



Drivers and barriers to environmental engagement in the MENA region

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Question

- What are the key drivers and barriers to environmental engagement in the MENA region?

Focus on the following 10 countries: Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), Syria and Yemen. Focus where available on civil society and environmental justice movements, although their interface with other stakeholders (governments and institutions) may also be relevant. Examples of levels of elite or public buy-in, as well as how environmental issues are framed by local or regional social and religious politics, (including, the interface between environmentalism and Islamic culture/ traditions) are of particular interest.

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The K4D helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Helpdesk reports are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.

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1. Summary

Environmental engagement in the MENA region is a relatively new field of research (Vincenti, 2015). However, environmental activism has been intensifying in the region during the past few decades. It has been most evident in countries with semi-competitive political systems and long histories of collective action (for example, Lebanon, Tunisia, Egypt). While environmental contestation has also emerged to a lesser degree in authoritarian states considered inhospitable to activism (e.g. the Persian Gulf), “routine forms of civic engagement have become almost impossible in war-torn Syria, Yemen, and Libya” (Sowers, 2017).

This review examines the evidence from 7 MENA countries: Egypt, Turkey, Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco, Libya and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).¹ This review draws on a mixture of academic papers, grey literature, and media reports. Despite growing environmental activism in the region, scholarship on environmental politics and social networks is, with some exceptions (Furniss, 2016; Sowers, 2013), limited (Vincenti; 2015; Loschi, 2019; Moneer, 2019; Sowers, 2017). There are also gaps in the research on the attitudes that civil society stakeholders adopt towards renewable energy (Akemi et al., 2017); how ‘green identities’ are forged and motivate eco-communities towards environmental engagement (Vincenti, 2015). Additionally, despite a plethora of studies on the role of youth in political movements and collective actions in the MENA region during the Arab Spring, the role of youth in environmental activism is significantly under-researched (Moneer, 2019).

Key findings from the reviewed literature:

- There is growing interest in the role Islamic ethics might play mobilising environmental action, but an Islamic environmental movement has yet to emerge.
- Country context and local dynamics very much shape the drivers and barriers of environmental engagement across the MENA region:
 - Egypt’s dependence on the hydrocarbon sector for government revenue and to fulfil its domestic energy demand shapes the attitudes towards energy and environmentalism amongst both the ruling elite and the wider public.
 - In Turkey, the deep levels of polarisation along Islamist-secularist lines creates difficulties for environmental NGOs to influence the government. The majority of environmental organisations are secular, but the Islamist-leaning government is more willing to engage with Islamist environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs).
 - In Tunisia, many of the mobilisations during the 2011 revolution embraced the environmental agenda as a tool of resistance against the political system and environmental activism in Tunisia grew during the transitional phase.
 - Lebanon also suffers from stark sectarian divisions and environmentalism is seen as a way to transcend political divides. Environmental practice often aims to be a-

¹ Jordan was excluded from this review as a separate K4D Helpdesk query addressed Jordan’s environmental policies and engagement on climate change (Combaz, 2019). This review also does not include sections on Syria, Yemen and Iraq as there was a lack of available literature on environmental engagement in these countries.

political and is intertwined with a broader set of goals relating to the production of a new societal order.

- In Morocco, where the government has invested heavily in renewable energy, environmental activism often involves resistance to renewable energy projects and relates to issues such as resource access, political power, and economic justice. Climate advocacy groups also work with women-led small businesses on implementing sustainable solutions at the grassroots level.
- Libya, compared to other Arab League countries, scores highly on the World Values Survey (2011) on issues including membership rate environmental organisations, participation in environmental demonstrations and giving priority to protecting the environment over economic growth (Tausch, 2015). Nevertheless, civil society in general is very weak as a result of several decades of authoritarian rule and an-going violence.
- In the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), environmental issues are intimately related to everyday access to resources, their use and control, but environmental activism has been overshadowed by the Israeli Occupation.
- Successful environmental movements in several countries have key factors in common. They are able to appeal to a broad social base, link well-defined and seemingly apolitical aims to wider social issues, secure important elite and government allies, and utilise new, old and social media to communicate campaigns to the wider public.
- There is evidence that public awareness and knowledge of environmental issues in some countries is weak. In others, citizens are well informed about environmental issues, but these are a lower priority than economic and social concerns (e.g. poverty and unemployment).

The dominance of fossil fuel economies in the MENA region with large Muslim majority populations has led to growing interest in the links between Islamic ethics and environmentalism. Section 2 therefore looks at evidence of Islamic environmentalism in the MENA region. Sections 3 – 9 examine drivers and barriers to environmental engagement in the countries that are the focus of this rapid review.

2. Environmentalism and Islam

There is growing interest in the role Islamic ethics might play mobilising environmental action (Foltz, 2000; Wickström, 2014; Ali, 2016; Abdelzaher et al., 2019; Abdullah, 2019). In 2015, 20 countries drafted the Islamic Declaration of Climate Change². This included a range of references from Qur'anic verses and Ahadith (sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), set specific targets for Muslim countries, and called for businesses in Muslim countries to divest from fossil fuels. The Declaration was the initiative of a coalition of civil society organisations working on environmental education in Muslim societies, alongside The Islamic Scientific Educational and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO), The Organisation of the Islamic Conference, and the International Islamic Fiqh Academy based in Saudi Arabia. Ali (2016: 173) notes that

² See: <http://www.ifees.org.uk/declaration/>

“what was notable about the declaration was its willingness to challenge the fossil fuel economy of the Middle East”.

Earlier, in 2008, 22 participants from Islamic non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academic, government and Muslim environmental groups from 14 countries had drawn up a ‘Seven Year Plan for Islamic Action on the Environment’. This was part of an initiative by the Earth-Mates Dialogue Centre (EMDC) and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) to “to harness the teachings, values and ethical law of the Islamic faith in the service of humanity, in order to meet one of the most serious challenges in the contemporary world” (ARC, 2008 cited in Ali, 2016: 173).

Ali (2016: 175) notes that “given the vast geographic expanse of Islamic countries from Indonesia to Morocco, there is a wide spectrum of ideas and perspectives, and therefore, it is important to highlight that Muslims, like others engaged in the environmental movement, may have many different ideas influencing their decision to join this global effort.” Yildirim (2016) suggests that Islamists have a mixed track record on environmentalism. Globally, some international Islamist organisations have included environmental components in their platforms, and education-oriented Muslim environmental groups have formed in a handful of western countries. But policy oriented environmental groups in the Muslim world are still relatively few, and an Islamic environmental movement has yet to emerge (Özler & Obach, 2018: 314).

In the MENA region, and beyond, some of the world’s most prominent Islamist groups (e.g. Muslim Brotherhood, Hizbullah, and Hamas) make no mention at of the environment in their party programmes. In contrast, the governments of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Egypt (with varying levels of Islamist control of the government) have, to varying degrees, acknowledged concerns about the environmental (Yildirim, 2016: 219):

Iran: The Islamic Republic of Iran offers strong evidence of an applied Islamic environmental ethic (Foltz, 2000: 69). The revolutionary government asserted its commitment to environmental protection by including it in its 1979 constitution (Foltz, 2000: 69; Yildirim, 2016: 2019). In 1996, the Islamic environmentalism incorporated into a paper by the Department of the Environment (DOE) which stated that ‘the religious leaders in Iran have found the principles of environmental conservation compatible with the general guidelines of the holy religion of Islam.’ (Yildirim, 2016: 219). The DOE is tasked with ensuring ‘sustainable development’ in all of Iran’s provinces, overseeing the country’s national parks and other protected areas, articulating policy, and administering public education programmes. Additionally, several NGOs have emerged, including the Green Party of Iran, which, although not an officially registered NGO, has been very vocal about defending Iran’s environment (Yildirim, 2016: 219). Foltz (2000: 71) suggests that ‘In Iran, official as well as public attitudes toward the natural environment appear to be unique in the Muslim world.’ This may be due to the fact that Iran’s Islamist regime has been faced with significant environmental challenges throughout its term (e.g. excessive pollution, overpopulation, and environmental degradation). As a result, the government of Iran began an effort to articulate and follow an environmental policy, even when it meant revisiting some previous policies (e.g. their policy on birth control and population growth) (Foltz, 2000; Yildirim, 2016).

