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Post-Colonial and Feminist Theories' and their relation to the protests in Egypt

In January of 2011 mass protests broke out all over Egypt against the oppressive rule of President Mubarak. After 18 days of angry protests, Mubarak resigned and turned over all power to the military on February 11, 2011 ending his 30 years of autocratic rule and bowing to historic popular uprising that has transformed politics in Egypt and around the Arab world¹. International theories can be applied to gain a better understanding of the forces surrounding the revolution. Two completely different international theories that can be applied are Post-Colonial theory and Feminist theory. Post-colonial theory can be applied to gain a better understanding of Mubarak's thought process and to explain the relations between the U.S. and Egypt. While Feminist theory can be applied to explain why women are left out of the press about the protests and to better understand this idea of the masculine state.

Post-colonial theory argues that colonial systems have a huge effect on the way states operate today. Integrated with post-colonial theory is this idea of subaltern states which are those states that have been shaped and dominated by colonial powers and suffer from an internal security dilemma. Chowdhry and Nair offer an explanation of this theory in their article stating, "the post colonial does not signify the end of colonialism, but rather that it accurately reflects both the continuity and persistence of colonizing practices, as well as the critical limits and possibilities it has engendered in the present historical moment"². Post colonial theory attempts to recognize the influence of colonial powers on states today in order to guard against these influences in small ways.

Egypt is deeply intertwined with colonial powers which is demonstrated by the influence of the British military remaining in Egypt until 1936. In 1914 Britain declared a Protectorate over Egypt. Then in 1921 martial law took over while the Egyptians were attempting to gain independence. Finally in 1922 Egypt gained independence and abolished the protectorate. This presence of colonial powers is bound to have an affect on the establishing of the Egyptian state.

Firstly, as a result of the break from colonialism this idea of nationalism was established and became a fundamental aspect of the Egyptian state. Leaders after the revolution wanted to maintain this sense of nationalism at any cost, Mubarak who grew up in this era and was directly affected by this thinking. According to James Le Sueur in his article *Postcolonial Time Disorder*, "Mubarak was part of a generation of leaders in the developing world who came to view nationalism as necessary and used the military to secure national unity at the expense of civic freedoms"³. This idea of nationalism directly affected the way that Mubarak ruled in Egypt. His oppressiveness and military rule began as a result of this fear of being recolonized by colonial powers and eventually escalated to a 30 year oppressive regime. Mubarak subscribes to

¹ The New York Times. "Egypt-The Protests." The New York Times. <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/egypt/index.html> (accessed February 24, 2011).

² Chowdry, Geeta, Shiela Nair. "Power in a Post-colonial World," Chap 1 in *Power, Postcolonialism, and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender, and Class*. Routledge, 2003.

³ LeSueur, James. "Postcolonial Time Disorder." *Foreign Affairs*. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/48836271/Post-Colonial-Time-Disorder-Egypt-and-the-Middle-East-Stuck-in-the-Past>. (accessed February 24, 2011).

this out of date philosophy of governance according to which authoritarianism is the only cure for external or internal political challenges, this colonial way of thinking of totalizing state power⁴.

Another way that post-colonial theory can be applied to the revolutions in Egypt is through the relations between Egypt and the U.S. The relationship between the U.S. and Egypt is one imperialist in nature. Egypt is a post-colonial state, serving American regional interests (oil, israel, containment of Islam, avoidance of unwanted proliferation of nuclear weapons in exchange for power, privilege, and wealth), vested in a tiny corrupt national elite that sacrifices the well being of the country in the process⁵. The relationship between them represents imperialism which is a construction of colonialism. The U.S. took an active role supporting the protests by telling Mubarak not to run for a second election and to speed up his exit from power. The amount of influence that the U.S. has in Egypt can be seen as a parallel to the influence that colonial powers used to have in Egypt demonstrating an aspect of post-colonial theory.

