IDS WORKING PAPER
Volume **2014** No **442**

The Politics of Mobilising for Gender Justice in Egypt from Mubarak to Morsi and Beyond

Mariz Tadros
April 2014

pathways
of women's
empowerment

DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT
التعاون
الألماني

Implemented by: **gíz** Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

IDS Institute of
Development Studies

The Politics of Mobilising for Gender Justice in Egypt from Mubarak to Morsi and Beyond

Mariz Tadros

Summary

This paper examines the nature of the political struggle over the status, role and identity of women in Egypt in between the two revolutions (January 2011 and June 2013). It presents a situational analysis of the various actors, relations and agendas that have both informed the backlash against women's rights and the mass movements of resistance. It acknowledges that while women's rights have historically suffered as a consequence of a hostile political will of the ruling authority and parts of political and civil society that are inimical to expanding women's rights (and sometimes mobilise around revoking what already exists), women's rights faced new threats after January 2011 because of the political settlement between the Supreme Council for Armed Forces and the Muslim Brotherhood. The threats to women's rights worsened under President Morsi's regime and while they were not the prime reason why women mobilised in the largest numbers ever to oust the president in June 2013, encroachments on their freedoms was a catalysing factor.

The paper's principle argument is that while a constellation of factors influence prospects of advancing women's equality in Egypt, collective action matters both for policy and for building constituencies that grant legitimacy to the cause being championed. The fragmentation and internal rivalry that characterised the myriad civil society organisations and coalitions during Mubarak's reign left advocates of gender equality unequipped to exploit the (few) opportunities of influencing the political configuration of power after the revolution of 2011. The threats to women's rights thereafter propelled old and newly formed non-state actors into a mass mobilisation of resistance. This represented a case where collective action in its various forms succeeded in challenging the status quo in critical ways. However, the political polarisation between supporters and opponents of the outcome of the 30 June revolution has led to a de-collectivisation of efforts. If the opportunities for influence are to be seized, and threats to influencing a progressive gender agenda challenged in the next phase, prioritising local pathways of re-building and strengthening collective action is of primary importance.

Mariz Tadros is a research fellow at IDS. She was formerly a Professor of Political Science at the American University in Cairo and worked for almost ten years as a journalist for *Al-Ahram Weekly* newspaper. Her most recent publications are *The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt: Democracy Redefined or Confined?* (Routledge, 2012) and *Copts at the Crossroads: The Struggle for Inclusive Democracy in Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2013). She works on democratisation in the Middle East, religion and development, the politics of gender and development, and Islamist political movements in the Middle East. Her work has featured in the *Guardian*, Open Democracy and the *Middle East Report*.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

This paper is about the nature of mobilisation around gender issues during the last ten years, in particular in the period in between Egypt's two revolutions (January 2011 and June 2013) and the immediate aftermath. It presents a situational analysis of the key actors, issues and networks through which gender agendas are mediated. 'Gender agendas' is loosely defined to mean political projects of how power relations between men and women should be organised in politics and society. Gender agendas are important not only because they have a bearing on women's agency, status and roles but also in view of what they tell us about contending notions of group, national and supra-national identity (Mohanty 1991). The extent to which gender equality factors in national policy also has a bearing on the human development trajectory of a country (UNFPA 2000) and its democratisation, in terms of its inclusiveness and recognition of its citizenry (Whaites 2008: 10).

The paper specifically examines the nature of collective mobilisation by non-state actors who champion gender equality, and what influences the nature of their agency and their prospects of influence. The rationale for focusing on collective actors that work on advancing gender equality stems from two critical factors. First, the period under study in Egypt between January 2011-June 2013 is one characterised by a political culture of exceptional collective activism around various political, economic and social agendas - and gender issues are no exception. Second, there is a consensus established in scholarly literature around the importance of collective action for eliciting positive social change in gender issues (Basu 2013; Waylen 2007; Weldon and Htun 2013; Cornwall 2012). This stance is however, qualified, since there have been instances in history where positive change has materialised through a top-down approach initiated by the government. Further, not all collective action around gender issues is informed by the normative values of women's equality. Some of the largest and most successful occurrences of mobilisation around gender issues witnessed in the Arab world have been in support of agendas whose aim is ultimately to curb women's rights. However, the paper argues that the strength and cohesion of collective action to demand more rights for women has a direct bearing on whether all opportunities for influencing the politics of gender are exploited to challenge power configurations on a grassroots and macro level.

While the paper briefly highlights some of the dimensions of the struggles for gender matters during Mubarak's reign, the focus is mainly on the period in between the two revolutions. This period is exceptional in every way - red lines have been challenged, political absolutes have been contested, and citizens have mobilised en masse around just about everything from water shortages to political repression. While this paper seeks to contextualise the struggles over influencing gender issues however, due to space constraints, it does not present a historicised narrative of the origins of these divisions and demarcations. It also does not present an analysis of gender discourses nor oral narratives that are critical for uncovering the pervasiveness of power dynamics in times of extreme volatility. They are perhaps best dealt with elsewhere, not due to their irrelevance but to space restrictions.

Finally, the paper is influenced by the author's own standpoint on gender issues. This standpoint is informed by a recognition of the necessity of understanding contending visions of gender justice, the power dynamics behind them and the sources of their appeal and changing context. However, gender justice here is informed by a normative belief in the importance of not only increasing the choices available to women and men to assume more egalitarian gender roles, but also to expose and address the underlying power dynamics that influence their own conceptions and perceptions of themselves and the choices available to them. In other words, conceptions of gender justice that are based on rigidly defined gender roles emanating from biological differences are considered here as restricting not only choice but people's own consciousness of the possible and conceivable.

The paper is a synthesis of many different research initiatives that have been undertaken by the author over the years. Different sections have been informed by different methodological approaches. In most cases, the methodology has involved a combination of qualitative research methods such as interviews and focus groups with ethnographic approaches based on participant observation and case study.

The paper is structured according to the chronological order of historical phases in which Egypt was ruled by different leadership. The first part sets out the interface between authoritarian rule in Mubarak's reign and the various state, semi-state and non-state actors which influenced the gender agenda, and the power relations between them. This is followed by an examination of what the 25 January revolution meant for collective struggles around gender issues, and how the rupture in the organisation of power in politics and society unleashed one of the worst backlashes against women's rights in the contemporary history of Egypt, but also generated various expressions of resistance, of an individual and collective form. The third part of the paper discusses the power struggles over the gender agenda during Morsi's reign, from above in multiple spaces: the constituent assembly, the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and national machineries; and the disconnects over perceptions of women's realities from below. The second revolution and its immediate aftermath are briefly discussed in part four of the paper, in terms of the power configurations from above, and the deepening divisions in society from below. Finally, the conclusions are followed by a set of policy messages for donors and external policy influencing circles committed to supporting gender equality and non-state actors working in Egypt.

1 Conceptual framing

The paper seeks to adopt a contextualised approach to analysing collective action around gender issues, recognising that critical junctures also need to be examined as interjections along a historical continuum. Consequently, the approach here is to revisit the conceptual framework for examining collective action to endorse women's rights in the last years of Mubarak's rule and assess the extent to which the determinants of the formation of initiatives have changed, along with the ruptures experienced in the status quo. A framework was inductively developed to explain the emergence, and success and failure of coalitions as forms of collective action, grounded in an analysis of six coalitions in Egypt and Jordan. The factors determined particularly relevant for the analysis of the emergence of collective action included:

- The trigger, political opportunity and ability to respond
- The leadership and the networks that sustain it
- The issue and its framing
- The external linkages and outmanoeuvring internal opposition

An examination of the changes that occurred in Egypt in collective action around gender issues suggests that the way in which these factors affect the mobilisation of people in collective action changed. In pre-revolutionary Egypt, triggers – occurrences or incidents - that catalysed people into collective action were few. Political opportunity, which refers to the extent to which an environment is enabling for collective action and the extent to which the political moment opens or closes new opportunities for organising, is a particularly important factor in the Egyptian context because during Mubarak's reign, political openings were unpredictable and heavily regulated by the state security investigations apparatus. However, the political opportunity or moment for mobilising collectively after January 2011 was exceptional in its release of revolutionary energy experienced in citizen mass mobilisation. Citizens took to the street to celebrate agency, to express dissent and to demand rights. Hence the importance of the trigger for mobilisation became less central. People were in a political frame of mind that made them more responsive to calls for mobilising and acting collectively than before.

The role of leadership and repertoires of relations continued to play a central role in mobilising through collective agency and for collective action. The pre-existing repertoires of networks and relations between activists who worked through different cliques and groups during Mubarak's era continued during the revolutionary phase, however, they reconfigured into new coalitions and initiatives. However, more horizontal forms of leadership with new repertoires of women and men also came into being after the revolution, often channelling their energies to new causes and issues according to the unfolding political context.

There was also an observable change in how the third factor - the issue and its framing - was affected by the change in the political system. The importance of an issue touching on real life matters in order to elicit people to organise collectively continued. However, the framing of the issue became less tied to assuming a religious mantra and shifted towards using slogans, ideas and images which are part and parcel of everyday culture. This is associated with the change of focus (no longer geared exclusively towards policy influence) and the changing power dynamics (no longer a case of women's rights' activists versus civil and political society but broad based movements in some instances versus other stakeholders).

On the other hand, external linkages inherent in donor support for the funding of the formation of collective actors or action, which often featured in many of the coalitions that were formed during Mubarak's era, became far less important after the January 2011

revolution. People organised more organically and many of the informal youth-based initiatives that assumed a collective character did not have external linkages in the form of donor funding or support (at least in the first year after their inception).

In terms of the success of collective actors, both to survive and to elicit change: (i) the political will of the status quo, (ii) ideological orientation, and (iii) alliances and networks, continued to be major influencing factors even after the January 2011 revolution. Political will refers to the choices made by those presiding over the state. While gender rights issues were often instrumentalised by the ruling regime to buttress its power during Mubarak's reign, it became altogether sidelined from the government's agenda after the revolution. Ideology is examined in terms of the underpinning of political visions, discourses and thinking that influence ideas, policies and practices associated with gender equality. The ideological orientation was patriarchal and when concessions were made, they were introduced in the spirit of the benevolent dictator (and caring First Lady). However, the ideological orientation after the revolution took the form of an overt backlash against women's rights, as will be discussed below.

