Deconstructing the “Facebook Revolution”

Specifying the Contribution of the Youth to the Radicalization of Contentious Politics in Egypt between 2000 and 2011

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The outbreak of ‘Egyptian Revolution’ in January 2011 astonished most experts, since the increasing adoption of violent and/or disruptive forms of contentious politics (radicalization) as well as the relevance of emerging non-violent protest movements prior to the revolution had escaped most researchers (see figure 1, p. 18). Another surprising aspect was the strong involvement of young Egyptians who were indeed “amongst the most politically mobilized groups in Egyptian politics” (Shehata 2008: 1). For this article, youth will be understood in accordance with the definition of the Egyptian governmental body in charge of youth issues, the National Council for Youth (NCY). It defines youth as the age group from 18 – 30 years.¹ Even though, the youth’s contribution to the outbreak of the revolution was indeed significant, their involvement must be perceived relative to the immense Egyptian youth bulge. Youth constitutes almost one third of the population. In 2007, 28 percent of all Egyptians were between 15 and 29 years old (Shehata 2008: 1). Except for the youth’s strong involvement it still remains unclear how exactly the youth contributed to the radicalization process and how they were enabled to do so. This is further obscured by the notion of the Facebook Revolution.

In this article I deconstruct the role of the Egyptian youth in the process of radicalization in the time between 2000 and the outbreak of the mass revolt in 2011. The year of 2000 is an adequate starting point, since the second Palestinian Intifada in 2000 was a major turning point for the regime’s opposition. The article will follow a inductive method in order to grasp central

¹ “This long period of time is due to the fact that large sectors of young people […] usually face the same problems and challenges, such as unemployment, poor education, low health awareness and limited access to training, educational, volunteering and job opportunities” (Tohami Abdelhay 2009: 10).
structural and dynamic elements of the interaction between Egyptian authorities and three crucial non-violent protest movements: *Kifaya*, the *April 6 Youth Movement* and *Kullena Khaled Said*.

After inquiring in a first section why young Egyptians got recruited to high-risk/cost activism under repressive authoritarianism at an initial stage of the emerging protest movements, I will use the latest version of the Dynamics-of-Contention-Approach (Tarrow 2011) for the analysis of the radicalization process in the second section. The use of this approach seems to be especially fruitful, since “radicalization may […] profitably be analyzed as a process of interaction between violent groups and their environment, or an effect of interactions between mutually hostile actors” (Della Porta & LaFree 2012: 7).

The relevance of the article is fourfold. Firstly, pivotal information on the specific contribution of the Egyptian youth to the radicalization process prior to the revolution is provided. Secondly, general conditions and prerequisites for recruitment to successful high-risk/cost youth activism under repressive authoritarianism are compiled. Thirdly, the article gives insights into the cooperation of adults and youth. Lastly, it informs about the use and relevance of innovative information and communication technologies in youth activism. Hence, this article is beneficial to all politicians, NGO-leaders and youth activists who strive to capacitate youth as agents for a change (in highly repressive contexts).

*Conditions for youth recruitment and mobilization*

In the following I will discuss several factors that seem to be particularly important for youth recruitment to high-risk/cost activism. Whereas cost “refers to the expenditure of time, money, and energy that are required”, risk “refers to the anticipated dangers – whether legal, social, physical, financial, and so forth – of engaging in a particular type of activity” (McAdam 1986: 67). These factors are as follows: (1) eroding regime\(^2\) legitimacy and grievances; (2) (biographical) availability; (3) ideological commitment and (4) the integration of the youth into dissident networks. This choice of factors bases on the work of Doug McAdam (1986: 71). It is extended by a resource-availability component. Hence, the factors refer to cultural (grievance, identity) and structural aspects (integration in networks and personal restraints) of recruitment.

