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EGYPT: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE PROCESSES

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SUMMARY

Egyptian women have a long history of engaging in their country's politics, political movements and transitions. The Arab Spring in Egypt, a popular uprising that resulted in the removal of two successive governments, has in turn presented a renewed opportunity for Egyptian women's participation and activism to reshape the state's political spaces, particularly through women's participation in protests as well as women's organising in the face of backlash to this participation. Lack of economic opportunity (particularly for young people), a restrictive political space for civil society, growing securitisation and a growing conservative movement are all worrying signs when it comes to increasing women's meaningful participation in Egypt's political and economic spaces.

STRENGTH OF GENDER PROVISIONS

Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt 2014

	0 None	1 Weakest	2	3	4	5 Strongest
Human Rights			✓			
Development			✓			
Post-Conflict Issues	✓					
Violence Against Women			✓			
Participation				✓		
General		✓				

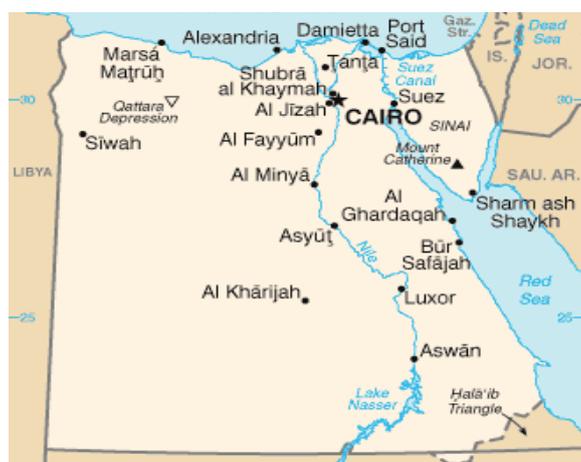
WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: KEY CONSTRAINTS AND ENABLERS

CONSTRAINTS

1. Threat of sexual violence during protests
2. Repression of civil society and the media
3. Widespread economic insecurity (and its impact upon women)

ENABLERS

1. High numbers of women involved in protests (online and offline)
2. A moderately gender-sensitive constitution that supports women's presence in parliamentary politics
3. A history of women's participation in political movements



BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

The Egyptian transition, like many in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, began as a popular uprising that resulted in the removal of two successive governments through two waves of protest. The first, which began on 25 January 2011, resulted in the collapse of the Hosni Mubarak regime, and the second in the removal of the 2013 democratically elected President Mohamad Morsi (from the Muslim Brotherhood).

When protests began around Egypt, they were met with state violence and in the face of this, unrest grew. The transition process began when Mubarak resigned and power was turned over to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), who dissolved the Constitution and both houses of parliament as Egypt prepared for the election of a new government. Elections for both houses occurred across late 2011 until early 2012. In June 2012, Mohamed Morsi was elected as President and parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) won a large share of the power. Some commentators state that MB's growing popularity was clear during parliamentary elections due to well organised activities, during the election, as well as service delivery and other programmes in the years preceding this transition (Sarquis 2012). In a transition where economic concerns and needs were paramount, their widespread support made sense, though a large number of their policies were at odds with the desires articulated at the beginning of the Egyptian protests.

Protests broke out again following this and clashes between MB supporters and detractors grew. The current President, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, launched a coup d'état in 2013 to depose Morsi, ostensibly because Morsi had failed to quell the unrest. In 2014, el-Sisi resigned from his military role to run in the new presidential elections, and the current government claims that the election was won with 96.9 per cent of the vote. Despite significant issues with the el-Sisi government, reports from Egypt claim that the situation for women has improved under the new President, as opposed to his predecessor Morsi, whose party was more aligned with conservative Muslim thinking.

Women faced particularly gendered violence... including 'virginity tests' and other forms of sexual assault.

