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# Transnational NGOs between Popular Uprising and Authoritarian Regime: Developments in Egypt

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## **Abstract**

Scholars differentiate the concepts of internationalism and transnationalism. While the first refers to the connectivity between macro institutions such as states, multinational corporations and other institutionalized actors within and beyond national boundaries, the second term emphasizes public movements, organizations and communities engaged in de-territorialized socio-cultural, political and economic activities. This paper focuses on the role of transnational NGOs (TNGOs) in recent developments in Egypt. The current scholarly debate on the so-called “Arab spring” considers the mobilization of disempowered youth, intense media-tech application and sustained international pressure as crucial to ousting authoritarian regimes in North Africa. Delineating the role of TNGOs complements such findings. TNGO activities and responses to the Egyptian uprising in 2011 and to the ensuing coup in 2013 reveal the capability of such organizations to balance civic transformational oriented mobilizations with state centred institutional considerations. Furthermore though TNGOs cannot directly change the current political stalemate in Egypt, the power elite might misinterpret the changing and sometimes contradictory positions of these organizations and might eventually encourage the return to authoritarianism. After introductory remarks on the background of the uprising, the paper proceeds to theoretical discussion of transnational engagement followed by recent historical and current empirical developments.

## **Introduction**

Among the countries of the “Arab spring” in the Middle East and North Africa only Egypt claims both a popular revolution and a coup. With a civic revolt in 2011 Egyptians mobilized resources to overthrow an authoritarian ruler. Two years later with a military coup the public fragmented into antagonistic factions: (i) those continuously insisting “shariyah”, the legality of the original revolution of the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011; and (ii) proponents of the “inqilab”, the army takeover of July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013. This paper explores the role of transnational NGOs (TNGOs)<sup>1</sup> in this unresolved political stalemate.

With nationwide mass protests in January 2011 Egyptians demanded “rahil”, the departure of Hosni Mubarak, the country’s long term autocratic ruler. Protesters called for “Eish” bread (Life) “karama” dignity and “huriya” freedom for all. These euphoric public eruptions marked the culmination of long term entrenched civic engagement. Over the years Egyptian activists established grassroots critical social movements and organizations to directly and indirectly challenge the military

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<sup>1</sup> “We define Transnational NGOs as organizations that normally operate, recruit membership and attract funding from more than three nations.” “The term “transnational” refers to activities, organizations, and movements that occur across national boundaries with limited or no involvement by national governments. Use of the term “transnational” as opposed to “international” is intended to accentuate the fact that the activities, organizations, and movements being described do not occur at the behest of national governments”. See more in Peter N. Stearns (eds.), *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World*, OUP, 2008.

regime. With diverse civic associational life Egyptian NGOs filled the welfare gap left by the state in providing basic services for vulnerable communities. Meanwhile domestic movements complemented the national civic efforts with trans-boundary interaction and collaboration with TNGOs. Such transnational connections enabled local NGOs to join global civil society mobilizations, particularly struggles concerning peace and social justice in connection to the Iraq wars and Palestinian intifadas<sup>2</sup>. The participation of transnational actors with embedded framing opportunities strengthened the foundations for subsequent popular uprising that for the Egyptians reached a climax with the fall of Mubarak<sup>3</sup>.

Later a military-administered distressful transitional period ended with an internationally observed democratic experiment in 2012. Among the winners of the closely contested national election included activists and leaders from earlier politically oppressed movements and NGOs. In retrospect the transformation was historic for the troubled nation. The transition, however, cultivated a more confrontational political conundrum. The electoral success of the Muslim brotherhood undermined the fragile national and transnational civic convergence that earlier disgraced authoritarianism. In Egypt Islamist resistance has a long history. For instance the Muslim brotherhood alongside associated organizations had for almost one hundred years pursued a counter-hegemonic platform. The movement resisted colonial power accumulation and the coercion of successive military regimes. Both colonial powers and the military oppressed religious organizations, while occasionally behind the scenes negotiating with the leadership. Over the years the brotherhood maintained a civic mobilization profile with, for instance, private educational institutions and clinics enabling the organization sometimes to operate as a de-facto welfare state. As the uprising gained momentum, although not among the prime initiators, the brotherhood promptly capitalized on the volatile situation for political ends. Unlike the digitally minded youth and non-activist civic components, the brotherhood maintained certain organic connections to local communities. Consequently the civic mobilizations congregating at Tahrir and other Egyptian squares for the common objective of "*isqad al-nidam*" the fall of the regime reverberated into diverging

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<sup>2</sup> Maha Abdelrahman. With the Islamists? Sometimes, With the State? Never! "Cooperation between the Left and Islamists in Egypt", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2009, 36:1, 37-54.

