

THE CONTENTIOUS ROOTS OF THE 2011 EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION

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## **ABSTRACT**

Although real socio-economic injustices may have been the justification for the Egyptian revolution of 2011, it was not the cause of Egypt's politicization. Demonstrators peacefully toppled a strong western ally on the premise of high unemployment, lack of opportunity, lack of free elections, food inflation, corruption, and lack of democracy, among others. Why did social mobilization lead to a social movement against a state that's highly dependent on coercion? How did politics make the shift from internal social relations to contentious street politics? Considering that access to social networks, high unemployment, systematic corruption, and economic stagnation are all commonplace throughout the world, the Egyptian revolution is an anomaly. This paper argues that an analysis of the possible roots of the modern era of contentious politics in Egypt and its subsequent politicization will help demystify and decipher how this anomaly occurred.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Early in the morning on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 police officers, troops, and undercover agents inundated the streets leading to Tahrir Square and other spaces of potential mass gatherings in Cairo. Hours later, small groups of protestors clashed with police; subsequently dispersing them to other locations. The different groups eventually moved towards Tahrir, “where a first group of protestors broke the police cordon around the square early in the afternoon, allowing thousands more to flood in” (Cook 2012: 283). By nighttime, 15,000 -25,000 people were in the sealed-off square. Two days later, Tahrir Square grew ten-fold, while roughly a million people demonstrated throughout the country (p. 284). By the thirteenth day of the uprising, workers throughout Egypt went on strike; while lawyers, doctors, and other politically strong sectors of society marched in solidarity with the demonstrators. For 18 days, collective action in the form of demonstrations, marches, strikes, riots, torching of police trucks, and occupations of symbolic spaces engulfed an ostensibly stable nation-state. Considering that access to social networks, high unemployment, systematic corruption, and economic stagnation are all commonplace throughout the world, the Egyptian uprising is an anomaly. These are the typical conditions of much of the world. If we are to accept the normative narrative of “evil dictator vs. oppressed people”, then similar uprisings should have engulfed most countries with similar circumstances globally. Specialist in Egyptian affairs, Mona El-Ghobashy, went as far as stating that: “If there was ever to be a popular uprising against autocratic rule, it should not have come in Egypt” (El-Ghobashy 2011). This event begs the question; how did this happen?

The demonstrators were seemingly motivated by high unemployment, lack of opportunity, food inflation, police brutality, and corruption, among other factors. Hosni Mubarak's embrace of deregulated capitalism (The Washington Consensus) has its roots in Anwar al-Sadat's 1974 October paper, which opened up the Egyptian economy to foreign investment, promoted an expanding private sector and reduced government regulations in the economy. The state was once the engine of employment; however, since Sadat's *Infitah* reforms, neoliberal policies have slowly killed that engine and failed to generate comparable employment. Relatively speaking, however, the economic situation in Hosni Mubarak's Egypt was common. By 2010 twenty-nine percent of the Egyptian population was between the ages of 15-29 (Assad and Barsoum 2009: 67). This resulted in an unprecedented amount of new entrants into the workforce, which rose from 400,000 entrants a year in the 1970's to roughly 850,000 a year in the early 2000's (2009: 73). Subsequently, an educated youth rightfully felt entitled to an expected standard of living that was becoming increasingly unattainable. Therefore, there is ample evidence to support the prevailing narrative that traces failed neoliberal economic policies as the prime drivers of revolution, but these globally prevalent symptoms of neoliberalism fail to explain the politicization and subsequent mobilization of the Egyptian people. Answers concerning *why* this event occurred can be linked to failed neoliberal policies, but an analysis of the possible roots of the modern era of contentious politics (collective political endeavors) within Egypt will help demystify and decipher *how* this anomaly occurred. An economic analysis is essential to explaining the deep rooted frustrations that underline the fundamental concerns of the average

participant of the mass, but fail to explain what Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow coin the *dynamics of contention*. In other words, the economic analysis fails to delineate the diverse forms of dynamic contentious politics that has characterized different episodes of protest within modern Egypt under Mubarak. My analyses will primarily focus on the mechanisms and processes of Egypt's long history of contentious politics: the episodic and disruptive-techniques utilized by demonstrators against the state's interests. The central question this thesis aims to analyze is: How did mobilization lead to a social movement against a state that's highly dependent on coercion? In other words, *when did politics make the shift from internal social relations to contentious street politics?*

### **1.1: Methodology**

The multivalent nature of revolutions opens doors to various interpretations regarding the ontological roots of the spontaneous amalgamation of individuals into a claim-making mass.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Egypt, a few have become adapted as true and inscribed as so. Michel Foucault's supposition that madness did not exist as such but rather had to be made to exist undermines universalist narratives and shakes off self-evident truths (Foucault 1984: 75). I will do the same with the normative explanations of the root causes of the Egyptian revolution by analyzing the practice of contention in order to show how the collective political struggles came about within an authoritarian environment, and to further reveal that contentious politics did not occur solely due to

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<sup>1</sup> Although, the events of 2011 have not yet engendered a fundamental turnaround of all of Mubarak's institutions and economic policies, I will utilize the term revolution throughout this thesis. It is too early to conclude if the events initiated on January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011 will generate fundamental changes to past institutions or the constitution. Furthermore, I find it appropriate to use the term revolution since this is how most Egyptians refer to the collective political actions of 2011 (Khouri 2011).

the authoritarian environment, but often times in spite of it. Rather than accept the mainstream assertion that people rose up in contention solely due to the brutality of the regime and dire living conditions; I've found it much more interesting to suppose that this is not necessarily the case, at least in explaining *how* this happened and not *why*. In *The Politics of Truth*, Foucault describes a historical mode of knowing that he labels 'eventualization' by which:

“One takes groups of elements where, in a totally empirical and temporary way, connections between mechanisms of coercion and contents of knowledge can be identified. . . We are therefore not attempting to find out what is true or false, founded or unfounded, real or illusory, scientific or ideological, legitimate or abusive. What we are trying to find out is *what are the links, what are the connections that can be identified between mechanisms of coercion and elements of knowledge...*” (Foucault 2007: 59; *my emphasis*)

In Egypt the mechanisms of coercion are many and they have aided the creation of the “knowledge-power” dictating what acceptable realms of contention are permitted or not. The durability of these links between mechanisms of coercion and “self-evident” knowledge reveals why contentious politics ensued for ten years, but never manifested into a revolution or mass uprising until January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011. Perhaps the most widely accepted self-evident knowledge-power was to not challenge the increasingly solidified emergency law, which among other things suspends constitutional rights and circumscribes any non-government approved demonstrations.

This once accepted system may be viewed as “a nexus of knowledge-power” that “has to be described so that we can grasp what constitutes the acceptability of a system” (2007: 61). The links between this specific nexus of knowledge and power began to slowly breakdown after the pro-Palestinian protests spontaneously erupted in October 2000, openly challenging the emergency law for the first time. By 2011 the emergency law was hanging by a thread. In this account, the conditions that made the revolution possible far preceded the events in Tunisia. Why did the formation of the first ever organized democracy movement never manifest into a revolution? Why was the emergency law so vehemently challenged during the anti-Iraq war protests in 2003 and 2004? Was the level of the state’s coercion overwhelmingly disproportional to the state’s reaction to dissent in the past? These are the sorts of inquiries that will help flesh out what constituted the acceptability of this decades old system. Therefore, the predominant academic goals of this thesis are:

1. To demonstrate when politics shifted from internal social relations to contentious street politics and how certain events of contention helped create the necessary spaces of interlinked dissent needed for the 2011 revolution to take place.
2. To demonstrate that Mubarak’s hegemonic grip on the Egyptian street greatly diminished since the pro-Palestinian protests of October 2000.

3. Shed light on the extent that regionality, relationality, and other external factors played in fueling or affecting contentious politics within Egypt's sovereign borders.

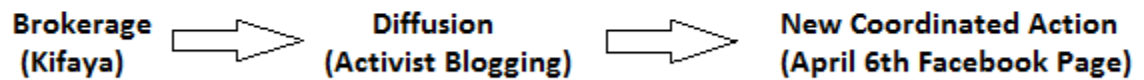
## 1.2: Theoretical Framework

In a shift to the analysis of process, social movement theorists Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly schematize mechanisms of collective action that lead to episodes of contentious politics. According to Tarrow and Tilly, contentious politics is defined as:

“Episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants.” (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 5)

In other words contentious politics is a combination of contention, politics, and collective action (Tarrow and Tilly 2007: 5). *Mechanisms* are the certain “events that produce the same immediate effects over a wide range of circumstances” and *processes* “assemble mechanisms into combinations and sequences that produce larger scale effects” (Tarrow et al. 2007: 214). These various mechanisms and processes greatly aided me in better conceiving the dynamics of the various episodes of contention in Egypt. For instance, brokerage (“new connections between previously unconnected sites”) amongst previously unconnected ideological factions under the banner of a democracy movement called Kifaya led to diffusion (“spread of a form of contention, an

issue, or a way of framing it from one site to another”) via activist blogging (Tarrow et al. 2007: 31). These three common mechanisms of coordination, brokerage, and diffusion combined to create a process of *new coordination* in the form of Internet activism:



In short, Tilly and Tarrow’s schematization of mechanisms and processes is an effective way to break down complex episodes of social uprisings, as well as their possible effects on future episodes of contention.

