Cyber Sha'bi:

The Role of Egyptian Cyberactivists in Vernacularising Human Rights Law in Relation to the January Revolution

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For Norea and Kyan

In Loving Memory of

Dr. Sally Engle Merry

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine how Egyptian cyberactivists applies the concept of vernacularisation of human rights as explained by late Dr. Sally Engle Merry. I also studied how this vernacularisation process played a role in mobilising Egyptian masses to take it to the streets in what is called the Egyptian Revolution of 25 January 2011. Through this study, I presented six prominent Egyptian cyberactivists, studied their background, their influence, activism, and the security risks they faced. The core of this study is applying a discourse analysis approach to selected social media content posted by the six selected cyberactivists, running in parallel with semi-structured interviews with them to draw their reflection on the content they created in the frame of vernacularisation of human rights concept. The aim of this analysis is to study how those cyberactivists vernacularised human rights on social media. This analysis examined how those cyberactivists used vernacularisation to put messages from one of the concepts of international human rights law into a local context that resonates with Egyptian audience. Through this analysis, I examined in detail all vernacular references that were included in the selected posts, putting these references within their local frame, and connecting them to the human rights message that the author of the post intended to convey.

The influence of social media on the Egyptian Revolution was in question and it created a controversy around it that inspired many research papers. In this paper, I am trying to highlight the use of the concept of vernacularisation of human rights by the selected cyberactivists in connection to the social media mobilisation that accompanied the Egyptian Revolution. This dissertation aimed to examine the actual content of the social media posts in their original language and their vernacular frame to shed the light on the mobilisation elements that this content had within the local vernacular frame that resonated with local social media users.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

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Chapter 1. Introduction and Methodology

1.1. Introduction

Prior to the 25 January Revolution of 2011, Egypt witnessed waves of online activism mainly concerned with human rights issues, some of which are believed to be the reasons behind the demonstrations that flooded Egypt's streets on 25 and 28 January 2011. Among these issues, for example, was torture. One well-known case is that of Khaled Said, who was tortured to death by police, and whose death inspired a Facebook group "We are all Khaled Said" that became one of the main groups calling for demonstrations in Egypt, among many other independent cyberactivists. These cyberactivists used a simple and common language in their Tweets, Facebook statuses, and YouTube videos to address these human rights issues. My main concern in this research is to investigate how cyberactivists played a role in this "vernacularisation" process and to what extent they were influential.

Due to a lack of political awareness among Egyptians, as well as the severe restrictions imposed on freedom of expression by the Egyptian government, people turned to the Internet to talk and read about politics in 2011. Most Egyptians receive minimal education, if any, and so to reach them, language had to be simple and relevant to local culture. Cyberactivists, being part of this society but having had the chance to attend events or courses on human rights, began using their own language to convey international human rights laws and principles to address people with no legal background. When they talked about torture, for instance, instead of citing provisions from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other human rights instruments, they said things along the lines of "torture is not right and the police should be held accountable for it," in a simple, colloquial Egyptian Arabic dialect.

My connection with Egyptian cyberactivists started in 2004, when I started following their activism and providing them with legal support against the prosecution they faced through my work at the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights. Since 2005, my work with the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights has given me the chance to work closely with Egyptian cyberactivists and enabled me to be part of the 2011 Revolution at all its stages, from online mobilisation to actually taking to the streets on 25 and 28 January 2011. This life-changing experience gave me the opportunity to share moments of hope, extreme happiness, and extreme sadness with whom were called the 'square colleagues' referring to the icon of the Revolution, the Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo. Among the square

colleagues there were the cyberactivists. I have known most of the famous Egyptian cyberactivists from before 2011, but the Revolution' experience created this emotional and psychological connection between us and among other activists and revolutionists. This collective experience of living the Revolution together and the questions that were associated with this experience are what inspired me to put myself on this quest to find answers. Also, being in the middle of this scene gave me the opportunity to observe the situation of cyberactivists in Egypt first-hand and gain valuable insights that gave me a good potential to work on such research.

In 2009, two years before the Revolution, I finished my MA degree, and my thesis was on Egyptian cyberactivists as a new social movement. I concluded my MA thesis by saying: "Despite all the challenges standing against the cyberactivism movement in Egypt, including a harsh intimidation campaign from the government, the numbers of the participants in the movement are increasing every day, and the movement is taking a more solid form that is making a real impact on the society. The government is trying its best to control this movement, whether through direct encounter with activists, or through legal ways. This harsh campaign is not stopping cyberactivists from doing what they believe in, whether individually or collectively, proving to the society that they exist and that their movement can be the spark of the change and a dawn of a new era."[1] This instilled me with motivation and an added sense of responsibility to pursue further research and try to conduct a more comprehensive study to determine to what extent I was correct in my prediction.

The Egyptian Revolution of 25 January 2011 was a life-changing event for all our generation and especially those who took part in it in person. Despite the current situation in Egypt, the chain of change the Revolution started still echoes on different levels. The Egyptian Revolution also has a regional and global value and importance. On the regional level, the 25 January Revolution was part of what is called the Arab Spring, when waves of protests stormed Arab countries demanding democratic changes. The spark started in Tunisia and expanded to Egypt, and from Egypt it expanded to Bahrain, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. The protests in Egypt were followed by millions all over the world and was seen as part and inspiration of more global movements such as Occupy Wall Street Movement and the protests that followed in the years after, such as the protests in Ukraine in 2014. Understanding what happened in the 25 January Revolution could be a key to understand

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[1] Sherif Azer, 'Cyberactivism in Egypt: A New Social Movement' (MA thesis, The American University in Cairo 2009) 62

contemporary street movements and protests, the dynamics behind them and the way to respond to them. As ten years have passed since the Revolution, studying the Revolution and the phenomena associated with it became of an importance, and the time elapsed would allow reflection and realistic evaluation after observing the short-term outcomes of the Revolution in different aspects.

Studying the Egyptian Revolution through the behaviour of those who lived the events personally and influenced and were influenced by the surrounding elements will also add to the academic studies an on-ground and inside view that would enrich further studies on similar events. This study of the Revolution aimed to connect more than one aspect and put them within a one narrative, such as human rights activism, communication of human rights ideas, the influence of social media, mass mobilisation, collective actions, localisation and framing of ideas, revolutions, and political change. By studying the writings and the behaviour of Egyptian cyberactivists in relation to the Egyptian Revolution, these different topics will be put into context, and pave the way for further research.

Ten years after the Revolution, we realized that our main challenge was not bringing down the government but changing people's mentality and awareness for them to choose the right one. Without this awareness, the majority ended up voting for a military dictatorship, leaving the minority that took part in the revolution to suffer various kinds of oppression. In order to move forward, we need human rights defenders, including cyberactivists, to lead this process of vernacularisation of human rights issues to address the majority of the population and change their mentality using their own local language. Studies and research have started to assess cyberactivists' role in the Revolution, but no final conclusion has been reached and further analysis is required. Most previous research conducted about the role of cyberactivism in Egypt relies mostly on well-known events and incidents reported on by cyberactivists. These researches has rushed into conclusions while undermining the most important aspect of how cyberactivists were influential: what they actually wrote, the content they posted, the language they used, and the way they framed their ideas. Without studying the actual content produced, the conclusions appear to lack depth or real explanation as to why cyberactivists helped change Egyptian public awareness. This research aimed to fill this gap and focus on a thorough study of the data and content posted by cyberactivists, with special attention paid to the language, terms and cultural frames they used to convey their message.

The rise of cyberactivism can be traced back to the early 1990s[2], but has been rapidly evolving in the last few years. In many ways, worldwide, the phenomenon has taken a much more distinguished form, especially regarding human rights issues. Defining cyberactivism is not a straightforward expression due to the complexity and the novelty of the concept, and also the different concepts associated with it as we will discuss in the coming chapters. However, scholars from University of Southern California attempted to define cyberactivism as "a means by which advanced information and communication technologies, e.g. e-mail, list-serv, blogs, and the www of the Internet, are used by individuals and groups to communicate with large audiences, galvanizing individuals around a specific issue or set of issues in an attempt to build solidarity towards meaningful collective actions."[3] Cyberactivism can constitute a platform of expression that is free from censorship, government control, supervision, and even self-censorship. Activists are able to openly disseminate their opinions on some of the most sensitive topics in society in a simple language. For example, Egyptian cyberactivists have spoken up about torture and violence used by security services, criticised and questioned leaders and religious authorities, and raised many other issues considered taboo by Egyptian society.[4] They have used online social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to organise demonstrations, strikes, events, and solidarity campaigns as well as to report and document violations and other activities related to human rights. Cyberactivists in Egypt played an important role in helping human rights groups develop a common and vernacularised language; this language opened opportunities for discussions with people who were not familiar with international human rights law.

Vernacularisation is to translate into the natural speech peculiar to a people.[5] The term in Arabic could be translated as *sha'bana* شعبنة, from the original word *sha'bi* شعبي which means popular or local. The concept of vernacularisation within the realm of political science and social sciences was developed by Benedict Anderson in his book "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism." He used the term "vernacularisation" to explain the process of deviation from the original Latin language by

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[2] Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers, Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice (Routledge Publishing 2003) 26

[3] 'About Cyberactivism' (Networked Public), <http://networkedpublics.org/cyberactivism/about_cyberactivism> accessed 18 May 2017

[4] Sahar Khamis, 'Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution: How Civic Engagement and Citizen Journalism Tilted the Balance' (2011) Arab Media and Society issue 13

[5] 'Vernacularization' (Dictionary.com) <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/vernacularization> accessed 15 May 2020

the nations of Europe (with their language based on the Latin alphabet), leading to grounds for and justification of nationalist sentiments among the citizen of those European countries in the nineteenth century.[6] The concept was introduced to the field for human rights by Sally Engle Merry from New York University. Merry uses the term "vernacularisation of human rights" to capture the important role that local agents play in making international human rights laws and ideas applicable in local contexts to challenge gender violence.[7] In this research, I will explore the extent to which Egyptian cyberactivists played this role of "local agents making international human rights laws and ideas applicable in the local context."[8]

In this research, I will answer two main questions: How did Egyptian cyberactivists vernacularised international human rights law? And to what extent the cyberactivists were aware of the concept of vernacularisation and carried out this process consciously. The second question for this research is to what extent did this vernacular process had an impact that might have caused mobilisation around the 25 January Revolution? This research is significant as it aims to understand the process of dissemination of human rights ideas over the Internet and shed light on the impact on mobilisation of masses and change of public awareness. The research also touches on the understanding of the effect of human rights on revolutions and investigates the influence of international human rights values on the Arab Spring revolutions. The aim of this research is to study the online content by Egyptian cyberactivists including (Tweets, Facebook posts, and YouTube videos) in order to answer the research questions. The study will take six Egyptian cyberactivists and study the online content they posted on different social media tools.

In the coming section I will present the methodology I used in this research. This will include the main approaches that I used including interviews and discourse analysis. I will also explain the tools used to collect data from different social media tools. Then I will move on to explain different criteria I used including the selection of cyberactivists and posts selection. Then I will present some of the challenges I faced while carrying out this research, including language challenges, time factors, and security risks. In Chapter 2, I will present the concept of vernacularisation of human rights and the different factors, forms and actors of vernacularisation and will discuss how to realise the vernacularisation of human rights without a compromise that would defy its purpose. In Chapter 3, I will introduce

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[6] Obinna Okafor and Eddie Krooneman, 'Vernacularization of Universal Human Rights' (2011) Wageningen University Law and Governance Group 8
[7] Sealing Cheng, 'The Paradox of Vernacularization: Women's Human Rights and the Gendering of Nationhood' (2011) Anthropological Quarterly, Vol. 84, 478
[8] ibid

cyberactivism and the different arguments around its origin and discuss how cyberactivism could be put in the context of a classic form of activism such as social movements and collective actions. I will also argue that cyberactivism could be placed within a more recent version of those classic frameworks such as new social movements and connective actions. In Chapter 4 I will present the social media tools that were studied in this research, namely Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, their role during the Egyptian Revolution. I will also present some pre-revolution cyberactivism such as blogging. In Chapter 5 I will present the six selected Egyptian cyberactivists and their background. This presentation will be put within the concept of social consciousness, and I will argue how their background played a role in shaping their consciousness leading to their cyberactivism. Chapter 6 will present the main analysis of this research where I will present the selected six social media posts. The chapter will present the historical background of each of these posts, then I will analyse all the vernacular elements contained in these posts and their relevance to international human rights law. Then I will present reflections from the cyberactivists on their posts and their relevance to local context and to the Revolution context in general. In the final chapter, I will conclude the research by connecting what was analysed in Chapter 6 to the literature discussed in Chapter 2 to show how cyberactivists managed to carry out the process of vernacularisation of human rights. The chapter also draws the connection between the process of vernacularisation carried out by the selected cyberactivists and the mobilisation that happened before, during and after the 25 January Revolution.

Working on this dissertation for the last few years felt like a personal quest rather than a topic that I picked to research. I had a question related to a personal experience that I lived, and I wanted to find an answer. I believe that the topic picked me rather than me picking it. Every aspect of the research is a personal interest that I am completely involved in, especially since the January Revolution. Being close to the research topic came with advantages and also disadvantages. I was able to communicate with the selected cyberactivists easily, as I know them personally. It was easy to communicate and understand their language, the context, cultural references, terms, and dates without having to go through an ethnography or using a translator or a local contact. I was familiar with the online content, the language, and the time framework. I lived most of the January Revolution events in person and shared emotional moments with those activists and created a bond of sharing an experience or even a trauma. One advantage of working closely with cyberactivists over the last seventeen years and being part of the movement myself is that gave me the privilege to conduct this research

from a position where I can recognise and document the process of vernacularisation and placing the cyberactivists within the position to answer the thesis questions. One challenge in this research was to identify the cyberactivists to study and positioning them in the category of human rights activists/defenders, while they themselves may not identify themselves as such.

Ten years after the Revolution, it is sad to see how Egypt looks like now under another military dictatorship. Also, being close to the selected cyberactivists in person and see them facing legal prosecution and spending their prime years in prison had a negative effect on me while writing, especially that my writing recognises their achievements and influence in the time where they were seen as inspiration to thousands of young Egyptians. I also faced technical challenges due to the arrest of and detention of the cyberactivists which led to the deactivation of their social media accounts, whether by their colleagues for their own security or through mass reporting by regime supporters. This causes inaccessibility to the online content and having to wait until they were released and activate their social media accounts or finding other sources that archived their content on other websites.

The security challenges also affected the way I had to conduct interviews. As required by the Ethics Committee, I had to conduct interviews through secure online communications services such as Signal. This was mainly for the purpose of the security of the researcher, me, after the incident of the Italian PhD student Giulio Regeni, who was a student Cambridge University and was assumingly tortured and killed by Egyptian security due to research activities and interviews he conducted in Egypt in 2016. After following the security procedures in conducting those interviews, I realised that the risk I am facing being a researcher is not comparable to the security risks that the cyberactivists are facing due to their activism. Being a human rights activist myself, I face a different kind of prosecution, as I am on a State Security checklist at Cairo Airport since 2015 and I get stopped and interrogated on my way in and out of Egypt every time. Despite how unfair that is, it is still not compared to what the cyberactivists face. Sadly, five out of the six cyberactivists faced legal prosecution at some point, and currently one of the six activists is still in detention while four of them are banned from traveling based on legal proceedings. Seeing the subjects of my research going through all these kinds of risks and prosecutions made writing this dissertation hard on the psychological side. As I witnessed how their lives were being destroyed and losing their futures and careers in such way while I am writing about their importance and influence made me feel heavyhearted. Instead of being celebrated, they had to face detention and ban. My only consolation is the thought that this dissertation would give this some of the recognition they deserve and appreciation to the role they played to change public awareness towards human rights issues.   The

writing of this dissertation was also interrupted by the appearance of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020. When the lockdown started, my wife was having very hard time dealing with the situation. She had episodes of panic attack and nervous breakdown worried about our kids, in case if we both got infected, there will be no one to take care of our children. Then, my wife decided that this situation cannot continue, and after consulting with her family, she decided that we should move to Canada where we can have some family support from her family. I did not have the visa to Canada to accompany them, so I moved back to Egypt. While I was in Egypt in early December 2020, I came in contact with a family member with COVID-19 and I soon developed severe symptoms of the virus myself and had to isolate and receive medication for almost a month. Despite all these challenges, I worked on this dissertation almost every day.**1.2. Methodology**

1.2.1. Overview

This research's aim is to address two main questions. The first question is how did Egyptian cyberactivists carried out vernacularisation of human rights in their social media content. The second question is to what extent this vernacularisation of human rights process carried out by the cyberactivists may have had an influence on the audience that might have caused mobilisation around the 25 January Revolution. In order to answer those questions, I selected six posts from six cyberactivists and analysed their content. This analysis ran in parallel to interviews with the selected cyberactivists to draw their reflections on the content they created, in relevance to the concept of vernacularisation of human rights.

Due to the nature of the content, which is political and in which the "language" is the key element, the method of data analysis that I will mainly be using is discourse analysis.[9] This discourse analysis will enable the researcher to study the behaviour of selected cyberactivists in choosing their wording and the language they use, thus identifying the vernacularisation process within their online activity. The analysis methodology in this chapter will be based on "Discourse Analysis" as set in the book *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook for Social Research* by Martin W Bauer and George Gaskell,[10] and the book *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* by Marianne Jorgensen Louise J. Phillips,[11] in addition to reference to the book *Social Research Methods* by Alan Bryman.[12] Past researches within the same field used some of these tools one at a

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[9] Marianne Jorgensen and Louise J. Phillips, Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method (1st edn, SAGE 2002)
[10] Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook for Social Research by Martin W Bauer and George Gaskell (Sage 2000)
[11] Martin W Bauer and George Gaskell, Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook for Social Research (Sage 2000)
[12] Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (5th edn, Oxford 2016)

time, but not in the same combination, scope, and approach, such as the study by Minavere Bardici, who used discourse analysis to analyse how mainstream media represented social media content during the Egyptian Revolution.[13]

This research's methodology is a 'mixed method' that included two main tools. The first tool is semi-structured interviews conducted with the cyberactivists. The second tool is discourse analysis of selected cyberactivism content. The aim behind using this mixed method was to run the two tools in parallel and put the semi-structured interviews in conversation with the discourse analysis of the content of the posts. This method gave the space of self-reflection and evaluation from the cyberactivists side and added a dimension of time to the data collection as the cyberactivists reflect on their past activity in the light of the present situation. Such method was best suited to extract elements of the vernacularisation of human rights process based on later consequences and hindsight evaluation. Six social media posts from six Egyptian cyberactivists were selected and presented as study samples. Studies and research have started to assess cyberactivists' role in the revolution, but no final conclusion has been reached and further analysis is required.[14]

In the coming sections I will give more details on the different tools and criteria I used in this research. First, I will explain the interviews with cyberactivists process and the purpose of conducting those interviews in such manner. Then, I will explain the different techniques I used to allocate and collect data from social media websites related to the selected cyberactivists, and also the selection of those specific social media tools themselves. Then, I will explain the process and the criteria that I used to select the Egyptian cyberactivists that I studied in this research. Next, I will explain the process and criteria of selecting the specific social media posts belonging to the selected cyberactivists that I studied and analysed in the research. Finally, I will address some of the challenges and risks that I faced through these processes.

1.2.2. Interviews with cyberactivists

For the purpose of this research, I carried out six in-depth interviews with six selected cyberactivists. These interviews are very thorough in looking at these cyberactivists'

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[13] Minavere Bardici, 'A Discourse Analysis of Media Representation of Social Media for Social Change: The Case of Egyptian Revolution' (2012) Malmo University

[14] Christopher Wilson and Alexandra Dunn, 'Digital Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Descriptive Analysis from the Tahrir Data Sets' (2011) International Journal of Communication 5 1248

understanding of human rights and the way they conducted the vernacularisation process, as well as their assessment of the risks associated with the vernacularisation process. I conducted one main interview with each participant from the cyberactivists. Each interview took around three to four hours to cover all the requisite questions and points. All interviews were carried out through a digitally secured application to reduce any security risks, such as Signal or Jitsi.[15]

The main purpose of these interviews was to the evaluate the cyberactivists own awareness and views about the process and their role in vernacularisation lead-up to and aftermath of the Revolution. The questions aimed to show the extent to which these cyberactivists awareness of human rights issues through previous experience. The core of the interview was asking the cyberactivists to identify six posts where they think they used a vernacular discourse to convey a human rights concept or value. These identified posts helped to establish a timeframe and the amount of data to be harvested and analysed to reach one post from each cyberactivist to analyse. This timeframe started with the days leading to the 25 January 2011 and reaching posts from early 2017. These six posts are whether a tweet, a Facebook post or a YouTube video. Based on these identified posts, I established a timeframe before and after the post to monitor the historical background and context leading to this post and the reaction/interaction that took place to the post. Also, from the identified posts, I established a list of keywords that represented the vernacular discourse of the concerned cyberactivist. This keyword list was used to identify other posts that can be associated with the vernacularisation process.

The interviews with cyberactivists included questions that covered a wide range of issues. They took a comprehensive look into these cyberactivists' background and early activism, investigating what issues had encouraged them to be active online, how they had learned about human rights, who the target audience of their posts was, what they can identify as street language in Egypt, as well as six examples/incidents in which they decided to use a vernacular language or frame to convey a human rights message, and what the reaction to those posts was. The interview questions avoided directly asking the interviewees whether they identify themselves as human rights activists/defenders, and that was left to the researcher to deduce based on previous knowledge and experience with the human rights situation in Egypt. The interview also included questions on the Egyptian Revolution, such as

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[15] Jennifer Bui, 'Secure Video Conferencing: The 5 Best Apps' (Dialpad Blog, 16 June 2021) <https://www.dialpad.com/de/blog/secure-video-conferencing/> accessed 27 June 2021

how the Revolution affected their online activism, how the Revolution encouraged them to use a specific style/language/topic/theme, and whether they felt that the reaction of their followers was supportive/not-supportive. The interview also covered the issues of the risks they faced, and what the primary source of risk (government/individuals) related to their activism, and whether using vernacularisation changed the risk they faced and how.

1.2.3. Data collection

Each social media tool or blog has more than one way to collect its data and organise it in a searchable manner for the purpose of research. Most of the data was collected during the summer of 2018. Some data was collected later in 2019 due to the detention of the cyberactivist and the deactivation of the social media account.

On Facebook, there is no special tool to collect data or archive it, so I reviewed the data without the use of data-collection tools. Searching Facebook and collecting data depended mainly on human intervention by browsing over past timelines and using browser searches with identified keywords. At some point over the timeline, Facebook will give users the option to jump to a particular year, month, or day, which will reduce the search time. Thus, a combination of search tools and timeline-browsing is the tool I used to collect data from Facebook.

On Twitter, I used two ways to collect and archive data. Firstly, I used API (Application Programming Interface), a coded script that collects all Tweets available within certain time periods through a searchable browser. This tool allows users to see the interaction of other users to each Tweet. Secondly, I used the "request archive" function on Twitter. This tool requires the owner of the Twitter account to run a "request archive" search to obtain their full archive of tweets. This was received in a compressed file by email from the cyberactivist, then forwarded to the researcher. I established a secure way of communication with each participant, such as the use of encrypted email. This archive file is searchable and has a time frame. While this means did not provide the interaction of other users to the Tweet, it provided all tweets generated since the account was set up. A third tool I used is the advanced search option on Twitter, which allows the user to specify, using search filters, the account users they are searching for, as well as the timeframe, keywords, and hashtags.

On YouTube, I mainly used the main search tool with the use of identified search keywords in both Arabic and English. YouTube also provides a filtered search option. After

typing the search query in the search box at the top of any YouTube page, you click on the Filters drop-down menu under the search box. You can filter by content type (i.e., video, playlist, or movie). For example, by adding specific keywords, you can find an entire playlist of videos by clicking Playlist under "Results type" in the "Filters" drop-down menu for this keyword. The analysis was also extended to the comments on the YouTube video and was analysed in the social media interaction analysis of the post in Chapter 6.

Through the research, I also referred to certain blogs, as some of the selected cyberactivists had history of cyberactivism prior to the era of social media. I used three methods to search these blogs: requesting the RSS (Rich Site Summary), which provides most website content as long as the owner enables RSS on his/her blog; through CMS (Content Management System), which allows access to online content; and Wayback Machine, which has a full digital archive of all website contents since 1996. This tool can retrieve websites even if they were modified, deleted or are not currently available.

In all of the methods above, I first gain the consent of the cyberactivist for access to the data described above and seek his/her permission to analyse the data according to the protocols above. After identifying the selected posts, I conducted short follow-up interviews with each cyberactivist through secure text chat to review if my analysis resonated with their experience of the events.

The next step was to identify the keywords for the search to go through all the collected data and content. This process required identifying 100 to 200 words related to the topic to be applied for the search in archives to avoid irrelevant content. One challenge in searching was using Arabic, because there are a lot of variables in writing some of the letters; all searches included all forms of how a word is expected to be spelled in Arabic.

1.2.4. Criteria for Selection of Cyberactivists

The phenomenon of well-known Egyptian cyberactivists started around 2004. Egyptian public opinion began recognising specific names, mainly those who had "blogs" and had started to write about public issues in Egypt. However, since the Revolution in 2011, the popularity of cyberactivists skyrocketed, especially on social media websites like Facebook and Twitter, in addition to their blogs.[16] Cyberactivists in Egypt could mount to

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[16] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)

thousands, but once I applied the following criteria, the numbers of considered cyberactivists was reduced to less than twenty.

The selection of the studied cyberactivists depended on the following criteria:

Popularity: Most of the selected cyberactivists are considered celebrities/well-known both online and in real life. Some of them are public figures who have received international awards or hold a significant position in their professional life. They are also famous for their strong opinions, especially among a younger generation of Internet users. This criterion also considered how they were covered by mainstream media, their interaction with stakeholders during the Revolution and the number of TV interviews they had.

Number of followers: Number of followers is a good indicator for how to select a cyberactivists to study. Followers' numbers for cyberactivists selected for this research ranged between 100,000 to one million followers on Twitter, as Twitter was the most influential social media tool during the Revolution and it was before Facebook created the 'followers' option. Most selected cyberactivists will also have similar number of followers on other social media sites, but Twitter will be used as the main indicator. To note, number of followers is different from popularity, as in the cyberactivism realm there are social media accounts of cyberactivists with millions of followers, but they only exist online and sometimes work anonymously. I have excluded activists conducting advocacy using pseudonyms or remaining anonymous.

Issues covered: All selected cyberactivists are involved in human rights issues. Some of the cyberactivists never used the explicit human rights language and used the vernacular discourse as I will discuss in this research, however, this criterion focused on those covering human rights violations as a message in their posts even without using legal human rights terms. Although, in 2011, many cyberactivists turned into politics, which includes human rights issues too, not all Egyptian cyberactivists are known for posts about human rights issues. In this research, I focus on those who displayed an interest in human rights before the 2011 Revolution and on those who choose to talk about human rights topics specifically and intentionally, meaning that they are aware that they are addressing human rights issues while they practice their online activism.

Influential: Many cyberactivists played a crucial role in influencing the outcomes of human rights cases they addressed. For example, certain torture cases brought up by cyberactivists received public attention that later saw court rulings in favour of the victim. Also, during and in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution in 2011, many cyberactivists formed groups that represented the Revolution in negotiation with authorities when conveying the demonstrations' demands. This research will prioritise those who had a greater influence on the situation and outcome of events. This criterion mainly focuses on an outcome, mostly positive, attributed to the cyberactivist in connection with human rights issues.

Time [online]: Despite the fact that cyberactivists gained massive popularity during and after the 2011 Revolution, I focused on those who existed before 2011 and were already well-known by the time the uprising occurred. In this way, all selected cyberactivists have had Twitter accounts since 2008 and 2009.

Based on these criteria, I selected the following cyberactivists to study: Wael Abbas, Asmaa Mahfouz, Wael Ghonim, Wael Khalil, Gamal Eid, and Esraa Abdelfattah. Each of those cyberactivists will be presented in detail in Chapter 5.

1.2.5 Criteria for post selection

As I explained above, I used the aforementioned tools to identify between 50 to 100 posts for each of the selected cyberactivists based on their identified posts during the interview. Then I selected one post for each cyberactivist to study, this post was among the posts selected by the cyberactivists during the interview and also follows the selection criteria such as: whether the post had been produced by one of the cyberactivists identified, was made within the timeframe identified, addresses a human rights issue, uses one or more vernacularisation element, and finally, the extent to which it has received social media engagement (shares/likes/retweets/comments).

The selected social media post had to have two main elements: elements of vernacularisation and elements of international human rights issues. The elements of vernacularisation include language (colloquial Egyptian Arabic), religious references, local culture references, simplifying political/legal issues with examples/comparisons, use of visuals/pictures/comics, as well as comedy, jokes and sarcasm. In terms of timeframe, as the research is connected to the effect on the January Revolution, four out of the six selected

posts were posted the month prior to the revolution. The two other posts are from after the Revolution, to study their longer-term effect.

Each of these selected six posts was analysed within seven steps. The first step is presenting the original post in the form of a screenshot or a picture, in its original Arabic form from the social media tool. Second, a representation of the transcript and translation of the original Arabic post in English is produced. Third, providing the specific context and historical background of the post as described by the cyberactivist and by other data collected such as media sources. Fourth, description of the international human rights issues, legal and otherwise, with which the post engages. In terms of human rights issues, the selected social media posts included issues such as police brutality/torture, democracy/exchange of power, political participation, freedom of assembly, mobilisation, labour rights/Egyptians' civil rights abroad, social justice and freedom of expression. Fifth, an analysis of all the vernacular elements and concepts presented in the post in the local and vernacular discourse within the Egyptian context is made. These vernacular elements that were considered included slang language, profanity, religion reference, pop culture reference, use of visuals/pictures/comics, and comedy, jokes and sarcasm. Sixth, the interaction that the post received on social media, whether in the form of shares, likes or retweets depending on the social media tool, is presented, with an analysis of user or follower engagement on these posts and their relevance to the post's topic. The final step entails reflections from the cyberactivists themselves on the post, based on the interviews carried out and conversations had on the posts with the cyberactivists.

1.2.6 Measuring Influence

More recent studies showed that there is no definite theoretical consensus among scholars that there is a certain tool to measure social media engagement and influence. Some of these tools tried quantitative metric methods that proposed a simplified assessment of social media impact based on engagement such as comments, likes, shares, and number of followers. Other methods used the concept of reach, mainly trying to measure the impact of the content based on the number of users it reached. More complicated methods were used also that used sets of indexes such as rates of conversation, amplification, and applause.[17] A group of academics also suggest that quantitative measure for social media impact is not satisfactory, and that a qualitative measure would be more suitable. In this study, the

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[17] Mariapina Trunfio, 'Conceptualising and measuring social media engagement: A systematic literature review' (2021) Italian Journal of Marketing 281-284

qualitative measure was used, with focus of discourse analysis. Despite that a quantitative approach would have given a more measurable indicators to the influence of cyberactivists but taking into consideration difficulties that might be associated with such approach, such as resources, security, and technical issues, the qualitative approach was more suitable for this research. The qualitative approach to measure the impact of social media is a recognised approach, with focus on the actual content of the post, in addition to studying the textual forms of interactions, such as comments. This research also took into account the quantitative and numerical approaches by recording and comparing numbers, such as the numbers of likes and retweets.

1.2.7 Challenges and Risks

1.2.7.1. The Egyptian Arabic dialect

The Egyptian Arabic dialect, known locally as colloquial Egyptian or the Egyptian language, is spoken by most contemporary Egyptians. The Egyptian dialect is a North African dialect of the Arabic language and part of a Semitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family. It developed in the Nile Delta in Lower Egypt around the capital, Cairo. The Egyptian accent developed from classical Arabic that was transferred to Egypt during the seventh century AD after the Islamic conquest, which was intended to spread the Islamic faith among Egyptians. Egyptian Arabic is strongly influenced by the Coptic language, which was the mother tongue of Egyptians before the Islamic conquest. At later periods, it was also influenced—albeit in a more limited way—by other languages, such as French, Italian, Greek, Turkish, and English.[18] Egyptians, numbering more than 100 million now, speak a series of dialects, among which Cairene (from Cairo), is the most famous. The Egyptian accent is understood in most Arabic-speaking countries due to the influence Egyptian culture exerts on the region, as well as the dominant influence of Egyptian media, including the Egyptian cinema and music industries, on other countries in the Middle East and North

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[18] Tetsuo Nishio, 'Word order and word order change of wh-questions in Egyptian Arabic: The Coptic substratum reconsidered' (1996) 2nd International Conference of L'Association Internationale pour la Dialectologie Arabe Cambridge 171-179

Africa for more than a century, making it the one of the most widespread and most-studied Arabic dialects.[19]

While Egyptian Arabic is primarily a spoken dialect, it is found in written form in certain novels, plays, and poems (vernacular literature), as well as in comics, advertisements, and some popular newspapers. Whereas in most written media and in television news reports, Modern Standard Arabic, a unified language based on the language of the Qur'an, is used. The Egyptian dialect is most often written in the Arabic alphabet, although it is also commonly written in Latin characters or by using an international phonetic alphabet in linguistic texts and textbooks aimed at teaching non-indigenous people. On the Internet and in SMS, many people use what is called Franco version of Arabic to communicate written in Latin alphabet.

Some people also argue that the modern Egyptian dialect has developed—or has deteriorated, according to others—into a more vernacular level that dominates poor areas and shanty towns in Cairo and its outskirts. The story of the rise and fall of the Egyptian dialect caught the attention of the British Economist, which concluded in a report that the Egyptian vernacular began to decline dramatically, after it was for years the voice of the Arabs, according to the description of the magazine.[20] The Economist report, titled "The Story of the Rise and Fall of the Egyptian Colloquial Dialect," gave a political overview of the matter, considering that the decline in the Egyptian dialect is due to the decline of the Egyptian role in general in the region. The report reminds us that the Arab world has been affected by the Egyptian dialect since the 1940s, when Egyptian cinema began to impose itself on the scene and affected all Arab cinema industries and audiences.[21] At that time, Egyptian songs were at the height of their popularity, and the impact of Umm Kulthum's voice on millions of Arabs is uncontested. The speeches of late Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, which was broadcast on Radio Voice of the Arabs (based in Cairo), were able to ignite the enthusiasm of Arabs across the region.[22]

New generations belonging to poorer areas have developed their own dialect, culture and music. In the realm of music, we began to see festive songs or *mahraganat* مهرجانات seeking and producing new expressions. According to Egyptian researcher Anton Milad,

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[19] Mahmoud Husain, 'Why the Egyptian Dialect is the Most Spread?' (Limaza, 28 December 2018) <Link> accessed 18 January 2021
[20] A.V. 'The rise and fall of Egyptian Arabic' The Economist (London, 31 January 2018) <https://www.economist.com/prospero/2018/01/31/the-rise-and-fall-of-egyptian-arabic> accessed 19 June 2020
[21] ibid
[22] ibid

language is closer to a living organism that expresses the identities of peoples and the extent of their rise or decline.[23] The study believes that language has the function of facilitating the communication of peoples, through which they can express their thoughts and feelings, and therefore should not have fixed rules, because it is an organism that evolves as long as the needs of human beings evolve.[24]

1.2.7.2 Time Factor

The interviews for this dissertation were conducted between January 2017 and May 2019. Around that time none of the interviewed cyberactivists were not in detention yet. However, cyberactivists such as Wael Abbas were detained during that period, but after I already had the interview with him. As I will mention later, one of these cyberactivists is currently in detention, Esraa Abdel Fattah, while three of them on travel ban pending a court prosecution. The situation of those cyberactivists changed dramatically over the course of my research period. Unfortunately, all the changes were negative due to the crackdown by Egyptian authorities on human rights activism in general, and specially on cyberactivism. These developments in their lives and path of activism affected my research on different levels. First, the psychological effect, as it was heart-breaking for me to write and celebrate the past achievements of those renowned cyberactivists while they are currently paying a heavy price for such activism with their freedoms and safety. Despite this drastic changes the selected cyberactivists witnessed, the focus of the study was not affected by the later changes, as it focused on a period that preceded the recent crackdown.

Another time factor that had an impact on me while drafting this dissertation is the current political situation in Egypt now compared to how it felt in 2011 and after. Ten years after the Revolution and now we can obviously see how Egypt is back under a military dictatorship that is even more suppressive than the Mubarak regime. Living the dream of the revolution in person and sharing all those moments of hope were the main inspiration to this research. Seeing the hope fading and the goal becoming harder was not easy to comprehend. However, I still believe that the approach of this research might be a way forward to increase human rights awareness to counter such authoritarian regime.

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[23] Anton Milad, Modern Egyptian Dialect (Dar Rawafed 2014)
[24] Ibid 62

1.2.7.3 Security Risk

Security risk was present through out of the whole period of conducting this research. As I mentioned above, the selected cyberactivists are subjected to different kinds of legal prosecution due to their activism. It is saddening to say that some of the initial cyberactivists that I considered for this research were already in detention at the time I started my research, and some of them are still in detention since then, such as Alaa Abdel Fattah, whom I will talk about more in the final chapter. So, conducting this research depended heavily on security situation and the availability of cyberactivists and online content, which also disappears when the cyberactivist is in detention, whether for their own safety, or because of mass reporting by regime supporters.

Struggling with the security situation in Egypt for this research happened on different levels. On another side, in order for me to get the approval of the ELMPS Ethics Committee at the University of York to carry out the fieldwork research, I had to declare that all the interviews for this research will be carried out through a secure virtual online application. The decision of the Ethics Committee was based on the risk that I will be facing carrying out human rights research inside Egypt after the incident of the Italian PhD student at Cambridge University, Giulio Regeni, was allegedly tortured and killed by one of the Egyptian security bodies. I totally understood the Committee's decision, and that it is similar among most of UK universities as they cannot afford to have another Regeni among their students. However, being an Egyptian human rights activist myself and one of the senior managers of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, the Egyptian organisation that is legally representing the Regeni's family, I did not think that conducting such research will subject me to more risk than what I am in already. Also, I worked for some years with international human rights organisations specialised in human rights defenders' security, such as Front Line Defenders, and I had advanced trainings on dealing with such situations. However, I accepted the decision of the Ethics Committee happily, considering that the risk will be also to the cyberactivists that I will be interviewing, who are actually in much more risk than me. Therefore, I conducted all the interviews for this research through secured applications, including Signal and Jitsi.

For the purposes of this research, I acquired an oral consent from all the six interviewed cyberactivists to use their actual names in the research. The six cyberactivists totally understood the risks they faced, and they concluded that being mentioned in an

academic research in a university based in the United Kingdom would not add to the risk they face already in Egypt, as before, during, and after the research period all six cyberactivists were still active and had statements criticising the regime being published under their names on social media and newspapers.

Chapter 2. Vernacularisation of Human Rights: A Real Change or a Compromise

2.1. Introduction

For decades, the fight for human rights took on different forms and strategies depending on the political situation at the time. The year 2011 presented new horizons—and new challenges—to the human rights movement. The Arab Spring and the Occupy movements brought with them slogans and demands for more human rights and changes toward a more democratic form of governance. The human rights concept is originally a legal concept reflected in international documents and treaties constituting international human rights law. Since the 1980s, the concept of human rights has gained international support and credibility while a range of international resolution and treaties have been drafted to complement its international legal framework.[25]

For human rights to become a populous demand rather than a written law, a process of transformation has had to happen. Human rights activists have played an important role in exposing human rights violations that can then trigger public outcries and mobilisation, which has taken on different forms and strategies. One main tool used by activists is translating international human rights ideas into local language. Activists all over the world adopted international human rights language and translate it for grassroots efforts and vulnerable people who seek hope and change.[26] This process is called the "vernacularisation of human rights," namely the process whereby transnational ideas such as human rights have been adopted in local social settings and moved across the gap between a cosmopolitan awareness of human rights and local sociocultural understandings.[27] These transnational ideas take the form of legal documents mainly generated in transnational sites such as UN conferences and circulated globally by activists and states.[28] In order for human rights ideas to have a real impact, they need to be integrated within the consciousness of ordinary people worldwide.[29] The process of vernacularisation of human rights takes different forms, as I will explain in detail later in this chapter, such as framing, value packages or within a the frame of a social movement.

Once human rights activists and organisations realised the importance of vernacularising human rights language, new space was made to address more people and make them more fully aware of their rights and freedoms. The concept of vernacularisation thus might be the gateway through which activists can access different audiences and convey

[25] Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence* (1st edn, University of Chicago 2006) 2
[26] ibid
[27] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 38
[28] ibid
[29] Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence* (1st edn, University of Chicago 2006) 3

human rights messages in people's own language. This language will touch people through knowledge of their very specific culture and in ways that can address their specific needs. Using this type of language will also reduce tension between most of the population and activists. One main reason activists were called traitors by the majority in Egypt is simply because these activists began to sound like aliens to them. They spoke using a different language, introduced new concepts and values, and they also tried to induce change in the lives of the majority, who in general tend towards stability at any cost. Sally Merry explained this phenomenon; she thinks it is a very natural reaction by the public toward those activists, who are trapped in a situation in which they are called traitors by many because they speak this foreign language that made them sound like enemies, while in fact they actually work in the favour of the people, but just in a language they do nott understand.[30]

On the other side, the concept of vernacularisation of human rights has raised certain concerns regarding its ability to impact change. One main concern is that, if vernacularisation of human rights is achieved fully, it might merge completely into existing power relationships, thereby losing its potential ability to induce change.[31] If human rights are successfully framed to be compatible with existing traditional way of thinking, it will lack the ability to challenge existing power relations, which is how radical possibilities are introduced.[32] For example, if a vernacular discourse explored the compatibility between human rights and Islamic Shari'a law and reached a full integration of human rights within Islamic culture, this will mean that there will be no space for introducing radical changes that are meant to bring enhancement to the current situation. Scholars stress on the fact that human rights should be introduced into Islamic culture from within that culture itself by internal actors rooted in their respective societies.[33] On the other side, this process requires a degree of monitoring to avoid neutralising human rights standards through interpretations that might reproduce a status quo and fail to achieve real change.[34] In this chapter, I will answer further this question of how to apply a vernacularisation of human rights in this context without compromising its core values and losing the potential to induce change.

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[30] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 40
[31] Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence* (1st edn, University of Chicago 2006) 136
[32] ibid
[33] Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, 'State Responsibility Under International Human Rights Law to Change Religious and Customary law' (1994) Human Rights of Women National National and International Perspective 184
[34] Yuksel Sezgin, *Human Rights and Legal Pluralism* (1st edn, Transaction Publisher 2011) 94

In order to answer this question, I will explore in this chapter the main ideas of vernacularisation of human right and other relevant concepts related, such as framing and value packages and social movements. I will answer the following questions: Who is a vernaculariser? What makes a common activist a vernaculariser? What are the types of vernacularisers? I will also study the critiques of certain scholars on the concept of vernacularisation to understand the weaknesses of the process and how to potentially overcome them.

2.2. Vernacularisation of Human Rights

The concept of "vernacularisation" is not new to academic field. One of the earliest introductions to vernacularisation was developed by Benedict Anderson to explain the process of European linguistic professionals in the nineteenth century, such as lexicographers, grammarians, philologists, and litterateurs, to deviate from the original Latin language. This process was considered central to the shaping of nineteenth-century European nationalisms.[35] Vernacularisation of human rights is the process of appropriation and local adoption; whereby human rights ideas relate to a locality by taking some local ideological and social attributes while retaining some of the original human rights formulations.[36] The process of vernacularisation may involve aspects of both appropriation and translation. Appropriation here is mainly taking programs or ideas developed by activists in one setting and replicating them into another within a transnational discourse. Translation means adjusting the rhetoric and structure of these programs and ideas into local circumstances.[37] Appropriated programs are not necessarily translated but translating them will increase the probability of them being popular.[38]

There are two main forms of vernacularisation. The first form is "replication," where international ideas constitute the main ideology, mission and organisation, while the local context constitutes the distinctive content.[39] In that form, transnational ideas remain as they are, while the local cultural understanding shapes the actual implications and the way the

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[35] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Verso / New Left Books 1991) 40
[36] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441
[37] Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence* (1st edn, University of Chicago 2006) 135
[38] ibid
[39] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 44

work is carried out.[40] One example of "replication" is the adoption of an American treatment program for batterers into Chinese concept of masculinity, wherein Chan Ko Ling, a graduate social worker at the University of Hong Kong, developed an indigenous treatment program for batterers based on the Chinese values of masculinity by transplanting a local North American program.[41] The second form of vernacularisation is the "hybrid," which takes a more interactive form—between symbols, ideologies and organisational models—that are generated within a specific locality merged with other localities that result to a new hybrid institution.[42]

The vernacularisation's translation process might take a two-way approach or, as Merry puts it, up and down. Translators may "reframe local grievances up by portraying them as human rights violations. They translate transnational ideas and practices down as ways of grappling with particular local problems."[43] As such, vernacularisers may transform international ideas into local contexts and at the same time reinterpret local ideas and violations into international human rights language.[44] They act like media reporters, in this sense, and the knowledge of local language and situation enables them to present these ideas well. In doing so, they are not actually trying to appeal to donors or media, rather doing what they believe will help the cause they fight for and attract international solidarity.

