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The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

**From the Forefront to the Sidelines:  
Youth in Post-Revolution Egypt**

A Thesis Submitted to  
Middle East Studies Center

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts (M.A.) in Middle East Studies

by Khadiga Sami Omar

under the supervision of Dr. Emad El-Din Shahin  
December 2014

## Abstract

This thesis examines the reasons for the declining role of youth as effective political players since the Egyptian Revolution. Particularly looking at the “Revolutionary Youth”, this study investigates why their activism over the course of the past four years could not translate into political power that would lead to the realization of the goals of the revolution. Resource Mobilization Theory, Political Opportunity Structure and Framing constitute a tri-lens through which the political experience of the youth is analyzed in this research. This thesis argues that a) the youth’s organizational dilemma; b) their reliance on protest as the exclusive tool to practice politics; c) and their failure to develop a culturally resonant discourse that attends to people’s socio-economic needs are the reasons for their marginal role in the post-revolution period. Relying on interviews with youth activists as well as a thorough survey of youth movements online pages, this research provides fresh insights evaluating the youth experience and presents a point of departure for further research. By understanding social movements as expressions of youth political engagement, the study also aims to highlight the characteristics and implications the “youthful” nature of the revolution has on the ongoing struggle.

**Keywords:** Youth, Revolutionary Youth, Egypt, Post-Revolution, Social Movement Theories, January 25th

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## **Acronyms**

RMT Resource Mobilization Theory

RYC Revolution Youth Coalition

SMT Social Movement Theory

SMO Social Movement Organization

POS Political Opportunity Structure

## **Chapter 1: Setting the Stage**

### **1.1 Introduction**

“Revolution Youth” is a term that has emerged in the last four years in Egypt acquiring a lot of popularity both in the media and in scholarly studies. After the downfall of Mubarak, the two most organized and established entities, namely the military and the Muslim Brotherhood, were able to direct the political scene while youth, who ignited the revolution, were pushed to the margins. The activism of the revolutionary forces could not translate into political power that would lead to the realization of the goals of the revolution. A plethora of youth-inspired organizations, movements and initiatives emerged over the past four years to occupy the public space and carve an independent path for pushing towards “bread, freedom and social justice,” the main slogans that the revolution raised. However, these efforts were faced with tremendous obstacles and setbacks.

With the newly acclaimed public space the revolution liberated, some youth formed new political parties or joined recently established ones, while others remained as pressure groups preferring to affect the political scene without being part of the official political game. Other groups of youth acted through different affiliations such as students’ movements and soccer fans associations, like the “Ultras.” At different stages throughout the transitional period, various attempts at unification and collaborating efforts appeared through the creation of youth coalitions and revolutionary fronts. The fact remains that the majority of the youth participants in the revolution stayed ‘unorganized’ and the revolution remained disempowered. Occasionally mobilized by the more organized revolutionary groups, these youth remain the vital force of the revolution that is able to tip the balance of power at any given point.

From all the revolution's scenes, two are contrasting and most revealing: January 25, 2011 and July 26, 2013. In a way, these two scenes display the extent of change that has happened in two years. January 25, 2011 represents the youth's power, innovation and ability to mobilize. The scene of Tahrir, filled with tens of thousands of people at night, epitomized the struggles of social movements for freedom, democracy and human rights over a decade preceding 2011. That day is also symbolic in that it attested to the power of social media and the ability of the educated urban middle class youth to reach out to larger segments of the society and ignite the first flames of the uprising. In terms of power balance, the youth who were backed by the people had the upper hand. For the first time, they were on the offensive while the regime was on the defensive. They got to decide collectively their demands and actively push for them. It was a scene of youth empowerment, people's power, hope for the future and a break of the fear barriers.

July 26, 2013 on the other hand, is the exemplification of the complete opposite. That is the day General Abel Fattah al-Sisi asked the people to take to the streets to 'give him a mandate' to fight 'terrorism'. A statement understood by many at the time as a code for a permission to kill the opposition, namely the Muslim Brotherhood, and violently disperse the Raba`a and Nahda sit-ins. The youth and revolutionary forces had great suspicion and reservation against Sisi's request. However, their voices were marginalized. The scene in Tahrir and elsewhere that day represented the antithesis of everything January 25, 2011 stood for: the nation is severely divided and polarized; the masses moved by fear instead of hope for the future; the revolutionaries on the defensive being called traitors and Muslim Brotherhood's sympathizers for their opposition of the rallies. The same people who once demonstrated for freedom and justice were now blinded by fear and hate, bent

on annihilating the opposition. The youth who were once active in orchestrating the scene were pushed aside and had little influence in directing the events on the ground. It was the coronation of the counter-revolution's victory.

These two scenes raise the question of what has changed between those two dates? What made the "Revolutionary Youth" lose their leverage and their ability to affect the political scene? Why were they successful in mobilizing the people during the 18 days of the revolution but lost them to the old regime only two years later? Why weren't the youth movements able to organize effectively to compete with the Muslim Brotherhood and the military? How did they shift from being main actors to marginalized ones over the course of such a short period? These questions represent several aspects that this study will cover.

## **1.2 Research Question and Study Objectives**

This study aims to answer the question of why and how the youth revolutionary movements as a whole transformed from being major actors in January 25, 2011 to being marginal players post June 30, 2013. This is based on the observation that youth played an essential role in organizing and orchestrating the Egyptian Revolution on January 25 and over the 18 days until the downfall of Mubarak. Almost four years into the revolution, these same youth figures and movements are faced with marginalization at best and defaming, persecution and imprisonment at worst. Their political power has greatly declined and their ability to affect the political scene is almost non-existent. Comparing those two historical moments is not the objective of the study, however. What this research is interested in is uncovering the reasons for the failure of the youth to assert themselves as integral and effective actors on the political scene to effect the changes they so ardently advocated.

The study's second objective is to understand the dynamics of social movements in post-revolutionary contexts. What sort of limitations does their form of organization pose on their effectiveness? How do their ideologies and the way they frame their demands affect the desired outcomes? What sort of strategies and tactics are most efficient and best suited to both their function as social movements and the nature of the political period? What sort of transformations occur to them in the process of shifting from revolutionary to political movements? This objective relates to the larger framework of social movements and its findings can be used to understand similar cases in other countries in the Middle East.

Informed by a large body of literature on social movement theories, I will focus on resources and especially organization, political process and framing as the major explanatory factors to answer the main question and the subsequent ones. This thesis argues that a) the youth's organizational dilemma; b) their reliance on protest as the exclusive tool to practice politics; c) and their failure to develop a discourse to attend to people's socio-economic needs are the reasons for their marginal role in the post-revolution period. An overarching theme that runs throughout the thesis is the relationship between the youthful and the revolutionary. By understanding social movements as expressions of youth political engagement, this study aims to highlight the characteristics and implications the "youthful" nature of the revolution has on the ongoing struggle.

### **1.3. Chapter Outline**

This research consists of four chapters in addition to a conclusion. The first chapter explains the objectives of the study and the research question. It situates the issue of youth and revolution in its larger context through a review of the literature. It also presents a conceptual framework giving a brief overview of the three main social

movements theories that the study applies: Resource Mobilization Theory, Political Opportunity Structure and Framing. The conceptual framework also identifies and problematizes the concepts of youth, “Revolutionary Youth” and “youthful revolution” which will be utilized throughout the thesis. Finally, the chapter lays out the methodology used as well as the challenges and limits of the study.

The second chapter explores the youth’s utilization of the different kinds of resources available to them. Most importantly, it examines the modes of organization in the post-Mubarak era. Using Resource Mobilization Theory, the chapter analyzes the effect of the Egyptian revolution’s “leaderless-ness” on the organizational models the different social movements adopted and the effect it had on their ability to mobilize and gain popularity. In addition to organization and human resources represented by leadership, moral, cultural and material resources are also examined.

Chapter three is interested in the political context affecting the youth’s activism. More specifically, it looks at the institutional structures which facilitate or constrain the youth’s realization of their goals. Applying Political Opportunity Structure, this chapter identifies the opportunities the nature of the closed political system and the state’s capacity for repression presented. While structures of the political system imposed restrictions on youth’s access to formal politics, it provided them an opportunity for mobilization. However, opportunities need to be perceived and recognized to be considered opportunities.

In chapter four, the cultural context is examined to understand its effect on the frames the youth used to appeal to the people. Based on the Framing approach, the focus on agency is important to complement the previous chapter on institutional structures. The chapter identifies the frames the youth used for identifying the problem, proposing solutions and calling the people to action. It discusses the reasons

for the failure of many of those frames to reach out to the people. Moreover, I will assess counter-framing and frame contests which the youth have been engaged since January 25<sup>th</sup> and the similarities and differences between their framing by the different post-Mubarak regimes.

Finally, the conclusion argues for the importance of using a three dimensional approach in studying youth movements. It highlights the thesis contribution to the literature on youth movements and reveals the necessity for more specific studies exploring the relationship between the youth and the revolutionary process.

## **1.4 Literature Review**

### *1.4.1 Social Movements in Egypt*

This study draws on a large literature on social movements and particularly youth movements in Egypt and the Middle East. When applied to the Middle East, Social Movement Theory (SMT) has most popularly been used to study modern Islamic movements (e.g. Berna 2008; Donker 2013; Kayhan 2009; Munson 2001; Shahin 1997, Wiktorowicz 2004; Zahedani 1997). More recently, it has also been used to study workers movements in the region (Abdallah 2012; Beinini 2012; El-Mahdi 2009). Since the January 25 Revolution, the role of youth as social movements acquired more prominence and became the focus of study of many scholars from various angles (Abdallah 2013; Cole 2014; Hoffman and Jamal 2012; Shehata 2012). A number of social scientists observe the emergence of a new form of social movements in the region (Abdelrahman 2013; Ezbawy 2012; Herrera 2014). Maha Abdelrahman considers the nature of activism and revolutionary process in Egypt and observes the characteristics of the New Social Movements (NSMs), arguing that the lack of sustainable new organizational structures is one of the great challenges for real revolutionary change in post-Mubarak Egypt. In her work “In Praise of Organization:

Egypt between Activism and Revolution”, Abdelrahman makes the argument that the very features of these movements, once credited for the success of the revolution, now pose serious challenges for the post-Mubarak transformation.<sup>1</sup>

Examining the literature on youth movements in Egypt, three main features become apparent. First, most of the major studies explore social movements in the decade *preceding* the Egyptian Revolution leading up to January 25<sup>th</sup> (Abdelrahman 2014; El-Mahdi & Marfleet 2009; Beinin & Vairel 2013). They focus on the element of continuity and argue that the roots of the revolution go deeper than what appears on the surface. The revolution in their opinion was the culmination of a decade of civil society’s activism in the form of pro-change movements, youth movements, workers movements, and pro-democracy movements. Without the increasing pressure and struggles of all those actors since the early 2000s, the revolution wouldn’t have been possible. Maha Abdelrahman best expresses that argument by the very title of her book *Egypt’s Long Revolution: Protest Movements and Uprisings*. Moreover, she postulates that the characteristics of these new social movements and their form of political mobilization have helped shape the political process since the fall of Mubarak. Rabab El-Mahdi refers to what is known in the literature as “cycles of protest”, observing the array of different but complementary activities of pro-change groups before the revolution.<sup>2</sup> El-Mahdi utilizes the framework of social movements to analyze the rise of pro-democracy movements preceding the 2005 referendum in Egypt; however, she goes beyond the limitations of Opportunity Structure Model<sup>3</sup> and argues for looking closely at the “cycles of contentions that preceded it and energized

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<sup>1</sup> Maha Abdelrahman (2013, May). In Praise of Organization: Egypt Between Activism and Revolution, *Development and Change*. 44 (3), 569–585.

<sup>2</sup> Rabab El-Mahdi and Philip Marfleet (2009). *Egypt: The Moment of Change*. UK: Zed Books. 88.

<sup>3</sup> In brief, the model focuses on fixed political structure e.g. nature of political system as the defining factor in the success or failure of social movements. Opportunity structure model will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.

it through shared personnel and leadership ... communities of protest ... collectively learned tactics, and through creation of space for overcoming ideological divisions”.<sup>4</sup>

Joel Beinin and Frederick Vairel agree with El-Mahdi in critiquing traditional Social Movement Theory. They argue that traditional Political Opportunity Structures (POS) understanding of contexts is narrow, fixed and objectivist. Contexts are never equivalent and the wide discrepancies among authors on the list of variables that represent “opportunities” testify to the limited explanatory claim of the model.<sup>5</sup> Beinin and Vairel observe that the same overly structural undertones are also present in the use of collective frames and mobilizing paradigm where these frameworks are regarded as pre-existing rather than dynamic processes constantly created and developed by leaders and followers in a dialectical way. Going beyond the traditional understanding of SMT, the authors redefine, modify and utilize with more nuances analytical concepts and tools such as ‘informal networks’. The authors focus on three axes: contexts, networks and contentious practices to answer the classical questions of the contribution studying social movements in the Middle East and North Africa can bring to mainstream social theory and also how these new insights enhance our understanding of the region.<sup>6</sup>

Those studies’ story of social -and especially youth- movements in Egypt is essentially one of success coroneted by the removal of Mubarak. Bearing in mind the different approaches and arguments, the analysis is centered on the sources of contention and the reasons for the emergence of protest movements. In the case of Egypt, it stops at the significant moment of the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution eruption and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>5</sup> Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel (Eds.) (2013). *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa* (2nd ed.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 8.

the transition of power to SCAF. The social and historical context they provide is invaluable in understanding the later developments of those movements.

Second, the researchers who went beyond the analysis of the roots of youth activism were preoccupied with the 18 days of Tahrir protest (Ezbawy 2012; Shahin 2012; Shehata 2012) Once again, the story projected is one of triumph that examines the process of bringing down an authoritarian regime. The questions asked have to do with the reasons for their success in mobilization and organization and the dynamics of contentious politics in a revolutionary context. Many of these studies, although descriptive in nature, add important documentation to the literature and draw an elaborate portrait of the movements participating in the January 25<sup>th</sup> protests that could be used for further in-depth analysis.

For example, Yusery Ezbawy's analysis concentrates on the elements of organization and cooperation and how central they were in planning and carrying out the revolution. He surveys the role of youth social movements in instigating the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution and shows the connections between them. Using actor network theory, Ezbawy explains how the absence of a revolutionary leadership was dealt with by the youth through forming new connections (networks) by a series of joint actions (demonstrations).<sup>7</sup> Tackling another aspect of social movement theory, Ezbawy demonstrates how through choosing underdeveloped urban areas as starting points for demonstrations on January 25<sup>th</sup>, youth movements were putting relative depravity concept into action.<sup>8</sup>

Dina Shehata traces youth activism since the beginning and 2000s and provides a useful account on the role of youth movements in January 25<sup>th</sup>. More importantly, she identifies five characteristics unique to those movements: they act

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<sup>7</sup> Yusery Ahmed Ezbawy (2012). The Role of The Youth's New Protest Movements in The January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. *IDS Bulletin*, 43 (1), 26–36.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

outside of parties and traditional organizations, they take place off-university campus, they are non or trans-ideological, and they make extensive use of information technology.<sup>9</sup> Shehata's account is informative and helps situate youth movements in their historical context; however, further studies are needed to examine the development of these characteristics in the post-Mubarak era and the extent of change and appropriation that occurred to them.

Third, there is a disproportionate focus on the role of Facebook and social media in instigating the Revolution and youth movement activities in the literature. Many studies on youth and revolutionary movements in the Middle East accord social media the primary role, giving the impression that the youth were able to change the regime essentially through the use of technology. They highlight the role of the Internet in the success of the revolution, the formation of new collective identity and call by consequence to further utilization of social media (Baron 2012; Bliuc 2013; Eltantawy & Wiest 2011). Some go as far as arguing that digital activism in Egypt since the 1990s and blogging in particular (in combination with protest movements and the press) are the root cause of the 2011 uprising (e.g. Faris 2012). However, many authors also engage the topic more skeptically and point to the limitations of using social media as the overarching framework of analysis (e.g. Sayed 2012; El-Mahdi 2011). Others, taking a moderate position direct attention to often less-studied aspects such as the difference between tactical and strategic uses of social media (e.g. Gerbaudo 2012).

Focusing almost exclusively on the Facebook page 'We are All Khaled Said', Linda Herrera traces its origins, and follows through the different phases of the page's developments as events unfold. However, Herrera asks larger questions on whether

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<sup>9</sup> Dina Shehata (2012). Youth Movements and the 25 January Revolution. In Korany, B. & El-Mahdi, R. (Eds.) *The Arab Spring in Egypt and Beyond*. Cairo: AUC press. 104-124. 117-118.

the balance of power could be shifted by the youth movements' use of technology for organization, expression, mobilization and discussion. Herrera explores how the virtual world can transform into battle sites where the youth movements' mastering of technological tools is faced by increasingly efficient ways of monitoring, containing and cooptation by more powerful entities using the same tools. The author seems to conclude, however, that pro-democracy youth movements that are oriented towards fighting corrupt and autocratic regimes remain at an advantage in the digital age.

Luis Fernando Baron tries to critically engage the debate on the “Facebook Revolution” by prefacing that a careful consideration of youth organizations and networks as well as larger history of social and protest movements in Egypt is necessary to put things in context. Nevertheless, he makes the case that Informational and Communication Technologies (ICTs) was not only essential in the formation of the largest youth movement, April 6<sup>th</sup>, but it was also instrumental in “reporting, framing, and discussing sociopolitical mobilization in Egypt”<sup>10</sup> as well as calling for action, organization and conduction of protests. Furthermore, ICTs represented a space for youth political engagement and identification providing them with alternative arenas of political debate and action.<sup>11</sup> An analysis shared by Nahed Eltantawy and Julie B. Wiest who explore the use of social media by youth movement during 2011 Revolution to reconsider the parameters of the Resource Mobilization Theory. They argue that social media should be incorporated as an integral resource for mobilization and organization in modern social movements.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Luis Fernando Baron (2012). More Than a Facebook Revolution: Social Movements and Social Media in the Egyptian Arab Spring. *International Review of Information Ethics*, 18, 86-92. 86

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Nahed Eltantawy and Julie Wiest (2011) The Arab Spring! Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory. *International Journal Of Communication*. 5 Feature 1207–1224.

Aouragh and Alexander (2011) attempt to offer an understanding of the dialectical relationship between the online and offline political activity. They hold that the two cannot have meaning or be understood in isolation from one another. However, they make the salient argument that Twitter and Facebook, commonly referred to as social networks, are in fact not social networks but social tools; the people are the social network.<sup>13</sup> In contradiction to Baron who perceived social media as having a decisive role in the creation, sustainability and development of April 6<sup>th</sup> Youth Movement and increasing the “size, speed and reach of activism” at large, Aouragh and Alexander consider social media only as a medium that provided alternative mechanism to spread the message.