Alliances continued to play a key factor in the success of collective action and had a clearly tangible impact on the ground. A comparison between the poorly attended, poorly framed event held in Tahrir Square to mark international women's day in March 2011 with that of March 2012 is a case in point. In 2011, participation was reduced to the exclusive feminist few whose presence in Tahrir Square resembled a small booth in a market. In March 2012, the collective mobilisation of youth revolutionary movements, as well as a number of political parties, in addition to the gender activists led to an impressive march, attended by hundreds, with catchy, powerful slogans being shouted out by a broad based citizenry movement.[1] Alliances are also critically important for understanding the gender agenda being not only about the affirmation of an ideological agenda but also the practical political division of power between different interest groups driven by the desire to maximise gains for themselves.

2 Aligning women's equality with amoebic authoritarianism during Mubarak's reign

2.1 Broader context

The power dynamics informing governance politics and processes were influx during the thirty years of Mubarak's reign. Like the amoeba which does not have a particular shape, so too authoritarianism does not have a particular mode of operating, and is ever changing and dynamic. In the last five years of Mubarak's reign, power configurations were exceptionally fluid. During Bush's administration, the Mubarak regime was pressed to open spaces for political dissent and freedom of expression, which it did from 2005-2007. During this time, Kefaya (Enough!) a movement committed to blocking the inheritance of the presidency from Mubarak to his son emerged and directly challenged the highest echelons of the regime by organising public protests to demand a democratic rotation of power.

Restrictions on the press and non-state media were relaxed to a large degree. As the toll of economic hardship increased, people also began to mobilise around bread and butter issues, the largest and most organised of which were the workers' movements. However, during the latter years, levels of political repression, corruption and impoverishment were conspicuously felt, in particular in 2009-2010. It became increasingly clear that Gamal Mubarak was being

---

[1]   I am very grateful to Professor Hania Sholkamy for sharing this example with me, since she was present on both events in March 2011 and March 2012

groomed to succeed his father as president, and his entourage of select businessmen were becoming increasingly powerful. The parliamentary elections of 2010, which witnessed a high level of corruption and regulation by the state security investigations apparatus, brought the country closer to the brink, and with the Tunisian revolution and the heightened political dissidence of protestors against the bombing of a church on New Year's Eve 2011, the scene was set for a major challenge to the regime (Tadros 2012).

2.2 Gendering amoebic authoritarianism

Against this backdrop of unpredictable opening and closing of public engagement space, there were various actors with contending agendas striving to influence the 'gender agenda' in Egypt. The most influential were the ruling party, the National Council for Women, a number of NGOs and coalitions committed to gender equality, and the Islamist movements. The influence varied across time (especially political moment), issue, and space (local versus national versus international) and the kind of coalitions through which the actors worked. Prior to the Egyptian revolution, the situation was characterised by a number of promising but also highly constraining realities. As has been established in much of the literature (for example Htun 2003; Jad 2010; Khattak 2010) authoritarianism is not necessarily inimical to women's rights, as long as these rights do not challenge the power base of the status quo in fundamental ways. This has manifest itself, for example, in the practice of instating new revisions to legal codes, such as with respect to more draconian measures of ensuring that men pay alimony including threat of imprisonment. In essence it is a manifestation of 'governance feminism' which Kandiyoti describes as a system which involves 'a top down enforcement of women's rights' in a way that is underpinned by oppressive governance practice (Kandiyoti 2014).

The challenges taken into account by autocrats are not only those posed from women assuming more rights but also the level of resistance which may be generated when these rights are opposed by important groups from within the party as well as the opposition. For example, Mubarak's regime has no qualms with introducing a quota for more seats in parliament to accommodate 20 per cent women's representation. However, the rules of the political system were set in such a way as to ensure that increased women's representation served the interests of the regime (Tadros 2010a). Women affiliated to the ruling party occupied almost all the 64 'quota seats' in parliament.

Nonetheless, during Mubarak's reign, a number of important changes in legislation regulating the public and private lives of women were made. Family law was reformed in order to open up new possibilities for women to secure a fast track to divorce through khul',[2] the age of marriage was increased to 18, female genital mutilation was criminalised, and rapists could no longer avoid punishment by offering to marry their victims. The prohibition of women from assuming judicial positions was challenged and the first women judges were appointed, the nationality decree which prohibited women from passing on their nationality to their children if their husbands were non-Egyptian was altered, and women no longer needed the permission of their husbands in order to travel. These changes were introduced in tandem with the liberal feminist tradition of focusing on legislative reform as a key to addressing gender inequalities. Issues of economic justice such as the needs of women in the rural areas, educated young women, and women in the informal sector were absent in these agendas.

---

[2] The right of women to unilaterally divorce men through a court system by forgoing some of their financial rights (though not those of their children).

2.3 National women's machineries

In Egypt, the First Lady presided over the two national machineries concerning women: the National Council for Women (NCW), a para-state entity established in 2000, answerable to the Prime Minister, and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM), established in 1988. These organisations were a hybrid between a QUANGO (Quasi-non-governmental organisation) and a GONGO (government-organised non-governmental organisation) (Fowler 1997). Institutionally, they typify Fowler's definition of a QUANGO, namely, a para-state body set up by government as an NGO, often to enable better conditions of service or create political distance. They enjoy the status of autonomous organisations and are neither considered part of the executive arm of the government nor are accountable to any governmental ministry. They have their own budgets, board and internal governance structure. However, in terms of function, the national women's machineries serve as GONGOs, namely they are used to capture or redirect non-profit funds allocated by the official aid system. Women affiliated to the national women's machineries tended to be able to directly exert influence on the policymaking process because of their proximity to the political will of the ruling regime.

However, the NCW had a record of appropriating feminist voice without crediting the feminist activism that had lobbied for change for decades. For example, in the case of the nationality law, despite many years of lobbying by women's NGOs and feminist activists for the change, when parliament discussed the ministerial decree, MPs made no mention of the role of civil activism in bringing it to the fore. Rather, one MP after another stood up to thank the First Lady for her benevolence towards Egyptian women.

Authoritarian regimes often instrumentalise bestowing more rights upon women both: to appear as benevolent patrons who change policy in response to their recognition of the people's needs; and to give the international community the image that they are committed to democracy. There were instances in which the NCW did collaborate with women's NGOs and coalitions, however, its ability to mobilise a constituency of supporters beyond people close to the ruling regime was stymied. It neither had a grassroots base (i.e. among ordinary women and men) nor did it have the support of feminists, NGOs, coalitions and other non-state actors. The reasons were: it was too close to the regime to be perceived as enjoying autonomy; its governance structures were highly elitist and exclusionary, almost to the point of being handpicked by the First Lady; and it appropriated feminist struggle by reaping the fruits of policy changes which it did not exclusively sow. Tragically, its greatest asset - having the regime's ear for policy influence and political leverage via the First Lady's leadership - became its greatest curse after the Egyptian revolution of 2011, a theme we will return to later.

2.4 Feminist voices, NGOs and coalitions

In Egypt, during the Mubarak era, feminist voice was expressed by a small group of women activists who tended to come from a professional background and engaged through NGO channels. The choice of NGOs as the medium through which to engage was informed by a number of important political dynamics: the heavy-handed security co-option and/or repression of political parties resulting in the need to find other platforms for engaging politically in covert ways; the need to have a legal identity in order to avoid the wrath of the security apparatus since collective action without the permit of the government was by and large prohibited; the increasing salience of the gender and development paradigm and the possibilities it opened for thinking about gender and social change.

The formation of NGOs committed to gender and social justice issues as well as community development and advocacy was a positive redirection of feminist energies that may have

otherwise been quelled due to the political environment. The NGO-isation of feminist activism, however, also had its negative ripple effects because of its reliance on and competition over foreign funding. Firstly, it generated the 'boutique phenomenon' women responding to the presence of foreign funding by setting up their own income generating enterprises cloaked as non-profit activism and secondly, competition over scarce resources made it more difficult for individual leaders and entities to work together for the achievement of a common goal, or mobilise ranks for movement building.

Towards the mid-2000s, the formation of partnerships and initiatives involving several actors became popular in feminist discourse and gender and development work. This contributed to the emergence of campaigns, networks, and coalitions though they fell short of a movement. This is not to suggest that they spontaneously sprouted, feminist leaders, NGO practitioners and activists had gained extensive experience in mobilising collectively throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. The FGM Coalition was an example of the emergence of a collective body bringing together diverse actors around a common agenda: a socially sensitive approach for addressing female genital mutilation. For many of the actors involved, such an experience provided a repertoire of contacts, and organisational experience in participatory forms of decision-making and consensus-building processes. Other successful experiences included the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women) Coalition, which though it went through spurts of activism and dormancy, was able to create a platform of influence and successful mobilisation (Tadros 2010b).

In terms of strategies of engagement and agenda-setting, the nature of civil society activism around gender equality in Mubarak's latter years had a number of general characteristics:

- Feminist inspired forms of activism had, during Mubarak's era, accumulated extensive experience in policy engagement but were very thin on building or sustaining a constituency, a corps or group of supporters on whose behalf they could make claims of representation. Many activists and organisations were active in launching advocacy campaigns to challenge gender-discriminatory practices such as sexual harassment, domestic violence and a discriminatory nationality law. While they lacked a significant constituency to champion their causes, they were often successful in ensuring that their voices were present in the media and succeeded in highlighting issues for debate amongst the public.

- Feminist voice in the contemporary Egyptian context has generally focused on campaigning for strategic gender interests, 'those involving claims to transform social relations in order to enhance women's position and to secure a more lasting repositioning of women within the gender order and within society at large' (Molyneux 2003: 153). Examples include feminist critiques of gender stereotypes in education and the media. However, in practice, women workers and civil servants have organised around practical gender interests, 'those based on the satisfaction of needs arising from women's placement within the sexual division of labour' (2003: 153). Rowbotham argues that there is a need to recognise that engaging with women's autonomy and gender relations cannot be abstracted from material circumstances (1992: 306). This reflects the dilemma facing feminists voicing a feminist agenda: intellectually, they are engaged with gender in relation to practical issues, however, in practice, the necessary links with a constituency that can lead on the advocacy campaigns and research work are absent. This disconnect between feminist activists and the wider female constituency is partly due to: limitations on freedom of association (though not after the demise of Mubarak), inexperience in engaging grassroots communities, and the elitist background of some of the activists.

- Within feminist inspired organisations, divisions have been around some ideological rifts but also clique groupings. Ideological rifts emerged between secular feminists

who refused to adopt a religious framework and women activists working through NGOs who increasingly embraced a more conciliatory approach towards integrating 'progressive' religious discourses in their work. The cliques relate to individuals coalescing into groups based on political orientations (Nasserite, liberal, leftist) and personality clashes. These demarcations are fluid, however, they have often had bearings on the ability of different groups to work together to build a united front with a singular voice in relation to the government, the internal opposition or transnational spaces. While diversity is desirable, competing leaderships, different banners for organising and internal disputes undermine the prospects of leveraging the power of the collective when it is needed.

