MIRD Master Thesis

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June 19, 2012

The Egyptian revolution, Al-Jazeera, Twitter and Facebook

The interaction effect of new media on the Egyptian revolution

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1. Introduction: Revolution 2.0 or Facebook fallacy?

Never has the power of the people appeared so humane, so inspiring, so personal, so determined as in Tunisia, so daring as in Syria, so diverse as in Yemen, so humble as in Bahrain, so courageous as in Libya, or so humorous as in Egypt. If, as one keen observer noted, every joke is a tiny revolution, the Arabs, and most notably the Egyptians, are revolutionaries par excellence.

Marwan Bishara – The invisible Arab: Promise and Peril of the Arab Revolutions (2012)

1.1 The "Arab Spring" and the revolutionary wave in the Middle East

If anything, the year 2011 was marked by the revolutionary wave[1] in the Middle-East. The region-wide uprising – soon known as the so-called "Arab Spring" – which spread from Marrakech to Sana'a, and from Cairo to Damascus, surprised policy makers and analysts alike. The revolutionary wave started off with the remarkable death of Mohamed Bouazizi – a Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire on December 17, 2010 – after a municipal official and her sides confiscated his goods, humiliated and supposedly harassed him. As a result, a massive wave of protests erupted all over Tunisia. Frustrated young Tunisians called for social and political reform and an end to the reign of President Zine El-Abidine Ben-Ali, who has held a 23-year long dictatorship over the country. Unable to crush the demonstrations Ben-Ali was left with no other choice but to resign on January 14, 2011 (Ryan, 2011).

Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and Syria followed suit, resulting in the fall of President Mubarak in Egypt and President Khadaffi in Libya, whereas (violent) clashes between protesters and security forces in Syria, Yemen and to a lesser extent Bahrain, are still ongoing. News of major protests were also reported from Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and Oman, while minor protests erupted in Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Saudi-Arabia, Sudan and the Western Sahara.

[1] The use of the term 'revolution' in the context of the popular uprising in Egypt is (of course) highly contested. Many wonder if it is not too early to speak of a 'revolution' in Egypt, especially because many elements of the old regime are still in place. In defense of its usage however one should note that the Egyptian demonstrators have succeeded in reaching their primary objectives – bringing down the 30-year presidency of Hosni Mubarak, and preventing his son Gamal Mubarak from taking over his father's position (an achievement that is revolutionary in itself). As a general rule of thumb the author has used the same names and indications as used by international quality newspapers (like "Facebook Revolution" and "Egyptian Revolution") – putting here and there a question mark by too over-simplistic use of terms.

No revolutionary movement did capture the lenses of the international cameras as much as the "January 25th Revolution"[2] in Egypt (not in the least because Al-Jazeera maintained a 24/7 live stream, which provided the world with vivid images of the events at Tahrir square in Cairo on its "Al-Jazeera Mobasher"). Watching the million+ masses in the streets of down town Cairo, commentators and policy makers referred to the historic events of 1989 – when the Berlin Wall fell down and Eastern Europe broke free from the iron fist of Soviet control.

Then (in 1989) it would have been thanks to the Western efforts to smuggle photocopy machines, broadcast Radio Free Europe-bulletins, and supply the East-German citizen with the tempting images of American soap series, which were believed to have brought down the Berlin Wall (Morozov, 2011: 46-50) – now the revolutionary events in the Arab world[3] and especially Egypt were ascribed to American social media enterprises like Facebook and Twitter.

Yet despite the strong emphasis initially put on the importance of communications, 'the end of the Cold War was triggered not by a defiant uprising of Voice of America listeners but by economic change' (Shirky, 2011: 4). "*It's all about the economy, stupid!*" as former President Bill Clinton once famously said. It was not the distribution of fax machines and photocopiers but the fell of the price of oil, the soaring price of wheat, the lack of freedom and creativity so necessary for economic development – combined with the heavy burden of Communist bureaucracy – which resulted in the collapse of the Soviet-Union. The presence of printing devices did not create a revolution, it only facilitated the work of revolutionary activists – perhaps.

1.2 Social media: cyber-utopianism or revolution through communications?

The revolutionary wave in Egypt is not the first uprising to be viewed through the spectacles of what Morozov cynically calls *cyber-utopianism,* i.e. 'a naïve belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside' (2011: xiii). The unsuccessful popular revolts in Moldova and Iran (both 2009) were quickly branded "Twitter Revolutions". While Iranian demonstrators were arrested and the backbone of the revolutionary movement was broken by the Revolutionary Guard, the

[2] January 25 refers to the first day of protest on January 25 2011, which marked the start of the 18-day revolt that eventually brought down Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. This day is traditionally a national holiday of the police, and was therefore chosen by activists to protest against the regime's brutality.
[3] The Arab world refers to the 22 Arab-speaking countries also member to the Arab League, expanding a region from Mauritania to Iraq and from Syria to Somalia.

Internet community was celebrating the victory of tweets over bullets. Knowing now that after quick government reprisal the number of active Twitter-users spreading news over the demonstrations in Tehran dropped to six active accounts, and the Green Movement was brutally crushed by government security forces, this Twitter-ecstasy seems premature if not repulsive (Morozov, 2011: 15).[4]

Other scholars also mention the 2001 Manila protest in the Philippines, the 2004 demonstrations in Spain, the 2006 uprising in Belarus and the 2010 Red Shirt uprising in Thailand as instances of social media revolutions (Shirky, 2011: 1-2). These uprisings did not make use of open digital communication networks however, but relied on peer-to-peer text-messaging and direct e-mail instead. Thus, despite the use of new technology, these revolutionary movements could not be considered social media-revolutions.

Although the Internet enables people to read and learn more about abuse and suppression in their state or society, it also opens up the 'gates of entertainment while globalization opened the gates of consumentism' (Morozov, 2011: 72), It is an utopian ideal to believe that open internet or better access to information goes hand in hand with increasing political activism. On the contrary; the more open the Internet, the easier the search for entertainment and porn. In many authoritarian states the Internet is used as an escape, or distraction from daily life. In conservative societies with strict gender-segregation this is only more so. Thus it might come to no surprise that out of ten countries searching for sex the most, six are predominantly Muslim. Egypt ranks second of Google's hit list of sex-related searches in countries worldwide – including all sorts of animal sex and gay porn (Pakistan ranks first). Cairo has ranked the number one city in the world Googling for "sex" most often, whereas Egypt as a whole ranks fourth (Google Trends, 2011).

One should indeed mind for drawing too hasty conclusions; using euphoric terms like "Facebook Revolution" for what was first and foremost a popular mass uprising. This is not to say that the introduction of new types of media, such as social-networking sites, web forums, (micro) blogs and content-sharing websites (i.e. YouTube and Flickr), played no role in the 2011 revolutionary movement in Egypt. Quite the opposite; new types of media provide for ways of communication once unimaginable in for long shielded, isolated and oppressed societies.

[4] The number of active Twitter-users in Egypt between January 1 – March 30 2011 stood at 1,312,040. Trending topics on twitter in the MENA-region in that same period were (in number of mentions): 1. #Egypt (1,400,000) and 2. #Jan25 (1,200,000), 3. #libya (900,000), 4. #bahrein (610,000) and 5. protest (620,000) (Seksek, 2011).

In a country where no one dared to talk politics on the street, young adolescents (age 18-30) found a safe-haven on the internet. There they could share their opinion and express their frustration for the first time and often anonymously. Blogging became extremely popular. Egyptian weblogs and civil journalist news networks have grown into the most professional of the MENA-region. Egypt is leading in blogs worldwide, hosting according to an official government report more than 160.000 active weblogs (2008 est. – recent data not available). Three out of four Egyptian bloggers is male in the age of 20 to 30 (OpenNet Initiative, 2009).

More than 700.000 Egyptians signed up for the January 25th Facebook page (Ghonim, 2011: 146). Another Facebook hit, the "We are all Khaled Said'-Facebook page was launched, in the Summer of 2010 and soon turned into the largest dissident group of Egypt with over 479,000 members (Preston, 2011). Earlier (in a time when hardly anyone knew about "Facebook"), some 70.000 people had joined a Facebook page calling for a national strike on April 6, 2008 (Ghonim, 2011: 56-7; Pintak, 2011: 57, 59).

Over the last couple of years and in the buildup to the revolutionary "18-days" of January 25 to February 11 2011, Egypt witnessed a "buzz" of online activity. While more and more bloggers started to blog about their frustration with the Egyptian regime, youth groups organized themselves on Facebook-pages, and activists discussed the latest tactics via Skype or MSN Messenger (Ghonim, 2011: 36-7, 43). Even when the Egyptian government decided to completely lock-down the Internet by shutting down the entire country's international internet access points at January 27 2011, activists still managed to post updates on Twitter, upload videos on YouTube, and provide 'independent' news (that is to say; not government controlled) on civil journalist news networks such as the on January 25th established RASD news network in Egypt (Solayman, 2011).

For once not only western governments and internet users cherished the role of social media, but also Egyptian demonstrators and activists themselves. Right after the fall of President Hosni Mubarak the streets of Cairo were covered with banners and graffiti stating "We love Facebook", "Thank you Facebook" and "Facebook = January 25". Online activists such as Google-manager Wael Ghonim and Nobel prize-nominee Esraa Abdel Fatah (alias the Facebook-girl; Pintak, 2011: 57, 59) talked about a "Revolution 2.0", claiming that now (thanks to the internet) "the power of the people is greater than the people in power" (Ghonim, 2012).

1.3 The digital divide and the advent of pan-Arab satellite-TV

Despite its impressive number of blogs, online activists and people joining revolutionary Facebook-pages, the MENA-region is still part of the global digital divide. Internet access ranges from only 5% in Libya to 34% in Tunisia (Hunter, 2011). Despite Egypt's status as one of the most connected countries in Africa, it is still a middle-ranker with internet access estimated at about 24,5 percent in 2009 (OpenNet Initiative, 2009).[5]

This is not too say that the other 75 percent of the population is completely sealed off from the World Wide Web.

> 'Most Internet use in Egypt occurs at public terminals, schools, and Internet cafes, and not inside the home. The flourishing of Internet cafes in Egypt has helped expand Internet access. By interviewing hundreds of Internet café owners in 2004 Deborah Wheeler found that Internet cafés are patronized by all classes of societies, including college students, tea boys, and secretaries' (Price, 2010: 3).

Downsides to these public cafes are their sometimes women-unfriendly atmosphere (especially in poor urban neighborhoods) and lack of privacy and security. Computers could be monitored and fellow Internet users might report 'suspicious' activities to the police or secret services agents. Another issue hindering universal Internet access is that of high illiteracy, especially in the rural areas of Egypt. Use of the Internet requires some sort of literacy. UNICEF (2012) has reported a total adult literacy rate of 66 percent over the period of 2005-2010. That is to say that still one out of three Egyptian adults is illiterate.

The Internet penetration rate of among Egypt's youth is significantly higher than other age groups 'since they have grown up socialized into Internet usage in ways their elders have not. Given the low cost and literacy barriers, a sizable portion of the 40 million Egyptians between the ages of 10 and 25 have at least basic familiarity with the Internet' (Price, 2010: 3).

Internet access might still be unavailable to a portion of Egyptian society, some 86 percent of the Egyptians watches television. In a country with about 84 million inhabitants, total newspaper circulation is not more than about one million copies a day, 'but everyone, from the richest real estate mogul to the poorest *fellahin* (peasant) watches TV. For the

[5] Perhaps more precise; The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has estimated 24,26 Internet users per 100 inhabitants for Egypt in the same year (ITU, 2009).

equivalent of $3 or $4, Egyptians can tap into a *wasla* (shared satellite dish), that gives them access to hundreds of channels' (Pintak, 2011: 7-8).

Not only did the introduction of satellite-TV in the 1980s provide more independent and objective news – compared to the tightly controlled state-TV in the Arab world itself – these channels also connect Arab migrants worldwide. 'The satellite package that provides Arabic television reception 5,000 miles away from its source also provides Arab families with a "real" connection to their favorite Arabic programs' (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 5). The most popular programs were soap operas and Egyptian movies. Until the late 1990s for news the elite would watch CNN and BBC World, whereas less-privileged citizens were left to BBC Arabic, Arabic broadcasts of Voice of America and some European broadcasters.

In 1991 Saudi entrepreneurs launched the first Arab news channel; the Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC). But treating the Saudi government (and its allies) with 'kid gloves' (Pintak, 2011: 34-5), the channel was hardly trusted by anyone. The arrival of the highly professional but also controversial Al-Jazeera news network in 1996 changed the Arab media landscape forever. 'By questioning everything, Al-Jazeera had opened a window to issues avoided and restricted by the Middle East' (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 12).

In the last couple of years Al-Jazeera not only grew more critical of Arab monarchs and presidents, it also provided a platform for a growing number of online activists, opposition leaders and even convicted 'terrorists' (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 132-3). Al-Jazeera's programs are provocative to the point of controversial, but are also the most professional transforming the satellite TV-channel into 'the most-watched satellite-TV network in the Arab world' (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 49).

One of Egypt's most famous online activists, Wael Ghonim, acknowledges the impact of Al-Jazeera.

> 'The channel's talk shows offered heavy criticism of many Arab leaders. Within a few short years, Al-Jazeera became the most viewed channel in Egypt and the entire Arab region. The network set an example that has been followed by many channels throughout the Middle East' (2012: 38).

It is the combination of *traditional-meets-digital media* which enables activists using social media to find a way to the Egyptian audience. An example of this was seen in the days before the January 25 (2011) in which 'Facebook pages with times and dates of Cairo protests were printed out and disseminated by hand between Egyptians without Internet access'

(Hunter, 2011). Handing-out copies and prints of Facebook pages are local and small-scale initiatives. A much bigger impact lies in the interaction of different types of "new media", i.e. social media plus highly professional and interactive satellite-TV of which Al-Jazeera (and to a lesser extent Al-Arabiyya) are by far the most popular – and thought-provoking.