Using Framing, one of social movements paradigms, Manaf Bashir analyzes the portrayal of online activism by youth movements. Taking the case study of April 6<sup>th</sup> Youth Movement, he concludes that the movement’s leaders and participants’ performance of the three social movements framing tasks (i.e. diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames) were similar. The significance of this study lies in offering possibilities for a better understanding of diverse frames used by leaders and participants of youth movements especially as the latter are gaining more agency.

The focus on the online aspect particularly the use of technology and social media in social movement mobilization and development and also in the formation of ideas and identities is definitely important. However, that analysis ignores other important aspects and neglects the fact that those who have no access to the Internet are the majority in the country. Also drawing a direct causal relationship between Facebook and the Egyptian Revolution is reductionist if not overly naïve. In Herrera’s words “Facebook is no more responsible for Egypt’s revolution than Gutenberg’s

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<sup>13</sup> Miriyam Aouragh and Anne Alexander (2011). The Arab Spring| The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of the Internet Revolution”. *International Journal of Communication*, 5. 1351

printing press with movable type was responsible for the Protestant Reformation in the fifteenth century”<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, the role of the Internet and online media in shaping and shifting the political consciousness of this generation is worthy of consideration but is at many times exaggerated.<sup>15</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the Arabic literature by and large, in contradiction to my expectations, proved to be of secondary use. This could be due to the fact that the majority of prominent Egyptian scholars in political science and sociology opt to write in English. In any case, many of the academic studies in Arabic I examined were in great part descriptive and at many times lacked an argument. Others were too absorbed in details while the majority were of a journalistic nature providing a lot of valid ideas but often lacking clear theoretical frameworks. Exceptions to this, which turned out to be useful, include Arab Forum for Alternatives studies, in particular George Fahmi’s paper “Youth Movements Post January 25<sup>th</sup>”, Omar Khalaf’s “Youth Political Participation after the Revolution” and the collective work “Untraditional Patterns of Youth Political Participation Before, During and After the Revolution”.

As can be noticed from this brief literature overview, youth movements in Egypt have been studied extensively from various perspectives. There is need to extend the research in terms of timeframe to cover Mohamed Morsi and Abdel Fattah al-Sisi presidencies which are often missing from the analyses. It is also timely that research goes beyond the utopic experience of Tahrir and pose new questions with regard to the role of youth movements in post-revolutionary/ transitional periods, the transition from the revolutionary to the political and the changes occurring to the movements in the process in terms of structures, ideas, strategies and tactics.

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<sup>14</sup> Linda Herrera (2012) Revolution 2.0: The Facebook Factor. In Haddad, B., Bsheer, R., & Abu-Rish, Z., (Eds.) *The dawn of the Arab uprisings: End of an old order?* London, UK: Pluto Press. 91.

<sup>15</sup> For example see McGarty, C., Thomas, E. F., Lala, G., Smith, L. G. E. and Bliuc, A. M. (2014), New Technologies, New Identities, and the Growth of Mass Opposition in The Arab Spring. *Political Psychology*, 35: 725–740.

Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly's chapter on contentious politics, of which social movement is the most studied form, summarizes the major debates, approaches, and theories regarding social movements. Written in 2009 based on and referencing the famous trio's work over the three preceding decades, that chapter does a remarkable job contextualizing the different concepts related to contentious politics, social movements processes, dynamics, and problematiques. The authors survey the development of the field since the 1960s when studying contentious politics first became popular among American and later on European scholars. In their survey, the three sociologists highlight the three main trends within social movement theory: Political Process Model, Resource Mobilization, and Framing reflecting the structural, rational and constructivist approaches respectively. This will be explained in more details in the theoretical framework.

#### *1.4.2 Significance of the study*

This thesis will add to the literature in a number of ways. First, it builds on the already established work on social movements before the Egyptian Revolution to present the journey of the youth post-the revolution. It will fill a gap in the literature concerning the relationship between the youthful and the revolutionary.

Second, it will assess the applicability and usefulness of the use of models such as SMT and NSMs to understand and analyze youth movements in Egypt. Using social movements theory to study the youth in post-revolution Egypt, this study posits new horizons for developing the theory to suit revolutionary situations and suggests prospects for including different factors of analysis specific to each case.

Third, the mapping of youth's political activity across the four years since the revolution is an endeavor that has not been exhaustively taken before. This research will present a valuable addition in presenting a comprehensive overview both in terms

of scope of actors and the timeframe covered to help future researchers studying the Egyptian youth.

Fourth, this study, using youth as a category of social analysis, strikes a balance between acknowledging the differences between the youth groups and not dealing with them as one homogeneous group and at the same time observing the common characteristics and patterns. My research allows for a flexible application of social movement theory that takes into action the nature of the political and cultural context in Egypt. I acknowledge the useful tools and concepts the theory offers in analysis yet I make sure they serve the purpose of direction not determination.

## **1.5 Conceptual Framework**

### *1.5.1 Social Movement Theories*

This research utilizes social movements theory as the main framework of analysis. In this section I will go briefly over the definition of social movement and the main theoretical tenants I will depend on. Specific variables of analysis will be discussed in each chapter more elaborately. Social movements is a term widely used to cover “most or all of the overlap between contention and collective action.”<sup>16</sup> It falls under the more general field of contentious politics, which has acquired prominence since the 1990s. The hallmark of contentious politics is common people’s ability to exert power by disruptive means setting in motion important political and social changes.<sup>17</sup> Contentious politics happens when “ordinary people – often in alliance with more influential citizens and with changes in the public mood – join forces in confrontation with the elites, authorities and opponents”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Doug McAdam, Sydney Tarrow & Charles Tilly (2009). *Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics*. In Lichbach, M. I. & Zuckerman, A. S. (Eds.) *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press. 277.

<sup>17</sup> Sidney G. Tarrow (2011) *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press. 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

Social movements is one form of contentious politics (perhaps the most studied), however, it has certain characteristics that differentiate it from other forms of contention such as civil wars. At the core of social movement is *contentious collective action*. Collective action becomes contentious when it is used by people with no consistent access to representative institutions who act on behalf of new or unaccepted claims behaving in a way that essentially challenges their opponents (usually the state).<sup>19</sup>

According to Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, there are three defining features to social movements: 1) “sustained campaigns of claim making”, and 2) “an array of public performances”. These include public meetings and statements, demonstrations, rallies, letter writing, press releases and lobbying. 3) And finally “repeated public display of worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment” (WUNC). This is done through wearing certain colors, chanting slogans, carrying signs, among others.<sup>20</sup> Donatella Della Porta, and Mario Diani identify four features for social movements: 1) They have informal interactions networks “between a plurality of individuals, groups and organizations”, which can range between being loosely organized and dispersed to being highly organized<sup>21</sup>; 2) collective identity which is displayed through having common beliefs and solidarity; 3) “collective action focusing on conflict”, 4) finally, protest is used by social movements as a form of action.<sup>22</sup> The combination of these four factors results in forming social movements.

After half of a century of theorizing social movements, three approaches have consolidated their presence in the field. None can be used independently to explain

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (2006). *Contentious Politics*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Press. Chapters 1 and 6.

<sup>21</sup> Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani (2006). *Social Movements: An Introduction*. (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

social movements. In this study, I build on previous scholars' efforts to synthesize and combine elements from each theoretical approach to study youth movements in Egypt.

The first strand of theories reflecting a rational choice model can be grouped under the *Resource Mobilization Theory*, which focuses on motivations that encourage or discourage popular mobilization and collective action. Appearing in the 1960s, this perspective essentially developed from the field of economics. The American economist Mancur Olson is one pioneer of this approach whose work on collective action focused on the reasons people de-mobilize rather than mobilize.<sup>23</sup> Olson argues that individuals based on rational choice may very well avoid taking action when they perceive others as doing so on their behalf. This puzzle known as the free rider dilemma was later specified by Mark Lichback as “the rebel’s dilemma”.<sup>24</sup> It became the subject of study by social movements scholars ever since. John McCarthy and Mayer Zald introduced a theory that focuses on professional movement organizations in response to Olson. Emphasizing the leadership aspect and shifting away from the effect of grievances on collective action, the theory posits that the success of social movements depends on their ability to make use of resources through organizational means.<sup>25</sup> These resources are not limited to material ones but include human, moral, socio-organizational and cultural resources.<sup>26</sup>

Based on the fact that social movements do not operate in a vacuum, a second approach concerned with exogenous factors and the context within which social movements act developed. *Political Opportunity Structure* reflects the structural

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<sup>23</sup> McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly. *Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics*, 268.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*.

<sup>25</sup> McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly. *Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics*, 269.

<sup>26</sup> Bob Edwards and John D. McCarthy (2007). Resources and Social Movement Mobilization. In Snow, D. A. & Soule, S. A. & Kriesi, H. (Eds.) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 116–152. 118.

paradigm perceiving collective action as both a response and an influence on institutional politics.<sup>27</sup> Based on several scholars' conceptions of dimensions of political opportunity,<sup>28</sup> four factors relating to the environment affect the movement's ability to mobilize can be summarized: 1) openness/closeness of the regime 2) stability of political alignments 3) presence/absence of elite allies 4) the state's capacity for repression.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, there is no agreement among scholars regarding the variables that constitute "opportunities" to explain the effects of the same context on different movements. In his comparative article, Marco Giugni presents four kinds of opportunities that deserve special attention: discursive opportunities, specific opportunities, perceived opportunities and the shift from conditions to mechanisms.<sup>30</sup> The political process model contrary to what the name suggests does not provide specific mechanisms to study the process of contention. Each scholar presents a different set of variables. It has to be used with other elements of social theory to be able to connect different aspects of the model to one another.

The third major paradigm is constructivism reflected in *Framing Process* and drawing on older collective behavior approach and culture analysis<sup>31</sup>. Framing refers to the social movement's construction of meaning by creating an "interpretative scheme"<sup>32</sup> that simplifies the world and assign meaning (frame) to itself, events and

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly. *Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics*, 266.

<sup>28</sup> For a comprehensive comparison between the different authors on those variables see *Comparative Perspectives Social Movements*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Doug McAdam (1996) Political Opportunities: Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions. In Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald (Eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 23- 40. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Marco Giugni (2009). Political Opportunities: From Tilly to Tilly. *Swiss Political Science Review* 15 (2), 361–68.364.

<sup>31</sup> More details about different approaches and theories of contention politics can be found in chapter 10 of Mark Irving Lichbach, Alan S. Zuckerman, and Thomas J. Watson, Jr. Institute for International Studies (Brown University).

<sup>32</sup> Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 142.

opponents to mobilize supporters.<sup>33</sup> David Snow, Donatella Della Porta, and Robert Benford are among the pioneers of that theory. With its focus on the construction of meaning and the role of ideas in sustaining a movement and its chances of success, framing processes theory completes the triangle for understanding social movements.

### 1.5.2 *The Definition of Youth*

Youth is often defined in biological terms comprising different age ranges according to the entity issuing the definition. For example, in Egypt the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) defines the youth as those between the ages of 18-29 while the UN defines them as those between 15-24.<sup>34</sup> The African Youth Charter, on the other hand, defines youth as anyone between the ages 15-35.<sup>35</sup> Although these are all valid definitions of the youth, none of them is exclusively used in this research<sup>36</sup>. Instead of focusing *solely* on the age-based definitions, I deal with youth as a social construct that provides more room for understanding the dynamics that exceeds the boundaries of age and delve into the realm of ideas, habitus, and expressions. Indeed, there is an important biological aspect that could not be overlooked; however, the concept is more comprehensive and lucid to be restricted in fixed ages. Asef Bayat goes as far as arguing that young people are not by default “youth”. Rather, they *become* youth as a social category that is turning into social actors.<sup>37</sup> This is based on his argument that youth is mainly a modern and urban social construct owing to the mass education, mass media and

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<sup>33</sup> Doug McAdam (1996). The Framing Function of Movement Tactics. In McAdam, D., McCarthy, J. D., & Zald, Mayer N. (Eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 275–290. 339.

<sup>34</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Definition of Youth <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> During the Egyptian Revolution, young people in their early teen years played a variety of important roles noticeably on January 28 and in Mohamed Mahmoud. Their participation was portrayed differently as the events unfolded on the ground. It would be interesting to examine that in further detail; however, it is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>37</sup> Asef Bayat (2013). *Life As Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (2nd ed.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 109.

urban public spaces.<sup>38</sup> In Egypt, a phenomenon such as ‘marriage waitness’ imposes on many youth an “extension of their youth” as their transition to adulthood by marriage is postponed.<sup>39</sup>

In Egypt, those between the ages 18-29 according to CAPMAS’s most recent statistics, constitutes around twenty millions Egyptians, half of whom are under the poverty line.<sup>40</sup> This latter part of the information is essential because in talking about the revolutionary youth, analysts and commentators often overlook the fact that half of them are hardly if ever represented in political movements and parties. The Egyptian youth had ample reasons to participate in the revolution. As previously mentioned, Egypt is a very young country with 24 as the median age, meaning that half the population is under 24. Politically and economically, the youth suffered from exclusion. Additionally, the youth carried the brunt of unemployment. According to CAPMAS 70.8% of the unemployed in Egypt are youth under the age of 29. Moreover, with regard to the level of education, 84.5% of the unemployed held high school and college degrees.<sup>41</sup> Youth have the highest stakes in democratic transition as they have the future ahead of them and a life to look forward to. With high level of education and exposure, the youth’s expectations increased and consequently their frustrations with the realities in Egypt.

### 1.5.3 “Revolutionary Youth”

The term “Revolutionary Youth” is a complex term that has no single definition. Over the past four years, it has been used and misused in different contexts

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>39</sup> Sina Birkholz (2013, March). “Confronting Gerontocracy – The Youthful Character of The Egyptian Revolution”, Working Paper No. 9. Center for North African and Middle Eastern Politics. Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin. 20.

<sup>40</sup> MENA (2012, August,12). Youth are Quarter of Egypt's Population, and Half of Them are Poor. *Egypt Independent*. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/youth-are-quarter-egypt-s-population-and-half-them-are-poor>

<sup>41</sup> Sara Aggour (2013, November 17). Unemployment Rates Reach 13.4% in 3Q 2013. *Daily News Egypt*. <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/11/17/unemployment-rates-reach-13-4-in-3q-2013/>

for various intentions by different actors. While some believe there is no such thing as “Revolutionary Youth” and that this is simply a media creation that perceived in the “Facebook urban middle class educated youth” a presentable model for a peaceful and civilized revolution; others believe there is no escape from the fact there existed a solid core of youth activists whose role has been essential for the revolution and by sharing certain characteristics can be considered a social category.

In this research I examine those youth who took part in the planning of the revolution, actively participated in it and remained politically or civically engaged throughout the post- Mubarak period. *Shabab Al-Thawra*, literally translated to “the youth of the revolution”, presents a more accurate depiction of the concept than “Revolutionary Youth”, which confers a revolutionary quality that may be contested. However, since the term “Revolutionary Youth” is commonly used in the media and scholarly studies, I will use it in this research to maintain consistency. At many times, I simply use the term “youth” for the sake of simplicity.

Many studies on the topic in Egypt deal with the youth as one homogenous group that act with the same mindset. They tend to focus on the role the youth played in organizing the revolution, often romanticizing it and falling into a lot of generalizations. In this research, I try to deal with revolutionary youth as a social group sharing many common features and aspirations for the future while acknowledging their different articulations of their demands and visions for the country. While it is important to note the role the youth have played in the revolution, it is equally important not to fall into the traps of oversimplification and idealizing of the notion. In my analysis, I deal with Revolutionary Youth as a social movement that encompasses many Social Movement Organizations (SMOs). Put differently, Revolutionary Youth is considered the social umbrella advocating for change. Entities

such as Revolution Youth Coalition, 6<sup>th</sup> of April, Revolutionary Socialists, We are All Khaled Said, and others are considered different SMOs –“formal organizations that take the collective pursuit of social change as a primary goal”.<sup>42</sup> This allows for a two-level analysis that avoids getting consumed in specificities or over generalizing.

#### *1.5.4 Youthful Revolution*

The role of youth in revolutions is not something new or unique to the Egyptian case. Historically, in revolutions, youth often were the majority of participants for reasons having to do with physical ability and having fewer responsibilities. So why is it then that the Egyptian Revolution has been called a “youth revolution” before the “popular revolution” narrative became mainstream? The issue is not just one of numbers. The mere large participation of youth does not make the Egyptian revolution a youth revolution. Instead of defining a movement according to the age of its participants and the identity of its actors at large, scholars like Asef Bayat advocate that it is the nature of demands and the causes adopted by the movement which define its nature.<sup>43</sup> The fact that the youth were at the core of the revolution *as youth* gave the struggle a generational dimension that could not be overlooked. While “youth” refers to an age range, “youthful” refers to the attributes and features associated with that phase of being young.<sup>44</sup> Age is an important factor but the choices and demands informed by that age are equally important. As one activist noted: “It is a generational struggle but on the level of ideas as well and not only age”.<sup>45</sup> It is a struggle between the old and the new, the conventional and the

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<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Tim Bartley (2007) Social Movement Organizations. In George Ritzer (ed.) *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. vol IX 4440-4443. 4440.

<sup>43</sup> Bayat, *Life as Politics* 107.

<sup>44</sup> Birkholz, *Confronting Gerontocracy* 9.

<sup>45</sup> Ahmed Adel, Author interview, December 2014

innovative, the past and the future. To be revolutionary even if one did not belong to the youth age range meant to be youthful on some level.<sup>46</sup>

“Youthfulness” has been a quality painting the Egyptian Revolution, the actors and the discourse involved. Even the traditional players had to engage with the youth discourse and adapt their rhetoric and tools to keep up with the changing developments and look “younger”.<sup>47</sup> The youthful character of the revolution imposed itself as an authentic part of the political equation that had to be contended with. The effects of the Egyptian Revolution on social media are beyond the scope of this study but it is one manifestation of how the youth were able to establish new ways of communication and practicing journalism as realities in the Egyptian context. In brief, the purpose of this section was to argue for the importance of including youth and youthfulness as useful factors in analyzing revolutionary activities.