Today, security concerns are primarily associated with terrorist groups or cells. Clashes between government security forces and armed militia continue in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. Outside of Sinai, while not in conflict, terror attacks are a threat and both minority communities and tourists have been targeted around Egypt. Egypt is also a transit and destination country for refugees from the region, including Syria and Libya (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) 2017). There are also ongoing issues relating to militarisation and widespread control that the Egyptian army has on society, the economy and cultural institutions. Furthermore, issues relating to the repression of journalists and activists continue, and these represent important security concerns that shape women's capacity to engage in the political and economic structures in Egypt.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Scholarship on the Arab Spring revolution in Egypt, and the organising that took place around it, discusses the vital roles that women played, not just in Egypt, but across North Africa (Johansson-Nogués 2013). The physical presence of women during the early days of the protests is evident through almost all media reporting on the Egyptian revolution. What is highlighted, in addition to the role that women played in protesting, is their role in online activism that occurred at the same time (Al-Ali 2012). In fact, the online space has become an increasingly important place for women to voice concerns as well as to participate, and it is worth exploring as it provides a new avenue through which to navigate gender norms in the MENA context.

Some literature on the Arab Spring and women's involvement does make note of the gendered nature of violence and the large impact upon women. Interviews with female protesters detail a turning point, when women began to experience attacks while protesting in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Images and stories (like the woman in the blue bra) began to make their way onto international media platforms, while others are documented by different organisations. While the reasons for this are not always clear, as one activist who experienced harassment told Saferworld, 'this type of harassment is a political rather than a sexual act' (Saferworld 2013). Reports of this nature continued beyond the initial protests, including by Amnesty International which highlighted incidents from the second round of protests in 2013 (Amnesty International 2013). In the face of this, women also organised to protect themselves and other protesters, organising initiatives like HarassMap to track incidents and safe areas in Cairo, as well as protection and first

aid responders – providing one example of how online spaces were useful in facilitating women’s participation in the Egyptian revolution.

Concerns for women during the protests centred (very similarly to other MENA states) on a fear of sexual abuse while in detention by security forces. In such circumstance, women faced particularly gendered violence, including the much-publicised ‘virginity tests’ and other forms of sexual assault. Similar attacks on female protesters followed, including women being assaulted in public spaces and later, being charged with prostitution. It is clear from these accounts that women’s presence was significant as an organising force, and that women’s bodies were used in very particular ways to undermine their efforts and identity as political actors.

The revolution in Egypt also represented a catalyst in which the feminist and women’s movement began to develop beyond its shape and scope pre-2011 (Sika 2014). The Egyptian women’s movement has a long history of activism and engagement with the state and other political actors, but historically those who participated were predominantly women from elite backgrounds. The revolution saw more diversity in the women who voiced concerns along gender lines, as well as entering public political spaces and discussions. There are numerous reports of women organising in their capacity as workers for example. More hijab wearing women also had a presence in the protests, traditionally a group of women who were not made visible through the lens of women’s activism in the region. Younger women also reshaped the focus of the feminist movement in Egypt, developing campaigns that targeted street harassment, including the development of online spaces like the aforementioned Harassmap and similar initiatives. More established organisations also banded together and created the Coalition of Egyptian Feminist Organisations in 2011, to articulate demands particularly around violence committed against female protesters.

In the transition process that followed the 2011 protests, women were not well represented within the transitional governance structures. In the first parliamentary elections held in 2011, women won less than two per cent of seats in both houses. The Ministerial Council that followed these elections only included three women from the 26 ministries. Interestingly, a gender quota was enacted for Egypt’s parliament in 2010 (under Mubarak), ostensibly in support of Egypt’s commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but was done away with in 2011 when parliament was dissolved.

Despite there being no women’s quota being included in Egypt’s 2014 Constitution, the elections in 2015 resulted in 75 women being elected to parliament (out of 568 seats), with an additional 14 women being appointed as members by President el-Sisi. Today, women hold 14.9 per cent of seats. Three of the ministers appointed after this election are women, holding the ministries of Social Solidarity (Ghada Waly), Immigration and Egyptian Expat

The appointment of 14 additional women to parliament following the election is one example of how the state is currently implementing its constitutional obligations.

