

Documentation

Islamic Democracies? – Egypt and the Arab Turn of an Era

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Edited by Helmut Krieger and Magda Seewald

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Welcoming

Magda Seewald and Helmut Krieger

Magda Seewald



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Meine sehr verehrten Damen und Herren, ich begrüße Sie ganz herzlich im Namen des VIDC/Wiener Institut zu unserer heutigen Veranstaltung: Islamische Demokratien? Ägypten und die arabische Epochenwende.

Es ist nun schon die dritte Veranstaltung zu Ägypten, die das VIDC innerhalb von drei Jahren organisiert. Eine Serie, die so gar nicht gedacht war, denn als wir uns im Oktober 2010 das erste Mal mit Ägypten beschäftigten, ahnte wohl noch niemand von uns, was auf Ägypten und die ganze Region zukommen würde.

In der Zwischenzeit ist in Ägypten ein autoritärer Herrscher gestürzt und die ersten freien Parlamentswahlen sind abgehalten worden. Wahlen, die mit dem Sieg der Partei der Muslimbruderschaft geendet haben. Zudem konnte sich, für viele überraschend, eine weitere Bewegung des Politischen Islam, nämlich die Al-Nour Partei, als entscheidende parlamentarische Kraft etablieren.

Westliche Beobachter sprechen daher gerne davon, dass aus dem „Arabischen Frühling“ ein „Islamischer Winter“ werden könnte.

Es wird gern der Vergleich zur Iranischen Revolution 1979 gezogen und die Ängste vor neuen Gottesstaaten im Mittelmeerraum geschürt.

Doch welche gesellschaftspolitischen und ökonomischen Programme verfolgen Organisationen wie die Muslimbruderschaft oder die salafistische Al-Nour Partei?

Inwiefern können sie diese überhaupt durchsetzen und welche Rolle spielt der Militärrat dabei?

In einem Monat wird in Ägypten ein neuer Präsident gewählt. Wird sich auch dann ein Mann des politischen Islam durchsetzen? Diese und vermutliche noch weitere Fragen werden heute Abend zur Diskussion stehen.

Dem VIDC ist es stets ein Anliegen, Themen nicht nur aus europäischer Perspektive zu beleuchten, sondern immer auch jene zu Wort kommen zu lassen, die in erster Linie betroffen sind. Daher freut es mich heute besonders, unsere beiden ReferentInnen aus Ägypten begrüßen zu dürfen: Mona Abaza und Bassem Zakaria Al-Samragy. Herzlich willkommen und danke für Ihr Kommen!

Bevor ich an Helmut Krieger, der die heutige Veranstaltung nicht nur moderieren wird, sondern sie auch kuratiert hat, weitergebe, möchte ich mich noch bei der Diplomatischen Akademie für die sehr gute Kooperation bedanken.

Ebenfalls bedanken möchte ich mich bei der Österreichischen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit aus deren Mittel die heutige Veranstaltung finanziert wird. Last but not least geht mein Dank an die beiden Dolmetscherinnen, Vera Ribarich und Gabriele Gallo, sowie an meine KollegInnen vom VIDC für ihre Unterstützung.

Noch kurz ein paar organisatorische Hinweise:

Sie finden auf Ihrem Stuhl einen Feedbackbogen, den sie gerne für Ihre Kritik, Ihr Lob oder auch Ihre Vorschläge nutzen können. Am Infotisch außerhalb des Vortragssaales können Sie die Bögen in die dafür vorgesehene rote Box werfen.

Im Anschluss an die Diskussion dürfen wir Sie noch zu einem Umtrunk im Nebenzimmer einladen.

Nun bleibt mir nur noch uns allen einen spannenden Abend zu wünschen und an Helmut Krieger zu übergeben. DANKE!

Helmut Krieger



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Thank you very much, Magda, and thanks a lot to the VIDC for facilitating this panel discussion. Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you all for coming here.

It is my distinct pleasure to chair the panel discussion on 'Islamic Democracies? - Egypt and the Arab Turn of an Era' (Islamische Demokratien? Ägypten und die arabische Epochenwende) and we are very pleased to welcome Mona Abaza and Bassem Zakaria Al-Samragy. My name is Helmut Krieger. I am a consultant to the VIDC and a lecturer at the Department of Development Studies at the University of Vienna.

The subject of today's panel discussion is not just, but for sure also about the upcoming Presidential election in Egypt. Last Friday, we were able to observe huge demonstrations against the ruling military in Cairo as well as in other cities in Egypt. What can be clearly understood from this event and in general the current political atmosphere, are ongoing power asymmetries within the political landscape in Egypt. Analyzing those power asymmetries as well as societal developments over the last years or so can provide us with a deeper knowledge of what is going on in one of the core countries in the Arab-Islamic world.

Hence, we'd like to structure our discussion around some of the core questions. These are as follows:

- How can we understand the overwhelming victory of the Islamic/Islamist movement at Egypt's parliamentary election a few months ago? What are their programmes as well as their practice as new leading political forces? What can be said about their social basis and how can we analyze it?
 - What are the political differences between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafist factions, especially the Al-Nour party? What about internal opposition within those parties and movements?
 - What are their limits with respect to SCAF, the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces? In general: What is their relationship with the army and how is that relationship perceived by the public?
 - How can we understand the cooperation as well as confrontation between the Islamic movement and so called 'secular' political forces?
 - And, last but not least about the significance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Egypt's political landscape: This is not just about the suspension (or cancellation) of Egypt's natural gas agreement with Israel two days ago, but this suspension might be another indication of the complex and contradicting relationship between Egypt and Israel and leads to the following questions: What are the standpoints of the different political forces (the army, the Islamic movement, the leftists, etc.) regarding Israel/Palestine? How is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict influencing the internal political rift zone in Egypt?

These are a lot of questions and it remains to be seen which of them can be discussed within our very limited timeframe.

Before we start, let me briefly introduce our panelists:

Mona Abaza is a Professor of Sociology at the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and Egyptology at the American University in Cairo. Mona Abaza received her B.A. in Political Science from the American University in Cairo in 1982, her M.A. in Sociology from the University of Durham, UK in 1986, and her Ph.D. from the University of Bielefeld in 1990. From 2007 to 2009 she was Chair of the Department of Sociology at the American University in Cairo and then served as a visiting professor of Islamology at the Department of Theology at Lund University in Sweden.

Her main research areas are:

Religious and cultural networks between the Middle East and Southeast Asia, discourses on enlightenment in the Middle East, gender orders in Egypt, consumer culture and the art market in Egypt and the sociology of knowledge.

Mona has extensively written about the uprising in Egypt as well as some other topics, including:

Twentieth Century Egyptian Art: The Private Collection of Sherwet Shafei, The American University Press, 2011.

The Changing Consumer Cultures of Modern Egypt. Cairo's Urban Reshaping, published in 2006.

Bassem Zakaria Al-Samragy studies political science at the American University Cairo. He is a political researcher that closely observes the social movement in Egypt and writes extensively about the developments in Egypt on his personal blog and in the newspaper Al-Shoruq.

Last but not least, some words about the format of our panel discussion:

Each panelist will speak for 20 to 25 minutes and if they would like to, we will then have a discussion among them before we will open the floor for questions.

So, please let's begin our panel and welcome Mona Abaza.