As one feminist, Dr Magda Adly of El Nadim Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture astutely pointed out, it was easier for various actors committed to gender equality to work together for a short period of time on a specific issue through, for example, a campaign that was time-bound than it was to work in a sustained manner towards movement-building that is internally cohesive and bound together by an overarching common cause. Nevertheless, activists committed to gender equality were able to work together through various networks and coalitions. Successful coalitions such as the FGM Coalition in the 1990s and the CEDAW Coalition, which is over ten years old, provided participants with an opportunity to build repertoires among themselves.

Repertoires comprise relations and collaborations built across different individuals and groups through experience in working together on campaigns and coalitional work. It is worth noting for example, that following the Egyptian revolution, new coalitions that emerged such as the Revolutionary Women's Coalition included many members that had worked together under the Network of Women's Rights Organisations and the CEDAW coalition. Hence, while fragmented, these expressions of collective action were important in generating repertoires that enabled individuals and groups to be responsive to political opportunity and necessity and coalesce around common causes and pursue collective action. As will be shown below, the collective front forged after the 25 January revolution was too weak to enable women's rights supporters to leverage any influence on the interim government or authorities in power. However, the intensity of the backlash against women's rights eventually allowed them to mobilise with greater collective strength against the Morsi regime.

2.5 The Muslim Brotherhood and the Muslim Sisters

Islamist movements have been some of the most important actors who have mobilised around gender issues, and the Muslim Brotherhood has been by far the most central actor from within these movements. Muslim Brotherhood mobilisation during Mubarak's rule occurred at many levels: internationally at conferences against for example the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) document and CEDAW, nationally through parliament against proposed legislation, and sometimes locally by pressing for the rights of women wearing the face veil on university campuses.

 The competition between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian government (as well as the ruling National Democratic Party) to show who is more committed to Islam added another layer of complexity to interpreting the increasing Islamisation of public life in Egypt during the past three decades

During Mubarak's reign, women belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood had an inverse relationship to the ruling regime on gender issues through feminist forms of activism. They had a low profile at the policy level but were extremely active at the grassroots level via the various Islamist networks of welfare provision and religious education. In one sense, the Muslim Sisters have remained true to the vision of Hassan el Banna, founder of the Muslim

Brotherhood, that they would play an important role in *da'wa* (proselytisation). Shortly following Hassan el Banna's establishment of the first branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Ismailiya in 1928, he established a club, a mosque, and a school for boys followed by a school for girls named '*Umahat al Mo'meneen*' (the mothers of believers). The school was purposed with teaching the wives, daughters and female relatives of the Muslim Brotherhood, combining Islamic teaching with subjects that are seen to be pertinent to women's domestic role (Khayal and El Gohary 1993: 231-2 cited in Tadros 2012). Hassan el Banna envisioned a role for the Muslim Sisters that would extend beyond the classroom and encompass *da'wa* among women in the households of Muslim Brotherhood members and society more widely.

In 1944, a new structure was instituted for the management of the Muslim Sisters, which blocked any possibility of women assuming leadership positions. The leader of the division would be a man, so too his deputy and one woman would serve as the liaison between the leader and the women members. Unlike other divisions which had rank and file, the Muslim Sisters did not in that organisational structure have committees, taskforces, or any other organisational mechanism for delegating responsibilities and authorities. In interviews with the Muslim Sisters in the mid-2000s, they explained that an autonomous Muslim Sisterhood was unnecessary because there is one singular leadership, that of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is all-encompassing for all members, be it women or men. They also pointed out that the lack of visibility of the Muslim Sisters in the formal leadership structures within the Muslim Brotherhood (such as the Guidance Bureau and the Shura Council) was a tactical measure to protect the women from the wrath of the security apparatus (in view of the frequent governmental crackdowns on leaders in the movement).

However, the Muslim Sisters have been very active in international spaces mobilising through transnational advocacy. Many members of the Muslim Sisters hold leadership positions in the International Islamic Committee for Woman and Child (IIC) as one of the committees of the International Islamic Council for Da'wa and Relief[3] headed by the Grand Imam Sheikh of Al-Azhar, one of Sunni Islam's most renowned institutions of Islamic learning globally.[4] Through the IIC, the Muslim Sisters have been active on two fronts: lobbying at international events to present the Muslim perspective on proposed agendas, and campaigning against the use of international women's treaties as the basis for reforming national family legislation in Egypt and other Muslim majority countries.

During Mubarak's term in Egypt, protests, marches and other forms of mobilisation by the Muslim Sisters has been rare (see Tadros 2013 for further information). By far the largest forms of organised public protest initiated by women during this time have been initiated by women workers. Women workers mobilised around livelihood issues such as poor wages and delays or cancellations in bonuses and fringe benefits (that have become a substitute for raising salaries). These women did not organise through formal trade unions which tend to be government-controlled and often take a position against workers' rights. Neither have they organised as women, but instead as fellow workers and employees.

Women's mobilisation took place at particular localities: for instance, a particular factory at risk of shedding labour as a consequence of privatisation, or a public-owned enterprise failing to give workers their wages for months on end. In response to the increasing deprivation and fall in the standard of living, women were among the central actors who organised protests, sit-ins and appeals for their rights. They have assumed leadership positions, earned through the support of both men and women, to speak out against injustices and negotiate with the ruling powers over the terms of any compromises reached.

---

3   The Council comprises 85 Islamic organisations from around the world.
4   For more information on the ICC, visit their website on http://iicwc.org/lagna/iicwc/iicwc.php?id=476

In doing so, they have broken many social taboos regarding the appropriate spaces for women to occupy as well as socially prescribed curfews on when to be at home, by, for example, sleeping in tents on the streets and sleeping in factories during sit-ins.

3 The 25 January revolution: From Mubarak to El Mosheer (Field Marshall Tantawy)

3.1 Broader context

After 18 days of sustained mass protest, President Mubarak was ousted and the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), representing the army, took over the country. The move was initially welcomed by the political actors who had mobilised for the removal of Mubarak, as an interim measure until a new constitution, parliamentary and presidential elections could be held. The period in which the SCAF ruled was a highly turbulent one in which the country faced new and accumulated political, economic and social threats.

Politically, an entente was forged between the SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood (Tadros 2012). In return for SCAF creating an enabling environment for the Muslim Brotherhood to ascend to political power, the latter would ensure political acquiescence to SCAF's leadership and counter any resistance. In effect, the Brotherhood would control the crowds to minimise dissent. The exclusion of key stakeholders from the political entente, such as the youth revolutionary forces and other political parties, generated deep hostility, which then escalated into political violence.

This phase was also characterised by the relaxation of the shackles of the security apparatus' regulation of every aspect of public life, and against the backdrop of the downfall of a thirty year old regime, there was a sense of political fluidity that is characteristic of revolutionary phases where political forces seek to secure a piece of the new pie that is being divided. Salafis who had adopted a stance of non-engagement in political affairs during Mubarak's era flourished after the revolution. Some groups from within the Salafi movement chose to enter the political arena, while others chose not to, but sought to increase their da'wa activities. The cumulative impact of the burgeoning of several different Islamist groups was felt on the ground well before they assumed formal powers through parliament or the presidency.

3.2 Ejecting women from the picture

The Egyptian Revolution, instigated on 25 January 2011 saw the participation and leadership of women in a bid to oust Mubarak from power and demand 'freedom, justice and dignity' for all. At the beginning many of the women revolutionaries were clearly taking a gender-blind approach, delegating gender issues to 'later' or they refused to acknowledge them at all. There were exceptions but few chose to speak out. When a number of women were exposed to virginity tests on 8 March 2011, the initial reaction of one part of the feminist movement was to deny it so as not to besmirch the image of the army. It is only thanks to the insistence of others that the issue was brought to the fore, and Amnesty International then responded to local protestations by exposing it internationally.

Many feminists, human rights activists and revolutionaries had raised expectations that women's agency would be recognised by the post-Mubarak state and society alike, through increased opportunities for leadership and more egalitarian attitudes towards citizenship rights for all, irrespective of gender.

The assumption was that the conspicuous role and activism of women in the revolution would be rewarded with recognition. Yet this did not happen. As with countries that have experienced regime changes, the link between participation and representation and recognition has rarely been an automatic one. This became very evident in the disjuncture between the size and scope of women's participation in the revolution compared to their representation within policy spaces later on. Not a single woman was included on the first committee delegated with the amendment of part of the constitution prior to the constitutional referendum of March 2011, despite the country having a large number of women constitutional experts, including Tahany el Gabaly, who at the time served as the Deputy Head of the Supreme Constitutional Court. In the first Constituent Assembly designated with developing Egypt's first post-revolutionary constitution, there were only six women out of one hundred members (in April 2012 the assembly was declared unconstitutional and dissolved due to technical irregularities in the application of the electoral law). There was a significant drop in women's parliamentary representation from 13 per cent in 2010 to 2 per cent in 2011 even though the number of women campaigning for office had doubled.

The reasons for excluding women from the centres of power were both ideological and political. Ideologically, both the SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood held deeply patriarchal values regarding leadership, defined in masculine terms. Further, there was an ideological commitment on the part of many Islamists to emphasise conservative gender roles as part and parcel of a broader political project to amplify Egypt's Islamic identity. Politically, the youth revolutionary movements that had instigated the uprising against Mubarak in the first place found themselves sidelined. A narrative of the hijack of the Egyptian revolution by SCAF and the Muslim Brothers began to be heard only a month after the ousting of Mubarak. Additionally, under the rubric of bringing down all that was associated with the Mubarak regime, there emerged in March 2011 a united front between the youth revolutionaries and the Islamists and others against policies that were associated with Suzanne Mubarak. For example, while there were deep disagreements over the electoral law, there was consensus that the quota for women should go. Opponents saw it as a tool deployed by the former regime to increase its dominance, spearheaded by the First Lady.

Another important political factor that directly contributed to a disconnect between women's activism and their representation was the competition over who should represent the post-Mubarak agenda for women's rights, and what its content should be. Some of this rivalry had its roots in personality clashes and membership in contending groups during Mubarak's era. The competition was between a number of leading feminists who have had strong associations with civil society in various roles. These divisions were over leadership and partly agenda and manifested themselves in the negotiations over what to do with the National Council for Women. There were those who preferred its complete demise and the birth of a new institution that did not have as much negative baggage. Some preferred leadership change while keeping the structure intact. Others opted for a complete overhaul of the structure of the institution, but fell short of calling for its liquidation.

