

Regimes lost in Political Space

A comparative analysis of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution
and the 2009 post-elections protests

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1. Introduction

The popular perception of the Egyptian and Iranian revolts

On a quiet evening in the Egyptian city of Alexandria a group of plain-clothed police officers storm an Internet café and violently drag a young man from the café, banging his head against a marble table and a doorway in the process. He is taken to the other side of the street where the officers under cover of darkness literally cave his head in with severe blows; their victim does not survive.

Almost a year earlier, during the protests against the disputed 2009 presidential election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a 26 years old woman was watching the clashes between the protesters and Iranian militiamen – the *Basij* – when she was suddenly shot in the chest. Friends and bystanders rushed towards her for help. It was to no avail, the heavy calibre bullet had pierced her heart and she died on the spot.

Their names were Khaled Said and Neda Agha-Soltan and both became symbolic individuals representing the generation of the tech savvy youth that would rise against the dictatorial regimes in the Middle East, forsaking their personal security in the face of merciless security officers. Khaled and Neda have become symbols, even known far outside their countries, because (social) media on the Internet could spread pictures and videos of their death. A then unknown person created an Facebook page called *We Are All Khaled Said*, depicting graphic photographs of Said's post-mortem body, which ignited wide spread fury about the endemic police brutality and would become a platform for protest against the Egyptian regime.

In Iran it was not much different. The death of Neda was filmed and posted on Youtube, attracting millions of viewers expressing their support for the anti-Ahmadinejad protesters. *Time Magazine* called Neda's departure 'the

most widely witnessed death in human history'.¹ Since then the social media are hailed as tools revolutionising the organization of social movements that try to promote democracy through their campaigns within repressive countries.

The popular uprisings against regimes throughout the Arab world received mainly positive titles throughout the Western world and media. CNN calls it the 'Arab Spring' while other news-outlets speak of an 'Arab Awakening.' If we would follow the excited narrative of mainstream media without reflection, the view emerges that a sudden urge for democracy was awakened within the so-called 'Facebook-generation' through their access to free information via the Internet. Which subsequently inspired an organic uprising of democratic minded people against repression. But is this assessment correct?

To praise the Internet for creating the possibility for Egyptians and Iranians to revolt is easy. For it is a neat and clear explanation of how citizens used new technology to fool the security services which enabled them to organize demonstrations that normally would have been impossible within the repressive political climate of these countries. However, some simple observations cast doubt on this explanation. For instance only 20 per cent of the almost 81 million Egyptians have Internet of which only 5,7 per cent have a Facebook account.² It makes the influence of the Internet on Egyptian society and with it the importance of social media as an organizational tool for protests at the least questionable. To organize nationwide demonstrations in which sometimes millions of people take part, you will need more than a limited connection with your target-audience through Internet.

In Iran it was not very different. While the 2009 Elections Protests are often dubbed as the 'Twitter Revolution,' the reality shows that during those

¹ 'Top Ten Heroes: Neda Agha-Soltan,' in *Time Magazine*, published 08-12-2008 and retrieved on 20-07-2011 from:
http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1945379_1944701_1944705,00.html

² 'Oren en ogen van de opstand,' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published on 13-05-2011.

demonstrations the Internet was blocked by the government and therefore inaccessible to most Iranians. Could Twitter then really be used as an organizational tool? Such observations create more questions such as 'if it was not the Internet, who and how were the protests then organized?' It seems easy to answer this question but it is not. Most politicians and journalists in Europe and the United States speak of the 'social movements' in Egypt or Iran and subsequently ignore the vague nature of the meaning of such a term and their public does not learn anything new, with dangerous public ignorance as a result. Therefore it is one of the goals of this thesis to pull the social movements responsible for the protests in Egypt and Iran out of their obscurity in order to enhance the public knowledge about these new important political actors in the Middle East.

-Goals of Thesis-

I will explore the Egyptian and Iranian revolts in the context of Social Movement Theory (SMT). As it appears social movements in Egypt and Iran were the key players and instrumental in the much-publicized demonstrations through which they contended the legitimacy of their governments. Therefore the organizational background of these revolts is likely to be found in social movements. I believe SMT to be the right theoretical framework through which I can map the various organizations behind these movements in a more concrete manner.

In this way I will try to provide: (1) a comprehensive analysis of the organizations behind the social movements and how these groups could become constituting members of these movements. With this analysis I can establish a contextual framework in which I can create (2) a truthful account of how the events developed during the revolts in Egypt and Iran. Furthermore I will provide (3) a critical analysis of how the creation of social movements was translated into a contentious campaign against the regimes of Egypt and Iran in which I will also assess the role of the social media. And finally (4) a comparative analysis of the Egyptian and Iranian cases will be

provided in which I will explain which political and institutional factors were significant in deciding the different outcome in these cases.

-Relevance of Thesis to the Public and Academic debate-

My thesis is relevant for both the public and academic debate concerning the social changes in the Middle East. The 'Arab Spring' is probably already the most featured news topic of the year 2011. Politicians, policymakers and journalists cannot speak enough about the 'democracy movements' in the Middle East while they do not seem to possess deep knowledge of the roots of those movements.³

This is potentially dangerous in the sense of Western governments and organizations founding or justifying their actions or policies with regard to countries like Egypt and Iran on poor or false information. I am confident that this thesis can fill in some gaps of missing information and in some cases correct wrongful information that is perceived as fact in the public debate about the popular uprisings in Egypt and Iran. Especially chapters 4 and 5, in which the organizations and the campaigns of the social movements are analysed, will offer a clearer picture of the causes for the protests and the development of events during this particular period.

On the academic level this thesis is relevant because scholars of Social Movement Theory are investigating for some years now the significance of social media to social movements and popular protests. Especially since the Iranian protests, which are still perceived as a 'Twitter Revolution.' However,

³ The popular Dutch talk show *Pauw en Witteman* hosted on the day of Mubarak's departure Member of Parliament Frans Timmermans, expert on Arab affairs and former Dutch diplomat Petra Stienen and Dutch-Egyptian political scientist Monique Samuel to talk about the Egyptian revolution. All three of the guests agreed on the opinion that this was a revolution of Egyptian people mobilized through Facebook and that the Muslim Brotherhood had no part in the events on Tahrir square. In this thesis my research will show that the part of this opinion concerning the mobilizing influence of the social media is too simplistic and the part about the Muslim Brotherhood will turn out to be downright false. The show can be watched back online on the following URL:

[http://pauwenwitteman.vara.nl/Gast-detail.1575.0.html?&tx_vegquestbook_pi1\[pointer\]=14&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=20380&cHash=c7c163457af1240d796977d49c63a472](http://pauwenwitteman.vara.nl/Gast-detail.1575.0.html?&tx_vegquestbook_pi1[pointer]=14&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=20380&cHash=c7c163457af1240d796977d49c63a472)

there is not yet a fully developed model that incorporates social media or other new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in SMT. And the opinions of social movement scholars are divided whether ICTs significantly change SMT (Earl, et al 2010: 427), (Cross 2010: 169, 185-186) & (Garrett 2006: 5, 9). With the research done for this thesis as foundation I will be able to give a reasoned opinion about the importance of ICTs to Social Movement Theory.

Furthermore this thesis aims to paint a clear picture of the grass-root level actors, who instigated the protests. For most academic analyses of modern Egypt and Iran have been done through the looking class biased by assumptions about elite politics (El-Mahdi & Marfleet 2009: 153). It has always been about the influence some Egyptian generals and Iranian Ayatollahs have on political policies and everyday live. Grass-root level oppositional political actors have not achieved that much attention so far. What might explain the limited knowledge the earlier-mentioned European and American politicians and journalists have of these actors.

-Theoretical Framework-

The people of the protest movements in Egypt and Iran, made through their demonstrations on the streets, claims on interests of their political adversaries in a coordinated and collective effort on behalf of their shared interests and values. In this case the government was the target. Social movement scholars Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow coded this kind of collective action in order to make a political claim as *contentious politics* (Tilly & Tarrow 2007: 4). Tilly and Tarrow created a theory around this term that they immortalized with their clever book, titled after their theory. I award the book *Contentious Politics* with the term 'immortal' because it provides a near-perfect guide that pinpoints significant mechanisms and processes around the process of political mobilization with which a researcher can navigate him or herself through the explanatory maze of popular revolts or revolutions. Mainly because the mechanism-process approach of Tilly and Tarrow, demonstrated

in their book, provides a method in which a social researcher can dismantle important processes that go hand in hand with political mobilization into mechanisms; the constituting parts of a process.

Detailed knowledge of constituting mechanisms is important because they are often empirically visible while processes are not. For instance a key-process in contentious politics is *new coordinated action*. It consists of two mechanisms: *brokerage* and *diffusion*. Brokerage entails that there is a new connection established between previously unconnected political groups. This mechanism is traceable for example through press statements of these actors in which they express plans for future cooperation. The other constituting mechanism, diffusion – spread of a contentious performance or issue to another political actor – is verifiable if a researcher keeps records of previous standpoints or performances in which he or she can observe any change since the investigated political groups became connected. If these groups subsequently start to campaign together for exchanged – and thereby now *collective* – goals, you can speak of the process of *coordinated action*. But now you can explain *how* in a certain period of time, previously non-existing coordinated action could emerge and therefore *why* particular issues are more effectively promoted than they were before (Tilly & Tarrow 2007: 29-31).

Such a theoretical method is excellent for comparative research because it allows me to dismantle similar processes, which turned out to be very different in their outcome during the revolts in Egypt and Iran. As I demonstrated with the short example above, using the mechanism-process approach will enable me to identify and analyse constituting mechanisms of those processes. As a result I will be in the position to explain *how* these particular processes evolved and therefore *why* the outcomes of the Egyptian and Iranian revolts were different.

Social movements redefined

Besides developing a theoretical framework that helps students of social movements to collect empirical data about demonstrations, riots and revolutions, Tilly and Tarrow also found a way to analyse the organization of

social movements in a more concrete fashion by modifying the definition of a social movement. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the term social movement remains pretty vague and therefore stands in the way of a sound analysis. A definition in Wikipedia describes a social movement as 'large informal groupings of individuals and / or organizations focused on specific political or social issues.'⁴ If you use this definition to make sense of for example the Environmental Movement, it does not last long before you hit a brick wall.

Just to demonstrate my point: What is the correct answer to the question of 'what and who constitutes the Environmental Movement?' - Is it a movement consisting of extremists fighting with the police as they did in Copenhagen during the 2009 UN Climate Change Summit? Many scholars would disagree with this answer because there are also numerous moderate scientists who propose a global change in policies concerning our environment. Is it then a movement dominated by intellectuals? No, because there are also many political parties in Parliaments worldwide, and the people in those organizations see themselves as part of this movement as well and have a more political view instead of an intellectual appreciation of climate change.

As becomes clear, it is hard to give the Environmentalists a homogenic label and to determine the constituting parts of this movement. It also shows that not necessarily only social movements engage in contentious politics. Other forms of collectivities can use contentious politics as well to make their claim a reality. But foremost this demonstrates that social movements may be perceived as such while they are in reality something different entirely. Tilly and Tarrow argue that the collection of different types of contention under the same label obscures their differences and complicates examinations of transitions among them and subsequently hampers systematic comparison (Ibid: 8).

⁴ Wikipedia: Social Movements. Retrieved 21-07-2011 from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_movement#Definition

In order to solve this problem and create a clear analysis of the formation and evolution of any given social movement, and the way it expresses its claims through collective action, Tilly and Tarrow designed their definition of a social movement in such a way that it breaks down social movements in two components: the social movement *base* and the social movement *campaign*. A base consists of 'movement organizations, networks, participants, and the accumulated cultural artefacts, memories, and traditions' in which a collective contention is created and from which campaigns are launched. Which are 'a sustained challenge to power holders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those power holders by means of concerted public displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment, using such means as public meetings, demonstrations, petitions, and press releases' (Ibid: 114) When a social movement base is actually able to launch a campaign, one can speak of a social movement. But a researcher must remember that the translation from a contentious idea within a base towards a campaign in the streets does not happen automatically. For it demands the presence of mechanisms and processes discussed earlier in this chapter, to trigger such a transition.

By dividing the definition of a social movement in these two concepts it becomes easier to identify the special properties of social movement bases and therefore the similarities and differences in the foundations of the revolts in Egypt and Iran. That is what makes this framework very applicable to my form of research. Because it illuminates the organizing components of social movements, which enables systematic comparison between the cases compared in this thesis.

2. Methodology

The main academic goals of this thesis are to (1) explain how the outcomes of two revolts - which appear to be quite similar at a first glance - could be so different. (2) To assess the impact social media have on mechanisms and

processes, and the need for a framework that incorporates social media as a significant factor in Social Movement Theory.

Through exploring three main features of the contentions researched for this thesis, I will present data on which I can base a comparative analysis with which I can achieve the first goal. The first feature is a description and comparative analysis of the conditions of the political opportunity structures in Egypt and Iran. This is relevant because the availability and salience of necessary mechanisms and processes depend on the opportunities or threats generated by components of political and institutional systems that facilitate or inhibit political collective action (Ibid: 49). The second feature entails a description and comparative analysis of the organizations, networks and traditions that compose the social movement bases responsible for the revolts. Knowledge of these bases is imperative if one wants to understand the meaning of the protests during the uprisings. The combination of the first two features creates a political and social context in which the third feature – a description and interpretation of events during the revolts based on the mechanism-process approach – can be carried out.

The explanation to which extent the social media had a significant impact on the events in Egypt and Iran, the second goal, will be based on critical analysis of mechanisms and processes, identified in the course of research performed to achieve the first goal.

Evidence and collection techniques

The evidence, in which the comparative analysis of the political opportunity structures and the social movement bases is rooted, comes mainly from literature research. Quite a number of scholars had already done specific research about social movement organizations in Egypt and Iran, which was for the most part very insightful and helpful because I was not in the position to acquire first account data about all the organizations constituting the movements in Egypt and Iran.

Tilly and Tarrow suggest the use of newspapers that cover the contention you want to investigate. For these printed sources are easily

accessible, record events that are often re-observable through movie clips on the Internet, and these types of sources are easy to subject to crosschecking because there are (still) many of them (Ibid: 38-39). Most data concerning the events during the revolts is also collected in this thesis through the use of a selection of Dutch and English language newspapers that had reporters at the scene. This criterion proved to be wise because many newspaper-commentators were at times fairly biased in their opinion – which later turned out to be heavily flawed - about the protesters. And at some times completely ignorant when it concerned the political groups behind the protests. The reporters at the scene tried to keep it to the facts and offered descriptions of the revolts based on actions and reactions they observed with their own eyes. It was remarkable how much information I could extract from such observations. For example the British journalist Robert Fisk observed during the election-protests that from one day to another tens of thousands of demonstrators switched the colour of their clothes from green to black in order to mourn killed protesters and simultaneously accuse the regime of criminal actions. Out of this plain observation I could determine that this contentious performance was tightly coordinated, which demanded mechanisms such as *brokerage* and *diffusion*, but apparently also *attribution of similarity* because the people expressed a shared identity by wearing clothes with similar meaning. Reading through hundreds of similar reporters' articles it was possible to collect a great number of such observations and descriptions from which I could distil mechanisms and processes constituting significant events.

Other written sources include documents of the Egyptian April 6 Movement in which strategies, resources and objectives are explained. Furthermore I have been able to collect a proportionate amount of Tweets of Egyptians citizens, published during the revolution. In some instances the Tweets turned out to be more than anecdotal evidence about the importance of social media as an organizational tool. Furthermore I will make use of documentaries that depict the *modus operandi* of Egyptian and Iranian social movement organizations before and during the revolts.

I also conducted interviews with Egyptians who were involved in the revolution when I visited Cairo last June. I focused on students because they instigated the protests and they speak English fairly well. I also tried to interview older Egyptians but that was complicated and I will give details about this matter in the next paragraph. In the end I was able to conduct seven quality interviews. The information collected with these interviews is not a sovereign piece of the evidence, but rather a verifying tool for the written sources outlined above.

Problems during research

The Iranian case turned out to be the most complicated to investigate. Since the Iranian regime cracked down with severe force on the anti-Ahmadinejad demonstrators, most if not all of them went underground. Therefore it would have been tough to find and interview former protesters if I were to go to Iran. I checked for possibilities to visit Iran anyway but at that time the Dutch government was engaged in a diplomatic incident with Iran over the execution of a Dutch-Iranian woman, sentenced to death by an Iranian court because of drug-charges. In the context of the current Dutch-Iranian relations I was told that it was hard for a Dutch citizen to get a visa, let alone a Dutch journalist / researcher. This deprived me of oral sources that could verify my findings about the protests. Nevertheless I found a book written by a protester that offers details with which I could triangulate other data.

I also encountered some problems during my field research in Egypt. As I quickly found out, interviewing Egyptian people, who are not a student, is a daunting task and if not near impossible. Especially since the main economy of Cairo - tourism - collapsed after the revolution scared away most Westerners, the phrase 'time is money' became a reality for most working Egyptians I encountered. Instead of two jobs they had four in order to provide for their family. An hour or half an hour of their time would cost an average Egyptian income that could not be missed. The result was that my interviews remained limited to students, who I always would encounter in a café that attracted many 'revolutionaries' as they called themselves. These

conversations turned out to be very informative but I would have liked to have a more mixed group of interviewees.⁵

⁵ The people interviewed for this thesis, will remain anonymous. The security services are on momentarily on a short leash due to the outcome of the recent revolution, however, there is possibility that this could change rapidly.

3. Site Comparison

Theoretical context

This chapter explores the features of the Egyptian and Iranian regimes. But what is the meaning of the term regime? State? Government? In Social Movement Theory, Charles Tilly and Sydney Tarrow define a regime as an entity consisting of 'regular relations among governments, established political actors, challengers, and outside political actors' (Ibid: 45).

Thus, within regimes, political actors – from Members of Parliament to pro-Palestinian activists – interact with each other in order to make their collective political claim as effectively possible. However, the ability to make that claim is determined by the amount of opportunities the regime offers to that particular actor in its political space. The framework of Tilly and Tarrow offers six features of a regime that indicate the political space, or in other words the political opportunities available to political actors to make their claim:

1. The multiplicity of independent centres of power within it
2. Its openness to new actors
3. The instability of current political alignments
4. The availability of influential allies or supporters for challengers
5. The extent to which the regime represses or facilitates collective claim making
6. Decisive changes in item 1 to 5 (Ibid: 57).

Through this checklist I will explore and analyse the regimes and the conditions under which Egyptian and Iranian social movement organizations had to operate.

EGYPT

-Conditions in Egypt under which social movement- organizations with political aims operate

The Republic of Egypt has remained in the hands of succeeding dictatorial regimes since its declaration in 1953. The governments of presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak kept the power through the use of an elaborate patronage system and security apparatus with which they could control political elections and every day life. The longevity of this regime was reinforced by the economical situation that financed the political elite and its security forces while it impoverished the majority of the Egyptian people. This chapter will explore *institutional, political and economic* Egypt in order to provide an understanding of the conditions in which individuals had to establish social movement organizations and political parties who may function as mobilizing agents for a collective contention against the Egyptian government.

-Institutional Egypt-

The security apparatus

When the Free Officers of the Egyptian armed forces in a quick and non-violent coup d'état removed the pro-British Egyptian King Farouk in 1952, the military elite became the ruling power and still is today. Officially Egypt remains a democratic republic with a leader that carries the decent title of 'president' instead of leadership titles associated with repression like 'Colonel' or 'Führer.' However, all of the Egyptian presidents that ruled their country since it was declared a Republic in 1953 were former generals and products of the Free Officers Movement.

It was relatively easy for the officers to enforce the political shift in power. In fact the coup was so swift and effective that the victors did not feel the need to seek legitimacy of the Egyptian people through free elections. It was in this period that the seeds for the elitist feature of the Egyptian government were planted. But the leaders of the Free Officers did know that they needed a story to justify the legitimacy of their leadership. After a messy transition period in which the now famous general Gamal Abdel Nasser removed the first president of Egypt, Muhammad Naguib, in 1954, the new president introduced his own form Pan-Arabism to create a sense of legitimacy. It was called - not surprisingly - *Nasserism*. This ideology was based on Arab nationalism and socialism, which used the anti-Western / capitalist and anti - Zionist sentiment that was widespread under the Egyptians during the decolonisation period (Marfleet 2009: 18-19). It has to be noted, however, that Nasserism was not a form of communism but a distinct Arab ideology. But one thing that Nasser did copy from the Soviet Union was its Stalinist type of centralised state and politics. The preservation of this system was protected by a wide array of security forces.

President Anwar Sadat changed course radically in an ideological sense. After the death of Nasser in 1970 Sadat became third President of Egypt and within eight years he was able to reform the nationalized economy to a free market version. And he signed a peace agreement with Israel following the 1978 Camp David Accords. But the security apparatus would remain as Soviet Union-like as ever. The security forces would even become increasingly powerful after the assassination of Sadat in 1981. The succeeding president Hosni Mubarak declared a State of Emergency as a response to the assassination, which is still effective presently. With basic rights suspended, the hundreds of thousands of security agents that fell under the Ministry of Interior could act at free will. They were free to arrest and detain citizens without a court order or trial; ban demonstrations, strikes or meetings of more than ten persons; close newspapers and refer civilians to military courts at which there is no right of appeal (Marfleet 2009: 23).

