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"The social question of neoliberalism"

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"***The social question of neoliberalism***"

Neoliberal orthodoxy privileges a preoccupation with the economic fundamentals of capitalism while deliberately marginalizing the social questions which the system produces. The three pieces in this issue assert this fact of failure at the level of law and policy, as having more to do with this neglect of social questions and a failure of critique itself. In his critical evaluation of this predicament, Rodrigo Serra focuses on the 'Popular Economy' – that is, "the set of economic practices that individuals develop on the margins of the labor market, displaced from the dynamic core of peripheral capitalism, embodied in a social subject defined as a "self-employed proletariat", "excluded worker", "worker of the popular economy", or "informal". The primary question he raises is whether the popular economy can also nurture the space for the politicization of a new subject of change in the third world. Kumar's probing piece reprises the long debate on the relationship between land and caste in India. A particular failure of land reforms in post-independence India was that it did not redistribute land to Dalits, which he considers to be more of a reflection of the historical relationship between land and caste than merely being a failure of implementation. From the vantage point of historically oppressed classes, the significance of landholding does not only signify economic advancement, but also freedom in a most fundamental sense. His contribution ultimately highlights the reality that landholding for those that have been excluded is not just tied to individual ownership but is intimately linked to the possibility of living dignified lives – not simply a matter of economic freedom but also ultimately about social freedom – the idea of 'dignified freedom.' Hamada and Abazeed similarly raise the question of the disjuncture between policies and people's structurally determined needs. They examine the extent to which Egypt's national policies on water are able to play a transformative role in relation to women's social, productive and reproductive burdens. Arguing against the technical and financial management of water in guaranteeing gender equality, they rather propose a focus on structural changes in policies, practices and perceptions of different elements in society to improve women's engagement in water management and the agriculture sector that supports reproduction. All three contributors remind us that ideas, no matter how great, have continually to be thought and rearticulated in relation to the people; that the social question must always precede the scientific solutions

we seek in the quest for a more dignified existence.

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"Popular Economy" and the subject of social change: From Latin American Liberationism to the South-South debate

Hugo Rodrigo Serra[1]

The *Popular Economy* has been in the last decade at the center of the agenda of a large part of Argentina´s political and social movements. At the same time, some of its proposals have found recognition in social and welfare policies. This form of *adjectival economy* is the product of a process of circulation of ideas in Latin American critical theory, which during the neo-developmentalist growth years took up some of the ideas of late 20th century Latin American Liberationism, as a way of seeking inclusion in rights of those whom this well-being cycle did not reach to the same extent as formal workers. Seen from Argentina, the emergence of a movement of workers-outside-the-salary-relationship, associated with different forms of precariousness and exclusion, shows a cycle of political mobilization associated with the reconfiguration of the neoliberal social question.

After the fall of the European bureaucratic socialisms and the bloody crushing of the liberation movements of the 20th century, the margins of the references of the critic and alternatives proposals to overcome the induced modernization of dependent oligopolistic capitalism seemed to have narrowed severely, and in the 21st century a "new social question" was configured from the Global South, in which living conditions and inequality gave way to the centrality of the issue of labor as a new concern. The pronounced unemployment and the new and multiple forms and experiences of precariousness changed the ways of proposing solutions to the model of commodification of life, towards new forms of resistance and subsistence that moderate its effects.

These proposals had in common that they were erected as responses and narratives that emerged from *civil society*, *the people*, *the poor*, *the citizenry*, as a way of indicating that the malaise of the market did not find its solution in the State. However, the response and attention to the demands varied between organizations and movements, from those who demanded greater intervention to reconstitute "the world of labor" and its associated relations, to those who demand that the State give spaces to the autonomy of those who seek to reconstitute the relations

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of cooperation and solidarity that the market would have dismantled. Thus, the key of interest in these processes appears to be given by a (not so) new subject of popular politicization, which goes beyond the limits of salary: the self-employed workers in precarious conditions, expelled from access to welfare and rights by the commodification process sustained for 40 years.

But, is the "Popular Economy" also the space for the politicization of a new subject of change in the third world? What are the debates and discussions that go through this proposal?