> 'Social media (…) was a successful catalyst when combined with myriad methods of digital and traditional media. Technological advances like cell phones, video cameras, blog posts and Facebook, in conjunction with more traditional media outlets like Al-Jazeera, created the circumstances for such effective information dissemination' (Hunter, 2011).

1.4 Design of this research

Given the complex context and dynamics of modern-day Egyptian society and its (social) media landscape, using a term like "Facebook Revolution" to describe the events of the January 25th (and onwards) is a huge oversimplification which does no justice to the real-life events on the ground.

This thesis tries to dismantle popular myths about Egypt's "Facebook Revolution", without dismissing the role played by Facebook and other social media in the advent to the so-called "18 days" all together. This thesis deals not exclusively with social media but also investigates the significance of modern satellite-TV (such as Al-Jazeera) and the interaction of these different types of new media as tools and catalyst of the revolutionary movement in Egypt.

Hence the main research question of this thesis is the following:
What was the role of new media on the revolutionary movement(s) in Egypt?

This thesis investigates the impact of new media on the birth of the first small revolutionary movements from 2004 – when the revolutionary spark of the Colored Revolutions of Eastern Europe first crossed the Mediterranean Sea – till the historic "18 days" of 2011 which resulted in former president Hosni Mubarak resigning from office. The variables are defined as follows:

New Media: this term is used over social media as it not only incorporates the six types of (digital) social media as defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), but also the rather 'new' phenomenon of cross-media satellite TV.

The six types of Social Media consist of:

1. collaborative projects (i.e. Wikipedia)
2. blogs (i.e. personal weblogs, but also microblogs such as Twitter)
3. content communities (i.e. YouTube, Flickr)
4. social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, MySpace)
5. virtual game worlds (i.e. World of Warcraft)
6. virtual social worlds (ie.e. Second Life)
   (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61-3).

Other authors also include e-mail and SMS-texting as types of social media (Shirky, 2011: 1-2). Given the direct and closed nature of these types of communication however, I chose to exclude them from this research.

A striking feature of 24/7 satellite-TV news channels such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyya is that they not only broadcast programs, but also have a rather interactive character. Viewers can call-in to share their opinion on talk shows, whereas tweets and Facebook-messages are showed in special text-bars. Al-Jazeera even hosts its own internet forum and debate club called Al-Jazeera Talk.

Revolutionary movement: to be defined as a spontaneous popular uprising, organized and/or supported by radical youth groups or other dissident, and opposition parties, targeted at a the leadership or primary institutions of the state.

As for the case selection – the Egyptian Revolution is by far the most commented upon of all revolutionary movements and popular uprisings of the so-called and still ongoing "Arab Spring". Egypt is the largest Arab state with the biggest population. It has been the cradle of history, (popular) culture, music and media in the Middle East and its recent developments form an inspiration to activists and revolutionaries all over the Arab world. Conclusively, given my Egyptian background and over-year research of Egypt's activist networks and civil society I might provide special insights, or present new information that could be used for further research.

Being the first Arab state to topple its dictator, Tunisia could have been another interesting case. But Tunisia is also an outlier in the Arab region due to the small size of its territory and population, its relatively high GDP, its secular orientation (even the Islamist parties call for the legality of drinking spirits) and strong ties with its former colonizer France.

This research is a cross-over of several fields of study including political science, communication studies and international relations. Itapplies political theories on social movements (Tilly *et al*) and modular revolutions (Beissinger *et al*), as well as Katz and Lazarsfield's theory on the two-step process of opinion formation and several theories on media and democratization.

Due to the fact that most cross-media satellite-TV stations are based in the Arab Gulf region and Lebanon, and that the Egyptian revolution was part of a global modular revolutionary movement, this thesis has a strong international focus in which the national context of Egypt is put into a regional and sometimes even global perspective varying from the rapid socio-political changes in the MENA-region, to the revolutionary wave of Eastern Europe (2000-2005).

2. How revolutionary change comes about: Social Movement Theory and alternative theoretical explanations

Social movements and protests have become so common today that they are considered by most social scientists who study them as a regular part of politics – contentious politics, is the term that is widely used.
Hank Johnston – States & Social Movements (2011)

2.1 Social movement theory and social power

Social movements can be defined as aggregations.

> 'They are made up of multiple organizations, as well as less formal groups, circles and nonaffiliated individuals. Members and groups coalesce around an issue or grievance to make their demands known publicly, and show their force to representatives of the state in order to effect a change' (Johnston, 2011: 13-4).

The concept of social movements, and social movement theory, was first introduced by Charles Tilly (1995) in his study of popular protest in Great-Britain (1758-1834).[6] According to Tilly (and others) the emergence of social movements goes alongside, in conjunction to and in dynamic relationship with the formation of the modern state – a process that started off in Western Europe in the seventeenth century when war making and attempts to secure territorial boundaries resulted in an increasing need of tax collection and other forms of extraction by the state (i.e. army conscription) which led to a growing number of policy areas under the state's jurisdiction (Johnston, 2011: 5-12, Tilly, 1995: 134). Against the interests of the elite, popular interests are given form and substance through a wide-variety of collective action. Hence social movements are 'politics by another means – popular politics, not elite politics' (Johnston, 2011: 1).

According to Tilly, social movements 'differ from other forms of contentious politics in their combination of sustained campaigns of claim making' (2006: 182). Successful social movements are built on 'a campaign around limited but important objectives, that are winnable, and that can engage a broad collation of people' and 'small but real successes'

[6] Tilly develops and elaborates on the theory of social movements in earlier work as well, first introducing the concept in an paper published in 1978 called "*From Mobilization to Revolution*".

(Hackett & Adam, 1999: 130-1). In order for social movements to have effect four characteristics are essential:

1. *Supporters' worthiness* or 'worthiness of cause' in order to make credible claims that there is potential for wider support of the public
2. *Unity of purpose* to ensure endurance and prevent strategic deviation by opponents
3. *Numbers of members* to maximize influence
4. *Strong commitment* to prevent movement breakdown and to 'invoke responsiveness of the state'

   (Tilly, 2006: 182; Johnston, 2011: 15)

Social movements exist in all types and forms; from environmental movements to revolutionary opposition groups. Social movements are often non-violent in order to gain public support and enhance legitimacy for their cause. Nevertheless 'when committed groups cannot claim large numbers, they sometimes choose violent strategies to show dedication to the cause' (Johnston, 2011: 15). This is what happened in Kyrgyzstan were the radical youth group *Kelkel* ("resistance") only succeeded in reaching its goal (toppling the regime) by use of force – 'due in significant part to the absence of sufficient structural support for successful non-violent action' (Braissinger, 2007: 262, 272). The lack of wide spread support might also explain the eruption of civil war in Libya and the current violence in Syria, where still a large part of the population supports President Bashar al-Assad.

Social movements possess *social power* which is 'contingent upon interaction, communication, relationships, and institutions' (Van Ham, 2010: 3). According to van Ham, 'the face of power derives from communication, social knowledge, and economic and political interaction' (2010: 3). This implies that 'social power only works in relationships and is ultimately dependent upon the perception of others' (Van Ham, 2010: 3). It is the latter where numbers and commitment come into play. The stronger and more visible the social movement, the greater the influence on policy makers and (inter)national public opinion.

Modern types of online and offline media are not new characteristics of social movements, but channel social power. New media challenge the hard physical power of the state (or establishment) through *soft power* i.e. 'the attractiveness of culture, of the culture, political ideals, and policies of a country' (Nye, 2002: 6).

> ‘New media and digital technology have made the production and distribution of news and culture easier and cheaper, adding to the decentralization of information and the erosion of central authorities’ (Van Ham, 2010: 96).

2.2 Transforming pre-modern protest in a modern social movement

Tilly and others make a clear distinction between pre-modern protests and social movements, which should not be confused with one another. Pre-modern forms of protests and not social movements as they ‘were not directed against the state because the state as we know it did not exist’ (Johnston, 2011: 10).

Pre-modern protest were *embodied* (i.e. ‘directed at concrete individuals), *immediate* (i.e. ‘they coalesced rapidly around the local targets’) and *nonreflexive* (i.e. these types of protests ‘lacked formal organization and planning’) as opposed to the modern social movement which repertoire is *cosmopolitism* (i.e. not local issues but national or global ones), *autonomous* (i.e. movements are ‘focused directly on the national level’) and *modular* (i.e. ‘a package of tactics emerged’) (Johnston, 2011: 10-1, 13).

Although clearly a state; Egypt under the rule of Hosni Mubarak still contained some elements of a pre-modern state. Louis XIV’s statement ‘*L’état, c’est moi*,’ might as well be applied to most of the highly authoritarian rulers of the Middle East today. It is no coincidence that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was often referred to as “the Pharaoh” – a nick name invented by political activists, but quickly adopted by the Egyptian public (Ghonim, 2012: 249; Tisdall, 2011). The Egyptian state was (and still is) highly ‘personal’ or *embodied*. Power in all its physical forms (both political and economic) are in hands of the view (i.e. the military, (old) NDP-party members and businessman allied to Mubarak’s regime – or now the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF)).

Over the last couple of decades people often directed their anger and frustration directly at Egypt’s president Hosni Mubarak, as well as his sons (especially Gamal Mubarak) and other high-up associates. Most popular protests in Egypt during President Sadat and later Mubarak were local and only focused on one (or two) issue(s). These “angry mob-protests” erupted spontaneously and lacked any formal organization.

The most striking examples of pre-modern types of protest are food and bread riots (Johnston, 2011: 14) – frequent phenomena in Egypt. Bread riots erupted in 1977 when President Sadat tried to cut down on bread subsidies and millions flew into the streets (Elbendary, 2002). From then on, small and larger scale bread and food riots occurred

repeatedly. However, the well-prepared Egyptian security forces usually crushed the protests before they had even taken hold.

Another frequent phenomena are strikes. With the introduction of the *infitah*-policy by President Sadat in 1973, the Egyptian state started to privatize major sections of the economy (Ghonim, 2012: 35). Though beneficent for Egypt's business tycoons, military generals and NDP-party members, most Egyptian families suffered from unemployment and high inflation. Massive waves of strikes occurred during the 70s, 80s and 90s, although most of them were concentrated in only one factory or state institution at a time. Lacking a clear agenda or formal organization which could enhance the protests' credibility and members' commitment these protests hardly constituted a serious threat to the Egyptian regime.

With economic malaise growing in Egypt, the number of strikes increased in the mid-2000s. 'Egypt began to witness a new wave of strikes in 2006 and 2007 in numbers of up to 26,000 at a time seeking social justice. It became obvious that a snowball was gradually forming' (Ghonim, 2012: 35). Yet it was not until the 2008-strikes at al-Mahalla textiles that local protest became a nation-wide strife.

The issue was taken up by a small group of online activists which on March 23, 2008 launched a new Facebook-group called "the April 6 Youth Movement". Leader of the movement was Esraa Abdel Fatah, a 27-year old woman (alias "the Facebook girl") who called out for a nationwide strike in support of the suppressed textile workers' in the city of Mahalla al-Kobra which were protesting against low wages and high food prices (Ghonim, 2012: 36-7; Pintak, 2011: 57-9).

> 'The group invited about 300 people to join its Facebook page; within a day it had 3,000 members and within a few weeks, 70,000 had joined the call for strikes across Egypt in support of Mahalla's workers' (Frontline, 2011).

Displaced and coordinated groups such as businesses and governments have advantages over loosely organized and undisciplined social movements. Governments face less collective action problems because they have better coordination, equipment, more discipline and fixed financial resources. Social media can compensate for the disadvantages of social movements by reducing coordination costs (Lim, 2003: 274, 276), and enabling political movements to raise the level *shared awareness* – i.e. 'the ability of each member of a group to not only understand the situation at hand but also understand that everyone else does, too' (Shirky, 2011: 5).

The 6 April Youth Group was the first of many dissident groups to organize and plan its activities on the internet and to use social media as a tool to transform a local issue into a nation-wide one. Although a massive strike never came about, the movement did raise general awareness on the issues of labor abuse, underpayment and hyper-inflation. Also new was the role of women, and especially that of Esraa Abdel Fatah, the first female activist to be arrested (twice) under Egypt's emergency law.[7]

Social media enable activists to connect, sympathizers to join, and ordinary citizens to watch the events real-life (Naughton, 2011). In doing so social media transforms a highly embodied, immediate, nonreflexive issue into a nation-wide strife of all against the state and its establishment. Conclusively Al-Jazeera and other pan-Arab channels provide for a bigger (even regional) audience by broadcasting YouTube videos and photos that would not be broadcasted by national (state) television. This also happened in the case of the 2008 April strikes when Al-Jazeera and other pan-Arab channels featured 'graphic footage of the violence' (Pintak, 2011: 57), whereas 'photos of protesters stamping on protests of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and bleeding victims of the violence appeared on the websites of Egyptian bloggers and foreign news organizations, until the government banned journalists from the area' (Pintak, 2011: 57-8).

2.3 Alternative explanations

Revolutions and revolutionary movements are well-documented and thoroughly investigated phenomena in the fields of political science and IR. This has resulted in quite an extensive bulk of explanative theories.

Tilly's social movement approach to revolutions does not exclude structural shifts within the political landscape but emphasizes on the role of *human agencies* – 'groups, organizations and individuals' (Johnston, 2011: 152). As opposed to this approach stands Skocpol's analysis of revolutions which focusses on 'macrosociological historical events beyond the making of individuals' (Johnston, 2011: 152).

In her famous book *State and social revolution: a comparative analysis of France, Russia and China* (1979) Skocpol looks for structural patterns in 'state and class structures and the international situations of the Bourbon, Tsarist and Imperial Old Regimes' as explanations for the French Revolution (1787-1800), the Russian Revolution (1917-1921) and the Chinese Revolution (1911-1949) (1979: xi).

[7] The role of Egyptian women and their emancipation through social media will be further discussed in 4.3 Revolution form within: women emancipation through the Internet.