## **1.6 Methodology**

### *1.6.1 Interviews*

This research takes a qualitative socio-political approach using a variety of primary and secondary sources to analyze the demise of youth as political actors. Depending on interviews, I conducted 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews with members from a variety of youth movements as well as many other informal discussions and conversations<sup>48</sup>. I do not claim nor do I aim to present a

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<sup>46</sup> In her MA thesis, Sanaa El-Banna defines generations in terms of political culture rather than age groups. The concept of political generation defined as “*a group of people who have been subject to common social and political (...) influences and circumstances that shape their political values, attitudes, and signify their sharing of an essential destiny*” proves especially relevant to this thesis. For more details see Sanaa El-Banna, (2012) *Divided, They Win? A Case Study of the New Political Generation in Egypt since 25th January 2011*. M.A. Thesis, The American University in Cairo, Egypt.

<sup>47</sup> For example for the first time during the SCAF's rule Facebook became "the official" channel for communicating the military council's communiqués before they got announced on national TV or published in the official paper. Essam Sharaf the first Prime Minister after the revolution created a Facebook page for the first time with the aim of directly communicating with the youth.

<sup>48</sup> Some of the interviews appearing in the list of interviews were not directly quoted in this thesis but helped inform research and the general argument of the thesis.

representative sample of the youth. This study is by no way intended to be an ethnography; rather, the interviews are used as additional primary sources to substantiate the arguments made. I am aware of the inherent bias in my research towards the urban educated middle class youth being more accessible and within my circle of acquaintances. However, the aim of those interviews is to show the diversity of political background and action among some of the youth who acquired leadership positions in their movements over the past four years since the revolution and came to be known as “Revolutionary Youth”.

Although it is impossible and probably counterproductive in a study with such scope to cover all youth movements, initiatives, groups and entities, I tried to be as diverse as possible by interviewing youth from the most active and effective youth social movements, political parties as well as independent activists. This included current and former youth members from: April 6 Movement Masr Al-Qawiya, Al-Tayyar Al-Masry, Al-Dostour, Revolution Youth Coalition, Revolutionary Socialists, Revolution Path Front (Thowar), and unaffiliated youth.

At each phase of the transitional period, certain youth entities arose on the political scene and acquired prominence. For example, during the SCAF's time, the Revolution Youth Coalition was the first attempt at youth unification and creating a unified front and for a year and a half it was regarded by some as the representative of the revolution. During Sisi's rule many new groups appeared such as Revolution Path Front. These two groups as examples of youth's unification endeavors as well as other actors will be referred to throughout the analysis whenever appropriate.

The interviews were conducted over the summer and fall of 2014. As I have been fairly active myself within different circles of activists and kept close ties with different initiatives and movements since January 25 Revolution, I believe this

provided an element of trust, making my job smoother and more productive. Some of the youth I interviewed had to leave the country in fear for their safety. In that case, Skype interviews were used.

### *1.6.2 Other Primary and Secondary Sources*

Given the youthful nature of the topic, a lot of useful material could be found in informal websites and blogs, I did my best to cite all sources whenever possible. Since all youth movements have constantly up to date Facebook pages, this constituted a major primary source I referred to for specific statements and articulation of positions. In addition, being a native Arabic speaker allowed me to follow official and local independent newspapers for data and a variety of views. This is in addition to scholarly articles and books, especially for the theoretical framework.

### *1.6.3 Challenges and Opportunities*

There are a number of challenges in a study of this sort. First, the events in Egypt are still unfolding and the political scene is pretty much fluid and in constant flux. Although the study is time bound, the ongoing events affect the analysis of the past period and necessitates continuous development of approach to set things in perspective. Attempting to engage a topic so contemporary feels like constantly trying to shoot a moving target. Nevertheless, the timeliness of the topic adds more value to the study and can help direct future research.

Second, being part of the youth myself and being engaged and greatly invested in the topic is something that cannot be overlooked. In fact, an essential component to the thesis is the personal motivation behind it. However, being aware of my inherit bias, I am able to recognize the shortcomings of my own analysis and turn this challenge into an opportunity for a more in touch with the ground study. In fact, more

studies are needed from young activists/scholars who could add to the theoretical discussions an insider perspective as well as a passionate and critical self-evaluation.

Third, many of the concepts employed throughout the thesis are of arbitrary and controversial nature. The definition and conception of youth itself the main concept of this research is a task that could merit a study on its own. The same could be said about the revolutionary. Nevertheless, it is by engaging with these concepts that a better and more nuanced understandings could be developed. This challenge may actually be an opportunity for suggesting new conceptions for understanding taken-for-granted categories.

## Chapter 2: In search of Organization

*"Those who want liberty must organize as effectively as those who want tyranny."*

Iyad al-Baghdadi, an Arab activist

### 2.1 Introduction

Using John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald's comprehensive definition of social movements as "a set of preferences for social change within a population"<sup>49</sup>, revolutionary youth in Egypt constitute a social movement. By revolutionary youth I mean those youth who took part in the preparation and implementation of the demonstrations on January 25<sup>th</sup> and continued to believe and strive for the ideals of the revolution<sup>50</sup>. But because those youth are diverse and have different interpretations of what "bread, freedom and social justice" mean in action, it is indispensable to study another closely related concept – social movement organizations (SMOs). SMOs are "named" groups that seek to realize the social change goals of the social movement using various tactics and strategies.<sup>51</sup> The distinction between these two concepts SM and SMOs is important to avoid generalizations, or even romanticization of the youth potential and at the same to allow for the possibility of understanding and assessing their activities realistically. In other words, what this thesis seeks to achieve is a balanced analysis that acknowledges the youth's heterogeneity while observing the common features they exhibit and the similar challenges they face as one group sharing the same formative experiences.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Bob Edwards and Patrick F. Gillham (2013). Resource Mobilization Theory. In David A. Snow, Donatella della Porta, Bert Klandermans, and Doug McAdam (Eds.). *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 1096-1101. 1096

<sup>50</sup> For more elaboration on how the terms youth and revolution youth are used throughout the thesis please see the conceptual framework in chapter 1.

<sup>51</sup> Edwards and Gillham. Resource Mobilization Theory, 1096

<sup>52</sup> Formative experiences refer to the events witnessed by a group in similar age-location in history. According to Strauss and Howe's Generational Theory, those similar early-life experiences shape the generation's political outlook in comparable ways and lead them to develop "similar collective personas". In the context of Egypt, the global/regional formative political experiences for those born in the late 70s and 80s include the second Palestinian Intifada, 9/11, the war on Afghanistan and Iraq. On

This thesis starts with the premise that revolutionary movement cannot be adequately understood without taking into account the generational aspect. Understanding revolutionary movements essentially as manifestations of youth activities, this chapter delves into the first factor in analyzing youth's demising role from the forefront to the margins – resources.

## **2.2 Resource Mobilization Theory**

Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) is one approach in Social Movement Theory (SMT) focusing on the importance of resources in the development and success of social movements. The theory posits that the available form of resources shapes the movement's development and that the ability to utilize it determines the movement's success. Because of the basic premise of RMT, many studies utilize resources as a primary factor in understanding the emergence, development and success of a social movement or social movement organization but without specifically referencing the approach. This is due to the fact that the main concepts and principles of the theory have been so mainstreamed and internalized in the literature that they have become “taken for granted”<sup>53</sup>. However, a careful application of the theory can provide useful insights into the processes of social movements.

Influenced by economics, social theorists, for a long time, have dealt with resources as being mainly financial or material ones. Others critiqued the model for considering ‘everything a resource’.<sup>54</sup> Understanding the nature of resources is essential before determining their use-value to social movements and the extent to

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the local level the 2005 presidential elections and the 2010 parliamentary elections are two other events. For more details see Strauss and Howe, *Generations*. 1991.

<sup>53</sup> Bob Edwards and Melinda Kane (2014). Resource Mobilization and Social and Political Movements. In Hein-Anton van der Heijden and Edwards Elgar (eds.). *The Handbook of Political Citizenship and Social Movements*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA. 205-233. 208.

<sup>54</sup> Bob Edwards and John D. McCarthy (2007). Resources and Social Movement Mobilization. In David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.). *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. 116- 151.

which access to them could be controlled.<sup>55</sup> In this chapter, I follow a fivefold typology developed by Edwards and McCarthy's, consisting of human, social-organizational, moral, cultural, and material resources<sup>56</sup> to analyze Egyptian youth's resource mobilization experience over the past four years.

Human resources constitute a tangible category comprising labor, experience and skills. For the expertise and skills of the members to be of added value they have to fit the movement or organization's needs. Leadership is an important component included in this category as it combines more than one human resource. The effect of leadership could be tremendous on the movement or the organization determining its success or failure. In the light of the leaderless-ness of the Egyptian Revolution with its ensuing consequences, human resources will be given special attention in analysis.

The second type of resources is social-organizational resources. This category includes intentional social organization created specifically to advance the goals of the movement as well as appropriable organizations created as nonmovements with actors using them to access other types of resources.<sup>57</sup> Social organizational resources take three general forms: infrastructures, social networks, and organizations. Access to these resources obviously varies with infrastructures being nonproprietary social resources. The two other resources will be carefully analyzed further on to explain the youth's inability to penetrate state organizations.

Legitimacy is the most studied form of moral resources. However, moral resources also include the support and sympathy of the people and celebrity figures. These forms of resources tend to develop outside the social movement or organization and are conferred by an external actor. Therefore, they can be considered less accessible and more proprietary than other resources. This could be observed in youth

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 127.

political parties created after the presidential elections in Egypt such as Masr Al-Qawiya, Al-Dostour and Al-Tayyar Al-Sha`abi, which sought to make use of the celebrity figures Abdelmoneim Aboul Fotouh, Mohamed AlBaradei, and Hamdeen Sabahi respectively to gain legitimacy.

The way Edwards and McCarthy define cultural resources, as cultural products that include specialized knowledge and conceptual tools, emphasizes their relative and context-specific quality. Among the cultural resources according to them is “tacit knowledge about how to accomplish specific tasks like enacting a protest event, holding a news conference, running a meeting, forming an organization, initiating a festival, or surfing the web.”<sup>58</sup> These resources are not universal.

Finally, material resources are the most tangible and analytically studied resources. They combine physical and financial capital most notably money. Money is definitely important for the sustainability of social movements and organizations, Youth movements in Egypt have proved successful in bringing down Mubarak’s regime with very few monetary resources available. However, the same could not be said about the youth partisan experience, which failed to a great extent because of lack of funds.

It is worth noting that the mere presence of these resources does not automatically make them available to potential social actors. For resources to be useful, they have to be both present in a specific socio-historical context and to be accessible to those actors. Resources also vary spatially and geographically with crucial resources concentrating more at the core than at the periphery. This leads theorists to expect mobilization to correlate more strongly with the availability of

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 126.

resources rather than with the geographic distribution of grievances or injustices<sup>59</sup>. This could be observed in the Egyptian revolution where mobilization did not occur mainly in Upper Egypt although it suffered more significantly from injustice and marginalization and instead took place in urban Cairo and the Delta.

There are various mechanisms to access these resources. Four main mechanisms are essential: Aggregation, self-production, appropriation and patronage.<sup>60</sup> Aggregation refers to the ways an SMO harnesses the resources by converting resources held by individuals to collective resources that could be utilized by the organization. This could include aggregating monetary resources held by others through the form of donations or aggregating moral resources by producing and publicizing lists of endorsements by public figures, for example. Self-production is the second mechanism by which movements can secure resources. As the name indicates, it is an essential mechanism to generate resources for any movement as it depends on its own members in producing them. Appropriation concerns the ways a movement can make use of previously aggregated resources by other organizations. It is important to note once more that these sources need not to be material. It could also refer to the cooptation of discourse, social networks or moral authority.<sup>61</sup> Finally, patronage is the gaining of access to resources through a “sponsoring” organization or person. Its most common form is financial patronage whereby an organization specialized in patronage (e.g. foundation grant) would provide an SMO with necessary money for their activities. In Egypt, youth movements used a combination of those mechanisms to acquire resources relying primarily on aggregation and self-production. Monetary patronage relationships proved to be the most difficult to

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>60</sup> Bob Edwards and Patrick F. Gillham (2013). Resource Mobilization Theory, 1097.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 1098.

secure, as youth's goals were often at odd with the successive regimes following Mubarak while local NGOs support was modest given their limit capacity.

This chapter will apply the five types of resources on revolution youth with focus on human resources and social-organizational resources. Other resources will also be examined briefly. The main part of the chapter, interested in the question of organization, will explore the youth's organizational dilemma to understand its effect on the mobilization of the other resources and provide one explanation of why some youth movements were more successful in developing sustainable and effective organizations than others. It also explains why the youth as a whole were unable to organize effectively.

In this regard, this chapter studies organizational structure and leadership not only as resources themselves but more importantly it considers them the lens through which the utilization of other resources can be analyzed. This is in accordance with a large body of literature interested in the creation and characteristics of SMOs using resources in combination with the two other analytical tools: frames and political opportunity.<sup>62</sup>

## **2.3 Human Resources**

### *2.3.1 Leadership*

Leadership is one of the most studied forms of human resources for it combines a number of human resources such as skills and experience. It is also important because it directly affects the mobilization of other resources. One of the most significant features of the Egyptian revolution is that it was a leaderless one, at least in the traditional sense. 'The multitude' to use political philosophers Michael

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<sup>62</sup> See for example Soule, S.A. and B.G. King (2008), Competition and Resource Partitioning in Three Social Movement Industries, *American Journal of Sociology*, 113 (6), 1568–610.

Hardt and Antonio Negri's expression, was able to organize itself without a center.<sup>63</sup> Social media tools were expressions of that new organizational structure that enabled autonomous forms of getting together. Many argue, and perhaps rightly so, that the revolution did not succeed, despite having a leader, but in fact *because* it didn't have a leader.<sup>64</sup> Having no leader meant the movement could not be co-opted or pre-empted. The regime could not target its leaders by killing, imprisonment or striking a deal. The Egyptian Revolution had no proclaimed leaders, nor a clear organizational structure. It was a fluid body that posed an unprecedented threat the regime did not know how to handle. Hierarchical structures such as governments are most familiar confronting structures of the same nature. Leaderless networks of actions, developed in response to the inefficient over hierarchical traditional political structures, constituted a new challenge they simply had no tools to manage.

This leaderless-ness, however, could not sustain for a long time once Mubarak was deposed. The first dilemma it posed in the Egyptian context is the issue of representation. Who gets to represent the youth or the revolution for that matter? When Mubarak fell on February 11, 2011, both the SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood drew on their large organizational skills and structures, while the revolutionary youth began to create numerous coalitions and revolutionary networks with the attempt of representing the millions of youth who protested against Mubarak and negotiate on their behalf. The phase between the fall of Mubarak and the election of the first civilian President Mohammed Morsi in 2012 saw the proliferation of coalitions, movements, initiatives and campaigns. The first coalition to be created was the Revolution Youth Coalition (RYC). Shortly after its creation, a state of chaos

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<sup>63</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2011, February 24). Arabs are Democracy's New Pioneers. *The Guardian*.

<sup>64</sup> John Chalcraft (Spring 2012) Horizontalism in the Egyptian Revolutionary Process. *Middle East Report*, No. 262 6-11.

emerged and dozens of coalitions were founded. As a result, April 6th left the coalition in April 2011 and began engaging with other coalitions in accordance with the new reality; it no longer has any links with the Revolution Youth Coalition.<sup>65</sup>

Throughout the first transitional period (February 2011 – June 2012), the media played a significant role in presenting some youth as “representative” of the revolution. While some of those youth, such as Wael Ghonim, repeatedly rejected being labeled a leader or hailed as a hero<sup>66</sup>, others were seduced by media lights and fame started acting accordingly. This led to inciting jealousy between youth leaders in their own organizations. Increasing internal disputes in the RYC centering on issues of representation, management and strategies led the coalition to announce its disbandment in July 2012 following the election of President Mohammed Morsi.

The lack of leadership stemmed from a structural reason that has to do with the fact that the youth who ignited the revolution did not belong to one social group with a coherent structure or ideological orientation. No ‘revolutionary vanguard’ took charge because no one was actually prepared for a revolution. The second reason is a more philosophical one. Some analysts observe that since its onset the revolution was resistant to all representations attempts. There was an inherent antagonism against the idea of control and leadership. Realizing their power for the first time, the masses opted for self-representation while the regime on the other hand sought to “create a head for the revolution” so it can negotiate with.<sup>67</sup> This revolution had no head, but that doesn’t mean it had no mind as El-Raggal rightly pointed. The ‘new multitude’ in Egypt appeared in objection to the failure of political parties and traditional

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<sup>65</sup> Yusery Ahmed Ezbawy (2012). The Role of The Youth's New Protest Movements in The January 25th Revolution. *IDS Bulletin*, 43 (1), 26–36. 31

<sup>66</sup> Wael Ghonim (2012) *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater Than the People in Power*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

<sup>67</sup> Aly El-Raggal (2013, 17 April) Egypt: A Revolution With no Head But Not Without a Mind, *Al Safir*, (Arabic).

organizations to effect change and win its battle against the regime.<sup>68</sup> Instead of dealing in terms of leaderless-ness, perhaps what the Egyptian Revolution experience presented was a ‘leaderful’ model where by their spontaneous participation, everyone got to be a leader.<sup>69</sup>

In conclusion, leadership is regarded in RMT as an important resource because of its great use in harnessing other types of resources. The Egyptian revolution proved that leaderless-ness could have its great advantages in protest settings while the transitional period has proved that the absence of representation leads to possible loss of victories achieved. With the collapse of the nascent democratic path and the ineffectiveness of political parties post June 30th, some are arguing that those circumstances necessitate concentrating efforts on building leaderless network-based groups once again to resist the current regime. Leaders in this context could become a liability rather than a resource as they could be easily targeted thus limiting the effectiveness of the movements. However, the question of representation still persists and remains unresolved. Leaderless movements could be effective in bringing about positive outcomes up to a certain point but once the regime collapses, those entities ready with leaders and organized structures will be the ones assuming the center stage to fill out the power vacuum while leaderless movements will remain in the opposition seat, at best.

### *2.3.2. Experience*

The problem with the revolution is that “we participated in the revolution without knowing what a revolution is” Ahmed Abdel Gawad, an ex Muslim Brotherhood member and the former Secretary General of Masr Al-Qawiya

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Chalcraft, Horizontalism in the Egyptian Revolutionary Process.

confirmed<sup>70</sup>. What Abdel Gawad is referring to is an essential factor in understanding the organizational failure of the youth to mobilize support in the post-Mubarak era. The revolutionaries became revolutionaries after the revolution. They had no prior ideas on what to do once the regime has fell. Living for 30 years under Mubarak rule, they never entertained the thought that there could come the day where the regime would collapse and they would be asked to present alternatives. Here the generational dimension is important to put things in context. The youth, in contrast to other actors, did not have an organizational legacy they could build on. All of sudden their status as protestors was changed to that of revolutionaries without knowing what that exactly entails.

