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Egypt: What, Where, When and How?

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This paper is an attempt to examine, from a personal perspective, how Egypt can move through the process of democratic transformation in the wake of the 25 January revolution, and the context of the Arab Spring. As the title indicates, the paper will discuss where the country should be going, when to do that and how to achieve this goal. However, it is essential to begin by giving a brief and general overview of the salient features and characteristics of the Egyptians, outlining their cultural background to allow for a better understanding of the nature of the people who took to the streets on the 25th of January 2011, and the causes that led to this mass revolt.

Egypt has existed for many years, and its Pharaonic monuments bear witness to its ancient being. This very fact must tell us that Egyptians have been influenced by the decades of history and the variety of cultures that have passed through the country. Egypt is an African nation, but it is also an Arab state, and certainly a Mediterranean country that is part of the Islamic world. What a mixture! It is, therefore, important to view Egypt as a state that has been influenced by its geographic position and its long history where settlers, invaders and travellers have left their mark on the land and its people. Likewise, we cannot ignore the fact that the country will inevitably be influenced by the problems, events and concerns of its neighbours. Similarly, Egypt has had a strong impact on the region in many ways over the years. However, speaking in detail about history and geography is a lengthy endeavor, and so I will very briefly refer here to three major influences: landscape; religion, and the socio-economic conditions in the country in the past sixty years which, I believe, have had a great influence on the mass revolt of January 2011.

Egypt's landscape allows for a variety of communities which impose diverse population activities, and dictate different types of behavioral patterns. Heavily populated around the Nile Delta, Egypt has a large agrarian community which in its turn has shaped a people who are characterized by their deep-rooted consciousness of the sense of community, a spirit of cooperation, a religious tendency and a reverence for the patriarchy. In this community the main concern is stability. It is also quite conservative, resists change and accepts gender inequity. In coastal areas, we have fishing communities and trade centers that feature a more mobile, culturally exposed society which tends to be more tolerant of the "other" and adaptable to change. Coastal people are more adventurous and better equipped to adjust to change and to deal with other cultures because of their exposure to trade with their fellow countrymen and foreigners. On the other hand, in the desert we find a nomadic lifestyle that is characterized by tribal

affinities and mistrust of strangers. These communities are patriarchal and submit to the law of tradition rather than state laws. Desert communities are far less open to modernization and prefer to maintain their traditional life style. Having said that, I must emphasize that despite their difference in habits, level of exposure and life style, all Egyptians share a common trait that has affected their character and behavior over the years: A strong religious tradition.

As Castles observes: “The determinants of national specificity include: religious, philosophical and ideological traditions” (14) and in Egypt, religion is a major influence on the people, it infiltrates their lives and is manifested in their habits, traditions, relationships, appearance, and everyday language. Both Muslims and Christians find in religion solace and a force that helps them cope with poverty, marginalization, inequity and oppression. In fact, many of the features of Egyptian culture have a religious base, and the tendency to go to mosques and churches for prayers on a daily basis is an example of the proliferation of religious sentiment in the country. Even the dress code has, in recent years, acquired a religious manifestation as is obvious in the Hijab, the short Gallabeya and the Niqab¹. The everyday language we use is permeated by religious sentiment and terminology, and all our actions are believed to be fated by God. This adherence to religion has had its positive and negative impact on the people. The tendency to be tolerant, patient and generous are positive effects but the dependence, passivity, belief in superstition, fatalism, and fear of the “other” can be considered negative consequences of this embedded religious tradition.

Another factor that brought Egyptians together, during the revolution, was their dissatisfaction with living conditions. In its modern history, throughout the past sixty years, there are three major periods that have had a great influence on Egypt’s social and economic structure. The 1950s and 60s were the era of revolution and socialism: A period of change in Egyptian politics and life. The 1952 revolution was hailed as savior and applauded by the people. With it came socialism and a huge national project of reform, but also a totalitarian police state that ended freedom of speech and violated human rights on every level. With this socialist, totalitarian state people were directed to depend entirely on the central government for everything:

¹ The Hijab is the headdress for women and the short Gallabeya is the gown worn by men to indicate their religious affinities, whereas the Niqab is the a face veil worn by women when in the presence of males who are not related to them or when out on the streets.

education, healthcare, food and employment, the end result was the crushing of the individual spirit. Another consequence of this political regime was the dwindling of the middle class. One obvious reason for this phenomenon is the brain drain that Egypt had suffered from since the 1960s due to the iron hand of the state, and which increased remarkably in the 1970s when many professionals and intellectuals left the country in search for better living conditions and more freedom.

