Article

Education as Resistance: Egyptian Civil Society and Rethinking Political Education Under Authoritarian Contexts

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Abstract

This article explores political education in civil society organisations (CSOs) in post-uprisings Egypt. By employing the work of Peter Mayo and Adam Morton, I develop a Gramscian framework that argues for the need to rethink political education where it can take direct and indirect forms. Direct political education explicitly teaches about politics and rights, and is more likely to be repressed by the Egyptian state. Indirect political education is more covert, taking the forms of games and simulations which can appear, in hindsight, to be apolitical but could have numerous contradictory political implications. Through analysing the different forms of political education provided in Egyptian civil society, I seek to understand how CSOs are able to adapt their educational methods to function, survive and educate under authoritarian contexts. This way, the article offers an insight into the interplay between authoritarianism and resistance through the medium of education.

Introduction

The Egyptian uprisings have indelibly transformed Egyptian society. Nonetheless, despite the optimism that surrounded the uprisings, the transformation process that followed Mubarak's fall in 2011 was tumultuous. The optimism turned into cynicism after Egypt, under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, slipped back into a brand of authoritarianism that exceeded that experienced under Mubarak (Hellyer, 2018; Lesch, 2017). In 2018, al-Sisi secured an overwhelming majority of the votes to win a second presidential term (Michaelson, 2018). This was achieved against the backdrop of his tight control over media outlets, his prosecution of critical journalists and activists and

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his crackdown on civil society and oppositional forces (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Furthermore, the Egyptian parliament has recently proposed constitutional amendments that would extend the current presidential terms, allowing al-Sisi to run for re-election and rule until 2030 (Michaelson, 2019).

The emphasis on authoritarianism neglects the copious changes that have been taking place since the start of the uprisings, such as the growth of civil society organisations (CSOs) that advocate social change, defend human rights and challenge inequalities, and that provide political education to develop critical consciousness. These initiatives are in many cases not as overtly political or oppositional as other visible acts of resistance (such as mass protests and strikes). Nonetheless, the lack of visible evidence of change does not infer the absence of oppositional initiatives, since CSOs can adapt to the current political context by exploring other avenues of resistance such as education.

This article argues that education must be viewed as constituting a central component of any initiative directed towards initiating social change and developing alternative methods of resistance. For the purposes of this article, political education (PE) represents a radical approach to learning about politics, rights and duties. It is associated with developing critical consciousness of the existing political, economic and socio-cultural conditions, and seeks to challenge them. I argue that utilising a Gramscian approach helps enhance our understandings of PE under authoritarian contexts. As discussed later, the radical character of Gramsci's education can help develop an alternative worldview which can expose contradictions and diminish a regime's legitimacy; cultivate a critical awareness of social reality by exposing 'universal truths'; take place across many sites in civil society; and provide a broad notion of educators.

The article theoretically contributes to debates surrounding the different 'readings' of Gramsci and their ability to help make sense of contemporary political and social conditions in the Global South. By utilising and building on the work of Peter Mayo and Adam Morton, I develop a Gramscian approach that helps analyse and rethink PE and resistance in post-uprisings Egypt. The article additionally empirically contributes to literature on critical education and political sociology by analysing the different forms of PE existing within Egyptian civil society and how CSOs adapt their educational methods to function, survive and educate under authoritarian contexts. In short, this article offers a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between authoritarianism and resistance whereby a Gramscian understanding implies that authoritarianism, even as repressive as al-Sisi's, cannot be absolute. Instead, it could be contested through the medium of education.

Thinking in a Gramscian Way

Morton (2007: 16) maintains that 'any reading of Gramsci based on a self-reflexive purpose, rather than a representative interpretation, cannot objectively reveal a "true" or "real" Gramsci', therefore any understanding of his writings is bound to be constrained by specific interests. Nonetheless, although no 'correct' reading of Gramsci can be produced, this does not imply that he can be submitted to an 'infinity of readings … completely annulling those principles to which he adhered' (Morton, 2007: 16). Importantly, we should not literally or mechanically apply his concepts expecting him to hold all the answers to our specific problems (Hall, 1988: 161–162). As Edward Said (1983: 239) warns, theories that were once insurgent and innovative could become 'methodological traps' if they are applied uncritically and repetitively. Theories should not aim to predict all situations nor close off alternative possibilities (Said, 2001: 210).

Instead, we should think in a Gramscian way about our contemporary issues. In other words, internalise his method of thinking about different historical and contemporary social conditions.

Thinking in a Gramscian way entails an immanent reading that acknowledges the fragmentary and open nature of his writings where 'a reading in favour of a particular purpose can be developed … which adheres to exegetical rigour and accuracy' (Morton, 2007: 23). This therefore provides an openness that enables us to obtain rich insights from Gramsci's writings despite their apparent fragmentariness. For a theory to maintain its critical and analytical vigour, it must be in touch with the political, economic and societal contexts of the place to which it is being applied (Said, 2001: 202). This means that it has to 'advance a practical understanding of a concrete reality or situation that is different from that in which it originated' (Gramsci, 1971: 201, Q9§63; Morton, 2007: 34) whereby it is able to represent, and make sense of, people's everyday lives. In short, a theory should be spatially sensitive and understood in the context of its original development, and related to other contexts to which it could be used.