2.3. Vernacularisers

One of the most important elements of the process of vernacularisation is the people who carry out this process. These persons are seen as intermediaries or translators, who working on different levels to intermediate between the local, regional, and global.[45] The vernacularisers' task is to take ideas and concepts and present them to another group in an acceptable way; mostly, this is not a one-person task. The work of vernacularisation is the result of the work of chains of actors that stretches from the source of international law at the UN to local actors.[46] Some scholars refer to them as the "knowledgeable," who are mainly individuals, in some cases migrants, who possess the knowledge of value to others and can

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[40] ibid
[41] ibid
[42] Ibid 46
[43] ibid
[44] ibid
[45] Ibid 48
[46] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441

enact a process of knowledge transfer by moving across space through innovative networks.[47] These innovative networks are mainly transnational and have the ability to cut across social network domains.[48] Social networks have a strong influence on the path of cultural circulation and its impact, and those who are well-positioned as messengers are key in this process.[49] From this, we can see cyberactivists and the way they use social media in general as a clear example of an effective vernaculariser.

Vernacularisers might take also the form of "activist packages" that have the ability to travel and come in the form of translated allegorical bundles that gather local meanings and find their place as distinctive interventions.[50] An example of activist packaging is the case of environmental activists of the Global North in Indonesia, who circulated a story of a local activist, Chico Mendes, and described him as a courageous and androgynous man who challenged the destructive frontier masculinity, while stripping his story from Brazilian cultural ideas of masculinity.[51]

Human rights translators' main concern is translating international human rights discourse and its legal forms into a specific situation of suffering and human rights violations.[52] For example, in China, the concept of women's rights was translated by local organisations into a concept that is fully embedded in the Chinese legal system, namely "women's rights and interest" as stated in national law.[53] There are many groups that are identified as human rights vernacularisers in Egypt. Among them are social movement activists, NGOs directors and staff, UN personnel working on human rights reports and who travel to their countries of origin, or those who travel between the capital and rural areas.[54] Accordingly, cyberactivists in Egypt, being identified as a new social movement, can be considered to be human rights vernacularisers.[55]

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[47] Neil M. Coe and Timothy G. Bunnell "Spatializing" knowledge communities: towards a conceptualization of transnational innovation networks' (2003) 3 (4) Global Networks 437-456.

[48] ibid

[49] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441

[50] Anna Tsing, *Friction: an ethnography of global connection* (Princeton University Press 2005) 250

[51] ibid

[52] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 39

[53] Meng Liu, Yanhong Hu, & Minli Liao 'Travelling theory in China: contextualization, compromise and combination' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 529

[54] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441

[55] Sherif Azer, 'Cyberactivism in Egypt: A New Social Movement' (MA thesis, The American University in Cairo 2009) 55

Being the translator in the middle gives you both power and vulnerability. Translators are powerful because of the knowledge they have, so they are able to manipulate others with less knowledge. They have this superior knowledge of international law and human rights values and also mastery of local language and knowledge. However, at the same time, they are vulnerable as they are always subject to accusations of disloyalty or double-dealing.[56] Because of their knowledge of both sides of interchange and the way they can control the flow of information back and forth, they are always subject to suspicion, envy and mistrust, whereby both sides wonder where their loyalty lies.[57] This is very applicable to the case of cyberactivists in Egypt; they are trapped in a situation where they are called traitors by many because they speak this international language that makes them sound like enemies of the state and people. Vernacularisers are also protected internationally because they are well-known human rights defenders. However, on the other side, they vulnerable too; "they are often distrusted, because their ultimate loyalties are ambiguous and they may be double agents."[58]

The process of vernacularisation is not restricted to one single set of translators between global and local sites; it is a whole series of actors who take on a set of ideas and apply a reframing process to put it in terms that appeal to a specific group.[59] At the same time, they also convey local grievances to the international source. One example is a programme in India that developed Nari Adalats, which relied heavily on government-hired administrators to work with field motivators called Sahyoginis who mainly used local women. The Sahyoginis from their side worked with groups of ten village collectives who had two or three leaders trained by feminist NGOs in Delhi.[60]

2.4. Types of Vernacularisers

There are different kinds of vernacularisers based on their position, motive, or task. The fist type is recognised by Levitt and Merry is the anointed. They are local leaders who, by virtue of their position, are chosen by the international community to carry out the task of

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[56] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 40
[57] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441
[58] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 40
[59] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441
[60] ibid

vernacularisation.[61] They possess the level of education and cultural capital to know about local issues and, at the same time, they attend international conferences and workshops in a way that enables them to represent international organisations and funders to dignitaries and government officials.[62]

The second type is the cosmopolitan elites, who are also active on the global level and integrated into the global network, but who possess less international prominence.[63] This group of vernacularisers mostly lived and studied abroad from their home countries or live in major urban cities; they belong to a network of activists and scholars exposed to global value packages and interact with the outside world on regular basis.[64]

The third type of vernacularisers, which constitute the majority, are the "beneficiaries and enactors."[65] They are the ones locally based and who have not travelled around much. They acquired their international ideas mainly from interacting with other activists and fellow staff members. They gained their knowledge from international elites, and they carry out a second-level vernacularisation process with their clients or the fellow volunteers they interact with.[66]

2.5. Strategies of Vernacularisation of Human Rights

2.5.1 Framing

In order to understand the process of vernacularisation of human rights, other concepts need to be studied, such as framing. The framing concept was developed by social movement theorists to assess the influence and persuasion of a specific idea within a social movement.[67] Framing is not the idea itself, but the package the idea is put in and how it is presented.[68] According to David Snow, framing is used by social movement activists as "they frame, or assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilise potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to

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[61] ibid
[62] ibid
[63] ibid
[64] ibid
[65] ibid
[66] ibid
[67] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 41
[68] ibid

demobilise antagonists".[69] The concept of framing emerged due to the conclusion reached by interactionists and constructionists that meanings do not have an automatic or natural association with our experiences, objects or events, but rather are made through an interactively based interpretive processes.[70] Frames are designed to render events into something meaningful that eventually will lead to organise experience and guide action.[71] The success of the vernacularisation process depends heavily on framing. Frames are not themselves ideas, but mainly the packaging of ideas and the way to represent them to generate shared beliefs, motivate collective action, and define appropriate strategies of action.[72]

Social movement theorists says that framing needs to be resonant within cultural traditions and narratives so it can be appealing to locals; the more the resonance it has, the more successful the frame will be.[73] Vernacularisers use framing to convey ideas from one context to another by adapting and reframing them to attach an original context to another context that resonates with the new location.[74] Framing can also take the form of an interpretive package that works on giving meaning to a specific issue through its internal structure, whereby there is a central organising idea at the core that is packaged in a frame so it can make sense of relevant events that suggest the core issue.[75]

One form of framing in the human rights field is indigenisation, which mainly refers to a change in a meaning and the way new ideas are framed and introduced within existing cultural norms, values, and practices, and which is used in development programs and human rights implementation. Indigenisation is perceived as the symbolic dimension of vernacularisation.[76] One example of indigenisation is NGOs in India use of slides of pre-

[69] David A. Snow, and Robert D. Benford 'Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization' (1988) 1 International Social Movement Research 197

[70] David A. Snow, 'Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields. In The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements' (2004) Blackwell 380

[71] David A. Snow, and Robert D. Benford, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment' (2000) 26 Annual Review of Sociology 611

[72] David A. Snow et al. 'Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation' (1989) 51 4 American Sociological Review 464

[73] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 41

[74] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441

[75] William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani, 'Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach' (1989) 95 (1) American Journal of Sociology 1-37

[76] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 39

Aryan goddesses to portray the concept of "feminine spiritual power" or *Shakti* so local women can imagine their power to face forms of oppression.[77]

Framing human rights ideas into local terms and adapting them to existing notions of justice might require abandoning some explicit references to human rights language altogether, which means hijacking these ideas for quite different purposes. International human rights ideas are reframed, in some cases dramatically, to fit into existing local justice and gender ideologies.[78]

In the case of women's rights, defining problems as legal, religious, economic, developmental, or gender-related might have consequences once framed in a specific category. The way of considering a problem is dependent on the path taken. So, for example, if a problem is framed as religious, it tends to stay on that path.[79] For example, frames affect how women's problems are defined and understood in how to theorise the causes of problems and their solutions and also how to identify which perspectives will be completely rejected.[80]

The framing message is considered to be a political project, whereby international ideas are associated with the West with all its implicit meanings of modernity, progress, or civilization. Once you try to adopt these ideas, it will bring symbolic values with it, which will lead to repositioning the individual or organisation in a different status hierarchy.[81] Human rights vernacularisers who carry out the task of mobilising human rights language guarantee themselves a wider audience and new possibilities for international alliances and coalitions. Also, this process can be driven by international donors, considering what to expose potential recipients to or what to encourage them to adopt.[82] In a collective action frame, a process of interpretive function is performed by simplifying and condensing aspects of the outside world, or the West, in a way that intends to mobilise potential adherents and constituents in order to garner bystander support.[83]

As a critique to framing theory, Mark Steinberg argues that framing theory ignores the continuous contestation over meanings with all their ambiguity and their susceptibility to

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[77] ibid

[78] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441

[79] ibid

[80] ibid

[81] ibid

[82] ibid

[83] David A. Snow, and Robert D. Benford 'Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization' (1988) 1 International Social Movement Research 197

change.[84] The framing analysis neglects the constraints imposed on the actors by the discourse, where the actor should be operating within an established discursive field which determines the available frameworks.[85] Therefore, the framing process should include more dialogic analysis that views the production of meaning as contested and shaped both by group conflicts and the internal dynamics of the discourse itself.[86]

2.5.2 Value Packages

Another form of vernacularisation is the global value package, which is a known form of circulation of ideas.[87] One example of these packages is the neo-liberal package, which contains democracy, capitalism, human rights, the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and gender equity.[88] This package is propagated through international institutions such as World Bank and Ford Foundation.[89] Another example of a value package is the religious package, like the ones based on gender complementarity, tradition, conservatism, and authority. This package is spread by religious groups such as Tablighi Jamaat or conservative Christian communities.[90]

The content of these global value packages is key to the vernacularisation process. The purpose of vernacularisation is to translate something into a communicable message that can appeal to potential recipient, a process that is mainly determined by the full comprehension of the contents of the package with all its values, norms, identities, concepts, and categories.[91] Vernacularisers who globally circulate ideas often think of the world in dichotomous categories: good vs. bad, moral vs. immoral, or sacred vs. secular. The audience they are hoping to target also think the same. These packages contain ideas, which are in general the meaningful categories people use to interpret social worlds.[92] These ideas can represent identities, such as immigrants, criminals, or human rights victims; sometimes they represent classificatory systems. In this way, adopting new ideas depends on framing the

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[84] Marc W. Steinberg, 'The Talk and Back Talk of Collective Action: A Dialogic Analysis of Repertoires of Discourse among Nineteenth-Century English Cotton Spinners' (1999) 105 American Journal of Sociology 736
[85] ibid
[86] ibid
[87] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441
[88] ibid
[89] ibid
[90] ibid
[91] ibid
[92] ibid

message so it can be easily inserted or connected with these categories of potential recipients of the vernacularisation process.[93]

2.6. Vernacularisation and social movements

It is particularly important to try to understand the role of vernacularisers/activists as a form of social movement. There are some common characteristics between the classic forms of social movements and human rights activists, such as the informal interaction network form they take, frameworks built on shared beliefs and solidarity, and the use of collective action that focuses on specific conflicts, including ultimately the use of protest as a way to demonstrate action.[94] In this section, I will draw on some of the references and the arguments I came across in my MA thesis on cyberactivism and new social movements.

As a general definition of social movements, scholars have said that a social movement is "a collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interest and, for at least some significant part of their social existence, a common identity."[95] Some scholars see social movements in a broader sense that might include more rebellious or revolutionary groups, defining them as deliberate collective action aiming to promote change by any means, including violence, illegality, or revolution.[96] Definition of social movements can also be found in encyclopaedias, such as Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, which sees social movements in a more of a collective aspect, and seen as a "loosely organised but sustained campaign in support of a social goal, typically either the implementation or the prevention of a change in society's structure or values. Although social movements differ in size, they are all essentially collective."[97] Some scholars have also agreed that social movements are a response to injustice that have led to some kind of mobilisation.[98] Other scholars focus on the element of "deprivation" as the main aspect of social movements and think of them as a "manifestation of feelings of deprivation

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[93] ibid

[94] Donatella Della Porto and Mario Diani, *Social Movements An Introduction* (Blackwell Publishers Ltd 1999) 14

[95] Alan Scott, *Ideology and The New Social Movements* (Unwin Hyman Ltd 1990) 6

[96] David Dietrich, *Rebellious conservatives: Social movements in defense of privilege* (Springer, 2014)

[97] 'Social Movements' (Encyclopedia Britannica Online) <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/551335/social-movement> accessed 18 November 2018

[98] Enrique Larana and others, New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity (Temple University Press 1994) 6

experienced by actors in relation to other social subjects, and of feelings of aggression resulting from a wide range of frustrated expectations."[99]

From these definitions, it seemed that many scholars agreed on change as the central aspect of the rise of a social movement, whether this movement wants to make a change or resist one that is taking place. Sociologists have argued that social movements may use violence or illegal means to make that change and should still be considered social movements. Some Scholars believed that political participation as one of the main elements of social movements, however that political participation will take the form of protest rather than and organised movement. Another aspect of social movements that scholars discussed is the collective, which included collective action, collective claim, or collective interest. On the other side, scholars such as Alan Scott, saw that the "individual identity" is the prerequisite to a collective identity, which means that an individual has to recognise themselves first before developing a common or collective identity.[100]

Social movement theorists believe that those who play the role in circulation and diffusion of information do not have to be in physical contact with the recipients, given that much of contemporary communication does not require interpersonal dynamics. Rather, it depends on modern technologies to disseminate its message, while joining the physical and the social to give a meaning to the technical.[101] Through technology, the transnational message is broadcast through the Internet to an unknown audience, or is picked up by mediators—in our case, the vernacularisers—who convey the message to other publics in their own ways.[102] Activists might play a role in vernacularisation in what Tarrow calls "mediated diffusion," where individuals, or organisations are brought together through a common mission to convey a specific message.[103] The Internet is a great tool to diffuse a transnational message to a local level; however, it might fail to attain the same ideological level of the original message and the coherent decision-making element compared to earlier forms of social movements.[104]

There is a tension between international human right law as a legal set of doctrines and institutions working on monitoring governments and pressuring them, and as an idea

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[99] Donatella Della Porto and Mario Diani, Social Movements An Introduction (Blackwell Publishers Ltd 1999) 14
[100] Alan Scott, Ideology and The New Social Movements (Unwin Hyman Ltd 1990) 18
[101] Sidney Tarrow, *The new transnational activism.* (Cambridge University Press 2005) 199
[102] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441
[103] Sidney Tarrow, *The new transnational activism.* (Cambridge University Press 2005) 208
[104] ibid

used by social movements for mobilisation.[105] Human rights ideas might leave the legal realm of the UN and become mobilising ideas for social movements like cyberactivists. Once human rights ideas move from the legal aspect to social movement, they take on a significantly difference with different actors and a different set of training.[106] UN human rights depends mainly on lawyers, focusing on building cases and appeals to UN bodies, while social movements' human rights depend on activists working on building public consciousness and confronting governments. International human rights law is "embedded in documents, interpretation, processes of monitoring, while human rights social movements draw on the legality of human rights in a broader and more open way, focusing on how these ideas are adopted and transformed."[107]

Both the international legal aspect of human rights and the social movement aspects need each other, despite the fundamental differences. Social movements expand the domain of human rights through bringing new rights and issues. They make use of human rights rhetoric to generate public support that might result to and outrage to support their cause.[108] As social movements need this international legal cover that gives their cause legitimacy and pressure on governments, international human rights also need social movements for publicity, public outrage and to put pressure on governments.[109] This distinction has an implication within social movements that the meaning of human rights is fluid and open to grassroots activism. International human rights are important to social movement activists because they can always refer to international law while taking a different meaning beyond the control of legal institutions.[110]

When social movement activists carry out the process of vernacularisation of human rights, the idea of human rights takes a broader form than the one in legal documents.[111] In the hands of the vernacularisers who are social movement activists, international human rights ideas become something totally new as they seize and wrestle with them.[112] Activists as a social movement might not be organised, but they do form a kind of collective action. This collective action, once started, will inevitably challenge the more powerful, oppressive government that resists change. This challenge will take the form of popular movement that

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[105] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441
[106] ibid
[107] ibid
[108] ibid
[109] ibid
[110] ibid
[111] ibid
[112] ibid

eventually will lead to the overthrow of said government.[113] This could apply to the case in Egypt during the Revolution in 2011.

2.7. Vernacularisation and Avoiding the Compromise

Adopting the vernacularisation process in human rights will lead to some dilemmas. One main issue that vernacularisers face is when reaching a certain level of compatibility between international human rights norms and local norms leads to a failure to induce change to the status quo.[114] Too much resonance will make the idea less radical, which will reduce the level of social change induced by such idea. This is why some leaders choose a non-resonant approach, and are more confrontational, so that their ideas can induce social change in the long run.[115] Choosing this high level of resonance to locality will require sacrificing of human rights idealism, accepting compromises related to the demands from authorities, a change of priorities, and may possibly exclude some groups and specific demands, or fail to represent the interests of some potential constituencies.[116] As argued by social movement theorists, frames need to be culturally resonant in order to facilitate the adoption of ideas. On the other hand, academics argue that resonant approaches are less radical than those that are nonresonant, which encourage movement leaders to choose a nonresonant approach that is more likely to induce change in the long run, rather than one with a fuller resonance that lacks the capacity for radical change.[117] Blending human rights completely in the surrounding social environment will result in losing the radical possibilities of human rights because it is the unfamiliarity of the ideas within them that makes them affect traditional ways of thinking.[118] For example, a full vernacularisation of domestic violence might fail to denaturalise male privilege to use violence against women as a form of discipline.[119] However, without a familiar form, new human rights ideas will instantly be rejected.[120]

Vernacularisation of human rights is very much required in the case of a closed social community or a group with very strong tradition driven from a belief, such as Islamic

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[113] Anthony Oberschall, Social Movements (Transaction Publishers 1993) 1
[114] ibid
[115] Myra Marx Ferree, 'Resonance and Radicalism: Feminist Framing in the Abortion Debates of the United States and Germany' (2003) 109 (2) American Journal of Sociology 304
[116] ibid
[117] Myra Marx Ferree, 'Resonance and Radicalism: Feminist Framing in the Abortion Debates of the United States and Germany' (2003) 109 (2) American Journal of Sociology 305
[118] Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence* (1st edn, University of Chicago 2006) 178
[119] ibid
[120] ibid

countries. Human rights ideas become more effective when they use Islamic approaches and present human rights through culturally influential and familiar sources such as the Holy Qu'ran.[121] For example, in 2000, Egypt passed a law that allows women to unilaterally divorce themselves from their husbands. It was mainly the effort of the National Committee for Women, which found evidence within the Islamic tradition that supports gender equality, and thus managed to argue against Islamic law professors, securing a law in favour of women.[122] This is an example of how vernacularisation can work on a legal level, by advocating for legal change in favour of human rights using local discourse. However, this might not be the case for all human rights, or specifically women's rights. Furthermore, it is the challenge that is offered by human rights concepts to traditional relationships that grants them the power to invoke a change on local and legal consciousness.[123]

Islamic scholars specialised in human rights have realised this dilemma. An-Na'im, in his proposal for cross-cultural dialogue on human rights, envisioned a conversation over incompatible values that respects cultural differences but also stresses on the importance of universal standards.[124] As a solution, An-Na'im suggested one that is more pragmatic, focusing on developing dialogues within and among countries.[125] This dialogic approach is used by many activists to localise human rights.[126]

Another solution suggested by Merry is not to consider human rights frameworks as a replacement for already existing frameworks, but rather an additional dimension to the way individuals approach problems. In this approach, victims are not expected to abandon their earlier perspectives, such as kinship obligations, for instance, but rather add a new layer of rights frameworks over the existing ones.[127] Consequently, in this approach, there will be no merging and blending, but rather two distinct coexisting sets of ideas, with the hope that, over time and through changing circumstances, one set of ideas will prevail over the other.[128] Sometimes human rights approaches will also constitute an alternative for the victim after exhausting local means. For example, if a woman complains about domestic violence and tries to talk to elders in the family but receives no respond, she might turn to human rights organisations, seeking what may offer her a more powerful framework to redress her

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[121] Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence* (1st edn, University of Chicago 2006) 180
[122] Esam Anwar Selim, General Theory for Personal Status for Non-Muslim Egyptians (1st edn, Nour Al Islam 2009) 45
[123] Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence* (1st edn, University of Chicago 2006) 180
[124] ibid
[125] ibid
[126] ibid
[127] ibid
[128] ibid

grievance.[129] Another approach I mentioned earlier that depends on the element of time is the nonresonant approach, which might be much slower, but provides radical change without any compromise on the original ideas.

It is also understood that any kind of vernacularisation of human rights on any level shall not change any fundamental global human rights values, given that these values are stipulated in written international human rights law documents that will not react to local rejections or be changed at their core.[130] Sometimes, the legal nature of human rights makes it harder to be tailored to a local context. At the same time, it is this legal nature that is what gives human rights its authority, legitimacy, power of implementation, and obligation to the state.[131]

Vernacularisers of human rights are mainly conveying new ideas, and most societies reject or ignore new ideas by default. These new ideas can be folded into pre-existing institutions that then create a hybrid discourse, which will not lead to any change in the existing situation.[132] It is very important for translators to be aware of this issue and know that they should assess what extent they are able to challenge local norms and traditions and how they should package radical ideas from international norms to familiar frames accepted by locals.[133]

2.8. Other Challenges to Vernacularisation of Human Rights

Another challenge that human rights vernacularisers face is maintaining international relevance while localising issues, so that their work has hope of achieving impact using the pressure and power of international institutions that are host to such ideas. International human rights ideas, once vernacularised, can be subverted, seized and transformed into something completely different from their international precepts, allowing for the placement of ideas outside the international legal system while still calling them the same name.[134] Localised human rights issues must resonate with the international legal framework of human rights so they can gain the legitimacy of a legal claim, which is what gives human rights true

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[129] ibid 222
[130] ibid 219
[131] ibid 222
[132] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 40
[133] ibid
[134] ibid

power.[135] In most cases, when theories transform or travel from their original form, they lose the power and rebelliousness associated with them and they become more domesticated, historicised and assimilated.[136] One other issue that might face human rights vernacularisers is the theoretical or rhetorical acceptance of human rights by locals, but the failure to put them into practice. This is a common downside in relation to legal changes or amendments to the law.[137]

One of the main elements of vernacularisation is meaning. Meanings in the social semiotic perspective are produced by the interaction between systems of signs and social action, whereby words may be interpreted differently by activists and their targets.[138] The message is always multivocal, so it is always possible for actors and targets to interpret these signs differently than intended. However, there are limitations to the ability of the producers of such discourses to control their meanings.[139] One of the main challenges faced by human rights translators is that they are trapped in this situation, and they have to face "the constraints of existing discursive fields where complex and multivocal messages are open to various, and uncontrollable, interpretations."[140]

Even though the purpose of vernacularisation is clearly the interest of the victims of human rights violations, this might also have drawbacks that might affect its targeted audience. Vernacularisation is generally seen as a challenge to the state and public awareness; however, at the same time, it might have unintended consequences in supporting the state or pre-existing norms.[141] One characteristic of these ideas is that they are resisted by those who are in power (states, men, etc.) for the fear of losing power.[142] Some legal governments find these transnational human rights ideas as obstacles to delivering their own local version of justice.[143] Creating new ideas by stimulating collective memories, emotions, values, history, and language may create barriers and burdens that might have a negative

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[135] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441

[136] Edward Said, *The world, the text, and the critics.* (Harvard University Press 1989) 23

[137] N. Rajaram and Vaishali Zararia, 'Translating women's human rights in a globalizing world (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 462

[138] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 41

[139] ibid

[140] ibid

[141] Sealing Cheng, 'The Paradox of Vernacularization: Women's Human Rights and the Gendering of Nationhood' (2011) 84 (2) Anthropological Quarterly 475

[142] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 41

[143] Ibid 38

effect on minorities.[144] Excessive stress on local norms, like gender hierarchy and patriarchy, without real radical challenge will end up in favour of supporting a state and the command of the nation at the expense of individual rights.[145]

Some scholars see vernacularisation as a profession; vernacularisers may be driven by financial gains, so they must speak the language of international human rights in order to attract donors to get funds and global media attention.[146] This can be done through international fundraising organisations and foundations established to help victims.[147] However, in most cases, vernacularisers are mostly independent and not funded by any organisations; they instead act based on their own motivations and belief in human rights and the dignity of humans. Many vernacularisers are actually victims of violations themselves, leading to their turning to activism to spread awareness about the issues they suffer personally.[148] Thus, the idea that vernacularisers use international human rights language only to receive funds may not be applicable to all cases, many of whom are motivated more by ideological belief than financial gain.

2.9. Conclusion

If there is a way forward for the human rights movement in societies like Egypt, it is the vernacularisation of human rights. Once human rights activists are able to address people with their own language, they will be no longer perceived as intruders or traitors, and the human rights message will appeal to more people. This will, in turn, open the door to inducing drastic changes as societies accept values that might have been alien to them once these values are put in a language they understand. Human rights values are made to be in favour of people so they can live a better life with more rights, justice, and freedom. Vernacularisation can take different forms, such as replication or hybrid models. Vernacularisers, who are seen as human rights activists, are the main actors of the vernacularisation process. For them to carry out the process of vernacularisation, they need to fully understand its forms, strategies, and drawbacks. One main issue of vernacularisation is that if it reaches a high level of compatibility between international human rights norms and

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[144] ibid

[145] Gaule S. Rubin, *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality* (Pandora 1989) 67

[146] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 42

[147] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441

[148] ibid

local norms, it will cease to induce actual change. To overcome this issue, vernacularisers may use different strategies, such as choosing a nonresonant approach and stress on the factor of challenge tradition; however, this might take a longer time to induce change. Another method is to adopt a pragmatic approach, focusing on developing dialogues within and among countries. One other approach is to consider a human rights framework not as a replacement of already existing frameworks, but rather an additional dimension to the way individuals approach problems.

Chapter 3. Cyberactivism: A New Old Form of Activism

3.1. Introduction

The Internet has become important to almost all aspects of our life, from the very personal aspect to the most public and advanced. The use of the Internet has now expanded to the level of activism, organising protests and other forms of political activism, as we will discuss later in the case of Egypt. Using the Internet as a tool of protest and activism is one example of what the Internet can offer. Cyberactivists have moved outside the cyber realm to the streets, organising protests and mobilising the public on different issues. The Internet has presented itself as a companion to political life in the world generally, as the use of the Internet is now expanded to, for example, elections campaigning, political participation, expressing political opinions and many forms of political activities.

One of the main issues I discuss in this chapter is how cyberactivism fits within the frame of regular activism. It is becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate between cyberactivism and actual activism as digital and social media became a main part of regular ways about learning different aspects of life, such as business, governing, political campaigning and many other forms of mobilisation. In this way, cyberactivism might be considered a continuum rather than a special category.[149] We are living in an age where there is a digital component to all kinds of social actions due to technology's provision of enhanced elements, such as speed, diffusion, reach, budget cost and many other elements that shift the communication realm from its classic hierarchical form.[150]

Some classic scholars argued the importance of structured organisations in putting into action the shared interests of a "latent group" of citizens with shared interests and vision. However, new technologies provide a less structured and more liquid organisational form that unites the interests of different groups from below. Authority in these types of networked social movements is seen as "polycentric," or based on a multitude of hubs and authorities.[151] Other scholars argue that this new networked politics is completely rhizomatic and represents a perfectly distributed crowd, free from authoritative leaders.[152]

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[149] Martha McCaughey (ed), *Cyberactivism in the Participatory Web*, (1st edn, Routledge 2014) 34
[150] ibid 36
[151] W. Lance Bennett, 'Communicating Global Activism: Strengths and Vulnerabilities of Networked Politics' (2003) 6 Information Communication Society 4
[152] Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, 'New Media and Internet Activism: From the 'Battle of Seattle' to Blogging' (2004) 6-1 New Media & Society 87

In this chapter, I will explore the concept of cyberactivism and will put it within an academic frame that can explain it. First, I will demonstrate the different definitions of cyberactivism and different terms that are associated with it. After that, I will study the history and the beginning of cyberactivism through different examples from all over the world in general with a focus on the Egypt case. Afterwards, I will move to the main argument in this chapter which is the relationship between the new concept of cyberactivism and more classic forms of activism. Cyberactivism might fall within the framework of social movements, but a more modern concept of social movements might be more convenient and explains it better, such as that of new social movements. Cyberactivism is seen by many scholars as a kind of collective action, but other scholars find that it falls within the frame of a more recent version of collective actions—namely, connective actions.

3.2 What is Cyberactivism?

Before I discuss the case of Egypt as it relates to cyberactivism, first I will explore the concept of cyberactivism and how this modern form of activism is different from the classic form of activism. As it says in the prefix of the term, cyberactivism is associated with the use of the Internet and its different tools, such as email, blogs and social media websites. Cyberactivism is defined by scholars from the University of Southern California as "a means by which advanced information and communication technologies, e.g. e-mail, list-serv, and the www of the Internet, are used by individuals and groups to communicate with large audiences, galvanizing individuals around a specific issue or set of issues in an attempt to build solidarity towards meaningful collective actions."[153] However, other scholars refuse to set a fixed definition to cyberactivism as they believe any definition will narrow the concept and limit it, and it will be as difficult as defining activism itself.[154] Other scholars have tried to put cyberactivism in a familiar frame by categorizing it into three main categories: 1) awareness/advocacy, 2) organisation/mobilisation, and 3) action/reaction.[155] We can see the cyberactivist as a person who tends to launch an initiative related to public concern in their surrounding environment. Cyberactivists exist within the virtual world where they present their causes using tools the Internet provides. Before the Internet, activism followed the

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[153] Kazys Varnelis, *Networked Publics* (MIT 2008) 59
[154] Martha Mccaughey and Michael D.Ayers, *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice*, (Routledge 2003) 14
[155] ibid 72.

hierarchal nature of society, whereby the change has to come from those who are societal elites and hold power. In contrast, the network nature of the Internet completely changed the traditional concept of an "elite." In the cybersphere, the power of change is available to members of the e-community, unlike hierarchical society in which governments, elites and senior management have a monopoly on sources of information and completely control over its broadcast and diffusion.[156]

Even within the cybersphere, there is a distinction between the old ways of cyberactivism, such as blogging, and the more recent tools of Web 2.0 such as Twitter and Facebook. Blogging is considered one of the earliest forms of cyberactivism. The term "blog" appeared in the late 1990s and originated from the term "web journal," then became "web log" then "weblogs" and finally "blogs."[157] A simple definition of a blog is that they are "frequently modified webpages containing dated entries listed in reverse chronological sequence"[158] with a "dominant use of first person"[159] in the writing style. The term "blogger" refers only to the authors of blogs, not those who read the blogs. Justin Hall is considered one of the earliest bloggers in the world, as he started blogging in 1994 while he was a student at Swarthmore College.[160] Blogs started to play a political role starting 2004 when a presidential candidate in the United States of America, Howard Dean, used them to reach his supporters.[161] However, blogs were used earlier than this in alternative journalism right after 11 September 2001, when many blogs were covering news on the war on terror, including Vodkapundit.com and Dailykos.com.[162] Most well-known cyberactivists in Egypt are among the earliest bloggers in Egypt, such as Manal and Alaa,[163] Sharkawy,[164] Malek X,[165] and Misr Digital.[166] These blogs were important sources for following up on what was happening in the political arena at the time. All these cyberactivists have since abandoned their blogs and moved to a more recent tool of the Web 2.0, such as Twitter or Facebook.

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[156] Khalid Hanafy, 'Cyberactivists: A New Pressuring Power' (2004) Alarabiya <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2004/06/16/4390.html > accessed 12 November 2020
[157] Mark Tremayne, Blogging, Citizenship and the Future of Media (Routledge 2007) vii
[158] ibid 3
[159] ibid vii.
[160] Reyhan Harmanci, 'Time to get a life -- pioneer blogger Justin Hall bows out at 31' San Francisco Chronicle (San Francisco, 20 February 2005) <https://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Time-to-get-a-life-pioneer-blogger-Justin-Hall-2697359.php> accessed 25 May 2020
[161] Robbie Allen, 'the Impact of Blogging' Rallen Home (20 December 2005) <http://rallenhome.com/essays/essay5.html> accessed 18 May 2019
[162] Mark Tremayne, Blogging, Citizenship and the Future of Media (Routledge 2007) xiii
[163] 'Manal and Alaa Blog' <http://manalaa.net> accessed 2 June 2019
[164] 'Sharkawy Blog' <http://sharkawy.wordpress.com> accessed 2 June 2019
[165] 'Malek X Blog' <http://malek-x.net> accessed 2 June 2019
[166] 'Misr Digital Blog' <http://misrdigital.blogspirit.com> accessed 2 June 2019

The Internet itself developed immensely over the last few years, while new concepts emerged to describe the new social aspect of the Internet such as the concept of "Web 2.0". Web 2.0 helped create and spread content that changed social movement activism and organising.[167] Web 2.0 was developed mainly for commercial purposes because, as consumers help build a business online by "liking" or "pinning" of things they are interested in online, they receive advertisements targeted to their individual web-browsing activity. However, activists started using Web 2.0 and other communication tools existed to share their concerns with as many people as possible and to mobilise more people around those issues they are concerned with.[168]

Even though cyberactivism is a new concept, it is combined with many forms of movement organising and protest from the analogue era, such as collecting donations and volunteer work, talking face-to-face with people, court-hearing monitoring, demonstrations on the streets and clashes with security forces. The question of whether online activism led to actual participation in demonstrations is very controversial. It is obvious now that movements are not just offline or just online, but rather a hybrid of both. Therefore, we can no longer ask the question of whether or not Web 2.0 has a direct impact on actual participation as it is clear that it is more complicated than that.[169]

Now, cyberactivists can easily organise social activities through creating blogs, Tweets or Facebook pages that do not require any special knowledge or cost any money and can blend virtual activism with physical movements, such as what happened in the Occupy movement, Arab Spring or other peace movements.[170] The movement in Iran in 2009 during the Iranian elections was called the "Twitter revolution" as Twitter was viewed the main medium of choice for most activists.[171] The actual influence of Twitter on the Iran case is debatable, but from the evidence seen, it seems that social media played the role of an additional networking tool for activists, rather than promoting the demonstrations.[172]

There is an ongoing debate about the role of cyberactivists and social media in the Arab Spring in 2011 and the change of public awareness. There is consensus that cyberactivists and social media played a role during the uprisings; however, there is wide range of opinions as to what extent they played a role during the revolution compared to

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[167] Martha McCaughey, Cyberactivism in the Participatory Web, (1st edn, Routledge 2014) 13
[168] ibid
[169] ibid 14
[170] ibid 23
[171] Devin Gaffney, '#iranElection: quantifying online activism.' (2010) In: Proceedings of the WebSci10: Extending the Frontiers of Society On-Line 3
[172] Martha McCaughey (ed), *Cyberactivism in the Participatory Web*, (1st edn, Routledge 2014) 109

other factors like written media or TV shows.[173] For example, in the case of the Egyptian Revolution, it seems that the focus of the research done so far is on the role of cyberactivists during the revolution itself, with all the calls for mobilisation or translating Tweets to English to be picked up by international media, which put certain Egyptian cyberactivists at the top of the global list of popular accounts. On the other hand, researchers undermined the role cyberactivists played over the years that preceded the Revolution. Some researchers do refer to the work done by cyberactivists before the Revolution in exposing violations by the government; however, they always seem to refer to a select few cases in specific, which might overshadow the actual role cyberactivists played in changing the mentality of the public concerning human rights issues.[174] Fieldwork researchers who worked in Egypt right after 2011 believe that the Internet is the tool that young revolutionaries in Egypt chose to express themselves through because it constituted the open space that this generation chose for daily communication.[175] Social media became the main channel for young, educated Egyptians to express themselves long before 25 January, one reason being that political life in Egypt was totally polarised between Mubarak's National Democratic Party and the Islamic groups like the Muslim Brotherhood at the time.[176] This younger generation did not find a place to be represented in political life or normal media, and thus took to new media to express themselves concerning public issues.[177]

One key indication of how the Internet played a bigger role during the Revolution can be seen in the way the Egyptian government took pre-emptive measures against the protests by shutting down the whole Internet service in Egypt on the Day of Anger on 28 January 2011, as it recognised how crucial the Internet was to protesters for coordination, mobilisation and organising.[178] However, some scholars see the term Facebook Revolution as not representative of the full truth, either. Many of those who took part in the Revolution see that this term undermines the role of the millions of people who took to the streets until the

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[173] Elizabeth Iskandar, 'Connecting the National and the Virtual: Can Facebook Activism Remain Relevant After Egypt's January 25 Uprising?' (2011) 5 International Journal of Communication 1225
[174] Sherif Azer, 'Cyberactivism in Egypt: A New Social Movement' (MA thesis, The American University in Cairo 2009)
[175] Miriyam Aouragh and Anne Alexander, 'The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of the Internet revolution' (2011) 5 International Journal of Communication 1344
[176] Elizabeth Iskandar, 'Connecting the National and the Virtual: Can Facebook Activism Remain Relevant After Egypt's January 25 Uprising?' (2011) 5 International Journal of Communication 1225
[177] ibid
[178] Adrienne Russell, 'Extra-National Information Flows, Social Media, and the 2011 Egyptian Uprising' (2011) 5 International Journal of Communication 1238

fall of Mubarak.[179] Some scholars argue that social media and ICT in general made a strong contribution to promulgate anti-government perception and apply pressure on governments to step down, but that their main role was restricted to facilitating communication and providing command and control for the protestors, and that it was the target of the government.[180]

The use of social media and the Internet in general to pressure governments to make reforms is not new and the Arab Spring was not the first to witness this. One of the earliest examples of the use of Internet in campaigning to pressure government to apply reform is the blogging in the years between 1994 and 1996.[181] Some scholars traced the debut of cyberactivism back to 1990 with the case of Lotus MarketPlace, when thousands of protests and complaints were sent to the Lotus Software company as a response to the release of a CD that contained a database of personal data of their users.[182]

In later years, social media was used in many countries to organise protests against the government, such as in Iran, Moldova, Philippines and Urumqi in China, and also in Mozambique.[183] Two decades after the Zapatista uprising that used listserv, we see how new tools of social media, like Facebook and Twitter, were used to organise protests in Egypt and also attracted the world's attention and support to the Egyptian Revolution. The main difference between the Mexican uprising and the Egyptian one was the millions of people around the world who were hooked to social media hungry for first-hand information, as even mainstream media was gathering its news from social media.

Prior to the 2011 revolution, Egyptian Internet activists were mainly using Facebook as a platform for exchanging and sharing knowledge. They also established networks of activists from the Arab world and outside in order to learn more on successful political resistance and protest.[184] Despite all the attempts prior to 25 January 2011, to organise a nationwide protest, none of these incidents met success like in the case of 2011 Egypt. In these previous incidents, social media had an impact, like helping activists' network and

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[179] Miriyam Aouragh and Anne Alexander, 'The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of the Internet Revolution' (2011) 5 International Journal of Communication 1344

[180] Brett Van Niekerk, Kiru Pillay and Manoj Maharaj, 'Analyzing the Role of ICTs in the Tunisian and Egyptian Unrest from an Information Warfare Perspective' (2011) 5 International Journal of Communication 1406

[181] David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, 'Emergence and Influence of the Zapatista Social Network' (2001) Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime and Militancy 171

[182] Martha Mccaughey and Michael D.Ayers, *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice* (Routledge 2003) 26

[183] Brett van Niekerk and others, 'Analyzing the Role of ICTs in the Tunisia and Egypt Unrest from an Information Warfare Perspective' (2011) International Journal of Communication 1406

[184] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)

making them more visible, but there was no dramatic and obvious change like in the case of Egypt.[185]

3.3. Cyberactivism: A Social Movement or a New Social Movement

One main form of classic activism is social movements. In this section, I will recall some of the arguments I came across in my MA thesis on cyberactivism as a new social movement, as I believe that this research is a continuation to my previous research and a further study to the concept of cyberactivism. Social movements are seen as a "collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interest and, for at least some significant part of their social existence, a common identity."[186] Social movements might also include more rebellious or revolutionary groups and define them as a deliberate collective action aiming to promote change by any means that would include violence, illegality, or revolution.[187] These definitions can be easily applied to cyberactivists all over the world. For cyberactivists, the Internet has become a virtual gathering place, and by time, the Internet a fertile soil wherein social movements can dwell. There are many factors and characteristics that allowed the Internet to play this vital role to social movements. The Internet allows social movements to communicate,generate, and distribute information in a cheap and effective way, in addition to allowing for reactions, responses and feedback, and within a decentralised structure that relies on a textual nature in its communication system.[188]

However, cyberactivism might also be seen within the frame of a more modern concept of social movements that would be more convenient to the nature of cyberactivism. The characteristics of the Internet we mentioned above are in accordance with "the requisite features of new social movements: non-hierarchical, open protocol; open communication; and self-generating information and identities."[189] So we can deduct from the previous statement that it is more likely to find a new social movement that is initiated on the Internet, thus making it more convenient to study the case of cyberactivists within the context of social movement. The emergence of new forms of collective action in the 1970s and 1990s,

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[185] Elizabeth Iskandar, 'Connecting the National and the Virtual: Can Facebook Activism Remain Relevant After Egypt's January 25 Uprising?' (2011) 5 International Journal of Communication 1225
[186] Alan Scott, *Ideology and The New Social Movements* (Unwin Hyman Ltd 1990) 6
[187] David Dietrich, Rebellious conservatives: Social movements in defense of privilege (Springer, 2014)
[188] Martha Mccaughey and Michael D.Ayers, Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice, (Routledge 2003) 129.
[189] ibid

especially in advanced industrial societies, stimulated an innovative "reconceptualisation" of the meaning of social movements.[190] The classic view of social movements is that they are always formed by political parties or labour unions. This is now becoming very vague in the spectrum of new social movements, as the idea of "labour movements and the rise of new political parties [being] the ideal-typical images of social movements and mobilisation"[191] is now coming to an end. However, the study of new social movements can be "advanced by cross-cultural research and by contrasting them with movements of the past that originated in class conflict."[192] Other scholars see new social movements as a "diverse array of collective actions that has presumably displaced the old social movement of proletarian revolution."[193] The new social movements concept is different from the classic social movement as it represents people who do not belong to any of the classical categories of social movements, such as labour workers, or represents people who do not belong to a specific social, economic or cultural class or group. [194] New social movements represent two groups of workers: in the first group are those whose jobs existed before but with less role to play in the arena or in social movements, while the second group contains those who are completely new to the labour market, such as software programmers, online journalists, etc.[195] What is common between these groups is that they do not gather in a physical place, compared to the classic image of factory labour.[196] Due to the givens of this new globalising world, social movements do not have to be related to a specific place, and are sometimes "increasingly conditioned by social actions in very distant places."[197] Therefore, it is more acceptable to see cyberactivism as a new social movement rather than a classic social movement.

New social movements have some main characteristics laid down by sociologists that can apply to cyberactivism. The fist characteristic is that new social movements do not establish a strong relationship to the structural roles of the participants as "the background of participants find their most frequent structural roots in rather diffuse social statuses such as youth, gender, sexual orientation, or professions that do not correspond with structural explanations."[198] So for a movement to be considered a new social movement, it should be comprised of a wide range of different social categories, without restrictions on a specific

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[190] Enrique Larana, New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity (Temple University Press 1994) 6
[191] ibid 4
[192] ibid 7
[193] Steven M. Buecgelr, Social Movements in Advanced Capitalism (Oxford University Press 2000) 45
[194] Farid Zahran, *New Social Movements*, (Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies 2007) 15
[195] ibid 18
[196] ibid
[197] Hanspeter Kriesi and others, Social Movements in a Globalized World (Macmillan Press 1999) 3
[198] ibid

age, gender or social standard. While some believe that cyberactivism requires a high social standard for the activist to be able to afford the costs of the hardware and the high-speed connection of the Internet.[199] Other studies believe that the rise of the cyberactivists came from middle and lower economic classes, which suffer the most from the suppression of the government and needed a way to express their needs and thoughts.[200] The diffusion of social structure of new social movements has sometimes reached the level of denouncing the terminologies related to social standards laid down by the classic schools. For example, prominent blogger Wael Abbas, who belongs to the Egyptian middle class, has stated openly his refusal of all terms used for social divisions, such as upper class, middle class, etc. [201]

A second characteristic of new social movements, which is the main difference between classic social movements and new social movements, is the ideological aspect. Scholars believe that new social movements "stand in sharp contrast to the working class movement and to the Marxist concept of ideology as a unifying and totalizing element for collective action."[202] New social movements are always associated with some set of elements, such as symbols, beliefs and values, that give them this feeling of belonging to a distinguished group associated with a particular self-image.[203]

One other characteristic of new social movements is that initially they start as an individual action that is then later translated into or takes the form of a collective movement. We can see that "the relation between the individual and the collective is blurred. Closely related to the above point many contemporary movements are acted out in individual actions rather than through or among mobilized groups."[204] Also new social movements are more concerned with "personal and intimate aspects of human life"[205] instead of revolving around public interest and global issues, like how blogging started as a kind of personal diary that, over time, evolved and was reshaped to take that specific form. New social movements are characterised by a blurred relationship between the individual and the collective action, as many new social movements were initiated through an individualistic attitude that was

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[199] 'Elshare3' http://elshare3.blogspot.com/2007/01/blog-post_116972161107923677.html accessed 20 June 2020

[200] 'Egypt: Deterioration of Social Standards' (Katib) <http://www.katib.org/node/5645> accessed 20 June 2020

[201] 'Bloggers Times Blog' <http://bloggers-times.blogspot.com/2008_03_01_archive.html> accessed 20 June 2020

[202] Enrique Larana and others, New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity (Temple University Press 1994) 7

[203] ibid

[204] ibid

[205] ibid 8

transferred to group action or movement.[206] New social movements tend to "accomplish the task of letting individuals re-define symbolic relations between them, with society, with nature, creating other relation networks which radically oppose the 'mass'".[207] This summarises the attitude of cyberactivists when blogging started as a personal and intimate practice, which, over the course of time and circumstance, turned into a movement with common goals and actions.