The 1970s brought with it the “The Openness Policy” after the end of the 6th of October war, and the attempt to resolve the Arab/Israeli conflict through the Camp David Peace Treaty. It marks a shift in political affinity from the Eastern to the Western camp (during the Cold War) and the encouragement of foreign investment with the aim of gradually moving towards a market economy. The government did, however, still maintain a firm control over education, healthcare, employment and major industries. As a result, Egypt emerged with a new mixed economy that brought about excessive consumerism and a discrepancy between the haves and have nots. From the 80s onwards, capitalism dominated and with it came an increased social mobility and migration to the Gulf/oil states which brought with it excessive urbanization, overcrowding of the cities and the proliferation of informal housing, as well as more consumerism and a larger discrepancy in income among Egyptians. But it also brought about a shift in culture. The lack of employment opportunities and the deterioration of living conditions in the country drove many to seek employment in the Gulf states, and this move east brought with it a new dress code and an extremist religious trend : Wahhabi Islam which had a great bearing on the culture of the nation in the past thirty years.

Although the Mubarak years were marked by a better opportunity for freedom of expression and an increased impact of regional and international media, Egypt remained a police state. In addition, over the thirty-year period of his regime, the country witnessed a severe decline on every level. Politically, the dominance of the president’s NDP² on the political scene as well as the dwindling role of other opposition parties, often referred to as "cartoon parties", made it quite impossible to have a proper democratic system of checks and balances. Often blatantly rigged, parliamentary elections proved to be a charade that only served to further enhance the

² The National Democratic Party was the dominant political party presided over by President Mubarak himself and included all the old guard as well as his son Gamal Mubarak who dictated most of the policies of the party particularly in the political and economic areas.

power of the ruling party. Likewise, the role of professional and workers' unions diminished with the lack of proper representation and the impotence of these elected bodies (often through rigged elections in favor of NDP members) to perform any kind of monitoring of the central government. What made matters worse was the obvious intention of the president to prepare his son Gamal to take over the reigns of the country, a plan that became very clear during and after the 2005 presidential elections.

Simultaneously, education and healthcare witnessed a sharp decline, and unemployment, especially among youth, increased, and so did corruption. However, it was the widening gap between rich and poor and the sharp increase in food prices that brought things to a head. With the move into the age of globalization, Egyptians began to feel the repercussions of the aggressive market economy as Castles rightly remarks: "Globalization [led] to new forms of social differentiation at the international and national levels. Polarization between rich and poor as well as social exclusion are problems affecting most countries"(18). In Egypt, this polarization was glaringly obvious in the wide gap between those who control most of the capital, live in gated communities and enjoy the benefits of a free market economy, and those who live on the margin in dire circumstances with poor housing conditions and sanitation, and a very low income that can barely make ends meet. Moreover, as the "Economic Performance and the Road to the Egyptian Revolution" report of the Al Ahram Center for Political & Strategic Studies indicates: "Contrary to official reports, Egypt, in the last years that preceded the fall of Mubarak's dictatorial regime, especially in 2010, witnessed an unprecedented level of disturbance in the public services that directly touch people's lives". The situation was exacerbated by a marked increase in corruption on every level, and as Beyerle explains: "When corruption is endemic, whereby a complex system of graft permeates the political system, economic spheres, and basic provision of services in a country, it can stimulate social unrest and foment violent conflict (55). Added to all this came the barefaced rigging of the 2010 parliamentary elections, followed by the bombing of al-Qiddissin Church in Alexandria on New Year's eve 2010/11, which shook Egyptians, Christians and Muslims alike, beyond belief. Thus, it was understandable that people would revolt and demand the fall of the regime, and better living conditions.

With the increase in population, the deterioration in education and healthcare, extreme corruption, ineffective governance, unemployment³, increased police brutality, the horrifying rise in the price of commodities as well as the widening gap between rich and poor, the Egyptians, despite their differences, their passivity, their reverence of the patriarch and their dependence on the state, revolted as a unanimous force against the regime that caused them much suffering. Thus, on the 25th of January, the official Police Day, youth and reformers in Egypt took to the streets to protest against police brutality and against all the injustices they were subjected to, chanting: “Bread, freedom, human dignity and social equity”.