Several examples of the interface between environmentalism and Islam, in the countries studied in this review and beyond, were identified in the literature:

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: In 1983, the Saudi government enlisted several Islamic scholars from the University of Jeddah to create an environmental policy centred on Islam. The Kingdom hired several non-Saudi environmental experts (e.g. Iraqi Mawil Izzi Dien and American Abd-ar Rah-man Llewellyn) to head the Meteorology and Environmental Protection Administration of Saudi Arabia, which is heavily based in Islamic environmentalism (Yildirim, 2016: 219).

Islamic Republic of Pakistan: In 1992, the Islamist government of Pakistan established the 'National Conservation Strategy Unit' within the Ministry of Environment, Local Government, and Rural Development. The government is heavily influenced by a variety of environmental NGOs, which succeeded in bringing about the Environmental Protection Act of 1997. However, many religious scholars there do not find the environment to be a serious concern in relation to other issues (Yildirim, 2016: 219).

Republic of Turkey: Turkey's Islamist parties have also begun to acknowledge the environment in recent years, although there is also evidence that environmental concern is lacking among most practicing Turkish Muslims (Yildirim, 2016: 219). Historically, Islamist parties in Turkey supported heavy industry instead of highlighting environmentalism. In 1997, Virtue Party (FP) called for "sustainable development" and "sustainable tourism" in their party platform, while Felicity Party (SP) outlines a programme "stress[ing] the importance of the natural environment" and calls for "sustainable development, cooperation with NGOs, and public awareness programs". The Muslim democratic party (AKP), currently in government, devotes two pages to the environment in its platform. This explains concerns for the environment, and vows to oppose any development or model of production that pollutes the environment (Yildirim, 2016: 220). However, a number of scholars note that there is little evidence that the ruling party is guided by Islamic ecological sensibilities (Özler & Obach, 2018: 314; Yildirim, 2016: 220).

Given the deep polarisation in Turkey along Islamist-secularist lines (Wickström, 2014; Yildirim, 2016; Özler & Obach, 2018), environmentalism has been cast in stark oppositional terms. This makes collaboration or compromise between secular-identified environmentalists and the AKP government difficult (Özler & Obach, 2018: 314). Most established environmental CSOs are secularist, although Islamist-oriented environmental organizations have also emerged (Özler & Obach, 2018: 321). Nevertheless, Özler and Obach (2018: 322) argue that the potential of Islamist-identified groups to serve as true advocates for the environment is "still an open question". Yildirim (2016) claims that "Islamist parties demonstrate virtually utter disregard of the environment in their discourses and actions". In contrast, Özler and Obach (2018) suggest that these groups have expressed sincere commitment to environmental protection, but also tend to favour the developmentalist rhetoric used by AKP officials (Özler & Obach, 2018: 322; see *section 4 on Turkey below for additional detail on developmentalist attitudes as a barrier to environmental engagement*). There is little evidence that these groups are motivated by specific Islam-inspired environmental sentiments. Instead, environmental mobilisation among many Muslims is motivated by the same concerns that inspire others to engage with these issues (e.g. growing evidence of ecological crisis). Interestingly, those affiliated with these groups tended to be more moderate in their positions on environmental issues (Özler & Obach, 2018: 321).

Egypt: Yildirim (2016) suggests that The Muslim Brotherhood's short stint in power (2011-2013) shows that the Islamist party did not ideologically prioritise environment (Yildirim, 2016). Amongst the general population, however, there is some evidence of a link between observance of Islam and environmental attitudes and behaviours. Research by Rice (2006) examines pro-environmental behaviours of university students and teachers in Cairo in three spheres (public, private and activist). Focusing on links with demographic variables, beliefs, values, and

religiosity, it finds associations between religious teachings and religiosity and pro-environmental behaviour. Rice (2006) argues that both government and NGOs promoting pro-environmental behaviours should focus at the grassroots level and find ways to utilise faith-based messages to support their efforts. Vincenti's (2015) study on Value-Based Social Movements (VSMs) observes that these Egyptian environmental movements can be "profoundly inspired or indirectly influenced" by the religious beliefs and values of their participants. It is not clear, however, whether and how the eco-Islamic worldview could support sustainability-oriented social mobilisation (Vincenti 2015: 139). El-Bassiouny et al. (2015) studies links between corporate social responsibility (CSR), including environmental actions, and religiosity amongst 4 leading corporations in Egypt. They find that two of these (Vodafone and Mansour) prioritise environmental CSR initiatives (Bassiouny et al., 2015).

The following section examines the wider evidence on drivers and barriers to environmental engagement in countries in the MENA region:

3. Egypt

Background

Although Egypt's environmental networks have evolved during several decades of authoritarian rule as well as following the 2011 revolution (Sowers, 2013), CSOs remain relatively weak (Schäfer et al., 2018).

Sowers (2013:10) suggests that network participants in Egypt are generally more 'rooted' in domestic institutional arrangements and interests, and that most networks are public-private hybrids (including a mix of state officials, environmental experts, and international consultants). She identifies the existence of two types of environmental networks in Egypt:

- **Managerial networks:** These establish their interventions on claims to technical expertise and invoke the authoritative role of the state as the basis for public policymaking. Participants hold overlapping or rotating positions (e.g. appointed officials, environmental scientists, university researchers, and environmental consultants). These individuals are connected through the repeated experience of working together on various policy-specific 'projects' and by staffing environmental reform units and parallel institutions established within existing central ministries.
- **Activist networks:** These draw upon different rationale and tactics than managerial networks. Activist campaigns address specific environmental issues (e.g. egregious sources of pollution, industrial siting, and other issues that impact on local communities). Participants often come together through a collective undertaking (e.g. a campaign to publicise their case, mobilize local communities, and influence decision-making). Activist networks frame their environmental discourses in risks to public health, livelihoods, and urban identities. They develop a sense of solidarity from a shared value orientation (e.g. commitment to human rights or labour organisation), or a shared sense of place (e.g. the cities of Alexandria and Damietta) (Sowers, 2013: 157).

The scope of Egyptian environmentalism has been increasingly redefined by the prominent role of activist networks and popular mobilisation. Activist campaigns became more effective in influencing decision-makers during the late 1990s and 2000s with the rise of an independent media, the strategic use of existing but weak formal political institutions (such as the Majlis al-

Sha'b, the elected parliamentary house, and the judiciary), and the increased willingness of ordinary people to engage in direct action. Managerial and activist networks have typically arisen in different locations, in the distinctive landscapes and projects that served as catalysts for network creation and activity (Sowers, 2013).

The literature identifies a number of notable Egyptian environmental campaigns, including Egyptians Against Coal (Zayed & Sowers, 2014: 32) and the city of Damietta's 2012 mobilisation against the construction by EAgrium (a Canadian consortium) of a large fertilizer complex. Elmusa and Sowers (2009) called the latter "a watershed for environmental mobilisation in Egypt". Additionally, the city of Alexandria also witnessed several activist campaigns revolving around rubbish ('Egypt Will Not Fall to Garbage and Clean Your Country'). Although these campaigns were not scaled up to the national level, they exposed official neglect (Kraidy, 2016).