One factor that should be analyzed is the youth's organizational experience (or lack therefore). The organizational deficiency noticed in youth groups emerging in the post-Mubarak era can be explained in part by their organizational experience, which led many of them to engage in fluid informal and network-based types of organization. Youth engaging in politics in post-Mubarak era came from three main organizational experiences: the first group had no prior political organizational training and their experience did not exceed civil-society activities basically focused on charity and development. The second group's experience was one of protest. This culminated in the 2000s decade with many unaffiliated youth becoming more engaged in blogging and in protest. The third group includes those who came from closed and highly structured organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Their experience with the lack of transparency and internal democracy in the MB made them resistant to hierarchical structures.<sup>71</sup> The organizational choices of those three groups can be clearly observed in the post Mubarak scene. The first group was dispersed among the

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<sup>70</sup> Ahmed Abdel Gawad, Author interview, Cairo, August 20, 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Mohamed Shams, Skype interview, November 5, 2014.

different initiatives and informal networks created throughout the revolution. Groups such as the Revolutionary Socialists continued their protest strategy not only because of their previous experience under Mubarak rule but simply because it was the only weapon they knew how to use. The ex-Muslim Brotherhood members tried to establish decentralized models to evade the shortcomings they suffered from in the MB model. The experience of establishing the two parties Al-Tayyar Al-Masry and Masr Al-Qawiya are cases in point.

### 2.3.3. Expertise

In addition to experience, political expertise is another resource the youth lacked. Here the experience of the Revolution Youth Coalition merits some analysis. As aforementioned, being the first attempt at youth unification, the RYC was established in February 2011 during the January 25<sup>th</sup> uprising. By the election of a new president in July 2012, the RYC announced it has fulfilled its duty for that phase and consequently its disbandment<sup>72</sup>. In a rare practice in Egyptian politics, the coalition published on its Facebook page an account of its accomplishments and shortcomings over the period of a year and a half. The coalition apologized to the revolution youth and to the people for what seemed at times as monopolizing talking about the revolution. Furthermore, it admitted that in fear of penetration it closed down shop and was not successful in reaching out to wider revolutionary forces calling it “an unjustifiable and serious mistake.”<sup>73</sup> Some considered the RYC’s real problem is that they were not qualified for the responsibility entrusted upon them. Ahmed Adel, who was close to the RYC experience, was quickly to acknowledge that

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<sup>72</sup> Zeinab El Gundy (2012, July 7) UPDATED: Revolution Youth Coalition disband with end of Egypt's 'transitional phase' *Al-Ahram English*.

<sup>73</sup> The statement was published in Arabic on the RYC Facebook page on July 8, 2012. <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=422755627776801&set=a.165714020147631.50568.165263783525988&type=1> Accessed 3 November 2014. Issandr El Amrani provided an English translation in The Arabist Blog 18 July 2012. <http://arabist.net/blog/2012/7/18/in-translation-the-revolutionary-youth-coalitions-final-repo.html> Accessed 3 November 2014.

but he also pointed out that to be fair this is a problem of the youth in general. They were subjected to a process of “intellectual bulldozing” over the years. Only a minority had the skills and capabilities to lead.<sup>74</sup> Expecting that much of the youth, especially at a moment when no one was prepared at would be asking too much of them.

The youth tried to capitalize on their technical expertise through the use of online media as a platform for direct democracy. The RYC often used its 220+ thousands of fans Facebook page in asking people to take part in naming the weekly Friday million-man marches, a hallmark of that period. The famous “We are all Khaled Said” page, the largest revolutionary Facebook page with more than 4 million fans often conducted polls during the first transitional period and Morsi’s presidency to include the voices of the youth to direct political action. This technical expertise was a resource that gave the youth advantage over other political actors who were forced to enter the Facebook world to adapt to the new realities of the political scene. As the reliance on social media became a feature of all political activities in the post-Mubarak period, Della Porta and Mosca make the argument that the use of internet-based communication can be considered a new type of resource utilized by “resource poor” social movements for it presents means for mass communication which was not possible before due to financial, spacial or temporal limitations.<sup>75</sup> Interestingly, this technical know-how, gave the youth activists access to more resources by allowing them to exchange experiences with activists around the world.

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<sup>74</sup> Ahmed Adel, Skype interview, November 5, 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Nahed Eltantawy, and Julie Wiest, (2011) The Arab Spring! Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory. *International Journal Of Communication*. 5 Feature 1207–1224. 1208.

## 2.4 Social-Organizational Resources

Youth's inherent skepticism if not outright opposition to vertical modes of organization, stemming from decades of suffering under authoritarian rule, has governed much of their organizational experience eventually leading to their fragmentation. The inability of the youth to develop an organizational model that would maintain flexibility and mass democracy and at the same time provide structure and tools of effective mobilization was one of the biggest setbacks to maintaining political clout.

Essential to understanding the revolutionaries' models of organization is capturing their conception of power which drives their strategy and choices. According to Bill Moyer there are two conceptions of power: elite power and people power. In the elite power model, the belief is that the elite at the top of the power triangle that control the society through the government and the market are what matters. All efforts are geared toward those power holders in an attempt to persuade or force them to change or implement policies. The people power model on the other hand places emphasis on the masses believing it is there that true power lies.<sup>76</sup> Obviously, the revolutionary movement is built on the people power model. Wael Ghonim, the Google marketing executive and one of the leading icons of the Egyptian Revolution, explicitly makes this case by the very title of his book documenting his experience with the Egyptian Revolution. The book's title is *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater than People in Power*. By 2.0 Ghonim is referring to the digital quality of the revolution likening it to Wikipedia where everyone contributes content but no one knows the name of the contributors. This gives the people enormous advantage facing "people in power". The power of the collective

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<sup>76</sup> Bill Moyer (2001). *Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements*. New Society Publishers. 12-15.

when centered around one goal can defeat the regime in power no matter how strong, Ghonim contends throughout his book.

Many of the revolutionary youth did not seek to assume “power” because they believed power to be in the hands of the people in the first place. Instead, they sought to empower people to be able to create their own alternatives and exert pressure on the regime to succumb to their demands. In my extended interview with him, Hany El-Gamal eloquently expressed that view using almost holy terms: “The revolution is like a religion and the revolutionary is like a prophet; his role is to give direction and his message is to convince people with change... the revolution succeeds when the largest number of people subscribe to the agenda of change and not when you change the government because your role as a revolutionary is to spread the ideals and not assume power yourself”. On the topic of organization El-Gamal was clear that an organization is a means and not an end. The change comes from the people. They need “someone to hold the torch” but the organization is never a replacement for the people. “And that’s the difference between ‘us’ and the Muslim brotherhood”, El-Gamal concluded.

Beyond leaderless-ness, ‘horizontalism’ and rhizomes are two other concepts that attempt to capture the new informal mode of organization manifested in the Egyptian Uprising. In his article, John Chalcraft uses ‘horizontalism’ to refer to an array of features observed in the Egyptian Revolution - leaderless protests, decentralized networks, deliberative rather than representative democracy, the absence of top-down command, the emphasis on consensus and the rejection of dogma and political ideology.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Chalcraft, Horizontalism in the Egyptian Revolutionary Process.

Rhizomes is a concept introduced by Deleuze and Guattari in different contexts. With the eruption of the Egyptian Revolution many activists and intellectuals found the concept suitable to explain horizontal modes of organization. Understanding rhizomes as plants with roots, Aly El-Raggal explains that new youth movements are linked together underground through strong roots that intertwine and spread horizontally.”<sup>78</sup> There is no way to break down a rhizomatic structure because once you cut one part; it grows up in a different part. It simply has no beginning, no middle and no end. “It is always a middle, always in process”.<sup>79</sup> This Key feature of a rhizome of not having a single reference point is exactly what enabled it to defeat the Mubarak regime, which only knew how to fight against tree structures with clear chain of command.

This organizational model relying on spontaneous mobilization and horizontal networks of communication proved so effective in challenging entrenched authoritarian rule and seemingly making success in the matter of couple of weeks by toppling Mubarak. This success narrative was a popularly held one in 2011 especially as the Tahrir model proved so inspiring that it spread across the world to Spain, Greece and as far as the US manifested in the global *Occupy* Movement.<sup>80</sup> However, with the unfolding events of the transitional phase in Egypt over the past three years, more scholars are reassessing the limits and roles of horizontal movements.<sup>81</sup> What appeared at first a new way of conducting politics is increasingly proving difficult to assert itself. There is an increasing realization that tools successful for bringing down a system are not necessarily suited for setting up a new one.

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<sup>78</sup> Herrera, *Generation Rev and the Struggle for Democracy*.

<sup>79</sup> Todd May (2005). *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 134.

<sup>80</sup> Paolo Gerbaudo, (2012). The Impermanent Revolution: The Organizational Fragility of The Egyptian Prodemocracy Movement in The Troubled Transition. *Social Justice* 39 (1), 8-23.

<sup>81</sup> See for example Abdullah Erfan, The Egyptian Revolution and The Question of Power: Did The Hierarchies Defeat The Networks? (Arabic) *Forum for Arab and International Relations* 3 November 2014. <http://fairforum.org/?p=2544>

Developing from a protest movement to a political one with an organizational structure that allows flexibility and sustainability is the challenge that faced all youth movements whether they existed before the revolution or not. Maha Abdelrahman points out that this dilemma is not unique to Egypt: it was highlighted in different contexts where the survival of revolutionary process requires the formation of institutions that provides alternative to the existing or collapsed regime, while at the same time the control of those institutions end up “freezing its dialectic in a totalitarian bureaucratic monolith”<sup>82</sup>

The revolution is not finished but it transforms from one form to the other. It has to move to the institutions; if not, then to the political opposition. If it achieves neither then it fails. The establishment of political parties and the transition from the revolution to politics was necessary but it had to be done based on revolutionary ideals.

When the youth realized they needed to become part of the formal political structure in order to be effective some of them started creating or joining newly created parties but with much confusion and lack of vision. Political parties are by definition excluded from social movements, as they do not fall within the category of contentious politics since they represent official form of political engagement within the formal boundaries. However, in the post-revolution Egyptian context political parties act very much as social movements. In terms of tactics, they use protest, campaigns and exhibit features of SMOs. All the major parties were created after the election of the first parliament in 2012 and never entered any sort of elections since their inauguration. Moreover, given the dynamic revolutionary circumstances, it is very common to find many members of political parties who are also members of

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<sup>82</sup> Cited in Maha Abdelrahman. In *Praise of Organization*, 576.

other revolutionary groups with often overlapping roles. It is also common to find youth acting in different capacities and keeping distance and closeness according to the events on the ground. In post-revolution Egypt, political parties are seen by many youth not as means to compete over power, as is the classic goal of political parties. Rather, they regard them as yet another tool in the ongoing struggle by which they can help push for the goals of the revolution.<sup>83</sup>

## **2.5 Moral Resources**

### *Legitimacy*

Legitimacy is an indispensable resource for any movement. The more legitimate the public perceives the movement's members and demands, the more the movement has success chances for realizing its goals. Legitimacy, as many scholars note can be derived from a number of sources and take different forms.<sup>84</sup> Revolutionary youth sought to secure legitimacy through aggregating it from celebrities and public figures. Acknowledging that young age is often a delegitimizing factor in a culture that accords age a great respect, the youth depended on figures already enjoying people's credibility to win legitimacy. Many instances could be cited to demonstrate that. For example, the two parties predominately formed of youth Masr Al-Qawiya and Al-Dostour rely on two well-known political figures as heads of the parties. This helped increasing the legitimacy they enjoyed, however, as both figures became increasingly condemned, it can be noticed how a source of legitimation becomes a liability transforming into a deligitimation factor instead. The youth also tried to secure legitimacy through self-production. By presenting few young candidates in the first parliamentary elections and frequently presenting young

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<sup>83</sup> Mina George, Author interview, November 6, 2014.

<sup>84</sup> Edwards and Kane, *Resource Mobilization and Social and Political Movements*, 217.

spokespersons in the media, youth movements endeavored to gain legitimacy to its members and consequently demands.

## **2.6 Material Resources**

### *Money*

Money is the most fungible resource, meaning that it could be transformed into other types of resources as the need arises.<sup>85</sup> Movements with large amounts of fungible resources have more flexibility in choosing their strategies and tactics as opposed to those movements whose resources are context-dependent. This could be seen in the case of youth's lack of financial means in Egypt. Having little money meant that the youth's political options were limited. To engage in the formal political process through the creation of a party a lot of money is needed. Ahmed Abdel Gawad, considered the lack of sustainable funding for Masr Al-Qawiya one of the biggest challenges the party is facing. In my interview with him, he noted that the dependence on businessmen is not reliable and often involves direction of policies which the party could not accept.<sup>86</sup> This was the case with Al-Adl party for example and that is why it could not continue, he concluded. Abdel Gawad's concern is consistent with the literature drawing attention to the risks attached to monetary patronage. He continued: "that is why we rely on members but it is still difficult. When the party was first launched we had 75 offices, now we only have 20-30."<sup>87</sup> The fungibility of money, however, has its limitations. Often it cannot secure moral resources, specifically legitimacy.

## **2.7 Cultural Resources**

Finally, cultural resources being so pervasive and taken for granted, sometimes could not be realized as resources. As explained above, cultural resources

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 218-219.

<sup>86</sup> Ahmed Abdel Gawad, Author interview, August 24, 2014

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

are all the array of symbols, values and beliefs available to use in a specific culture to facilitate the actions of daily life. The cultural element was clear since the “Friday of Rage” where mosques were used as meeting points for demonstrations. Moreover, the use of old patriotic Egyptian songs, for example, appealed to a wide variety of people and was another way to capitalize on the shared cultural resources. The youth attempted to make use of the cultural resources in form but in terms of content, many of their beliefs and ideals contradicted the culture in which they operated making their task more challenging. This is discussed in detail in chapter four. In brief, from all resources, cultural resources provide a great asset for utilization that does not require except the attentiveness to the culture and the skill of rhetoric adaptation to speak to the people in their own language.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

As Hannah Arendt puts it, “[r]evolutions, as a rule, are not made but happen”.<sup>88</sup> They are not the result of revolutionary plots but they are the outcome of disintegration of power at a certain moment. This could not be more true for the Egyptian Revolution. It took everyone, including those who “organized” it by surprise. As soon as people took to the streets in massive numbers on January 25<sup>th</sup>, the uprising took a life of its own with every participant becoming a leader of himself. No public figure could present himself as representing the masses and no single organization could claim responsibility for the uprising. But, the “leaderless-ness” of the Egyptian Revolution as much as it was a major factor for its success constituted a great obstacle for the development of the revolutionary movement post Mubarak’s fall. The lack of political ideology, pre-existing structured organization and central leadership, all important resources to sustain a social movement led some to believe

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<sup>88</sup> Cited in John LeJeune, (2013, November). “Hannah Arendt’s Revolutionary Leadership”, *HannahArendt.net Journal for Political Thinking*, (7) 1  
<http://www.hannaharendt.net/index.php/han/article/view/286/413>

the revolution was one without revolutionaries or as others put it “a revolution on the form of revolution itself”<sup>89</sup>. This proved to have great consequences on the course of the unfolding of events and the prospects of youth’s secure of other important resources which are greatly dependent on the form of organization and kind of leadership.

It would be mistaken to talk about the ‘youth’ as one coherent group. Different youth groups took diverse tracks since the downfall of Mubarak; however they share certain characteristics by virtue of sharing the same age range and consequently early-life experiences. Revolutionary organization has taken several shapes since the beginning of the uprising reflecting the youthful nature of the participants, their organizational (in)experience and their ideological trends. The absence of clear vision, political experience and unified leadership led the youth to “move to the streets and remain stuck in the streets”<sup>90</sup> in the role of protestors. The question of organization remains to be asked by many: have networks have proven their failure as modes of organization and if so whether the solution is to resort to traditional modes of vertical organization if indeed any change is to occur? When can the shift be made to formal forms of organization and when can it prove effective?

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<sup>89</sup> Linda Herrera. (2011, October 24). “Generation Rev and the Struggle for Democracy: Interview with Aly El-Raggal”. *Jadaliyya*. [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2869/generation-rev-and-the-struggle-for-democracy\\_inte](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2869/generation-rev-and-the-struggle-for-democracy_inte)

<sup>90</sup> Iyad el-Baghdadi (2014, October, 22) “The Arab Spring Manifesto” Oslo Freedom of Speech. <https://oslofreedomforum.com/talks/the-arab-spring-manifesto>

## Chapter 3: Political Context

*“An opportunity not perceived is not an opportunity at all”*  
William Gamason and David Meyer

### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I used Resource Mobilization Theory to understand the relative success and failure of the youth in organizing and consequently mobilizing. RMT is important in explaining how resources rather than grievances can provide impetus for action. However, focusing primarily on the movement “itself”, the theory risks ignoring the context in which the movement is operating and consequently its ability to access and utilize available resources. Resources can be used to answer the question of why movements emerge or succeed in a particular area and not another but it cannot explain why movements fail despite having access to the same resources. Holding context constant and dealing with resources as the only explanatory factor would lead to a partial understanding, at best. Therefore, an additional approach that goes beyond the confinement of social movement is necessary.

In this chapter I turn to the world surrounding youth movements to examine its impact on their activities. Using Political Opportunity structure (POS) to complement RMT, this chapter examines the effect of political context on the development and outcome of youth revolutionary movements since the downfall of Mubarak. Acknowledging that social movements do not choose their tools, goals and tactics in a vacuum, I demonstrate in this chapter how the closure of the political regime and its capacity and propensity for repression has affected the kinds of claims and tools the youth engaged in response. Finally, the concept of “missed opportunities” will also be applied to identify situations conducive to mobilization that were not used effectively.

### 3.2 Political Process Approach

Political Process Approach is based on the premise that political context is essential in shaping social movements' development, responses and effectiveness. Interested in emphasizing the link between activists and institutional politics, state action acquires primary importance in analysis as not only does it affect the size of mobilization but also its location and the form it takes.<sup>91</sup> Political Process model posits that the activities and creativity of social movements can only be analyzed and understood by examining the political context and “the rules of the game in which those choices were made”.<sup>92</sup> In other words, agency cannot be understood in isolation of structure.

At the core of the Political Process Approach is Political Opportunity Structure. Broadly defined, opportunities can be considered “options for collective action, with chances and risks attached to them which depend on factors outside the mobilizing group.”<sup>93</sup> There is no agreement among scholars on the factors of the political context that constitutes political opportunity. The variables studied are so diverse that they include: state capacity for repression, public policy changes, the organizations of previous challengers, the activities of countermovement opponents, the perception of political opportunity by activists, the openness and ideological positions of political parties and the constraints on state policy by international alliances, to name a few.<sup>94</sup> This broad conceptualization of opportunities reminds us of the conceptualization of resources except that it extends to include almost everything outside the social movement. Because of the inclusiveness of the concept,

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<sup>91</sup> David S. Meyer (2004) Protest and Political Opportunities, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30, 131.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Marco Giugni (2009) Political Opportunities: From Tilly to Tilly. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 15 (2), 361–68. 361.