<sup>3</sup> Naomi Sakr. "Foreign Support for Media Freedom Advocacy in the Arab Mediterranean: Globalization from Above or Below?" *Mediterranean Politics*, 2006, 11/1: 1–20.

ideological clashes; return to belligerent military rule interweaved with prospective civil conflict<sup>4</sup>.

### **The problem**

This study focuses on the contradictory response by some TNGOs to the January 25<sup>th</sup> uprising and the military coup in July 2013. The paper argues that the inconsistent proclamations by such organizations reflect broader national and transnational civic divergence. For instance, Human Rights Watch, a focal TNGO operating in Egypt, applauded the January 2011 upheaval describing it as the product of “Egypt’s transformers and revolutionaries”<sup>5</sup>. In comparison the organization’s response to the military coup in July 2013 expressed caution that “Egyptian authorities should take the necessary steps to protect churches and religious institutions against mob attacks”<sup>6</sup>. Absent from the statement was reference to the revolutionaries in 2011 and there was unwillingness to categorize the military takeover as a coup. Even the prime stakeholders, the Egyptians, remain divided in determining the classification of such a dramatic national rupture. This is due to the leaders of the decades’ long military rule often legitimizing the acquisition power with violence and with constitutions dividing society.

Another US based powerful TNGO, the Carter Center, had a similar approach to the Egyptian turmoil. The former president, Jimmy Carter, who leads this organization has a somewhat paradoxical relationship with Egypt. Under his presidential supervision, the Camp David treaty mediating Egypt and Israel sponsored and launched a long term US-Egypt security partnership. The retired statesman, and a Nobel laureate, this time as the head of a civic transnational platform, articulated willingness to help Egyptians towards “self-governance”. The dual approach to the Egyptian predicament seems clearer when in response to the Egyptian uprising Carter on behalf of the Carter Centre “Congratulate[d] the people of Egypt on their courageous steps toward a new era of democratic legitimacy and respect for human rights... [and let Egyptians] know that they have the support of the international community as they embark on the difficult path of building a truly democratic nation”<sup>7</sup>. During the parliamentary elections and the short lived Morsi’

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<sup>4</sup> Faiqa Mahmood. “Evolving Civil-Military Relations: a comparative analysis of Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan” Research Paper for Ibn-Khaldun Center for Development Studies, August 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Feature by Human Rights Watch at: <http://www.hrw.org/features/revolutionaries-egypts-transformers>

<sup>6</sup> Statement by Human Rights Watch at: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/19/egypt-security-forces-used-excessive-lethal-force>.

<sup>7</sup> Carter Center statement at: <http://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/egypt-021111.html>.

presidency both the US embassy in Cairo and the Carter Center sponsored numerous coordination meetings to “mediate” opposing political forces in Egypt<sup>8</sup>. Later reacting to the military coup the Carter Center refrained from direct association with Egyptian protesters but instead “Placed an extra responsibility on the armed security forces of Egypt to remain within reasonable limitations of not only applying lethal force but also showing fundamental respect for the human rights of their fellow Egyptians”<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore when Morsi took power and changed the constitution both Human Rights Watch and the Carter Center adopted a critical discourse highlighting themes such as gender inequality and increasing violations against religious minorities in Egypt. The position of the two TNGOs coincides with the US government’s scepticism towards democratic Islamist rule<sup>10</sup>. Although TNGOs often seek to reconcile civic movement and grassroots oriented priorities with formal organizational and institutional objectives, the statements by Human Rights Watch and the Carter Center confirm organizational ambivalence aiming at an intermediate position. Such a standpoint will require the implementation of parallel and occasionally overlapping functions. Hence organizations build partnerships with states or state linked institutions such as the UN system<sup>11</sup>. Under such a framework organizations interact with home and host states as well as international institutions. The recent legal actions by Egypt against “foreign NGOs” attest to the existence of competing ideological and institutional platforms within and around TNGOs<sup>12</sup>. The Egyptian judiciary accused western TNGOs of undermining the country’s political authority, sovereignty and state legitimacy. For their part western states from which most indicted NGOs and funding originate defended the credibility of these organizations. Consequently TNGOs create tension within Egypt and beyond. For the supporters of the military regime, the action of raiding “foreign NGOs” and confiscating their equipment was justified as Egypt is a sovereign state with legitimacy to control national territory. For them democracy has limitations as “there are red lines” under which civil society could not exist unregulated and beyond the state. For human rights activists the action against the TNGOs was “unprecedented and directly targeted all NGOs”. For them