Under Mubarak the security apparatus flourished. Untouchable due to the ever-effective Emergency Law, operatives intimidated, murdered and tortured people opposing the Egyptian regime through political means. Which firmly depoliticized the Egyptian society at its core.

-Politics in Egypt-

The Stalinist inspiration

Although Egypt under Mubarak presented itself as an electoral democracy, in reality it was something different entirely. Nasser founded the new Republic with a powerful central Stalinist state as its foundation. In which effectively a one-party system was established, preserved by wide networks of intelligence services and snitches. The Egyptian presidents have dictated the political scene through this system since the 1950s. The rulers-party was created under the name of the Liberation Rally in 1953 and switched titles until it was known as it is still known today: the National Democratic Party (NDP).⁶ As in communist countries the electoral system in Egypt is designed to ensure solid majorities for the ruling party at all levels of government. When religious actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood gained popular support as legitimate opposing political actor, the government passed constitutional amendments in 2007, banning religious parties.⁷

But next to dominating the legislative scene, the NDP has cut through the separation of powers and was until the 2011-revolution located in the Ministry of Interior where its officials guarded executive obedience to the state of the Egyptians in socio-economic affairs (Beinin 2009: 68). Throughout the years the NDP evolved into a conglomerate of appointed officials and senior state officials loyal to Mubarak, which has leverage over local governing officials by having the power of firing, transferring or arresting

⁶ After the 2011 revolution, the NDP was dissolved by court order. The assets were transferred to the state. Quite ironical since the NDP was in effect a part of the state apparatus to govern Egypt.

⁷ Freedom House. Dossier Egypt. Retrieved 14-07-2011 from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2010>.

these officials if they do something against the political line of the NDP (Marfleet 2009: 25-27). The political clout of the NDP over Egyptian society is near completed through their strong ties with the workers unions. Since the establishment of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) in 1957, the 'trade unions have functioned as an arm of the state rather than as democratic representatives of workers, mobilising workers to demonstrate "popular support" for the divergent policies of successive regimes at the ballot box or in the street' (Beinin 2009: 68). A former employee at the Ministry of Tourism, whom I interviewed in Cairo, verified this modus operandi of the Egyptian government / NDP: 'they are not even subtle about the forced support for Mubarak. My supervisor at the department said simply: "no vote, no job."⁸

The multi-party system

Although officially Mubarak had abolished the one-party system in favour of a multi-party system, which happened under US pressure, the twenty-four organizations in the People's Assembly were never worthy the title of 'political party.' Despite diplomatic efforts of EU countries and less diplomatic demands of the United States⁹, the new 'plural' political system in Egypt remained an illusion (Alexander 2009: 148). Any individual or group that aspired to establish a political organization had to underwrite the agreement to 'never mobilise publicly' (Marfleet 2009: 27). If - mainly at the local level - an outside political actor was suspected of collecting the majority of votes at the expense of the NDP, more drastic measures were implemented. For example in 2000 the police initiated an attack on voters in Menoufiya, where an opposition candidate had been expected to receive many votes: sixty people were hospitalized. In 2005, during the Parliamentary elections sword and machete wielding thugs in the service of the regime stormed polling stations in Port Said and smuggled in pre-filled ballots in favour of Mubarak (Marfleet 2009: 16).

⁸ Former employee of the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism interviewed in Cairo, 17-06-2011.

⁹ US President George W. Bush delivered in 2003 at National Endowment for Democracy in which he referenced directly to Egypt. Explicitly stating that Egypt should show other Arab states the way to democracy.

It seems that these government-measures led to a massive de-politicisation through institutionalised channels under the average Egyptians. It effectively closed down opportunities for legal political actions by new political actors. However, the regime arguably made a mistake by the unequal distribution of wealth. As it turned out the economic situation would become the most important underlying factor on which the revolution was based.

-The Egyptian Economy-

How the patronage system was created

As with the above-described political system, the economic system of Egypt is officially organized in a sound manner, as instructed by the International Monetary Fund and the US. But in reality the Egyptian market-oriented economy lacks commitment to practices associated with advanced liberal economies in the West, such as 'formal guarantees of a rule of law, a fair wage system, or investment in knowledge production' (El Naggar 2009: 36).

President Nasser established in 1956 a nationalized economy - as socialism dictated. However, Egypt has known mainly a capitalist based economy since Sadat sought alignment with the West after the Yom Kippur War in 1973. The so-called *Infitah* - opening - policies of Sadat aimed at attracting foreign investments and reforming the economy into a liberal market. But the state institutions remained centralised as ever giving well-connected bureaucrats and government officials opportunities for self-enrichment through corruption. Officials would often sell agricultural lands - one of the main economic sectors in Egypt - against low prices in return for huge commissions (El Naggar 2009: 35). Thus the economic opening and the associated new wealth mainly benefited the regime's elite and some well-connected citizens instead of the majority of the Egyptian people.

Actually, the situation of the average Egyptian would only increasingly worsen under the new economic system. The IMF and the US demanded of president Sadat that he would abandon protectionist policies in order to adjust totally to the free market philosophy. Which meant in practice

that subsidies on basic consumer commodities were lifted. As a result, bread, the most basic form of food on which most Egyptian families depend for survival, became too expensive for most. As a result there was a nation wide revolt in 1977 in which hundreds of thousands of poor Egyptians demanded the reinstatement of the subsidies. Sadat eventually had to incline to this demand of the street (Beinin 2009: 70). However the mixture of a corrupt state apparatus with a flawed capitalist economy would remain in existence and only members of the political elite profited.

The cohabitation of public and private interests increased under the rule of Mubarak and reinforced the state apparatus. Generals and other senior government officials entered business partnerships in which their influence guaranteed preferences or even monopolies in particular markets, establishing an elaborate patronage system in the process (Alexander 2009: 136) & (Marfleet 2009: 22). Under this system the situation for ordinary labourers and workers continuously deteriorated. For example, politically well-connected businessmen / statesmen ensured that the Unified Labour Law passed legislation in 2003. This law legalised indefinitely renewable fixed contracts, depriving many Egyptians of a secure workspace (Beinin 2009: 75-76). This example is a clear illustration of how the patronage system deprives many Egyptians of decent employment opportunities. For one has to realise that the combination of this particular law with the earlier mentioned state-controlled unions, robs workers from a single opportunity to combat this measure.

Global connection of Egypt

The enduring financial crises worldwide proof everyday the high interconnectedness of national economies. It is common knowledge that the current two superpowers – the US and China – are so dependent on each other economically, that a military conflict between these nuclear powers becomes highly unlikely in the foreseeable future. Is this situation also applicable to the Egyptian regime? In what way is the Egyptian economy tied

to the West and does this give the EU and the US leverage over actions of the Egyptian regime?

Well, if one country has warm relations with the United States of America it would be the Egyptian government. Since the 1979 peace accord between Egypt and Israel, Egypt has become the most important US ally in the Middle East - next to Israel. Between 1977 and 2007 Egypt received 62 billion dollars in aid. An annual average of 2.1 billion of which more than half ends up in the budgets of the armed forces. The give or take 1 billion dollar is almost a third of the total budget of the military, making its capability to operate highly dependent on US-Egypt relations (Alexander 2009: 138). Next to aid in liquid assets, the military also receives help from the US in deliveries of military hardware.¹⁰ Protesters also showed the gas-canisters - fired by Egyptian riot police - to the international press during the revolt. Most objects had a 'made in USA' tag. Besides the purely military cooperation, the Egyptian military uses the liquid aid as well to increase their influence in the civilian economy through the earlier-described patronage system. By investing directly through the military industry in markets such as food and consumer goods production, the generals effectively militarize these areas (Alexander 2009: 139). Next to the Egyptian military economic-industrial dependence of US budgets, Egyptian soldiers also established a sort of cultural connection. Many Egyptian officers follow their advanced training at American military academies. During their training they live with their families for a few years in the US during which time they foster a positive attitude towards their host country and establish friendships with American soldiers¹¹

¹⁰ For instance in 2009 Egypt and the US made several deals concerning the delivery of twelve Longbow Apache combat helicopters and twenty-four F-16 fighter-jets to the Egyptian military. These deals combined have a value of over 4 billion Dollars. I extracted this information of US Department of Defence notifications addressed to the US Congress. Documents Transmittal No. 09-15 and Transmittal No. 09-68 can be found Appendix 1 and 2.

¹¹ 'US-Egyptian military ties, how much leverage does the Pentagon have?' In the *Christian Science Monitor*, published 03-02-2011 and retrieved on 26-06-2011 from: <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Military/2011/0203/US-Egyptian-military-ties-How-much-leverage-does-the-Pentagon-have/%28page%29/2>

Dependence of Egyptian civilians on the outside world

The political elite in Egypt has claimed most sectors – textile, agriculture and manufacturing industries – for itself. Granted, they need Egyptian workers but an average monthly wage of labourers in these markets is very low. A weaver in the textile industry earns between 250 and 450 Egyptian pounds a month. That is about 30 to 55 euros. The Egyptian government has found ways to attract even cheaper, but foreign workers from Libya and Sudan with the realisation of the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs). These zones were established in Egypt in 2005 after the government realised a trade agreement with Israel and the US that allowed products manufactured in one of the four QIZs to be directly exported to US markets without tariff or quota restrictions. The hire of cheap foreign labour is legal in these zones and therefore deprived many Egyptian workers of job opportunities (Beinin 2009: 77). Currently 22 per cent of the Egyptian population lives under the poverty line according to the World Bank.¹²

The only sector that is not controlled by the regime is the tourism sector, which was booming before the 2011-revolution. In 2009 nearly 12 million people from other countries arrived in Egypt to visit the wonders of ancient Egypt in Giza, Answar and Luxor. Many independent guides used to sell their services to hordes of tourists with which they could earn much more money than in the textile industry. In 2009 the revenue of the tourism sector constituted 6.2 per cent of the Egyptian GDP.¹³ In reality the percentage of tourism providing income for many Egyptians in the tourism-areas is probably way higher due to the thriving black economy that surrounds the business with foreign tourists. Out of own experience I can assure readers that as a Westerner you will almost always pay the double price compared to what an Egyptian would pay. It allows tourism-workers to report official income while they can keep almost a year income without paying tax over it.

¹² Online dossier of the Arab Republic of Egypt. <http://data.worldbank.org/country/egypt-arab-republic>

¹³ Online dossier of the Arab Republic of Egypt. <http://data.worldbank.org/country/egypt-arab-republic>

This makes it a profitable international-oriented market to work in for many Egyptians, who are not politically connected, through which they can get a decent job.

IRAN

-Conditions in Iran under which social movement organizations- with political aims operate

The Republic of Iran became officially an *Islamic* republic after the Iranian monarchy under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi collapsed due to the Islamic revolution in 1978 and 1979. Since then the country effectively isolated itself from the West and severed many economic and cultural ties. The controversial 1988 fatwa – in which the Supreme Leader Khomeini ordered the execution of Indian-British writer Salman Rushdie because of his ‘insulting’ novel *The Satanic Verses* – created an image of Iran in which many Westerners saw Iranians as a sinister nation of religious extremists. This image was reinforced years later when president Ahmadinejad denied the existence of the Holocaust and made references to an apocalyptic battle with Israel, which contributed to the creepy image of Iran.¹⁴

In reality Iran developed itself since 1979 into a relatively stable country with strong institutions. There is a real electoral system in which Iranians are allowed to vote for members of Parliament and presidential candidates. The pluralism within this system is real to a certain extent. For political power has shifted at least three times from multiple power bases in an orderly, peaceful and institutionalised fashion for almost thirty years. However, the anti-Western attitude of the early and latest regimes are real as well, it is also the guiding philosophy on which *institutional* Iran is based,

¹⁴ There are many disagreements among scholars and commentators about the meaning of Ahmadinejad’s ‘World without Zionism’ speech on the 26th of November in 2005. The phrase that was translated into English as ‘wiping Israel off the map,’ appears to have a different meaning in the Iranian language. But nevertheless the speech was perceived in Israel, the US and Europe as a nuclear threat to the Jewish state of Israel.

over which *political* Iran clashes and hampers the *global* connection of Iran. Therefore the emergence and nourishment of anti-Western sentiment in Iranian society, the reasons behind it and the Islamic exploitation of it, will be the guiding line through the description of contemporary Iran.

-Institutional Iran-

The creation of a modern state and how this process planted the seeds for anti-Western sentiment, 1925-1951

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Iran territory resembled the current state of Afghanistan. A weak government led by a monarchy, tribalism, infighting and poverty. In 1923 Reza Khan Pahlavi, an Iranian cavalry general, overthrew the ruling dynasty and in 1926 he officially became the new *Shah* – King – of Iran. The new ruler admired the founder of the Turkish republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and shared his secular and western orientation (Fisk 2005: 51). Already a year before his coronation, Reza Shah, started to modernize Iran after Turkish example, which meant that the armed forces would be the foundation around which the modern Iranian state was built. Infrastructure was vastly improved to increase the mobility of soldiers, while education became mandatory in order deliver educated boys to the armed forces through the newly imposed conscription. Initially there was a lot of opposition from tradition tribal organizations but by the 1930s there was a standing army of 100 thousand men (Axworthy 2007: 222-223).

However, this industrialized secular militarism would also threaten the main religious and cultural way of life of most Iranians, namely Islamic Shiites. The huge improvements in infrastructure and education – financed with the help of Great Britain – could not undo the widespread civic malcontentement with Western dress codes imposed by the Shah who viewed Shiism as a form of backwardness. The veil was banned and everyone had to wear clothes in the fashion of Europeans. Furthermore the *bazaars*, for generations the scene of the economy for ordinary folk, were heavily struck by high state-taxes on domestic trade. Which were imposed to create

opportunities for European traders (Axworthy 2007: 224). The pro-Western economic state policies and the subsequent societal anger about Western 'imperialistic' traders who were blamed with destroying the livelihood of many Iranians probably planted the seeds for anti-Western sentiment right there and then.

How American-British arrogance fertilized the seeds of anti-Western sentiments, 1941-1953

During World War II Reza's son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, would succeed the royal position. During the war Soviet troops invaded Iran because Stalin was in desperate need of oil resources in his struggle against Nazi Germany. It ensured that the position of the Shah was weak and it opened the opportunity for constitutional monarchy and democracy, which occurred for a short period of time (Ibid: 237). The initial pro-Western politicians in Iran were replaced when the nationalist Mohammad Mossadeq was elected prime minister in 1951. One of his first deeds as statesman was to renegotiate the oil exploitation contract with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) in order to get more revenues. The AIOC had developed the oil resources in Iran since its discovery in 1908 and pocketed more than 50 per cent of the profit. The British decided not to accede to the demands of Mossadeq but this strategy backfired when the Iranian prime minister with massive popular support nationalised the Oil Company (Fisk 2005: 114).

The UK and the US - both had major interests in the oil reserves of Iran and suffered huge financial losses as result of the nationalisation - did not possess the goodwill to pay for the Iranian democratisation project at the time. A joint American-British coup d'état was set-up under the codename Operation Ajax. A veteran spy from MI6, Christopher Woodhouse, who had much experience as a guerrilla fighter in wartime Greece, developed a plan to overthrow the democratic government and reinstate the Shah as executive leader. The plan was executed with success in 1953 and the US and the UK openly installed a dictatorial regime, proving in the process to the Iranians the 'imperialistic' motives of the West (Fisk 2005: 116-120).

Pax Americana – hate towards Westerners flourishes, 1953-1979

In the years that the threat of Soviet expansionism reached disturbing high levels of paranoia in the United States, which allowed the practices of the sort of senator Joseph McCarthy enjoyed, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi reclaimed the throne of Iran. But his role was in the Cold War context significantly different compared to his father's. He was now next to Israel the foremost ally of the US in the Middle East. He guarded the Soviet borders in southwest Asia and the vast oil supplies (Ibid: 121). In a sense the Shah was a precursor to the Mubarak regime in Egypt that guarded the Middle East against Jihadism. He ruled through decree without any control or counter power. The autocratic ruler furthermore divided the political opposition before he banned political parties all together. Only the Shiite clergy in the city Qom was left untouched and would become the best-organized opposition power in the future (Rakel 2009: 107) & (Axworthy 2007: 254).

The shah would keep his state secure through the CIA - trained security force, the SAVAK. This organization, probably best described as the KGB on steroids, employed 60 thousand agents and at one point in time, allegedly one third of the male population was involved with the SAVAK, either paid or under duress. Besides fear, the SAVAK-operatives would awaken fury and hate towards the Shah and his international allies due to the often-applied torture-measures. The basic treatment consisted of electric shocks through wires connected to the victim's genitals and excessive beatings of the soles of the feet and nail extraction. But all the more often people would get raped repeatedly (Fisk 2005: 120-121). The Shah would continue to lose support for his rule by unpopular decisions like agricultural reforms and state monopolies on trade, with which he impoverished the middle class. Pahlavi also estranged his natural supporters, the educated, secular middle / upper class by the continuous repression and abuse of human rights (Axworthy 2007: 254).

The final ten years of the autocratic rule of the Shah were marked by increasing insanity on the part of Pahlavi, who started to see himself as the reincarnation of Cyrus the Great, the admired Persian emperor of ancient

times. The shah would even dress up his soldiers as ancient Persian warriors at a special party to commemorate the 30th year of his rule (Fisk 2005: 122). However insignificant this might seem, it was the precursor to the Shah's wish to replace Shiite Islam with a state-religion devoted to Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. And this very proposal infuriated the mighty Shiite clergy in Qom, led by the exiled Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. In combination with the estranged upper class, the impoverished middle class, the revolting clergy marked the full circle of all layers of Iranian society willing to participate in a mass uprising against the Shah.

The Islamic Revolution and creation of constitutional *Islamic* Iran, 1979-1989

The first demonstrations against the regime started in 1977 and intensified through strikes in 1978 and turned at the end of that year into a full fledged armed revolution in which the security forces and the army were overwhelmed by the large numbers of people revolting. The Shah fled the country in January 1979. Within a few weeks Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned from years of exile and was greeted by a crowd consisting of millions of people who came to greet their spiritual revolutionary leader. But Khomeini wanted more.

While Khomeini was exiled, he recorded tapes with religio-political monologues in which he accused the Shah of being a Western and Israeli puppet that impoverished the Iranian citizens. The earlier mentioned economic reforms and especially the Persian-style celebration party of the Shah, which was only open to world leaders and prominent foreigners, instead of to ordinary Iranians, proved in the eyes of many Iranians the point Khomeini was making and his political ideas became widely popular (Fisk 2005: 120-121). Through the influential and powerful clergy - *Ulema* - countless copies of audiocassettes in which Khomeini expressed his views were distributed among Iranians.

When the actual revolution started, people rose against the Shah for a variety of social-economic reasons. But the clergy was able to present Islam

as the panacea to end all problems. The revolutionary creed was therefore expressed by protesters through the slogan: 'Islam is the Solution. It is an explanation for the fact that despite the revolution being a joint effort of communists, socialists, secular liberals and Islamic parties, that the just-returned Ayatollah was able to seize momentum with the use of his popularity (Menashiri 2001: 3). As a result Khomeini was able to collect an overwhelming majority for the referendum, held in October 1979, legitimizing the implementation of the new Islamic constitution, which was based on the *velayat-e faqih* principle. Translated this principle means 'Rule by the Jurisprudent.' It embodies the Shiite philosophy that a high-ranking cleric should be able to carry out the role of political leader in the absence of the Hidden Imam, 'the infallible Messiah whom the faithful expect to reappear in the future' (Hen-Tov & Gonzalez 2011: 47). This high-ranking cleric unsurprisingly turned out to be Khomeini himself.

The revolutionary clergy led by Khomeini took over executive power in November 1979 and unleashed a purifying campaign on Iranian society to consolidate its power. The organization executing and protecting this effort became known to the world as the Iranian Republican Guard Corps (IRGC). Established by Khomeini, as the Ayatollah did not trust the old army of the Shah, it soon developed itself as a complete military apparatus with as soul purpose protecting the theocratic principles of the Iranian state. They would round up state officials that served under the Shah and deliver those people to 'Revolutionary' Courts, where many people were sentenced to the gallows or the firing squad. The *ancien régime* of Pahlavi had to be exterminated to its core. Soon the consolidating effort of Khomeini started to resemble 'The Terror' of 18th century revolutionary France. People who had fought against the Shah or were victims of the regime themselves, increasingly were imprisoned or executed because of their 'counterrevolutionary sentiments.' These sentiments were of course determined by pro-Western, secular or anti-Islamic convictions. With this method Khomeini soon got rid of the socialist, communist, liberal and other secular groups, strongly reaffirming the new theocratic nature of Iran (Fisk 2005: 127-129, 147-148).