Gramsci, Said (2000: 464) argues, offered 'an essentially geographical, territorial apprehension of human history and society', demonstrating his emphasis on the historical specificity of all social relations whereby his concepts are 'sensitive to issues of place, space and scale as well to issues of periodisation, historical structures, specific conjunctures and social dynamics' (Jessop, 2005: 434–435). Accordingly, to think in a Gramscian way about PE and resistance in post-uprisings Egypt requires an approach and a 'reading' influenced by the work of Peter Mayo on critical adult education and Adam Morton on the Modern Prince and passive revolution. To reiterate, it is crucial to espouse an immanent reading of Gramsci that is open and capable of developing rich insights regarding contemporary political and social issues in contexts that differ from Gramsci's own.

A Gramscian Approach to Political Education

Gramsci believed that hegemony and education should not be analysed separately; instead, they are interlinked where every relationship of hegemony is necessarily 'an educational relationship' (Gramsci, 1971: 350, Q10§44). Discussions surrounding hegemony therefore have to be accompanied by an understanding of the role of education in its formation and resistance (Morrow and Torres, 1995). As Butko (2004: 47) argues, Gramsci recognised that 'the ability of the hegemon to exert monopolistic control over such coercive instruments as the army and the police [was] subordinate to its ability to dominate both the content of education and the environment of intellectual development'. It comes as no surprise that Gramsci viewed schools and formal education as 'privileged instruments of socialisation' (Gramsci, 1971: 254) that reinforced people's subordinate positions within society and secured consent for the ruling elite (Gramsci, 1971: 228; Mayo, 1999: 35–36).

A key characteristic that aided in securing consent for Gramsci was common sense, a consciousness internalised by people that is 'fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is' (Gramsci, 1971: 419, Q1§65). Common sense comprised a traditional conception (albeit not a false consciousness) in which people uncritically and unconsciously understood the world making people conform to a given social order. It thus contributed to people's subjugation by making inequality and oppression seem natural and unchangeable. Nonetheless, Gramsci argues that common sense contains elements that help develop an alternative conception of the world and which should not be entirely rejected, where the 'starting point must always be … the spontaneous philosophy of the multitude and which has to be made ideologically coherent' (Gramsci, 1971: 421). Accordingly, these elements could 'develop a "new common sense", or a "renewed common sense", that contains critical and reflective philosophical foundations that transcend the passivity and paternalism of religion and dominant ideologies' (Green, 2019: 543). It is through education and critical intellectual activity that people could achieve this. Gramsci therefore conceived of education as a terrain of

contestation, capable of inculcating hegemonic ideas and opposing it (Morrow and Torres, 1995). This is made possible since hegemony is never absolute, but is always contested (Hall, 1996).

Gramsci's ideas on education must be considered radical for a number of reasons highlighted by Peter Mayo. Firstly, since there is a necessary educational element to any relation of hegemony, education must be considered as a vital aspect of any quest for social transformation (Mayo, 2014: 386). This is achieved through developing an alternative worldview to the one promulgated by formal education. This worldview can 'expose the contradictions between the views of the rulers and those of the ruled in order to diminish the former's legitimacy and force it to reveal its ugly face' (Gramsci, 1971: 210). To expose these contradictions, we have to teach against the grain, which entails a 'systematic investigation of different social structures and constructions of reality', in which subjects like history and philosophy, for example, become tools for transforming common sense (Mayo, 2014: 393). By working on exposing the supposed 'universal truths' and dominant narratives, people become empowered to resist such conceptions of the world. Therefore, a new way of thinking, one that is free from the restrictions of the ruling elite, becomes possible (Gramsci, 1971: 423).

Secondly, Gramsci's writings:

> convey the idea that different sites of social practice can be transformed into sites of adult learning. His scattered writings reflect a lifelong effort to engage in political/educational activities in all spheres of social life … an educator who would leave no space unexplored to educate members of the 'subaltern' classes. (Mayo, 2016: 48)

For Gramsci, education must be considered in its broadest sense where it extends beyond schools, universities and adult education centres to become wide ranging. Education can therefore take place across many sites located within the terrain of civil society where 'educational/hegemonic relationships' are consolidated and challenged (Mayo, 2016: 119). In other words, Gramsci's broad conception of education necessarily incorporates all elements of the hegemonic apparatus. Consequently, it is partly in this sphere that the 'prefigurative work for a transformation of power must take place' (Mayo, 2016: 38). This, as discussed below, helps broaden conceptualisations of PE by taking into consideration the initiatives that take place outside of the state, where it is 'embodied in people, movements and institutions that can go well beyond the corridors of officially sanctioned spaces and places' (Apple, 2015: 177).