En Attendant Godot: A Waiting Nation

Mona Abaza¹



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Prelude

One day after completing this article (April 2012), the eligibility for the candidacy for presidency in Egypt was denied to the following three candidates: the former chief of Intelligence Omar Soliman, Muslim Brotherhood member Khayrat al-Shaater and the Salafi Salah Hazem Abu Ismail. All three candidates were disqualified by the Supreme Presidential Elections Committee.

During the time I was revising the final version of this article, Mohammed Morsi, member of the Muslim Brotherhood, became the first president after Mubarak's ousting. He won the elections against the ex-military Ahmed Shafiq. The parliament was dissolved. The reader will notice that he is not mentioned at all in this article because he simply emerged at a later point as a second option after Khayrat al-Shaater had been disqualified. This is why numerous jokes circulated about him being designated as the "spare wheel".

One of the thousands running jokes on facebook states the following: "if you miss politics in Egypt for just seven hours, you will no longer understand anything about Egypt". To this statement I would add that even if one attempts to follow politics thoroughly, I doubt that one would be able to fully grasp what the future will bring.

If there is a lesson to be learned, it is the following: the debated definition of January 25th 2011, as not being a revolution should be challenged more than ever. Unpredictability, which forces us to live on a day by day basis, is precisely what makes it a genuine revolution. However, it remains to be an incomplete, if not hijacked revolution by both the Islamists and the military. Besides that, no revolution has occurred in history without encountering a fierce counter-revolution that would use the grimmest means to cling on to power. It remains to be a problem that it keeps becoming more difficult to theorize the experiences as the written word might often be a betrayal to the occurrences.

Introduction

A year and a half has elapsed since the January revolution, which led indisputably to drastic transformations in street politics. The revolution triggered a new public culture that has re-appropriated public spaces as spaces for contestation, grieving and for artistic expression in

¹ Mona Abaza's lecture was based on this article.

a fascinating manner but which remains still precarious. It is a precarious situation because the entire year of 2011 witnessed a drastic escalation of violence with the junta's continuation of Mubarak's politics without Mubarak. "Hosni went and Hussain came" (meaning Hosni Mubarak/Hussain Tantawi). This is the running joke that describes the overwhelming feeling of disappointment best. It has been a year that witnessed extremely violent street confrontations, whereby it looked as if the junta would only respond to the pressure of the million marches and the overwhelming demonstrations. Yet, it is clear that the majority of the young men and women who took the streets feel that they have been excluded from the process of decision making and political participation. Clearly, the revolution has been hijacked. We are approaching the presidential elections that are due in May. Surrealism, or rather, that we are plunging into a farcical situation, would be the best two designations that could describe what many feel today in Egypt. The political scene seems like an emulation of a poor quality film perhaps lacking a script. Since it is a mediocre film, should it then make much of a difference who will be the unfortunate president? We are told that those who managed to become eligible for the presidency totaled 23 out of some 1300 applicants.² Two of the three presidential candidates are highly placed military officials of the Ancien Régime. Omar Soliman (former head of the intelligence service), who is known for his dubious past with human rights abuses, and Ahmed Shafiq, who is still responsible for the memorable 'battle of the Camel' that took place on February 2nd, 2011, and who has recently been charged with 24 complaints for the dispersion of public funds. Both military men are on the frontline for presidency. The third candidate is Amr Moussa who was the former Minister of Foreign Affairs under Mubarak. These three candidates have re-emerged as if no revolution had occurred and as if they had no connection with the Mubarak regime. It is not a coincidence that al-Baradei retreated after a long smearing campaign that had been orchestrated against him. We are also told that Hazem Salah Abu Ismail, the Salafi candidate, had concealed the fact that his mother carried an American passport. Thus, he became disqualified from becoming a candidate. However, nothing has been resumed regarding Abu Ismail's case. The recent Salafis' aggressive electoral campaigns and ultra conservative statements about what they imagine to be an Islamic state, which betray a surreal irrationalism, could be serving as an end effect as the scaring nightmare, or the scarecrow (the popular Arabic term used is *fazaa'*), which would be the best justification for a potential military putsch.

But "the hijacked revolution" is becoming the slogan of the Ancien Régime. It is no wonder then that lamentations over the hijacked revolution is what both Omar Soliman and Prime Minister al-Ganzuri complained about. This time, however, they targeted attacks against the growing power of the Muslim Brothers who intended to enter the game of the presidency by challenging the legitimacy of Soliman.

The message the SCAF (The Supreme Council of Armed Forces) wants to convey after such a highly stressful year is that nothing really changed. It is certainly an affront to the revolutionaries.

² *Al-Masry al-Yaum*, April 9th, 2012

If the junta's rhetoric maintains that it has protected the revolution, it is precisely with this lying discourse that it is vehemently repressing the vibrant power of the street by having perpetrated massacres (Abbaseyya, Maspero, Mohammed Mahmud Street, the Port Said massacre of the Ahli Ultras) and by disfiguring the protesters and by undertaking virginity tests on women. That is why the revolutionaries have led a wide anti-SCAF campaign, which they have called LIARS (kathebuun). The campaign toured all over Egypt (not without resistance) to screen public videos, which exposed the violence, torture, and misdoings of the junta. What made it easy was that these were able to be downloaded via youtube and thus be screened anywhere where internet had been available.

The Junta has been responsible for imprisoning 12,000 (the revolutionaries state that these have reached 15,000) to be tried under military rule. Nawara Negm, who is a leading spokesperson for the revolutionaries and who has a regular column in *al-Tahrir* newspaper, mentioned that the number of martyrs has reached 3000 since the revolution, excluding the many thousands who were wounded, blinded and, disabled.³ Novelist Alaa al-Aswaani speaks of 1,400 victims who lost eyes and a thousand went missing.⁴ *Al-Qassass* retribution for the martyrs and the victims of the revolution is the paramount demand that has not been met so far.

The violation of human rights continues to be on the rise. Youtubes is verifying that the tortures of the protesters are abundant.⁵ In fact, the officer who was charged with undertaking the virginity tests on seven women has recently been acquitted. Samira Ibrahim, the female protester who filed a case against him lost the case despite a flurry of public support and media attention. The former brutal internal security and police system has re-emerged after January 2011 with even more repressive weapons, ammunition, internationally sanctioned lethal gas (used in Tahrir in November 2011) besides the tear gas bombs and what not to attack protesters. Even more tear gas was reported to be imported from the US after the first violent incidents of Mohammed Mahmud, which confirms that the US' civilizing mission in spreading universal democracy and human rights is one thing and the trafficking of weapons and financial interests, which evidently come first, are quite another.

During the entire year of 2011 and early 2012, the Egyptians experienced the continuous delay of any serious trial of the old regime cronies and corrupt figures. The internal security highly employed officers who remain responsible for the massive killings of the protesters and the cases involving deadly tortures such as Khaled Said, the iconic martyr who died the year before the revolution.