The start of the Iran-Iraq War, declared in 1980 by Saddam Hussein probably saved Khomeini from estranging the Iranian people. It provided Khomeini with an opportunity to frame this attack of the Saddam-regime into a holy war to protect the newfound Shiite sovereignty in Iran from Sunni aggression. There was enough desperation amongst the Iranians to hope for actual divine power of Khomeini, for the recent revolutionary clean up had decimated the numbers, organization and military talent of the armed forces and it was subsequently not able to repulse the initial invasion of Saddam in the southwest. Only the Republican Guards had the equipment and organization to wage effective war and by 1983 most territory conquered by Iraq was retaken (Hen-Tov & Gonzalez 2011: 48). But it would take another five years of stalemates gruesome trench-type warfare with associated chemical weapons and massive human wave attacks, which resulted into a total of certainly one million deaths, before a peace agreement was signed.

The war and all the suffering on the Iranian side arguably merged the religious and national identities into one. For as *Iranian* you fought in a *holy* war to protect your country. It allowed Khomeini to implement his governmental system based on the *velayat-e faqih* principle without people openly or effectively opposing it. By the midst of the 1980s the creation of institutional Islamic Iran was completed. In this system the Iranian people were allowed to choose through Parliamentary elections their representatives and through presidential elections a suitable candidate for the presidency. However the final power belongs to the Supreme Leader (Khomeini) who decides about the deployment of the military and police. A person in this position is furthermore able to replace presidents and veto legislation. But this is rare. Normally the Council of the Guardians – a sort of a religious senate that consists of six clerics appointed by the Supreme Leader and six jurists chosen by Parliament (and approved by the Supreme Leader – review laws passed by Parliament to determine whether those are in conformity with Islamic law (Rakel 2007: 108). This institutional design creates a small somewhat democratic republic in which economic and social laws and policies are drafted by elected representatives and carried out by an elected

president. But the real and final leader, the Supreme Leader is not elected and is able to veto all decisions made in the republic that is controlled and scrutinized by his religious institutions. This unique construction makes it very hard for outside observers to assess the level of political freedom in contemporary Iran. Which will be the topic of the next paragraph.

-Politics in Iran-

How radical Islamists reclaimed power, 1989-2005

As puritanical Khomeini may have started his *velayat-e faqih* project, in the secure environment of the office of the Supreme Leader, the old cleric started to unwind and allowed some pluralism in Iranian politics. At the beginning of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Parliament was dominated by the radical faction,¹⁵ which proposed a classless society, the export of the Revolution¹⁶ and an economically interventionist state (Bjorvatn & Selvik 2008: 2316). However, the practical concerns of state affairs soon got the dominant position in the everlasting dilemma between dogmatic principles and more pragmatic considerations and national interests. Khomeini himself would press on many occasions the Council of the Guardians to approve economic laws and

¹⁵ There are no political parties in Iran, only factions that are composed of representatives. There are currently four main factions:

1. The Conservatives: the main constituency of this faction is to be found in the clerical part of Iranian society. They propose private property and isolationism, with Islamic jurisprudence over state-led society making.
2. The Pragmatic Conservatives: They also propose Islamic jurisprudence over social and state affairs, however, they argue for a more liberal economy with international connections. Their main constituency consists of independent entrepreneurs and the working class.
3. The Reformists: as the name suggests this faction wants significant reform of institutional Iran and propose a separation of religion and state. They argue furthermore for a détente with the West. Their main constituency consists of intellectuals and students.
4. Neo-Conservatives: This faction is the real inheritor of the puritanical ideology on which the Islamic Republic is based. Their main constituency consists of members of the IRGC and the deprived poor. (Rakel 2007: 108).

¹⁶ This export entailed the training and equipment of Shiite Muslims in the Middle East. It actually happened during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). Journalists Robert Fisk and Terry Anderson discovered in 1982 in the Bekaa Valley a military camp set up by hundreds of Iranian Revolutionary guards who supported the Shiite faction in their battle against Israel and other hostile factions (Fisk 1990: 468-470).

measures in the public interest while these legislations previously were red flagged by the Council. In order to resolve this problem, the Supreme Leader established the Council of the Experts, where members of Parliament or government could appeal to the decision of the Guardians. This Council consisted of six Guardians, the president, the Parliamentary speaker, the president of the Supreme Court, the prosecutor general and a representative of the Supreme Leader. The decisions of this Council were final. The fact that half of this council did not consist of clericals significantly weakened the religious grip on Parliament and the president (Menashiri 2001: 14).

Khomeini died in 1989 and was succeeded by his confidant and 1981-1989 president Ali Khamenei. This year marked a change in Iranian politics. The Pragmatists were elected into power and their leader, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, became President for two four-year terms. The combination of the new, more moderate, political establishment with the religious-authority vacuum left in the wake of Khomeini's death, allowed to a certain extent debate about the role of Islam in public affairs. Even though opposing people with 'counterrevolutionary sentiments' were carefully removed ten years earlier, the political division in Parliament over the religious inspired society making had remained latent and became visible after Khomeini's departure (Bjorvatn & Selvik 2008: 2315-2316). Even clerics appeared to be divided over the role of Islam and the connection to the West. The most senior Shiite cleric and scholar Hussein-Ali Montazeri criticised the fatwa against Salman Rushdie arguing that 'people in the world are getting the idea that our business in Iran is just murdering people' (Menashiri 2001: 39-41).

The process of pluralism and free debate continued throughout the 1990s that resulted in the emerging Reformist faction¹⁷ winning the presidential elections by a landslide in 1997 with Mohammad Khatami as candidate whose campaigns were based on significant reform of institutional Iran. Khatami was, next to being a politician, also a cleric, but in the Iranian context he had quite liberal views. He proposed more political and social

¹⁷ During a decade of relative stability and continuity the Iranian society had been able to create a solid middle class. In this newfound space, the youth, women and intellectuals could develop themselves (Menashiri 2001: 78-79).

freedoms, a more significant role for the political (republican) institutions, broader education for young people and more rights for women. He also tried to open relations with the US and Europe. At the beginning of his two-term presidency there was an increase in the freedom of press as well. Numerous new publications popped up (Menashiri 2001: 80-87, 139-141) & (Bjorvatn & Selvik 2008: 2316). But it was there and then that the limitations of freedom and pluralism became visible.

Most new publications were harshly critical of the religious institutions and called for drastic reforms, which effectively meant the end of the *velayat-e principle* and the political elite – Supreme Leader Khamenei and the IRGC – felt endangered. Starting in 1999 Khamenei used his considerable leverage and influence to close down most of the critical newspapers and magazines. In July 1999 it resulted in the Reformist paper *Salam* being closed down by the regime. Many students of the University of Teheran protested and organised massive sit-ins and demonstrations. The Supreme Leader¹⁸ decided to solve this matter once and for all and ordered a deployment by night of security forces on the campuses of the University and a crackdown on the students. Senior officials of the Khatami administration rushed to the scene to where they tried to convince the commanders at the scene to cancel the assault. Khatami's people were ignored and hundreds of agents invaded the dormitories where they indiscriminately molested many students, set rooms on fire and severely damaged the campus (Mahdi 1999: 19-20). This event demonstrates two things: first, the religious leadership felt sincerely threatened by the reformist-minded students, and second, in times of crisis the elected leadership is overruled and turns out to be rather powerless.

The crackdown, however, did not nip the protest in the bud. The attack polarized the society even further and the following six days students would riot and protest on a scale never seen before since the inception of the religious Republic. But the violent riots and the images of burned out carcasses of cars and busses provided Khamenei with opportunity to frame

¹⁸ It is obvious that this decision came from the Supreme Leader, for only Khamenei is allowed to order the deployment of troops, the IRGC and the police. The president has absolutely no control over these forces.

the students as stooges of 'foreign conspirators,' – the favourite and most effective excuse of the religious leadership on which they could rely since the British-American coup of 1953. The constitutional reform suggested by the Khatami administration became contaminated with 'counterrevolutionary sentiments' and it would frustrate and hamper any reform during the remaining terms of Khatami (Menashiri 2001: 139-141). The ineffectiveness of Khatami led to much frustration and political disillusionment among Iranians that voted for Khatami.

Nevertheless, the Republican Guards were by now vigilant and aware of the pro-democratic aspiration present among many Iranians. Through Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and with support of Supreme Leader Khamenei they entered the political arena as the neo-conservative faction, with which they won the 2005 presidential elections.¹⁹ The radicals were back in control.

-Economy and global connection of Iran-

A rich/poor country that overvalues its isolation

As the recent history of the Islamic Republic of Iran makes clear, the Iranian leadership values its sovereignty above anything else. It is deeply distrustful of the West and therefore tried to avoid doing business with the EU and US before sanctions imposed by the last Bush administration, made it entirely impossible (Maloney 2010: 139). However, it does not erase the fact that Iran has one of the largest oil resources globally. But despite record high oil prices and massive spending of the revenues, the economic growth remains modest if not negative. Over the period 1975-2004, the economic growth per capita has been negative at an average of 0,1 per cent. Furthermore, there has been an average inflation of 22 per cent every year since 1990. Unemployment is estimated at 20 per cent, and many Iranians need two jobs to make ends meet. Iranians, as Egyptians do, depend on a patronage system to receive favours,

¹⁹ They electorate of Khatami was disillusioned with the Reformist faction because instead of institutional reforms, the repression had increased. Ahmadinejad was able to collect many votes through effective mobilisation through the network of the IRGC and the mosques.

resources and jobs. The main difference is that political power has shifted during the years and therefore the wealth has been spread more evenly over society (Bjorvatn & Selvik 2007: 2315-2316).

In recent years the Republican Guard has transformed itself from a religious-military force into being an economic-political giant in Iran that preserves the economic isolation from the West. The Guards expanded their influence in the economy up to the point where they arguably control one third of the Iranian economy, being connected to hundreds of Iranian companies one way or another.²⁰ As imposing entity they have done much to preserve their achieved monopolies. Especially where foreign agents are involved. For instance during the Khatami administration, a new airport was built and after completion, a Turkish company was selected over a company of IRGC to exploit and run the airfield. This happened in the pro-international Khatami years. The Republican Guards responded by blocking the landing strip with vehicles. They removed the Turks effectively when Khamenei, who reasoned that the Turkish presence at the airport could jeopardize national security, backed them up. But in reality the IRGC wanted to have an own terminal through which they could smuggle certain goods (Bjorvatn & Selvik 2007: 2319). It proved to be a telling sign for the future political and economic increasing significance of the Republican Guards.

-Comparative analysis of the political opportunities structures- within the Egyptian and Iranian regimes

The Multiplicity of independent centres of power within the regimes

Egypt and Iran are strikingly similar when one views the security apparatus of both countries. The current governments – Mubarak and Ahmadinejad / Khamenei – both have inherited a wide array of Stalinist-type security and intelligence services that only answer to the highest leader of the country.

²⁰ 'Iran's \$ Billion enforcers' In the *Los Angeles Times*, published 26-08-2007 and retrieved on 26-06-2011 from: <http://articles.latimes.com/print/2007/aug/26/world/fg-guards26>

However, the two countries could not be more different from each other when it comes to separated powers that balance each other.

In Egypt it is virtually impossible to complain or go into appeal against government's decisions through state institutions. Parliament is designed to serve Mubarak's political party the NDP; the labourer unions are state controlled organizations instead of independent representatives of the workers; and the Emergency Law allows the security services and police to refer citizens to military tribunals where there exists no opportunity to file for an appeal. In other words the militarist system serves only the system and not the people. Iran works – or worked – quite differently.

To start with, Iran has – or had, that is another debate - a relative democratic system through which Iranians can make their political claim. There are every four years Parliamentary and presidential elections, where people can freely choose their favourite candidate. The catch here is that the candidates have to be approved before the elections take place, by the undemocratic, religious Council of the Guardians that checks if candidates live properly according to Islamic law. But, Members of Parliament can make objections against the Guardians' decisions through the Council of the Experts – another vetting institutions that exist for fifty per cent of republican representatives and the other half consists of Guardians. There have been examples of the Experts having overruled decisions of the Guardians (Menashiri 2001: 14).

Openness to new actors

The Egyptian regime has always remained closed to new actors that aspired to contest the power of the political elite. As this chapter has shown, the regime repeatedly used its state resources to suppress any serious oppositional action. As a result the oppositional groups had no experience in effective claim making. In effect it was the other way around, as I will describe in the next chapter, the opposition would experience a lot of infighting over the scraps Mubarak left these actors. Iran, again, is different.

The Islamic Republic of Iran exists now for over thirty years, during which new political actors emerged and shifts of political power took place. For instance the Radical faction under president Ali Khamenei was the first leading power in Iran. After two terms in office Khamenei was replaced by the leader of the Pragmatist faction, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. The power shift was completed when the moderate Reformists came to power eight years later. The last two power shifts did not happen with riots or revolutions, but were achieved through institutional means.

The instability of political alignments

I can say with certainty that in Egypt the political alignments between the leading political actors were quite stable until the change of the millennium. But even then, the elaborate patronage system enabled the political elite to remain firmly in control, while the majority of the Egyptians remained poor and had no means of enforcing a political change. The new political alignment of Mubarak with the United States and the European Union would only enforce the hegemony the political elite already enjoyed in Egyptian society.

The Iranian case and its smooth transitions of power suggests a stable political situation. However, since the 1990s this is not the case any longer, for the religious political scene is everything but a scene of political alignment. Ever since the popular, influential and once designated successor of Khomeini - Ayatollah Ali Montazeri - criticized the *velayat-e faqih* principle and suggested that the republican institutions should have superiority over the religious councils, a fierce debate within the community of the mullahs has polarized the religious political elite in Iran (Menashiri 2001: 26). This was followed by the emergence of the Reformist faction that threatened - in the opinion of the Neo Conservatives and Supreme Leader Khamenei - the foundations of the Iranian political system.

The availability of influential allies or supporters for challengers

In Egypt, the opposition was deprived of any powerful ally. The West did call for democratic reform in Egypt but did not actively pursue this official position through threats of economic sanctions, like it did with Saddam's Iraq or Ahmadinejad's Iran. On the contrary, as I demonstrated through official papers of the US Department of Defence, Egypt received billions of dollars in aid and military support. Which only strengthened the security apparatus of Mubarak. However, this would change entirely during the 2011 Revolution.

In Iran, however, oppositional politicians that were critical of the republican government of Iran often could find support from influential Ayatollahs or other prominent members of society. Criticism of the Supreme Leader remained difficult. But some highly regarded clerics, like Ali Montazeri, had the courage to support people who criticised the position of the Supreme Leader. The ties with 'America the great Satan' were completely cut, and certification by American or European leaders remained political suicide in the domestic scene.

The extent to which the regime represses or facilitates collective claim making

Both countries share a bad track record on this point when I look at contentious performances on the street. As the Iranian student protests and their harsh repression in 1999 demonstrated, the regime did and does not tolerate large-scale critique of the *velayat-e faqih* principle. Thus, there is room for contentious politics in Iran, as long as it does not touch the subject of the supremacy of Islam in the political system.

In Egypt there was under the consecutive presidents no room for any serious contention of oppositional actors. Elections were rigged, unions remained state-controlled, and ordinary daily life was firmly checked by the state security apparatus.

Decisive changes in these features?

This will be the topic of the next chapter.

4. Comparison of Social Movement Base

In this chapter I will explore how the social movement organizations, responsible for the revolts in Egypt and Iran, created or took advantage of changes in the political opportunity structures of these countries.

EGYPT

The Mubarak regime was effective in its effort to depoliticize everyday life in Egypt. The few groups – Nasserites, Marxists, Liberals and Islamists – that actually had an opposing ideology and as a collective could have had an opportunity as opposition, remained fiercely divided. Partly because of their own antagonism towards each other and due to the effective ‘divide and rule’ tactics of Mubarak and his predecessors. A telling example is the earlier-mentioned bread-riots of 1977, when poor people protested against Sadat’s policies that would increase basic commodity prices. The government accused the secular Left of instigating the riots, a position backed by the Muslim Brotherhood that viewed the demonstrations as a conspiracy of (secular) communists. The antagonism between the Left and the Islamists deepened during the nineties when the Left returned the favour and supported the repressive 1993 Unified Law for syndicates, which gave the government greater power to intervene directly in the internal elections of professional syndicates. This law enabled Mubarak to control the increasing influence of Muslim groups in these syndicates, which had been demonstrated in the 1991 and 1992 elections (Abdelrahman 2009: 41-42).

This oppositional infighting – in combination with the government’s monopoly of power on most levels in society – made it in the 1990s virtual impossible for Egyptian citizens to participate in politics in the institutional setting. Individual discontent on the streets would be met with imprisonment

or worse. But with the coming of the new millennium, international political developments would change the odds for politics on the streets.

The Second Intifada and the unifying common enemy, 2000-2001

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict was and still is a major polarizing factor on a global level, but it turned out to be an incredible unifying factor for the equally polarized Egyptian opposition. When the Second Intifada brought new images of suppressed Palestinians to the forefront of the minds of many in Egypt, it created a general sense of anger among large sections of the public, especially the youth. Most had never taken part in collective political action before but were now ready to participate (Abdelrahman 2009: 42). The Egyptian Popular Committee in Solidarity with the Intifada (EPSCI) was established. The steering members consisted of Revolutionary Socialists and Muslims Brothers, who all had found a common enemy in Israel. The committee was further reinforced by human rights NGOs such as the Egyptian Association against Torture, which brought in experience in effective claim making (Browers 2007: 71). Under the umbrella of this committee, leftists and Islamists would cooperate to organise demonstrations in order to demand the end of the occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel. In other words the committee became the broker for the diffusion of ideas. The Mubarak regime tolerated the (still small-scale) protests because it did not concern contentions against his policies or government. The protests were furthermore a great example that Mubarak could use as a positive reference when his American and European allies criticized him about the lack of democratic reform in Egypt.

It proved to be a tactical mistake with severe implications for Mubarak and his clique in the future, because the Intifada brought back (newly coordinated) politics in the street of Egyptian cities. A new generation would learn there to play the game of political contention. The demonstrations would grow bigger after students, workers, Islamists and other parts of society deeply identified themselves with the Palestinian cause, which was further strengthened by the contentious interaction that took place

during the protests. Political enemies on domestic issues, whom never even spoke to each other in the past, established friendships on the streets (El-Mahdi 2009: 92-93). All these efforts culminated in the formation of the 'Cairo Conference,' in which political groups across ideological and social divides debated their anti-US / Israel and anti-globalization positions. Groups, who were each other's antagonists in the past, were able to establish connections and consensus on foreign issues, apparently an easy task in comparison to the domestic issues. Due to the success of the conference, it was held annually since 2002 and it provided the opposition with an independent forum where it could debate and organise. But more importantly, it created a space in which processes as *coalition formation* and *new coordination* could occur.

The new and intense political interactions between secular parties and the Muslim Brotherhood brought incentives for self-reflection and reconsiderations. The Revolutionary Socialists decided not to see the Islamists as a homogeneous entity, but as a very diverse collection of groups with goals similar to the ones of the Left (e.g. stopping American imperialism and global corporatism stealing jobs of Arabs). The Muslim Brotherhood started to downplay its goal of implementing sharia and proposed a more general discourse of democracy and political freedom that appealed to a larger section of the Egyptian public (Abdelrahman 2009: 45-50). As a result a new kind of coordination emerged, which enabled repetitive forms of protest through (condoned) public demonstrations. In other words the foundation for a network of different kind of organisations (political, NGOs, student associations, religious groups) was placed in Egyptian society. On this newly created foundation the newly politicized individuals would collect contentious repertoires and a degree of activist professionalism unseen in Egypt for decades.

A moment of changing self-consciousness, 20 March 2003

Before Mubarak realised his error of allowing the oppositional parties the political space in which they could organise, it turned out to be too late. On the 20th of March 2003, US President George W. Bush ordered the invasion of

Iraq, with the alleged threat of Saddam's Weapons of Mass Destruction as legitimizing factor. As controversial this decision was in the West, just as infuriating it was to many Arabs in the Middle East. The umbrella organization EPCSI was in anticipation of the war in Iraq already re-branded as the 'Egyptian Popular Campaign for the Support of Resistance in Palestine and Iraq and Against Globalization,' and called for an immediate demonstration on Tahrir square. The activists only expected a few hundred protesters at the square but thousands of people turned up, occupying Tahrir in the process. The mob vastly outnumbered the Egyptian riot-police and for the first time the Mubarak-regime was unpleasantly surprised.

It is one thing to allow small protests nobody notices, but to allow a massive demonstration on the main square of Cairo, where your main ally (and fundraiser) is called a war criminal is quite another. Before massive reinforcements could arrive in order to disperse the crowd, activists were able to occupy the square for one full day. During the night armoured security vehicles supported by a vast army of security operatives arrived at the scene and a violent crackdown followed (El-Mahdi 2009: 95). But it turned out to be too late. Today the activists learned some valuable lessons.