<sup>94</sup> Meyer, Protest and Political Opportunities, 135.

different scholars have emphasized different aspects of opportunity depending on the movements they study and the questions they ask.

In this chapter, I build on McAdam's synthesis of four factors that constitute political opportunity; two relating to the state: access to political system and diminishing state repression and two relating to the elites: division within the elite and the presence of elite allies.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, I utilize the concept of perceived opportunities, believing that opportunities need to be recognized before they can be seized. Similar to the idea that the mere presence of resources is not enough for mobilization if actors have no access to them, the mere "presence" of opportunities is useless if they are not perceived. [A]n opportunity not recognized is not an opportunity at all."<sup>96</sup>

The extent to which social actors are aware of changes in the political context and the existence of an opportunity deserves more attention. "[E]ven if opportunities are objective, external to the actor, what explains the action is the actor's desire together with 'his beliefs about the opportunities'"<sup>97</sup>. Here two contrasting conceptions arise. The first one views activists as rational actors who monitor the state and the society to know which claims to make and how. In that regard, they plan for their actions strategically in accordance with the realities of their situation. The second view, doubts the intentionality of activists regarding them as always "trying to mobilize and are usually unsuccessful".<sup>98</sup> In this view, opportunities are considered as simply environmental conditions allowing protest rather than signals that should be

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<sup>95</sup> Doug McAdam (1996) Political Opportunities: Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions. In Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald (Eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 23-40. 27

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Marco Giugni, Political Opportunities: From Tilly to Tilly, 365.

<sup>97</sup> Hanspeter Kriesi (2007) Political Context and Opportunity. In David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. Oxford: Blackwell. 67-90. 68.

<sup>98</sup> Meyer, Protest and Political Opportunities, 139.

picked up upon.<sup>99</sup> In the Egyptian context, the second conception seems to apply more adequately. This was confirmed to me throughout my interviews by a commonly repeated sentence -- “we had no strategy.”<sup>100</sup> However, it is important to note that it is possible inside every SMO to have the two types of actors – those passionate activists who constantly endeavor to mobilize regardless of limitations and the more experienced ones who seek to adjust rhetoric, tactics and focus to suit the changing political circumstances.

After having defined *what* aspects of the political context affect youth movements in Egypt the most, it is equally important to define *how* they affect those movements. As scholars of POS disagree on the variables, they also differ on their relationship to outcomes. Scholars typically examined the effect of exogenous factors on the movement in five main areas: the ability to mobilize, the types of tactics and strategies used, the impact on institutional politics, the kind of claims it can advance, and finally the alliances it can cultivate.<sup>101</sup> Obviously, different elements of political opportunity would work differently for these distinct dependent variables. Following McAdam’s advice on the importance of being “explicit about *which* dependent variable we are seeking to explain and *which* dimensions of *political* opportunity are germane to that explanation”<sup>102</sup>, I restrict my inquiry to the first two factors.

The concept of open and closed structures is essential to POS. Open systems often have a limited capacity to act, while closed systems have larger capacity for action.<sup>103</sup> The degree of (objective or perceived) openness or closure of a regime determines the response of social movements and whether their strategies become assimilative or confrontational. Complementary to openness and closure (input

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Author interviews with Ahmed Adel, Tareq Ismail, Mohamed Shams and others.

<sup>101</sup> Meyer, *Protest and Political Opportunities*, 126.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Ibid, 138. Emphasis in original.

<sup>103</sup> Kriesi, *Political Context and Opportunity*, 70.

structures) is the distinction between strong and weak states (output capacity). The strength of a state in this model is measured by the state's ability to act independently and effectively implement the policies. Following this model developed by Herbert P Kitschelt, strong and closed systems such as the one in Egypt encourages social movements to use confrontational strategies.

Finally, one major limitation of the political process approach or the opportunity structure model is that it was mainly developed and applied in western democracies. The conceptualization of the model is based on the study of four western countries: the USA, France, Germany and Sweden.<sup>104</sup> Little efforts have been directed in testing the model and how it functions in authoritarian or nondemocratic contexts. This chapter will contribute to the existing literature by observing how the major concepts of the approach can be applied and understood in the Egyptian context over three different post-revolution regimes.

### **3.3 Institutional Structures**

In the last section I presented a general overview of the Political Process Approach in order to give an idea about the main tenants of the model that will be used in this chapter. In this section, I start to define more specifically the first set of elements that constitute the institutional structures and apply them in the Egyptian Context. These elements are a modified version of Doug McAdam's synthesis of political opportunity structures. As aforementioned, McAdam observed that scholars' conceptions of relevant dimensions of the political structure greatly overlapped. Therefore, he attempted to combine the most important structural opportunities in a consensual fourfold typology that consists of: "1) the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system 2) the stability or instability of that broad set of

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<sup>104</sup> Kitschelt Herbert P. (1986) Political Opportunity Structure and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies. *British Journal of Political Science*, 16 (1), 57–85.

elite alignments that typically undergird a polity 3) the presence or absence of elite allies 4) the state's capacity and propensity for repression.”<sup>105</sup>

In the case of Egypt, I argue that from the institutional structures, state repression has had the greatest effect on the prospects of youth mobilization and on the types of strategies and tactics they employed. In my analysis, I only focus on the two elements relating to the state as constitute the “structural” components of the political opportunity. Elites on the other hand, can be more adequately conceived as part of the configuration of powers, which is more dynamic and not strictly structural. Moreover, the possibility of cultivating elite alliances and benefiting from elite divisions was already discussed under moral resources in chapter two and will also be tackled from a different angle in the next chapter on framing. Although it could be argued that the state's capacity and propensity for repression is closely related to the degree of openness or closure of a regime, I agree with McAdam in dealing with them as two separate variables as they affect different aspects of the youth movement. The combination of these two institutional opportunities along with the cultural opportunities discussed next chapter help explain the youth's resort to protest and their failure to access or impact institutional politics and realize the goals of the revolution.

### *3.3.1 State propensity and capacity for repression*

The relationship between repression and protest has been the subject of many debates between scholars. Conceptualizing state's repression, two kinds of repression need to be distinguished: institutional and situational. The effect of the two kinds of repression is different for mobilization. Situational repression refers to the sporadic coercive response to events or populations. This includes police intervention using

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<sup>105</sup> McAdam, *Political Opportunities*, 27.

repression in an ad-hoc manner. Institutional repression on the other hand, is systematic and constant targeting of groups, organizations or populations denying them access to formal institutions in visible ways. In the case of Egypt, the following cases of state repression represent institutional repression where the state consciously and constantly targeted youth groups with the aim of silencing their calls for change and reinforce the structures of authoritarianism.

One of the main reasons for the eruption of the Egyptian Revolution was the increased state repression manifested most evidently in police brutality. This was reflected in the youth's symbolic choice of January 25 Police Day for demonstrations. In facing state's brutality, the revolutionaries chose peacefulness as a conscious and strategic weapon. This did not mean that limited violence was not used in self-defense. The Egyptian state's capacity to repress was dealt a great blow on January 28 by the popular burning down of police stations. However, with the military's intervention on the same day, repression was restored at the hands of the military police and army forces who engaged in repeated clashes with the youth throughout 2011 and 2012.

The first display of state repression came as early as March 9, 2011 when the military police violently destroyed tent camps remaining from the sit-in in Tahrir Square and forcibly took the demonstrators inside the Egyptian Museum where they were subjected to brutal beating and torture. Later around 200 youth of those arrested were sent to nine military prisons where they faced military trials<sup>106</sup> – a practice that has become a hallmark of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF)'s rule over the following 18 months. In just six months after the military taking to the streets on January 28, 2011 more than 12,000 civilians were brought before military courts

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<sup>106</sup> Egypt: End Torture, Military Trials of Civilians. *Human Rights Watch*. (March 11, 2011).

for a wide range of crimes<sup>107</sup>. This number exceeded the total number of all military trials conducted over the 30-year Hosni Mubarak rule. Although not all the cases were of political nature, the regime used military courts as a weapon to terrorize the youth and limit their mobilization efforts. For example, Asmaa Mahfouz, a co-founder of 6 April youth Movement and an iconic figure of the Egyptian Revolution was arrested and referred to a military trial in August 2011 over a tweet for inciting violence. Charges were later dropped and Mahfouz was out of jail; however the regime's message was clear. No criticism of SCAF would be allowed.

On the same day, March 9, 2011 female protestors were subjected to 'virginity tests' by the military police and threatened with prostitution charges. This was the first in a series of actions undertaken by the regime by way of humiliation and breaking the moral of the revolutionaries. Violence against female protestors and protestors in general only increased in intensity, visibility and frequency over the following months with revolutionaries being killed, injured and arrested every month. In the period between February 2011 and June 2012 when SCAF was in control more than 350 people were killed in social and political protests and while in detention<sup>108</sup>. Moreover, more than 12,000 were injured according to the figures of the ministry of health. Other sources raise the figure up to 16,000.<sup>109</sup>

Tahrir became the site of constant struggle for control between the protestors and the military. Whenever protestors attempted to occupy the square, violent repression was the regime's only response. In April 2011 the military dispersed by force a sit-in in Tahrir that consisted of tens of thousands including a dozen officers who joined the revolution demanding a radical change of the Mubarak regime. The

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<sup>107</sup> Egypt: Retry or Free 12,000 After Unfair Military Trials. *Human Rights Watch*. (September 10, 2011).

<sup>108</sup> Wiki Thawra, September 24, 2013 (Arabic) <http://wikithawra.wordpress.com/2013/09/24/scafcasualities/>

<sup>109</sup> Wiki Thawra, October 3, 2013. (Arabic) <http://wikithawra.wordpress.com/2013/10/03/scafinjuries/>

same violent dispersal of protestors was repeated by the military in August, on the first day of Ramadan to clear up the sit-in that has taken place for a month. However, state's brutality was not confined to Tahrir. Many violent episodes took place in 2011 around the Israeli Embassy in May, outside Balloon's Theatre in June and in Maspero neighborhood in front of the Public TV building in October.<sup>110</sup> In all of these clashes, the state's security forces used disproportionate power resulting in the killing and the arrest of hundreds of protestors, mostly young people. What started as undercover state repression that the population did not want to believe, took more visible and brutal forms culminating in the tragic beating and stripping of a female protestor in the vicinity of Tahrir Square in December 2011. The clashes of Mohamed Mahmoud and the sit-in Cabinet constituted a turning point in the state's use of repression as for the first times state's brutality in dealing with protestors was blatantly visually documented. The picture of the dragged female protestor made it to the newspapers front pages and had great effects on the youth who regarded it as the epitome of the state's disregard to any human rights values.

During President Mohamed Morsi's rule, both the state's capacity and propensity for repression were significantly reduced. The non-cooperation of state institutions including the police with Morsi reduced the regime's capacity to use violence to repress the youth opposition. Instead the repression had more of a situational nature rather than an institutional one. The clashes turned to be between civilians – Muslim brotherhood opponents and proponents with the security forces often taking a neutral stance. Examples include Al-Itihadeyya clashes and Al-Mokattam incident. The major exception to that was the Port Said incident when the police fired against the protestors following death penalty sentencing in the case of

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<sup>110</sup> For a timeline of the revolution's events see Ghazala Irshad (2012, June) Timeline: Egypt's Transition. *Cairo Review*. 215-219. For an online version: <http://www.aucegypt.edu/GAPP/CairoReview/Lists/Articles/Attachments/225/Egypt-Timeline.pdf>

Port Said massacre. Following clashes in Port Said and other cities resulted in the killing of tens of people and the declaration of a partial emergency state. In terms of targeting youth activists, several youth figures such as Alaa Abdel Fattah, Ahmed Douma and others were summoned on charges of inciting against the Muslim Brotherhood. Although these cases were dropped after the ouster of Morsi, the crackdown on activists increased the animosity between the revolutionary youth and the Muslim Brotherhood. The repression during Morsi's rule was in most cases situational, however the institutional element cannot be ignored. The youth who organized in opposition of Morsi, despite having voted for him in the second round like April 6 Movement and activists like Alaa Abdel Fattah, were a clear target for the Muslim Brotherhood regime. The systematic crackdown on opposition was less effective than the SCAF's for reasons that have to do with capacity rather than political will.

With the ouster of Mohammed Morsi on July 3, 2013 state repression was reinstated in the most brutal way taking a whole new level. The Rabaa massacre ushered the state's new policy of dealing with the opposition. As the new regime sought to entrench itself, political repression expanded beyond the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamists to the revolutionary youth. A new law incriminating protest was issued specifically to target activists. Major youth figures were put in jail along with more than 40 thousands political detainees.<sup>111</sup> But repression is not only confined to the physical sense. What is most remarkable about the use of repression under Sisi is that it created a setting in which civil society practices "self-repression". The clearest case is the private owned media which allied itself with the regime and actively engaged in repressing opponents to the military rule. Through defaming

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<sup>111</sup> Egypt: Rampant Torture, Arbitrary Arrests and Detentions Signal Catastrophic Decline in Human Rights One Year After Ousting of Morsi. *Amnesty International*. (July 3, 2014). <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/egypt-anniversary-morsi-ousting-2014-07-02>

campaigns and spreading conspiracy theories about the January 25 Revolution and its youth activists, the media was able to propagate fear and hatred and increase polarization in the society while not “physically” engaging in repression.

### *Effects of Repression*

As much as repression had direct effect on the youth in terms of casualties, it also provided an opportunity to discredit the regime. Being part of a peaceful revolution, the youth made use of repression to gain the sympathy of the people and embarrass the regime. An activist told me “the intelligence is to drag your opponent (the state) to use excessive force while you maintain your peacefulness in order to gain the public’s support and sympathy”<sup>112</sup> when asked about whether the youth were successful in doing so, he answered that it happened naturally, but if it was planned the results would have been much better. The caveat for this scenario to happen is strong media coverage and documentation. This could be seen most clearly in Mohamed Mahmoud and the cabinet clashes. Although these were not the first time for full-fledged clashes to take place between protestors and the military police as I have shown in the previous section, they were the first to receive extensive media coverage. Here the element of framing, which will be discussed at length in the next chapter, overlaps in the analysis. However, what I am interested in here is the youth’s use of state repression as a political opportunity to raise their demands. In Mohamed Mahmoud, what started as an act of solidarity with the families of the martyrs of the revolution’s sit in, turned into a second revolutionary wave due to the police’s use of lethal force. The regime’s targeting of eyes specifically in those clashes arose the sympathy of the people with revolutionaries. As the events gained more momentum, the SCAF was forced to speed up the schedule for power transfer and accept the

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<sup>112</sup> Ahmed Adel, Author interview, November 5, 2014.

resignation of Essam Sharaf, the first prime minister after the revolution. While this was a partially victory for the demonstrators, the choice of Kamal Al-Ganzouri confirmed that the SCAF was not sincere in responding to the youth's demands who called for a civil presidential council. The youth tried to utilize the political opportunity the events created and the regime fostered, however, for reasons having to do with configuration of actors and framing, they were not successful in making the best out of it.

The second effect of repression is linked to the strategies and tactics the youth employed during the transitional period. With clashes occurring on a monthly basis, the revolutionary youth were always put in a defense, reactionary position instead of a position of action. Hatem Tallima, a member of the Revolutionary Socialists' political bureau, admits that a big mistake the revolutionaries fell into during the SCAF's and Morsi's rule was that they remained in the activists role taking up any and every possible confrontation with the state.<sup>113</sup> "There were a lot of battles that we were dragged into that pushed us away from (formal) politics and forced us to remain in the streets", Tallima reiterated. Tallima also believe that one of the Revolutionary Socialists' mistakes was not to join the Revolution Youth Coalition to help establish a political front for the revolution. State's repression made it easier for the youth to practice what they knew best – protest. Instead of working on political alternatives, the youth found in repression the occasion to assume the role of victimization or the never-ending revolutionary. Being engaged in constant clashes and choosing the wrong battles prevented the revolutionary youth of developing long-term strategies. It is remarkable observing youth's activity over the different regimes to note that their response to the state's use of repression was through the use of the same tactics. In the

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<sup>113</sup> Hatem Tallima, Author interview, August 19, 2014.

words of one youth activist “the youth were all the time playing but without scoring any goals.”<sup>114</sup>

Consistent with the literature suggesting that repression could serve as a precursor for mobilization, repression gave opportunities for the youth to organize. This organization, however, was mostly in the form of campaigns that tackled specific issues. The extensive use of military trials gave rise to the creation of one of the most active youth groups – No to Military Trials. By having an outspoken co-founder Mona Seif, the movement was able to use military trials as an opportunity to question military rule. Similarly, Mohamed Mahmoud and the cabinet clashes provided an opportunity for the emergence of “Kazeboon” (Liars) movement to combat the perceived lies of the SCAF and showcase their crimes in videos in different neighborhoods in Egypt. Although these campaigns were able to achieve relative success compared to their declared goals and scope of action, no sustainable organizations were created to plan more strategically for realizing the larger goals of the revolution. The campaigns were able to make media appearance and force the issues of military trials, eyes targeting and other forms of military repression in the public discourse, but the revolutionaries did not succeed in building upon this momentum to develop an all-inclusive political discourse beyond the momentary reactions.

### *3.3.2 Access to Political System*

After discussing the effect of repression, the second element in the political environment that affects youth movements is the degree of openness or closure of the political regime. The two factors that define the extent of openness or closure of a regime are centralization and separation of power. Starting with the first factor, the

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<sup>114</sup> Mohamed Shams, Author interview, November 5, 2014.

greater the centralization of a system, the more difficult it is for outside actors to gain formal access and the harder it is for the regime to act. Decentralized states provide multiple access points and decision-making by virtue of having multiple state actors. Secondly, the degree of separation of power between the three branches of the government (Judiciary, legislative and executive) and inside each branch determines the degree of formal access. The greater the separation of powers the greater the degree of formal access and the more limited the capacity of the state is to act.<sup>115</sup>

Applying this to Egypt, Egypt is clearly a case of a highly centralized regime. It is an executive form of centralization that revolves around the figure of the president. The executive is autonomous from the state, and the state is autonomous from society.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, when Mubarak was removed he could easily be replaced by the SCAF as a head of state. This executive centralization where the president solely makes the decisions, favors the authoritarian regime's ability to adapt to challenges. It also allows it to keep tight control on who can penetrate the system. Local councils provide one opportunity to effect the system and push for more decentralization. It is worth mentioning that all attempts at reforming local councils law after the revolution were faced by great obstacles from the regime. The law governing local administration dating back to 1979 gives the president the right to directly appoint governors and restrict the local councils' role to a monitoring rather than an executive one. According to Tariq Ismail, an activist working on local empowerment, one of the biggest missed opportunities for the youth was using the revolution's fervor to push for the dissolving of the pre-revolution local councils. According to Tariq, if the youth had put municipalities as a priority and local elections were held in 2011, the youth could have had an access point to the regime

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<sup>115</sup> Kriesi, Political Context And Opportunity, 71.

