an_Urban_Tumour

32   Omar Najati, an architect and academic teacher, works at CLUSTER, which organized the aforementioned Learning from Cairo conference. To view its presentation in Kharita 01 see the following link: www.v2v.cc/v2v/Omar_Nagati%3A_Competing_Urban_Orders_in_Cairo%3A_A_Historical_Perspective

33   www.maddplatform.tumblr.com/

34   Beth Stryker, Omar Nagati, Magda Mostafa eds., *Learning from Cairo: World Viewpoints and Future Visions*, Cairo: CLUSTER, The American University in Cairo, 2013.

35   To view the urban constitution paper, see: www.urbanconstitution.wordpress.com/2013/10/11/uc/

among the actors discussed in this research. They were for the most part jointly engaged in one or more of the aforementioned projects and at least know about each other's activity. Some of these actors are from purely academic backgrounds such as Diane Singerman and Roman Stadnicki of CEDEJ. Some of us were also involved in setting up workshops on neighbourhoods that focused mainly on methodological training. Other actors come from educational institutions and urban initiatives such as Shaima Ashour, Ahmad Borham, Muhammad Abu Tera, Ahmad Zaza, Dr. Dina Shuhaib. Others come from rights activism such as Hala Makhlouf, Rabi Wahbeh, Joseph Shakla, Yehia Shawkat and his Initiative for the Right to Housing, the Egyptian Initiative to Personal Rights, and the Housing and Land Rights Network – his Habitat International Coalition. Others are linked to foreign research centres or international bodies of cooperation and development such as GIZ/GTZ. Another subgroup comes from professional architecture backgrounds, whose work overlaps with rights activism such as Yehia Shawkat or networking and planning initiatives such as the Tadamun initiative, which Karim Ibrahim and Hajar Awata are part of.

Despite the fact that these fields appear different in their work methods, goals, and standards, in the years preceding this paper they interacted at academic events and activities such as conferences and workshops. They cooperatively mobilized on issues such as the Initiative for the Right to Public Space**,** in art exhibitions and events such as those organized by Townhouse Gallery, or even for producing published knowledge either on websites or in the form of non-periodical publications.[36] It was these repeated gatherings as well as co-mobilizations that I recognize as a process of network-building within the field of urban activism.

Moments of Mobilization and Assembly: The Cairo 2050 Project and January 2011

"We set out with the thing that was hardest – the right to occupy space. The rest seemed easy". - Hala Makhlouf

How can we understand the formation of activism for urban rights and rights to the city without foundational events? As mentioned, this paper does not take the beginning of the revolution as the main founding event. This does not, however, negate the opportunities presented by this moment of discontinuity for new beginnings, which can be used to understand intensified mobilization.

On the formal policy level, 2011 saw the declared suspension of the Cairo 2050 project due to its relation to the National Democratic Party and the name Hosni Mubarak. Prior

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36   While some initiatives were doomed to failure, others thrived and created new coalitions. These individuals also met under new initiatives and projects after the completion of this research and until the time it was edited for publication. For instance, the Madd initiative, in cooperation with other rights organizations and popular forces, put forward an alternative plan for Maspero, making itself a solid partner in the negotiations and collaboration with the governorate. A new initiative, 10Tooba, was also established with the cooperation of some of the above-mentioned persons. In addition, some rights activists moved to academia, such as Hala Makhlouf. Certain academic and urban institutions had a more significant role in engaging with communities in which they worked like "Mujawarah", who started meeting in larger-scale meeting such as international conferences on urbanism or exhibitions on the city.

to 2011, criticisms of the project accumulated around its blunt modernist approach to restructuring the city without taking notice of how to provide adequate resources or monitor the consequences of endangering the urban fabric or displacing large populations.[37] At that time, the project presented an autocratic plan that enhanced urban inequality and injustice, as well as a number of planning projects that seemed ineffective and unrealistic. Consequently, it represented a model for governmental urban policies that some initiatives networked to challenge and overcome.

This project and others similar to it began with the assumption of a highly modern state capable of accessing, understanding, and gathering information about citizens, as well as drawing models outlining its visions for the future.[38] The actors understood such assumptions and used complications in the state's vision as points to network around and criticize. It was also apparent that the state and its plans might not be able to monitor all citizens as well as expected – it did not have the expected efficiency, control, and data collection ability. Nor could the state choose when and how to see citizens, speaking of them as a resource or a problem only when convenient to its policies and urban programmes.

Thus, there was increasing awareness of the fragility of the state as a monolithic actor with the ability to control, oversee, and decide. There was also a realization of the neoliberal paradigm driving the state's abandonment of planning responsibility to external bodies. This was accompanied by increased awareness that external bodies could not be understood as entities outside or opposed to the state, but rather that the state would incorporate them and deal with them by simply adopting their visions.[39]

This represents the development of critical knowledge about the state's approach to urban policy of the city before 2011. Such knowledge developed to confront "the state" and deal with it as a complex, multifaceted, and contradictory agent, with the ability to assume or ignore responsibilities as it liked.[40] This presents a more nuanced narrative than the interpretations that primarily see the development of urban activism as bridging the widening gap after 2011 and the withdrawal of state apparatuses.

The revolution also held different connotations for the actors themselves. To some it was a founding event and a starting point for developing activism on urban rights. Muhammad Abu Tera, a Madd member, says: "The platform began right with the emergence of the revolution.

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37   The same points of criticism reoccurred when the plan for an alternative capital was put forth, giving the impression that the state's urban practices haven't changed. On another note, it can also be seen how the criticisms against this project were present and more capable of briskly shaping their position compared to the criticism of the Cairo 2050 project.

38   James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

39   Julia Elyachar, *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 90-91, 2005.

40   WJ Dorman, *The Politics of Neglect: The Egyptian State in Cairo, 1974-98,* London: SOAS University of London, 2007.

The pre-revolution atmosphere was charged, and the revolution was the spark, or a big bang, that caused motion in all directions that was even at times unguided. It rather represents the expansion that wanted to break out of the place where we were standing. And as a result, we found that a lot happened and materialized throughout that period. It is as if we were being constantly suffocated and all of a sudden, we realized our ability to breathe! We finally could bring to action all what we had been always talking about."[41]

Hala Makhlouf points to the fact that after 2011 there was a surge in activism on the right to the city. Yehia Shawkat thinks that the revolution helped empower some to stand against practices that threatened their rights, but that it did nothing to improve their legal status as there was no structural change to legislation or plans threatening them. On the other hand, Karim Ibrahim objected to linking urban rights activism to the revolution, saying: "The main argument is that you cannot date urban rights experiences according to the personal experiences of the actors only. This in no way means that nobody joined this movement in 2010 for instance, because that is its starting point, or after the revolution, which is the reason for this movement. Rather, this movement has been active on the ground for so long, and that is what we are attempting to prove: the revolution is only a phase on this trajectory."[42]

Ambiguity in the narrative of the revolution's role in the emergence of new urban activism, or in pushing forward a new wave of extensive activity, indicates a similar problem indicated by Taylor in her approach to abeyance structures. Taylor sees it as difficult to talk about the birth of a new social movement by way of expressing complete newness. Consequently, what can be confidently said is that it was the beginning of a synergy between initiatives, new and old, as well as emerging self-awareness of interested networks, even if influence remained limited. Some actors could cynically say that the same persons met in all events to hear the same speeches being repeated.

This can be reintroduced as an example of conscious networking to build meaning and a common framework for activism,[43] principally pushed to bypass the effects of the modern state's inefficient and unjust plans on multiple urban rights. This differs, however, from the idea of bypassing the state itself. The demands often cantered on forcing the state to take up its urban responsibilities, and bypassing traditional urban practices related to clienteles that "do not conflict with the street or the society," easily contemplated with the existence of some sort of urban crisis.

The Motives and Pathways of Engagement

"All of a sudden, we were able to do something, we wanted to be outside the institution and its conventional practices" - Ahmad Borham

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41 Interview with Muhammad Abu Tera, 31 October 2013, Cairo.

42 Interview with Karim Ibrahim, 5 November 2013, Cairo.

43 Manillo Sinali, «Network Analysis», *Dictionnaire des Mouvements Sociaux,* Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2009.

It is hard to understand the motives for mobilization toward alternative practices without touching upon the "institution" and its "traditional practice" that some actors seek to circumvent. They consider such efforts a major motive for activism, connected to the academic context of training urban experts, as well as professionalism and the definition of activism.

The Academic Context: Opening a Linked Domain for Understanding Urban Issues

Interactions with the city and related urban rights are complex and multi-faceted topics. As a result, it is no surprise that narratives of mobilization and engagement on urban rights involve academic leaps and changing the meaning of one or more urban issues. Under a traditional academic education concerned with the knowledge silos between engineering, sciences, and social sciences, research in the urban field and conventional professional practice must often go against such separations.

In addition to knowledge silos, practitioners have increasing awareness of the inherent problems of academic traditions under which they were raised. Teaching architecture and planning has relied on autocratic reorganization of urban space, something reflected in professional practice for social engineering.[44] This is opposed to politicians who often lack the technical and professional knowledge behind urban issues and fall into situational analysis – like that of Singerman and Amar – providing critique, particularly when it comes to urban studies of the Middle East and Cairo.[45]

As a result, some actors keep in mind the goal of changing knowledge and the way it is conveyed in academic institutions, even though the academic space impacts networking and engagement opportunities. Yehia Shawkat points to the fact that the teaching of planning adopts old-fashioned ideologies unfit for Egypt, which are still being adopted and applied by the state. He reveals how, as a student, he was aware of the problem of informal housing and the architect's role in solving it, but that he viewed it from a purely technical viewpoint, not as a policy-related matter. This is what influenced his documentaries and book on justice and urbanism – which was newly published at the time of the interview – to be geared towards activists and students. In his view, such efforts would have multiple effects such as enhancing their capacity to act, and holding instructors accountable and pressuring them not to take academic traditions for granted. He also believes that students are in need of a discourse with societal content, unlike the autocratic discourse that marked the urban practices he learned as a student. Yehia Shawkat is particularly interested in students because they represent a challenge to the state's practices.

Hala Makhlouf, for her part, narrates how she moved from understanding the problem of informal housing as a development problem related to work or volunteering in civil society organizations as a student, to being an urban rights problem after being exposed to the

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44 Sarah Aseel, Aya Nassar, "Accessing Cairo Performative Methodology, Neighborhoods and Lessons Learned from Elsewhere", Presentation at the International RC21 Conference 2013, Resourceful Cities Berlin (Germany), pp. 29-31, 2013.

45 Singerman and Amar, *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture and Urban Space*.

rights- and policies-related dimension in the summer school Nama.

Though not perfect, academic education allows a space for connection and networking for activism.[46] Despite the predominantly orthodox role of academic institutions, a number of those interviewed point to the distinctive role of certain instructors who attempt to break stereotypes and encourage engagement and activism. This was due to their ability to network and urge students to give up the standard frameworks for understanding urban issues.[47] Mentorships are particularly important, especially given the role of some mentor models in opening the way for activity that surpasses simply conveying the traditional knowledge in academic institutions. Mentorships also influence the self-perception of the mentored as a generational unit in relation to other generations.[48]

Professionalism and the Definition of Activism

For a number of those interviewed, attitudes towards state policies and the criticism of urban practices are two common factors that define activism as an "alternative or parallel practice." Orthodox urban practices sometimes combine with public policy to produce major autocratic plans that express a somewhat authoritarian balance of power. These have sometimes been supported by professional planners who are suspicious of the participation of everyday people in the supposedly rational planning process, which emphasizes the necessarily participatory nature of planning.[49] This professional practice is connected to conventional forms of education and training. As such, looking beyond traditional understandings of professional practice has been a way for actors to frame an alternative space for thinking about urban policies.

Some interviewees referred to the newer concept of the "client" as a relationship primarily based on the market and consumers. For example, Muhammad Abu Tera worked in an office where he was to carry out the wishes of a client, before moving to teaching in 2003. Similarly,

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46   Postgraduate choices offer an example of spaces for suspension or engagement. In the case of Hala Makhlouf and Muhammad Abu Tera, the master's degree was a time of travel and perhaps suspension. With Hala, it was a convenient time to read David Harvey for instance and to think about setting up a project or initiative related to the right to the city after her return to Egypt. For Ahmad Borham though, postgraduate study represented a chance to network with Ahmad Zaza and Dr. Dina Shuhaib and start a network of activism. The same applies for Hajar Awata, who joined "Takween" based on the nomination of her professor, Dr Khalid Abdalhalim, and who moved from a master's in public policy (which was of benefit to her in her work with Tadamun afterwards) to a program in sustainable development.

47   For instance, professor of planning Dr Dina Shuhaib, is frequently referred to: Ahmad Zaza sees that she was the one who helped him change his understanding of the potentials of architecture as a profession, whereas Muhammad Abu Tera refers to her as "one of the godmothers of her generation, because she is among the first people to start talking about social sensitivity in the street, and thus she is considered the first reference for their work now". Similarly, the names of Dr Khalid Abdalhalim, one of the professors networking between students and initiatives (Hajar Awata), Dr Hiba Rauf, professor of political science, and Rabi' Wahbeh and Joseph Shakla (of the Habitat International Coalition), are frequently repeated, together with their lectures in the summer school Nama which represented the beginning of the interest in the right to the city for Hala Makhlouf.

48   For more details on the influence of generational relations, see Phillip Johim's chapter "The Effects of the Generation", *Dictionnaire des Mouvements Sociaux*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2009.

49   Marcel Lopes de Souza, "Together with the State, Despite the State, Against the State: Social movements as Critical Urban Planning Agents", *City*, Vol.10 No.3, p.337, 2006.

Ahmad Zaza feels his research work with Dr Dina Shuhaib was what got him interested in matters of housing, urbanism, and informal housing, and began viewing himself as a researcher. It was through this decision that he ventured into mobilization and networking.

For some academic architects, work provided more freedom to move and engage in other projects, experiment, get support from students, and widen the circle of those working with them. It also represented a space where some sought to shape a socially engaged science by enhancing the knowledge capacity of the students or transforming their work into a formalized curriculum.[50]

The concept of "the client" is evident with Yehia Shawkat, who explained mistakes in urban planning from the perspective of a consultant architect. This period gave him the chance to experience the work of the Ministry of Housing. He points to the fact that in urban planning – key to traditional urban practices – the client remains unknown, while the aim is to build comprehensive spaces without adequate information on the most appropriate methods for the society. Thus, the question becomes how to treat a society as the architect's client. He does not see this as possible except through networks of nongovernmental organizations or adequate forms of local representation.

In the post-revolutionary period, Shawkat briefly imagined that people's committees could fill that role. Separately, he allowed for the creation of people's committees among members of Madd to develop their vision. He also created pathways for them to enter territory they had previously struggled with. For example, Ahmad Zaza was able to network with local revolutionary committees, through the people's committees, to develop alternative plans for projects in regions instead of those imposed on them. The "blueprint" would then be left with the community to help them exert pressure to change designs and budget. This happened in the paving of the roads in Mait Aqaba upon a request by the people's committee to defend the revolution in the town.[51] This kind of urban practice developed for the sake of the communities, not the client, and occurred in more than one project (al-Kaum al-Amar, Bulak Abu al-Ula, and Mait Aqaba). According to Muhammad Abu Tera, the concept of a single client became less useful at this point and was discarded.

Among interviewees, Ahmad Borham was the most interested in adding meaning to the concept of activism that differed according to his affiliations with different initiatives. He says: "I was at the same time a member of Madd, Cairo from Below, and Tadamun, all of which can be classified as initiatives interested in urban activism, as well as my blog Drawing Parallels." Borham says his activities differed from traditional practice: "Traditional architecture does not focus on the society and does not approach the street. An architecture

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50   Ahmad Borham, Ahmad Zaza, and Muhammad Abu Tera transformed some of their work into a curriculum on special practices as community-based learning at the American University. It is delivered as a core curriculum that is not specific to the Architecture Department.

51   The experience of the people's committee in exerting pressure for the paving of the road has been recorded in full on the website of the Initiative for Urban Solidarity in Cairo Tadamun, available at www.tadamun.info/?post_type=initiative&p=2422

student, on the one hand, works on design in an office and deals with a single client where he understands his order and fulfils it. On another note, urban planning students do not approach the street except when they want to gather information, and that without true interaction or engagement."[52] As for the Madd platform, both Borham and Zaza hesitate to classify it as urban activism. It could be an activist group, guerrilla architecture, or urban practice, but it eventually has a "grassroots approach" to work, without imposing autocratic assumptions from the state or professionals.

The Madd project experienced role changes that transformed it from a networking platform to a group of architects working in design at society's request. This happened after several projects (al-Kaum al-Ahmar, Mait Aqaba, and then the research in the Maspero Triangle) which clarified the classification of the platform. At the same time, Borham, as a member of Madd, worked in parallel with Cairo from Below, which started as a research project by two students from Columbia University who tried to access information about the Cairo 2050 Project and its impact on urbanization in Egypt. The output was expected to be a blog or website, and they wanted Borham to cover it in Egypt.

Cairo from Below's activities started with a video shoot of one part of the Cairo 2050 Project – Mamar Khufu – and the influence it had on the urban fabric. This initiative soon grew beyond critique of the Cairo 2050 Project and autocratic planning developed behind the scenes and resulted in the launch of Our Urban Futures, a competition on alternative planning visions, and a workshop to enhance participants' practical capabilities. Borham is aware of this initiative's role as an urban activist group: "The urban activist is like a political activist: the political activist works on the ground; the urban activist also believes in a cause such as the right to the city or the right to housing. He too works with people on the ground."

Borham uses part of his experience with Cairo from Below to influence the Madd project toward critiquing the present blueprint of the Maspero Triangle and offering research and parallel participatory design. He also prefers the ability to network and overlap with the working fields of other initiatives: "I would like to know where the working zone for each of the initiatives ends so we complement each other. Some initiatives have zones of influence that other initiatives had better respect ... and that is part of the institutionalization process, even though we try at Madd not to be institutionalized and not to have a zone of influence, so we can move with more relative liberty, a thing that, to me, is the core of activism."