The hesitance of the regime gave the organizing activists the hope, or even the confidence, that they *collectively* could withstand the might of the Egyptian security apparatus. For the following two days new demonstrations were organized, but could not reach the massive effect like the previous 20 March demonstration. Another lesson was that the occupation of Tahrir square increased the effectiveness of any given contention, for all of Cairo was aware of the fact that something big was happening. The square is namely the epicentre of the traffic in Cairo, a city with around 18 million habitants. All the roads come together on the huge roundabout of Tahrir, where they are connected with traffic from the other parts of the city across from the river Nile. Occupation and disruption of traffic on Tahrir means that a significant part of Cairo ends up in a lock down. Such a blockade creates problems and incidents that attract the attention of (international) media, which in turn provide the activists with a platform where they make their claim public to a

large audience. That this lesson was well learned became clear during the 2011 revolution, where the first objective was the occupation of Tahrir. A clear example of how social movement organizations enriched their contentious repertoire and game plan on past experiences.

However, I believe that the most significant effect of this newfound confidence was the realisation of oppositional political actors that they had a real chance on changing Egypt if they did so *collectively*. The fact that the Muslim Brotherhood – that always operated on the background in the cooperation with leftists – took on the responsibility to organise the 2004 Cairo Conference speaks volumes for the trust that the normally distrustful, leaders of the Brotherhood had in this kind of cooperation. Another development was the readjusted aim of the cooperating opposition. Domestic issues were now the main concern. The reason that the secular groups and the Islamists this time were able to reason with each other and overcome huge differences, comes from previous experiences over less controversial issues that had provided them with a manual for effective cooperation.

The first social movement, Kifaya, emerges 2003 – 2006

There were two main principles on which the cooperation between the various oppositional groups was based: (1) consensus and (2) independence. In practice this meant that only slogans and goals would be expressed upon which all parties agreed and which they could defend towards their constituency (Abdelrahman 2009: 44-45). If one considers the high level of polarization it is hardly surprising that the opposition could agree in the end on only one goal: the removal of Mubarak. Ultimately the Karama (Nasserites) party, the Chad (Liberals), the centre and labour (Islamists) parties, the Revolutionary Socialists and the Muslim Brotherhood would underwrite this agreement and act accordingly (El Mahdi 2009: 89-90). During protest marches the consensus idea resulted in the use of only a few slogans of which one would stand out: Kifaya! – Enough! Every organization that sympathised with the ideas of the cooperating opposition would often use that very slogan. It was not for long or journalists and commentators spoke of

the democracy *secular* movement 'Kifaya.'²¹ A common mistake made by the international media, who often equate a call for democracy with secularism, while in reality the Muslim Brotherhood was a significant member that participated in the Kifaya demonstrations. The framework of Tilly and Tarrow helps to avoid these kinds of mistakes. For it realises that behind the demonstrations, in which the slogan Kifaya is used, the social movement *campaigns*, there is a social movement *base* that can have a highly diverse background.

A new kind of protester arises on the 6th of April 2008

The contentious actions of Kifaya remained limited to habitants of bigger cities like Cairo, Alexandria and Suez, who were mostly intellectuals and students. There was no real link between the social movement and the labourers in the textile and manufacturing industry. Since the Qualifying Industrial Zones came into existence and the law permitted employers to indefinitely extend fixed-term contracts, the working conditions, especially in the textile industry, deteriorated rapidly. Since the unions were state-controlled institutions, a nation wide strike was out of the question. But the amount of small local strikes, driven by dynamics specific to a given workplace, increased rapidly to 614 actions in 2007 and 609 in 2008 (Beinin 2009: 450-452).

Some activists, who also participated in protests under guidance of Kifaya, wanted to connect with the workers in the manufacturing industry. Especially some tech-savvy youth tried to reach out through social media in 2008 to support the workers. A young construction worker from Cairo, Ahmed Maher, created a Facebook page to support huge strikes that had to take place on the 6th of April 2008 in the Textile industry of the town El-Mahalla El Kubra. 80 thousand Facebook members signed up for the 6 April Strike group, but the strike itself was a failure due to the effort of security

²¹ 'Egypt's Uprising, How one Young Man found the Revolution' in *Time Magazine*, published 01-02-2011. Retrieved 16-07-2011 from <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2045571,00.html>

forces, which infiltrated the workplace and prevented an effective strike.²² However, the group that surrounded Ahmed Maher would learn valuable lessons on this day and created an activist group that we know today as the *April 6th Youth Movement*. Not many people realised it at the time, but the inception of a new kind of protester was there and then.

IRAN

As I pointed out in the passage of my methodology, I was not able to perform field-research in Iran. Nor could I find Iranian activists who were present during the revolt outside Iran. The amount of literature on the social movement base that made the campaigns during the Iranian revolt possible remains scarce, for other scholars and researchers probably found similar obstacles on their way to investigate the recent surge of Iranian social movement activity. However, a valuable source of information was the book *Death to the Dictator!* (2010) Written by an Iranian under the pseudonym Afsaneh Moqadam, who himself participated in the revolts; the book offers an insight in the organization of the so-called 'Green Wave Movement' and the motivation of participating individuals. Since it only explains the reasons of a few persons to get involved, it is not a very representative source, but it offered me a focus of research during my archive analysis of Dutch and English-language newspaper in order to collect data about the 2009-elections protests.

How despair transformed the apolitical Iranian youth into being a passionate activist against Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

I attempted to paint in the previous chapter an adequate picture of the political culture in Iran being a strange mixture of real political pluralism and

²² 'Egypt's Facebook showdown' in the *Los Angeles Times*, published 02-06-2008. Retrieved 15-07-2011 from <http://articles.latimes.com/print/2008/jun/02/opinion/oe-mansour2>

theocratic repression²³. The latter arguably being nurtured by a constantly-present fear of losing the Iranian sovereignty and the right of self-determination to American 'imperialism.' Which is seen in the context of the 1953 coup, the US invasion of Iraq and the war-like rhetoric of the then US President George W. Bush towards Iran, actually realistic paranoia. However, the political-religious elite tends to abuse these sentiments by linking any form of dissent to CIA operations of the 'Great Satan' America, as they did with the 1999 student protests.

As a result of these repressive tactics, there has been hardly any activity of individuals or groups to form a social movement base until it exploded on the streets in 2009. When the populist president Ahmadinejad came to power in 2005, a great segment of Iranian society, of which many were Khatami voters, became increasingly embarrassed by Ahmadinejad's extreme statements about Israel and the Holocaust (Afshari & Underwood 2009: 7). Subsequently many Iranians lost their faith in the polity and became increasingly desperate about the future of Iran in the world. Afsaneh Moqadam explains the damaging effect Ahmadinejad's presidency has had on the international Iranian image through his observation of how foreign custom officials act when they encounter a traveller with an Iranian passport: 'During his (Khatami) tenure it happened, every now and then, that an Iranian travelling to Europe was not treated as the carrier of a dangerous bacillus... Since Ahmadinejad came to power... things have changed again, the other way... The Iranian passport is the least-cool passport in circulation today. When it falls with a slap on the immigration-hall counter, it elicits the same reaction as a warm, dead bird. Nostrils wrinkle' (2010: 10).

During the 2008 Parliamentary elections, many Iranians were beginning to doubt if the political system was robust enough to withstand any institutional power grab of Ahmadinejad. Because the Council of the Guardians refused many Reformist Parliamentary candidates, which made

²³ Iranians are free to elect the president of their choosing. However they do not elect who is *eligible* to become a presidential candidate. That is right privileged only to the Council of the Guardians, through which the religious leadership remains significant leverage over the republic system.

the Reformist faction already a minority before any votes were cast. Unsurprisingly all the candidates of the Neo Conservatives were approved. Another indication that the religious-political elite around the Supreme Leader was attempting to consolidate its power through institutional means (Alfoneh 2008: 2). With no real charismatic oppositional candidate like former president Khatami, many Iranians became increasingly fearful of the real possibility of having Ahmadinejad for another four years in office (Moqadam 2010:14).

How the election campaign of the reformists became the resemblance of a social movement base – overnight

It was not until one month before the election that the re-politicisation of the Reformists was accelerated by the emergence of a serious opponent to Ahmadinejad: Mir-Hossein Mousavi. Before Khomeini removed the office of prime minister out of the constitution in 1989, Mousavi had been acting prime minister under president Khomeini during the Iran-Iraq War after which he was credited by guiding the country's economy through desperate times. After 1989 he retired from public life and became a teacher in architecture. But twenty years later, Khatami appealed to Mousavi to represent the reformist faction as presidential candidate. On the 9th of May 2009, under the endorsement of the ever-popular former-president Khatami, Mousavi was presented to the public as savior in dark times. Even the Pragmatists and their constituency – way more conservative than the Reformists – under the leadership of former-president Rafsanjani supported Mousavi (Afshari & Underwood 2009: 7).²⁴

Also NGOs, for human rights issues like the One Million Signatures Campaign rallied behind the Mousavi campaign, which was effectively waged on the urban streets by a newly inspired Iranian youth. A clever, tech savvy, young man Mostafa Hassani became the campaign-leader of Mousavi. From his mind sprouted the idea of using the colour green as a unifying mark

²⁴ 'Hervormingsgezinden vs. Ahmadinejad' in *NRC Handelsblad* published 14-05-2009.

for people supporting Mousavi.²⁵ The Dutch reporter Thomas Erdbrink, a Teheran based correspondent for the *Washington Post* and the Dutch daily *NRC Handelsblad*, observed how a 'now or never' kind of attitude towards the chance of voting Ahmadinejad out of power, emerged among many Reformist supporters.²⁶

The Reformist campaigners found in the use social media a perfect diffusion tool that could enhance their election campaign. The Facebook page of Mousavi would attract a few hundred thousand 'friends', and e-mail listservs containing up to four hundred thousands subscribers enabled the Mousavi-camp to spread its political vision, and to be perceived as a significant threat to Ahmadinejad (Afshari & Underwood 2009: 7). Therefore it is telling that the regime abused its state-resources to frustrate the opposing campaign by blocking websites such as Facebook in late May.²⁷

The oppositions campaign, however, was unintentionally electrified by Ahmadinejad himself when he slandered the wife of Mousavi and accused other opposition figures of corruption on national television during a presidential debate;²⁸ unheard of in Iran, especially the remarks at Mousavi's wife hit a nerve with Iranian public²⁹ (Afshari & Underwood 2009: 7). Thousands of volunteers took the street in the last week before the election in order to campaign on behalf of Mousavi. This week turned out to be crucial, for during this short period of time friendships and relationships were established between people of different backgrounds in which the foundations of the organizational machinery of the Green Wave Movement would be rooted (Moqadam 2010: 24-25).

²⁵ 'Iran's Green Wave' in *The Nation*, published 20-06-2009.

²⁶ 'Remmen los op straat in Teheran' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 09-06-2009.

²⁷ 'Bewind Iran blokkeert Facebook' in *NRC Handelsblad* published 25-05-2009.

²⁸ Watch the complete debate on the following link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5gGxwDPTTk>.

²⁹ 'Openlijk oorlog tijdens tv-debat Iran' in *NRC Handelsblad* published 04-06-2009.

-Comparative analysis of the Egyptian and Iranian social-movement bases

Contentious politics bound to specific national conditions

The social movement bases in Egypt and Iran are very different. It starts at the different nature of the political claim making processes in these two countries. In Egypt effective institutional efforts of contentious politics is made virtually impossible by the regime. While in Iran some claims were successfully made in the past. Through Parliament or through the Council of the Experts on the higher and more indirect level.

The fact the Egyptians were convicted to secret meetings and private houses in order to be able to even *speak* about a possible collective political contention increased the importance of political street-based organizations in Egyptian society significantly. Thus when Mubarak allowed Egyptian political groups to utilise the political opportunity offered by the unifying theme of the second Palestinian Intifada in 2001, the subsequent oppositional contentions were expressed in the streets and not in Parliament. In Iran, the only real contention fought over in the streets, prior to 2009, was during the 1999 student protests. Throughout the first decade of the new millennium street-based politics were not fashionable in Iran. While in Egypt the engagement in politics on the streets became increasingly popular throughout the 2000s.

The over one thousand examples of strikes and street protests in the years of 2007 and 2008 are a testament to that assumption. It is actually quite remarkable that Egyptian social movement organizations, like the Revolutionary Socialists and the Muslim Brotherhood, were able to create such a firm social movement base, for the political opportunity structure of Egypt did not really change. It appears that Mubarak severely underestimated the compromising ability of the normally excessively polarized opposition. The result was that the Egyptian opposition could steadily collect organizational experience in contentious politics and expand their contentious repertoire throughout the last decade.

The organizational history of the Iranian opposition was the opposite story. Despite the fact that Ahmadinejad angered many Iranians with his remarks about Israel and the way he handled the economy, most people appeared to have genuine confidence in the electoral system. It had served them well in the past, when Iranians had voted new leaders into power. However, the Iranians were cured from this optimistic illusion when the Council of the Guardians marginalized the Reformist faction just before the Parliamentary elections of 2008. With the late emergence of a real opposition leader - Mir Hussein Mousavi - only one month before the presidential election day, previously unconnected people came together. These people established relationship during their time as volunteers with the Mousavi campaign. However, this electoral machinery that became known as the Green Wave Movement, because of the green campaigning attributes, did not come close to the organizational experience shared by the Egyptian social movement organizations. Which was logical if one regards the limited amount of time pro-Mousavi campaigners had in order to get organized.

5. Campaign Comparison

EGYPT

From the 25th of January until present day, Egyptians have been involved in contentious politics on a daily basis. However, I chose to focus on examples of contentious politics against the Mubarak-regime that erupted during the first three weeks of the revolution. I mark the beginning in first instance by effective mobilization of thousands of protesters on 25 January 2011, and the end by effective de-mobilization of protesters on the streets of Cairo on the 11th of February. I will present this period of contention on a day-by-day basis, or I will combine certain days if the mechanisms and processes observed take a few days to transform together in a process. It enables me to give a detailed explanation of the mechanisms that were the constituting components of the social and political processes, which were significant to the outcome of the contention. Despite the fact that the revolt against Mubarak was a nation wide endeavour of his deviant citizens, I decided to focus mainly on the events in Cairo. The most important reason was the limited data available about the events in cities like Alexandria, Port Said and Suez, for most reporters stayed in Cairo during the protests.

The Group with the Plan that started the Revolution

I left the social movement scene of Egypt in the previous chapter with the failed strike of the textile workers in the industrial town of El-Mahalla El Kubra on the 6th of April 2008. Instead of discouraging the people behind the Facebook page that argued in favour of the strike, they viewed the failure as a challenge that they could and should overcome. Young urban professionals like Ahmed Maher and Mohammed Adel established an activist group named after the failed strike: the April 6 Youth Movement. This group worked independently from the Kifaya organizations, but some members did

have connections with people of the social movement organizations.³⁰ At the surface the new activist group had the resemblance of a political debate group, using their Facebook page to great effect to inspire tens of thousands of Egyptian persons on the social website to participate in debates about international and domestic politics.³¹ But in secret the core group of April 6 was planning a revolution.

The activist leaders Ahmed Maher and Mohammed Adel realized that the demands of real and effective reform towards democracy could only be achieved if they were able to beat or outsmart the dreaded Egyptian security services on the street. A lesson-well learned from the failed strike in El-Mahalla El-Kubra. Mohammad Adel travelled to Serbia in order to be trained by members of *Otpor!*³² The civic youth movement that was responsible for overthrowing dictator Slobodan Milosevic through non-violent protests in 2000. On his return Adel brought with him new skills in organising non-violent protests, police-evasion tactics on the street and instructional videos made by members of *Otpor!* During the years of 2009 and 2010 the April 6 Youth Movement would offer workshops based on the Serbian experience to other activist groups and Kifaya social movement organizations, effectively becoming the broker between *Otpor!* and the Egyptian opposition. This newly established connection was the wire through which new methods of collective contentious action could spread throughout the activist landscape of Egypt.^{33 34}

³⁰ A member of the Youth for Change (a social movement organization of Kifaya) confirmed that he knew Ahmed Maher and that people of his organisation were trained in demonstration- and street tactics by members of the April 6 Youth Movement. Interviewed in Cairo 15-06-2011.

³¹ 'Revolution, Facebook-style' in *The New York Times*, published 22-01-2009. Retrieved 12-07-2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/magazine/25bloggers-t.html>.

³² Otpor! transformed itself from a political movement organization to a NGO dedicated to the (international) diffusion of non-violent protest methods. Pro-democracy activists from all over the world are welcome to be trained. Their website: <http://www.canvasopedia.org>

³³ Reporter Elizabeth Jones followed the April 6 Movement during the initial days of the Revolution. In her documentary *Seeds of Change* you can see Sdja Popovic, the former leader of *Otpor*, confirming the fact that he trained Egyptians in non-violent protest tactics. Furthermore you can see how members of April 6 watch instruction videos of Popovic while they plan anti-Mubarak demonstrations. The documentary can be seen on <http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/peopleandpower/2011/02/201128145549829916.html>

The activists of Kifaya and April 6 all vividly remembered the one-day occupation of Tahrir square on the 20th of March in 2003. When against all expectations thousands of people turned to the street in order to condemn the US invasion of Iraq. This march was enforced upon the Egyptian state because the crowd vastly outnumbered the police and security services that subsequently could not maintain their perimeters. Therefore the key to defeating the security apparatus on the streets was clear to Maher and Adel: the ability to overstretch and exhaust the capabilities of the police. In other words, they needed to find a way to mobilize a huge amount of people that could overwhelm the security forces. This awareness was the foundation on which the Plan for revolt was built.

The Tunisian Revolution in which the Tunisians ousted their dictatorial president Ben Ali, mesmerized many Egyptians, who could follow the events though Al Jazeera offered via satellite television. It was the spark the activist groups needed to set Egyptian society on fire.

-Day 1, 25th of January-

The Plan

The day -14 January 2011- the Tunisian president fled his hostile country, Kifaya members like the youth organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Revolutionary Socialists and members of the April 6 Movement would meet in secret on a daily basis in a cramped flat to produce an effective-protest plan quickly in order to take advantage of the momentum.³⁵

- Overall goal: demand for political reform towards democracy.
- Preferred site of contention: Tahrir square because it proved to be a perfect stage to express a contention and it became a solid part of the contentious repertoire since the 20 March 2003-occupation.
- Target of first protest: Conquest of Tahrir.

³⁴ See footnote 29.

³⁵ 'The Secret Rally That Sparked an Uprising' in *Wall Street Journal*, published 11-02-2011.

- Requirements: mass mobilization in order to overwhelm the police.³⁶

The most pressing question that challenged the organisers was how to mobilize and coordinate thousands of demonstrators.

The decision was made to launch the protest on Tuesday the 25th of January because it was a national holiday during which many people do not have a lot of obligations, and the organisers gambled on the assumption that on such a day persons would be more open to rally and protest on Tahrir. The organisers designated twenty sites on different locations in Cairo from which groups of protesters would march to Tahrir, in order to make it difficult for the police and security forces to maintain a tight perimeter around Tahrir. The wildcard in the game was the secret twenty-first marching point – only known to a select group of protesters that would march undetected to Tahrir and grow in volume with bystanders while it would march to the square.³⁷

The choice for the 25th also had a symbolic meaning, for this national holiday is a day that the Egyptian police are honoured. It was especially controversial in 2011 because a few months' earlier police officers in Alexandria had outraged the public after they had beaten Khaled Said to death (Idle & Nuns 2011: 25). The Facebook page *We Are All Khaled Said* attracted tens of thousands of Egyptian Facebook users on which rallying calls were made to protest.³⁸ As the April 6 leader Ahmed Maher put it into words in the documentary of Elizabeth Jones: 'How could we be expected to celebrate these thugs, torturers, criminals...'

³⁶ I extracted the proposed tactics and goals from an instruction document written by (unknown) members of the activist groups. I know for a fact that this document was used by the activists because I found this document via an Internet link on Google.Docs, offered by activist blogger Mahmoud Salem through a Tweet posted one day before 25 January in order to inform other Egyptians eager to join the protests. The document contained among others phone numbers of organisers. My fellow graduate student Yasmin Haloui was kind enough to translate the content from Arabic to English. Retrieved 09-07-2011 from <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qU3TnumUD5ZzZN9CEBbDRIZNvcjbOtjX5CkcBcC9OjI/edit?pli=1>.

³⁷ 'The Secret Rally That Sparked an Uprising' in *Wall Street Journal*, published 11-02-2011.

³⁸ Visit the Facebook group on <http://www.facebook.com/elshaheed.co.uk>.

Internet as an organising tool

The Internet proved to be an essential tool in the hands of the activists to enlarge the coordinated claim making. In the past, Kifaya and the April 6 Youth Movement only achieved protests on a small scale – with the exception of 2003 Tahrir occupation. The initial idea was that each of the twenty-one groups marching towards Tahrir would lure unaffiliated bystanders into the demonstration through the use of unifying nationalist slogans against the elitist regime.³⁹ These Kifaya-type slogans had been effective in the past and were probably therefore selected from the collective contentious repertoire in order to function as a unifying tool. But the Internet turned out to be an accelerating and intensifying factor with regard to the mobilization. The instructional Google.Doc, initially meant as a guide to coordinating members, soon circulated on social media like Twitter⁴⁰ where tens of thousands of Egyptian social media users could read and spread on their own accord the rallying points, the strategy, the contentious performances of choice, the phone numbers of the organisers and human rights lawyers in cases of arrest. At least 90 thousand people signed up to the special Protest Day Facebook⁴¹ page, through which instructions could be diffused at a high pace.