Thirdly, this desire to leave no educational space unexplored is manifested through the educators themselves. According to Mayo (2016: 49–50), Gramsci's notion of an educator included a diverse set of practitioners who might not identify themselves as such. This included activists, fore(wo)men, supervisors, parents, teachers and volunteers who hailed from differing backgrounds (see Mayo, 2014, 2015). This coincides with Gramsci's (1971: 9, Q12§3) notion that every man and woman are to be considered intellectuals, despite not everyone necessarily possessing this function in society. In short, we must adopt a 'holistic approach' whereby we are able 'to incorporate different aspects of Gramsci's large oeuvre and to deal with a broad range of ideas' (Borg et al., 2002: 19; Mayo, 2017: 36–38).

Nevertheless, this reading does not offer in its entirety a conceptualisation that can be adopted straightforwardly in the Egyptian context. This article builds on Mayo's reading in the following ways. Mayo's arguments mainly focus on adult education. I expand on this by considering PE that accounts for the experiences of young adults and children to offer a broader understanding of PE. Additionally, by taking into consideration the extent of the Egyptian state's crackdown on civil society, it becomes imperative to locate methods of providing PE that do not attract unwanted attention and subsequent repression. Therefore, to analyse the potential (and at times hidden) trans-

formative role played by PE under authoritarian contexts, I suggest broadening its conceptualisation by considering its direct and indirect manifestations.

Direct political education refers to an approach that is overtly political, which is reflected in its terminology, objectives and content. There is an acknowledgment of the links between education and politics, whereby the main aim is to teach about politics, and people's rights and duties. As a result, the content and objectives are explicitly politicised. An indirect political education is more covert in comparison and less explicit in teaching about politics. The terminologies are often toned down, and the content and practices of the educational initiatives do not necessarily allude to anything overtly political or critical of the regime. This approach could take the form of games and simulations which may appear in hindsight to be apolitical, but could end up having political implications. In short, such educational activities, despite their superficial depoliticisation, are still capable of providing opportunities to contest the hegemonic terrain, or even of protecting the status quo as I argue later. If PE can take place across many sites in civil society, it becomes important to 'read' the Modern Prince from within the Egyptian context.

The Modern Prince(s)

Gramsci considered the Communist Party as representing a different conception of political and social organisation – a laboratory of a new society (Thomas, 2013a). As a result, the Modern Prince assumes an all-encompassing *educational* function (Femia, 1981). However, Morton (2007: 207) argues that faith in this view is fundamentally misplaced today since the Modern Prince, as a catalyst of political change, 'stands as a historically limited and contingent element of Gramsci's problematic'. Morton further maintains that we must, instead, account for the ways through which our contemporary conditions could foster new forms of political action. As Bieler et al. (2015: 152) argue:

> Our own conditions may be different from Gramsci's – for example he lived in an era of mass membership of political parties – but his refusal to be bound by contextual certainties meant that, were he alive today, he would be interested in the potential of new Left political parties, anti-austerity social movements and centres of everyday struggle for achieving revolutionary goals.

This is an important clarification, especially when considering the Egyptian context and the growth of movements and CSOs taking place outside mainstream politics. Political parties (especially left-wing parties) have historically been repressed (Langohr, 2004), and since 2013, have been bearing the brunt of the crackdown on Egyptian civil society (Achcar, 2016; Lesch, 2017), and have historically struggled to obtain broad-based support (Fahmy, 2006). Building on Ismail and Kamat's (2018) arguments, it becomes fundamental to consider a wide range of movements and organisations to help build resistance against authoritarianism. This implies that NGOs, rights-based organisations, educational organisations and other types of community-based movements can assume oppositional roles which could complement and substitute the work of political parties. Under such conditions, the main agency may lie with such movements, or networks of movements.

Political Education Under Passive Revolution

Gramsci did not solely conceive civil society as an arena of oppositional politics (Mayo, 2016: 38). Rather, CSOs could end up performing contradictory roles by channelling away, advertently or inadvertently, political action aimed to challenge the status quo. Considering the variety of CSOs, Morton (2007: 151) warns not to consider them as being 'automatically progressive', as they can

contain 'sources of both democratic subaltern activism and anti-democratic impulses'. Accordingly, Gramsci's concept of passive revolution offers an approach that considers such potential contradictory and problematic roles.

Passive revolution was initially invoked by Gramsci to denote a 'revolution without a "revolution"' (Gramsci, 1971: 59, Q1§44) which takes place when social relations are 'fundamentally reorganised (revolution) but ultimately, popular initiatives are neutralised so as to continue class domination' (Hesketh, 2017: 398–399). This neutralisation depended on preventing the emergence of competing perspectives through the depoliticisation of politics where it was turned into 'purely bureaucratic or technical questions', and through molecularly absorbing members of oppositional movements to become part of the state apparatus and its representative organs in civil society (Thomas, 2013b: 150–151).