Another characteristic of new social movements is the element of decentralisation as a source of power for the movement. New social movements "tend to be segmented, diffused, and decentralised. […] This has been called the 'self-referential element; of the new movements, and it constitutes another sharp distinction with the hierarchical, centralised organisation of the working-class movements and the role of the party organisation in the Leninist model."[208] Scholars also found that new social movements employ a new pattern of mobilisation which is characterised by civil disobedience and nonviolence activities.[209] Some scholars see that new social movements are symptoms of crises within the social system.[210]

Some scholars mentioned some aspects of new social movements that can be applied on cyberactivism, as argued by Alan Scott, those "modern social movements are primarily social and not directly political in character. Their aim is the mobilisation of civil society, not seizure of power."[211] Scott goes further and puts some general guidelines of a new social movement, stating that these movements should be located within civil society.[212] Scott Also argued that new social movements should "bring about change through changing values and developing alternative life-style"[213] rather than controversial political issues.[214] While it's argued that the concept of new social movements is a "double-edged sword. On one side, it has contributed to the knowledge of contemporary movements by focusing attention to the meaning of morphological changes in their structure and action and by relating those changes with structural transformation in society as a whole. These changes are the source of these movement 'novelty.'"[215]

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[206] ibid 7
[207] Alan Scott, Ideology and The New Social Movements (Unwin Hyman Ltd 1990) 17
[208] Enrique Larana and others, New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity (Temple University Press 1994) 9
[209] ibid
[210] Alan Scott, Ideology and The New Social Movements (Unwin Hyman Ltd 1990) 8
[211] ibid 16
[212] ibid 17.
[213] ibid
[214] ibid 14.
[215] Enrique Larana and others, New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity (Temple University Press 1994) 6

One last aspect that was laid down by Alain Touraine is that new social movements are an offspring of the transitional phase between industrial and post-industrial society.[216] Cyberactivists were able to use most of the technological tools available on the Internet to propagate their ideas, or to organise activities and campaigns. These tools included blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and many other tools and websites. All these applications that are mainly used by cyberactivists are put under a general term: "Web 2.0".[217] What associated these applications with this special term is the fact that they share common features that can be summarised in keywords such as "democratic," "respect for users" "user-orientated," "community building," "collaborative," "interaction," "participative," "sharing," and social networking,"[218] These recently developed applications are seen by researchers as "a significant phase in a social movement for advancing the increasing ability of individuals and groups to exercise their right to communicate."[219]

This explains how cyberactivists could be integrated in the scope of new social movements rather than the classic form of social movements, as the main tool of the cyberactivists movement is the Internet and information technology, which are features of the technology that characterises this transitional era.[220]

3.4. Cyberactivism: A Collective Action or a Connective Action

As in the case of cyberactivists, when a group of people are concerned with a specific issue, they occasionally seek some kind of collective action to benefit from a larger group of people rather than just benefiting from those who are around them.[221] What makes this collective action different from a purely individual action is not just its goals, personality, motivations or thoughts, but is "the public, nonroutine dimension of collective action, its challenge and threat to established groups, and its potential for being an agent of social change."[222] This collective action mainly constitutes a challenge to a more powerful,

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[216] Alan Scott, Ideology and The New Social Movements (Unwin Hyman Ltd 1990) 15
[217] Tim O'reilly, 'What Is Web 2.0' (O'Reilly' 2005) Sep. 30, 2005, <http://www.oreilly.de/artikel/web20.html> accessed 4 July 2019
[218] William F. Birdsall, 'Web 2.0 as a social movement,' (WEBOLOGY, 6 February 2007) <http://www.webology.ir/2007/v4n2/a40.html> accessed 10 May 2019
[219] ibid
[220] 'Industrial Society' (Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopedias) <http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/166811> accessed 20 May 2020 citing L Grinin, Periodization of History (KomKniga/URSS 2007) 10
[221] Anthony Oberschall, Social Movements (Transaction Publishers 1993) 1
[222] ibid

oppressive government that resists change in the form of a popular movement, and eventually could lead to the overthrowing of the authority by this movement.[223] This could be applied to what happened in Egypt in January 2011 and how a collective action seeking change took place in reaction to a suppressive government.

Collective action sometimes overlaps with the concept of collective behaviour. According to sociologist Anthony Oberschall, collective behaviour "refers to the spectrum of crowd behaviour from strikers manning a picket line, demonstrators attending a rally at the steps of state capitol, and other collective manifestations of citizens exercising their constitutional rights peacefully to assemble and petition the government."[224] From Oberschall's definition, we can see that collective behaviour is mostly associated with protest actions carried out by a group of people, but one that still has yet to form into a full-fledged organised movement. In trying to understand classic social movements, scholars have agreed on some main characteristics, such as an informal interaction network, shared beliefs and solidarity, collective action focusing on conflicts, and finally the use of protest as a means of demonstrating action.[225]

In more recent studies, scholars started to recognise a more modern form of collective action that they decided to call connective action. Connective action is different from the classic collective action on different levels. The main aspect is that it is directly related to use of new technology and the Internet. Connective action is far more individualised and technologically organised process that leads to an action. So instead of having the collective action frames, connective action uses personal frames as transmission units across social networks.[226] One main characteristic of connective action is the element of sharing of posted content as a process of personalisation in distributing it widely across social networks.[227]

Connective action does not require the collective identity framing nor the level or organisational resources associated with collective action.[228] The main logic behind connective action that it uses different set of dynamics from the collective action based mainly on the recognition of digital media as organising agents.[229] One of the main aspects of connective action is that it can be self-organised without any central or a lead organising

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[223] ibid
[224] ibid
[225] Donatella Della Porto and Mario Diani, Social Movements An Introduction (Blackwell Publishers Ltd 1999) 14
[226] W. Lance Bennett, Alexandra Segerberg, 'The Logic of Connective Action' (2012) 15:5 Information, Communication & Society 739
[227] ibid 760
[228] ibid 752
[229] ibid

actor while depending heavily on technologies as organisational agents. Even if some formal organisational agents were present, they tend to remain at the periphery or exist as much in online as in offline forms.[230]

From the characteristics of connective action, we can see it represents the concept of cyberactivism more accurately than collective action. Applying connective action does not mean replacing collective action completely, as they both can take place at the same time in various forms within the same ecology of action.[231] Collective actions continued to play a great role in the political realm and in understanding social movements; however, it was joined by this new form of collective action formation in which digital media became integral organisational part.[232]

3.5. Conclusion

Cyberactivism is still relatively a new concept in the academic field and much more research and observation are still required to reach a full understanding of such a new phenomenon. One way in the attempt to understand cyberactivism is to study it within the framework of classic forms of social actions such as social movements or collective actions. However, it might be more convenient to study cyberactivism within a more resent versions of these classic forms of activism.

Social movements are an important frame in which cyberactivism can be explained. However, the classic form of social movement failed to explain many aspects of cyberactivism. On the other hand, a newer version of social movements, new social movements, proved that they share more characteristics with cyberactivism that may offer a more convenient explanation to the phenomenon. New social movements explain the lack of social structure in cyberactivism. They also explain the lack of strong and well-established ideological nature within cyberactivists compared to classic movements that were mainly associated with ideologies such as socialism, Marxism, and others. New social movements also succeeded to explain the individualism nature of cyberactivism and how personal tendencies and initiatives can become a movement. New social movements explain how a movement can exist without a central power or hierarchy, which can be applied to the decentralised movement of cyberactivism. Finally, new social movements are believed to be

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[230] ibid 755
[231] ibid 754
[232] ibid 730

an offspring of the transitional phase between industrial and post-industrial society, which explains the technological aspect of cyberactivism.

Conventional social movement theory is no longer representative for the individual, with the current focus on the personalisation of politics and how connective action is replacing collective action within the context of what is now referred at as "networked individualism."[233] The personalised nature of cyberactivism contradicts with the conventional form of collective action, which requires more socialisation and brokerage to reach a larger number of people.[234] Therefore, the personalised action frame and the "logic of connective action" explains the phenomenon cyberactivism and how hundreds of thousands of relatively isolated individuals can share online in the frame of the "connective" (as opposed to "collective") zeitgeist of demands justice expressed by participants in diverse social uprisings around the world. These new theorisations that emphasize the individualisation experience of politics in a network form takes us closer toward understanding citizens engaged in connective action around the globe.[235]

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[233] ibid 739
[234] Martha McCaughey (ed), *Cyberactivism in the Participatory Web* (1st edn, Routledge 2014) 307
[235] ibid

Chapter 4. Social Media Tools and the Egyptian Revolution

4.1. Introduction

Revolutions do not start from scratch or take place in a political or social vacuum; they reflect accumulation of a long-term social structure. The Revolution of 25 January 2011 was the product of harsh conditions. The Egyptian people lived, for several decades, under a government that inflicted injustice and oppression onto them. The social structure became packed with all the factors necessary for the explosion, but the Egyptian people remained silent for long periods of time. Some thought they would never revolt, while others warned of the revolution of the hungry. It came on 25 January, and with it the most remarkable events of Egypt's modern history, believed to be sparked from the virtual world—most importantly Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter—before moving boldly into real society, starting in Cairo's Tahrir Square and spreading to every Egyptian governorate. Before we introduce the Egyptian cyberactivists, however, it is important to provide background on the main social media platforms they used, and which will be the source of the data analysed in this research.

4.2. Facebook

The first and most important social media tool used during the Egyptian Revolution is Facebook. Facebook is a company founded in the United States of America to offer online social networking services, founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 and his colleagues at Harvard University: Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes.[236] The first iteration of Facebook began at Harvard University in 2003 with Facemash, an online service for university students to judge the attractiveness of their colleagues. However, it was shut down after two days because the primary developer, Zuckerberg, violated university policy in acquiring resources for the service.[237] The important transitional moment in the history of Facebook was in the spring of 2006, when Facebook stopped being a purely education-based network and first opened to users from different companies. By September 2006, the service

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[236] 'Facebook' (Britanica Online) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Facebook> accessed 12 December 2020
[237] ibid

was open worldwide for anyone over the age of 13.[238] The Facebook welcome page described the website as "a social utility that connects you with the people around you."[239] Another significant feature added in October 2006 was the new sharing functionality. This function would allow Facebook users to share a link from external sites to their Facebook profile pages. In 2006, Facebook allowed the creation of pages separate from personal profile pages, which were widely used by politicians running for mid-term elections in the US in November 2006, marking the first political use of Facebook.[240] 2006 was also the year the membership of Facebook exploded, reaching 12 million users in December 2006 and up to 100 million by August 2008.[241] By the fourth quarter of 2020, Facebook had roughly 2.8 billion active users, making it the biggest social network worldwide.[242]

There is a possibility for users' personal information to be leaked by adding an application to their personal pages, according to a BBC programme that looked into how a programmer was able to program an application, which may come in the form of a game or comic, to withdraw personal data from Facebook accounts.[243] In March 2019, federal prosecutors in New York began a criminal investigation into data deals that Facebook entered into with major smartphone and device manufacturers. The newspaper said that a grand jury in New York summoned information from at least two companies known to manufacture smartphones and other devices. These two companies have partnered with Facebook data, giving them access to the personal information of hundreds of millions of users.[244]

Activists in the Egyptian Revolution have used Facebook to express themselves and to communicate their views freely, and to organise political activities. Facebook played an integral role before, during and after the Egyptian revolution; many demonstrations and gatherings were organised through Facebook, and many sit-ins and protests called and agreed upon via Facebook groups as we will see in the next chapter. The director of the International Association Against Cybercrime, Mohamed Shawki, believes cyberactivists were able to use

[238] Neils Brugger, 'A Brief History of Facebook as a Media Text' (FirstMonday 29 April 2015) <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/5423/4466> accessed 27 August 2020
[239] ibid
[240] ibid
[241] ibid
[242] 'Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 1st quarter 2021' (Statista) <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/#:~:text=With%20roughly%202.8%20billion%20monthly,the%20biggest%20social%20network%20worldwide> accessed 14 November 2020
[243] Spencer Kelly, 'Information Leakage from Facebook' BBC (London 1 May 2008) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/sci_tech/newsid_7377000/7377348.stm> accessed 20 November 2020
[244] 'Facebook Users Data' (Joomdesk) <link> accessed 15 November 2020

Facebook to manage the activities of the Egyptian Revolution aiming towards six main objectives during the period between 10 January to 10 February 2011.[245] The first objective is the stage in which activists used Facebook for coordination and mobilisation. Second came the focus on peaceful anger. The third objective saw the rebels focus on the justice of the cause. The fourth objective was seen when Facebook was used for what some people called the unified principles and collective goals. In the fifth objective, the rebels used the site to raise political awareness, and with a renewed determination and focus on political objectives. The sixth objective manifested when activists across Facebook continued to focus on the goal until they succeeded. This stage reached the level of organising seen on the Day of Anger (also known as the Friday of Anger, 28 January 2011) and mobilising at the Presidential Palace in Cairo.[246]

According to a report prepared by the Egyptian Information and Decision Support Centre of the Egyptian Council of Ministries under the title "Digital Media in Egypt," the number of Facebook users in Egypt for the year 2010 amounted to 2.4 million users, with the proportion male users of at 60.06 percent and female users at 39.4 percent.[247] Between January and February 2011, the number of users reached 5.5 million users, i.e. the number of users of the site increased within one year by over 3 million users, which shows the great popularity of the site. Statistics show that more than 22 percent of users used the site to support the revolution by posting content related to it. Therefore, Facebook can be considered the first social media site used by activists in Egypt to follow the events and news of the Revolution.[248]

Through Facebook, the call to participate in mass demonstrations was agreed to be on January 25, 2011, through the Facebook page "We Are All Khaled Said," which contributed to delivering a large amount of important information, photos, and videos to people in Egypt and abroad, and published all types of content related to the protests and demonstrations. This contributed to an increase in awareness for many and motivated others to take to the streets. Through it, activists were able to exchange information on the places of gatherings and dates, as they worked to mobilise the largest number of people to participate in popular

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[245] Mosaab Hossam Eldin Quatloni, Facebook Revolutions: The Future of Social Media for Change, (Matbouaat For Publication and Distribution 2014) 187-189
[246] ibid
[247] 'Social Media Report' (Egyptian Information and Decision Support Center, Egyptian Council of Ministries 2010) <https://www.idsc.gov.eg/IDSC/DocumentLibrary/List.aspx?cid=1&id=2> accessed 13 Jun3 2020
[248] Kamal Sedra, 'The Role of Social Media & Networking in Post-conflict Settings' (2013) World Bank African Development Bank Conference 6

demonstrations. In this way, Facebook was able to bring Egyptians into large groups and allow them to communicate easily.[249]

Facebook has allowed a wide berth of freedom and communication. With Facebook, people moved from the oppressive government's systemic and comprehensive censorship into a loose self-censorship system. In Egypt, the government failed to contain and control the flow of news as revolutionary contemporary digitalism broke traditional barriers between information production and consumption and undermined the capacity of authorities to control information and legalise its circulation.[250]

In an interview with political activist Mahmoud Afifi, director of the media office of the 6 April Youth Movement and a founding member of the movement, about the role of social media in the Egyptian revolution, he said: "Of course, they had a significant impact on the Revolution. Social networking sites are the language of a generation. The role of social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, will not decline, as they constitute the fastest way to communicate information in a successful manner. While the law in Egypt criminalises the assembly of more than five people and this could be the justification for arrest, we see on Facebook tens of thousands gathered under one group for a common purpose without regulation, as well as underground activism, and the experience has proven that social media communication cannot to be separated from the youth and can be easily turned to the street."[251]

In a study conducted on the role of social networking sites in the January Revolution, the results came as follows: 69.5 percent of respondents in the sample reported that they relied on Facebook primarily for social networking during the revolution. YouTube came second place with a significant difference of 7.7 percent, followed by mail communication at 4.6 percent, then Twitter and blogs together ranked the same at 2.5 percent each, while 13.2 percent of respondents reported that they did not use the Internet at all with the aim of communicating regarding the events of the Revolution.[252]

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[249] Mosaab Hossa Eldin, Facebook Revolutions: The Future of Social Media in Making Change (Matbouaat Company for Publishing 2014) 191
[250] Elsayed Weld Abah, The New Arab Revolutions (Gadawel for Publication 2011) 43
[251] Ahmed Lozy, The Effect of Social Media Websites and the Egyptian Revolution (2012) Hewar Journal 49
[252] Alaa Elshamy, Electronic Opposition and Democratic Transform in the Arab World (Arab Centre for Research and Study 2012) 349

4.3. Twitter

Twitter is an online microblogging tool for distributing short messages among groups of recipients via personal computer or mobile telephone.[253] Twitter incorporates aspects of social networking with instant messaging technologies to create networks of online users who can communicate with brief messages known as "Tweets."[254] A user types a Tweet on a mobile phone or computer and post to Twitter's server, to be shown to the subscribed followers through mobile phone connection or a computer. On Twitter, users can also elect to track specific topics, creating a dialogue of sorts and pushing the number of followers in a given Twitter feed into the millions. Tweets may be on any subject, ranging from jokes to news to dinner plans, and initially were designed not to exceed 140 characters.[255]

Twitter was founded in March 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone and Evan Williams, and Twitter became popular all over the world, and by 2012 the number of Twitter users exceeded 100 million users, who were publishing over 340 million Tweets per day.[256] Initially, Twitter was a free SMS programme. In the beginning, Twitter had no revenue that could be collected from ads or membership fees, but in 2009, it was noted that the number of visitors increased by 1,300 percent. In 2010, the service of promoted Tweets, ads that appear in search results, were added and grew to become the main source of Twitter's revenue.[257]

Twitter allows for many tools that can be used for dissemination of messages. Twitter users can write and publish Tweets up to 280 characters long, and add up to four images, in addition to videos and gifs. Users can also delete Tweets after writing them and use the retweet icon, a feature that enables users to post other people's Tweets and add their comments to it.[258] Twitter users can follow public figures and other important figures. Users can search for Tweets of friends, celebrities, or political leaders by searching for keywords or hashtags, and the search results can be controlled and filtered to ensure that they are free of irrelevant content. Also, private messages can be sent directly to followers on Twitter,

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[253] 'Twitter' (Britanica Online) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Twitter> accessed 12 December 2020
[254] ibid
[255] ibid
[256] 'Twitter Turns Six' (Twitter Blog) <https://web.archive.org/web/20170206120727/https://blog.twitter.com/2012/twitter-turns-six> accessed November 2020
[257] 'Twitter' (Britanica Online) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Twitter> accessed 12 December 2020
[258] 'How to Retweet' (Twitter Help) <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/how-to-retweet> accessed 12 December 2020

because it is only possible to receive direct messages from followers, where a text of up to 1,000 characters can be sent per each message.[259]

One important aspect of Twitter is the concept of the trend, which is a popular topic that circulates in discussions over a certain period. This trend could be just a word, someone's name, or a phrase preceded by the hashtag (#) symbol, with each geographical region having its own trends.[260] Upon clicking on a specific trend, search results will appear related to that word or phrase, as the search includes all the Tweets included that trend, and the trend is determined by several factors: the interests of the user, the people they follow, and their geographic location. In this way, users are able to follow global and local news and events through the trend.[261] This aspect works through the hashtag: The hashtag is determined using the symbol (#) which indexes keywords to facilitate the appearance of such keywords in the search tool's results. This tool allows users to follow topics they interested in. All Tweets that contain that hashtag will appear once the user clicks on that hashtag.[262]

Twitter played a prominent role in the 25 January Revolution, where Egyptian activists and users began the #Jan25 hashtag to mark Tweets related to the Egyptian Revolution. Relying on this feature contributed to the dissemination of the Tahrir Square demonstrations on Twitter and then in Arab and Western media, and here emerged the impact of social media and its power.[263] The Egyptian Revolution of 25 January 2011, was characterised by a participatory nature that included vast masses without the need for a unified leadership to run it. Twitter offered an immediate system for the collection, transmission, and exchange of information and signals, as well as their processing and use in decision-making, all at once.[264] It allowed users to react quickly to the protests and communicate easily with each other during the live scramble of events. It is through Twitter that tens of thousands of people exchanging tens of millions of focused short messages, all of which revolved around what had happened or was happening or about to happen next.[265] Tweets were sent for different purposes, including calling for demonstrations, participating in

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[259] 'How to Use Twitter' (Tech Advisor) <https://www.techadvisor.co.uk/how-to/social-networks/use-twitter-3534616/> accessed 12 December 2020
[260] 'Twitter Trends FAQs' (Twitter Help) <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/twitter-trending-faqs> accessed 12 December 2020
[261] ibid
[262] 'How to Use Hashtags' (Twitter Help) <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/how-to-use-hashtags> accessed 12 December 2020
[263] Ibrahim Boaziz, 'The Role of New Communications in Political Change in Arab Countries' (2011) Arab Unity Centre for Political Science 174
[264] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)
[265] ibid

them, mobilising people, and contributing to and organising events and activities, clarifying causes and ideas, following up with events in real time, as well as exposing and documenting attacks on protesters by security forces and others.[266] Monitoring and analysis conducted on Tweets about the revolution that were produced, sent, received, and circulated through Twitter during this period, came to around 12,032 daily messages, at an average daily rate of 364.8 original message being produced from around 2,789 users who sent them to their followers.[267] The statistics indicate that the number of Tweets sent to other users reached 93,963,229 posts, with an average of 28,473,370 posts per day and 118,460 posts per hour.[268]

Based on the previous figures, we can see that the performance of the revolutionaries and the masses of the revolution on Twitter followed three tracks in terms of message production: The first was the production of messages shared for the first time—i.e. the creation of original content—which was in heavy production, and shows high levels of activity and vitality on the part of revolutionary youth. The second method was attracting and gathering masses of followers for users who shared revolutionary ideas using the hashtag, and this also revealed the great popularity of cyberactivists involved in producing and broadcasting revolutionary messages, resulting in a huge number of audiences. The third track was resending revolutionary messages by retweeting to widen the scale of spread, a tactic that showed strong awareness and enthusiasm among the general public about the Revolution and its effectiveness, evidenced by the very high level of the function of retweeting messages.[269]

These three paths took a unified pattern, and held a steady pace throughout the revolution, all of which began quietly on 10 January 2011, whether in terms of the number of messages, the retransmission Retweet function, or audience interaction. On that day, 86 messages were sent (244) times, and received 483,543 users.[270] This continued to grow slowly and quietly until January 24, which saw 160 messages with retransmission reaching 465 times and the number of recipients reached being 864,544 users. On January 25, the situation spiked, and the three indicators jumped, where the number of messages reached 766 and the Retweet rate reached 4,140 Tweets, which reached 5,163,802 users.[271]

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[266] ibid
[267] Osman Dilgawi, 2011 The Year of the Revolution (Gomhoria Publishing, Cairo 2012) 29
[268] ibid
[269] ibid
[270] ibid
[271] ibid

The next day, on 26 January 2011, the rise continued, reaching 814 messages that were retransmitted 4,384 times, but the number of recipients decreasing to 488,7331 users. The drive of the revolution had reached its peak activity level on Twitter, which in these two days, turned into a digital nervous system for the revolution through the transmission and recycling of instantaneous data.[272] In the following days, performance dropped significantly due to service cuts and Internet blackouts implemented by the government, reaching its lowest level on 31 January, but it did not completely disappear, thanks to communications from outside Egypt. While the service was suspended in Egypt, supporters of the Revolution abroad continued to Tweet. Upon the return of service on 1 February, performance jumped again to reach another peak on 2 February, with 877 messages that were Retweeted 7,681 times and received by 13,050,115 recipients.[273] On February 3, the performance eased slightly on Twitter, but remained high overall, recording 798 messages that were sent 20,826 times and reached 6,529,224 users.[274] On Thursday, the next day, there were 828 messages sent with Retweets standing at 5,569 messages, and information reaching 7,350,788 users. Two days later, the situation began to slow down and reach a relative calm until it ended on 10 February with 691 tweets, retweeted 4,875 times and which reached 5,754,792 users.[275]

The above figures show that Twitter provided an effective system for revolutionaries and the public to communicate quickly, creating links between those sitting at home and walking in the street and the protesters in the field and those involved in direct clashes with security forces.

4.4. YouTube

YouTube is a website that allows its users to upload, record, comment, and share recorded and live video clips for free. YouTube was founded on 14 February 2005, by three former PayPal employees: Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim, in the city of San Bruno, CA.[276] First, it used Adobe Flash technology to show clips, but now adopts HTML5 technology. The website content varies from movie clips, TV, music, as well as videos

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[272] ibid 30
[273] ibid
[274] ibid
[275] ibid 31
[276] 'YouTube' (Wikipedia) < https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YouTube> accessed 20 December 2020

produced by amateurs, among others. It currently employs more than 2,000 employees. In October 2006, Google announced an agreement to buy the site for 1.65 billion US dollars.[277]

Users have uploaded billions of videos to the site since its inception, as 100 hours of videos are uploaded to YouTube every minute.[278] These videos vary in content, and users can find videos related to everything, including propaganda, educational material, music videos and songs, comedic videos produced for entertainment, etc. The content of YouTube is not limited to entertaining videos published by amateurs only, and this great diversity in YouTube video content is one of the reasons why this site is so popular.[279] YouTube is a social media interactive side based on two kinds of users, the first is those who create the content, which is videos and upload through a YouTube channel that the user creates. The other kind of users are those who watch the videos that are posted on the site, and who can also upload their own videos.[280]

The role of YouTube in calling for the 25 January demonstrations was recognised from the earliest days prior to the Revolution. Egyptian activist Asmaa Mahfouz, as we will discuss more later, posted a video on the site calling on Egyptians to respond to calls to protest. Mahfouz sent her message through the site, saying: "If we have some remainder of dignity, and to live as ordinary people, we have to go to Tahrir Square on 25 January to claim our rights." Mahfouz posted this video on 18 January 2011, where it was watched by more than 180,000 viewers, and received hundreds of comments on it. The call turned to a popular revolution, and during the first week of the revolution, the video had reached 6 million views.[281]

We can define the role of these social media sites in the 25 January Revolution as follows, first, political mobilisation; the 25 January Revolution is a clear and optimal model of the great effectiveness of these sites, foremost of which is Facebook, as a means of mass mobilisation towards major revolutionary claims, such as freedom, rights, democracy, and social justice. The interactions at these sites are horizontal not vertical, as they do not have a head, and users in the vast do not receive instructions or guidance from anyone, nor they are

[277] 269- Mark Sweney, 'Google buys YouTube for $1.65bn' The Guardian (London, 9 October 2006) <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2006/oct/09/digitalmedia.googlethemedia> accessed 20 November 2020
[278] 'What is YouTube' (GCF Global) <https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/youtube/what-is-youtube/1/ > accessed 20 November 2020
[279] ibid
[280] 'What Is YouTube: A Beginner's Guide' (Lifewire) <https://www.lifewire.com/youtube-101-3481847> accessed 20 November 2020
[281] Alaa Omar Mohammed 'Social Media and Decision Making in Egypt (MA Thesis, Nahrain University 2011) 221

subject to direct control from any party. They are completely free and they exercise their own freedom of expression.[282] Its role is political mobilisation in two areas: first, to build a social base that supports the basic objectives, and second, employ those bases to achieve limited political goals, such as calling for strikes, demonstrations, or disobedience. Social media succeeded in turning virtual anger into real anger through exchanging invitations among young people to meet the call for demonstrations, and to gather large numbers of young people through pages and groups under one umbrella and shared demands. These sites worked to guide Egyptian public opinion, targeting events of political, cultural, and social change within Egyptian society by expressing attitudes, opinions or influencing people and their opinions to make them more positive, and to work to mobilise and exploit popular energies and capabilities to achieve the goals of the revolution, which revealed the emergence of new leaders of public opinion. These calls on social media turned into a campaign on Facebook and Twitter, then moved the impact on the ground.[283]

Second, organisation and coordination; the most effective weapon against the repression of the Egyptian government was social media sites, which helped young people in communication, coordination, and organisation, and enabled them to gather and move quickly and effectively. These sites played a central role in the organisation and the coordination of the 25 January Revolution. Social media websites also worked to form an Egyptian collective mentality whose features was formed in the unification of demands and the transfer of experiences across these sites in the face of the Egyptian political regime. This led to the existence of agreement and coordination around certain mechanisms of change, such as the unification of slogans and demands to bring down the system, and not stop when the government abdicated, eventually pressuring it to enter into a vicious circle of decline until the government fell.[284]

Third, breaking the state's and the society's monopoly on mainstream media; activists across social media broke all traditions on which theories of media are based, including the foundations of news editing, commentary and field reporting. Cyberactivists turned into media stars with direct impact on receiving audiences, while some media outlets, particularly TV satellite channels, become dependent on these cyberactivists as a primary source of news

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[282] Gamal Ali Zahran, 'Regional Attitudes and January Revolution in Egypt' (2011) Arab Centre for Research and Study 12
[283] Alaa Omar Mohammed 'Social Media and Decision Making in Egypt (MA Thesis, Nahrain University 2011) 221
[284] Zyad Hafez, 'January Revolution in Egypt: Present and Future Questions' (2011) Arab Future Journal issue 362 22

related to developments on the ground, and aired video footages from the ground taken by cyberactivists using mobile devices or personal cameras.[285]

Fourth, a means of political engagement; social networking sites have led to the politicisation of Egyptian youth. Many young people in Egypt were far removed from political issues for many reasons. In the absence of laws that allow citizens to communicate and form organizations, these young people found that the only way for them to do this was through social media, by establishing virtual political groups and organisations similar to political parties, through which they could disseminate political ideas and discussions, as a means of public opinion and expression. This constituted the first real threat to the application of Egypt's emergency law, which the government failed to use it to suppress the rise of a complicated and advanced means of communication and assembly.[286] Social networking sites have become one of the most important sources to shape opinions and knowledge about political discourse. These sites were considered alternative arenas for political activism, especially among young people.

4.5. Pre-revolution Cyberactivism in Egypt

Egypt is considered the Arab country with the largest number of Internet users. According to a report by the Egyptian Ministry of Communication and Information Technology in 2010, Egypt had 23 million broadband Internet users and 9 million mobile-phone Internet users, while 80 percent of household have mobile phones and 30 percent of households have Internet access.[287] In February 2011, Facebook users in Egypt reached 5 million users.[288] According to a report issued by the Information and Decision Support Center, which is a governmental body under the Council of Ministers, the number of bloggers in Egypt has reached 160,000 bloggers in 2008.[289] Egypt is believed to have the highest number of active political bloggers in the Arab world.[290] According to another official report on bloggers issued also by the Egyptian Information and Decision Support Centre, the

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[285] Abulelah Beqiziz, 'Revolution and Democratic Transition in Arab Region' (2012) Arab Unity Centre for Studies 22

[286] Mahmoud Sherif Bassouni, The Second Republic in Egypt (Dar El Shorouq 2012) 82

[287] Miriyam Aouragh and Anne Alexander, 'The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of the Internet Revolution' (2011) 5 International Journal of Communication 1344

[288] ibid

[289] 281- 'Egyptian Blogs: A New Social Sphere' (Egyptian Information and Decision Support Centre 2008) <http://www.idsc.gov.eg/Upload/Publications/blogs%20final-2.pdf> accessed 4 February 2019

[290] M Lynch, 'Blogging the new Arab public. Arab Media & Society' (2007) <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=10> accessed 20 February 2019

number of Egyptian blogs in April 2008 reached 160,000 blogs, constituting 30.7 percent of the Arab blogs and 0.2 percent of the total blogs worldwide.[291] The report pointed out that there are five types of blogs, 30.7 percent interested in a variety of areas, 18.9 percent are of a political nature, 15.5 percent of the blogs concern personal affairs, 14.4 percent are interested in arts and culture, 7 percent are of a religious nature, and 4.8 percent on social issues, while blogs focused on technology do not exceed 4 percent of the total Egyptian blogs.[292]

The political aspect of the Internet use in Egypt started around the legislative elections of 2005.[293] Around that time the term "*modawen*" "مدون" or blogger in Arabic started to become more familiar to the public and more people started to follow blogs that tackle political issues. Some Egyptian bloggers believe that the real start of blogging was in 2004 with the rise of grass-root political movements such as the *Kefaya* movement. Many of the young activists involved in this political movement were also engaged in blogging on the Internet.[294]

Some researchers consider the real start of the cyberactivism wave of the 2011 Revolution was in June 2010 when hundreds of thousands to participate in the Facebook page "We are all Khaled Said." Users started to collaborate content and share content reaching for example sharing videos by 60,000 users.[295] Another Facebook page received significant traffic is 6 April Youth Movement page, which commemorates the day of the massive protests in the city of al-Mahalla in 2008 in solidarity with the workers of al-Mahalla factory. From these two incidents we can see that the two Facebook pages are a response to two non-virtual incidents that received great reaction online leading to massive protests.[296]

Many scholars see that Wael Ghonim, founder of "We are all Khaled Said" page, in his statement about the role of the Internet in the revolution is highly overstated, which they believe that it is a common mistake in the Internet era where young enthusiastic activists would think, while undermining a longstanding theory that establishes communication media as the main site of political contestation.[297] Social media might provide an important platform for dialogue, however, without the strong and consistent engagement of users through other

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[291] 'Egyptian Blogs: A New Social Sphere' (Egyptian Information and Decision Support Centre 2008) <http://www.idsc.gov.eg/Upload/Publications/blogs%20final-2.pdf> accessed 4 February 2019
[292] ibid
[293] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)
[294] ibid
[295] Adrienne Russel, 'Extra-National Information Flows, Social Media, and the 2011 Egyptian Uprising' (2011) 5 International Journal of Communication 1238
[296] Interview with Esraa Abdelfattah, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 16 May 2017)
[297] Adrienne Russell, 'Extra-National Information Flows, Social Media, and the 2011 Egyptian Uprising' (2011) 5 International Journal of Communication 5 1238

means of media and political activism, social media would be very limited to the specific audience of the Internet which consequently will limit any effect social media would have on Egypt political transition.[298] In the case of Egypt, there has been a long process of growing political, human rights awareness and activism running for years in which social media was a crucial part and contributed to pave the way to a greater change.[299] The effect of social media in Egypt leading to the revolution represents a final stage of the long- term development process of social activism as well as the increase in suppression by the government.[300]

4.6. Conclusion

The contemporary world has seen several variables that have imposed themselves on the structure of interactions within the state, which is clearly reflected in most areas of life, where the sites of social media communication constituted a considerable means of change in the political and social system of the state. Today we live in the age of digital language, and this age has become a symbol of the abundance and flow of information with tremendous speed as they play important political, economic, social, scientific, and cultural roles.

The Internet has contributed, with its characteristics, technology, and services, to creating a worldwide network of users where every network user feels part of it by participating in social networking sites that allowed users to live in a virtual world. Users can express all what goes through their minds, without direct censorship, and share those posts through networking sites. This kind of activity contributed to breaking government censorship barriers. Suddenly those in charge or actors in political life realised that censorship overturned, and governments themselves started to adopt a self-censored on their movements and actions, but also taking restrictive measures to control as we will see later. These sites have been widely used, along with the accumulated struggle of peoples in Arab world during the Arab Spring revolutions, to overthrow the tyrannical governments in the Arab region. It is a demonstration of protesting Arab youth who have been provided with open communication directly with the outside world, not government sanctioned and controlled, easy to deploy and low cost.

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[298] Elizabeth Iskandar, 'Connecting the National and the Virtual: Can Facebook Activism Remain Relevant After Egypt's January 25 Uprising?' (2011) 5 International Journal of Communication 1225
[299] ibid
[300] ibid

What happened in Egypt on 25 January 2011, was the offspring of many factors, including in-depth discussions were conducted through social networking sites during recent years, youth campaigns, some of which have come out of virtual space to the field, have been shaped by movements such as the 6 April strike of 2008 that marked a turning point in the activity of these sites at the political realm in Egypt. Through all the above we can conclude that social networking sites played an important role in various human societies. These sites have become able to be a good and effective connector of information. The functions of social networking sites, which allow the integration of many of the data from various sources, such as text, images, and video, prompted users to use these sites while their use was limited to traditional media. Social media sites provided a wide range of freedom that was never available to anyone before, where everyone is free to express their opinion and consent, free of state control. However, this freedom comes with its own risks and setbacks as we will discuss in later chapters.

Cyberactivists on social media managed to organise protests in Egypt and then took it to the ground through a revolution, which led to a huge wave of popular movement at all levels, resulting in a regime change in Egypt. Social networking sites have contributed to raising political awareness, which has generated a sense of social responsibility. These websites have allowed political criticism and raised the level of political mobility, especially in Egypt. They also provided information materials that played a significant role in motivating the masses to participate in the revolution of January 2011. It is believed that Facebook played an important role in the Revolution, and many considered it the main engine of the youth of the 25 January Revolution, where meetings and gatherings were held and called for over social media, and protester agree on their places and times at a predetermined date via Facebook groups.

Chapter 5. The Cyberactivists and Social Consciousness

5.1. Introduction

In order to study how Egyptian cyberactivists carried out a vernacularisation of the human rights' process, first we must explore relevant background. This chapter will study the behaviour of cyberactivists within the concept of social consciousness, by studying their backgrounds, influence factors, and activism. This chapter has two main purposes; first, to provide general context about cyberactivism within Egypt in the period around the Revolution, and second, providing specific background information about the selected cyberactivists for this research. The second purpose will be mainly based on desk research and media sources and will draw upon the interviews I conducted with the cyberactivists. One of the goals of the latter is to better understand how the cyberactivists situate their activism in relation to human rights, including their understanding and adoption of human rights values and concepts, and their experience with and training on human rights-based advocacy. In this chapter, I will present information on cyberactivism before, during, and after the 2011 revolution. I will present a profile on each of the featured cyberactivists that will be examined in this study, with details on their background, upbringing, education, and activism. It is important to understand how these cyberactivists gained their understanding of human rights values and concepts that allowed them to translate these messages through their cyberactivism. There are many factors that played a role in shaping the social consciousness of these cyberactivists that provoked them to take an active stance to spread the knowledge they gained. These factors might have been embedded within their cultural exposure, family influence, readings, education, or other personal experiences that made them distinguished in the traditional and conservative society around them and gave them the chance to play a bigger role in shaping public opinion.

5.2. Cyberactivists and Shaping Social Consciousness

One way to see how the mentality of Egyptian cyberactivists was shaped and reflected on their activism is to apply the concept of social consciousness. The words awareness and consciousness are often used widely as synonyms, but it is best understood that the latter is a special form of the first. The word 'aware' is derived from the Anglo-Saxon origin 'gewaer'

which means 'being informed' or 'to know.' The original meaning of the word awareness relates to gaining experience and the experience itself. While the linguistic origin of the word 'consciousness' indicates a more specific meaning, it consists of the Latin words 'cum' and 'sciere' translated into 'to know about,' which refers to some reflective properties of consciousness in respect to experiences."[301]

The concept of consciousness in the Arabic language is derived from the verb "wa'iy," وعى which, according to Moheet dictionary, means: "memorising, managing, accepting, collecting and containing, preserving and gathering it. It is a state of realisation and reasoning."[302] On the difference between awareness and consciousness, scholars see that awareness refers to the processing that occurs as a result of the nervous system of animals interacting with their environment. It appears in the animal's basic ability to respond to environmental stimuli.[303] This term is related to terms such as: sensitivity, perception, feeling and knowledge. Consciousness, on the other hand, refers to the ability to perceive the self as a subject related to the past, present, and future, including the reflection of the self as being aware of surrounding environment.[304] It is related to certain terms such as: experience, subjectivity, and conscious thinking. As such, it is not necessary for awareness to accompany the existence of consciousness. Therefore, an animal can be aware, but they are not conscious, while the person is aware and conscious at the same time.[305] Some may argue that a two-year-old is aware, but is not conscious, or he is conscious, but not fully conscious, but rather has a form of a limited awareness that fits this stage of human development, because he is able to link between past and future events that affect his life.[306]

According to Karl Marx, it is not human consciousness that determines their existence; on the contrary, their awareness is determined by their social existence. Consciousness is the result of the interaction between us and our material world surrounding us, and therefore is a historical product.[307] Humanity, as Marx says, is founded by the material world; only through our involvement in it can we exercise our power or authority and its reality is confirmed.[308] Marx defined social consciousness as the collection of ideas, opinions, theories, social emotions, and traditions that one has and their reflection on

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[301] William A. Darity, William A. (ed.), International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences 2nd ed Vol. 2 (Macmillan Reference 2008) 78
[302] Mostafa Hegazy, The Lost Man, Sociological Psycho-Analytical Study (The Arab Cultural Center 2005) 226
[303] Robert Arp, 'Consciousness and Awareness' (2007) 14 No. 3 Journal of Consciousness Studies 102
[304] ibid
[305] ibid
[306] ibid
[307] Terry Eagleton, Why Marx was right (Yale University Press 2011) 135
[308] ibid

objective reality.[309] Since the social existence of people is characterised by complexity and diversity, social awareness is also characterised by complexity and diversity. A review of social history shows that, with the changing social presence of people, their social awareness also changes. Marx also emphasised that social awareness has a comparative property of independence in its development. Social consciousness may fall behind or may precede the development of social existence, and the relative independence of social awareness becomes apparent in the continuity of development.[310]

According to Schlitz and Vieten, social consciousness is "the level of explicit awareness a person has of being part of a larger whole. It includes the level at which one is aware of how he or she is influenced by others, as well as how his or her actions may affect others. It also includes an understanding that there are many factors shaping experience that lie below the threshold of conscious awareness."[311] Schlitz and Vieten also cites Ammentorp's definition of "the development of social consciousness" as a "process involving increasing awareness of social historical context, the ability to think abstractly about time and place, and beyond the immediate everyday conditions to understand individual experience as embedded in a broader system of social relations."[312] The connection between individual consciousness and society is very crucial to our study, as we focus on the process of transformation of individual consciousness and awareness into messages conveyed to wider society. Charles H. Cooley explains that social consciousness is inseparable from self-consciousness, as it is hard to think of ourselves without a reference to social group of some sort and vice versa.[313] The two things go together and what we consider as awareness is a complex of the personal and the whole, where both the particular and the general are emphasised.[314]

There are three dimensions of social awareness. First, there is individual consciousness, which refers to a specific individual who has their own specific circumstances and reflects a specific individual visual presence. Second, there is collective or mass consciousness, or consciousness of a specific class or group, which is a class perception and perception of society and nature. Third is societal awareness, which reflects social existence

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[309] Samir Naim Ahmed, Theory in Sociology (2006) 10 th edition (D.N. Cairo) 189
[310] ibid
[311] Marilyn Schlitz and others, 'Worldview Transformation and the Development of Social Consciousness' (2010) 17 Journal of Consciousness Studies 18
[312] ibid citing L. Ammentorp, 'Imagining social change: Developing social consciousness in an arts-based pedagogy' (2007) 1 Critical Social Studies 38
[313] Charles H. Cooley, 'Social Consciousness' (1907) Vol. 12, No. 5 American Journal of Sociology 676
[314] ibid

as a whole, but topography, variations, and contradictions indicate the awareness and perception of key societal issues.[315] These levels and dimensions are not isolated from one another, or from the history of society, because they dynamically interact. Both the individual and social levels exchange influence from a dialectical perspective and understanding each of them necessitates an understanding of the other. But the distinction between them reveals two things: the first explains different historical and contemporary cognitive dimensions, including ideology, affect social awareness, in addition to being affected by the interaction of individuals' awareness.[316] The second clarifies the degree of reflection of reality, the shape of this reflection, and its content. Individual consciousness is a direct and visible reflection of individual existence, while social awareness contains more general and abstract degrees.[317] Here, it is important to distinguish social awareness, which reflects ties and relationships between phenomena, individuals, groups, and classes, from social consciousnesses, which generalises the experience of direct awareness and gives it social form and content, deepening and disseminating these experiences of members of a particular group or class to the masses.[318] Therefore, individual perceptions are integrated into collective perceptions, which gives them an objective nature, the balance of the interests of the group and its perceptions.[319]

For cyberactivists to induce change, they had to undergo a process themselves in which their awareness changed from traditional social norms to more open ideas and concepts. Bochenski believes that "social consciousness cannot reflect a change in social being before this has taken place in the being itself."[320] This process of change and formation of cyberactivists' mentality took place during an earlier stage of their lives, in some cases prior to their activism phase, and sometimes coinciding with their early activism. The earlier phase of their lives in which this process would have taken place is during their upbringing, education, family, or early cultural exposure. Within these aspects, the process of change and formation of social consciousness developed, and these are the aspects that we will try to explore while presenting cyberactivists' profiles in this chapter. It is worth mentioning that

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[315] Abdel-Basit Abdel-Moaty, 'Arab Developmental Awareness' (1983) Research Practice, Arab Standing House for Press, Publication and Distribution 25

[316] ibid

[317] ibid

[318] ibid

[319] Abdel-Basit Abdel-Moaty, 'Arab Developmental Awareness' (1983) Research Practice, Arab Standing House for Press, Publication and Distribution 26

[320] J. M. Bochenski, 'Social Consciousness and its Role in the Life of Society. In: The Dogmatic Principles of Soviet Philosophy [as of 1958]' (1963) Publications of the Institute of East-European Studies University of Fribourg/Switzerland 14

there are thinkers who oppose this discourse in favour of a more revolutionary stance. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, for example, argue that the influence of circumstances and upbringing is a materialistic doctrine, which implies that for a person to change they have to go through an influence of circumstances and upbringing. Marx and Engels believe that this is not true, and the person is the one who changes the circumstances.[321]

Between forming a social consciousness and reflecting that into an active action, there is a process that the person, in our case the cyberactivist, must undergo. Schlitz and Vieten describe this process in what they called the "five levels of social consciousness."[322] These five levels are: embedded, self-reflexive, engaged, collaborative and resonant. The first level is "embedded," where the consciousness is being shaped without conscious awareness, through the influence of the social, cultural or biological; it is considered a pre-social consciousness.[323] Schlitz and Vieten see that a person's views of the world are mainly influenced by factors that exist outside of their own conscious awareness, which means they lie within their personal beliefs, values, and social attitudes. During the embedded level, the main factors that shape the social consciousness of the person and how they are influenced and influence their environment primarily resides outside of their own conscious awareness and is considered the base for developing their social consciousness.[324] In this level, there are also other aspects that have influence, such as globalisation and mass media, which might lead to the disintegration of fixed or static worldviews.[325]

The second level in shaping the social consciousness is self-reflexivity, where the person steps back and reflects upon their thought process concerning worldview transformation. This step is important "because it can bring you back to square one, from which place radical revision of your model of the world becomes possible."[326] The most significant impacts on self-reflexivity is increased cognitive flexibility, where the person learns to hold beliefs and becomes consciously willing to change their belief systems, increasing the possibility of developing the ability to be open to considering new points of

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[321] Andrew Cole, 'Struggle, Revolution, and the MST: Reflections on the Meaning of Resistance' (2007) Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection 245.
[322] Marilyn Schlitz and others, 'Worldview Transformation and the Development of Social Consciousness' (2010) 17 Journal of Consciousness Studies 18
[323] ibid
[324] ibid.
[325] ibid citing C. Spinosa and others, 'Disclosing New Worlds: Entrepreneurship, Democratic Action, and the Cultivation of Solidarity' (1997) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
[326] ibid citing L. Sundararajan, 'Religious awe: Potential Contributions of Negative Theology to Psychology, 'positive' or otherwise' (2002) 22 (2) Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology 178

views and engaging with differences, while becoming more comfortable with unfamiliarity.[327]

The third level of developing a social consciousness is becoming "engaged." As self-reflexivity increases, a shift in the awareness of the individual develops to make them open to interacting with others and with the world, which is a sign of development in social consciousness.[328] As an individual's mentality develops, they lose the passive awareness and develop a desire to engage actively to work for improving the wellbeing of others and the world in general.[329] As these individuals are exposed to the suffering of others, they first develop a sense of passive sympathy, but once they realise that their participation in the social environment would have an impact, they develop a desire and intention to relieve the suffering of others. This desire to help others can be through direct support or through making choices on how they direct their energies and resources—in our case, their activism.[330] Theorists believe that moral sensibilities that emerged in an a earlier stage in person's life and that move towards activism may be related to a person's sense of connectedness, identification with morality, and the sense of larger meaning and purpose, rather than in the surrounding political factors.[331]

The fourth level of social consciousness is collaborative consciousness. In this phase, individuals gain more awareness concerning social issues and start to develop a desire towards individual action. However, at the same time, they develop a greater desire to participate in coordinating with others to find solutions to those issues. As the awareness increases, engagement with the world and others, and becoming collaborative rather than prescriptive, becomes the logical development in the socially conscious mindset.[332] An important element to the engaging phase is empowering conversation, in which stories, personal experiences, and ideas are shared, which makes people begin to recognise that solutions to issues must be collaboratively created with all involved, especially victims or those who are affected.[333] This is where social media and cyberactivism can play a greater role in collaborative social consciousness through discourse, interaction, and conversation. Through interactive dialogic approaches and debates, collective actions are formed to engage

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[327] Ibid citing Schlitz, M., Vieten, C. & Amorok, T. (2008) Living Deeply: The Art and Science of Transformation, Berkeley, CA: New Harbinger Publications
[328] ibid
[329] ibid
[330] ibid citing S. Berman, 'Children's Social Consciousness and the Development of Social Responsibility' (1997) New York: SUNY Press
[331] ibid
[332] ibid
[333] ibid

people in serving a common purpose while sharing knowledge, intelligent decisions, and demands for actions to change negative life situations.[334] This process of "thinking together" collectively allows these groups to participate in examining and challenging their preconceptions, stereotypes, and prejudices, and promoting for a more general movement of thought.[335] Psychology academics are also suggesting that role models, and in our case cyberactivists, can aid people to explore their way to prosocial behaviours and actions, rather than personal or individual, towards opposition to the greater cause. This process opens the possibility of a general and public shift that can include a shared identity around collaboration and shared goal.[336]

The fifth and the final level of social consciousness is the resonant consciousness, which is the focus of this research. In this level, people show a sense of necessary connection with others in the field of shared experiences, and this feeling emerges in social groups, which stimulates social transformation. After exploring the phenomenon and development of shared discourse and action comes the growing need for research that studies the theory of social consciousness in the context of shared experience that emerge and are expressed within social groups. This level includes descriptions of social consciousness involving shared experiences that have manifested in a physical form within these groups.[337]

Other studies adopted the concept of social consciousness and applied it to activists. Researcher Heidi Holman applied the model of activist identity development to study the development of the social consciousness of activists by proposing five stages; contact, commitment to action, stridency, adaptation, and deepened understanding.[338] This model showed that exposure to knowledge about issues in early stages stimulated the individuals to take the decision to react, then move to becoming fiercely and vocally involved, and adapting to the risks associated with such reaction until reaching the level of becoming experienced activists.[339] This model described the process of gaining the social consciousness to become an activists, however compared to the model described by Schlitz and Vieten it stopped before studying the level where the activists starts sharing the knowledge they gained with other to increase public awareness.