Much more people than the organisers had expected to come, turned up at the designated sites of contention. Most of these protesters did not know each other or the organisers personally (Idle & Nunns 2011: 32). *Washington Post*-reporters Sherine Bayoumi and Leila Fadel observed also up to fifteen thousand people approaching a vastly outnumbered police force on Tahrir from all corners of the city. But the most interesting observation they made was the remarkable *small* protester-group approaching from the upper-class district Mohandeseen – the twenty-first and secret rallying – point.⁴² The fact that the rallying points known to a general audience through the use of

³⁹ The earlier-used instruction document from Google.Docs retrieved 09-07-2011 from <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qU3TnumUD5ZzZN9CEBbDRizNvcjbOtjX5CkcBcC9OjI/edit?pli=1>.

⁴⁰ Tweet from Mahmoud Salem, A.K.A Sandmonkey: 'For when and where the revolution will be and other important info, go here <http://bit.ly/Jan25egypt>' – the link to the instruction document. Posted 21:51:18 hours January 24 2011 on www.twitter.com.

⁴¹ 'Across Egypt, Protests Direct Fury at leader' in *The New York Times*, published 26-01-2011.

⁴² 'Protest spread against Mubarak' in *the Washington Post*, published 26-01-2011.

social media attracted hundreds if not thousands of people, while the secret point of assembly generated a march of only a hundred people – consisting of core members and unaffiliated people that joined during the march – demonstrates the power of Internet as a tool to accelerate and intensify mechanisms as *brokerage* and *diffusion* and subsequently also the process of *new coordination* in which thousands of previously unconnected people collectively took their contention to the streets of Cairo. Another consequence of the acceleration of the process of new coordination was the emergent process of upward *scale shift* due to the sudden alliances between thousands of strangers.

The *Washington Post* reporters also made another observation that is quite telling about the diffusional power of the Internet, for they describe many people carrying blankets and provisions in order to occupy Tahrir for as long as necessary. I could directly link this observation to the Google.Doc instructions, where it is explicitly stated to bring warm clothing, food and water in case of a long demonstration.

However remarkable the scale and sophistication of the organized non-violent demonstration was, it was not enough to definitely scare off the security services. During the night reinforcements came and retook the square by force. It did not de-mobilize the protesters or the organisers either. The latter ones just realised they needed the ultimate organizational tool in Egypt: The Mosque.

-Days 2, 3 & 4: the 26th, 27th & 28th of January-

Coalition Formation

Maha Abdelrahman, lecturer in development studies at the Cambridge University in the UK, has performed many studies into the Egyptian social movement base responsible for the contentious campaigns that started on 25 January. One of her conclusions was that the well-organised and influential Muslim Brotherhood had returned to a more cautious position in the Kifaya cooperation. For instance the leadership explicitly stated not to participate in

the 25 January protests. However, Abdelrahman expected that the Muslim Brotherhood Youth would start to play in the near future, a more prominent role in making the old Kifaya cooperation stronger (2009: 54). As it turned out the younger generation of Islamists did join the protests. And the secular movement organizations were able to convince the old, traditional Brotherhood leadership to join the protests at the 28th of January, probably with the help of the Youth of the Brotherhood. It was imperative for the organising activists to enlist the (organizational and moral) support of the Muslim Brotherhood because it had an elaborate network of mosques to its disposal, which could be used as an effective mobilization tool.

The 26th and 27th of January were relatively quiet days in Cairo. There were violent clashes between groups of protesters and the massively present riot police in the streets of downtown Cairo, during which almost nine hundred people were arrested. But it did not have the resemblance of the non-violent nature or the coordination of the masses that were used to overwhelm and defeat the security forces on 25 January.^{43/44/45} All the riots appeared to be the work of Egyptians, energized by the Tahrir march of a few days before. In the meanwhile, the experienced and organising activists from the April 6 Youth Movement and Kifaya movement organizations were frantically negotiating with the leadership of the Brotherhood in order to form a firm coalition that was needed to continue the revolt. The documentary *Seeds for Change* depicts a concentrated Ahmed Maher on the 27th of January negotiating on the phone. It seemed to work because the Muslim Brotherhood announced the same day on its website that it would join 'with all the national Egyptian forces, the Egyptian people, so that this coming Friday will be the general day of rage for the Egyptian Nation.'⁴⁶ The rapid development of the coalition formation process with the largest Islamist group of Egypt

⁴³ 'Egypte op rand van revolutie' in *de Telegraaf*, published 27-01-2011.

⁴⁴ 'Egypt Intensifies Efforts to Crush Wave of Protests, Detaining Hundreds' in *The New York Times*, published 27-01-2011.

⁴⁵ 'On the streets of Cairo the crackdown has already begun,' in *the Independent*, published 27-01-2011.

⁴⁶ 'Opposition in Egypt Gears Up for Major Friday Protest' in *The New York Times* published 28-01-2011.

suggests that the social movement organizations were capitalizing on the past examples of cooperation. As is described in the previous chapter, mechanisms such as *boundary deactivation* – when possible future partners decrease their us-them distinction -, and new *boundary formation* – when Kifaya members decided to target Mubarak – already paved the way for eventual intensive cooperation between Kifaya movement organizations and whoever underwrote their collective goals.

The Day of Rage, Friday 28th of January

The Friday is the most important day of the week in the Muslim world. It is what a Sunday is to the Christians and what the Saturday Shabbat is to Jews. It is a day of rest, of religion, of reflection and of assembly on holy ground. In the still devout cities of Egypt it is easy to engage in the process of mobilization in order to pursue collective political goals from these locations, if you have the blessing and support of the clergy. The April 6 Youth Movement knew this all too well and designed their refined and bigger plan, based on their 25 January-strategy to conquer Tahrir, around the geography of the mosques affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo. In the documentary *Seeds for Change*, Mohammed Adel is shown on Thursday 27 January behind his laptop, modifying the instruction manual on Google.Docs by adding a list of mosques that would function as points of assembly prior to the marches from all corners of Cairo to take control of Tahrir. Also on Facebook and Twitter rallying calls were made for people to join each other at the Square on the ‘Day of Rage.’ Some mosques already joined in on the same day.^{47/48}

The Mubarak regime did anticipate this time and closed down the Internet completely. Pages were not blocked; the entire net went simply offline. Only one ISP was exempted to enable the Egyptian Stock Exchange to remain connected (Idle & Nunns 2011: 59). The measures appeared to be too little and too late. The mosques had already taken over the role as organizing

⁴⁷ ‘Na Twitter nu de moskee’ in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 28-01-2011.

⁴⁸ ‘Leger houdt zich op de achtergrond’ in *de Volkskrant*, published 28-01-2011.

tool by brokering connections and spreading tactical instructions. The Friday-prayers at 11.30 hours were well visited around the designated mosques and points of assembly. After prayer, tens of thousands marched towards a heavily guarded Tahrir-square from a 360-degree encirclement. The riot-police was armed to the teeth and had sealed off the main roads that lead to Tahrir. When thousands, if not, tens of thousands protesters approached Tahrir by walking up to the square on the connecting Tahrir-bridge. They were met with teargas, rubber bullets, baton charges and water cannons. Initially the response was of non-violence as instructed through Internet, social movement and mosque networks,⁴⁹ but as the day progressed and the police allowed pro-Mubarak criminals to unleash brutal violence against the protesters⁵⁰, the peaceful demonstrations were transformed into violent battles around the three great bridges – the Tahrir-bridge, the 6 October-bridge and the 26th of July-bridge – crossing the Nile towards Tahrir. ⁵¹ Just before the evening, demonstrators were able to overwhelm the riot-police and supporting forces and to send them running. A few weeks later *Los Angeles Times* reporters Jeffrey Fleishman and Amro Hassan interviewed police captains that commanded the lines at the bridges to reconstruct the regime's anticipation to the revolts. The senior officers that spoke on the promise of anonymity painted a picture of a large police force, that while being attacked from three different directions, ran out of ammunition and reinforcements with which they could have pushed back the crowd. 'The Interior Ministry knew days before how big the protests might get," said police captain Ramy. 'There was intelligence coming. Tunisia had just happened. But the political

⁴⁹ The amateur cameraman Mohamed Ibrahim Elmasry was able to film the early confrontations between the protesters and security forces on the Tahrir-bridge (A.K.A *Kasr El Nile*-bridge). His movie-posts on Youtube clearly show how thousands of protesters march toward the riot-police, which reacts immediately with violence, and how they keep pressing by sheer numbers. Retrieved 25-05-2011 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nf23o1Daijg&feature=related>.

⁵⁰ British reporter Robert Fisk observes how the riot-police creates lanes in the crowds through which they allow *battagis* – regime paid thugs – to charge the protesters with knives, machetes and other kinds of primitive weaponry. 'A people defies its dictator, and a nation's future is in the balance' in *The Independent*, published 29-01-2011.

⁵¹ 'Cairo falls into near-anarchy' in *the Washington Post*, published 29-01-2011.

leadership played it down like it was going to be another small Egyptian protest. The police have been made the scapegoat.⁵²

A Dutch reporter for *de Volkskrant*, Rob Vreeken, who witnessed the fight over Tahrir-square at the other side, saw just before dusk how thousands of protesters coming from the bridges swarmed Tahrir-square and how police officers ran for their lives.⁵³ Another Dutch journalist, Alexander Weissink of *het Financiële Dagblad*, observed at the same moment how tanks of the Egyptian army role on to the square. But thousands of people took hold of the square nevertheless. They were there to stay. The back of the police force had been broken. They were not afraid any longer.⁵⁴ But the price they paid for sovereign territory on Tahrir was high. Hundreds of people were severely wounded, and an unknown number of people were killed. Reporter Rob Vreeken witnessed how dozens of people, wounded by rubber *and* live ammunition, were carried to a near by mosque where doctors had set up a first aid post.⁵⁵

The internationalization of the revolution

Nobel price laureate Mohamed ElBaradei, a former Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) returned to his home country Egypt when the revolution started, in order to join the struggle as a leader. Despite the fact that many Egyptians were ignorant of his existence, ElBaradei was well known and respected in the West. When the regime put ElBaradei under house arrest on the Day of Rage, the United States responded with a warning that shook the core of the political elite – the generals. For the US threatened to cancel 1.1 billion euros of aid destined for the army if ElBaradei was not released immediately and if the violence against the protesters would continue.⁵⁶ With this high profile tactical error, Mubarak effectively

⁵² 'The day a nation's fear dissolved' in *Los Angeles Times*, published 06-02-2011.

⁵³ "'Schurk Mubarak,' roepen de betogers' in *de Volkskrant*, published 29-01-2011.

⁵⁴ 'Het land zal nooit meer hetzelfde zijn' in *Het Financiële Dagblad*, published 29-01-2011.

⁵⁵ "'Schurk Mubarak,' roepen de betogers' in *de Volkskrant*, published 29-01-2011.

⁵⁶ 'Mubarak offert kabinet na onlusten' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 29-01-2011.

internationalized the conflict. Numerous journalists arrived in Cairo. The international spot light was on Mubarak and his generals.

I believe that this new development decreased the amount of space in which the regime could manoeuvre in order to de-mobilize the protesters. The volume of the crowd occupying the square was actually only removable by giving in to their demands or to disperse them with military force, Tiananmen Square-style. Both options were at that moment out of the question. Mubarak did not want to give up the throne, while the Egyptian army could not be seen killing thousands of unarmed civilians. As I described in the previous chapter, the budget of the armed forces consisted for one third of annual American aid, which the US already threatened to cancel. Not only the operational strength of the military depended on US money, but also the investments the generals made as businessmen through their patronage system. American sanctions would most probably have struck the elite personally in their wealth and business opportunities. I believe this to be a major factor in the decision-making process of the generals that led to the order towards their subordinates to restrain from violent actions of the army when it took positions around the square with its tanks.

This impasse forced the generals to come up with a new plan to diffuse the situation. In the meanwhile the protesters claimed their own free piece of land on Tahrir-square, where a new type Egyptian citizen would arise.

-Days 5 & 6, the 29th and 30th of January-

The day after the defeat of the security forces, the generals and Mubarak had to take in their precarious situation. Tens of thousands protesters turned Tahrir square into a sovereign space in which the state had no control or legitimacy. The headquarters of Mubarak's political party the NDP that was situated at the edge of Tahrir, was set ablaze during the night. The police and security forces were humiliated in defeat and conscripts of the Egyptian army

- the most revered institution in Egyptian society - had taken over the policing role after they took control of the streets surrounding the square.

In response to the demand of the Tahrir-demonstrators that Mubarak would leave the office of the presidency, Mubarak fired his cabinet. The motivations behind this move are hard to determine. But he was most probably pressed by his powerbase - the generals - to appease the public in order to buy some time. The fact that his new cabinet was to be led by vice-president Omar Suleiman and Prime Minister Ahmed Shafik - both former generals - suggests that the leadership of the military was establishing a dominant role in the political-decision-making process of Mubarak.⁵⁷

The Identity Shift on Tahrir

After the breakdown of the state on the streets of Cairo and police officers disappeared from the scene, criminals took advantage of the sudden lawlessness and started looting. Even the famous Egyptian Museum that contains the treasures of ancient Egypt was partly ransacked before the army intervened. It was an old trick of the regime. Allow anarchy for a while and most ordinary people come back begging for state protection. Internationally, Mubarak played the same game with his Western allies. I could imagine that I conversation between Mubarak and a visiting dignitary from the West would evolve as the following passage: Mubarak: 'you want democracy? Sure but then you will get another anti-Western theocracy in the Muslim world. I am all what stops it from happening, therefore please support me.'

But the Egyptians did not buy it any longer and the demonstrators and civilians themselves quashed the general looting; protection committees were set up in every street and on Tahrir (Idle & Nunns 2011: 65). *New York Times*-reporters Kareem Fahim, Mona El-Naggar, Scott Nelson and Anthony Shadid witnessed also how ordinary civilians established checkpoints in cooperation with the army in their neighbourhoods.⁵⁸ These quick-emerging

⁵⁷ 'Defiant as Military Does Little to Quash Protests' in *The New York Times*, published 30-01-2011.

⁵⁸ ⁵⁸ 'Defiant as Military Does Little to Quash Protests' in *The New York Times*, published 30-01-2011.

protection-committees were arguably the result of solid planning of the social movement organizations on Tahrir, but were more importantly also the consequence of the *identity shift* process. Charles Tilly explains such a process as a *cognitive* development within the mindset of an individual or a certain social group. It is when people's perceptions and understandings of their place in society are quickly altered (Tilly 2001: 24). In the Egyptian case I observe that the contentious interactions since the 25th of January *politicized* tens of thousands, if not, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians. For they discovered that as a collective they could be a viable political actor. The victories of the last four days thus started the *public* identity shift of many Egyptians from an a-political subject belonging to Mubarak, towards a proud and politically aware citizen of the nation of Egypt. I extract this new self-consciousness from observations of two Dutch reporters. Edward Padberg of *Trouw* and Alexander Weissink of *het Financiële Dagblad* both noticed a strong sense of social control on the Tahrir-square. People who were about to violate the rules of the protest – no violence, no sectarian slogans, no looting – received criticism from their peers with the result of nipping any form of delegitimizing anarchy in the bud. Furthermore, the reporters saw tightly coordinated crews that cleaned up the square and guard crews that protected the perimeter.^{59/60} Protester Farida Makar – normally a student at the British Oxford University but she went back to Cairo in order to support her people – explains in the Dutch documentary show *VPRO Tegenlicht* how at one point many people had designated tasks to fulfil on the square. 'We even had a crèche for the children.'⁶¹ You take care of what is yours. Apparently the public space had become joined-property of the new Egyptian citizen, which took care of the cleanliness and hygiene on Tahrir. The areas controlled by the state and inhabited by the so-called 'subjects' of Mubarak remained as filthy as in any other third world country.

⁵⁹ "'We kunnen het, we hebben al zoveel bereikt'" in *Trouw*, published 31-01-2011.

⁶⁰ 'Egyptische volksopstand drijft Mubarak tot wanhoop' in *Het Financiële Dagblad*, published 31-01-2011.

⁶¹ 'De Arabische lente en wij' documentary broadcasted by *VPRO Tegenlicht* on Dutch national television. 02-05-2011. Retrieved 06-06-2011 from <http://tegenlicht.vpro.nl/afleveringen/2010-2011/de-arabische-lente-en-wij.html>.

Another telling sign is the observation of *the Independent* journalist Robert Fisk, that almost all protesters on Tahrir seem to have lost their fear for the state. A strong sense of 'we are the nation's people' has taken hold of many demonstrators.⁶² Also *Los Angeles Times* reporter Jeffrey Fleishman observed this new collective philosophy of being a fearless Egyptian when he interviewed protesters. One of them, Alaa Ammar, said: 'I didn't think demonstrating would bring change... The myth that security forces are stronger than the population is gone.'⁶³

-Day 7; the 31st of January-

Stalemate

On this point thousands of protesters had already occupied the square for three full days, but Mubarak stubbornly refused to give up power. Furthermore the words of European and US leaders started to soften a bit. Hillary Clinton proposed a transition of power in certain phases and the EU remained quiet.⁶⁴ Reporters of the *Los Angeles Times* and *Trouw* sensed subsequently a return of fear among the protesters when it became clear that the Western inaction resulted in a loss of momentum against Mubarak.^{65/66} Which was reinforced by the still-unclear loyalty of the armed forces. Yes the soldiers secured the outskirts of Tahrir and allowed people to leave and enter the square, but the generals had not publicly condoned the revolutionary demonstrations, nor expressed sympathy for the demands of the opposition. As a result the people on the square started to feel the return of fear that

⁶² 'The people believe the army are behind them... I am not so sure' in *the Independent*, published 31-01-2011.

⁶³ 'Egyptians wonder, can it happen here?' in *Los Angeles Times*, published 26-01-2011.

⁶⁴ The inaction of European countries, that normally claim to uphold and spread human rights globally, was not strange at all. As the Dutch RTL 4 News revealed, many European countries, The Netherlands included, shipped and sold military technology and hardware of millions worth to their ally Mubarak throughout the years. Suddenly calling Mubarak a 'dictator' would have meant the acknowledgement that the EU had sponsored dictatorships. Retrieved 06-06-2011 from http://rtl.nl/%28/actueel/rtlnieuws/%29/components/actueel/rtlnieuws/2011/02_februari/22/verrijkingsonderdelen/leveranties_Egypte.xml.

⁶⁵ 'Anti-US sentiment surfaces' in *Los Angeles Times*, published 01-02-2011.

⁶⁶ "'Waar wacht het Westen toch op?'" in *Trouw*, published 01-02-2011.

Mubarak would win and take his revenge. The organising activists decided to stage a demonstration of 'a million people' in order to force the generals to publicly acknowledge the legitimacy of the 'revolution,' as it was called now by the Egyptians. For the organisation of this huge demonstration, designed to retake the initiative, the organisers turned to their new tool of brokerage and diffusion: Tahrir-square.

Tahrir as an Iphone

Since Apple released its popular smartphone, millions of people worldwide have become familiar with the handy diffusion-device. It offers forms of direct communication, entertainment and recreation. Tahrir-square became a similar type of multi-information-broker that connected hundreds of thousands of people. Especially then, when digital and modern forms of communication like the Internet and phone-connections remained cut off since the 'Day of Rage.' *Los Angeles Times* reporter Laura King observed how rallying calls were made for the 'Million March' planned for the next day.⁶⁷ And *NRC Handelsblad* reporter Guus Valk described how organisers on the square used megaphones and huge sound-speakers to spread the plan for a million march.⁶⁸ It is the most direct way to communicate with tens of thousands of Egyptians on the square, who come to Tahrir to debate about the future of Egypt, or to be entertained by the (revolutionary) street theatre. Thousands of Egyptians slept on the square, but many more Egyptians visited Tahrir as a way of recreation after which they returned home. This coming and going was facilitated by the conscripts of the army, who gave people free passage from and to the square. In other words the process of new coordination was not contained to the square. The open-borders policy of the army, and the disappearance of police and security forces in other parts of Cairo, arguably supported an effective diffusion of revolutionary rallying calls throughout Cairo when Tahrir-visitors returned to their families and friends. I do not have concrete evidence through reporters' observations of

⁶⁷ 'Protests build toward a showdown in Egypt' in *Los Angeles Times*, published 01-02-2011.

⁶⁸ 'Feesten tegen Mubarak' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 02-02-2011.

the dynamics at the family kitchen-tables in Cairo. But I do know from my own observations that I made during my stay in Egypt, that family is still one of the most important social structures in which support for causes is found. Therefore I believe it to be a logical conclusion that the 'Million March'-diffusion went viral through friend- and family-relations, which would cause a major scale-shift in participants to occur the next day.

Regime response

The intense, organizational interaction among the Egyptians on Tahrir went not unnoticed by Mubarak or the generals, who apparently had not yet made up their mind of whether to support the protests or not. Mubarak's response revealed his will to remain in power. He suspended all trains from travelling to Cairo. In this way he hoped to disrupt revolutionary-supporters from other cities to join in with the crowds on Tahrir.⁶⁹ The reaction of the generals was different. They certified the protesters by stating that their demands 'were legitimate',⁷⁰ but the events that were coming would later reveal the shallowness of the generals' loyalty.

