
Political Changes in Egyptian State Formation and Its Effect on the State-Civil Society Relations

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Abstract. From the Mamluk Empire to British rule, Egypt had gone through political changes in its pursuit of state formation; even after independence, the process didn't stop. Independent Egypt has always been a military-dominated state. When this authoritative domination came in touch with globalization, people started to cherish their dream of Democratization. This also led Egypt to witness its own 'Arab Spring'. For a little time, Egypt has enjoyed its democracy but again with the coming of Sisi in power, military domination again became visible. At the same time, Civil society always struggled for its place and function in Egypt under authoritarian rulers, and the ruler's tendency to keep his citizens in check created very rigid relations with the civil society. This paper aims to understand the political changes in state formation in Egypt, the inception of Civil society in Egypt, and the relation between state and civil society. This paper will also try to explain this 'state-civil society' relation from the theoretical point of view and would like to understand the reason behind such relations through analysing the political changes Egypt experience from the past century till today.

Keywords: State formation; State-Civil Society Relations; Egypt, political Changes; Arab Spring

Introduction

EGYPT IS AN AFRICAN STATE THAT HAS A VERY LONG HISTORY of culture and civilization. It is worlds one of the ancient civilizations. Throughout the time, Egypt has gone through political changes that brought remarkable change

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to itself. From Mamluk Empire to British rule, Egypt had gone through phases of state formation. With the coming of Nasser and later Sadat and his successors, Egypt has always been a military dominated state. This authoritative domination came in touch with globalization and people started to cherish their dream of Democratization. Thus, came Arab spring and later the dream turned into a nightmare when the expected outcomes were not met through it. Coming of Sisi regime was the end of the dream for proud Egyptians. At the same time, throughout the time, Civil society always struggled for its place and function in Egypt under authoritarian rulers and ruler's tendency to keep his citizens in check created very rigid relations with the civil society. As people struggled for their democracy and ruler practiced their authoritarian rules, Egypt also witnessed severe human rights issues in past few decades especially during Mubarak regime and current Sisi regime. Civil Society, Globalization, Human rights condition are now three Buzz words alongside with military state in Egyptian politics right now. This paper aims to understand the state formation in Egypt through its political changes and the state-civil society relations according to these political changes especially after the 'second inception' of civil society in Egypt, which gave birth to the modern and current civil society trend in Egypt. This paper is an attempt to understand the Egyptian politics and state-civil society relations both epistemologically and ontologically. Therefore, this paper will seek the answers of both what is the present political condition of Egypt and how it came into such phase and what is the relation between state and civil society in Egypt and how it came into such being. To do so, this paper will present historical analysis of Egyptian politics and theoretical analysis of state-civil society relations in Egypt from Mubarak era to current Sisi regime.

Methodology

This research is a qualitative research based on secondary data retrieved from newspapers, journals and websites. This research also uses collected data and reports from different scholarly articles on civil society organizations in Egypt and relevant information from different websites.

Political Changes in Formation and Transformation of Egypt

“For most of their history, Egypt has been a state, but only in recent years has it been truly a nation-state, with a government claiming the allegiance of its subjects on the basis of a common identity.” (Goldschmidt Jr. 2004)

Egypt became an administrative division of the Ottoman Empire, following the empire's victory in the Ottoman–Mamluk War 1517. It used to be a neglected, isolated and poor province of the empire. Napoleon's army occupied Egypt in 1798 and ruled it since 1801. A joint Anglo-Ottoman campaign defeated the French and restored order. Right after the departure of the British army, an Ottoman general of Albanian origin named Muhammad Ali became Wali (vice-roy) of Egypt after securing approval from the Ottoman sultan. From 1805 until his death in 1848 he ruled Egypt with virtual autonomy and is widely regarded as the founder of modern Egyptian state. Egypt under Muhammad Ali experienced rapid modernization project that included the development of a sophisticated bureaucracy and well-armed military. The Muhammad Ali dynasty ruled Egypt until the revolution of 1952 by the Free Officers Movement.