Passive revolution should therefore be viewed as involving a combination of conservatism *and* change, whereby 'the problem is to see whether in the dialectic of "revolution/restoration" it is revolution or restoration which predominates' (Gramsci, 1971: 219, Q13§27). This conception 'remains a dialectical one – in other words, presupposes, indeed postulates as necessary, a vigorous antithesis which can present transigently all the potentialities for development' (Gramsci, 1971: 114, Q15§62). This means that passive revolution is not an inert process (Morton, 2010: 329). It can never be predetermined nor inevitable, but rather is conditioned by relations of force between different social and class factions. Accordingly, just as passive revolution can involve the molecular absorption of oppositional movements and activists, it can also entail 'molecular changes which … progressively modify the pre-existing composition of forces, and hence the matrix of new changes' (Gramsci, 1971: 109, Q15§111).

For the purposes of this article, I am interested in two types of passive revolution. Passive revolution as continuing a 'molecular' revolution; and passive revolution as a wave of neutralising and absorbing oppositional elements. The former can entail a continuous and 'quiet' process of resistance and politicisation that is deliberately hidden from the view of authoritarian regimes. The latter purports to systematic depoliticisation and the channelling away of political action to protect and restore the status quo and the legitimacy of the regime in power. Under such considerations, PE can involve a contradictory process, particularly its indirect forms.

As formulated earlier, indirect PE tends to be covert when teaching about politics (i.e. it is superficially depoliticised). On one hand, and given the existing repressive context in Egypt, this approach can provide some of the limited means available to contest the hegemonic terrain through methods that would not attract the state's attention. On the other hand, the depoliticisation of the form and content of education could be consonant with broader strategies of systematic depoliticisation of education and society in Egypt (Ghoneim, 2005). It can also be consistent with arguments regarding CSOs ceasing to be an 'expression of interests and demands of strong social forces' where they are turned into vehicles utilised by the state to control society and maintain the status quo (Abdelrahman, 2004: 123). Instances of CSOs being co-opted (Lust-Okar, 2004) and emerging as integral parts of the state (Albrecht, 2005) must be critically taken into account when studying Egyptian CSOs under such political conditions.

The past sections argued for the need to (re)think in a Gramscian way PE and resistance in post-uprisings Egypt. Through particularly focusing on the writings of Mayo on education and Morton on the Modern Prince and passive revolution, I developed a framework that espouses a reading of Gramsci that can provide rich insights capable of analysing the challenging political process unfolding in Egypt. The rest of the article builds on this framework by exploring the manifestations of PE in Egyptian civil society and the various theoretical and empirical implications arising from within.

Research Methods

Egypt has a rich history of organised civil society that includes labour unions, service-oriented NGOs, religious (predominantly Islamist) organisations, business associations, rights advocacy groups, political parties and informal social groups (Abdelrahman, 2004; Langohr, 2004; Yom, 2005). To account for the heterogeneity of Egyptian civil society and address the issues outlined in the section on Modern Prince(s), I included the following CSOs. *Political organisations and movements* comprising legal political parties, parties awaiting legalisation and informal social movements; *rights-based organisations* that include NGOs, non-profit organisations, legal-support organisations and advocacy groups that deal with human rights, labour rights, women's rights and economic and social rights; and *educational organisations* that offer an alternative education. I included 16 CSOs (five political organisations and movements, four rights-based organisations and seven educational organisations).

Fieldwork took place in Cairo between June and November 2014 where I utilised three methods of data collection: semi-structured interviews, overt participant observation and secondary document analysis. The findings presented are based on 30 interviews conducted with founders, party members, activists, volunteers, researchers and participants who took part in some of the educational activities. The majority of the interviews were conducted in Arabic, and transcribed and translated by myself into English.

In terms of overt participant observation, I attended and observed weekly committee meetings and seminars in a number of political parties, in addition to educational seminars organised by rights-based organisations, as well as other educational and networking activities organised by educational organisations. Moreover, I obtained secondary documents which included CSOs' policies, manifestos, educational material and research reports. I used NVivo to code the data where a number of main themes were developed, such as: resilient authoritarianism, challenges facing civil society and resisting authoritarianism. The content analysis that followed provided theoretical and empirical insights that are presented in the following sections.

Direct Political Education

Direct PE tends to be overtly political, as reflected in its terminology, objectives and content. It is popular across political parties and rights-based organisations, and consists of political seminars, summer camps, grassroots educational associations and 'facilitating solutions' initiatives. Seminars are the main method utilised to target the wider population as opposed to solely focusing on CSO members. Seminars are organised on a weekly to monthly basis – their frequency depends on the size and popularity of the CSO. These seminars generally have two objectives: to develop awareness about contemporary Egyptian politics and society, and to increase people's understandings of basic political and economic concepts.

The topics covered include the crackdown on civil society and activism, human rights abuses, the reformation of the state's administrative and security functions, neoliberalism and austerity, the Islamist movement, the independent trade union movement, sexual harassment and women's inequalities, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, amongst others. Regarding the latter objective, theoretically-oriented seminars are mainly organised by left-wing parties. These focus on the critiques of capitalism, and introducing Marxist canonical thought. Seminars can therefore provide an opportunity to learn about politics and discuss contemporary issues facing Egypt. They can also serve as a means for parties and movements to introduce people to their objectives. The majority of the participants maintained that their activism and interest in politics resulted from attending such seminars.