[334] ibid
[335] Marilyn Schlitz and others, 'Worldview Transformation and the Development of Social Consciousness' (2010) 17 Journal of Consciousness Studies 18 citing Marilyn Schlitz and others, 'Living Deeply: The Art and Science of Transformation (2008) New Harbinger Publications
[336] ibid
[337] Ibid
[338] Heidi Holman, 'Awakening a Social Conscience: Toward a Model of Activist Identity Development' (PhD thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2007)
[339] ibid

5.3. The Cyberactivists

In this section, I will present the Egyptian cyberactivists that will be studied in this research. One of the main goals of this research is to understand how these cyberactivists influenced public opinion in Egypt. In order to do this, I will study how these cyberactivists shaped their social consciousness and how it developed to be able to address social and human rights issues using the model explained above. In this section, I will present social background for each of the cyberactivists, as well as information on their early upbringing, their first exposure to human rights awareness, their early activism, their role during the Egyptian revolution, and, finally, their current situation and activism.

5.3.1 Wael Abbas

Wael Abbas is an Egyptian blogger, cyberactivist and journalist. He has won several international awards and has hundreds of thousands of followers on different social media outlets. Abbas was born on 14 November 1974, to a middle-class family living in popular district of al-Qubbah in Cairo, an area that is known for its middle-class residents and which is home to one of the fanciest presidential palaces that used to belong to the ousted Egyptian royal family.[340] Abbas has a long history of cyberactivism and is considered one of the most prominent bloggers in Egypt, who is well-known for publishing on his blog MisrDigital,[341] before becoming active on social media. Wael's blog was known for covering human rights violations committed by the Egyptian police, such as torture.[342] In 2005, Abbas played a key role in publicising a video, first published by the MisrDigital blog, that showed two police officers sexually assaulting microbus driver Emad al-Kabir.[343] The officers in the video were eventually convicted and sentenced to three years in prison, in no small part due to Abbas' efforts.[344] This was a landmark case in Egyptian human rights verdicts, and sparked a wave of cyberactivism, especially against torture. This case also led to more cyberactivism on the

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[340] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)
[341] 'Misr Digital Blog' <http://misrdigital.blogspirit.com> accessed 20 August 2018
[342] ibid
[343] ibid
[344] ibid

issue of torture in detention centres, which was manifested in the establishment of an online movement called "Egyptians Against Torture."[345]

In early 2007, Abbas published on his blog, "Videos of Torture," films taken on mobile cameras showing torture and abuse against Egyptian citizens inside Egyptian police detention facilities and by Egyptian police officers in order to extract confessions or to humiliate victims.[346] The materials Abbas published were considered disclosure of these crimes of torture committed by the Egyptian Ministry of Interior for the first time in such incontrovertible evidence, and exposed the practices of the Egyptian government in general. These torture videos were picked up by international media and human rights organisations and were used as the sources for many statements and reports on the human rights situation in Egypt.[347]

Abbas has been awarded many prestigious awards. In 2008, Abbas turned down an invitation to meet with US President George W. Bush. Abbas was announced the winner of a Knight journalism award by the International Center for Journalists on August 24, 2007. He also won the Human Rights Watch's Hellman/Hammett Award in 2008. Abbas was named Middle East Person of the Year 2007 by CNN.[348] He was considered one of the Most Influential People of 2006 by the BBC. Abbas also won the Egyptians Against Corruption Award in 2005/2006.[349]

During the 2011 uprisings, Abbas used his social media accounts, such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, to document his personal experience during the Tahrir sit-ins. His documentation included events and details of daily life in Tahrir, in addition to reporting details of security abuses such as arrests and physical assaults on protestors.[350] Abbas' Twitter account is considered a contemporaneous and detailed archive of the 2011 events and constitute a valuable resource for any academic researcher working on the Arab Spring, especially on the role of social media as a mobilising agent.[351]

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[345] Ahmed Hassan Elsamman, *Journalism and Sustainable Development* (Almaktaba Alakaemiya 2011) 50
[346] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)
[347] ibid
[348] 'Middle East Person of the Year 2007' CNN (Dubai, 31 December 2007) < http://edition.cnn.com/CNNI/Programs/middle.east/blog/2007/12/inside-middle-easts-people-of-year-your.html> accessed 14 Jue 2020
[349] 'Wael Abbas' (Wikipedia) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wael_Abbas#Awards_and_honor> access 13 November 2020
[350] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)
[351] Martin Belam, 'Twitter under fire after suspending Egyptian journalist Wael Abbas' the Guardian (London, 18 December 2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/dec/18/twitter-faces-backlash-after-suspending-egyptian-journalist-wael-abbas> accessed 13 November 2020

Beside his detailed documentation of abuses, Abbas is known for being an outspoken human rights defender with strong opinions on issues that are considered sensitive in Egyptian society, such as the death penalty and homosexuality. Abbas is also known for his political insight and the ability to foresee consequences of current events, such as his strong opinion against the uprising on 30 June 2013, when he warned of the return of the military rule at a time when most activists did not see this coming.[352]

Abbas is known for using vernacular discourse, in which he puts human rights and political language into a common street language. Obviously, street language does border on vulgarity, sometimes reaching an intense level. Abbas is known for using profanity and deliberately colourful and provocative language drawn from local idioms as his unique style of writing. However, this style has the ability to reach more audiences with limited knowledge of political or legal language. This simplified street language Abbas uses is much more appealing to a wide audience base and, consequently, has a higher probability of inducing societal change. As we will see in the analysis how Abbas put a political and human rights issue in a text loaded with explicit profanity.

On 12 December 2017, Twitter shut down Abbas' account, @waelabbas. Abbas received a message from Twitter saying, "Your account has been suspended and will not be restored because it was found to be violating Twitter's Terms of Service, specifically the Twitter Rules against hateful conduct."[353] This action by Twitter is believed to be a response to a wave of "violation reports" by users who were supporters of the Mubarak government when Abbas attacked Alaa Mubarak, son of ousted president Hosni Mubarak, on Twitter after Alaa accused the January 25 revolution of being an Israeli conspiracy. Mubarak supporters started a "report" campaign against Abbas to suspend his Twitter account and any other temporary accounts he could create. This mass reporting tactic by government supporters is carried out by what are termed "electronic committees," or social media users who are government supporters that have been mobilised by a smaller group connected to a security body or affiliated with the government.[354] The work of electronic committees, or these groups of Internet users controlled by the government, is not a secret—in one of his speeches, President Sisi admitted to the fact that these strategies are used, saying, "With only two

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[352] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)
[353] Sherif Azer, 'Twitter suspends more accounts of Egyptian activists' (Mada Masr, 28 December 2017) < https://www.madamasr.com/en/2017/12/28/opinion/u/twitter-suspends-more-accounts-of-egyptian-activists/> accessed 24 May 2021
[354] Said Abdel Raheem 'Welcome Electronic Committees' Alaraby (Londo, 12 January 2015) <Link> accessed 20 May 2021

electronic 'troops,' I can totally close the Internet and turn it into closed network to be the only source of information."[355] Thus, the closure of Abbas' account is considered a deliberate act by government supporters to silence an outspoken cyberactivist using a loophole in the Twitter security system to report vulgar language. The reaction of state-owned media outlets, such as Al-Ahram newspaper, to the closure of Wael's account also showed a tone of contempt, indicating a general attitude toward Wael and other cyberactivists.[356] The weapon that electronic committees use against Abbas is his use of vulgar language, which can be easily reported and blocked by the Twitter system without an investigation into the actual content.[357] On 23 May 2018, Abbas wrote "I am being arrested" on his Facebook account. As stated by his lawyers, Abbas was blindfolded by security officers, and he was arrested at dawn and taken to an unknown location without an arrest warrant.[358] It was the latest event in a crackdown on government critics as Abdel Fattah al-Sisi prepared to begin a new term. Other prominent arrests included labour lawyer Haytham Mohammadein, satirist Shady Abu Zeid, and activist Shady Ghazaly Harb, one of the leaders of the protests that toppled President Hosni Mubarak in 2011. Abbas was questioned and interrogated by State Security and then he received a 15 day pretrial detention. Abbas was charged with "involvement in a terrorist group," "spreading false news" and "misuse of social media."[359] Abbas was put in pre-trial detention for almost six months and was finally released on 12 December 2018. Abbas's Facebook account was closed during his detention period, as requested by his lawyers for his own security, during interrogations.[360]

Wael stated that one of the sources he learned about human rights through were movies and plays, which is on the level of a vernacular discourse itself. He saw scenes that were meant to be comedic about someone beaten in police stations and realised that was not funny and a violation to human dignity.[361] Even though his activism tackled human rights, he began by mainly aiming for a radical change in the system, with human rights being one

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[355] 'El Sisi Attempts to Close Opposition Websites' (Aljazeera) (Doha, 17 January 2015) <Link> accessed 13 November 2020

[356] 'Closure of Wael Abbas' Twitter Account' Ahram (Cairo 14 December 2017) <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/1736155.aspx> accessed 5 June 2020
[357] 'Report Abusive Behavior' (Twitter Help) <https://help.twitter.com/en/safety-and-security/report-abusive-behavior> accessed 13 November 2020
[358] 'Wael Abbas Post' (Facebook, 23 May 2018) <https://www.facebook.com/waelabbas/posts/10160532579045220> accessed 5 June 2020
[359] 'AFTE Annual Report on Freedom of Expression 2018' (AFTE, 23 January 2019) <https://afteegypt.org/publications_org/2019/01/23/16998-afteegypt.html/4> accessed 3 June 2021
[360] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 8 January 2019)
[361] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)

element. He was also influenced by the international context related to human rights violations and torture, such as the Abu Ghraib Prison case.[362]

The issues that Wael focused on were mainly torture, prisoners' rights, sexual harassment, women's rights and children's rights. Wael introduced and used new words to address violations. These words became very popular and have been used online by many since. For example, he introduced a word that in Arabic would mean "using a discriminatory language" *bet'ansar* بتعنصر, a word that was never used before in this form, and which made it vernacular.[363] Wael believes that social media opened a whole new level of awareness when it comes to racism and discrimination in Egypt, which Egyptian society had normalised without recognising this behaviour as racist or discriminatory. Now, you see thousands of responses to racist comments, which might have been acceptable some years ago but now cannot be said on social media without being criticised.[364]

Abbas also deliberately used a vernacular language online to address the youth. Wael writes in colloquial Arabic using simple language and logic and expressions used by the youth and pop culture. He believes this way has a much stronger effect than just using classic language and concepts.[365] Classic and complicated language that a lot of writers use to show off is very off-putting to young readers and often does not have an effect on them or induce change. Abbas was influenced by an underground book that came out right before the revolution. The book, which was written by an ex-cop and is entitled "If you don't want be smacked on the back of your neck," explains Egyptian laws in simple language, including what citizens might need to know to avoid being arrested or abused.[366]

Abbas was very aware of the downside of the vernacular language and over-using it. For example, when he talked about torture and rape in the Emad al-Kabir case, he used a vernacular language to explain the violation.[367] However, he avoided stressing on the "honour" concept to avoid incitement of calls for "honour revenge."[368] In this case, the victim was at first angry at Abbas for publishing the video, as it was considered scandalous and harmed his reputation according to local cultural norms.[369] However, later on, Emad stated that he appreciated what Abbas had done and understood that it was the right thing to do to

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[362] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)
[363] ibid
[364] ibid
[365] ibid
[366] ibid
[367] ibid
[368] ibid
[369] ibid

claim your rights and put perpetrators on trial.[370] Abbas also used tools other than written vernacular language, such as street interviews, videos and photos. One of the examples he used to demonstrate the power of vernacular discourse was the interviews he carried out and published online during the constitutional referendum in 2005.[371]

5.3.2 Wael Ghonim

Khaled Mohamed Said Sobhy became famous in Egypt when he was publicly killed by police officers, and his death was a formative moment in the run up to the Revolution of 2011. The story started when Khaled Said, a young Egyptian man from Alexandria, was beaten to death by Egyptian police informants on 6 June 2010, when two policemen, who were dressed in civilian clothes at the time of the crime, while they were trying to search Khaled using the powers given to them under the emergency law.[372] When Khaled resisted, they smashed his head against a marble shelf. Khaled then was taken by the two policemen to an adjacent building to the café, where he was severely beaten to death before several eyewitnesses in the district of Sidi Gaber in Alexandria.[373]

The killing of Khaled Said sparked popular outrage in Egypt and worldwide reactions from local and international human rights organisations.[374] Solidarity events such as a series of peaceful street protests in the cities of Alexandria and Cairo were organised by human rights activists. The activists accused the Egyptian police of practicing systematic torture and use of violence under the emergency law.[375] Local Egyptian human rights organisations called Khaled Said the "the emergency law martyr," indicating that Said was a victim of the enactment of the emergency law imposed in Egypt since 1981.

The death of Khaled Said was one example of several human rights abuses by the police in Egypt. This incident encouraged many Egyptian youths to become more engaged in political action, social mobility, citizen journalism, monitoring the failures of officials, government corruption, growing demand movements, and fighting against human rights abuses in general. Although incidents of physical abuse and murder by the hands of

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[370] ibid
[371] ibid
[372] 'Emergency Law Martyr Ignites Demonstrations' (Aljazeera) <Link> accessed 13 November 2020
[373] ibid
[374] 'Egyptians Act to Stop Torture, Find Justice for Khaled Said' (Amnesty International USA) <https://www.amnestyusa.org/egyptians-act-to-stop-torture-find-justice-for-khaled-said/> accessed 13 November 2020
[375] 'Emergency Law Martyr Ignites Demonstrations' (Aljazeera) <Link> accessed 13 November 2020

policemen were a systematic phenomenon in Egypt and it increased over the last years of Mubarak's rule, it was believed that Khaled Said's belonging to the middle class, which has traditionally been less affected by such abuses than the popular and working classes, led to sympathy among a wider audience, who saw Khaled as an example of what could befall them and their children.

The human rights protest movement spurred by the killing of Khaled Said is one of the precursors of the 25 January Revolution. Many activists on 25 January 2011, were influenced by the crime and established their networks around Khaled Said's Facebook page and other communication tools in cyberspace and on the ground. A Facebook page was created on 10 June 2010 and was founded by Egyptian activist Wael Ghonim[376] to show solidarity with Khaled and crossed the four-thousand-member barrier within an hour of its creation, and reached 184,000 in 10 days, demonstrating the public outcry that escalated on Facebook to protest the killing of Khaled Said. User comments showed a state of anger and outrage, and activists considered Khaled's death a new condemnation against extending the emergency law that allowed informants to deal inhumanly with the deceased. The number of fans of the page is currently over three million people.[377]

Ghonim's experience in Internet marketing played a role in attracting a number of supporters and shaped the page's path into a space where youth flocked to spontaneously. Some journalists pointed out that the reason the page was distinguished was that it was not just an outlet for anger or publishing government scandals or regular news but focused on setting a clear strategic goal (to stop torture in general, to repeal the emergency law, stop officials' exploitation their positions and corruption, and stop media misinformation).[378]

Days after its creation, the page had reached 131,000 followers, and Wael Ghonim began to choose his team carefully: blogger Abdulrahman Mansour (23 years old then) joined the team, as well as Egyptian bloggers from the 2005 generation, an Al-Jazeera Talk correspondent and the founder of Wikileaks Arabia. They were also joined by blogger and activist Mustafa al-Naggar and the second general coordinator of Mohammed ElBaradei's campaign.[379] Later on, human rights activist Nadine Wahab, an Egyptian-American National Association for Change activist in Washington, joined the team too. The identity of the

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[376] 'We Are All Khaled Said' (Facebook) <https://www.facebook.com/ElShaheeed/> accessed 13 November 2020
[377] Interview with Wael Ghonim, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 20 January 2019)
[378] 'Khaled Said Facebook Page and Call for Demonstration' (Elsaba7)
<https://www.elsaba7.com/NewsDtl.aspx?Id=34303> accessed 13 November 2020
[379] Interview with Wael Ghonim, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 20 January 2019)

founders of the page was not publicly known, but obviously they were known to State Security.[380] Ghonim collaborated anonymously with activists on the street to call for the demonstrations. On 3 February 2011, Google's Middle East and North Africa branch announced that one of its employees, Wael Ghonim, was missing, and opened a hotline to report any news about him. On 6 February 2011, Ghonim was released, and it was disclosed for the first time that he was the founder of Khaled Said page.[381]

We Are All Khaled Said played an important role in the demonstrations on 25 January 2011. In December 2010, Mansour proposed to Ghonim to organise an anti-Police Day event on 25 January, similar to what the April 6 Movement did in 2009. But after the overthrow of Tunisian President Zain El Abidine Ben Ali, Ghonim, influenced by the opinions and comments expressed by page members, changed the event to what he called "a revolution against torture, unemployment, corruption, and injustice" on 14 January 2011. This was the first call for the 25 January Revolution. [382] The call spread among the more than 350,000 members of the page then it was adopted by many political and human rights movements and groups.

We Are All Khaled Said page has become an icon of the Egyptian Revolution and has taken an important place in the field of political and human rights awareness, engaging with many political positions and activities at all levels. It played a role in completing the objectives of the revolution and condemning the killings and beatings that took place, including during events at the Balloon Theatre, the Maspero massacre, the Mohamed Mahmoud Street clashes, the events of the Council of Ministers, the Port Said Stadium massacre, in addition to criticising the constitutional declaration announced in June 2012 by the military council, which was considered a backlash against the revolution.[383]

The "Khaled Said" page was extremely effective in organising its members and gained great credibility over time. Demonstrators were provided with the exact times and locations of the demonstrations and given specific instructions on what to wear and what to do, as well as emergency numbers to call in the event of a problem. The page administrators used to poll users, asking them to vote on the place or time of the next protest. Thousands of people would take part in those polls, and then moderators would rate the votes and meet the

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[380] ibid
[381] 'Prime Minister Announces the Release of the Admin of Khaled Said Page' (Ahram Gate) <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/37527.aspx> accessed 13 November 2020
[382] 'Khaled Said the Victim of Torture who Ignited the Egyptian Revolution' (Elaph) <https://elaph.com/Web/news/2011/2/629179.html> accessed 13 November 2020
[383] Interview with Wael Ghonim, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 20 January 2019)

wishes of the majority, allowing users to indulge in a taste of democracy that did not exist at the time.[384] Over time, the page became very popular, and when the right moment came, it was the "Khaled Said" page that published the "events" of the massive demonstrations on 25 January, which coincides with Police Day in Egypt.

Wael Said Abbas Ghonim, born 23 December 1980 in Cairo, the founder of We Are All Khaled Said Facebook page is a computer engineer who worked as the regional director of Google's marketing in the Middle East and North Africa.[385] Many believe he was the most prominent of the figures of the 25 January Revolution. He was dubbed the "leader of the youth revolution" for his role in its outbreak—but in a press statement, he called himself a "keyboard militant." The Egyptian authorities arrested him two days after the outbreak of the revolution in the State Security Investigation Building, handcuffed and blindfolded for 12 days. In March 2011, he was selected for the Kennedy Award for Courage. Time magazine also named him as the first name in its annual list of the 100 most influential people around the world.[386]

Ghonim was born in Cairo and moved with his parents to live in the city of Abha in Saudi Arabia in 1981 and then returned to Cairo at the age of thirteen and completed his secondary school and university education.[387] He received his bachelor's degree in computer engineering from the Faculty of Engineering, Cairo University, in 2004.[388] He also obtained an MBA degree with distinction from the American University in Cairo in 2007. Ghonim has been active on the Internet since 1998, when he launched IslamWay.com.[389] Ghonim founded and ran the site for three years. From 2002 to 2005, he worked for Gawab.com, an e-mail services company with more than five million subscribers across the Arab world.[390] From 2005 to 2008, he formed and managed the team that created Mubasher Information Portal (Mubasher.info), the largest Arabic-language information portal specialised in the capital markets.[391] Wael Ghonim moved to Dubai, UAE, in January 2010, where he became the regional director of Google marketing in the Middle East and North Africa, overseeing the

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[384] Rasha Abdallah, 'Egyptian Media During the Revolution' (Carnegie Center, 16 July 2014) <https://carnegie-mec.org/2014/07/16/ar-pub-56329> accessed 20 February 2021
[385] Interview with Wael Ghonim, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 20 January 2019)
[386] ibid
[387] ibid
[388] ibid
[389] ibid
[390] ibid
[391] ibid

Arabisation and development of the company's products, as well as his efforts and participations in various projects aimed at supporting the Arabic content on the Internet.[392]

Ghonim has been influenced by world-renowned activists such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Malcolm X. He states that he read Malcolm X's biography when he was 20 years old, and it impacted him significantly.[393] He found similarities between Malcolm X and himself, mainly his ability to change his attitude and retract from one position to another without feeling that he had betrayed the cause.[394] Ghonim was fascinated by the fact that Malcolm X was self-aware and had the ability to oscillate without fear of criticism because he saw himself as a seeker of truth. Ghonim also believed that reality is changeable, and the most honest position in life is to be a true seeker of truth. According to Ghonim, it is idiotic to stick to one position and drift to extremism.[395] One of the books that influenced Ghonim was *The Kybalion*, published in 1903 and which claims to have the core teaching of Hermes Trismegistus. He saw in this book how the author valued his message and understood that the message has to be on the same level of the audience when they are ready to receive it.[396]

In 2010, he founded Facebook's "We are all Khaled Said" page in solidarity with the young Egyptian Khaled Said who was tortured to death by police in Alexandria and called through this page to demonstrations of anger on January 25, 2011.[397] On Tuesday, 25 January 2011, the popular revolution broke out. On the evening of Thursday, 27 January, Ghonim was kidnapped and detained at night by security in civilian clothes and taken to the State Security Investigation Office.[398] His family has been looking for him and were unable to ascertain where he was. The authorities did not admit that they had arrested him, despite the efforts of his family in addition to Google connections. The government did not seem to resist public pressure; then-Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq came out to promise Ghonim's speedy release.[399] In order to prove the credibility of the government in opening the door of freedoms and not arresting those who express their opinions, Ghonim was released on Monday, 7 February 2011, after spending 12 days in jail blindfolded.[400]

Upon his release from prison, he made a statement saying: "First, I comfort all Egyptians who have died, and I apologise to them and tell them no one was among us is

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[392] ibid
[393] ibid
[394] ibid
[395] ibid
[396] ibid
[397] ibid
[398] ibid
[399] ibid
[400] ibid

broken. Don't make a hero of me; I am just someone who has been sleeping for twelve days and the real heroes are on the streets and I hope that you shed light on them. I thank God, I am okay, and God willing, we will change our country, and we are all one hand in cleaning our country."[401] Ghonim appeared on the Egyptian satellite channel Dream TV after he was released from prison to talk about his arrest and his objectives of the demonstrations. He pointed out that it was his love for Egypt and his feeling of regret about Egypt's situation that led him to call for people through the Facebook page to go out on 25 January 2011.[402] He denied that there were any foreign or regional agendas, or even the influence of those able to direct these young people from abroad, saying "Our only agenda is to love Egypt."[403] When talking about the people who were killed during the clashes and displaying their pictures, Ghonim collapsed and sobbed. He apologised to the mothers of these martyrs, crying, "I want to say to every mother and every father who lost their sons, I am sorry. But this is not our fault—this is the fault of everyone who was clinging to power … I want to leave now," before withdrawing from the studio.[404]

Two hours after Ghonim appeared on television, Masrawi website wrote: "Ghonim's tears have moved millions and even reversed the political stance of some as they shifted their position to become against Mubarak."[405] On the same night, hundreds of thousands joined his Facebook page and announced their support for the Egyptian youth revolution, while about 200,000 people joined a new page on the social site entitled "I authorize Wael Ghonim to speak on behalf of the revolutionaries of Egypt" within one day of his appearance on television after his release.[406]

Ghonim, who had become a popular hero and a global figure at the same time, announced that he is planning to leave search giant Google for a while to devote himself to the establishment of an NGO to combat poverty and improve the level of education in Egypt. Ghonim said on his Twitter account that he had finished contracting with British and American publishing houses and an Arab publishing house was being hired to publish his book on the Egyptian revolution and its memories.[407] Ghonim announced that the total value

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[401] Mostafa Soliman,'Wael Ghonim Statement After Release' Alarabyia (Cairo, 7 February 2011) <Link> accessed 20 May 2021
[402] 'TV Interview with Wael Gonim after his Release' (Youtube)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K689F4PNvVo> accessed 20 November 2019
[403] ibid
[404] ibid
[405] 'Tears of Wael Ghonim Coud Change the Game in Egypt' (Reuters) <https://www.reuters.com/article/oegtp-egy-activist-mr4-idARACAE71713I20110208?edition-redirect=in> accessed 20 November 2020
[406] Interview with Wael Ghonim, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 20 January 2019)
[407] ibid

of the contract so far exceeds 14 million Egyptian pounds, which will be donated in full to charities in Egypt and to the families of martyrs and those injured in the events of 25 January. He also announced that the book would be published by January 25 on the first anniversary of the revolution.[408]

After the Revolution, with a group of well-known computer technicians in Egypt, he founded a civil society organisation concerned with fighting poverty and spreading science in Egypt using technology under the name Nabdat Foundation.[409] As one of the symbols of the January Revolution, Ghonim received the John F. Kennedy Prize for Courage awarded by the John F. Kennedy Foundation during its 23rd annual dinner in Boston, in the presence of a group of politicians, writers, historians and dignitaries.[410] Meanwhile, Caroline Kennedy, the daughter of the late US president, presented the award to Ghonim in the name of "the people of Egypt" for his efforts in establishing the page "We are all Khaled Said," which played a big role in organising the protests that ousted former President Hosni Mubarak, adding that his virtual anger on the Internet produced a strong impetus for the revolution, and the award is to honour him and the Egyptian people for their role in encouraging a new generation of activists seeking freedom and democracy.[411] The Swedish Embassy in Cairo announced that Ghonim has received that year's annual "Freedom of the Press Award," presented by the Swedish section of the Reporters without Borders organisation. Ghonim was ranked second in the 2011 list of the "500 Most Powerful Arab Persons," published by Arabian Business magazine, a list of the 500 most powerful people who have made a significant impact on their communities or the communities in which they live.[412]

5.3.3. Asmaa Mahfouz

Asmaa Mahfouz is an Egyptian political activist who rose to prominence during the January 25 revolution and is a founding member of the 6 April Youth Movement and a proponent figure of the 25 January 2011 Revolution. Mahfouz is noted for her prominent activism in the Youth Revolution Coalition, and its impact on the Egyptian revolution in 2011. Mahfouz was born on 1 February 1985 and lived in Cairo's Ain Shams neighbourhood

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[408] Interview with Wael Ghonim, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 20 January 2019)
[409] ibid
[410] 'Wael Ghonim' (Wikipedia) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wael_Ghonim> accessed 13 November 2020
[411] 'Award Announcement' John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum <https://www.jfklibrary.org/node/4341> accessed 6 May 2021
[412] 'Meet the Arabian Business Power 500' Arabian Business <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/photos/meet-arabian-business-power-500-385564.html> accessed 5 May 2021

in a modest apartment with her family.[413] Mahfouz then worked for years in the private sector, before working as an editor with a documentary production company. Mahfouz holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Cairo University.[414]

Mahfouz started her political activism in 2008. Before that, she didn't follow current politics at all. She didn't read news or keeping updated with the government before; however, she was aware that the country was full of injustice and corruption in all aspects, including education, healthcare, security, etc.[415] Mahfouz used to take the metro every morning when she was working, around hour and half from Ain Shams to Maadi, where she used to talk to women and hear their problems. For a year, from 2007 to 2008, Mahfouz heard things she never heard before—an unbelievable level of injustice and issues that these women faced—and which made her depressed, until she heard about the calls for strike on 6 April 2008 on Facebook.[416] Mahfouz had been on Facebook since 2007, when she started following and wondered if people were finally going to do something, and wanting to take part. Mahfouz started to print and distribute, and share invites without knowing those who are behind it. All what she cared about is that finally someone will talk against the government.[417]

After the 6 April 2008 strike, Mahfouz started following everything more closely, including Ministry of Interior statements, social media, and media. She started taking part in demonstrations in support of prisoners.[418] The arrest of Esraa Abdel Fattah shocked her—how could they arrest a woman who looked like her and was not a criminal? Mahfouz started participating, out of curiosity but she was afraid at the beginning.[419] She saw how security forces dealt with demonstrators and that further fuelled her anger and sense of injustice that innocent young people were surrounded by security forces. Mahfouz then started to connect between those who were speaking on the Internet and those taking part in street demonstrations.[420]

Mahfouz's work in the sales' field taught her to speak in the language of the people and learn what resonates with them, as well as how to target sales based on people's ways of thinking and interests.[421] When she attended demonstrations, she found organisers talking in

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[413] Interview with Asmaa Mahfouz, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 3 March 2018)
[414] Mahmoud Ramzy, 'Asmaa Mahfouz: I Swear To God I am in Debt' Almasry Alyoum (Cairo, 2 October 2011) <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/115271> accessed 6 November 2019
[415] Interview with Asmaa Mahfouz, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 3 March 2018)
[416] ibid
[417] Interview with Asmaa Mahfouz, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 3 March 2018)
[418] ibid
[419] ibid
[420] ibid
[421] ibid

a very political language and using expressions she did not understand, asking how they thought they could reach people while speaking this kind of language.[422] Mahfouz saw herself differently; she was a very regular person, a young woman, working a normal job, with colleagues at work who were also regular and who would not understand politics either.[423] Mahfouz told organisers of demonstrations that if they wanted people to join them, they would have to speak in a simpler language and explain things to people without using complicated expressions and jargon.[424]

Mahfouz never got a real human rights education; maybe she had one by instinct. When she was at school, she had teachers, especially religion teachers, who spoke about the good values of Islam, such as rights of others, how to accept difference, reject racism, help the vulnerable and needy, fight poverty and hunger, and how in Islam no ruler has all the food while subjects are hungry. Mahfouz was also influenced by cartoons that taught her kindness and innocence. At an early stage of her life, Mahfouz started to understand that there exists a basic level of rights that are meant to be guaranteed to all, but she did not see that in Egypt. She saw human rights violations everywhere: with women, at police stations, in rural areas, in corruption. Mahfouz saw how her father faced injustice at work and the lack of justice in the rule of law.[425]

Vernacular language was Mahfouz's main concern when she joined the ranks of political activists. When she read press statements, she found them to be written in classical Arabic and full of complicated expressions.[426] Mahfouz expressed her opinion and told organisers that this language would not work with young people and it had to be much simpler, given that people were afraid to talk about politics because of the threat of reprisals.[427] Mahfouz considered herself to represent the *sha'bi*, or popular, faction of society when she joined the group of intellectuals who were organising political activities, and she asked the organisers to explain to her slowly, and would translate the message in her style to reach to a wider audience.[428] She began travelling to rural areas and universities and talking with young people. Mahfouz asked the older leaders of the movements not to use complicated language when they give speeches.[429] She even made fun of them when they

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[422] ibid
[423] ibid
[424] ibid
[425] ibid
[426] ibid
[427] ibid
[428] ibid
[429] ibid

used classical Arabic in middle of dialogue. Mahfouz sees that there is a large sect in Egypt, even among readers and intellectuals, that cannot be motivated using classical Arabic and believes that activists should use colloquial Arabic in their discourse.[430] Activists should talk about people's basic rights, which is a simple concept that does not require complicated language to explain. Mahfouz believes that rights do not need talking about in terms of ideologies—liberals or secular or radical—and that people just need their rights.[431]

Firstly, Mahfouz's interests in social media were simple and non-political—films, songs, and just other common interests. When she joined social media-based political groups, she started making connection between both worlds, translating political language, and posting it on these simple groups.[432] People engaged with her posts and asked about gatherings. Mahfouz always put herself in their shoes: she was afraid at the beginning but then she saw people who were similar to her. And because she was similar to them, she began to absorb their fears and not to get them involved in something risky, especially women.[433] As people joined, Mahfouz realised how similar people were to each other, and saw that they shared common concerns about rights and injustice and wanted to avoid risk. Above all, they spoke a simple language.[434]

A few days before the 2011 Revolution, Mahfouz uploaded a video urging people to demonstrate peacefully on 25 January 2011. Mahfouz presented herself as an Egyptian woman who wants to defend her dignity and rights and says no to corruption. She called for peaceful demonstrations, saying that all young people would be culpable if they left her alone and failed to leave their homes. On the night of 24 January 2011 at 10 pm, Mahfouz released another video urging Egyptians to go out for a completely peaceful day and sit for a day or two or three until demands were met.[435]

On 14 August 2011, Mahfouz appeared before the Egyptian military prosecutor, who interrogated her for insulting the military council for things she had posted on her Twitter account.[436] Later, the prosecution decided to release her on bail of 20,000 Egyptian pounds and continue investigations into the charges against her, until the military council dropped the

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[430] ibid
[431] ibid
[432] ibid
[433] ibid
[434] ibid
[435] Waleed Ahmed Fathy, 'Names Egyptian History will remember' Okaz (Cairo, 21 February 2011) <https://www.okaz.com.sa/article/382257> accessed 6 November 2019
[436] Interview with Asmaa Mahfouz, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 3 March 2018)

charges against her. After her release, Mahfouz wrote on her Twitter page: "Down, down with the military rule."[437]

In a statement she gave as soon as she left the military prosecution, Mahfouz said that the investigation, which lasted for three hours, came after a report submitted by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces against her, accusing her of insulting the council, the army, Field Marshal Tantawi, and Major General Hassan al-Ruwaini, commander of the Military Central Division.[438] She added that she denied all the charges against her, which relied mainly on posting on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, explaining that the accusation of calling for armed operations and "destabilisation of public security" is unfounded, and she was warning the military junta that "mismanagement and lack of justice will lead to chaos."[439]

The Revolutionary Youth Coalition and the Egyptian Current Party criticised the summoning of Mahfouz by the military prosecutor, for no apparent reason, to appear before the prosecution for investigations into a case without any further details. The statement stated that "there will be no acceptance of the return of institutions of systematic repression and terrorising political activists."[440]

On the morning of 14 August 2011, dozens of political activists of the 6 April Youth Movement demonstrated in front of the Military Prosecution in Nasr City in solidarity with Mahfouz. Human Rights Watch denounced the army's harassment of expression rights in Egypt and said the military prosecutor's interrogation of activist Mahfouz for "insulting the army" was a serious escalation of what the Armed Forces was doing to silence critics.[441] A large number of protesters and civilians had been referred to the military court in just a week, the organization said, stressing that civilians should not be tried by military courts that are inconsistent with basic principles of justice. Joe Stork, former deputy director of Middle East Division at Human Rights Watch, said the decision to try Mahfouz was "a major attack on freedom of expression and fair trials using the same abusive laws that the Mubarak regime

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[437] 'Egyptian military drops charges against activists' Financial Times (New York 18 August 2011) <https://www.ft.com/content/79edadb4-ca4d-11e0-a0dc-00144feabdc0> accessed 6 November 2019
[438] 'Egyptian Activist Charged with inciting Violence' (Aljazeera) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/08/2011814171152881872.html> accessed 6 November 2019
[439] ibid
[440] Ghada Mohamed Sherif, 'Military Prosecution Summons Asmaa Mahfouz' Almasry Alyoum (Cairo, 13 August 2011) <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/102949> accessed 6 November 2019
[441] Malaka Badr, 'Human Rights Watch: The Military Council Uses Mubarak's Laws to Silence Opposition' Almasy Alyoum (Cairo, 17 August 2011) <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/103797> accessed 6 November 2019

used against his opponents" and that the army "uses Asmaa to muzzle potential opponents, to send a message that anyone who criticizes the junta is going to jail." Human Rights Watch statement pointed out that Mahfouz's case is the latest in a series of prosecutions of dissenting opinion-makers.[442]

Amnesty International called on the Egyptian authorities to immediately drop the charges against Mahfouz, who was accused of defaming the army on the social site Twitter. Amnesty said in a statement that Mahfouz were presented to the military prosecution, and released on bail of 20,000 Egyptian pounds after a public outcry expressing concern about the justice system in Egypt and the procedures of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and the transitional government.[443] The statement said "Asmaa Mahfouz is facing a military trial merely for posting comments which criticise the Egyptian military justice system and do not at all appear to represent a call to violence.[444] The Egyptian authorities' decision to refer Mahfouz to a military court seems intended to send a message to those critical of the authorities that dissent will not be tolerated, andthe charges against her must be dropped immediately.[445] Trying civilians before a military court is also deeply problematic: these courts are fundamentally unfair and deprive defendants of some of the basic guarantees of fair trial, including the right to appeal."[446] Such trials, which have been frequently used since former President Hosni Mubarak stepped down, violate the basic requirements of justice and rights, refusing to conduct them or exposing civilians to them. Later on, a lawsuit was filed against Mahfouz and a number of public figures, including journalist Yosri Fouda, Mamdouh Hamza, Abu al-Izz al-Hariri, and Wael Ghonim, accusing them of inciting to "overthrow the state and provoking strife against the junta." The prosecution referred the case to the jurisdiction of the military court.[447]

In 2013, Ali Abdel Aziz Fahmy, director general of the Directorate of Youth and Sports in the Gharbiya governorate, filed a complaint falsely accusing Mahfouz of assaulting him with a sharp object in front of the Public Prosecutor's Office, resulting in a head injury. The victim, Abdel Aziz Fahmy, had filed a case at a misdemeanour court in Ain Shams.