As Serageldin had predicted back in 2007:

The Arabs are proud people, and today, more than ever, they yearn for freedom, self-rule, democracy and the rule of law. Long postponed in the name of national and international imperatives, reform will no longer be denied. The forces of change are challenging the forces of stasis on every Arab society. A younger generation is pushing open the gates to the labor force and to public life. (7-8)

Right enough, these forces of change came from the younger generation. For several years Egyptian opposition had been growing, and people were beginning to feel that there is a need to make their voices heard as Mady observes:

The 25 January revolution was a crowning of extensive political activism that had reached a decisive moment in 2004 with the establishment of the Kefaya movement which refused the hand down of power project. Political opposition to Mubarak increased with the constitutional amendments of 2005 and 2007, and the spread of professional and labor protests and sit-ins as well as the emergence of youth opposition movements. Dr. Baradei’s joining force with Egyptian opposition, and his leading of the National Society for Change, which called for radical political reform, added momentum to the Egyptian national movement. Moreover, the blatant rigging of the parliamentary elections of November 2010 led to reinforcing and uniting opposition around demands for change and reform. Finally, the Tunisian revolution proved to the Egyptians that it is possible to oust

³ Abdih. Yasser, “Closing the Jobs Gap”, *Finance & Development*, June 2011, Vol. 48, No. 2, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2011/06/abdh.htm>. Abdin notes that unemployment is “nearly 60 percent in Syria and Egypt. The average unemployment rate among youth in these nations was 27 percent in 2008, higher than in any other region in the world.”

Mubarak and destroy his regime if people were to take to the streets in millions. (85)

Furthermore, the new generation, using the technology of their times, made it possible for this uprising to happen. The massive demonstrations that started the revolution and were manifested in Tahrir square were initiated by “Egyptian internet activists, youth who emerged in the era of the National Democratic party, [who] succeeded in igniting the revolution of Egyptian internet users or those who just heard about it“ (Abdel Fattah:8). And as Idriss in his "Prelude to the Revolution" remarks, the Tunisian revolution gave courage to Egyptian youth⁴.

Tahrir square became a symbol for freedom, courage and peaceful protests; monitored by the entire world and supported by millions around the globe. But when the revolution ended, the road to democracy was less smooth than Egyptians wanted it to be! They discovered that there is a diverse set of colossal problems facing the nation, among these perhaps the most significant is the weakening economy as Schuman and Hauslohner observe: "Of all the many challenges facing the Middle East's post-revolution leadership--rebuilding political institutions ravaged by decades of authoritarianism, uprooting endemic corruption and restoring order to societies in disarray--perhaps the toughest and yet most crucial are economic". Since "...the economic problem is not usually simple but rather a complex and complicated one in that it is affected by and affects many other non-exclusively economic problems"(Amin: 189), the likelihood of improving living conditions is currently next to impossible and thus, the call for “bread, freedom and social equity” that brought the people to the streets is not likely to be addressed in the near future⁵. The reasons are many,

⁴ Idriss. Mohamed El Said, "Prelude to the Revolution" in Rabie. Amr Hashem(ed), The 25 January Revolution: An Initial Reading and a Future Perspective, Cairo: Al-Ahram Center for Political & Strategic Studies, 2011 (2nd edition). "The Tunisian revolution provided great lessons to Egyptian youth who were closely in touch with their Tunisian brothers. The first of these lessons was that the bringing down of the dictator was possible. Experiences were diverse and Egyptian youth owned the initiative and led the revolution on the 25th of January; a thunderous call in which the Egyptian people with their diverse political and social backgrounds took part". p. 22

⁵ Khan Mohsin , “Egypt’s Broken Economy”, Project Syndicate, Mar. 29, 2012 <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/egypt-s-broken-economy>
"In 2011, the situation worsened on virtually all fronts. Annual growth fell to about 0.5%, and inflation remained in double digits. The unemployment rate reached

starting with inefficient governance, lack of security, corruption, the disappearance of foreign investment, poor education and last but not least, socio-political conflict.