Barriers to environmental engagement

Egypt's dependence on the hydrocarbon sector: Egypt's hydrocarbon sector is a longstanding critical source of foreign currency, and a key target of foreign investment (Zayed & Sowers, 2014). Moreover, more than 95% of Egypt's energy needs are met using oil and gas; consumption increased by 72% between 1998 and 2009, driven in part by the extensive state subsidy system in place (Sowers, 2014: 30). Pressured by the IMF and World Bank, the Egyptian government has "repeatedly" announced plans to scale back energy subsidies – but progress has been slow and inconsistent "out of concern that reducing energy subsidies will produce political unrest and adversely affect low-income groups" (Zayed & Sowers, 2014: 30).

Large state-owned and quasi-privatised firms: Despite a relatively small number of large firms in Egypt, their entrenched, privileged position in Egypt's political economy allows them to engage in drawn out negotiations over compliance with environmental regulations rather than facilitating coordination with pollution networks (Sowers, 2013: 158).

Limited reach of environmental movements: "Small and fragmented" numbers of participants can curb the effectiveness of environmental movements (e.g. anti-coal) (Zayed & Sowers, 2014). Moreover, not all environmental issues can be addressed through efforts of activist networks alone. For example, conservation and habitat protection require both experts and activists to influence formal state policies and environmental outcomes on the ground (Sowers, 2013: 96).

Dutiful activism: Dutiful activism is one of the three types of activism identified by Moneer (2019) in her study on the Egyptians against Coal movement³. This works through existing political and economic institutions in ways that sustain their legitimacy, but can also draw on existing social norms and rules to challenge unjust institutionalised practices. Although dutiful action represents resistance to the status quo, it also sustains the prevailing hegemonic powers and economic system (Moneer, 2019: 44).

Campaigns to delegitimise Egyptian CSO activists: Since the mid-2000s Egypt has revised and passed new laws to increase controls over domestic NGOs, particularly those in receipt of foreign funding and who participate in transnational advocacy networks (TANs). (Matejova et al., 2018). The Egyptian state has also attempted to delegitimise NGOs as foreign agents by framing

³ The three types of action are dutiful, disruptive and dangerous activism (Moneer, 2019: 44).

them as 'traitors', and 'paid agents' seeking to destabilise domestic politics (Matejova et al., 2018).

Forceful government responses to political protest: Egyptian governments (past and more recent) have often used force to dispel protesters making political demands (Yee & Rashwan, 2019; Sowers, 2013: 154; Elmusa & Sowers, 2009: 1). Nevertheless, as Sowers (2013: 155-157) points out, "while repression makes headlines, these proliferating protest campaigns regularly win concessions from governmental authorities, even as these same authorities often employ force to disperse, detain, and injure those engaged in direct action."

Dominance of 'brown agenda' over 'green agenda': Research indicates that Egyptians are aware of environmental problems, yet a "brown agenda" (e.g. issues of poverty and pollution in cities) dominates over a "green agenda" (e.g. issues of global warming) (Alden, 2004: 181, citing Hopkins et al., 2001). More recent research on notable environmental campaigns in Egypt indicates that this may still be the case, since these environmental campaigns often frame their messages with reference to wider societal concerns (Elmusa & Sowers, 2009; Sowers, 2013).

Drivers of environmental engagement

Lessons from environmental interventions: In the literature on environmental movements, a number of factors were found to strengthen them:

- **Building broad coalitions:** Although historical Egyptian protests involved homogenous groups (e.g. union members, syndicates) (Elmusa & Sowers, 2009), more recent protests have broadened their social base. For example, Egyptians Against Coal was a 'loose coalition' of civil society, including human rights organisations; young environmental activists and professionals; established conservation organisations, and members of the 'Tahrir networks' (the activist alliances forged in the 2011 protests movement; environmental experts and the Egyptian Doctors Syndicate) (Zayed & Sowers, 2014).⁴ In some cases these have successfully crossed stratified social class and occupational lines (Sowers, 2013; Sowers, 2009). In Damietta, protestors included representatives of voluntary organisations, members of Parliament, business representatives, university professors, landowners and residents living nearby the petrochemical plants, members of unions, professional syndicates, and different political parties. (Sowers, 2013: 85; Elmusa & Sowers, 2009). Sowers (2013: 85) notes that "no single party, individual or interest group monopolised the campaign; instead, activists and concerned community residents formed several popular committees [...] to facilitate coordination." Notably, the Damietta campaign against EAgrium did not set civil society in opposition to the state (Sowers, 2013; Elmusa & Sowers, 2009: 1). Instead, campaign messages were framed as pleas to President Mubarak and his family, in order to legitimise the protests and distinguish them from anti-regime protests (Elmusa & Sowers, 2009: 3).

⁴ The Egyptians Against Coal coalition included human rights organisations (The Land Center for Human Rights, Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights), Platform (a London-based organisation working on the global fossil fuel industry and its ties to universities, government and big business); young environmental activists and professionals (from Egypt Climate Change Coalition, Dayma, Green Arm of Nahdat al-Mahrousa and 350.org), established conservation organisations (National Conservation Egypt, Hurghada Environmental Protection and Conservation Association); members of the 'Tahrir networks' (including, for example, Tammarud and the Revolutionary Socialists); environmental experts and the Egyptian Doctors Syndicate (Zayed & Sowers, 2014).

- **Framing movement aims within wider societal concerns:** These movements often adopted “limited, well-defined and seemingly apolitical aims” (e.g. combatting health threats posed by pollution; the subsidy of foreign investors; widespread government corruption, and lack of environmental enforcement) (Zayed & Sowers, 2014: 33) which can be linked to the broader social, economic and political context (Moneer, 2019: 46). In Damietta, activist networks made their demands in the name of everyday, ordinary people, evoking a sense of distinctive communal identity to question the role of foreign investors in the domestic political economy (Sowers, 2013).
- **Utilising new and old media** to communicate their messages (Moneer, 2019; Sowers, 2014; Elmusa & Sowers, 2009), through state-owned and opposition media outlets, as well as emerging new independent newspapers, privately owned TV stations and regional satellite channels (e.g. Al-Jazeera) (Elmusa & Sowers, 2009). Egyptians Against Coal also launched a social media campaign to organise public meetings (Zayed & Sowers, 2014).
- **Employing diverse protest tactics and mobilising strategies.** Damietta protesters used coordinated statements and petitions; marches and vigils; litigation and strikes. Demonstrations were strategically timed to coincide with holidays (Elmusa & Sowers, 2009: 1-3). Activists made use of an extensive infrastructure (mosques, public squares, workplaces, and associational offices) to engage citizens (Sowers, 2013: 86). Egyptians Against Coal utilised well attended public meetings against coal, technical workshops (closed to the wider public) and messages disseminated through traditional and social media (Zayed & Sowers, 2014).
- **Engaging influential allies:** Egyptians Against Coal and the Damietta protests engaged high profile allies. In Damietta, this included local economic elites and politicians (e.g. the Chamber of Tourist Facilities) whose views on local development contrasted with the central government. Egyptians Against Coal also found allies within the cabinet (the Ministry of Tourism who was concerned about the environmental impact of supporting coal on Red Sea resorts and macrosystems; and Dr. Laila Iskandar, who briefly held the post of Minister of State for Environmental Affairs from 2013 – 2014). (Zayed & Sowers, 2014)

Value-based Social Movements (VSMs): VSMs are “dynamic and multi-dimensional movements based around defensive, non-strategic social action that is normally not recognised as having a transformative potential” (Vincenti, 2015: 136). They can mobilise ordinary citizens to create and support shared ecological ideals (nurturing ‘eco-citizens’); through these individual and collective lived alternatives are constructed to improve communities. Examples include *Nawaya* (an Egyptian permaculture movement inspired by the revolution) and *Tadamun* (an initiative for urban solidarity). Both of these initiatives are non-political, committed to eco-ethical values, with a marked focus on environmental education and learning, community empowerment and resilience (Vincenti, 2015: 136).