Transparency and justice regarding the trials of the Mubaraks is one major demand of the Tahrir masses, which so far seems to have been clearly circumvented by the military

³ Nawara Negm, *al-Tahrir newspaper*, March 17th, 2012

⁴ Alaa al-Aswaani, 'hal akhtaata al-thawra al-masriyyah?' ('Was the Egyptian revolution mistaken?' or 'Was the revolution wrong?'), *Dar al-Shuruuk*, Cairo, 2012, p 128

⁵ The group of Mosireen has done the best (documentary work) (on the violent events during the last year and posting them on youtube).

establishment. One thing is clear: The revolution has been hijacked from the very start by the army and the Ancien Régime supporters who fostered the Islamic camp as a counteracting strategy against the revolutionaries. Intellectuals like Alaa al-Aswani see that the happy marriage between the military junta and the Islamists was already sealed with the amendment, or rather the “grafting” of the few clauses of the constitution that were redrafted by public figures who were clearly sympathetic to the Islamist camp. However, the demands of the revolutionary and liberal forces, which advocated for a complete redrafting of the constitution, were clearly ignored. After all, because this is a revolution, the entire constitution should have been dropped and been newly redrawn. The demand for a civilian state (*dawla madaniyya*), which the revolutionaries aspired for, has been clearly suppressed. The Islamic camp (the Salafis and Muslim Brothers) both strongly pushed for the yes vote, which they then advertised a religious duty paramount for Egypt’s religious identity. The Islamists then used the strategy of discrediting their opponents by using the argument of “takfiir” (disbelief/or excommunication) by preaching in the mosques and in public forums that the no vote is against Islam. They specifically used it against Barade’i, who was constantly attacked for once being a “foreign agent” or for being “westernized”. Thus, they challenged his credibility as an Egyptian. “Disbelief” to discredit the Other, it seems, is a tactic that has often been used during this year and will often be used in the near future. The referendum was originally held to decide the amendment of nine clauses, but the army stymied everybody by agreeing on a temporary constitution with 63 clauses.⁶

I concur with Hesham Sallam’s analysis⁷ that the end result of the transitory phase that fostered the parliamentary elections and the constituting of the new parliament mainly led to deep-seated cleavages, if not an open conflict that will continue to escalate between two opposing “universes”, namely what Sallam calls the “universe of the revolution”, which believes in the power of the street through pressuring the SCAF versus the “universe of transition” that is overwhelmingly dominated by the Islamist camp. This camp is already dominating the official channels of the state (the People’s Assembly redrafting the constitution after isolating the liberals) to suppress the “unruly” street, i.e. the revolution. Indeed, the Muslim Brothers have quickly lost popularity after they seized the parliament, Like the SCAF, they have been attacked as *kathebuun/Liars* on facebook. It is quite astonishing how they swiftly betrayed the revolution. Now that they have lost the street, would they then end up in an open confrontation with SCAF by re-aligning themselves with the revolutionaries?

The entire last year witnessed how the Muslim Brothers and the Salafis have been increasingly contradictory in their statements regarding the extent of their future involvement in the formal channels of the state. For example, recently, they suddenly changed their minds about the percentage of their participation in the parliament and also

⁶ Alaa al- Aswaani, p. 101

⁷ Hesham Sallam, ‘Post Elections Egypt. Revolution or Pact?’, *Jadaliyya*, February 10th, 2012

about the candidacy for presidency. In their earlier statements they claimed that they would not seek political power. Then they once again changed their minds when they claimed that they would not have more than 35 % of the candidates for the Peoples' Assembly, but they ended up controlling the majority of the seats. Then, they first declared that they would not run for presidency while recently Muslim Brother millionaire-tycoon, who was incarcerated for several years, Khayrat al-Shaater had declared that he would run for the presidential elections.⁸ It is not a coincidence that Abul Ezz al Hariri from the Socialist Alliance Party has recently filed a case to the Supreme Presidential Elections Commission against Khayrat al-Shaater's running for elections. The reason for that is that al-Shaater was sentenced to seven years in 2007 for money laundering and was exempted from the SCAF recently. According to al-Ahram Online, al-Harriri's point of view is why exonerate al-Shaater from the previous charges while SCAF is still incarcerating some 12,000 political prisoners. Furthermore, al-Harriri attacked the Muslim Brothers for resorting to fraud in presidential elections⁹

Once again the majority of the Islamists managed to discredit the minority of the liberals, Copts and leftists, who recently retreated from the drafting of the constitution (in March) because they felt that the majority of the Islamists used, time and again, the tactics of discrediting the Other.

The Muslim Brothers and the Salafis have been known for their high level of organization, which explains why they won the elections for the parliament, but this is not the whole story. It is undeniable that there were clear cases of forgery, rigging, of buying votes, food and money, and once again, mobilising preachers to demonise the secular parties by taxing them of "kufr". Would charity - as a form of buying votes with food and consumer goods - in our part of the world have more acceptance? Or would it be given a different appellation to forging elections? What seems to be important for the United States - since they are major players in deciding who will be running/obtaining the aid - is the form, or rather, the semblance of democracy by elections, campaigns, and a semblance of a parliament at the expense of overlooking the context and content, i.e., the SCAF still maintains the upper hand of power. While the street was still boiling with protests and clashes were ongoing in Mohammed Mahmud street, because no demands were met, the elections were once again advertised as an alternative to the unruly "anarchy" of the street. Also, many see that the violence escalated in November, precisely because the Muslims Brothers retreated from the square and condescended with the police forces in crushing the revolutionaries.

We all know that the political campaigns need extensive funding. Speaking then of funding and foreign funds which became one of the most explosive issues after the Egyptian-American crisis over the role of the NGO's and the "illegal" activities, it turns out that it was not the April 6 Movement, which had been under pervasive attack for either having received

⁸ Ahmed Youssef Ahmed, 'al-shaater khayrat al-tariiq illal-riaassah', *al-Shuruuq*, April 5th, 2012

⁹ 'El-Hariri to file appeal against El-Shater with elections commission', *Ahram online*, April 11th, 2012

foreign training, foreign funds or for following some dark Free Masson sects, as it was said about Wael Ghoneim, or that the revolutionaries were supported by a truck that distributed hard currency and Kentucky sandwiches in the square, leading to a torrent of jokes and hilarious youtube parodies. In fact, foreign funding, which then became one main alibi for demonizing once again the 6th of April movement and Egyptian Human rights organizations, does not seem to be a convincing populist argument. It was the Salafis and the Mubarak family that both received the highest amounts of funds in 2011. One Salafi association obtained 296 million L.E and 50 million US\$ from two Gulf countries. The Ansar al-Sunna Association obtained 181, 7 million (30 million US\$) from Qatar and 114, 5 million from Kuwait. Until July 2001, the Mohammed Alaa Mubarak Charity Association obtained from Oman and UAE some 15, 5 million US\$.¹⁰

The newly established parliament with a majority of Muslim Brothers and Salafis seems to have encountered great support from the army with the assistance of foreign funding from Saudi Arabia and Qatar – at least this is the argument advanced by Alaa al Aswaani. Observers and politicians argue that the Islamic camp has sealed a pact with the army and they seem to constitute the most suitable camp that managed to isolate al-Barade'i and the liberals. For how long, however, will this pact last?

Many perceive the recently formed parliament as a carbon copy of the NPD – only with an overwhelming majority of bearded members. This is the running joke in Cairo, which transmits much of the growing unpopularity of the Muslim Brothers, who seem to emulate exactly the same strategies as the former party in power. To quote famous journalist Ibrahim 'Issa "I believed like many that the Muslim Brothers were more intelligent than burning out so quickly their reputation by blindly imitating the NDP, as if their incarceration made them fall in love with their jailer, so much that they embodied and emulated him. Their only concern after the revolution was to seize power".¹¹

'Issa insists on the fact that the Muslims Brothers hardly ever commented on the violence, the denuding and humiliations perpetrated against on women in November and December in Tahrir, nor on the killings of Mohammed Mahmud.