According to Borham, Madd's work is still far from urban rights activism and closer to grassroots urban design. The agent closer to rights activism is Yehia Shawkat, who works now mainly on the right to urbanization under the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. Despite this, Madd's work on an alternative design project for the Maspero Triangle overlaps with a number of rights organizations, as explained by his colleagues below.

Practical ground work is similar to engaged knowledge relationships in local spaces. These

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52   Interview with Ahmad Borham, 4 November 2013, Cairo.

enhance actors' ability to critique participation and the issuing of major, autocratic plans as mentioned by de Souza. Similarly, moving across initiatives and exchanging experiences and expertise represents moments of meeting and transferring action, coordination and deliberation mechanisms. This enables possibilities for future mobilization if need be, where actors rally previous experience to transfer to other movements and initiatives.

Networking and Developing a Record of Action

Following the personal pathways of actors is extremely important in understanding the development of network junctures, shifting visions towards urban causes, adding new meaning, and choosing actions better suited for practicing pressure. Following actors across initiatives and movements is equally important in understanding deliberation mechanisms and the capacity for future mobilization.

Hala Makhlouf points to the fact that she previously worked in numerous development activities but that she did not see these actions as an urban cause until the summer school in 2008. Alternatively, Yehia Shawkat was always aware of certain urban problems, but did not want to get involved in them through development. Rather, his engagement progressed gradually as he looked into urban issues as a rights and legal problem.[53]

Makhlouf was able to launch an initiative for the right to the city and to public space through her membership in the Egyptian Initiative of Personal Rights, as the latter allowed members to work on their ideas. She had joined the Initiative as a consequence of earlier work in the ElBaradei campaign, where her manager worked for the Initiative and where most of the issues she had worked on had an intertwined urban dimension (al-Dab'a and Ramlah Bulak). That was until she set up a Facebook page in March 2011 on the right to the city and public space.

By contrast, Yehia Shawkat started his blog "The Shadow Housing Ministry" as a critical, novel, and limited tool in 2008, after a temporary job at the Ministry of Housing and direct contact with government policy. His motivations were initially professional, after noticing that comments on many issues related to housing policy came from non-specialists, as industry professionals wouldn't write about and explain how and why policies were adopted. Consequently, the blog sought to write about selected policies concerning housing and urbanization. The blog started anonymously, until the start of the revolution when he declared it under his name. Most initial attention to the blog was from researchers. Shawkat preferred to write in Arabic mainly, after beginning in both Arabic and English. Through this blog, Shawkat initiated the Initiative for the Right to Housing to help study the issue by defining its most urgent dimensions. For example, he picked the topic of the real estate crash, which lacked any official statements to base a report on. The blog also sought to review urbanization and its problems to help him and other activists in the field. The initiative won a

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53   Shawkat narrates how he had prior helped in drawing maps for the Hisham Mubarak Center, as well as tourist maps of the Tunis Village in Fayyoum, Egypt. He also relates how he did not know what the proper gateway was since he knew he did not want to get involved in development or voluntary work.

grant, and its work in it split into two areas: fact-finding on the ground through a film series, where each would tackle one of the urban issues (in this regard, cooperation was achieved with Mosireen[54] for instance); and publishing a book that included data collected about urban disasters alongside short contributor articles.

Shawkat began to view to matters from a rights perspective when he was invited to a workshop related to Amnesty International's work on urban issues in Duwayka. At the same time, some of his blog posts were used in a book on property rights, and he began looking at the issue within a legal framework. The rights and legal discourse were the dominant elements in his view of urban social issues. Additionally, through rights work, Shawkat learned the difficulty of dealing with «society» directly and the complexity of power structures in any societal work. Interviews with Ahmad Zaza show a similar record of continuous reformulation in the importance of networking with the urban rights society – either on a personal level, by other members of the team, or by the Madd platform – from their earliest activity up to their latest research project on the Maspero Triangle.

The latest project follows the line the Madd platform has settled on for now, parallel participatory design, although this is closer to being a research project with the aim of studying the region and offering an alternative, more realistic plan to the one submitted by the government. Because the Maspero issue is complex, this project represents initial networking with rights organizations such as the Egyptian Center for Civil and Legislative Reform, from which Madd received partial funding, as well as grants from other organizations such as the Arab Digital Expression Foundation.[55]

Zaza points out that this project required, in addition to funding and networking, as much advocacy assistance as possible, leading to networking with members of Mosireen, who had previously cooperated with Yehia Shawkat in the production of his films. Zaza also refers to the fact that in this context the vision might slightly change to insulate it from issues effecting or impeding it, since legal problems and other issues related to property ownership are out of its scope of work but can still detract from the vision. These problems have become part and parcel of such work.

Karim Ibrahim's engagement in more than one project appeared in his retelling of a few landmark moments of reconsideration. In the late 1990s, when he joined the United Nations Development Programme for work on a report on al-Muiz Street, he "learned by talking to people that the issue has got to do with their economic networks, and that at the end there is one that if I hadn't given proper attention to it would have been very bad. The following year, I joined the Agha Khan project concerned with al-Darb al-Ahmar. We did our studies over two years. What was special about this project was that we were in the area itself and worked directly with the people, a thing that we learned a lot from to understand how the

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54   Mosireen, a cooperative society for the support of popular media, was launched after 2011: www.mosireen.org

55   www.arabdigitalexpression.org

society viewed urbanization, confidence-building mechanisms, and the way the government and authorities treated the people. Over time we discovered that urban solutions were easy and that the problem was not there. The most important thing is that it represented the existing forces that would allow us to design, fix, or build the house."[56]

The architect discovered that he could make decisions determining the use of funds at his disposal and how they could be spent for the society's benefit. He also had the power to take decisions with social and economic dimensions as well as environmental ones. Ibrahim tells how, through his Agha Khan experience, his vision, and that of his colleagues, shifted when it came to recognizing the importance of governance structures. This process happened by learning of other experiences and other countries, and through meeting government officials whose capacities were of a much higher level, even if their accomplishments were limited.

This interest in governance mechanisms, together with a feeling that there were many projects which had developed successful mechanisms without sharing their lessons, is one of the factors that brought together Diane Singerman and Takween – a company established by Karim Ibrahim and others after the end of the Agha Khan project. They cooperatively produced Tadamunak, an initiative aiming at documenting successful grassroots urban experiences to enable knowledge transfer, replication, and networks between urban rights approaches.

Network Building as a Goal and Strategy

Networking emerged as a primary goal for Hala Makhlouf in her Initiative for the Right to the City and Public Space. During the first year, she organized a number of roundtable discussions among people directly or indirectly interested in the issue. These discussions presented a considerable opportunity for networking and forging closer links among interested individuals. This was a significant resource for the Initiative that could later be invested in enhancing available resources, similar to what social movement theories describe on the role of networks. Makhlouf for example says that the Initiative for the Right to the City benefited from the resources of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights that hosted it. Similarly, the Egyptian Initiative benefited from the database the Initiative for the Right to the City created whenever an urban issue was raised. Some topics moved from small talk on the Right to the City, to being popular campaigns and deliberated by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, such as Ramlah Bulak. Makhlouf is satisfied with the Initiative's handling of and gains in networking, with some individuals now working together. She then moved to organizing a series of lectures on the relationship between the revolution and public space to more broadly publicize the issue. Now Makhlouf aims to document what has occurred, and move forward in popular campaigns and strategic litigation on urban issues.

Networking and coordination efforts, among others, were initially the primary goal of the Madd platform, though this has diverged over time. The platform initially aimed to connect

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56   Interview with Karim Ibrahim, 5 November 2013, Cairo.

activist groups and reduce the gaps between experts, practitioners, and activists. It also aimed to make itself a platform on which different initiatives would meet – a result of rapid rise in mobilization after the revolution and a sense of urgency to network them such actions. The platform was not ever fully able to achieve this, even though Omar Najati developed a map of initiatives, the Cairo Urban Initiatives Platform CUIP, and Tadamun mapped grassroots initiatives.[57] At the same time, some members of the platform, such as Ahmad Borham and Muhammad Abu Tera, worked as advisors to the Tadamun initiative and mapped networks of government actors by reading legislation and attempting to find its on-the-ground application. Similarly, they started to delineate government bodies, map their networks, and then determine which would be open to assessing successful grassroots urban initiatives.

Eventually, Madd moved away from its unsuccessful networking attempts as a goal, towards private urban practice which criticized concepts of planning and worked on alternative planning in cooperation with communities. The platform members were then able to develop their project capacities such as fundraising, applying for grants, and discovering the capacity of civil society groups with shared goals. This was the case with the Arab Digital Expression Foundation, which is concerned with the knowledge production component of the Maspero Triangle project.

Pressure Tactics, Charitable Development, and the Role of the State

"There must be someone to pressure the government to take its role" - Yehia Shawkat

Discourse on urbanism and the city of the group investigated here is marked by two characteristics: an emerging discourse on urban poverty, and discourse on the role of the state.

According to Shawkat, development charities represent a double-edged sword, as they start with good intentions and work only on the subsistence level, but have neither long-term objectives nor aims to empower or change certain policies. A few urban activists see that development creates an economy based on subordination, with each emerging charity creating its own varied sources of strength, patronage networks, and structure. Shawkat believes that we cannot ignore this structure, as well as the fact that actors' roles are in the end usually outsider ones. Consequently, lobbying for and enabling new policies can take a long time and is not always successful. In this context, development discourses bridge a gap in actors' capabilities and play a key role in meeting existing community needs.

At the same time, this development activity absolves the state of its responsibility and shifts it to the private sector, both civil and business-based. As a result, actors must pressure the government to take its role, or else risk a form of decentralized responsibility, where state resources are directed inefficiently, often with over-allocation. Governance problems

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57   Ahmad Borham stresses the difference between two kinds of initiatives: intermediary initiatives consisting of experts, professionals, or activists observed by CIUP, and initiatives related to "the main stakeholders and the community itself". That is why the Maspero Youth Civic Association, for example, does not appear in the CIUP map.

such as the centralization of development and resources in a certain region, or the choice of improper, costly technology, can compound this.

Shawkat maintains that he prefers his work methods to that of development organizations for several reasons. First, for him, the main fight is to influence public policy. Second, he sees an important difference between political conflicts and those fought on the ground. All that is done on the ground is erasable, even after significant effort by groups and individuals. Third restructuring public policies on the basis of social justice built from realistic data is a must. And fourth, it is important to connect those working in policy development with those working on the ground to enhance complementarity.

Ibrahim adds that the role of the state is considered key, especially as stated in the constitution. He sees a problem in some rights discourse, in that it deals with the outcome of numerous chain reactions that started initially with the state's concept of public interest. The topic of an "urban constitution" is thus of great interest, and he advocated research into the underlying assumptions of the state's vision and its related responsibilities as essential.

Pressure tactics are diverse, and discussion about the right to the city and public space have the ability to grow into campaigns or causes that the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights could adopt. For instance, when Yehia Shawkat joined the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, he wrote reports attempting to identify – in a legal framework – levels of civil or criminal responsibility connected to urban issues. He also offered legal assistance through lawyers or grassroots support in cases where there was societal responsibility.

Yehia Shawkat feels that thug-like behaviour in the legal process can occur, hence the importance of bringing awareness to the rights of people to address such bullying by the state and/or the private sector. Additionally, the state does not deal with the infringement of society upon itself. This contributes to awareness of long-term conflicts over changing public policies which still have time to help communities. Simultaneously, legal advocacy has been successful (as in the example of Qursaya Island), meaning that litigation represents an opportunity to win certain spaces at different levels, especially when the state does not have adequate legal capabilities.

Similarly, Karim Ibrahim narrates the underexplored experience of Izbah Kheir Allah – a legal dispute dating to 1982 that is still in court. To Ibrahim, it is "a pure people's struggle and an unknown case that no one has heard of." He also believes that it is one of the most important lawsuits because the court rulings reached will elaborate on the concepts of state and public interest. Karim gives this case profound importance because the litigation process has been active for 30 years without much support. He sees this as an example of strategic litigation.

Shawkat says that pressure tactics take shape through the disclosure and publication of information in conferences, papers, and reports. He is experimenting with opening new channels with government institutions, international actors, and public policy makers such

as the Bank Information Center connected with the World Bank.[58] Shawkat says: "We have started to open channels with them as a public policy maker. But how can we pressure them to make more socially fair policies? As a public policy maker, they say that they report to civil society. We will assume goodwill and provide the data and information in our hands and we will see. Some organizations will be obliged to take responsibility if they get hold of these data because it is their duty to report to civil society. That is an experiment; we do not yet know whether it is going to be useful or not. Since it is a probationary period, nothing is clear; we cannot give a final decision on whether it is going to be right or wrong. Nothing is certain."[59]

The Urban Charter, the Urban Constitution, and the Urban Reform Coalition

In addition to the informal networking processes, of particular interest among these urban activists was the emergence of the urban constitution paper at the time the new Egyptian constitution was written, in 2013. The urban constitution came into existence through the cooperation of eight rights and civil society organizations, with Takween (the Tadamun initiative) attempting to publish it and open the document for discussion. This was not the first time that pressure was exerted to integrate urban rights in the constitution, with earlier attempts such as the Movement for an Urban and Development Charter.[60]

Most of the individuals interviewed – who either participated in the making of this document or lost their will to influence the constitution – had criticisms of the process in which constitutions are formulated. Ahmad Borham, for example, was excited about this lobbying with the Movement for an Urban and Development Charter in 2012. But by 2013 he started to sense the futility of such a movement given the severe restrictions of the political climate. He remained, despite this, a believer in complexity theory, which does not demand that all attempts must succeed as their success is cumulative. The idea of presenting the paper was for many a first step in creating dialogue on such issues, with others seeing the process of formulating the Constitution as domineering and leading to no real change.

Ibrahim for example says: "Our aim is to develop the paper so it continues to be a standard for dealing with urbanism as well as a professional and ethical charter, and to form new policies dealing with urbanism that bring together a whole lot of entities. This idea already exists in Brazil where this movement remained active for ten years. We think that the entities on the table are too small and their voice is unheard, and that those who hold conferences are the

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58   For more information on the report written by Yehia Shawkat see BIC, "Impact of World Bank Policy and Programs on the Built Environment in Egypt", Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2013, available at www.eipr.org/en/press/2013/03/impact-world-bank-policy-and-programmes-built-environment-egypt   ; For more information on strategies to internationalize issues, see Johana Simion, "Across Nationalities/ Internationalization", *Dictionnaire des Mouvements Sociaux*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2009.

59   Yehia Shawkat, 3 November 2013, Cairo.

60   Khalid Abdalhalim, "Cairo searching for itself in the Constitution", Shorouk News, 20 September 2012, available at www.shorouknews.com/mobile/columns/view.aspx?cdate=20092012&id=a0c359b1-8f8a-42b5-a7f5-608ab9b95217

same persons. It is as if they are talking among each other. We would like to exit this state into such a coalition, and the paper is a nucleus wherein we tried to have a framework that governs the basic concepts of urbanism and pieces together different issues. It is such a good experience that eight institutions have collaborated to produce this paper."

Yehia Shawkat participated in making the urban constitution paper and thinks that his additions were based on realistic data on Egypt. Thus, the added articles were a justified response to documented, real problems. A press conference was held for the paper's launch, but Yehia Shawkat, Karim Ibrahim, and Hajar Awata (who worked on the coordination for the paper's related workshops) agreed that while its goals were long-term, there was no harm in discussing them straight away.

In March 2014, ways to collaborate among civil society organizations and interested persons were revisited, and discussions on legal strategies and pressure tactics were revived more prominently. Additionally, there was a continued push on the principles of the right to the city and debates on urban issues and social justice issues more broadly.[61]

Conclusion

This networking of a number of actors on urban issues who were not engaged in a single institution or movement reveals that, despite their individual differences on priorities and other aspects of activism or advocacy, collaborative efforts were made to build connections, create meaning, and establish space for mobilization on urban rights.

This process, as Ahmad Zaza states, is the result of "irresistible momentum as the cause is crystallizing and its crowds are increasing in number." This came in the context of discussion on intergenerational differences among different actors. Zaza sees that there is a new generation that plans to continue working along these paths. Muhammad Abu Tera also believes that the trend depends on newer generations. Hasan Fathi thinks, despite criticizing social engineering tendencies, that there is a split between the generation represented by Dr. Dina Shuhaif, Mai al-Abrashi, and their colleagues – who produced books and research on social responsibility – and the generation represented by Karim Ibrahim, Omar Najati, and their peers who began to establish institutions, offices, and centres. According to him, identifiable circles are forming at conferences and events, marking the beginning of a parallel current, even if the current lacks an identifiable platform.

In this way, this case study differs from Taylor's, which was interested in analyzing abeyance structures from several aspects. Most importantly, Taylor was concerned with understanding the marginalization process of a social movement that experienced initial success before receding and depended on exclusivity in order to retain a core pressure group capable of future revival in circumstances more favourable for mobilization. This case study, in contrast,

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61   See also Tadamun, "Cooperation Among Civil Society Organizations on Issues of Urbanism and the Right to Proper Housing in Egypt" (in Arabic), 7 April 2014, available at www.tadamun.co/?post_type=voice&p=4157#.WiUb8zeDMdU

dwells more on the various groups and individuals involved in networking. This approach helps us understand the process of borrowing and deliberation, and the continuation of the issues at hand; the process of learning the protocols for action and advocacy among different groups, various social movement, and consecutive generations; and the importance of focusing on continuity in understanding activism as a series of progressions, rather than discontinuities and rebirths, by using the lens of networks and not the central structures in which Taylor was interested.