<sup>116</sup> Joshua Stacher (2012) *Adaptable Autocrats Regime Power in Egypt and Syria*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

by which they could have changed from below. Mina George, a former member of Strong Egypt Party shares the same view. “We had a golden opportunity in 2011 to occupy the state’s institutions through the municipalities... imagine if we had 54,000 youth members working directly with the people all over Egypt”<sup>117</sup>. The Revolution Youth Coalition and other pro-change movements did call for disbanding local councils in the wake of the revolution. In June 2011 the administrative court ordered the dissolving of all local councils<sup>118</sup>. The ruling was never put into execution and no local elections were ever held since that date.

With regard to the legislature, the electoral system provides a larger or lesser degree of system access depending on its degree of proportionality. Majoritarian or plurality systems provide less access for emerging political actors than proportional systems. In Egypt, after the revolution, the SCAF amended the electoral law to introduce a parallel voting system. In the first parliamentary elections after the revolution in 2011, two thirds of the seats were elected by party proportional representation while the remaining third were elected by a form of bloc voting. Although this could be regarded as a larger degree of openness from the previous system under Mubarak in which bloc voting was exclusively used, the system still contained many constraints for youth’s effective engagement with the elections. In addition to the one third of the seats elected by bloc voting in two-seats constituencies, more importantly, the 50 percent quota for laborers and farmers was retained. This significantly reduced the chances of youth (mostly urban) from the same electoral district to run for the parliament. There are of course many reasons for the modest results of the youth in the elections, some of which were already outlined in chapter two under material resources. This section is only interested in

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<sup>117</sup> Mina George, Author interview, November 6, 2014.

<sup>118</sup> Mai Shams El-Din. Supreme Admin Court dissolves Egypt’s municipal councils. June 28, 2011. *Daily News*.

demonstrating the structural elements of the political context pertaining to the youth's ability to access the political system. Returning to the parliamentary constraints, just one day before his departure, President Adly Mansour issued a new controversial electoral law which stipulates that nearly 80 percent of the future parliament's seats will be elected by individual candidacy system. Moreover, either political parties or individual candidates can fill the remaining seats.<sup>119</sup> This law is clearly an attempt to restore Mubarak's pre-revolution parliament setting. With less proportionality, the electoral system does not provide an opportunity for the youth to run for parliament. It is a confirmation of the closure of the political system.

In terms of separation of powers, the second defining element in the degree of openness of a regime, there is a great overlap between the different branches of government in Egypt. During the SCAF's rule, until the election of a parliament the SCAF retained executive and legislative powers, which gave it autonomy in setting the rules of the game. Although the nascent parliament after its election was not under SCAF's total control, the judiciary remained to be politicized. Under President Mohamed Morsi's rule the overlap between authorities continued to persist though with many internal difficulties. With the ouster of Morsi and the dissolving of the parliament the executive and legislative powers were once again grouped in the hands of one person first President Adly Mansour then President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. The politicization of the judiciary as best demonstrated by the mass death sentences issued in April and June 2014 is a clear example of the effect of the executive on the judiciary. In systems where there is no clear demarcation line between the different branches of government, the target of mobilization cannot be clearly defined as no demands can be made of specific branches of the government. In other words, the

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<sup>119</sup> Khaled Dawoud Egypt's Parliamentary Elections Law: A Setback for Democracy. June 26, 2014. *EgyptSource. Atlantic Council.* <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/egyptsource/egypt-s-parliamentary-elections-law-a-setback-for-democracy>

youth could not appeal to courts or exert pressure on the (inexistent) parliament to effect policy change by the executive.

The case of Egypt is in accordance with the body of literature arguing that constricted institutional opportunities offer possibilities for extrainstitutional mobilization to happen.<sup>120</sup> Although a closed system such as that of Egypt prevents the youth from accessing formal institutions and thus being part of the regime, it allowed them to organize in other forms outside of the system to effect change by different means. This could be seen in the multitude of youth coalitions and organizations that formed as pressure and protest groups. Some youth argue that because of these institutional constraints, youth never had a real chance of engaging formally with the regime. Instead, they hold that they should have prolonged the first transitional period and utilized this time to “dismantle the structures of repression”.<sup>121</sup> According to youth activist Mohamed Shams, the regime with this centralized structure does not allow for any kind of penetration. “Egypt is not a country of political parties,” he was definite to conclude. Although he admitted that informal politics have to be institutionalized at some point, the idea is in the timing for him and engaging in negotiations from a position of strength to secure a gradual access to the system. Having no access to the system whether in terms of effect or actually being part of it discouraged the development of alternative political programs by the youth. Seeing that there are no political openings in the system reinforced the primacy of informal politics as means to advocate for change.

To sum up this section, state’s repression and closed structure prevented the youth from accessing the political system and engaging formally with political institutions. However, these constricted and constraining settings presented different

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<sup>120</sup> Meyer, *Protest and Political Opportunities*, 133.

<sup>121</sup> Mohamed Shams, Author interview, November 5, 2014

kinds of opportunities for extrainstitutional mobilization. When properly utilized, these opportunities were able to achieve relative degrees of success such as the case of Mohamed Mahmoud clashes which forced the SCAF to announce a date for the presidential elections and a schedule for the transition of power to a civilian entity. However, the youth missed several opportunities to capitalize on the state's use of repression to their benefit. They also were not able to change the rules of the game to guarantee formal access to the system. Instead of actively seeking to engage with people's issues on a local level through the municipalities, the youth were stuck in street politics using protest the only tool they knew how to use. Eventually, this led to demonstrations losing people's sympathy and their effectiveness on the regime. Since the downfall of Mubarak, Egypt witnessed three regimes, nevertheless, the Egyptian revolution, let alone the youth, never ruled in any of them.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

This chapter attempted to show the effect of the political context on the youth's choices of strategies and tactics and their impact on their environment by on the institutional level. While the closed and strong nature of the political system in Egypt combined with the state's capacity and willingness to use repression had a constraining effect on the possibilities of youth's success and increased the difficulties for youth mobilization in the formal arena, it opened way for extrainstitutional mobilization. The youth's overuse of protest exhausted their ability to perceive political opportunities to engage with the regime on their own terms.

## Chapter 4: Framing and Counter-framing

### 4.1 Introduction

After discussing the resources and political context in which the youth operated after the downfall of Mubarak, I turn to the discussion of the cultural environment which shaped their collective action. One of the most used culturist approaches is the framing perspective. Focusing on agency and interpretation, this chapter will show how the youth framed themselves and their demands to the public. Divided into three parts, the first section of the chapter deals with the ways the youth framed the issues in Egypt and the demands of the revolution, the solutions they proposed and the kind of rhetoric they used to motivate their adherents and mobilize the people. I then turn to examine the extent to which the way they presented their cause resonated with the people and how credible they were perceived. Finally, in the last section I analyze the different framing processes that took place simultaneously. I give special attention to how the regime and the media used counter-framing to undermine the legitimacy of the youth's actions. By understanding the power of ideas, symbols and rhetoric, this chapter will cover the third dimension of this study allowing a fuller understanding of the reasons behind the marginalized role of the youth in the political scene.

### 4.2. Framing Approach

Framing approach to social movements is focused on examining the connections between culture producers, culture consumers and the cultural object itself.<sup>122</sup> As Rhys Williams explains: “the analytic core of the approach is the socially

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<sup>122</sup> Rhys H. Williams (2007) *The Cultural Contexts of Collective Action: Constraints, Opportunities, and the Symbolic Life of Social Movements*. In David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. Oxford: Blackwell 91-115. 97.

and culturally available array of symbols and meanings from which movements can draw”.<sup>123</sup> Scholars, as always, have different conceptualizations of the core ideas of the framing perspective.<sup>124</sup> Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow are two pioneer scholars who sought to articulate and synthesize the main tenets of the approach in manageable categories. Their contribution to the cultural approach, and particularly framing in social movements is essential to the study of the interaction of meaning and action in social movements.

In this section, I primarily depend on their extensive research to present an overview of the framing approach that covers three main aspects. The first one deals with the core-framing tasks, the second looks at the issue of resonance and its crucial importance for framing, and finally the third part explores the different framing processes the activists use to create and develop their frames. By understanding the combination of these three dimensions, we could have a better idea of how movements develop their frames of action, why some frames work better than others, and how the cultural environment can facilitate or constrain the adoption and propagation of certain frames. After establishing the theoretical framework, I will apply these elements to the case of revolutionary youth in Egypt.

Every movement has three core-framing tasks that are indispensable. The first is diagnostic framing. This frame refers to the way social actors identify the problem at hand and its source. It also includes the identification of who to blame and who to hold accountable and responsible for the problem. However, agreeing on the nature of the problem does not necessarily translate into an agreement on the causes for the problem.<sup>125</sup> This could sometimes lead to disagreements within the SMOs belonging

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>124</sup> See Robert D. Benford, and David A. Snow (2000) Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 611-639 for an overview.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 616.

to the same movement. In Egypt for example, injustice, a common frame in social movements, was commonly used; however beyond the agreement against Mubarak different youth movements had different views on who or what specifically is to blame for injustice. These variations with regard to the attributional component of the diagnostic framing are reflected in the second core framing task - prognostic framing.

After defining the problem and its main cause, prognostic framing is concerned with articulation of a proposed solution or a plan to fix the problem. It simply attempts to answer “the Leninesque question of what is to be done.”<sup>126</sup> Usually, there is a correspondence between the diagnostic and the prognostic framings, meaning that the way a group identifies the issue implies the kind of strategies it will employ to remedy that issue. Here is where SMOs differ one more time. While, it is easier to agree on the diagnosis of the problem, the solutions offered vary according to the ideological and organizational background of the participants. It is expected that prognostic frames also deal with the efficacy of the solutions proposed by their adversaries and refute them. This is known as counter-framing. It is important to note that The way in which opposition frames the youth’s movement greatly influences how the activists frame their activities, often putting them on the defensive whole they try to respond. This can be clearly applied to the youth during the past four years.

The third and final core-framing task is the motivational frame which provides the rationale for mobilization through the “construction of appropriate vocabularies of motive”.<sup>127</sup> Developing the agency component of collective action frames is entailed in attending to that task. By socially constructing vocabularies, activists equip the adherents to the movement with persuasive accounts to engage in collective action.

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 617.

As actors assert motives, their vocabularies become part of the daily discourse and consequently part of the movement's culture.<sup>128</sup> In Egypt, youth used three general vocabularies of motive that will be discussed thoroughly in the analysis section – martyrs' rights, dignity, protection of the revolution.

For frames to be successful, they need to resonate with the people. Resonance is the function of two factors: “credibility of the proffered frame and its relative salience.”<sup>129</sup> The credibility of the frame in turn is composed of three elements: empirical credibility, the credibility of the claimsmakers, and frame consistency. Starting with the first element, empirical credibility is the apparent fit between the framings and the events in the world. In other words, it is the extent to which the claims can be verified using empirical evidence. However, some scholars hold that “empirical” credibility is in fact relative as evidence always exists, but it is up to the people to interpret it in the way that appeals to them. Based on that, movements may find difficulties appealing to a larger audience as the empirical credibility of their frames can be determined only by a small cadre of adherents. The second element is the credibility of the claimsmakers. It is hypothesized that the more experienced and authoritative the claim articulator is, the more resonance his ideas and claims have. Factors such as knowledge, status, expertise, and often age as, the case of Egypt demonstrates, are important in establishing this perceived credibility. In Egypt, the revolutionary youth realized this early on and engaged in a process of “credentializing” by which they tried to capitalize on the credentials of the public figures who supported their demands for change. As discussed previously using RMT, this is one of the moral resources they attempted to use in order to gain legitimacy.

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<sup>128</sup> Robert D. Benford (May, 1993) "You Could Be the Hundredth Monkey": Collective Action Frames and Vocabularies of Motive within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 34 (2) 195-216. 200.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 619.

Finally, the third element affecting credibility is the consistency of the frame. What is meant by that is the degree to which the elements of the frame are perceived to be congruent. Inconsistency can refer to the contradictions among the ideas being advocated and it can also signal the disparity in the ideas, beliefs and actions of movements? When there are fewer contradictions, the frame will resonate more with people and will be a stronger mobilization force. Those three elements constitute the credibility factor of the frame which affects its resonance with the target of mobilization.

The second factor which affects the resonance of the frame is its salience or how important it is perceived. Salience has three dimensions: “centrality, experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity”<sup>130</sup> also known as cultural resonance. As the name implies, centrality refers to how fundamental the claims and ideas of the social actors are to the lives of their target audience. It follows naturally, that the more essential the concepts and the beliefs of the movement are to the people, the higher the chances the frame has in successfully mobilizing them. Second, experiential commensurability has to do with the everyday personal experience of the people. When framings are too abstract and distant from the lived daily experience of the people, it is more difficult for frames to have resonance with the people and consequently they have lesser chances of mobilizing them. Finally, many scholars believe narrative fidelity, which is also known as cultural resonance, has the greatest effect on the salience of a frame. This factor refers to the degree to which the ideas and beliefs that the activists advocate are in line with traditional culture of the people. Myths, domain assumptions, and inherent ideology (as opposed to derived ideology) are all expressions of public cultural narrations that affect the saliency and, by

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<sup>130</sup> Rhys H. Williams, *The Cultural Contexts of Collective Action*, 105.

consequence, the resonance of the movement's ideas.<sup>131</sup> As Williams concludes: “[m]ovement discourse, ideologies, and actions must be culturally resonant – coherent within some shared cultural repertoire – if they hope to strike bystander publics as legitimate, or neutralize oppositional positions by elites and countermovements”.<sup>132</sup>

Turning to the third part of this section, activists do not develop and elaborate on frames only using the three aforementioned core-framing tasks, but also through three interrelated processes known as framing processes: discursive, strategic and contested. Discursive processes concern the discussions, written communications, and talks that occur in the context of movements activities. Strategic processes are “framing processes that are deliberative, utilitarian, and goal directed”<sup>133</sup>. Put differently, these are the calculated efforts by the activists of a movement to link their interests and frames to those of their target audience. The third set of interrelated processes is contested processes. Frames are not created in isolation of other factors. More importantly, activists are faced by challengers who are also engaged in the politics of significations. Counterframing by the antagonists, bystanders and the media has been the greatest challenge for the revolutionary youth. Counterframing includes attempts “to rebut, undermine, or neutralize a person's or group's myths, versions of reality, or interpretive framework”.<sup>134</sup> The activists in turn resort to oppositional frames to try and repel, curtail, contain, or reverse the negative and damaging effect to their movement's previous claims. These episodes are known as frame contests. It is important to note that these contests often take place in complex multi-organizational arenas. Here the role of media and elites cannot be overlooked as they greatly affect the extent of resonance of framing/counterframing. Social

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<sup>131</sup> Benford and Snow, 622.

<sup>132</sup> Rhys H. Williams *The Cultural Contexts of Collective Action*, 105.

<sup>133</sup> Benford and Snow, 624.

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in *ibid*, 626.

movements are often at a disadvantage in these situations as generally they do not control the media; they do not choose the stories that get covered, or how the media will present their claims.

### **4.3 Core-frame Tasks**

#### *4.3.1 Diagnostic Frame*

As mentioned before, the purpose of a diagnostic frame for a movement is to identify the problem and its root causes. The January 25 Revolution made it clear that the problem lied in Mubarak's authoritarian regime. In the call for demonstrations on January 28<sup>th</sup> the event created by We are All Khaled Said was titled "a day of rage against corruption, injustice, unemployment and torture". In the description the organizers also added absence of freedom. Authoritarianism and the injustice associated with it could be identified as diagnostic frames for the uprising. Corruption, police brutality, social injustice, repression, illiteracy, ignorance, curtailment of freedoms, poverty, humiliation of human dignity can be considered byproducts of the main ailment of authoritarianism. The revolutionaries directly laid the responsibility upon Mubarak who resided over the country's rule for more than 30 years. The diagnosis was clear and simple.

Disagreements in articulating the problem started to arise after the ouster of Mubarak and the taking over of the SCAF. The youth realized that the problem is bigger than Mubarak and that structures of authoritarianism run deeper into the system than they initially thought. A minority of the revolutionaries believed from the on start that military dictatorship is the root cause of problems. Given their clear ideological inclinations, Revolutionary Socialists were consistent in diagnosing the problem. It has always been the regime's monopoly of power and wealth. The socio-economic aspect of repression manifested in the lack of social justice, and violations

of workers' rights are at the core of their analysis of the issue. Two days after the ouster of Mubarak, the Revolutionary Socialists issued a statement entitled "The People Still Want the Downfall of the Regime" in which they called for the continuation of demonstrations and expressing little trust in the army who they accused of attempting to violently clear Tahrir Square. Most of the youth, beyond their superficial identification of the issues with the Egyptian state, did not possess nor develop serious intellectual treatise that comprehensively identified the core issue. With the passing of time and the development of events, the revolutionaries' articulation of the problem became more nuanced. Concepts that were previously confined to academic scholarship such as the deep state, the military security complex, the Generals State and networks of corruption entered into the revolutionary daily lexicon adding more depth to their understanding of the fundamental issues with the system.

Several months into Mohamed Morsi's presidency, religious authoritarianism replaced military authoritarianism as the overarching diagnostic frame. For many of the youth, however, it was less an issue of "religious" than it was an issue of "authoritarianism". One activist elaborated:

Our problem is not with the military or the Muslim Brotherhood, our real problem is with the idea that you could have one group controlling the country and excluding everyone else. At the time of SCAF it was the generals, during Morsi's time it was his trusted brothers. Any organization, interest group, or social class that seeks to monopolize the system and exclude or repress the rest will be opposed. That's why I opposed Mubarak, SCAF, Morsi and now Sisi.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Ahmed Adel, Skype interview, December 3, 2014.