\(^2\) In this article the term regime is used to refer to "the rules and procedures of a polity, among decision-makers and between decision-makers and society" (Albrecht 2008: 14).
(1) **Eroding regime legitimacy and grievances:**

The Egyptian regime suffered from a crisis of legitimacy (Sedgwick 2010) which was related to the people’s grievance (e.g. when considering material legitimacy). This can be best captured when dividing the menaces the youth faced into two categories: (a) economic and (b) political marginalization. Statements of youth activists like Ahmed Abdullah El-Shikh confirm that grievance can be a motivator for activism: “It’s about being human […]. I need to choose my way; I need to choose my destiny. And they were taking this from us. You don’t have a voice, you don’t see, you don’t hear, you have to follow whatever they say. I am out of it, I am out of it, I am out” (interview with A. El-Shikh). Grievances are indeed closely linked to the violation of human rights committed by the Egyptian state (Human Rights Watch 2011). Many Egyptians are impeded to meet their fundamental rights such as the right to work, the right to freedom of thought, expression, conscience and religion, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association (UN Universal declaration of Human Rights 1948).

(a) The economic marginalization of the youth is reflected by an extraordinary unemployment rate. In 2007, the age group between 15 and 29 years comprised 83% percent of all unemployed Egyptians. Even more striking is that 95% of these unemployed young Egyptians held a secondary education degree keeping their social and economic expectations high (Shehata 2008: 2). Beside the general material hardship and negative psychological impact caused by unemployment, it is even more devastating in the patriarchal Islamic context of Egypt, since a job is the necessary condition for male Egyptians to purchase and furnish an apartment. Without the provision of housing for the future family, marriage, mostly the prerequisite for a sexual relationship between men and women, remains impossible.

The youth’s marginalization is one aspect of the increasing social inequality which was an inherent aspect of the Egyptian authoritarianism whose neo-patrimonial character included the personal legitimation of power which was executed in an informal system (Schlumberger 2008: 625f.) dominated by clientelist patterns. However, it was further aggravated by “the selective

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3 Grievance is mostly examined by culturalist approaches of social movement theory of which the framing perspective is the most important one (see the differentiation between framing processes, mobilizing structures and the political opportunity structure below). It stresses the relevance of the "symbolic and meaning work done by movement activists as they articulate grievances" (William 2007: 93).

4 Responsible for public awareness in the April 6 Youth Movement.
choice of free-market principles without concern for social welfare or political reform in the interests of the mass of Egyptians” (El-Sayed El-Naggar 2009: 36), since Egyptian market-oriented economy never violated the logic of power maintenance. It started with Sadat’s open-door-policy in the seventies, was sustained by Mubarak’s neo-liberal policy and lacked “formal guarantees of the rule of law [and] a fair wage system […] Economic policy included repeated attempts to radically reduce public spending allocated to subsidizing basic commodities, services and social transfers” (ibid.: 36). Thus, authors go as far as speaking of a conceptual policy of neglect (Droz-Vincent 2009: 229) marking not only the end of the state’s commitment to hire all graduates of the university system, but also the disruption of the former ruling pact between Mubarak and the people (El-Mahdi 2009: 1020). The pact was characterized by “the consent the Egyptians have expressed to be governed” (al-Bishri quoted in Droz-Vincent 2009: 229) in exchange for the guarantee of basic services.

(b) Political marginalization can also be regarded as a product of authoritarian rule, since it typically limits participation (Albrecht 2008: 16). However, under former president Mubarak virtually all channels of political participation were closed down. The parliament simply formalized presidential policies and channeled resources in local constituencies (Kassem 2004: 35). Opposition parties and NGO’s, massively observed and constrained, were likewise mostly incorporated into the clientelist structure and thus no means to push for reform. Extra-legal political activism was always harshly repressed with the help of a strong security apparatus and the perpetual extension of the emergency law. Omnipresent threat and increasing repression contributed to a great apathy of many Egyptians. This increase of state-sponsored violence was a direct result of eroding regime legitimacy: The rulers cultivated a “security atmosphere in the country in perfect accordance with the regime’s heavy and parallel reliance on emergency law, censorship [and] control of the public space […]” (Droz-Vincent 2009: 229). Nevertheless, “squeezed between the rock of inequality and the hard place of repression” (El-Mahdi & Marfleet 2009: 9) some Egyptians were continuously striving for change.