This paper has attempted to outline urban activism from the actors' point of view and narrate their pathways through in-depth interviews; therefore, it does not present a comprehensive map nor a structural classification such as that by Stadnicki.[62] This was primarily to capture the fluidity and mobility of such activist networks, and the borrowing among causes and campaigns. This sees that issues of environment and heritage do not get separated from rights, and that rights activism and charity organizations remain distinguishable.

Looking at the history of personal engagement of a single agent for instance, we find that classifying activism according to scope of work is not effective, even though it may provide a clearer picture of the various narrations and voices presented in this paper. Furthermore, charity organizations such as Risalah and Masr al-Khair connect with rights organizations such as the Egyptian Initiative of Personal Rights because the scope of their interests can surpass urban issues. It is also helpful to notice the different patterns and records of action, as well as the different goals of the activism.

If Stadnicki considers the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights as not primarily concerned with urban issues, how can we understand the activity of an agent such as Yehia Shawkat in this institutional context? Shawkat adopted the right to housing issue, using a body of knowledge and experience developed as a professional and a creator of one of the private initiatives which Stadnicki includes in the second type of initiatives, i.e. those purely interested in urban issues. Consequently, this classification fails to adequately explain the complex networking processes and the importance of individuals' agency in their intertwined relationships.

I maintain that the mobility processes between these various networks are conscious and that networking takes place through sharing meaning. This means that classification dependent on explaining the scope of activism is doomed to fail, whereas social movement theory literature focuses on activists' progress in a more dynamic way.[63]

Questions remain on the ability of these networks' advocacy to bringing about lasting change in patterns of knowledge production or radicalizing rights mobilization. De Souza points to the necessity of re-examining some social movements as grassroots urban planning actors, in order to bypass intellectual prejudice and view civil society as a critic to planning passed down from the state, rather than solely as a receiver of its policies. He also thinks that

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62   Stadnicki, "De l'activisme urbain en Égypte: émergence et stratégies depuis la révolution de 2011".

63   For more details see Olivier Fillieule, "The Progress of Activists", *Dictionnaire des Mouvements Sociaux*, Paris : Presses de Sciences Po, 2009.

these movements will increase their capacity to act and shape appropriate policy by using their local knowledge, space, and the people's needs, language, and desires in combination with technical knowledge gained through state institutions and universities. This degree of knowledge and power cannot be underestimated even if the actors are not able to plan the city in the comprehensive way state apparatuses can.[64]

All of the above refers to similar patterns of networking to combine technical engineering, architectural, and rights knowledge while working on the ground to create distinct patterns of knowledge and strategies that defy public policies seen as autocratic and unfair. This is especially the case with rapid developments in acquiring knowledge, technical expertise, and political gains that some actors have witnessed.

Most interviewees felt that "we" are all at the beginnings of the formation of a single, homogenous stream of advocacy, and thus it is still too early to judge possible problems facing this network. Such problems may include how successful this group will be in mobilization or expanding its framework to earn recognition as "an urban social movement"; or the networking potential between this group – consisting basically of professionals and rights activists – and the more grassroots movements in a way that does not divide academic and rights currents from the movements and communities of the other.

Additionally, it is still too early to judge patterns of withdrawal from engagement. There is also the possibility that the state assimilates or co-opts this group's activity by allowing access to government discussion forums in return for respecting official plans and the abandonment of more radical activism. It is safe to say however, in recent years the city and urban issues have witnessed the foundation of a space for activism, network formation among unorthodox actors, and the breaking of knowledge barriers, which has opened the door to potential moments of larger-scale mobilization in the future.

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64   Marcel Lopes De Souza, "Together with the State, Despite the State, Against the State: Social movements as Critical Urban Planning Agents".

Between Professional Ethos and Revolutionary Action: The Tahrir Doctors Society

Habiba Mohsen

Introduction

The Tahrir Doctors Society emerged as a direct result of the political mobility and openness accompanying the beginning of the January 2011 revolution. Arising spontaneously as a response to the urgent need for medical care to protestors on Tahrir Square, the group of previously unconnected doctors quickly grew in organizational and strategic terms, becoming increasingly complex in its range of activities but also depth of claims. While the group's early focus was on the provision of relief activities and first-aid in crisis situations, it quickly adopted a more legal approach, using advocacy work to promote the right to health and physical integrity, and to improve the conditions of the health system in Egypt more broadly. In this way, while the group was initially formed in the light of professional ethos, it came to adopt a more revolutionary outlook, promoting the rights-based discourse of the 2011 uprising. Indeed, throughout 2011, the Society steadily increased its organizational formalization, range of activities, and coordination/networking with other groups representing a mixture of professional medical associations and youth revolutionary groups. Yet, following the largely failed Doctor's Strike in October 2011, the group entered into a phase of isolation and decline, exacerbated by the political context of the Morsi presidency and ensuing deep polarization of Egyptian society.

Using Sidney Tarrow's concept of cycles of protest,[1] this study explores the various stages of mobilization of the Tahrir Doctors Society and the group's attempt to merge professional life with the revolutionary ambitions over the period of 2011-2013. The paper traces the rise of the Society during a period of increased political opportunities and the expansion of

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1   Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Collective Action, Social Movements and Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

mobilization across different sectors, the peak of mobilization marked by tactical innovation and diffusion, and the eventual descent of mobilization as a result of the difficult external context that limited action and the ensuing problem of participant demotivation.

The Birth of Tahrir Doctors: Combining Emergency Medical Response and Revolutionary Ambitions

The Tahrir Doctors Society emerged in the adverse conditions and generally chaotic climate of the beginning of the 2011 revolution, ensuring that the first stage of the mobilization cycle was marked by "moments of madness" creating new forms and opportunities for social action.[2] On 25 January 2011, as violent clashes erupted between protestors and police forces, individual doctors participating in the protest spontaneously formed a group to treat to those injured. This led to the establishment of an assembly point to provide first aid, close to Tahrir Square, as well as the use of social media by medical volunteers to inform protestors of supplies needed. The assembly point included hastily established units for internal medicine, maxillofacial surgery, general surgery, and anesthesia to extract live bullets and cartridges and to treat gas suffocation. It also proved critical in the first days of the revolution to protect those injured from possible arrest: protestors in need of further medical assistance were evacuated to a nearby clinic run by one of the doctors.

On of eve of 28 January 2011 – the day of the largest clash between protestors and the police force, where the police were heavily defeated and opted to withdraw from the streets – information circulated that the regime was intending to cut off telecommunication services. In preparation, medical supplies were assembled to provide necessary first aid to the injured, while volunteer doctors were divided into three sub-groups: a group that stayed in the clinic; a group who relocated near the Abdul Rahman Mosque on Tahrir Square, where a large number of the gathered injured were later shot; and a third group wearing doctors' coats that joined protestors over the Kasr al-Nil Bridge, and who later came under fire by the police.[3] The doctors continued to use the Abdul Rahman Mosque as a base for their field hospital for the next two days (29 and 30 January) without much trouble. By 31 January, competition emerged as the Muslim Brotherhood became more active, forming the Arab Medical Union whose members covertly and overtly attempted to dominate the headquarters of the field hospital. In response, the group adopted the name "Free Doctors", setting up new rescue points with field hospitals inside Tahrir Square, and successfully mobilizing volunteers to distribute the necessary medical supplies by telephone and later by social media. At this stage, however, the political and ideological differences between the two groups were not obvious, as the primary focus was on the revolution and its goals.

Indeed, as the group of doctors came to formalize their efforts, re-baptizing themselves the Tahrir Doctors Society, their mission and goals were directly linked to those of the

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2 "Moments of madness" refers to Tarrow's description of effervescent mass mobilization when anything seems possible. See Isabelle Sommier, "Cycle de mobilisation", *Dictionnaire des mouvements sociaux*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2009.

3 Author interview with Dr. Ahmad Faruk, spokesman of Tahrir Doctors Society, Cairo.

revolution itself. The Society's founding statement, written on 08 and 09 February 2011 by core members of the field hospital, included the provision of medical assistance to injured protestors, the exchange of experience between doctors participating in the revolution, the unveiling of regime atrocities perpetrated against protestors, and the spreading of field medical techniques across the region and more broadly as the group's raison d'être. [4] Likewise, the Society listed campaigning on the right to health and the disclosure of the deaths of martyrs of the revolution as primary goals. This combining of professional identity and ethos with revolutionary ambition would help shape the strategies and domains of action of Tahrir Doctors as the organization formalized and developed its distinct niche.

Organizational Formalization and the Strategic Evolution of Tahrir Doctors

This organizational formalization of the group - a second stage in the cycle of protest - saw growth in the variety and diversity of activities outside of its initial geographical area of Tahrir Square, as well as the evolution and development of new strategies. The shifting political context forced the Society to rethink or invent strategies and different tools for mobilization in response to challenges emanating from the broader environment. Critical to the development of the Tahrir Doctors Society was the ability to respond to external challenges and to adopt strategies and tactics that would ensure the material and immaterial durability of the group. Among the various challenges faced by the Society were the security breaches and physical threats to both the doctors themselves as well as their medical facilities and supplies, the threats emanating from negative public imaging and the accusations of non-transparent practices, and the worrying trend by both unaffiliated doctors as well as security agents to appropriate the name and identity of the Society at grave risk to protestors' safety. As each threat manifested itself, the Tahrir Doctors Society adopted strategies and tactics designed to mitigate risks and respond directly to both ensure the survival of the Society but also the well-being of protestors. As a result, several prominent patterns of action dominated the Society's public work, used in parallel in most cases. This included: the emphasis on less formal medical response to crisis situation; the use of strategic networks with both revolutionary and civil society forces; the issuing of public statements to reinforce the identity of the Society; the limited partnering with international medical organizations; the creation of "medical caravans" inside and outside Egypt to express solidarity; and the placing of "revolutionary pressure" on official institutions through rights-based discourse.

From Field Hospitals to First-Aid Points and Personal Participation

Despite hopes for a peaceful transition, the continuing of urgent medical intervention in cases of violent clashes between protestors and the police came to dominate much of the work of Tahrir Doctors, even after the ouster of Mubarak. During the first 18 days of the January revolution, for example, the incidents of Izbet al-Zabbaleen in Sayyida Aisha in Old Cairo,[5] where clashes with sectarian undertones and excessive army oppression against the

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4   See the group's Facebook page, www.facebook.cpm/tahrirdoctors

5   An extremely impoverished area in the Sayyida Aisha quarter in Old Cairo.

population occurred, the Society responded by providing urgent medical intervention and establishing field rescue points. Likewise, in the period from the ousting of Mubarak to the end of 2012, the Society continued providing urgent medical intervention to protestors injured by police forces, including at the July picket of 2011 and the Maspero massacre in October 2011. In these incidents, the Tahrir Doctors were responding not only on site but were also establishing field hospitals, given that normal hospitals were unequipped to deal with such medical cases. Indeed, the field hospitals proved highly organized. During the Muhammad Mahmoud street battle in November 2011, the Society established a large field hospital at Mujamma' at-Tahrir, utilizing protocol approved by the international organization Doctors Without Borders (also known by its French acronym, MSF), while another field hospital was established inside the Omar Mukarram Mosque.

This type of activity, unimaginable before the revolution, represented a major success for the Society's doctors, as well as for civil society and the political and youth forces that adopted the slogans of the revolution. In addition to the success of providing sometimes life-saving first aid to many protestors, the Society also achieved significant gains in defending the right to physical integrity, the provision of urgent medical intervention, and the right to health. Indeed, the direct intervention of the Society's doctors was an embarrassment for the Ministry of Health. Consequently, the Society was successful in gaining the Ministry's support in the form of ambulances and medical supplies for field hospitals under its supervision.[6]

Despite this tacit approval for the organization bequeathed by the Ministry of Health, the Society did not prove immune to the regime's repression; in response to these increased security threats, the Society came to increasingly rely on first-aid points and the deployment of doctors in a personal capacity to reduce the threat of physical harm. During the incidents of Muhammad Mahmoud street in 2011, Society doctors located at the Mujamma' at-Tahrir field hospital were forced to beg the police to allow them passage for the transfer of medical equipment and supplies, falling under tear gas and gunfire more than once.[7] Documents published on the Society's website also tell of the arbitrary arrest and inhuman treatment of members while volunteering at the field hospital.[8] The Tahrir Doctors were victims of assault be hired thugs, who forcibly entered the field hospital and uttered personal threats against the doctors to prevent them from practicing, forcing the Society to evacuate the hospital and move to continue rescuing those injured. 51 doctor members of the Society together with nine patients, some in critical condition, were detained and threatened with arrest if they exited the mosque for whatever reason, even for the purpose of rescuing those injured. Doctors involved in evacuating the injured were also subject to arrest by army officers, and the army raided the field hospitals and various first-aid points.[9]

Likewise, attacks on volunteer doctors and pharmacists associated with the Society at Omar

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6   Author interview with Dr. Ahmad Faruk.

7   Author interview with Dr. Ahmad Faruk.

8   See https://www.facebook.com/tahrirdoctors/photos/a.284635694884656.88309.231414563540103/324334894248069/?type=3

9   Author interview with Dr Ahmad Faruk.

Mukarram Mosque,[10] and the fear of repetition of such assaults on field hospitals and the doctors working at them, instigated new security measures on the part of Tahrir Doctors. Contrary to the protocol signed between the Society and MSF,[11] the Tahrir Doctors came to resort more often on using first-aid points and deploying doctors in clash areas to help protestors individually, rather than establishing complete field hospitals. During the Port Said Massacre of February 2012, for example, the Society leaders were not able to call upon members to travel urgently to Port Said owing to time constraints and the long distance. Instead, the Society called for doctors and volunteers to establish first-aid points at the train station in Cairo, directing those injured to nearby specialist hospitals, and called upon citizens of the Canal towns to donate blood in the Port Said hospitals, much in the same way as in Cairo.

The strategy of resorting to first-aid points and the participation of doctors in clash areas in a personal capacity reoccurred on other occasions, such as in the second Abbassia protest in front of the Defence Ministry in May 2012. This incident was marked by a strong Salafi presence, particularly of supporters of Hazem Salah Abu Ismail, and some injuries were so severe that doctors could not provide first aid in the field. Some were taken to the hospital, but the surrounding hospitals for the most part denied admission to injured protestors. In response to such denials, the Society's doctors filed an official complaint against the administrators of these hospitals for their failure to fulfil their professional and humanitarian duty by refusing to take in these cases, their failure to protect their hospitals from the assaults carried out against them either by patients or by the medical crews working in them, and the absence of emergency plans to be implemented in such hospitals in similar emergencies and crises.[12]

Strategic Networks to Counter Negative Imaging

In addition to the physical threats issued by the security sector against Tahrir Doctors, the group also faced arbitrary accusations that risked affecting its public image. The political context during the revolution and early transition period was characterized by a state of tension where it was easy to make false statement without sufficient evidence, and where political point-scoring among various political actors necessitated clear mechanisms to guarantee the transparency of the Society's work during its revolutionary activity. The was achieved through gaining the trust of different revolutionary groups, including the Ultras, despite their different political affiliations, as well as the establishment of critical relationships with non-revolutionary actors.

With generous voluntary contributions by Egyptian citizens, the field hospitals set-up by

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10   See https://www.facebook.com/tahrirdoctors/photos/a.284635694884656.88309.231414563540103/350798198268405/?type=3

11   Field hospitals and first-aid points entail different protocols and degrees of management. Field hospitals require management by the supervising doctors and coordination by at least one of the conflicting parties to guarantee non-aggression against volunteer doctors or those being treated by them. These protocols were developed in collaboration with MSF.

12   See https://www.facebook.com/tahrirdoctors/photos/a.284635694884656.88309.231414563540103/449803345034556/?type=3&theater

the Society had abundant medical supplies, to the extent that the hospital in the Omar Mukarram Mosque, according to Dr Faruk, was overcrowded with donated medicine and devices. The Society had the intention, after the end of the crisis and confrontations between the protestors and the police, to donate excess supplies to the different governorates and remote or marginalized areas in greater need for this equipment. However, as protests and the number of injured declined, what was called "The Revolution's Board of Trustees",[13] under the leadership of Safwat Hijazi, repeatedly accused the Tahrir Doctors Society of being "thugs" and "agents", in what they viewed as a Muslim Brotherhood attempt – under the umbrella of the Arab Medical Union – to seize the in-kind medicine and equipment. In response, the Tahrir Doctors Society utilized other revolutionary groups, such as the Ultras White Nights as well as some youth from the Ultras Ahlawi, to secure the donated items, an endeavour which was not entirely successful.

Realizing the importance of committing to transparency as an optimal solution for such problems, the Society then decided to conduct an inventory of all medicines, medical equipment, and medical supplies in stock in the storage rooms and premises of the field hospitals it supervised in Tahrir Square. The Society's spokesman announced a comprehensive stocktaking exercise for all items under the supervision of civil society representatives as observers overseeing the integrity of the process.

An agreement was reached with a delegation composed of Dr Abduljalil Mustafa, General Coordinator of the National Association for Change, Dr Khairi Abduldaim, Head of the Syndicate of Egyptian Doctors, and Counsellor Zakaria Abdulaziz, former President of the Judges Union Club, that these supplies would be exported to the storages of the Syndicate of Egyptian Doctors after they had been inventoried, in parallel with inventorying the medicines, medical supplies, and medical devices in the storage area of the Omar Mukarram Mosque. An agreement was reached with the Syndicate that these supplies would be kept in the storage facilities of the Syndicate under the name of the Society in a way that would allow their recovery and disposal by the Society at the end of protests and pickets, under the decision of a committee consisting of the forces participating in the revolution. Such an arrangement made sense to the members of the Society at the time.