Feminist scholarship suggests that the nature of women's collective action prior to regime change plays an important role in influencing the extent to which the processes and outcomes recognise gender equality (Waylen 1994; Viterna and Fallon 2008; Zulu 2000). Viterna and Fallon's study of four countries that have experienced regime change (South Africa, Argentina, Ghana and El Salvador) indicates that among the key factors that account for a positive outcome for integrating gender equality in new political orders are a cohesive coalition within the women's movement and a legacy of women's activism that legitimates present-day feminist demands (2008: 669; Tadros 2013).

Regrettably, this cohesion was missing at the time of the 2011 January revolution. A number of women's coalitions had formed after the revolution such as the Women Revolutionary

Coalition which essentially comprised of NGOs who had organised under different banners during Mubarak's era (membership was a mixture of members from the Egyptian Network for Women's Rights and the CEDAW Coalition). While the new coalition was effective in issuing policy statements (on the overall political situation and women's demands) and press releases (condemning women's rights violations), its representational power vis-à-vis women's collective actions was by and large limited.

The Egyptian Feminist Union, formed in 2011 to revive Hoda Sharawi's original organisation, sought to provide an umbrella for building consensus around a common set of demands for women post-revolution. The document which became known as the 'Women's Charter' had the endorsement of hundreds of thousands of signatures. However, the Union's mobilisation of support was vertical (smaller organisations in the governorates), it had limited horizontal support (from the other women's coalitions working in the policy arena). Hence, its delegation power was also quite limited.

The failure to act through a cohesive unified front had an impact on weakening the legitimacy of the women's coalitions' demands, first because there was no consensus on the demands, and second, because their fragmented nature undermined their political clout.

This is in stark contrast to the Muslim Sisters whose unified ranks enabled them to present counter-coalitions of influence on women's rights. Following the Egyptian revolution, the Muslim Sisters were able to seize the newly opened political spaces to engage fully in the social, political and economic life of the nation. They had extensive and expansive skills in outreach and constituency building established through years of welfare provision through charitable organisations and through building bridges with women in universities and educational institutes. In 2011, against the backdrop of a new political climate allowing them to engage in formal political spaces, the Muslim Sisters played an instrumental role in transforming the social base into a political constituency. For example, each year on Mother's Day, every Egyptian province celebrates a woman deemed to be a "model mother". Nehad Abou el Qomsan director of the Centre for Egyptian Women's Rights, a non-governmental association, noted that in her governorate, Giza, women activists from the Freedom and Justice Party (the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm) paid a visit to this model mother, gave her a Quran, and invited her to become a member of the party.[5]

However, the disjuncture between their newly emancipated roles as citizens and their internal position within the Muslim Brotherhood persisted, and became more conspicuous after the Egyptian revolution. The invisibility of the Muslim Sisters within the formal decision-making apparatus of the Muslim Brotherhood has reflected a lack of true recognition of their status, and contribution. Contrary to some scholars' expectations that once the shackles of Mubarak's authoritarian rule were removed, the Muslim Sisters would gain their rightful place within the Muslim Brothers' internal hierarchy, this did not materialise. There are no women members in the Shura Council of the Muslim Brotherhood and no women members in the Guidance Bureau. Some young women members, who felt empowered by the experience of participating in the Egyptian revolution and realised afterwards that there were few opportunities of influence within the Brotherhood, felt compelled to leave. While the Brotherhood's power centres remained impenetrable for women, there were more spaces for their participation and assumption of formal leadership roles in the Freedom and Justice Party – as founders and as members on several committees.

The Muslim Sisters played a central role in the success of the Muslim Brotherhood's ascendency to political power through the parliamentary elections of 2011/2012. As the electoral law did not specify where women should be placed on the party list, it is not surprising that the Muslim Sisters hardly featured at the top of the lists although this was the

---

[5]   Interview with Nehad Abou el Komsan, Cairo, March 2012.

same with most of the other political parties, including some of the non-Islamist parties that pride themselves on a commitment to gender equality. However, some of the Muslim Sisters did manage to win a seat in parliament. In line with the profile of the Muslim Sisters' in leadership positions, they were all highly educated, occupying white collar professional positions, middle-aged or older, and with decades' experience in social work. One common characteristic in their profiles is that one way or another, they were connected to the work of the IIC and they championed its agenda in their new role as parliamentarians. Members of the Muslim Sisters advocated the decriminalising of female genital mutilation, the removal of women's arbitrary right to divorce through khul' and the reduction of the minimum age of marriage. The suspicions held by many non-Islamist feminists that the Muslim Sisters would seek to revoke the modicum of rights that were secured through women's century long mobilisation for emancipation proved to be well-founded.

Beyond the policy-level, the situation with respect to women's rights on the ground was a complex one. In focus groups undertaken in May 2012, when women and men were asked to comment on the impact of the revolution on their lives, one of the most positive factors making the top of the list was their sense of freedom. One woman commented that before the revolution, she was interested in politics but every time she talked openly people used to silence her or she would end up being arrested by the state security investigations apparatus. After the revolution, she pointed out, she is able to talk openly about politics with whomever she wished - even loudly in the market - without fearing that an informant would be at her heel. Another important change reported in the focus groups with the young women in particular, was a sense of claimed voice. This was expressed in different ways: that they now had opinions to make about issues and that they engaged in debates with their families and friends about the events in the country. This sense of empowerment through voice also manifested itself in the conversations about exercising choice: choosing their president and expressing what they want and what they oppose.

Almost all the women in the focus groups said they had voted in the parliamentary elections, fewer said they had voted in the first round of the presidential elections. Most participants were very proud to point out that it was their first time ever to vote. One working woman made a point about how the new political climate encouraged her to engage in formal politics in ways that she had not done before. She pointed out that after the revolution of January 2011, for the first time ever she voted in her syndicate and participated in the parliamentary and presidential elections. However, this high level of political participation should not be equated with more rights. Decisions affecting rural non-working women's choices seemed highly dubious. When asked how they chose their candidate, many said that they chose according to what everyone else was choosing, or that they would go to the voting polling station and wait until someone told them who to pick! It was unclear whether they were promised any reward for their voting by the person at the voting station, however, others, for example in Minya spoke about how, during the parliamentary elections, the Sunniyeen (a broad term referring to the Islamists) distributed food (including fave beans, lentils, and honey) and money and told them to vote for the Freedom and Justice Party. In some cases, people knew the signs they voted for (al mizan, computer, etc) but did not know the name of the candidate!

Since the 25 January revolution the two greatest issues that women have consistently complained about as life changing are security laxity and a decline in the economy. Women fear for their personal safety and that of their family members due to the unchecked violence of thugs, organised gangs, thieves, and other actors. People perceive the thugs as being responsible for the increased incidence of muggings, harassments and violent assaults after the revolution. Many of the focus group members had personal stories to recount on their exposure (or that of members of their family) to theft and/or increased sexual harassment.

While the increased lack of personal safety was identified as threatening to all people - women, children and men- there were clear gendered dimensions to it. First, in reaction to this state of fear, families often imposed new restrictions on girls' and women's mobility but found it more difficult to do the same for male youth. Second, many women argued that while they could try to limit their own mobility, this was impossible for their husbands whose livelihoods required them to work in the late hours of the night or commute long distances. Third, as everyone imposed new cautionary measures in response to the perceived insecurity, this caused severe burdens on women's time. They now had to undertake additional chores such as taking their children to school and bringing them back (prior to the revolution they would let them go with their friends if they lived nearby), as well as - in cases when their children were taking tutorials in the evening - wait for several hours until they had finished in order to take them home.

In all the focus groups, participants highlighted the increased prevalence of sexual harassment. Many pointed out that sexual harassment was manifest in the streets well before the revolution and had been part of people's daily lived experiences, however, it had increased in both intensity and frequency. For example, in terms of the degree of sexual harassment, some suggest that there is greater boldness on the part of those who harass on the street, in terms of resorting to physical contact. While all women shared a sense of increased vulnerability to harassment, Christian women said they were not only harassed on account of being women but also on account of their religion. This became particularly manifest in the kind of slurs that accompanied the harassment, for example referring to them as 'blue boned'.[6]

The overall security situation was astutely summarised by one young person in Alexandria who noted that while the Egyptian people had broken the fear barrier through the revolution yet they were now too scared to be on their own streets.

Economically, the collapse of tourism, the closure of factories and businesses, the withdrawal of investment, the security situation and other macro-crises have taken their toll on Egyptian women and their families. There is increased unemployment and underemployment and in some instances a drop in salaries. In other instances, there has been a marginal increase in public servants' salaries but it has been far less than the increase in the rate of inflation. Increases in food and basic commodities prices has led to a drop in living standards and depleted women's survival strategies, i.e. having to sell assets such as personal jewellery and borrow in order to make ends meet. The association between the decline in economic wellbeing and the revolution was so intense in some focus groups that people said they wished to go back to the days of Mubarak. NGO workers who facilitated the focus groups said they were struck by the extent to which not only the poor but also the middle class had been negatively affected by the economic downfall. This was manifest in the way they talked openly about depriving their families of food and clothing, selling their gold and borrowing. Socially, it would have been seen as undignified for middle-class women to admit to this, since it was the poor who resorted to such strategies.

In many focus groups, women told of their exposure to a post-revolution talk that was increasingly antagonistic towards women. People in the street said that Mubarak's downfall was due to his wife's interference in the running of the country. The narrative may have varied, but many men said gloatingly that now that Mubarak is out, 'Suzanne's laws' will be revoked. It was not only the laws that they were referring to, but the whole notion of promoting women's equality, which they saw as imposed from above.

---

[6]   One of the slurs used against Copts, associated with practices originating in the Abbasiyyid period during which they wore heavy crosses, leading to the emergence of bluish-purple patches on the backbone in the neck area.

There was much confusion over what the rise of the Islamists meant in terms of women's situation. Three issues were at the centre of the debate: women's attire, education and work. On women's attire, the prevailing perception was that the Salafis would push for women to wear the niqab, while the Muslim Brotherhood would press for all to veil, but not necessarily don the face veil. In most focus groups, this was based on perception. In two focus groups, women spoke of being subjected to intense pressure to veil on the streets. On the question of education, there was again the perception that the Salafis would urge that girls stay at home and discourage them from pursuing education beyond the basics. This was met with strong resistance from participants who said that their girls' education was non-negotiable.