-Day 8; the 1st of February-

The Million

Reporter Robert Fisk was not sure if there were a million people on Tahrir square, but he sure observed hundreds of thousands protesters, and that made today's demonstration probably the largest in the history of Egypt. Fisk also saw secular, unveiled girls demonstrating side by side with devout long bearded Islamists, while poor people dressed in rags stood together with rich educated people.⁷¹ An indication that all layers of society by now were drenched in the revolution. It is another indication of how effective Tahrir

⁶⁹ 'Protests build toward a showdown in Egypt' in *Los Angeles Times*, published 01-02-2011.

⁷⁰ "'We're here to protect you, not threaten you" army tells protesters,' in *the Independent* published 01-02-2011.

⁷¹ 'Secular and devout. Rich and Poor. They marched together with one goal' in *the Independent*, published 02-02-2011.

was as a organizing tool. Certainly, in combination with the announcement of the army to protect and allow the demonstration that probably took away enough fear by ordinary people to join their fellow citizens on Tahrir.⁷²

Even on this massive scale, when all factions participated in the Million March, people remained faithful to the agreed contentious performances to the point that you can speak of the mechanism of *emulation*. I come to this conclusion after interpreting observations made by reporters of *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant*. They describe the total absence of factional political symbols and slogans. Only national symbols were used, as with the initial protests of Kifaya against Mubarak since 2004. People frantically waved and danced with the Egyptian flag, or were painted in the national colours. In other words people repeated and copied each other in their contentious performances, which is also a mark of the mechanism *attribution of similarity*. They are all wearing the same colours and they all share the same goal: the removal of Mubarak.^{73/74}

Organising factions as the Muslim Brotherhood, the April 6 Youth Movement and Kifaya *certified* the legitimacy of their political demands with this demonstration through 'repeated public displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment' (Tilly & Tarrow 2007: 8). This is of course demonstrated by the sheer amount of people rallying for a collective goal for the eight consecutive day, but also by the disciplined Tahrir-crews of cleaners, cooks, nurses and guards that were always operational through a tightly organized rotation⁷⁵ The combination of these mechanisms with processes like *collective action* and *identity shift* arguably triggered the process *actor constitution*. In other words the mechanisms and processes that guided the developments of the revolution, transformed the Egyptians of Tahrir into free citizens that knew how to demand their human rights. This was possible to happen quickly because the *free space* of Tahrir offered a vision of a citizen-led

⁷² 'Mubarak rekt zijn presidentschap' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 02-02-2011.

⁷³ 'Feesten tegen Mubarak' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 02-02-2011.

⁷⁴ 'De Egyptische revolutie ontpopt zich in Cairo tot een volksfeest van de Vrijheid' in *de Volkskrant*, published 02-02-2011.

⁷⁵ 'Feesten tegen Mubarak' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 02-02-2011.

society built on compromise. This kind of new self-awareness is also visible in the descriptions of *Volkskrant* reporter Rob Vreeken who saw how demonstrators participated in the earlier-mentioned Tahrir-crews. He also noticed how they used their new political freedom on Tahrir to express their disdain of Mubarak not by burning his image, but through humorous slogans on banners.⁷⁶ A week earlier this would have been science fiction, for this kind of defiance would have meant imprisonment or worse.

Institutionalisation

The day before the Million March on Tahrir began, the regime already attempted to de-mobilize the Egyptians through the process of *institutionalisation*, when the generals declared the demands of the opposition 'legitimate.' Which is quite remarkable in a country where genuine political opposition never really existed due to the repression. But Mubarak continued in public to tread the new track of institutionalisation by responding to the largest demonstration ever with the announcement that he would not run for president during the next elections in September 2011.⁷⁷

The next day, however, would show that Mubarak never left his old repressive tactics. And the military elite would reveal that its face head was shaped in the image of Janus.

-Day 9, the 2nd of February-

Betrayal

Early in the morning, an army officer entered the Tahrir-square and announced that it was time for the protesters to leave: 'All you're demands are being met'^{78/79}, a clear reference to the announcement of Mubarak not to run for president any longer. However, the people of Tahrir did not trust any

⁷⁶ 'De Egyptische revolutie ontpopt zich in Cairo tot een volksfeest van de Vrijheid' in *de Volkskrant*, published 02-02-2011.

⁷⁷ 'Mubarak rekt zijn presidentschap' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 02-02-2011.

⁷⁸ 'Hoe lang blijft het leger nog neutraal?' in *Trouw*, published 03-02-2011.

⁷⁹ 'Mubarak supporters confront protesters' in *The Washington Post*, published 03-02-2011

long-term commitments of Mubarak. They wanted him out, immediately. The protesters knew that they had leverage as long as they controlled the square. Mubarak knew that too.

The demonstrators were flabbergasted when they were stormed in the afternoon by dozens of Mubarak supporters on horseback and camels. With long stick and machetes these reincarnations of ancient warriors hacked onto the heads of the surprised anti-Mubarak demonstrators, before a frenzied crowd of thousands pulled them off their animals and bloodied them with severe blows. The horsemen were the first wave of attack. They were followed by thousands of angry men on foot, who came from the direction of the 6 October-bridge. The two parties charged each other like mediaeval armies in front of the burned down carcass of the flat building that once was the home to Mubarak's NDP. The soldiers on the tanks did nothing to protect the anti-Mubarak demonstrators from their attackers.⁸⁰ Children started with the necessary desperation to break down pavements and fences on Tahrir, women carried the improvised projectiles in the fabrics of their dresses towards the men who launched the bricks and heavy iron pieces as missiles towards the assailants.⁸¹ The fences were dragged to the front, where they were used as battering rams and shields against the Mubarak supporters, while hundreds of stones filled the air.⁸²

Where did these new antagonists come from? Was it a sudden mobilization of Mubarak supporters? No, it was an organized effort of the NDP to regain power on the streets in Cairo. *Trouw* reporter Eduard Padberg witnessed how busses, chartered and guided by known party-members of the NDP, deliver thousands of paid thugs - *battagis* - to the frontline of Tahrir square.⁸³ *International Herald Tribune / New York Times* reporters David D. Kirkpatrick, Anthony Shadid and Kareem Fahim witnessed the same kind of tactics employed by NDP members. They paid every individual coming out

⁸⁰ 'A sudden, violent turn to chaos' in *Los Angeles Times*, published 03-02-2011.

⁸¹ 'Mubarak huurt "criminelen in voor het vuile werk,"' in *Trouw*, published 03-02-2011.

⁸² The English news channel from Russia: *Russia Today* broadcasted footage of the battle over Tahrir. Retrieved 07-06-2011 from: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4k0_9Y1XaC8&feature=relmfu.

⁸³ 'Mubarak huurt "criminelen in voor het vuile werk,"' in *Trouw*, published 03-02-2011.

of the busses 50 Egyptian Pounds to wear pro-Mubarak cards.⁸⁴ Many of Mubarak supporters turned out to be members of the police and security forces as well. This time they did not wear a battle dress but civilian clothes. Robert Fisk recognised a few of them by face. But he retrieved factual evidence after hours of battle when some Mubarak supporters were held captured on Tahrir. Fisk found papers of police officer Mohamed Abdul Azim Mabrouk Eid on his wounded body. His police security number was 2101074 and he was from the Giza governorate.⁸⁵

The fights between the people of Tahrir and Mubarak would go on for hours and inflicted serious wounds to more than a thousand people. The amount of people that died that day remains unknown. But the revolutionaries were able to keep their ground and they defeated the forces of Mubarak for a second time. This assault tells us that Mubarak never intended to leave office and implement institutions for genuine democracy. But it also demonstrates that the generals had been buying time and had been supporting Mubarak all along. For the army did not block the entry points to the square with their American Abraham tanks in order to protect the people of Tahrir.

The international community, which had been more moderate towards Mubarak since the Day of Rage, flipped in one definitive breath over to the anti-Mubarak forces. In spite of earlier words uttered by the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who pressed for an orderly transition, White House spokesperson Robert Gibbs suddenly said that Mubarak should step down. 'Now means yesterday' a firm Gibbs demanded. He continued by warning the generals, that an army crackdown on Tahrir would 'negatively influence funding.'⁸⁶ The gloves were off. But Mubarak responded in kind. The special envoy Frank Wisner, sent by the US to mediate between the

⁸⁴ 'An orchestrated counter attack sets off melee in Cairo Square' in *The International Herald Tribune*, published 03-02-2011.

⁸⁵ 'The sky was filled with rocks. The fighting around me was so terrible we could smell the blood'; Blood and fear in Cairo's streets as Mubarak's men crack down on protests' in *the Independent*, published 03-02-2011.

⁸⁶ 'An orchestrated counter attack sets off melee in Cairo Square' in *The International Herald Tribune*, published 03-02-2011.

revolutionaries and Mubarak, would encounter a closed door and returned to America without any achievement.⁸⁷ It turned out to be a signal that Mubarak would ignore much of the international pressure and was furthermore determined to clear Tahrir. But the defeat of the regime's forces did present the generals and Mubarak with a significant problem in Cairo, only solvable through one option: military force. The only thing that stood between the demonstrators and a massive crackdown was the regime's next target: the international press.

-Day 10, the 3rd of February-

After the repressive measures of Mubarak escalated the political dispute between his regime and hundreds of thousands of protesters into a violent frenzy, the political scene of Egypt became polarized, as it had not been in decades. The cornered leadership of the regime knew that they only could regain total power if Tahrir was swiped clean, which was not possible due to the massive international coverage of the event. Foreign journalists therefore became the target of choice of pro-Mubarak forces and security services. NDP secretary-general Ibrahim Kamel engaged in the process of *framing* when he branded on state television foreign journalists as Western 'spies' with the intent to wage a 'campaign against the Nation of Egypt.' Kamel concluded with remarking that 'the people of Egypt have the correct impression of Western media being a part of "the plot" against Egypt.'⁸⁸ Vice President Omar Suleiman would complete the stigmatisation of reporters as he called them 'infiltrators with the goal to create chaos and to cripple Egyptian society.'⁸⁹ It signalled the start of tightly coordinated campaign of police, security forces and parts of the armed forces to hunt down reporters in order to isolate the people on Tahrir-square.

⁸⁷ 'A rebuffed U.S. turns to Egypt's army in the crisis' in *Los Angeles Times*, published 03-02-2011.

⁸⁸ "'Westerse media voeren vuile oorlog'" in *de Volkskrant*, published 05-02-2011.

⁸⁹ 'De dag van vertrek op Tahrir' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 04-02-2011.

Rescuing Egypt from the Western 'Plot'

Security officers stormed Cairo's Hilton hotel where they, once inside, attacked journalists and seized broadcasting material from amongst others the BBC. The hotel's management refused from that point on to prolong the stay of journalists, which forced reporters to travel to other hotels through streets dominated by pro-Mubarak enforcers. Once they were outside, the outlawed journalists were molested, robbed, sexually assaulted or arrested. Removing the press from the Hilton was a key objective of the regime in order to isolate Tahrir, because the media had a clear view on the square from the roof of the hotel.

The outlawed-press could not move outside of the safety of Tahrir through the streets with equipment, for they were robbed or molested instantly by mobs or police officers.⁹⁰ The New York based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) recorded on that day alone 30 detentions of reporters.⁹¹ Among those reporters were *New York Times* reporters Souad Mekhennet and Nicholas Kulish, who were captured together with their Egyptian driver by police officers at a checkpoint just outside Cairo. Within a few hours they were handed over to the *Mukhabarat* - the Egyptian secret service at a isolated prison outside of Cairo, where the reporters witnessed and heard the torture of Egyptian reporters that had turned against the regime. Despite their imprisonment, they were fairly treated. But they saw many other Western journalists who were cuffed, gagged and blindfolded after which they were thrown on a concrete floor with dozens of others prisoners. The *New York Times* reporters were released without any explanation after a anxious night in the torture prison, apparently because being an employee of the biggest American newspaper gave some

⁹⁰ 'Er is geen taboe op angst, woede of verdriet' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 07-02-2011.

⁹¹ Report of Committee to Protect Journalists, published 03-02-2011. Retrieved 21-06-2011 from <http://cpj.org/2011/02/mubarak-intensifies-press-attacks-with-assaults-de.php>.

protection.⁹² The fact that they were held in state-facilities proves that the hunt for reporters was a government-organised crackdown.

Lost friends

Yet again this campaign proved to be a tactical error on the part of Mubarak. The little support he still enjoyed from the international community, started to fade away. The US government accused Mubarak of having instigated the 'concerted campaign' against journalists.⁹³ And the five big countries of the till-then-quit EU - the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain - became confronted with critical questions about their support for the regime from their own Members of Parliament and journalism unions. It forced them to condemn the violence against the reporters and just as the US did a day earlier, they demanded Mubarak to step down immediately.⁹⁴

In the meanwhile the battle for Tahrir continued. Pro-Mubarak demonstrators laid siege to their adversaries on the square. But they did not become a real threat, as they had been the day before. The organizational engine of the social movement base on Tahrir shifted gears and had taken defensive measures during the night. Robert Fisk saw for instance how lorry's loaded with rocks were driven to the square where the improvised ammunition was placed on strategic places. A picture of protester Ashraf Khalil depicts even mediaeval type of catapults.⁹⁵ At the front line, near the Egyptian Museum on Ramses street, demolished trucks, steel plates and other sorts of rubble were used as barricades. At the end of the afternoon the increased numbers of anti-Mubarak demonstrators forcibly removed regime-

⁹² '2 detained reporters saw police's methods' in *The New York Times* published 04-02-2011. Retrieved 21-06-2011 from

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/06/weekinreview/06held.html? r=1&pagewanted=all>.

⁹³ 'Government supporters attack foreign journalists,' in *Los Angeles Times* published 04-02-2011.

⁹⁴ 'EU-landen trekken handen af van bewind Mubarak' in *het Financiële Dagblad*, published 04-02-2011.

⁹⁵ Link: <http://twitpic.com/3wdbss>

supporters by violent means from Ramses street. The sovereignty of Tahrir is re-established.⁹⁶

-Day 11, the 4th of February-

Again a Friday. The most holy day in Egypt. It was the first day without violence since the failed crackdown of Mubarak supporters. Hundreds of thousands of Egyptians joined the scarred people who had fought for the preservation of the revolutionary nature of the square. Even after the violent clashes that turned parts of downtown Cairo into a real war zone, people massively supported the demand of Mubarak's removal (Idle & Nunns 2011: 135). Again the social movement base of Tahrir showed its political legitimacy through a concerted public display of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment. The people of Tahrir also showed that they were able to create and uphold a civil society. The square was their exhibition. *Los Angeles Times* reporter Raja Abdulrahim observed how throughout the revolution Tahrir was the most hygienic, clean and safe place where civility among people prevailed.⁹⁷ This only was of course possible due to the high level of organization imposed by the groups constituting the social movement base. If you interpret this emphasis on order and civility in the context of the unhealthy and dirty conditions in Egypt *and* the discourse used by Mubarak for decades – 'without me there will be anarchy and chaos'⁹⁸- you will see that this disciplined demonstration of order and hygiene on the square is a terrific contentious performance.

It was not strange that these people almost obsessively clung to the square, for the previous days proved that Mubarak and the military were both untrustworthy. In fact anti-Mubarak politics outside the safety of the square were punished through torture or worse. This made the protesters

⁹⁶ "'Mubarak will go tomorrow,'" they cried as rocks and firebombs flew' in *the Independent*, published 04-02-2011.

⁹⁷ 'Civility reigns in Tahrir,' in *Los Angeles Times*, published 06-02-2011.

⁹⁸ See his interview with ABC's Christiane Amanpour on this link of Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtpamD9Jx3g&feature=related>

realise that they had reached the point of no return. Therefore the political boundaries intensified and the Egyptian society polarized deeply. Because protesters perceived that any form of compromise that would not include the immediate departure of Mubarak to be dangerous to their physical security.

The generals start to switch sides

The military leadership probably sensed that the desperation of the demonstrator was translated into a kind of grim determination for survival. This added to the clear defeat of the hired thugs and security forces and the persistence of the revolutionaries on the square, made the generals realise that Mubarak could very well loose. The president had already alienated his powerful international allies, the only institution that kept him in place were the powerful armed forces. The generals, as explained in previous chapters, had many (international) business interests and they would suffer from being generals in a isolated pariah state under Mubarak. Therefore they subtly started to defect. The first major indication of defection was the fact that the Egyptian minister of defence: General Mohamed Hussein Tantawi visited together with the Arab League secretary-general Amr Moussa the prayer on Tahrir square. There they both paid their respects to the protesters. Furthermore the amount of soldiers and tanks increased significantly in order to protect Tahrir.⁹⁹ Even the Egyptian state-television sensed a possible defeat of Mubarak. After weeks of pro-regime coverage – they even said on the Day of Rage that all people had returned home – news shows suddenly allowed protesters to speak and make their point on television.¹⁰⁰

However, Mubarak was not yet beaten. He had still a few cards to play.

⁹⁹ 'Scale shifts away from Mubarak' in *Los Angeles Times*, published 05-02-2011.

¹⁰⁰ 'De strategie van de regering heeft de solidariteit alleen maar vergroot,' in *de Volkskrant*, published 07-02-2011.

-Days 12, 13 & 14, the 5th, 6th and 7th of February-

Division on Tahrir

As Mubarak discovered, violence was not the way to de-mobilise the protesters in Cairo. Therefore he turned to more subtle measures and his old tactics of divide and rule. Before Mubarak could execute his plan he bought time by firing the NDP leadership through his vice-president Omar Suleiman. Which meant that his son and heir, Gamal Mubarak was sacked publicly (Idle & Nunns 2011: 149). It appeared to make an impression because some of the oppositional parties were willing to talk about leaving the square. Especially the Muslim Brotherhood, which was re-certified by the regime as a legitimate political party, was eager to negotiate.¹⁰¹

Institutionalisation in its repressive form

However, the youth movement organizations of the social movement base on Tahrir did not want to talk about anything before the president had given in to their demands. Mubarak exploited this new momentum with attempts to exacerbate the new division within the ranks of the protesters through the use of economic policies. Shops, banks and factories that were kept closed since the 25th of January were reopened. Which gave most Egyptians - who are poor - incentives to do something else than occupying the square. At first it worked. For despite the fact that many Egyptians supported the revolution, it had also significantly damaged the economy and livelihood of ordinary Egyptians. Most tourists had fled, which caused immediate problems for many entrepreneurs in the billion US dollar tourism industry. For instance Ali Ibrahim, an independent entrepreneur who offered camel and horseback rides around the pyramids, suffered significantly from the collapse of the Egyptian tourism-industry. Mr Ibrahim told *NRC Handelsblad* reporter Gert van Langendoek that he 'was 100 per cent behind Tahrir, but enough was

¹⁰¹ 'Regering en oppositie om de tafel,' in *Trouw*, published 07-02-2011.

enough.' If Mr Ibrahim would not get new customers within two weeks he would be forced to sell his camels and horses.¹⁰²

An increasing number of demonstrators that had obligations to support their family subsequently went back to work.¹⁰³ As a result the people occupying Tahrir decreased significantly from tens of thousands of people to thousands of people. The regime continued with a propaganda campaign in which they alleged that protesters were paid 100 Egyptian Pound a day by foreigners, and that people on Tahrir could eat for free at Kentucky Fried Chicken. An image that infuriated a lot of impoverished Egyptians.¹⁰⁴ With the announcement that the government, made on Monday 7 February, would give the salaries of civil servants a bump of 15 per cent, Mubarak clearly intended to administer the coup de grâce to the manpower of the opposition still occupying Tahrir.¹⁰⁵

Some protesters feared that it would work. The 22 years old protester Mona Sayd noticed for instance how ordinary people in busses and other forms of public transportation accused her and her fellow demonstrators of being responsible for the increasing price of bread and other hardships. 'I feel like I have had a miscarriage,' explains Sayd when she contemplated the future of the revolution.¹⁰⁶ However, the revolutionaries would soon get help from an unexpected corner.

-Day 15, the 8th of February

The Wael Factor

In spite of the latest efforts of the regime to de-mobilize the protesters through financial means, suddenly hundreds of thousands Egyptians ignored their duties and congregated on Tahrir square. Where they listened to the

¹⁰² "'Tijd om aan het werk te gaan,'" in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 08-02-2011.

¹⁰³ 'Many lives back to near normal,' in *Los Angeles Times*, published 07-02-2011.

¹⁰⁴ 'Plotseling zijn we de bad guys geworden,' in *NRC Next*, published 08-02-2011.

¹⁰⁵ 'Oppositie is verdeeld geraakt, precies wat Mubarak wil,' in *NRC Next*, published 08-02-2011.