The British Occupation

A nationalist uprising led by a military commander named Ahmed 'Urabi threatened the rule of Khedive Tewfik and European interests in February 1882. The British army intervened and suppressed the revolt in June 1882. Although the British reinstated the Khedive, the occupation army remained in Egypt and the British officials started to influence key administrative decisions since then. In 1914 the British declared war with the Ottoman Empire, declared a Protectorate over Egypt and deposed the Pro-Ottoman Khedive Abbas, replacing him with his uncle Husayn Kamil as Sultan of Egypt.

Independence

Following widespread nationalist resistance, on 28 February 1922, the British government issued a formal statement terminating its protectorate and declaring Egypt to be an independent sovereign state. However, four points were reserved for further negotiations between Britain and Egypt:

1. Security of British Empire communications in Egypt
2. Egypt's defence against foreign aggression or interference
3. Protection of foreign interests and minorities in Egypt
4. The status of Sudan

Significant number of British troops and officials still remained in Egypt to ensure control over the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean coast. Following the developments, the emerging structure in Egypt's politics was that of a power triangle made up of the king, the Wafd Party, and the British. In August 1936, the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty for a twenty-year of alliance was signed by the two

parties. The signing of the treaty can be considered as the final step toward Egypt's political independence. According to Goldschmidt Jr.,

“Comparisons with other Middle Eastern states are difficult to make, but Egyptians have probably developed a clearer sense of nationality than any other Arabic-speaking people” (Goldschmidt Jr. 2004)

The Free Officers Movement and the 1952 Revolution

On 23 July 1952, the Free Officers Movement, a group of army officers led by Mohamed Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser carried out a military coup and formed the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). Right after the revolution, King Farouk was deposed and sent into exile with his family. In June 1953, the RCC formally ended the monarchy and Egypt was declared as a republic. Mohamed Naguib became its first president, as well as Chairman of RCC. However, because of power struggle with Nasser, Naguib was eventually marginalized and put into house arrest. After 1954 there was no virtual opposition to Nasser's power in Egypt. In January 1956 a new constitution was drafted resulting in the establishment of a single-party system under the National Union (NU). The 1956 constitution proclaimed openly that Egypt was an Arab country and a part of the wider Arab nation. Nasser was formally elected as the president of the republic in June 1956.

Arab Socialism

Although the 1952 revolution was mostly based on Egypt-centred nationalism, President Gamal Abdel Nasser introduced “Arab Socialism” as the state ideology involving secularism, pan-Arabism and socialism. Soon Arab socialism became as the most dominant political ideology in the Middle East. Syria and Egypt agreed for a political unification and on 1 February 1958 the United Arab Republic (UAR) was proclaimed. A loose federal union with Yemen—the United Arab States—was also declared subsequently. However, the idea of a unified Arab state did not materialize as Syria disintegrated from the union after the 1961 Syrian coup d'état. Nasser's political credibility hit rock bottom following Egypt's defeat in the Six-Day War of May 1967 which resulted in the Israeli occupation of Sinai Peninsula.

After Nasser

On 28 September 1970 President Nasser suddenly died of a heart attack. Vice President Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat succeeded him, as the new president. Egypt experienced significant transformation under Sadat's presidency.

President Sadat reserved some of the economic and political principles of Nasser by breaking with Soviet Union to make Egypt an ally of the United States, initiating the peace process with Israel, re-instituting the multi-party system and abandoning socialism by launching open market economic policies. On October 6, 1981, President Sadat was assassinated by Islamic fundamentalists during a military parade in Cairo. Following Sadat's death, Hosni Mubarak became the fourth president of Egypt. Mubarak remained in power for almost 30 years marking him as the longest serving head of state since Muhammad Ali in Egypt.