Certain episodes of contention build upon previous spaces and in this sense are interconnected. In the case of Egypt the pro-Intifada protests, the anti-Iraq war protests, and the creation of the democracy movement, primarily Kifaya, created new spaces of dissent leading up to the Egyptian revolution. It is important to note that dissent has always existed in Egypt, but some moments create long lasting if not permanent imprints, while others do not. “Contentious politics sometimes fizzles and sometimes reproduces the status quo, but now and then produces profound alterations in regimes” (Tilly 2006: 215). This paper will focus on those episodes of profound alterations.

Therefore, I maintain the essential argument that:

1. The pro-Intifada protests created a space of initial experimentation where although dissent was not directed at Mubarak, it did flirt with the validity of a decades old norm.
2. The protests against the invasion of Iraq left an indelible mark on the public sphere by openly challenging Mubarak in large numbers; here was where a space of nascent contentious politics directed against the state was born.
3. The democracy movement, primarily Kifaya, was built on both these spaces and created new opportunities for future dissent. Although still in an experimental stage Kifaya materialized into a movement that's sole purpose was to change the status-quo.

For purposes of maintaining consistency, I have adopted Sidney Tarrow's definition of social movements as "collective challenges based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (Tarrow 1994: 2). The pro-Intifada and anti-Iraq war demonstrations are part of the broad realm of contentious politics, but ought not to be viewed as social movements since they were not based on deep social networks, but rather created them.

Additionally, both of these events did not necessarily maintain a *clearly sustained challenge* to the Egyptian state and dissipated before developing the capacity to do so.

### 1.3: Doxa & Opinion-Undermining Mubarak's Hegemony

The Egyptian state has never attempted to become what Antonio Gramsci labeled the “night-watchmen of the liberal state”; however, a delicate balance of hegemony and coercion did exist (2000: 235). When the status quo was not continually threatened, Mubarak did not use the same degree of coercion as many regional dictatorships have both prior and after the ‘Arab Spring’, “but this looser rule is a strength of the Egyptian system, not a weakness...Egypt’s regime, like those of other Arab states, relies on a mix of co-optation and coercion to ensure its rule” (Byman 2005: 75). Therefore, as the cycles of protests shifted the balance in their favor, the state became increasingly more coercive and thus increasingly delegitimized. As a result, the mechanism of *boundary formation*, the creation of us/them distinctions between the state and its contentious challengers, became increasingly solidified (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 215). By 2011 there was a clear divide between ‘the people’ and their state, and a continuous change in identity on the side of the Egyptian people versus the state (*boundary shift*) became increasingly evident throughout the public sphere. The weakening of the state would not have been possible without the unconventional *creation* of public discourse through contentious politics. Ultimately, these historical changes in Egyptian politics demonstrated that “what goes without saying and what cannot be said for lack of an available discourse, represents the dividing-line between the most radical form of misrecognition and the awakening of political consciousness” (Bourdieu 1977: 170). As previously mentioned, this line of analysis does not dismiss

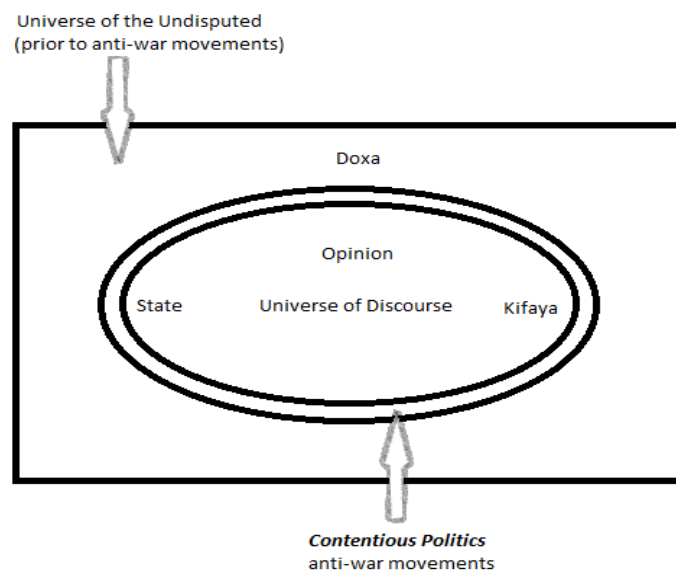
the increasingly prevailing narrative that traces failed neoliberal economic policies coupled with access to social networking sites or satellite television as fundamental engines of the revolution. For instance, the erosion of the state-controlled flow of information by way of satellite television (e.g. Al-Jazeera) created what Marc Lynch has coined as the “new Arab public” (2012: 3). This phenomenon has doubtlessly challenged the authoritarian regime’s ability to filter information. However, I believe that although this narrative is an element to the creation of the 2011 uprising, it does not independently explain the politicization and subsequent mobilization of the Egyptian people. The rationale behind the mass-mobilizations of the Egyptian people is not an event that was hidden before being discovered; rather I have honed in on three eminent interlinked events that, together, created spaces of contention which *allowed* for the events of 2011 to occur. In other words, the revolution was contingent upon past unprecedented mass-uprisings, and not strictly the extent of Mubarak’s cruelty or dire living situations, although these obviously played a part in justifying the revolution and again are useful when asking why.

These three interlinked events together allowed the undiscussed to be more openly conversed. This boundary between the universe of the undiscussed (*doxa*) and the universe of discourse (*opinion*) was concrete prior to the cycles of contentious politics. Prior to these events, the universe of *doxa* was effectively solidified; a “regime of truth” inscribed the Mubarak era knowledge-power regime into reality and ultimately created a norm of compliance. The essential mechanism to this regime of truth has

been the broad acceptance of the emergency law (No. 162) which was perceived as an unshakable “truth” in Mubarak’s Egypt’s. Enacted in 1958 and enforced after the Six-Day-War in 1967, it has affected virtually all Egyptians. The two elements of the law most relevant to this thesis are the state’s right to arrest and imprison anyone without warrant and the banning of all protests without government approval (Ghonim 2012: 2). Obviously, the emergency law has been a tool of maintaining political power over the people, but more importantly, it has created the cultural hegemony that saturates all sectors of Egyptian society. With exception to a three year hiatus under late president Anwar Sadat, the emergency law is part and parcel of civil society and the modern Egyptian psyche. As such, contesting the validity of this tool was a direct threat to the durability of the regime. Therefore, we ought to consider repeated public disregard of this essential state apparatus, primarily through unauthorized protests, as public attacks against the unspoken hegemonic order of society. A pastoral type of obedience was expected from Mubarak. Reciprocally, each individual not only obeyed but “had to be governed and had to let himself be governed, that is to say directed towards his salvation, by someone to whom he was bound by a total, meticulous, detailed relationship of obedience” (Foucault, 2007: 43). Salvation in Egypt implied avoiding the states often utilized coercive element.

The democracy movement demonstrated the states intrinsic weakness by publically emphasizing that it *had* to resort to violent repression to quell an unprecedented type of dissent that “broke the golden rule”. The pro-Intifada

demonstrations were the first events of mass contentious politics during Mubarak's presidency, even though it was directed at Israel and not publically at Mubarak. The states weakness was exposed when the mere presence of bodies in the street challenged the hegemony of the emergency law. In a sense, the pro-Intifada protests helped move society from an unquestioned sphere of truths and into the sphere of discourse. However, such a fracture was only a condition of possibility, not a cause. The cycles of contentious politics began with the anti-war protests in March 2003. Consequently, the anti-war movements against the invasion of Iraq actually crossed a boundary, into the realm of cyclical contentious politics. Past truths, like not publically challenging the regime, were broken. The democracy movement took it one step further. Kifaya attempted and briefly entered the "universe of discourse" (not yet at the societal level), but were quickly pushed out of that realm by the state. Built upon preceding cycles of contention, Kifaya briefly challenged the state where a new discourse between orthodoxy and heterodoxy permeated throughout Egyptian society.



In the end, these three separate yet interlinked events *initiated* a historical change to the point where the undiscussed became discussed, consequentially opening a new chapter in Egyptian politics.

Pierre Bourdieu sheds light on breaking the self-evident through *crisis*. The truths implanted by the dictatorship are by no means natural; however, they do become norms on a societal level. Similarly, crisis, in this case through contentious politics, was essential in Egypt to move society from one boundary and into the other: “Crisis is a necessary condition for a questioning of doxa but not in itself a sufficient condition for the production of a critical discourse” (Bourdieu 1977: 169). In Egypt, breaking such norms required episodic, public, and collective crises against the interests of the dominant power holders.