The Society conducted another stocktaking exercise for the medicine and medical equipment in the Omar Mukkarram Mosque, leaving them under the custody of the mosque administration. Sheikh Mazhar Shain, Imam of Omar Mukarram Mosque, agreed to this arrangement until plans could be made to export the items to a trusted third party. At the request of Mosque administration these exercises took place despite the ongoing protest in Tahrir Square, the accompanying tension, and the possibility of renewed confrontations between the police and the protestors. This was in order to mitigate disagreement among the political forces participating in the protest over whose custody the medical items would be placed in, or how they would be stored until the need for them arose. An agreement was eventually reached between the majority of the doctors involved in field hospitals and the Egyptian Cure Bank,

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13   A pro-Brotherhood, pro-Revolution group that emerged from the January 2011 revolution.

a non-governmental charity organization.[14]

Such agreements reveal the extent to which the Tahrir Doctors Society was not merely an occupation-related movement between doctors. Rather, the organization was comprised of multiple dimensions that overlapped with other movements and institutions. These overlaps helped the Society to build a network of relationships with official institutions as an occupation-related group, as well as gain the trust of other revolutionary groups and movements thanks to its humanitarian and revolutionary activity. From the perspective of government institutions, this group's identification with medical practice appeared to help the Society retain the voluntary contributions offered by citizens, or at least a certain portion of them. It also helped establish the previously mentioned agreements – with the Syndicate of Egyptian Doctors, the Egyptian Cure Bank, and the Mental Health Hospital in Hilwan – in light of the competition over medical supply donations between the Society and Arab Medical Union – which had more extensive fieldwork expertise but also a more politicized nature.

The Challenge of Appropriation

The third challenge faced by the Society during and after the Muhammad Mahmoud protest was the appropriation of the Society's name and identity by persons who were not doctors and/or were not protestors. In November 2011, a number of doctors held a press conference and issued a fake statement in the name of the Society, forcing the Tahrir Doctors to issue an official statement to clarify that it did not participate in press conferences, that it did not issue any statements, that it was not responsible for all field hospitals and rescue points established in Tahrir Square at the time of the Muhammad Mahmoud protest, and that it was only responsible for a specific number of such hospitals (mentioned explicitly in the statement). The statement also expressed that the group would not hesitate to offer the expertise of its doctors for collaboration and coordination with others.[15]

While the Tahrir Doctors Society was not the only medical group offering first-aid services to protesters in crisis situations, it did consider itself the most organized, trained, and disciplined. For the group, given that it was not possible for the Society to monopolize or control all field hospitals or direct other volunteer doctors, medical, and pharmaceutical students, it was equally important that non-affiliated medical professional not talk in the name of the Society. In response to this problem of name appropriation, the members of the Society started thoroughly inspecting the membership cards of volunteers including doctors, nurses, coordinators and others who were present in field hospitals and rescue points. In field hospitals, the Society was especially keen to verify the Syndicate of Egyptian Doctors membership cards held by volunteer doctors who did not belong to the Society.

The second instance of appropriation occurred during the Majlis al-Wuzara protest in mid-

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14 See https://www.facebook.com/tahrirdoctors/photos/a.284635694884656.88309.231414563540103/335027796512112/?type=3&theater

15 See https://www.facebook.com/tahrirdoctors/photos/a.284635694884656.88309.231414563540103/328056427209249/?type=3&theater

December 2011, where a number of the Society's doctors participated by offering medical services in their personal capacity and during which no field hospitals or other stations were set up – unlike the Muhammad Mahmud incident. Given this, the appearance of a few individuals presenting themselves as members of the Society, dressed in the group's uniform with its logo, came as a surprise to its leadership structure, who assumed that police or army agents were utilizing the uniforms as disguises to capture injured protestors and hand them over to the security authorities. Assessing the potential danger to protestors, the Society issued an official statement calling upon protestors to verify that first-aid points and field hospitals were indeed run by the Society, or at least had Society doctors staffing them. These included the Omar Mukarram Mosque, Kasr al-Dobara Church, and the Church of Virgin Mary in Zeitoun, which did not fall under Tahrir Doctors' administration but where members were practicing their work in their personal capacity.

Despite this, a short video appeared on social media showing a group of individuals dressed in doctor and nurse uniforms, beating and torturing a person who seemed to be injured on the roof of the Omar Mukarram Mosque. The leadership of the Society was obliged to note that it identified a few individuals in the video as thugs earlier involved in looting the medicine and supplies that the Society had left in the custody of the administration of the Omar Mukarram Mosque.

Capacity-Building, a Mechanism for Forming International Partnerships

Besides work in Egypt, the Society was also interested in coordinating and networking with organizations abroad; nonetheless, these collaborations were limited to trainings only. The Tahrir Doctors Society did not accept financial support from any international organization, and limited its acceptance of technical support to international organizations with proven efficacy and integrity through recruiting experts or training of trainers only. Successive events pushed the Tahrir Doctors Society to establish such partnerships with international organizations, and in particular the need for expertise in urgent medical intervention in humanitarian crises. MSF, for example, which has well-recognized neutrality and integrity, offered training sessions to the Society doctors[16] and developed alongside them a working methodology based on MSF criteria. And to overcome its limited financial resources, the Society made use of training rooms that cost almost nothing.

Additionally, there was an offer of cooperation between the Society and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – an independent humanitarian organization that works under the umbrella of the UN – to invite a number of trainers from abroad and offer hospitality services (lodging and meals etc.) to the trainers and trainees. However, a number of Society members objected, stating that one of the financial resources for the training was the United States Agency for International Development. Indeed, the majority of Society members objected to any form of cooperation between the Tahrir Doctors Society and any outside party. Consequently, the hospitality service was boycotted, and the lecturers

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16   The first training programme was conducted in the Youth Center in the Sayyida Zaynab neighborhood in Cairo.

who were invited by IOM delivered their trainings on a pro-bono basis.[17] This coordination between the Tahrir Doctors and IOM was repeated, as the IOM participated in the medical caravans that travelled to the regions of Halayeb and Shalateen, in late March and early April 2012, where the doctors examined around 805 patients, provided treatment, and performed home visits for some patients who were unable to make it to the caravans.

The Tahrir Doctors Society paid forward these trainings and collaborations with international organizations through their dissemination more widely. The Society conducted a theoretical and practical training course on field evacuation of injured cases in situations of disaster and crisis following the international methodology adopted by MSF in September 2011. It also performed another course for the medical crew of doctors and nurses on facing medical disasters in January 2012. The second training program was held in the National Training Institute, which means the training rooms were used by the Society at no cost to the Ministry of Health. Likewise, the medical caravans were carefully documented, organizing patient admissions, distributing patients to the relevant specialties, communicating humanely with them, as well as photographing the event and preparing daily reports. This data was intended for use in preparing reports to be submitted to the Ministry of Health.

Medical Caravans and the Manifestation of Solidarity

The organizing of medical caravans represented a new domain of activity for the Tahrir Doctors Society, expanding their domain of action from emergency response to the provision of health services to the marginalized more broadly. The purpose of these caravans was to provide medical assistance and necessary medications to patients in remote areas, and to monitor the most widespread diseases among populations in remote areas outside the coverage of the official health system, including Halayeb, Shalateen, Minya, Dumyat and Port Said and other regions.[18] The medical caravans also created strategic links to other youth movements, such as the April 6 Youth Movement and Salafyo Costa, and allowed the society to provide assistance to youth movements in raising public awareness of the right to health.

In addition, the mission and scope of work that the Tahrir Doctors laid out for themselves was not limited to Egypt. On the contrary, the revolutionary overtones of the group, and the fact that it was initially born from the January revolution and thus had a strong sense of solidarity with other Arab Spring countries at the time, sparked genuine interest in working with other Arab states. This paralleled the interests of the majority of average Egyptians who participated in the revolution and had sympathy with the revolutions in Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Tunisia. To extend work past the Egyptian borders, the Tahrir Doctors laid out a

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17   Later, the Society wrote a number of official letters thanking the lecturers for their time and knowledge. See https://www.facebook.com/tahrirdoctors/photos/a.284635694884656.88309.231414563540103/367465 023268389/?type=3

18   The caravan headed to Halayeb and Shalateen, for example, was composed of a medical crew of different specialties (internal medicine, oncology, paediatrics, ear, nose and throat, urology, orthopaedics, jaw surgery, and dentistry) as well as paramedics, coordinators, and documenting activists. See https://www.facebook. com/tahrirdoctors/photos/a.284635694884656.88309.231414563540103/426530287361862/?type=3&thea ter

solidarity strategy comprised of press releases; sending medical caravans for the relief and treatment of those injured; and training doctors abroad in the first-aid methods developed with the help of MSF.

The implementation of this strategy involved numerous actions. The Society built and sent medical and surgical caravans to Libyan hospitals to treat those injured in the revolution and provide medical and moral support to Libyan casualties, and a Society delegation visited the "Syrian Revolution Coordinating Body" at its sit-in in front of the Arab League in Tahrir Square, providing medical support to the protestors at the location. The Society then issued a statement condemning the daily massacres in Syria, calling on the governments of the countries neighbouring Syria to facilitate cooperation with credible and reputable Arab and Islamic civil organizations to offer support to the Syrian refugees in camps. In its search for ways to provide humanitarian aid to those affected by the humanitarian disaster in Syria, the Society also established the "Support Committee for Syria" that consisted of Egyptian and Syrian youth, with the aim of providing medical support and treatment to Syrian refugees in Cairo through independent grassroots efforts. This committee facilitated coordination with a number of volunteer doctors for medical examinations in clinics and hospitals or free-of-charge operations to the Syrian refugees in Egypt. Similarly, within the same framework and through agreement with the Union of Syrian Medical Relief Organizations, the Society organized three medical caravans based solely on voluntary in-kind contributions offered by the public. These provided medical support to hospitals inside Syrian territory. Through these caravans, several specialized surgeries were performed, and several serious injuries were treated in cooperation with Syrian doctors. The Tahrir Doctors Society also provided training to Syrian doctors on relief and first-aid in situations of violent clashes and humanitarian disaster.

Even beyond the Arab Spring countries, the Society's official website displayed the Arab Nationalist character, and especially its keen interest in the Palestinian cause. In the aftermath of the Israeli army's operation "Pillar of Clouds" in Gaza on 21 November 2012, which killed 150 Palestinians, the Society issued a firm statement mourning the martyrs in Gaza and reaffirming that the cause of freeing Palestine, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, from the occupation is "an undisputed, well-established national belief that is above all ideology and party rhetoric."[19] The Society also participated in a people's caravan in solidarity with Gaza in November 2012, in addition to medical support for the Palestinian resistance.

"Revolutionary Pressure" and Rights-Based Claims

Pressuring state institutions was one of the most prominent and complex strategies of the Society. It was also the strategy with the largest contribution to broadening the work of the Tahrir Doctors and increasing its radicalism. In this sense, in addition to be the driving force for the Society's work, it was also the main reason for the Society's partial isolation at later stages, as will be shown.

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19   See https://www.facebook.com/tahrirdoctors/photos/a.284635694884656.88309.231414563540103/548878348460388/?type=3&theater

The Tahrir Doctors Society developed from a professional group of volunteer doctors and nurses with a mission to provide emergency first-aid and medical services to a group working on developing new campaign tools open to, and connected with, legal and political campaigns. The structure of political opportunities within the revolutionary context was fluid and opened space for new political or legal actors to influence the decision-making process. This also impacted the openness of the Society, and its connections – through its presence in different political activities – with human rights organizations and legal activists was a significant factor allowing the Tahrir Doctors Society to adopt an approach reminiscent of a more rights-oriented organization.

This pattern of work and mobility overlaps to a great extent with Asef Bayat's "social non-movements" approach,[20] which illuminates how the structure of political opportunities or the political context surrounding the Tahrir Doctors Society at the time allowed the group to work according toward what he calls "the quiet encroachment of the ordinary," or more clearly, the "fluid" mobility of social actors that cannot be considered as "social movements" in the traditional sense, reflecting instead the silent struggle of the most marginalized classes to create more space for themselves in mobility, work, and gaining new territory in society. This kind of silent, gradual flow and the struggle deeply attached to the street reflects and shapes new forms of challenging the state authorities. This is what happened in the case of the Tahrir Doctors Society, which moved from being a professional group to one defending basic rights, such as the right to physical integrity, health services, and the protection from torture.

The Tahrir Doctors Society was able, by way of practical precedent-setting, and through cooperation with legal centres such as al-Nadim Center and Doctors Without Rights, to gain the right of civil society organizations to be present in post-mortem examination sessions of civilians whose death aroused suspicions of torture or human rights violations. This was achieved through revolutionary pressure and without waiting for official approvals or legal documents. The Society started following this strategy by taking advantage of bewilderment among government institutions following the Maspero Massacre. Upon the request of Coptic activists and the families of some of the martyrs, Dr. Muhammad Futuh attended the autopsy examination of those killed alongside Dr Muna Mina of the Syndicate. This trust the Tahrir Doctors enjoyed had been acquired from their permanent presence in the field; their substantial contribution in rescuing those injured since the beginning of the revolution; and the desire of the population for the presence of renowned, neutral, and respectable doctors during the post-mortem processes to guard against forgery or manipulation of official forensic report (as in the cases of Khaled Said and Said Bilal).[21]

The Society's involvement in legal cases expanded after the partial success in gaining the right of civil society organizations to be present at autopsies in cases of suspected torture. The Society's interest and activity in the right to physical integrity then developed further

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20   Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

21   For further details, see the testimony of Dr Muhammad Futuh https://www.facebook.com/tahrirdoctors/photos/a.284635694884656.88309.231414563540103/301496049865287/?type=3

into the demand for the reform of the health system as a whole. Indeed, close observers saw the development of the Society's strategies, which grew from being limited to rescuing those injured in clashes, to advocacy and defending the right to health as a public service. The medical caravans, for example, were a means to exert pressure on the Ministry of Health to provide the minimum healthcare to the inhabitants of those areas. At the top of the list of reforms was pressure to increase the proportion allocated to the health sector in the state budget. This budgetary change was designed to cover a number of demands, including improving the wages of doctors and other medical staff working at public hospitals; improving the conditions of public hospitals and clinics, among others, providing basic health services to remote and marginalized areas; and allowing civil society organizations to, at a minimum, observe all Egyptian health institutions. Although the Ministry repeatedly promised the Society that it would meet these demands, the promise never came to fruition.

Simultaneously, the Society began developing ideas for public mobilization around the right to health and the improvement of the health system in Egypt as a whole, with the objective to render it a priority among decision-makers. A number of strategies were employed in this pursuit, including the use of official media and social media campaigns, as well as networking with other groups and organizations that adopted the same principles. The Tahrir Doctors sought to raise public awareness of the health budget, by catalyzing grassroots discussion, spreading the word through medical caravans, and conducting presentations in impoverished and middle-class regions. By cooperating with other civil society organizations and movements such as the Doctors Without Rights Movement and the Committee to Defend the Right to Health, the Society launched a campaign under the title "What's more important than Egyptians' health? Don't get ill!". The aim was to use public pressure on the government and state institutions to increase the health budget to 15% of the overall state budget (three times the current budget), in order to raise the general level of health services provided to Egyptian citizens to a minimum level of acceptable healthcare. In addition, the group sought to create a lobby for exerting pressure on the government to meet the demands of the Society on improving healthcare in Egypt. The was to be achieved through the mobilization of civil society institutions and within circles of intellectuals, activists, and political parties.

During the preparation phase for the Egyptian presidential election of April 2012, one of the Society's main goals was to be active towards presidential candidates and foster open discussions to render the issue of healthcare a higher priority in their platforms. During the election campaign, the Society worked intensively on informing the public of their right to health through organized medical caravans in parts of Cairo such as Embaba and Dokki. Collaboration among the three groups participating in the campaign (the Society, along with Doctors Without Rights Movement and the Committee to Defend the Right to Health) saw hundreds of patients examined, and presentations given about civilians' right to health, and the importance of pressuring the government to increase the general budget allocated to health immediately. These three groups also became more active on social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to raise the right to health as a subject for discussion on decision-makers' agendas.[22] Popular Facebook pages, such as the "We are all Khaled Said" page,

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22 See https://www.facebook.com/tahrirdoctors/photos/a.284635694884656.88309.231414563540103/495800700434820/?type=3&theater

picked up the thread and started contributing to the media campaign by urging the public to observe the violations and poor condition of medical services offered to Egyptian citizens in public hospitals and clinics etc., either through blogging or photography. This led to a large a sizable public response on social media.

It is worth noting that Society doctors effectively proposed a number of alternative health policies. These were innovative policies that did not require assigning a large part of the general state budget to be successful. For instance, they proposed the institutionalization of medical caravans to remote areas with specialist doctors to be organized on a regular basis, until the required budget for building permanent hospitals and clinics for those communities became available. However, the Society received frustrating responses and procrastination from the Ministry without any real measures for application. In a similar vein, the Society suggested opening the door for civil society oversight over health institutions and the Ministry of Health. The reaction to this suggestion was also extremely disappointing.

The Doctors' Strike and the Peak of the Society Activity

Following the frustrating responses from the Ministry of Health, particularly after the election of Muhammad Morsi as president, and the government continued ignoring of health issues, participating doctors in all three groups, the Tahrir Doctors Society, Doctors Without Rights, and The Committee to Defend the Right to Health, played a significant role in pushing for more radical strategies - the peak of the cycle of protest of the Society.

Doctors from all three groups took their struggle to the Syndicate of Egyptian Doctors. In the general meeting of the Syndicate on 12 September 2012, a heated debate took place among doctors from across the political spectrum, with those from different political currents demanding a partial, continued strike to escalate pressure on the regime to meet their legitimate demands for increasing health spending in the general state budget, as well as improving the conditions of the health system across Egypt. Improving security conditions to prevent attacks on hospitals, medical crews, and patients was also a major common demand. However, doctors supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood strongly objected to the idea of the strike, to the extent that the Head of the Syndicate of Egyptian Doctors and the remaining Muslim Brotherhood doctors walked out of the meeting. An agreement was eventually reached on a partial ongoing strike, to begin on 01 October 2012, until a response to the demands was achieved.

