

Nothing Was Ever Brought to Trial

Interview with Magda Adly

Perspectives: Dr. Magda, you are a leading member of the Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence in Cairo. Much has been said about the authoritarian character of the Mubarak regime. Can you describe the scope of torture in Egypt?

ADLY: Horrific tortures were perpetrated by the state security apparatus, but no security officer was ever brought to trial during Mubarak's rule. It was enough for a citizen to be close to – or the neighbor of – somebody engaged in political activity opposed to the regime: that was

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sufficient grounds for a citizen to be tortured. At the Nadeem Centre, the issue of torture was the main area of contention with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Government. We stated that torture was a systematic policy – they claimed it was a result of excesses perpetrated by individuals. We published reports on many individuals, including medical and forensic reports that backed up these claims.

People were dying in prison cells without anybody ever knowing about it. In Beheira province, a mass grave was found behind a prison; there is a burial site underneath the State Security building inside the prison fence; people accidentally discovered a secret room where human bones were found, and when the incident was investigated by Amnesty

International, they discovered the burial site. The news spread on Facebook, as to where the burial site was concealed. But many people in Beheira province either saw or knew about the site; it became a place of pilgrimage for people in the province, along with other notorious sites in Lazoghly, Nasr City and Gaber ibn Hayyan.

Perspectives: Have people been tortured in State Security prison cells after the fall of Mubarak?

ADLY: Yes, there was torture: people arrested in the most recent demonstrations were tortured in State Security detention centres.

Perspectives: What about police stations?

ADLY: Police stations are an issue we need to look at. Over the past few years, the insolence of police officers reached its peak when they started to use individuals' own mobile phones to videotape them being tortured, with the aim of humiliating and terrorizing them. And some people did indeed become afraid of being arrested and disappearing, but this behavior also brought popular anger to the boiling point.

Perspectives: Was torture in police stations carried out on the orders of officials?

ADLY: Of course! When you're talking about state policy, this means that the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the Interior Minister all know about and approved of these things. Much of the equipment was purchased out of the State budget – a military secret which hasn't yet seen the light of day.



Magda Adly

Magda Adly is a medical doctor and activist promoting human rights and women's issues.

She was a member of the Egyptian students' movement in the 1970s and spent most of her time as a student in detention. She is manager at the El-Nadeem Centre for the Treatment and Psychological Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence in Cairo, coordinates a support programme for women victims of violence, and trains others in resistance to torture and in women's rights. While attending the trial of a torture victim, she was attacked by a member of the security forces and beat so severely that she now suffers a permanent disability.

Perspectives: After the revolution was there a resolution prohibiting the use of torture in police stations?

ADLY: There was an verbal undertaking, but I neither trust it nor feel confident about it.

Perspectives: Is torture being continued in the same scope as before?

ADLY: Not yet. They have started to replace ministers and senior leaders, such as the security chief in Cairo and his assistant. Until now this is a mere reshuffle, these senior figures have not even been forced to retire. Throughout this period, television and other media have been broadcasting propaganda stating that we are a tolerant people, that we should forget these issues, that the police force now understand they are at fault and will treat people better.

Previously a citizen would be tortured and imprisoned just for stealing a loaf of bread. How can I forgive those who killed both before and during the revolution? Personally, I do not believe we can turn a new page until all those who have committed crimes against this nation are brought to trial and dismissed from the security services, in compliance with the International Convention Against Torture. Only this will enable the new generation to forgive, so we can all turn over a new page. Everybody,

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from the lowest-ranking officer to the most senior police officer and Interior Minister – even Hosni Mubarak and all the ministers who were aware of these reports and made statements about them in the media – they should all be brought to trial. There can be no forgiveness until this happens!

Unfortunately, a new torture dossier needs

to be opened – on the torture of civilian detainees by army officers. This is a sensitive, dangerous issue. One of the motives behind the revolution was the rejection of torture. So is the army now exchanging roles with the police? The nation rejected the police, welcomed the army, and was happy with the solution – but then we discovered that civilians were being tortured in military police stations and military prisons, as well as various illegal places of detention before they were handed over to the military police. There are suspicions that legal cases have been fabricated, that demonstrators have been accused of being thugs. The military tribunals do not meet the minimum standards for a fair trial. This issue poses an extreme risk to the future of our nation at this critical juncture, when members of the former regime are still attempting to crack down on the revolution.

Perspectives: On another note, the Nadeem Center strongly supports the increased participation of women in political process. In the events leading to change and revolution, what role did women play in conjunction with young people, and with movements and political parties?

ADLY: During the events of 2004 and 2005 – when the last presidential election took place and the Constitution was amended allowing the President to stay in power for unlimited consecutive terms – an unprecedented number of women were actively involved in opposition protest. I'm using here my own definition of political participation, because I do not consider that mere representation of women in Parliament in any way reflects active political participation; women representing the National Democratic Party who adopt an even more patriarchal way of thinking than men are not a valid benchmark. The rise in women's participation started with popular movements aimed at change, best known of which are Kifaya, the Egyptian Movement for Change, and the National Front for Change, which paved the way for a large number of social movements. Between 2006 and 2010 the percentage of women who took

part in demonstrations and sit-ins – lasting anything up to thirty days – was greater than the percentage of men.

The opposition movement has put an end to the myth that women should just stay in the kitchen and look after their children – those same women, together with their children, took part in demonstrations in the streets. By participating, women encouraged men to overcome the barrier of fear and join in the

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economic protests. This paved the way for the youth movement. It gives you an idea of the number of women who were actually involved in the demonstrations during the revolution – women not only from the elites. Veiled women took part in the demonstrations in public squares and slept there overnight, including volunteer medical doctors working in field hospitals. Many young women volunteered to be doctors and nurses, then male doctors from the major hospitals joined them in Tahrir Square, accompanied by female nurses and girl volunteers. Women journalists working for Egyptian newspapers and press agencies in other Arab and non-Arab countries were there, taking photographs and filming while under fire and during tear-gas attacks.

There has been a quantum leap in understanding – we thought that young women in their twenties were wasting their time on Facebook! Instead they formed a united front of like-minded individuals; they understood one another's language, they trusted one another: "We are all Khaled Said."¹ Nobody knew who the *Facebook Administrators* were, but by daring to

write, women learned to trust in and respond to each other. On January 25, the so-called *Police Day*² when the protest started, Nadeem Center planned to hold a special conference on the subject of torture. But then there was a call for protests by young people and everything began. We don't have a monopoly on ideas and knowledge – these are very inspiring, intelligent young people.

We in the older generation talk a lot – we like to discuss which came first, the chicken or the egg, but the young people can convey what they want in a couple of lines. So the young people are teaching us. But this is a reason for indescribable happiness – the world is moving forward in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen, Jordan, Algeria and Palestine; it is essential that the future should be better.

Interview by Joachim Paul, 21 February 2011.

Translation from Arabic by Word Gym Ltd.

¹ The Facebook group which emerged in protest against the murder of Khaled Said by the police in Alexandria.

² January 25 was declared as an official holiday in 2009 by Mubarak to underline the importance of the police for the Egyptian regime. It symbolizes today the successful Egyptian protest movement.