Popular Economy is more than just economy

In Argentinean contemporary debate, Popular Economy is understood as the set of economic practices that individuals develop on the margins of the labor market, displaced from the dynamic core of peripheral capitalism, embodied in a social subject defined as a "self-employed proletariat" (Núñez 1995), "excluded worker", "worker of the popular economy", "informal", etc. This notion refers to a highly heterogeneous set of practices that seek to generate income that sustains the life of domestic units and/or provide services for the reproduction and care of individuals and communities. These tasks include a range that goes from street vending, garbage collection, care and communal labor, food production by peasants. Beyond this dispersion, the conceptual core of the Popular Economy can be found in the question of the reproduction of life as a principle, the position of workers displaced from the dynamic core of dependent economies, the question of labor outside of a wage relationship and precarious access to rights.

This notion was born in the late 1980s in dispute with the concept of informal economy promoted by the International Labor Organization (ILO 1972). At that time, in those countries that were implementing structural adjustment policies, the dimensions of the so-called informal economy increased more than the relatively large they already were. From the ILO, at the beginning of the 70s, a labor agenda was developed on non-wage forms of employment that took the studies of Anthropologist Keith Harth on Ghana and his conclusions on the changes that occurred in the processes of "modernization" (Harth 1973). Years later, this institution reassumed its own discussions from the 1970s, but now after the employment crisis, and sought a way to promote employment with access to rights in a different context (OIT 1991).

In response, a group of intellectuals linked to social movements and organizations from different realities of Latin America sought to address the phenomenon from a perspective that included a politicization of those displaced by the

neoliberal adjustment. They began to propose an alternative notion and in dispute with that of informality: the Popular Economy.

Although the notion of Popular Economy in those years circulated in a limited circle and was abandoned even by those who forged the concept (Coraggio 1993; Núñez 1995; Rezetto 1993), from the 2000s it gained a new impetus in Argentina with the creation of the Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy (CTEP)[i], a social-organization-trade-union (new type unionism) that for the first time proposed the representation of this universe of working people. In the Argentinean context of first decade of the 21st century, after a process of sustained decrease in unemployment and improvements in income conditions, more than 25% of the active population persisted in self-employment or in social organizations without access to social security. In 2017, after an intense period of struggle and mobilization against a new neoliberal government, the organizations grouped in the CTEP obtained the formal recognition of the Popular Economy in different social programs of income assistance, job training, etc.

From class to the people

These different moments of circulation of the Popular Economy can be explained, among other aspects, from a continuity in the way of thinking of the subject of social transformation in the movements that support it.

As mentioned, the first developments on the notion of Popular Economy appeared between the mid-1980s and early 1990s, at a time when neoliberal policies were expanding in Latin America. Faced with the social consequences of that period, some authors and movements began to propose a political and economic project "of and from" those displaced by neoliberalism, mobilized by a multi-class subject of what was called the informal sector. This proposal also implied a criticism of some sectors of the partisan left who considered the "informal" self-employed a petty bourgeois mentality that could not become a social class.

These authors considered that these new *self-employed workers* were the product of specific conditions in peripheral capitalist development. For Orlando Núñez Soto and for the CTEP in Argentina (Grabois y Pérsico 2013), the workers of the Popular Economy, the self-employed workers, are subjected to "indirect exploitation", where exploitation is transferred from the area of the labor process to the broader scheme of general production relations. The self-employed proletariat would be the product of the unequal development, of production relations between the countries of central capitalism - which develop their industries very early - and the proletarianized nations

that specialize in extracting natural resources. Thus, in Latin America without an extended proletariat, a good number of people from the proletarianized nations are employed in activities on their own, so the relations of exploitation become indirect in two ways: First, because of the asymmetric and exploitative nature of the relations of production that occur between nations with different degrees of development and, secondly, regarding the exploitation suffered by those workers who do not obtain their income by selling their labor power. Self-employed workers, deprived of the means of production and without salaried employment, undertake activities with very little capital, having to increase the working day in order to obtain money to acquire what is essential for the reproduction of life. In this way they are exploited by oligopolistic companies through their participation in the market as consumers and the need to exploit themselves (Núñez Soto 2011).

In both Nuñez and Coraggio's proposals, on a subordinate subject that could potentially become a subject of transformation, the debates of Nicaragua´s Sandinista Revolution - the last liberationist experience of the 20th century - resound, in which both actively participated, one as president of the institute for agrarian reform and the other as advisor. The revolution that brought the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) to power was structured around three factions opposed by their conception of the revolutionary subject: The pro-Chinese that proposed the guerrilla focus as a methodology and the peasantry as a subject; the proletarian, pro-Soviet tendency with an axis in the urban proletariat, which proposed a revolution in stages; and the majority fraction called "insurrectionary" or "third party", which proposed a strategy of urban insurrection sustained by the impoverished masses and a multi-class struggle, as the integration of different classes around the signifier of "democracy". This struggle was presented as anti-imperialist liberation in a mixed economy, as a strategy of national unity with the bourgeois sectors confronted with the dictator Somoza Debayle as a politically subordinate class (Vilas 1995).