(2) (Biographical) Availability

McAdam considers biographical availability as a necessary but insufficient cause for participation in high-risk/cost activism (McAdam 1986: 87). It can be defined “as the absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-
time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities” (ibid. 70). In Egypt, biographical availability of the youth existed to great extent, since employment and family responsibilities were low. Differing from biographical availability, the disposability of resources (Edwards & McCarthy 2008) also mattered to start activism. In this regard, the Egyptian youth was constrained by a lack of money (material resources) but blessed with time, due to the high unemployment rate, and skills, due to the high percentage of secondary education (human resources). This mixed record is completed by poor social-organizational resources as a consequence of authoritarianism.5

(3) Ideological commitment
Another necessary but insufficient variable is attitudinal affinity. When pan-Arabism and Nasser’s socialist populism ended, Egypt was left in an ideological void, typical for authoritarian regimes (Kassem 2004: 12). Weak remaining ideological trends were incorporated by the regime (e.g. the Tagammu-party) which also adopted a divide-and-rule-tactic to prevent cooperation and real opposition. Despite this apparent void, the Egyptian youth developed a strong attitudinal commitment against the regime in favor of rather ill-defined values of justice, democracy and human rights (Shehata 2008: 6). Foreign policy issues served as facilitators for internal criticism6 and an opportunity to unite around least common denominators. There could hardly be a better example than the emergence, composition and political orientation of Kifaya (meaning ‘enough’) which wouldn’t have been possible without the massive Egyptian protests in solidarity with the Palestinian people during the second intifada in 2000 and the demonstrations against the Iraq war in 2003. These contentious episodes sustained individual commitment to the emerging protest movement.

(4) The integration of the youth into dissident networks
Even though, the Egyptian Committee for the Support of the Palestinian Intifada was set up in 2000 by leftists with a longer history of activism, hundreds of non-activist young Egyptian joined

5 In academic literature existed the tendency to assume poor socio-organizational capacities due to the apathy of the masses (Stacher: 91). However, with the emergence of policy oriented NGO’s successes in overcoming the lacking capacities to organization were stated (Hegasy 2000: 151).
6 The former Kifaya activist Affaf el-Sayed indicated that the American invasion of Iraq provided the first context in which protesters called for the demission of Mubarak (personal interview).
in. They were also among the initiators of a number of demonstrations in 2000 and 2001. In March 2003, ten thousands of mainly young Egyptians staged large demonstrations in Tahrir-square against the Iraq war which was generally perceived as American threat for the whole region and Egypt (Shehata 2008: 4). Thus, the youth quickly capitalized on platforms built by older activists with a longer history of activism in order to become a well-integrated and dominant actors with their own, mostly more radical, goals. This applies also to Kifaya. The movement was established in September 2004 by six activists, dedicated to their cause since the seventies (Al-Nasrawi 2006: 90). It quickly attracted young Egyptians and students, most of whom had no protest experience (ibid.: 97) but were eager to get active. Soon after joining the movement, disputes between the older core members and younger members arose. This led to the establishment of a youth fraction called the Youth for Change-movement (YFC) out of which April 6 Youth Movement (April 6) emerged.

To sum up the analysis on youth recruitment for high-cost/risk activism, it can be confirmed that, firstly, an affiliation to activist networks indeed heightens further commitment. The same is true for, second, an existing history of activism. Although, the youth had a poor history, they capitalized on the initiative of older activists. Thirdly, the identification with the Palestinian and nationalist cause decisively influenced their disposition for activism. In addition a diffuse democracy discourse mattered. In total, it became clear that the Egyptian youth had a great potential for high-risk/cost activism.

**Radicalization of Contentious Politics in Egypt with a Focus on the Youth**

In the following, I will analyze the increasing adoption of violent and/or disruptive forms of contentious politics (radicalization) which led to the mass revolt in 2011. Contentious politics is defined as “what happens when collective actors join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities and opponents around their claims or the claims of those they represent” (Tarrow 2011: 4). Scientists endorsing the notion of contentious politics have mostly the ambition to make profit of several conflict related research traditions, especially theories of revolutions: “Analysts of both revolutions and social movements realized that many of the processes underlying revolutions – e.g. mass mobilization, ideological conflicts, confrontation with authorities – have been well studied in the analysis of social movements. […] Thus, new literature on contentious
politics has developed that attempts to combine insights from the literature on social movements and revolutions to better understand both phenomena” (Goldstone 2001: 142).