[442] 'SCAF' Suppressive Campaign on Activists' (Human Rights Watch, 29 April 2011) < https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2011/08/17/243759> accessed 5 March 2021
[443] 'Egypt must drop charges against blogger accused of 'defaming' military on Twitter' (Amnesty International UK) < https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/egypt-must-drop-charges-against-blogger-accused-defaming-military-twitter> accessed 6 November 2019
[444] ibid
[445] ibid
[446] ibid
[447] Fatma Abu Shanab, 'Postponing Asmaa Mahfouz's Trial' Almasry Alyoum (Cairo, 7 March 2012) <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/165281> accessed 6 November 2019

Mahfouz was sentenced to one year imprisonment and a fine of 2,000 Egyptian pounds on charges of assaulting Abdel Aziz Fahmy, in front of office of the Attorney General.[448] In August 2013, Attorney-General Hesham Barakat commissioned the Supreme State Security Prosecutor to investigating the complaint filed by Abdel Aziz Fahmy against both activists Esraa Abdel Fattah and Asmaa Mahfouz on charges of "collaborating with foreign entities" in addition to a request to include them on a travel ban list.[449] In Communique no. 11459 of 2013, the Attorney-General said that Esraa and Mahfouz were involved in obtaining funds based on statements made by former Minister of International Cooperation Faiza Abul-Naga, who said that the total funds that entered Egypt for political and human rights activists is estimated at 1.6 billion Egyptian pounds, and that the two women activists are among the recipients.[450]

On 1 January 2014, government-supporter lawyer Samir Sabry filed a complaint before the Attorney General Hisham Barakat against Mustafa al-Naggar, Abdul Rahman Yousef al-Qaradawi, and Asmaa Mahfouz, accusing them of involvement in the storming of the State Security Agency headquarters, as well as the theft of files, hard disks, and other belongings from the headquarters. According to Sabry's report, Mustafa al-Naggar, Abdul Rahman Yousef al-Qaradawi and Asmaa Mahfouz were involved in the theft of files belonging to public figures and media personnel, such as Mona al-Shazly, as well as stealing hard drives containing classified security information.[451] Sabri presented a portfolio of documents containing CDs confirming the gathering and the storming of the headquarters of the State Security and theft of some of its contents and asked to investigate the incident until the referral of the defendants to a criminal trial.[452]

On 17 September 2013, Kuwaiti authorities refused to allow Mahfouz and her daughter Aliaa Mohamed to enter their territory. Mahfouz had travelled to Kuwait from Cairo airport to visit her husband who works there but was surprised upon arrival to the border

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[448] Ibrahim Quraa, 'Confirming Imprisonment for Asmaa Mahfouz for One Year' Almasy Alyoum (Cairo, 8 May 2012) <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/177394> accessed 6 November 2019
[449] ibid
[450] Ahmed Maher Faces Charges of Espionage' Mada Masr (Cairo 28 August 2013) <https://madamasr.com/content/ahmed-maher-faces-charges-espionage> accessed 6 November 2019
[451] Mona Rabea, 'Alnaggar, ALqaradwi and Mahfouz Accused of Storming State Security' Hawadeth (Cairo, 1 January 2014) <Link> accessed 6 November 2019
[452] ibid

control of Kuwait Airport to find her name included among those prohibited from entering Kuwait.[453]

On 27 October 2011, Mahfouz was among five Arab revolt activists who won the Sakharov Prize awarded by the European Union.[454] In March 2012, Newsweek chose a list of 150 women from around the world who were "courageous and confronted with fear." The magazine described them as determined to hear their voices, announce revolutions, change ideas, open schools and inspire new generations. Among them were five women from Egypt, most notably Mahfouz. The magazine explained that the reasons for Mahfouz's selection was that the video published in January 2011 about participation in the protests "had a role in the revolution, where it spread widely on social networking sites, and some have described her as the leader of the revolution in Egypt."[455] Arabian Business magazine also ranked Mahfouz 381 among the 500 most influential women in the world.[456]

5.3.4. Gamal Eid

Gamal Abdel Aziz Eid, born in 1964, is prominent Egyptian human rights defender and a leading lawyer. He currently holds the position of the Executive Director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), the leading organisation for the defence of freedom of opinion, belief and expression in the Arab world. Eid founded the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information in 2003.[457] ANHRI has collected publications, advertising campaigns, reports, and data from about 140 Arab human rights organisations in the region and republished them in daily bulletins on its website. The network focuses on supporting freedom of expression, particularly through the Internet and the media, and

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[453] 'Egyptian activist Asmaa Mahfouz deported from Kuwait' Ahram Online (Cairo, 28 September 2013) <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentPrint/1/0/82689/Egypt/0/Egyptian-activist-Asmaa-Mahfouz-deported-from-Kuwa.aspx> accessed 6 November 2019
[454] 'The Arab Spring wins Sakharov Prize 2011' Europarl (Brussels, 27 October 2011) <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/eu-affairs/20111021STO30027/the-arab-spring-wins-sakharov-prize-2011> accessed 6 November 2019
[455] Nevine El Shabrawy, 'Newsweek's 150 Women Who Shake the World' Egypt Independent (Cairo, 9 March 2012) <https://www.egyptindependent.com/newsweeks-150-women-who-shake-world-offers-optimism-womens-rights/> accessed 6 November 2019
[456] 'Arabian Business Power 500' (Arabian Business) https://www.arabianbusiness.com/arabian-business-power-500-388992.html?itemid=387265 accessed 6 November 2019
[457] Katalan Wrede, 'Gamal Eid – Egypt's leading human rights lawyer and promoter of free speech' (Human Dignity Forum, 21 November 2011) <https://www.human-dignity-forum.org/2011/11/gamal-eid-egypts-leading-human-rights-lawyer-and-promoter-of-free-speech/> accessed 10 March 2020

defends people held to express their personal views. Moreover, the network is attacking censorship imposed by Arab governments.[458]

Eid grew up in a poor neighbourhood and was aware from an early age how police operate in these areas and how they carry out random arrests. This was not logical to him; in his early life, he recognised the extreme injustice of police in Egypt.[459] He saw them hurting and insulting people. This early experience was his first connection to human rights, in addition to reading and attending Amnesty International events at his university, Ain Shams University.[460] This all created his human rights awareness and confirmed his beliefs that he had at early age. The second aspect that opened his eyes was the inhumane use of torture by authorities.[461]

Eid was a young man who dreamed of idealism when he joined the struggle for human rights and democracy in Egypt in 1989, shortly after graduating from Ain Shams University's Faculty of Law in Cairo.[462] At that time, a third of Hosni Mubarak's term as president of the Republic of Egypt had passed. As with most authoritarian leaderships, he focused much of his attention on putting pressure on civil society and curtailing its activities. But despite the harassment and the oppressive environment in which they have been forced to work, many committed civil and human rights advocates such as Eid were still able to sustain a vibrant civil society sector.[463]

Eid graduated from the Faculty of Law at Ain Shams University and later became a lawyer specialising in human rights.[464] Eid became more well-known locally and abroad after representing many detainees held by the State Security Investigation Office, which was dissolved after the Revolution in 2011.[465] He served as defence team leader in most of human rights cases in Egypt. Eid was detained on several occasions and he was subjected to torture by the hands of security officials.[466] In 2004, he joined the Egyptian Movement for Change (*Kefaya*), a popular movement founded to pressure the Mubarak regime. Eid also specialises in Internet issues and has stressed that the impact of the Internet has been infinite, especially

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[458] Interview with Gamal Eid, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 June 2018)
[459] ibid
[460] ibid
[461] ibid
[462] ibid
[463] ibid
[464] ibid
[465] 'Egypt: Anatomy of a State Security Case: The "Victorious Sect" Arrests' (Human Rights Watch) <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=t9hOiq95bq0C&dq=Gamal+Eid&source=gbs_navlinks_s&redir_esc=y> accessed 10 March 2020
[466] Interview with Gamal Eid, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 June 2018)

in terms of documenting human rights violations and the ability to hold government officials accountable.[467] Gamal's first relation with Internet and human rights started when he developed the Human Rights Watch website in 1999. His early activism was through online forums, with predated blogs and then social media later.[468] Together with his team of 25 employees, Eid conducts research and offers legal aid, networking and strategic support to human rights organizations, journalists, and bloggers. ANHRI website enjoys the most visitors of human rights websites in the Arab countries. The information on the site (posted in Arabic) includes the network's own research and information provided by more than 300 human rights organisations worldwide.[469]

Gamal started his work as a construction worker then a journalist during the study period at the Faculty of Law, Ain Shams University. After graduation, he worked as a lawyer in the office of Ahmed Kamel Awwad in al-Sayeda Zeinab between 1991 and 1993.[470] Eid moved to the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights as Deputy Director of the Field Work Unit from 1993 until 1994. He then co-founded the Legal Aid Center for Human Rights with the late lawyer Hisham Mubarak and served as director of the Legal Unit 1994-1995.[471] Gamal established his own law practice office in the Dar Salaam neighbourhood, besides working as a researcher at the American University in Cairo and the Democracy Development Group between 1994 and 1998.[472] He worked as a consultant for Human Rights Watch in New York, in the Middle East Division in the period 1998 until 2005, and continued with the institution, despite his return to Cairo in 2001.[473] In 2004, he and some of his colleagues founded the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information and still works as its director to date.

Eid had worked for 25 years as a human rights defender and had to endure arrests and harassment, but the situation worsened under the government of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. With the Egyptian public surrendering itself once again to living in a state dominated by the military that distorted and suppressed most of what was celebrated and praised during the 2011 Revolution, the support and protection of the few stable voices on the ground facing unprecedented repression became of the utmost importance. Eid is one of those voices that

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[467] ibid
[468] ibid
[469] ibid
[470] ibid
[471] ibid
[472] ibid
[473] 'Gamal Eid Resume' (Gamal Eid) <http://gamaleid.net/?page_id=84> accessed 10 March 2020

the authorities intend to extinguish. In 2011, Eid was awarded the Leaders for Democracy award by the Project of Middle East Democracy.[474]

In recent years, Eid has been subjected to an increasing number of violations of his rights and freedoms. On 4 February 2016, he intended to travel to Athens, but the airport authorities informed him that he was on the list of those banned from traveling without giving him any reason or explanation for this ban.[475] On 19 March 2016, the Cairo Court froze his assets and those of his wife and 11-year-old daughter.[476] On 23 May of the same year, Eid stood before three judges on charges of accepting foreign funding without permission—a charge that could be punished with life imprisonment according to the amendment to the Egyptian Penal Code in 2014.[477] After the trial was postponed several times, it was finally held in September 2016. The court froze the assets of Eid and other human rights defenders.[478]

On 29 December 2019, members of the Egyptian security forces attacked Eid in the street near his home in Cairo while he was waiting for a taxi. About ten men, including a national security officer whom Eid knew, threw him on the ground, hit him severely, and doused him with paint from head to toe. Eid was told that he was doused with paint in order to "blame himself."[479] Gamal is currently banned from traveling outside Egypt based on the court decision that was issued to prevent the defendants from traveling, pending their accusation in Case no. 173 of 2011, known in the media as the "foreign funding" case.[480] Despite all the legal intimidation that Eid is subjected to, he is still very active on social media with thousands of followers on both Facebook and Twitter. Eid's Twitter account has over a million and half followers as of March 2021.[481]

5.3.5. Esraa Abdel Fattah

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[474] 'Gamal Eid' (Front Line defenders) <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/gamal-eid> accessed 10 March 2020
[475] Interview with Gamal Eid, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 June 2018)
[476] ibid
[477] ibid
[478] ibid
[479] Interview with Gamal Eid, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 30 January 2020)
[480] Haitham Elboraai, 'Gamal Eid's Appeal Rejected' Alwatan News (Cairo, 18 July 2020)
<https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/4908944> accessed 20 December 2020
[481] 'Gamal Eid' (Twitter) <https://twitter.com/gamaleid> accessed 20 December 2020

Esraa Abdel Fattah is an Egyptian political activist who was born in Banha, Qalyubiya, in 1978.[482] Abdel Fattah is a digital media specialist and journalist at Youm7 newspaper and has worked as a project manager at the Egyptian Democratic Institute, an Egyptian non-governmental organisation that promotes the use of modern media tools to promote democracy and human rights.[483] Abdel Fattah participated in the call for the 6 April 2008 strike in Egypt against "price hikes and corruption" on Facebook, when she was a member of the Ghad Party.[484] Abdel Fattah was arrested on 6 April 2008, and taken to the Qasr al-Nil police station for investigation and charged by the Egyptian authorities with inciting riots. She remained held until she was released on April 14, 2008.[485] However, the Egyptian Interior Minister issued a decision to arrest Abdel Fattah again for no reason, and she was released on 23 April 2008.[486] Egyptian security forces arrested her again on 15 January 2010 while she was paying condolences to the victims of the Nag Hammadi massacre.[487]

Abdel Fattah's main belief at the beginning was that everyone should enjoy freedom of opinion in politics. Seeing how other countries, like the US, changed presidents in free elections while Egypt had been ruled by Mubarak for decades, Abdel Fattah's first interest in politics and human rights started with the Egyptian presidential elections of 2005.[488] She was shocked when she compared the situation of democracy between Egypt and other more democratic countries and saw how people were supressed in Egypt under an authoritarian government.[489] When Abdel Fattah joined the Ghad Party, her main concern was people's rights, and how to allow people to express their opinion and induce real change in political situation in Egypt. Granting people a voice and an ability to express themselves was her obsession along her journey of activism.[490] Abdel Fattah always targeted young people and saw in them the potential to act and induce that change. She believed in empowering youth, which is why she supported young political activists such as Ayman Nour when he decided to

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[482] Interview with Esraa Abdelfattah, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 16 May 2017)
[483] 'Esraa Abdel Fattah' (Front Line Defenders) <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/ar/case/case-history-esraa-abdel-fattah> accessed 4 June 2020
[484] Interview with Esraa Abdelfattah, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 16 May 2017)
[485] ibid
[486] ibid
[487] ibid
[488] ibid
[489] ibid
[490] ibid

run for presidency in 2005, when he was 41 years old. Abdel Fattah supported Nour because he was young, ambitious, and presented new ideas in a very bold way.[491]

Abdel Fattah's first actual involvement in politics was during a judges' protest in 2006. She saw in that protest how much of a failure the judicial system in Egypt was, whereby judges from inside the system were not able to achieve justice due to the government's control over the judiciary.[492] She felt it was important that people support judges in their fight to gain independence. Abdel Fattah believes that justice is the core of any positive change in Egypt and people should be aware of that and learn how to fight for justice.[493]

Abdel Fattah does not see that the main source for her political awareness was just reading or education, but rather real interaction with people in the street. She always has her sense of justice on alert, which has led to a lot of troubles in her daily life.[494] Abdel Fattah found herself many times in a situation where she would speak up on behalf of people around her, such as stepping in in a situation on the street where a police officer is intimidating an innocent citizen. After she realised her interest in the rights of the people and her eagerness to speak up on their behalf, Abdel Fattah started to read more about human rights and attended workshops and discussions to learn more.[495] Abdel Fattah attended the human rights school organised by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies in 2005, and she attributes a lot of what she learnt on human rights to that course.[496] Abdel Fattah showed a great interest in human rights and excelled in the subject that she became a human rights trainer in the CIHRS course in 2008, four years after she was just a student in the course.[497] Abdel Fattah also attended many human rights-related activities organised by the Political Awareness Committee at the Ghad Party, and though these activities, Abdel Fattah gained a great deal of human rights teachings that enabled her to take her activism to a much higher level and playing leading roles in significant events such as the 6 April 2008 strike and the 25 January Revolution.[498]

In her activism, Abdel Fattah always targeted young people belonging to the lower-middle classes and who have a moderate level of education. She believes that this targeted

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[491] ibid
[492] ibid
[493] ibid
[494] ibid
[495] ibid
[496] ibid
[497] ibid
[498] ibid

group is fertile soil for receiving human rights messaging and has the ability to interact and induce change.[499] This group has the potential to have access to knowledge and access to Internet; they have ambition to change their lives and have the awareness to recognise the needs of the society as whole, allowing them to fight for their own rights as well as the rights of others around them.[500]

When Abdel Fattah created the April 6 Youth Movement group on Facebook in 2008, it was one of the first political groups in Egypt to reach over 77,000 members in the period between 23 March 2008, and 6 April 2008.[501] At that time, these high numbers of group members were seen only in celebrities' pages, such as that of pop start Amr Diab or other artists of a similar level of fame. The same impact of social media was seen later in 2010 in the "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook page. This page presented the victim of torture as an average middle-class Egyptian, who looks like a normal person, plays music, has a cat, and goes to cyber cafés like any young Egyptian of that age. This delivered the message that torture could befall any Egyptian citizen, no matter what one does to avoid being politically active and targeted for that.[502] This was the same strategy that Abdel Fattah used in her cyberactivism to create a personal association with the audience in posts that represent elements that are very close to them to convey a wider message. Even when she organised events and activities, they were not termed activities against human rights violations, such as torture; they were just symbolic silent vigils to remind people of the victims of these types of violations.[503] These kinds of events were very appealing to people, as they were simple actions without banners with complicated slogans or sophisticated language. The strategy behind organising these events was influenced by interaction on social media, which means that Abdel Fattah and other organisers followed closely what social media users followed and interacted with, and designed such activities using the same language used on social media and responding to users' comments and questions accordingly.[504]

Abdel Fattah's strategy on posting on social media is one where she picks one issue at a time, mostly related to human rights, and starts posting about it in a series of posts to explain the issue in a simple way to the audience. Her goal is to make this issue a trend on social media, which promotes followers to post about the issue in their own words within the

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[499] ibid
[500] ibid
[501] ibid
[502] ibid
[503] ibid
[504] ibid

capacity of what they understand from her posts. After that, Abdel Fattah follows up with discussions with followers in the comments section and she uses the highest level of tolerance and patience in these discussions. Abdel Fattah struggles with tolerance when it comes to direct insults addressed to her in the comments, even though she understands that swearwords are part of the vernacular path that she chose to take, but also finds that when the discussion reaches the level of insult-exchange, this means that the discussion is completely deviated from being constructive.[505]

Abdel Fattah, known as Egypt's "Facebook girl,"[506] co-founded the 6 April Youth Movement, which became a driving force for street protests in 2011. She and a number of activists launched a social media page (6 April Youth Movement page) on Facebook urging young people to join a strike to support workers in an industrial city. In this page, Abdel Fattah managed to gather sixty-five thousand followers at the time where opposition political parties were failing to be of any appeal to young Egyptians.[507] Abdel Fattah's activism on social media also contributed to creating hashtags that became trend at the time. For example, Abdel Fattah created the hashtag #إحنا_متراقبين or "We're being monitored" when the Egyptian government announced its plan to monitor social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in 2014.[508] Most of the participation on this hashtag was sarcastic, mocking the effort and the resources that the government was to exert to monitor millions of posts over social media thinking that they could contain and control the criticism. On this hashtag, Abdel Fattah used a simple language to explain the difference between privacy and secrecy, and people's right to speak up on social media without fear of prosecution.[509]

On the morning of 13 January 2015, police officers at Cairo International Airport prevented Abdel Fattah from boarding a plane bound for Germany and informed her that she was banned from traveling by a judicial decision, even though that she had not received any prior notification of this ban.[510] On 12 October 2019, Abdel Fattah was assaulted and abducted by security forces in civilian clothes. After her detention, a National Security Agency officer threatened her with torture after she refused to allow him to open her mobile

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[505] ibid

[506] Michael Georgy, 'Activist Esraa Abdel Fattah Feels Isolated after 5 Years' Alquds (London, 25 January 2016) <Link> accessed 4 June 2020

[507] Wael Mamdouh, 'Elyoum 7 Interviews Esraa Abdel Fattah After her Release' Elyoum 7 (Cairo, 25 April 2008) <Link> accessed 4 June 2020

[508] 'Egyptian Ministry of Interior Monitors Facebook and twitter' (Daily Motion) <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x1yatfz> accessed 4 June 2020

[509] Interview with Esraa Abdel Fattah, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 16 May 2017)

[510] ibid

phone.[511] Several men then entered the room and started hitting her on the face and body. A National Security Agency officer returned and repeated his request for her to give them access to her phone. Abdel Fattah refused again, and the officer stripped her of her shirt and strangled her, while threatening to kill her until she gave him her password.[512] The officer kept her restrained for about eight hours. Another officer warned her that she would face more torture if she informed the prosecution about what had happened.[513] The Public Prosecution Office passed a detention order for 15 days during her interrogation, on charges of "participating in a terrorist group," "spreading false news" and "misuse of social media," same charges faced by other human rights activists, such as lawyer Mahienour al-Massry, the politician Khaled Dawood, and a professor of political science, Hassan Nafea. As it happened to them, Abdel Fattah was questioned about her past political activity.[514] The prosecution had no evidence against her, other than the investigation file of the National Security Agency, which neither she nor her attorneys were able to access.[515] Abdel Fattah is still in pretrial detention as of the writing of this paper in June 2021.

5.3.6. Wael Khalil

Wael Khalil, born on 21 December 1965, is an Egyptian political activist known for opposing the Hosni Mubarak government, his activities during the 25 January Revolution in Egypt, and his blog WaELK.net covered topics on politics and political activism.[516] Khalil is a software engineer and the son of prominent actress Mohsena Tawfiq. He has been married to Lamia Bulbul since 5 September 1996.[517] Khalil joined the Revolutionary Socialists in 1992, but left them in 2011, a few weeks after Mubarak stepped down. Khalil has been active since 2000 in the fight against war and globalisation.[518] Khalil began his activities in 2000 as part of the Egyptian anti-war and anti-globalisation movement.[519] Khalil formulated his political beliefs through engaging in movements such as the anti-war and Palestine solidarity

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[511] ibid
[512] ibid
[513] ibid
[514] ibid
[515] 'Egypt Escalates Violence by Abducting and Torturing a Human Rights defender' (Amnesty International UK) < https://www.amnesty.org/ar/latest/news/2019/10/egypt-steps-up-brutality-with-abduction-and-torture-of-human-rights-defender/> accessed 4 June 2020
[516] Interview with Wael Khalil, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 July 2018)
[517] ibid
[518] ibid
[519] 'Egyptian anti-war and anti-globalization movement' (Ahram Weekly) <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/748/eg9.htm> accessed 3 December 2019

movements, and he also saw in fighting dictatorship a means of countering larger injustices such as imperialism.[520]

Khalil is a member of the *Kefaya* movement. He is also a founding member of the March 20 Campaign for Change.[521] Khalil took part in the 2002 Palestine solidarity demonstrations, and for him it was the first time someone cheered, "Down to Hosni Mubarak."[522] It came from a street protest and marked the first sign of real opposition against the Mubarak government. In 2006, he criticised Egyptian police for killing Sudanese refugees who were protesting in a Cairo square.[523] In 2006, Khalil took part in the judges' movement. When he saw the Khaled Said movement in 2010, he realised that there was something much stronger about it.[524] He saw that it had a reach that was much wider than anything he had seen before. For the first time, he saw what he called micro-activism—specific, simple, not complicated and anyone can do it. He believed that it was also an accumulation of previous movements too, like the bloggers or *Kefaya*, and since then he focused his activism on social media, especially Twitter.[525]

In September 2010, Khalil exposed on Twitter a media scandal committed by Mubarak's government, when he exposed a photoshopped image published by Al-Ahram to change the position of former President Hosni Mubarak from the end of the row to the front. In the actual picture, Mubarak appeared behind Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, King Abdullah of Jordan and US President Barack Obama after a White House press conference.[526]

Khalil was very active on Twitter prior and during the revolution of 2011, and it is believed that he created the famous hashtag of the revolution: "#Jan25."[527] In a well-known analysis done by programmer Kovas Boguta on Egypt's influence networks on Twitter users during the days of the revolution in January 2011 using the hashtag #Jan25, it showed that Khalil's account @wael had the highest influence number among Twitter Arabic users,

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[520] Interview with Wael Khalil, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 July 2018)
[521] ibid
[522] ibid
[523] ibid
[524] ibid
[525] ibid
[526] 'Egyptian newspaper under fire over altered photo' BBC (London, 15 September 2010) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11313738> accessed 3 December 2019
[527] 'Wael Khalil' (Twitter) <https://twitter.com/wael/status/166105058256240640> accessed 3 June 2019

represented in the biggest red circle in the illustration.[528] Khalil also wrote opinion pieces for prominent international newspapers such as the Guardian.[529]

In July 2011, Al-Ahram reported on a meeting between Khalil with Prime Minister Essam Sharaf, along with four other activists. The meeting sparked much controversy as to whether the group actually represents the growing voices of protests. The meeting took place during the sit-in of thousands of protesters in Tahrir Square on the second Day of Anger.[530] In September 2012, Khalil was appointed as member of the Egyptian National Human Rights Council.[531] However, in December 2012, Khalil and human rights activist Ahmed Saif al-Islam announced that they had submitted their resignation from the National Council for Human Rights to Counsellor Husam al-Ghariani, speaker of the Council, in opposition to putting the constitution up for a referendum.[532] The two resigning members described the constitutional declaration as a "catastrophe," and emphasised that continuing in the National Council had become impossible to improve human rights conditions, especially if the violations were committed by the president and the rest of the bodies that are under the control of the majority members of the council.[533]

5.4. Conclusion

Social consciousness is one of the most important pillars of progress and development in any society, and it plays a great role in the stability and advancement of society by raising the status of its members, as social consciousness and awareness constitute an important step to self-development and the creation of the creative, educated, understanding and conscious person who contributes to building and developing society. As we have seen from the backgrounds of these cyberactivists, the development of social consciousness began with the self-first. By observing oneself, a person will realise that their feelings are mostly the result

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[528] 'Egypt Influence Network' <https://mostafanageeb.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/egyptinfluencenetwork.pdf> accessed 3 June 2019

[529] 396- Wael Khalil, 'Why we are holding Egypt's second 'Friday of rage'' the Guardian (London, 27 May 2011) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/may/27/egypt-second-friday-of-rage> accessed 3 June 2019

[530] Yassin Gaber, 'Chronicles of a sit-in: Day 4' Ahram English (Cairo, 13 July 2011) <http://english.ahram.org.eg/~/NewsContent/1/64/16325/Egypt/Politics-/Chronicles-of-a-sitin-Day-.aspx> accessed 10 July 2019

[531] Mohamed Salem, 'Al Shorouk Publishes the Formation of the National Human Rights council' Al Shorouk (Cairo, 3 September 2012) <https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=03092012&id=5a6eb543-bbc2-40d9-acca-0e9c927a0a24&fb_comment_id=490880410924208_5935194> accessed 3 June 2019

[532] Interview with Wael Khalil, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 July 2018)

[533] Bahi Hassan, 'Khalil and Saif Aleslam Resign from the National council' Almasry Alyoum (Cairo, 3 December 2012) <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/255807> accessed 4 June 2019

of their thoughts, and that their behaviour is the result of their thoughts and feelings. Therefore, the process of self-development begins with their observation of thoughts and their effort to replacing every negative thought with an appropriate positive idea, so that the person fills their conscious and unconscious mind with progressive ideas and culture. It removes the thoughts that are stuck in their mind from the past or imposed on them by a society that hinders their development, in order to help them to develop and advance.

And between the events of reality, internally and externally, and the minds of people, in all processes of preserving societies or changing societies, preservation and change often depend on the social consciousness and awareness of intellectuals and creators in various fields, for their influence as the largest group of soft power affects society and leaves a mark, whether negative or positive. Therefore, the conscious intellectual and creative person represents the voices of many, the tongue of the suffering of their people, and the eye through which society sees what is happening in the world in terms of processes and dangers, in all their political, social, economic, and cultural forms. That is why the conscious person acts as the safety valve for their community, whereby they see, analyse, clarify the facts, and warn and point out the dangers. When this valve becomes fortified with social consciousness, awareness, honesty, truthfulness and sincerity, society remains safe from any exploiter or tyrant or cultural invasion that destroys its structure and breaks its existence.

There are educated and conscious creators such as these cyberactivists, who turned their gained social consciousness into activism, and there is a type that is satisfied with the role of a spectator, as if they are not concerned because they are drowning in their own personal issues, often superficial or marginal matters. There is another destructive type that calls for pessimism and blames societies, and a culture of frustration and despair is spread. And there is a rampant type that is opportunistic, who uses events to polish their image and highlight their name in every field, a person who does not offer solutions; truth is not expected from them, but they talk about events in line with the surrounding atmosphere. Within the Egyptian context, we have seen many media presenters who played that role, which was one reason that people turned to cyberactivists for the truth.

As for the kind that societies need, like our cyberactivists, the true cause-holder is an active person affected by the community's issues, the mouthpiece of peoples and the awareness of nations and the light of truth and justice, who strives to build a society enlightened with awareness, mission, and honesty, aware of the size of the responsibility that has fallen on their shoulders. They are also aware that the title of activist is a responsibility, not an honour, and it comes with its risks and dangers. That desired type, the activist, does

not despair of the existing contradictions, but continues to present ideas and constructive criticism and rejection of any political or societal transgressions, aiming to fight any hostile behaviour, intellectual scourge that afflicts the culture and awareness of societies, or political decision that harms the interests of peoples. This activist presents the public interest of peoples over their own interest, and may not receive anything in return, except that they are the owners of a sincere message that carries the concerns of a society they suffer for.

In an ideal society, the biggest role in shaping and creating social consciousness and awareness, personality and culture of the human being is the family, followed by education, institutions, civil society organisations and the media. However, in the case of the cyberactivists we presented, it seems that the main source of their social consciousness came from their early personal experience and exposure to injustice in the society around them. Their social consciousness and awareness were not formed by preaching and guiding, nor by resonant speeches, nor by indoctrination and memorisation, nor education, but rather through human communication, and participation, which makes those cyberactivists conscious. We see a citizen surrounded by a lack of knowledge, randomness, and a decline in culture from every direction, yet they remain aware, vigilant, and attentive to the dangers surrounding them and the opportunities that life allows. Building awareness among large sectors of young people did not happen through the culture of indoctrination of the topics and the dangers surrounding them, but by expanding their perceptions so that they themselves realise what is happening around them and form their beliefs towards it through dialogue and exchange of views. There is a difference between awareness of indoctrination and awareness of formation. The first deals with minds as vessels for pouring information, and the other deals with them as human faculties to form visions and trends. If we want a real, cumulative, and lasting awareness, it should be through the cultural formation of youth, which is achieved through cultural activities, participation in them, freedom of expression, and civic activity.

Awareness and reform usually come in a cumulative manner and because of the experiences that an individual or community undergoes, and this can be clearly seen in the demonstrations that erupted in a number of Arab countries like Egypt in what was known as the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011, whose effects and results are still continuing today and will remain for years. Regardless of the positions for and against it, it is a fact that cannot be ignored, and the history we all live in has what came before it and what will come after it. However, in the events of the Arab Spring in 2011, the forces of change were seeking to bring down the ruling regimes only, considering that regime change is a key to changing all

the wrong situations in their countries, and a prelude to achieving the aspirations of their people and the supremacy of social justice.

Chapter 6. Analysis

6.1. Introduction

This chapter represents the core of this dissertation, in which the selected online content will be analysed. Due to the nature of the content, which is political and in which "language" is the key element, the method of data analysis I used is discourse analysis.[534] This discourse analysis enabled me to study the behaviour of the selected cyberactivists in choosing their wording and the language they used, thus identifying the vernacularisation process within their online activity. The analysis methodology in this chapter will be based on "Discourse Analysis" as set forth in the book *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook for Social Research* by Martin W Bauer and George Gaskell,[535] and *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* by Marianne Jorgensen Louise J. Phillips.[536]

Each of the selected six posts will be analysed in seven steps as explained previously in the methodology section. The first will be a reproduction of the original post as a

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[534] Marianne Jorgensen and J. Louise Phillips, Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method (3rd edn, SAGE 2002)

[535] Martin W Bauer and George Gaskell, Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook for Social Research (Sage 2000)

[536] Marianne Jorgensen and J. Louise Phillips, Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method (3rd edn, SAGE 2002)

screenshot or an image, in its original Arabic form and taken from the social media tool it was posted on. Second will be the transcript and translation of the original Arabic post in English. Third, historical background and political context will be provided. Fourth, relevant international human rights law elements of the post, in addition also to local legal context, will be summarised to demonstrate the human rights and legal concepts that the cyberactivist has referred to. Fifth, we will analyse the vernacularisation that has occurred in the post and frame these within the local, vernacular discourse of the Egyptian context. Sixth, we will discuss the online reaction the post received on social media at the time, whether in the form of shares, likes, or retweets, depending on the social media tool. I will also discuss certain comments made by users or followers and their relevance to the issues brought up in the post. Finally, I will present reflections on the post from the cyberactivists themselves based on interviews and conversations carried out with them. In the coming section I will analyse six posts from the six selected cyberactivists. Those posts were selected based on the criteria stated in the methodology section in Chapter 1.

6.2. Post # 1 (Post by Wael Abbas on Facebook)

6.2.1. Screenshot of Original Post

Wael Abbas
April 28, 2012 ·

السفير المصري في السعودية مجرد تاجر رقيق نخاس عرص وكلب بيتاجر في البشر وبيبيع المصريين عبيد بالرخيص في السعودية !!! نظام الكفيل هو نظام استرقاق اصلا وده مش راي ولا وجهة نظر لان اي حد شايف غير كده يبقى ابن مرة شرموطة عبد !!!

Heba ElShamy, Mohab Abdeldaim and 170 others   4 Comments 22 Shares

Illustration 1: Screenshot of original post by Wael Abbas on Facebook

6.2.2. Transcript

"The Egyptian ambassador to Saudi Arabia is just a slave-trading pimp and a dog who trades in humans and sells Egyptians as slaves in Saudi Arabia for cheap!!! The *kafeel*

system is a modern-day form of slavery and this is not an opinion or point of view because anyone who sees it otherwise is a son of a slut-whore-slave !!!"[537]

6.2.3. Historical Background

This Facebook post was posted on 28 April 2012. At the time, Egypt was under the rule of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), which took over the country after ousting former President Mubarak following public protests that started on 25 January 2011. Under the rule of SCAF, Egypt witnessed massive human rights violations, among them violations of the rights of Egyptians working in the Gulf, including in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This post by Abbas was a reaction to major incident that was significant to Egyptian-Saudi relations, and which included a human rights issue.

On 28 April 2012, Egyptian-Saudi relations suddenly became strained after Saudi Arabia's decision to close its embassy in Cairo and its consulates in Alexandria and Suez and recall its ambassador, Ahmed Abdel Aziz Qattan, for consultation, as a reaction to demonstrations by activists in front of the Saudi embassy in Cairo in protest of Saudi security forces' arrest of lawyer Ahmed al-Gizawi on charges of drug possession.[538] Earlier in April 2012, al-Gizawi was arrested upon arrival to Saudi Arabia, purportedly for defaming King Abdullah by filing a lawsuit in a court in southern Cairo against the Saudi monarch on behalf of Egyptian citizens detained with no charge in Saudi prisons. Later, Saudi authorities stated that al-Gizawi was arrested at King Abdulaziz International Airport near Jeddah on 17 April for possession of anti-anxiety Xanax pills, which are banned in the Kingdom.[539] They expressed doubts that he intended to make the pilgrimage, because he was not wearing the typical white Hajj dress (*ihram*). Al-Gizawi was sentenced in absentia to one year in prison and 20 lashes.[540] This incident prompted Egypt to send a large parliamentary delegation to Riyadh in order to resolve the crisis. During the visit, Saudi Arabia pledged 2.7 billion US dollars to support the deteriorating financial situation in Egypt. The Saudi embassy then

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[537] 'Wael Abbas Post' (Facebook, 28 April 2018) <https://www.facebook.com/waelabbas/posts/10151579048345220> accessed 20 June 2020
[538] 'Egyptian protests over detained lawyer shut Saudi embassy' BBC (London, 28 April 2012) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-17881733> access 8 May 2020
[539] ibid
[540] 'Egyptian protests over detained lawyer shut Saudi embassy' BBC (London, 28 April 2012) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-17881733> access 8 May 2020

issued a statement saying that the Saudi ambassador would return to Egypt on 5 May 2012, to carry out his duties.[541]

To contain the situation, the Egyptian ambassador decided to drop allegations of human rights violations and back up the possession charges. Saudi Arabia welcomed this stance, and subsequently offered Egypt the large donation. The Egyptian ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Mahmoud Auof, explained that the accused, Ahmed al-Gizawi, had attempted to smuggle 21,000 narcotic tablets hidden inside a milk package.[542] The ambassador confirmed that al-Gizawi had signed a written confession seen by the Egyptian consulate in Jeddah and had appeared in a number of images showing his arrest as well as the drugs he was allegedly in possession of. The Egyptian ambassador denied that al-Gizawi was politically persecuted in Saudi Arabia. He explained that this was not a political case, like people in Egypt had been saying, but was related to a narcotics offense, which is considered a major crime in any country.[543]

This stance from the Egyptian ambassador caused anger among Egyptian human rights activists, political activists, and revolutionaries, because it revealed a common approach taken by the government: undermining Egyptians' human rights in exchange for large sums of money, in what is seen as what Abbas expressed as "pimping." This case was one among many cases where Saudi Arabia had violated the rights of Egyptian labourers under the *kafala* كفالة system of sponsorship.[544]

6.2.4. International Human Rights Law Element

This post involves labour rights and the rights of Egyptians working abroad, as well as freedom of expression. The job market in the Gulf depends mainly on expatriates, who make up more than two-thirds of the total population. The sponsorship *kafala* system is one of the most important pillars of the expatriate management process. The phenomenon of Egyptian labour abroad is like any human phenomenon—it arose out of a set of political, economic and social conditions reflecting what Egypt had been witnessing in terms of deteriorating economic conditions, poor living standards, and high unemployment rates. It

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[541] ibid

[542] ibid

[543] Mohamed Zaarir, 'Egyptian Ambassador: Gizawi Case is Drug Smuggling and not Political' Alweeam (Riyadh, 24 April 2012) <Link> accessed 8 May 2020

[544] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)

was natural for the rates of Egyptian labour migration to rise abroad, a trend that started to increase with the beginning of the seventies.

Although the migration of Egyptian workers abroad has contributed to solving the problem of unemployment, Egyptians working abroad have faced many difficulties due to their presence in the countries of work, which may compel them to carry out work that does not conform to the general principles and prevailing values of rights of migrant workers. They may be subjected to trafficking operations, degrading conditions of work—which often takes place when they do not possess the necessary documents, such as in the case of illegal immigration—and to imprisonment and unlawful detention because their embassies neglect them and do not interfere to protect them from prison.

Legal practitioners see that the sponsorship system adopted in the Gulf states is one of the most difficult fields to navigate for migrant workers, and falls under the definition of "modern slavery" because of its problems and the resulting violations, and which has put these countries in the face of criticism by international organisations concerned with human rights.[545] The sponsorship, or *kafala*, system is one of the most serious violations faced by Egyptians in Arab countries, with which Egyptians are subjected to unlawful detention and prevented from the right to move freely and travel. Migrants are forced to give the sponsor the powers to confiscate passports and withdraw residency, as well as waive their rights, for fear of being subjected to unfair imprisonment. This practice violates the provisions of Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which gives everyone who is legally present in a region the right to freedom of movement and freedom to choose their place of residence within that region. According to paragraph 1 of Article 12 of ICCPR, people have the right to move from one place to another and to live in a place according to their choice; freedom of movement is guaranteed for every person and seen as a necessary condition for the free development of human beings.[546] This principle intersects with several other rights mentioned in the covenant, since every state must guarantee the rights contained in the covenant for all individuals within its territory and entering its jurisdiction.[547]

According to human rights organisations, there are more than 9 million migrant workers doing manual, accounting and service jobs in Saudi Arabia, who make up more than half of the workforce. Some of them suffer violations and exploitation, which can reach

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[545] Habib Tawfik, 'Kafala System: Bondage or Work Regulation' BBC (London, 24 October 2019) <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/business-50110444> accessed 8 May 2020
[546] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 Article 12 para 1
[547] ibid

conditions that qualify as forced labour.[548] The sponsorship system links migrant workers'

residence permits to the "sponsor" employer, whose written approval is required to change

jobs or to leave the country.[549] Some employers illegally confiscate the employees' passports,

withhold salaries, or force migrants to work. Saudi Arabia also imposes an exit visa and

compels migrant workers to obtain a permit from the employer before leaving the kingdom.

A worker who leaves his employer without consent can be charged with absconding and

faces punishments such as imprisonment or deportation.[550]

Being born in the 1970s, Abbas was among this generation that witnessed the early

waves of Egyptian labours heading toward the Gulf to work in different fields. This era

witnessed a mass exodus of Egyptians seeking better opportunities of work in the Gulf,

whose economy was blooming at the time compared to Egypt's.[551] This phenomenon also

had different negative influences on Egyptian society, as it was one of the gateways to

introducing Islamic fundamentalist ideologies that developed in Saudi Arabia and were

brought to Egypt by returning labourers. Abbas, as a child, heard stories of Egyptian workers

in Saudi Arabia and the suffering they faced under the *kafala* system.[552] Seeing all the

negative aspects of it while not feeling significant benefits made to Egypt's society or

economy made this generation develop an attitude toward this issue and an early

understanding of the human rights violations associated with it through first-hand stories

from family members and friends' families.[553]

Abbas tackled the issue of Egyptian labour rights abroad in his early blogging

activism. According to a study by Hisham Abdel Maqsood, Wael Abbas' blog "*al-Wa'iy al-*

Masry" had the issue of the Egyptian labours abroad as the second most tackled issue in the

external affairs category, with 39.2 percent of blogposts dedicated to it.[554] Abbas also

addressed other incidents related to Egyptians working abroad, such as Egyptian fishermen in

Libya. In one post, Abbas attacked the *kafala* system by posting the old Egyptian flag with a

comment saying: "Under this flag Egypt conquered the first Saudi state... that is what we

were but now we are just people run over by Gulfies' luxurious cars in countries where

Egyptians are slaves to the sponsor."[555]

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548 'World Report 2017' (Human Rights Watch) <https://www.hrw.org/ar/world-report/2017/country-
chapters/298422> accessed 8 May 2020
549 ibid
550 ibid
551 Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)
552 Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)
553 ibid
554 Hisham Atia Abdel Maqsood, 'Arabic Blogs: Political and Social Terms' (2010) Al Manhal 53
555 ibid

6.2.5. Vernacular Context

One of the main characteristics of this post is the extensive use of vulgar and profane language. These new social media tools come with the advantage of freer expression, making that space widely available among a younger generation in particular. On the other hand, this freedom also comes with linguistic content that is full of heavy use of vocabulary that could be considered vulgar and insulting. Unfortunately, there are no studies or attempts to monitor accurate data on this phenomenon among Arab users of social networking sites. Studies and data in this field are still limited at the global level; some indicate that 47 percent of users have profane content on their Facebook walls.[556] The extreme form of such content might constitute a different issue, and there are global attempts being made to develop mechanisms, laws, and software programs to monitor and block content on the Internet that might be considered harmful, such as abuse, harassment, and intimidation in what has been called digital or cyber bullying. However, this level of violence in social media content is outside the scope of this study.

Profanity in the Arabic language can be seen as the expression of things unwelcomed in explicit terms. This occurs through using terms that are prohibited in normal linguistic communication. Within the Egyptian culture, there is a recognition of the existence of what is called bad or brazen language in linguistic communication. Social media includes manifestations of this language. This is a street language that includes strong language and vulgar expressions with explicit and abusive references that indicate depictions of sexually explicit topics, including vocabulary that detracts from a person or group on the basis of some characteristics related to gender, colour, race, ethnic and religious differences. In general, profanity and advancement are a common dualism in judging human behaviour in all societies and cultures throughout history, and no language is free of vocabulary that denotes indecency and obscenity. This means that obscene language is always present in human life, before the advent of the Internet, and is used in specific contexts and controls that may narrow or expand depending on the number of social restrictions imposed by the group and the positions of authority within it on language. There are no absolute or definite boundaries between what is appropriate and inappropriate in language, but the boundaries between them

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[556] Emil Protalinski, '47% of Facebook Walls contain profanity' ZDnet <https://www.zdnet.com/article/47-of-facebook-walls-contain-profanity/> accessed 8 May 2020

are relative and vary with different societies, human cultures, and social groups within the same society. Likewise, the criteria for advancement and ugliness in language are not fixed, but always change over time. For example, the Arabic word *al-shater* الشاطر used to mean immoral but has since changed to become an adjective that describes intelligence, acumen, intuition, and cunning.

It is not permissible in any way to overlook the fact that obscenity in language is an integral part of Egyptian oral folklore, which boasts an enormous vocabulary from a legacy of insults, offense, and mockery, as well as frank innuendos in vocabulary and rhetorical images. Among the most popular folk texts full of pornographic language is *A Thousand and One Nights*, for which legal cases had previously been filed in Egypt in 1986 and 2010 to prevent the Ministry of Culture from printing it on the pretext of preserving values, morals and public modesty.[557] There is also a presence of indecency in written literary texts containing vocabulary and obscene language, in an attempt to break the sacred and moral barriers, and to break into the untold worlds. Modern Arabic poetry is not without this bold language, especially among the vocabulary of Nizar Qabbani, in addition to the poetry of Ahmed Fouad Negm, who was sometimes described as an obscene poet. There are also various literary writings that use this bold language described in post-modernist writings.

And if we turn to social media, we will note that profanity in the language is not limited to the dialogues and comments received on social networking sites, but rather the links that are transmitted to these sites from the colours of singing, such as rap songs that have proliferated in several Arab countries, and which are described in the eyes of political, religious, moral, and artistic powers as bad songs due to their lack of sophistication in words, melodies, and the way they are performed. On the other hand, and around these songs, it is important to note that what is described as vulgar content in these songs challenges prevailing taboos, prohibitions, ideals, tastes, and technical standards. Its performance gives room for freedom from societal restrictions and addresses the feelings of population blocs that suffer social and economic marginalisation and political and cultural suppression. It addresses young people in general and the problems they suffer, all of which plays an extremely important role in its acceptance and spread.

Obscene language space clearly widens among young people from virtual communication circuits to wider circles of direct communication in reality, which has

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[557] 'One Thousand and One Nights: An Obscene Work or Culture Art' Deutsche Welle (Berlin, 29 April 2010) <Link> accessed 8 May 2020

contributed to the deeper attachment to the linguistic dictionary of prohibited words. This appears when these words sometimes escape from the area of interaction among young people to situations of interaction and disagreement with others. And when some young people are blamed, for example, for not being able to avoid the use of obscene words, many of them justify this by saying that these words have become normal and do not cause shame or require apology. The widespread use of obscene words among young people inside and outside social media is closely related to the desire to freely express emotions completely, and sometimes bragging about breaking the barriers of language silence imposed by all religious, moral, patriarchal and political authorities on freedom of expression in daily life in the name of preserving values, traditions, sanctities, human advancement, respect, and the preservation of standards of prestige. Also, resorting to language described as inferior is inseparable from common expressions that use abbreviations, letters and English numbers to write words in Arabic. This phenomenon demonstrates the tendency of young people to assert an identity that resists social norms imposed from a higher authority.