However, there are limitations associated with this approach. Many CSOs organised seminars that focused on similar topics. This implies that there is either an overall agreement in terms of the importance of the topics discussed, or, alternatively, a lack of coordination and communication amongst CSOs. Another limitation concerns their inability to attract an audience. This is due to the lack of advertisements as a result of state restrictions, and the CSOs' weak financial and organisational capabilities. Crucially, weak attendance can also be a result of people avoiding seminars because they are deemed to be too political. Moreover, such seminars, in the majority, take place in Cairo, which implies a relative absence across rural and marginalised communities. Finally, some seminars can resemble a hierarchical learning environment whereby an expert lectures people and discussions are relegated to brief question and answer sessions, if any.

The second illustration are summer camps, and specifically those organised by a prominent human rights advocacy organisation. Its summer camps have been taking place for 24 years and target students from across Egypt and the Middle East. It concentrates on topics such as human rights and its conventions and philosophical and historical roots, transitional justice, the rights of association, the right to bodily integrity, the right to freedom of expression and the right to education. This camp has been deemed by many interviewees to be influential in politically educating them. As one feminist activist states, 'when I was a university student, I attended a course about human rights there, and it really influenced me … They do it every year, there are generations [of activists] who have been brought up with their help'.

By observing their session on the rights to education, I found that that their pedagogy was predominantly discussion-based and depended on collaborative group work to debate and discuss different perspectives on education, its history in Egypt, the rights to education and the purpose of education in transforming societies. The session was run by a facilitator who guided discussions towards key debates and maintained a collegial and dialogical relationship with the participants. Nonetheless, the CSO was forced to cancel it annual camp in 2016 (*Mada Masr*, 2016) due to the state's crackdown.

Grassroots educational associations comprise another example, and particularly the ta'alam taharar (Education for Liberation) initiative offered by a left-wing party awaiting legalisation. This initiative evolved from educational associations organised against the backdrop of housing occupations that took place in the working-class district of Madinat al-Salam in Cairo in 2011. Moreover, it emanated from the party's commitment to PE and developing critical consciousness amongst marginalised communities. According to the party's secretary of PE, the initiative was initially based on eradicating illiteracy amongst adult squatters, and providing basic education for children and youth. Although such education focused on teaching Arabic, English, history and philosophy (amongst others) in apartments provided by the residents, it was made political by linking people's everyday experiences with their rights and duties, the state's responsibilities towards them and the actions they can take to protect themselves from state violations. However, this initiative was in its embryonic stage during fieldwork, and through informal discussions with members and volunteers it was suggested that it was not spreading as originally intended and was unable to attract enough support. This was mostly attributed to the state's crackdown on civil society and on independent educational activities. Crucially, two volunteers were arrested after being tipped off by a police informer and were accused of 'inciting protest' for teaching residents how to file a complaint against the local council.

It is worth noting that the majority of the CSOs do not have strong grassroots ties with communities. This can be attributed to the CSOs' limited resources, and to state restrictions. According to a founding member of a left-wing party, such approaches end up targeting a limited number of people who are already interested in politics, and are therefore able to attend such activities. Moreover, some of the above approaches (particularly seminars) risk reproducing the same

hierarchical educational experiences that they are supposed to challenge by socialising people into particular ideologies, as opposed to encouraging deliberation. Furthermore, discrepancies can exist between what is taught theoretically and what is experienced every day.

However, I maintain that not all direct PE entails such hierarchical learning environments where discussions are discouraged. The educational association and the summer camps considered above offer examples of an education that tends to avoid imposing particular beliefs or ideologies and relies on interactive group work. In short, I do not argue that all methods of direct PE are necessarily less effective. Instead, under the current authoritarian context, they can attract unwanted state attention and repression. This implies that we need to look beyond direct PE and seek alternatives that do not require as many resources and that crucially could go 'under the radar'.

Facilitating Solutions

Although this approach is categorised as direct PE, its methods do not aim to directly teach about politics, but instead encourage people to develop their own political understandings, opinions and critical awareness. Some CSOs have adopted this approach to empower people through their self-education, and to overcome their limited resources. This approach includes reading groups and cinema clubs which constitute two popular political educational methods. Respondents argued that reading groups are a straightforward and cost-effective way to get people to learn about politics in their own time. Importantly, they encourage debate with regard to the readings at hand. From my observations, the books discussed ranged from Marx, Trotsky and Lenin, to contemporary novels that, as one activist argued, although 'not hav[ing] direct political implications, could be interpreted and debated in a political and socio-cultural manner'.

Cinema clubs were an educational activity that helped facilitate discussion about themes presented in films and documentaries, and that were not always explicitly about politics. An example of this revolved around an organisation screening an Iranian film titled *Children of Heaven* about two siblings who have lost a pair of shoes. The discussion that followed attempted to link these seemingly trivial issues to wider societal problems focusing on poverty, economic inequalities and solidarity. As an activist from the organisation argues:

> the movies are not really related to politics, but we need to have a political outlook on everything and analyse it politically in order to reach something useful. So that happens on a very small scale and could be considered as an alternative for political education.