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace\\_publications/election\\_reports/egypt-2011-2012-final-rpt.pdf](http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/egypt-2011-2012-final-rpt.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Carter Center statement at: <http://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/egypt-081713.html>

<sup>10</sup> Trager, 2001

<sup>11</sup> Peter Willetts. “Transnational Actors and International Organizations in Global Politics” in J. B. Baylis and S. Smith (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, second edition, 2001), pp. 356-383.

<sup>12</sup> Helle Malmvig and Christina Lassen. “The Arab Uprisings: Regional Implications and International Responses, Transitions in the Arab World”, EMed. *Mediterranean Yearbook*, 2013.

the campaign resulted from a long term government manipulation of public discourse portraying TNGOs as “serving for external actors”. In contrast TNGOs consider themselves as “the voice that upholds human rights, exposes abuses [making them] heroes of the revolution which the military aims to silence”.<sup>13</sup> Such claims remain debatable but powerful states and international organizations such as the UN, though formally supporting the prevailing discourse of national sovereignty, funded and encouraged TNGO efforts. For their part TNGOs interact and cooperate with national and transnational civil society constituents in creating “transnational governance spaces”<sup>14</sup>. With emphasis on mobilization oriented activities TNGOs contribute to the formation of essential associational and expressive spaces. Though such efforts might occasionally appear partial and reflect ideological frames, the involvement generates alternative transnational mechanisms for Egyptians and their NGOs to counter military rule.

### **The recent history**

Military elites with authoritarian leaderships have dominated Egyptian politics since 1952<sup>15</sup>. All three former presidents, Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak, reigned with usurpation and systematic persecution of political opponents<sup>16</sup>. The military restricted non state sponsored alternative public spheres. Under such circumstances, civic movements and organizations had the option of either accepting co-option or risking long term imprisonment and torture. Through successive emergency measures, authorities curbed public liberties and mobility<sup>17</sup>. For decades the Egyptian military elite justified such actions with reference to nation-building priorities, prevailing cold war geostrategic considerations and threats from global extremism. The pattern consolidated a praetorian state under which the military and collaborative elites reproduced socio-political as well as economic underdevelopment and increasingly polarized civil society<sup>18</sup>.

Nonetheless citizens, victimized by years of military rule, maintained indomitable resistance countering excessive state oppression. In order to

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<sup>13</sup> See more at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCdS5YZXOVE> (Aljazeera program “Inside Story” invited Egyptian scholar supporting the regime, Human rights Watch representative and a political commentator to discuss implications and consequences of Egypt’s treatment of NGOs.)

<sup>14</sup> Sabine Lang. *NGOs, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge University Press, 2013

<sup>15</sup> Atef Said. “The Paradox of Transition to “Democracy” under Military Rule” *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 2012, 79/2: 271-298.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony McDermott. *Egypt from Nasser to Mubarak: A flawed Revolution*, Routledge 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Stachursky, 2013

<sup>18</sup> Steven Cook. *Ruling but Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria and Turkey*, John Hopkins University Press 2007.