In this post, Abbas used the context of pimping and prostitution. The expression '*ars* عرص(pimp) in Egyptian vernacular is very widely used to express much deeper connotations than actual pimping in the context of prostitution. Pimping in the Egyptian dialect can also mean sucking-up or bootlicking or any flattery behaviour to gain favour of those in power. This connotation is heavily applied within the political context. In the post in concern, Abbas accuses the Egyptian ambassador of pimping in its political context of approaching the Saudi government, undermining Egyptians' rights in return for materialistic gains. Foreign journalists have worked hard to translate the word, but no one has provided the exact meaning of the word in English. Some have translated it as to "pimp" or "pander," and this is one of the meanings of the word but not the exact meaning of it. Some have translated it as "jerk," and this also is not accurate.[558]

There are two meanings to defining the word '*ars*. The first meaning is what relates to personal matters in a man's accepting misbehaviour of the women in his household. At the second meaning, a person who knows that a wrong thing is happening and closes his eyes or justifies it. And while the person on the first meaning is stigmatised by society, society might tolerate second meaning.[559] The concept of pimping in the Egyptian vernacular context is also expanded to include the male interference within the female sexual behaviour even if

[558] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)
[559] Magdy Samaan, 'The Word the Everybody Failed to Translate' Mada Masr (Cairo, 16 April 2014) <Link> accessed 8 May 2020

this woman is not related to him. For example, if a taxi driver driving a couple who started kissing, he might react to stop them as he would be considered a '*ars*, or a doorman who saw a woman entering a single man's home without stopping her would be also considered a '*ars*.[560]

In this post, Abbas used explicit street language such as "'*ars*" and "son of a whore." The latter is a common street insult used very frequently in spoken language but not in written language. The word in Arabic is "*ibn sharmoota*." ابن شرموطة *Sharmoota* is a colloquial counterpart to classic Arabic words that refer to prostitutes, such as "'*ahera*" عاهرة or "*mumis* مومس."[561] For Wael, the choice of the word was not random, as he sees it fitting within the context of the model in the post.[562] From the beginning of the post, Abbas used the frame of "prostitution" where the Egyptian ambassador is the pimp and Egyptians under the *kafala* are enforced prostitutes. Abbas continues the allegory by stigmatising those who accept the situation as prostitutes also. However, Abbas distinguish between those who are under *kafala* as they are forced to prostitution, while using the shameful prostitution concept to describe the one who are supporting the *kafala* system and cannot see it a violation of rights.[563] Abbas' choice of profane language was not random and was used within a context to address the issue by putting it within a local framework of "prostitution" while using a local street language in a political/legal context. The profane language might sound shocking and the explicit use of spoken expressions in writing is not common, but its use gave the message the integrated vernacular context able to reach a grassroot audience.

6.2.6. Social Media Interaction

This post was initially share 22 times and received 170 interactions. The number of likes on a post is an indication to Facebook that this content is interesting to users—for example, if the rate of likes on one of the posts on the page is higher than the average likes on the rest of the posts, Facebook starts bumping the post to a larger number of users who like that account. The number of comments is also a heavier weight indication for Facebook, so a post that receives lots of comments signals to Facebook that the content is interesting enough that users not only pressed the like button but also participated in the discussion. The higher

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[560] 'They Asked Me About Pimping' (Dot Masr) <Link> accessed 10 June 2020
[561] 'Sharmoota' (Urban Dictionary) <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=sharmoota> accessed 10 June 2020
[562] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)
[563] ibid

the number of interactions on the post, the more likely it is that content will reach users who follow your page—not only that, but you will also have the opportunity to reach new audiences who are the friends of the user who shared the post.[564]

This post received four comments, which is not much, but the comments made did constitute a controversial argument. One user commented: "The *kafala* system exists in many countries, whether Arab or Western, same concept but under different names" This comment triggered an explanation from other users and the author of the initial comment had to explain that even in Western countries there are hard requirements to work, such as work permit, residency status and a guarantor. Wael's post here triggered a debate that compared the *kafala* system with Western work requirements for foreigners and showed that sometimes even in Western countries work restrictions on foreigners was perceived by some as a right to work violation.

In another comment, a user said: "What worries me are the comments from Egyptians there. They are in fear, fear to the level of humiliation." This comment showed that taking a stand on a human rights issue such as the *kafala* system in these authoritative countries might trigger reprisals from the authorities targeting the rest of those who work under the *kafala* system. This kind of comment brings another aspect of the post to light and shows that those who are under the *kafala* system will be scared to talk about the violations they face for fear of reprisal. As a result, many violations will never be exposed. This fact gives great value to posts such as Abbas' for exposing these types of violations at the time when victims remained scared to speak out.

6.2.7. Reflections from the Cyberactivist

In this post, Abbas used one main concept of vernacularising, which is "framing," whereby he framed the meaning to interpret relevant events and conditions to bring the attention of the masses to a human rights issue and create an active participation.[565] By doing this, he created an interactively based interpretive processes as he rendered events into something meaningful that eventually will lead to organise collective experience and

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[564] Belle Beth Cooper, 'The Beginner's Guide to EdgeRank: How Facebook's News Feed Algorithm Actually Works' Buffer < https://buffer.com/resources/understanding-facebook-news-feed-algorithm/> accessed 10 June 2020
[565] David A. Snow, and Robert D. Benford 'Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization' (1988) 1 International Social Movement Research 197

action.[566] Abbas understood that framing needs to be resonant within the cultural traditions and narratives so it would be appealing to locals, and the more the resonance the more successful the frame will be, as we've described earlier.[567] By using the frame of "pimping," Abbas applied an interpretive package, which gave meaning to the migrant workers' issue as the core issue while covered in a frame that resonated with the local culture that made sense to relevant events suggesting the core issue.[568]

Abbas also applied what Merry explained on how the vernaculariser has to abandoning explicit references to human rights language in their posts, and present the human rights idea with a different purpose.[569] In this post, Abbas reframed the concept of migrant workers and the *kafala* system dramatically to make it fit into an existing local frame—in this case, to the idea of "pimping" and without any reference to human rights.

6.3. Post #2 (A video by Asmaa Mahfouz on YouTube)

Illustration 2: Screenshot of YouTube video by Asmaa Mahfouz

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[566] David A. Snow, and Robert D. Benford, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment' (2000) 26 Annual Review of Sociology 611

[567] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 38

[568] William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani, 'Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach' (1989) 95 (1) American Journal of Sociology 1-37

[569] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441

6.3.1. Original Post

Mahfouz posted on her YouTube channel a series of videos days before the 25 and 28 January 2011 uprising, but the most significant video, which we will represent here, is one she posted on 18 January 2011 on her Facebook account. The original post was later deleted but it was re-uploaded to YouTube by other YouTube users.[570] The version we will be using for this analysis is the earliest version I found (duration 4 minutes and 32 seconds), uploaded on 19 January 2011, the day after the original video was posted on Facebook, and was uploaded by YouTube user Mohammed Abdo (modeykokey).[571] Another full copy of the original video (duration 4 minutes and 37 seconds) was uploaded with English subtitles by Iyad al-Baghdady.[572]

6.3.2. Transcript of the Post in English

"Four Egyptians set themselves on fire to protest humiliation, hunger and poverty and degradation they had to live with for 30 years. Four Egyptians set themselves on fire, thinking we can have revolution like what happened in Tunisia—maybe we can have freedom, justice, honour and human dignity. Today, one of those four has died and I saw people commenting and saying: "May God forgive him, he died a sinner, he killed himself seeking fame." People have some shame! I posted that I, a woman, I am going down to Tahrir Square and I will stand alone, and I will hold up a banner, and perhaps people will show some sense. I even wrote my number, so maybe people will come down with me. No one came except three guys. Three guys and three armoured cars from the riot police, and dozens of hired thugs and officers came to terrorise us. They shoved us roughly away from the people. But once we were alone with them, they started to talk to us they and said, "Enough! We are from the people

[570] Melissa Walls, and Sahar el Zahed, '"I'll Be Waiting for You Guys": A Youtube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution' (2011) International Journal of Communication 5 (2011) 1333
[571] 'Asmaa Mahfouz on 25 January' (YouTube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRMpm4ejJS8> accessed 31 August 2020
[572] 'Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution' (YouTube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBg7O48vhLY&t=186s> accessed 25 August 2020

too. Those who killed themselves are suffering from mental illness." Enough said! Every time someone dies, the state media calls them psychopaths. If they were psychopaths, why would they burn themselves before the Parliament building? I am making this video to give you one simple message: We want to go down to Tahrir Square on 25 January. If we still have dignity and want to live as humans on this land, we have to go down on 25 January. We will go down and demand our rights, our fundamental human rights. I won't even talk about our political rights; we just want our human rights and nothing else. This entire government is corrupt—a corrupt president, a corrupt national security apparatus. Those self-immolators were not afraid of death, but they were afraid of the National Security, afraid of corruption. Can you imagine that? Are you also like them? Are you going to kill yourselves too? Or are you completely indifferent? I am going down on 25 January, and until then I am going to distribute flyers in the streets every day. I will not set myself on fire. If the security forces want to set me on fire, let them come and do it. If you think of yourself a man, come with me on 25 January. Whoever says women should not go to protests because they will get beaten, let him have some chivalry and manhood and come with me on 25 January. Whoever says it is not worth it because there will be only a handful of people, I want to tell him, you are the reason behind this, and you are condemned, just like the president of the security cop who beats us in the street. Your presence with us will make a difference, a big difference. Talk to your neighbours, your family, your friends, your colleagues, and tell them to come. They don't have to come to Tahrir Square, just go down anywhere and say it, that we are free human beings. Sitting at home and just following us on the news or Facebook will lead to our humiliation, leads to my own humiliation. If you have honour and dignity as a man, come! Come and protect me and protect other women in the protest. If you stay home, then you deserve all that's been done to you, and you will be condemned, before your nation and before your people. And you will be responsible for what will happen to us in the streets while you sit at home. Go to the streets, send messages, post it on the Internet, make people aware. You know your own social circle, your building, your family, your friends, tell them to come with us. Bring five people, or ten people—if each of us manages to bring five or ten people to Tahrir Square, that would be more than enough. Instead of setting ourselves on fire, let's do something positive; it will make a difference, a big difference. Never say there is no hope. Hope disappears only when you say there is no hope. As long as you come down with us, there will be hope.

Don't be afraid of the government, fear non but God. God says: "Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves" (Qur'an 13:11). Don't think you can be safe anymore! None of us are! Come down! Demand your rights, my rights, your family's rights. I will go down on 25 January, and I will say "no to corruption," and "no to this regime."[573]

6.3.3. Historical Background

By early 2011, the political situation in Egypt was ready to explode as political and economic injustice was on the rise. Egypt witnessed an upsurge in protest movements and the departure of large sectors of the masses from political participation through legitimate channels such as parties, trade unions and unions, and this was an important indicator of the decline in the legitimacy of the existing political and social system and its inability to achieve the interests and assimilate the demands of different social groups. Among the prominent movements that contributed to the political movement in the years before 25 January were the 6 April Youth Movement, a movement that was established by Egyptians in 2008, including Asmaa Mahfouz, following a general strike that Egypt witnessed on 6 April 2008, in solidarity with the workers of Mahalla al-Kubra. As a movement that aims to try to cleanse all the diseases of the Egyptian political arena, it has succeeded in attracting a sector of Egyptian youth. More than 70,000 Egyptians on the Internet joined it in a few weeks, and it opened the way for political use of the electronic world of struggle through blogs and other things.[574]

A new phase of the national struggle began, and dozens of parallel protest movements continued, which then led the national struggle to the founding stage of the 25 January Revolution, which was the result of the accumulation of a deep and expanding national political movement. The distinguishing mark of this new movement was the descent of protest movements to the street, which resulted in breaking the barrier of fear of the oppression of the state and the police apparatus of repression and extracting the right to peaceful demonstration in the Egyptian street without waiting for permission from the security services. This raised the level and severity of criticism against the corruption of

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[573] 'Asmaa Mahfouz on 25 January' (YouTube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRMpm4ejJS8> accessed 31 August 2020
[574] Dina Shehata and Mariam Wahid, 'Street Politics: The Rise of Opposition Movements in Arab World' (2011) issue 186 vol.46 International Politics Journal 79

authority and highlighted the dangerous marriage between power and wealth, manifested in businessmen indulging in financial and political corruption alongside the ruling regime.

With the state's failure to manage crises and its weak control over the freedom of information, and with the suppression of freedoms and the continuous violation of human rights, popular dissatisfaction, and loss of confidence in the ruling system increased, and the political, economic and social movements in Egypt increased to form a unique case of political movement that paved the way for a revolution in January 2011. The absence of real democracy, despite the previous government's promises of it and its claim to exist on the ground, was one of the main reasons behind the Egyptian revolution, in addition to the fact that the former Egyptian president remained in power for nearly thirty years and his apparent attempt to have his son inherit his power, along with the gradual deterioration of Egypt's political role in the region. Even among friendly Arab states, it almost lost its position, in addition to the exposure of a large segment of the Egyptian people to examples of many countries in which the transition to democracy and the elimination of dictatorship had succeeded.

In the wake of the success of the Tunisian Revolution, opposition activists began preparing for 25 January 2011, which coincides with Police Day, to be a day for demonstrations and protests across the country, and young people, both those with political affiliations and those without, including opposition movements such as *Kefaya* and the National Association for Change, and the 6 April Youth Movement, distributed thousands of leaflets and mobilised via Facebook and Twitter. The demonstrations continued until former President Mubarak stepped down from power on 11 February 2011, and the Supreme Council of the Egyptian Armed Forces took over the management of the country's affairs.[575]

By 18 January 2011, the number of Egyptian citizens who set themselves on fire in protest against social conditions reached four, as the Ministry of Health announced that Ahmed Hashem al-Sayed, an unemployed citizen who burned himself alive in Alexandria, died of his wounds, along with news of a lawyer called Muhammad Farouk Hassan who attempted to set himself on fire in front of the People's Assembly to demand legal reform. Another person called Mohamed Ashour Sorour, who worked as a security officer at EgyptAir, also tried to set himself alight in front of the Journalists Syndicate following his dismissal from the company. This wave of self-immolation came after the events of the Tunisian revolution, which were sparked by the young Mohamed Bouazizi, who burned

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[575] Interview with Asmaa Mahfouz, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 3 March 2018)

himself alive after he was insulted by a police officer. Egyptian youth began to organise a huge demonstration in front of the Ministry of the Interior on 25 January 2011, in conjunction with the celebration of Police Day, to demand the resignation of President Mubarak and to break the ruling party's monopoly on power in Egypt. In the same wave of self-immolation, a man named Abdo Abdel Moneim set himself on fire in front of the People's Assembly headquarters in Cairo. Abdel Moneim, a restaurant owner from the city of Qantara near Ismailia (on the Suez Canal), said in the investigations conducted by the Public Prosecution that he did so in protest of the "insult" he had suffered when he was trying to obtain his family's share of subsidised bread.[576]

Before 25 January 2011, Mahfouz printed some flyers and distributed them in local and poor areas calling on citizens to participate in the coming demonstrations and talking to young men and women about their rights and the necessity of their participation.[577] After these several incidents of citizens self-immolation, Mahfouz went to Tahrir Square with a number of members of the 6 April Youth Movement and tried to protest against these incidents, but security forces prevented.[578] This incident prompted Mahfouz to make a video clip of herself calling for the protest on 25 January as she believed that a video would be better as long as she could not communicate directly with people.[579] Mahfouz broadcasted the video on her Facebook account and it was re-uploaded to YouTube by different users later that day.[580] Mahfouz was surprised by the unprecedented spread of the video, which went viral. She made three other videos in the days before the protests began.[581]

6.3.4. International Human Rights Law Element

In this video, Mahfouz is addressing a wide range of human rights violations in the context of a greater message: mobilisation and a call for participation in demonstrations. The calls for demonstrations on 25 January were a direct reaction to rising social and political injustice, with the slogan of the revolution later formulated as "bread, freedom, and social

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[576] 'Self-Immolation of Four Egyptians to Demand Change' Alquds (London, 18 January 2011) <Link> accessed 15 August 2020
[577] Interview with Asmaa Mahfouz, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 3 March 2018)
[578] ibid
[579] ibid
[580] Melissa Walls, and Sahar el Zahed, '"I'll Be Waiting for You Guys": A YouTube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution' (2011) International Journal of Communication 5 (2011) 1333
[581] Interview with Asmaa Mahfouz, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 3 March 2018)

justice."[582] Mahfouz was influenced by the events and by her understanding of what "fundamental or basic human rights" were, as she mentioned in the video.[583]

Prior to her phase of activism, Mahfouz did not receive any official human rights education. Mahfouz believes that her understanding of human rights was instinctive.[584] She was lucky to have teachers in her secondary school who taught her about manners, as well as others' rights, from an Islamic point of view. She was taught about accepting others, accepting differences, rejecting racism, helping the vulnerable, rejecting poverty and hunger, and how in Islam no ruler has all the food while subjects are hungry. Mahfouz started to understand that there was a basic level of rights, but she did not see that in Egypt. She saw violations everywhere, with women, at police stations, in rural areas, in corruption.[585]

The first concept of human rights that Mahfouz tackled in her video was "social justice." The slogan of "social justice" is one of the most frequent slogans and chants on the tongues of thousands in the squares and squares of the Arab revolutions, and in demonstrations and rallies. The slogan of social justice carries different and complex meanings, depending on intellectual, social, and cultural backgrounds, but the clear indication of the adoption of most political and intellectual currents for it today is the "exposure" of the major imbalances and injustice in the Arab world that accumulated over the past decades.

The focus on social justice in Mahfouz's video did not come out of nowhere, as it reflects—to a large extent—the depth of the economic crisis and the widening of the large gap in the Egypt between those who have and those who do not have, as well as the growing feelings of social deprivation, population pressures, the continuation of the upward graphical line of the dilemmas of poverty and unemployment, the failure of economic development and the spread of corruption, etc. It is not possible to separate the social, economic, and political equations. The protests and revolution emerged in Egypt demanding democracy after a clear conviction was established among most social strata that the reason for the disappointments, frustration, failure, and social and economic suffering they had reached lied with the mismanagement of governance, and the monopoly of limited groups over wealth, power, prestige, and privilege. With exceptional privileges, the absence of justice in job opportunities, the fragility of the rule of law principle, and the feeling that the state of citizenship has become a big lie, the patience of societies reached the wall. People felt that

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[582] Mohamed El-Agati, 'Demands of the Egyptian Revolution and the Newly-Emerging Actors' (2014) European Institute of the Mediterranean 20
[583] Interview with Asmaa Mahfouz, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 3 March 2018)
[584] ibid
[585] ibid

hope for political breakthroughs that would modify conditions was not possible, and the rulers, in turn, had developed a disdain for them. Considering Mahfouz's non-political background, it is clear why she decided to address social justice as her first issue in a video calling for demonstrations.

The second human rights issue that Mahfouz addressed in this video is police brutality and violation of the right to peaceful assembly, which came within the frame of a personal experience that happened to her when she tried to gather with others to protest. This was just a mild beginning to what came after and what happened during the Revolution. On 25 January 2011, Mahfouz encountered a tougher lever of police brutality. At the beginning of the day, Mahfouz went to Bulaq al-Dakrur area with colleagues from 6 April Youth Movement planning to start the march to Tahrir Square from there. Once they gathered, they started raising the Egyptian flag chanting slogans, and they were surprised that they were joined by more people. While the numbers joining them increased, they started marching towards Tahrir Square while meeting other demonstrators on the way. Then they decided to sit in Tahrir Square. However, after midnight, security forces attacked them with tear gas and rubber bullets and chased them in the streets of downtown Cairo.[586]

According to Human Rights Watch, a total of at least 302 were killed in the unrest in Egypt since 28 January and until 8 February 2011, in Cairo, Alexandria, and Suez, while most of these deaths took place during the events of 28 and 29 January when security forces used gunfire and teargas. An eyewitness told Human Rights Watch that: "On 28 January, his brother was in Kasr al-Aini Street, just off Tahrir Square, when he reached down to throw a teargas canister away from the protesters. At that point he was shot in his side and fell to the ground. His friends carried him out and spent three hours trying to get him to a hospital they trusted, but soon after that he died."[587] Mahfouz's position in the video was based on a long history of violations and use of violence by Egyptian security forces that predated the events of the 2011 uprising.[588] Egyptian police during the Mubarak era were known for dispersing any kind of peaceful gatherings. This use of violence in many cases lead to death of protesters.[589]

6.3.5. Vernacular Elements

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[586] ibid
[587] ibid
[588] Interview with Asmaa Mahfouz, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 3 March 2018)
[589] 'Accusation against Egyptian Police of Using Violence against Protesters' BBC (London, 16 May 2005) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/middle_east_news/newsid_4545000/4545387.stm> accessed 25 August 2020

When Mahfouz planned to do the video, she deliberately decided to use a vernacular discourse, on both the level of language and concept.[590] To convey her message, Mahfouz decided to use vlogging and post it on social media, mainly Facebook and later on YouTube. Vlogging is one tool of blogging; it stands for video blogging. It is considered so when the content of the blog is in a video format. Vlog posts consist mainly of videos of oneself talking about a particular subject, whether reporting or reviewing a product or an event.[591] We can consider a vlog to be a combination of blog posts (blog articles) and live video recordings in which a person appears to be talking about him/herself and describing an experience or an impression he/she has acquired from a particular experience. The success of this type of content lies in direct dialogue with the audience in a direct manner. The vlogger works to attract audience attention and increase interaction and engagement with them, in a way that helps them generate a personal relationship with the audience and preserves the distinctive nature of their content and distinguishes it from others.[592]

In her video, Mahfouz took full advantage of vlogging. Her presence and appearance were an important element for the audience to associate with. Mahfouz appeared in a modest, conservative appearance easily associated with Egyptian young people. She dressed in a simple striped shirt, and a simple light purple Islamic headcover (hijab), a look that associates her with the vast majority of Egyptian young women of her age. Mahfouz's video is seen as a classic vlog, where the only image is a close-up of her face, looking into the camera directly, and with emotional voice tone and passion she is calling, in Arabic, for her fellow Egyptians to join her in a protest against the regime.[593]

On the language level, Mahfouz used Egyptian colloquial Arabic. Political discourse in Egypt has historically been delivered in formal classical Arabic, whether through newspapers or political statements, which indicates that the topic is "important." However, Mahfouz decided to use a simple colloquial Egyptian dialect to make her call for others to participate in the protests. Mahfouz did not have any partisan affiliation, nor any political

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[590] Interview with Asmaa Mahfouz, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 3 March 2018)

[591] 'What is Vlogging' (The Arts development Company) <https://theartsdevelopmentcompany.org.uk/resources/good-to-know-1/what-is-vlogging-2/#:~:text=Vlog%20stands%20for%20a%20video,a%20product%20or%20an%20event.> accessed 25 August 2020

[592] 'Confused between Blog and Vlog?' (Hotmart) <https://blog.hotmart.com/ar/%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%8A-vlog/> accessed 25 August 2020

[593] Melissa Walls, and Sahar el Zahed, '"I'll Be Waiting for You Guys": A YouTube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution' (2011) International Journal of Communication 5 (2011) 1333

ideology, instead, Mahfouz used a simple street language understood by virtually any Egyptian.[594] Mahfouz also used a more interactive dialogue style; after she mentioned the four Egyptians' self-immolation in expression of frustration with corruption and deteriorated economic conditions, she asks the audience: "Are you also like them? Are you going to kill yourselves too? Or are you completely indifferent?"[595] In this way, Mahfouz provoked the audience to think about and formulate a response. This response would decide the audience's subsequent actions.

In this video, Mahfouz touched on a very important and deeply rooted concept of vernacularisation relatable to the vast majority of young Egyptian men: chivalry and manhood. Mahfouz says: "Whoever says women should not go to protests because they will get beaten, let him have some chivalry and manhood and come with me on 25 January." The use of these concepts came in a more sensitive context, which is the call for protection of vulnerable women, a call that young men may positively respond to within their given context and cultural background.

The first concept Mahfouz brings up is chivalry *nakhwah* نخوة, a concept commonly associated with Arab manners and Middle Eastern culture. Chivalry, or *nakhwah*, is defined in Arabic dictionaries as a source derived from the triple verb *nakha*, meaning proud, greatness and chivalry. As for idiomatically, *nakhwah* is seen as an Arab characteristic with a distinct Islamic character. *Nakhwah* is usually associated with men rather than women—one often hears of men being referred to as having a *nakhwah*, but rarely are woman described as having one, similar to the use of the word "handsome."[596] Arabs have historically been associated with certain cultural traits, such as generosity, magnanimity, eloquence and courage, as a result of their growing up in Bedouin societies located in the desert, characterised by the difficulty of living. According to Samir Harrasis, a writer specialising in Islamic law, *nakhwah* is an adjective in which an individual is able to provide assistance without any compensation, and he supports the oppressed even at the expense of himself.[597]

Moral and ethical concepts, such as chivalry, have been critical concepts in Islamic culture. Despite this, it is hard to conclude that they developed after the advent of Islam. The tradition of chivalric behaviour, which has always been associated with the virtues of

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[594] ibid

[595] ibid

[596] Hanin Hegab, 'What is Nakhwa?' (Mawdoo3, 11 July 2017) <https://mawdoo3.com/%D9%85%D8%A7_%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%89_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A9> accessed 20 August 2020

[597] Samir Harasis, 'Nakhwa and Shahama' (Alukah, 22 March 2016) <https://www.alukah.net/sharia/0/100630/#ixzz6WdvIZBxK> accessed 25 August 2020

courage, forbearance, liberality, generosity and fidelity, existed in the pre-Islamic world too.[598] The description of *nakhwah* is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an in Surat al-Qasas in reference to a story of the Prophet Moses in which he provides water for the livestock of two girls, who came for a bucket of water. Moses waters the livestock for them, using his own bucket among the men to avoid the women competing with men's space. Rather, chivalry and eloquence moved in him, and he helped them achieve their demand.[599]

Another source of this concept in Egyptian culture is the moral code of Upper-Egyptians (from South Egypt). Southern-Egyptian Mohammed Abu Elghait argues that, within the Egyptian Revolution context, society in Upper Egypt still retains many of the reasons for its internal strength, such as the extensive family ties, the pride in carrying weapons, the keenness to preserve dignity, and considering an insult to the individual an insult to the group. Upper-Egyptian society still retains a force that can negotiate with state power and is not in permanent submission to it.[600] Egyptian journalist and researcher Ismail al-Eskandarani tried to study the relationship between Upper-Egyptians morals and values and between their political participation. However, despite the fact that these values, like chivalry and dignity, are of a great influence, other elements, such as poverty, poor education and life hardship may have affected their political participation as well.[601] There is a great contradiction between the image presented by the limited research available and the reality of the class and factional composition of Upper-Egyptian society. There are groups in Upper Egypt that many researchers do not know enough about, and that neither the spotlight nor the social and anthropological studies are interested in studying. Where the focus is on studying Upper Egypt society is through studying the major cities and villages on the one hand, and studying issues that are closer to clichés than to really important questions—for example, a focus on urban and rural studies, marginalisation, and even the influence of culture, even though many researchers have not studied primitive societies in Upper Egypt, or the marginalised within the same plane, or looked at the issue of awareness and popular

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[598] Morteza Rashidi Ashjerdi and Saeedeh Shafiee Nahrkhalaji, 'Chivalry in the Islamic World' (International Journal of Social Science and Humanity 2013) 10
[599] Hanin Hegab, 'What is Nakhwa?' (Mawdoo3, 11 July 2017) <https://mawdoo3.com/%D9%85%D8%A7_%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%89_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A9> accessed 20 August 2020
[600] Mohamed Aboelgheit, 'The Big Winner in South Egypt's Elections' Al Shorouk (Cairo, 17 January 2012) <https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=17012012&id=913e8ecb-a432-4395-8a63-0db43fa6c0aa> accessed 30 August 2020
[601] Ismail Aliskandarani, 'Egypt: The Revolting North and The Calm South' Al Akhbar (Beirut, 27 April 2013) <https://al-akhbar.com/Arab/50090> accessed 25 August 2020

perception.[602] Mohammed Ahmed, an Egyptian journalist specialised in Egyptian local culture, argues that the waves of immigration of Upper-Egyptians to the North and to Cairo during the Mamluk era (1250–1517 AD) was one of the main reasons behind the spread of Upper-Egyptian values and the influence they had on shaping the general mentality of Egyptians that has lasted until now.[603] This spread of Upper-Egyptian culture after immigration has led to the emergence of a "value struggle" between these displaced people and the Cairene community, leading to the intensification of the stream of social criticism of a society that is full of weaknesses and contradictions. Some have criticised the corrupt customs and traditions, as well as immorality, of the big city. They have expressed the morals of the village in the face of the widespread corruption in the new society to which they were displaced.[604]

The second vernacular concept that Mahfouz brought up is "manhood," which is also very deep-rooted in Egyptian and Arab culture in general, even though it is a much-complicated concept to try to explain. There is a difference in the concept of manhood, socially and culturally, and it varies according to the environment, profession, social level, and geographical region. And while the concept differed over time and from one society to another, it may also differ in the large community from one region to another according to the multiplicity of subcultures and their differentiation from the mother culture. There are those who limit manhood to strength, courage, violence, and a loud voice, and to appear in difficult situations and crises to help, while others explain it by referring to generosity and hospitality. Others see it as leadership, some think that it is wealth, and others think that it is in the deadening of emotions and showing cruelty. Others see it in controlling and decisive personalities; the more he issues orders and prohibitions, the more manly he is. As complicated as it is, manhood carries something of some of the previous meanings.

The Holy Qu'ran distinguishes between a man and a male. The word "male" appears in the Qur'an most often in the worldly issues, such as creation, the distribution of inheritance, and the like, but the word "man" appears in particular places that God is said to love; the messengers of God were to all people "men," and, as the Quran says, "And we have not sent before you except men."[605] The whole exponents of the Quran in its verses contained

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[602] Ahmed Abu Zaid, 'Why the South Did Not Revolt?' Jadaliyya (Beirut, 7 March 2014) <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/30325> accessed 25 August 2020
[603] Mohamed Ahmed, 'This How Peasants Changed Cairo People's Behaviour' Shababbek (Cairo, 12 July 2018) <https://shbabbek.com/show/141194 > accessed 27 August 2020
[604] ibid
[605] *Holy Quran*, Surah Yusuf 109

therein that manhood: steadfastness in the face of distractions and strength against temptations. As the Quran says: "Men whom neither commerce nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allah and performance of prayer and giving of *zakah*. They fear a Day in which the hearts and eyes will [fearfully] turn about."[606] Within Islamic teachings, there are facets of common behaviours that are expected of those of the aforementioned "manhood," such as protection of family, jealousy over family, control over family, especially women, keeping promises, chivalry, and striving to fulfil people's needs and cessation of harm.[607]

The social researcher, Nada al-Zein, points out that there are qualities that Egyptian woman search for in a man, and derived from these characteristics are the most important constituents of masculinity or manhood in the eyes of Egyptian women. The first trait is the willingness to sacrifice, as women tend to be with sacrificing men, who are always willing to extend a helping hand. Second is leadership; that is, you love the man you can depend on, strong men capable of supports and performs all basic tasks in life.[608]

Another significant vernacular discourse element that Mahfouz used is religion. In this video, Mahfouz used a direct quote from the Holy Qur'an as a mobilisation element while fully aware that religion will have a great level of resonance with young average Egyptians. Mahfouz quotes: "Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves."[609] This verse has always been used to promote human action verses dependency on God's intervention. It emphasises the human willingness to change unpleasant conditions, instead of waiting for God to intervene miraculously to alleviate injustice. The verses began in Surat al-Ra'd about the power of God and the management of things, and that God is the truth, as he raised the heavens without pillars and created the sun and moon in a cosmic order, among other miracles, such as rivers and tides. Surat al-Ra'd covers many other topics, such as the Quran and its miracle, the firmness of the truth, as well as God's ability to combine contradictions in the concept of thunder and the miracle of creating the universe.[610] Surat al-Ra'd holds lessons, among which is the revelation of the Holy Qu'ran, and the verses make clear the Qur'an's authority and strength.[611] However, classical Qur'an interpreters such as al-Saadi interpret these verse differently than commonly

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[606] *Holy Quran*, Surah Al Nur 37
[607] Talal Mashaal, 'Men's Characteristics in Islam' (Mawdoo3) <Link> accessed 27 August 2020

[608] 'What is Manhood in Women's Eyes?' (Alwatan Voice) <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2011/08/29/186618.html> accessed 25 August 2020
[609] *Holy Quran*, Surah Ar-Raad 13:11
[610] 'Interpretation of Surah Ar-Raad' (Photoarby) <Link> accessed 25 August 2020
[611] ibid

done, and says that the verse says that God will not change or grant grace, benevolence, and wellbeing to people until they change what is in themselves; and that moving from faith to disbelief, from obedience to disobedience, or from thanking God's grace to being ungrateful, will lead God to repeal these gifts.[612] Despite the classic interpretation, Mahfouz used the most common interpretation of the verse aiming to encourage young people to take action to induce change.

Within the religious context of the video, Wall and Zahed argue that Mahfouz in this video resembled the modern popular Muslim televangelists such as Amr Khaled in their shows where they address religious matters to a common public in a simple language while using Qur'anic quotes in the general context.[613] Both Mahfouz and Amr Khaled are similar in their oratorical style and strong passion in sermonising to encourage public and civic engagement. However, Mahfouz's videos are considered more of a radical call for the public to embrace activism as a form of new Egyptian nationalism, yet with religious undertone.[614] This kind of modern speech shows the growth of a new Islamic cultural that spreads through media and arts to serve nationalist and Islamist purposes.[615]

6.3.6. Social media interaction

As we mentioned before, the original video was posted first on Mahfouz's personal Facebook account, before it was reuploaded later that same day on YouTube. Having the video on Facebook meant that the audience was limited to those who were within Mahfouz's Facebook social network; however, by uploading it to YouTube, it could have a much further outreach and a larger audience.[616]

Wall and Zahed used YouTube's analytics on 11 March 2011 to measure the outreach of the video on YouTube and identified the spread within the network of interested

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[612] 'Surah Ar-Raad' (Quran Encyclopaedia) <https://quranenc.com/ar/browse/arabic_mokhtasar/13> accessed 26 August 2020
[613] Melissa Walls, and Sahar el Zahed, '"I'll Be Waiting for You Guys": A YouTube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution' (2011) International Journal of Communication 5 (2011) 1333
[614] ibid
[615] ibid citing K. van Nieuwkerk, 'Creating an Islamic cultural sphere: Contested notions of art, leisure and entertainment An Introduction (2008) 2(3) Contemporary Islam 169
[616] ibid

viewers.[617] On 18 January 2011, the first day the video appeared on YouTube, analytics show that it began to circulate on mobile devices inside Egypt. Analytics confirmed that the video was viewed mostly inside Egypt, followed by Saudi Arabia.[618] As I mentioned above, the video was re-uploaded on YouTube; however, it seems that there was more than one version of the original Arabic. The most viewed version that Wall and Zahed found was on an account named Mohammed Abdo (modeykokey), where it recorded 70,672 views as of March 15, 2011. This is the version we are using for this analysis.[619] It is still available on YouTube and currently has 86,507 views and 65 comments.[620] The title of the video is "The day the nation rose on 25 January 2011," and with a subtitle in the description section saying, "Woman of Egypt, Asmaa Mahfouz, the woman with the idea of the 6 April strike, talks to the people of Egypt about 25 January 2011, and its importance."[621] In the other version uploaded by Iyad al-Baghdadi on 2 February 2011, and which was entitled "Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the Vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution," was viewed 14,076 times and has eight comments as of 31 August 2020.[622] This version was obviously targeting an international audience, given its English title and English subtitles. These numbers of views are considered very high, considering that only 24 percent of Egyptians had Internet access around that time.[623]

From the sequence of events, we can see that this video was first intended for the limited number of Egyptians who were both online and personally connected to Mahfouz, but then the video caught up quickly among a wider base, including activists or non-activists who had interest in political activism and were involved in activities such as demonstration and came across that video and felt the need to interact.[624]

As for the comments on the video, in the version we analyse here, there are 65 comments, all of which were posted in 2011. The vast majority of these comments were a positive response to Mahfouz's call for mobilisation, and some of these comments were a direct reflection of the vernacular elements that Mahfouz used. In one comment, YouTube

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[617] ibid
[618] ibid
[619] ibid
[620] 'Asmaa Mahfouz on 25 January' (YouTube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRMpm4ejJS8> accessed 31 August 2020
[621] ibid
[622] 'Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution' (YouTube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBg7O48vhLY&t=186s> accessed 25 August 2020
[623] Melissa Walls, and Sahar el Zahed, '"I'll Be Waiting for You Guys": A YouTube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution' (2011) International Journal of Communication 5 (2011) 1333
[624] ibid

user Mohamed Hosne replies: "We are with you…we are men," which reflects a direct interaction to the gender role that Mahfouz created in the video based on the vernacular culture.[625] Among those 65 comments, it seems that around 59 comments were made from what appears to be male users from their names, while the rest are unclear.[626] The manhood concept appeared clearly in five comments in different forms, such as in comment by user Saleh saying: "Egyptians, you are real men; if your women are like Mahfouz, imagine what your men are like."[627] In another comment, user il mare morto says: "A woman that is more brave and manly than a hundred men; I swear to God she is more manly than any officer in the army or police."[628] Another comment from user Gold Egypt that also picked up the manhood concept said: "You girl deserve all the best; truly there are no men left in Egypt."[629] These kinds of comments show that there were a percentage of recipients who reacted directly to the concept of manhood that Mahfouz including in her video as a mobilisation element.

Among these comments were around ten comments that responded to the religious element. Most of these comments used religious connotation in mobilisation and wishes for success in the revolution, such as users Emad Frank and Mahmoud Barakat, who said, "God willing, we will win and Mubarak's regime will fall."[630] In a comment by user Sherif Soliman, he explains the issue of the tyrant ruler in Islam and how revolting against a tyrant who adopts a secular system is acceptable under Islamic teachings.[631] Another comment by user Amal al-Fetyani also brings a religious element, when she says: "It is true that our religion taught us to obey the rulers, but this is only when the ruler is like Omar Ibn al-Khattab (one of the guided caliphs of the Prophet Mohammed)."[632] In a more critical and sceptical comment, user Smoozable says: "Tell me! Even if we go down in great numbers, how many among those practice praying? How many women are veiled? Or you think that God will side with those who are abandoning praying or with women wearing jeans just because they went to demonstrations?"[633] This kind of comment shows the other side of the vernacular discourse that we will discuss later in more detail. In another comment, same user

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[625] 'Asmaa Mahfouz on 25 January' (YouTube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRMpm4ejJS8> accessed 31 August 2020
[626] ibid
[627] ibid
[628] ibid
[629] ibid
[630] ibid
[631] ibid
[632] ibid
[633] ibid

was sceptical about the use of the manhood concept too and questioning the value of provoking manhood among non-believers. The comment said: "What is the motive of young men to go down to streets? Is it caring about their daily bread? Is it because of chivalry and to protect the women of his country? Not to be called cowards? Or to stand against the oppressor while each one of us oppresses themself by abandoning religion and the teachings of the Prophet? I am not against the revolution, but before going on a revolution, we have to be aware of the main reason behind our situation, so God may be on our side. If you are with God, then God will grant you victory."[634]

It seems that religion-related comments were not restricted to Islam only, as in a comment by user protectiontech2002 says: "Darling, if God is with you, so who is against you."[635] This comment is obviously influenced by the Christian Bible and referring to the verse in the Book of Romans:" If God be for us, who can be against us?"[636] Another comment that seems coming from a Christian user, Gorgecris1, says: "God with us! Down with injustice! Down with the regime!"[637]

6.3.7. Reflections from the Cyberactivist

In this video, it is obvious that Mahfouz's choice of how she wanted to convey her message was innovative and uncommon within the political discourse that was taking place in Egypt at the time. Mahfouz broke the standard expectations of how one communicates about politics in Egypt using a new language that invites all Egyptians to see themselves as participants.[638] What makes Mahfouz's video distinguished from earlier attempts of social media use, such as blogs, is the personalised factor, whereby she created a very personal statement that revolved around her own personal background and her story, not a cell phone submission from someone else or her own filming of others.[639] Mahfouz might not be the first to use personal video as a tool for political or human rights messaging, but the way she utilised social networking for mobilisation is considered very significant within the context of

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[634] ibid
[635] ibid
[636] *The Bible*. (Authorized King James Version, Cambridge UP 2004) Romans 8:31
[637] 'Asmaa Mahfouz on 25 January' (YouTube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRMpm4ejJS8> accessed 31 August 2020
[638] Melissa Walls, and Sahar el Zahed, '"I'll Be Waiting for You Guys": A YouTube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution' (2011) International Journal of Communication 5 (2011) 1333
[639] Melissa Walls, and Sahar el Zahed, '"I'll Be Waiting for You Guys": A YouTube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution' (2011) International Journal of Communication 5 (2011) 1333

Egyptian political discourse.[640] This video is considered an extension of what Egyptian bloggers started years earlier in creating activism language targeting those with no prior experience in politics or political participation. Wall and Zahed concluded that, "While the Egyptian blogosphere may have popularised the use of colloquial language to discuss politics, these videos appear to have taken the form further, ultimately creating a fresh way of communicating about politics that is visual and intensely intimate."[641]

Wall and Zahed argue that despite the fact that Mahfouz's video might seem familiar to a Western audience, wherein a young woman expresses herself before a camera, this video, within the Egyptian context, is considered very significant.[642] Egypt has been ruled by military dictatorship since 1952, and in 2011, the rule of the Mubarak regime reached its peak in human rights violations. The emergency law continued to prevail during Mubarak's presidency, providing an environment for arbitrary arrests and unfair trials. In 2009, Human Rights Watch estimated that there are 5,000 to 10,000 Egyptian citizens detained without charge.[643] Police and security forces have always used methods of brutality and torture. According to the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights EOHR, 701 cases of torture were recorded in police stations between 1985 and 2011, and 204 victims died as a result of torture and ill treatment. EOHR affirms that torture crimes take place on the streets of Egypt in broad daylight, in police stations and citizens' homes, in clear violation of the dignity and freedom of people.[644] What makes Mahfouz's video significant is that despite all this, she published a video criticising Mubarak's government and calling for demonstrations with her face completely visible and name known without any attempts of anonymity, taking all the risks that might come with such action. Wall and Zahed concluded that, "Therefore, Mahfouz's action in fact generated authority for herself. This ability to create a public self seems inherently tied to the publicness of posting the video on YouTube where it would be visible to anyone and available to be remediated by anyone seeking to embed the video on their own website in addition to being responded to by anyone choosing to comment on it."[645]

Even though YouTube and Facebook are Western tools, Mahfouz managed to localise them to her non-Western context, with her appearance as a modest, veiled young woman and

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[640] ibid

[641] ibid

[642] ibid

[643] 'World Report 2010' (Human Rights Watch) <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2010/country-chapters/egypt> accessed 30 August 2020

[644] Khaled Afifi, 'Report to Prosecution on Torturing 900 Citizens since 1993' Ikhwan Online (Cairo, 22 June 2011) <https://ikhwan.online/article/86425> accessed 28 August 2020

[645] Melissa Walls, and Sahar el Zahed, '"I'll Be Waiting for You Guys": A YouTube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution' (2011) International Journal of Communication 5 (2011) 1333

using local discourse, which also contradicts how many in the West view Muslim women, with the idea that they are oppressed and not allowed to speak themselves.[646]

Within her vernacular discourse, Mahfouz uses the idea of gender roles in Egyptian society to her benefit. According to a study conducted by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in 2017 that covered four countries, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine, the majority of men, and nearly half of women (or more) support a history of social role division.[647] Many men and women in the four countries are anxious or uncomfortable about the changes of usual exchanges of social roles that take place in the current system.[648] The study concludes that changing these behaviours requires more than focusing on individuals and engagement with religious and political leaders, community leaders, producers of new and traditional media, and the private sector. The study recognises the use of new and traditional media to discuss stereotypes and traditional roles of men, based on positive trends towards change.[649]

In this video, Mahfouz decided to define her gender role as an Arab Muslim young woman verses Arab Muslim men and utilise male expectations in Egypt, even if that meant emphasising existing roles with their negative aspects and contradiction with gender equality. This compromise was made to serve the purpose of the video in mobilising young men to join the demonstrations to "protect" women from police violence. Walls and Zahed see this as "a bit of gender jujitsu," as the language Mahfouz used might not be within the traditional gendered messaging, but she decided to use it, by calling herself a "girl" to appeal to a male audience, a concept that would resonate with many Egyptian men.[650] This resonance happens because of the Egyptian society's embedded patriarchal ideas about "honour and the general expectation that any honourable man would step up to protect a woman who was in harm's way."[651]

The second vernacular element that Mahfouz used in her video was religion. Considering her Muslim background and appearance, it was very convenient and made the

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[646] ibid

[647] 'The International Men and Gender Equality Survey – Middle East and North Africa 2017' (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) < https://imagesmena.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/05/IMAGES-MENA-Executive-Summary-AR-15May2017-web.pdf> accessed 20 August 2020

[648] ibid

[649] ibid

[650] Melissa Walls, and Sahar el Zahed, '"I'll Be Waiting for You Guys": A YouTube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution' (2011) International Journal of Communication 5 (2011) 1333

[651] Melissa Walls, and Sahar el Zahed, '"I'll Be Waiting for You Guys": A YouTube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution' (2011) International Journal of Communication 5 (2011) 1333

resonance with audience intimate and realistic. Mahfouz was citing from the Qur'an, an act that might have provoked a negative reaction if it had come from a non-veiled Egyptian woman, who may be considered uncommon within conservative, religious Egyptian society. Even though there is no direct obligation on the woman to wear a veil while reading Qur'an in Islamic teachings, it has become a favoured tradition, especially in public.[652] By using the religion element, Mahfouz created a fully framed message, along with the elements of manhood and gender roles, producing a tailored message addressing young Egyptian men that appeals to two issues sensitive to them. Using these two elements within a message on injustice and human rights violations made a message which originally came from a remote source like international human rights law very close and achieved a high resonance factor, leading to a massive mobilisation. This was something that Mahfouz was fully aware of when she decided to do her video. Mahfouz knew very well her society while being part of it and having the view of the insider, while at the same time exposed to international norms and measures of justice and human rights. This perfect combination was the reason that Mahfouz's video became a crucial element of mobilisation leading to the protests of January 25, 2011. In that video, Mahfouz used all her skills to convey her message. Mahfouz stated that: "My work in the sales field taught me to speak in the language of the people and what resonates with them, and then you target your sales based on their way of thought and interests. When I attended demos, I found the organisers talking in a very political language and expressions I did not understand, and I asked how you think you can reach people while you speak in such language. No one will understand and people will be afraid too. I saw myself different, I was a very common person, young woman, working a normal job, my colleagues at work are common too who would not understand politics too. I told the demonstrations' leaders if you want people to join you, you have to speak in a simpler language and explain to the people without complicated expressions."[653]

All these elements combined created a video that became an icon to the Egyptian revolution. Even though that an exact measure or numerical statistics of the impact of this video is impossible, this video created by Mahfouz played a greater role in mobilisation of young men to join demonstrations, as well as creating a new form of online activism that continued after. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, the role Mahfouz played in the Revolution was recognised in form of awards and international recognition. Also, it reflected

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[652] Walaa Abu Dawood, 'Conditions of Reading Quran for Women' <Link> accessed 28 August 2020
[653] Interview with Asmaa Mahfouz, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 3 March 2018)

on the crackdown on Mahfouz by the governments that followed Mubarak's in for of legal prosecution and travel bans.