According to Johnston, Skocpol's theory is about 'large-scale process that, of course, have social actors taking place. Yet in her model, their actions seem preordained by the situation they find themselves in: hardships that are so difficult, that peasants are led to revolt; threats to elite power so clear that they must respond' (2011: 152). Precisely because of Skocpol emphasis on the role and emergence of 'peasant insurrections' (1979: xi), I consider her theory less applicable for studying the role of new media in Egypt's young urban revolutionary movement.

Skocpol's study of the 1979 Iranian Revolution (1982) however, in which she acknowledges that the volatility of revolutions derives in part from the 'power of ideas' and the actions of leaders does provide some interesting insights for the Egyptian case. Skocpol states that the Iranian revolution 'surely qualifies as a sort of "social revolution" which she defines as: 'rapid, basic transformations of a country's state and class structures, and of its dominant ideology' (Skocpol, 1982: 265).

The unfolding of the Iranian Revolution challenges Skocpol's revolutionary causation model as developed through comparative-historical research – not in the least because opposition to the Shah was not focused in rural peasant communities but in 'urban communal enclaves' (Skocpol, 1982: 271).

The belief system of Shia Islam and the economic and social network organization of religious centers (like mosques) and the bazaars[8] played a significant role in the Shah's downfall (Skocpol, 1982: 267, 272). Striking features were the network of communications and powerful symbolic resources developed by the religious clerics. Although there is no such uniting factor as Shia Islam in Egypt, the organizing power of the Muslim Brotherhood and the large number of university students offer about the same types of network of communications which swiftly bring the masses to the street.

From Ayatollah Ruholllah Khomein's widely dispersed audio cassettes, to the modern-day revolutionary Facebook page; communication within existing social classes and social groups (like Iran's university students) plays a key role in confronting a 'repressive apparatus' (Johnston, 2011: 154). Thinking about the physical social networks in Iran of the late-197os, the following question comes to mind: *Could digital social-networking replace the "old" physical social network on the ground?*

Somewhere between Tilly's actor-oriented approach and Skocpol's structuralism approach lies Goldstone's (1993) two-step theory one *state breakdown,* which occur because

[8] The newly emerged middle-class of shopkeepers (also known as *bazari's*) played a significant role in the Iranian revolution.

'large structural shift characteristics of state analysis' and 'full revolutionary outcomes are pushed forward by mobilization-related factors' (i.e. persuasive ideologies, cultural influences, rural and urban discontent among popular classes) (Johnston, 2011: 153).

Most scholars quickly dismiss demographic factors. Interestingly enough, Goldstone's theory emphasizes population growth as an important destabilizing factor in the state-breakdown phase (1993: 31). Given the enormous population growth (or demographic explosion) in Africa and the Middle East in general and Egypt in particular – population growth might prove to be an important (if not decisive) factor in explaining the regional socio-political upheaval of the last couple of years.

Some experts even argue that the current revolutionary wave in the MENA-region is in fact a "demographic revolution". According to the Peterson Institute for International Economics the biggest problem Egypt faces today is unemployment driven by a demographic youth bulge. Approximately 65% of the total population of Egypt is younger than 30, whereas 32,4% of the population is less than 15 years of age (CIA World Factbook, 2012).

The population of Egypt is still growing with approximately 1.5 million each year.[9] United Nations predictions indicate that the overall population will reach 95,6 million in 2026 and 114,8 million in the year of 2065 (Khalifa *et al*, 2010). These numbers are predications based on an expected declining fertility rate (TFR), but even population momentum still results in population growth because 'after the country reaches replacement-level fertility – just over two children per woman – the population of Egypt will continue to grow for a number of years' (Khalifa *et al*, 2010).

Many policy makers view the youth bulge with great concern. Some even refer to the distorted demographics in the MENA-region as a time bomb. Others however favorably compare the existing situation in the Middle East with East Asia where the massive availability of human capital resulted in extraordinary economic growth in the last decades, as does the Middle East Youth Initiative which refers to the youth bulge as a *demographic gift*, which –
if engaged – 'could fuel regional economic growth and development' (Dhillon & Yousef, 2007).

[9] Average population growth varies from year to year. According to the CIA World Factbook was 1,64% in 2009, 2% in 2010, 1,96% in 2011 and an estimated 1,94% over 2012.

2.4 Solving the collective action problem

A recurrent puzzle in academic literature on revolutionary movements and revolutions is Olson's *collective action problem* (1965). 'At the heart of the repression-mobilization relationship is the high cost of challenging the repressive state' (Johnston, 2011: 104). Most political scientists assume (on basis of the rational choice paradigm) that actors are rational and make cost-benefit analysis before taking action. Why then do people come into action? The phenomena of collective action is especially hard to explain in authoritarian states were opposition to the state might lead to imprisonment, torture or even losing one's life. As Tucker explains:

> 'In countries where citizens have strong grievances against the regime, attempts to address these grievances in the course of daily life are likely to entail high costs coupled with very low chances of success in any meaningful sense; consequently, most citizens will choose not to challenge the regime, thus reflecting the now well-known collective action problem' (2007: 535).

Repression seriously hinders the organization and coordination of any form of protest. Hence even if people – regardless of the high costs – decide to protest, creating an opposition movement might be quite difficult, if not practically impossible in authoritarian states.

Another hurdle is the so-called *free rider problem* (Olson, 1965: 76). Acknowledging that one extra person does not really make a difference and that other people can fight the fight for you – which in the case of opposition to an authoritarian state always results in a collective outcome (also beneficent for those who have not paid a personal price) – it might be tempting to ride freely on the collective action of others.

Conclusively 'assessing the costs and benefits is further complicated by another option, fleeing or emigrating from the repressive state – or "exit" (Johnston, 2011: 105). The concept of *exit* was introduced by Hirschman (1972) who claimed that an unsatisfied citizen with the state has three options:

1. Remain loyal
2. Leave – exit
3. Voice demands

The first option is the most common. A citizen will only choose the third option if A. there is a big chance of success and B. state legitimacy is weakened (Hirschman, 1972: 92).[10] Leaving a state could also be considered a form of protest. In the same time mass emigration is an indicator to the remaining citizens that the system is cracking. Hence states, especially authoritarian ones, often try to prevent their citizens from an easy exist because it damages state reputation. When an easy exit is complicated, citizens might quicker opt to voice their demands (Johnston, 2011: 166-7).

Egypt has witnessed a massive outflux of migrant workers and Coptic Christians to the US, Canada and Europe ever since the 1960s. Temporary economic migration to surrounding Arab states has also been a recurrent phenomenon (first in the 1970s during the oil boom in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and later to the Gulf States and Libya) (Bartolomeo *et all*, 2010: 1).[11] Although the Egyptian government does not hinder its citizens to move abroad, ever more strict migration laws in the USA, Canada and Europe, and the decline of work opportunities in the Arab Gulf Region due to the 2008 financial crisis (and later economic crisis) have reduced the chances of "exit" for the large number of unemployed adolescents in Egypt. Hence Egyptians are left with only two options: 1. remain loyal or 3. voice demands. This might explain why popular unrest increased in Egypt in the last couple of years.

Relative deprivation has for long been a key-explanation for the eruption of protest and civil upheaval. This phenomena occurs if people feel discontent when they compare their (material) positions to those of others and realize that they have less than them. [12] Relative deprivation does not equal actual deprivation – i.e. even if someone's economic position improves he might still feel deprived of his basic rights, as 'people compare themselves with some reference group within the society rather than with the whole society' (Yitzhaki, 1979: 321).

The concept of relative deprivation has been unsatisfactory to many scholars and analysts. According to Kuran, Tucker and others relative deprivation is 'too common in

[10] The weakening legitimacy of Egypt's state and security forces due to compromising videos and images of brutality posted by Egyptian activists turned into one of the most important causes for revolution – more about this later.

[11] 'In 2000, Egyptian permanent and temporary emigrants were 2.7 million, 3.9% of the Egyptian population. The majority resided in Arab countries (69.9%), especially in Saudi Arabia (33.7%), Libya(12.2%) and Jordan (8.3%). High proportions were also to be found in North America (15.6%) and Europe (11.9%)' (Bartolomeo *et all*, 2010:.1). Note: this data does not incorporate early and illegal immigration. An estimated half million Egyptians have illegal migrated to Europe between 2000-2010.

[12] Runciman defined *relative deprivation* as follows: 'We can roughly say that [a person] is relatively deprived of X when (i) he does not have X, (ii) he sees some other person or persons, which may include himself at some previous or expected time, as having X (whether or not this is or will be in fact the case), (iii) he wants X, and (iv) he sees it as feasible that he should have X' (1966: 10).

politically stable societies to provide a complete explanation for every observed instability.' Hence the theory 'neither predicts nor explains' (Kuran, 1991: 16). Kuran draws a distinction between public preference and private preference. A person's private preference is fixed, but his public preference might (out of fear for prosecution for example) be different. This is what Kuran calls *preference falsification* (1991:17). Yet if the size of public opposition against government overthrow (*S*) decreases significantly, someone's private preference for a regime to collapse – and his public standpoint in this matter – might gradually convene.

In deciding to join an opposition movement, participants look at the trade-off between *external* and *internal payoffs*. External payoffs are potential rewards and punishments, but are not sufficient to make someone protest because the benefits are often undetermined. Internal payoffs are of a psychological nature. 'The suppression of one's wants entails a loss of personal autonomy, a sacrifice of personal integrity' (Kuran, 1991: 18).

The longer someone suppresses his personal preference and the internal payoff, the bigger the lie he is living in (to the point it becomes almost unbearable). Thus, when public opposition against the government grows – while a person's private preference is constant – 'there comes a point where his external cost of joining the opposition falls below his internal cost of preference falsification' (Kuran, 1991: 18). This switching point is called the *revolutionary threshold.*

In his later work Kuran stresses the role of *intense emotional commitment* to ideas and value systems like democracy and human rights (1995: 51).[13] New media transports these ideas and value systems and has social power (Van Ham, 2010: 96). Kuran's assumption that value systems matter more than cold-hearted cost-benefit analysis seems at least partly supported by the revolutionary patterns in the MENA-region. Over the course of the last decade Egypt and other Arab states have experienced several demonstrations which nevertheless remained small and were easily suppressed. Although many people sympathized with the aims of activist movements, they would not support the concept of 'activism' in itself, let's stand join any protest or strike. The general negative attitude against 'activism' changed when discrediting images and videos of committed atrocities by police and state security forces started to circulate on the Internet – which were later broadcasted by Al-Jazeera and other pan-Arab satellite-TV networks.

Loss of state credibility of course enhances the chances of success and thus fits within the rational actor paradigm, but one should not underestimate the importance of certain

[13] As for Egypt "self-respect" and "dignity" were often mentioned revolutionary slogans and phrases.

values in Arab culture such as “dignity”, “self-respect” and “family honor”. The death of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, and a young man named Khaled Said in Egypt – who was beaten up severely by the police and died under suspicious circumstances on June 6 2010 – resulted in nationwide outrage and massive protests. The arrogance and brutality of the regime had gotten a name, face and story that every ordinary Tunisian or Egyptian could relate to. Similar catalysts were seen in other Arab states were in imitation of Khaled Said, more young adolescents self-immolated.

Such a drastic protest measure such as self-immolation – which in most cases results in extreme burning wounds (if not death) – could almost only be explained by Kuran’s idea of intense emotional commitment to a certain cause or a feeling of absolute despair. Yet in general one could argue that people are not willing to pay the price of sacrificing their life without at least the certainty that their individual act will have positive end-results. Hence even the most ‘fervent proponents of change will not act if they see no possibility for success’ (Johnston, 2011: 106).

The power of successful example grows confidence among members and the general public and can be an indispensable factor in turning idea into action. The revolutionary events in Egypt might not have happened without the successful examples of Eastern Europe, Lebanon and Tunisia. The next chapter deals in terms with modular revolution theory, the revolutionary wave in post-Communist Europe and its impact on (pre-)revolutionary Egypt.

3. Revolution as export product: modular revolution theory and the impact of the revolutionary wave in post-Communist Europe on the MENA-region

One day revolution seemed utterly impossible, and there were just a few people dreaming of change. And then, after the brave people of Tunisia ignited a fire that had been smoldering in the hearts of Egyptians and many other Arab people, the impossible quickly became possible. Wael Ghonim – Revolution 2.0 (2012).

3.1 The Colored Revolutions in Eastern-Europe and the post-Communist world

The 21st century might as well turn out to be the "revolutionary century", not only because of the rapid speed of technological innovation, the changing international landscape and the shifting geopolitical power balance, but also because of the emergence of a worldwide civil society which gradually replaces the old power elite. The arrival of new media and the Internet have made the world ever more connected, and make it harder for democratic governments – and even more so for authoritarian states – to control information flows, manipulate public opinion and safeguard the status-quo.

The rise of the modern, independent yet interconnected free-willed citizen and the decline of the old power structure is marked by socio-political unrest and a global revolutionary wave – from the Colored Revolutions of the early 2000s to the "Occupy Movement" and "Arab Spring" of 2011 (the latter of which is still ongoing in 2012). Not always revolutionary per se in a political sense, these movements have a strong social impact and ruffle the traditional balance between people in and out of power.

Although the origins, cause, impact, achieved results and geographic locations of these (social) revolutionary movements are wide and diverse, they show great similarity in principles and tactics. New media – especially social media, but also interregional or even global satellite network such as Al-Jazeera – play an indispensable role both in transporting new (revolutionary) ideas (and tactics) as well as in framing and creating a notion of *global citizenship.*

The first domino stone of the revolutionary movements of the 21st century was constituted by the "Bulldozer Revolution" in Serbia, where a dissident student group called *Otpor* ("Enough") launched a non-violent campaign in answer to widespread fraud in the 2000 presidential-elections. The movement quickly won public support and led a nation-wide protest which resulted in the downfall of President Slobodan Milošević.

> ‘Otpor, played the central role in the struggle against Milošević, and the size, dedication and geographical spread of this movement are what, arguably, proved to be politically decisive’ (Bunce & Wolchik, 2006: 291).