Another theory that can be used to explain the events going on in Egypt is the Feminist theory. Feminist theory attempts to expose power relations and the relationship between the aspects of femininity and masculinity. Burchill attempts to expose the different divisions of the feminist theory in his book *Theories of International Relations*. For example, analytical feminism attempts to reveal the gender bias that pervades key concepts such as notions of power, sovereignty, autonomy, anarchy, and security in international relations⁶. While normative feminism attempts to explain gender as a transformative category from a normative perspective and deals with the masculine- feminine gender dichotomy⁷.

An example of feminist theory that can be found in the Egyptian revolution is through the absence of women's protest movements from the media. Mozn Hassan, executive director of the Cairo- based Nazra for Feminist Studies states that, "women are key actors in this historical moment of Egypt and are working closely with men to change Egypt"⁸. While women protested just as much as men, they are not acknowledged in the press, while men are talked about all over. This reiterates the fact that men are seen as the important aspect in society. This coincides with Guillian Youngs ideas that the "conceptualization of agency in male dominated terms ignores both women's realities and contributions"⁹. Many women's movements are extremely upset and do not believe they are getting the credit that they deserve.

As well as women being neglected from the press, another feminist aspect of the revolution is this idea of the masculine state. Egypt has always been a military or police state, with the authorities reaching into virtually every aspect of public life¹⁰. This is reinforced by the huge role the military played in the revolution, backing the protestors and forcing Mubarak to

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Falk, Richard. "The Toxic Residue of Colonialism: Protecting Interests, Disregarding Rights." Citizen Pilgrimage, 8 Feb. 2011. <http://richardfalk.wordpress.com/2011/02/08/the-toxic-residue-of-colonialism-protecting-interests-disregarding-rights/>. (accessed February 24, 2011).

⁶ True, Jacqui. "Feminism." Chap 10 in "Theories of International Relations. Palgrave Macmillian: 2009. 237-259

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Soguel, Dominique. "Part 1: Egyptian Women Lay Claim to Revolutionary Role." We News, 3 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.womensenews.org/story/the-world/110203/egyptian-women-lay-claim-revolutionary-role>>. (accessed Feb 26,, 2011)

⁹ Youngs, Gillian. "Feminist International Relations." International Affairs 80, 2004. 75-87.Print

¹⁰ The New York Times. "Egypt-The Protests." The New York Times. <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/egypt/index.html>(accessed February 24, 2011).

step down. Now that Mubarak has stepped down, the military has taken complete control and promises to hold democratic elections(Get fact from New York Times).

Since the military has played such a crucial role in the revolution and Egypt's history, it reinforces this idea of the use of force to cause change which according to the feminist theory is a masculine tendency. According to the feminist theory this idea of masculinist is associated with certain values such as exhibition of strength and power via behavior and decisiveness and bravery in risky situations. From these ideas of masculinist, this perception of the manly state emerges which is described as one that perceives this idea of bravery, decisiveness in crisis and willingness to use violence. This is what the military did during the revolution, it stepped in and made a decision about threatening Mubarak to step down, siding with the people creating a new form of government. Therefore according to these conceived perceptions of masculinity, Egypt due to the military can be described as masculinist state because it values these aspects.

The revolution in Egypt is a huge event for the country, ending 30 years of an oppressive regime and leading to the formation of a new form of government. Different international theories such as post-colonial theory and feminist theory can be applied to the revolution in Egypt to gain a better understanding about the different aspects surrounding the event. Post-colonial theory can be applied in two ways. Firstly, that the colonization of Egypt caused Mubarak and other previous leaders to hold tightly onto this idea of nationalism and using the military to secure this unity even at the expense of its citizens' freedoms, creating an authoritarian rule. Also post-colonial thought can be used to understand the relations between the U.S. and Egypt as an imperialistic relationship, which first emerged from colonization. In addition to post-colonial theory, feminist theory can be used to analyze the revolution in terms of this idea of the masculinist state and explain why women's movements are left out of the press.

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