Rise of young activists: Rice (2006: 386) highlights the lack of participation of young people in environmental activism in Egypt despite 45% of the population being aged under 18. There is evidence, however, that this is changing. Moneer’s (2019: 46) research on youth involvement in the Egyptians Against Coal campaign, suggests a growing environmental awareness, agency and willingness to take action against the fossil fuel industry and unsustainable capitalist system amongst young Egyptians (Moneer, 2019: 46). Similarly, Vincenti (2015) finds generational

identity a striking feature of VSMS; indeed, “young people constitute the bulk of the activists involved in sustainability-oriented actions” (Vincenti; 2015: 136).

Environmental concern spans the class divide: Contrary to frequently expressed sentiments among Egyptian elites that poor and middle-class areas suffer more from pollution because the people living there are ignorant about the issues, research indicates that middle and lower classes are ‘acutely aware’ of environmental hazards and pollution. Indeed, environmental issues rank concerns about environment above economic worries, family problems and crime (Alden, 2004: 181, citing Hopkins, Mehanna & el-Haggag, 2001). Nevertheless, opinions and actions related to the environment are constantly evolving in Egypt (Alden, 2004: 181, citing Hopkins et al., 2001).

The tourism industry: Egypt promotes a ‘green economy’ approach to achieving sustainable development (Ramzy, 2013: 125) in five key sectors of the Egyptian economy: agriculture, tourism, water, energy, and waste management. Ramzy (2013) suggests that tourism is both a potential catalyst of change and a component of transformation and that small improvements toward greater sustainability can have important impacts in shifting towards more sustainable, cleaner and low-carbon economic growth. Sowers (2013; 2009) observes that actors from the tourism industry were often important allies to notable Egyptian environmental campaigns (e.g. Egyptians Against Coal; the Damietta protests).

4. Turkey

Background

Environmental social movements and activism in Turkey first emerged in the 1980s (Knudsen, 2015: 306). Although Turkey ranks among the 20 biggest economies in the world following economic growth in recent years, rapid industrial development and expansion of infrastructure have contributed to significant environmental degradation. Together with opportunities for greater civic engagement starting in the late 1990s, this has encouraged increased environmental activity by CSOs. Although this has primarily been campaigns by local grassroots groups directed at one specific issue, more formal and broadly focused domestic environmental advocacy groups addressing wider national environmental policy concerns have also emerged (Özler & Obach, 2018: 311). Environmental NGOs range from associations, foundations, platforms, city councils, regional platforms, local agendas, university student clubs, citizen initiatives and coalitions on issues including energy, waste, mining and climate change (Yildirim & Ayna, 2018: 421).⁵ These groups vary in their focus (from wider environmental concerns to specific issues, like water protection) and activities (e.g. public education, research, more explicit political action) (Özler & Obach, 2018: 315-316). The Turkish environmental movement also has powerful international allies, including transnational environmental NGOs and foundations,

⁵ Yildirim and Ayna (2018: 422-426) identify a number of ‘effective’ environmental NGOs: Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, for Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA); Environment Foundation of Turkey (TÇV); and Turkish Society for the Protection of Nature (TTKD). Özler and Obach (2018) also highlight the work of TEMA as the ‘largest and most established environmental group’, in addition to the Water Foundation, the Buğday Ecological Life Association, TURMEPA Clean Sea Association, Yeryüzü (Earth) Association and the Peace with Earth Association.

foreign governments and the international community. Despite this, Turkey's environmental movement remains limited and weak (Özler & Obach, 2019: 777).

Barriers to environmental engagement

Sectarian divisions: Several scholars highlight the deep partisan divides that exist in Turkey (Knudsen, 2015; Özler & Obach, 2018), and how polarisation along cultural, religious and political divides shape environmental activism (Özler & Obach, 2018: 324). Knudsen (2015) argues that examining identity dynamics, and the power the state holds over these, is key to understanding environmental politics. Despite this, the research literature on environmental protest in Turkey has tended to neglect identity issues (Knudsen, 2015: 321).

Environmental advocates are commonly viewed by the ruling Islamist leaning AKP government as “partisans simply doing the bidding” of [secular] opposition forces” (Özler & Obach, 2018: 317). In turn, oppositional secularist identities among some environmental advocates have been enforced, further exacerbating polarisation in the environmental arena. (Özler & Obach, 2018: 317). In some instances, divisions between secular-identified environmental groups and the AKP government takes material form. Several environmental leaders reported that state support for environmental programmes or research had been cut or diverted from organisations perceived as critical of the government or otherwise from the “wrong side” of the cultural divide (Özler & Obach, 2018: 318). Özler and Obach (2018: 319) suggest that this creates a “self-reinforcing cycle that fosters polarization around environmental issues”. This leaves little to no room for collaboration or compromise between secular-identified environmentalists and the Islamist-leaning AKP government (Özler and Obach, 2018: 313). Some environmental have stopped attempting to work with state officials to advance policy, focusing instead on public education and campaigns to promote ecologically sound personal lifestyle choices (e.g. purchasing natural products or riding bicycles) (Özler & Obach, 2018: 320).

Cultural characteristics: Two particular values hinder prioritising environmental protection (Özler & Obach, 2019: 774):

- **Developmentalism** (i.e. ‘a strong desire for domestic economic growth’): Although the desire for economic progress is a global phenomenon, the sentiment is particularly strong in Turkey, amongst government officials as well as Turkish citizens. Environmental protection is often perceived as in opposition to these development goals, thus undermining environmental appeal (Özler & Obach, 2019: 778). According to Yildirim (2016: 220), “the main concern for AKP is economic growth, which involves heavy decentralization and privatization, with the hope that environmental protection will be taken up by local municipalities.” In order to remain in line with IMF-sanctioned neoliberal policies, AKP’s environmental concerns have taken a backseat (Yildirim, 2016: 220).
- **Suspicion of foreign influence on national affairs:** Occupation of Turkey serves as a historical foundation for cultural attributes that can weaken environmental activism. Turkish culture is imbued with a strong suspicion of foreign powers and their efforts to influence domestic affairs (Knudsen, 2015: 316). Although this has provided rhetorical sources for some environmental struggles⁶, it can also constrain environmental actions

⁶ Some contemporary environmental movements use nationalist rhetoric and symbolism (e.g. discourses about ‘the sanctity and unity of the community, the fatherland, and the soil’) to mobilise against hostile foreign forces. (Knudsen, 2015: 316).

and cooperation. The environmental movement is international in character and environmental movements around the world seek global cooperation on environmental issues (Knudsen, 2015: 317; Özler & Obach, 2019: 778-779). In Turkey, however, it is unusual for place-based environmental movements in Turkey to cooperate beyond the borders of Turkey as local communities are keen not to distance themselves from “mainstream” national identity (Knudsen, 2015: 318). Some environmental activists in Turkey have faced accusations concerning their identity or political stance, including accusations about being foreign agents or involved in separatism (Knudsen, 2015: 313; Özler & Obach, 2019: 786)⁷. The fact that much funding for environmental research and campaigns in Turkey comes from European-based foundations lends credibility to these charges (Özler & Obach, 2019: 786).