In order to inquire the role of the youth in this radicalization process I will use the Dynamic-of-Contention-Approach (DOC). It is well rooted in Social Movement Theory (SMT), whose application in the context of the Arab Middle East is rather a recent phenomenon and was mainly conducted with a focus on Islamic movements (e.g.: Bayat: Islamism and Social Movement Theory 2005). In that regard DOC builds heavily on the Political Process Model (PPM) which was dominant in the 80s and focusses on the political opportunity structure, mobilizing structures and framing processes (McAdam et al. 1996: 2). The political opportunity structure refers to changes in the political environment of social movements which also includes constraints and threats. Opportunities are defined as the perceived likelihood that a collective action will allow to attain the desired goal. Thus, every change in the balance of economic and political resources possessed by the state and dissidents that harms the former is potentially increasing political opportunities for collective action (Tarrow 2011: 160). However, as the actor’s perception matters, the belief in changing opportunity structures is almost as important as an actual change. The latter one is mainly characterized by the following aspects: (1) extended participatory possibilities (for new actors); (2) changes in the institutional order of the state’s organization; (3) availability of powerful allies; (4) fractions and splits within the regime elite (Tarrow 2011: 164f.). Moreover, political opportunity might also arise out of collective action: “Contentious collective action demonstrates the possibilities of collective action to others and offers even resource-poor groups opportunities that their lack of internal resources would deny them” (Tarrow 2011: 167). Threats refer to the expected risks and costs of action or the omission of action. The actual decision for collective action will always be a result of weighting perceived changes in the political opportunity structure and threats (Tarrow 2011: 261).

Mobilizing structures comprise formal and informal structures of organization. It is noteworthy to add that the Internet recently allowed digitizing parts of the mobilizing structures which was mainly beneficial to resource-scarce movements: “Electronic networks…constitute organizational structures (such as decentralized campaign networks, interactive protest calendars and planning sites, and social forums) joining diverse and often widely dispersed activists” (Givans and Willnat quoted in Tarrow 2011: 137). In that sense, the Internet allows the low cost spreading of ideology, raising money, training and recruiting activists as well as the avoidance of
repression by the state. Framing processes refer to the internal movement culture which is “the norms, beliefs, symbols, identities, stories and the like that produce solidarity, motivate participants, and maintain collective action” (Williams 2007: 94).

In contrast and in addition to the PPM, the DOC explicitly stresses longer episodes of contentious politics in order to allow studying the dynamic interactions of multiple actors. Moreover, DOC-authors attribute importance to interpersonal networks which are the simplest form of organization. They are either based on mutual trust and/or information and/or resources (Tarrow 2011: 132). The emergence of networks mostly requires collective action and/or suffering and/or experience: “Situations of risk, excitement, or repression create trust among people who may not have known each other beforehand or understood that they have claims in common” (Tarrow 2011: 133). Interpersonal networks, regardless if they are horizontally or vertically structured, are crucial for the developments of a movement’s identity. They craft opinions, they socially control members, are the origin of normative pressure and solidarity (ibid.: 124). Informal networks allow bridging phases of demobilization and enable the reactivation of subsequent collective action under more promising political opportunities.

Lastly, DOC is an attempt to better connect the different elements of the PPM (Tarrow 2011: 28), since observed episodes of contentious politics are deconstructed in delimited and recurrent mechanisms that drive the conflict (Rössel 2003: 165). Although this article cannot deal with mechanisms for reasons of space, the approach is nevertheless most useful to study collective conflicts in the Middle East (Beinin & Vairel 2011: 6), since it allows, as already mentioned, grasping the dynamics of conflict. Particularly insightful is its concept of cycles of contention. It describes how an early-riser-movement actively uses perceived changes in the political opportunity structure in order to implement disruptive collective actions triggered by innovations in the repertoire of contention, which is characterized by “arrays of contentious performances that are currently known and available within some sets of political actors” (Tilly & Tarrow 2007: 49). Disruption causes reactions of opponents and the subsequent diffusion of the new forms of collective action, organization and communication to newly inspired spin-off-movements. The latter will follow the new master frame, set by the early riser, which also allows the identification of potential allies in a context which is often characterized – due to disruptive action – by uncertainty. Movements remain influential as long as they are able to maintain disruption through constant innovations (Tarrow 2011: 199ff.). Although disruption often
contributes to the innovation of the repertoire of contention, it “easily hardens into violence or becomes routinized into convention” (Tarrow 2011: 99). Moreover, the quick adaption of security forces, initially taken by surprise, often repels moderate activists, leaving the ground for radicals, willing to deal with higher threats and more prone to violence.