There is no comparison between the authoritarianism of the SCAF and that of Morsi in terms of extent and level. It would be more accurate to point to the elements of exclusion and alliance with the old state in propagating the authoritarianism frame. According to Mohamed Abbas, an ex-Muslim Brotherhood member and a youth activist leader, the Muslim Brotherhood's "stupidity" in dealing with state's institutions is what gave rise to the development of the youth's frame. He affirmed:

They [The Muslim Brotherhood] made all the wrong choices... they went back on the promises they made in Fairmont agreement ... they made an alliance with the old regime against the revolutionaries hoping to fix the regime from the inside... they are the ones in power, how else would they expect the youth to characterize their actions?<sup>136</sup>

Regardless of whether the youth perceived Morsi as a dictator who sought to empower his own group or a weak and naïve leader who could not be up to the revolutionaries' expectations, he remained to be blamed by the youth. The demands of the revolution remained the same.

#### *4.3.2 Prognostic Frame*

The main criticism directed to the youth or those who advocate change in general is that they do not have an alternative to present. For the youth, the prognosis was straightforward: freedom is the solution to tyranny; democracy is the solution to authoritarianism; social justice is the solution to poverty; the respect of human dignity is the solution to torture and state-inflicted humiliation. Beyond these generic values, the youth never developed a political program to demonstrate what these ideals actually mean in real life and how they could be applied. One major reason for that is that the youth do not form a united class, despite sharing many commonalities. With

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<sup>136</sup> Mohamed Abbas, Skype interview, December 3, 2014.

many youth organizations refusing the constraints of political ideology or even the formal engagement in politics, their solutions remained to be in the realm of pressuring the regime for more changes.

Youth activists realize that shortcoming, but only a few of them have engaged in thoughtful attempts to rise above the daily battles and develop a long-term vision and strategy. One of these youth attempts is by Iyad El-Baghdadi, an online Arab activist. Writing a few days before the downfall of Mubarak, El-Baghdadi asked a question everyone was too preoccupied in the events to contemplate: “A constitution must be preceded by a statement or a manifesto. Do we have one?”<sup>137</sup> Recognizing that the Arab Spring was not ideologically tinted, El-Baghdadi repeatedly stipulated that if the youth wanted to replace the tyrants they needed to develop a manifesto. As early as December 2011 he predicted and rightly so, that if the youth do not present an alternative, the old guard will be back to fill in the gap. El-Baghdadi decided to take on the task of articulating his version of “Islamic libertarianism” in a book by the title *The Arab Spring Manifesto*. His attempt is one of the very few, if not the first by youth activists and intellectuals, to develop an alternative vision. More efforts representing the diverse backgrounds of the youth are needed in that direction.

In terms of strategies and tactics employed to respond to the problems identified in the diagnostic frame, protest arose as the corrective measure used by the youth to push for the revolution’s goals. While the regime practiced politics, issuing laws, arresting protestors, putting civilians on military trials, and forming cabinets, the youth’s proposed solution was the same: demonstrations. This form of “street

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<sup>137</sup> This was initially a tweet posted on February 8, 2011. El-Baghdadi references it in his talk *The Arab Spring Manifesto*. Oslo Freedom Forum. October 22, 2014. <https://oslofreedomforum.com/talks/the-arab-spring-manifesto>

politics”,<sup>138</sup> although more effective earlier in 2011 than later on, reflected the prognostic deficiency of the youth. In terms of momentary actions, there were many “solutions” presented by the revolutionaries at different stages to solve the issue of military being in power. For example, prior to Mubarak’s ouster, the revolutionary socialists advocated the development of popular committees to popular councils that elect higher councils to eventually represent the revolution. The Revolution Youth Coalition called for the creation of a presidential council that involves one military figure in addition to two civilians. This proposed solution was developed to a full civilian presidential council and became the demand of many revolutionaries during 2011. The naivety in believing that the military council would willingly hand over power to an unelected civilian council, along with the many internal disagreements on who represents the people and the inexistent mechanism to choose the figures, led the term to become a joke among activists in the following years.

#### *4.3.3 Motivational Frame*

Vocabularies of motive provide the activists in a movement with reasons to identify with the goals of the movement and engage in action. They are created through the course of interaction among actors and are usually invoked when the participant’s action is put into question.<sup>139</sup> The youth in Egypt employed a variety of rhetoric to appeal to the people at large and motivate the members of their groups. It is noticeable that the language used generally appealed to emotions and not reason. This proved effective most of the time in mobilizing the people and especially the youth who are carried away easily by enthusiasm. Egyptians, an emotional people, as they are often referred to, proved to respond more positively to calls that address their feelings. Evident in the naming of the first Friday “The Friday of Rage”, emotions

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<sup>138</sup> Nadine Abdalla (March 2013). Egypt’s Revolutionary Youth From Street Politics to Party Politics, SWP comments 11. *German Institute for International and Security Affairs*.

<sup>139</sup> Robert D. Benford, "You Could Be the Hundredth Monkey" 200.

varying from anger to fear passing by pride continued to play a significant role in mobilizing people by different parties. In determining the vocabularies of motive used by youth, I applied a combination of methods. First, I examined the names given to more than 65 Friday demonstrations during the SCAF's and Morsi's rule. Second, I conducted an extensive survey of the Facebook pages of Revolution Youth Coalition, We are All Khaled Said, 6<sup>th</sup> of April Movement and Revolutionary Socialists particularly looking at their created events. I also consulted statements calling for action on the pages of youth and youth dominated parties such as Masr Al-Qawiya, Al-Tayyar Al-Masry and Al-Dostour. Finally, I depended on personal interviews with youth activists who completed the picture with their lived experiences and backgrounds. Next are the three kinds of vocabularies of action the youth utilized in their framing to provide motivational impetus for collection action – Martyrs' rights, dignity, protection of the revolution.

### *Martyrs' Rights*

One very common motif used by the revolutionary youth to provide rationale for their actions is the defense of martyrs' rights. During the 18 days of the revolution until the ouster of Mubarak, 846 protestors were killed by the police and security forces.<sup>140</sup> While calls for bread, social justice, freedom and human dignity were the demands during the 18 days, after Mubarak's overthrow the retribution for martyrs was added to the list of demands and also became a motivating factor in itself to call for action. This is manifested in the famous slogan "Either we get their rights or we die as they [the martyrs] did"<sup>141</sup>. On April 8, 2011 the million-man demonstration was named "purification and judgment". The most famous slogan that day was

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<sup>140</sup> Amnesty International (2011) *Egypt Rises: Killings, Detentions and Torture in the '25 January Revolution'* London: Amnesty International Ltd.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE12/027/2011/en/b33cf2ea-e057-4a34-905b-46a897c4fe6d/mde120272011en.pdf>

<sup>141</sup> *ya negeeb ha'ohom ya nemoot zayohom*

“Retribution, retribution. They shot our brothers with bullets”<sup>142</sup>. It is remarkable that these slogans continued to live on and be used consistently for mobilization throughout the time of SCAF, Morsi and Sisi. The dedication of events for the sole purpose of demanding retribution to the martyrs also was a feature common to all three periods. Martyr’s blood is not for sale, Martyrs’ rights Friday, Martyrs’ memorial Friday, Maspero’s Martyrs’ Friday, the Martyr’s dream Friday, Justice (Retribution) Friday are but some of the examples of demonstrations organized during 2011 and 2012. In 2013 and 2014 under Adly Mansour and Sisi respectively, the motivational frame for youth changed from martyrs to prisoners. This, however, is beyond the scope of this short survey.

Although this rhetoric proved convincing and motivating enough to some people to engage in demonstrations, the over-use and sometimes abuse of the martyrs’ blood by political forces, led people at times to lose sympathy and regard the issue of secondary importance. Some youth admitted to me that the cause of the martyrs is a just one; however, their cause is an offshoot of the initial problem. “They [the consecutive regimes in power] succeeded in distracting us from our real demands. What we should have invested more in was to work on realizing the dreams the martyrs died for”, one activist confided to me<sup>143</sup>. Hence the slogan was sometimes modified in demonstrations to be “We will get their rights and we will realize their dream.”<sup>144</sup> The symbolism of martyrs, however, continued to have a great appeal to the youth, based on their feelings of guilt, loyalty, and the desire for retribution.

### *Dignity*

Another motivational frame the youth used is the appeal to dignity. Daily

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<sup>142</sup> *al-qasas al-qasas darabou ekhwatna bel rosas*. Nariman Abdel Karim, etl. (2012, June 9). Million-Man Demonstrations: Toppled Mubarak and Still Looking for a Complete Revolution. (Arabic)*Al Masry Alyoum*. <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/184823>

<sup>143</sup> Author informal interview with an activist who did not want his name disclosed. October 5, 2014.

<sup>144</sup> *hangeeb ha’ohom w neha’a’ helmohom*

humiliation, especially at the hands of the police was one of the main reasons for the January 25 uprising. One of the main slogans of the revolution was the call for human dignity which was crushed under Mubarak's 30 year rule. Dignity was at the root of the demonstrations to the extent that some dubbed the Egyptian Revolution a "dignity revolution."<sup>145</sup> The brutal use of force by the military and security forces during SCAF's time provided a momentum for youth movements to appeal once more to that feeling. Abuses against female protestors in particular were highlighted to harness the sympathy of the people. Following the cabinet clashes in December 2011 when female protestors were stripped and dragged in the street, a million-man demonstration, bearing the title "Free Women of Egypt", was called. The slogan which dominated the day was "Down, down with military rule; Egypt's girls are a red line"<sup>146</sup>. Two weeks later, the weekly demonstration was called "Friday of Pride and Dignity" in which demonstrators demanded an end to military rule, holding the military accountable for the mismanagement of the transitional phase.<sup>147</sup>

### *Protection of the Revolution*

This frame, in contrast, to the first two frames is primarily addressed to those who believe in the revolution in the first place. It does not seek to convince or mobilize bystanders, rather it attempts to persuade its adherents of the urgency and importance of their participation. The youth repeatedly depicted the revolution as endangered to incite their fellow members and the wider public who believe in the importance of the revolution. For a generation who has lived its entire life under Mubarak's repression, the revolution represented the biggest achievement worthy of defending. The revolution, embodying the hope of the youth for a better future, was

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<sup>145</sup> See Carla Seaquist. (2011, February 10). The Dignity Revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia -- and America? *The Huffington Post*. and Nawara Negm (2011, February 19) Egyptian dignity in the face of death. *The Guardian*.

<sup>146</sup> *yasqot yasqot hukm el a'skr banat masr khat ahmar*

<sup>147</sup> Nariman Abdel Karim, etl. Million-man Demonstrations

an abstract symbol that could express all their demands. Appealing to save the revolution meant saving freedoms, fighting corruption, opposing repression and guaranteeing no return to the old regime. The frame of protection or defense works in a number of ways. First, it highlights the element of agency, reminding the people of their collective power but also appealing to the sense of individual responsibility “it is your duty to defend the revolution.” Second, it instills an element of urgency. By invoking the rhetoric of “danger”, “protection”, “defense” activists created an urge to take part in the demonstrations as it is something that cannot wait.

#### **4.4 Resonance**

After defining the three main core-framing tasks and how the youth dealt with them, I will now examine how resonant these frames were with the people. Resonance, as previously explained, has two main components: credibility and salience. In the next few pages, I will analyze these two elements in order to understand the reasons behind some frames used by the youth being more successful in yielding public support than others. In particular, The issue of cultural resonance, also known as narrative fidelity, is especially difficult for youth to address and is more difficult to change than other components. As such, I will give it special attention.

##### *4.4.1 Credibility*

Credibility is an issue the revolutionary youth struggled with on various levels. In Egypt, age is an important factor in conferring credibility. Since credibility is often related to knowledge, experience and expertise, the older you were, the wiser, more knowledgeable, and, by consequence, more respectable you were perceived. The youth were often perceived as inexperienced enthusiasts who do not possess enough legitimacy to be taken seriously. Popularity is another contributing factor to

credibility. Public figures are generally seen more credible just by the fact of being known to the people. Understanding this culture, the youth tried to get around this by a “credentializing” process in which they sought the support of “credible” persons in the eyes of the community so they could be taken seriously. The first instance where this was clearly manifested was the campaign leading up to the March 2011 referendum. The youth who were in favor of a “no” vote campaigned for their choice by creating a video in which youth figures, as well as well-known politicians, businessmen, professors, actors, singers, and writers all appeared justifying a no vote<sup>148</sup>.

In terms of empirical credibility, the youth were successful in creating all sorts of documentation for their claims. Social media provided them a platform through which they could publish videos, pictures and statistics supporting their claims. The issue, however, was one of outreach to the people. Since the youth did not control the media and had little financial means to create a news outlet that represented their cause, these empirical evidences were not displayed to the people. Using innovative ways, the youth developed the idea of “Kazeboon”, a campaign using a portable projector and videos of SCAF’s human rights violations and contradictory statements to display in public squares. As one activist put it, “If people cannot watch us on TV, we will go to them in the streets and let them watch the truth for themselves.”

Finally, frame consistency is also essential in acquiring credibility in the eyes of the people. Here the youth’s demands proved to be consistent. The problem, however, was in the perceived inconsistency between the ideals being advocated and the methods used. For example, the youth called for democracy and free elections but when parliamentary elections were held, only a few ran for office. In the presidential

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<sup>148</sup> To view the video in Arabic see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYYfM6SwIHk>

elections, disagreements between revolutionary youth led them to support different candidates representing the revolution camp who all failed to make it to the second round. Generally, youth's reluctance to participate in formal politics was perceived as inconsistent with their calls for change. In conclusion, for claims to be accepted by a people, those three elements of credibility need to be present. Revolutionary youth scored poorly on all three, This cost them the credibility they dearly sought.

#### *4.4.2 Saliency*

All throughout the four years, the youth were consistently dragged into political battles that did not concern the majority of the people. Instead of focusing on economic and social demands of the revolution that were the main reason average laypeople joined reason for the joining of laymen, the revolutionary youth engaged in elitist contestations that the people could not relate to. This could be seen in the infamous debate of the "Constitution First" or "Elections First" which drained the youth for months. Following the constitutional amendments referendum in March 2011, political forces were divided into two groups with the liberal opposition, the majority of the youth and nascent political parties calling for drafting the constitution before holding parliamentary elections, while the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamists were in favor of early elections. Eventually, the SCAF decided to hold parliamentary elections in November and December 2011 before writing the constitution. The debate, however, resurfaced in 2012 with the political forces arguing once more whether presidential elections this time should take place first or the drafting of the constitution. Interestingly, many of the youth represented in movements such as April 6 Movement and Masrena and political parties such as Al-Adl and Al-Tayyar Al-Masry switched roles, this time advocating "President First" and vehemently opposing writing a constitution under military rule. The first Friday million-man

demonstration in February 2012 was held under the same title “President First”. Moreover, We are All Khaled Said Page in conjunction with other youth movements, launched a campaign titled “No constitution under Military Rule”. This seeming contradiction could be explained by the fact that the youth hoped the presidential elections could result in a revolutionary president, while in the case of the parliamentary elections, it was widely predicted that the Muslim Brotherhood would gain the plurality, if not the majority, of the seats and thus control the constitution drafting process.

The debate, which garnered media attention and the focus of political forces, lacked the saliency aspect for resonance, making it distant from the people. For the majority of the people, the two options seemed equally insignificant. Centrality, the first factor composing salience, was completely absent. Some youth tried to break that dichotomy and redirect the public discourse to discuss people’s real issues. In the midst of that heated debate, Mohamed Abo-elgheit, a young 22-year blogger and student at the time wrote a blog titled “The Poor First, You Bastards!” in which he tried to highlight the role of the poor in the revolution. Publishing pictures and stories of poor martyrs for the first time in a challenge to the entrenched narrative, his post got a lot of attention in the media and in the cyber world spreading to pages all over Facebook and Twitter. Abo-elgheit’s attempt to break away from the existing elitist frame and create an alternative discourse yielded a degree of success. For example, following his post, We are All Khaled Said Page dedicated a lot of space to the discussion of poverty and analyzing the issues Abo-elgheit’s raised in his note. However, by and large, the youth were still stuck into the political elites debates carefully and deliberately designed by the SCAF and could not impose their own agenda.

On the level of experiential commensurability, which is the second component of salience, the youth also failed to make the link to people's lives. The issues youth advocated or opposed remained too abstract to the people who did not understand their relevance to their daily lives. An issue like the militarization of the state, which was a central feature in the youth's discourse especially during the SCAF's time, was never broken down into tangible effect on people's lives. Given the low literacy rate, the youth's rhetoric came across as too elitist and complicated for the masses to understand and interact with. Some youth parties attempted to bridge this gap by simplifying the concepts and drawing direct relationship between them and the people. For example, during the debate preceding the voting on the 2012 constitution, Masr Al-Qawiya Party youth launched a campaign that tried to take every objection to the constitution and turn it into a real life example. However, these attempts remained limited and got swapped away in the midst of the mega debates.

The "Elections First" or "Constitution First" debate is one example of an issue that lacked salience. Another would be the debate surrounding the "civility" of the state. Especially during the Muslim Brotherhood rule, the elites engaged in a parochial debate concerning the nature of the state. After the "battle of ballots" in March 2011, a destructive identity-based polarization increasingly found its way into the political environment. The youth were not immune. The more the youth and political elites engaged in these debates, the more the people became disenchanted by the revolution and its prospects for affecting their lives. Almost all the youth activists I interviewed admitted they engaged in the wrong battles and expressed remorse for not giving precedence for economic and social demands that touch people's lives. On the local level, some groups were able to realize small victories, but on the national discourse level, the frames remained every much determined by the major political

actors. Hany El Gamal, a founding member of Al-Dostour party told me, “We were for so long drained in the battle of titles. We need to make the move now to the battle of content.”<sup>149</sup> But even the Revolutionary Socialists who adopt economic and social justice as their primary frame of action used rhetoric that was difficult for the people to understand. The movement’s discourse, as a member of its political bureau declared to me, reflected the ideological rigidity and the professional background of the majority of the members.<sup>150</sup> The discussion was relevant, especially for workers, but the language was simply too distant from the laypeople.<sup>151</sup> In conclusion, the types of issues and how relevant they are to the people are important but so are the motivational frames and vocabularies of action used.