The major actor and engine for the strike was Doctors Without Rights, with the coordination of the Tahrir Doctors Society. Despite the partial overlap between the two groups, due to shared active members, the former is a professional group closer in nature to a trade union, with a focus on doctors' rights. The latter, however, is a humanitarian relief group first and foremost, with more comprehensive aims to provide urgent medical services in crisis situations and improve the health system at large, through both the amelioration of doctors' and patients' rights. Thus, the strike was a golden opportunity to increase coordination and networking between the two societies.

A higher committee was formed to manage the strike, along with a media committee specialized in collecting data on strike participation across different governorates. The media committee was tasked with publicizing the strike while also explaining the doctors' position. Shortly before the specified start date, an advisor to President Morsi met with the higher committee, in which he promised to satisfy the doctors' demands in the hopes that they would back out of the strike. But despite the repeated promises, the demands were met with further procrastination and no schedule was arranged to which the government would commit. As a result, the committee stuck with its decision to strike on the planned date.

The event was marked by a high initial turnout, reaching around 80% of doctors around the country, corresponding to around 580 hospitals, according to one interviewee.[23] The Tahrir Doctors Society was one of the major drivers and supporters of the strike, issuing a statement endorsing the legitimate demands and urging doctors, members and non-members of the Society, within all health authorities country-wide, to participate.[24]

After a successful start, the strike suffered major setbacks, both from the government and the Syndicate. The government tried to ignore the strike completely and launched a media campaign to demonize it and those participating in it. The campaign portrayed them as lacking commitment to their professional and humanitarian duties. The Syndicate, under Muslim Brotherhood administration, began fighting the strike through direct and indirect means, including announcing that participation in the strike was optional and not mandatory, contrary to the Syndicate's rules. In addition, the government launched a media campaign attacking and defaming the strike throughout its 82-day duration. The continued negative media and pressure from the Syndicate saw the participation rate in the strike fall to 65%. This led to another general meeting on 21 December 2012, where a decision was taken by simple majority to suspend the strike. The strike ended with the regime not responding to any of the declared demands of the doctors nor announcing a decision to review them. This unsuccessful denouement ushered in the third stage of the cycle of protest, that of isolation.

Disappointment, Division, and Declining Action

In the cycle of protest, the peak of mobilization activity is followed by a decrescendo, which can be marked by the establishment of new organizations, the routinization of collective action, the gaining of a partial response to demands, or withdrawal/demobilization of participants. In the case of the Tahrir Doctors Society, while elements of all four of these possibilities emerged in the aftermath of the strike, two main patterns dominated the actions of Tahrir Doctors Society: the routine mode of collective action and the withdrawal of participants.

There was a partial response to the doctors' demands, particularly on issues other than those encompassed in the strike, including prisoners' right to health. Through collaboration

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23   Author interview with Dr Amr al-Shura, Member of Tahrir Doctors Society and Member of the Egyptian Medical Syndicate on behalf of the Independence Current, Cairo.

24   See https://www.facebook.com/tahrirdoctors/photos/a.284635694884656.88309.231414563540103/526866843994872/?type=3&theater

between the Tahrir Doctors Society, the al-Nadim Center, and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, the Society launched a media campaign pressuring the Morsi government on this issue in its early days. This campaign exploited the influence that the incidents of the Abbassia Battle had on the Egyptian public opinion – particularly among the Islamist political current – after many civilians were put in military prisons and many others stood trial in military courts. These arrests and trials displayed extremely poor respect for physical integrity and basic human rights.

The Society issued official statements on detainees in Torah Prison, where conditions were quickly deteriorating following their three-week hunger strike, and objecting to the arrests without proper investigation or fair trials. This case in particular was utilized as a gateway to mobilize around the defence of the right of Egyptian prisoners or detainees to gain access to healthcare in specialized health facilities, and to lay the responsibility on the Interior Ministry for the deteriorating medical conditions of prisoners and detainees due to neglect and arbitrary denial of treatment. In cooperation with civil society organizations, the Society also organized visits to some prisons which held detainees of the second Abbassia incidents and Muhammad Mahmoud street incidents, where the appalling conditions were discovered through conversations with the detained. Most testimonies described inhumane treatment of detainees either in regular or military prisons. Emphasis was placed on the fact that the issue had long been neglected by Egyptian society and institutions, particularly by prison authorities under the Interior Ministry.

The Society then organized a press conference with the same civil society organizations with which it stressed its advocacy for the right to health in general. This extended by default to the right to health in detention facilities; that the prison authorities and the Interior Ministry were required to immediately cease the violations of the right to health and physical integrity; and that humane detention conditions were required to prevent detention becoming a period of torture to those arrested.[25]

The "partial response to the demands," however, did not actually entail replacing the tough detention conditions with more humane ones or ceasing violations to the prisoners' right to health or physical integrity. Rather, the existing conditions of detention facilities in Egypt remained unaltered. What actually occurred was allowing – although on a limited basis – civil society organizations to monitor the health conditions of the prisoners and a degree of commitment by the prison authorities and the Interior Ministry to respect human rights standards. These demands were similar to those agreed to by the Department of Forensic Medicine in allowing civil society organizations – under the pressure exercised by the Society and the al-Nadim Center – to be present in the autopsy examination of citizens whose death was suspected to be a result of torture. This did not entail ending the use of torture in detention facilities but was, at least, a "partial response" to the demands put forward by the Society.

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25   See https://www.facebook.com/tahrirdoctors/photos/a.284635694884656.88309.231414563540103/485162358165321/?type=3&theater

The sense of disappointment regarding the right to health and physical integrity, particularly after the Doctors' Strike ended in December 2012 with none of its stated demands being met, translated into a general desire to withdraw from action among a large number of the Society's members. Likewise, a loss of faith in the Syndicate and even in peaceful means of reform in general prevailed due to the government's almost complete overlooking of the doctors' claims. The Tahrir Doctors Society and MSF both strived, by means of the strike, to massively increase awareness – among doctors and the public at large – of the demands of the doctors, the disastrous state the health system in Egypt, and the necessity of increased health spending as a priority of any future government. The strike was instead successful in highlighting to doctors the need to replace their representatives in the Syndicate if they hoped to improve its performance.[26]

Nonetheless, some sub-groups inside and outside the Syndicate started to consider individual solutions, such as finding work in the Gulf, immigrating to another country, or looking for jobs at private hospitals in Egypt. The climate of despair in the Syndicate also led to doctors giving up on general meetings. Meanwhile, some other sub-groups thought about more radical solutions, such as declaring a general strike that would paralyze work at all public hospitals, and exercising unrelenting pressure on the government to meet the demands of the strike. In addition, a number of smaller and more casual movements arose before and during the Doctors' Strike on the side-lines of the Syndicate of Egyptian Doctors. These included the Doctors' Coalition, which became active after the revolution but was closer to being a casual, non-organized group rather than a fully formal organization. Its activity lessened toward the end of 2012, with the exception of its online presence through its official Facebook page,[27] due to its lack of experience in trade unionism and relief work, and its lack of well-organized members on the ground.

Similarly, on the issue of urgent medical intervention - a cornerstone and main driver of the Tahrir's Doctors' activity - the Society notably decreased its institutional, organized intervention. Many members stopped participating in relief efforts except on an individual basis, especially after Morsi assumed the presidency. Society activists gave several reasons for this. First, the demanding technical requirements for running field hospitals diminished the possibility of the Society intervening in the streets in clash areas without adequate research. The protocol for establishing a field hospital, for instance, requires coordination with one of the conflicting parties to provide protection to the field hospital and its medical crew. Likewise, protocol called for hospitals to be set up with easy-to-find entrances and exits. The ensuing decision to call upon member doctors to act in an individual as opposed to institutional capacity necessarily diminished the organizational nature of action.

In addition, the length of the transitional governance phase and its uncertain progression left many Society members frustrated and eventually discontinuing their participation. Although the organization's records show around 300 founding members, those who worked regularly, volunteered, and participated actively in running the group and its activities were closer

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26   Author interview with Dr Ahmad Faruk.

27   See https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100002542684212&ref=br_rs

to 50 individuals.[28] Some Society members also withdrew due to the sharp divisions that emerged in Egyptian society following the Morsi government's election. They discontinued their participation due to the political controversy between members who sympathized with the Muslim Brotherhood and those who opposed it. This divide grew deeper, causing more members opposed to Morsi to withdraw, especially after the death of prominent Society member and one of its Facebook page administrators, Muhammad al-Qorany (nicknamed "Kristy"), during the Ittihadiah Battle in early 2013. Indeed, the death of Kristy demonstrated the deep political divide between members and the ensuing demobilization it incited. Some developed feelings of personal revenge between themselves or the Society and the Morsi government, while others discontinued their participation due to deep sadness from the death of a field colleague, friend, and an important member of the Society. Others, however, discontinued their participation based on sympathy with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Conclusions

The internal reasons for the decline of the Tahrir Doctors Society include members' disappointment with the only partial responses to their demands; the complexity of the Society's activities and its inability to act with limited financial and human resources; and the adoption of legally-oriented work without actual experience in this domain. Yet, beyond these internal reasons, the external environment can also be pointed to as a source of decline: to what extent was the political dead-end in general and the absence of political opportunity the cause of the demobilization of the Tahrir Doctors?

The changing structure of political opportunities was perhaps the most important influence on the Society's action. After the removal of Muhammad Morsi from office in July 2013, the political context became antagonistic to working through legal mechanisms. It was difficult for the Society to complete its activity through legal channels, or even to provide emergency response, due to the profound polarization of Egyptian society. Instead, a real opportunity emerged for the Society in its professional – and not revolutionary - capacity. Opportunities emerged for the Society, as well as the other two professional groups with which they collaborated before the strike, to create a significant change inside the official institution of the Syndicate of Egyptian Doctors, by attempting to compete with the Muslim Brotherhood's influence. Indeed, the leaders of the Society began shifting their thinking towards trade unionism, and established the "Independence Current" inside the Syndicate. This current attracted a large number of doctors seeking real representation of demands within the structure of the Syndicate, instead of its poor performance under the Muslim Brotherhood, and was at least partially successful in this venture.

However, the violent dispersal of the Raba'a al-Adawiyya and Midan al-Nahda protests in August 2013, where no Society members were officially present, signalled a major blow to the group. Despite the strenuous efforts exerted by Society leaders to discourage the interim government from forcibly removing the protestors at Raba'a and Midan al-Nahda, the authorities did not take notice. And while the Tahrir Doctors Society contributed on an

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28   Author interview with Dr Ahmad Faruk.

individual basis in the form of first-aid points and provided medical support to those injured in the dispersal of the Midan al-Nahda, the presence of Society volunteers was totally, and sometimes violently, rejected by protestors at the Raba'a sit-in.

The chaos in the political climate, and the internal divisions it provoked between Society members, led to a notable decrease in membership, allowing the group to inadvertently filter and screen members. Among those who left were sympathizers or those intellectually influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, who expected a more political attitude by the Society than the neutrality shown in its condemnation of violent dispersals of Raba'a and Midan al-Nahda. Yet it also included those who rejected the individual volunteer efforts of members to provide care to the injured, those who considered the provision of medical assistance equivalent to supporting "terrorist" elements and sabotaging public facilities and state property. With the exclusion of these two polarized views among Society members, the Tahrir Doctors underwent an internal shake-up, but one that was perhaps ultimately beneficial. The Tahrir Doctors resumed activity shortly after, especially on the right to health and physical integrity, particularly through direct action from inside the Syndicate. With Egypt's decreasing space for political action; however, it remains to be seen whether advocacy of rights will continue through official institutional channels, or whether the Society will instead shift to an independent professional group comprised of doctors. The balance between professional ethos and revolutionary action remains uncertain.

The Rab'a al-Adawiya Sit-In from Inside: Strategic Choices and Trade-Offs between Security and Counter Messaging

Sherif Mohy El Deen

Introduction

Over a period of 48 days, during the long summer of 2013, Egypt witnessed the longest popular sit-in since the outbreak of the 2011 uprising, centred on Rab'a al-Adawiya square in Cairo's Nasr City. Launched on 28 June 2013 by Muslim Brotherhood supporters of then-President Mohamed Morsi, the sit-in began as a precautionary action against the mass protest demanding Morsi's resignation and early elections that was to be held two days later. For those initially mobilized at the sit-in, claims focused on the issue of "legitimacy": the Rab'a al-Adawiya protestors reiterated the importance of having the legitimately elected president complete his four-year term (of which only one year had thus far been served). Less than a week later, following the 03 July military coup and forced removal of Morsi from office, the sit-in began rapidly gathering strength. Over the course of the next several weeks, tens of thousands of protestors would gather on Rab'a square daily, many remaining on the vast encampment overnight. The sit-in's macabre denouement came on 14 August, as security forces violently dispersed protestors in what would become the worst massacre in modern Egyptian history.

The Rab'a sit-in represented a new form of contention in Egyptian politics. While in the past sit-ins were usually organized to oppose a government's decisions or laws, the novelty of Rab'a was the utilization of a sit-in to support the legitimacy of the existing authority. Indeed, the Rab'a sit-in was organized not only to support the sitting president but also to counter the popular movement opposing him. In addition, the use of the sit-in as a mobilization tactic by the Muslim Brotherhood captured the qualitative development of the group's protesting performance capacity, which had been honed over the three years following the 2011 uprising. The mechanisms of organizing the sit-in by the Muslim Brotherhood, and especially

the unprecedented flexibility of the Brotherhood leaders, and in particular its youth and other cadres, are of note, given the group's lack of previous experience in running such a protest. This was coupled by counter-messaging tactics utilized to win over public opinion in the face of a stigmatizing media campaign led by the majority of Egyptian satellite channels against the protestors. Yet, despite the success of gathering supporters at the encampment, this event also brought to light the internal conflict between the participants about priorities of demands.

This study explores organizational and mobilization dimensions of the Rab'a sit-in from inside, including the mechanisms of the protest's management, the fortification of the sit-in, the framing of demands, and the protesters' interaction with the intensive media campaigns against them. Based on participant observation during the sit-in as well as four months field work following the dispersal of Rab'a, the study applies an analytical framework based in social movement theory to bring forth new insight on the protest event.[1]

The Early Symbolism of the Sit-In

The reasons behind the choice of Rab'a as the site of the protest is not immediately obvious. The perimeter of Rab'a al-Adawiya Mosque did not have any symbolic significance prior to the sit-in on 28 June 2013, something confirmed by all interviewees. For some, Rab'a was simply the usual location for Brotherhood activities in Nasr City. Indeed, the movement had always held many of its activities there, such as solidarity stands with the Palestinian cause, long before the 25 January 2011 revolution.[2] Yet beyond the actual location of the protest, the sit-in itself was endowed with important symbolic value in the post-2011 context of the street as site of contestation.

For "Awad," a youth member of the Muslim Brotherhood, the main objective of mobilizing Brotherhood supporters on 28 June was largely anticipatory in nature. In light of the gathering groups of anti-Morsi protestors in the area surrounding the Federal Palace, groups of Brotherhood members tried to scatter demonstrations and sit-ins of opponents, leading to the famous "Federal" clashes which caused the injuries and deaths of dozens of people.[3] According to Awad, the aim was to "stay near the presidential palace, for fear that opponents would break into it." In this sense, the Brotherhood's strategy was to confront crowds with crowds. From the start, the aim was to out-flank opposition demonstrations, which had been gathering during the month of May and collecting signatures calling for Morsi's departure through the Tamarod petition. The Brotherhood's anticipatory mobilization was meant to show that not everyone was against President Morsi, nor demanding his departure and early presidential elections. In this sense, it was "no more than a symbolic sit-in to bring about a balance of power in the street."[4]

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1 Given the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood since 2013, the identity of interviewees has been rendered anonymous here for ethical reasons.

2 Author interview with "Mohamed", August 2013.

3 Author interview, October 2013.

4 Author interview with "Sarah", a non-Brotherhood revolutionary activist who joined the Rab'a sit-in in

Given this, the sit-in at the beginning was limited to few hundred members of the Muslim Brotherhood, other Islamic movements, and a few independents. There was no intention for a long-term encampment. The organizers and leaders of the Brotherhood believed that their protest tactic was a tool to create pressure. The situation changed completely following the military coup on 03 July, as goals crystallized when an active decision to organize a sit-in on Rab'a square was taken and crowds began swarming the site.

Building on Prior Experience: The Link between Tahrir Square and Rab'a

Although the Brotherhood's attempt to organize a sit-in was new, many members nonetheless had prior experience organizing and managing such protest events. Indeed, every organizer of Rab'a al-Adawiya sit-in that participated to this study had prior knowledge that helped them organize and administer the sit-in. Much was accumulated experience from their participation in the 18-day Tahrir Square sit-in during the 2011 uprising. To this point, nearly every tactic used to secure the sit-in, manage its survival, and to develop organizational and media tactics, derived from organizers' experience in the 18-day sit-in at Tahrir Square. "The idea of dividing the perimeter of the sit-in into certain entrances, distributing organizers for protection and security purposes, and organizing the entering and exiting processes, mainly emerged from the sit-in of the first revolution on 28 January 2011."[5] In this vein, the establishment of security procedures became a predominant organizational dimension of the Rab'a sit-in. This included the formation of security committees at the entrances to the sit-in, to verify the identity of people entering and to search participants to prevent entry of weapons. Relying on the experience gained on Tahrir Square, these procedures evolved as the sit-in developed. Farraj, an organizing official, attributed these developments to "the participants' reasoning and innovation in security measurements more than [...] any decision from the official organizers of the sit-in."[6]

Evolving Security Procedures

Interest in the need to develop strategies to protect the sit-in increased when demonstrators were seriously threatened by a clash with army forces, once the sit-in expanded in front of the Republican Guard club, at dawn of 08 July 2013.[7] More than 61 people were killed and dozens injured at the clashes when the army used excessive violence and live bullets to disperse peaceful demonstrators.[8] Security threats to protesters ranged from simple to great

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solidarity after the 03 July coup, November 2013.