Collective crises were made up of a series of contentious practices that were present in all three waves of public dissent. Repertoires of contention, refers to the familiar and historically created arrays of claim-making performances, like the sit-in or strike (Tilly 2010: preface vvi). As frequency of repertoire increases, opportunities and threats are analyzed by each side and strategically adjusted to benefit the interests of each party. In this sense, tools were utilized by the state. Once these coercive tools were challenged, the cycles of protests accelerated, challenging them as well as the orthodoxy of the state’s hegemonic control of institutionalized power. “The dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of doxa or, short of this, of establishing in its place the necessary imperfect substitute, *orthodoxy*” (Bourdieu 1977:

169). In Egypt the Integrity of doxa was publically impugned by the democracy movement and subsequently the government, in its weaker state, resorted to repressive violence in an attempt to implement the orthodoxy of power.<sup>2</sup> To be clear, the threat of violent repression has existed for decades in Egypt. The states reaction to the first-ever openly anti-Mubarak movement is what makes this particular instance(s) of repression unique and in turn revealed a weakness that would be capitalized upon during the 2011 revolution. The integrity of the state's "absolute truth" was questioned, temporarily restored, and then repeatedly questioned through more cycles of protests. Contentious politics emerges when opportunities broaden, potential for new alliances are present, and "when they reveal the opponents vulnerability" (Tarrow 1998: 23). In other words, the hegemony that had gripped Egypt for decades was becoming increasingly vulnerable since March 2003 (first anti-war demonstration) and more so in December 2004 (first publically organized anti-Mubarak demonstration) when all three elements of contentious politics were in play.

These historical changes created opportunities for brokerage between previously unconnected peoples and groups. During periods of contentious politics, brokerage became the relational mechanism for mobilization where increased interaction among previously disconnected networks caused them to discover the common sentiment of frustration against the status quo (Tarrow 2004: 26). The new collective actors created by this brokerage, the democracy movement, may have disappeared temporally after

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<sup>2</sup> "The dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of doxa or, short of this, of establishing in its place the necessary imperfect substitute, *orthodoxy*" (Bourdieu 1977: 169; *my emphasis*).

increased state aggression, but the state's hegemonic control was publically challenged and permanently affected. Gramsci's explanation of the state as "hegemony protected by the armor of coercion" is relevant here since Mubarak's Egypt heavily depended on both of these tools of coercion (2000: 235). This is especially important when considering that the hegemonic element is needed to justify the state structure, while the coercive element is not. Essentially, the cycles of contention led to the state becoming disproportionately dependent on its coercive element, while hegemony withered away by degrees.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu tells us: "It is possible to imagine the coercive element of the state as withering away by degrees, as ever more conspicuous elements of regulated society (or ethical state or civil society) make their appearance" (p. 235). In Egypt the opposite happened under Mubarak, the coercive element increasingly overshadowed the more conspicuous cultural hegemony.

## CHAPTER 2: PRO-INTIFADA ACTIVISM

Public acts of collective contention directed at Mubarak can be traced to the tumultuous regional events of the Middle East. Dissent was not initially aimed at Mubarak, but Israel. The inception of the second Palestinian Intifada in September 2000 triggered “the largest and most radical spontaneous demonstrations in the Arab world since the first Gulf War” (El-Mahdi 2009: 93). This externally generated environmental social mechanism would eventually set off a chain of cognitive and relational mechanisms throughout Egypt’s rigid political structure. The initial manifestations of public protests took place at various university campuses. The supposed first act of protest occurred shortly after the gruesome images of a 12-year old Palestinian boy being shot dead in his father’s arms were aired in Egypt. Students at Cairo University protested and threw rocks at riot police. A few days after this event, roughly 6000 students attempted to storm the Israeli Embassy, but were dispersed by security forces. It was becoming evident that an unprecedented wave of student activism was rapidly permeating what was during Mubarak’s reign viewed as an ostensibly “apolitical” sector of society:

“At the other end of town, at Ain Shams University, the high point of student demonstrations came on Sunday when approximately 7,000 students, spurred by leftists and Nasserists, gathered at Qasr Al- Zaafaran (the central administration building on the main campus) and marched towards the university's side entrance. Before security forces could take action, the students

were on the street and were joined by by-standers as well as students from the faculties of commerce and languages across the street. According to witnesses, about 12,000 students marched to Abbasiya Square around 4.00pm, chanting pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli slogans. The students occupied the square, which was totally surrounded by security forces until around 8.00pm, when the protesters disbanded quietly. The following day, 7,000 students staged a smaller demonstration that was confronted by police forces when the protesters attempted to come out of campus grounds.” (Farag 2000)

Eventually, the protests would include small demonstrations led by actors and entertainers, high school students, and from many prominent political parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood (primarily the youth faction), the nationalist liberal Wafd Party, and the socialist Tagammu party. For the most part, the major political parties focused their anger towards Israel, while issuing statements urging Mubarak to close the Israeli Embassy in Cairo. In relation to the students, the political parties appeared “to have been shy, if not intimidated by the public reaction” (Farag 2000). To say the least, the unity amongst the diverse political parties and historically antagonistic ideological groups that was present during the 2011 uprising was lacking. Furthermore, spatial and temporal unity was practically nonexistent, rather separate ephemeral events that sparked throughout Egypt at different places and times resulted in a consistency of outcome. In other words, the amalgamation of the various detached sites of protests into a unified mass in a defined area, like Tahrir Square, never happened.

One explanation for this failure of mass organization is that the dispersed clustering of Cairo's politically active universities problematized the mobilization of students beyond organizations and subsequently the possibility of forming a concentrated student mass. For instance, the distance between the two most politically active universities, Cairo University and Ain Shams University is two hours by foot. The significance of this urban reality is amplified if we contrast it with the spatial situation of the universities in Beijing prior to the Tiananmen Square uprising. The vast majority of Beijing's universities, for example, are found in one district. The preceding organizational techniques leading up to the April 27<sup>th</sup> uprising at Tiananmen Square greatly benefited from the physical proximities between campuses and to Tiananmen Square. Dingxin Zhao's interviews with student informants in Beijing, regarding how the ecology of the universities facilitated strategies for collective action, led him to conclude that ecological conditions can also form *ecology-dependent* dynamics of mobilization: "It shaped students' spatial activities on the campus, creating a few places that most students had to pass or stay daily. These places became centers of student mobilization...The concentration of many universities in one district encouraged mutual imitation and interuniversity competition for activism among students from different universities" (Zhao 1998: 1495). Organizers took advantage of students' "spatial routines" by placing posters in a central location where all students would pass through during the day called the 'Triangle' (Sewell 2001: 73). "It was the physical proximities of the campus and the powerful emotional effects of public spatial massing, not just the operation of space-based social networks, that swelled the demonstrations to their

enormous size” (p. 73). The urban reality of Cairo’s universities should be viewed as neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for an uprising, but rather as a condition of possibility for more effective mobilization. Had the universities in Cairo been located within a single district where ecological realities could have facilitated the mobilization of students beyond organizations or networks, then perhaps the protests would have been denser and therefore more significant. This is especially true when considering that during this period the authoritarian environment in Egypt had left little space for low-risk environments of mass mobilizations.

The apogee of the student protests in Egypt occurred in the 1970s when hundreds of thousands of students from different universities occupied Tahrir Square and demanded that Anwar Sadat attack Israel to reclaim occupied land. Following years of student protests outside university walls, in 1979 “the government clipped the students' wings by passing a new university law which forbade political activity by students—effectively confining student demonstrations to the campuses” (Schemm 2002). This law effectively broke the possibility of student mobilization beyond loose university-to-university networks. Student ID cards were needed to enter the universities and security clearances were required for Student Union elections (Abdalla 2009: 230). Low-risk mobilization of the various universities was an obstacle due to, not only the spatial reality, but also the university law which circumscribed student-state battles “at the university gates—usually far away from the rest of the population” (Schemm: 2002). In such a restrictive environment, ecology-dependent dynamics of

mobilization of students without other feasible outlets of inter-university mobilization may indeed have been essential for a more formidable protest. In spite of the cultural hegemony found in many democratic states, they “typically guarantee zones of toleration for speech, belief, assembly, association, and public identity” (Tilly 2006: 25). This was not the case in Egypt during this specific period; zones of toleration were few and therefore needed to be facilitated through other means. Consequently, these spatial disparities between the various protests throughout Cairo’s separate student collectivities and the juridical means of control were to the state’s advantage.