On perceptions of the Islamists' views on women's work, there was more confusion and controversy. While some argued that both the Salafis and the Muslim Brotherhood will discourage women's work, some said only the former will. Some argued that even if they want to, they would not be able to enforce a prohibition on women's work because they would not be able to compensate women's earnings. Others argued that if the Islamists were to secure a living for women at home, this would be far better for women who would no longer have to be exposed to so much hardship. Others argued that even if the Islamists were able to pay them their salaries in full, they would still resist staying at home because they do not only work to earn a living. One member of the Salafi movement said that if women were to stay at home, the overcrowding, noise and transport problems would all be solved.

4 From El Mosheer [Tantawy] to Morsi

4.1 Broader context

The political ascendency of President Morsi to power was met with celebration by the Islamist factions and with cautious optimism on the part of many belonging to various non-Islamist social and political forces, and strong opposition among others. Prior to Morsi coming to power, an informal entente was established between a number of leading non-Islamist political forces and the Muslim Brotherhood, known as the Fairmont Agreement. The Agreement spelt out that in return for the revolutionary forces, political parties and some leading intellectuals' endorsement of Morsi's candidacy against Ahmed Shafik, the Brothers would commit to power sharing, should they come to office. While some political and social forces remained stout opponents of the Muslim Brotherhood coming to power, there was a great deal of pressure on the new regime to deliver on many of its ambitious political, economic and social policies, particularly those set out in the 100 day programme of action which was primarily focused on reinstating security for citizens, cleaning up the cities and improving the economic situation.

4.2 The gender agenda with the new conditionalities

All eyes were looking to the new Muslim Brotherhood regime to show that its agenda was commensurate with human rights on two principle fronts: gender equality and the rights of religious minorities, the largest of which were the Copts who comprise roughly ten per cent of the population. In other words, of all the proxies for democratic governance, the Brothers were under particular pressure to show that women's rights would be respected, and if they were not enhanced, then at least they would not experience a regression. The two principle foci around which gender issues were prioritised at the beginning of Morsi's reign were: (i) the constitution and, (ii) an end to the ever-widening phenomenon of gender-based violence

in public spaces. These were the two gender issues which generated the most mobilisation and which merit some reflection here and which had lingered on from SCAF's rule.

The first issue, the constitution, was of critical importance to the predicament of women's rights and entitlements. One of the conditions agreed to in the Fairmont Agreement was that if they come to power, the Muslim Brotherhood would endorse a constitution whose composition was premised on inclusive representation of all the different political forces rather than predominantly the party in power, and whose decisions were arrived at through a consensus making process rather than majoritarian vote. After Morsi came to power, the different political forces arrived at an agreement whereby the Islamists would take 50 per cent of the 100 seat Constituent Assembly and the non-Islamist political forces the other 50 per cent. This seemed on the surface as a compromise for all. Ghozlan, a member of the Guidance Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood and the media spokesperson for the movement argued that since the Islamists occupied 77 per cent of the seats in parliament, they had already given way by having a lower percentage of the Constituent Assembly. The non-Islamists argued that they had sacrificed the notion of a rainbow representation, whereby equal weight is given to all different political forces, rather than this polarised framework. Another agreement that they had reached was that both sides would need to approve of the persons proposed by the other. Since the majority in parliament were Islamists, they effectively had more power to veto candidates they were wary of than the non-Islamist political forces had.

The representation of women in the Constituent Assembly was problematic on two fronts: descriptive and substantive. From a descriptive point of view, there were seven women in the Constituent Assembly, representing only 7 per cent of the total membership. From a substantive point of view, i.e. in terms of advancing women's interests, the situation was significantly worse. Other than Manal el Teeby, none of the women members had a record of championing women's rights. The position of the women representatives from the Muslim Brotherhood was to espouse the agenda that they had championed and lobbied in national and international fora for years: a rejection of any articles that challenge men's *qawama*[7] and that remotely relate to the rights enshrined in CEDAW. However, the Muslim Sisters also pointed to the introduction of a new clause recognising the state's commitment to providing support for female-headed households and the neediest as an indicator of the new regime's commitment to women's rights. In fact, the new parliament had already issued a law in May 2012 recognising female-headed households' rights to medical benefits.[8]

Undoubtedly the recognition of the welfare needs of vulnerable women is a positive addition, however its acceptance by the Muslim Sisters lies in the fact that it does not challenge power relations between men and women and in effect, its wording reeks of a paternalistic state engaging with the vulnerable through a needs-based rather than rights-based framework.

Various (non-Islamist) actors all concurred with the Muslim Sisters' championing of the insertion of a conditionality on women's rights within the constitution, and were the most vehement opponents of the insertion of any article that would expand women's rights in relation to bodily integrity. They opposed the introduction of an article setting a minimum age of marriage for women as well as any constitutional clause that would condemn all forms of violence against women, arguing that both could be potentially tackled through legislation and did not have to be mentioned in the constitution. On other articles such as on human and sex trafficking, the Islamist lobby by and large, denied their prevalence in Egyptian society. This refusal to acknowledge such social phenomena was extremely perplexing since the

---

[7]   The meaning of qawama is hotly debated in Islamic jurisprudence and has been the topic of diverse interpretations. Among the many meanings of the word are: protection, authority, leadership.
[8]   For further details on the law that was promulgated in parliament, see http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=30028

Brothers have strong grassroots links and are deeply embedded in the everyday lives of Egyptians across all classes, in particular the poor. They would have seen first-hand the way in which multiple forms of oppression, including those of gender, work against their followers and beneficiaries.

At the heart of the Constitutional Assembly's dispute over women's rights was an addendum to the article that recognised women's rights. The proposed new article made such rights conditional upon their conformity to the Sharia. The Islamist lobby, in particular the Muslim Sisters, assured sceptics that the insertion of this qualifier was simply to acknowledge that in matters such as inheritance and divorce, equality between men and women is not absolute. However, many interpreted this qualifier as intended to deny women all kinds of rights, including those associated with leadership, under the pretext that women cannot rule over men.

In effect the level of mistrust towards the Islamists and especially the Salafis was so deep that their opponents assumed a backstopping role with respect to women's rights. They wanted to have enshrined in the constitution as many rights as possible for women in order to make it more difficult to revoke them later, and to eliminate as many loopholes (such as the Sharia qualifier) as possible in order to prevent a legal backlash against women's rights.

Feminist voices, though marginal, were seeking to build alliances from among the non-Islamist forces to remove the qualifier to women's rights and were successful. Rather than just removing the qualifier however, the Constituent Assembly removed the article altogether so as to appease the opponents as well as the Salafis. However, if feminists had won the battle with the qualifier, they had lost the war. They were outmanoeuvred by a last minute insertion of a clause that effectively empowered the Islamist constituency to redress all existing rights by introducing new qualifiers affiliated to Islamic jurisprudence. Article 219 was purposely kept at the tail of the constitution in order to deflect attention from it, it stated: 'The principles of Islamic Sharia include general evidence, foundational rules, rules of jurisprudence, and credible sources accepted in Sunni doctrines and by the larger community'. It was proposed by the Salafis, and supported by various Islamist movements and it was vehemently opposed by many representatives in the Constituent Assembly who had thought that there was agreement to drop it. Yet on the very last night, there was a majority vote by the Islamists in its favour, and it was passed.

In effect, it meant that should conservative Islamist political parties assume a dominant presence in parliament (which they did) they could choose the most regressive interpretations in Islamic jurisprudence and base legislation upon them. In view of the fact that Al-Azhar has adopted a consistently reactionary stance on women's rights, such legislation would get its blessing.

The constitution fell short of fulfilling the aspirations of women activists who wanted to see an expansion of women's rights as part of a broader post-Mubarak emancipatory agenda for the Egyptian people. Yet not only did it fail that litmus test, but when it came to women's rights, it effectively represented a regression from the modicum of rights that they had been inscribed under the previous constitution of 1971 (even if those rights were not always implemented). This sentiment exceeded disappointment and spilt into feelings of being cheated and was sufficiently strong to catalyse women activists from different backgrounds: development NGOs, feminist NGOs, political parties and non-politicised citizens to join ranks at critical instances to make a unified stance demanding their rights.

One of the most powerful of such instances was on International Women's Day on 8 March 2012 when women activists created strong alliances with youth revolutionary parties and non-Islamist political parties joining ranks to lead a march calling upon the regime to remember women's rights. The numbers excelled any other march that women's

organisations had ever organised on International Women's Day in Egypt, with the participation of multiple constituencies and groups. It is to be contrasted for example, with the march that women activists had organised the previous year, which had not benefited from this kind of unifying of women's advocates ranks or from alliance building with other political and social actors.

Other than the Egyptian constitution, the other main issue that elicited large scale collective mobilisation was on gender-based violence in public spaces, which took two forms: individual/collective acts of socially-motivated sexual harassment and politically motivated acts of sexual assault.

President Morsi had promised that in his first 100 days in office, his government would strive to improve security for citizens, create economic opportunities, and address the waste disposal problem. There did not seem to be an improvement on the streets with respect to exposure to daily incidents of socially motivated harassment. Politically motivated sexual harassment, according to Farah Shash, a psychologist with El Nadim Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, had got worse. While she conceded that incidents of politically motivated sexual assault were documented during the rule of the SCAF, such incidents increased in frequency and severity when the Muslim Brotherhood took over.

The reasons why some forms of sexual assault are believed to be politically motivated is because: (i) they happen in squares and public spaces associated with protests; (ii) they take place in these spaces during times when protests and demonstrations are held; (iii) the assaulted are disproportionately activists, whether women or men (notwithstanding the assault on non-politically active citizens as well); (iv) sexual violence is used in conjunction with other forms of violence; (v) sexual violence is not enacted on a one-to-one basis but through a group of men, simultaneously assaulting the woman; and (vi) the sexual assault does not happen in a passing moment, but is sustained over a period of time. A counter argument would be that similar incidents of sexual assault also occur in crowded spaces such as at *moulids*,[9] major football games and even concerts. While there are many similarities, there are differences as well. These differences lie in the disproportionate targeting of women activists and in the level of brutal violence used to incur harm on the victim (i.e. rape through sharp objects) and in the targeting of protest spaces in the same spots (for example in the case of Tahrir Square, the area around Hardees was renowned to be a site of repeated assaults) which gives the impression that these are pre-orchestrated and calculated.