Cultural values interacting with structural mechanisms: Attitudes of developmentalism interact with structural mechanisms in a self-reinforcing fashion. The prioritisation of economic development is reflected in the power of different parliamentary commissions and in the delegation of environmental responsibility within the ministries. Over the years, responsibility for environmental issues has been passed between different ministries. Environmental NGO leaders, as well as some bureaucrats within government, challenged situating environmental responsibility alongside urban issues, arguing that this diminishes attention to the environment. Activists argue that there should be one ministry with environmental protection as its sole focus (Özler & Obach, 2019: 782).

Powerful economic actors: Given that threats to the environment often come in the form of development projects advanced by private industry, environmentalists often find themselves in conflict with powerful economic actors and their allies in government (Özler & Obach, 2018: 315).

Low levels of citizen participation: Participation by Turkish citizens in environmental organisations is low. According to the World Values Survey, (2011, cited in Özler & Obach, 2018: 316) just 0.8% of Turkish respondents identify as active members in environmental organisations, compared to the average of 3.6% in developing countries. National polling data suggests recognition of the severity of environmental problems, but that Turkish citizens give these issues relatively low priority. For example, in one university poll only 0.3% of the respondents identified environmental problems as the most significant issue facing Turkey, down from 1.1% in 2010 (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu 2010 cited in Özler & Obach, 2019: 774). Özler and Obach (2019: 782) find that the majority of the population places greater priority on economic concerns (e.g. poverty and unemployment) than on environmental degradation. Wickström (2014: 130) suggests that environmental protection is often considered “an elitist hobby.”

Lack of resources: Environmental groups are often under resourced, impeding their ability to advance a proactive environmental agenda (Özler & Obach, 2018: 316).

⁷ According to Knudsen (2015): ‘professional’ environmental organisations (such as TEMA, TuRMEPA, DoĞADER and Greenpeace) may seek international cooperation, but some national movements and organisations such as KİP, Halkevleri and to a certain extent the Brotherhood of Rivers Platform (Derelerin Kardeşliği Platformu, DKP), are careful to avoid overly overt cooperation with foreign organisations (Knudsen, 2015: 318).

Drivers of environmental engagement

Local, issue-based activism: Because of the sectarian divisions in Turkey, environmental organisations often avoid overt political action and instead engage in issue-based activism (Knudsen, 2015: 303). Historically, environmental mobilisation has tended to occur as grassroots efforts responding to specific development projects (e.g. mining, hydroelectric dams, coal plants and infrastructure projects), where local communities feel threatened by more powerful economic actors and their interests. Campaigns that focus on issues that directly affect people’s lives can nurture unconventional alliances (Özler & Obach, 2018: 323). In such cases environmentalists “intentionally avoid direct reference to the government officials whose aid is ultimately needed to stop a project, instead focusing on the companies invested in the development” (Özler & Obach, 2018: 324). By focusing on threats to environment and human well-being, sensitive partisan divisions are avoided and allow citizens to find common ground (Özler & Obach, 2018: 324). Knudsen’s observations (2015: 320) support this view: “Recent developments in Terme and Ünye demonstrate how ‘above politics’ mobilisation is possible when protesters stick to a more neutral language which gives less room for ideological and identity statements with reference to the national identity landscape”.

The impact of such mobilisations in Turkey is, however, not clear. Knudsen (2015: 307) suggests that “many hydropower projects have been cancelled or postponed after courts ruled against contractors”, whilst Özler and Obach (2019: 777) argue that “these local struggles are rarely successful.”

5. Tunisia

Background

Environmental mobilisation became common in Tunisia following the 2011 uprising as activists were able to mobilise for the first time without facing harsh repression (Loschi, 2019). Indeed, many of the mobilisations in early 2011 embraced the environmental agenda as a tool of resistance against the political system. Environmental activism in Tunisia grew stronger during the transitional phase between the fall of Ben Ali in early 2011 and the second parliamentary elections at the end of 2014 (Loschi, 2019: 97-99)⁸. Many environmental protests are rooted in older forms of mobilisation (e.g. against industrial projects by energy corporations and the petrochemical industry in the oases of southern Tunisia) (Loschi, 2019: 96).

There is a limited literature on environmental engagement in Tunisia. One notable exception is a Loschi’s (2019) study, which examines the environmental protests that occurred in Tunisia after the 2011 uprisings. This analyses factors underpinning the rise of the environmental networks during the transition period between 2011–2014 (further detail is provided in the sections below). Another paper that provides some useful insights is by Ben Fraji et al. (2019). This examines the

⁸ Loschi (2019: 100) suggests that one of the most successful Tunis-based networks that emerged was an NGO named SOS BIAA (‘biaa’ is Arabic for ‘environment’). She also highlights Tunisian Association for Health Promotion (Association Tunisienne pour la Promotion de la Santé (ATPS)). Both of these NGOs sought to act as watchdogs, monitoring the actions of national institutions, and trying to mobilise public opinion (Loschi, 2019: 100).

case of water transfers from the Ichkeul Lake-Lagoon system, mapping out the various actors, their stakes, discourses and strategies, and decision-making power of these actors.

Barriers to environmental engagement

Ideological divisions: Political and ideological divisions still played a part in protest dynamics following the revolution (Loschi, 2019). Activist groups that were unable to develop new, clearly defined environmental identities, and who continued to rely on pre-existing structures and practices, were more likely to be negatively affected by ideological cleavages (Loschi, 2019: 102). Although the new environmental networks that emerged at the time were built on strong personal social ties, and often included members of the old regime or institution, network durability depended on the formation of a new identity and agenda (Loschi, 2019: 108).

Asymmetrical power relationships: Ben Fraj et al. (2019) suggest that asymmetrical power relationships influence mobilisation of various actors on the issue of water transfer from the Ichkeul Basin. Nevertheless, these relationships are dynamic: the discourses and the mobilisation of each of them can evolve, depending on the hydrological situation and according to the personality of the officials in charge. The substantial asymmetry of power has meant that environmental activists and local users of water (public or private) have been unsuccessful in influencing the logic and national policy of water transfer. There has been no emergence of a coalition opposed to the transfers (Ben Fraj et al., 2019: 25).

Intimidation of activists: Environmental rights activists have faced repression in Tunisia, both during and after the Ben Ali era (McNeill & Addala, 2013; Gale et al., 2019).

Limited public environmental consciousness: Despite the visible presence of environment in public spaces (e.g. many cities have a main street named “Environment Boulevard” and roundabouts adorned with statues relating to environmental issues) (Gale et al., 2019), environmental issues are not significantly present in the public consciousness (Akermi et al., 2017: 134; Gale et al., 2019).

Lack of political will: It has been suggested that Ben Ali’s eco-friendly gestures (outlined above) were intended to please the European Union, a major source of funding for projects to clean up the Mediterranean and reduce emissions and waste. Follow through was limited due to lack of political will of that, and subsequent, governments due, in part, to Tunisia’s heavy industries, which belonged to the state. As powerful revenue-producers they polluted with near-impunity. Those same heavy industries are continuing their pollution today in their quest to “produce” revenue (Gale et al., 2019).

Drivers of environmental engagement

Loschi’s (2019) study on the environmental protests that occurred in Tunisia after the 2011 uprisings shed some light on key factors that enabled the growth or survival of specific environmental networks following Tunisia’s post-2011 transition:

History of mobilisation: In the oases of Tozeur and Gabès in southern Tunisia, local environmental protests build on a long history of mobilisations against industrial projects by energy corporations and the petrochemical industry. These historic protests focused on environmental impact, poor labour conditions, and the informalisation of local economies and draining of small farm and peasant communities (Loschi, 2019: 96).

Formation of broad coalitions: Network leaders were able to bring together social and political actors from different backgrounds and ideological orientations (Loschi, 2019: 95).