The early riser: The Egyptian Movement for Change (Haraka Taghyeer) – Kifaya

The end of the ruling pact between the Egyptians and the regime as well as the mentioned regional events were perceived as changes in the political opportunity structure. Moreover, the Bush-Administration had adopted a democracy promotion agenda and pressured the regime for liberalization. “With Mubarak’s usual renewal in office due in September 2005, […] activists saw a ripe opportunity to call for democratization. Their engagement […] during the preceding years provided them with shared experiences, a platform for negotiation and exchange of ideas, and the necessary tools to interpret and capitalize on an ‘opportunity’ when they see it” (El-Mahdi 2009: 1026).

In this context the cross-ideological Kifaya-movement was established. The early riser’s activism was for several reasons of prime importance: It surmounted the obstacle of ideological divide and united anti-regime factions around least common denominators (framing process). In that regard it rejected the American intervention in the region and strongly condemned Mubarak’s plans of preparing his son Gamal as successor. Moreover, it pushed for a constitutional referendum with the goal of democratic reforms. As Kifaya crossed the red line of protesting without permission in the public against Mubarak, Kifaya’s actions had a strong disruptive impact. It attracted the attention of the regime, of the media and, hence, of the broader public. Protests, mainly carried out by young Egyptians, were accompanied by an innovation in the repertoire of contention. New slogans and forms of non-violent protest like candle light vigils and silent stands emerged (interview with G. Ishak – former coordinator of Kifaya). Communication was also innovated as short-messages, email-groups, a webpage and blogs were used for the first time in Egyptian contentious politics.

“A natural symbiosis” (Radsch 2008: 2) between the non-conformist young bloggers and Kifaya emerged. Many young journalists who began their work life in newly established independent dailies like ‘Al-Masry Al-Youm’ or ‘Al-Dustur’ were also well connected with Kifaya or even activists and bloggers themselves. Hence, those newspapers were not only
inclined to support *Kifaya*, but they also regularly cited blogs in their articles. Lynch speculates that bloggers and young journalists had a disproportionate impact, even though they didn’t reach the masses (Lynch 2007: 5): Blogs allowed low risk connection between formerly unconnected individuals and the consolidation of the common identity against the regime (framing processes) as bloggers started to report on state-sponsored violence (Radsch 2008: 6). Blogs and independent media also accelerated the rapid diffusion of *Kifaya’s* actions among the urban youth and the international media. Finally, together with *Kifaya’s* webpage, they allowed the first partial digitization of the mobilizing structure.

The youth of *Kifaya* was aware of their role and thus not disposed to accept the primacy of the older core members. They claimed that the latter were too conservative and not sufficiently confrontational (interview with G. Ishak). They also complained about a lack of participative opportunities while having the impression of taking all the risk during protests. As a result of these disputes, YFC was established. It continued to operate under the umbrella of *Kifaya* but implemented also more confrontational actions.

*Kifaya* demonstrations never mobilized more than 2500 protestors. When the American diplomatic pressure decreased after the presidential election in 2005, the movement faced increasing repression (al-Sayyid 2009: 57) and quickly lost its *disruptive* capacities. Arguably, this was also due to the movement’s failing to connect its mainly intellectual discourse with the socio-economic problems of the people. Moreover, the mass of Egyptians was too disillusioned to believe in change and structurally too incorporated by the regime to revolt. However, the movement had raised the ceiling of political demands and, even more importantly, created a new model for change which was largely imitated and extended in the subsequently (El-Mahdi 2009: 1027).

Inspired by the subversive atmosphere produced by *Kifaya*, the activism of the judges (Bernard-Maugiron 2009) and the workers (Beinin 2009) – both groups had established factions in the movement – reached an unprecedented level. In the case of the workers the strike level even consolidated until the revolution. The youth tried to support them, but failed because of repression. Consequently, the new political space on the Internet was more intensively used (interview with A. Maher) which was facilitated by increasing numbers of broadband connections (Radsch 2008).
Spinning-off: The April 6 Youth Movement