This Sandinista´s third tendency that proposed to settle on the action of the urban masses and the impoverished urban sectors, was made up of subjects who did not have the status of workers or peasants as a result of an accelerated process of urbanization, in a country with a dependent agro-export economy in which the increase in international prices of some primary products (mainly coffee) produced the expansion of the agricultural frontier. The depletion of the soil and the expropriation and displacement of thousands of peasants towards the cities, led to a process of urbanization without industrialization, in

which the cities went from housing 35% of the population in the 1950s to 52 % in 1982, from which emerged in a few years an urban mass without employment or with temporary employment in agriculture, and dedicated to tertiary activities on their own (Núñez 1987).

With this characterization of the revolutionary social bases, the influences of *Latin American Liberationism* resonate, a heterogeneous set of intellectual currents that, in different fields and disciplines, raised a radical social change and the question of Latin American identity (Parisí 2015). This group of philosophical currents was born in the debates of the mid-twentieth century in Argentina, Mexico and Peru, combining Catholic Third-world movement with critical social sciences analysis and proposing the possibility of a Latin-American own philosophy, as Leopldo Zea and Augusto Salazar Bondy proposed. They have as common postulates the idea of the dependence of Latin America on the first world and that philosophy must be done from the commitment to the Latin American situation, as a theoretical illumination of a liberating praxis, in addition to the idea of a liberating utopia differentiated by the *subject of liberation* (Beorlegui 2004).

In the particular case of the analectical current, the Subject of philosophizing is the people, as a different category that surpasses the class category. Its two most conspicuous representatives, Enrique Dussel and Juan Carlos Scanonne, drew on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, who provided them with a critique of Western philosophy and a philosophical proposal centered on a metaphysics and anthropology of alterity. For Levinas, Western philosophy is based on a conception of totality that reduces the other to the self or to an image of the self over the other. In the dialectic, both Platonic and Hegelian, the dialogue with the others is based on a dialectic between the self and the not self, in which the not self is never respected in its alterity but rather is the negation of the self. Faced with this, he proposes a metaphysics of alterity on which the liberationists are going to build an idea of the other as external, an exteriority, in which he goes from being another denied to being another different but within the same system as a phase of an identity process. In this way, the difference is built on the category of exteriority and the subject of liberation is thought from the categories of negativity and materiality, which are understood as the inability to live of the oppressed, exploited and victims (Dussel 2001).

The basis of position is given by an ethic that consists in recognizing the "primus factum" of human life. Unlike the traditional critical theory, which bases the contradiction on a notion of a closed totality determined by the capitalist mode of production based on the contradiction between capital and labor,

the liberationist position is based on the contradiction with the possibilities of the development of human life for the people and their sustenance. In this sense, the subject of social change is not linked exclusively to the class position, but sees capitalism as a historical form of exploitation linked to European colonial expansion, not reducible only to the contradiction between capital and labor. Thus, the proletariat is moved from the center as the sole agent or as the privileged subject of history, defining the subject of liberation from a position of negativity and exteriority that is more encompassing than the proletarian condition.

From Liberation to inclusion

As of 2011, with the creation of the CTEP and its subsequent transformation into the Union of Workers of the Popular Economy (UTEP) in 2018, the Popular Economy gained a new circulation in Argentina. The associated meanings and the way of conceiving the political subject had continuity with its origins in liberationism. In recent years, the mobilization was sustained under the motto of Land, Roof and Labor ("Tierra, Techo y Trabajo", the "3 Ts"), which encompasses the condition of precariousness in access to rights and unmet basic needs.

Political rash of the Popular Economy as a project and claim was based on the constitutive assumption of the invisibility of its subjects, based on the lack of knowledge of their rights as workers. This public commitment represented an ambiguous manifestation that presents its subject as a negative consequence of a neoliberal economic model and at the same time as a positive manifestation of the "labor culture of the poor" and popular classes that created their own jobs. Thus presented, the Popular Economy is a negative consequence but at the same time it is the fruit of the effort and the autonomous organization of the popular sectors.