Once the Muslim Brothers conquered the parliament, they turned rapidly against the protesters and street activism. On the 27th of January, 2012, confrontations between the Muslim Brothers and the revolutionaries took place in Tahrir when the Muslim Brothers were seen abusing religion which signaled their alliance with SCAF.¹² Perhaps it was the first time that the revolutionaries openly sang slogans against the Muslim Brothers like "*bii', bii'al thawra ya Badii*" (sell, sell the revolution Badii), Badii' is the General Guide of the

¹⁰ Zainab al-Gundy, 'Report show that Salafis, Mubaraks, not April 6 Youth Movement receive Millions in Foreign Funding', *Ahram Online*, November 19th, 2011

¹¹ Ibrahim Issa, *al-Tahrir* newspaper, March 31st, 2012

¹² Ekram Ibrahim, 'Brotherhood supporters clash with anti-SCAF protesters outside Parliament', *Ahram Online*, January 31st, 2012

Muslim Brotherhood. *lid weskhah* (dirty hand, rhymed on *iid wahda*, one united hand) was another pervasive attacking slogan against the Brotherhood heard in the square. The clash started over if January 25th, 2012 was to be considered a celebration, which the Islamists claimed to be, versus the revolutionaries' unheard demands: Namely, that it still remains an incomplete revolution, whose martyrs have not been honored. Thus, the commemoration had to take the form of a protest and of a huge demonstration. Not only no demands were met, but the fact that many are still undergoing unjust military trials and incarceration were the forefront demands. Whereas the revolutionaries saw no point for celebration since no demand had ever been met, they demonstrated so that the SCAF would hand over power. The Muslim Brothers decided to occupy the square on the evening of January 24th to make it look like an Islamist dominated festivity. On January 25th, some 22 marches departed from all corners of the city and kept on growing as the people marched from one quarter to another to reach Tahrir Square. These highly organized, fascinating marches reveal such sophistication in the way the organizers call on people to get down and march. As the marches approached Tahrir, millions were mobilized to fill the majority of the streets of Cairo. By the early afternoon, practically millions invaded the square such that the presence of the Islamists withered away under the moving millions. It was a warning signal for the SCAF that their scare tactics and machinery propaganda to frighten people from the street, simply failed.

This led to the retreat of the Muslim Brothers from the square, nevertheless, not without clashes. I think that this was the first time that when the Islamists loudly put on the Quran in Tahrir, they were met with a massive resistance.

On January 31st, 2012, another large march headed towards the people's parliament demanding the retreat of the SCAF. A large human cordon of Muslim Brothers who acted exactly like the former internal security NDP party security forces met it. The Muslim Brothers chanted "The army and the people are one hand"¹³. Once again, the Anti-SCAF protestors compared the Muslim Brothers' behavior as typical of the former "fuluul"¹⁴ Mubarak followers. The slogan "yassqut, yassqut hukm al-murshid" (meaning down, down with the supreme guide of the Muslim Brothers), rhymed on "yassqut, yassqut hukm al-'askar" (down, down with military rule) is much telling how quickly the Muslim Brothers lost popularity.

The antagonism grew even more when Gamal Tag El-Din, a member of the Muslim Brothers and secretary general of the Lawyer's Syndicate's Freedoms Committee, filed a lawsuit against the members of the Revolutionary Socialist Party Yasser Abd El-Qawy, Sameh Naguib, and Hesham Yousri. The charge against the three socialists was because they allegedly were "inciting people to topple the state and occupy state buildings, burn down

¹³ Ekram Ibrahim

¹⁴ One possible way of translating the word fuluul could be the lackeys of the ancient régime.

state buildings and intentionally create chaos”¹⁵ The Salafis too participated in this witch-hunting campaign by attacking the socialists for receiving foreign funds.

While many would agree that in the near future the success of the revolution remains unpredictable precisely because of the omnipotent power of the military in running the country. It seems that the transitional phase to civil rule will be far from smooth because the army controls approximately 40 % of the various vital sectors of the economy. The Egyptian army is the second largest recipient of US Aid after Israel, receiving roughly 1.3 billion US\$ annually as assistance for their military equipment. The transfer to civil rule would inevitably clash with the process of legalizing the transparency of the military budget. Furthermore, the Egyptian army has been the most faithful ally of the American government for the past three decades after Sadat signed the Camp David peace treaty. The geo-strategic interests, in particular Israel’s priority to the US regardless of the neo-colonial, segregating policies towards Palestinians, is one main reason why the Egyptian army receives such lavish yearly aid. It receives US aid in order *not* to wage a war against Israel, as historian Khaled Fahmy argued in an al-Jazeera interview. Obama’s dream of spreading a planetary democracy evidently clashes with America’s vital interests in maintaining a stable relation with such an old ally as the SCAF. This is exemplified in Hilary Clinton’s insistence on the significance of US partnership with the Egyptian army, the partner it has trusted most during the past three decades. Clinton made such a statement in one of al-Jazeera’s interviews immediately after the Maspero massacre in which she denied the seriousness of the implication of the SCAF.

II

Xenophobic sentiments have been on the rise from the first days of the revolution. Xenophobia has been the card to discredit the revolutionaries. Qaddafi and Assad have used it against the opposition. Foreign journalists were specifically targeted during the early days of the revolution because they courageously reported on location. Later, the crisis of the American NGO’s and European funding organization escalated xenophobia, which in the end, was in effect one way of tightening the grip on the civil society and human rights organizations. These have been highly active in denouncing the violations of human rights under the junta. The campaign against the April 6th movement and revolutionaries as “foreign agents” escalated too. The American University was also targeted for similar allegations as well as for spying. It is possible to interpret the simulated US-Egypt crisis as one way of the SCAF desperately trying to rectify its tarnished image by insisting on the nationalist cord. It is true that anti-American sentiments much like US Aid have been strongly unpopular since no such thing as no-strings attached exists. However, the SCAF’s insisting on supra-nationalist sentiments could not be precisely understood without linking it to its tarnished image as one the most important aid recipient institutions in Egypt. Facebook jokes did not spare the army on that point.

¹⁵ ‘Muslim Brotherhood member files lawsuit against 3 Revolutionary Socialists’, *Ahram online*, December 24th, 2011. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/30113/Egypt/Politics-/Muslim-Brotherhood-member-files-lawsuit-against--R.aspx>

The affinity between Islamist judge Tarek al-Bishri's desire to draft the constitution and requisite Egyptian nationality for presidential candidates is not a coincidence. Not only should the president be of any other nationality, but also he should be married to only an Egyptian and both parents should be Egyptian. I concur with Samer Soliman that the drafted constitution was already the entry ticket for "militarization", whereas the civil (The Peoples' Assembly) would be given to the Islamic contingent. In other words, it should be the prelude to emulate the Pakistani model whereby the deal between the Islamists and the military would mean concessions over a transparent (or lack thereof) budget, and perhaps later the issue of retribution or amnesties for the army regarding the killings? At least these have been the predictions of Alaa al-Aswani, Ibrahim 'Issa, Samer Soliman, and many other liberal intellectuals. Soliman reminds us that two of Egypt's recent presidents (Sadat and Naguib) had Sudanese mothers and both Suzanne Mubarak and Gehan Sadat's respective mothers were English.¹⁶ Samer Soliman also notes, that for the Islamists, Islamic identity always superseded Egyptian identity, so much so that supporting the cause of Afghanistan often took priority over other Middle Eastern causes. The volte-face in the MB's identity discourse is telling about their political opportunism.