undermine any emerging opposition and consolidate “oligarchic kleptocracy”, Egyptian rulers perennially employed a “divide and rule” strategy creating social fragmentation and enmity among the population<sup>19</sup>. Equally critical, powerful states such as the USA, from which the regime receives sizable funding, as well as international organizations and TNGOs, complicated the state-society relationship in the country. The externalization of development mechanisms worries Arab public opinion that considers western TNGOs as “elitist organizations with limited accountability promoting particular interest”<sup>20</sup>. Consequently for the military regime the quest for external legitimacy appears desirable rather than securing the more accountability demanding internal legitimacy. Eventually the waves of uprising that engulfed Middle Eastern and Northern African countries in 2011 temporarily overturned this elite and state centred political structure. Witnessing the involuntary departure of the Tunisian dictator Ben Ali, the military elite in Egypt initially unsuccessfully tried to constrain the Egyptian people from diverse social, economic and ideological backgrounds from mobilizing. The efforts failed as protesters occupied public squares demanding “rahil” the departure of the “nidam” regime. Likewise the international impetus and media attention at the time surrounding the uprising facilitated and to a certain extent accelerated national, regional and transnational political and technological opportunities. If in the past Egyptians mainly engaged transnationally to bypass domestic pressure and avoid persecution, the political opportunities in early 2011 of a world witnessing a potentially changing region reduced the gap between national and transnational mobilization and institutionalization dimensions of civic engagement. For instance for a period Tahrir and other Egyptian protest squares attained global inspirational status<sup>21</sup>.

The national and transnational civic mobilizations occurred in diverse competing and complementary levels. Firstly the local social level in which organic associations best articulate relevant socio-political issues. Among such constituents include religious and traditional kinship components. During the uprising their main goal was to achieve change with the basic demand of freedom and autonomy. The second level arises from the interaction with the state (the

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<sup>19</sup> Andrea Teti and Gennaro Gervasio. “After Mubarak, Before Transition: The Challenges for Egypt’s Democratic Opposition”, *Interface: a journal for and about social movements Event Analysis*, 4 (1): 102 – 112: 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Nicola Pratt. “Hegemony and Counter-hegemony in Egypt: Advocacy NGOs, Civil Society, and the State, in NGOS AND GOVERNANCE IN THE ARAB WORLD”, supra note 31, at 123, 124.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz “The Globalization of Protest” Project Syndicate at: <http://www.projectsyndicate.org/commentary/stiglitz144/English>.

military regime). The army controls the security apparatus such as the military and other enforcement agencies. At the national level both supporting and oppositional networks operate under this hierarchical structure. Depending on declared policies such diverse groups could either support the status quo or advocate for change. The third level relates to the international/supra national level in which international organizations such the UN, EU, AU and the World Bank pursue designed strategies and projects. Similar to the national arena, transnational networks include constituents calling for change and others preferring the status quo. Finally, we have national NGOs operating at transnational networking level. Under such circumstances, TNGOs often sympathize with local activism in demanding for change, while in practical terms organizations rely on states (regimes) for institutional collaboration and networking within the transnational public sphere. The regime in Egypt controls and occasionally degrades NGOs. One of the main sources for NGO funding is USAID while the US government is the main donor for the Egyptian regime. Meanwhile religious NGOs such as the Muslim brotherhood remain in a precarious situation due to the movement's resistance as well as its semi-political function. The stated religious goals of the Muslim brotherhood and related movements differ from aims stressed by the secular leftists and feminist organizations. Similarly their relationships with the state and TNGOs diverge. Though religious groups remain locally rooted their networks operate and extend transnationally<sup>22</sup>. After accessing power with contested democratic elections the leadership of the Muslim brotherhood missed a unique opportunity to reach out to opposing ideological forces for compromise. Instead the brotherhood embarked on a transnational ideological campaign.

### **Transnational activism and TNGOs**

In theory, TNGOs participate in networks driven by individual activists and related groups sharing "beliefs and identities". These activists pursue trans-border social, humanitarian and political activities in which "cultural framing" plays a central role. More specifically TNGOs obtain transnational expertise and knowledge that is necessary for global developmental debates seeking solutions for "instances of Problematic justice"<sup>23</sup> and social inequalities. In countries like Egypt where such organizations confront bureaucratic obstructions, TNGO activists employ the so-

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Mandeville. "Transnational Muslim solidarities and everyday life", *Nations & Nationalism*, 2011, 17/1:7-24.

<sup>23</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, Cambridge: Polity Press 1990.

called “boomerang networking pattern”. The aim is to externalize and through the collection of sensitive information valorise domestic claims which the authoritarian regime initially ignores and suppresses. The motivation for such endeavour derives from moral/ethical values rather than political ambitions and the personal gains of transnational activists<sup>24</sup>. From this perspective TNGOs often put maximum pressure on authoritarianism, while leaving others to compete for access to influence and power.