Between 2006 and 2008 Ahmed Maher, a core member of the YFC, loosing its steam with the general decline of Kifaya, failed several times in establishing a movement. He was only successful in 2008, when he and his friend Israa Abdel Fattah capitalized on another workers strike in the industrial delta town Mahalla al-Kobra. They created a Facebook-group in order to call for solidarity. As the protests escalated on April 6th “into a nationwide strike, the Facebook group gained momentum and eventually coalesced into a political movement known as the 6th of April Youth Movement” (Carnegie Endowment 2010) which recruited its members mainly from the well-educated urban youth. The youth focus was an active decision in awareness of their biographical availability, risk and innovation affinity (interview with A. Maher). The movement alignment prior to the revolution can be best described as a supra-ideological resistance group with the ambition to raise public awareness for a possible overthrow of the regime. In March 2012 Ahmed Maher, the movement’s coordinator, perceived by its internal opponents as rather conservative (interview with B. Fathy), described the ideology of the movement as follows: “Aprilian ideology is something near social democratic. We are talking about a mixed economical regime with private sectors and public sectors, more social justice and more freedom of speech […]. We are in middle. We are not secular and we are not religious.” (personal interview).

However, soon after its establishment April 6 was wracked with sustained repression of all sorts comprising not only constantly repeated members’ detentions, the monitoring of all internal communications, attacks by electronic militias, regular defamation by the state media, but also verbal threats against members and sometimes torture during detention (interview with B. Fathy). Thus, April 6 only recovered its vitality some month prior to the mass revolt. Virtually all attempts to organize demonstrations failed, since the political opportunities were much worse compared to the end of 2004. Nevertheless, the movement exploited repressions intelligently to promote its cause. “The story of April 6 was repression and media coverage” (interview with B. Fathy). Another impediment to effective performance was internal struggles over differing ideologies. Their emergence is not surprising in a society where the practice of democratic organization was suppressed for decades. Besides, it remains unclear if they were partially induced by an infiltration by the intelligence (interview with B. Fathy & A. Maher). The internal fights only didn’t ruin the movement since Maher opted vehemently for the perpetuation of
organizational hierarchy. He was the strong man (interview with B. Fathy) and pushed only for internal democratization when the danger of repeated implosion vanished in the course of 2012.

Despite these problems, lasting mainly from 2009 until summer 2010, April 6 was for several reasons “the most dynamic anti-Mubarak movement” (Lim 2012: 239): It was the first Egyptian social movement which used social media such as Facebook and Twitter for mass-mobilization and advocacy of democracy and human rights. This proved to be an extremely effective innovation of the repertoire of contention. Soon after the April 6th strike in 2008, the movement’s Facebook-page had attracted 70.000 users, a remarkable figure given that less 900,000 Egyptians used Facebook at that time (ibid.: 240). However, social media were not only useful for the cost-saving viral spread of information, but also for the coordination of the group in the different districts of Cairo as well as in other centers. For this purpose, the core group of April 6 (around 50 activists) met weekly in a secret Facebook group called ‘kitchen’ (madbah). The use of social media was only one aspect of the movement’s extension of the repertoire of contention. It likewise started political awareness campaigns, also in poor neighborhoods, and tried to work as much in the streets as possible. Moreover, its leaders constantly attempted to innovate via trainings and to exchange with other movements with which April 6 started intensified coordination in 2010.

Towards the barracks – The phase of youth cooperation
When, in February 2010, the Egyptian Nobel laureate Mohamed ElBaradei returned home, some activists started to promote him as he had announced reformist intentions. ElBaradei quickly became a new center for the movements’ cooperation as his entrance into Egyptian politics slightly changed the configuration of the existing political actors, creating enough hope among young activists to start a new phase of intensive cooperation. ElBaradei’s figure was for several reasons attractive for the Egyptian youth. He is an internationally respected person who was out of internal politics for a long time. This yielded credibility, as he was perceived as not being corrupted. Moreover, his critical position towards the regime was interpreted as important defection since ElBaradei’s career is rooted in the Foreign Ministry. He established the National Association for Change (NAC) which attempted to “bring together everyone known to oppose the

7 In contrary to suggestions of Alimi et al. (2012: 10) this intra-movement competition didn’t lead to a radicalization of the movement.
Egyptian regime” (Ghonim 2012: 44). The core group of ElBaradei’s campaign was mainly composed of youth activists, but the NAC comprised many older intellectuals, oppositional politicians and Muslim Brotherhood leaders. Again, this was allowed by the vagueness of NAC’s demands and, notably, by a less confrontational approach than, for instance, the one of April 6. Consequently, physical repression was absent as the regime preferred to stick with defamations. The campaign extended the repertoire of contention once again through a more sophisticated use of social media. With the expertise of Google employee Wael Ghonim, who administered ElBaradei’s Facebook page, the campaign introduced new means such as opinion polls to ameliorate decision-making (Ghonim 2012: 50). This experience was of great value as was the less confrontational approach.