In the wake of the revolt, a chaotic atmosphere surfaced due to the absence of a clear-cut vision of how we want our future to be and because the newfound freedom foregrounded all the negative aspects of the former regime(s). Lawlessness, lack of discipline, traffic chaos, thuggery, extreme disregard for the rights of others, disrespect of law, and a marked laxity in law enforcement became very common phenomena. All these negative features have resulted in a perpetual state of social conflict that needs to be addressed immediately before the country descends into a dramatic state of total chaos.

One of the negative features that emerged after the revolution is the legislative and political mayhem we are living in. We had an interim ruler – Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) – warring ideologues and ideologies, and a referendum that put the cart before the horse! When in March 2011 a referendum was put to the people to say whether they would go for parliamentary elections first or the constitution, people voted for elections first⁶, not realizing that this would complicate matters even more. This event created a huge constitutional problem whereby for eighteen months we have been governed partly by a provisional constitutional declaration issued by SCAF, and partly by the former 1971 Constitution which was annulled by the revolution. What a mess! With the absence of a constitution, we have missed clear direction and slid rapidly into a state of political chaos.

Following the referendum, two predominant political paradigms emerged: the Islamic and the liberal/secular, and with them emerged a new atmosphere of "ugly polarization and division, more obvious than in the pre-revolution period, around the relationship between religion and

12.4% in the fourth quarter, up from 8.9% in the same period of 2010. The current-account balance deteriorated rapidly, owing to the loss of more than \$4 billion in tourism revenues and a sharp fall in remittances by Egyptian workers abroad. The fiscal deficit widened to 10% of GDP, causing government debt (including external debt), which had been falling steadily, to rise to 76% of GDP".

⁶ Many people, due to poverty and lack of education, were used by Islamists (whose main aim was to win the largest number of seats in Parliament before the Constitution was drafted) to vote "yes" for elections first by giving them the argument that voting 'no' for the elections would be voting against the law of God, and moving away from Islam.

governance“ (Amin: 185). But what made matters worse was the emergence of a multitude of political parties, coalitions and groups which eventually led to a fragmentation in the political scene. Since then, the country has been suffering from a series of political pitfalls and social mishaps. Because there is no clear direction, demonstrations proliferated and group demands increased causing disruption in the economy and major losses in the national reserve. The more the people felt that nothing was improving, the more they demonstrated, put the spoke in the wheel of production, leading to shortages in gas, food supplies, and petrol, and the vicious circle goes on.

The emergent political paradigms were manifested in numerous political parties competing for power, and the more they competed, the more the conflict in society increased until it reached a climax in the presidential elections:

Egyptians [were] divided into two major groups: one went to the Brotherhood whether out of conviction, compassion or simply out of hatred for the other party; and the other faction cast its votes to Shafik⁷ out of conviction, or fear of the unknown or in search of the lost stability or out of hatred for the other party. As such, the common factor between the two voter groups is fear and hatred for the other party. (El Manawy)

Unable to reach a consensus about anything, the two warring ideologies continue to pressure the public for support, and the public is torn between them, exhausted by the absence of security, the rocketing prices and the uncertainty of tomorrow. But why can't those two factions agree? For the parties representing political Islam, the struggle for power became one of life or death because more often than not, “people build walls around their belief systems and defend them at all costs. This is because religion has to do with one's place in the world and the manner in which the world is meaningfully put together, and it is difficult, at best, to get someone to negotiate over issues that fall into this category”(Fox: 58), especially since they had been ostracized and marginalized during the previous military regime in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world. Indeed, the rise of Islamists in Egypt is part of a trend in the region, where we find political Islam“ increasingly dominating the political scene”(AlSayyad & Massoumi:33) as is the case in Tunisia and Morocco. On the other hand, for liberals and secularists, the dominance of religious groups is threatening to their very existence, and to the future of the country as they want it to be.

⁷ Ahmed Shafik is an army general, a former Minister during the Mubarak regime, and the PM appointed by Mubarak during the revolution.

Nevertheless, their inability to rally their forces and form a united front has weakened their position in the political arena. Ultimately, as Hamid remarks, “No one, however well intentioned, seems capable of separating their own particular set of interests from broader concerns over the rule of law and institutional integrity. This, in part, is because each side sees its partisan preoccupations as approximating either the state’s interests or the popular will”.