Otpor’s tactics varied along three lines:

1. *Protest and persuasion* – i.e. street theater, ubiquitous pestering, large public rallies, music concerts, coalition-building, campaigning, wide-spread distribution of anti-Milošević material, use of Internet, cell phones, fax machines, alternative media, and public and private communications with the most important actors of Serbia’s civil society (church, media, union leaders, parliamentarians), petitions, press releases, public statements and speeches, workshops, and training sessions for activists (Kurtz, 2010).
2. *Noncooperation* – strikes and boycotts by workers and students, nation-wide strike, cultivated defection of military and police, defection of state-controlled media personnel, election monitoring (Kurtz, 2010).
3. *Nonviolent intervention* – blockades of highways and railroads to shut down political and economic activity, physical occupation of public areas, bulldozers breaking through police barricades *(Ku*rtz, 2010).

The principles and tactics of Otpor’s non-violent resistance were based on a guidebook written by Gene Sharp; head of the Albert Einstein Institute in Boston. *The Methods of Nonviolent Action*” (1973) was soon to become a bestseller for ‘would-be demonstrators in the post-Communist region’ (Baissinger, 2007: 261).

Sharp’s principle of ‘peaceful and disciplined resistance’ was adjusted to the political and social context of Serbia in Otpor’s grassroots training manual “*Resistance in Your Neighborhood: How to Resolve the Serbian Crisis Peacefully*” which explains ‘how to analyze and defeat the pillars of support for the regime while maximizing the opposition’s assets’ (Kurtz, 2010).

After the initial ‘success’ of Otpor (i.e. Milošević and his close allies were brought down), the Serbian activists turned into modern kind of “mercenaries”;

> ‘Traveling around the world, often on the bill of the U.S. government or NGOs, in order to train local groups in how to organize a democratic revolution’ (Baissinger, 2007: 261).

The concept of direct democracy-promotion was embraced by American NGOs such as Freedom House, the National Democratic Institute, the National Endowment for Democracy, the International Republican Institute, and the Soros Foundation which donated large sums of money and technological equipment to Eastern European activists. The U.S. government also played an active role, donating some $41 million in support of Otpor's anti-Milošević campaigns.

Otpor's first external project was Georgia, were it trained a group of 20 students which later founded their own version of Otpor – *Kmara* (again meaning "enough"). These activists 'were able to travel to Belgrade because the trip was funded by the Soros Foundation in Georgia' (Tursunkulova, 2010: 351). The group eventually turned into a 3,000 strong movement, and successfully applied the same non-violent tactics in Georgia's "Rose Revolution" (2003).

The Ukraine followed suit. Local NGOs and social movements received $65 million from the U.S. government in the year(s) preceding the 2004 "Orange Revolution" – most of which activists played a leading role in the events to come. The leaders of Ukraine's *Pora*-movement received direct training in Serbia at the newly established Center for Non-Violent Resistance. As soon as Pora gained its objective, its activists (together with those of Georgia's Kmara) 'joined the ranks of international consulting centers engaged in the business of democracy promotion through modular revolution' (Braissinger, 2007: 266).

Next was a number of Kyrgyz youth who visited the Ukraine to learn from the Orange Revolution and then erected their own dissident group – *Kelkel* ("resistance"). As noted earlier the dictatorship in Kyrgyzstan was eventually toppled but only because activists resorted to violence. 'An innovation on the revolutionary model that originally inspired it due in significant part to the absence of sufficient structural support for successful non-violent action' (Braissinger, 2007: 262, 272)

Otpor's methods and tactics were (re)deployed by Egyptian activists. Just as in Serbia, these activists planned large sit-ins and occupied public space. Cairo's largest square and heavy traffic road – the soon to be world famous Tahrir square – turned into a large tent camp twice – first during the revolutionary wave of January 25th till February 11th 2011, and later in the second wave during the long restless summer of 2011. In 2005 however, initial protests in Egypt failed, drawing scholars to the conclusion that the learning-effect of modular revolutions was restricted to Eastern Europe, or more generally speaking; countries of a similar cultural type (Tucker, 2007: 545).

3.2 The theory of modular revolutions

The experiences of the revolutionary wave in post-Communist Europe constitutes the foundation of *modular revolution theory* – i.e. ´the spread of collective action amongst groups´ which ´is based in significant part on the prior successful example of others´ (Baissinger, 2007: 259). In the case of modular revolutionary change, the successful revolution in one country is followed by a revolutionary movement in another. This is also called *the power of precedent* (Tursunkulova, 2010: 349).

The lack of immediate success in other non-European countries made scholars question 'whether the model is likely to have much resonance beyond the post-communist region' (Baissinger, 2007: 262). The mass-level learning effect was believed to be limited to 'experiences in countries of a similar type' (also called 'post-communist boundary') (Tucker, 2007: 545).

Modular revolutionary theory was modified to include a shared history or socio-political identity as necessary for a revolutionary movement to cross-over to neighboring states.

> 'Modular phenomena are made possible by the sense of interconnectedness across cases produced by common institutional characteristics, histories, cultural affiliations, or modes of domination' (Baissinger, 2007: 263).

Based on the experiences of post-Communist states, Baissinger recognizes six features according to which modular revolutions evolve:

1. 'The use of stolen elections'
2. 'Foreign support for the development of local democratic movements'
3. 'The organization of radical youth movements'
4. 'An united opposition established in part through foreign prodding'
5. 'External diplomatic pressure and unusually large elections monitoring'
6. 'Massive mobilization upon the announcement of fraudulent electoral results' (2007: 261).

Crucial element of the model of modular revolutions is electoral fraud as a significant factor to unite opposition groups and mean to solve the collective action problem (Baissinger, 2007: 261). 'When a regime commits electoral fraud (…) an individual's calculus regarding

whether to participate in a protest against the regime can be changed significantly' (Tucker, 2007: 535). And: 'prior examples of successful protest following electoral fraud will increase the likelihood of protest following electoral fraud in the current circumstances' (Tucker, 2007: 544). Studying Kyrgyzstan's "Tulip Revolution", Tursunkulova later included the domestic sphere as concept of example, showing that (successful) domestic example 'opened up possibilities for the 2005 March events as much or even more than external modular examples' (2010: 349).

3.3 Transporting a revolution: "Enough is enough!"

Activism and popular protest in Egypt used to be small-scale phenomena with an almost pre-modern character. Only when cuts on food subsidies were announced did the public mass rally on the streets. The *Kefaya*-movement constituted the first serious challenge to the Mubarak regime. Kefaya (literally: "enough") is the unofficial name of the "Egyptian Movement for Change" which first received some public attention in the summer of 2004.

Former head of the union of Catholic schools and leftist activist George Ishak, led the movement which existed of small groups of union members, women and law students protesting against yet another term for President Hosni Mubarak. The movement also demanded amendment of the constitution and liberalization of the political system (Abaza, 2011; Oweidat *et al*, 2008: xiii).

While Egyptian activists were trying to win popular support for their cause, the wave of nation-wide anti-Syrian protests in the heart of Beirut during the spring of 2005 glued the Arab citizens to their screens. Being the first large democratic movement in the Middle East and constituting the first "one million protest", the so-called "Cedar Revolution" was by many viewed as a regional breakthrough. Lebanese activists in turn, had gained 'inspiration from events in Georgia and Ukraine, including the youth orientation of the protests, the construction of tent cities, the handling out of flowers to police, and the carnival atmosphere on Martyr's Square' (Baissinger, 2007: 262).

The events in Lebanon did not only mark the transformation of the revolutionary model of the "Colored Revolutions" into a worldwide export product; they were also a testament of the impact and regional effect of the Arab media revolution.

> 'The color scheme (of the red-white flags, MS) was made for TV by a team of Lebanese advertising executives who, like the tens of thousands who poured into the streets, were inspired by Ukraine's telegenic Orange Revolution,

whose orange-clad protestors waving orange banners provided vital images that were beamed around the world' (Pintak, 2011: 43).

Catalyst of the massive Lebanese uprising was the murder of the Sunni prime-minister Hafik Hariri. He was not the first (or last) politician to be murdered. Yet 'what was different this time was the Arab world was watching it (…) Al-Jazeera had changed the rules of the game (…) The unblinking 24/7 lens of the Arab media provided an electronic safety net to the crowds assembled at Martyr's Square' (Pintak, 2011: 14). Faced with crowds too big to ignore and growing international pressure, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had to back down and withdraw Syria's military forces after 29 years of occupation.

The Lebanese protests gave a new boost to the Kefaya movement which received much greater awareness after the alleged wide-spread fraud of the 2005 constitutional referendum and presidential election campaign. The trial of two supreme judges – Hisham Bastawisi and Mahmoud Mekki – prosecuted for openly criticizing the legitimacy of the presidential elections, led to massive street protests by approximately 2,000 Egyptian judges (Lake, 2006; Abaza, 2011).

After some weeks of public upheaval the movement lost momentum due to internal dissent, leadership change, government oppression and especially the lack of a strong united opposition. Yet the movement – though considered elitist and ineffective – could be considered a social breakthrough, inspired by and based on modular revolutionary change worldwide. No longer was a protest led by an unorganized group of angry housewives which worried about the price of bread.

The Kefaya-movement had three striking elements:

1. An opposition-wide support base from Nasserists and Marxists to Liberals and Islamists
2. "New style" of opposition inspired by the Colored Revolutions and Poland's Solidarity Movement (i.e. activists were learning from abroad; especially Otpor)
3. Relative young leaders and activists.

Without Al-Jazeera's coverage of the nationwide anti-Syrian protests in Lebanon and the electoral fraud in Egypt, Kefaya could never have captured public attention in Egypt. The Kefaya-movement even found some resonance in other Arab states. *Kefaya haram!* (best

translated as meaning something like "please enough!" or "enough is enough!") turned into a frequent heard phrase in the Arab street.

Kefaya grew the confidence of Egyptian activists who now had their own (though still small) 'domestic example'. Although inefficient and quickly scattered, Kefaya paved the pathway for other dissident movements and managed to achieve some cooperation among opposition groups which later united in "The National Association for Change". 'By exhibiting the courage to protest, Kefaya helped tear down a psychological barrier' (Ghonim, 2012: 32).

> 'Kefaya leaders see their greatest accomplishment as having broken down the population's aversion to direct confrontation with the regime. Prior to the Kefaya movement, Egyptians never dared to openly oppose their government. Kefaya has also inspired other social reform movements, particularly those of workers, in Egypt, and similar reform movements in other nations' (Oweidat *et al*, 2008: IX).

The preliminary conclusion that the mass learning-effect of the Colored Revolutions is limited to Eastern Europe, is in my view premature. The model had to be adjusted first to the cultural and historical context of Egypt in order to be successful. Also: given the fact that Egypt lacked a strong civil society let's stand a well-organized opposition (aside of the Muslim Brotherhood) more time was needed in order for grassroots organizations (and its leadership) to emerge (El-Ghobashy, 2005).[14]

The growing accessibility of the Internet and the introduction of social-media facilitated the process of social-movement formation by enabling loose activists to unite, exchange tactics and information, and help them organize new protests. Eventually activists found a successful catalyst aside of election fraud (i.e. Khaled Said), and an external example which the people could (culturally and socially) relate to (i.e. Tunisia) to 'substitute to some extent for structural disadvantage'.

[14] The establishment of a civil society was supported by the US and EU. 'By 2004, the U.S. gave Egypt $37 million annually, and this funding peaked in 2008 at $54.8 million (…) between 2004 and 2009, democracy assistance still amounted to (…) $250 million' (Guirguis, 2009).

4. Social media and the birth of the revolution

I am a real life introvert yet an Internet extrovert
Wael Ghonim – Revolution 2.0 (2012)

4.1 Introduction: the Internet as "exit"-strategy

Over the course of the last decade a new middle class emerged in Egypt, which could afford cell phones, cars, computers and laptops. Ever since the introduction of Sadat's economic liberation policy in the early 1970s, the general standard of living gradually increased in Egypt, yet for many nothing changed and for some living conditions even deteriorated.

Due to an enormous demographic explosion, streets became increasingly more dirty and (over)crowded. Youth unemployment numbers are (still) breaking record after record, wheras hyperinflation makes food and goods ever more expensive. [15] Unemployment among young people (15-24 in age) is estimated to be more than 25% (Middle East Youth Initiative, 2012). Surprisingly enough more (and better) education only increases the problem of unemployment. Egypt is one of the view countries on earth with negative correlation between employment and education. Unemployment among graduate students is almost ten times that of people with only primary education (Noland & Pack, 2008: 1), and is estimated to be about 40% for men and 50% for women. Estimates suggest that 700,000 new graduates are in pursuit of 200,000 extra jobs each year (Provost, 2011).

According to the 2010 Egypt Human Development Report at least 90% of the unemployed are less than 30 years in age and many more are affected by so-called "underemployment" (i.e. and engineer working as a cab driver) (2010: 6). Youth unemployment is predominantly an urban phenomenon resulting in rising levels of friction and social unrest in the cities.

The glamorous world of soap operas and movie stars as presented by popular Arab TV-shows is for many out of reach. Even reality-TV stands far off daily life in the poor lower class neighborhoods were people are struggling to make a living. The discrepancy between dreams and reality and the increasing gap between rich and poor result in a growing sense of

[15] Since the fall of Mubarak living conditions have even further deteriorated in Egypt. 'Food riots have continued after the revolution with inflation reaching new peaks and basic necessities moving further out of reach for whole communities. Egypt is experiencing a severe shortage of petrol, which is not only affecting middle-class car-owning commuters but a bulk of the working class who rely on minibuses for transport' (Tadros, 2012).

disillusionment and frustration. The hopes and expectations of university students are scattered as soon as they graduate and enter the already overstrained labor market.