Here the identity of the poor or excluded articulates in the identity of workers, but is not reduced to the former, as it places material needs in the foreground. Thus, class and living conditions articulate the heterogeneities of the subject that CTEP constructs as typical of the Popular Economy. Class and poverty/exclusion/precariousness appear articulating this heterogeneity as a poor working subject whose rights are unknown. In short, in the workers/poor relationship, the traditional axis of the class perspective is displaced: the relationship between labor and exploitation, or in the less radical versions, the relationship between labor and employment conditions, to a new version of the contradictory relationship between labor and life conditions.

The relationship between the ideas of Latin American Liberationism with the

Popular Economy shows that at the base of the latter there is a component of *situated* critical theory that stands out for its originality. The Popular Economy emerged then as the reverse of the recipes for market liberalization and the weakening of state intervention. A central point of this analysis is to propose that the Popular Economy represented a proposal that sought to generate social change, at the same time that it sought a broadening of the subject that should carry it out, expanding it to the poor, the displaced, the marginal and informal, recognized in its capacity of agency to generate transformation in its favor.

However, this subject can no longer be thought of as embodied in the same actors as the recent failed revolutionary experiences, which is why the Popular Economy proposed a rereading of the subject of social change broader than the proletariat, which encompasses all those affected by neoliberalism: workers, marginalized, urban poor, self-employed, displaced peasants, united under the significant people as the negativity-exteriority proposed by the philosophy of liberation.

Finally, new questions are opened regarding the uses given to the Popular Economy today, in a different context from its emergence. It would be necessary to think today how the dimensions of statehood and public policies play, through social employment programs, which were not present in its origin.

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[i] In 2019, the CTEP decided to transform itself into a formal trade-union, presenting the formal request for admission. Since then it has been called the Union of Workers of the Popular Economy (UTEP).

A Conspectus on Land and Caste in India

Awanish Kumar[1]

Land struggles are witnessing a resurgence in many parts of the world. Some of these draw, in part, from colonial histories, for instance, the Rural Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil. While others, more recently, agitate against land grabs for commercial farming in parts of Africa, reflecting a rise in agrarian unrest against neoliberal policies in food and agriculture leading to the disenfranchisement of peasants, economically and politically. India, on the other hand, has had a distinctive land problem.

The Problem

Historically, an entire social class in India was customarily prohibited from holding land because of their "untouchable" caste status and was relegated to being "village/field servants," bonded labourers or landless workers (Habib 1963, 1975, 1983; Omvedt 1980, 1981).[i] This was unlike *typical* feudal societies where serfs had a degree of operational control over their land and a class of landless proletariat emerged only after capitalist agriculture gained ground. While describing the production conditions of Indian agriculture during the Mughal period, Irfan Habib (1975) writes,

> Beneath the peasantry, a large rural proletariat was to be found, largely consisting of the menial and untouchable castes. The zamindars and the upper peasants had their farms or *khud-kashta* holdings cultivated by labourers, who were paid wages in cash as well as grain, and who in some areas, like parts of Bihar and southern India, were held in conditions of semi-bondage. (p 25; also see Habib 1983)

In medieval India, the category of "tax/revenue farmers," responsible for the collection and payment of taxes to the state, attained this role through customary vesting of such rights onto them via caste or ritual hierarchical status. In the exercise of their role as taxpayers representing the entire village, they gradually transformed into intermediate tax collectors or *zamindars* (landlords) during the colonial period. And

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thus, throughout the history of India, caste and control over land were entangled. Such caste-based exclusion of the Dalits from land ownership and the customary vesting of revenue rights to non-Dalit caste households engendered a hierarchy of classes and caste groups linked to their relationship with land. [ii]

Bharat Patankar and Gail Omvedt (1979) have characterised this agrarian system as *caste-feudalism*, whereby different castes were not only tied to land but also to distinct occupations, with an overarching ideology of caste to maintain hierarchy among the classes. In the words of Irfan Habib (1963:1999), "the existence of 'untouchables' was thus a pillar of Indian peasant agriculture from very early times, ever since, that is, the food-gatherers and the forest folk were humbled and subjugated by settled agricultural communities" (p. 143). The agrarian policies under colonialism during the nineteenth century enhanced the number of landless agricultural workers but as Habib notes, "… this century was essentially one of enlargement, not of creation, of the class" (ibid.).