The only time during the pro-Palestinian protests where space, time, and differing ideologies converged was in the form of NGOs, primarily the Egyptian Committee for Solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada (ECSPI). Founded by a coalition of the Egyptian left, the ECSPI was joined by Islamists, Nasserists, and women’s rights groups, among others. The committee collected money, food, and medical supplies to be sent to the Gaza strip, organized boycotts of American and Israeli products, developed mailing lists, and formed petitions to close the Israeli embassy in Cairo. The broad-based effort towards sending aid to Palestinians was tolerated by the regime and “provided the major centers for organizing and mobilizing solidarity actions” (Shukrallah 2002: 46).

According to Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, Transnational Advocacy Networks are “networks of activists, distinguishable largely by the centrality of principled ideas or values in motivating their formation” (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 1).

Under the umbrella of Palestinian aid and solidarity, the ECSPi created this network of previously disconnected groups and people into a cooperative environment.

Additionally, Keck and Sikkink tell us that: “network actors bring new ideas, norms, and discourses into policy debates” (p. 3). The ECSPi did just that by creating the new political space necessary for future brokerage, “the production of a new connection between previously unconnected sites” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 215). “For the first time in modern Egyptian history, the committee had members of rival political factions” (El-Mahdi 2009: 94). It is important to note that the ECSPi created a space where it was acceptable for differing ideologies to come together, but sometimes they did so out of interest for their public image. For instance, in April 2002 leftist-led pro-Palestinian riots erupted again at Cairo University where in an unprecedented move; Muslim Brotherhood members were present, but only as representatives at the ECSPi organized meetings. The Brotherhood did not necessarily intend on joining the leftist, but rather were forced to bow “to the pressure from its youth, who were not happy with a complaisant stand vis-à-vis the authorities . . . the usual scene at such demonstrations was that the crowd would split into two circles, one led by leftists and Nasserists chanting leftist slogans, and another led by the Labor Party supporters chanting Islamic slogans” (El-Hamalawy 2007). Thus, the stage was set for future brokerage and not immediate coalescence amongst the rivals. In the short run, this brokerage did little to threaten Mubarak; however, in retrospect it is clearly visible that these initial acts of collective activism created new spaces of *tolerated contention* to the current discourse between the state and a growing movement of activists. Indeed, Mubarak’s ability to

absorb protests through tolerance and coercion would epitomize his policy towards unauthorized contention for the next decade and prove quite successful up to the revolution of 2011.

## **2.1: Hegemony and the State's Reaction**

During these critical months, contention, politics, and collective action came together on a national scale to form the first link of a consequential series of *interlinked* episodes of contentious politics leading up to the events of 2011 (Tarrow and Tilly 2007: 9). Although this was a breaking point of a new era of activism within Egypt, it did not yet set off an immediate cycle of contentious politics against the state. The protests were episodic, occurred in public, and there was interaction between those making the claims (demonstrators) and 'others' (Egyptian State), however, *prima facie* it's not clear whether the states interests were directly threatened. This is especially true when considering that the Palestinian Intifada generated spontaneous, as well as state-sponsored peaceful marches and demonstrations. Traditionally, the three primary strategies for protest control are: coercive (physical force or weapons to control/disperse protests), persuasive (negotiating with activists), and information strategies (collection of targeted information) (Della Porta 2006: 153). Mubarak's government has used all three strategies, but has primarily relied on a combination of coercive mechanisms when state interests were directly threatened. However, coercive strategies were not universally deployed in this case. A closer analysis reveals that although the anger was overwhelmingly directed against Israel, the spontaneous

uprisings did threaten the interests of the Egyptian state by challenging the legitimacy of the decades old emergency law. The contingent nature of these protests on unforeseen external events caught Mubarak by surprise, but Mubarak acted tactically by allowing some protests to persist. What Mubarak didn't foresee was the new space created for future contentious events. This transnational issue generated protests and in turn created a new culture of transnational activists; similar protests erupted throughout the region during the same week. If transnational activism is understood as "people and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in contentious political activities that involve them in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts", then the Egyptian-based committee formations and NGO's which sent aid to Gaza ought to be defined as a form of transnational activism as well (Tarrow 2005: 29).

The protests generated by the Intifada translated into a mass outpouring of rage against Israel, but not the Egyptian government, at least not rampantly. As Cairo based journalist, Ashraf Khalil states in his book *Liberation Square*: "Among the protestors, much of the internal conflict centered around whether or not to turn their frustrations with Israel against the Mubarak regime" (Khalil 2011: 37). Clearly, brokerage amongst the protestors here was critical to the difference in tone during the next mass wave of contention in 2003. Nevertheless, the anti-Israeli protests marked a new period of street politics, which is still vibrant today. "Since the beginning of the second Palestinian Intifada, demonstrations (though often small and encircled by large security presences) have become an almost weekly feature of Egyptian life" (Schemm: 2003).

This era essentially created the uncertainty that “the nation state may be losing its capacity to constrain and structure collective action” (Tarrow 1998: 181). The state’s delicate balance between coercion and tactical toleration was threatened. This delicate balance allowed Mubarak to have a monopoly over when, how, and if collective action was conducted, which was important since the regime’s economic outcome was withering away along with its control of “illegal” protests. Journalist and member of the Revolutionary Socialists (RA), Hossam el-Hamalawy, participated in the pro-Palestine protests, the subsequent anti-Iraq war protests, and became a leading member of the Kefaya movement in 2004. In his widely read article in *the Guardian*, “Egypt's revolution has been 10 years in the making”, El-Hamalawy traces the 2011 Egyptian Revolution to a chain reaction connected to the autumn 2000 pro-Palestinian protests:

“Only after the Palestinian intifada broke out in September 2000 did tens of thousands of Egyptians take to the streets in protest – probably for the first time since 1977. Although those demonstrations were in solidarity with the Palestinians, they soon gained an anti-regime dimension, and police showed up to quell the peaceful protests. The president, however, remained a taboo subject, and I rarely heard anti-Mubarak chants.” (El-Hamalawy: 2011)

El-Hamalawy also noted that Mubarak has traditionally responded to unauthorized public gatherings with force, sometimes with live ammunition used on strikers. Mubarak’s Iron fisted approach to street politics can be linked to the assassination of the late president Anwar Sadat on October 6, 1981, this approach was more actively

diffused throughout society following the internal war against militant Islamists since the 1990s. Leader of the militant group Egyptian Jihad, Ayman al-Zawahiri, initiated a wave of terrorist attacks and an assassination plot against Mubarak in 1995. Mubarak's response to the wave of terrorism depended upon "the emergency laws that had been promulgated after Sadat's assassination, the arrests and secret trials, and the widespread use of torture" (Gardner 2011: 159). Mubarak's toleration of the pro-Palestinian protests in the 2000 is a break from the traditional reactionary responses by the state. Security forces were utilized primarily to avert crowds from reaching the Israeli Embassy and demonstrations were often dispersed with tear gas. On the other hand, the state did permit various anti-Israeli protests to take place, and adopted a more confrontational stance towards Israel. Following the protests, the Egyptian regime's harsher tone against Israel produced "the strongest Egyptian statements against Israel since 1976" and it also attempted to propitiate Pro-Palestinian protestors by recalling the Egyptian ambassador from Tel Aviv (Hammond). In essence, these symbolic gestures did little to shake the peaceful relations between the two sovereigns; more relevantly, the attempted placation on behalf of the state demonstrates that it did not remain indifferent or merely antagonistic to the protestor's 'illegally organized' demands through street protests. In short, Mubarak's response to the first ever unauthorized mass protest was a break with the overwhelmingly coercive stance towards dissent of the past. This regionally instigated rupture in hegemonic order within Egypt had a lasting effect on Egypt's public sphere which can be traced to the revolution in 2011. In Marc Lynch's book, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions*

*of the New Middle East*, Lynch observes that the taboo of public protest was not the formidable factor in convincing potential participants to take to the streets on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011:

“The real challenge facing the organizers of the January 25 demonstration *was not that they would be breaking a taboo against public protest*; the challenge was in persuading potential participants that they could succeed. They needed to persuade ordinary people that it was worth the risks and costs to leave their homes and come into the streets against Mubarak.”(Lynch 2012: 85; *my emphasis*)

The Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia undoubtedly persuaded many Egyptians that change was feasible via a mass uprising; however, breaking the taboos of public protest within Mubarak’s Egypt has its embryonic roots in the pro-Intifada protests and was further provoked during the anti-Iraq war protests in 2003.