Gender/Violence/Regression/Resistance

Tahrir mesmerized the world with remarkable public visibility of women. Whether women wore headscarves or were veiled, or whether they wore jeans and were "westernized", apparel was not the issue. What was magical, was how during the first days the masses at Tahrir genuinely protected women. January united everybody under one aim: To oust Mubarak. It is needless to repeat the hundreds of articles that highlight the fascinating performance and courage of the young, beautiful, and articulate young women of Tahrir. The revolution marvelously challenged the oft-repeated orientalist biases regarding Muslim and oriental women. Hundreds of articles and interviews with women from the square revealed how politically conscious and powerful Egyptian women proved to be. However, the magical 18 days, the utopian community, which Tahrir created was soon challenged by the violence perpetrated by the SCAF on both male and female protesters which commenced in February as human rights activist Mona Seif informs us in one of the youtube videos filmed by the group of *Mosireen*. Since then, sexual harassment and blatant attacks on women's bodies in public spaces have been alarmingly on the rise. Obviously, sexual harassment has turned out to be the most pervasive tactic to terrorize protesting women who have been repetitively attacked by the regime's paid thugs in anti-sexual harassment demonstrations.

In March 2011, virginity tests together with the torturing of male protesters, were undertaken by the army in the headquarters of the museum. More than ever, sexual assault

¹⁶ Samer Soliman, 'al-iqutissaad al-siyaassi li-ihyaa 'omar solaymaan' (Political Economy to Revive Omar Soliman), *al-Shuruuq*, April 9th, 2012

was used as a tactic, during last November and December 2011 by sending the regime's thugs to the square to intimidate women from going to Tahrir. Certainly, gender inequalities, together with the violation of human rights, will remain for a while at the forefront of the battles between the SCAF and the conservative Islamists and those struggling for a civilian state.

The hijacked revolution is best exemplified in Gender politics. Once again, the powerful public visibility of the women of Tahrir is clashing with the nearly exclusive invisibility of women in parliament today. Compared to Morocco and Tunisia, Egypt scores worst in women's representation in the parliament¹⁷ with only 8 women who won the elections and two others whom were appointed. Hania Sholkamy explains this obvious defeat with various reasons among which might be what she calls the kind of "state sponsored feminism" that imposed "an unpopular quota for women within corrupt electoral practices".

Clearly, women's bodies, chastity, pollution and sexual humiliation in cathartic moments like wars and revolutions become the focus of the nation's concern. The shocking image of the dumping of a dead protester in the garbage will remain for a while in our memory. It was followed by an image of a female protester whom was dragged and who was stripped of her clothes after having been kicked by the military, which was the spark that ignited the volcano of anger. Cynically, one could read the incident as a new form of gender equality in the exercise of brutality on both sexes, in the public sphere during last November and December 2011. The memorable incident was on December 16th, when security forces attacked the protesters in front of the cabinet, leaving 12 dead and hundreds injured. Violence escalated. On December 17th, when the unknown veiled woman was violently dragged on the floor, her blue bra was exposed. The "blue bra" became an iconic symbol that led to thousands of women taking the streets in solidarity with the protesters.¹⁸ Since then women's protests and marches against the military have multiplied. The many protests chanted for the termination of military rule.¹⁹ It was accompanied with the slogan "Egyptian women are a red line" which gained tremendous momentum²⁰

This was not the first time that women had encountered such public humiliation. In fact, the repertoire was initiated by Mubarak's thugs. The antecedents were in 2005, when women were protesting in front of lawyers and the journalists syndicate and were sexually harassed by paid thugs of the regime. Since then, it seems that a green light was given to directly attack women's bodies in public. The discourse of the former regime was to equate protesting women with prostitutes, thus they deserved to be raped. Since, they demonstrate in the public and women's place as we know, is home, they deserve all evil. The 2005

¹⁷ According to Hania Sholkamy, women represent 17% in the Moroccan parliament even after the great success of the taking over of the religious parties, while women reached 28 % of the seats in the Tunisian parliament. Egypt on the other hand scored only 2%. See Hania Sholkamy, 'Egypt's women missing from formal politics', *Ahram Online*, January 22nd, 2012

¹⁸ Lina El-Wardani, 'Women activists refuse to be cowed by sexual violence, marginalization', *Ahram Online*, March 8th, 2012

¹⁹ Salma Shukrallah, '10,000 Egyptian women march against military violence and rule', *Ahram Online*, December 20th, 2011

²⁰ Ekram Ibrahim, 'Women's march calls for end to military rule', *Ahram Online*, January 21st, 2012

incident, legitimized then the series of gang raping that occurred the following years in Downtown and other quarters in Cairo. With the similar reasoning, some Salafi Sheikhs and a pro-Mubarak television presenter attacked the unknown female protester as a prostitute, because prostitutes and only prostitutes wear blue bras. Only prostitutes, we are told, wear blue bras with nothing else underneath the Abbaya (in fact she wore underneath jeans and was veiled). The fact that she was dragged, beaten up, kicked with the soldier’s shoes and stripped of her clothes did not seem to draw the attention of either the Salafi Sheikhs or the television presenter. However, the same logic of attacking the women’s demonstration was heard from some female members of the Muslims Brothers and the Salafis after thousands of women took the streets in protest against SCAF’s brutality.



©Mona Abaza

After the memorable incident of the unknown woman with ‘the blue bra’, the city’s murals and the cement block-walls that were erected by the SCAF after the events of Mohammed Mahmud street, were filled with hundreds of blue bras. Ironically, the blue bra turned into a symbol of national contestation against both the SCAF and the stupidity of some Salafis.

These horrifying statements turned out to be the butt of jokes and target of biting comments on facebook and in opposition newspapers, which led in December to one of the most significant women’s demonstrations against the SCAF policies, only adding to the systematic escalation of sexual harassment, gender humiliation, and violent attacks on protesters. The blue bra abounded in much graffiti, became the major theme for expressing dissent among several artists.



Mohammed Abla exhibiting his painting in Tahrir Square
©Mohammed Abla

Painter Mohammed Abla produced an amazing series of paintings, titled *Wolves*, in which he drew the scene of the female protester being dragged by police forces whom were depicted as having heads of wolves. He exhibited the paintings in Abdiin Square.

This incident coincided with the offending statements of the Freedom and Justice Party member of parliament Azza al-Garf, who advocates for the repeal of the anti-harassment law because she firmly believes

that the blame should be placed primarily on women who instigate lustful acts with men through their improper apparels.²¹ Al-Garf alarmed the various feminist groups by further advocating for the abolishment of the khul' law (the first law that finally allowed women to file for divorce). She also supports to cease the recognition of children for illicit relations (here the informal forms of marriage like 'Urfi, misyaar and muta' which became popular during the past decade raised that issue of recognizing or not off springs). Al-Garf wants to equally acknowledge the right of husbands to have coercive sexual intercourse with their wives if they abstain, and to forbid women from traveling without their husband (i.e., legalizing the husband's permission). She also wants to strip the Egyptian nationality that was granted to children of foreign fathers and to remove the law requiring men to notify their first wife of a second marriage, as well as repealing the law that guarantees a divorced wife access to housing acquired as private property.²² Last but not least, al-Garf advocated checking the criminal records of those wounded from the revolution, a demand that could have been raised by the SCAF rather than a Muslim Brother member.