5   Author interview with "Mohamed", organizer of the sit-in, November 2013.

6   Author interview, October 2013.

7   This was the northern entrance to the sit-in area at the end of Tayaran Street and its intersection with Salah Salem Street.

8   The details of what happened at the Republican Guard club between the demonstrators and the security forces can be found in an investigation by the *Guardian* newspaper, "Killing in Cairo: the full story of the Republican Guards' club shootings", available at http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2013/jul/18/cairo-republican-guard-shooting-full-story#part-one

risks. The simple risks were easy to control, such as blocking the entry of security agents and sometimes people with non-firearm weapons. Moderate risks included encroachment of some groups of men, armed with homemade cartouches (gun cartridges) that were fired at some security entrances. The firings were not frequent, unlike at the al-Nahda sit-in, which witnessed many armed clashes at its entrances, between the protesters and groups from outside. The greatest risks were where the security forces engaged in wide clashes with the protesters for hours. Clashes such as that on 08 July were repeated at the events of the Manassa Memorial on 26 July, until violent dispersal by the security forces through the whole day of 14 August.

According to "Mosaab," security measures consisted of securing the entrances, securing the square and the protesters from inside (the responsibility of the Brotherhood), and securing the rooves of buildings for the purpose of surveying and monitoring, and dealing with any expected attack such as an aerial landing of paratroopers (the responsibility of the al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya).

Operations to secure the five entrances were divided among members of the Brotherhood based on their geographic origins, utilizing the Brotherhood's own geographic divisions (known as *shuaab* or branches of different regions), primarily the Suez Canal, Delta, Alexandria, Matrouh, Greater Cairo, North Upper Egypt, and South Upper Egypt. According to Mosaab, each sector of the Brotherhood was primarily responsible for securing a certain entrance or space at the normal times of the sit-in: the western entrance to the sit-in was the responsibility of the governorates of Sharqia, Suez, Ismailia, North Sinai, and South Sinai; the eastern entrance the responsibility of the governorates of Damietta and Dakahlia; the northern entrance the responsibility of the North Upper Egypt governorates Minya, Beni Suef and Fayoum; and the southern entrance, along with the sub-side entrance, was the responsibility of Cairo governorate. The security of the square from inside, for its part, was allocated to the governorates of Alexandria and Beheira, while the main custodian of the sit-in platform and the surrounding area was the branch of Nasr City.[9]

The main tactic for dealing with hired thugs infiltrating the sit-in was slightly different from the way of treating security agents caught sneaking into Rab'a. As Mosaab recounts, "the thugs who were caught we investigated as soon as they were pulled out of the crowds of protesters, who would automatically beat and assault them severely. At the end of the investigation, they were released and thrown out of the sit-in. As for the intelligence service agents and police detectives who were caught in the sit-in, they were handed over to the army or the police without any investigation." However, as the number of deaths of protesters at the hands of the security forces increased, a more widespread view advocating violence possibly began to emerge. As Mosaab states, "saving the thugs from the attack of the protesters and throwing them out every time is not the ideal solution. It encourages others to come again. Leaving the protesters to abuse them would teach them a lesson and [act as] a deterrent to others." Nonetheless, resistance to violence remained prevalent. According to the testimony of "Duha," a political opponent of the Brotherhood but who

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9   Author interview, December 2013.

participated in solidarity with the sit-in, this view was not fully adopted. As she recounts, "I witnessed four young protestors voluntarily release one of the thugs from the abuse of a crowd of protesters and take him to the hospital. The young protestors were arrested in a security ambush. The thug claimed that they had beaten him, even though they had rescued him. They are still in prison due to that accusation." [10]

The procedures for securing the sit-in changed with increasing clashes with security forces, which caused dozens of deaths among the protestors. These cases reinforced the need for greater precautionary measures of security to keep the protesters safe. This was reflected in the development of a new security plan by the organizers. According some of the official organizers, the plan involved the preparation a collection of wooden beams with screws poking through, in order to block the attempts by security vehicles to storm in the sit-in. They also prepared large water drums to contain the gas bombs used by the security forces. In addition, they placed piles of sand at the entrances of the sit-in, which reached a height of about 3 meters, with piles of sidewalk stones at the entrances. By the final days of the sit-in, some of the organizers at the front rows of security checks were wearing bulletproof armour and motorcycle helmets, and were wielding thick wooden sticks. They also brought water pumps and electricity to cope with the frequent power cuts in the final days of Ramadan. These measures occurred in conjunction with increasing talks within the government, Interior Ministry, and media outlets about how to approach the process of dispersing the sit-ins of al-Nahda and Rab'a al-Adawiya.

The Failed Evacuation of the Square

By the beginning of August, less than two weeks before the dispersal of the sit-in, some youth groups among the protestors surveyed the site and found that the numbers of women and children were very high. In response, they proposed an evacuation plan that was communicated with the leaders of the Brotherhood. While some testimonies confirm that oral orders were issued stressing the need to evacuate women and children for their own safety, as calls for dispersing the sit-in gained momentum,[11] this remains difficult to verify. Regardless, many female protesters accompanied by their children remained at the sit-in; and many of the Brotherhood branches refused to implement an evacuation. Interviewees state that reason most women refused to evacuate was gender equality, there being no difference between their survival or men's survival, especially following the death of many of their relatives at earlier clashes. In addition, some women believed that their presence indirectly protected male protesters from violence by the security forces.

Consequently, the security committees rented some apartments in the area surrounding the Rab'a al-Adawiya sit-in as a precautionary tactic to house women and children if security forces were to storm the site. The final stand, however, did not leave the opportunity to

10   Author interview, November 2013.

11   Calls by the media and many political parties and public figures to disperse the sit-ins of Rab'a and al-Nahda intensified when crowds gathered in Tahrir Square upon invitation by Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, for a "popular mandate to confront terrorism."

implement this precaution. The internal security forces stormed the sit-in from all entrances and exits. According to Duha, the first victim was killed on a side street where women and children were supposed to seek shelter. It was filled with gas bombs in the first few minutes of the security operation against the protestors and many women and children lost consciousness.

The security forces' attack then intensified, led by groups from the Interior Ministry who were protected by the army, and fully encircled the sit-in. Live bullets were used among a stream of gas bombs. Testimonies of all interviewed, including organizers and activists supporting or opposing the sit-in, emphasize that what happened on 14 August was a form of mass murder practiced by the state against peaceful protestors. The security crackdown extended to many journalists and researchers who were working to cover the events.[12]

With the increasing intensity of the security forces' raid, groups of young people fled to the al-Manifa building near the field hospital and Rab'a Mosque, the centre of the sit-in. Al-Manifa was still under construction and was the only place that saw armed resistance by demonstrators against the advance of security forces Using stones, Molotov cocktails, and some cartouches,[13] the protestors at al-Manifa managed to prolong the time needed by security forces to raid the sit-in. Eventually, the raid ended with the killing by live bullets of most of those at the al-Manifa building. The deaths resulted either from direct clashes or the helicopters and snipers. Only a very small group of people survived as they left before the troops surrounded the building.

What worsened the situation and increased the bloodshed was the lack of a safe exit for protesters who wanted to leave, as documented in a report by the Egyptian National Council for Human Rights. As the report states, "the safe exit, Nasser Road, was completely closed due to clashes at all sides." It also states that protesters' attempts to leave or flee through small safe exits at side streets were unsuccessful. According to the report, many of those protesters were attacked by the "popular committees" of Nasr City who handed them over to security forces.[14]

Competing Frames of the Sit-In

For many participants at Rab'a, the sit-in was framed as a completion of the revolution, a continuation of the first 18 days at Tahrir Square in 2011. The protesters attached the

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12   The full testimony of journalist Tariq Abbas can be found in *Al Watan* newspaper. His testimony on the dispersal of Rab'a, and the commission on 'safe exit', can also be found on *Yanair Net*, 19 March 2014, available at http://yanair.net/archives/27196

13   It is difficult to confirm whether security organizers at the sit-in had firearms. Every organizer met for this research denied having been armed, although some independent activists spoke about the limited presence of some homemade weapons (cartridges, etc.) among security personnel. Nonetheless, weapons did appear during violent clashes with the security forces, especially on the day of dispersal.

14   "The Egyptian National Council for Human Rights", *Al Masry Al Youm*, 17 March 2014, available at http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/412470

revolution to their main demand for the return of the ousted President Morsi to power, putting forth the concept of "legitimacy" against their interpretation of 03 July as a military coup. They considered their request to restore legitimacy a step towards completing the revolution, not the contrary. This fusion of the 2011 revolution and the Rab'a sit-in, however, was opposed by some of the Brotherhood's youth as well as groups of independent activists, both those participating in solidarity at the sit-in and those opposing it. "Mohi," a youth member of the Muslim Brotherhood, claimed, "it is stupid to claim that the demand for the return of Morsi and adherence to his alleged "legitimacy" is a revolutionary demand." He adds:

> "On the contrary, the recognition of the mistake committed by the Brotherhood, starting with their preference for the reform process and their departure from the revolution's ranks since the events of Muhammad Mahmoud in November 2011, and what followed till reaching the series of mistakes Morsi committed during the whole year of his ruling. He completely failed to be the leader a revolution and preferred to be a member of a group or a particular movement than to be a president for all Egyptians. 03 July was a very appropriate and perhaps the final opportunity for Morsi to apologize to the Egyptian people and the revolutionary movements for all the mistakes he committed. But the Brotherhood leaders' persistence to hold on to Morsi until the end meant the continuation of the isolation of the Brotherhood from the rest of the revolutionary factions and movements. Perhaps it even led to the abortion of the whole revolution, unfortunately!"[15]

Independent activist Duha added that she and other independents participating in the sit-in were trying to turn the protest at Rab'a into an event for a "revolution," not a sectarian or a group-based activity that would only divide the revolution's ranks and disperse them in front of the regime. She adds, "In fact, [the] Rab'a sit-in was very similar to [the] Tahrir Square sit-in in terms of solidarity, synergy, and determination. However, its real catastrophe was the main platform of the sit-in, where two undesirable personalities such as Safwat Hijazi and Assem Abdel Majid produced a repelling speech full of hatred." This view was indeed shared by numerous other participants: an internal survey circulated among the protesters in order to improve the performance of the platform in July 2013 revealed that these personalities occupied the first rank of undesirable characters among the protesters. The protesters refused their presence at the podium and did not acknowledge their right to speak on their behalf. Yet despite the poll's results, these two figures were not excluded and, on the contrary, were kept to the end, with the podium maintaining its framing of "legitimacy" rather than rejecting military rule. For some, a call to overthrow the rule of the military could have formed a common ground with all the revolutionary currents in order to complete the revolution as opposed to a more Brotherhood-specific frame regarding the ouster of Morsi from power. Yet for others, the effort to utilize pro-Morsi framing was a strategy to gather wider support. Mohammed, a member of the Brotherhood and a participant in the sit-in, states that, "the Brotherhood and its leaders mostly kept their image and their chants for Morsi's return to preserve the image of a democratic battle against a military coup. In addition, they wanted to maintain consistency with their base so that they wouldn't feel the abandonment of their leaders."

15   Author interview, August 2013.

These competing frames led to a degree of confusion about the sit-in's objectives. Were pro-military social forces the targets of the protestors, or was it the state? Despite consensus between those interviewed here that the target was the state, one observing the chanting and slogans could see an increasingly hostile tone against parts of the society that were neutral or supported Morsi's ouster - hostility that increased greatly following the oppressive crackdown on the sit-in.

In addition, the framing of the protest event also drew upon Islamic elements and calls to religious loyalties. The protestors' description of the events at the Republican Guard club contained Islamic features, describing the incident as "the massacre of the kneeling worshipers" and claiming that the security forces killed them during the dawn prayer. In addition, among their base, the Brotherhood and other groups promoted the events of 03 July as a conspiracy against the elected Islamic president. The framing of the actions of 03 July mainly focused on the image of Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria with the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar and other elite figures, who were filmed with Abdel Fattah al-Sisi during the announcement declaring Morsi's political isolation and their adoption of a new roadmap for the country's transition. This was promoted as a coup by Christians and secularists against an Islamic president, who had memorized the Qur'an. This view was reinforced by the decisions made by the authorities to close a number of Islamic TV channels once Morsi was ousted. The framing of such actions went as far as to declare a "war on Islam."[16]

While this Islamic framing of the sit-in was an influential factor reducing popular support for the protest, it was certainly not the only one. In interviews with revolutionary activists opposing the military regime as well as the regime of ousted-President Morsi, the various dynamics that reduced popular support for Rab'a were evident. "Yusri," a liberal activist, related that the continuation of bloodshed at the Rab'a sit-in was a decisive factor preventing him from joining in solidarity over the shared issue of freedom of expression. As he states, "the Brotherhood's insistence on turning the battle of the revolution against the regime into a battle of one spectrum of society, namely the Islamic, against the rest of the society, threatened to turn the matter into a civil war where there will be more losses of blood than what have been shed so far."[17]

Countering Negative Messaging

Fear of social stigma was a legitimate reason for the protesters to seek to change the negative image that the authorities and majority of media outlets promoted of the sit-in. Indeed, this commenced from the outset of President Morsi's ouster. Examining anti-sit-in allegations, their impacts on breaking support and sympathy circles, and the interactions and responses of protesters to these allegations provides important insight into the counter-messaging tactics of the Rab'a protestors.

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16   Wajdi Ghoneim, in response to Sheikh Mishary Rashid al-Afaasi, available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2YenZn5Les

17   Author interview, August 2013.

Sexual Jihad (Jihad al-Nikah)

One element of the media's negative messaging towards protestors involved accusations of "Jihad al-Nikah," that women, attributed to a group calling itself "Brotherhood Without Violence," were engaged in sexual intercourse with protestors on Rab'a square.[18] Such allegations fit into a pattern of media messaging on display at the most prominent sit-ins in Egypt since January 2011. The protesters were stigmatized with allegations of having sex in the sit-in tents in order to distort their image and to revoke the public's confidence in the justness of their cause or rights. This sought to help justify the security intervention to disperse these gatherings, after allegations reinforced the idea that they committed practices which are strongly denounced by the society and criminalized by state law.

Goffman suggests that some of the response strategies used by socially stigmatized people[19] include trying to reduce tension and clear the atmosphere by using humour when dealing with accusations or issues raised against them. Such a strategy was employed by a group of independent youth protesters through the production of a short film called "Jihad al-Nikah: A Film from Inside Rab'a."[20] Uploaded on YouTube, it showed the daily life of the protesters, thus denying what was circulated about sexual behaviour. In addition, the film defied what had been said about the spread of cases of scabies and infectious diseases among the protesters. It was seen by more than half a million viewers at the time.

Rab'a as a Local Nuisance

Media outlets also published what they purported were complaints received by authorities from the residents of the areas around Rab'a sit-in, complaining about harassment and intimidation from the protesters. In response, organizers attempted to curb the 24-hour operation of the podium, and limited operations during the nights of Ramadan to dawn time only.[21] Moreover, the podium hosted men and women claiming to be residents of area around the sit-in who expressed their support for the sit-in, thus trying to deny media claims that local residents were urging the authorities to disperse it.

The Armed Nature of the Sit-In

Many media outlets not only claimed that there were weapons present at the sit-ins of Rab'a and al-Nahda, but that they involved advanced weapon technologies including mustard gas,

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18   See Hussein Abdel Rahman, "Sabah Show", ON TV, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLIpUH9wcXk

19   Erving Goffman, *Stigma*, London: Penguin, 1963.

20   Ahmed al-Zukeiri, "Jihad al-Nikah: A Film from Inside Rab'a", available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3GTtoGeUVY

21   On July 18, The National Coalition acknowledged the legitimacy of demands by the residents of Rab'a. It announced the reduction of the volume of microphones, opened the roads that lead to residential areas and prohibited the use of laser. Also, it announced the launch of medical, plumbing and other services. The following video from the daily newspapers of *Youm 7* shows this response from the protesters, available at http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=1166856#.UoPCvl0W20w

anti-aircraft missiles, etc.[22] The main page of Egypt's state-owned newspaper, al-Akhbar, published on Tuesday 06 August 2013 a press release with the bold headline, "Chemical Weapons at Rab'a and al-Nahda Sit-Ins." This hyperbole put forth by the media was propagated until popularly accepted as truth. In response, protestors took three tactics to counter this messaging. First, at the official level, human rights organizations and foreign delegations were invited to visit the sit-in of Rab'a al-Adawiya to verify for themselves the extent of its peacefulness. The delegations included an African delegation and an independent Egyptian human rights delegation, as well as delegations from the British House of Commons, Ireland, Amnesty International and foreign journalists.

In addition, at the grassroots level, various ideas were put forth to open the sit-in to the public and establish creative initiatives for public participation, such as the Cultural Forum, which became a nightly event in the latter days of the sit-in. Another initiative, called Rab'a Tours, was established by Egyptians from abroad who returned specifically to participate in the Rab'a sit-in. They organized guided tours for visitors to learn about the sit-in from the inside.

Likewise, the Rab'a Panorama[23] initiative, which crystallized following the violent clashes with the security forces at the Manassa Memorial on 26 July 2013, was an attempt by four young individuals to commemorate the memory of protesters killed during the various confrontations with security forces, as well as the victims of the clashes in Mansoura and Alexandria. The youth group started by erecting a large tent inside the sit-in, purchasing a large screen and a projector and exhibiting "the belongings of the martyrs, in addition to the presentation of short documentary films about the bloody clashes," according to "Sarah," one of the founders and the organizer of Rab'a Panorama. She adds, "The tent had the capacity to accommodate around 30 people to watch the film. Every day there was at least 12 performances. This means that, daily, 400 visitors of the sit-in would see the film."[24] By the day of the dispersal, she estimates that around 3,000 visitors had visited the tent and seen the documentaries, which were then shared with others in Upper Egypt's governorates. The most prominent problem facing this initiative was securing equipment. As Sarah explains, the organizers "faced many attempts at sabotage, such as cutting of the wires of [the] electricity generator, or some suspected agents from the security forces attending the show to photograph the working team." Rab'a Panorama's operational costs were completely covered by the initiative's organizers, who requested in return only the provision of security.