In the post-independence period, land reforms were a general failure in India, except in a few states (Suri 1987; Jannuzi 1994). Tenancy reforms primarily benefited middle-caste tenants in different states, such as the Marathas, Jats, Patidars, etc. Further, land reforms were largely unsuccessful in redistributing land to the landless, mostly the Dalits. It is important to note that the failure of land reforms to redistribute land to the Dalits was not simply a failure of implementation but a result of the historical relationship between caste and land. In India, the rhetoric as well as practice of slogans such as "abolition of landlordism" and "land to the tiller" did not refer to the same thing, that is, providing ownership and/or occupancy rights to persons *actually* working *on* land. The tiller, exclusively, meant tenant farmers who often cultivated land by hiring landless Dalit workers. In this sense, these slogans in uniquely Indian conditions excluded the Dalits who primarily worked as landless "field servants" (see Omvedt 1980).

This scenario remains largely unchanged to date for the Dalits who constitute about 20% of India's population. Data from the National Sample Survey Office, Government of India, reveals that more than 58% of all rural Dalit households were landless in 2013. In the agriculturally advanced states of India, such as Haryana and Punjab, landlessness among the Dalits was as high as 92% and 87% respectively (Anand 2016). Recent village studies have shown that caste and agrarian class continue to be "enmeshed" (Chakravarti 2001, Kumar 2022).

Ambedkar's Theorisation: Land as Constituent of Freedom and Dignity

Dr B R Ambedkar is considered the father of the Indian constitution. He is well regarded as a great jurist and a crusader against caste, class, and gender-based exploitation and for equality, justice, and most importantly, fraternity. Dr Ambedkar was also the founder of Navayana Buddhism. His writings on the agrarian problems of India, however, have not received as much attention.[iii]

Ambedkar articulated the agrarian problem in India as follows: the real reason for the poverty of the masses in India is their complete dependence on agriculture. He saw industrialization as the way forward to reduce the population pressure on agriculture and provide an alternative occupation to the masses. Secondly, Ambedkar was keenly aware of the destruction and misery caused by the colonial land revenue policy in India. At the same time, he emphasized the casteist nature of the pre-colonial polity and legal system that benefited only a limited few, belonging to the upper castes. According to Ambedkar, the agrarian scenario in India could be characterized by the presence of various classes, such as various types of parasitical intermediaries/landlords, a few big farmers and a very large mass of small holders, reflecting a high degree of social differentiation within the peasantry. It is important to note that, for the most part, the Dalits were outside this framework. This was in line with the physical and social segregation of the Indian village—continuing to this day—wherein Dalits live in the "ghetto" in Ambedkar's words. Due to the complete monopoly of village society over productive resources, including land, the Dalit part of the village, as a whole, was "economically dependent" on the village society. The patchy and uneven industrialisation process has been, and continues to be, inadequate to decisively break this exploitative dependence. The complete landlessness of the entire class of Dalits meant that they were forced to work under horrible conditions while being at the receiving end of regular cycles of violence and "social boycotts."

Landholding for the Dalits, therefore, does not only signify economic advancement or assets but *freedom* in its very fundamental sense. Further, the land question for Dalits was not simply about individual ownership, but intimately tied to *social dignity*. Even if one Dalit household remained landless and dependent on the village society, they might be forced into undignified and offensive work and "demonstrative violence" may be unleashed on them. The only way out is the collective liberation of all Dalits from their economic

dependence upon the village society. This notion of dignity needs to be further understood in the background of Dalits being forced to perform services, such as field servants, for a long period in history. Medieval regimes variously provided land grants to Dalits but in many instances, like in Maharashtra, such grants were tied to them performing compulsory services as village servants (known as *Maharwatans*). Unsurprisingly then, one of the earliest legislative interventions by Ambedkar was to seek its abolition, even though it involved ownership of land, as the Dalits were unable to free themselves of the dependence on the village due to obligatory services attached with landholding.

In sum, Ambedkar asserted that landholding was not simply a matter of economics but also of social status as, "a person holding land has a higher status than a person not holding land" (BAWS, Vol. 15, p. 913). Land thus reflects dignity as much as it was about social and economic freedom. This idea of dignified freedom implies *collective* social and economic freedom of Dalits because until everyone is free, no one is free!

Ambedkar's immediate resolution of the Dalit land question in India involved utilizing the cultivable wastelands available in the country to be redistributed among the Dalits. This process also included the creation of separate villages for the Dalits. Ambedkar stood against the dominant discourse of land reforms because that further solidified the landholding structure of the Indian villages through the creation of peasant proprietorship in land. The resolution of the agrarian problem in India, according to him, required the annihilation of caste that fundamentally disrupted the ties of dependence and oppression between the members of Dalits and village society. In concrete policy terms, he advocated the nationalization of land and collectivization of agriculture under the auspices of the state along with modern industrialization.