While some initiatives such as Harassmap were established before the Egyptian revolution, the growing epidemic of socially and politically motivated sexual assault gave birth to new initiatives that sought to counter it, many of the initiatives emerging in the period between June-December 2012. The emerging initiatives were led by youth people, *informal, organic* and *responsive* to the pressing phenomenon on the ground. The informality of the activists leading on these initiatives can be distinguished from the institutionalised social actors that were registered as NGOs and civil companies. This came from their freedom and fluidity but it also made access to foreign funding prohibitive. The activists' organic nature was exceptional in that while some did come from a professional background, others didn't. What brought them together was a common struggle to make streets and squares safe for women. Their responsiveness was not only meaningful in terms of the rapidity of their organisation and mobilisation, but the kind of responsiveness they displayed. These initiatives were the offspring of the revolution and a political culture at the heart of which was sustained activism through the streets in conjunction with social and virtual media. There are many important lessons to be learnt here for policymakers, researchers, international donors and

---

9   Festivities in celebration of the birth of the Prophet Mohamed.

development practitioners about alternative discourses on gender justice, alternative strategies of influence and outreach and different ways of sustaining collective action.

Most of these informal youth-based initiatives working on gender-based violence in public spaces sought to put pressure on the Morsi government from below by exposing the scale and intensity of women's exposure to assault, and by holding them to account for the failure to protect. While there was a singular commitment to defending women's rights to unhindered access to the streets on the part of these initiatives, their proponents held differing positions on how to engage the Morsi regime. Some adopted a position of non-entanglement in the power struggle between Morsi and his opponents, preferring to focus exclusively on addressing gender-based violence. Others believed that the struggle to address gender-based violence was part of the broader struggle to resist the regime in place whose legitimacy was called into question.

The Morsi regime's stance on gender-based violence in general and harassment in particular only served to add fuel to the fire. At the 57th session of the CSW in March 2013, the commission issued a set of 'agreed conclusions' on the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls which reiterated many of the principles highlighted in CEDAW and reinforced the message regarding a zero tolerance policy towards both private and public forms of gender-based violence. This was a golden opportunity for the Morsi-led government to show the international community that an Islamist regime recognises and endorses women's bodily integrity. Instead, the Muslim Brotherhood issued a statement condemning the Agreed Conclusions on account of their incompatibility with the specificity of the needs of Muslim women and their destruction of family values. This was the same stance that Pakinam el Sharkawy, the Presidential advisor took to the CSW. In her speech Pakinam also used the 'cultural specificity' argument, stating that violence against women should be combatted based on a 'balance between the values shared by humanity, and the cultural and social particularities of countries and peoples' (Ayed in AWID 2013).

The political cost for the Muslim Brotherhood regime in terms of loss of public face nationally and internationally was immense for many reasons. First, they had continuously stressed that they did not run the show in government, yet, the fact that the Presidential advisor, Pakinam Sharkawy, went to the CSW to champion the Brotherhood's stance on gender-based violence exposed that they held the real policymaking power. Second, the Muslim Brotherhood's transnational alliances in the CSW did not seem strong enough to counter the transnational feminist mobilisation against them. If the Muslim Brotherhood were counting on their alliances with ultra-conservative right wing Christian religious groups to take their side and defend them, they did not receive the support they were hoping for. The foreign press and international feminist groups blasted the Muslim Brotherhood for their stance and made them the object of negative public opinion.

Third, there was covert dissent from within the official Egyptian delegation. If Pakinam took the role of defending the government (as official delegates are supposed to), Mervat Tallawy, Head of the National Council for Women, took the opposite position. Informants from Egyptian civil society who attended the CSW said that Tallawy's open criticism of the Egyptian government's policies towards women and her exposure of the extent to which women's rights were threatened was received sympathetically. Besides, Tallawy, in view of her former role in the Foreign Ministry, had strong allies in the upper echelons of the UN apparatus and the CSW, who looked favourably to her role as defender of women's rights from within the Egyptian government. In effect this international space was one where she could exude more political influence than Pakinam Sharkawy, the Muslim Brotherhood's representative. The international damage to the Brotherhood's image was considered sufficiently embarrassing as to merit presidential intervention, as will be discussed below.

The 'Brotherhoodisation' of state policy vis-à-vis gender issues was evident in a two-pronged strategy adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood. The first was to create a select corps of women whose agenda was congruent with that of the Muslim Brotherhood, even if they were not organisationally part of the movement. These women were to lead in all policy spaces by basically playing political musical chairs. In effect what we were observing was the substitution of the First Lady's entourage under Mubarak with the Muslim Brotherhood's female corps and other women with Islamist sympathies. For example, Omaima Kamel was a parliamentary candidate, a member of the constituent assembly delegated with the responsibility of drawing up the constitution, and a presidential aide to President Morsi.

The second policy was to co-opt one of the institutions close to the state so that it would be compliant with the Brotherhood's political agenda. Putting such a strategy in place was evident shortly after the CSW when President Morsi announced a new initiative at a conference in the Presidential palace, committed to elevating the position of Egyptian women. In that conference, President Morsi announced that the government plan of action to enhance the situation of Egyptian women would be led by the Centre for Sociological and Criminological Studies. Little of his speech tackled women's issues per se, with its content focused mostly on launching an assault on his internal opponents against the background of increasing political violence against the Muslim Brotherhood and his rule.

The intention behind the conference was not only to save public face on women's issues, but also, to pull the carpet from beneath the feet of the National Council for Women as "the" key national institution delegated with addressing women's issues in Egypt, and which clearly was resistant to co-option. Mervat Tallawy who was invited to the conference, was absent on account of being "sick". In effect this was a move intended to replace one resistant institution that could not be co-opted with another one that was more amenable to yielding to the political will of those in power. What followed was a workshop to examine gender-based violence, with recommendations issued for the security apparatus on how to better handle assault in public spaces. Nothing else followed and the idea of a new action plan to enhance the status of Egyptian women was quietly buried, possibly because of a lack of genuine political commitment, but also because the government was forced to prioritise managing the growing internal dissent towards its rule.

The Islamisation of state policy was also felt on the ground, though women in the focus groups continued to talk about two prime preoccupations: economic downfall and personal safety and security (*al infelat al amny*). In the focus groups that were undertaken in March 2011, the fragmentation in society between women who endorsed the Islamists and those that didn't had become acute and was manifest in the complete disjuncture in the perceptions of reality that were conveyed in two competing narratives of life in the shadow of the Brothers. Women belonging to the Islamist movements praised the new regime and pointed to the everyday forms of dissent and protest that were instigated by citizens as evidence of the newly won freedoms enjoyed. They argued that this was a golden era for women who enjoyed the freedom to express themselves without being subject to the repressive apparatus of the Mubarak regime. This narrative was strikingly at odds with that captured in other focus groups where women mentioned being under increasing pressure to dress in more conservative clothing while on the street. In focus groups in Giza and Qena, women complained that in some mosques during the Friday sermon, men were being encouraged to take on second wives from among the Syrian refugee population in Egypt as a kind of social duty.

5 The 30 June revolution and beyond

If women were some of the biggest supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and actively contributed to their ascendency to power, they were also some of the most vehement opponents of the Brothers in the 30 June uprisings. Eventually, the threat to women's rights led to the emergence of a counter-coalition along feminist lines, whose identity and strength were manifest on the second anniversary of the Egyptian revolution when women entered Tahrir Square carrying huge banners and images all about women's rightful place in a new Egypt. Some of the worst acts of sexual violence were reported on that day.

Since images and accounts of women who were sexually assaulted in the mass demonstrations that took place in Tahrir Square on the anniversary of the 25 January revolution were widely circulated in the media, and became a public opinion issue, there were doubts whether women would dare join in the 30 June revolts, or whether their families would forbid them. While some women spoke of wanting to join and being prevented, others went out with their families in large numbers. The crowds that joined the 30 June uprising in 2013 were much larger than those that joined the 18 days of revolt in January 2011, and as a consequence, in terms of numbers, there were more women who participated in this second uprising. Women who had largely been absent from the 25 January revolution such as rural women, women in the provinces and Upper and Lower Egypt all participated on the 30 June. While women's rights did not represent the main driver behind their mobilisation, nonetheless, the slogan '*sawt al mar'a thawra mish awrah*' (a woman's voice is a revolution not a depravity) was also heard, in particular in urban squares in Cairo.

When on 3 July 2013 General Abdel Fattah el Sissi announced the ousting of President Morsi and the appointment of the Head of the Constitutional Court as the interim president, it was done in a public conference which was attended by figures who represented all the factions who had been politically marginalised during SCAF's and Morsi's rule. The representation from the National Salvation Front, the judiciary, Al-Azhar, the Coptic Orthodox Church, Tamarod, and the Salafi movement was intended to give the signal of a political settlement that was all-encompassing (the Muslim Brotherhood were invited to attend, but not surprisingly, declined). Sakina Fouad, a renowned non-Islamist writer was also present. It is believed that her representation stood for women, as she was later appointed Adly Mansour's (the interim President) Councillor for Women's Affairs.

While the descriptive representation of women in policy spaces remained poor, their substantive representative improved dramatically. The Constituent Assembly that was formed to arrive at a new constitution for Egypt included 5 women out of a 50 member body. However, all five women were strong advocates of women's equality and the constituency in favour of gender equality within the broader membership was greater than before, making it easier to form alliances and negotiate over exchanges of support. The Muslim Brotherhood were excluded from the Constituent Assembly, but not the Islamists, though their position had changed from being a majority to being a minority. The impact was to reduce the level of opposition to women's rights within the assembly, though the "unliberating" liberals sometimes served as major opponents, despite their "pro-women" rhetoric.

If we were to read the new constitution through a gender sensitive lens, women are conceivably some of its most notable winners. For the first time ever, the constitution stipulates that the state is committed to women holding public and senior management offices, to the appropriate representation of women in legislative bodies (thus endorsing the principle of affirmative action), and to women's appointment in judicial bodies and authorities without discrimination. The clear stipulation of women's entitlement to hold judicial positions without discrimination not only serves to consolidate the gains they had already made in

becoming judges but it effectively forces certain judiciary bodies such as the Council of State, who had refused to appoint women, to change their course of action.

For the first time too the state commits to protecting women from all forms of violence (Article 11 of the constitution). This is one of the battles that feminists had fought and lost in the previous constitution. Moreover, the same article clearly stipulates the rights of Egyptian citizens to pass on their nationality to their children, irrespective of their gender. While the decree prohibiting women from passing on their nationality to their children had been overturned during Mubarak's era (albeit some qualifiers still applied), by enshrining it within the constitution any reversal of the law is made far more difficult. Article 180 sets a quarter of seats in the local council for women, again for the first time ever.

True, the presence of Article 2 which stipulates that Islam is the principle source of legislation could be used by conservatives to undermine the idea of unqualified rights, however, any removal of that article would have been met with complete opposition from large segments of the Constituent Assembly. Article 93 stipulates the state's commitment to international conventions which it has ratified, which is instrumental for women's rights in view of Egypt's ratification of CEDAW, and will leverage the constitutional premise for the state's observance of women's rights.