Affairs (Nabila Makram) and International Cooperation (Sahar Nasr). To highlight the tension the appointment of the three women as Ministers caused, it is interesting to note the response to them in Egyptian media: some commentary focussed on their beauty, others on their modest or immodest dress.

Egyptian women have taken up the opportunity to participate in this new political space in other ways. During this period, Hala Shukrallah became the first woman in Egypt’s history to lead a major political party. According to Mariz Tadros, women also made up the biggest bloc of voters to endorse the adoption of both constitutions. An important point to note in the context of peacebuilding post-transition, is that Egypt has increased persecution of journalists and civil society activist and has also passed laws that make civil society (and reporting) work extremely difficult. Most recently, a law passed in May 2017 places heavy restrictions on non-government organisations (NGOs). For example, organisations cannot publish reports without prior approval from the appropriate ministry. Non-government organisations must also only work in ‘developmental or social’ capacities and are barred from any activities that are deemed ‘harmful to national security and public morality,’ amongst other things. The Egyptian state does have a history of this that pre-dates the current government (Sika 2014). This has the potential to severely limit the capacity of women to organise effectively.

Many international human rights organisations continue to report on human rights violations, and these extend beyond freedom of speech and political organising issues, and also include labour rights violations amongst others. Amnesty International, as well as other international NGOs have lobbied the government and the President directly in an attempt to mitigate these restrictions, however they continue. According to Amnesty International reports, a number of human rights organisations have had members banned from travel, and seven organisations/ten individuals have had their assets frozen (Amnesty International 2017).

The ‘peace agreement’ in the Egyptian context is the 2014 Constitution, which was passed by referendum. This document replaced the 2012 Constitution that came into effect during President Morsi’s government. Both documents were based on the 1971 Constitution. The 2014 Constitution, which was coded for this project, enshrines equality before the law between men

The role of women, and women's bodies, have historically been involved in the narrative around the national identity of Egypt.

and women, and prohibits discrimination. The Constitution protects women from all forms of violence. However, this is in part undermined by Article 60 of the Penal Code, which has been used previously to acquit domestic violence charges (UK Home Office 2017). The emphasis on 'Islamic Shari'a' as a guiding principle to legislation in the Constitution is also highlighted as problematic.

The most prominent focus on women in the 2014 Constitution is Article 11, which has a series of statements relating to the state's role in ensuring 'the achievement of equality between women and men,' 'appropriate representation of women in the houses of representatives, as specified by law,' protection against violence, enabling women to 'strike a balance between family duties and work requirements' and providing care to mothers, female headed households and the 'neediest women'. It is unclear how some of the above would be enacted though developments to date provide some insight. No quota for women in parliament was enacted (despite efforts by some women's organisations), though a 25 per cent quota of seats in local councils was included (Article 180). President el-Sisi's appointment of 14 additional women to parliament following the election is one example of how the state is currently implementing its constitutional obligations in relation to gender provisions.

The implementation of different aspects of Article 11 (as well as other women's rights commitments Egypt has made at the international level) has taken on different forms to date. The National Council for Women (NCW), the Egyptian state's women's machinery, set up by Hosni Mubarak in 2010, was not abolished and continues to operate as the body tasked with helping the state enact its gender-parity and women's development policies. The NCW was tasked with drafting the 'National Strategy for Combating Violence Against Women,' which again draws on state obligations under Article 11 of the Constitution.

In March 2017, President el-Sisi (with the President of NCW, Dr Maya Morsy) helped launch the 2030 National Woman's Strategy, which has four pillars of focus: political empowerment, economic empowerment, social empowerment and protection.