Such transnational activists also qualify as “rooted cosmopolitans” with the involvement of not just transnational networking but also with concrete social movement engagement and “trans-border activism”. Apart from politically “framing issues” such activists and organizations engage in “contentious politics” with the purpose of accessing national and transnational power and resources. TNGOs operate through “connective structures” in which institutions, technology, management and leadership play critical roles. In practice TNGOs implement “franchising” activities by establishing branches and offices in different countries. The existence of “political opportunity structures” enhances the capability of TNGOs to mobilize relevant civic activities in home and host environments. Therefore the domestic national structure remains foundational for the operation of TNGOs. In addition the unpredictability of “scale shift” makes a significant difference if transnational engagement seeks civic capability reconfiguration. Scale shift refers to “a change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions to a different focal point, invoking a new range of actors, objects and broadened claims”<sup>25</sup>. With this approach TNGOs might negotiate and even share institutional power with authoritarianism.

Furthermore TNGOs reproduce not just moral and cosmopolitan norms through transnational networking but also new forms of governmentality and asymmetric power relations trying to bypass nation states. Such transnational networks have together with international agencies such as the IMF and World Bank, “taken over the governmentality of, for instance, vulnerable parts of the world. TNGOs often bridge the sovereignty of developing nations in comparison to the developed countries. Operationally TNGOs might reflect the characteristics of “western bureaucratic organization” designed to maintain “liberal global order” with

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<sup>24</sup> M. Keck and K. Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Ithaca 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Tarrow, 2005

an emphasis on secularism<sup>26</sup>. Under this hegemonic and hierarchical structure, TNGOs often seek institutional privilege.

In relation to the African continent TNGOs might exercise “independent sovereignty”. Unlike other more consolidated regions (states) in the world “both the African state and the civil society operate within a trans-nationalized environment and global context”<sup>27</sup>. Consequently countries find themselves almost “ruled by trans-nationalized networks under which condition few countries remain sovereign not because countries are invaded or conquered but because complex networks rule and pressure these countries from distance”. In countries like Egypt, we often see diverse projects designed by “people sitting in transnational distant places”<sup>28</sup>. In recent years due to technological and communicational development, global civil society attained greater significance in issues of transnational social mobilization and organization. Liberalization, originally designed to expand global markets, provided civil society with alternative opportunities to confront and bypass the state. Over the years, expanded liberalization had, however, instead of promoting democratization, undermined state capacity and fragmented society into haves and have-nots. Under such a global liberal environment, we find not just cosmopolitans, the activists involved in global justice movements and cultural innovation, but also TNGOs with contentious organizational hegemonic capacity<sup>29</sup>.

### **Diverging Egyptian forces with conflicting political goals**

In a complex globalized world diverse civil societies maintain formal and informal connectivity across diverse nations and territories. During political upheavals, i.e. the Arab uprising, civil society movements and organizations have intensified transnational civic exchanges. Similarly TNGOs systematically engage and invest in actual processes with the aim of influencing and achieving suitable outcomes<sup>30</sup>. The ideological and organizational priorities of these organizations combined with the tension and suffering often expressed in the national and transnational public spheres as well as the concerns of the communities scattered across the world

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<sup>26</sup> James Ferguson. *Global Shadows, Africa in the neoliberal order*, Duke University Press 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Ferguson, 2006

<sup>28</sup> Vincent Durac. ‘The Impact of External Actors on the Distribution of Power in the Middle East: The Case of Egypt’, *The Journal of North African Studies*, 2009, 14/1:75–90.

<sup>29</sup> Sidney Tarrow. *The New Transnational Activism*, Cornell University 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Stachursky, *The promise and perils of transnationalisation: NGO Activism and the socialization women’s human rights in Egypt and Iran*, Routledge 2013.

contribute to such endeavour<sup>31</sup>. The general public discourse also mobilizes communities linking them to their host countries and societies. The grievances and the daily pictures projected by national movements and organizations and their confrontations with oppressive states also inspire “global public protest” motivating people to act individually as well as collectively<sup>32</sup>.