Chronically underpaid doctors in public hospitals, teachers in public schools, government employees, police officers and military personnel hardly make it to the end of the month. Consequently bribery and corruption flourish. Meanwhile a happy view are benefiting from the economic system of what Tarek Osman calls *distorted capitalism* (2010) meaning that there is no protection of the state, nor any safety net, yet companies and government (in hands of the view) can do whatever they want.

For the majority of the Egyptian youth computers and especially the Internet turned into their most favorite pastime activity (aside of watching TV perhaps). Bored, unemployment and stuck at home in a small apartment shared with at least six or more family members or so, Egypt's young adolescents were looking for an escape. The Internet was providing them just that (which might explain the extreme popularity of courses in computer engineering and computer science at Egyptian universities); opening up new worlds, showing events real-life happening on the other side of the globe, enabling for expression of opinion, and – another taboo-breaking activity in the conservative Arab society – chat and "date" with people of the opposite sex. As online activists Wael Ghonim testifies:

> 'The Internet has been instrumental in shaping my experiences as well as my character. It was through the Internet that I was able to enter the world of communications (when I was barely eighteen) and network with hundreds of young people from my generation everywhere around the world. Like everyone else, I enjoyed spending long hours in front of a screen on chat programs. I built a network of virtual relations with people, most of whom I never met in person, not even once' (Ghonim, 2012: 24).

4.2 The "social power" of the Internet

In his famous study on the impact of *electronic media* on social behavior, Meyrowitz explains how the widespread use of electronic media (i.e. television, comics and blockbuster movies) has played an important role in social developments, such as:

> 'The social explosions of the 1960s, the many "integration" movements (blacks, women, elderly, children, disabled etc.), the rise of malpractice suits, the development of "halfway" houses for prisoners and the mentally ill, the

> decline of the nuclear family and the rise of the nuclear freeze movement, and the trends toward living alone and "living together"' (1985: 9).

Media can change social environments by breaking down the boundaries between the private and public sphere, leading to new or 'different social conceptions' and 'undermining the traditional relationship between physical setting and social situation' (1985: 7, 15-17). Social media could bring the diffusion between private and public to yet another level by not only presenting an opinion but also enabling for direct interaction.

In their theory on opinion formation Katz and Lazarsfield have found it to be a two-step process. Opinions are first transmitted by the media and then – in a second social step – echoed by people in the direct vicinity (Shirky, 2011: 5). According to Katz: 'Interpersonal relations are (1) channels of information, (2) sources of social pressure, and (3) sources of social support, and each relates interpersonal relations to decision-making in a somewhat different way' (1957: 77).

It is the social and highly inter-personal second step in which someone's mind changes and in which social media's unique characteristics could play a striking role. Not only do social media enable for opinions, news and information to be quickly transmitted all over the world – they also enable people to directly respond, discuss or add new weight to the story.

Shirky recognizes two views on the power and use of the Internet:

1. The *instrumental approach* 'focuses only secondarily on public speech by citizens and least of all on private and social users of digital media' (Shirky, 2011: 3)
2. The *environmental view* 'assumes that little political change happens without the dissemination and adoption of ideas and opinions in the public sphere. Access to information is far less important, politically, than access to conversation' (Shirky, 2011: 5).

The environmental view takes account of social media's ability to develop a social public sphere in which an exchange of information and opinions on the interpersonal level could take place.

Since its early introduction, blogs have been extremely popular in Egypt. According to official documents, the number of blogs has increased from only 40 in 2004 to an estimated 160,000 in July 2008 (OpenNet Initiative, 2009).

> ‘Blogs, short for weblogs, are characterized by reverse chronological journals of personal opinion and videos, using archives and hyperlinks to other news stories and postings elsewhere online. Blogs allow information and opinions to be disseminated quickly, making claims public much faster than mainstream media’ (Van Ham, 2010: 97).

In authoritarian states where there is no freedom of speech, nor any free press, blogs substitute for the lack of editorials and opinion-pieces of quality newspapers. Egypt also hosts the most professional civil-journalist news networks of the Arab world, such as: *Hoqook*, *Masr al-Youm Online*, *Youm al-Saba* and the on January 25 (2011) established *RASD* news network, which are visited by millions each day.[16]

Hoqook news network delivers rights-based news by citizen journalists through a number of online activities (such as online broadcasts, online radio, videos, blogs and articles). The network has 23 correspondents all over Egypt, 20 journalists in Cairo and two permanent journalists based in Alexandria. The online news network fights for social justice using the lens of the camera as public witness of any unlawful acts committed by security forces or government officials. Two of Hoqook’s videos were used as material of evidence in court cases and helped to convict policemen guilty of disproportional use of violence during demonstrations. Asked about the principles underlying Hoqook’s news network, Sameh Said – General Director of Hoqook – explained to me that the principles of democracy and human rights are leading.

> **Sameh Said**: “We are the first civil society news agent in Egypt. We inform people on campaigns, demonstrations and other political rallies and try to make them politically active. Our news is not necessarily 100% neutral, as it has an activist standpoint. However, we are unique in bringing local news through a wide network of correspondents. Our network is by many considered as thrust-worthy and reliable. If we hear about power abuse or social problems in a certain area we send a correspondent to interview the local town major or

[16] Masr al-Youm online is the digital offspring of an official Egyptian newspaper, yet in its online form it has much more editorial freedom.

governor of that particular governorate and hold him accountable."[17]

Most blogs and other online communication devices are written in *`ammiyya* (Egyptian colloquial Arabic) and not in *Arabi Fusha* (Standard Arabic) – the formal language of the established media. Use of daily Egyptian slang lowers the educational barrier and makes the Internet easier in use for lower-educated people who only have a basic understanding of the Arabic language (Price, 2010: 3).

4.3 Revolution from within: women emancipation through the Internet

The Internet enables (young) women to have a voice of their own in a way unfamiliar to traditional media. In Egypt under the rule of Hosni Mubarak politics was a highly contested affair that could only be secretly discussed during late-night hours in back-street coffee shops. Due to the highly segregated nature of Egyptian society, this were places for "men only". Yet on the Internet, girls and adolescent women could freely participate in lively chat room discussions, share their opinion by blogging on socio-political affairs and linking up with other activists to become the vivid leaders of dissident youth groups.

Fervent blogger and Coptic activist Marianna Nagui Hanna (now 31) was one of the first Egyptian girls to attract hundreds of visitors (later in the thousands) on her blog "Restless Waves"[18] (Tarrant, 2009). She started blogging in 2006, at age 25 and was quickly branded a "Coptic Revolutionary Element". Aside of her work as blogger and civil journalist, Hanna works for *Sowt al-Hor*, the Egyptian branch of a Dutch NGO supporting freedom of press and implementing international standards of quality (Free Press Unlimited). She also runs her own organization promoting the inter-religious dialogue between Muslims, Christians and even a view atheists under the slogan "together for God".

Asked about the impact of social media Hanna told me in an interview that she would have never been able to do what she does without it.

> **Marianna Nagui Hanna**: "My blogs gave me my own sphere of influence. The Internet helped me to connect with other activists and form a new movement of Christians and Muslims, women and men, who fight together for

[17] Passage from interview with Sameh Said on March 15, 2012 – recorded in English at Oxfam Novib (the Hague - Netherlands).
[18] Full link: http://resstlesswaves.blogspot.nl/ - Hanna's weblog is written in Arabic.

the purpose of a democratic state, a society of religious tolerance and gender-equality."[19]

Social media not only enables women to become more politically active, it also raises shared awareness on the marginalized position of women as a whole.

Marianna Nagui Hanna: "Blogs and Facebook-messages posted by women were important as they made men realize that women have a voice of their own. Our presence on the Internet in chat rooms and other online discussions on politics and social affairs puts the society for a challenge. If women can write excellent blogs and provide for political analysis, how could people still claim they are too "dumb" to participate in real-life politics? Women played a key role in organizing the revolution, they participated in it, and some even sacrificed their lives, now they want an equal share in political and social institutions."

4.4 The introduction of Facebook

As illustrated by the examples above, the Internet has a strong influence on the way people live and think. However the social power of the Internet exceeds the personal level of the individual. It changes societies as a whole by transforming communication on the interpersonal level – i.e. the way we meet, organize and get to know one another. It is at this level, that the first steps towards the historic events of January 25 2011 took place.

The Kefaya-movement still relied on flyers, leaflets and the rapid growing popularity of SMS-texting. If Al-Jazeera and other pan-Arab channels would not have reported on the events, most Egyptians might not have been aware of the small-scale protests in the streets of down town Cairo .[20] Yet from then on activists started to rely on the Internet using it in ways that were even considered innovative by "cyber-cynic" Morozov who (among many other things) warns for the destructive impact of online money raising on social movement

[19] I interviewed Marinne Nagui Hanna several times over the period of June-July 2011 in the office of Sowt al-Hor on the Talaat-Harb Stret (Cairo - Egypt). Passages are a compilation based on recordings in English as to reduce the chance of misinterpretation.

[20] 'At the turn of the century, there were fewer than 1 million mobile phone subscribers in Egypt; less than a decade later there are almost 55 million,1 a penetration rate of almost 66%. Considering that over 25 million Egyptians are under the age of 14, over 95% of Egyptian adults have access to a mobile phone. With SMS rates at less than .1 Egyptian pound a message, communication via text message is available to almost all adult Egyptians. Mobile phones have become ubiquitous in Egypt' (Price, 2010: 3).

formation – giving those who donated the feeling that they have already done their share and thus undermining social action. Looking into the 2007 "Free Monem"-campaign Morozov remarks:

> 'The website of Free Monem, a 2007 pan-Arab initiative to free an Egyptian blogger from jail, featured the message "DON'T DONATE; Take Action" and had logos of Visa and MasterCard in a crossed red circle in the background. According to Sami Ben Gharbia, a Tunisian Internet activist and one of the Free Monem organizers, the message on the site was a way to show that their campaign needed more than money as well as to shame numerous local and international NGOs that like to raise money without having any meaningful impact on the situation' (2011: 191)

Not only is the "Free Monem"-campaign an example of the creativity of online activists; it also shows the growing interconnectedness turning a national issue of an arrested Egyptian blogger into a pan-Arab one.

4.4.1 "April 6 Youth Movement"

The April 6 Youth Movement was the first group to start off as a Facebook group. The movement tried to mobilize civilians for a nationwide protest in support of the workers of El-Mahalla El-Kobba in 2008. The group's symbol and tactics were derived from the Otpor-movement in Serbia, yet the use of social-networking site Facebook was new – not only in Egypt, but to the world. *The New York Times* identified the April 6 Youth Movement as the political Facebook group with the most dynamic debates in Egypt (Shapiro, 2009).

The initiative for a nation-wide strike was launched by the young activists Esraa Abdel Fatah, who posted a call for a nationwide strike on April 6, 2008 on the still rather unknown social-networking site Facebook. Her Facebook-page quickly attracted over 70,000 members (Ghonim, 2011: 56-7; Pintak, 2011: 57, 59). Fatah was arrested by Egypt's security forces on the day of the strikes and thus became the first woman to be prosecuted under Egypt's emergency law.

Egypt's state security forces completely underestimated the impact of Esraa Abdel Fatah's activism. International media reported in length on her story, calling her the "Facebook Girl". Fatah was released in a little over two weeks later (Ghonim, 2011: 26-7) – to be arrested again in 2009 (this time she was released after a couple of days). Fattah's online struggle for freedom was eventually rewarded with a nomination for the Noble Peace Price in

2011.

I had the opportunity to meet Esraa Abdel Fatah several times in the first months after the fall of President Hosni Mubarak. Asked about her reasons for turning yet another strike into a national issue, Fatah gave me the following answer:

> **Esraa Abdel Fatah**: "I heard the news of the strikes in Mahalla and was thinking by myself: 'This is not the problem of Mahalla, this is the problem of the whole of Egypt. Why aren't we supporting this people?' So I opened up a Facebook-page – just because I happened to know this new networking site and found it the best online tool for organizing an event. I posted links to the page on popular weblogs, web forums, Yahoo! and Google-communications. I also linked my Facebook-page to dozens of organizations, political parties and blogs of well-known Egyptians."[21]

The April 6 Youth Movement transformed into a right-based group fighting for a divergent number of socio-political issues including: free speech, an end to government nepotism and revitalization of the economy. The movement was quickly endorsed and supported by Kefaya-members, two opposition parties (Al-Karama and Al-Wasat) and professional associations such as 'the Movement of Real Estate Tax Employees, the Lawyer's Syndicate, the March 9 Movement of university professors and the Education Sector's Administrations' Movement' (Ghonim, 2012: 36)

Leading members of the April 6 Youth Movement (among which were Ahmed Mahar and Esraa Abdel Fatah) were directly trained by American institutions to learn how to make better and even more effective use of the Internet (Nixon, 2011). These activists could only be identified and trained because of their digital "foot print" which made them traceable for American institutions.

Although the movement did not reach the goals it was aiming for – most Egyptians did go to work on that particular day of April 6 2008 like it was just any other day – the strikes in Mahalla were a clear signal to everyone that the Internet was a new force of power in Egypt's strictly-controlled social landscape.

The brutal violence as deployed by state security forces resulted in the dead of several civilians, including a 15-year old bystander. Hundreds of people were injured while the police arrested dozens of activists. Activists uploaded videos and posted blogs on the events, filling

[21] The interview took place on June 19, 2011 in Fatah's office in Doqi (Cairo - Egypt). Passage recorded and translated from Egyptian Arabic into English.

in the information void left by Egypt's mainstream media which completely ignored news on the strikes.

Al-Jazeera and other pan-Arab satellite channels transmitted everything to the greater public – reaching in the end, a worldwide audience (Pintak, 2011: 57). Street-battles between strikers and security forces were broadcasted as well as an amateur video of strikers tearing down a picture of Hosni Mubarak – bringing a severe blow to Mubarak's status and credibility.