6.4. Post #3 (by Wael Ghonim on the "We Are All Khaled Said" page on Facebook)

6.4.1. Screenshot of Original Post

كلنا خالد سعيد
January 15, 2011 · 🌐

دايما أهالينا بيضحكوا علينا وبيقولولنا: مالكش دعوة بالحكومة والسياسة .. ركز في "أكل عيشك" .. حتى أكل العيش في مصر دلوقتي بقه مينفعش نركز فيه .. الحرية أهم من رغيف العيش .. وبدون حرية الأكل مالوش طعم .. عايزين حقوقنا في بلدنا .. عايزين تعليم كويس وعايزين محاربة فساد عايزين نتعامل باحترام في أقسام الشرطة ومش عايزين تعذيب ورشاوي وفساد في الداخلية .. احنا نفسنا بلدنا تكون أحسن وده هدفنا الوحيد

👍 Hisham Zaki, Ahmed Sz and 473 others   98 Comments 2 Shares

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ↪ Share

Illustration 3: Screenshot of post by Wael Ghonim on Facebook

6.4.2 Transcript

> "Our parents always fooled us and said stay away from government and politics … Concentrate on your daily bread … Even the daily bread in Egypt now is hard to concentrate on … Freedom is more important than daily bread … Without freedom, bread is tasteless … We want our rights in our country … We want better education and to fight corruption. We want to be treated with respect in police stations. We don't want torture, bribes, and corruption in the Ministry of Interior. We want our country to be better and that is our goal."[654]

6.4.3. Historical Background

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[654] 'We Are All Khaled Said Page Post' (Facebook, 15 January 2011)
<https://www.facebook.com/ElShaheed/posts/17862575510584> accessed 28 August 2020

This post was posted on 15 January 2011 among a series of posts that Wael Ghonim posted on We Are All Khaled Said page after the page on the same day adopted the call for demonstrations on 25 January 2011. Earlier on that day, the page changed its profile picture saying "Our date is 25 January" with the Egyptian flag mixed with the Tunisian flag in the background.[655] It is obvious that what happened in Tunisia on 14 January 2011 had a great influence on Egyptian activism, leading to a call for a bigger demonstration on 25 January 2011.

The Tunisian Revolution started on 17 December 2010 after young man named Mohamed Bouazizi sat his body on fire to express his anger at the economic conditions and unemployment after a police officer confiscated his vehicle he used to sill goods. Bouazizi died on 4 January 2011, and his death led to the outbreak of protests against the lack of social justice and the exacerbation of corruption in the ruling regime. This also led to the outbreak of clashes between protesters and security forces in the Sidi Bouzid region and in Kasserine, resulting in the deaths and injuries of many demonstrators. These developments forced President Ben Ali to make some political shuffles by dismissing several ministers and made promises to address the issue.[656] However, protests expanded and increased in intensity until they reached government buildings, forcing President Ben Ali to step down from power and suddenly leave the country to Saudi Arabia on Friday on 14 January 2011.[657] The influence of what happened in Tunisia on Egyptian activism was obvious, and many saw, including me, the wave of the revolution reaching Egypt. Before the day of 25 January 2011, many activists shared their thoughts about the influence of what happened in Tunisia, the calls for the demonstrations already started on next day Ben Ali left Tunisia. Activists shared their thoughts and expectations with some scepticism, but all agreed that the influence is imminent.[658]

We Are All Khaled Said page adopted the call for demonstration on 25 January on 15 January 2011 and started posts calling followers to participate. Later on, the page also played a role in facilitating and coordinating logistics for the demonstrations. "25 January is the day of the Police Day, an official holiday … I think that during a year they have done many

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[655] 503- 'We Are All Khaled Said Page Post' (Facebook, 15 January 2011) <https://www.facebook.com/ElShaheeed/photos/a.125821607467712/157721100944429> accessed 28 August 2020

[656] Kim Willsher, 'Tunisian prime minister Mohamed Ghannouchi resigns amid unrest' the Guardian (Paris, 27 February 2011) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/27/tunisian-prime-minister-ghannouchi-resigns> accessed 29 August 2020

[657] ibid

[658] 'Will the Jasmine Revolution Start in Egypt?' DW (Berlin, 19 January 2011) <Link> accessed 29 August 2020

things that deserve to be celebrated in our own way … What do you think?" This was the first call to demonstrate on 25 January 2011, which was launched by the page "We are all Khaled Said." It was the first spark that ignited the flame of the revolution and motivated the masses of Egyptians to come out against the government of former President Hosni Mubarak, after corruption prevailed in society, and political life worsened.[659] The page "We are all Khaled Said" was established mainly to expose the violations of the police and to demand reform, change its system, and hold all wrongdoers accountable, was established on 10 June 2010 in solidarity with the Egyptian youth Khaled Said, who died after being beaten and tortured by police informants in the Sidi Gaber police station in the city Alexandria, taking advantage of the emergency law, which Mubarak imposed for 30 years.[660] Beside text posts, the page also used visual arts and posters as profile pictures to call for the demonstrations on 25 and 28 January 2011.[661]

6.4.4. International human rights law element

In this post, Ghonim brings a very well-known debate in the politics, sociology and human rights field, which is freedom vs bread. The concept of bread as element in political equation was introduced by Russian communist thinker Peter Kropotkin in his book "The Conquest of Bread" published in 1892.[662] Kropotkin concluded that social transformation that is based on ideals only was destined to fail and that in order to have a new society, it has to be built on the ability to provide sustenance for all.[663]

The element of bread is relevant to politics as it is always an indicator of social standards and the ability of the ruling regimes to meet people's needs. The bread crisis played a role in Egypt uprisings later in 2013 too. Beard has been a factor in most of major revolutions and uprisings along the history, for example it was one of the reasons behind the French revolution.[664] Even on the language level, bread permeates our political consciousness

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[659] Islam Gamal, 'Khaled Said: The Spark that Ignited the Revolution Fuel' Alyoum 7 (Cairo, 27 January 2015) <Link> accessed 29 August 2020
[660] ibid
[661] 'We Are All Khaled Said Page Poto Album' (Facebook, 3 September 2011) <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=ElShaheeed&set=a.125821607467712> accessed 28 August 2020
[662] Ruth Potts and Molly Conisbee, 'The Politics of Bread' Toward Freedom (Burlington, 15 January 2014) <https://towardfreedom.org/story/archives/activism/the-politics-of-bread/> accessed 29 August 2020
[663] ibid
[664] 'French Revolution' (History) <https://www.history.com/topics/france/french-revolution> accessed 29 August 2020

in terms such as dole, daily bread, breadline, bread, and circuses.[665] Even in Egyptian colloquial Arabic, the word for bread is *aish* عيش, which simply means "life."[666]

One of the main arguments used by Arab dictators before the uprisings in 2011 was that economic reforms have priority compared to freedoms, an approach that is called bread before freedom approach.[667] Those dictator leaders argued that it is premature and this might have dangerous consequences to introduce political reform before providing the citizens' with their basic needs, and people will be responsible politically and practice democracy only when those needs had been met.[668] Obviously this strategy did not work and people were hungry for more freedoms and rights as equally as their hunger for food, which eventually lead to uprisings demanding freedoms and rights. Actually, others argue the opposite, that there is no contradiction between bread and freedom, and they should go together, and furthermore, it is observed that countries with more freedoms and established democracies are providing a better economic standard to their people compared to authoritarian regimes.[669]

In this post, the term "daily bread" was not referring directly to hunger or economic needs, but rather a general concept of caring about daily matters and trying to pass the day without concerning yourself with political matters and the situation of the country in general. Interestingly, later after the revolution already took place, the slogan for the revolution was introduced that is "Bread, freedom and social justice."

"Bread, freedom, social justice." This was the slogan of the beginnings of the events of 25 January Revolution in Egypt. To live means bread, freedom is freedom to express opinion, social justice in the distribution of wealth and equal opportunities. The raising of these slogans and shouting at them loudly on the road to Tahrir Square represented the desire of the Egyptian people and their youth to consolidate these meanings in Egyptian society, and to change governmental administrative practices in this direction.

Another human rights violation that the post tackles is torture, which is a crucial element as the page was established mainly as a reaction to the torture and killing of Khaled Said. The brutal killing of Khaled sparked a great storm of anger in Egypt, beginning with

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[665] Ruth Potts and Molly Conisbee, 'The Politics of Bread' Toward Freedom (Burlington, 15 January 2014) <https://towardfreedom.org/story/archives/activism/the-politics-of-bread/> accessed 29 August 2020
[666] ibid
[667] Marwan Muasher, 'Freedom and Bread Go Together' (2013) Vol. 50 No.1 IMF <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2013/03/muasher.htm> accessed 29 August 2020
[668] ibid
[669] Minoo Masani, 'Bread or Freedom?' (1977) Libertarianism <https://www.libertarianism.org/publications/essays/bread-or-freedom> accessed 28 August 2020

silent protests in mourning clothes, and extending into a revolution of anger. Although the eyewitnesses confirmed that the killing of Khaled Said was brutally at the hands of the police forces, the incomplete justice was only achieved in 2014 when the Alexandria Criminal Court sentenced two police corporals of killing Khaled Said, to 10 years in prison. Khaled Said's family, consisting of his late mother Laila Marzouq and his sister Zahra, were subjected to many harassments, and the authorities prevented the issuance of a death certificate for Khaled proving the true cause of death, and his family ended up leaving Egypt permanently to the United States, where they now reside.[670]

Torture and dying under torture are the most chronic human rights violations in Egypt and no wonder why it was the spark of a massive uprising. The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights EOHR documented about 797 deaths as a result of torture during the period from 2000 to 2011, as 2011 came on top of the years that witnessed violations of the right to life, with a rate of 696, followed by second place in 2004 with 22 cases of violations, followed by third in the years 2005 and 2008 with 17 cases each, and the fourth place in 2002 and 2009 with 12 cases, and the fifth place came in 2001 and 2003 with eight cases per year, and in the last place came the years 2000 and 2001 with seven cases per year.[671] Although the year 2011 comes first over the previous years since the year 2000, the EOHR confirmed that only this number is what the organisation was able to monitor throughout the year, and this is due to the difficulties faced by the organisation to document the violations of this right represented in the spread of deaths under torture throughout the country, and the difficult pursuit of all cases in a clear and accurate manner, which means the actual number is even higher.[672] EOHR also documented 666 cases of injuries inflicted by police forces during torture of citizens that did not lead to their death.[673]

The post also brought a crucial human rights issue in Egypt, which is right to education. The right to education is a founding right of other human rights, as it is an indispensable means for the realisation of other human rights. Education, as a founding right, is the main tool by which adults and children, both male and female, and the marginalised economically and socially, can lift themselves out of poverty and have the opportunity to fully participate in the various social, political, cultural and economic activities of their

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[670] 'Ten Years Passed Since Khaled Said was Killed' (Killed in Egypt) <Link> accessed 28 August 2020

[671] 'Ten Years of Violations' (The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights) <http://ar.eohr.org/?p=2651#more-2651> accessed 30 August 2020
[672] ibid
[673] ibid

societies. The Egyptian education system is considered one of the largest in the Middle East and North Africa region, yet it suffers from structural and functional defects. Enrolment rates at all levels of pre-university education have increased, reaching global rates.[674] Egyptian pre-university education includes 20 million students. Local and global indicators indicate a decline in the quality of education in Egypt, as the Global Competitiveness Report 2016/2017 indicates that Egypt ranked 135 out of 138 in the quality of education in general, and also ranked 130 in the quality of teaching science and mathematics and ranked 133 in Internet availability in schools.[675] In the 2011/2010 report, Egypt ranked 81st, leaving its ranking in the 2011/2012 report to 94th. A report issued by the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics in 2016 indicated that the number of villages in Egypt is 4,655 villages, about 60 percent of villages need to establish schools and that government primary schools are present in 95.3 percent of villages, but secondary schools are present in only 18.2 percent of them. Governmental preparatory schools are present in 82 percent of villages, and 85 percent of villages have primary and preparatory schools at the same time.[676] The report indicated that only 3.8 percent of villages have permanent public libraries, 2.8 percent have a children's library, and 20 percent have educational services centres.[677]

6.4.5. Vernacular Element

This post is written in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, in a simple language that uses expressions used daily by the majority of Egyptians. It is easy to recognise expressions that are exclusive to Egyptian culture, for example "*akl 'aish*," literally it means eating bread, but it is used in the context close to breadwinning in English, which means maintaining an income. The concept is different from "breadwinner", which indicates only the person who supports the whole family with his or her earnings.[678] *Akl 'aish* in Egyptian context means earning an income in general to support oneself and does not require supporting the rest of the family. The term is also related to another term "*at''aish* قطع عيش," literally means cutting bread, but it is used in the context of losing one's job. The word "'*aish*" in itself simply means "live" in Arabic. The word "'*aish*" was strongly present in the chants of the

[674] Sami Nassar, 'The Right to Education in Egypt' (Human Rights Studies) <Link> accessed 28 August 2020
[675] ibid
[676] ibid
[677] ibid
[678] 'Breadwinner' (The Free Dictionary)
<https://www.thefreedictionary.com/breadwinning#:~:text=bread%E2%80%A2win%E2%80%A2ner,one%20who%20supports%20dependents. > accessed 29 August 2020

Revolution, and it is the word with which Egyptians express the meaning of bread, income and sometimes even the whole life, the prejudice to "livelihood," whether in its outward sense, or work and life in general. Perhaps the Egyptians are the only people in the world that uses the word "live" to denote bread, in a clear reference to life as ancient Egyptians had, as it was known by the name Ankh, meaning life, and perhaps they were the only people in the world who swear by it, and they call the pursuit of livelihood "eating bread." Despite that, Egyptians sell bread on the sidewalks, exposed to all kinds of pollution, while they put shoes in storefronts, decorated and wrapped, a phenomenon that caught the attention of everyone who passed by the streets and squares of Egypt.[679]

The Egyptian sanctifies bread and considers that it is forbidden to step on it, even if a morsel unintentionally stepped upon it, one should seek God's forgiveness. The relationship of the Egyptians to bread is old and extends back to ancient times, in the autumn of 2005 an American archaeological mission working in the pyramids area discovered the oldest administrative building of the builders of the pyramid of Khafre and Menkaure, 500 meters south of the statue of the Sphinx, built about 4,500 years ago. The American mission headed by Mark Lehner found the remains of the building east of the work area of the Egyptian mission in the workers' graves, the mission had uncovered a large part of the royal building. The discovered building included a grain storage area, as rations for bakeries, where the oldest bakery was found, and inside it, utensils and tools were found that were used to prepare dough and bake it, and it was producing a type of bread called Shamsy bread, which is still used until now in some villages of Upper Egypt.[680]

This post tackles a deeply rooted element in Egyptian which is the influence of the family/parents on young men and women and the conflict that rises between the two generations. This conflict in most cases leads to a revolting attitude from the young towards their parents. Middle Eastern cultures, including Egyptian culture, place great importance on the behaviour of children towards parents, primarily for religious reasons. However, there is a common misconception among older generations Egyptians that reduces "good behaviour" to obedience, specifically to blind obedience. "You do not know your interest, you are still young, so you should hear my words," these are examples of the most famous phrases used by the traditional Egyptian parents, but in this regard they overlook other important facts, such as that the current generation was born with open eyes to the world through the Internet,

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[679] Nedal Mamdouh, 'The Story Behind Bread in Egypt' Dostor (Cairo, 22 March 2020) <https://www.dostor.org/3037899 > accessed 29 August 2020
[680] ibid

and that they already know a lot more about the world than their parents did when they were in their age.[681] In most of Arab countries, the family is still playing a greater role, as it is still at the forefront in teaching the foundations of life and consolidating the principles of interaction and teaching the rules of communication and dialogue through a common language that conveys ideas, feelings and desires. The family is required to provide protection and psychological and social safety for its children after satisfying their biological, social, and cultural needs.[682]

This post touches on a controversial issue, the family's control over their children in all aspects of their life, and young people rebelling against their families. This phenomenon became more intense after the revolutions wave in the Middle East in 2011. Researchers see that one of the main elements of the uprisings in 2011 was individual rebellion from young people against older generations, rather than an organised political movement.[683] This rebellious attitude from the youth came against all forms of suppression, starting from the suppression inside the family, considering that Middle Eastern societies are patriarchal, aiming to control all aspects of their children's life. The revolution against the ruling regimes showed a projection on what individual young people felt in recognising their self-identification and show the will to control their lives, bodies, future.[684]

6.4.6. Social Media Interaction

This Facebook post received 474 likes and 98 comments. This level of high interaction shows the magnitude of interest in such kind of posts. The post had a high level of motivation and mobilisation that reflected in most of the comments. That was obvious from the comments that followers were seeing something coming in the near future, a seed to the revolution to come.

We can also see the influence of what happened in Tunisia on the same day the post was published, and how people made comparison between the situation in Egypt and Tunisia. User Mome Qassim commented with a short poem in Egyptian dialect drawing such comparison and saying: "Tunisia is like us in Egypt, they had what we had, same blood, same

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[681] Engy Ashraf, 'Generations Struggle in Egypt: Alternative Upbringing' Qantara (Cairo, 7 September 2018) <Link> accessed 29 August 2020

[682] Badr Salem, 'Adolescents and Social Rebellion' (Albayan, 14 April 2012) <https://www.albayan.ae/one-world/correspondents-suitcase/2012-04-14-1.1630788> accessed 29 August 2020

[683] Fathy Almaskeeny, 'The Phenomenon of Atheist Adolescents' (Majalla, 16 June 2014) <Link> accessed 29 August 2020

[684] ibid

worries. What happened with them, must happen here."[685] Another user, Abo Makka El Masry, said: "I feel what happened in Tunisia is a spark for may uprisings to come."[686] In a response to the bread eating concept and combining it with what happened in Tunisia, user Ahmed M. Raslan said: "Who said that bread eating is not related to politics, the Tunisian revolution erupted because Bouazizi's bread was cut," in reference to Tunisian citizen Mohamed Bouazizi who set himself on fire to protest against the police that banned him from selling goods in the market.[687] Another user Nona Ali saw the influence of what happened in Tunisia saying: "Tunisia was liberated from the tyrant by 58 martyrs, and in Egypt ten times this number die every day, either in the state security apparatus from torture or in police stations or car accidents, many more from carcinogens, or 20 times that number in the sinking of ferries or trains. Congratulations to Tunisia!"[688]

The message and the timing of this post triggered a high mobilisation element, and that was clearly reflected in the comments where users discussed ideas and steps towards a wider street movement. User Ahmed Mostafa said: "I very much wish you would take this into account, Admin, it is not enough to depend on the people who use Facebook to call for that day. It is necessary on that day to have a popular revolution is to involve all sects of people. If we want it to be a successful revolution, it is not just that we go down and be an easy target for security. I wish we take the issue seriously, and we intend it as the first step for real change. The day of the revolution must be announced by all means and methods, including publications and posters, and we want to communicate our voice to the newspapers, to the internal and external media."[689]

Some of the comments tackled the aspect of the family influence that was brought by the post and discussed whether parents should force their children to go on specific path to avoid harm, or they should give them their freedom. User Ammar Radwan says: "Indeed, the vision of the parents is very superficial in this is a matter, but it is not all of course 'mind your own business and care for your interest.' If we look far away, we will find that political reform will have a reflection on all aspects of our lives. This is really a culture that has been cultivated in our people for a long time, but you have to change it and you do what you want

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[685] 'We Are All Khaled Said Page Post' (Facebook, 15 January 2011)
<https://www.facebook.com/ElShaheeed/posts/178625755510584> accessed 28 August 2020
[686] ibid
[687] 'Mohamed Bouazizi' (Britanica Online) <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mohamed-Bouazizi>
accessed 30 August 2020
[688] 'We Are All Khaled Said Page Post' (Facebook, 15 January 2011)
<https://www.facebook.com/ElShaheeed/posts/178625755510584> accessed 28 August 2020
[689] ibid

with no fear, as livelihood and life are in the hands of our Lord."[690] User Sarah Mahmoud expressed her wishes and said: "I wish parents would let their children do what they want. Parents can't say no to everything good their children want to do in name of fear for them and care."[691] Comments also acknowledged that the worry by parents is valid, given the circumstances in Egypt and risk that comes with involvement in politics and activism. User Lamia Hussein said: "By God, you are right. I hear those sentences from my parents every day, but instead of saying "care for your breadwinning," they say, "I fear for your future," but they also have a right to say that. They do not want to see us dead bodies with torture as the cause of death. Who speaks in politics now, like in Iraq during the days of Saddam Hussein, they send you behind the sun (a known term for enforced disappearance)."[692]

6.4.7. Reflection from the Cyberactivist

In this post, Ghonim used his deep understanding of the situation in Egypt, his background and upbringing and his deep familiarity with what influences young Egyptians to create a post with strong mobilisation element ten days ahead of the biggest Egyptian uprising in modern history. The Facebook page that Ghonim is its administrator had many posts with much more direct messages on calling for demonstrations and presented logistic details for participants. But in this post, we can see how the build-up to such calls was created within a vernacular context that reached the followers to create a self-association with the cause. Ghonim wrote on the page on few hours before this post the first call for demonstration on January 25, and he said: "Today is the 15 … 25 January is Police Day, an official holiday … if we can reach 100 thousand protesters in Cairo, no one will stop us. Can we do it?"[693] Between these direct messages, Ghonim published posts like the one we are studying here to reach a full package of mobilisation. In that way the content had a much deeper context than just calls for protest and presented different layers of messaging.

These vernacular messages are what represented Ghonim's personalised messaging and reflected what he is. Wael started his activism when he was very young, but he did not understand at the time that this is activism. He was following the news and had his own thoughts and reactions, but he could not express himself because of the suppressive

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[690] ibid
[691] ibid
[692] ibid
[693] 'We Are All Khaled Said Page Post' (Facebook, 14 January 2011)
<https://www.facebook.com/ElShaheeed/posts/163391383707409> accessed 28 August 2020

environment that Egypt was in during that time under Mubarak. Ghonim main concern then was how many are like him and think like him at the time and if his ideas are shared by others or not. For example, in 2009, Ghonim used to wonder who else that he meets daily would be having revolutionary thoughts like him, but he never dared to ask. Ghonim always had this intuition to sense the people around him and their level of engagement, and whether they are suppressed and willing to take action, or they will just stay low and take it in silence. This was Ghonim's strategy to sense the street's pulse and ability to interact with political changes.[694]

Ghonim had a strong Islamic upbringing, and he believes that his understanding of God based on his own experience is a constant and permanent reference that he would resort to no matter how far he would drift and soar with his imagination. Wael considers the source of his human rights awareness is Islamic teaching and not Western or international human rights standards. He has Islamic sayings such as a quote by Omar Ibn al-Khattab, one of the guided caliphs, saying: "When did you enslave people when they were born free?" as a reference that he believes a source of modern human rights standards. This quote is also considered by many as one of the earliest references to human rights in history.[695] These kinds of cultural and religious references are imbedded in the minds of Middle Easterners by default, and this is what Wael sees himself when it comes to human rights, and that is what he used in creating such posts.[696]

Ghonim also has other values that would be referenced to local culture such as pride and dignity, which he believes he acquired from his mother. These values gave him human rights attitudes through his life, such as rejection of injustice. These values what made him take a stand in life situations, for example, Ghonim's uncle when he was young, he drifted to Islamic extremism and was arrested for just adopting ideas and not actually committing a crime. Ghonim also had a friend during university studies that also went through the same situation as his uncle, was arrested by mistake and was tortured for six months. These kinds of experiences what made Ghonim realise that injustice is very widespread in the Egyptian society.[697] What Ghonim experienced in his early life shaped what would be later his human rights awareness, even though at the time he did not see these experiences as human rights eye-opener situations. Ghonim started to understand that there are wrongdoings that are

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[694] Interview with Wael Ghonim, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 20 January 2019)
[695] Nagat Albar, 'When you Enslave People' (Mawdoo3, 29 July 2020) <Link> accessed 15 September 2020
[696] Interview with Wael Ghonim, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 20 January 2019)
[697] ibid

accepted by the society but are not accepted by his consciousness. Ghonim understood that the most dangerous level of self-failing is to deceive yourself in accepting what is wrong just because it is accepted by society. However, Wael realised that this stand will result to consequences and a price he has to pay, by telling the truth and standing against the society.[698]

One aspect that Ghonim realised that it is important in his posts on the page is the ability to apologise when you post a wrong fact or a misunderstanding. He believes that this way of communication gave the audience the respect they deserve and maintained a high level of credibility too. The apology also showed that the admin of the page is not assuming a superior position all the time, an attitude that he avoided as it would show double standards considering that the page is messaging against the dictatorship of the government. For Ghonim, life is a learning process of understanding others, the more you understand the person before you, the more you can address them in their own language, hence, have a higher level of influence on them.[699]

When Ghonim started his activism on the "We are all Khaled Said" page, he was fully aware that he is conveying human rights massages reflecting his own understanding of human rights based on his personal experience and wanted to present it in his own language. Ghonim understood the pulse of the street and he believed what people would associate themselves with. This became evident as his page gained very high popularity compared to other Facebook pages that presented the Khaled Said case. When other pages were much more aggressive and used a much-politicised messaging, Ghonim decided that the strongest element to realise mobilisation through his page is to humanise Khaled's death in a way that the average middle-class young people would associate themselves with. Hence, Ghonim used the family influence reference such as this post to appeal to younger non-politicised audience. Ghonim used a language that would represent him personally, a young Egyptian with limited political background, but with high sense of intuitive human rights messaging that created a strong level of self-association with the victim. Due to his up-bringing and beliefs, Ghonim decided that he would use a more family-friendly language that avoided clashing with society but at the same time would deliver the message at full.[700]

6.5. Post #4 (by Wael Khalil on Twitter)

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[698] ibid
[699] ibid
[700] ibid

6.5.1. Screenshot of original post

Illustration 4: Screenshot of post by Wael Khalil on Twitter

6.5.2. Transcript of the post in English

"I will not drink 7-Up to be cool — nor Birell to man-up — nor Fantaloup for
Meselhy — nor Pepsi because I can dare — I will drink myrrh — because I am
Egyptian, and I want to be free #Jan25."[701]

6.5.3. Historical background

This Tweet was posted on 22 January 2011, three days before the start of one of the
biggest uprisings in the history of Egypt. This was a very crucial time for mobilisation
leading to the demonstration day. The first call for demonstrating on 25 January 2011, came
from the "We Are All Khaled Said" page on 14 January 2011.This call started first as a call
to overwrite the Police Forces Day (January 25) to remind Egyptians of the violations the
police commit, then it turned to a call for public protest and demonstration on 25 January
2011.[702] This Tweet is seen as part of a wave of Tweets calling for the demonstration on 25
January demanding freedom.

6.5.4. International Human Rights Law Element

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[701] 'Wael Khalil Tweet' (Twitter, 22 January 2011) <https://twitter.com/wael/status/28922837922226176>
accessed 16 September 2020
[702] Wael Ghonim, 'The Story of a Revolution Call on Page' (Facebook, 25 January 2012) <Link> accessed 15
September 2020

One of the three slogans of the 25 January Revolution was "Freedom," and this was reflected in Wael's tweet. As we will explain later, Khalil wanted to emphasise that at this moment freedom is the most important demand to the Egyptian people. The thirst for freedom became a driving element that promoted Egyptian activists to amplify the call for demonstrations against Mubarak's government. This government that put the Egyptian people under a state of suppression since 1981, when the state of emergency was declared after the assassination of President Sadat, and it lasted for the whole reign of Mubarak. Under the state of emergency, Mubarak government had a vast array of suppression tools that put the whole country under a state of fear. Under the Emergency Law (Law 162/1958), the executive authority has the power to restrain the citizens freedoms, including restraining their freedom of assembly and travel. It also gives the power to arrest citizens as suspects, searching places without abiding by the Criminal Procedures Law, which is considered a clear violation to Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.[703] According to the Emergency Law, the trial of the accused before the Emergency Supreme State Security Courts, in which the accused are deprived of fair trial standards, most notably their right to appeal their verdicts before a higher court, and the continued referral of civilians to military courts. On the other hand, the military governor (the president of the republic) or his representative, according to the emergency law, has the authority to order the control of letters, newspapers, pamphlets, publications, editorials, and all means of expression, propaganda and media before they are published, and to seize, confiscate and suspend them.[704] The military governor, under the Emergency Law has the power to issue military orders that have the force of law. The most prominent example of this is Military Order No. (4) of 1992 regarding the demolition of real estate and collecting donations, and this order is a breach of the legislative authority. In addition to the expansion of the authority in using this military order, which has become a sword hanging over the necks of civil society activists.[705] Freedom for Egyptian people in 2011 was an essential demand. After almost 30 years of suppression, Egyptians understood that freedom is the basis of everything, and without it a person becomes a slave to a government that erases the thinking, perception, understanding and awareness of their subjects. Without freedom, people felt they are like falling in the

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[703] 'Annual Report 2009' (The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights) <Link> accessed 16 September 2020
[704] ibid
[705] ibid

abyss, imagining that there is no escape from the inevitable fate and the whip of brute force, pressure, and push by the government.

Those who called for the demonstrations like Khalil believed that freedom is a treasure that only one deserves to strive for and sacrifice preciously in order to obtain it. Blessed is the one who thinks for himself and hates the good of others in playing with dignity, love, solidarity, and fruitful cooperation that spreads justice everywhere. Expression of opinion is not a crime and participating in making the present and the future of Egypt country is not a game.

This long struggle for freedom during Mubarak's era happened despite that the Egyptian Constitution then provided clear rights and freedoms to the Egyptian citizens. The Egyptian Constitution 1971 in its first four chapters guaranteed the most essential rights and freedoms, such as Article 41 that stipulates:" Personal freedom is a natural right and it is inviolable, and with the exception of a case of flagrante delicto, no one may be arrested, searched, imprisoned, or his freedom restricted in any way or prevented from moving except by an order necessitated by the necessity of investigation and protecting the security of society, and it is issued by the competent judge or the Public Prosecution in accordance with the provisions of the law."[706] Also in Article 48 it says: "Freedom of the press, printing, publishing and the media is guaranteed, and censorship of newspapers is prohibited. Warning, suspension, or cancellation of newspapers by administrative means is prohibited. An exception may be made in case of emergency or wartime that specific censorship be imposed on newspapers, publications and the media in matters related to public safety or national security purposes, in accordance with the law."[707]

Despite all these constitutional guarantees, Egyptians lived in suppression and were deprived of their freedoms. The call for the demonstrations on 25 January 2011 with "freedom" as one of the main demands was a manifestation of all the accumulated suppression over all those years.

6.5.5. Vernacular Element

In this tweet, Khalil used famous advertisement's taglines known for Egyptians to convey his message on freedom to his audience. Advertisement's taglines could be defined

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[706] 'The Egyptian Constitution of 1971' (Egyptian Gazette, 12 September 1971)
<https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/constitution_of_1971-arabic.pdf> accessed 16 September 2020
[707] ibid

as: "a pithy descriptor used in marketing campaigns to communicate the unique value proposition of a brand or its products. More broadly, the goal of a tagline is to leave consumers with a lasting positive impression of the brand."[708] In our case here, we have an additional aspect which is the translation of the original tagline, in most of times English, to Egyptian colloquial. Studies believe that translation of advertisement slogans is important in adding an economic value to the whole marketing process. The process of the translation of advertisements is considered an important linguistic and cultural process, in addition to be a key commercial process. Studies also imply that advertisement translators, like our cyberactivist vernacularisers, are seen as knowledge workers who are contributing to the new global economy, and their contribution should be recognised and rewarded.[709] Those studies also revealed that translation across diversified cultures might involve more than just content translation or cultural adaptation, but the process might also involve conversions between different mindsets characterised by different kinds of cultural psychology.[710] When those translators work on localising an advertisement tagline, they consider the popular taste of consumers in the target market, as it is an important factor in the decision-making process in commercial translation, especially in the case of advertising texts.[711]

Using a local vernacular language and context in advertisement is an important element to reach audience, which was one reason Wael decided to use the very well-known taglines to phrase his tweet.[712] The target audience in the advertising message is important in the formulation and crafting of the advertisement itself. The characteristics of that audience, for example, its age group, gender, place of residence, hobbies, etc. determine whether it is better to use one dialect or language at the expense of another. Speaking the language or dialect of the target consumer may have an effective role in the advertising message to be effectively communicated. Studies showed that the characteristics of good advertising from the point of view of Arab consumers concluded that the slang youthful dialect is much more preferred than classical Arabic, especially if the target group is the youth.[713]

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[708] Laura Lake, 'What is Tagline' (Smallbusiness, 21 October 2020) <https://www.thebalancesmb.com/what-is-a-tagline-4017760> accessed 10 November 2020

[709] George Ho, 'Translating Advertisements across Heterogeneous Cultures' (Taylor and Francis Online, 21 February 2014) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13556509.2004.10799178?src=recsys&> accessed 20 October 2020

[710] ibid

[711] ibid

[712] Interview with Wael Khalil, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 July 2018)

[713] 'Targeted Advertisement in Arabic' (Maal, 29 September 2015) <https://www.maaal.com/archives/20190519/123422> accessed 20 September 2020

Wael chose famous advertisements for brands of drinks, so he can compare it at the end with drinking myrrh as we will explain later. The first tagline for drinks he picked up is 7UP, which is a soft fizzy drink that was launched in 1929.[714] In 1989 the company introduced the character Fido Dido as its mascot, which was associated with the concept of "coolness". Different taglines were introduced in TV and printed advertisements that reflected that concept such as "It's cool to be you," "It's cool to be clear," "Daily life is more than boring," "Seriousness can be cured," "I lost some time. Reward offered to finder."[715] In early 1990s, the campaign was introduced to the Arab market, including Egypt, and had a massive success and popularity.[716] The tagline "It's cool to be clear" was translated to Arabic into "*Ya laziz, ya raye'*", which in English could be "You cool, you clear," where "clear" in Arabic here means more of clear-minded.[717] Within the youth mentality around early 1990s, where Wael belongs, drinking 7Up and Fido Dido were associated with coolness and clearing mind, and the tagline is surprisingly is still used in Arabic slang.[718]

The second tagline from an advertisement that Wael used is "Birell to man up." Birell is a local Egyptian non-alcoholic beer that was introduced by Al-Ahram Beverages Company in 1986 as a Muslim-friendly alternative of beer.[719] Introducing such a product was a huge success to the company, as it was a way for beer-drinkers to get around religious taboos.[720] Due to the tough taste of beer beverages especially for non-beer-drinkers from younger age, the company decided to adopt a tagline in its advertisement "Drink Birell, man up" that the company started in 2009.[721] The advertisement campaign, despite its huge success, was deemed sexist and misogynist, as it was seen by many propagating for stereotypes on

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[714] 'A history of 7UP told through 14 fascinating ads' (MeTV, 1 October 2015) <https://www.metv.com/stories/a-history-of-7up-told-through-14-fascinating-ads> accessed 18 September 2020
[715] 'History of 7Up in Romania' (Superbrands) <http://superbrands.s3.amazonaws.com/AAA%20MASTER%202%20PAGE%20PDF%20Case%20Studies/Romania/Romania%20Edition%201/Romania%20Edition%201%207%20Up.pdf> accessed 20 September 2020
[716] 'Zap Tharwat Song' (Muhtwa) <https://www.muhtwa.com/208469/%D8%A7%D8%BA%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A9/> accessed 18 September 2020
[717] '7Up Video Advertisement in Arabic 1994' (YouTube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orml9FMGFxE> accessed 18 January 2021
[718] 'Nancy Ajram: You are Cool!' (Elmawke3) <Link> accessed 18 September 2020
[719] Mohamed Khairat, 'The Beer Company Promoting Sexism and Sexual Harassment in Egypt' (Egyptian Streets, 27 March 2015) <https://egyptianstreets.com/2015/03/27/the-beer-company-promoting-sexism-and-sexual-harassment-in-egypt/> accessed 19 September 2020
[720] 'Non-Alcoholic Beer Brews Success for Al Ahram Beverages Company in Egypt' Albawaba (Cairo, 6 June 2000) <https://www.albawaba.com/business/non-alcoholic-beer-brews-success-al-ahram-beverages-company-egypt> accessed 20 September 2020
[721] Mohamed Khairat, 'The Beer Company Promoting Sexism and Sexual Harassment in Egypt' (Egyptian Streets, 27 March 2015) <https://egyptianstreets.com/2015/03/27/the-beer-company-promoting-sexism-and-sexual-harassment-in-egypt/> accessed 19 September 2020

manhood and insulting to women.[722] The advertisement made some women angry because they perceived the theme of the advertisement as offensive to women, as it links the man's manhood standards associated with his admiration for woman's body, not personality.[723] In Egypt where it is believed that most of women have experienced some form of sexual harassment at some point, the ads appeared to be encouraging denounced practices such as cat-calling, staring and more. The recent campaigns even angered social media users who accused Birell of sexism and promoting sexual harassment. This reaction prompted a counter campaign on social media to boycott the drink.[724] Despite these boycott campaigns, the tagline became popular among young men and became a common saying within street language.[725]

The third tagline from a drink advertisement that Khalil picked was for the Egyptian version of the drink Fanta, flavoured in cantaloupe and named Fantaloupe. Fanta is originally an orange flavoured drink produced by Coca-Cola Netherlands during World War II, as there was fear that of shortage in supply for ingredients of the original Coca-Cola drink coming from the United States of America.[726] In 2010, Coca-Cola Egypt decided to introduce a localised flavour of Fanta, and chose the cantaloupe flavour. For the company it was a gamble, as the flavour will be totally new to the Egyptian market of soft drinks. This gamble was reflected the first Fantaloupe TV advertisement that showed a senior employee convincing the manager of a soft drink and the board of directors with a new drink extracted from cantaloupe and tells them that "Mr. Meselhy" was the one who invented it, and was very enthusiastic about it and called it "Vantalope." Then, the manager asks what they do with the line of production if it doesn't sell, the employee responds quickly: We will blame it on Meselhy. Then the ads addresses the audience if they want to save Meselhy's career, they should drink Fantaloupe.[727] So the tagline that became very popular was "Drink Fantaloupe and save Meselhy." Some analysts saw the advertisement as a direct message using suspense

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[722] Wassim Eid, 'Facebook Activists Rebels against Manup!' (Media Observer) <https://www.mediaobserver.org/article.php?id=13654&cid=6&catidval=0> accessed 22 September 2020
[723] Sarah Hallows, 'Birell Shame-Free' Alyoum 7 (Cairo, 30 January 2009) <Link> accessed 18 September 2020
[724] Mohamed Khairat, 'The Beer Company Promoting Sexism and Sexual Harassment in Egypt' (Egyptian Streets, 27 March 2015) <https://egyptianstreets.com/2015/03/27/the-beer-company-promoting-sexism-and-sexual-harassment-in-egypt/> accessed 19 September 2020
[725] 'Women's Campaign to Boycott Birell' Dostor (Cairo, 14 July 2013) <https://www.dostor.org/238359> accessed 22 September 2020
[726] Peter Zwaal, 'Dutch Fanta Wars' (Peter Zwaal, 2015) <https://peterzwaal.nl/nederlandse-oorlogs-fanta/> accessed 27 September 2020
[727] 'Fanta Fantalop Video Advertisement' (YouTube, 25 October 2010) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDdRry71hc0> accessed 23 September 2020

and sympathy, which aimed to urge the masses to support the company by buying the new product under the pretext of saving the Meselhy from punishment. This aspect was addressing the popular traits of Egyptians in supporting those who are in need or facing risk.[728] The advertisement played on the unconventional nature of the product itself, which requires creating a different method to push the audience to try it, while continuing to buy depends on the quality of the product and the brand, by playing on the strings of love for the experience and embarking on everything new, especially in light of the humorous style that the campaign took.[729]

Other analysts projected this advertisement on the Egyptian political situation and related it to corruption. They saw that the story of Meselhy happens hundreds of times in the lives of officials in Egypt, where the senior management in order to avoid being caught in corruption, they have to have a Meselhy, a less senior employee that they could present as a scapegoat and they can frame to take all the legal responsibility in case of failure.[730] It is worth mentioning that the Meselhy advertisement won an award, Effie MENA 2010 for the best ad for a new product.[731]

The last tagline that Khalil used was from the soft drink Pepsi's ad that first appeared in 2004 and had the tagline "Dare for more."[732] The original TV advertisement depicted a Roman arena with celebrities such as Britney Spears, Pink and Beyonce as gladiators and Enrique Iglesias as a Roman emperor. In the Egyptian version of the advertisement, Iglesias was replaced by famous Egyptian singer Amr Diab and had the tagline "Dare for it."[733] The original ad was deemed by international media as "iconic", as it showed female gladiators' power and beauty, in a high standard of cinematography, while famous song "We will rock you" by British band Queen playing in the background.[734] The commercial ends in the emperor falling in the arena and threatened by a lion. The Middle East version of the ad was a great hit and had massive popularity for the same reasons, in addition to the appearance of the

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[728] 'New Ways of Advertisements' (Almal News) <Link> accessed 23 September 2020

[729] ibid

[730] Lamis Gabr, 'What do the Ministers Actually Do?' Almasy Alyoum (Cairo, 28 August 2010) <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/218838> accessed 24 September 2020

[731] 'Promo7 Wins 7 Awards' (Albayan) <https://www.albayan.ae/economy/2010-12-03-1.592643> accessed 28 September 2020

[732] 'Pepsi Commercial: We Will Rock You 2004' (IMDB, 2004) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7111958/> accessed 29 September 2020

[733] 'Amr Diab Gladiator Pepsi TV Ad.' (YouTube, 27 December 2010) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tPCrin1Rc0> accessed 29 September 2020

[734] Lauren McCarthy, 'Why Britney Spears's Pepsi Commercial was Perfection' (W Magazine, 4 May 2017) <https://www.wmagazine.com/story/britney-spears-pepsi-commercials-kendall-jenner/> accessed 28 September 2020

all-time popular Egyptian singer Amr Diab. One interesting fact, when the product's company decided to make the Middle East version to appeal for the local Arab audience, they changed the ending of the ad to show the emperor opening the gate for a lion to attack the rebel female gladiators, while looking happy at the end. This could be understood in the context of the local culture in the Middle East that the majority of the audience would see the ending were the emperor loses to a group of women as offensive. This shows that this process of localising TV advertisements goes through a prosses of vernacularisation, not just a translation of the language, but also drastic changes in the content based on the local context and culture.

Khalil used the action of drinking and the brands of drinks to associate with his final part of the Tweet that has a famous Arabic saying: "I will drink myrrh — because I am Egyptian, and I want to be free". The full Arabic saying is "Drinking myrrh from my elbows" which means going through hard time and suffering. The saying literal meaning is drinking a bitter drink from through an unusual means, and it implies deep struggle and suffering in Arabic culture.[735] Myrrh is a yellow-brown kind of gums that has a bitter taste and is extracted from trees such as Commiphora abyssinica, and commonly used in Africa and Arabia.[736] The saying is commonly in Egyptian culture and used in political context on different capacities.[737] In this tweet, Khalil is expressing the amount of suffering and struggle that Egyptians have to endure to reach freedom. Khalil believes freedom is not a gift, rather it is a right for everyone. It is taken and not sought, and it can never be divided or forfeited, because confiscating it means confiscating life, and encroaching upon the greatest moral value. How many poems and thoughts were said in it, how much was mentioned in slogans, and raised in squares and streets like in Tahrir Square, how many voices have demanded and are still demanding their freedom.[738]

6.5.6. Social Media Interaction

This Tweet was retweeted 20 times and was liked four times. It is significant to consider that around the date of this Tweet on 22 January 2011, the level of interaction was

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[735] 'Drinking from Elbows' (Arabic Translators Society Forum) <http://www.atinternational.org/forums/showthread.php?t=2326> accessed 29 September 2020
[736] 'Myrrh' (Merriam Webester Dictionary) <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myrrh> accessed 20 October 2020
[737] Amina Disouki, 'El Sisi is Drinking Myrrh for the People' Elbalad (Cairo, 29 July 2018) <https://www.elbalad.news/3404703> accessed 27 September 2020
[738] ibid

still low compared to what happened during and after the 25 January Revolution. Among those who retweeted the Tweet are prominent activists and journalists such as Reem Abdillatif, Noha Atef, and Sarah El Deeb who have thousands of followers.