Ability to develop new collective identities: Loschi (2019: 95) argues that creation new and distinctive collective identities was crucial for network sustainability. Networks with a clear identity and agenda were able to connect with different types of localised activism to strengthen the network structures. Nevertheless, pre-existing personal ties were often at the root of successful networks, facilitating mobilisation (Loschi, 2019: 108). Although initial network dynamics were based around leaders' personal ties, this could be turned into a more institutionalised, associative structure and identity grounded on a formal expertise and agenda (Loschi, 2019: 107). Networks that were able to articulate a distinct environmentalist identity were able to take advantage of institutional instability, whilst those that were unable to do so became vulnerable to political and ideological competition (Loschi, 2019: 108).

Locally rooted activist movements: Strong local connections can be vital assets especially during a process of national political transition (Loschi, 2019: 105).

New media and social media: After 2011, social mobilisation in environmental networks could exploit the new infrastructure provided by the new or liberalised media (Loschi, 2019: 96). Facebook and Youtube were also used to market the role of the network and reinforce inner connections with other local actors (Loschi, 2019: 101).

Securing important allies: Environmental NGOs SOS BIAA and Association of Health Promotion (ATPS) monitored the actions of national institutions (on issues related to pollution and waste management) and mobilised public opinion. To accomplish this, they strengthened relations with individual scientists from private companies and reinforced the expert approach to insist on the technical evaluation of the dangers of uncollected rubbish, the ineffective management of waste transport and stocking. Support from donors and international organisations was also key. For example, in 2014 SOS BIAA started to gain financial support from international donors, such as the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation, to sponsor such conferences and divulgation activities gathering protesters, stakeholders and public institutions. (Loschi, 2019: 101).

Collaboration between environmental activists: SOS BIAA brought together its network, made up of the ATPS, and individual members such as engineers, scientists, students, and the activists from Tunis neighbourhoods who had already mobilised over previous environmental issues. The movement also included, for the first time, citizens from Djerba living in Tunis who wished to support the strike on the island from the capital. SOS BIAA thus raised the profile of environmental issues in the media and highlighted the importance of collaborations among environmental activists (Loschi, 2019: 104).

Avoiding explicit political affiliation: Initial success of SOS BIAA and the ATPS is attributed to their apparent apolitical character. Networks sought to facilitate collective environmental action by avoiding explicit political affiliation. This was a significant strategic choice in the immediate aftermath of the Tunisian revolution when ideological schisms between national political actors repeatedly shaped protests on multiple issues as for or against the new regime. In this case, technical expertise was the main source of identity for the networks. This does not imply that there was no mobilisation along political lines in relation to environmental issues, however, the leading actors did not primarily use political affiliations to mobilise (Loschi, 2019: 104).

6. Lebanon

Background

Lebanon has signed more international environmental agreements than any other MENA country (Djoundourian, 2009: 429) and environmental activities, which have a historic precedent, are prominent in Lebanese society (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 3). Historically, Lebanese nationalist elites “wove themes of nature and landscape into their narratives of national origins and uniqueness” (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 8). During the 1960s, with the inflow of donor funds, a new kind of environmentalism emerged in Lebanon, linked to civil society rather than sectarian elites (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016). The environmental politics that which emerged among Lebanon’s impoverished, rural Shi’a communities in the 1960s focused on unequal access to natural resources (e.g. water, land) (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 10). In the 1970s, environmentalism shifted and began to reflect a politics of accommodation with the status quo. Many environmental initiatives fragmented under pressure from Lebanon’s entrenched sectarian political system or were absorbed by that same structure (Djoundourian, 2009: 434; Kraidy, 2016: 20). Lebanon’s environmentalist movement was hampered by the outbreak of civil war in 1975 (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 11).

An upsurge of environmental activism has occurred in Lebanon since the end of the civil war in 1989. NGOs became “standard-bearers of environmentalism’ focusing on issues such as nature protection and rural preservation, the promotion of hiking and camping (especially for youth), advocacy for publicly accessible green spaces in cities, nature and wilderness, as well as urban green space and the cultivated rural environment (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016). Nevertheless, environment, nature and green space also play a prominent role in more recent efforts to develop citizenship and national identity in the context of sectarian divisions (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 3). Whilst environmental NGOs often describe their work as apolitical or non-political, environmental discourse and practice has become intertwined with “a broader set of goals relating to the production of a new societal order” (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 11). Indeed, few NGOs are dedicated exclusively to the preservation of nature for its own sake. Instead, most NGOs who run environmental and green-space programmes are also addressing a range of other issues (e.g. women’s empowerment, youth empowerment, local economic development, leadership training, and/or democratic participation) (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 11-12).⁹ More generally, civil society in Lebanon’s post-civil war context is characterised by “a fragmented system of patron-client networks” (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016).

Barriers to environmental engagement

Sectarian politics: Nagel & Staeheli (2016: 2-3) observe that “the capacity for NGOs to transform Lebanese society through environmental activism and nature-oriented activities is limited both by the entanglement of NGOs in sectarian politics and the involvement of sectarian groups in the environmental movement.” Sectarian leaders have used environmentalism to forward their own agendas and goals (e.g. providing legitimacy to real estate dealings) (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 27). They have often effectively co-opted, fragmented and narrowed the

⁹ High profile NGOs operating in Lebanon identified by Nagel and Staeheli (2016: 13) include Friends of Nature; Lebanese Mountain Trail (LMT); Association for Forest Development and Conservation (AFDC) and Green Line.

scope of environmental activity in post-war Lebanon by exercising monopolies over environmental activities in their local areas. By participating in umbrella organisations (e.g. the Lebanese Environmental Forum (LEF)) sectarian leaders have side-lined more independent NGOs and diluted the demands of environmentalists relating to development. They have also used the LEF to channel donor funds to protected areas under their control. Nevertheless, some members of sectarian elite (e.g. the Jumblatt family¹⁰) are understood to more genuinely support environmentalism. Yet, they (and other elite families) use forest and nature reserves in their strongholds as a means of exercising local political control and distributing patronage (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 27).

Environmental activism can also be impeded by **NGOs' associations with Western donors** "whose politics implicate them in the very sectarian system they wish to undermine" (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 12).

Elite domination of urban development: The key actors dominating urban development in Lebanon are sectarian political leaders and real estate developers (often one and the same). For example, the development of downtown Beirut by the corporation Solidere, was touted as "a model of 'smart' urban design", but has been widely criticised by scholars, activists, and ordinary people for being inaccessible to the middle class and (especially) the poor (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 22).

Social class: Social class can operate as an obstacle to the formation of large, mobilised publics (Kraidy; 2016). For instance, in 2015 an environmental movement that became known as the 'You Stink' movement emerged in response to a waste management crisis in Beirut. 'You Stink' movement's leaders were "middle-age professionals in information technology and the arts, whose activities elicited a very classed discourse with an undercurrent of sectarianism" (Kraidy 2016, 23).

Limited reach of environmental NGOs: These often cultivate relatively small numbers of young people who become well versed in international norms but whose relationship with other Lebanese who have less exposure to international discourses seems somewhat tenuous (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 26).

Low levels of public environmental literacy: A study by Hussein et al. (2019) examines the perceptions of and reactions to, climate change held by Lebanese citizens (of mixed age, gender and education) living in Beirut. It finds low levels of ecological literacy and intentions to reducing carbon lifestyle. The authors suggest that interventions to combat this should:

- Aim to increase wider climate change knowledge and environmental culture in Lebanon;
- Invest in research on this topic in order to highlight its value and relevance to everyday Lebanese life, and
- Showcase pro-environmental cultures, people's connection with nature; 'green skills'; and increase carbon labelling of products and services to encourage consumer familiarity with the environmental consumption system (Hussein et al., 2019: 57)

¹⁰ An influential family involved in a range of political, cultural, economic and social activities in Lebanon.