4.4.2 "ElBaradei for president"

Over the period of 2008 to 2011, more radical youth groups emerged on Facebook. Protests and strikes became more frequent. Economic malaise, a demographic explosion,[22] extremely high unemployment rates, nepotism, and widespread corruption were all causes for deep resentment with the regime, but Egypt's civil society had not yet found an acceptable alternative to President Hosni Mubarak. The Muslim Brotherhood was (and still is) the only serious opposition force, and that – for many – was reason enough to remain loyal to Mubarak's regime.

Being the second Egyptian to receive a Nobel price, former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Mohammed Mostafa ElBaradei, was for long Egypt's national pride. President Hosni Mubarak honored him with "the Order of the Nile", but when ElBaradei started to openly criticize the political state of Egypt, the regime immediately launched a sneer campaign against its former hero. With the third term as director-general of the IAEA nearing his end, ElBaradei announced his return to Egypt. This led to rumors and speculation about potential candidacy in the 2012 presidential elections.

In 2009 Mahmoud al-Hetta launched the Facebook-page "ElBaradei President of Egypt 2012". The group quickly attracted more than 100,000 members. As a result ElBaradei was pushed to announce his willingness to play an active role in the movement for change in Egypt.

After his return to Egypt, ElBaradei met with key opposition leaders and became the chairman of the newly erected National Association for Change. The movement was backed by feminist groups to opposition parties and launched "ElBaradei's Seven Demands for Change" which were the following:

[22] Approximately 65% of the total population of Egypt is younger than 30. 32,4% is younger than 15 years old (CIA World Factbook, 2012).

1. ‘Terminating the state of emergency’
2. ‘Granting complete supervision of the elections to the judiciary’
3. ‘Granting domestic and international civil society the right to monitor the elections’
4. ‘Gathering equal time in the media for all candidates running for office’
5. ‘Granting expatriate Egyptians the right to vote’
6. ‘Guaranteeing the right to run for president without arbitrary restrictions, and setting a two-term limit’
7. ‘Voting with the national identity card’

   (Ghonim, 2012: 44-45)

Although the regime refused to compromise
towards the demands of the National Association for Change and ElBaradei eventually never run in the 2012 presidential elections, the movement was important for further uniting Egypt’s opposition and giving it a more formal agenda. ElBaradei’s seven demands formed the foundation for the January 25 principles – along with some socio-economic requests (like minimum wage, universal right for health care, education and employment). The “ElBaradei for President” group was yet another testimony of Facebook’s social power and raised expectations about a democratic alternative to the presidency of Hosni Mubarak.

4.4.3 “We are all Khaled Said”

Turning point for Egypt’s civil society was the death of the 27-year old ITer Khaled Said, who was arrested in an Internet café, beaten up by police, and later molested on the street. Bystanders witnessed how two policemen smashed Said’s head repeatedly against an iron door. Khaled Said died shortly after his arrest under suspicious circumstances in the area of Sidi Gaber on June 6 2010.[23] Furious activists created a special Facebook page called “*Kullena Khaled Said*” (“We are all Khaled Said”) – on which they dispersed pictures of his disfigured corpse. The page quickly turned into Egypt’s largest dissident group with over 479,000 members.

The images of an apparently young innocent fellow randomly molested by the so hated Egyptian police, led to national outrage and nation-wide protests. Young people who considered themselves just another Khaled Said dressed in black, and mourned his death

[23] Sidi Gaber is an urban neighborhood in the port town of Alexandria.

standing ten meters apart on the Boulevard of Alexandria and the Nile river promenade, holding a Bible or Quran, and silently watching over the water (El Amrani, 2010). "The common thought was: if an innocent boy could be killed in broad daylight, so could we," several activists later told me during yet another mass demonstration at Cairo's Tahrir Square in July 2011. Because activists and demonstrators were operating as loose individuals they effectively bypassed Egypt's ban on street gathering. To the frustration of the police, their strategy worked.

The news of the murder of Khaeld Said was picked up by mainstream media and turned into a national debacle, further discrediting the Egyptian police and security forces. A long and very sensitive trial started, which was by many viewed not only as a trial of two policemen, but also a trial of the regime itself. Egypt's online civil society was slowly winning ground.

The case of Khaled Said was not the first incident in which the Egyptian government was forced to listen to popular demands. Earlier in 2007, the Egyptian blogger Wael Abbas posted a video on YouTube in which two Cairo policemen 'used a nightstick to sodomize a cab driver in their custody (…) sparking a media feeding-frenzy that ultimately forced the government to prosecute the kind of conduct that had long been cordoned' (Pintak, 2011: 51). Yet what was different this time was that the police molested an innocent civilian in full daylight at a crowded street, and that the victim who would not live to see another day was a young men who happened to be part of an extensive online community.

4.4.4 Run-up to "January 25"

The first call for a "one million protest" on January 25 was posted in early January 2011 on the "We are all Khaled Said"-Facebook page. Ideas about a big protest on the national holiday for the police had been lingering on since the deed of Khaled Said, but was further inflamed by the recent events in Tunisia (i.e. the death of Mohammed Bouazizi and the successful protests against Tunisian President Ben-Ali only 11 days before January 25 2011[24]).

Moderators of the "We are all Khaled Said"-Facebook group and "ElBaradei for President"-campaign (Wael Ghonim, Abdelrahman Mansour and Ahmed Saleh) presented "January 25" as an independent event, hence enabling soccer fan clubs like al-Ahly Ultra's, the April 6 Youth Movement (80,000 members at that time), the Nizar Qabany Page (157,000

[24] The Tunisian President stepped down at January 14, 2011.

members at that time), and even the Egyptian Sugar Cane Juice page (250,000 members) to embark the protests (Ghonim, 2012: 158-9).

The imitators of the protest knew they would only have one chance. Hence they brought together the best and the brightest to think through a strategic plan. Based on their prior experience activists had learned some valuable lessons. A large demonstration could only work if A. it was too big to be contained by Egypt's security forces, B. it could count on support by as many actors of civil society as possible and C. protests did not start at the same location (thus preventing for early encircling by security forces).

The 2009 Green Movement in Iran warned activists worldwide for the risks of using the Internet for political purposes. Agents of the Iranian state security successfully spread false information that was not only picked up by millions of Twitter-users but also by traditional media without any fact-checking (Morozov, 2011: 17). State security officials also deployed the American anti-censorship software *Haystack* to directly search and target activists (Arthur, 2010).

Hence the Iranian example taught Egyptian activists that if everyone knows about an online call for large demonstrations, so does the state. And if activists can distribute information online, so can agents working for Egypt's state security – who in fact were already doing just that. Earlier in 2008, Hosni Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) established a so-called "Electronic Committee" rumored to have 'legions of well-paid young men and women whose mission was to influence online opinion in favor of the party through contributions to websites, blogs, news sites, and social networks' (Ghonim, 2012: 38).

To prevent the security forces from knowing everything about the events to come, the main leaders of the different radical youth groups (like the April 6 Youth Movement, We are all Khaled Said, ElBaradei for President and the Muslim Brotherhood Youth Branch) met in-person and only privately discussed the strategy plan.

The activists worked with twenty different starting locations on January 25 2011, from which demonstrators would march to Tahrir Square. These locations were only known to fifteen people as Bessam Kamel, one of the key-leaders in the January 25 movement and representative of the "ElBaradei for President Campaign", explained to me in an interview:

> **Bassem Kamel:** "Nobody knew about these twenty locations but we. Every one of us would invite twenty friends to join the protests, which would then again invite five friends each. We would not inform our friends on the exact location but asked them to wait for us in a public place like a mosque, bridge or

grand café. Only on the day itself did our friends receive a *personal* (emphasis added, MS) SMS-text message which would point them at one of the twenty locations. Within minutes after our twenty friends received a text message and started moving to the requested location with their small group of friends, their number had had grown into hundreds – too many to be quickly encircled by the police. Of course security forces knew about the protests, but they did not know any of the starting locations, nor did they know that we were heading for Tahrir square. Moreover, the security forces could have never expected the number of participants to reach far into the tens of thousands – ant that already on the first day."[25]

Although social media was an essential tool to unite groups and organize the protests, vital information was not shared on the Internet, but kept within very intimate and closed circles. Aside of the Internet however, activists also used traditional methods like flyers and leaflets to inform the general public.

Bassem Kamel: "My location was the bridge by Nahya (a very poor neighborhood in down town Cairo, MS). Given the number of food riots in this area, we knew that people were very dissatisfied with their lives. We dispersed flyers and leaflets about the upcoming protests in the area, without informing the people that one of the marches would start in their neighborhood. The flyers were of a general nature which suggested that they were dispersed all over Cairo. This was not true. We directly canvased in Nahya, going from door to door, questioning people on the state of the economy and their dissatisfaction with the regime. On the day the protests started, we only had to call for the people to come out of their house to support the protests and they would join immediately."

[25] Interview took place on July 21, 2011 in the office of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party in Mahmoud Bashami Street (Cairo - Egypt). Passage was recorded in English.

5. The power of Al-Jazeera

How the fellahin, how white collar workers in the Gulf, how rich Saudi wives in their opulent palaces and shopkeepers in Morocoo, Palestinians in the refugee camps of Jordan, and presidents, sheikhs and kings all interact with their world is deeply influenced by the way in which the real-life dramas of the Middle East are depicted on their television screens.
Lawrence Pintak – The New Arab Journalist (2011)

5.1 Media and democratization

The proliferation of new technologies in the 1980s had an enormous impact on the news media. Due to the introduction of satellite-TV (and later the Internet) 24/7 news networks could suddenly 'provide a constant flow of global real-time news' (Robinson, 1999: 301). The revolutionary year of 1989 constituted a new breakthrough for TV News, when millions watched the quickly evolving events at Tiananmen Square and the fall of the Berlin Wall – *live*. The fact that now the world could watch warfare and revolutionary struggle right from their living-room worried some analysts and policy makers who posed questions about the consequences of this new *media pervasiveness*.

> 'The new technologies appeared to reduce the scope for calm deliberation over policy, forcing policy-makers to respond to whatever issue journalists focused on' (Robinson, 1999: 301).

Feeling ever more independent, American journalists started to criticize US foreign policy in ways once unknown to the State and Defense Department in Washington. In reference to the growing power of the media – and especially that of the biggest news network on the globe: Cable News Network or simply CNN – the phrase *CNN-effect* emerged, i.e. 'the idea that real-time communications technology could provoke major responses from domestic audiences and political elites to global events' (Robinson, 1999: 301).

The new phenomena of *embedded journalism* during the Gulf War in which journalists would broadcast live from tank divisions speeding through the Iraqi dessert, was by many considered an effort of the state to take back some control and again propagandize the news. Yet regardless the initial framing-power of spin doctors and PR-assistants, the end of the Gulf War showed quite the opposite. Investigative journalists found out that some of the

government stories were false and started to produce numbers of critical articles and TV-reports.

Shaw argues that if it was not for the extensive media-coverage of Kurdish refugees fleeing their homeland in Northern Iraq, 'the virtually unprecedented proposal for Kurdish safe havens' might never have come about (1993: 88). Another perhaps more striking example of the growing power of the media on US Foreign policy is the humanitarian intervention "Operation Restore Hope" to the blood lands of Somalia in 1992. Though not eager to interfere in an exhausting civil war that waging on in the Horn of Africa, strong domestic pressure inflamed by extensive media coverage of starving children forced the Clinton Administration to deploy its troops (Robinson, 1999: 302). Within a year however, the images of a dead American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu forced the same Administration to withdrew its forces (Van Ham, 2010: 105).

The *agenda-setting effect* of the modern news media is particularly strong in democracies were governments and political leaders are competing for public approval and potential re-election. This is not to say that authoritarian states are immune for negative publicity. On the contrary; although the public might have less of a say on the state's foreign policy (or any policy issue for that matter), authoritarian rulers are usually very dependent on the loyalty of at least a part of their population. These type of states also rely on the backing of foreign powers – to survive economic sanctions, political boycotts or other measures taken by the international community for example. Yet even the biggest power cannot back a regime if news about extreme atrocities committed by it keep on circulating in international media. Hence the extensive use of state propaganda, manipulation of the news and continuous efforts to control the message-stream out of the country in authoritarian states.

More than leading public opinion, the media *reflects* it – marking a breakthrough in authoritarian states were public opinion is usually silenced. Due to its visual character, TV-news can be extremely powerful – especially in countries with high illiteracy rates. According to Pintak: 'TV cannot alone create change. It is an *agent* of change – more specifically, a tool used by the architects of change' (2011: 45). By being the first to bring the news 'Al-Jazeera could win the first round in the information battle' (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 26).

Mass media does not equal mass democratization. Yet by opening up for the popular discourse and political debate new Arab media at least give a platform to opposing views, more democratic notions and ideas. As Pintak argues:

> ‘Satellite TV’s grand opening of the marketplace of ideas was an important first step in the process of democratization, but it was just that – a first step’ (2011: 47).

According to the *Four Theories of the Press* media is *shaped* by social and political structures – instead of *shaping* it (Siebert *et al*, 1956). Pintak stresses however, that in the case of pan-Arab media ‘the media both *shapes* and *mirrors* public attitudes’ (2011: 45). This is especially true for the case of Al-Jazeera which ‘reframed – and in many cases *created* – the debate (Pintak, 2011: 47).

5.2 From CNN to Al-Jazeera

Because governments in the Arab world had (and have) so much to lose in the event of change, local stations generally ‘lack the concept of local news’ (Pintak, 2011: 57). Most Arab citizens were for long dependent on foreign (that is to say “Western”) news networks like CNN International and the BBC World Service. The less well-off relied on BBC-broadcasts in Arabic, the Voice of America, the Middle Eastern Radio Broadcast, and Radio Monte Carlo-Middle East (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 17-8, Pintak, 2011: 34). These Western news agents would not deliver local news, and if they did, most Arab listeners would find it superficial and biased.