The removal of Article 219 from the 2014 constitution jettisoned the major threat that conservative readings of Islamic jurisprudence would be used to justify the denial of women's rights. In order to satisfy the Salafis, the preamble stated that it will be up to the Supreme Constitutional Court to determine the interpretation of the Sharia. The record of the Supreme Constitutional Court is a mixed one, at times it has produced enlightened readings, at others, more regressive ones. Of course the only way to ensure the odds are against conservative readings justifying regressive policies would be revert Article 2 to its previous phrasing, where the Sharia is 'a' source of legislation, not 'the' source. This was not broached in the Constituent Assembly as it was considered 'a red line' that neither the Salafis nor Al-Azhar, nor a wide section of the population were willing to see crossed.

The process of creating consensus on these 'gains' for women was not an easy nor straightforward one. Some members of the Constituent Assembly were willing to support some women's rights but not others. In other words, feminist advocates could not count on an approach of the indivisibility of human rights. For example, some members were willing to concede to having an article prohibiting violence against women but completely rejected the idea of quotas. Quotas were a particularly divisive issue. Professor Hoda el Sadda who headed the Freedoms Committee confided that the issue of quotas was often one subject to negotiations and bargaining between different factions rather than ideological positions per se. Those who endorsed having a quota for workers and farmers recognised that the bloc favouring a quota for women would not accept their demand unless equal recognition of the women's quotas case was made. Opposition for a recognition of women's rights came not only from the Islamists but also from those considered to be among the "liberals". El Sadda noted that there were some unexpected people among the most vehement "liberal" opponents to women's rights in the constitution. What helped however, was that the group of five women on the Constituent Assembly consistently and categorically championed women's rights in the constitution. They also created alliances across parties and movements in order to create a strong front that could push its weight around.

The process of drawing up the new constitution occurred in the context of a deeply divided nation polarised between those who hailed the rupture in the regime as a revolution against a theocratic dictatorship (or some versions thereof), and those who rejected the new status quo as illegitimate because it came into being through a military coup d'etat. These deep polarisations also gripped feminists in Egypt. Feminist activists who were active in the youth revolutionary movements that rejected the new regime rejected the constitution altogether

because of certain clauses giving the military special rights such as to try civilians. Women's rights became of inconsequential weight for them. Those that endorsed the revolution found themselves vilified as endorsing a dictatorship.

The fate of the Muslim Sisters under the present circumstances remains unpredictable, some of them have become radicalised by the ousting of President Morsi, and some have retreated from public life. However, what is for sure is that the security crackdown has affected them in deep ways. It is likely that their collective mobilisation will subside, though one off stand-ins, protests and marches have been sustained in different governorates at a great price for personal safety.

The reaction of feminists to the repression of the Muslim Sisters has been mixed: some have stood up to defend the violation of their human rights, others have argued that their instrumentalisation by the Brothers and entanglement in acts of violence is morally unjustifiable. This has certainly added to the fractures and polarisations among feminists and the ethics of either stance will be a matter of debate for a long time to come. Ultimately in the next phase, gender justice advocates will need healing as do the rest of the Egyptian population in order to be able to rediscover what binds together more than what divides.

6 Conclusion

During Mubarak's rule, autonomous forms of activism championing gender equality survived in a context where they were regulated by the state security investigations apparatus, subject to encroachments from the National Council for Women, and lacking in the outreach capacities of the Islamist movements. However, attempts at working collectively were made through launching campaigns, joining networks and forming coalitions. While these forms of collective action were undermined by deep fragmentations, they nevertheless generated repertoires of human relations that could be activated in the right circumstances. Yet after the first revolution of the 25 January, an *ideological* assault on women's rights was combined with a *political will* bent on the exclusion of pro-equality leaders. Two years of insidious backlash against women's rights created a political necessity of stepping up collective action, enabled by the *political opportunity* of an exceptional revolutionary political culture. New repertoires emerged to counter gender-based violence, strengthening the collective power of organised action on the streets of Egypt. Many of these repertoires came to fruition in the lead up to the mass protests to defend women's rights witnessed in the 30 June uprising. However old and new repertoires may degenerate under the pressures of fragmentation and political divisions. The question is whether political necessity in future will force them to reconfigure in new struggles to defend women's equality.

After the ousting of President Mubarak, there was a great deal of optimism on the part of many actors domestically and internationally that Egypt would be on the path to democratisation. Acting on that basis, the approach on the part of many donors and local NGO workers was to seek exchange of experience from other countries that have undergone regime change, in particular from Latin America, and to develop programmes of political empowerment and engaging with the youth. So far, Egypt has experienced two ruptures (25 January 2011 and 30 June 2013) whose outcomes in terms of democratisation are still unknown. Hence, the idea that gender equality flourishes better in democratic settings has never really been tested in Egypt. However, what became clear from the first two years regime change phase in the country is that the Western liberal procedural tradition of deeming elections as the prime yardstick for democracy has failed. If voter support is the prime guide for legitimacy, then the Muslim Sisters who advocated for policies that would in effect undermine women's rights in parliament, could rightly make a case that they were empowered to do so by a public who put them in power. This form of majoritarian rule led to

a political order where women's rights were revoked (and that of others), in the name of the ballot box.

One of the recurring themes in this paper is the importance of *ideology*, but also the importance of understanding *political manoeuvring* in understanding how gender equality agendas are mediated. The ideological underpinnings of the Islamist movements' stance on gender issues directly influenced the policy choices they made when they assumed majoritarian representation in parliament and the Constituent Assembly. The strong ideological opposition of the Muslim Sisters to CEDAW that catalysed their decades' long struggle against the document and those who endorse it did not subside, but rather grew with their growing political influence. However, ideology is neither absolute in its influence on the political choices of its followers, nor in its impact on the wider context. The Salafis acquiesced to the introduction of the same set of women's rights in the Egyptian constitution that they had vehemently opposed only a year earlier. The decision was evidently one of political manoeuvring in order to secure that they did not alienate themselves from the centres of power. This was a classic case of de-privileging ideological creed in favour of political survival.

Conversely, the non-Islamist political forces, who had historically been associated in the minds of many with an ideological commitment to gender equality were prepared to forgo women's rights repeatedly during the constitution drafting process as concessions in return for other political gains. Perhaps one of the problems too has been the tendency to associate the liberals with progressive political agendas when in effect, there is a need to recognise that there are non-liberating liberals as well - and perhaps naming and shaming them should be part of a future agenda to hold them to account for the disconnect between their public discourse and their actual practice.

One of the clear messages emerging from this study is the difference that collective action makes for advancing gender equality at all levels, be it policy-engagement, interventions on the ground, or outreach work. While the political stakes were certainly against the recognition of women's political agency during SCAF's rule, nevertheless, what enabled the acting government at the time to afford to ignore the demands made by women's rights activists was their division and inability to represent a united front when one was needed.

The difference that collective mobilisation can make in bringing gender justice issues to the attention of policymakers and the public was evident in the work of the informal youth initiatives that were organically formed from 2011-2013 to counter gender-based violence. Through collective action, they were able to organise highly synchronised rescue operations that intervened in incidents were women were at risk of sexual assault or were being attacked. They were also able to identify and document incidents of assault and use this knowledge effectively to influence public opinion locally and human rights and gender justice groups internationally.

Moreover, alliance building with political parties and movements when pursued *strategically* has also proven to be of great success for amplifying the impact of collective work. The evidence from the events organised on the occasions of International Women's Day in 2011 and 2012 are highly indicative. In March 2011, when a small group of mostly feminists and women youth revolutionary forces congregated in Tahrir Square to remind the public not to forget women's rights in the "new" Egypt, their small numbers and absence of men and women from other political groups made them vulnerable to verbal and physical attacks (Sholkamy 2012). When the year after, they planned for the event, drawing on the support of political parties and youth revolutionaries, their presence was stronger and voices were louder.

Some donors working in Egypt need to reflect on whether their policies towards gender justice advocates supported their efforts to build strategic alliances. For example there were instances in which donors pressed feminists to 'engage more' with the Muslim Sisters and the Brotherhood so as to influence policy. Whether this pressure for engaging the Islamists was reflective of the broader foreign policy of some of the bilateral donors or whether it stemmed from a belief that this was the most opportune pathway to pursue (or both), it was counter-productive. The strategic interests of feminists coincided by and large more with those of other actors, who happened to be in the opposition.

This is not to suggest that collective action or alliance building are magic bullets to effecting positive change on the gender agenda. Sometimes a political will that is committed to gender justice can secure the institutionalisation of a gender just agenda 'from above' in ways that fast track the outcome of the struggles from below. The danger is the co-option of independent non-state actors and the closure of public spaces for mobilisation. Pressure from below is needed in order to ensure that informal youth based initiatives are not repressed or sidelined – and in order to make sure that the government is held to account for bringing the constitution into force. Depending on the nature of the unfolding entente between the authorities and the Nour party, one potential future scenario is the increasing formal and informal political power of the Salafi movements. Even if their formal discourse were to become more moderate, their informal discourses and practices are anathema to women's citizenship rights, and will need to be countered through multiple forms of resistance.

Key policy messages

The following are eleven policy messages for international donors and policymakers supporting gender justice in Egypt:

1   *International policymakers and donors should take a non-partisan position with respect to the political events that occurred on 30 June 2013*
    They should not endorse either the Muslim Brotherhood or the military in their narratives. In view of the deep divisions in position among activists, including those that work on gender issues, donors' partisan positions can only worsen the situation and arouse suspicions over motives and agendas.

2   *Support coalition-building and collective action without engineering it*
    There is a pressing need to ensure that the momentum of collective mobilisation around gender issues is not lost. This will need donors to have convening skills and sustained engagement with local actors in order to provide a safe space for them to think collectively and deepen ties and networks around common agendas. However, in so doing, donors must not assume a role in designing the form and membership of the collective groups. In practical terms, the difference is between the following two scenarios. The first is issuing a call for application where one of the criteria is two or more initiatives working together so local actors can choose each other, decide on the division of labour between them and present themselves as a united front. The second scenario is to select the partners who donors think would complement each other well and prod them to work together in the belief that the sum of all parts would amplify impact. Successful collective action must emerge organically rather than enforced in a top down manner - even if it is done in a participatory way.