Here, I will try, from a personal perspective, to outline the best possible ways to reform or re-build existing state structures and highlight the appropriate timing and sequence for such procedures. First, I will address, in general, the immediate measures that need to be taken. Then, I will explain the major aspects that require immediate reform, and finally, I will talk about the means to achieve this goal and the timeline for this process.

Our springboard, I believe, should be to get our act together as individuals and start working round the clock to help boost the economy. The second step should be to create a crisis management cabinet to deal with the diverse and disturbing problems on the scene such as security, food and petrol shortages, sanitation and healthcare. Now, more than ever, we must learn the lesson from what happened during the revolution and not repeat the same mistake when “there was no vision or role for the political leadership or the government in dealing with the crisis” (Gad: 111). The new cabinet must endeavor to find innovative and creative, people-oriented solutions. What I mean here by people-oriented solutions is to create two parallel structures for economic reform: a strong central government that can protect the rights of the vulnerable, and encourage the private sector that will enhance production, offer employment opportunities and serve the much needed market economy – which we must confess, we cannot do without as Khan explains: “Egyptian leaders must look for ways to engage the private sector in reviving the country’s economy“. It is also essential to provide opportunities for entrepreneurship by relaxing the bureaucratic regulations that hamper the building of small businesses which can boost the economy. Simultaneously, serious attention must be given to reforming the existing tax system and immediate efforts to close the gap or the “mismatch between the skills young people possess and those that firms seek”(Abdin). More importantly though, is to gradually replace the older generation in leadership positions in government with younger people who would be more energetic and more capable of thinking outside the box. For there is nothing more important than the “human capital” that Egypt possesses, and that any reform agenda should have, at its core, a program to invest in the people

through massive informal education campaigns and vocational training programs.

Politically, the state of affairs needs a major makeover. The current political leadership, represented by the Freedom & Justice Muslim Brotherhood Party, should transcend political rivalry and try to reach a consensus with other factions, and the Islamists must certainly “get beyond the simple slogan according to which Islam is the solution; for it does not create jobs”, as Dahlgren aptly states. Liberals and secularists must also work together to form a strong political front for the upcoming parliamentary elections. Last, but not least, we must all focus on the new constitution to ensure inclusiveness, equity and the rule of law if we are to hope for any change in the country. People must be made aware of the importance of writing a “good, effective, inclusive constitution” that addresses the hopes and needs of all Egyptians with their gender, ethnic and religious diversity.

To reform and rebuild existing state structures, four fundamentally important issues have to be addressed: law enforcement, fighting corruption, reforming the educational system, and building a strong civil society. Over the past eighteen months, the laxity in law enforcement has had disastrous consequences such as lawlessness, the appearance of thugs everywhere, unauthorized, haphazard construction and sit-ins that have disturbed people’s daily lives beyond imagination. At this point in time, awareness campaigns by the government, the media and NGOs are a must to help people recognize the value of the rule of law and the benefits that it will have on social peace and justice. In addition, these campaigns should underscore the importance of citizen participation in law enforcement since the police force cannot function properly without a cooperative public. Parallel to this, a serious effort must be made to re-build and restructure the Ministry of the Interior to better cope with the new situation in the country. For in order to enforce the law, law enforcers must set an example to the people by abiding by the law themselves, by enforcing law without violating human rights and by reflecting the desired equity and social justice which is “about removing structures that abuse and subjugate citizens and turn them into powerless victims of oligarchies and autocracies. It is about ensuring that public authorities reflect the values, and serve the needs and rights, of citizens. (Khouri:14)

The second fundamental aspect to be addressed is corruption. Oftentimes, when corruption becomes “endemic” in a country as Beyerle explains:

A vicious cycle can develop, whereby authoritarian and/or ineffectual governance paired with endemic corruption results in the further delegitimization of authority and rule of law, leading to fragmented tyrannies, which in turn reinforces authoritarian and/or ineffectual governance, impunity, poverty, and so on.(56)

This is exactly what happened in Egypt. The only way, in my view, to combat this evil is to have citizens and government unite around the single goal of ending corruption. Because corruption exists in most of the institutional structures in Egypt, ending it depends largely on the people. By taking ownership of their country and feeling responsible for its future, the people need to realize that by ending corruption they will be able to enjoy their full citizenship rights. Thus, it is through a mass effort of civil society, NGOs, the media and government that we can overcome this. Indeed, this is no easy task because of two important factors: the lack of public awareness and the extensive and deep rooted bureaucracy that has contributed largely to the proliferation of corruption. Therefore, to work towards this goal, there is a dire need for extensive awareness campaigns, the creation of mechanisms that help people report and follow-up on the process, and an innovative approach within the judiciary to aid in the course of incriminating corrupt personnel.