At a third level, the use of social media to upload videos, publish pictures from the heart of the sit-in,[25] and create official pages for the sit-in and some of its main units, such as the media centre and the field hospital, was also a means of countering negative messaging.

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22   See for example an article published in *al-Watan*, available at http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/242299

23   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y77q0Ibcah4

24   Author interview, November 2013.

25   See for example http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixXorFJNrns&feature=youtu.be&fb_source=message

Finally, the images of daily, normal life and religious celebration taking place on Rab'a were also viewed by the protestors as an effective means to counter the negative images of the sit-in. For example, the celebration of Aid al-Fitr, which began on 08 August and lasted for three consecutive days, saw a great part of the sit-in allocated as a children's playground. Large balloons were installed at the entrance of the sit-in, and hundreds of demonstrators arrived from different provinces to spend time in the festive atmosphere, which the protesters were keen to create. Despite the deaths of dozens of protesters during the clashes over the preceding weeks, the Aid celebrations were seen by the protesters to have "contributed to mitigating the negative image of the sit-in or partially breaking it."[26] Likewise, scenes of the night prayer during Ramadan and the Iftar of protesters contributed to the public's sympathy with the sit-in. That being said, this public was mostly comprised of an Islamist audience, who never believed the stories of authorities and the negative images portrayed in the media to begin with. The above events were not broadcast on any Egyptian satellite channels, but were broadcast on al-Jazeera Mubasher-Egypt (Qatar), in addition to some less popular channels such as al-Quds TV.

Conclusion

In contrast to experiences of other sit-ins around the world, mobilization was not the main concern of the organizers at Rab'a al-Adawiya. Rather, it was the security of the sit-in, especially from threats emanating from the state. This was especially true given the very real concern of dispersal and previous examples of the excessive security crackdown witnessed by protesters at the Republican Guard club or the Manassa Memorial. Indeed, for at least some organizers of the Rab'a sit-in, the security concerns and the problem of facing state police forces were the main reason behind the lack of replication of the protest at other sites. Despite the considerable capacity of the organizing groups along with the Brotherhood's mobilization capabilities, parallel sit-ins were never convened.

At the same time, strategic effort was also directed towards countering negative imaging of the protest and its supporters, as put forth by the authorities and the media. Yet these two goals – securing the sit-in and promoting a positive image of its nature – came into conflict with one another as the risks to protestors' safety increased. Favouring security above all else, those responsible for patrolling the site's entrances began wearing helmets, wielding large wooden batons, and hiding behind brick walls and sand dunes they built as fortifications. Such images, which were not media fabrications but rather the outcome of security priorities, thus actually contributed to the negative image in the public's eye of the Rab'a sit-in. This strategic dilemma over whether to prioritize security or positive imaging remained and indeed was prevalent among sit-in organizers. Some interviewees admit that they failed to provide real security for the sit-in as, "the repression, brutality, snipers and excessive use of live bullets by the security forces were beyond their expectations."[27] At the same time, the also failed to improve the public image of the protest beyond the already-convinced Islamist audience.

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26   Author interview, October 2013.

27   Author interview, November 2013.

The longer-term impact of the experience of the sit-in and its violent dispersal on the Muslim Brotherhood and its protest repertoire is perhaps most obvious among its youth members. For them, the fact that the sit-in was able to last 48 days was both a success but also quickly a source of risk: the authorities' escalation against the hierarchical internal structure of the Muslim Brotherhood, and its excessive force during dispersal, proved to many of the Brotherhood youth and their sympathizers that "the method of gathering and mass mobilization has expired. There must be a move towards spreading and decentralizing the movement."[28] For these youth members, there was an accumulation of mistakes that needed to be addressed. Most notably was the obsession of the movement's leaders with the "battle of numbers." For the Brotherhood youth, the biggest mistake of the organization's leadership was mobilizing all available resources for the purpose of one big sit-in. As a result, it was more easily crushed by the state, causing a complete rupture in the movement. For them, it would have been better for the revolution, the Brotherhood movement itself, and for all participants to maintain a series of sit-ins and protests to deplete the authorities' ability to suppress them.

Likewise, despite the national and international solidarity garnered for the victims of the dispersal, the Brotherhood's own internal division regarding the aims of the protest and its central messaging perhaps failed to capitalize on this newfound public sympathy. In Turkey, for example, a widely circulated yellow hand sign symbolizing solidarity with Rab'a was created by Turkish designers and was brandished by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The Muslim Brotherhood took advantage of this by linking solidarity with the victims of the massacre with its demands for the return of ousted President Morsi. Yet, it also insisted on denying having committed any mistakes. The movement considered those calling for self-revision and a focus on completing the revolution alongside other revolutionary forces, rather than seeking the recovery of Morsi's alleged legitimacy, of being accomplices to the bloodshed or selling-out. For those who has been protesting alongside the Brotherhood at Rab'a for the broader goal of democracy and the larger revolutionary aims, such discourse did little to contribute to bridging sympathizers. Studying how the movement reacts to its rupture, and whether or not new protest tactics and new messaging is able to emerge from the ashes of Rab'a, provides considerable future avenues of research in the aftermath of the movement's mass sit-in.

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28   Author interview.

Failing to Effectively Unionize: The Independent Union of Transport Workers and the Crisis of Legitimate Representation

Fatma Ramadan

Introduction

In Egypt, the strikes of the Public Transport Authority (Authority), like transit strikes everywhere, have always been much more disruptive than those of factory workers or government offices. Transit strikes impact large sections of the Egyptian population, and imply not only a suspension of work at the Authority, but also at least the partial suspension of work at places whose employees rely on public transport. Given this, Authority workers have a higher chance of success in seeing their demands met, especially when strike leaders coordinate successfully and prevent their efforts from falling apart and/or their worker base from drifting away. As such, it is natural for workers to seek organizing assistance from unions, which can become a permanent tool for coordination and for connecting with workers in different locations, and which can also shield workers against arbitrary treatment either by the Authority's administration or the police force. Yet, prior to the establishment of independent unions, the only syndicates allowed were those under the government union. Authority workers concluded that it was impossible to work through this union or even attempt to reform it in a manner that could represent workers and their demands.

Instead, Authority workers were at the forefront of efforts to build new possibilities for organization away from the unions under government auspices with the establishment of independent unions. After failed attempts in 2009 to establish the Independent General Union of Transport Authority (the Independent Union), Authority workers post-January 2011 were able to obtain recognition of their independent union in the atmosphere of change and political opening that followed the ouster of Mubarak.

This paper studies the foundation of the Independent Union by following a number of

significant strikes before and after 25 January 2011, revealing how a focus on organization became urgent, and assessing whether the union was able to meet workers' demands in the intervals between strikes, through recognition and engagement in negotiations with different entities. The paper explores the experiences of union actors through interviews with six leaders of the Independent Union, some of whom are well-known for their roles in creating the union as well as their leadership of a number of strikes. They are also known for their ability to rally people around them despite being locked out of decision-making processes within the union. Other interviewees are part of the decision-making processes in the union but had no role in the strikes preceding its creation. The latter were also nearly always against strikes at every point after. They belong to those who joined the union either towards the end of its foundation phase or thereafter, as well as those who have access to what was published in the media about these strikes and the Independent Union. The paper thus explores the Authority as a vital institution and what that means for state organs and the security system, in addition to the influence of this on the workers and their union.

The Strike: A Politically Charged yet Efficient Tool

Millions of Egyptians use public transportation every day, rendering the Authority one of the most important services in Egypt.[1] Yet despite this key role, it has been neglected for decades, especially with the change in state policies towards neoliberalism, marked by the adoption of economic reform programmes and the privatization of services. This process has seen the state move away from supporting not-for-profit authorities as a public service and instead transforming them into private for-profit companies. The results of such policies are similar across various sectors like water, electricity, and telecommunications, as well as other transport bodies, especially the Railway Authority, whose conditions have been deteriorating day by day. Despite millions of dollars being supposedly invested yearly, there is little evidence of reform. Privatization and vandalism have many shapes, including the intentional loss of resources.

This process of privatization also opened the door for private transit companies and individual transportation, exacerbating traffic problems in Egypt as well as overburdening the impoverished majority with higher public transport charges. Further, even with the involvement of private transit companies, bodies such as the Railway Authority and Transport Authority continue to bear a major burden in providing public transport. Given this, the suspension of any Transport or Railway Authority activities places major pressure on the government as millions are unable to arrive to work and run errands. That is why these authorities have been a top priority for all security institutions, and why, during strikes or pickets both before and after 25 January 2011, security forces (the Authority's internal security system, the public

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1   According to its 2010 statement, the Authority had 3,029 buses, 954 minibuses, 91 trains, and 49 metros. It provided transit services to around 3.5 million daily travelers in Greater Cairo. Additionally, the Authority had a workshop complex for maintaining vehicles and returning them to service as fast and efficiently as possible. To achieve its goals, the Authority used a labor force of 37,000 workers from different science and vocational backgrounds. See the Cairo Electronic Gate, 2010 statement: www.cairo.gov.eg/HaykalTanzemy/body/ Disdetails.aspx?DID=هيئة%20النقل%20العام Interviewed members of the Authority, however, gave different numbers of current workers, ranging between 40,000 and 47,000. The number of buses has also changed in the last few years as some were put out of service and others brought in after demands by the workers.

security service, the state security service, and intelligence services) interfere using carrot-and stick and divide-and-rule tactics with workers, including bringing them to the negotiation table to end the strike. Because strikes are linked to workers' organization, security bodies have always been keen on keeping a close eye on these and other unions.

Between their strike of 1976 – in which former President Anwar Sadat had to intervene to end – and the strike of 2007, Authority workers suffered from neoliberal economic policies and resulting inflation while their wages remained unaltered or witnessed only slight increases. In their strike of 2009, Authority workers complained that their gross wages, after 10 years of service, barely exceeded 400 Egyptian pounds a month, and many wondered how they could sustain themselves.[2] The year 2007, however, marked the beginning of a new phase for Authority workers as they rediscovered the power of strikes as a weapon for attaining some of their demands. Indeed, hardly a year passed without the workers striking and picketing to regain lost conditions. Subsequently, the 2009 strike in particular signalled a new phase in workers' emerging awareness of their right to organization and unionization in order to defend themselves and their rights. This paralleled the emergence of a new era for worker organization through the establishment of independent unions, the first of which was the Independent Union of Real Estate Tax Authority.

In general, Authority strikes led to results for both workers' rights and the government's approach towards the Authority. Workers were able to halt the privatization policies within the Authority and force the government to carry out some reforms and buy new buses, although they were still not sufficient to compensate for the ones that had gone out of service, according to workers. Yet among the demands that Authority workers failed to achieve – much like workers at many other institutions – was the issue of corruption, holding the corrupt accountable and defining a reporting body for the Authority.[3] Nonetheless, many gains for Authority workers were achieved through strike action during these years. In Majdi Hasan's[4] words: "Our incentives increased through our struggle. I am one of the people who all they got was 154 pounds [monthly]. Now my wage is 840 pounds, and it fails to satisfy me."

The Stages of Strike Mobilization

Those responsible for calling strikes have their own ways for preparing, taking the decision to stage the strike, and making up the time for it, as well as for confronting the administration's decisions of complete closure or mandatory vacation in an attempt to break the strike.

At the ideational level, there are two drivers on which mobilization can be built. The first is

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2   Center for Socialist Studies, "Transport Authority workers paralyze Cairo life with their continued strike despite security pressures until some of their demands were met", 20 August 2009, available at www.revsoc.me/workers-farmers/lmlwn-bhyy-lnql-lm-yshlwn-bdrbhm-lhy-fy-lqhr-wywslwn-drbhm-rgm-ldgwt-lmny-hty-thqqt/

3   See Annex for a list of the main demands made and met in the last several years.

4   Majdi Hasan, member of the Board of Directors of the Independent General Union of Transport Authority and President of the Training and Education Commission.

an intolerable sense of injustice. This situation was the background in which the enormous wave of protest among Authority drivers and microbus drivers occurred after the 2008 Traffic Law was approved, with drivers finding themselves unable to pay the large fines. The second is the realization by workers that they have a right they have not obtained, whether this right has been approved by a law, a decision, or a former negotiation agreement, or by custom, such as other workers gaining certain benefits, thus making colleagues in similar workplaces demand similar benefits. For example, following a strike by al-Mahalla textile workers and their success in achieving one of their demands, there were a series of strikes in textile factories with workers mirroring the al-Mahalla demands. In the public transport sector, the success of Authority workers in Cairo in obtaining some of their demands, such as the increase in meal and nature-of-work allowances through the 2007 strike, influenced the Inland Transport workers in Alexandria to demand the same conditions, which then Finance Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali agreed to.[5] The Alexandrian Inland Transport workers' demands for the end of service bonus was also the main driver of the Authority workers strike of March 2012.

A union member in the Authority – who preferred to be anonymous and is referred to as Mr. X – went even further by stating that the success of workers at any site in obtaining their demands through strikes helps mobilization at other locations. He states: "I talk to my colleagues about the success of al-Mahalla workers in obtaining their rights, and I tell them 'Till when will we be servants to arbitrary chance?!" Mr. X added: "We were a like-minded group in the garage. We used to coordinate and organize ourselves well before the strike started. Our work was not arbitrary; we took care in picking the right time."

The interviewee alludes to the progression of strike organization, moving from the stage of defining demands or exposing injustices, to the stage of building a critical mass and a common understanding of the importance of changing the status quo, to the stage of choosing the method and timing of protest. There is always an optimal time for every industry to start a strike and exert pressure to achieve its demands. In the case of business or factory owners whose commitment is fulfilled by delivering goods to the client at a specified time, such as the sugar beet industry, the optimal moment for starting a strike is when sugar beets are delivered by farmers, as not being able to receive and start to process the sugar beets exposes them to damage. In the case of service industries, the perfect moment for strikes is the moment when citizens are most in need of their services. In the case of the Public Transport Authority, a busy season, such as the return to school, could be the best time to organize a strike.

Yet, the question of the optimal moment for service authorities is problematic as pressure on the Authority's administration is matched and counter-balanced by pressure from the public, whom the strike temporarily deprives of the essential service. This issue requires immediate attention from the workers performing the strike: they must consider how they will win the

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5   Mohamad Azouz, "The increase of allowances for the 'Inland Transport' workers in Alexandria, and equalizing them with their 'Cairo colleagues'", *Al Masry Al Youm*, 28 July 2007, available at www.today. almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=70312

support of the population that rely on the service and transform public anger to sympathy until the strike is over.

The government, together with the security apparatus, often tries to use this point to rally the public against striking workers and incite hostile action, as has been the case in assaults against doctors, hospital workers, and school teachers on strike. This can reduce sympathy with striking workers when the state persecutes them. Doctors examining patients and handing them free medicine in one of their strikes was a way to win the people's sympathy. Similarly, Authority workers' demands to combat corruption in the Authority, improve the service through maintenance and new vehicles, and promote their strike as improving conditions, were all a means to earn public sympathy.

The process of spreading the call for a strike varies in relation to the nature of work and to the level of geographic dispersal of workers. For instance, factory workers report seeing statements left in washrooms, allowing for anonymity of the organizers. In the case of the Public Transport Authority, the workers' shifts were especially significant in spreading the news of the strike across garages. Indeed, this was the method used by the 1976 strike organizers (see below). Tarek Buhairi[6] links the nature of work with processes of mobilization, stating: "Drivers meet at different bus stops and talk together in the same way workers meet in shifts, and each of them tells their colleagues of what they have heard from the other whom they have met."

In a final stage, the process moves from mobilization and spreading the call to the actual execution of the strike. Sometimes the strike would be universal at all garages, while at other times it would be partial. In the case of a general strike, one or more garages would start the strike, and then within the same day or in the next few days other garages would join. In order to counter attempts to break up the railway workers' strike, a group of workers would stand on the railway in front of the train that attempted to call off the strike. Similarly, with the 2011 Authority strike, some workers would lie down in front of any bus whose driver attempted to operate and break the strike. One bus had its glass broken as soon as it went on the road. The return of this bus with its glass broken and its driver beaten was enough to deter all those who might have been tempted to break the strike and marked its real beginning. However, preventing service shuttles from leaving is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, employers could use such actions to enforce a mandatory closure; on the other hand, workers could deploy such tactics to activate the strike. The difference is that in former cases workers understood the employer's intention and came to work at their own expense.

In some cases, both the Authority administration and security forces would try to break the strike before it started, calling on workers to reject the strike under the pretext that their demands would be met by the Authority. The purported reasoning was that workers would drop calls to strike as it would do them more harm than good. These pre-emptive measures took place through workers in the service of the administration, alongside direct threats by

6   Tarek Buhairi, a driver at the Transport Authority, current Vice President and Spokesman to the Independent Union, and Representative of the Imbaba Branch of the General Union of Transport Authority, that belongs to the former Egypt Trade Union Federation.

the administration and the security services to detain workers or terminate their contracts. Ahmad Suks, a member of the Independent Union General Council, mentioned threats of removal from the Council for some directors if they did not follow orders or refused to end the hunger strike to demand a meal allowance in August 2012. He also mentioned that he was told: "You are angering the administration, and we do not want to anger it, especially because when we ask them to help us with, say, a hundred pounds for some worker, they never fail to provide assistance."