Although the Internet allowed increasingly digitizing parts of the mobilizing structure and helped greatly in framing identities, the basic problem was still, how to carry online activism to the streets. It seemed that Egypt’s rulers were right not to “believe that word and thought lead to opposition action of consequence” (Springborg 2009: 17). However, it assisted massively in proving the contrary. Finally, it was blatant repression, which fueled anger among the Egyptian middle classes in the summer of 2010. When young blogger Khaled Said was dragged out of a cyber-café in Alexandria and beaten to death on the street by two plain clothed officers in June 2010, Wael Ghonim anonymously created the Facebook page Kullena Khaled Said (‘We are all Khaled Said’) to “mobilize public support for the cause” (Ghonim 2012: 67).

The initiative was incredibly successful as it grew up to 365,000 members, days before the outbreak of the mass revolt (Ghonim 2012: 142). Ghonim and his co-administrator Abdel Rahman Mansour picked up the idea of a Facebook user and began to call for a first silent stand. Although this was not a new idea, its time was ripe. It provided worried Egyptians with an opportunity to voice outrage without getting involved in high-risk/cost activism. “A silent demonstration was proactive but not provocative” (ibid. 70). In accordance, the regime only started to openly harass participants during the third stand on 9th of July (interview with K. Kamel), which might result from the delay with which the regime reacts to new phenomena of activism. The stands were a means to motivate much more people to become active. Reuters reported that 8000 people took part in the first stand (Ghonim 2012: 79). The subsequent ones were even bigger and spread all over Egypt. Only in September they lost their verve when the case of Khaled Said was put on hold. It seems that it was not only blatant violence and the less
confrontational form of activism that motivated the people. Ghonim himself gives a remarkable example how important communication and thus framing processes were: Parallel to *Kullena Khaled Said* existed another *Facebook* page which was called *My Name Is Khaled Mohamed Said*. In August 2010, this page had 60,000 members more than Ghonim’s page. However, sometimes comments on *Kullena Khaled Said* outnumbered the ones on the bigger page by the double. Ghonim speculates that the aggressive rebellious language used by the other page administrators’ was due to their activists’ background and not suitable for non-politicized young men and women that constituted the largest share of participants during the silent stands (Ghonim 2012: 111). The large youth representation comes by no surprise, as 77% of all Egyptian *Facebook* users were not older than 29 years. Out of population of approximately 80, 5 Million, 5 Million Egyptians used *Facebook* at the beginning of 2011 (Spot On 2011). Other movements used the silent stands as platforms on which coordination significantly intensified. At that period of time hundreds of thousands were following up on the collective action of extra-legal protest movements or were familiar with their way of acting and communicating. Activists, especially young men and women, had made a great effort in delegitimizing the regime and lowering its power of incorporation. Mobilization in Egypt had indeed a mechanical element of accumulation.

The Tunisian revolution was the last and very crucial change in the political opportunity structure, since it gave most Egyptians the courage to revolt. *April 6* had already used the occasion of the National Police Day on January 25th to mock the Police via public collective action in 2010. Now, the significantly extended repertoire of contention was employed to make a coordinated call for a mass demonstration on that day. Wael Ghonim exchanged regularly with Ahmed Maher on the planning of collective protest. Maher then discussed the details of the demonstrations with other activists (Ghonim 2012: 149). In that way, the on-the-ground experience of more confrontational activists was combined with the less offensive approach of *Kullena Khaled Said*. The repertoire of contention was again extended through the inclusion of radical football supporters who had a record in confrontations with security forces. Moreover, fear-lowering tactics were used much more proactively than before. A good example is the uploading of a video in which Asmaa Mahfouz announces her participation at the demonstration. The demonstrations on January 25th 2011 in which between 50,000 and 70,000 people participated in Cairo (Collombier 2012: 7), were also successful since protests started at many
different points and were merged during the day. Only in the subsequent days the Muslim Brotherhood and the workers stepped in and transformed the youth revolt into a multi-sectorial mass revolt (Collombier 2012: 7).