Drivers of environmental engagement

Environmentalism as means for achieving unity: As noted above, environmentalism in Lebanon is considered important not just in and of its own but because it offers “a means by which Lebanon might achieve unity and overcome sectarian divisions” (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016). Nature and environmentalism are seen as able ‘to transform the ways that Lebanese people (especially youth) understand and perform societal membership and non-sectarian definitions of citizenship (Kraidy, 2016; Nagel & Staeheli 2016). This is because it can make possible a “depoliticised politics” centred on interaction, dialogue and community building (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 21). Nature can also provide a ‘neutral’ physical space in which individuals can leave narrow affiliations behind and perform a more unified “Lebanese-ness” by partaking in camping, hiking, and rural-heritage activities or in activities that benefit the whole country (e.g. beach clean-up efforts). Nature is considered “a space in which otherwise dissociated actors learn to be citizens through activities and opportunities for engagement, interaction, and dialogue” (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 15).

Critics have suggested that the depoliticised understanding of citizenship and participation offered by NGOs serves an instrument of neo-liberal governance and closes off more radical forms of dissent and protest (Nagel & Staeheli, 2016: 21).

Ownership of key issues by activist movements: Kraidy’s (2016: 22) study of the ‘You Stink’ campaign identifies ‘ownership’ as ‘a hallmark’ of social movements built around a key, single issue, from which they expand the scope of their demands. To frame this issue in public discourse the movement invested into “the symbolic capital of garbage, with its tropes of putrefaction, odour, dirt nausea, disease, corruption” which they linked to all political elites. This enabled the movement to maintain focus on a political class that included all politicians (across all sects) and pre-empted attempts at co-optation by sectarian forces. “Ownership entails developing frames that include a sense of moral obligation, environmental expertise, and a deep involvement in assessing and pressing for solutions to problems” (Kraidy, 2016: 23). Despite the middle-class nature of the ‘You Stink’ movement, activists managed to overcome this “by turning collective revulsion at the sight and smell of garbage into political energy, by challenging and exposing the official discourse of power and expertise, and by exposing the Lebanese political system as a decapitated, rotting corpse” (Kraidy, 2016: 25).

Social media savvy of activists: The ‘You Stink’ movement was led by “seasoned activists who display the usual social media savvy and artful protest tactics that echo activism in the Arab Uprisings” (Kraidy 2016: 19).

Establishment of the Ministry of Environment: The Ministry of Environment was created immediately after the cessation of hostilities. The Ministry has been key to creating awareness and mobilising resources to promote environmental quality (Djoundourian, 2009: 437).

Role of media in promoting public awareness: The media’s role has been key to raising public awareness about environmentalism and promoting grassroots environmental activities (Djoundourian, 2009). A number of newspapers (e.g. An-Nahar) provide daily coverage of local and regional environmental issues, whilst daily talk shows on radio and television are disseminate information on the activities of environmental NGOs (Djoundourian, 2009: 435).

7. Morocco

Background

The Kingdom of Morocco has signed numerous international conventions to promote sustainable development, (e.g. on desertification, maritime pollution, protection of the ozone layer, and protection of endangered species) (Daadaoui & Saoud 2017; Tarfaoui & Zkim, 2017). In 2009, Morocco embarked on an ambitious 10-year Solar Plan to become a leading solar power producer (Rignall, 2015). Morocco has also significantly invested in wind and renewable energy (Daadaoui & Saoud 2017). Rignall (2015) notes that the King has “a personal interest in renewable energy as leveraging the country’s “strategic position at the heart of an energy crossroads”” (Rignall, 2015: 544). The dynamics of environmental engagement in Morocco therefore differs from several of the other countries in this rapid review in that community-based and civil society activism is often focused on resistance to renewable energy projects. This is explained further below.

Barriers to environmental engagement

Inequality of social relations: Community resistance to renewable energy initiatives in Morocco relates to the social relations of renewable energy (e.g. resource access, political power, and economic justice) (Rignall, 2015: 541). Rignall (2015: 554) suggests that “the language of cleanliness and carbon emissions masks the ways in which the [solar] plant is much like a fossil fuel or an extractive mine in the way it occupies space and circumscribes people’s sovereignty over the land so as to capture the rents generated on that land”. Resistance tends to focus on top-down planning procedures, the uneven distribution of project benefits, and the associated impacts of these on traditional/ cultural ways of life. Resistance highlights questions about the state’s role in perpetuating unequal resource access and control also permeate these contestations (Rignall, 2015: 547).

State intimidation of activists: During Morocco’s hosting of the COP summit in 2016, environmental activists in the country received much attention in the international press (see, for example, Shearlaw, 2016; Tramel, 2016). Shearlaw (2016) alludes to the various forms of state intimidation that environmental activists in Morocco are still exposed to, post-revolution: being watched by the authorities, prevented from gaining employment and exposing their families to harassment (Shearlaw, 2016).

Environmental attitudes and actions: A study by Daadaoui and Saoud (2017: 4767) found a “huge” lack of knowledge about environmental issues amongst the student community they surveyed. Education and past behaviour (e.g. childhood experience) are related to ecological attitudes and behaviour. Conventional social norms and influencers (e.g. professors, family, friends, idols, Youtubers, etc.) also play a role in shaping behaviour (e.g. enabling or inhibiting pro-environmental behaviour), particularly for young people (Daadaoui & Saoud 2017: 4768). Daadaoui and Saoud (2017) also identify “locus of control” as a key issue (e.g. feeling responsibility but also powerlessness), but that this was also related to environmental knowledge. A perceived lack of institutional infrastructure and incentives were also identified as inhibiting the pro-environmental behaviours of their respondents. A similar study by Tarfaoui and Zkim (2017) on human ecological behaviour in Morocco supports these findings.

Drivers of environmental engagement

Women-led small businesses: Many women-led small businesses in Morocco have been working with climate advocacy groups on implementing sustainable solutions at the grassroots level, to (1) fix the logistical obstacles caused by climate change, and (2) create more employment opportunities. Women are often most connected to their communities and family, providing unique potential to contribute to create real and lasting change (Jaffery, 2017). Their involvement can foster entrepreneurship and provide better employment opportunities, which helps improve living conditions and social status for their entire families. For example:

- **Dar Si Hmad**¹¹ (a women-led NGO) has almost solved the water fetching problem for many women by implementing a new initiative of 'fog farming,' using 600 square meters of special nets to harvest fresh water from fog. This has enabled women to gain back time that they put into economic activities (e.g. argan oil production).
- **Greenpeace** is supporting several primarily women-run cooperatives in Morocco in adapting solar systems to replace the more costly diesel generators that suffered from chronic electricity shortages. These groups are now diversifying the production of argan oil, almond, and eggs. The NGO is also currently running solar cooking training sessions that showcase the potential of solar energy as an alternative to coal, wood, and butane gas to women in rural parts of the country (Fayad, 2017; Jaffery, 2017).

8. Libya

Background

There is no substantial literature on environmental engagement in Libya. One study by Tausch (2015) examines how globalisation, rising ecological footprint and shrinking biocapacity shape public perceptions of environmental issues in the Arab countries, including Libya. Citing World Values Survey data, Tausch claims that in a survey of 12 members of the Arab League¹², environmental consciousness and activism – with regards to membership rate environmental organisations, participation in environmental demonstrations and giving priority to protecting the environment over economic growth – Libya is one of the most developed (Tausch, 2015: 20). There is a dearth, however, of additional studies on environmental engagement in Libya which might back up or refute this claim, although several studies highlight the difficulties for CSOs more generally to operate in Libya (e.g. Sowers, 2018).