This strategy also fits in with Egypt's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) commitments in relation to women's rights. The state also draws on programming enacted in partnership with international and transnational organisations to discuss the 'empowerment of women' article in the Constitution. For example, World Bank programs Takaful and Karama are cash transfer programs aimed at providing resources to people living in poverty in Egypt, many of whom are women. It must be stated that these programs do find opposition. In an environment with shrinking space for independent civil society, there has been strong criticism of both the strategies of NCW and its leadership, and consultation with non-governmental voices (Anderson 2016). The NCW has also failed to voice concerns about SGBV carried out by state security forces. As such, while the state has made some moves to realise the gender provisions that are in the Constitution, it has also enacted laws and policies that undermine women's capacity to participate outside of the narrow state sanctioned spaces available.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER CONFLICT

Egyptian women have historically had a presence in the political spaces and discussions of their country and there is much published on the history of political movements and women's movements there. Scholars have detailed the various roles women have played, either as individual members of the intelligentsia (very much rooted in nationalist and anti-colonial thinking and activity) who shaped the Egyptian state in the first half of the twentieth century, as well as parts of diverse movements related to class (and other) struggles (Awad 2011; Khater & Nelson 1988; Salime 2008). The role of women, and women's bodies, have also historically been involved in the narrative around the national identity of Egypt. In the book *Egypt as a Woman* (2005), Beth Baron opens with the narration of a significant moment for Egyptian nationalism; the unveiling of a statue in 1928 that depicted a female figure removing her headscarf. The statue was erected as a symbol of nationalist activities in the 1919 uprisings, during which women played a significant role (Baron 2005). Nationalist movements in Egypt have historically used the images and bodies of women as symbols for the nation-state and its development and movement in modernity. Women are also assigned the role of mothers of the nation and bear the 'authentic ethnic identity,'

a burden that places the responsibility of sexual and cultural purity, as well as modernisation, squarely on their shoulders (Timmerman 2000: 18-24). Over time, this role became more complex, as did women's involvement in Egypt's political narrative. Women's activism shifted from embodying modernity in the early part of the twentieth century, to activism that had a class consciousness in part (and partly was rooted in socialist feminist thinking), but also articulated demands in terms that related to 'women's rights' (Khater & Nelson 1988).

In a more modern iteration, Islamist movements, including the paternalistic Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, similarly used women to organise and widen appeal to an 'Egyptian' or even 'Arab' identity. The rise of an Islamist movement can be described as a post-colonial (or anti-Western) response, and women's bodies seem to be at the front line of this (Angrist 2012). It is also a response to the secularism of the Egyptian state (Blaydes & Tarouty 2009). In opposition to external political, military, economic or social forces present in the MENA region, fundamentalist Islam demands a more stringent enacting of its prescribed identities. As such, the burden of identity is often assigned to women to both enact and reproduce it. Renewed efforts on this front this year take the form of the Estargel or 'man up' banners seen around Egypt, where men are encouraged to control 'their women's' clothing.

This is closely linked to material factors that both encourage and reproduce these patterns of Islamic identity. Limited socio-economic opportunities can be attributed to changes in the state's economic policies and economic liberalisation that occurred in the 1980s under both Sadat and Mubarak (Hatem 1992). This heightened the economic burden on middle and lower classes generally, and women especially experienced difficulties in entering the job market as they could no longer access employment in the public sector. Fundamentalist Islam (or a more Islamist outlook and political position) is, in part, a reaction to this also and provides incentives for women to subscribe to its tenets (Blaydes & Linzer 2008). In fact, there is a more material iteration of this political economy reading of women's presence in Islamist movements in Egypt: The Muslim Brotherhood relies heavily on women to engage other women in voter recruitment, relying on social capital and social networks, as well as navigating social norms within conservative communities, to draw female voters for them, enabled in part by the social services the Brotherhood provides (Blaydes & Tarouty 2009).

Egypt has a history of state feminism, and women (both practically and symbolically) have played a significant role in a number of important political events in Egypt's history. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Egyptian state

became a welfare state, in which the state explicitly committed to making efforts to achieve equality between men and women (Hatem 1992). In Egypt, this took the form of 'ambitious state programs that introduce important changes in the reproductive and productive roles of women' and 'government efforts to remove the structural basis of gender inequality by making reproduction a public – not a private – concern and by employing increasing numbers of women in the state sector' (Hatem 1992: 231). Hatem (1992: 233) writes that while the state's economic policies created women who could be economically independent from their families (and the patriarchal structures that come with that), personal status codes were not amended to match this freedom and so gender relations were not transformed in a meaningful way.