The introduction of pan-Arab satellite channels was an attempt by Arab governments to take back some control over the way the Middle-East was (and is) portrayed in international media. The cause for a better, more nuanced image of the MENA-region was considered so important that Arab states were even willing to face the risk that ‘long-suppressed ideas might also step in’ (Pintak, 2011: 47). Al-Jazeera was the first Arab 24/7 news network to address taboo-breaking topics for long ignored by state-controlled news agencies. As a result audiences shifted away from state-TV to the more vibrant landscape of satellite-TV. ‘Pan-Arab TV functions as a political change agent on a regional, rather than a national level’ (Pintak, 2011: 56). Al-Jazeera started off with addressing those central issues that matter to every Arab citizen (like the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, US Foreign Policy in the Middle East or the Israeli-Lebanese war of 2006), but gradually moved into the direction of more personal and local news still at the heart of the Arab society as a whole like government corruption, exploitation of workers’ rights, the role of religion or the position of women.

This is not to say that pan-Arab media are neutral and independent. According to Altschull ‘the news media are agencies of someone’s else’s power’ (1995: 5). For Al-Jazeera

that someone else is Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, head of the tiny Gulf state Qatar (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 117-8; Pintak, 2011: 3). Biggest competitor Al-Arabiyya is in hands of some wealthy Saudi-Arabian entrepreneurs befriended with the Saudi-royal family (Pintak, 2011: 35). All Arab satellite TV-channels have red lines that surround their coverage. For Al-Arabiyya these lines involve 'terrorism and anything to do with religion and religious policy' (Pintak, 2011: 67). For Al-Jazeera the infinite red line is Qatar's foreign policy.

Ownership of the many other pan-Arab satellite news networks varies from terrorist groups (like Iran-backed Hezbollah's *Al-Mahar*; Pintak, 2011: 51-2) to business tycoons (like Egypt's *ONTV* owned by Coptic Christian and multi-billionaire Naguib Sawiris – CEO of the Orascom Group).

Almost every single Arab news network (if not all) is entangled in regional power politics. Being completely dependent on support of the Emir; Al-Jazeera forms no exception to that rule. Most Arab news networks fell in the hands of business tycoons linked to one regime or another who care more about economic stability than giving a voice to the voiceless.

Ranking 93 out of 179 at the latest Freedom of Press Index (2011-12) Lebanon is still the Arab state with most freedom of press (Reporters Without Borders, 2012). Long a leader in Arab news and entertainment, Lebanon's many pseudo-independent news networks – representing an almost feudal system of religious and sectarian groups – have lost ground ever since the introduction of Al-Jazeera in 1996.

Al-Jazeera single-handily changed the Arab media landscape. Being the first Arab news network to broadcast 24/7, it plays an import role not only in the geopolitical power struggle of the Middle East but also in the daily lives of tens of millions. Al-Jazeera made Arab governments aware of (and accountable to) modern communications and their audience.

Even though about 400 Arab-speaking news channels have now joined the wide and diverse media scene, Al-Jazeera is still scoring best on the 3P's: *popularity, professionalism and provocativeness.* What makes Al-Jazeera so successful? How does it distinguish itself from other (Arab) news media? And what was it role in shaping and reinforcing public opinion in Egypt? We will now turn to the origins of the network which – according to its own popular slogan – brings "the opinion and the other opinion" (Van Ham, 2010: 94).

5.3 The rise of an international news brand

Al-Jazeera was first introduced in 1996 as a democratic initiative but also regional power device of Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, who launched the new pan-Arab news

network shortly after his enthronement in 1995. The head of this tiny Gulf State at the tip of the Arab Peninsula also announced democratic elections for the national council and municipal officers. Al-Thani abolished Qatar's censorship laws, turning the national capital Doha into a journalist free-zone from where media associations and satellite networks can freely operate (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 36-7). 'The Al-Jazeera team was given $140 million subsidy by the emir and a mandate[26]: launch an independent television station free from government scrutiny, control, and manipulation' (Pintak, 2011: 40).

Despite Al-Thani's efforts to promote free and independent media some analysts put big question marks by Qatar's so-called "media freedom". Al-Jazeera is indeed not as free and independent as some people would like to see it. Its coverage of regional conflicts and other Arab states (like Saudi-Arabia and Egypt) follows the lines as set by Qatar's foreign policy.[27] Qatar ranks 114 out of 174 countries on the Freedom of Press Index – a position lower than that of its neighbor the United Arab Emirates which ranks 112, and 17 positions lower than that of Lebanon (Reporters Without Borders, 2012).

Although operating since 1996, Al-Jazeera established its popular reputation in the early 2000s. Many observers note that Al-Jazeera's first regional breakthrough was marked by the outburst of the Second Intifada in September 2000. The conflict, that was heavily downplayed in Arab media as to defend the 'stand-by and watch' position of Arab leaders, got full airtime on Al-Jazeera's news network which broadcasted very graphic images of the violence and dared to report on the disproportional use of force by the Israeli Defense Force in ways Western media and Arab state-TV did (or dared) not (to).

Al-Jazeera's rebroadcast of the footage of the death of twelve-year old Mohammed Al-Durra's put the network on the international media map. 'He was shot by Israeli fire in his father's arms; the short clip was unforgettable' (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 8). The footage of Mohammed al-Durra was rebroadcasted by every renown news agency and became a symbol of the tragic Palestinian fate. The young boy's death resulted in a cry of outrage by Arabs worldwide and pushed Arab leaders to openly criticize the Israeli occupation. The top of Arab pop-artists recorded a song called "Jerusalem will return to us" which was broadcasted on leading Arab networks a day after Al-Jazeera first showed the tragic video.

[26] Other sources set the first subsidy at $147 million (Berr, 2011).
[27] This issue will be more fully discussed later in this chapter.

> ‘In those early days Al-Jazeera was just another news channel, but the (…) outbreak of violence in Israel and the Palestinian territories transformed it into must-see TV in a painfully personal sense’ (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 10).

> “I guess this is the point where the Arab media realized the importance of Arab media and Arab television,” Giselle Khouri, host on a Beirut-based program of Al-Jazeera’s biggest competitor Al-Arabiyya conveys in an interview. “Because the opinion *mondiale* changed – their opinion about terrorism, about the Arab world, about being a victim” (Khouri in Pintak, 2011: 50-1).

Not everyone was happy with the arrival of Al-Jazeera on the international media scene. Its Western-competitors such as CNN feared the network’s popularity in the MENA-region (and later in Africa and Asia). Arab viewers complained about Al-Jazeera’s provocative talk shows. And governments – no matter Western of Arab – increasingly worried about that *enfant terrible* which was growing into one of the biggest media labels of the world.

Being set up by former BBC employees, and having predominantly female anchors fashionably dressed in western clothing without wearing a headscarf, some conservative voices criticized Al-Jazeera for being too Western (a complaint that only increased with the launch of Al-Jazeera English in 2006; Geara & Johansen, 2010: 2).

In an interview to *the New York Times*,
Al-Jazeera’s chief editor Ibrahim M. Helal acknowledged the friction between professional western-style journalism and being a distinct Arab-news network “Using the Western style, we have broken many taboos. Of course, we upset most Arab countries” (Helal in Kifner, 2001).

Al-Jazeera scooped the world by broadcasting a unique interview with the most-wanted man on earth – Al-Qaida’s leader Osama Bin Laden – on October 7 2011, instantly propelling the network to the upper ranks of the international media pyramid. Bin Laden’s six and half minutes of fame on the Arab news network resulted in yet another wave of criticism (to the point of outrage) directed at Al-Jazeera and the Emir of Qatar. This time the anger did not come from the side of Arab conservatives who usually claimed that ‘the satellite’s network’s framing of Middle Eastern and world events is ignoring Muslim and Arab anger and fury against the United States, its military campaigns, and its foreign policies’ (El-

Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003; 23), but from American policymakers, Western experts and several Arab leaders who feared that the network was galvanizing Islamic radicalism.

It was not the first provocative act of Al-Jazeera. In 1999 it had brought the first ninety-minute discussion with Osama Bin Laden to a wide Arab audience (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 22). What was different however, was that this time that same man was now to believed to have led one of the most striking terrorist attacks in history. Al-Jazeera was now definitely on the map, but so was Osama Bin Laden who was soon to enjoy a mythic status precisely because the network served as his 'bully pulpit' as Al-Qaida launched its 'military and propaganda assaults on the US' (Pintak, 2011: 40).

Even more suspicion was aroused with Al-Jazeera's entrance into the heartlands of Afghanistan, being the first and only news aent to broadcast from Taliban-controlled territory. Nevertheless Al-Jazeera also broke the absolute taboo in Arab media to broadcast full interviews with Israeli officials giving them ample room and space to explain Israel's highly-contested foreign policy (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 22-3).

> 'The fact that Al-Jazeera has been labeled Islamist-oriented, pro-Iraqi, as well as pro-American and pro-Israeli indicates that its news coverage is criticized by all political camps, which strengthens its credibility' (Van Ham, 2010: 94-5).

5.4 Al-Jazeera and the regional power strife

Arab leaders from Morocco to Bahrain have protested against Al-Jazeera's news coverage. Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian territories, Bahrain and Kuwait have all closed Al-Jazeera offices, denied visas to reporters or (temporarily) broken of diplomatic contact with Qatar over an Al-Jazeera dispute. Egypt even boycotted an Arab summit in Qatar because of its anger about Al-Jazeera's broadcasts of interviews with Egyptian Islamists (Pintak, 2011: 40-1).

The fact that the anger of Arab states over Al-Jazeera is often directed at Qatar comes is no surprise. Al-Jazeera is only pseudo-independent and as subject to regional power politics as any other Arab media station. The network's pseudo-independent status was once again illustrated by a recent change of tone in its coverage of Saudi-Arabia. For long Al-Jazeera directed its arrows at Saudi-Arabia, reporting on social issues and religious affairs in ways very displeasing to the Saudi Kingdom. Faced with the raising geopolitical power of Shi'ite Iran however, Arab states closed ranks in Doha (2007) and rallied behind Saudi leadership. "Back down of the Saudis" was the simple message of the Emir to Al-Jazeera's board of

directors (Pintak, 2011: 74). Not only was Al-Jazeera forced to change its tone regarding Saudi state affairs; plans for an Al-Jazeera newspaper aimed at challenging Saudi-Arabia's predominance in printing press were also put on hold.

Even more striking however was Al-Jazeera's growing criticism on the state of Egypt and the dictatorial reign of President Hosni Mubarak. Relations between Qatar and Egypt strained in a 1997 dispute over alleged pro-Islamist coverage by the newly arrived news network, and allegations that Qatar would finance pro-Islamist groups in Egypt (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 131-2). A series of economic and political sanctions followed. From then on Al-Jazeera was free to report on Egypt the way it wanted.

In the most popular talk show of the MENA-region; Al-Jazeera's *Al-Ittijah Al-Mo'akis* ("The Opposite Direction", comparable with CNN's "Crossfire") – Egypt became a frequent topic of discussion. The Mubarak regime was furious about Al-Jazeera's invitation to several Egyptian Islamists (one of which were even convicted for acts of terrorism) to discuss Egyptian politics and social life in "the Opposite Direction" talk-show (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 131-3).

Even more threatening to the Egyptian regime was the platform Al-Jazeera was giving to a growing number of dissident groups and online activists by broadcasting amateur videos of mass rallies and state violence (as during the Kefaya-movement for example, and late during the 2008 Mahalla strikes; Pintak, 2011: 43-50, 57-8), discussing the content of influential Egyptian web blogs in talk shows and critical covering of electoral fraud and government corruption.

Tensions between Egypt, Saudi-Arabia and Al-Jazeera rose to the point that they resulted in an Arab League 2008 Satellite Charter, authored by the two countries, which warns against jeopardizing "social peace, national unity, public order and general propriety" and orders channels to protect "the supreme interests of the Arab countries" (Arab League Satellite Broadcasting Charter in Pintak, 2011: 58).

The regime of Hosni Mubarak tried everything to scare of Al-Jazeera in the hope the network would abstain from too critical coverage. During several raids in Cairo the police confiscated satellite transmission equipment, shut down the officers of several foreign broadcasters (including of course Al-Jazeera), a national campaign against satellite-channels and the introduction of new censorship law (Pintak, 2011: 58-9).

Sometimes even Qatar has to alter its position due to its own network's coverage of geopolitical conflicts – as during the Israeli-Lebanese War of 2006. In the early days of the Israeli attacks on Lebanon Al-Arabiyya and most Arab leaders still downplayed the conflict.

Yet due to extensive (and again very graphic) coverage by Al-Jazeera, the privately owned Lebanon Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) and Hezbollah's own satellite TV-channel (Al-Mahar) Al-Arabiyya was forced to redirect its attention to the Beirut bombings. Public opinion from Yemen to Morocco rallied behind Hezbollah, leading to a foreign policy shift all over the Arab world. First outspoken opponents of Hezbollah, most Arab leaders were now embracing the "Party of God's" leader Hassan Nasrallah as a pan-Arab hero – including Qatar's emir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. For once Qatar's foreign policy had to change due to Al-Jazeera coverage instead of the other way around (Pintak, 2011: 51-2).

'It has been boycotted, banned and bombed. But Al Jazeera's Arabic language service is most widely watched news channel in Middle East' (Fenton, 2011). The Doha-based news network is simply too big to be overlooked or ignored by the Monarchs and Presidents of the Middle East. It is as Hazem Saghieh, a columnist at the pan-Arab daily *Al-Hayat* argues: "Al-Jazeera is the most influential [political] party in the Arab World" (Saghieh in Pintak, 2011: 47-8). No Arab leader can afford to lose the battle for (at least a bit of) influence over Al-Jazeera. Hence sooner or later offices are again opened up, and government officials reluctantly seat in Al-Jazeera's major talk shows.

5.5 How Al-Jazeera changes the Arab mind

Al-Jazeera did not kick-start any of the Arab revolutions. However, the impact of its critical broadcasts and new way of doing media cannot be neglected. Although indirect and implicit, Al-Jazeera has set the standard for more vocal, outspoken and critical pan-Arab news; sometimes even openly campaigning for human rights – including an explicit call for freedom during the Arab revolts, as Aref Hijjawi Program Director at Al-Jazeera Arabic also acknowledged (2012).