One of the reasons that contributes to the lack of public awareness of fundamental issues concerning the building of a nation is the deterioration of the educational system. Over the past sixty years, the country has witnessed a decline in the standard of education. We have a basically exam-oriented, competitive system that has magnified our problems. Our major setbacks when it comes to education are its poor quality, a tense teacher/learner relationship, competition, and the incompatibility of the end product with the needs of the workforce; all of which have contributed to creating a senseless dissatisfaction and indirectly caused the exclusion of a large percentage of the population from public life, finally fostering frustration and lack of purpose. Critical thinking, as Benesch defines it, is “a democratic learning process examining power relations and social inequities” (547) thus permitting the learner to become actively engaged in his/her daily life and consequently, included in his/her society and culture. On the other hand, when people are not trained or allowed to judge for themselves, they gravitate towards sets of rules, usually created by others, and adopt them as their own. The danger here is that this will invariably lead them to be entrapped in dogmas or ideologies that they can neither explain nor abandon, a practice that will, more often than not, result in bigotry and

rigidity of worldviews; a thing that has become obvious in Egypt in recent years⁸. Unfortunately, the educational system does not foster critical thinking in any way, and the reasons are many, some political but others are merely practical and logistic. To encourage critical thinking, a more interactive approach to education has to be adopted ; a thing that is made practically impossible in the Egyptian context because of the inadequate resources and the large number of students. For how is it possible to encourage students to express themselves, question ideas, do research and interact with their peers and teachers in a classroom of 20 desks and 80 students, and a long syllabus that has to be covered before a specific time? Or how feasible is it, in the same classroom situation, to promote class discussions or an interactive learning approach? The answer to both questions is that it isn't. Consequently, the learners enter and exit the educational system without having had a chance to practice how to conceptualize anything. Therefore, it has become increasingly difficult to count on education to provide the base for public awareness and engagement since the entire system is characterized by limitations, competition and frustration. As such, it is mandatory to turn our attention to reforming education. Of course this is no easy task, and requires proper planning, financial resources, time, energy and dedication – but it can be done if we start now. Here I must add that reforming education should not focus only on formal education but it has to include non-formal and informal education, and the process should aim to ultimately create a 'learning society' that will eventually enhance the democratic transition.

Simultaneously, while reforming education, we must strive to build a strong civil society because it really is the key to rebuilding state structures since, without citizen participation, very little progress can be made. The role of civil society can be enhanced by "building alliances and getting the largest possible number of people to actually become involved in a participatory fashion to achieve results on the ground"(Serageldin:71). In Egypt, we need to use the positive spirit of cooperation that emerged during the revolution to create a citizen based rule that will ensure social justice and equal opportunity. But we must first try to resolve the existing political, class, religious, and economic conflicts in society. To do that, a careful revisiting of our own political culture is necessary. Moreover, if we are to reject autocracy in favor of democracy, we must also avoid using the western paradigm of democracy as the only correct model; we must make sure that

⁸ What happened with the March 19 referendum, as well as the sharp polarization of ideologies are obvious examples of this point.

we adopt the model that best suits our value system and our heritage. Here, it is important to recognize what Davies identifies as the fundamental difference between a “power-based” and a “rights-based” culture where the first refers to autocracy and the second to democracy⁹. In other words, we must ensure that we do not replace an authoritarian regime by either a military oligarchy or an autocratic theocracy. It is by addressing everyone’s needs¹⁰ and guaranteeing their rights that we will be able to transcend the complex conflicts we are faced with today, and build a strong citizenry that is receptive to and engaged in reform. Today, more than ever before, the media and social networks need to work on encouraging civil engagement and emphasizing the benefits of societal participation in the reform process. This should not be a difficult task especially that after the revolution, Egyptians are becoming increasingly involved in the affairs of their country and quite adamant to claim ownership of their nation’s future. It would be a great shame that we do not capitalize on this newfound public concern to create a strong civil society and effective advocacy groups that can pressure for reform. In my view, depending on political parties is not as effective as civil engagement at this stage, and with the open skies that are available now, we have no excuse to falter in pushing for reform of all structures and ending the corruption that has gnawed at the very heart of all institutions.