The Arab Spring, Transformation and Aftermath

Following the popular uprising for democracy across the Arab World in early 2011, President Hosni Mubarak resigned and the Egyptian military assumed power. A constitutional referendum was held on 19 March 2011. On 28 November 2011, Egypt held its first parliamentary election since the previous regime had been in power. Mohamed Morsi from Muslim Brotherhood was elected as the new president on 24 June 2012.

Arab uprisings, according to the IFIs, occurred because of insufficient economic reforms, the rise of crony capitalism and weak governance structures. For these global institutions, the goal after the uprisings was to implement deeper reforms that would introduce qualitative shifts in the economies of the region under the banner of good governance ([Ianchovichina et al. 2015](#))

The Morsi presidency became heavily unpopular and was short lived. Morsi in his presidency also failed to address the problems of governance and structures that Ianchovichina et al. pointed out in the previous paragraph. On 3 July 2013, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) removed the president from his office following a series of anti-government protests across the country. The former army chief who executed the removal of Morsi, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was elected as the sixth president of the country and assumed formal power on 8 June 2014, bringing back Military as the governance establishment.

Rise of a Military-Elite Coalition in Egypt

Egypt's military establishment has been the real winner of the country's political transformation in the early 2010s. The military had been the power centre for several decades, beginning with the 1952 revolution and subsequent Nasser's rule. Under Anwar Sadat, the civilian leadership started to systematically keep the military away from direct involvement in politics ([Stacher 2012:60](#)). Under Mubarak, this trend took on a different dimension with the expansion of the internal security and intelligence apparatuses that tried to counterbalance

the army's remaining political influence (Kechichian & Nazimek 1997: 128). As a result, Egypt transformed gradually from a military state into a police state (Kandil 2012: 4). In addition, the Egyptian business elite were also making a dominant position within the power configuration (Roll 2013: 8). Therefore, the Arab Spring and its subsequent events gave the military leadership an opportunity to restore their former supremacy and emerge as the most politically relevant elite. Today Egypt's economy is largely dominated by the military controlled institutions (Reuters 2018). Thus, the parasitic military's corporate structure makes Egypt's political-economic structure unsustainable in the long run (Roll 2016). For Goldschmidt Jr. who shares an optimistic opinion on Egypt,

“Egypt is a great and enduring country with a civilization that has lasted for nearly sixty centuries. It has one of the largest and most beneficent rivers in the world, heavily modified by the hand of humanity but capable of further improvement. Its people are diligent and resourceful. The storms of Middle East politics may rumble around and disturb their equanimity. But Egypt has weathered such storms before, and its people are determined to survive”. (Goldschmidt Jr. 2004)

Inception and Function of Civil Society in Egypt

Egypt, the country linking northeast Africa with the Middle East, is the possessor of one of the longest and richest histories of the world and dates back to the time of the pharaohs. The fertile Nile River Valley is evidence to the rich Egyptian past. Like its history, Egyptians have witnessed major political, economic, social, ideological and geographical upheavals over the decades triggering public sentiments. Many reforms were inculcated in the society that was pertinent at the moment which could eventually lead to some palpable solutions. The inception of the civil society in Egypt took birth owing to these instances. The whole process can be understood by categorizing the history of civil society in Egypt into phases. Scholarly works of Hassan and Amin had immense impact on this study. This research will also follow the footsteps of them and would like to understand trends of the inception and development of civil society in Egypt through two inceptions and several phases.

The development and rise of civil society in Egypt, which extends over a period of almost two hundred years, is different from other Arab countries. According to Hassan, *The first inception* (1821-1881) of civil society in Egypt came with the modernization project at the beginning of the 19th century, under the rule of Mohammad Ali, with the emergence of a national elite but this did not confront the state. (Hassan,2011) There was a sort of complementarities in the functions of both parties as some of the founders of civil society organizations

were high functionaries or members of the Royal Family with European linkages. (Hassan 2011)

In the Colonial Egypt (1882-1922), civil society organizations in struggled with the colonizers for the rights of its nationals. Movements and awareness on issues such as labour rights, feminist movements, proliferation etc flourished and also gave birth to first labour rights movement in 1898.