#### *4.4.3 Cultural Resonance*

The last factor determining people’s interaction with the demands is narrative fidelity or cultural resonance. Culture has a great effect on which frames can propagate. Success of the narratives and actions are determined by whether they conform or contradict entrenched ideals and traditions in society. Youth’s beliefs and attitudes contradicted the cultural tradition of the Egyptian people in two distinct ways – respect and stability. First, respect of the military institution is part of the popular culture since the 1952 Revolution. The military was generally seen before the revolution as a professional and disciplined organization that was not corrupt as the police was. Moreover, mandatory conscription meant that it is likely that everyone in the people had a close relative or friend serving at the army at some point. This reinforced the feeling that the army is part of the people. Finally, the legacy of the 1973 war, especially for the older generation added a hallow of respect and

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<sup>149</sup> Hany El Gamal, Author interview, August 27, 2014

<sup>150</sup> Hatem Tallima, Author interview, August 19, 2014

<sup>151</sup> Interestingly, Hatem revealed to me during the interview that the movement’s statements are received more positively by the workers than the public.

sacredness to the military who was perceived as the only army who achieved victory for the Arabs against Israel. For all of those reasons, the infamous slogan “Down, down with Military Rule” which the youth developed and continued to use over 2011 until mid 2012 was met with popular indignation. The youth repeatedly attempted to differentiate between the SCAF, which Mubarak had appointed, and the army as a patriotic institution, by declaring “The army is ours but the council [of Armed Forces] is not.”<sup>152</sup> However, the media and the SCAF consistently made sure to blur the differences in order to rid the revolutionaries of any support they may get from the people. The swelling incidents of army soldiers using torture and lethal force against protestors over the transitional period led some youth to reconsider their previous assessment of the army being “ours”. The unprecedented confrontation with army soldiers made the revolutionaries convinced they are not that different from the police forces they for long considered an antagonist. Naturally, the media picked this and used it to discredit the revolutionaries. The increasing information made available on the “Officers Republic”<sup>153</sup> made the youth realize the issue transcends SCAF to include the entire political and economic institutional militarization of the country. For the people to see fault with this fact, the revolutionary youth had to engage in a multi-level struggle.

Respect for the elderly is a second cultural convention the youth’s framing of their demands contradicted. In the Egyptian culture, age begets respect. In spite of all of Mubarak’s crimes, when he was strongly attacked by the youth following his arrest, some called for “considering him like your father”. The youth’s often challenge and sometimes disrespect for authority figures led them to be perceived as “undisciplined” and hampered the resonance of their demands with the older

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<sup>152</sup> *el geish beta`na wel magles msh taba`na*

<sup>153</sup> See Yezid Sayigh (August 2012) Above the State: The Officers’ Republic in Egypt Carnegie Papers. *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.

generation.

Similarly, respect of public morals is considered of high importance in Egyptian culture. It is interesting that the revolutionaries' use of symbolic violence in language has been more harshly condemned by the people than state's practice of physical violence. A famous example is the heated media interjection between novelist Alaa Al Aswany and then Prime Minister Ahmed Shafik in the month following Mubarak's ouster. The older generation's reaction to the episode centered around the condemnation of Al Aswany's insult to Shafik and the disrespectful attitude he displayed towards his patriotic role as an army officer. The public's dismay at "disrespectful" attitude extend to the youth's use of swear words and obscenity in their online interactions. Youth activists such as Alaa Abdel Fattah declared more than once that their use of symbolic/verbal violence was intentional and is meant to hurt the image of the powerful who commit actual violence against the powerless.<sup>154</sup> Claiming a higher ground, however, The regime's rhetoric, in its depicting youth as morally decrepit, resonated with the people more than the youth's.

Finally, the Egyptian culture is one that favors stability. It could be argued that any society prefers the status quo, but in Egypt, the compulsion for stability over Egyptian history led to the entrenchment of a culture of submission and non-confrontation. Phrases such as *emshi gamb el heit*, meaning mind your own business became the unofficial motto of the Mubarak years. For the youth to call for the rising up against tyranny and risking your life was in total conflict with the conventional wisdom. These cultural traditions attest to the fact that the battle in Egypt is primarily demarcated along generational lines. This also raises the question of whether the

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<sup>154</sup> Egyptian Activist, Alaa Abd El Fattah, Penalized by Sarkhov Prize Nominating Committee for Speaking Out Against Israel. 8 October 8, 2014. *Muftah*.

<http://muftah.org/sarkhov-freedom-thought-prize-nomination-rescinded-egyptian-activist-alaa-speaking-israel/#.VIEJ9KSUdtI>

revolution was indeed a popular revolution or essentially a youth revolution which the people, under the impression they shared the same goals as the youth, joined.<sup>155</sup>

#### **4.5 Framing Processes**

Framing processes are important in understanding how frames develop and interact; however, a full analysis of framing processes is beyond the scope of this study and is not feasible in a chapter of this length. The two sets of discursive and strategic processes were indirectly touched upon throughout the first half of the chapter. In this final section, I would like to focus on contested processes and more specifically counter-framing in the context of Egypt. The outcome of frame contests between youth activists and their adversaries, as I will demonstrate, played a decisive role in the degree of acceptance of the youth's demands by the public.

##### *Frame contests*

The target of any framing activity is to reach out to the largest number of possible adherents in order to mobilize them. However, the success or failure of collective action frames is not merely a function of its content. Frames advocated by social movements are subject to intense contestations that involve the movement's activists, the state as well as countermovements.<sup>156</sup> Official frames developed by the state and propagated by the media to combat the social movement have a great impact on the success prospects of the collective frames mobilized by the social movement. In this section, I discuss how the Egyptian regime characterized January 25<sup>th</sup> and framed the youth who ignited it and their demands throughout the different time periods. For the SCAF period, I examine the Facebook communiqués the SCAF

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<sup>155</sup> For more discussion on this and on the characterization of the relationship between the youth and the revolution please see section 1.5.3 and 1.5.4 in chapter 1.

<sup>156</sup> John A. Noakes (2005) Official Frames in Social Movement Theory: The FBI, HUAC, and the Communist Threat in Hollywood. In Hank Johnston and John A. Noakes (eds.) *Frames of Protest: Social Movements and the Framing Perspective*. 89- 112. 90.

issued during its first year of ruling. I also refer to press conferences and speeches by General Hussein Tantawy and other members of the military council whenever appropriate. For Morsi and Sisi's presidencies, I mainly rely on the coverage of their speeches and televised interviews. In addition to official frames, media frames, which in the case of Egypt greatly overlap with the official narrative, will also be analyzed.

The framing of the youth by their adversaries took different shapes over the past four years. At first they were hailed as “the pure youth of January 25” but as soon as clashes intensified with the SCAF, they started to be framed both by the media and the regime as “troublemakers” and “thugs”. During Morsi's time, they were framed as “immoral” and “irreligious”. Finally, during Sisi's time they were framed as “traitors”, “foreign funded”, and in some cases “Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers”. In all three phases, two parallel frames existed simultaneously. There was always an attempt to differentiate between the “real or true revolutionary youth” and the disruptive youth who “misuse democracy” and engage in vandalism of public property or disruption of the political process. The SCAF's discourse mirrors the official narrative favorably viewing January 25<sup>th</sup> while delegitimizing all demonstrations that followed it. In its first communiqué, SCAF called the revolution a uniting and peaceful one that has impressed the world. In communiqué no 51, the council called the revolution “one of the greatest revolutions of this time.”<sup>157</sup> SCAF addressed the “pure youth of January 25<sup>th</sup>” who are patriotic and aware of the responsibility entrusted to SCAF as per communiqué 24, while warning against the “misguided” youth who Only seek to cause strife and raise disputes between the army and the people. The official frame, for the most part, remained one that talked positively about the youth in the attempt to integrate them into the system, while

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<sup>157</sup> Fatma El Zahraa Abdel Fattah, (2012, February 14) Thus Spoke the SCAF: A Reading in the Transformations of the Military Council's Discourse Over a Year of Ruling. *Al Masry Alyoum* (Arabic) <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/151436>

charactering the protesting youth a disruptive minority.

Similarly, in their multiple statements and speeches, Morsi and Sisi appealed to the youth. Speaking at a ceremony in Cairo University, Sisi addressed the youth by saying: “I want Egypt's youth to be by my side.” He added, “I love Egypt's youth and consider them my children.”<sup>158</sup> In different speeches, he called for youth’s participation in the upcoming parliamentary elections<sup>159</sup> trying to frame them as part of the solution. However, the counter-framing continued for the politically active youth and more importantly measurements on the ground spoke louder.

The counterframing of the youth used by the regime and the media appealed to the people’s desire for stability. By depicting the youth as elements who are causing disruption, obstructing the democratic path, and leading to the worsening of the economic situation, the regime created an easy enemy for the people. Instead, of addressing and changing policies, the problem was framed as one caused by the uncooperative youth who are insistent on disrupting the system. While the factor of stability remained present in the counter-framing throughout the three different regimes, the discourse took different forms. Before Morsi’s victory in the second round of the presidential elections, the youth were seen as an essential part of the political landscape. In Fairmont agreement Morsi gave the revolutionary youth many promises with regard to inclusion of all parties into power. During Morsi’s presidency, and as identity-based polarization intensified, the pro-Muslim Brotherhood media undermined the youth’s religiosity and morality to discredit them. Appealing to religious and moral sentiments, the personal conduct and beliefs of

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<sup>158</sup> El-Sisi Promises Bigger Role for Youth in Cairo University Speech. *Ahram Online*. September 28, 2014

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/111915/Egypt/Politics-/ElSisi-promises-bigger-role-for-youth-in-Cairo-Uni.aspx>

<sup>159</sup> El-Sisi calls in Youth to Participate in Egypt Parliamentary Vote. *Ahram Online*. October 1, 2014  
<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/112149/Egypt/Politics-/ElSisi-calls-on-youth-to-participate-in-Egypt-parl.aspx>

activists were often brought into question and used to delegitimize their demands.<sup>160</sup> During Sisi's time, the regime whose legitimacy rested on its ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood, appealed to the sense of fear. Making use of the "newly discovered" nationalist and patriotic feelings, the youth were conveniently portrayed in the media as foreign-funded traitors engaged in a grand conspiracy against Egypt. Sympathizing with the Muslim Brotherhood became a general accusation to anyone who actively opposed the regime.

A key point in all of these counter-framing endeavors is the role of the media. The target audiences of these counter-frames are bystanders who are open to changing their views and taking sides. One major challenge the youth faced in constructing their oppositional frames is having access to the media. During the SCAF's rule, activists had better "standing" in the media, meaning they had a voice rather than mere coverage of their mentioning in the news. While the media allowed some youth voices to appear, they carefully chose those whose narrative does not greatly contradict that of the regime. Standing, however, is not automatically granted by the media. In order to gain standing, the youth had to contend with other political officials and journalists.<sup>161</sup> While officials can have access to the media forum when they wish, the youth have to earn their standing by actions that draw media attention e.g. demonstrations, new campaign etc. These actions in themselves affect the message they wish to convey to the people and sometimes affirmatively confirming the regime's counter-frames. In other words, having mere access to the media does not translate into the ability to oppose the regime's counter-framing. Another issue with the media that featured prominently is the internal rivalries between the youth inside

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<sup>160</sup> Examples include Safwat Hegazy's reference to 6<sup>th</sup> April and the Agouza apartment, Khaled Abdalla's depiction of Alaa Abdel Fattah as an atheist and many others.

<sup>161</sup> William A. Gamason (2007) Bystanders Public Opinion, and the Media. In David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. Oxford: Blackwell 241-261. 251.

each SMO. Those whose actions create the standing often found that their preferred frame is poorly represented by those who became the media designated spokespersons.<sup>162</sup> These internal movement contests can become the subject of media's coverage, distracting the public from the real issues and contributing to the counterframing. This could be seen for example in the case of 6<sup>th</sup> of April movement and its eventual splitting into two movements. In brief, the youth's inadequacy in developing effective strategies to deal with the media led to the corroboration of the official counter-frames. Relying primarily on social media to oppose these frames, the youth essentially were absorbed into monologues and could not reach out to the wider bystanders who were not already engaged but heavily influenced by official media.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Framing is an active verb to signify that the construction and development of frames are a dynamic and never ending process. In this chapter, I tried to reveal the major frames the youth used in identifying the problem with the regime and proposing a solution and alternatives. I also identified the three vocabularies of motives they used to mobilize support: rights of the martyrs, dignity and pride, and protection of the revolution. As I demonstrated, these frames found little resonance due to the absence of credibility and salience of the demands. The role of the dominant culture in determining the extent to which these frames resonated was also highlighted. Finally, the chapter ended by examining the frames contests the youth engaged in with the regime particularly the effect of the media on the prospects for challenging counter-frames.

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 252.

## **Conclusion**

This research started with a personal quest to find answers for the ever-evasive question of “what went wrong” with the Egyptian Revolution. Being an activist/researcher myself made the issue so poignant. In this research, I used a threefold theoretical framework to look at the apparent failure of the youth to maintain a position for themselves in the political scene and realize the goals of the Egyptian Revolution. The analysis leaned more towards analyzing the early phase of the transitional period being the most formative in the youth’s revolutionary experience. The purpose of this thesis was not to analyze or assess the current moment as much as it was an attempt at understanding the processes which led to present consequences. Thoroughly examining the three phases of the post-Mubarak transition would necessitate three separate theses. Investigating a topic so dynamic proved to be a strenuous task. The ever-changing situations and positions not only affected the analysis of current events but also altered and nuanced the understanding and perceptions of previous stances and events.

In this thesis, I prefaced with the argument that in order to understand the Egyptian Revolution and its development, it is indispensable to analyze the youth element as an integral part of the study. Looking at the revolutionary youth as a social movement, this research utilized three main theoretical approaches to study their activities: Resource Mobilization Theory, Political Opportunity Structure and Framing.

In chapter two, I looked specifically at leadership and organization as two problematic issues the youth had to deal with. The leaderlessness of the Egyptian Revolution caused by the fact that no single coherent group could claim responsibility for it imprinted much of the political realities during the period following Mubarak’s

ouster. As for organization, two interrelated issues capture the youth's organizational dilemma. The first one is the official vs. unofficial political organization dichotomy – the choice of whether to formally engage the political process in the form of political parties or remain as pressure groups affecting the system using street mobilization. Related to this issue is the choice between hierarchical structures of organization and network models. The chapter also examined the issues the youth faced with other kinds of resources such as moral, cultural and material resources.

In the following chapter, I tried to analyze the effects of the political context on the youth's development from revolutionary to political movements. Youth are often criticized for their unwillingness to join formal politics and resort to street politics manifesting in protests. In that chapter, I demonstrated how the nature of the political system in Egypt, being a closed and strong system restricted the youth's opportunity to join the political process on equal terms and led them to use confrontational strategies. The state's use of repression had a direct effect in the same direction. The more the state used repression, the more the youth got engaged in side battles that distracted them from developing long-term strategies. These institutional structures must not, however, overshadow the element of agency. As many activists admitted in my interviews with them, the revolutionary youth had the option of turning these institutional obstacles into opportunities for other forms of political engagement. The main problem is that youth either focused too much on the institutional structures, trying to penetrate the system or they disbelieved in the prospects of accessing the system and found in protest and informal organizations the tool to affect the regime from outside. Both strategies, however, overlooked an important factor – the people. As one youth activist put it: “we were so consumed with reaching out to power, instead of reaching out to the people. We ended up losing

both.”<sup>163</sup> This is not a call for forsaking formal politics or politics altogether for that matter. Instead, it is a suggestion for practicing politics by other means. Some youths realized that the institutional obstacles curtail any chances for their penetration into the system and became convinced that the any solution would have to be geared toward the empowerment of people as its top priority.<sup>164</sup>

In chapter four I attempted to analyze the problems with the youth’s rhetoric and presentation of themselves and their ideas. A summary of these issues can be identified in four points. First, one major reason for the failure of the youth to present a convincing discourse to the people is the vagueness of their diagnostic and prognostic frames. While the former, arguably was better conceived of, the latter is where the youth’s main problem lied. The youth did not form alternatives on the intellectual or the practical levels for reasons discussed thoroughly in the chapter. The end result is that they presented the old regime with a golden opportunity to step in to fill the void they created by the ouster of Mubarak and then Morsi. Second, the motivational frames the youth used remained “activist-oriented”. After a while, martyrs’ rights and protection of the revolution were not strong enough reasons for the laypeople to join mobilization. The distortion of the revolution in the media succeeded in leading the people to perceive the revolution and even the martyrs as the reasons for the deteriorating economic conditions and political instability. People were unable to make the connection between the demands of the revolutionaries and their own lives. Furthermore, the absence of any political alternative made demonstrations seem like ways of letting out frustration more than effecting policy change. Dignity is an important motivational factor but the increasingly worsening economic pressures and instability in people’s daily lives following the revolution led

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<sup>163</sup> Mina George, Author interview, November 6, 2014.

<sup>164</sup> Tariq Ismail, Author interview, November 17, 2014

some of them to believe that forgoing some of their rights for the sake of the country's political advancement is an acceptable price. Additionally, the brainwashing effect of the media led people to disbelieve the credibility of many human rights violations happening to the revolutionaries or worse, perceiving it as necessary. Third, the political battles the youth, as well as other political parties were focused on were of marginal importance to the people, lacking all aspects of resonance. This was reaffirmed by the use of elitist rhetoric in expressing and discussing those demands. In short, once more the absence of the appeal to the people on their own terms was a major setback to the youth. It could be argued however that these ailments plagued all political actors and not specifically the youth. This could be correct to a certain degree, however, what the youth lacked in terms of rhetoric compared to other actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood for example is cultural resonance. The youth's demands by definition were in contradiction with many tenets in Egyptian culture; nevertheless, they directed little efforts toward tailoring the message to the people who found the youth's rhetoric or characterization of the issues offensive.

Finally, this study is one more effort at understanding of how the youth ended up where they are now. Rather than being prescriptive, the findings of this research serve the purpose of better comprehending the reasons for the youth's failure in order to draw lessons for the future. While this thesis was an attempt at diagnosis, more efforts are needed to transform these findings into practical solutions. My hope is that this work and similar ones open more opportunities for discussion. It is timely for the youth who have actively participated in the revolution to engage in an extensive and thorough re-evaluation of their revolutionary experience. As for scholars, it is equally an opportunity to revisit some of the theoretical assumptions regarding the relationship between youth, revolutions, and political transition.

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## **Interviews**

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Tamer Wageeh, Revolutionary Front, Cairo, August 18, 2014.

Hatem Tallima, Revolutionary Socialists, Cairo August 19, 2014.

Ahmed Abdel Gawad, Ex Masr Al-Qawiya Party, August 21, and August 24, 2014

Khaled Abdel Hameed, Revolutionary Youth Coalition, Cairo, August 25, 2014

Hany El-Gamal, Al-Dostour Party, Cairo, August 27, 2014.

Mohamed Shams, Ex Muslim Brotherhood, Skype interview, November 5, 2014

Ahmed Adel, Independent, Skype interview, November 5, and December 2, 2014

Mina George, Ex Masr Qawiya Party, Cairo, November 6, 2014.

Tariq Ismail, Independent, Cairo, November 7, 2014

Mohamed Abbas, Al-Tayyar Al-Masry, Skype interview, December 2, 2014