TNGOs operating in developing countries such as Egypt often have to balance the dynamics of mobilization necessary for the empowerment of wider civil society and the institutionalized pragmatism tendencies required in dealing with powerful political and institutional constituents. This creates a dialectical tension and controversy. The ambivalence further explains the reluctance of TNGOs in initially taking sides in controversial state-society conflicts. TNGOs depend on the backing of both the civic mobilization side as well as the institutional side. While the roots and sympathy might lie on the mobilization side, managerial and structural aspects belong to the institutional dimension of the state. The absence of a transnational public sphere with the capability to connect local indigenous traditions sustains this collective action dilemma<sup>33</sup>.

One crucial factor in this context is the external funding that plays a critical role in state-society relations in developing countries and is occasionally a source of tension and struggle among NGOs for accessing economic privileges and recognition<sup>34</sup>. Funding regimes often exercise influence and might even seek to govern local NGOs directly. Therefore it remains unclear whether the essence of transformative agency emanates from nationally mobilized movements and organizations, or whether it is from the link with and supervision from TNGOs. In most circumstances, for developing countries like Egypt, the distinction between national and international boundaries appears blurred as both the state and civil society depend on external support eventually undermining national sovereignty<sup>35</sup>. In this complex environment of interdependence with multiple competing actors, TNGOs seem better positioned to deal with challenges. Their ability to link and influence both the diverse transnational social groups and different states confirms the centrality of such organizations. Similarly local NGOs often navigate between

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<sup>31</sup> Işık KUŞÇU. “The Egyptian American Diaspora During and in the Aftermath of the Egyptian Revolution of 2011”, *Ortaoğu Etütleri*, 2012, 4/1:121-142.

<sup>32</sup> Seumas Milne. *The Revenge of History: The Battle for the 21st Century*, Verso Books 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Nancy Fraser. *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World*, Columbia University Press 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Altan Ozlem and Ahmet Icduygu. “Mapping Civil Society in the Middle East: The Cases of Egypt, Lebanon and Turkey”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2012, 39(2): 157-179.

<sup>35</sup> Riad El-Ghonemy, “Introduction” in (eds.) M Riad El-Ghonemy, *Egypt in the 21st century*, Rutledge 2004.

transnational ideological demands and state hegemony. While counterhegemonic NGOs risk exclusion and underfunding, cultural, religious and women NGOs could become targets for ideological exploitation<sup>36</sup>. Such tendencies raise doubts with respect to TNGOs' objectivity in relation to the mobilization and empowerment of locally rooted cosmopolitans confronting an antagonistic national regime.

TNGOs, through "rooted cosmopolitans", activists and "connective structures", influenced the struggle to oust Mubarak. They sympathized with and valorised the protests innovating expressional space in Tahrir and other squares<sup>37</sup>. NGOs originally started their work with humanitarian and advocacy activities partially funded and encouraged by neo-liberal tendencies. IMF sanctioned liberalism disrupted the socio-economic pattern as structural adjustment programmes severed basic food subsidies for the poor<sup>38</sup>. Furthermore the creation of a transnational frame and space attracted rooted cosmopolitans from both the west and east together. Initially the Egyptian state tolerated such global protest mobilizations taking place in Tahrir Square, mainly because it dealt with the Palestinian intifada and the Iraqi wars<sup>39</sup>. This window of opportunity mobilized Egyptians nationally and transnationally and gradually generated more or less formalized popular activism connected to different parts of the world. When the right moment came with the Egyptian uprising, civic groups exploited the relationship with diverse national and transnational movements and organizations from which Egyptians received support.

The affiliation with external foreign actors, though seemingly beneficial in certain aspects, divides Egyptian NGOs, fragments society and confirms the existence of post-colonial dependence<sup>40</sup>. Henceforth TNGOs might avoid directly promoting public mobilization and prefer instead to pursue networking, opportunities for valorisation and creating platforms for exchanging and transmitting ideas of the good life.

One of the major problems confronting TNGOs in contributing to lasting political transformation is the lack of the so-called indigenous connection to communities at the local level. So far the scattered Diaspora communities have the

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<sup>36</sup> Benoit Challand. "The Counter-Power of Civil Society and the Emergence of a New Political Imaginary in the Arab World", *Constellations*, 2011, 18/3: 271-283.

<sup>37</sup> Anna Newby. "U.S. Civil Society Assistance to Egypt: Thinking Long Term", *Middle East Studies*, 2012, 21/2: 327-352.