Should feminists not be worried when al-Garf publicly supports female genital mutilation as a form of "beautification plastic surgery"? In fact, she reverses the argument of the barbarity of the practice by proposing that it is a matter of choice, and if needed, then it should be undertaken by a doctor.²³

Is not then al-Garf siding much affinity with the Salafis who too are threatened by women in the public sphere and who are advocating banning women from political life, even though al-Garf is a member of parliament? The Salafis' demands can only be understood as a direct attack on women's freedom, such as to remove the age limit for marriage, legalizing it at puberty, and mandating the stoning of adulterers.

By Way of Conclusion

I

As a trained sociologist, I have to confess that the problem of this article is that it evidently lacks a theoretical perspective. This is in fact not a coincidence. I guess there must be a relationship between the conscious stance of not wanting to postulate a theoretical framework that is coinciding with experiencing the uncertainty and precariousness of a living "revolution".

For the past year, many in Cairo have experienced similar emotional tensions. One such tension is for sure the high level of volatile emotions. This results in experiencing high joy and the next, tremendous sorrow that puts us in tears. Such mercurial moods reminded me of Norbert Elias's description of the volatile psychogenesis and sociogenesis of man's character in the Middle Ages, which experienced mutations and transformations throughout

²¹ See Sawsan Gad's important article 'We mold the collective memory of sexual assault', <http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/750081Tue>

²² Al-maraa al-guadida, 'la musaawamah ala huquuq al-nissaa', <http://nwrcegypt.org>

²³ 'Islamist Parliamentarian demands abolition of Egypt's Ban on FGM', March 29th, 2012. <http://www.desertflowerfoundation.org/en/islamist-parliamentarian-demands-abolition-of-egypt%C2%B4s-ban-on-fgm/>

the 'civilizing process' – the growing monopoly of power by the state that led to the longue durée to a growing internalization of emotions and increasing self-restraining of manners and social conduct.²⁴ What makes it a revolution is exactly that overwhelming dominance of volatility and emotional instability in all aspects of life.

Another problem which many of my friends, colleagues, and I encountered was the inability to write anything after having experienced a tense moment. If there is field that I wished to have explored in this paper, it is how to combine the "sociology of emotions" with a more or less "objective" analysis.

II

The question that many raise in Egypt is the following: for how long will the honeymoon between the Islamists and the SCAF continue? And why did the Islamists return to demonstrating in Tahrir on April 13th against Omar Soliman's candidacy after they attacked the revolutionaries for remaining in Tahrir to pressure the SCAF?

Are we not witnessing here another farce? Mohammed Waaked speculates that there is a great chance that Hazem Abu Ismail might win the presidential elections as a short-term strategy backed by the SCAF. Abu Ismail might win the first round, even though his late mother might have acquired an American nationality. Mohammed Waaked argues that this could be possible due to the fact that the Egyptian administration might not be able to prove the existence of the American passport because the administrations (US and Egyptian) do not necessarily coordinate or inform each other on the issue of acquiring a second nationality. Thus, if it is in the interest of the SCAF that Ismail wins, the issue of the passport will be suppressed for a while. Waaked raises the significance of the timing of publicizing the American passport, which is in itself worth noting that it occurred exactly after the fight over the drafting of the constitution. Earlier though, Waaked remarked again that hard work was undertaken to shape the glamorous image with which Abu Ismail has recently used to conquer the street.

Would not Abu Ismail's success be the prelude and the justification for the army to take over with a military coup, as once again Mohammed Waaked has argued?²⁵ And would not Abu Ismail's flagrant statements about his understanding of applying the Islamic Shari'a be the best excuse for the liberals to rally behind the army? What if the Pakistani scenario whereby a division of powers between the rising Islamic neo-liberal (economic neo-liberalism but not political freedom) classes would work? This would mean that the pie will be shared between the Muslim Brothers and the army provided an agreement on the opacity in running the military budget. What if this scenario fails? What if both the Muslim Brothers and the army end up competing over who would be the best service provider for the US? Waaked speculates that more conflict is yet to come since the US have recently been embellishing

²⁴ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, Blackwell, 2000

²⁵ Mohammed Waked, 'matha ya'ni al-hukm lisalih salah abu ismail wa matha naqra fi awdat al-ikhwan lil maydaan', *Jadaliyya*, April 12th, 2012. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/5024/لصالح-الحكم-يعني-ماذا-وماذا-اسماعيل-ابو-صلاح-حازم>

the MB's image as a possibility to replace some of the services provided the army to the US through them?

On the other hand, the revolutionaries have been criticized for being a "de-centered movement". 2011-2012 witnessed a harsh economic recession, an increase of crime and thuggery, bank robberies, the alarming flight of hard currency overseas, fuel and gas shortages, alarming bread shortages, the collapse of the tourist industry (which was one of the major national resources), and the threat of economic collapse due to state bankruptcy that appears imminent. How long will "organized chaos" turn into total uncontrollable chaos? Clearly, all this took place during the transitional phase administered by the SCAF, but with brainwashing propaganda machinery repeating that all evils are to be blamed on the revolution. After so much violence experienced in just one year many experience tiredness and exhaustion. The question then is how long can the street sustain the momentum of protest?

The revolution's lesson is that Egyptians have to learn to live by the day. One thing is clear, the power of the street should never be underestimated. It is also clear that the Ancien Regime wants to reconfigure the game to redress the same emperor but with new clothes. And the emperor is not one man's power together with his family but an entire "deep state" ramified system. With that said, the price of pressuring juntas through the power of the street will surely be bound with the high price of spilling even more bloodshed.

A Revolution in Stagnancy

Bassem Zakaria Al-Samragy²⁶



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Introduction

The revolution is not solely a phase of reform, rather, it's the radical structural changes in the relation between the state and the society. Hence, I find it hard to celebrate the victory of the Egyptian revolution, since all the changes the revolution managed to do is displacing Mubarak, expanding the margin of freedom as well as some procedural reforms regarding democratic participation, while the structural foundation of the distribution of wealth and authority, i.e., the relation between the state and the society, remains untouched.

On the other hand, we cannot say that this is the furthest the revolution can reach or that the revolution is defeated by the counter-revolution and contained by those cosmetic reforms. The revolution is ongoing, it tries to enroot itself socially so that it can unfold politically in the right direction. It is a historical process that will take years of struggling, a process that will to larger extent be directed by the spontaneous movement of the masses. This spontaneity has been the main theme of the revolution ever since its eruption. In this context, I find it obligatory to be humble enough to question our conventional understanding and refrain from absolute speculation and stereotypes so that we can understand and interpret what is really going on and how it is going on, and not just what we desire or even fear.

In light of what was mentioned above, the following thoughts are a contribution to understand the political scene. They will be structured according to the development of the political actors' positions ever since Mubarak's overthrow until now. In this way, we can develop an understanding of the scene based on contextual overview and not only some excerpts from it.