Dalit Movements for Land[iv]

Conventionally at least, land movements in India have been understood mostly from the Gandhian, Marxist or Maoist paradigms. However, there is a long history of Dalit land movements in Maharashtra along with Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh. The Dalit land movement since inception has made a rather minimalist demand: the redistribution of uncultivated land, wasteland, grazing land, forestland, etc. The constant threat of violence, especially at the local levels, hegemony of regional caste elites and unsympathetic local state/judiciary may have been the constraining factors limiting the nature of demands and

possibilities of sociopolitical organization. The point to note, however, is that even this very limited demand has, without exception, resulted in massive and consistent violence against Dalits in every context.

Many of these movements draw their inspiration from Ambedkar's own writings and political action on the question of land. This is significant in many ways but also because these movements raised a slogan that went beyond the "land to the tiller" and challenged the dominant understanding through the question: *kasel tyanchi jamin, nasel tyache kaay?* (land to the tiller, but what about non-tillers, that is, those with no traditional rights over land).

One of the most important objective constraints faced by the Dalit land movement has been the constant threat of violence from village society. This basic fact forces them to adopt a variety of strategies to simultaneously negotiate with the society and the state. Additionally, the Dalit land movement is rarely recognised as a movement for land. The state as well as village society considers the movement essentially as a caste-based and Dalit demand. This presents yet another challenge to the Dalit land movement which thereby needs to work both as a Dalit rights as well as a land rights movement.

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[i] To emphasize the relationship between caste and land and to distinguish this category from the modern category of agricultural labourers, Patankar and Omvedt (1979) clarify the term 'untouchable field servants' by pointing out that were just that: field servants drawn from untouchable castes (also see Omvedt 1981).

[ii] The term 'Dalit' (literal meaning: oppressed) is used to refer to members of the ex-Untouchable castes of the Hindu social hierarchy. The politically significant term Dalit was first used by the revolutionary anti-caste thinker from Maharashtra, Jotiba Phule. The approximate corresponding legal and administrative term often used in popular parlance is Scheduled Castes (SCs).

[iii] The arguments in this section are drawn from my paper titled, "B R Ambedkar on Caste and Land Relations in India", published in the *Review of Agrarian Studies* (see Kumar 2020).

[iv] This section draws from my forthcoming paper titled, The Caste of Land: *Gairan* Movement in Maharashtra, India. See Kumar (forthcoming).

Do water policies transform women's role in Egypt?

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Introduction

Egyptian water national policies emphasize the significance of inclusive management of water mainly under scarcity of freshwater resources[i]; however, the gender aspect is silent in water national strategies which impedes the possibility of gender transformation. On the one hand, the agricultural sector consumes more than 60% of water resources (CAPMAS, 2021) and about 58% of the total population live in rural areas (CAPMAS, 2017) that entangle with 25% of women who work in the agriculture sector (NCW, 2017) and the feminization of agriculture and poverty due to neoliberal policies. On the other hand, the Egyptian state since the Nasser regime in the 1950s has been endorsing women's equality and empowerment; nevertheless, it has been a top-down approach that consolidates state and society patriarchy (Hatem, 1992). The interplay of these factors and their consequences is revealed in water national policies which implicitly recognize women as one among the targeted users of water in other sectors and might open the door for women's participation in designing, implementation and evaluation of these policies, which are considered gender sensitive. Yet this cannot be perceived as transformative in terms of gender as they do not aim to change embedded gender dynamics in society.

We argue that though Egypt suffers from water scarcity, rigid gender roles in water management are left to other national strategies and not integrated explicitly into water national policies. To understand this equivocal inclusion\ exclusion of women in water policies, we demonstrate first the differences between the three levels of gender mainstreaming; i.e. gender blind, gender sensitive and gender transformative by examining the triple roles of women (productive, reproductive and social); then we explain how water national policies consider gender roles. This piece is based on documents of water national strategies for

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2017 and 2037 and focuses on irrigation water as agriculture is the top consumer sector in Egypt.