Women were given the right to vote as well as stand for elections in 1956 under Abdel Gamal Nasser (Arab Socialist Union Party) (Johansson-Nogués 2013). Subsequent leadership in Egypt enacted a variety of laws and policies that supported women's participation, particularly politically. Women's rights to public office, to education, as well as to employment were all enshrined in law prior to 2011 - though implementation is another issue entirely. There is a darker side to this, which is that authoritarian states adopting state feminism as a policy can co-opt women's rights movements, and Al-Ali (2012: 30) makes the argument that this occurred in Egypt, particularly under the Mubarak regime. For example, a strong relationship between parts of the women's movement and Suzanne Mubarak's National Union for Women has the ability to undermine the credibility of women's rights activists as well as limiting strategies and achievements, as they work within a particular system or regime and its confines (Al-Ali 2012).

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER CONFLICT

To situate Egyptian women's economic profile on an international level, Egypt ranks low in many indices that indicate women's economic access. For example, it ranks 132 out of 144 on the Global Gender Gap Index. Egypt's economy is shaped in large part by structural adjustment programs (SAP) that began in the 1980s and these adjustments impacted women, who benefited from state policies around women's employment (Nassar 2003; see Hatem above). These policies created the 'feminisation of government employment' in Egypt, which meant that women were hit harder when SAPs were implemented (Nassar 2003: 106). An increasingly neoliberal

approach to Egypt's economy is also credited for deepening the grievances that led to the protests in 2010-2011 (Moghadam 2013). In turn, this has had gendered outcomes and a marked impact on women's economic participation and access to paid employment. Due to limited economic participation opportunities in Egypt (particularly for women) in the period that followed these reforms, women were increasingly engaged in self-employment activities (Assaad 2003; Nassar 2003). International organisations have also taken up the opportunity to support women through micro-lending initiatives. Malak and Salem (2017) highlight an important aspect of micro-finance, which is the problematic power structures that occur between urban based micro-finance NGOs and rural 'benefactor' women, as well as how the introduction of market economy norms and infrastructure can often undermine women's roles in communities, cooperatives and informal economic processes.

There are, of course, stark differences in the way women engage with economic activities and processes in rural and urban contexts. Rural women have been strongly impacted by labour migration in the past few decades, as men travelling to work outside of the agricultural sector meant that women became heads of households as well as engaging in more work outside the home (Toth 1991). More recently, Nassar (2003) lists the barriers that women face in the labour market as:

- Wage discrimination
- Discrimination in employment conditions (harassment for example)
- Lack of childcare
- Lack of transportation/mobility issues
- Women's share of unpaid work
- Reproductive roles
- Lack of female representation in trade unions

Issues relating to discrimination (highlighted in the literature as a key barrier to women's labour force access) do not appear to be addressed in the most recent 2014 Constitution, as there are no provisions discussing discrimination in an economic sense. Article 11 does stipulate that 'the state shall... ensure enabling women to strike a balance between family duties and work requirements,' but it is unclear what this means.

Women in Egypt do take up opportunities for education with a high number of women at university. However, some reports highlight the disconnect between the number of women in higher education and the rate at which women are entering the labour force (El-Hamidi & Said 2014). In fact, unemployment is often cited as being highest among university graduates (Sika 2014). Where education does make a significant difference - or perhaps simply there is a visible correlation - is for birth rate. Research shows that the average birth rate declines as women access more education, though this is also linked to other factors like access to reproductive health services, class, and life opportunities (Moghadam 2004).

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Monash Gender, Peace & Security is a group of policy and community engaged scholars whose research is focused in the field of gender, peace and security. We seek to use our research to inform scholarly debate, policy development and implementation, public understanding about the gendered politics of armed conflict and the search for peace.

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