The current scene

It's now becoming obvious that the authorities are being divided and consolidated in the hands of two major organizations – the only two major organizations that survived the aftermath of Mubarak's overthrow. One of them emerged out of the old regime, the *Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF)*, and the other one, the *Muslim Brothers (MB)*, emerged out of the opposition camp. The latter has the legislative authority, while the

²⁶ Bassem Zakaria Al-Samragy's lecture was based on this article.

former has the executive authority. Although both of them are coming from different backgrounds and holding on different heritages, they share the same conservative nature that is being asserted in their closed nature. While the military nature keeps the cohesion of the SCAF, the ideology is what keeps the cohesion of the MB. Also, in the case of the MB, being under the regime scrutiny pushed them to provide their members with an alternative environment to fortify themselves from the corruption of the society and from being chased by the regime. They have their own kind of music, plays, clubs, activities etc. This has led to the consolidation of more disciplined members and a more coherent organization.

We can understand the behavior of disciplined hierarchical organizations like the two we are talking about by simply looking at their leadership. By doing that, we will find both leaderships are old and mild; none of them is radical enough to take radical steps in either direction, that is, the direction of the reformist or the one of the counter-revolution.

So, what we have in the center of the state, the main sphere of the political action and the main target of the revolution, are two “reformist” organizations. Regardless of their contradiction – while the SCAF was structurally embedded in the regime, the MB was the biggest organized opposition movement and its members were among those who faced detention and torture from Mubarak’s regime – they share the same behavior, that is, avoiding to take radical steps, going to an open political or military faceoff and they both prefer to use the step-by-step process of procedural reforms.

In addition to these two major organizations, we have other different groups scattered on the periphery of this center with variant agendas and organizational natures. It’s more appropriate to classify these groups on the basis of their agendas and organizational nature than to classify them according to their ideological labels, since, as we are going to examine later, we will find that groups with the same ideology take different positions and vice versa. We will, for example, find Salafis, who are another Islamist group. We will, however, find them vary a lot from Al-Nour party, which was formed shortly after the revolution and which managed to win about 25% of the parliament. It consisted of a group of Salafis who chose to enter politics by forming a legitimate political group. But it also consisted of other Salafis who are more radical and who challenge the political as well as the religious legitimacy of the parliament as a whole.

It’s clear that Al-Nour party has more or less the same agenda as the MB, with a more radical flavor towards applying sharia law and a more conservative outlook in general. Also, we will find a great variety in the other groups. Some of them are part of Hazem Abu Ismail’s presidential campaign. Hazem Abu Ismail was, until he was disqualified because he did not fulfill the required criteria (as his mother carried foreign citizenship), the most vocal presidential candidate in terms of applying sharia as well as criticizing the SCAF and the authorities of the state including the MB’s parliamentary performance. The main logo that unites all these groups is the sentimental aspiration towards an Islamic state, in the pursuit of which they are ready to arrange themselves with whoever can get them there.

In addition to the Islamists, we also have the secular groups that, despite having numerous organizations and parties, have not managed to have an organization that lasted long (like

the MB) ever since 1982. Also, they are not socially enrooted ones like Al-Nour party, which was built on the social capital they surprisingly acquired due to working in non-politized NGOs in the rural areas of Egypt for several years. Regardless of the ideology, those groups also have different agendas in terms of the position from/in the revolution; some of them are members of the parliament, some of them refuse the parliamentary process at all, some of them were participating in the newly formed constitutional committee which was dominated by the MBs, and some of them do not mind cooperation with the SCAF in order to avoid the supremacy of the Islamists. Like the Islamists, the logo of the secular state – although they like to call it the civil state, I don't think it's possible to reach a civil state through the intervention of the army – is the one that unites these secular groups in the pursuit of which they don't have a problem cooperating with anyone that can get them there.

Although these groups – Islamists, Secularists, SCAF – apparently have different agendas, they more or less have, at least in the eyes of the revolution, the same attitude as none of them has ever talked about taking radical positions towards changing the economic policies (the neo-liberal policies) or the foreign policies (relations with the USA and Israel). That's why I dare to consider the polarization and the battle between them as false. In reality, this battle is only one over power.

Apart from this false polarization between Secularists and Islamists, there are other groups with very different backgrounds that chose to adopt a new position that, instead of the conventional ideological one, is based on the revolution. Some of these groups are Islamist ones consisting of individuals who are not bound to any organization. Many of these people either resigned from the MB or were kicked out due to intellectual or political conflicts. They were not happy with the mild agenda of the MB because they felt more revolutionary than the MB movement. Another part of this group consists of Salafis that are also more revolutionary than Al-Nour party and that have a more liberal outlook than Hazem Abu Ismail. They are less interested in forcing Sharia law. Most of these groups as well as some other independent revolutionary Islamists are working for Abou El-Fotouh's presidential campaign. Abou El-Fotouh was a member of the MB and kicked out as a result of his announcement of running for the presidency, however, it was only the tip of the iceberg. Over the years, he was struggling with the leadership of the MB as he had more liberal views regarding personal rights and freedoms.

Other revolutionary groups came from secular backgrounds (leftists as well as liberals) scattered on the peripheral of the state, the main domain of the political activity. Some of them are part of Abou El-Fotouh's presidential campaign, while some are part of Hamdeen Sabahy and Khaled Ali's campaigns, and some others are ultra-revolutionary – refusing to be part of neither any campaign nor any organized political configuration.

To conclude, what we have is a false polarization between secular and Islamist groups, both of them caring about their ideology more than getting rid of the remainders of the old regime. None of them finds any problem in partnering with the SCAF to win the battle against the other party. However, the fact that the Islamist groups are the most organized, in

addition to being in accordance with the conservative mood of the Egyptian society, makes it easier for them to further push their agenda and winning the battle against the secular groups.

On the peripheral of this false battle, another battle is taking place on the basis of the revolutionary polarization and is being fought by revolutionaries from different ideological backgrounds who realized that the nature of the moment compel us all to make “getting rid of the whole old regime” our battle. The fact that these groups have no organization makes it hard for them to push their revolutionary agenda further; hence, no revolutionary achievement was achieved peacefully and bloodlessly.

The Road to Now

The formation of the political scene was formed and consolidated through a line of events which started in the aftermath of Mubarak’s overthrow and is still developing until now.

In order to begin analyzing this line of events we have to take a quick look at the composition of the scene of the revolution since its eruption until Mubarak’s overthrow. All of the people who went to streets had different aims, however, there was a prerequisite for all those aims – Mubarak’s overthrow – even the SCAF shared the same prerequisite, as they weren’t happy with the succession project according to which Mubarak was planning to pass the presidency to his son.

The first round of the game took place nearly a month after Mubarak’s overthrow on March 19th, which was the constitutional amendment referendum. However, although this was a procedural issue, Egyptian political groups managed to transform it into an ideological issue! Islamists were enthusiastic to get into parliamentary elections as they were confident of winning – resting on their organizational capacity and their accordance with the general mood of the Egyptian people. On the other hand and for the same reasons, Secularists were aspiring to have some time before getting into the elections. So, Islamists used their full power to rally the people to vote *yes* for the amendments; some of them kept telling people that if you voted *no* on the clause that this would mean that the Sharia as one of the sources of legislation will be taken out. This was not true since the Sharia clause was subject to amendment at all. On the other hand, some Secularists went to the SCAF and asked them to stay in power longer and postpone the elections and the constitution until they get ready to form their parties and so on.

On the March 19th, the Egyptian people voted *yes* with a majority of 77%. This deepened the rupture as Islamists celebrated this result victory as if it were their victory, while secularists were attacking the result and the people who were easily deceived by false religious direction. All this happened despite the fact that this poll was only on a procedural issue that has nothing to do with ideology or identity. The ironic fact was that the SCAF didn’t even apply the time plan that should have been applied according to the amendments; they rather, postponed the elections and tried to intervene in the constitution and impose a

special position for them! So, the only real result we had from this poll was the rupture between the political groups, which the SCAF used very well.