### CHAPTER 3: ANTI-IRAQ WAR DEMONSTRATIONS

Leading up to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, anti-war protestors again poured into the streets of Cairo for two consecutive days. "Cairo had witnessed two days of protests like nothing seen since the 1970s, complete with a day-long occupation of the central Tahrir Square" (Schemm 2003). This time the protestors vacillated between anti-war slogans and anti-regime anger, focus shifted from regional events to internal realities. "Baghdad is Cairo, Jerusalem is Cairo" and "we want Egypt to be free, life has become bitter" were common slogans during the protests (Howeidy 2003). Needless to say, the strident public display of anti-regime sentiment was unprecedented during Mubarak's presidency; this was the initial test of the regime's, once stable, hegemony over unauthorized protests and the fear-barrier. The most critical days during this period were the massive protests that occurred on March 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, where Tahrir Square was occupied for the first time since a leftist-led student movement occupied the square in 1972. The protestors had found their space for contentious amalgamation, which was previously lacking. "The takeover of Tahrir Square and even the government-approved demonstration on March 28, 2003 are part of a slow expansion of the purview of Egyptian street politics-which had been moribund for most of the Mubarak era" (2003). Environmental, cognitive, and relational mechanisms would combine to permanently transform Egyptian politics. Cognitive mechanisms would alter the *collective perceptions* of the people, while relational mechanisms would *create connections* among groups, networks, and individuals. Essentially, the first

occupation of Tahrir “was a key turning point on the road to revolution” (Khalil 2011: 40).

Not only was this the first time that large crowds called for the regimes downfall, but a broader “repertoire of contention” (inherited forms of collective action) was born. According to Tilly repertoire “helps describe what happens by identifying a limited set of routines that learned, shared, and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice” (Tilly 1998: 30). These routines are usually created at the “edges of well-established routines”, like a demonstration. For instance, during the eighteenth century the petition in Western Europe was gradually “transformed from the tool individuals seeking grace from superiors or groups lobbying power holders into a form of mass collective action” (1998: 67). Similarly, the occupation of Cairo’s most important plaza proved to be a new challenge for the state:

“Normally a snarl of honking traffic that pedestrians cross at the peril of death, the square belonged to the demonstrators on that day. For about 12 hours, they wandered almost bemused across it’s suddenly car-less expanse. “This is the first time we’ve made it out of the cage,” said one jubilant activist. Riot police were present in vast numbers, but only on the edges of the square. They had surrendered the center, which was filled with some 3,000 people listening to speeches and chanting slogans.” (Schemm 2003)

This new repertoire, like the modern-day sit-in, was based on autonomous forms of association in which students, Islamists, Nasserists, and new activists swelled to over

40,000 in and around Tahrir Square (El-Mahdi 2009: 95). Thus, Egyptian street politics during this period matured in the sense that association shifted from ideological fault lines to collective association that crossed differing political ideologies and class. A similar situation occurred in the eighteenth century when a broad coalition of social classes during the 1851 French insurrection was made possible by a combination of commercial print, like the newspaper, and new forms of association, such as reform groups. These “loose ties created by print and association, by newspapers, pamphlets, and informal social networks, made possible a degree of coordinated collective action across groups and classes that the supposedly “strong ties” of social class seldom achieved” (Tarrow 1998: 51). In Cairo, however, a combination of emails and text messages were utilized to organize a mass protest of coordinated collective action based off *loose ties*, not homogeneous groups of differing ideologies. Contention created new actors and identities and connected previously isolated activists into a more homogenous mass with a shared goal.

The day after the takeover of Tahrir, security forces in large numbers locked down the square to prevent another occupation. On March 21<sup>st</sup> the tactics shifted from the mass collective occupation of Tahrir to small groups of rioters clashing with police that eventually converged to form a group of 10,000 demonstrators that “overwhelmed units of riot police and set fire to a water truck busy reloading one of the water cannons. Marching along the Corniche, they stopped to torch the poster of Mubarak outside the ruling party headquarters and burn all the foreign flags outside the Nile Hilton”

(Schemm 2003). Tarrow accurately observed that violence is the easiest form of collective action for smaller groups and has the power to attract or repel people with alacrity. In this case violence seemed to repel potential activists and subsequently the demonstration died down within a week. Due to their displacement after the closing of Tahrir Square, the demonstrators changed their form of repertoire, which created an ongoing game of “tactical adaptations” between the police and the demonstrators. Violence on behalf of the demonstrators was mostly aimed at objects and therefore police aimed violence in a harsher manner at the demonstrators. It’s not surprising why violence tends to favor the state more than the demonstrator since when “violence occurs or is even likely, this gives authorities a mandate for repression and turns nonviolent sympathizers away. When that happens, organizers are trapped in a spiral of military confrontation with authorities that, in the modern age, it is virtually impossible for them to win” (Tarrow 1998: 96). Ultimately, it was during these demonstrations where a new era of contentious politics against the Egyptian state became a reality. A new era was born since coordinated collective action was increasingly being conducted over preexisting ideological fault lines and for the first time in Mubarak’s presidency demonstrators openly and widely protested against him specifically, as well as those in his regime. This new era was built upon the space created by the anti-intifada protests, which experimentally challenged the rigidity of the emergency law and eventually proved difficult to reclaim by the state. The withering of the emergency law’s legitimacy was further confirmed by the state when the interior minister “issued a statement

prohibiting street demonstrations without permits, basically a reminder that the emergency law bans public demonstrations” (Howeidy 2003).

The emergency law would continue to lose legitimacy after the anti-Iraq war protests. As we will see in the next chapter, the reaction to the U.S. led invasion of Iraq created another space where a broad coalition of old and new activists became characterized as the democracy movement: “The democracy movement should therefore be understood in the context of a series of mutually reinforcing initiatives within which shared networks and overlapping leaderships grew in confidence, learning strategy and tactics and developing a space in which they could overcome their ideological differences” (El-Mahdi 2009: 96). The Invasion of Iraq was the original spark to the new recurrence of public demonstrations against the regime via street politics. Contentious claims directly contradicted the state's interests, became increasingly more episodic, and contentious politics moved from the private and into the public. The democracy movement that spawned from a cycle of contention would grow increasingly larger and more organized during the next year. The coalition formation that took place during the Pro-Palestinian protests in 2000 spilled over into the anti-war movement, and this period would spill over into future waves of contention. For instance, “The left-leaning Palestine solidarity committee [formed during the 2000 protests] evolved into an anti-war movement, convening small street actions, which exploded into running clashes with the police in downtown Cairo on March 19 and 20, 2003” (El-Hamalawy 2003). Shortly after these events, many leaders of the EPCSPI faced legal intimidation

and prison sentences. Therefore, the pro-Palestinian episode and the anti-war movement were not just connected via previously created spaces of contention, but tangibly connected via evolving coalitions of activists too. The trajectory of all three movements was repeatedly reinforced (El-Mahdi 2009: 96).

The profound impact that the invasion of Iraq had on Egypt in 2003 created the necessary spaces of contentious politics that would repeatedly threaten Mubarak during 2004. The increasingly habitual nature of dissent overshadowed particular political agendas. Once again, on March 20<sup>th</sup> 2004, protestors composed primarily of Islamists, Nasserists, liberals, and leftists marked the first anniversary of the invasion of Iraq with demonstrations that again “turned quickly to expressions of outrage at Egypt’s economic woes” (Moustafa 2004). This time the anger was directed at price increases in staple-foods, which was perceived by many as a symptom of Prime Minister Nazif’s accelerated pace of economic liberalization. Subsequently, many food items were increasing in price three times as quickly as they did in 2000-2002 and the impact was felt across the country. Unlike the bread-riots of 1977, there was no publically known threat to officially accept an IMF plan to end Egypt’s subsidization of wheat, rather the cause of the inflated prices were directly connected to the drastic increase in prices due to the behind-the-scene market reforms of Prime Minister Nazif. “Price deregulation and the adoption of flexible exchange rates added to inflationary pressures in the domestic economy...After floating the exchange rate in 2003 the Consumer Price Index jumped to 21.7 percent in January 2004” (Farah 2009: 47). Therefore, in a sense the

drastic increase in staple foods, regardless of their cause, was an important environmental mechanism that affected “people’s capacity to engage in contentious politics” (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2004: 25). Indeed, environmental changes played a crucial role in fueling anger against the regime in March 2004; most notably the assassination of Hamas’s spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin by Israel on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March, just two days after the anti-war protests began. Death proved to be yet another mobilizing factor in Egypt. “Death has the power to trigger violent emotions and brings people together with little in common but their grief and their solidarity” (Tarrow 1998: 36). Mobilizations around deaths are common and rarely materialize into revolutions, but what is different about the mobilization around this specific death is that reactions started in Egypt *within a few hours* of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin’s demise. The increased penetration of satellite television, most notably Al-Jazeera, was another environmental mechanism that increasingly threatened the state. Other obvious environmental mechanisms include urbanization, rising unemployment, and a growing youth bulge, but these environmental changes are not time-specific enough to an individual event and have been present in Egypt throughout the decade. Tarrow and Tilly tell us: “When contention, politics, and collective action get together, something distinctive happens: power, shared interests, and government policy come into play. Claims become collective, which means they depend on some sort of coordination among the people making the claims” (p. 9). The shared interests toward a common *telos* became more evident in the aftermath of the anti-war protests and would further flourish in the form of a democracy movement.