More importantly, though, is realizing that transitional periods are as crucial as the actual revolution and even more uncertain and that is why it is mandatory to start the process of reform as soon as is possible. Vital to all this is the necessity of seeing this phase as a period of change that will bring with it negative aspects, and thus, we need to understand that losing heart or hope would be the worst thing at this point in time, for as Halligan states: "Metamorphosis... includes periods of conflict and chaos that are necessary precursors to organic change processes" (225). Patience is required at this stage, but it has to be supported by faith in the future and very hard work. Thus, the appropriate timing and sequence for reform can only be

⁹ Davies. John & Kaufman. Edward (eds), Second Track/Citizens’ Diplomacy: Concepts & Techniques for Conflict Transformation, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. pp 110-111

¹⁰Nan. Susan Allen, "Consciousness in Culture-Based Conflict and Conflict Resolution", Conflict Resolution Quarterly, vol. 28, no. 3, Spring 2011. " The core of conflict resolution is a process of shifting consciousness or increasing awareness; parties develop increasing awareness of their own needs, the needs of others, and ways of meeting everyone’s needs". p. 242

determined by the level of energy and commitment that the people of this country are willing to have and sustain. In my modest view, the appropriate timing is *NOW*, in other words, we have to start immediately so as not to waste time and opportunity. All four aspects that need reform: law enforcement, corruption, the educational system, and building a strong civil society, are not impossible to start on immediately especially that, as I mentioned earlier, the spirit of change and revolution are still there and all we need to do is capitalize on this and put our feet on the right path.

Perhaps one of the most important basis for building new structures is guaranteeing inclusion for all groups in society and working real hard to remove the stumbling blocks that could hamper this necessary component of social equity. The first step to achieve this would be to ensure that we have a constitution that is representative of the diverse gender, ethnic and religious variety in Egypt. It is also mandatory to guarantee that the laws that will emanate from this constitution will serve that end in the long and short term. Here the role of civil society, political activists, women's organizations and the media and social media becomes vitally important. Through campaigning and advocacy we can create a societal consensus over inclusion and elicit public support for equity, freedom and a democratic tradition.

However, the constitution is not the only way to guarantee inclusion. Therefore, it is vitally important to campaign on a large scale, encourage informal education and non-formal education to, at least, improve the traditional and cultural norms that foster exclusion, since it will take quite a while to alter these notions and much effort in the areas of formal education, the media and civil society activism. This is no easy task especially that such traditional notions are so embedded in society that, at the moment, they present huge stumbling blocks towards the achievement of this goal. Let us take, for example, the issue of the position of women in Egypt. Many claim that women have won their rights, but reality indicates otherwise. For although the constitution underlines gender parity, the 'gaps' that are found in the set laws, can lead to discriminatory actions. One such gap is found in article (11) of the constitution¹¹ which states: "The state guarantees the reconciliation between a woman's duties towards her family and her job, and equates her to man in the political, social, cultural and economic realms, provided that this does not contravene Islamic laws" (Abdel Hafeez: 21); a

¹¹ The reference here is to the 1971 Constitution since we still do not have a new one.

statement which allows for interpretations that may lead to discrimination against women. Likewise, despite the fact that there are a number of laws that give rights to women and prompt their active participation in public life, the end result is far from satisfactory. When we look at labor laws, we will find that in the latest law (# 12) passed in 2003, article (88) reinforces equity between the two sexes and states: "All laws regulating the employment of male laborers apply to female laborers without discrimination as long as they have similar working conditions"(Abdel Sattar: 54). However, again, reality illustrates otherwise. Nothing proves this more than the statistics of 2008 that reveal the absence or minimal representation of women in vital and highly influential sectors of government (El Tawil: 51-52). For example, the percentage of women employed in important government sectors are minimal: 2% in the Ministry of the Interior, 0.1% in the Ministry of Justice and 0% in the Defense Ministry! And the examples are many. It is enough to mention that women's political participation has been negligible in the past years: The percentage of female representation in parliament (2005) was 2% (Abdel Sattar: 37), and the percentage of candidates within political parties ranges from 1.3% to 33% (El Shobaky: 142). Not to mention of course the recent disaster of the post- revolution parliamentary elections which brought to the lower house exactly seven elected women plus two appointees by SCAF! More alarming still, is the new Council of Ministers, announced only yesterday (2/8/2012) which again, includes only two women. Therefore, it is very important to rectify this during the period of democratic transformation and to underline the importance of female inclusion in all spheres of life, and the new constitution is the place to start.