March's constitutional poll was nothing but the first step in a series of events that contributed to deepening the rupture between the political groups, and hence among the people by emphasizing on a false Islamist/non-Islamist polarization to cover the real revolution/anti-revolution polarization.

Observing the attitude of the SCAF, MB, other less powerful political groups, and the scattered revolutionaries reveal a lot. While the MB's discourse emphasized the vitality of the electoral path as the only way to execute the demands of the revolution, some other political groups were meeting with the SCAF, urging them to postpone the elections to avoid the hegemony of the MB. Although those political groups were successful in pushing the SCAF to take some steps to postpone the elections, they were outweighed by the MB that they couldn't achieve their full agenda. Thus, they started to attack the MB, for betraying the revolution and making deals with the SCAF, depending on the fact that only few people know what is going on behind closed doors.

As time progressed, the SCAF started to attack protesters. They apologized once but it didn't prevent them from repeating the attacks more brutally on different occasions, rendering the famous chanting "The People and the Army are one hand" meaningless. The brutality of the army against the protesters – who were mostly individual revolutionaries, neither MBs nor members of other political groups – led the protestations against the SCAF to grow bigger by the participation of those individual revolutionaries from different ideologies. Those protestations evoked different reactions from political groups. The MB considered these protestations as a plan orchestrated by either the secularists or the SCAF to postpone the elections. On the other hand, the secular political groups have seen these protestations as opportunities to have their voice heard, depending on the fact that they, unlike the individual revolutionaries, own money and media at their disposal for producing a discourse. They have managed in different occasions to position themselves as the vanguard of the protestations, which was not true but it consolidated the image the MB had of protestations directed exclusively against them. Needless to mention, this scene resulted in mutual demonization between political groups. Hence, the divide in the society and the truth was confused by consolidating more and more of the false Islamist/non-Islamist polarization.

One of the events in which we witnessed the highest manifestation of this rupture was during the July sit-in. Through nearly a one-month a sit-in took place in Tahrir square, which was orchestrated to put greater pressure on the SCAF. We witnessed this mutual demonization taking place on a daily basis. It didn't stop here though, as on July 29th some of the ultra Islamists announced that they were going to the square to raise their demands. Some of the political activists rushed to make a deal with the Islamists that they will raise only the consensual demands. Although they agreed with them, they violated the deal and went to the square chanting "People Wants Sharia Law". They by far outnumbered the other people in the square and other groups declared their retreat from the square. When these

ultra Islamists left the square it was nearly empty because the other had already left and the few that remained, most of them were the families of the martyrs, were easily beaten and removed from the square a few days later by the Army.

The cycle of events proceeded in the same direction until we reached the parliamentary elections, which as expected, resulted in the MB winning 45%. However, the newly formed Al-Nour Party won a surprising 25% of the vote. So, the parliament was mainly the Islamists Parliament and the mediocrity of it was the responsibility of the Islamists. The parliament really disappointed the people by the mediocre performance of most of its members as well as by the topics and discussions taking place in the parliament. While the Islamists were enjoying the majority, they received the blame which forced them to take a defensive attitude towards the other political groups creating much more tension which benefited nobody but the SCAF and other elements of the counterrevolution.

Also, the MB habit of not keeping their promises contributed to increased tensions. First of all, they announced that they will only run for 30% of the parliament seats, but they ran for more than 90% and managed to get 45%. They also announced that they will not run for presidency as they believed that it's not good for Egypt to have an Islamist president. However, they recently decided to nominate their star, Khairat Al-Shaater, for presidency. This decision caused the credibility of the MB to be extremely shaken and pushed some of the political groups who are positioned as revolutionaries to go in the absolute opposite direction by supporting Omar Suliman, the former head of the General Directorate of Intelligence, who was appointed by Mubarak during the revolution as vice president.

Also, the constitutional arena witnessed the tension between the political groups. The constitution is to be written by a committee appointed by the parliament. Although MB, who are dominating the Parliament, announced that they will pursue a consensual formation of the committee, they monopolized it by appointing just MB members or people with Islamist inclination, an attitude which also evoked more rage among the political groups against the MB.

The Potential: What should be done?

Apparently, the political groups are not going to resolve this stagnation, as each group has its own hidden agenda and calculations which are not necessarily in favor of the revolution. So, the only way out of this stagnation is replacing these political groups in charge with a new elite coming from below, from the people. And the only way for the revolutionaries to do this is to be among the people in their struggle even if it wasn't radical enough. The task of the revolutionaries is to find ways to radicalize the struggle. An example of this is the approaching battle for the presidency. Although, as most of the battles after Mubarak are considered reformist battles, we have to have the sense that the masses – the essence of the revolution – consider this battle theirs. Thus, we have to go through this battle and revolutionize it.

In order to revolutionize this battle we can't submit to the state's discourse that it's a fair competition in a democratic atmosphere, for the prerequisite of democracy is defining the

rules of the political arena. This can't be done in a liquid situation like the current revolution. So, we have to look at it not as a democratic competition but rather, it has to be looked at as a revolutionary battle and an opportunity for those who have the revolutionary agenda but lack the organization to start forming the organization

In order for this to happen effectively, we have to work towards forming a coalition between the revolutionary candidates so that the revolution camp may have the opportunity to have the capacity to produce a revolutionary discourse which goes beyond the false polarization and emphasize on the true one between revolution and anti-revolution. Hence, this coalition can win the people's voices that are likely to support the revolution regardless of their ideologies. Even if this coalition doesn't make it, they can form a strong, inclusive opposition front.

Conclusion

The Egyptian revolution is neither victorious nor defeated. It's still in the making and suffering stagnation that is due to the fact that both the reformist and the counter revolution have organizational capacities which inhibit them from producing effective discourses and pushing their agendas forward. On the other hand, the revolutionaries lack such capacity and are being cornered in reactiveness, with no ability to take proactive steps to change the scene.

It's a must, not a leisure anymore that the revolutionaries begin thinking of organizing themselves.

Speakers

Mona Abaza is a Professor of Sociology at the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and Egyptology at the American University in Cairo. Mona Abaza received her B.A. in Political Science from the American University in Cairo in 1982, her M.A. in Sociology from the University of Durham, UK in 1986, and her Ph.D. from the University of Bielefeld in 1990. From 2007 to 2009 she was Chair of the Department of Sociology at the American University in Cairo and then served as a visiting professor of Islamology at the Department of Theology at Lund University in Sweden.

Her main research areas are:

Religious and cultural networks between the Middle East and Southeast Asia, discourses on enlightenment in the Middle East, gender orders in Egypt, consumer culture and the art market in Egypt and the sociology of knowledge.

Mona has extensively written about the uprising in Egypt as well as some other topics, including:

Twentieth Century Egyptian Art: The Private Collection of Sherwet Shafei, The American University Press, Cairo, 2011

The Changing Consumer Cultures of Modern Egypt. Cairo's Urban Reshaping, the American University Press, Cairo, 2006

Bassem Zakaria Al-Samragy studies political science at the American University Cairo. He is a political researcher that closely observes the social movement in Egypt and writes extensively about the developments in Egypt on his personal blog and in the newspaper Al-Shorouq.