### 3.1: Threatened Hegemony and the State's Reaction

The protests, engendered by the invasion of Iraq, created crowds that were no longer apprehensive about directly challenging the state: "More than 30,000 Egyptians fought the police in downtown Cairo, briefly taking over Tahrir Square, and burning down Mubarak's billboard" (El-Hamalawy 2003). Expectedly, Mubarak's response was far more violent and reactionary than the state's reaction to the overwhelmingly peaceful pro-Palestinian protests three years prior to this event. The U.S. lobby group, Human Rights Watch, reported various cases of beatings and torture, and hundreds of arrests. Furthermore, two Egyptian Parliament members (a Nasserist and an independent), were arrested for participating in the protests. Many activists utilized the familiar repertoire of throwing rocks or accessible objects at police. Riot police would respond by chasing the protestors and those they caught would be arrested, "According to official figures, 61 people were detained for up to 15 days after violent demonstrations in Cairo." (Black 2003) A Human Rights Watch report, released on March 24, 2003, issued a detailed account of the excessive force used by the state:

"Police have arrested leaders of movements protesting the Iraq war and Israeli actions in the Occupied Territories; journalists, professors, and students; and onlookers, as well as children as young as 15 years old. Some detainees reported hearing the use of electroshock torture in neighboring cells. "The crackdown many feared has come," said Hanny Megally, executive director of the Middle

East and North Africa division of Human Rights Watch. "Fundamental freedoms in Egypt are now under serious threat." (Human Rights Watch 2003)

It's clear that this wave of contention was starkly different than previous episodes. The occupation of Tahrir, along with the blatant dismissal of not only the state's laws, but of its president broke ostensibly ossified taboos. The violent clashes with police, the harsh crackdown by the state, and the repertoires of contention were more characteristic of Egypt's 2011 revolution than with previous episodes of contention. After the large protests withered away in March, demonstrations in support of Palestinian and Iraqi independence became regular incidents. "Although the Egyptian government still hems in demonstrations with an overwhelming security presence, the mere fact that protests are tacitly permitted outside the gates of university campuses marks a qualitative shift in Egyptian political life" (Moustafa 2004).

## CHAPTER 4: BIRTH OF A DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT

On December 12, 2004 a protest that was built upon various preceding bases of contentious episodes explicitly challenged Mubarak. “Many of the protestors knew one another from earlier gatherings to protest Israeli strikes on the Gaza strip and the U.S. invasion of Iraq” (Ghonim 2012: 32). The anti-war protests in 2003 fostered brokerage and created a space for anti-Mubarak activism. Initially two groups were formed: *Kifaya* (Arabic for enough) and the Popular Campaign for Change, which was primarily composed of Marxists. These two groups fused together under the Kifaya banner, which also served as an umbrella organization for anti-Mubarak activism (El-Hamalawy). Tilly tells us that every “social movement depends on a base of connections among potential participants in the collective claims forwarded by the movement. Those connections include interpersonal networks, shared previous experiences, and formal organizations” (Tilly 2008: 119). Past bases of contention that shared experiences during the anti-Israeli and anti-war demonstrations united towards another collective claim. The Kifaya organization, which became the unofficial pseudonym for the 2011 Egyptian revolution, caught the country's attention in 2004 by organizing multiple protests demanding the ouster of Mubarak and refusal to accept a shift in power to his son. Kifaya consisted of a broad range of ideological backgrounds who met through various protests since the Palestinian Intifada. Despite ideological differences, Kifaya was united by their “skepticism of legally recognized political parties and the futility of attempting to introduce any genuine reform in the Egyptian political

system through the existing institutions” (Hopkins 2009: 50). Kifaya did not necessarily act on opportunity or threat, rather it created them. Indeed, it’s no surprise why only a few hundred people showed up to the first demonstration ever to call on ending the Mubarak presidency. The group was ostensibly secular and mostly composed of leftist intellectuals whom had a history of activism. The high risk associated with collective action directly against a repressive state sufficiently justifies the initial hesitation to be associated with a movement base like Kifaya. Rather, small demonstrations served at creating opportunities by being a bellwether case of a democracy movement during an uncertain political context. In revealing potential allies and by exposing the states weaknesses, Kifaya became an example of what effective movement formation should look like: based off loose ties, not homogenous, secular versus ideological, and working for change through contentious politics, not familiar institutions. In sum, weak ties sharing a common complaint led to a groundbreaking movement.

It is important to note that a unified political organization publically challenging Mubarak was taboo before these movements surfaced. “A disparate collection of burgeoning movements among several sectors of Egyptian society has converged upon one message: opposition to the status quo” (Beinin 2005). Kifaya was a drastic shift from Ideologically-based movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, because it better reflected the realities of what many Egyptians were upset about. Kifaya’s statement of principles listed two twin dangers: “the odious assault on Arab native soil (Palestine and Iraq), and a ‘repressive despotism’ pervading all aspects of the Egyptian political system”

(EL-Mahdi 2009: 122). Although the group would occasionally allude to external causes, its primary focus was on internal concerns. In other words, Kifaya capitalized on the prevailing shift of street politics away from external causes and onto national struggles:

“It is not logical for dozens of conferences, seminars, lectures, etc. to be organized on an annual basis for standing in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Palestine and Iraq while no efforts worth mentioning are organized to be in solidarity with farmers who suffer under new and unjust laws formulated to strip them of their land, workers who are fired from their factories, the millions of youth who are unemployed, the thousands who are imprisoned and detained, the hundreds who are tortured in police stations, or those or those who suffer from rising prices, inflation, economic stagnation. . .” (Oweidat 2008: 13)

The panoptical gaze of the state could no longer conveniently observe their subjects express their contestations outwards, but an increasingly politicized society began to reflect their gaze inwards at the watchman. In other words, contention directed at the state could no longer be hermetically internalized. One of the main proposals for reform of the Egyptian political system was not just an end of the Mubarak era by preventing the succession of his son Gamal, but also the “elimination of the current unfounded economic monopoly and squandering of the wealth of the nation” (EL-Mahdi 2009: 90). It’s no surprise why a political organization, in an embryonic stage, became the moniker of the Egyptian Revolution: Kifaya drew in new and old activists under a

banner that most could identify with; essentially it helped overcome past ideological cleavages between Islamists, liberals, and Nasserists, among others. It “breathed life into Egyptian politics” (2009: 92).

What allowed a democracy movement to exist in a repressive state? I argue that the answer is two-fold; more changes in environmental mechanisms and timing. It’s true that in 2004 many Egyptians were uncertain whether the 76 year old Mubarak would run again for presidency or cede power to his son, either way the uncertainty created by the elections was an unpromising binary (Hopkins 2009: 47). As previously mentioned, no real critical opportunities existed for the democracy movement in 2004, so the “reductionist” Political Opportunity Structure theory that Kifaya’s “participant’s saw an opportunity in the upcoming elections does not suffice, since this was not the first plebiscite during Mubarak’s reign” (El-Mahdi 2009: 96). Additionally, at the time major institutional changes primarily took place at the economic level while the authoritarian element of the state remained rigid. Mubarak continued to practice what Sidney Tarrow (1998) labels *selective repression*. “The Egyptian public, particularly elements that oppose the current regime, are ignored or repressed” (Byman 2005: 75). Certain groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, faced limited repression and increasingly worked within state institutions and won parliamentary seats. Albeit, the authoritarian environment remained rigid, the spreading of technological changes created pockets of free public-opinion that had become more familiar to the average citizen.

#### 4.1: Diffusion via Blogs

Kifaya did utilize familiar forms of repertoire like the strike, demonstration, and sit-ins; however, its organizational techniques were not as traditional, neither was the environment. Its primary form of communication was through the internet and text-messaging: “Both cellular phone and the internet were important in Kifaya’s mobilizing efforts” (Hopkins 2009: 51). Organization via texting was present during past protests, but the popularity of blogging coincided with Kifaya’s coming to life. Kifaya capitalized on this technology by utilizing activist blogging to mobilize and as a form of contention:

“If Kifaya has provided the political space for voices of opposition to speak out, blogs have provided the means for Kifaya’s mobilization. Not only have bloggers continued to challenge the official version of events, exposing a wide array of abuses by Egypt’s authorities and monitoring fellow activists’ lives in jail, they have also rallied other activists to the cause by publicizing Kifaya demonstrations often overlooked by mainstream publications” (Al Malky 2007).

Tilly and Tarrow define diffusion as the spread of “a form of contention, an issue, or a way of framing it framing it from one site to another” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 31).