<sup>38</sup> John Salevurakis and Sahar Abdel-Haleim. "Bread Subsidies in Egypt: Choosing Social Stability or Fiscal Responsibility", *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 2008, 40/1: 35-49.

<sup>39</sup> Abdelrahman, 2009

<sup>40</sup> Julia Elyachar. "Empowerment Money: The World Bank, Non-Governmental Organizations, and the Value of Culture in Egypt", *Public Culture*, 2002, 14(3): 493-513.

capacity to deliver some sort of simultaneous transnational linkages to host and homeland environments. In addition global movements for justice promote targeted projects on issues such as democratization, human rights and gender. Undoubtedly transnational NGOs provide alternative platforms for oppressed civil society. With transnational networks, global deliberations and civic engagements emerge from the existing connection at the local, national and transnational levels. In Egypt the cases of the Academy for Change shows that Diaspora originated TNGOs have empowered the mobilization and education of Egyptian youth during the uprising<sup>41</sup>. Unlike conventional TNGOs Diaspora rooted organizations build upon indigenous connections that facilitate the flow of transnational resources to concrete local entrepreneurship developments. In contrast, the activities of for instance the Carter Center, Human Rights Watch and other TNGOs show the continuing struggle to reduce the gap between competing mobilization and organizational tendencies.

Transnational networking emanates from diversified sources. Egypt has been the target of EU liberalization and democratization policies oriented towards the region. Such policies fostered both favourable and oppositional social mobilization platforms. For instance western countries funded transnational projects which facilitated transnational civic negotiations and empowerment. In addition there are opposition groups, often exiled from their countries by authoritarian regimes, linking in western countries from which Diaspora activists and organizations mobilize resources<sup>42</sup>. Transnational community movements, i.e. Diaspora constituents, link to transnational NGOs at the beginning to contribute to humanitarian tasks but gradually pursue greater political and social institutionalization. The liberal public space in more democratic countries provides Diaspora communities opportunities to mobilize and engage.

### **Removing an authoritarian but not authoritarianism**

The January 2011 uprising removed an authoritarian ruler but the current situation attests to the failure of the upheaval in dismantling dictatorship. Though not the major cause, TNGOs, as well as their home countries, reacting calmly to the military, partially contributed to this outcome. TNGOs no longer unambiguously side with civic mobilization against the continuing military consolidation. In

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<sup>41</sup> See more at: <http://wagingnonviolence.org/2011/04/the-role-of-the-academy-of-change-in-egypts-uprising/>

<sup>42</sup> Sean Yom. "Civil society and democratization in the Arab world" *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 2005, 9/4:14-33.

accordance with policy positions taken by home states TNGOs call for national dialogue, restraint and better management from military rulers:

For the first time in the history of the world, a coup is not a coup. The army take over, depose and imprison the democratically elected president, suspend the constitution, arrest the usual suspects, close down television stations and mass their armour in the streets of the capital. But the word 'coup' does not – and cannot – cross the lips of the Blessed Barack Obama<sup>43</sup>.

It was not just TNGOs and their sponsoring states but Egyptian intellectuals also refrained from opposing the coup. A prominent Egyptian leftist scholar contends the following:

The fall of Morsi and of the rule of Muslim Brotherhood came as expected. Firstly, the government of the Muslim Brothers has been pursuing the same neoliberal policies as that of Mubarak, and even worse. It could not solve any of the problems faced by the Egyptian people. Secondly, Morsi was elected as a result of a gigantic fraud....Millions were given to people to buy their votes. The Muslim Brotherhood were mobilized to control the polling stations, which made it impossible for the others to vote, to such an extent that the Egyptian judges who normally oversee the election were disgusted and withdrew their support for the election process. Despite that, the US Embassy and Europe declared the election was perfect. This is how Morsi was elected<sup>44</sup>.

Amin expresses a valid critique that both the military and the religious organizations in their economic priorities embrace a neoliberal orientation. Together they manage a large portion of the Egyptian economy. Many Egyptians work for and get so-called "welfare" services from them. The almost never-ending conflict between the two powerful organizations (one supposedly secular, the other religious) might lead to the collapse of order. It happened in Somalia and it is currently generating the semi-collapse of Syria- and it might possibly lead to some sort of ongoing disorder and disenchantment in Egypt. Both organizations benefit from powerful transnational networks.