3   *Support and strengthen the informal youth initiatives which work on gender-based violence in public spaces*
    At the time of writing, the activism of informal youth based initiatives working on sexual assault in protest spaces has waned. This is to be expected in view of the fact that some of the initiatives' raison d'etre such as Opantish and Tahrir Body Guards were specifically established to make protest spaces free from assault. Since protests have considerably decreased, there is a fear that, typical of social movements that have cycles of emergence and dissolution, some of these initiatives would also disappear. However, sexual assault continues and some initiatives such as Basma and Shoft Taharosh have redirected their efforts to other spaces where women's bodily integrity is threatened, such as in public transport and the *moulids*. Concerted efforts are needed to create an enabling environment for these initiatives to thrive and grow, including strategic planning, capacity building and experience exchange, as well as funding. Caution is needed however, not to transform them into new "donor darlings".

4   *Support the process of restructuring the National Council for Women, supporting the rotation of leadership and building its outreach and alliances*
    With the downfall of the Mubarak regime, the fate of the National Council for Women has been put in question, in view of its strong association with the First Lady. The National Council for Women has proven to be an integral institution that has not lost its authority to engage in policy processes both domestically and internationally. During Morsi's reign, it managed to escape co-option and loss of autonomy. However, it is time to revamp the NCW, bring in new faces, new capabilities and new visions. In view of the central role that donors have played in supporting the NCW both in terms of general policy as well as funding, they are well positioned to play a supportive role in restructuring the NCW to make it fit for purpose.

5   *Build a consortium of donors to work on FGM as part and parcel of a broader agenda on rural community health*
    While the Mubarak regime's record in protecting women's rights left much to be desired, one of the successful initiatives in terms of eliciting positive social change was the experience of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (which has since then been brought under the umbrella of the National Population Council) in addressing female genital mutilation. However, their outreach was rather limited and approaches were lacking in innovation. It is perhaps time for donors to collectively pool funds for supporting a 10 to 15 year plan of action to eliminate FGM as part of a long-term rural health improvement initiative that would benefit vulnerable women, men and children in poor communities.

6   *Press the Egyptian authorities to adopt a gendered approach to human security*
    The Egyptian authorities' approach to security during this current phase has been through the war on terrorism. However, human security in terms of putting at the centre citizens' priorities and needs for safety and personal security has continued to be deprioritised (although as suggested above, it has got significantly worse since 2011). At this critical juncture, in view of the thorny relations with the West, it is unlikely that the Egyptian government will be responsive to external calls for security sector reform, even if it is necessary to address the structural causes of the country's poor record on human security. However, one entry point for making modest progress on human security which has been consistently at the top of Egyptians' concerns, is to adopt a gender lens to framing human security issues when engaging in policy dialogue with the Egyptian authorities. For example, more and better trained police officers should be placed in the subway stations in order to make these spaces safe for women. As one of the key subway stops was closed (as a security measure to prevent protestors from congregating in Tahrir Square), other stops have suffered from extreme overcrowding

which has created an environment conducive to the increased sexual harassment of women.

7   *Support local efforts to redress the cultural backlash against women*
     Donors can support initiatives that use soft power to redress the setbacks that the country has experienced over the past three years with respect to girls' and women's wellbeing. These setbacks include, although are not restricted to:

     • an increase in school drop outs and reduced attendance
     • and increased social acceptance of early marriage
     • conflicting messages regarding the necessity of FGM

8   *Donors should make a large grant to the Egyptian government to implement the constitutional commitment to providing for poor female-headed households through a temporary scheme of conditional cash transfers.*
     At this critical juncture in which employment opportunities are scarce, conditional cash transfers may be a positive, albeit temporary, measure to prevent further deterioration in the economic well-being of the Egyptian family and to provide women with opportunities for positive social engagement (be it literacy, skills training or participation in developmental programmes).

9   *Continue to build bridges between Egyptian local activists and transnational feminist and human rights platforms and networks.*
     Such links have proven to be invaluable in knowledge sharing, and whistle blowing on the violation of women's rights, and solidarity. It may be helpful to adopt a plan for mutual increased engagement and exposure between local and transnational actors.

10   *Donors should continue to diversify the actors that they are supporting in civil society*
     The 25 January revolution revealed the extent to which the usual suspects that donors have been engaging with for decades may not be the movers and shakers on the ground. Among many donors there was a realisation of the need for a new approach that recognises youth as leaders rather than objects of interventions. However, despite the rhetoric of supporting youth-led activism, there has been very little to indicate that a policy shift has materialised (Moustafa 2010). While the diversification of actors is by no means an easy or automatic process, there is a need for evidence-based research that explores how working with unusual suspects can be developed without undermining the agreed upon criteria for partnerships informing donor policy.

11   *In addition to the diversification of actors, donors also need to diversify the themes that they support under the gender rights agenda*
     There has been a disproportionate focus on political rights at the expense of social and economic rights. While both are needed, initiatives associated with conditional cash transfers, educational reform, and reproductive rights are badly needed.

Key policy messages for non-state local actors engaged in initiatives to support gender justice

1   At the time of writing (March 2014), the political mood and public opinion was not very acquiescent of civil society or spaces for organic, spontaneous civic activism. However, in view of the fact that many of the innovations in promoting women's equality witnessed in the revolutionary phase of January 2011-June 2013 emerged from the

bottom up through street activism, it is of paramount importance that spaces for citizen engagement be protected. While the onus rests on the government which has the power to enhance or restrict political freedoms, creative ways of subverting and circumventing inhibitions in order to create safe spaces are needed.

2   Work collaboratively with counsellors, psychologists and experts on processes of healing and coming to terms with the violent ruptures that Egypt has witnessed over the course of the past few years. The aim of such initiatives would also be to support a healing process among advocates of gender justice, in order to work through the divisions and polarisations that have created fissures between people and examine the opportunities for finding common ground around collective action on particular campaigns.

3   Hold the government accountable for the fulfilment of its obligations to eliminate violence against women, including the issuance of a new law, the reform of the existing penal code, the rehabilitation of security officers, and nationwide programmes that address private and public forms of violence.

4   Provide a number of possible scenarios for the restructuring of the NCW and also put forward a number of names that would show diversity in backgrounds, experience and skill sets to the institution.

5   Work with different stakeholders to design and implement a nationwide plan for identifying women with strong leadership skills, a strong social/gender justice agenda, and a community base to help them and their teams to prepare for local council elections, and to ensure that capable women are able to take advantage of the new gender quota.

6   In line with the constitutional commitment to provide for poor female-headed households, local activists should press the government to implement conditional cash transfers that are tied to participation in programmes that support the women's well-being. Local development actors with strong community links may be well-equipped to undertake participatory needs assessments and, in conjunction with feminist organisations, influence the design, monitoring and evaluation of such programmes.

7   Use soft power for public outreach. While Egyptian society has tended to be by and large patriarchal, the level of misogyny seems to have increased in the past three years (at least according to the accounts of women in the focus groups that we engaged with who do not have an Islamist political orientation). It will take years to undo the impact of the backlash against women's rights politically, economically and socially. Innovative approaches that engage the public through culture and media are needed in order to challenge some of the ideas, values and perceptions that undermine women's agency and distort relations with men. This may for example include soap operas, films, cartoons, and the use of social media.

References

AWID (2013) *UN Stand on Violence against Women now in Jeopardy Activists worried Status of Women Declaration will be Watered Down Today*, CBC News, N. Ayed, http://www.awid.org/Library/Promised-UN-stand-on-violence-against-women-now-in-jeopardy-Activists-worried-status-of-women-declaration-will-be-watered-down-today (accessed 13 May 2013)

Basu, A. (ed.) (2013) *Women's Movements in the Global Era, The Power of Local Feminisms*, Western View

Cornwall, A. (2012) *Women's Empowerment: A Journey not a Destination*, http://www.pathways-of-empowerment.org/PathwaysSynthesisReport.pdf

Htun, M. (2003) *Sex and the State: Abortion, Divorce, and the Family under Latin American Dictatorships and Democracies*, New York: Cambridge University Press

Jad, I. (2010) 'Palestinian Women Contesting Power in Chaos', *IDS Bulletin* 41.5: 81–8

Kandiyoti, D. (2014) *Contesting Patriarchy-as-Governance: Lessons from Youth-led Activism*, 7 March, Opendemocracy, http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/deniz-kandiyoti/contesting-patriarchy-as-governance-lessons-from-youth-led-activism

Khattak, S. (2010) 'Women in Local Government: The Pakistan Experience', *IDS Bulletin* 41.5: 52–61

Mohanty, C. (1991) 'Under Western Eyes, Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', in C. Mohanty, A. Russo and L. Torres (eds), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press

Molyneux, M. (2003) *Women's Movements in International Perspectives Latin America and Beyond*, London: Institute of Latin American Studies

Moustafa, Y. (2010) 'The Islamisation of Human Rights: Implications for Gender Politics in the Middle East', *IDS Bulletin* 42.1: 21–5

Rowbotham, S. (1992) *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action*, London: Routledge

Sholkamy, H. (2012) 'The Jaded Gender and Development Paradigm', *IDS Bulletin* 43.1:94–8

Tadros, M. (2010a) 'Quotas: A Highway to Power in Egypt: But for which Women?', *IDS Bulletin* 41.5: 88–99

Tadros, M. (2010b) *Women's Coalitions in the Middle East*, A Case Study of Six Coalitions Study commissioned by the Development Leadership Programme, funded by AUSAID, March–December

Tadros, M. (2012) *The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt: Democracy Redefined or Confined?*, London: Routledge Press

Tadros, M. (2013) 'Politically Motivated Sexual Assault and the Law in Violent Transitions: A Case Study from Egypt', *IDS Evidence Report* 8, July, http://www.ids.ac.uk/publication/politically-motivated-sexual-assault-and-the-law-in-violent-transitions-a-case-study-from-egypt

UNFPA (2000) *The State of the World Population 2000*, http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2000/english/ch05.html (accessed 24 April 2012)

Viterna, J. and Fallon, K. (2008) 'Democratization, Women's Movements and Gender-Equitable States: A Framework for Comparison', *American Sociological Review* 73, August: 668–89

Waylen, G. (1994) 'Women and Democratization, Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics', *World Politics* 46.3: 327–54

Waylen, G. (2007) *Engendering Transitions: Women's Mobilization, Institutions and Gender Outcomes*, New York: Oxford University Press

Weldon, S. and Mala Htun, M. (2013) 'Feminist Mobilisation and Progressive Policy Change: Why Governments Take Action to Combat Violence Against Women', *Gender and Development* 21.2: 231–47

Whaites, A. (2008) 'States in Development Understanding State-Building', *DFID Working Paper*, London: DFID

Zulu, L. (2000) 'South African Women's Participation in the Transition', in S. Rai (ed.), *International Perspectives on Gender and Democratisation*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press