Brokerage amongst the previously unconnected groups and activists under the umbrella of Kifaya created new connections, ideas, and practices of claim making, most notably through internet activism. The diffusion of this new form of contentious performance permeated throughout Egypt’s widely accessible internet. One Kifaya blogger pointed out that blogging “helps me reach an ever-growing group of politicized youth, while at

the same time I maintain my independence. It can also reach people outside the political sphere altogether” (Al Malky 2007). Prior to Kifaya’s emergence politics was gradually shifting from internal social relations to contentious street politics, now it was permeating the technological sphere too.

It’s safe to say that the “techy” aspect of the 2011 revolution can be linked to groups like Kifaya that created new and less risky opportunities and examples for hesitant bystanders to show support for such a movement. Kifaya was quite innovative in the methods it used, not only in expressing protest, but also in mobilizing public opinion and communicating with its members:

“It held press conferences on important occasions, attended by correspondents of local, Arab, and international media. It’s spokespersons made effective use of Arab satellite television stations in presenting their views to the Egyptian and Arab public opinion. Besides its website, it used electronic media particularly e-mail and SMS messages through mobile phones in informing its members of future actions. Its statements were widely reported on pages of independent newspapers in Egypt as well as those of opposition parties sympathetic to it, particularly those published by Nasserites.” (Hopkins 2009: 55)

The technological environment within Egypt had become increasingly *inclusive* and thus access to cellular phones, satellite television, and most importantly the internet were spreading throughout the country. Such structural changes have a history of affecting social movements, most notably the structural changes engendered by the invention of

the print press in eighteenth century Europe. However, in both eighteenth century Europe as well as modern Egypt the social movements benefited from these inventions when they became available to a broader range of people and therefore inclusive. “In both Europe and America, the spread of literacy was a crucial determinant of the rise of popular politics” (Tarrow 1998: 44). Likewise, the internet has been available in Egypt for years, but had become increasingly inclusive during Kifaya’s rise. Unfortunately, for Kifaya the problem with successful mobilization laid in the same technological predicament: gaining tens of thousands of signatures of online petitions, while mongering a few hundred protestors to take place in real contentious forms of protest. Supporting such an outlawed cause via the internet was much safer than participating in a protest.

#### **4.2: Fleeting Certification**

Kifaya’s timing coincided with a watershed moment in American policy towards Egypt. On June 20, 2005, then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice delivered a speech at the American University at Cairo which emphasized the necessity for opposition parties to compete in free elections, the need to abolish the emergency law and to permit international monitors to observe the upcoming elections. Expectedly, Mubarak did not bow to Washington’s demands and won a widely-viewed rigged election on September 7, 2006 (Khalil 2011: 48). What this short-lived policy towards Egypt did do was protect groups like Kifaya from the swift coercive dismantling of various protests. It is true that coercion and violent repression against the group did

occur, but many protests were allowed to proceed. This peculiar phenomenon merits investigation when considering that these protests blatantly targeted Mubarak. As one journalist observed during a Kifaya demonstration, this unexpected response from Mubarak “seems to beg the question of why the security forces, which overwhelmingly outnumbered the protesters, allowed this particular demonstration to take place, while they could have easily prevented it, as they have shown on many similar occasions in the past” (Essam El-Din 2004).

According to Tilly and Tarrow, *certification* “occurs when a recognized external authority signals its readiness to recognize and support the existence and claims of a political actor” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 75). In this case the American certification provided Kifaya with a strategic advantage to force the government to play by new rules, at the very least it urged Mubarak to limit public coercive tendencies towards groups like Kifaya. Therefore, protest events that were permitted (like the aforementioned one) did little to shake Mubarak; rather they created further elements of certification through international media outlets, which sympathized with Kifaya’s cause. A professedly non-ideologically based group, peacefully holding sit-ins for the goal of democracy, in its most normative sense, was everything the Western media outlets wanted. It starkly contrasted the familiar Western narrative of a violent, radical, and hopelessly tumultuous Middle-East. Abuses against Kifaya were often published by the *BBC*, *CNN*, *the Washington Post*, and *the New York Times*, among others. This did more than further tarnish Mubarak’s image, rather as a founding figure of Kifaya has

stated: international pressure “has helped to curb government repression” (Oweidat 2008: 24). Essentially, the significance of this pressure *allowed* this bellwether anti-Mubarak group to demonstrate to all Egyptians that seemingly solidified norms can be broken, and when they are this is what happens.

Unfortunately for Kifaya, Washington’s certification was a fleeting anomaly to its traditional policy of *realpolitik*. A combination of unprecedented acts of public dissent and foreign pressure did lead to ostensible steps toward reform. In 2005 the Egyptian Parliament passed reforms that permitted direct elections of the president, the establishment of electoral committees for parliamentary and presidential elections, and relaxing certain restrictions to form parties (Dunne 2006: 8). Needless to say, these reforms were intended to strengthen the state, not democratize it. Some translate the Brotherhoods 2005 ‘victory’ as an indirect message from a disquieted Mubarak to Washington, regarding the potential effects of the American push for democracy (Bradley 2008: 68). Indeed, this theory has merit when considering that during the subsequent elections the Brotherhood did not win a one seat, despite having nineteen candidates (p. 69). The message to Washington was further clarified when shortly after the Muslim Brotherhood won twenty percent of the parliament, the Palestinian group Hamas prevailed victorious in free Palestinian parliamentary elections. America’s pro-democracy campaign in the Middle-East vanished shortly afterwards. In other words, “democracy was a fine and noble concept, as long as it didn’t produce a government of scary bearded Muslims in power. From that point on, the United States settled back into its old, time-worn and halfhearted rhetoric” (Khalil 2011: 51).

Certification gave way to decertification. By no means did Washington's change in tone cause Mubarak to successfully dismantle Kifaya, rather it often turned the familiar blind eye to on-going state intimidation. Violent intimidation, like kidnappings and even assassination attempts against high-member supporters occurred concurrently with state manipulation over laws and the media to dismantle the group. Among other cases, in May 2005, plain-clothed government agents violently attacked protestors and sexually assaulted female demonstrators (Associated Press 2005). Also, the unprecedented level of transcendence over ideological fault lines played a significant part in the group's downfall when ideological in-fighting pervaded the seemingly united coalition. By 2006, the group began to fade away and would not make a significant appearance until the 2011 Egyptian Revolution.

#### **4.3: The Effects of a Threatened Hegemony and the State's Reaction**

Mubarak realized history demonstrates that a government which rejects all opposition with repression will either destroy the opposition or lead to a revolutionary polarization (Tarrow 1998: 148). Therefore, Mubarak's selective repression worked in the short-run since Kifaya's strength flagged, but it also initiated a revolutionary polarization that followed its temporary extirpation. Mubarak's increased loss of legitimacy began to accelerate with these protests and would only increase with the new organized campaign of anti-government messages circling the internet. The groups rise should therefore be analyzed "in light of cycles of contention that preceded it" (El-Mahdi 2009: 96). It was the preceding cycle of contention, which began with the anti-

war protests that gave life to Kifaya: “The anti-war movement, successor of the pro-*intifada* movement, evolved again by the end of 2004 into an anti-Mubarak movement” (El-Hamalawy 2003).

These cycles of contention energized Kifaya through “shared personnel and leadership, through communities of protest, through collectively learned tactics, and through creation of space for overcoming ideological divisions” (El-Mahdi 2009: 96). Ultimately, the democracy movement led by Kifaya created further uncertainty about the legitimacy of the Mubarak government. In essence, “Kefaya changed the game in a crucial and permanent way” (Khalil 2011: 46). It exposed that the government was *forced* to resort to coercion in order to quell unacceptable forms of dissent that continued to delegitimize crucial elements of the emergency law, created new opportunities for future dissent, and recharged the Egyptian collective perception of future possibilities of protest directed internally versus externally.