**Remarks on the gender dimension of activism**

Until this point gender issues have been almost absent from this article. This is due to the fact that gender dimension of activism is not a focus of the article. However, women did play an important role in the contentious collective action analyzed and were often at the forefront of protest. Although, they profited from legal advances in the 90s and the 2000s (especially in regard of the personal status law, access and representation in the judiciary as well as the possibility of working in certain professions), economic hardship and poverty diminished these slight improvements of Egyptian women (Tadros 2010: 89). This mixed reform record was paralleled by a general trend towards religious conservatism, insufficiently confronted by the state: “The government moves against certain Islamist-favored restrictions on women, but also, as if seeking society’s approval, expresses its own version of Islamic conservatism” (Zuhur 2001). In accordance with its general strategies against disruptive opposition, the government tended to coopt women activist by establishment own NGO’s (often subsumed under the oxymoron GONGO referring to government created non-governmental organizations) with a moderate and elitist agenda of feminism (ibid.). Moreover, effective enforcement of newly adopted laws is missing which contributes to the prevalence of discrimination against women and the widespread violation of their human rights (through the practice of female genital mutilation, just to name one of the worst violations). Thus, the emergence of innovative and less discriminatory forms of political participation constituted also an attractive opportunity for women activists. “Women workers were the first to strike and female students have been just as active and defiant as their male counterparts” (Tadros 2008). Women were of course active in Kifaya and April 6. In the latter movement they were better represented among higher-ranking members and co-founders than in the Egyptian Movement for Change.

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8 However, it seems that this was not a result of coordination but rather the opposite (Ghonim 2012: 150).
9 See e.g. the interesting observation of Krieger, spending time with young Kifaya activist Maryam Sayeed (Krieger 2006).
Finally “for many Egyptian women, the revolution […] was their first chance to take part in public life in Egypt, and they say they were treated as equals by their fellow male protesters” (Zoepf 2011). However, following many observers and human rights organizations, women rights witnessed a backlash under the rule of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in the post-revolutionary transition period (see for the example the extensive report of Amnesty International from 2011: “Broken Promises”).

**Conclusion**

With the most helpful DOC-approach, the article found that the activism of the Egyptian youth was, as expected, of prime importance for the genesis of the Egyptian Revolution. Moreover, it was possible to work out how the youth specifically contributed to radicalization and which factors enabled them to do so.

It is found that innovative capacities (possessed due to good education and access to new techniques) and risk affinity (a consequence of biographical availability and grievances) were crucial for enabling the youth to make a contribution to the radicalization process.

The contribution to radicalization itself divides into three main aspects: (1) The youth helped gradually raising the ceiling for demands by constantly adopting disruptive actions; (2) It extended the activist network through: (a) innovative means of communication which allowed a steady process of framing; (b) disruptive actions which attracted the attention of bystanders, the media and the regime. These aspects refer to the significant imitation and extension of a new model for change which is still of pivotal importance in today’s Egypt.

Several further aspects seem to be particularly noteworthy: Firstly, as to mobilizing structures, a certain level of hierarchy is inevitable when movement members are not used to act politically and to democratically organize collective action (*April 6*). Secondly, the action and language of actual activists seem to be too radical and rebellious for the mobilization of non-politicized bystanders to street activism. Thirdly, focused regime repression effectively prevented most disruptive youth activism between 2006 and 2010. However, in the long run, the high-level of repression delegitimized the regime as state-sponsored violence was successfully portrayed as grievance and allowed the creation of a common identity. As soon as repression became blatant, it massively contributed to mobilization as the case of Khaled Said showed. Lastly, the
digitization of increasing parts of the mobilizing structure was most helpful for the organization, mobilization and consolidation of a common identity. In that regard, the Egyptian Revolution indeed profited substantially of the emergence of social media services like Facebook.
Annex: Figure 1

Figure 1: TIMELINE OF STREET ACTIVISMS IN EGYPT (2003-2011)

* significantly/substantially organized online
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