¹⁰⁶ 'Plotseling zijn we de bad guys geworden,' in *NRC Next*, published 08-02-2011.

speech of a young man, who had become a national hero overnight, when he galvanized Egypt in an emotional interview on Egyptian satellite television.¹⁰⁷

His name was Wael Ghonim, and despite the fact that he did not strike anyone as the Che Guevara-type, this 31 years old IT professional that was employed by Google, offered the people of Egypt one of the first spaces from which the revolt could be launched. For it was Ghonim who was the anonymous creator and administrator of the Facebook page *We Are All Khaled Said*. Nobody in Egypt knew who was behind this page that accused the regime and initiated critical debate about the state of the Egyptian society. However, the secret service got him in its cross hairs and arrested him on the Day of Rage. They interrogated him and held him captive for eleven days. Until Amnesty International got wind of it due to the efforts of family, friends and colleagues at Google.¹⁰⁸ Probably due to the increasing international pressure, the regime released him on the 7th of February, after eleven days of imprisonment in isolation.

Ghonim was aware of the events that occurred during his capture because his interrogators told him what happened. Therefore he did not fully grasp the scale of the sacrifices made by ordinary Egyptians during the revolt that he had supported through his efforts on Facebook and he felt ashamed that he was not with the others on the street. When Wael Ghonim was released he asked Mona el-Shazly, the host of the independent Egyptian satellite news show *Al Ashira Masa'an* in which he was interviewed when the revolution started, if he could tell his story. El-Shazly agreed, for many Egyptians were anxious to know what had happened to the revolutionary blogger that suddenly disappeared after the high-profile interview with Mona el-Shazly. What happened next is history.

¹⁰⁷ 'Verzet in Egypte laait weer op, Google-manager Wael Ghonim inspireert betogers,' in *de Volkskrant*, published 09-02-2011.

¹⁰⁸ Press release of Amnesty International: <http://amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/fears-google-employee-egypt-2011-02-06>.

The activists Nadia Idle and Alex Nunns articulate accurately in their book *Tweets from Tahrir*, the ambiance and tone of the interview¹⁰⁹ that turned out to be a huge re-mobilizing factor. Therefore I quote their description:

‘His television appearance was raw, unprepared, and tearful. It emerged that he had been one of the anonymous administrators of the *We Are All Khaled Said* Facebook page, which had circulated calls for the first demonstrations. He used his interview to explain to Egyptians, as he had explained to his state interrogators, that the protesters were not traitors or agents of foreign powers but young people simply demanding a better country. When el-Shazly showed pictures of some of those who had been killed in the protests, Ghonim broke down in tears and walked off set. The tone of Wael Ghonim’s interview, at that particular moment, won over the nation. He had gently exposed the brutality of the regime, and brought home with unsurpassed emotion the price that had been paid in blood. For those uncommitted Egyptians who were not yet revolutionaries, it was decisive. For the regime it was devastating’ (2011: 165).

Particularly the remark of Idle and Nunns about the uncommitted Egyptians being turned into revolutionaries is interesting to check with the observations of reporters that were present at Tahrir the next day. For if they are correct it means that the interview single-handedly enforced an enormous scale shift.

Tahrir rookies

Leila Fadel of the *Washington Post* interviewed dozens of people on Tahrir of which most of them were there for the first time ever. Many explain that ‘the

¹⁰⁹ Watch the interview with subtitles on the following links:

Part1: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjimpQPQDuU&annotation_id=annotation_914368&feature=iv

Part2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yW59LZsjE_g&feature=iv&annotation_id=annotation_855315

Part3: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V690GO7YzgA&annotation_id=annotation_8208&feature=iv

weeping moment' of the interview inspired them to come.¹¹⁰ Reporters Robert Fisk and Donald Macintyre, both reporters of *the Independent*, corroborate this observation.^{111/112} Another telling example is the story of Gigi Ibrahim, a Revolutionary Socialist activist, and her pro-Mubarak sister. The sisters Ibrahim were part of a wealthy Egyptian family with connections to the regime's elite. Gigi, however, became critical and went on to become one of the faces of the revolution by appearing on the cover of *Time* and even *the Daily Show* of Jon Stewart.

Journalists of *PBS Frontline* followed her during the revolution and made a documentary about Gigi in which you can see how she has a fierce argument at home with her sister, who says to consider Mubarak 'as her father.'¹¹³ However, I found a Twitter message of Gigi Ibrahim a few days after the Wael interview in which she says: 'My sister in #Tahrir, that's huge.'¹¹⁴ Apparently something of the revolution touched her sister as well. It could well have been the tears of Ghonim.

My observation in combination with those of reporters at the scene does verify the claim that Nadia Idle and Alex Nunns make in their book, concerning the scale shift. Which would continue to become nation wide scale shift the next day.

-Day 16, the 9th of February-

Decisive Scale Shift

The people from Cairo did not monopolize the revolution. Throughout the weeks other big cities like Alexandria, Suez and Port Said, were also the theatre of riots and protests. But on 9 February many workers joined at the

¹¹⁰ 'Ranks of demonstrators swell,' in *the Washington Post*, published 09-02-2011.

¹¹¹ 'With every passing hour, the regime digs deeper,' in *the Independent* published 09-02-2011.

¹¹² 'Rallying cry from freed online activist galvanises crowd,' in *the Independent* published 09-02-2011.

¹¹³ See the documentary of *PBS Frontline* on the following link: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/world/jan-june11/frontline_02-21.html The extended version on: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_x1ZRC7wUY.

¹¹⁴ Tweet from Gigi Ibrahim. Posted 16:34:11 hours February 10 2011 on www.twitter.com.

scene. I can only speculate about how the nationwide strikes were coordinated, for I focused on the social movement in Cairo. The documentary *Seeds for Change* of Elizabeth Jones depicts how leaders of the April 6 Youth Movement discusses the necessary link of the Tahrir protests with the workers in order to enforce a national economic breakdown. It would have been logical if this group had made the connection. They already tried to do it on the 6th of April in 2008. But I have no further evidence to corroborate this claim.

Furthermore it seems that the processes of *identity shift* and *actor constitution* affected many Egyptians in such a way that they had the courage to demand better working conditions. And it appeared in all kinds of sectors. For instance two thousand textile and steel workers went on strike in Suez, while six thousand labourers in the canal zone quit working. Fifteen hundred nurses who held sit-ins at hospitals nationwide, and governmental employees at state run television and newspapers joined them as well.^{115/116/117}

From this moment on, it became clear that the regime's strategy to get people back to work in order to decrease the amount of protesters had failed miserably. The generals had to act, which meant in other words: pressuring Mubarak to resign in order to save their own position in the future state of Egypt. But Mubarak would prove to have one more card up on his sleeve.

-Day 17, 10th of February-

Miscommunication?

Everything that happened today had appeared to confirm the assumption that the military had taken over power from Mubarak and was willing to

¹¹⁵ 'Spreading unrest raises pressure on Mubarak,' in *the Washington Post*, published 10-02-2011.

¹¹⁶ 'Labour actions across Egypt lend momentum to anti-Mubarak protests,' in *The New York Times*, published 10-02-2011.

¹¹⁷ 'Egyptian officials warns of a coup as tensions rises,' in *Los Angeles Times*, published 10-02-2011.

incline to the demands of the protestors. Or at least the generals thought they had the reigns.

Hundreds of thousands of people were again on Tahrir demanding Mubarak to go away through their public displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment, when general Hassan Ruwaini, the military commander of Cairo, treaded carefully to the centre of the square and announced that 'all your demands will be met, the president will step down today.'¹¹⁸ The crowd on Tahrir swelled in anticipation as they waited for the speech of Mubarak. When the president appeared on national television he turned out to be a wildcard. As the people on Tahrir and the generals expected him to announce his resignation, they were unpleasantly surprised when Mubarak said that he 'would continue to carry his responsibilities to protect the Egyptian constitution and people.'¹¹⁹ The cry of the angry crowd was deafening,¹²⁰ while they shouted abuse towards their hated leader. Shoes were raised in the air, the worst insult in the Arab world. However, no violence broke out.

The contradictory statements of Mubarak and his generals is a clear sign of the regime split that occurred after the nation wide protests and strikes. It remained the question which side of the regime would win.

-Final day, the 11th of February-

The answer to the question of who really was in charge came in the course of the final day of the revolt. Vice-president Omar Suleiman appeared on national television and announced that Mubarak had resigned from the office of the presidency. The huge crowd that had not decreased since the disappointing previous night roared in happiness and excitement. They had won this first struggle on the road to democracy. Still many lay ahead of them. But that night they celebrated their victory.

¹¹⁸ 'Niemand wil de revolutie missen,' in *Trouw*, published 11-02-2011.

¹¹⁹ 'Mubarak heeft gesproken,' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 11-02-2011.

¹²⁰ Footage of the crowds reaction on the following link:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOfqnC-E-QQ>

IRAN

The protests against the controversial election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president of Iran in June 2009 flared up and down throughout the end of 2009 and the year of 2010. But the protests only came close to being a threat to the Iranian regime in the week that followed the day of election. It was only then that a large segment of society in Teheran and other cities would protest almost non-stop for a week. Therefore I have focused my research on these first significant days that followed the election day of the 12th of June 2009. As with the Egyptian case, I will describe the revolt mainly on a day-to-day basis in order to identify specific mechanisms and processes that were fundamental to the political outcome of the protests against Ahmadinejad. As with the Egyptian case, I was forced to limit my research to the contentious campaigns held in the capital of Iran, Teheran. As in Egypt, most reporters reported only from the capital.

-Day 1 & 2, the 12th and 13th of June 2009

Was the 2009 presidential election actually a coup d'état?

There are a numbers of commentators and scholars who believe that president Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Khamenei used their connections with the puritanical Republican Guard and other state resources to stage a coup¹²¹ (Alfoneh 2008) and (Hen-Tov & Gonzalez). It is important to review this allegation, for a coup demands planning, organization and determined people to execute it. Which implies that the demonstrators struggling on the streets for fair elections were up against a well-organized security apparatus directed and prepared to quash any form of civilian dissent on the street. For riots and protests are a contingency, which every serious coup-plotter calculates into his or her strategic plan. Therefore the

¹²¹ 'Khamenei's Military Coup in Iran,' in *the Washington Post*, published 15-06-2009. Retrieved 22-05-2011 from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/14/AR2009061401758.html?hpid=topnews>.

following question: Do the observations of reporters and other parties involved suggest a coup d'état executed by the followers of Ahmadinejad?

Washington Post and *NRC Handelsblad* correspondent in Teheran, Thomas Erdbrink, was surprised by the unprecedented freedom of speech and assembly during the election campaign. There were no police officers, state-militia members or moral police officialsⁱ on the streets and people could do and say whatever they wished.¹²² Afsaneh Moqadam described a similar atmosphere in his book *Death to the Dictator!*

In the context of a possible coup d'état it is remarkable that after a week of non-presence by security forces, suddenly on election day the religious *Basij* militia members were placed in great numbers on strategic positions in the capital.¹²³ Also during the evening of election day, *Basij* members invaded locations used by the organization of Mousavi, where they arrested the leaders. The *Basij* knew the names of the management-level employees of Mousavi because they cross checked the identity papers to a name list in their possession. Other Mousavi supporters present at these locations were photographed and their identities were written down by officers of the militia (Moqadam 2010: 29-31). It suggests that the organizations loyal to Ahmadinejad had generated intelligence about key members of the oppositional organizations, which were only a few weeks old. The fact that the militia continued with making another list of Mousavi-supporters, suggests the possibility of a future wave of arrests. And why would they take this course of action if Ahmadinejad was confident enough to win the elections?

Was a coup d'état logical from the point of view of Ahmadinejad?

ⁱ This institution consists mostly of female civil servants that are allowed to give fines or short prison sentences to Iranian women on the spot, if they deem that these ladies are not dressed to the Islamic standards that state prescribes.

¹²² 'Na het feest wachten de stembureaus,' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 11-06-2009.

¹²³ 'Wide reverberations as door slams on hope of Change,' in *The New York Times*, published 14-06-2009.

As I described in the third chapter, the religious political-elite, consisting of Supreme Leader Khamenei and senior members of IRGC, felt endangered by the reformist faction during the presidency of reformist Khatami. For actual implementation of the proposed reformist-policies would arguably have been the beginning of the end for the religious supremacy in Iranian state institutions. The 2005 presidential-election victory of Ahmadinejad signalled the return of the rattled radicals. During his first tenure as president, Ahmadinejad attempted to consolidate the power of his political base. Many Republican Guards and members of the *Basij* militia were appointed at key positions in government. The other religious institutions, such as the Council of the Guardians, were trusted aids in this process. For instance, when the candidates for the 2008 parliamentary elections had to be approved by the Council, many candidates were refused for various reasons. In other words the reformist faction was reduced to minority in Parliament, not by popular vote but by institutional means of the political religious elite. It is therefore hardly surprising that many Republican Guards were approved to run for Parliament (Alfoneh 2008: 2).

However, this confident assertion of power through institutional means suddenly faced the risk to be undone by the quick rise of Mir Hussein Mousavi as reformist presidential candidate. That the Ahmadinejad-regime felt threatened by the re-emerging reformist faction, is suggested by the fact that they blocked the website of Facebook, which was becoming an increasingly important platform of the opposition during the election campaign.¹²⁴ The pro-Mousavi newspaper *Yaseno* was also closed down, one day before the election.¹²⁵ Furthermore the government blocked the Internet and mobile phone services since the day of elections in order to deprive the opposition of means of communication.¹²⁶ Late in the evening of election day, the Interior Ministry announced that Ahmadinejad had won the election. A

¹²⁴ 'Bewind Iran blokkeert Facebook in,' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 25-05-2009.

¹²⁵ 'A thunder of free speech,' in *the Independent*, published 13-06-2009.

¹²⁶ 'Machtsstrijd in Iran,' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 15-06-2009.

quite unexpected outcome at the time, for Mousavi had been leading in the polls for weeks (Moqadam 2010: 23).¹²⁷

It is reasonable to be sceptical about the impartiality of state institutions like the Interior Ministry. The Council of Guardians had already proved to be in favour of Ahmadinejad during the Parliamentary elections; the state blocked the Internet as countermeasure against the campaign of Mousavi. And the state repression of Mousavi's campaign was finalized with the police-enforced cancellation of his press conference on the day of elections.¹²⁸ These indications, in combination with the observations of a planned security services-operation to round up legitimate political actors, after Ahmadinejad had declared victory, reinforces the credibility of the assumption that Ahmadinejad felt a coup d'état to be necessary in order to safeguard his position.

How did Iranians react?

Thousands of people appeared on the streets of Teheran the day after, Saturday, 13 June. Where they uttered slogans as 'where is my vote?' and 'death to the dictator.'¹²⁹ The *Basij* militia, represented in great numbers on the streets of Teheran, cracked down on the demonstrators immediately. Robert Fisk describes how police officers even started to break down the pavement of the roads in order to hurdle the rocks toward the Mousavi-supporters. Many green – the Mousavi colour – clad protesters were arrested and dragged to prison cells of the Interior Ministry. Fisk, happened to be there and witnessed how the arrested men were molested severely by security agents before they were kicked inside the building.¹³⁰ The crackdown continued throughout the day until the protesters left for the safety of their homes. The Teheran police chief, general Ahmad Reza Radan, declared that evening on national television that demonstrations from now on were

¹²⁷ 'Wide reverberations as door slams on hope of Change,' in *The New York Times*, published 14-06-2009.

¹²⁸ "'Iran op weg naar tirannie,'" in *de Telegraaf*, published 14-06-2009.

¹²⁹ "'Iran op weg naar tirannie,'" in *de Telegraaf*, published 14-06-2009.

¹³⁰ 'Terror in Iran,' in *the Independent*, published 14-06-2009.

banned, and that any rally would 'be dealt with according to the law.'¹³¹ As Ahmadinejad probably thought to have won, angry shouts of women echoed from the rooftops of Teheran: 'Allah Akbar!' A contentious performance that heralded the demise of previous dictator; the shah.

-Day 3, the 14th of June-

How repression unified

It was this Sunday that Supreme Leader Khamenei acknowledged Ahmadinejad to be the legally elected president of Iran. It was added that since the incumbent president had won over 50 per cent of the votes – that remains even controversial today – a second was not longer necessary. Therefore visas of foreign journalists did not need to be extended, the story was over. Or so thought the Iranian government.¹³² Ahmadinejad, apparently more confident after the certification of Khamenei, continued with his coup d'état-like repression.

More than a hundred leading reformist figures, including Mohammad Reza Khatami – the brother of the former president – were arrested.¹³³ Also international reporters were number one targets. A Dutch television crew was detained, stripped of equipment and footage of protests before they were deported from Iran.¹³⁴ Journalists from Belgium, Germany and the UK shared the same fate, while the BBC satellite connection was jammed.¹³⁵

In spite of the violent crackdown a day earlier, again thousands of people, spread over entire Teheran, took their contention – fair elections or the removal of Ahmadinejad – yet again to the street. And yet again they met the violent hand of the *Basij*. Motorcycles manned by pairs of the *Basij* – one

¹³¹ 'Terror in Iran,' in *the Independent*, published 14-06-2009.

¹³² 'Terror in Iran,' in *the Independent*, published 14-06-2009.

¹³³ 'Iran sees second day of clashes as anger rises over elections,' in *The Guardian*, published 15-06-2009.

¹³⁴ 'Iran zet journalisten van NOVA het land uit,' in *het Financiële Dagblad*, published 15-06-2009.

¹³⁵ "'Eis dat filmploeg Iran weer in kan,'" in *de Telegraaf*, published 15-06-2009.

to drive, one to strike with a baton – raced towards or through the crowds while they inflicted havoc.¹³⁶ The pro-Mousavi demonstrators were also disorganized and according to *Independent* reporter Tim Marshall, did not have a real objective, like a march or sit-in. The pro-Ahmadinejad Iranians, however, were tightly organized with governmental help. For instance, state television announced venues for mass rallies in favour of Ahmadinejad. The opposition could not rely on its trusted social media, for the Internet was blocked, and therefore seemed to lack any form of effective coordination.¹³⁷ But the Ahmadinejad supporters came with tens of thousands of people to the Val y Asr square – the revolutionary square – where they listened to their president when he accused the opposition of being traitors to Iran.¹³⁸ An obvious effort of the president to engage in the process of *framing* his adversaries as foreign puppets and therefore enemies to the nation. In the light of the collective memory the Iranians have of the CIA funded terror of SAVAK-agents, such kind of framing is the gravest accusation one can make in Iran.

It was exactly this kind of language that would feed the anger of Iranians towards their president. It seemed to unite them. Robert Fisk interviewed a orthodox Muslim woman, Maryam, who articulated this anger perfectly: ‘I didn’t join in wearing green, like so many others. But when I heard about how Ahmadinejad cheated I promised I would wear green in public all the time.’¹³⁹ Reporters like Robert Fisk and Thomas Erdbrink – they were the few still walking freely through Teheran – observed how more and more people started to wear the colour – green – of Mousavi. A clear sign of the mechanism *attribution of similarity*.

¹³⁶ “‘Tell the world how they have stolen our elections,’” in *the Independent*, published 15-06-2009.

¹³⁷ “‘Tell the world how they have stolen our elections,’” in *the Independent*, published 15-06-2009.

¹³⁸ ‘Ahmadinejad whips crowd to frenzy as opposition muzzled,’ in *the Independent*, published 15-06-2009

¹³⁹ ‘A face in the crowd, a cry from the heart,’ in *the Independent*, published 15-06-3009.

It did not really change anything yet, because the anti-Ahmadinejad protesters clearly lacked a sense of coordinated action. The next day, however, would prove, that it was in the making all along.

-Day 4 & 5, the 15th & 16th of June-

New Coordination

Iranian pro-Mousavi activist Afsaneh Moqadam describes in his book how most people involved in the campaign of Moussavi were totally surprised by the victory of Ahmadinejad and the swift actions of the security services in order to detain hundreds of leading figures in the reformist organizations. It took them therefore a few days to get organised and find safe places to meet. But in the evenings of the 13th and 14th there were secret meetings to coordinate a 'Million Marches' on the 15th and 16th of June. Moqadam mentioned how many students – depoliticized prior to the 2009 elections – had established contacts through the campaigning organization with older people who had experienced the 1979-revolution and knew how to organise a protest. It was also during these meetings that the non-violence approach, the use of inclusive slogans – no anti-Supreme Leader slogans were permitted – in order to attract moderates, and the importance of a collective appearance was explained and spread through the satellite groups throughout Teheran. Every member of these groups was appointed to be a 'marshal,' responsible for mobilizing people from his or her own neighbourhood for the planned million marches (2010: 38-52). Also reporter Thomas Erdbrink, married to a Iranian woman and a resident of Teheran for many years, described how neighbourhood relations like the local pizza boy or cabdriver diffused the latest news and information.¹⁴⁰

I am aware of the fact that this evidence is rather thin of how the marches were organised. But in a society where the only mass media was in the service of the state, and where the social media, that could function as an organising tool, were blocked, the informal human connections seem to be the

¹⁴⁰ 'Mondkrant of Twitter in Iran,' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 16-06-2009.

only explanation of how the protest could experience such a scale shift due to the effective diffusion and brokerage, that the marches would be a huge success. For they were a triumph. The few international reporters that were still in Iran and could still move freely, described how at least hundreds of thousands of people with green robes marched through the streets in a non-violent manner. Robert Fisk saw how all parts of society were represented as he witnessed how students, devout Islamists and elderly people marched side by side¹⁴¹The *Basij* and other security forces were so overwhelmed in numbers, that they were forced to retreat to their barracks for safety.^{142/143}

The next day, Tuesday 16 June, the Mousavi supporters planned a demonstration at the national Val Y Asr square at 5 pm, but the Ahmadinejad camp got wind of it and state media made rallying calls to assemble on the square one hour earlier. The organisers of the Mousavi march decided to stay faithful to the non-violence approach, and out of fear of clashes between the two camps, they decided to demonstrate at the other side of Teheran.^{144/145}

However, the massive demonstration of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment through the well-coordinated protest-marches, appeared to have caught Ahmadinejad, the Supreme Leader and the members of the Council of the Guardians off guard. As a result Khamenei announced an investigation of the Council into the irregularities during the voting procedure as Mousavi alleged.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ 'The crowds came out and called for freedom,' in *the Independent*, published 16-06-2009.