After that, came phase Hassan coined as 'the Liberal Phase' (1922- 1952. (Hassan 2011) The era started with the creation of the Constitution of 1923, which according to Hassan, was one of the most liberal constitutions at that time, as it guaranteed a number of rights and basic freedoms, such as the right of association and expression which prompted the colonial power and the throne to strive to get rid of this constitution by suspending it completely. (Hassan 2011) In this time, Civil society in Egypt had its most favourable time and space which allowed it to flourish all over the country. And with the revolution, the phase ended and civil society in Egypt was on its verge to face its toughest time.

After the revolution, When Nasser was in power from 1952 to 1970; Nasser took policy of centralizing power by creating authority everywhere. As a result, soon, Civil Society also found itself under the authoritative administration from the government that marked the end of its liberal era. Nasser's successful consolidation of power by populist politics also earned him huge popularity in Judiciary and Parliament and as a result Nasser was in position to undermine the criticism and challenges he was facing from the civil society at that time. As a result, Nasser's initiating constitution of 1964 marked the end of the civil society as according which any association apart from judicial recourse was banned in Egypt. As a result, civil society in Nasser's era faced its doom due to authoritarian nature of the politics.

When Sadat came in power in 1971, he replaced the constitution of 1964 with a new one that saw '*the second Inception*' (1974 - Present) of Civil society in Egypt. The new constitution was relatively more open and freer than its predecessor. It ensured democratic representation which allowed the Civil Society to function again and gave the second inception according to Hassan.

By the end of 2008, there were some 30,000 civil society organizations in Egypt, or approximately one for every 2,800 Egyptian residents. (Hassan, 2011) But one must keep in mind that, the numbers are deceiving because there are trifling numbers of Civil Society organizations, who are actually active. And again, among the associations, religious and development associations together represent more than half of all associations. (Abdallah 2008)

State and Civil Society Relations in Egypt after Second Inception

Theoretically, State and civil society relations can be understood through western traditions mentioned by Khan and non-western traditions pointed out by Chandoke.

In western Tradition, Khan tried to understand state-civil society relationship from three perspectives. (Khan 2015)

1. Liberal Perspectives
2. Marxists perspectives
3. Pluralist perspectives

Liberal perspective sees the relation by taking state as an arbiter between conflict of interest and ensures individual liberty and right. According to Khan, "state is a necessary evil that serves civil society and which is accountable to the citizens through political representation." (Khan 2015)

Marxists takes it as a tool for unequal distribution of resources and a process to create consent among the society on behalf of state and capitalists. (Khan 2015)

Pluralists are extremely critical of both the theories and see the relation as 'polyarchy' where state should have least interference. (Khan 2015)

In non-western tradition, exerted from historical evidences, according to Chandoke, the relations are various. (Chandoke 1995) Sometimes it is 'controlled' and suppressive and sometimes it is a battle between state and civil society as 'State vs. Civil Society'.

The first inception of Civil Society in Egypt can be easily understood by applying both the western tradition and non-western tradition where for a long time, Liberal perspective was truly relevant. But the second inception and the developments afterwards can be understood in a comprehensive way by applying the non-western traditions mostly.

State and civil society relation In Egypt after its second inception can be best understood through three phases.

1. Mubarak Era
2. Post Mubarak Era &
3. Sisi era

It is important to identify the periods because in this decade, Egypt has seen a lot of political change happening which also effected the relations between state and civil society.

Mubarak Era

Mubarak was the vice president of Nasser. The modern 'Authoritative' and 'state-dominating' trend in 'state-civil society relations' in Egypt is the development of his while he was in the authority as vice president till 1981 and after 1981, his ascension to the power.