The third example is access to information as political education. A key reason for CSOs opting for this approach arises from their conviction that solutions are found within people themselves. One example is an economic and social rights-based organisation that considers PE to take place by making knowledge more accessible. The aim is not to teach people about their rights, but to facilitate people to educate themselves. Enabling Egyptians to access information about state budgets, legislations and the constitution necessitates an element of empowerment whereby education encourages people to move from a questioning stage to one of taking action. A senior member of the organisation maintains:

> My problem is not just to get them to think critically about these questions, but also to give them the tools to be able to answer them … information is key to livelihood … we want to popularise the idea of access to information in everything we do about the empowerment of the poor … we will empower you through information.

The CSO publishes factsheets relating to the rights to education, housing and health, which enable people to understand the discrepancies existing between what ought to be and what actually is. It

is through recognising their rights and the state's responsibilities towards them that people become conscious of the incongruities that exist between what is promised and what is in fact provided. As argued earlier, this represents a Gramscian conception of an education that helps reveal the contradictions existing between 'the views of the rulers and those of the ruled in order to diminish the former's legitimacy' (Gramsci, 1971: 210).

By recognising such discrepancies, people can be mobilised to act against the status quo. One senior member stated that 'you take the data to tell people that this or that exists and make them know more about it … and [they] ask us "How do you start a case against corruption?"'. An example of this revolved around their work with a community in Aswan (a city in the South of Egypt) who were concerned that their village was not receiving its allocated funding from the government. To address this, the CSO was able to get hold of the investment plans and presented those to the community. The discussions that ensued aimed to interpret the numbers and terminology used in the plans. This helped outline the discrepancies existing between what was promised and what in fact took place (i.e. lack of infrastructural investments). This evinced a case for corruption and, with the help of the CSO's legal team, a case against the local council was initiated. What makes this approach unique is that it does not assume that people are ignorant of their own conditions. This resonates with Gramsci's (1971: 9, Q12§3) belief that everyone is an intellectual, where people's own experiences ought to be considered whenever CSOs develop educational initiatives. Therefore, any PE should focus on people, be broad enough to cultivate critical awareness of the existing structures and offer the tools to challenge this.

The above illustrations resonate with many of Gramsci's ideas on education. The examples highlighted aim to teach about politics and to inculcate a basic understanding of Egypt's political, economic and socio-cultural conditions. The educational activities are at times teaching against the grain by helping reorient education towards people's own experiences. Moreover, they profoundly rely on educators who hail from diverse backgrounds who work for a range of CSOs. To reiterate my earlier argument, examples of emancipatory PE can be found in its direct manifestations, making it unlikely that it will become completely moribund. Nevertheless, under the existing political context, they are more likely to attract repression given their explicit political nature.

According to Ghoneim (2005), the Egyptian state is constantly engaged in efforts to systematically depoliticise the public sphere and education to help maintain the status quo. The state's constant attempts to separate politics from education have dominated the majority of my discussions whereby, according to a social researcher, merely talking about politics becomes an offence and an accusation in itself. As one activist contends, such efforts can lead to many Egyptians losing interest in politics, developing a sense of apathy about it or avoiding it altogether. The security apparatus' involvement in civil society and its educational activities should therefore never be underestimated.

Such stringent state security involvement entails police informers attending educational activities to 'keep an eye on what is being discussed', as a co-founder of an educational organisation confides. Moreover, it could also lead to the arrest and violent repression of CSOs and volunteers who provide PE, as was the case with the two volunteers discussed earlier. As a result, we need to consider more indirect approaches to PE that can offer more intangible methods of politically educating people. Nonetheless, such an approach may entail a contradictory process, as I argue later.

Indirect Political Education and Superficial Depoliticisation

By adapting their discourses and content to practices that are not overtly political, CSOs can avoid attracting unwanted attention by functioning 'under the radar'. As a result, the question of intent becomes crucial as the educational methods discussed here contain instances of deliberate

depoliticisation, or superficial depoliticisation, to challenge the state's restrictions. As one social researcher contends:

> We were doing this consciously [educating through a depoliticised activity] … In that space, people were comfortable talking, so there were many people who started their work in the public sphere by attending simulation models … then a year or two passed, and these people ended up in the streets taking part in the revolution.

Additionally, a member of an educational organisation further argues:

> We offer a political education, like we have courses on civil society and governance … so we are political in that sense. We are quite political really, and also from our direction, it is clear, we do not say it, but no one here supports al-Sisi.

With this intentionality in mind, developing a broader understanding of PE is imperative as it offers educational forms that CSOs and activists can adopt depending on the contexts they face. As established, this approach tends to be covert and less explicit when teaching about politics. The terminologies are deliberately toned down, and the pedagogical practices utilised are predominantly practice-based (as in games and simulations). As a result, these approaches can have long-term political implications, especially under authoritarian contexts. Nonetheless, the potential contradictions contained within them must be taken into account. I focus on five examples found within educational organisations.