The power of Al-Jazeera lies in three factors:

1. *Raise general awareness*

   Al-Jazeera brings small local news to the world, and brings world news to small isolated places. By reporting on long ignored, suppressed, or sensitive issues and events in a new, sometimes even provocative way, the network raises general awareness among its viewers not only about what is actually going on, but also what the people living in the "Arab street" think about that (Van Ham, 2010: 95).

> ‘Its political debates reflect the everyday arguments that Arabs privately carry on among families and friends. The fact is that by broadcasting such issues in public – and in Arabic, no less – Al-Jazeera violated long-established customs’ (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 50).

Some observers note that reality-TV talent shows like *Super Star* and *Star Academy*, on which viewers vote for their favorites, offered many young Arab adolescents their first experience with voting mechanisms and democracy. For the same token, one could argue that Al-Jazeera by providing opinion polls, broadcasting real political debate with opponents and proponents of a central thesis, and granting viewers the opportunity to directly respond on programs by calling-in or responding at Al-Jazeera’s popular web forum, the Arab public got its first taste of democracy – setting a chain of reactions into motion that will change Arab societies in ways unimaginable to many scholars just a couple of years ago.

The communications-revolution is changing the for long shielded-off societies of the Arab world forever. As Newsweek commentator Dickey noted in Newsweek’s prospect issue published at the end of the revolutionary year of 2011:

> ‘The level of contact and communication these Arabs enjoy was inconceivable to their parents. And yet the young people take it for granted, as part of the natural order in which they’re growing up. Twenty years ago, there was no 24-hour satellite news station in Arabic. Now there are many. By 2009, according to a University of Maryland survey of the Arab world, some 80 percent of the respondents were getting their international news from television, and most (58 percent) were getting their headlines from Qatar-based Al Jazeera’ (2011).

Al-Jazeera and other pan-Arab satellite TV-channels help to reduce the diffusion between private and public (Meyrowitz, 1985: 15-17), and enable its viewers to discover that their private preference might in fact be shared by other people. – helping them to express their public one.

2. Changing public opinion

Al-Jazeera is not only monitoring public opinion, it is also shaping it. The news network can influence public opinion by its news-selection, framing of the message and prioritization of events. Even the choice of guests in its popular talk shows could be considered an effort to win the Arab mind for a certain cause.

The way Al-Jazeera has portrayed the Arab-Israeli conflict, US Foreign Policy in the Middle East and the American invasion in Iraq has been contested from many (if not all) different sides. As noted before, Al-Jazeera is only pseudo-independent and forced to follow Qatar's foreign policy. Illustration of the latter is the temporarily removal of Wadah Khanfar from the corporate board of the Al-Jazeera group in 2007 for his pro-Hamas sympathies. At that time Qatar was still supporting Fatah. Yet during the Gaza Raid of 2009 Qatar had switched sides and Al-Jazeera was blamed for "flag-waving for Hamas" – something that was even acknowledged by former Al-Jazeera stars including Hafez Mirazi and Yosri Fouda (Pintak, 2011: 67-8).[28]

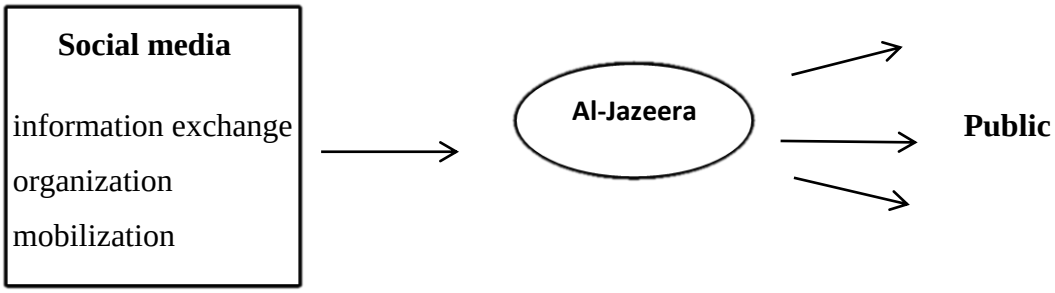
Western governments harbor suspicion about Al-Jazeera's "political agenda". Yet Arab governments are at least as worried, if not even more so. Perhaps rightfully so. As soon as the first Tunisians started to protest the forty-year reign of Tunisian President Ben-Ali Al-Jazeera changed its general news coverage into an anti-dictatorship campaign. As Atef Hijjawi, Program Director of Al-Jazeera Arabic acknowledges:

> 'Al-Jazeera was quick to take a stand supporting Tunisian protesters and their demands. As demonstrations intensified, the station dropped its regular scheduling and opted for an open news cycle, which broadcast news and images from Tunisia as they came in online. The Tunisian audience followed their revolution on Al-Jazeera – the station was already popular in Tunisia before the revolution, due to the absence of trustworthy local media. During the revolution, the Tunisians lifted banners praising Al-Jazeera' (Hijjawi, 2012: 70).

3. *Acting as facilitator*

[28] Yousri Fouda would later play an important role as investigative journalist for Egyptian Satellite-TV channel ONTV.

Over the last couple of years Al-Jazeera has broadcasted an increasing number of activist videos, blog posts, tweets and Facebook-posts. In doing so Al-Jazeera not only bridges the digital divide, but also enhances the credibility of activists and their cause. Without Al-Jazeera most Egyptians would have been unaware of the 2008 Mahalla strikes or the murder of Khaled Said in 2010. Hence the network operates as a platform, not only for the cause of most activists (i.e. freedom, democracy and human rights) but also for the activists themselves (by rebroadcasting their videos for example).



Model 1: Al-Jazeera as Facilitator

6. Conclusion and suggestions for further research

6.1 The interaction of new media in Egypt and the modern Arab world

The revolutionary events of 2011 which have shaken up dictatorial regimes all over North Africa and the Middle East, came to many as a surprise. Just like in 1989 Western policy-makers and analysts tried to get a hold on the unexpected popular uprising, by drawing analogies with the end of Communist Europe and the fall of the Berlin Wall, and taking credit for the "democratic movement" by linking "the Arab revolt" to the advancement of Western technology and the introduction of the Internet.

People – lots of people – make a revolution, not photo-copiers or laptops. Like Morozov correctly notes:

> 'The West has been slow to discover that the fight for democracy wasn't won back in 1989. For two decades, it has been resting on the laurels, expecting that Starbucks, MTV, and Google will do the rest just fine' (2011: ix)

The idea that the revolutionary movements in the Arab world are somehow fashioned or preconfigured by the West is an illusion. Arab activists have their own extremely diverse yet distinctively Arab agenda – mixing democracy with Islamic principles, freedom with pan-Arab ideals.

It is perhaps too early to speak of a real revolution in the Middle East. Yet the events of 2011 are at least revolutionary in the sense that four long-established dictators are now overthrown (President Ben-Ali, President Khadaffi, President Mubarak and President Saleh) and that the so often quoted "Wall of Fear" has finally broken; as is also shown by the ongoing protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain and other Arab countries.

No single day is the same in the streets of Cairo or Damascus. More than sudden unexpected uprisings, the revolutionary events in the Middle East and North Africa are yet another signal of the continuous change in the region. Due to an enormous demographic explosion, mass migration, economic development (and inequality), growing literacy, and technological advancement, the Arab world – after centuries of passive stand-still and stagnation – is now a dynamic, rapidly changing, restless and muggy region. The way alone in which the Arab youth – that big proportion of the population between 18 and 29 in age making up almost two-third of it – think, belief, work and love is already a revolution in itself.

New media – i.e. pan-Arab satellite-TV and social media – *represent* but also *contribute to* and *facilitate* these social developments. Al-Jazeera and other pan-Arab satellite-TV channels have changed the way the Arab public view social and political events in their own region and have given them a voice of their own. Just as Egyptian President Gamel Abdel Nasser united Arabs under the flag of pan-Arabism, pan-Arab satellite-TV unites Arabs worldwide and fosters an image of an unique and distinct Arab identity.

> 'By detecting and highlighting the links that connect Arabs worldwide, Al-Jazeera has become part and parcel to the Arab world. It speaks to and for it' (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003: 20).

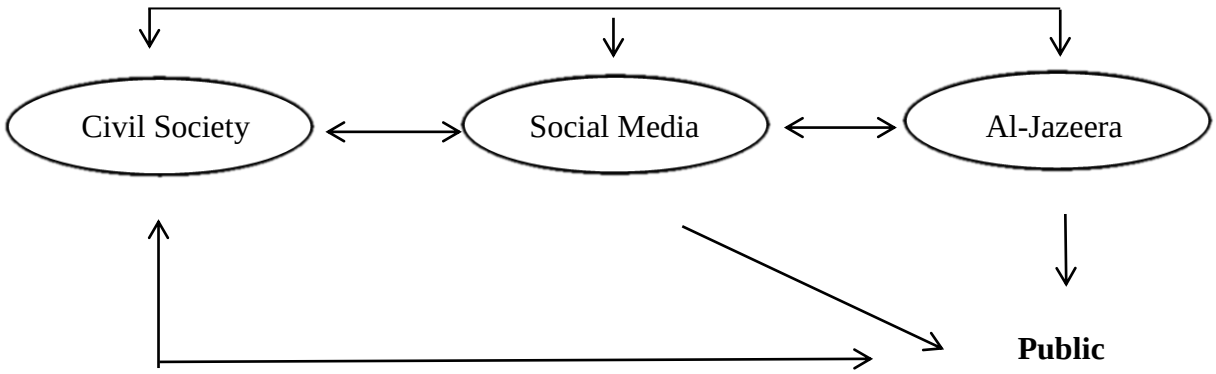
Gamel Abdel Nasser used the airtime of his highly popular "Radio Cairo" to send his message to the world. Now modern technologies like Satellite-TV and the Internet are fighting the battle for the Arab mind. New media do not bring one story: they bring many. "The opinion and the other opinion" as the slogan of Al-Jazeera states. Hence creating socio-political debate and a diversity of public opinions and ideas once unimaginable to the inhabitants of the highly conservative, hierarchical and authoritarian societies of the Middle East.

This thesis' case study of the march towards the historical "18 days" of Egyptian protests in January-February 2011, shows that the revolutionary events in Egypt are not only part of a modular revolutionary movement originally spread from Eastern Europe, but that they are also embedded in ongoing civil unrest and social change.

New Media played an indispensable role in connecting people and places, transforming loose activists into organized groups, and finally bringing the masses to the streets. The news stories of the Colored Revolutions in Eastern Europe and telegenic images of the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon broadcasted by Al-Jazeera (and others) inspired the Kefaya-movement to lead the first public protests against electoral fraud in Egypt.

The April 6 Youth Movement learned from the strategies of Otpor activists via the World Wide Web and used Facebook as a new organizational tool, turning a local strike in an international news story. Videos of violent crack-downs of strikes and protests by Egypt's police and security forces, torture of prisoners and sexual abuse of women, uploaded on YouTube and rebroadcasted by Al-Jazeera crippled the credibility of Egyptian authorities, and resulted in growing opposition against the state.

The emergence of grassroots organizations and radical youth groups, the growing popularity of Al-Jazeera and other pan-Arab channels, and the introduction of the Internet and later social media have changed the Egyptian society from within. The triangle of Egypt's civil society, social media and pan-Arab satellite TV is getting ever more interconnected. It is no coincidence that Al-Jazeera's entry into the Arab media scene was marked by the rebroadcast of an amateur video of the death of Palestinian boy Mohammed al-Durra. Twenty years ago Egyptian girls had no chance of reaching millions of people, yet Esraa Abdel Fatah became world famous simply by opening up a Facebook-page. This interplay between civil society, social media and pan-Arab satellite-TV is. perhaps best visualized by the following model:



Model 2: Interaction of civil society and new media

Last year's revolutionary events in Egypt should be viewed in the light of continuous socio-political change in the streets of Cairo and Alexandria. Large demonstrations will erupt time and again – as was recently seen in the demonstrations following the court's verdict in the "Mubarak trial". The outcome of the "Egyptian Revolution" – if a revolution at all – will remain unclear for at least a couple of years or so. The Egyptian uprising was not a Facebook Revolution – not even a new media revolution. However, new media facilitated it and will remain a driving force behind the social changes in the MENA-region. The era when decade-long takeovers were feasible has passed, as Dickey notes:

> 'There are too many men and women who have too many ways of making their voices heard, whether on the streets or in cyberspace. There's no looking back. These once-closed societies are now open or opening, and that process cannot be reversed. The history of the modern Arab world has only just begun' (2011).

6.2 Suggestions for further research

The emergence of revolutionary movements, the use of Facebook and Twitter in Egypt, or the role of Al-Jazeera and other pan-Arab satellite-TV in the MENA-region all deserve long and extensive research. Interviews with leading scholars, journalists and activists, conduct of opinion polls and survey research and content analysis of Al-Jazeera broadcasts, Facebook posts, YouTube-videos and else, would have added to the still insufficient bulk of knowledge on these new, yet rapidly involving, phenomena.

Given the limited length and size of a master thesis, this research only briefly touched upon most of these issues. I could have restricted myself to the study of only one of three (radical youth movements, social media or Al-Jazeera) – yet given their growing interconnectedness none of these actors should be studied separately.

Most radical youth movements in Egypt started off as a Facebook-page. Egypt's civil society is predominately an online network of bloggers and human right's activists who use social media and content-sharing websites to get their message across. Although Egyptian activists have managed to unite up to half a million Internet users at a time, major pan-Arab satellite-TV can transfer their messages to the masses.

It is in my view this interaction-effect that requires further – more structured and interdisciplinary – research. Soon scholars from the fields of political science, International Relations and communication studies will be forced to study modern-day socio-political phenomena together. There is no such thing as a "Facebook Revolution", but modern-day technology and mass media will keep on changing the world as we know it. Forcing policy-makers, scholars and analysts to look at an ever bigger picture. This thesis was a first attempt in doing so.

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