Authority Strikes before 2011 and the Heavy Hand of the State

In the period prior to the January Revolution and the phase of widespread mobilization and unionizing efforts across the polity, the organization of Authority workers and their ability to make claims and demand rights was largely constrained by the absence of an independent representational body and the important capacity of the state to repress worker mobilization quickly. Yet, exploring the dynamics of Authority worker mobilization in years before 2011 also shows the ability of workers to use strikes as well as high-level negotiations to achieve at least partially their demands. Examining three strikes in particular from this period – 1976, 2007, and 2009 – are revealing of these dynamics.

September 1976 Strike

The organization of the 1976 strike demonstrates the very grassroots manner of mobilization that workers utilized at the time, the negotiating relationship with policy-makers, and the use of infiltration tactics on the part of the state to limit workers' organizational capacity.

The strike was conceived at an opportune moment, when the Aid al-Fitr festivities would coincide with the start of the new school year. A meeting was organized where eight representatives of Authority workers would directly contact the president of the Authority to request 15 days advance pay. When this effort failed to produce results, the eight representatives continuously moved up the ladder of policy-making to plead their case, using the threat of strike as a bargaining tool, eventually reaching the offices of President Sadat. Despite this direct approach to negotiation, however, efforts failed, and the eight Authority workers instead launched the strike.

The strike itself was organized through word-of-mouth: the eight representatives each took a shuttle bus to announce the strike, with each driver in turn charged with informing his garage. At this point, an MP intervened, informing the workers that their request would be fulfilled; however, the workers refused to end the strike, instead extending their list of demands. The strike continued two more days until the workers, through negotiations, were able to obtain certain concessions.

Despite the negotiated nature of the strike's resolution, Sadat and his government were unwilling to move on so easily. Seven workers representatives were arrested and taken from

the Public Prosecutor's Office to the al-Qal'a Prison where they remained for 38 days, only to be released after a solidarity march was organized on their behalf.

According to Abdalsalam Abdalhamid Durgham, a retired Authority worker,[7] the ability of the state to intervene so rapidly in the process of mobilization was the result of infiltration. In his account, the then General Secretary of the General Union of Transport Authority, as well as another union member, informed the security forces of the details of their meetings in preparation of the strike. The state would not let this key facility endanger its security without using all methods at its disposal. Infiltrating workers' organizations to retain complete control over administration and workers remains an active government tactic.

Little occurred in the 31 years after this incident, bar two small pickets in the 1980s. For Abdalsalam, this lack of workers' activity was a result of failings on the part of political parties and their secretariats to raise awareness of workers' rights. This pattern of limited worker activity only broke in 2007, when the socio-political climate and entrance of highly-qualified new blood in the Authority created new opportunities and resources for mobilization.

May 2007 Strike

The general political climate of protest movements in the 2000s, either in solidarity with Palestine, against the war in Iraq, or in the face of the Mubarak regime and the re-election of Hosni Mubarak or the succession to his son, Gamal, played an important role in the organization of the partial Authority strike of May 2007. The rising labour movement was at the centre of a class conflict linking national issues, such as rejecting dictatorship and demanding democracy, and social ones. Workers started to fully realize that with a government completely biased in favour of business people there was no way they could achieve their demands except through alternative protest methods, including striking. The strike of al-Mahalla workers and Real Estate Tax Authority employees proved that to be possible.

The 2007 strike began on 2 May and lasted for only two days. It was exclusive to the garages of Nasr City and Fateh. As a result, a few demands were met, such as the increase of meal allowances and salary increase for drivers and fare collectors. However, the strike lacked a general sense of intolerable injustice to drive mobilization. Despite efforts by certain workers to publicize the problem of traffic fines, the issue never represented a grievous enough injustice that workers would no longer tolerate – though it did become one by 2009. And although the issue of fines was one of the demands raised by workers in this strike, it wasn't a central claim and the strike ended without resolving the issue.

The existing union at the time, which reported to the state-run Egypt Trade Union Federation,

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7 Abdalsalam started working for the then Tramway Service in 1964 with the help of his uncle who was president of the Cairo Tramway Inspectors Union at the time. His uncle introduced him to union leaders in the Authority. He remained active with them until his success in the union leadership cycle of 1966. He was also nominated for the youth organization cycle in Hilwan and became the Youth Secretary for Public Administration (public relations) in the Transport Authority.

was clearly not the catalyst for the mobilization effort, although the union was the vector through which workers' demands were presented to the Authority's administration. The preparatory meeting was nonetheless reported to security services inside and outside the Authority. As a result, organizers were once again subject to threats by security services. Despite its only partial nature and this reaction by the administration, the mobilization of May 2007 did achieve some of the workers' demands in 28 garages.

August 2009 Strike

The 18 and 19 August 2009 strike was generalized across the Authority, with all buses ceasing operation. Occurring right after the issuance of the 2008 Traffic Law that introduced arbitrary traffic tickets, workers presented more than 16 demands in this strike, waiving traffic tickets for drivers being at the top of the list.

The injustice driving this strike was obvious and intolerable. Traffic fines were so substantial that drivers couldn't pay them. It was also clear that the critical mass this time formed in the Mizalat garage, to which a key figure, Ali Futuh[8] – who had become quite popular among workers following the 2007 strike – was redeployed. Because he had become a known personality, the mention of his name in news media helped spread news of mobilization efforts through mass communication channels.

As in previous cases, the efforts of the security organs to break strikes before they began were present. According to Buhairi, "The morning of 19 August was insane, with elements of the Republican Guard, state security agents, and intelligence operatives on the scene." The strike nonetheless began despite the presence of state security officers. Consequently, tens of drivers and fare collectors were arrested and later accused of inciting a strike.

The union, which was still under the state's Egypt Trade Union Federation, condemned the strike. This antagonistic stance, which had also been present in 2007, paved the way for the establishment of the Independent Union following the ouster of Mubarak.

The Independent Union and Failures of Legitimate Representation

The establishment of the Independent General Union of Transport Authority was announced during a press conference at the Union of Journalists on 24 March 2011, in the presence of many union figures and representatives of the International Labour Organization. It began operations with 77 founding members. The Independent Union's name initially remained closely connected to Ali Futuh as one of its founders and as its first president. Futuh indicates that the idea to create an independent union did not stem from the 2011 revolution but rather emerged in the aftermath of the 2009 strike. As he states, a union independent from the state would serve as a protective measure for workers but would also be endowed with

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8   A former driver at the Transport Authority in Cairo, Futuh started the call for establishing an independent union and would eventually become its first leader.

the capacity to defend their interests as opposed to those of the state.

The process of establishing a union in the aftermath of Mubarak's ouster demonstrated the lack of experience of its organizers, who were unaware of the need to establish a Board of Directors and who saw the nomination of the board as an interim measure only. The union began setting up branches, using the headquarters of the Revolutionary Socialists. However, with the organization of their first strike in September 2011, the ability of the Independent Union to achieve legitimate representation and to rally all workers around the same mobilization strategy was called into question. Indeed, by tracking the course of strikes within the Authority post-2011, it becomes clear that dissent and disagreement among leaders of the nascent Independent Union started almost immediately.

The September 2011 strike was motivated by the sense of injustice at discrimination between workers and government officials regarding the reward allowance for those affected by Law No. 74 of 1976 and it unequal application. The critical mass in this case built up inside the Independent Union. It agreed on the diagnosis of the problem and the importance of change, but disagreed on the timing and method. At the same time, the majority of the Independent Union's Board of Directors refused to start the strike at the specified time in order to give negotiations a chance. A minority went to workers in the garages, consulted them, and agreed to start the strike regardless of the decision of the union's board. This difference in opinion caused a split as two groups pushed different methods to become the actual representative of the workers.

At the same time, the Minister of Manpower and Immigration, Ahmad al-Bura'i, wanted to appear as if he had reached a resolution. Yet, whenever he reached an agreement with one party, the other party denounced its representational capacity. This was further complicated by the multiplicity of unions and negotiation tracks, including with the Egypt Trade Union Federation and the Independent Federation. As a result, garage workers felt that negotiations failed to sufficiently consult them or adopt their opinions. Indeed, there was significant conflict among members of the Independent Union's Board of Directors and other actors over building a presence and claiming the right to negotiate for workers – a split which diminished worker's gains in comparison to the scale of their mobility. These splits reduced the likelihood of success if the movement was not powerful enough to force the government to make concessions.

The roles that the president of the Independent Union and the president of the General Union of Land Transport attempted to play became clear through the agreement reached with the minister. None chose the route of participating with workers' representatives in the negotiations and pressuring the government to meet the workers' demands based on the power of the strike. Rather, they opted for making garage visits, talking the workers into breaking the strike, and making promises that later proved to be false.

The Entrenchment of Disagreement within the Independent Union
The two factions that began to develop in the Independent Union were divided along their

understanding of the means of obtaining demands. The first faction saw struggle as the basis for gaining rights and considered negotiations a means to reap the rewards of a strike. Though in principle not opposed to using all possible avenues to present demands, this faction usually deferred to workers whenever a decision to call off the strike was taken by the Independent Union's Board of Directors. The second faction, on the other hand, was closer to the Authority's administration and sought to avoid aggravating them as much as possible. It also objected to all strikes under the pretext that they preferentially negotiated with the administration and had an obligation not to destroy this relationship in order to represent the interests of their colleagues.

This fundamental disagreement over the use of strikes profoundly impacted the Independent Union's organization. Blocs formed that distanced a number of founders from decision-making positions. As Buhairi relates: "The scramble for authority was the beginning of the fall of the Independent Union." Changes were made to the union's regulations that drove a further wedge, and the sitting president, Ali Futuh, was removed through an internal election process. While some interviewees attributed his loss to a mistake he had made, and in particular the negotiations undertaken with the ministry on behalf of workers without proper consultation or taking their demands and priorities into account, others mentioned that this was the wish of the Authority's administration. As Buhairi explains: "Replacing him was a mistake. Ali is a genuine activist of intellect, and he is more courageous than Adel.[9] But managing Adel was easier for the administration. While Ali is a revolutionary, Adel is not. Ali is also a driver who is familiar with the issues of the drivers. The intention was to remove anyone who... the administration didn't want."

Indeed, efforts by the administration to distance certain individuals from decision-making positions in the union was more widespread. Criticism against the faction favoured by the Authority's Board of Directors was that they benefited from their position at the Union by changing the nature of their work from drivers and fare collectors to "secretaries" at the offices of sector managers after having been elected as representatives to the garages where they used to work. As Mr. X states: "After the [establishment of the] union, half of the members who wanted to be seen and gain benefits got lost. A lot of them got new jobs at the administration. These and others attempted to "buy" the remaining ones on the General Council."

The Shift in Critical Mass

The shift in the critical mass from the Independent Union to the third negotiation team under the leadership of Tarek Buhairi occurred fully during the March 2012 strike. The strike started at Buhairi's garage, with the garage of Ali Futuh joining in solidarity. The Union's new Board of Directors, however, was against the strike on the grounds that the circumstances in the country didn't allow for it. Perhaps more importantly, the Fateh and Nasr City garages were also against the strike – demonstrating the lack of internal cohesion or coordinated mobilization effort resulting from the split of the Independent Union into two factions and

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9   Adel Abdallatif al-Shathili, an employee at the Transport Authority hospital and current President of the Independent General Union of Transport Authority, did not join the union until after it had been established.

the crisis of leadership.

Tarek Buhairi entered the parliament on 26 March 2012 for a hearing session in which he talked about Authority workers' issues, refusing the participation of any member of the General Union of Land Transport in the delegation. During that meeting, an agreement was reached concerning the end-of-service bonus and the meal allowance. The strike ended that day and work resumed the next day.

This event had an important impact on recruitment dynamics: immediately after, the numbers of those leaving the General Union increased with a parallel increase of those joining the Independent Union, reaching 6,000 members in April 2012.

A later strike in September 2012 strike signalled the continuation of the March strike, with the two mobilization efforts separated by several negotiation sessions either with the Minister of Manpower and Immigration, or with the president of the Transport Authority's Board of Directors, or with members of Shura Council after the parliament was annulled. The period was also marked by small pickets inside the Authority's headquarters or hunger strikes by a number of workers and members of the Union's Board of Directors, during which the workers achieved several smaller demands.

These various efforts paved the way for a shift in representation to Buhairi and his supporters at the Imbaba garage or the Mizalat garage where Ali Futuh worked. Nonetheless, the president of the Union and his group maintained their position in objecting to the strikes under different pretexts each time. With every strike, they would talk about the administration's promises to meet the demands and their concern for workers' safety during mobilization events.

These various incidents reveal that the major factors in mobilizing a strike or protest movement in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution and the establishment of the Independent Union was the legitimacy of the leadership in the eyes of the workers, based on trust and a faith that negotiations will not be undertaken in a manner that contradicts the stance of workers. It is also clear that garages where such leaders exist acted as the catalyst, with other garages joining in thereafter. Garages whose workers were submissive and loyal to the administration tended to hinder the strike or join only when the strength of the movement could not be overlooked.

Conclusion

Beyond the role in the organization of strikes and the negotiation of workers' demands, the Independent Union also played an important role in the provision of social services. As Mr. X explains: "The Union pays marriage and death benefits and pays for resort vacations. When it comes to grants, they come from the administration. To us, the Union is useful if I go to the Prosecutor's Office and tell them that I am a union member, i.e. it is a name that we can face the authorities with." The Independent Union also organized events during Ramadan, rented

an apartment building in Jasma as a summer resort for members, among other benefits.

Yet, the Independent Union did not use its full power, either in participating in all committees concerned with workers and their rights, or in adequately consulting on decisions concerning workers. Despite the fact that the Independent Union emerged from the workers' strikes and was opposed to the General Union for Land Transport that belonged to the state's Egypt Trade Union Federation, the Independent Union remained loyal to the administration and the security system, and defended neither the workers' nor their rights. Those loyal to the administration continued to suppress activist voices inside it, and were awarded through internal election processes with decision-making positions while simultaneously removing or distancing many activists closely connected with Authority workers. Nonetheless, the workers' movement remains strong and can impose demands through strike action. Activist leaders, along with grassroots mobilization strategies, continue to play a key role despite the failures to effectively unionize in the wake of the January Revolution.

Questions remain, though, as to whether workers will be able to put in place those who can truly represent them and their demands in the Union's Board of Directors, or whether administration loyalists in collaboration with the government and security forces will still restrain the Independent Union. This critical question is indeed applicable to all of Egypt, which now sits in a bottleneck, as revolutionary forces face major challenges in imposing the will of the people and completing the revolutionary process, while the former regime and security services attempt to reverse any gains achieved.

Annex

Workers' Demands

- Renewing the Authority's fleet and supplying new buses.

- Providing spare parts for Authority vehicles.

- Defining the chain of command of the Authority and whether it has a service-based or economic nature.

- Increasing income ratios for drivers and fare collectors.

- Increasing the number of supplementary hours.

- Renovating the Authority hospital after numerous deaths resulting from negligence.

- Waiving traffic tickets for drivers.

- Reinstating uniforms.

- Updating Authority staffing by increasing salaries and incentives.

- Paying insurance fees that are deducted from workers' monthly salaries.

- Allocating an "infection allowance" due to Authority workers being in direct contact with crowds.

- Increasing the "nature-of-work allowance" and the "attendance allowance."

- Ensuring equality between drivers and fare collectors in terms of meals and income.

- Cancelling salary deductions from drivers or fare collectors when the "sliding glass" is broken.

- Granting workers of simpler duties full rights and accelerating their medical procedures.

- Removal of president of the North Cairo Sector, Muhammad Kamal, from office due to misconduct and arbitrary treatment of workers.

- Approving the end-of-service bonus (for 100 months).

- Increasing incentives for engineering workers.

- Paying a "reward" incentive.

- Improving healthcare and the treatment of chronic diseases.

- Standardizing the carriage of Cairo Authority workers of the Wast al-Delta, Gharb al-Delta, Shark al-Delta, Wajh Qibli, and metro lines.

- Paying a bonus of 7%.

- Reconsidering the value of traffic fines which reached, with the new traffic law, more than 11,000 pounds for drivers.

Demands Met

- Suspension of privatization.

• Supplying the Authority with buses to replace those put out of service.

• Paying of 10 Egyptian pounds (EGP) to bus drivers and 8 EGP for garage drivers for every actual workday as an allowance for tickets. In-house lawyers were also appointed to appeal against these tickets.

• Periodic income increases: from 8% for both the driver and fare collector to 12% for buses whose pass was 50 piasters, and to 10% for buses whose pass was 1 EGP. As for the engineering staff, their income increased from 60% to 85% of what drivers earned.

• Creation of an insurance unit at the Authority.

• Work allowance shifted to 50% of the main salary instead of being linked to drivers' earnings (increasing it from 19 to 190 EGP/month), 40% for fare collectors, and 30% for technicians and administrative staff.

• The end-of-service bonus was settled as equal to two months per service year to a maximum of 36 years.

• Meal allowance increased to nearly 300 EGP/month for all employees instead of 13 EGP/month.

• An "excellence" incentive was approved instead of the reward incentive, set at 200 EGP for movement workers, 175 EGP for the engineering staff, and 150 EGP for administrative staff.

• Uniforms were distributed once after 2007, though were not provided again.

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

The book gives a broad snapshot of an ephemeral moment in Egypt, when autonomous mobilization, organizational experimentation, and the demand for rights and equality were generalized across the enlarged public sphere. Based on extensive field research, including hundreds of interviews, ethnographic methods, and participant observation, as well as action-research dialogues between activists and researchers, this book provides a vivid and exceptionally rich picture of Egyptian civil society in the period of 2011-early 2014. Although this moment of opportunity was interrupted, the book provides timely insight for social and political actors in Egypt and further afield, with reflections on what worked and what didn't, as well as new strategies for the achievement of rights, including cause lawyering and strategic litigation.

ABOUT ARI

The Arab Reform Initiative is the leading independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality and social justice.

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