Along the same lines, we have the phenomenon of religious extremism which, to my mind, represents a major stumbling block. The fact that political Islam has risen to power can be a prelude to an extremism that might hamper all efforts towards creating a harmonious social atmosphere in Egypt. Particularly important here is the salient mood of the general public that voted for Islamists thus indicating that they have the support of at least 51% of those who went to the polls¹². The fact that Islamists have political power is not in itself a matter of concern. It is the repercussions of this state that foregrounds fear of exclusion. The more extremist powers will most certainly seek to exclude women and non-Muslim minorities because of the threat their inclusion, from their perspective, might pose to the

¹² At this historical junction, it is no surprise especially that Wahabbi Islam has been brought to Egypt by the excessive migration to the Gulf states as indicated above.

Islamic nation project. Recently, since the revolution ended, we have seen several calls for the abolishing of some family laws that protect women under the pretext that they were instigated by the former First Lady, and that such laws negatively affect the cohesion within the family unit.

Similarly, the fact that the percentage of illiteracy in Egypt is 66.4% according to the UNDP of 2011, presents yet another important hurdle in inclusion. Uneducated masses will certainly not be able to become part of the body politic, thus negatively influencing the power of civil society in the democratic transformation process. In addition to all of the above, the absence of the rule of law can only serve to legitimize or enhance and ultimately reinforce exclusion. As such, we do not have much choice except to support the rule of law as well as work round the clock to reform and improve education through the three fundamental axes: formal, non-formal and informal education.

But how are we to achieve our goals of reform and inclusion without strengthening the mentality for constructive transformation in a society that is currently teeming with social, religious, economic and political strife? In my view, the only way to achieve this is to address the immediate concerns of the people (security –rising prices –economic decline –law enforcement), build and promote advocacy campaigns for issues that have an immediate impact on people’s lives, hold constructive public debates over an inclusive, egalitarian constitution and last, but not least, strive, in all earnestness and goodwill, to end the existing political and ideological conflicts. Here, the Galtung triangle¹³ could offer a better understanding and analysis of our current socio-political situation. For when we identify the attitude, behavior and contradiction in the conflict itself, we can succeed in addressing the existing conflict situations that have only served to pull the country down rather than promote constructive transformation:

Interests, behaviours and attitudes feed off each other in escalating relations of mutual hostility, threat perception, polarized identities, projection of enemy images and fear. This often considerably complicates the task of addressing the original, core conflict. Eventually however, resolving the conflict must involve a set of dynamic changes that involve de-escalation of conflict behaviour, a change in attitudes, and transforming the relationships or clashing interest that are at the core of the conflicts structure...(Ramsbotham:44).

¹³ Galtung’s conflict triangle consists of three axes: A, B & C representing: Attitude, Behaviour & Contradiction

Furthermore, if we were to apply Galtung's Transcend theory, and look at his basic premise (V), following Islamic thought, which states: "the strength deriving of submitting together to a common goal, including the concrete responsibility for the well-being of all"(1) as a starting point, we can succeed in strengthening the mentality for constructive transformation. In other words, it is essential to convince the public – through a strong and serious effort by government, media and civil society activists – that change can only come through shared responsibility and serious effort. For if we can succeed in working on the emotive and cognitive attitude of the public by foregrounding the commonalities, and relegating the differences to the background, and addressing the centrality of a common goal, we can achieve some success at this early stage. However, this necessitates a sincere desire to hold constructive dialogue about vital issues that concern the general public, from all walks of life, diverse ideologies, gender and religion, to dispel fear and mistrust and narrow the gap in viewpoints. Once again, this cannot be done by government alone, it requires the candid efforts of the media, social networks, activists, political parties, NGOs and public and private institutions like schools, universities, cultural centers and local government bodies. Indeed, if we succeed in building a collective will for reform and transformation, we are sure to achieve our goals in the next few years, and finally enjoy the blessings of freedom, social equity, justice and democracy.

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