#### **4.4 Withering of Cultural Hegemony**

After Kifaya’s demise, worker-led demonstrations in Egypt increased throughout the country. Most strikers demanded better wages, contracts, and job security. Over 100,000 workers were involved with such strikes in 2007 (El-Mahdi 2009: 100). The workers struggles that followed the demise of the democracy movements may have fought for different objectives, however, they both utilized once absent street-politics due to the era of contentious politics initiated through regional issues. The nature of the worker-led uprisings, however, was vastly different than the aforementioned waves

of interlinked contention. “The spatial element in street politics distinguishes it from strikes or sit-ins, because streets are not only where people protest, but also where they extend their protest beyond their immediate circle” (Bayat 2003). For this reason I argue that the near perpetual tradition of worker-led strikes and sit-ins that long pre-date the Mubarak era should be viewed on a different space of politics that is not directly connected to the street politics that started with the pro-Palestinian uprisings. On January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011 these two spaces dovetailed into each other, which does not imply they did not do so in past, just not on this scale. A prime example of the coalescing between labor and the democracy movement was the April 6<sup>th</sup> movement, when “youth activists from Kefaya formed the April 6 Movement in solidarity with textile workers who were planning a strike for that date” (Shehata 2011). On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008 violent riots ensued in the city of Mahalla al-Kubra. Workers from the textile factory (Egypt’s largest) clashed violently with police, resulting in many arrests and three deaths (Wolman 2008). Democracy activists used social media to promote a workers strike that has been ensuing for over two years. Two volunteers for the centrist-liberal El-Ghad Party, Ahmad Maher and Israa Abdel-Kobra, created the April 6<sup>th</sup> Youth Movement Facebook page out of solidarity for the workers of El-Mahalla who were planning a strike on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008 to protest poor wages and soaring food prices. The April 6<sup>th</sup> movement adopted the amorphous and inclusive nature of past groups like Kifaya, and grew to 70,000 Facebook members. The group also adopted the now widespread repertoire of contention via Internet activism that was popularized through Kifaya, primarily through

sister Facebook pages and blogs. This time, however, the state began actively paying more attention to this underestimated repertoire:

“State security was aware of online dissidents but was completely caught off guard by the popularity of the Facebook group. In recent years, agents had concentrated intimidation efforts on individuals, especially bloggers with a significant readership. ..But social networking was something new. Security officials, perhaps believing that Facebook was no more than a mechanism for kids to vent angst, paid little attention to the crescendo leading up to April 6, underestimating the network's ability to galvanize opposition.” (Wolman 2008)

After a heavy crackdown against the movement, including the arrest and detainment of both founding members of the Facebook page, the April 6<sup>th</sup> movement attempted to organize strikes like the one on April 6<sup>th</sup>, but ultimately the group gave way to the coercion. Nevertheless, unlike Kifaya, the group never completely dissipated, it continued to organize smaller pro-democracy rallies. One of the most formidable events occurred during 2010 when the group continued to utilize Facebook, Twitter, and blogs to organize a pro-democracy rally and welcoming party for the United Nation Nuclear Watchdog, Mohamed El-Baraadei (BBC 2011).

The April 6<sup>th</sup> phenomena should not be viewed as evidence of the widespread use of social networking that was ostensibly omnipresent during the 2011 revolution. Indeed, during the revolution roughly eight percent of the Egyptian population claimed to use Facebook, while twenty-six percent of the participants of the revolution had

Facebook accounts (Lust 2012). *Cyber-activism became an increasingly familiar repertoire of contention, which was passed along from different waves of protest, but by no means a sufficient means to an end.* In essence, youth plus electronic social media does not equal revolution, rather within authoritarian environments where street politics is often violently crushed, social media may be the most effective and low risk outlet for organizing/expressing contention. Social media amplified “exponentially the effects of relatively isolated initiatives...it requires the relay through hubs and strong tie groups and clusters that can begin to operationally translate ‘chatter’ into action” (Nunes 2012). Contentious hubs, like the April 6<sup>th</sup> movement, capitalized on the existing strong tie groups (the labor movement) to effectively organize mass demonstrations.

Additionally, April 6<sup>th</sup> is a great example of an apex of the inclusiveness that the street politics of the pro-Palestinian protests, anti-war movement, and Kifaya movement perpetuated. The fact that members of El Ghad, a party which strived for democratic elections, would adopt a workers struggle and promote its cause on a national level was *indicative of the increasingly inclusive and multifaceted nature of Egypt’s once non-existent street politics.* During the 2011 revolution, the April 6<sup>th</sup> movement joined the diverse array of demonstrators and promoted the mobilization of a million people to march against the regime (Al Jazeera 2011). On January, 25<sup>th</sup> 2011, the umbrella organization of differing groups, the National Association for Change (NAC), called for an end to the state of emergency and eventually for the ouster of Mubarak:

“In the NAC, leaders of liberal political parties like al-Ghad and the Democratic Front are represented alongside Islamists from the Muslim Brotherhood. The loose coalition also includes prominent intellectuals and veteran activists, among them members of Kefaya, the Egyptian Movement for Democratic Change, which organized unprecedented rallies ahead of elections in 2004.” (BBC 2011)

During the revolution groups like the NAC depended on the decade of loose ties coupled with experimental street politics for such an event to exist. The crumbling hegemony that once seemed solid was continuously weakened by years of breaking norms and regimes of truth. “In 2010 alone, there were around 700 strikes and protests organized by workers across the country” (Shehata 2011). By 2011, street politics became a normalized event that engulfed a nation-state where public dissent was once an anomalous event.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

On June 8, 2010, the infamous *Kullena Khalid Said* (We Are All Khalid Said) Facebook page utilized the repertoire of cyber-activism to bring attention to the brutal beating and death suffered by Khalid Said at the hands of two secret police officers. Although, the details are sparse, Said was targeted for posting a video of police officers and drug dealers working together (Ross 2011). Within an hour of the pages creation 3000 members had joined the group and by the first day it had reached 70,000 members (Ghonim 2012: 62). The group organized various protest events, some organized by the April 6<sup>th</sup> movement and Kifaya (p. 79). More critically, it was Wael Ghonim, the one who launched the We Are All Khalid Said Facebook page, which first called on people to protest on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 via the internet. What made this scenario possible? Why would 70,000 people affiliate themselves with a cause that might lead to the brutality that Khalid Said experienced? The possibility of such a phenomenon within a highly authoritarian environment did not happen overnight; rather, a decade of contentious political action and discourse precipitated the possibility of this act of contention. Within this decade certain organized focal points of contention were created, such as Kifaya and the April 6<sup>th</sup> movement, which communicated to a society that was losing its fear and a state that had become increasingly fearful of unprecedented waves of dissent. This communication between “established hubs” of contention and a “long tail of ties with decreasing intensity” has its roots in the three episodes of contention outlined in this thesis (Nunes 2012). During

the last days of Egyptian revolution, established hubs like the workers unions, doctors, judges, professors, and other sectors of society organized mass strikes and protests that some believe “finally convinced the military to oust Mubarak and assume control” (Shehata :162). Traditionally cooperative collectivities have long interacted with the regime and at times contentiously capitalized on opportunities, but it’s the collective response to the uprising of January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 which divulged the true nature of a regime that had become instinctively *dependent* upon repression against the expression of legitimate concerns by the average citizen: “A critical event that changes perceptions of state strength or of popular support, or of the current level of threat from the existing regime, can suddenly shift the calculus of a protest group or groups...thus *creating a suddenly new set of conditions for protests and state-protestor interactions*” (Goldstone and Tilly 2001: 193; *my emphasis*).

Regional conflicts in Iraq and Israel may have been the initial engines of a nascent street politics; subsequently creating a new space for contentious politics, but domestic economic woes along with a largely unemployed and ignored youth bulge are the suspected reasons behind why spontaneous demonstrations occurred on January 25, 2011. I have primarily dealt with how this process was initiated by analyzing the roots of contentious politics in Egypt while largely ignoring the fundamental reasons to why this happened. What pushed normally idle Egyptian’s to risk their lives and protest against the regime on January 25, 2011? The average demonstrator will not likely respond that he or she acted upon an opportunity or environmental change; rather,

unemployment, lack of dignity, or lack of opportunities will likely be common responses. History has demonstrated that people often “rise in contention under the most discouraging circumstances, as long as they *recognize* collective interests, join others like themselves, and think there is a chance their protests will succeed” (Tarrow 1998: 198). Although real socio-economic injustices may have been the justification for the revolution, it was not the sufficient cause of Egypt’s politicization of the public sphere. Recognition and perception have played vital roles in the decision to participate in contentious politics. Indeed, the base of this struggle seems to be aimed at changing collective perceptions, so that a transition from orthodoxy and into an unknown universe of discourse is possible, or at least appears so. The social interaction among subjects, challengers, and members of the state led to the development of contention needed to oust Mubarak in 2011. Unfortunately, the ideological fault lines that were overlooked during the organization of the Egyptian revolution are again becoming focal points of Egyptian politics. In fact, the events leading up to Tahrir have demonstrated that “unity does not precede praxis; it is produced through political struggle” (Mamdani 2011: 560). Political theorist, Ernesto Laclau, has argued that a world characterized by heterogeneity need not be a negative factor element for politics, rather heterogeneity builds chains of equivalence and fosters the creation of ‘the people’. In other words, “unicity shows itself through its very absence” (Laclau 2005: 223). Social and political heterogeneity may have played a continuative role for the creation an overwhelmingly united “Egyptian people” on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011; but will the reaffirmation of preexisting fault lines have similar effects within a country that has become well versed in the

language of street politics? The dramatic images of Coptic Egyptians protecting Muslims during prayers by forming human barriers have been superseded by the increasingly frequent clashes between Copts and Muslims. While secular groups continue to protest what they feel has been a hijacking of the revolution by a deeply organized Muslim Brotherhood. Pluralism has had a remarkably positive effect on the mobilization of disparate groups of people against Mubarak; only time will tell if further social interaction in 'post-revolutionary' Egypt will lead to new cycles of contention or a return to the static realm of doxa.

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