On the other hand, Africans have this time chosen the civilian side. African leaders suspended Egypt's membership in the AU while some countries in the continent severed diplomatic relations with Cairo. Historically the continent has had considerable experience of military coups.

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Fisk at:” <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/when-is-a-military-coup-not-a-military-coup-when-it-happens-in-egypt-apparently-8688000.html>”

<sup>44</sup> Samir Amin at: “<http://www.codesria.org/spip.php?article1817>”



With the January uprising of 2011, TNGOs expected a more open and western oriented democratic Egypt. Instead, better-organized Islamic groups won the elections and the subsequent referendum. Responses from several TNGOs indicate their disappointment with developments in Egypt. TNGOs criticised the process of constitutional reform, particularly on gender issues and the pressure on foreign NGOs operating in Egypt. TNGOs failed to take a tougher stand against the Egyptian coup for two main reasons. The first relate to “rooted cosmopolitans” that operate through transnational “connective” structures with contentious power political national institutions that constrain TNGOs. According to this perspective in “contentious politics” TNGOs might choose cooperation rather than confrontation with governments. In addition some western governments have little sympathy for the Muslim brotherhood taking power in Egypt. Islamists leading powerful countries like Egypt and Turkey might transform the region in favour of implementing alternative socio-political structures. It is possible that conflicting signals sent by western governments and TNGOs after Morsi took power might have convinced the military to reclaim power.

Secondly the international impetus for the “Arab spring” no longer exists. With the absence of a global civic movement, TNGOs prefer to concentrate on institutional organizational conditions.

### **The way forward**

The case of Egypt following the January 2011 uprising and the subsequent July 2013 coup shows that TNGOs actively contribute to the development of and political transformation in developing countries. Their contribution depends on the prevailing power relations and dynamics of the local, national and transnational circumstances. TNGOs seek to balance the mobilization dimension, which is often popular and civic-oriented, with the organizational aspects necessary for organizations to operate in politically contentious institutional environments. Responses from TNGOs, such as Human Rights Watch and the Carter Center, to the Egyptian January 2011 uprising and to the military coup in July 2013, confirm this pattern.

The Egyptian conflict remains unresolved and continues to dominate debates in international politics. Furthermore the case illustrates the failure of post-colonial politics and decades’ long authoritarianism sustained by geopolitically motivated external interventions. Consequently the Egyptian people fragmented

into diverse political and social groups linked to complex transnational constituents. For instance the two most powerful groups, the military complex and the Muslim brotherhood, both retain international networks. Power and substantial political struggle in Egypt revolve around these two powerful contenders and their formal and informal national and international networks. The military remains the main industrial producer and property owner in the country. This economic platform links the army to the global economy. General Abdalaziz Sisi, the top military figure, currently gets funds from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which consolidates his position and a process of constitutional reform favouring military consolidation and a potential presidential career for himself.

For its part the Muslim brotherhood as a religious organization interacts with transnational devotional networks in almost every country in the world. Thus their persecution in Egypt is unlikely to succeed as the organization has transnational offices and a membership that will persist in challenging the military. In between the two competing heavyweights the Egyptian people suffer. Increasingly some new movements are trying to emerge in Egypt calling for consensus for the sake of Egypt. Activists established multi-religious and multi-ideological networks seeking to overcome the entrenched military-brotherhood dilemma by concentrating on non-ideological solutions rather than the usual confrontation<sup>45</sup>. These new movements have the potential to help Egypt overcome the stalemate.

Therefore despite the presence of authoritarianism in Egypt the civic call and mobilization for “eiash, karama & Horiyah” (Bread, dignity and freedom) continues to send a resonating message. The reason is that the overwhelming majority of Egyptians are young people, many of them connected to the world and exposed to the livelihoods in more prosperous parts of the world. Besides, the funding from richer countries currently partially ensuring military superiority in the country might not persist.

At the moment TNGOs seem reluctant fully to oppose Egyptian authoritarianism. Therefore it is difficult conclusively to categorize these organizations as transnational network activists, rooted cosmopolitans that depend on political opportunities, or transnational cultural platforms for hegemonic state(s).

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<sup>45</sup> See more in “Coup or Revolution”, Africa Research Bulletin: Political, Social and Cultural Series, 50/ I: 7, page I, August 2013.

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