Gender mainstreaming and the triple role of women

Gender mainstreaming has been an integral part of different governments' development policies. The international framework of sustainable development goals (SDGs) has constituted a push factor for attending to issues of gender equality all over the world. Feminists and gender scholars have developed a complex understanding of what it means and what it takes to achieve gender equality in its true sense. Accordingly, gender mainstreaming has become an important tool in order to achieve gender equality, but cannot be considered as equivalent to it (Walby, 2005). This section is going to address three levels of gender policies as well as discuss the main analytical tools for analyzing gender mainstreaming.

Goal No.5 of SDGs proclaims achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls and calls governments to adopt different policies and regulations to achieve this end. Gender scholars have distinguished between three levels in this regard. The first level is gender blind policies and regulations. This means that policies and regulations adopted by the government\ institutions do not recognize the differences between men's and women' needs as well as ignore the different impacts of development policies on them. Thus, national development policies are planned regardless of these differences. The second level is gender sensitive; i.e. planning processes and implementation recognize the fact that women and men have different needs and accordingly they expect different policies and will be affected differently. For example, this level recognizes the fact that women in the agriculture sector constitute a large segment of informal workers as well as the main contributor to non-formal economic activities. Gender-sensitive planning and policy aim at integrating women into the formal work and formal economy, through providing micro-loans, IDs and formal jobs; in addition to procedures helping in improving the quality of life for families in general and women in particular (clean water and sanitary and health facilities). While these policies and regulations are very important steps on the way to empower women, they do not address the triple roles of women: productive, reproductive and social roles. They only tackle the productive roles of women (their contribution to the economy)

without looking into the other two roles (reproductive and social). Thus, gender scholars emphasize that this in fact has increased the burden on women and girls. Consequently, though these policies might have positive impact on the overall level of certain economic indicators, yet women and girls remain to suffer social discrimination, violence and what we may call fragile empowerment (Anderson and Sriram 2019, Weber 2021). Realizing the above would help us to understand the reluctance of some women to be part of the work-force. Working outside the house, though economically empowering to them, is increasing the workload of those women who are still required and obliged - because of social norms - to attend to domestic and reproductive chores as well as perform their social roles in their local community (Choiryah, et all., 2020).

The third level is the gender transformative level, through which we look into not only development policies and regulations, but also into gender roles and dynamics on the social level. In other words, how can we understand and analyze the triple roles of women and accordingly plan, implement, monitor and evaluate policies as well as changing gender roles in society? Scholars argue that the gender transformation level is the highest level of gender mainstreaming; thus achieving gender equality in its true sense and application (Kagestan and Mouli, 2020).

National action plans have been a very important step in gender mainstreaming. Actually, the Nasser regime adopted policies that aimed at providing equal access and supportive conditions to women in different sectors through issuing laws and regulations that do not discriminate on gender in applying for jobs and enable women to play their family roles (i.e. paid maternity leave and children care) (Hatem, 1992). As Hatem (1992, p.233) argues, Nasser's policies provided better conditions for women, especially from the middle and lower middle class to participate in the labor force; however, there was no change in the personal status laws that keep women as inferior to men and what the state did is consolidate a 'system of public patriarchy'.

In recent years, Egypt aligned its national policies with the global development discourse i.e. SDGs and disseminated Egypt's vision 2030 in 2016. Departing from this vision, the government announced in 2017 the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030 which aims at improving women's conditions

in political, economic and social spheres, in addition to affirming their protection against violence (NCW, 2017). The national strategy puts emphasis on women in the agriculture sector to attain empowerment in the economic sphere. However, the vision aims to facilitate women's integration in the 'value chains of agricultural production' including the projects considering environmental aspects such as organic farming and waste recycling. In addition to the women's strategy, the government has developed many plans and projects targeting 'rural women' which cover women's productive health, legal rights and enhancement of their economic conditions (NCW, 2019).

Accordingly, women's empowerment has been clearly endorsed by different political regimes in Egypt; yet, these efforts have not attained gender transformation. Bearing in mind the previous discussion, we move to discuss the Egyptian water policies and evaluate whether they are gender blind or sensitive.

Water national strategies: equivocal gender role

The Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation (MWRI) disseminated the national strategy of water resources in 2005 for more than ten years to end in 2017 then it was updated for the next twenty years (2037) under the titles of 'water for the future' and 'water security for all' respectively. The national strategies are built on the notion of integrated water resources management (IWRM) which is a global mainstreaming approach in water studies (Allouche, 2016). The notion was developed to incorporate technical aspects into a broader scope of water governance. Accordingly, the IWRM assumes the participation of stakeholders would enhance governing water quality and distribution across sectors.