¹⁴² 'Honderdduizenden betogen in Iran,' in *Trouw*, published 16-06-2009.

¹⁴³ 'Defiance grows as Iran's leader sets vote review,' in *The New York Times*, published 16-06-2009.

¹⁴⁴ 'Onrust blijft aanhouden,' in *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, published 17-06-2009.

¹⁴⁵ 'Aanhang Mousavi beraamt nieuwe betoging,' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 17-06-2009.

¹⁴⁶ 'Amid impasse, rivals rally in Iran; ruling clergy agree to partial recount of Friday's ballots,' in *the Washington Post*, published 17-06-2009.

-Day 6, the 17th of June-

Certification

The US and Europe were careful in their response to the domestic unrest in Iran. Just a week earlier, president Obama had extended his open hand towards Iran in his now famous speech in Cairo. This new stance reflected Obama's cautious attitude towards the Iranian government, for he needed their assistance in resolving the mess in Iraq and for securing the porous Iran-Afghanistan border.¹⁴⁷ The Republican members of Congress heavily criticized the soft American stance,¹⁴⁸ but in hindsight Obama's careful approach, this was a wise move. For US certification would have been a two-edged sword for Mousavi and his supporters. It would have given Ahmadinejad the ultimate excuse to accuse the reformists of being American spies. No, the most powerful certification had to come from Iranian bases of power, and it did.

In spite of the mass arrests made by the security forces since election day, the defiant marches in which hundreds of thousands of people participated, inspired many prominent Iranians to speak out and back the reformists. It came from all kinds of directions. For instance the Association of the Combat Clergy, an influential group of clerics representing war veterans, backed the opposition. One of the highest regarded Ayatollahs of Iran, Ali Montazeri also expressed words of support by declaring that the current government did not possess 'legitimacy any longer'.¹⁴⁹ Influential politicians as former vice-president Mohammad-Ali Abtahi and many of his supporters followed suit in public. They were all detained by the secret service.¹⁵⁰

But it did not deter Ayatollah Montazeri – once the designated successor of the late Supreme Leader Khomeini – who continued with harsh

¹⁴⁷ 'Machtsstrijd in Iran,' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 15-06-2009.

¹⁴⁸ 'Muted response reflects US diplomatic dilemma,' in *the Washington Post*, published 15-06-2009.

¹⁴⁹ 'Restore calm, Iran's Supreme Leader urges,' in *The International Herald Tribune*, published 16-06-2009.

¹⁵⁰ 'Tientallen hervormers oppgepakt,' in *de Volkskrant*, published 18-06-2009.

critique on the government and Khamenei. He argued that the electoral fraud of Ahmadinejad and the subsequent endorsement of Khamenei had undermined the legitimacy of the current Islamic political system and that reform was imperative.¹⁵¹ With this charged accusation Montazeri opened the debate, Khamenei and Ahmadinejad feared most: the question of who was the rightful heir to Khomeini's heritage – the reformists or the radical neo-conservatives?

-Day 7, the 18th of June-

Martyrs

In order to understand the 'heritage' of the first Supreme Leader and founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, one should have some knowledge of the darkest time of this young religious state: the Iran-Iraq war. This conflict lasted from 1980 till 1988, it demanded about one million Iranian and Iraqi lives in gruesome warfare, which included the use of chemical warfare and human wave attacks. As I explained in the third chapter, when Saddam declared war on Iran, the ranks of the Iranian army were decimated by the 'purification' campaign of the new leaders. Only the then just established IRGC had the manpower to counter Saddam's forces.

However, a great deal of these forces consisted of fourteen year-old boys. These devoutly raised Shiite kids carried the martyrs' sword around their necks when they cleared the minefields for the advancing infantry by racing through them on cross motorcycles. These boys were also used as explosive components of human attack waves, when they were ordered to storm Iraqi trenches with explosive belts and grenades; thousands perished per wave. Also back then, Robert Fisk was reporting the events in Iran and spent much of his time in the trenches with the kamikaze boys of Khomeini. Fisk saw how grown men and children appealed to death in order to serve their holy land, Iran. He saw how children sincerely cried when they had to

¹⁵¹ 'Tientallen hervormers oppgepakt,' in *de Volkskrant*, published 18-06-2009.

wait their turn before they could become martyr themselves (Fisk 2005: 247-251).

Without these martyr-warriors the Islamic Republic of Iran would have probably lost vast territories and oil fields to Iraq. Therefore Khomeini revered these fallen soldiers intensely, and the concept of martyrdom became chained to the idea of being a good Iranian. Therefore, when seven Iranian football players of the national team wore, on the 17th of June, dark mourning belts to commemorate the seven pro-Mousavi protesters that had been killed by government forces during the unrest,¹⁵² the implication was made that Ahmadinejad and Khamenei had dishonoured the memory of the martyr-warriors on which the national identity was built. The players made this statement during a World Cup qualification match against South-Korea and was highly publicized, widely visible and therefore an embarrassing moment for the government.

Mousavi called upon his followers to wear black on the 18th of June and to march towards Khomeini square in order to mourn their martyrs. Hundreds of thousands of black clad mourners did participate in this march where they carried posters of Khomeini and this was a terrific contentious performance. For it turned out be quite difficult for Ahmadinejad to accuse people who carried the image Khomeini of being a traitor to Iran.¹⁵³

This kind of contention was difficult to counter, also for the Supreme Leader. He had to make a choice: give in to the demands of annulment of the election results and a second round, or he should side definitively with Ahmadinejad with all the consequences it entailed.

-Day 8, the 19th of June-

The last sermon

Friday. Also in Iran, the holiest day. Supreme Leader would lead the Friday's prayer, which was broadcasted on national television. Afterwards he

¹⁵² 'Rouw als nieuwe fase in protest in Iran,' in *Trouw*, published 18-06-2009.

¹⁵³ 'The dead of Iran are mourned,' in *the Independent*, published 19-06-2009.

delivered a sermon¹⁵⁴ in which he expressed his faith in Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president. Khamenei warned the opposition against a continuation of the protests. Enough was enough, the Supreme Leader had spoken. Mousavi supporters were actually outright threatened: 'If street protests don't stop, there will be other consequences... They will be held accountable for all the violence and blood and rioting.'¹⁵⁵ The old tactic of blaming the US and the UK – while these powers had been very careful in their comments – for everything wrong with the Iranian society was used yet again.

Tens of thousands of protesters clashed with the forces of the government. Not only the *Basij*, also anti-riot teams of the Republican Guards were deployed. Relentless violence and teargas were used to disperse the crowd.¹⁵⁶

-Final day, the 20th of June-

The definitive defection of Khamenei to the neo-conservatives can be viewed as a process of *actor constitution*. Because the Supreme Leader ought to be an impartial figure, much like the Dutch Queen is supposed to be. Khamenei was no longer the neutral, holy figure; he was just a squabbling politician like the Mousavi and Ahmadinejad. It arguably caused much disillusionment among the Mousavi supporters who still had trust in the *velayat-e faqih* principle. It subsequently caused *de-mobilization*, a subsequent downward *scale shift*, *escalation* and *radicalization*. Unnamed reporters of *the Washington Post* observed how only three thousand protesters confronted the *Basij* and the riot police in a very violent manner.¹⁵⁷ The non-violence protocol was obviously discarded and indicates a certain process of radicalization among

¹⁵⁴ The complete and translated sermon of Supreme Leader Khamenei. Retrieved 11-05-2009 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Co2r-iNMPBs>.

¹⁵⁵ 'Khamenei is fighting for his own position as well as Ahmadinejad's,' in *the Independent*, published 20-06-2009.

¹⁵⁶ 'Iran police use teargas on election protesters, witnesses say,' in *The Guardian*, published 20-06-2009.

¹⁵⁷ 'Police unleash force on rally in Teheran,' in *the Washington Post*, published 21-06-2009.

the protesters. Robert Fisk confirms this assumption with his observation of protesters shouting 'Death to Khamenei'¹⁵⁸ The decreasing numbers of protesters - only a few thousand protesters against the hundreds of thousands a day earlier - suggest effective de-mobilization. Also special forces units if the IRGC were deployed to crack down on the remaining protesters.¹⁵⁹ It became so fierce that a young Iranian women named Neda Agha-Soltan is shot to death. She would become the face of the failed revolt against Ahmadinejad.¹⁶⁰

The fierce words of the Supreme Leader in combination with the harsh crackdown seemed to do the trick. The next day it was quit on the streets of Iran and for the time being Ahmadinejad appeared to have won the contention.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ 'Protesters cry: "Death to Khamenei," in *the Independent*, published 21-06-2009.

¹⁵⁹ 'Police force Iran protest off streets,' in *the Guardian*, published 21-06-2009.

¹⁶⁰ 'Neda wordt gezicht van Iraans protest,' in *NRC Handelsblad*, published 22-06-2009.

¹⁶¹ 'Mousavi roept op om te blijven protesteren,' in *Trouw*, published 22-06-2009.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter I will finalize my thesis with a comparative analysis of the presented evidence in order to solve the puzzle with which I started this research.

The Puzzle:

What Particular conditions and events at the sites of contention, before and during the 2009 Iranian post-election protests and the 2011 Egyptian anti-Mubarak revolt, enabled or disrupted the oppositional political actors to remain committed to their contention aimed against their government in order to achieve its goals? And do the differences in conditions and events explain why the Iranian revolt failed where the Egyptian version succeeded?

I will start this comparison with the analysis of the Egyptian and Iranian contentious campaigns. Then I will analyse how the organizational nature of the social movement bases influenced the development of the campaigns, and I will finalize this comparison with the analysis of how the different Egyptian and Iranian political opportunity structures influenced the organizational nature of the social movement bases. As an extra I will also offer my opinion on the question whether the Internet and the social media have made the current frameworks in SMT redundant.

-The Contentious Campaigns-

Revolution or just a plain revolt?

Every Egyptian I encountered during my stay in that country, called the period of unrest last January and February in his or her country 'the Revolution.' Many commentators and journalists have referred to the Iranian election-protests as the 'Twitter-Revolution.' But was there really a revolutionary situation in both countries?

Charles Tilly and Sydney Tarrow speak of a revolutionary situation when there is / are:

- Contenders or coalitions of contenders advancing exclusive competing claims to control of the state or some segment of it;
- Commitment to those claims by a significant segment of the citizenry;
- Incapacity or unwillingness of rulers to suppress the alternative coalition and/or commitment to its claims (Tilly & Tarrow 2007: 156-157).

If we interpret both cases through the first necessary feature, required for a revolutionary situation, what is the main difference? The Egyptian coalition of contenders did advance exclusive competing claims in order to overthrow the political system and to topple the ruling political elite. On a first glance, the Iranian contention appears quite similar, but it is not. The Iranians did not engage in contentious politics to overthrow their political system, but for another round of elections, *within the current* electoral system. The Iranian campaign was also not intended to topple the highest political leader, Ali Khamenei.

Thus summarizing; the main difference between the Egyptian and the Iranian contention is found in the fact that the Egyptian claim was aimed against the political system *as a whole*, while the Iranian claim was directed against a *particular actor within* the political system.

The second feature required to create a revolutionary situation – commitment to the contention by a significant segment of the citizenry – appeared in both cases. Egyptian and Iranian organising actors were able to mobilize hundreds of thousands of citizens in consecutive days. However, the third requirement was yet again not a shared feature between the Egyptian and Iranian revolts.

The Iranian rulers were very well able to suppress the commitment of the Green Wave Movement to its claim. After the death of Neda, the protesters were effectively de-mobilized and the marches of hundreds of thousands of people were over. Mubarak, however, will enter history as the

first dictatorial president of Egypt, who was not able to suppress the revolts against his government.

Thus in hindsight, Egypt endured a contentious campaign with a revolutionary goal, backed by a significant amount of the citizenry, which the government was unable to suppress. Therefore the situation in Egypt could be marked as 'revolutionary.' But the Iranian uprising was something different. It had not a revolutionary goal of overthrowing the government, nor could the Green Wave Movement sustain its campaign against the might of the security forces. Which brings us to the interesting question: why? For the crackdown of the Egyptian security apparatus was just as massive and severe.

The importance of sovereign political space

I would argue that the Egyptian contentious campaign became a triumph because The 6 April Youth Movement and the social movement organizations of Kifaya always kept and safeguarded a piece of sovereign political space in which they could organise and from which they could launch contentious campaigns. The Egyptian activists used the (allowed) political space, created by the Second Intifada, to its full potential. After the Intifada became less meaningful, the oppositional actors consolidated their newfound political space by institutionalising it by organising an annually held 'Cairo Conference' about foreign issues. When Kifaya turned to domestic issues, the allowed political space became increasingly smaller. But the new oppositional organization the April 6 Movement was able to transfer the sovereign political space of the oppositional social movement base to the Internet and the social media. As it turned out, the Mubarak regime was not able to suppress this development, or his security services simply missed its significance. When Mubarak and his apparatus became aware of the organizational power of the social media, the regime took down the entire Internet on the Day of Rage. It was too late. On the same day the protesters acquired a new sovereign political area, the Tahrir-square, which they used as launching ground for bigger contentious performances until Mubarak was

forced to resign. The people of Tahrir realised the importance of this free piece of land and protected it literally with their lives when the Mubarak-regime tried to retake it.

The Iranian oppositional actors were never able to maintain a sovereign space that could be effectively used as a tool to organise and mobilize supporters. The Reformist faction thought they could use the 2008 Parliamentary elections to reclaim legislative power and with it some political opportunities. As we know now, the religious-political institutions deprived the Reformists of that chance. Only during the month before the presidential election in 2009, the buildings of the Mousavi-campaign organisation, and the social media, were a place where anti-Ahmadinejad voters could meet and organise. However, this government *certainly was aware* of the organizational potential of the social media. The government subsequently blocked Facebook. On election day, key-locations of the Mousavi organization were raided and important personnel was arrested. The subsequent spontaneous protests on the same evening were squashed by the well-prepared security apparatus, which appeared to act more like a force to execute a coup d'état instead of being responsible to keep the streets safe.

During the subsequent 'Million Marches' it seems that it never crossed the minds of the Green Wave Movement leaders to occupy a Tahrir-like square, which they could have used as an organizational tool against Ahmadinejad. Thus, after every successful demonstration, the protesters had to start from scratch each day, which significantly weakened the impact of their contention.

The importance of Western leverage on repressive regimes

Another factor that was significant in determining the outcome of the Egyptian and Iranian campaigns can be found in the answer to the question of how dependent the political elites were on the West.

It was quite revealing to me during my research how one third of the Egyptian military's budget floated on American money. And how the generals-turned-businessmen needed international aid funds to invest in their

own commercial enterprises. Therefore, international economic sanctions would have really affected the political elite negatively. I am convinced that this threat restrained the generals from a military crackdown. At first they allowed forces loyal to Mubarak to storm Tahrir. But when this operation failed the generals decided to give the protesters real support through robust military protection. In other words they were protecting their income and investments, for the demonstrators had the future while Mubarak had become damaged goods.

Seen from this perspective it is actually quite ironic that the Egyptian revolutionaries rallied in the beginning also around the anti-globalization issues of the Cairo Conference, for it was probably the Western connection on which Mubarak and his military-businessmen elite significantly depended, that saved the protesters from a military crackdown.

On the other hand, the isolationist regime of Iran did not suffer at all from Western pressure to express restraint in their coercive actions against the protesters of the Green Wave Movement. The most important international relations of Iran are its ties with countries like Russia and China. These countries do not really encourage domestic popular revolts, for such developments are also the greatest fears of those particular political leaderships. The West was in this case toothless. Not only because of weak economic connections with Iran, but also due to the fact that at that particular moment the political developments in the US gave Iran some leverage over the West. Since Obama was eager to leave Iraq and Afghanistan, he was in desperate need of the aid of the regional power Iran. Deteriorating the relationship with Ahmadinejad would have endangered the new US strategy. In such cases most of the time *real-politik* will prevail over the idealistic American ideas of democracy and human rights.

-How the organizational nature of the protesters influenced the course of the revolts

Egyptian social movement organizations learned many lessons in contentious politics the last decade. They knew how some slogans would include unaffiliated people on the street and how other expressions would endanger the popularity of their aims. Kifaya-members also discovered how they could attract international and national attention by occupying Tahrir square and how thorough the impact of that contentious performance was on the population of Cairo. Furthermore, the *Otpor!*-lessons, which the 6 April Youth Movement brought into the equation, contributed to the overall professionalism of the oppositional social movement base.

The organization of Mousavi missed this kind of collective contentious experience on the street. For instance the Egyptian activists were aware of the contentious power of Tahrir because they experienced it by accident in the year of 2003. The well-acquainted activist community in Cairo modified the contentious repertoire probably instantly. The most of the constituting members of the Green Wave that were tasked to organise the demonstrations, on the other hand, did not know each other longer than one month. It is without a doubt that the Egyptian activist-teams that had shared many challenges on the street before, were more effective in their planning and organising than the rather unacquainted Mousavi supporters.

The organizational arrear of the Mousavi-supporters is revealed through their rather objective-less demonstrations. These contentious performances remained limited to the area of Teheran. The Egyptian activists always aimed to fire up the process of scale-shift in order to increase the pressure on Mubarak. In Iran, this was quite difficult because the Supreme Leader and not president Ahmadinejad could declare new elections. However, contention against Khamenei was out of the question because Mousavi was afraid that he would alienate many supporters that firmly believe in the *velayat-e faqih* principle. This made it extremely hard to increase the pressure on the Iranian regime. A decade of experience in contentious politics on the streets might have made the difference between the actual ad-hoc strategy and refined and effective strategy.

-How the site conditions determined the organizational nature- of the social movement bases

Do the differences in site-conditions explain why the Iranian revolt failed where the Egyptian version succeeded?

Yes I believe they do. Because the Egyptians that opposed the Mubarak-regime knew that they were dealing with a full-fledged dictatorship. The extreme repressive conditions of their country had taught the members of Kifaya and the April 6 Youth Movement, how to engage in collective claim making on the streets because it was the only way of politics they knew. The Iranians on the other hand believed that they could engage in effective contentious politics through their republican institutions. While these institutions in reality were controlled by theocratic institutions with dictatorial tendencies.

After the highly disputed 2009 presidential election, the Mousavi-supporters saw no other way than to take extra-institutional measures and to pursue their contention on the urban streets. For which they did not possess the preparation, or the collective experience. And why would they? The political conditions in the past twenty years had offered some sense of political pluralism, which made political campaigns launched from the streets in the view of many Iranians unnecessary.

The Egyptian repressive political climate, however, had always stimulated oppositional actors to meet in secret, to adapt to tactics of the police and security forces. In other words, in order to survive, physically and politically, the activists always had to think ahead in order to outsmart the Mubarak-regime. I believe that in the end that is what delivered the Egyptian protesters their victory: their ability to surprise the political elite again and again.

-The impact of the Internet and the social media on SMT-

As I described at the beginning of this thesis, media have dubbed the Iranian protests as the Twitter-Revolution. If one fact emerges from this thesis, it is that this is a false assumption. For Twitter and Facebook have been blocked by the Iranian government throughout the entire contentious episode. Therefore it was virtually impossible for the protesters to use the social media as an organizational tool. Therefore I would argue that the protests do not deserve the title of 'Twitter Revolution.'

However, the Internet did offer the Egyptian protesters an extra means to get organised, to diffuse instructions and tactics through social media in order to create a scale shift on the 25th and 28th of January. Do these events make the frameworks in SMT redundant? I believe not. As I see it, the Internet created an extra opportunity in the repressive landscape of the Egyptian politics. But the abilities of the Internet remained within the political opportunity structures. It did not, however, surpass it. Because the regime was still able to close down the political space opened up by the digital possibilities. That it happened too late from the point of view of Mubarak is his error.

Therefore, I would argue that the ICTs do not change SMT significantly. For they do not create a new kind of political space outside of the control of the relevant regimes. The impact of Internet and social media can be explained within the contentious politics theory of Tilly and Tarrow. It is only a new kind of medium that can combine other kinds of media with each other. Newspapers, radio and television are now combined in one browser of the Internet, but if a state wishes to block it, that remains possible.

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-Appendix-