The lack of literature on environmental engagement may be linked to the weak nature of Libyan civil society more broadly. This is a legacy of the many decades of Qaddafi's dictatorship (Bribena, 2017; Sawani, 2012) as well as the ongoing conflict and violence that emerged in the wake of the 2011 revolution (Daraghani, 2019; Freedom House, 2017).

¹¹ www.darsihmad.org

¹² Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Tunisia, and Yemen.

Barriers to environmental engagement

Legacy of the Qaddafi dictatorship: CSOs were characterised by Qaddafi as “a bourgeois culture” and “an imitation of the West” that had no place in Libya. Several factors impeded the emergence of any meaningful civil society during his rule, including:

- The restrictive legal framework for civil society associations which impeded the emergence of a “genuine” civil society (Bribena; 2017). Civil society was further restricted because foreign funding was outlawed (Bribena 2017: 9000). Capital punishment was utilised against individuals who created, joined, supported or financed organisations prohibited by law (Bribena 2017: 8997).
- The regime did not allow for independent organisations free from government monitoring; those civic organisations which were allowed to exist were pro-regime (Bribena 2017: 8997).

Current challenges of civic engagement: Sowers (2017) also points to the ongoing challenging context for CSOs operating in Libya, stating that “routine forms of civic engagement have become almost impossible.” Other sources point to the volatile and dangerous context that activists in Libya currently operate in (Daraghani, 2019; Freedom House, 2017; OHCHR, 2015). Decades of repressive rule and continued threat posed by militias has contributed to a high degree of self-censorship among activists on political issues (Freedom House, 2017).

Tribalism: Bribena (2017: 8998) suggests that the prominence of the tribe in Libyan society means that other forms of social identify and association are subordinate. In a study of how the dynamics of religion, tribalism, oil and ideology play out in post-Qaddafi Libya, Sawani (2012: 3) notes that successive rulers have relied on tribal alliances which consistently created tribal and regional sensitivities. Because tribes have not transformed into institutions that work in parallel with modern institutions of state, this has “contributed to diminishing the chances of building a strong civil society” (Sawani, 2012: 3). He argues that tribalism (both in culture and as an institution) will continue to influence socio-political relationships and individual and group identities in Libyan society as long as Libyans do not perceive the existence of alternative institutions and CSOs (Sawani, 2012: 3). Recently some liberal, nationalist and non-Islamic actors have begun to set up political parties and CSOs that reflect their views, although “these have yet to crystallize into any clear form with distinct features” (Sawani, 2012: 19).¹³

Islamist control: Many CSOs that are emerging in major cities in Libya focus on human rights, women’s rights or humanitarian issues (Sawani, 2012: 20). The formation of a union of CSOs was announced although there are doubts to what extent these truly reflect a union since, as Sawani notes “Islamist forces figure decisively in the inception of these organizations [as well as other charitable or humanitarian organisations] as a means for taking greater control of them” (Sawani, 2012: 21).

¹³ The Libyan Democratic Gathering is one of the emerging political parties which Sawani (2012: 19) describes as “a front association for activists, politicians and human rights activists comprising organisations of civil society with liberal and progressive tendencies”.

9. Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs)

Background

The literature on environmental engagement in the OPTs is limited. This may be because, despite a rich history of environmental activism in Palestine (Pratty, 2020), environmental issues are often overshadowed by the Israeli Occupation (McKee, 2018; Dajani, N.D.; Isaac, N.D.). As McKee (2018: 450) puts it, “the violence seems to be more pressing than concerns such as wilderness conservation or environmental justice” (McKee, 2018: 450). Nevertheless, environmental issues are intimately related to everyday access to resources, their use and control (Dajani, N.D.). Palestinian CSOs engage in environmental advocacy and activism on two levels: global and local (Dajani, N.D.). In recent years, environmentalism has grown more mainstream and NGOs and CSOs are involved in environmental initiatives related to wildlife conservation, stream restoration, air and water pollution and agricultural reform (McKee, 2018: 451).

Barriers to environmental engagement

Limited environmental engagement by the Palestinian Authority (PA): Although the PA is tasked with design and implementation of effective adaptation strategies, its role and capacity are limited under Israeli occupation (Dajani, N.D.). This is because it has no sovereign jurisdiction over natural resources or large swathes of territory and lacks political will with regards to mitigating climate risks (Pratty, 2020). Although the PA drafted environmental policy plans in 2016, allocating USD3.5 billion towards climate change adaptation plans over a period of 10 years (UNEP 2016), this did not indicate where the funding would come from (Pratty, 2020).

Challenges for the Palestinian Environmental Quality Authority: The Palestinian Environmental Quality Authority has main responsibility for environmental administration in the OPTs. Challenges it faces include an unclear mandate, lack of financial and human resources and having to work in two geographically separate entities (the West Bank and Gaza) (UNEP 2002: 129).

Focus on self-determination: Under occupation, Palestinians are primarily concerned with their struggle for self-determination, rather than “contemplating ‘better’ or ‘more appropriate’ patterns of resources use when they have little or no choices to begin with” (Isaac, N.D.).

Lack of environmental awareness: Although segments of Palestinian society have engaged in environmentally sound practises (e.g. recycling) there is a general lack of environmental awareness in Gaza and the West Bank (Isaac, N.D.). Nevertheless, there is a “perceptible increase of environmental consciousness among Palestinians” and environmental education initiatives has been undertaken by grassroots organisations and NGOs (Isaac, N.D.).

Challenges for cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli activists: The political situation creates difficulties and dangers for collaboration between Israeli and Palestinian environmental activists (McKee, 2018; Pratty, 2020). Environmental activists also face the challenge of trying to “include within a single frame issues that have more commonly been approached through separate ‘environmental’ and ‘social justice’ frames and to reach audiences across Israeli/Palestinian identity lines” (McKee, 2018: 451).

Drivers of environmental engagement

Civil society participation in international environmental forums: Palestinian CSOs participate in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)'s Conference of the Parties (COP). Given the restricted role and ability of the PA to implement adaptation policies, this representation of CSOs “provides a platform for awareness-raising and advocacy on how to tackle climate change under conditions of military occupation and resource exploitation” (Dajani, N.D.).

Local engagement: Because the PA's authority to design and implement effective adaptation strategies is limited under occupation, CSOs have identified the need to work locally.

Framing of environmental issues: Although it also creates challenges for environmental activism (outlined in the previous section), McKee (2018) argues that the complex historical and contemporary relationships that Israelis and Palestinians hold with land also creates flexibility on framing environmental campaigns (McKee, 2018). McKee (2018: 461) illustrates how trilateral NGO EcoPeace¹⁴ (which works across Palestinian, Israeli and Jordanian borders) employed flexible framing and “increasingly aimed its proposals for practical intervention not to government leaders, but to various segments of the three national publics.”

Agricultural communities: Agricultural communities are the most vocal about the impacts of climate change, since their livelihoods have been affected by the combined forces of Israeli occupation and climatic shifts (Dajani, N.D.).

The role of the media: Isaac (N.D.) suggests that “publications, media programming, regular columns, educational curriculums and the formation of formal institutions such as Palestinian Nature Protection Society may be forums for expanding awareness”.

Private sector allies: UNEP (2002: 131) identifies the private sector as “an important ally” in environmental engagement in Palestine. It suggests involving private sector organisations in environmental policy making in Palestine, in order to work proactively on environmental management and facilitate the work of the Palestinian Environmental Qualitative Authority.

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