The Egyptian water strategy and its update IWRM ensures the improvement of quality of scarce freshwater in Egypt to meet the increasing demands; importantly, the strategy states: 'w*ater development and management should be based on a* ***participatory approach*** *[the strategy emphasizes], involving users, planners, and policy-makers at all levels*' (MWRI, 2005, p.xvii). The preface of the national strategy and the executive summary of the 2017 strategy emphasize the significance of the IWRM approach and how the strategy was designed after discussions with relevant ministries. Regarding gender roles, the strategy of 2017 claims it is gender blind stating that 'the presented strategy FtC

[Facing the challenge] is formulated in gender neutral format' (MWRI, 2005, p.5-40). But it attempts to overcome that by considering gender lens when assessing the implementation of the strategy mainly in the health and environmental aspects.

While the strategy for 2037 espouses the SDGs of 2030 as global and national mandates. Here, the ministry states in the explanation of the IWRM approach that: '*Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water. Egypt widens this principle to 'inclusive development'; aiming to provide equal opportunities to all, and searching to close development gaps between regions and people; while ensuring the rights of future generations*' (MWRI, 2017, p.2). Accordingly, women are one among the other as users and unlike the strategy of 2017, there is no reference to the equality gaps in water management.

The overarching mission of the national water strategy is to achieve a balance of increasing demands (water usage) and scarcity of water across sectors in a technical sense; while, gender issues, in particular, can be considered in other national policies. As a result, we can find scattered applications of gender-sensitive activities. For instance, the ministry endorses women's participation on the boards of water users' associations (WUAs) (Elsayed and Betah, 2013). On the other side, at the institutional level, the ministry founded a Gender Focal Point to help in facilitating women training programs in the fields as well as in the ministry itself (Ibrahim, 2006), still, women compromise only 18% of leadership positions in the ministry (NCW, 2018).

Obviously, gender issues are tackled through secondary activities and more of them as awareness campaigns in collaboration with other agencies rather than being fully integrated into water national strategies, this indicates the ministry recognizes that women have distinct needs and will be affected differently by water policies. Nevertheless, there are critical aspects that need to be addressed for women in water policies that are silent in water strategies. For instance, due to male migration outside the country or to urban cities, women in rural areas have to do farming tasks that used to be done by males. In these situations, women's accessibility to irrigation canals should be questioned: how do women negotiate with other farmers who use the same canal to schedule irrigation and manage conflict over water distribution and maintenance costs? As observed in many

developing countries women's capabilities to manage water distribution and management are weak with the dominance of men (Slavchevska, et al, 2018). Moreover, pumping water into the fields is a challenge in the Nile valley thus the ministry implements a national plan to replace surface irrigation with modern methods in order to improve water usage efficiency. Financing this national plan is through banks that provide farmers with loans - the government covers the interest (almalnews, 2021); however, this national plan does not discern women's financial capability to get loans to keep irrigating their fields. Such daily struggles of irrigating fields - with the struggle of getting seeds and fertilizers - add up to women's burden in the water and agriculture sectors. The national water strategy and its updates address women in general without integrating gender roles and capabilities to attain water national objectives. One more interpretation of the lack of gender sensitivity in water policies is the dominance of men in water knowledge in general. Across regions and countries, hydrology is a masculine discipline where male engineers design, distribute and implement water management (Zwarteveen, 2008) that is why water national strategies negate women as an integral actor.

Conclusion: Don't underestimate gender-sensitive policies

Traditionally, agricultural societies are founded on the work of all members of the family; i.e. men, women and even children, yet the capital control of this production has been in the hand of the head of the family; i.e. the man. Gender equality as an important part of the SDGs is not only about adding women to the picture and achieving quantitative equality - though fundamental - rather it is about the structural changes in policies, practices and perceptions of different elements in the society aiming at transformative changes in gender relations and roles.

Looking into Egyptian water policies, we can see in the documents that national strategies are less sensitive to gender needs/ involvement because it prioritizes managing water scarcity in technical and financial terms. However, the ministry conducts activities that improve women's engagement in water management. Therefore, to encourage gender transformative policies, we should never be underestimating the importance of gender-sensitive policies and regulations aiming at improving the participation of women in the water and agriculture sectors. Though not an end, these

changes are crucial for achieving changes on the ground and paving the way for further more substantial ones.

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[i] Egypt depends on the Nile river that provides 55.5 bm3/year while, deep groundwater, rains and desalination supply 2.5, 1.30 and 0.38 bm3/year respectively (CAPMAS,2021).