In the Mubarak Era, Civil societies were governed by the states under the Law of non-governmental organizations, known as LAW 84 passed in 2002. (Harold 2015) According to which, Organizations are strictly prohibited in activities deemed as political or threatens 'National Unity' or violates 'public orders or morals'. (Refworld 2002) This law virtually constrained the civil societies from its natural sphere of work.

But at the same time, organizations such as judges club, lawyers club, Journalists associations played a huge role in political bargaining on behalf of the citizens. (El Medni 2013) Judges club had history of strike and ensured freedom of judiciary from the executive. On the other hand, Journalists association was more politically engaged in public life which was a venue for public participations. (El Medni 2013) Interestingly, these organizations were dominated by oppositions, mostly Muslim Brotherhood and served as the hub of political activists under the Law No 84 still prevailing.

During Mubarak era, the relation between state and civil society was very much controlling and 'self-censored' by the organizations and in one sentence, very much rigid.

Post Mubarak era

Post Mubarak era roughly covers the Arab spring took place in Egypt and the later democratization phases. One specific organization started this process. According to El Medni, "Kifaya was born during a time of political stagnation when Egyptian people lost hope in the possibility of change". (El Medni 2013) At that time Kifaya was born and gave people a new meaning in Associational Life. (El Medni 2013) Thus with coming of Kifaya, Arab spring took place and Egypt was going through a transformation to democracy. Kifaya and other organizations played a huge role in ensuring public participation.

At this stage, the relation was more like, 'State vs. civil society' where civil society played the role of 'agent of change'.

Sisi Era

Sisi regime came in power in mid-2014, halting the democratization. With coming to the power, Sisi regime started to crackdown organizations that explicitly displayed the abuse of this law. Egypt joined 'War on Terror' Campaign to combat the Sinai based terrorism. Now they do not only combat with terrorism rather they abuse it to keep a leash on civil society. According to Chick, "Under the guise of fighting a 'war on terrorism', Cairo is cracking down on organizations that shed light on its abuses." (Chick 2017) Organizations like Al nadim centre that worked with torture victims or Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA) that provided legal assistance to women faced illegal crackdown without prior notice or any warning or without any documents. Many organizations and activists were banned and activists were under surveillance. (Chick 2017)

Sisi regime passed a new law on governing the civil society in 2017. (Sadek 2017) Under this law; the regime handicapped the civil society in areas like funding, activities and by appointing overseer. Many activities are now seen as criminal activities and funding are monitored. There is government appointed overseers who keeps the organizations checked. New law has made organizations and their policies 'non-existent' as they have no one to engage with. (Chick, 2017)

Thus, Sisi regime has crippled the civil society in Egypt by creating 'strictly controlled relation' with them.

Relations in Different Era

From Mubarak era to Sisi regime, state and civil society in Egypt always had a relation that can be understood in non-western perspective as 'State vs. Civil society'. From Mubarak to Sisi, civil society was under the abuse due to law 84 and later law of 2017. But all the time, state tried to keep it as minimum as possible by imposing strict laws and by both legal and illegal coercion, where civil society struggled and also struggling to be the space for political activists and agents of change.

Final remarks

Egypt's politics always faced a very rocky path. In this rocky path, military always found itself in the centre of power especially after the revolution in 1952 which resulted in coming of Nasser. After that, Authoritarian governments and dictators ran the country till Arab spring hit them. But in the turmoil and after the turmoil, it was again the military that came out as the winner with Sisi in power. As a result of almost seven decades of military rule, Egypt became a

tough place for democracy to flourish. Political changes throughout the history has turned Egypt into a state struggling for democracy and human rights where ‘military-elite’ coalition suppresses anything that goes against their agenda. Such political changes also affected the relations between civil society and states where sometimes we saw civil society being censored by the states and sometimes civil society standing against the regime or state. And till today, civil society in Egypt under authoritarian military-elite hard and fast rule, is being suppressed by the regimes using coercive means both legal and illegal.

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