The first concerns an organisation which provides activities that encourage children to develop certain skills and behaviour aimed to empower them by allowing them to choose and manage their own education. The facilitators do not impose any 'correct' way for learning, on the condition that the children respect and abide by their choices. It is through such opportunities that children learn about responsibility and accountability and thus become accustomed to assuming control over their own education. Moreover, this organisation implements a code of conduct that is written by both facilitators and children. A senior member argues that this:

> value system constitutes our principles, our responsibilities. This constitution is developed with the kids, and it is agreed upon between us and them that these are our rules of conduct and this has what is right and wrong … we are trying to promote for you to do what you think is right, and that these decisions have consequences.

This 'constitution' is not imposed; children can question and debate its contents with the facilitators. A simple act such as developing a constitution can teach children that this process entails deliberations and disagreements. If disagreements were to arise, the facilitators and the children would then discuss the points of contention and attempt to find a workable solution that would not compromise their education. However, such disagreements rarely occurred due to the constitution being regularly updated and revised. This process, experienced at a young age, can arguably have long-term political consequences by providing young adults with skills required for political participation, deliberation and cooperation.

The second example concerns an organisation that teaches about peace and conflict resolution through a range of interactive activities based on participants' experiences which can be simulated. One of its activities revolves around a social exclusion exercise. Its co-founder stated that, at times, participants are sceptical about the aims of this exercise, citing that social exclusion is not an issue facing Egyptians. Accordingly, they are asked to be part of an 'outside' team that attempts to gain entry into an 'inside' team:

> We make people go outside and those who stay in the room sit in a circle, and they are given instructions that they are one team. Afterwards, the people outside attempt to enter the circle, and they would be trying everything, from bribery to violence … you observe how those inside felt strong and the others weak, and then you ask those who are outside … and then you tell them to think about this as being in their own society, that we exclude people in our society.

A debrief that follows the exercise connects what people experienced during the exercise with what happens on a daily basis within society at large. Two participants (one initially deemed a 'sceptic') alluded to their increased awareness of social exclusion and its detrimental effects on a personal and wider scale as a result of this activity. Through sharing and discussing such experiences of exclusion, emphasis is placed on the participants' collective and dialogical learning capabilities, offering a method of learning about rights, duties and inequalities.

The third example is found in an initiative that offers a 'civic educational experience'. Through allowing the participants to work as a group to build a city out of recycled cardboard, it offers them a space that provides opportunities to learn about being a citizen with all its associated rights and duties, including those of decision making. According to a co-founder of an educational organisation, by simulating life in a cardboard city, this initiative teaches children basic political and economic concepts:

> It aims to teach children how to run the city, how they would make decisions, and it is all really civic education, the idea that this city is ours … they are the ones who decide which system they should have, and if they have a shortage of money, they would decide whether to print more and hence understand the idea of inflation. They make decisions and witness their consequences. The adults are not supposed to interfere, you should not go and tell them what to do … after they finish playing, they sit together and explore why this problem happened … so they understand things that are related to politics, but through games and playing.

The activity starts with the children interactively brainstorming ideas on what the city will look like and the public services it will offer. This is followed by the children deciding on the societal roles assigned to each through a voting process. If disagreements occur when voting, the facilitators recommend solutions without necessarily interfering. When deciding on the public services offered, the children are asked to discuss their rationale. For example, one argued that having a well-equipped and free hospital is a necessity given the dire conditions facing Egyptian public hospitals. Similar arguments were put forward when discussing schools and public transport. In short, participants were encouraged to think of alternatives to the existing situation, and through this simulation they were able to understand the complexities related to any political and economic decision and the vitality of effective participation.

The fourth illustrative example is a board game that aims to educate about Egypt's diverse cultures, customs, histories and geography. The game includes a map of Egypt that covers all its governorates, and players work in teams to answer questions relating to each governorate. According to one of its developers, the board game aims to challenge the straitjacketed education offered by formal education:

> While players are having fun, at the same time their mind is being stimulated by thoughts that are not framed in a certain way or that are concretely established … we want to talk about diversity, sustainable ways of creating energy and all these ideas that we think a human should know about. Our game is about accepting diversity, critical thinking, self-expression, helping create a discussion. There are many questions that ask you to say your opinion, there is no right or wrong.

Aiming to teach against the grain and reorienting focus towards local cultures provides opportunities to develop an education that offers alternative narratives and conceptions to those dominant within formal education. Importantly, it encourages youths to appreciate the subjectivity of historical and cultural narratives, and thus constitutes another example of a superficially depoliticised approach to PE.

The final example is found in an independent publishing house that publishes books designed to teach young adults about human rights, democracy and tolerance. The owner, who also authors books, believes that:

> Civic education is not just about politics, [it is about] how to become a citizen … you will find civic education indirectly in lots of things, these are clear in the books. We use these from when they are in Kindergarten and arrange them as games they play … so, indirectly, at the end of the day, you are providing them with civic education … we have to teach them their rights and duties and how to be a good citizen in an indirect way.

The owner further argues that it is challenging to talk to children about politics but that to overcome this we need to introduce basic humanistic topics, such as how to be a responsible citizen and how to respect others, which can gradually lead to more complex concepts such as diversity and democracy. With regards to one of her books:

> It teaches them how the world works, what their duties and responsibilities are, what the system of the state is, the role of each of its institutions, my own role towards them … what taxes are, what diplomacy is and so on. All these concepts around them – how do they work?

The publishing house has also published three illustrated volumes introducing the concept of democracy. The books link democracy with everyday experiences in schools and playgrounds. Nonetheless, despite its superficial depoliticisation, the publisher has faced difficulties when some bookstores refused to stock them:

> Everyone gets scared of such concepts. Bookstores were afraid to display and sell these books … 'No, lady, we do not want any problems' … so they were scared to sell them … they did not want problems with the state, and that was both before and after the revolution.

The above examples of indirect PE offer methods whereby CSOs can function, educate and survive under the current repressive context. Accordingly, they also must be understood in a Gramscian way. By utilising games and simulations, indirect PE goes beyond activists and adults to offer opportunities for children and youth to develop knowledge and critical thinking skills to help question Egypt's history, culture and political system. In other words, it teaches against the grain by offering alternative conceptions of Egyptian society and politics. Moreover, the activities discussed here are offered by an amalgam of organisations that are not political parties or that represent a conventional understanding of the Modern Prince. Instead, they represent a network of movements, or Modern Princes, that can complement and potentially substitute the work of traditional political parties. These CSOs additionally rely on a diverse body of volunteers and educators which coincides with Gramsci's broad notion of the educator.

Crucially, indirect PE can entail a contradictory process whereby it can, advertently or inadvertently, support the status quo or alternatively comprise molecular processes of resistance and politicisation. Given their deliberate intention to find ways to educate and function under the existing political context (as argued at the start of this section), I consider the cardboard city, the board

game and the publishing house to be instances of molecular movements. Those activities offered by the first two organisations (the constitution and the social exclusion exercise) can end up intentionally preserving the status quo. This is due to the first organisation offering supplements to the formal governmental curriculum as part of its educational activities, and the second working alongside governmental institutions in a number of cases.

Given the growing repressive tendencies displayed by al-Sisi's authoritarianism and his crackdown on civil society, we must become cognizant of the increasing potentiality of CSOs (in)advertently maintaining the status quo and neutralising political action, particularly in terms of their PE. Nonetheless, a Gramscian way of thinking indicates that authoritarianism is never absolute and can be challenged through means that are not always explicitly visible. As argued in this section, there is still limited space available for CSOs to function and educate, albeit on a much narrower scale than previously allowed. Accordingly, it is challenging to measure such an education in terms of conventional understandings of impact and success. Instead, it is vital that we explore the opportunities they offer for opening up alternative educational spaces under authoritarian contexts.

Conclusion

This article argued that political education (PE) must be viewed as comprising a crucial component of developing alternative methods of resistance in post-uprisings Egypt. Through focusing on the work of Peter Mayo and Adam Morton, I developed a Gramscian framework which helped analyse the interplay between authoritarianism and resistance through the medium of education. I explored the direct and indirect manifestations of PE in Egyptian civil society and analysed how CSOs adapt their educational methods to function, survive and educate under the existing authoritarian context. The former manifestation, although containing opportunities for a dialogical and emancipatory education, can entice state repression. The latter offered a more complex approach that could contain contradictory elements. On one hand, through superficially depoliticising its education, indirect PE offered opportunities of molecular resistance that may not attract the state's attention. On the other hand, it could channel away political action to protect and restore the status quo and the legitimacy of the regime in power, particularly by working alongside governmental institutions. A number of implications must be considered in relation to authoritarianism and hegemonic politics, and the current conjuncture facing Egypt.

First, al-Sisi's authoritarianism has surpassed that experienced under Mubarak. The systematic crackdown on civil society and oppositional forces, alongside al-Sisi's recent re-election and constitutional amendments, indicate further challenges and constrictions facing CSOs. Nonetheless, thinking in a Gramscian way infers that hegemony and authoritarianism can never be absolute, but can always be challenged in multiple ways, one of which is through education. The examples discussed here, particularly those that are superficially depoliticised and that do contain limitations and potential ambiguities, still offer means whereby CSOs can negotiate the terrain of hegemonic contestation under authoritarian contexts. Consequently, there is an increasing need for an in-depth engagement of the interplay between authoritarian tendencies and their resistance in post-uprisings Egypt.

Second, and building on the above, thinking in a Gramscian way which entails a reading that acknowledges the openness of his writings is needed. Espousing such a reading can help develop rich insights and critical analyses regarding contemporary political and social issues even in contexts that differ from Gramsci's own, such as those explored in this article.

Finally, and in terms of the current political conjuncture facing Egypt, it is difficult to know for certain where such educational initiatives will eventually lead, and whether they will be capable of offering sustained efforts to challenge the status quo. Yet, it is vital that we acknowledge the

importance of opportunities for experimentation, imagination and alternative organisation which can comprise central facets of counter-hegemonic struggles.

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