6.5.7. Reflection from the cyberactivist

Khalil believes that online cyberactivism is more important than normal media as it represents the truth. People knew that the state media is lying, and the traditional media is failing. Today, the world is witnessing a completely new media, which is social, interactive, or post-modern media, or what has come to be called "post-truth."[739] We are no longer in front of an audience that goes to the media, and media messages are no longer monopolised by certain institutions, companies or governments, but rather transforming the individual from a passive recipient to a maker and sender of news, without any cost or effort, just because they is part of an interactive media network.[740] What was presented on social media is most of the time a personal content, a personal statement, a personal photo, in all cases it represents the person who is posting personally. Khalil thinks that this wave of representation of personalised truth in Egypt started during the incidents of Mahalla on 6 April 2008, when cyberactivists started using Twitter over SMS messages. The element of representing the truth in personalised manner created this trust between followers and the cyberactivist. The followers start following and listening to the cyberactivists because of their credibility that they built over time and mainly because they spoke the truth in a language that people understood.[741]

If you want to represent facts, you have to present them in a clear and understood language. Sometimes those cyberactivists use strong or vulgar language, but as long as they say the truth and in a language that people understand, the people will follow. Even those who are supporters of the government, they will go to the cyberactivist to hear the truth, even though they know that they might not like this truth, but in a controlled-media country, cyberactivists might be the only source of truth. The element of individualism in cyberactivism and the importance of interaction are the key elements to a high impact content.[742]

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[739] ibid
[740] ibid
[741] ibid
[742] ibid

In drafting this tweet, Khalil had to think of the audience before writing. Writing an article in newspaper is totally different from writing a post on social media. Wael had a plan, had a message in his head and he understood the audience. Khalil said: "When you have a complicated idea in your head, you start thinking of what message you want to say, and you identify your audience, then you try to find a common reference and you build your post based on that. As long as you are fully aware of what you want to say, and the message is clear to yourself."[743]

Khalil believes that being a cyberactivist you have to think smart when addressing an issue to the public. The cyberactivist has to think of what they want to say, to whom and how. Being part of that society, the cyberactivist has an intuitive sense to all these aspects.[744] This sense is what makes the cyberactivist decide in what context they want to put their message, and what do they want to achieve. Being part of that society allows them to have more common references with the audience than an outsider, which enables them to face the challenges in such conversations.[745]

In this tweet, Khalil decided he will choose the audience's common reference despite that it contradicts with his own ideology. Khalil is a hardcore socialist and even belonged to an extreme wing of the socialist movement in Egypt, the Revolutionary Socialists. Khalil had a strict socialist upbringing and education, and extensively published articles on socialism in the Revolutionary Socialists website.[746] In this tweet, Khalil used commercialism and capitalism extensively, by presenting all these multinational corporations and using their commercialised approach to sell their products and making billions of dollars at the expense of the consumers who in our case belonged to a poor country like Egypt and are barely making a living. Khalil understood the value of the common reference and the power of using it even if it contradicts his socialist beliefs.[747]

Khalil believes that in rallying up to a revolution and influencing public opinion, vernacularisation is much more important than projecting a specific ideology. Khalil attributes the downfall of the 25 January Revolution to the failure of some of the revolution's leaders such as Mohammed El Baradie and Amr Hamzawy, who failed to reach down to the common people's level by using a vernacular language and getting closer to the street. On the

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[743] ibid
[744] ibid
[745] ibid
[746] 'Wael Khalil Articles' (Revolutionists Socialists) <https://revsoc.me/people/wyl-khlyl/> accessed 29 October 2020
[747] Interview with Wael Khalil, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 July 2018)

contrary, they used a very elitist language when they used social media. Khalil thinks that the vernacular discourse was the strongest element to get the revolution starting, as it came from below, people felt they are involved, engaged, understood what is happening and wanted to take part. However, what happened later is that the process turned political, with the old factions struggling over power, straying away from the people and their language, and resorting to their classic ideologies or dogmas, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, or even the liberals such as Hamzawy and Baradie, who decided to play elitist politics by the book, while ignoring the masses the went to the streets. When the people did not understand what is happening, it opens the way to the more conservative block to take over and demanding the return of the military rule, something the people can understand.[748] The problem was that those elitists thought they know what is right for the people while they are distant from them. Khalil believes that the leadership of the revolution should have opened to people and brainstormed publicly and listened to them, maybe one idea would have worked and gave a better outcome. For example, the strongest slogan that was used during the revolution "The people demand the downfall of the regime," was not created in an official meeting, it was originated in the street, by an unknown protester.[749]

Khalil was fully aware that he was applying a vernacular approach when he posts on social media, and he understood that this process comes with power and responsibility. In this vernacularisation process, it is important to know that it is a responsibility on you as a cyberactivist, you cannot take this process as a challenge game or a mind exercise just to provoke people, nor you can be scared and avoid challenges or play it safe. Khalil believes that shock therapy is the best way to challenge the society's negative traits, but we need be also to be careful not to open the taboo topics in a too direct way that you put it out of the local context. For example, you cannot just walk in the street asking people out of nowhere what they think about homosexuality, you have to put it in a context, and here is where vernacularisation comes.[750]

Despite that Khalil used vernacular discourse that contradicted with his ideology, he was also aware that it is a sensitive border that and carries its own risk. The author of the post should create a balance between how to present your message, but at the same time to avoid tolerating negative aspects of society in your message in order to be appealing to the audience, and remember your role is to challenge those traits, not become part of it. Khalil

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[748] ibid
[749] ibid
[750] ibid

also believed in the universality and the wholeness of human rights and is against postponing or prioritising one human rights issue over the other, and always thought of it as one package.[751]

This Tweet could be also considered a two-levelled vernacularisation process. The first level is when the advertising company vernacularised the original advertisement to appeal to the Middle Eastern consumer by localising the concept and the tagline. The second level is when Khalil vernacularised the Middle East version of the advertisement to convey his message of Egyptians seeking freedom. This proves that vernacularisation sometimes is a complex process that undergoes a multi-levelled process in order to reach the final audience with the targeted impact.

6.6. #5 (Tweet by Gamal Eid on Twitter)

6.6.1. Screenshot of Original Post

Illustration 5: Screenshot of post by Gamal Eid on Twitter

6.6.2. Transcript of the Post in English

"2016 is the Year of Youth

Year of Youth 1

Year of Youth 2

Year of Youth 3

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[751] ibid

Year of Youth 69

Year of Youth 137

How many youths are left, Sergeant?"

Photo: Egyptian police personnel leading young Egyptians into prison transfer truck.[752]

6.6.3. Historical background

This Tweet was posted by Gamal Eid on 24 April 2016. In a report issued in September 2016 by the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (a non-governmental organisation based in Cairo directed by Gamal Eid) revealed that the Egyptian authorities have detained more than 106,000 prisoners, in their detention centres, including 60,000 political detainees.[753] The report indicates a steady increase in the number of prisons in general after the 25 January Revolution, and after the ousting of President Morsi in July 2013 in particular, and the number of political detainees reached 60,000 compared to 46,000 criminal prisoners.[754] The report links between the establishment of new prisons and raising their capacity to accommodate thousands instead of hundreds in each prison, and the increase in the number of pre-trial detainees and the length of their detention, which amounted to three years in some cases.[755]

According to a report by international organisation Human Rights Watch, since July 2013, the Egyptian authorities have launched a mass arrest campaign targeting a wide spectrum of political actors. Between Morsi's ouster and May 2014, at least 41,000 people were detained or imprisoned, according to a documented count, with 26,000 others arrested since the beginning of 2015, according to lawyers and human rights researchers. The government itself has admitted to making about 34,000 arrests.[756] This massive flow of detainees has severely strained the Egyptian prison system. According to the semi-official National Council for Human Rights, prisons in 2015 were operating at 150 percent of their

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[752] 'Gamal Eid Tweet' (Twitter, 24 April 2016) <https://twitter.com/gamaleid/status/724248840463851525> accessed 15 October 2020
[753] Ahmed Gamal Ziada, 'Egyptian Prisons Before and After the Revolution' (ANHRI, 2017) <http://anhri.net/?p=173465#_ftn7>
[754] ibid
[755] ibid
[756] 'We Are in Tombs' (Human Rights Watch, 28 September 2016) <https://www.hrw.org/ar/report/2016/09/27/294235> accessed 30 October 2020

capacity. Over the two years following Morsi's fall, the Egyptian government constructed and planned to build eight new prisons.[757]

According to another human rights organisation, Human Rights Monitor, the vast majority of detainees in Egypt are subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment without there being any deterrent or mechanism for accountability for this crime, which has spread and has become a reality in which tens of thousands of young people live in Egypt's prisons.[758] Courts have issued hundreds of death sentences and long prison terms after grossly unfair mass trials. And the current president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, did not deny the presence of those he called innocent youths in prisons as a result of the situation Egypt is going through, as he put it, while unofficial estimates indicate that the number of political detainees has exceeded 65,000 detainees, leaving tens of thousands of detainees' lives behind bars at risk of death as a result of torture at any moment.[759] In addition, the authorities deliberately conceal the crimes and cases of systematic torture that take place in police stations, State Security headquarters and secret prisons, and there are higher instructions to practice the most brutal and systematic forms of torture to break the will of detainees. The Ministry of Interior constantly seeks to conceal the crimes of prisoners' murders during torture, by putting pressure on their families or manipulating through forensic reports, which usually confirms that the cause of death is either suicide or a sharp drop in blood circulation. Most of the detainees who were subjected to torture do not know where they are being held, or who arrested them, and their eyes were blindfolded during torture, and thus it is difficult to know the perpetrator to bring charges against them.[760]

When it comes to youth detainees, Human Rights Monitor has documented the arrest of more than 25,000 young men and women who are under thirty at the time of during the period between 2015-2016. Most of those young detainees were subjected to torture in prisons in order to extract confessions from them on fabricated charges, in addition to torture of all detainees from the moment of arrest in what is known sarcastically as *tashrifa* or the formal honorary welcome, which includes beatings, kicks and insulting.[761] According to Human Rights Monitor, thousands of young men and women were issued harsh sentences during the year 2015, including life sentences and death sentences in the absence of the

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[757] ibid

[758] 'The Situation of Egyptian Prisons' (Human Rights Monitor, 2016) <http://humanrights-monitor.org/Posts/ViewLocale/25639#.X9WlOtj7RnI> accessed 30 October 2020

[759] ibid

[760] ibid

[761] 'Human Rights Monitor Post' (Facebook, 12 August 2016) <https://www.facebook.com/575870665838699/posts/1107365676022526/> accessed 30 October 2020

simplest fair trial standards. The violations were not limited to the establishment of the security services only, but the educational bodies also used the weapon of dismissal from universities and the denial of taking exams for detained students as a form of psychological torture and terror. Hundreds of students were dismissed from schools and universities, especially Al-Azhar, and they were prevented from completing their education.[762]

In January 2016, President Sisi held the Egyptian Youth Day celebration event at the Cairo Opera House, where he declared the year 2016 as the "Youth Year." This declaration included plans for Egyptian youth such as genuinely qualifying young people through a scientific system based on national foundations to qualify young people for leadership. Those plans also included providing courses for young people for free to activate the role of youth in the national work system and assign the Central Bank to use all the capabilities of the banking sector to finance small and medium projects for youth.[763] In October of the same year, President Sisi organised the First National Youth Conference, with the attendance of more than 3,000 young people in Sharm El-Sheikh, in an attempt to exchange dialogue with young symbols, to raise their standards. The President participated in the conference himself and attended many sessions, including the evaluation of the experience of youth political participation in parliament, the opportunities for elections, the relationship between the file of public freedoms and the political participation of youth, the vision of youth to reform the higher education system and scientific research, the vision of youth to link the education system with the labour market, the impact of cinema and drama in forming collective awareness, the challenges of the Egyptian state to confront illegal immigration, the influence of propaganda and media, as well as dealing with the topics of circumcision and harassment.[764] The conference witnessed several decisions for the sake of youth, foremost among which is the amnesty for 203 people against whom final court rulings were issued in cases of protest, the issuance of Law No. 515 of 2016 to pardon 82 of the imprisoned youth, the formation of a national committee of youth to examine the legal position of young people detained pending cases to take appropriate measures according to each case and within the limits of the powers that the Constitution grants to the president.[765] Human rights organisation saw these presidential plans unrealistic and did not represent the truth, where

[762] ibid
[763] Mostafa Mahmoud, 'El Sisi: 2016 is the Year of the Youth' Masr Alarabia (Cairo, 9 January 2016) <Link> accessed 30 October 2020
[764] Aya Abuelnaga, '2016 is the First Year of Youth in Sisi's Era' Albawaba News (Cairo, 7 June 2017) <https://www.albawabhnews.com/2560512> accessed 30 October 2020
[765] ibid

thousands of youth are detained and more are arrested every day. On the same day that it was announced that 2016 was the Year of Youth, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, Ahmed Abdullah, was subjected to a kidnap attempt by security personnel in Agouza. Lawyer Tariq al-Awadi was also detained at Cairo airport while returning from Doha.[766] The arrest of young Egyptians continued and over the course of the year 2016 "Year of Youth," and thousands of young Egyptian men and women filled the prisons, including prominent human rights activists, political activists, journalists and artists.[767]

6.6.4. International Human Rights Law Element

In this tweet, Gamal Eid tackles the issue of arbitrary detention on young people, mainly young protesters. There are two main international human rights aspects to this post, arbitrary detention, and the freedom of assembly. According to human rights organisation Front Line defenders, all states practice arbitrary detention. It is a boundless practice as thousands of people are subjected to arbitrary detention annually. And since detention itself does not constitute a violation of human rights, international law has gradually sought to set limits by which the detention, whether by court order or administrative, becomes arbitrary.[768] Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "No one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile."[769] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in Article 9 confirms the right to liberty and security, and confirms that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention, with exception of conditions stipulated on national laws.[770]

According to the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (established by United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution No. 1991-1942); Deprivation of liberty is an arbitrary measure if a case falls within one of the following three categories:

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[766] Samir Youssef, 'Suppression, Imprisonments and Trials in the First 4 Months of the Youth Year' (Journalists Around the World, 24 April 2016) <Link>

[767] ibid

[768] 'Arbitrary Detention' (Front Line Defenders) <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/ar/violation/arbitrary-detention> accessed 29 October 2020

[769] Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 Article 9

[770] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 Article 9 para 1

"First, when it becomes impossible to rely clearly on any legal basis to justify the deprivation of liberty (for example, if the person remains in detention after the end of his sentence or after the issuance of an amnesty law that covers him). Second, if the deprivation of liberty results from the exercise of the rights or freedoms guaranteed in Articles 7, 13, 14, 18, 19, 10 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and as long as the States Parties are concerned with Articles 12, 18, 19, 21 and 22, 25, 26 and 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Third, when the failure to observe some or all of the international rules relating to the right to a fair trial - stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the relevant international instruments accepted by the concerned states - is such case the deprivation of liberty gives an arbitrary nature."[771]

In June 2018, the United Nations Human Rights Office expressed grave concern about the prevalence of arrests in Egypt, which are often followed by harsh sentences and often carried out solely for the purpose of exercising the right to freedom of opinion, expression and assembly and arbitrary detention has become a persistent problem in Egypt. The Human Rights Office called on the Egyptian authorities to fully guarantee the rights of all detainees to their physical and psychological integrity, and to follow due process of law. It also called, unequivocally, for the immediate and unconditional release of all those currently detained by the Egyptian authorities for exercising their legitimate human rights.[772] Most of those arrested during the summer of 2018 were prominent young human rights activists, among them Wael Abbas, and lawyer and civil society activist Haitham Mohammadein, on charges that include calling for illegal protests, as well as Shadi al-Ghazali Harb, who was arrested following Tweets he published criticising the Egyptian president's plan to cede two islands in the Red Sea to Saudi Arabia. He was accused of spreading false news and joining an illegal group, blogger Mohamed Oxygen, activist Sherif al-Roubi, activist Amal Fathy, who was accused of using the Internet and social media to incite against the state and spreading false news, among other charges, and comedian Shady Abu Zaid.[773]

The second human rights aspect in the Tweet is the reference to the right to demonstration, which mostly intertwines with freedom of assembly. The right to demonstrate

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[771] The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Fact Sheet no. 9 <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/FactSheet26en.pdf> accessed 30 October 2020
[772] 'Arbitrary Detention is a Chronic Issue in Egypt' (UN News, 5 June 2018) <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2018/06/1009991> accessed 5 November 2020
[773] ibid

and protest is a human right that is driven from other different basic human rights such as freedom of assembly, freedom of association and the right to freedom of expression.[774] With the increase in the phenomenon of demonstrations following the revolutions in the Arab region since 2011, opinions differed regarding the extent of the right to freedom of protest on the one hand, and the ways in which governments could deal with demonstrators on the other hand. Before the outbreak of the Arab Spring waves, the concept imposed by the ruling authorities in most Arab countries was that demonstrating is a crime and not a right, but with the advent of the Arab Spring, people collided with this concept, trying to get rid of it and whoever imposed it.

Most of governments do not pay much attention to international laws that guarantee the right to demonstrate. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights stipulates that peaceful assembly must be recognised. According to ICCPR, "The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognised. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law, and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others." Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in its third paragraph that: "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures."[775] Hence, it is clear that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights excludes demonstrations as a means to change a government that came by the will of the people, but rather limits the means to change it to the same means that it brought, namely elections, although demonstrations remain a right for any citizen to express his protest against the actions of any government, whether elected or not.

In a more recent development, the United Nations Human Rights Committee has identified recommendations to states on the legislative references that constitutes the effective exercise of this right, which included: the prohibition or criminalisation of demonstrations, unjustified restrictions on demonstrations, unnecessary requirements for obtaining licenses that affect the enjoyment of freedom of assembly, the lack of ways to

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[774] 'The Historic Right to Peaceful Protest' (Your Rights Liberty 19 September 2006) <https://web.archive.org/web/20080430160441/http://www.yourrights.org.uk/your-rights/chapters/the-right-of-peaceful-protest/the-historic-right-of-peaceful-protest/the-historic-right-of-peaceful-protest.shtml> accessed 4 November 2020
[775] Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 Article 21

challenge decisions rejecting the organisation of demonstrations, arresting demonstrators that amount to arbitrary detention, legislation that does not comply with international human rights law because it impedes and punishes the exercise of the right to assembly and the right to demonstrate and because it creates procedures that violate the actual ability to enjoy the right to peaceful assembly, and legislation on counterterrorism is accompanied by broad definitions of terrorism that may endanger legitimate activities in a democratic society, particularly participation in demonstrations and protests.[776]

Despite the unclarity in international human rights law concerning the right to protest, the Egyptian Constitution was clearer and more direct in granting the right. Article 73 of the Egyptian Constitution of 2014 stipulates: "Citizens have the right to organise public meetings, marches, demonstrations, and all forms of peaceful protest, while not carrying weapons of any type, upon providing notification as regulated by law. The right to peaceful, private meetings is guaranteed, without the need for prior notification. Security forces may not to attend, monitor or eavesdrop on such gatherings."[777]

6.6.5. Vernacular Element

In this tweet, Gamal used more than one vernacular element. The first main element is using sarcasm and black comedy in creating a political joke or jest. Political humour could be defined as "any humorous text dealing with political issues, people, events, processes, or institutions."[778] For decades, scholars tried to study the role of humour in society and its impact on the audience, especially at the age of digital technology where is becomes much harder to capture the full scope of this impact.[779]

Throughout the ages, political joke was an Egyptian weapon to overcome their worries and sorrows. It is their defence against the sadness inherent in the Egyptian character. It is not strange for the Egyptians that, despite what they suffer, they laugh. The late Egyptian academic, Abdel Wahab al-Messiri, says, "The joke as part of the oral culture can be a channel through which popular opinion expresses its opinion, vision and anger away from the

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[776] 'Right to Peaceful Assembly' (Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 37 Article 21, 27 July 2020)
[777] 'The Egyptian Constitution of 2014' (Constitution Project, 19 February 2021)
<https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2014.pdf> accessed 16 March 2021)
[778] Dannagal G. Young, 'Theories and Effects of Political Humor: Discounting Cues, Gateways, and the Impact of Incongruities' (2017) The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication
<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199793471-e-29?rskey=NBL29e&result=2> accessed 30 November 2020
[779] ibid

control of the central state authority. The joke could be a sign to increase of awareness and call to opposition and civil society to take action, supported by a broad popular base."[780]

The joke for Egyptians, as journalist Adel Hammouda sees it in his book, *The Political Humour*, means "sarcastic, conscious, lively, philosophical, and perhaps passive resistance as well, resistance that gives the people (security), expresses their will that does not perish, does not acknowledge fear, and seeks to transcend it, it is a sacred revenge with which the people defend themselves against tyranny."[781]

"Have you heard the last joke?" This sentence is well-known to Egyptians, because making jokes is seen as part of cultural Egyptian-ness, which emphasises having a good sense of humour, mastery of laughter, and mockery of reality, even in the most difficult circumstances. Egyptians excel in creating political jokes that are a tool they use to criticize their reality and political situations, in a sarcastic and scathing way that has also affected their rulers over decades. The joke is often released and circulated quickly in tongues without knowing its source or the first person who published it.[782]

The joke accompanies Egyptians in most of their problems and crises and deals with most of their most sensitive and sad issues, so they dealt with a sad laugh that often comes from mockery. The political joke spread during the era of the late President Gamal Abdel Nasser, as well as during the era of President Sadat, and it expressed the ideas and feelings of Egyptians in the days of peace and war. Abdel Nasser complained about the number of jokes that the people shouted at their armed forces after the 1967 defeat, so he said in the general conference of the Arab Socialist Union, in strict language: "Stop the jokes!"[783] The former Egyptian Minister of Interior, Major General Hassan Abu Basha, admitted that "the security services used to collect jokes during the Sadat era," and that he was presenting to the president, when he was director of the State Security Investigation, a report containing the most important political jokes that Egyptians circulate on a weekly basis.[784] As for the largest share of the jokes, it was for president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who was besieged by Egyptians with jokes since his decision to run for the presidency, when activists called him "*balaha*" بلحة(meaning "date," in reference to the fruit), to the point that some suggested calling the

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[780] 'Jokes: The Egyptian Invincible Weapon' Alaraby (London, 17 February 2014) <Link> accessed 30 November 2020.
[781] ibid
[782] 'Egyptians Utilise Jokes in the Revolution's Favour' (DW, 7 March 2011) <Link> accessed 30 November 2020
[783] Mohamed Afifi, 'Political Jokes in Egypt' Sasapost (Cairo, 10 January 2020) <https://www.sasapost.com/opinion/political-humor/> accessed 20 November 2020
[784] ibid

new administrative capital "*balaha* land." Sisi himself revealed his distress from the Egyptians' "joking" about him, saying: "The volume of jokes that came out on the subject is beyond imagination," concluding his speech by saying, "I hope you take it easy on me with your jokes a little!" Then the result is that the people do not stop joking, and rulers do not stop injustice.[785]

In an article published in 1945, British writer George Orwell said: "Every joke is a tiny revolution."[786] Political jokes were always circulating and feared by the sultans, because they could not confiscate it and could not prevent it from entering their countries and spreading on the tongues of their subjects. It is the most widespread and the fastest transmission among people in a time of oppression and injustice. In the new era of Egypt, it can be said that the 25 January Revolution began as a joke against authority and tyranny, until Mubarak said about those who launched jokes, "Let them have fun." Before Mubarak, the intelligence services were keen on monitoring people, and reading mutual jokes, to know what the citizens were thinking.[787] The scene in Tahrir Square in January 2011, even if it was inlaid with pictures of the martyrs, and the scenes of the protesters, who were injured and insisted on staying until the fall of the regime, but it was decorated with jokes that carried on banners raised by protesters, humour mixed with pain. President Hosni Mubarak was the focus of most of these jokes, commenting on the demonstrations, and based on news that a number of Arab youths burned themselves in protest, Egyptians circulate a joke that "Mubarak threatens to burn himself and demands the people's change."[788] The Egyptian revolution was not without jokes, actually it was one of its main features. Jokes occurred during the Revolution, as it turned after 25 January from a symbolic state of venting worries to a powerful and bold tool. There were jokes about the fate of former President Mubarak and his family, and even surpassed him to joke with the fate of ministers and businessmen during his reign. It also crossed the borders of Egyptian territory to reach the Tunisian and Libyan revolutions.[789]

Political writer Suleiman Kenawy believes that this Revolution blew away the old theories that used to say that the Egyptian joke to give way to the anger that is hidden in their

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[785] ibid

[786] 'George Orwell: Funny but not Vulgar' (Orwell RU)
<https://orwell.ru/library/articles/funny/english/e_funny> accessed 30 November 2020

[787] 'Political Joke in Egypt: Black Comedy' Ultra Sawt (Cairo, 28 January 2019) <Link> accessed 30 November 2020

[788] 'Egyptians Fight the Regime with Jokes' Haifa Net (Haifa, 10 February 2011)
<https://haifanet.co.il/archives/6155> accessed 2 December 2020

[789] 'Egyptians Utilise Jokes in the Revolution's Favour' (DW, 7 March 2011) <Link> accessed 30 November 2020

chests and which they cannot bring out in the form of a protest or a demonstration in the face of their ruler because of fear. Kenawy pointed out that this theory has become invalid now with the revolution that revealed the courage of the Egyptians, and instead of the Egyptians resorting to joking as an alternative to revolution and protest, they combined revolution and joking at the same time in the 25 January Revolution.[790] While Egyptian writer, Tayea al-Deeb believes that Egyptians stopped producing jokes shortly before the outbreak of the 25 January Revolution, which was an indication that the lack of expression of jokes indicates something dangerous for Egyptians. The mocking feelings that were pent-up exploded during the 18 days of the revolution's events, and with them exploded thousands of jokes that we saw in the revolution.[791]

In this Tweet, we see Eid is creating a joke, which actually could be classified as black comedy. Black comedy can be defined as "a kind of drama (or, by extension, a non-dramatic work) in which disturbing or sinister subjects like death, disease, or warfare, are treated with bitter amusement, usually in a manner calculated to offend and shock."[792] Eid played on the words, he used the term "Youth Year" declared by the Egyptian president to show the numbers of the youth being arrested as the number increases with every count. Eid is showing the great number of youths detained under Sisi's government using his own term for counting. It is a sad fact as the number is great, but it is sketched in a comic form to show the contradiction in the behaviour and the policies adopted by the government. While the government is supressing and arresting youth, it is pretending that they care about the youth and dedicating a year for them. Hence, we see the sarcasm and the black comedy immerging for such contradiction.

The second vernacular aspect that Eid used to display the joke was the use of pictures or illustrations. Images are a cultural practice by which the person that produces and receives them expresses their social belonging, its value uses within the group, its psychological conditions, its unconscious motives, and its cultural uses. A picture expresses psychological visions, social perspectives, and cultural shades. Therefore, it was an active element in all the mutations that humanity has known, from the drawings on the walls to the writing on paper, to the printing press, then the digital means at the heart of all the transformations that have

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[790] ibid

[791] Mahmoud Khairallah, 'First Book on Political Jokes' Maspero (Cairo, 16 February 2019) <https://www.maspero.eg/wps/portal/home/radio-and-tv-magazine/culture/details/cbbafe73-8156-4c72-b862-db997fe4801f> accessed 3 December 2020

[792] 'Black Comedy' (Oxford Reference) <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095509665> accessed 10 December 2020

shaped the past, present and future of mankind.[793] A study that was carried out by Microsoft in Canada concluded that since the year 2000, about when the mobile revolution stared, the average attention span for a person is around eight seconds.[794] This led to that the human brain started to rely more on visual processing, and social media made a manifestation of that fact and studies showed that adding a photo of link to photo to your Tweet can boost the range of engagement 35%.[795] Also studies showed that messages that are associated with photos are more likely to motivate the process of remembering and retention of the message.[796]

In social media, the images found another opportunity to consecrate their authority, and found in the attractiveness of the screens a more fertile field for rooting their globalisation and power, to move across borders without restrictions, and to extend in different worlds with all fluidity, and acquire their colours and shades through the diversity and plurality of their viewers. Then it derives its sanctity from the meanings exerted on it, the ideologies that are worn with it, the rituals of receiving and circulating it, and the benefits and harms that accompany it.[797] Until recently, the focus was on the use of images as a tool to record the past, keep snapshots of it, and as a means of transmitting events directly, but on social media sites, images, and then video, day after day, are getting closer to being a global language of communication between people on the Internet, and through smartphones do not have an alphabet or grammar, and do not need translation, and two people, neither of whom speaks the language of the other, can communicate through them.[798] Instead of the person having to write a text message explaining their message, it is sufficient for them now to take a picture of a meal they are eating or of the street in which they are located and sends it through many services and sites, and in many cases it is sufficient on its own and is not accompanied by a written comment.[799] Another study concluded that sharing images on

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[793] Abdel Fattah Shahid, 'The Power of Image on Social Media' Aljazeera (Doha, 5 January 2020) <https://institute.aljazeera.net/ar/ajr/article/932> accessed 30 November 2020
[794] Kevin McSpadden, 'You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span Than a Goldfish' Time (New York, 14 May 2015) <https://time.com/3858309/attention-spans-goldfish/> accessed 20 December 2020
[795] Patricia Maranga, 'Social Photos Generate More Engagement' (Social Media Examiner, 13 May 2014) <https://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/photos-generate-engagement-research/> accessed 3 December 2020
[796] 'Why Images Are So Important to Social Media' (Online Logo Maker, 29 March 2017) <https://medium.com/@onlinelogomaker/why-images-are-so-important-to-social-media-b9411dd678a8> accessed 30 November 2020
[797] Abdel Fattah Shahid, 'The Power of Image on Social Media' Aljazeera (Doha, 5 January 2020) <https://institute.aljazeera.net/ar/ajr/article/932> accessed 30 November 2020
[798] 'Image is a New Language on Social Media' Emarat Alyoum (Dubai, 9 July 2013) <https://www.emaratalyoum.com/technology/pc/2013-07-09-1.589890> accessed 20 December 2020
[799] ibid

social media plays a great role in shaping individuals' social life by creating a what could be called as mobile mediated visualities.[800]

Eid's choice of photo was successful in presenting a shocking image to his message. We can see a line of young Egyptian being led into the prisoner's transfer car one after another. This image showed and almost moving sequence to his works, describing the rising number of youths being arrested as he counts. The scene of mass arresting of youth became familiar since the ousting of President Morsi in 2013. In June 2015, Amnesty International has accused the Egyptian authorities of imprisoning young activists to quell unrest in one of the most severe repressions in the country's history. In a report released days before the second anniversary of the ouster of Islamist President Mohamed Morsi, entitled "Egypt's Youth from Protest to Prison," Amnesty International criticised what it describes as the repressive policies of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who was head of the army when he ousted President Mohamed Morsi in 2013 after mass protests against his rule. The organisation said that President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's rule seeks to "kill any future threatening his authority in the bud."[801] The London-based human rights organization added that popular demonstrations have been replaced by mass arrests, and that young activists are behind bars, and this testifies that the state reverted to becoming an oppressive state by relentlessly targeting young activists in Egypt. "The authorities are crushing the hopes of an entire generation for a brighter future," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, deputy director of the Middle East and North Africa Program at Amnesty International.[802] This was a fact known to everyone and Eid showed a strong illustration to that in a sad contradiction to the claims by the government that they support youth.

The second important aspect of the photo is the prisoner's transfer truck itself. This notorious truck is a violation of human rights in itself. The trunk of the truck in which the deportees are stuffed is rectangular in shape, its sides and roof are made of tin, and it is always overcrowded. Climbing to the first step of the ladder requires effort when it is parked at a distance from the sidewalk and the height of the first step in the stairs is not less than 50 centimetres. This door leads to a small corridor, with a second entrance in the middle that leads to the main space to accommodate detainees. The one standing at the second entrance

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[800] Elisa Serafinelli, 'Analysis of Photo Sharing and Visual Social Relationships. Instagram as Case Study (2017) University of Sheffield 2
[801] 'Prison Generation' (Amnesty International, 2015) <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1218532015ARABIC.PDF> accessed 20 December 2020
[802] ibid

could hardly see the details of the detention space. The lighting is very weak even during daytime and the car's smell is foul, and the lack of ventilation makes you feel the need to vomit even though the doors are open, let alone the situation when you close the door on the detainees while the car is moving.[803] The detention box is about three meters long, about two meters wide, and has eight windows, each of which does not exceed 30 centimetres in width and 15 centimetres in height, and a large number of people sit on the floor of the car most of the time due to overcrowding.[804] The ventilation windows are narrow, each of which is punctuated by five longitudinal iron bars reinforced with an iron grid from the inside and the other from the outside, their openings are narrow, which greatly limits the entry of air. Some windows are equipped from the outside with a metal frame with a sliding part that can be dragged to close the window completely or leave it half open.[805] The detainees' conditions inside the transfer truck have been on the monitor of human rights organisations, including the Egyptian National Council for Human Rights, since 2005, as many incidents happened were the detainees died in the truck due to hard conditions.[806]

Since 2013, the prisoners' transfer truck was associated in the minds of Egyptians with a nightmarish accident that killed 37 prisoners in one of those truck. On 18 August 2013, 37 of those held in pretrial detention pending investigations in the case of the Rabʿa al-Adawiya sit-in dispersal were killed in a prisoners' transfer truck. The Ministry of Interior issued more than one account of the events, one of which was that the pretrial detainees tried to escape and kidnapped an officer inside the deportation car, forcing the police forces to throw a gas bomb inside it, which caused the death of all the deportees. In a previous version, the Interior Ministry said that the car was attacked by gunmen on the road and bullets were fired at the accompanying officers, which forced the police forces to deal with gas. While the Minister of Interior said in a televised statement that a number of arrested rioters inside the yard of Abu Zaabal prison, at the same time that the deportation car was unloading the last batch of pretrial detainees, tried to kidnap an officer, so the security forces liberated him and fired a gas bomb that killed 37.[807]

In conclusion, Eid succeeded in conveying a very strong message using an image that is associated with traumatic incidence or ongoing violations, which gave a visual impression

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[803] 'Prisoners Truck, a Moving Coffen' (Arij, 29 December 2013) <Link> accessed 30 December 2020
[804] ibid
[805] ibid
[806] 'National Council for Human Rights Annual Report 2005-2004' (NCHR, 2005) <https://nchr.eg/Uploads/publication/ar/report11570443509.pdf> accessed 25 November 2020
[807] 'Prosecution Should Charge Officers Responsible for the Abu Zaabal Deaths' (EIPR, 21 August 2013) <Link> accessed 30 December 2020

on the audience that combined both words and image to create a full scene with maximum impact.

6.6.6. Social Media Interaction

This Tweet was retweeted 69 times and received 61 likes.[808] This considerable number of interactions shows that these kinds of Tweets are viewed by a relatively high number of users and indicates a high level of impact considering the political environment in 2016 and the restrictions on political engagement at the time of the post. The Tweet also received a number of comments that confirmed that the message was well received. In a comment by user Moh Azazi, he stressed on the fact that the security's arrests did not only target youth but also children. The comment said: "Yes, it is the year of youth and there are children too." It is known that those random mass arrests by security forces included children. According to Article 2 of the Egyptian Childs Law, a child is who is under the age of 18.[809] A report issued by Human Rights Watch in March 2020 documented human rights violations committed by Egyptian security officials against 20 detained children, who have all been arrested and prosecuted for allegedly participating in demonstrations, or in incidents of political violence. Authorities have detained the children in locations across Egypt, including Alexandria, Cairo, Damietta, Giza, Ismailia, Mansoura, North Sinai, Qalyubiya, and Sharqiya.[810] Prosecutors charged the children with vague charges, or that violated their right to freedom of expression and assembly. A court found a 14-year-old woman guilty of planning to participate in an illegal gathering that was in fact cancelled. A judge later commuted her sentence to two years in prison. There is a 14-year-old boy who was subjected to torture, while he was forcibly disappeared for a month, and remained in pretrial detention for three years on the basis of accusations related to what the authorities said was "spreading a pessimistic atmosphere" as part of an alleged plot to spread "false news" harmful to Egypt.[811] In July 2015, the report of the United Nations' Working Group on Arbitrary Detention confirmed that detention is systematic and widespread in Egypt, and that the number of children arrested in Egypt—from 30 June 2013, until the end of May 2015—

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[808] 647- 'Gamal Eid Tweet' (Twitter, 24 April 2016) <https://twitter.com/gamaleid/status/724248840463851525> accessed 15 October 2020
[809] 'Law No. 12 1996 Egyptian Child's Law' (National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, 1996) <https://www.arabccd.org/files/0000/7/Egypt%20Child%20law.pdf> accessed 20 December 2020
[810] 'No One Cared he is a Child' (Human Rights Watch, 23 March 2020) <https://www.hrw.org/ar/report/2020/03/23/339255> accessed 30 November 2020
[811] ibid

reached more than 3,200 children under the age of 18 years. They were subjected to torture and severe beatings inside the various detention centres. Children in Egypt are subjected to systematic violations of their rights, which were not limited to arbitrary arrest or detention in places not designated for children and torture inside places of detention, but also extended to include sexual assaults, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killing by firing live bullets during the dispersal of demonstrations.[812]

Other positive comments included hopes and prayers for those who are arrested to be released soon. Eid received negative replies, such as one that assumed that he is tweeting from outside Egypt and sarcastically asked him to come back to Egypt and "fight." One comment from user mshrkawi25 said: "There are two more left under the wheels, *basha*," stating that security did not only arrest youths but also killed them. Running over protesters using security trucks is a known practice by Egyptian security. The most well-known incident of running over protesters is the Maspero incident that happened in October 2011 when a demonstration took place in front of the Egyptian radio and television building known as "Maspero" as part of the activities called "Coptic Day of Rage," in response to residents of the village of Marinab in Aswan Governorate demolishing a church, and statements by the governor of Aswan were considered truly offensive. The demonstration turned into clashes between protesters and forces from the Military Police and Central Security Forces, which resulted in the killing of 28 people, mostly under the military vehicles, in addition to more than 321 injuries, most of them Copts.[813]

6.6.7. Reflection from the Cyberactivist

In this tweet, Eid combined his extensive knowledge and experience in human rights violation in Egypt and his understanding of he believes that appeal to Egyptian audience. By combining those elements, Eid created a strong message that appealed to young audience who would associate with the play on words and imaging to understand the sarcasm and dark humour. Eid was always seeing youths as his main target. Since his early activism, and now his cyberactivism, he always targeted young people. This feeling increases when he finds a

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[812] 'Egypt: Arbitrary Detention of Young Individuals is Systematic' (Alkarama, 16 July, 2015) <https://www.alkarama.org/en/articles/egypt-arbitrary-detention-young-individuals-systemic-and-widespread-says-un-working-group> accessed 30 November 2020
[813] 'Church Escalates with Fasting and Salafists Warn' Alakhbar (Beirut, 11 October 2011) < https://www.al-akhbar.com/Arab/95934?__cf_chl_captcha_tk__=a3cee173c93b1d094c75190765c8a38485682327-> accessed 25 November 2020

circle of youth or group that likes him and trusts him and respect him. This made him feel that he cannot shut up or not express his opinion or convey to those youth how to express their opinions without being prosecuted, like Kareem Amer's case. Those youths' trust obliges him not to stop writing and encouraging them to write and express themselves.[814]

In this tweet, Eid created a paradox between the white-washed image that the government wants to convey and the reality. Eid believes that one of the forms that he finds very impactful when used in posts on social media is when using comparisons or paradox and showing contradictions. For example, the former Egyptian Minister of Interior Habib Aladli who escaped responsibility, while someone like activists Alaa Abdelfattah who came back from South Africa to attend the revolution. Just mentioning that facts is enough to convey the message without much explanation.[815] This technique was well-employed in this Tweet and Eid did not have to explain himself very much and the limited characters and a photo were more than enough to create the full picture of how the Egyptian government pretends that it cares about the youths, while in reality it violates their fundamental rights. Presenting such a message on Twitter constitutes a real challenge. What is different about Facebook and Twitter is that you have to concentrate and focus your message, because you are addressing a wide audience rather than a circle of friends. The challenge of writing on Twitter, for example, is how to write 140 characters in a focused form and simple language. Eid does not lean toward writing posts divided into multiple tweets, but rather just one Tweet that is focused, direct and brief to convey the message.[816]

Despite that Eid is from an older generation, but he is fascinated with the youths' language and presence on social media. Eid understands that is playing the role of a bridge, not just between human rights and the street awareness, but also a bridge between different generations. "Sometimes I get surprised when I discover that I am older or from an older generation, and there is new terminology that I do not understand. Sometimes I feel like I am half-blind in the middle of a fully visioned group of youth, but at the same time I feel that I see more a lot than some of the activists that belonged to the older generation. This made me feel like I am a bridge between those young activists and those from the older generation of activists and huma rights professions. However, I still feel that the new generation developed this new language and messaging that is faster than my capacity of comprehension. These new terms like *fashkh* فشخ or other expressions became the youth language, and every time I

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[814] Interview with Gamal Eid, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 June 2018)
[815] ibid
[816] ibid

think I am catching up I realise that they progressed to a new level."[817] Eid believed in the youths of Egypt, and they did not fail him and they kept on the fight for justice when the activists and political activists on the other side retreated and got scared after 2013. Those older activists started to reduce their interaction on social media, they see the post but they do not comment, they like the Tweet but they do not retweet, they post on Facebook for friends only and their posts are indirect and not to the point. This really annoyed Eid and made him feel sad. But the positive side is that the number of youths who are involved in public issues is increasing, and that want encourages him to keep writing.[818] There is a wide range of opinions and stands among the Egyptian youth, sometimes Eid feels that there are non-activists' youth who have a human rights opinion that is even stronger than his. These are all gains from the revolution, and they should be support.[819]

Eid understands that the youth on the Internet use their own language, and he believes that this language is developing as fast as the communication technologies develop. So, he decided to use a middle ground or a middle language, as he realised that he will not be able to be up to date all the time.[820] After all, he is really not in their age to use their language at full, and at the same time, their language is not always mature or sedate language that he would want to use in all his posts. Therefore, he used a middle language, a simple and understood language to be understood by youth, and at the same time avoiding a language that belongs to youth only.[821] The youth call the act of talking many times on the same issue *hari* هري, which means ranting on. Eid rarely write things with no message or meaning. The feeling that he is always playing a role in increasing awareness, even if the post is something simple, for example a song or a joke, it has to have significance or deeper meaning not just entertainment.[822]

In addition to his extensive knowledge and experience in human rights, Eid had a very early understanding of the sense of injustice in Egypt. Eid grew up in a poor neighbourhood, he knew how police operates in these areas, and how they carry out random arrests. This was not logic to him; in his early life he recognised the extreme injustice of police in Egypt.[823] He saw them hurting and insulting people. He remembers this incident, when they arrested a young man known for his good manners and helping people, they dressed him a woman's

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[817] ibid
[818] ibid
[819] ibid
[820] ibid
[821] ibid
[822] ibid
[823] ibid

sleeping dress in the street and forced him to walk in the street to humiliate him and break him.[824] This incident for Eid was an eyeopener and it was his first connection to human rights, in addition to reading and attending Amnesty International events at his university, Ain Shams University. This all created his early human rights awareness and confirmed his beliefs that had had at early age. The second aspect that opened my eye was the inhumane use of torture and random arrests by authorities.[825] This early human rights awareness was reflected in all Eid's online activism, as seen in that Tweet here.

Eid is aware of the risks that come with writing in the vernacular, the same risks that made many human rights activists to stop posting. When Eid writes about sensitive issues such as religion or issues like death penalty and homosexuality, he feels it is a betrayal to deny or hide his position on such issues, but at the same time it is absurd if you present a cause in wrong timing or out of context, but if the issue is already being discussed publicly then one has to make their stand clear and it is their responsibility to declare it and they do not deny if they are faced with it.[826] Also, it depends on who is asking, if you feel that the question is coming from someone with no significance, you can simply tell them that it is not their concern. But if the question comes in the context of a serious discussion, you have to present your point of view and you do not hide your principles, just make sure you have the space to fully express your opinion, especially when you know that you are targeted.[827]

Eid is with absolute freedom of expression, and with the right to belief and at the same time the right to criticise beliefs. He believes that homosexuality is a personal freedom too. He never denied that, but at the same time he did not seek to strongly present those issues when it is not already on table or being discussed due to specific incident. After 30 June 2013, Eid started to apply more self-censorship.[828] Eid has a constant feeling that he is being monitored by State Security all the time and they monitor what he posts online. This came obvious as some of his posts were presented in the lawsuit against him and other human rights defenders. However, this also gave him the feeling that he has real impact, or else why would the authorities care to present those posts as evidence.[829] Eid believed that with greater impact comes greater risk. Eid realise that he posted something that caused impact when he gets strong reaction from the supporters of the government attacking him in their comments.

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[824] ibid
[825] ibid
[826] ibid
[827] ibid
[828] ibid
[829] ibid

Eid also believes that some of these comments are orchestrated by the security apparatus itself. The negative reaction to his posts actually provokes him to continue talking in such topic or trend. Also, he realised that a post made an impact when he sees it picked up by state media.[830]

Despite the clear message that Eid presented in this Tweet on violations against youths and contraction with state policy, Eid always had a subliminal message in all his cyberactivism content, which is freedom of expression. Eid believes that the most important aspect used on social media is the right to express oneself, the right to talk, the most important aspect of human rights is freedom of expression and the right for people to talk and criticise the government without falling in the trap of slandering and defamation. He believes that it is important in how to reach criticism in a condensed way without causing damage to anyone.[831]

Eid believes that the real human rights activist is the one who is able to say the truth in the time when people do not want to hear the truth. The positive feeling that Eid has since the Revolution is that he does not feel he is alone in the fight for justice. Whenever he presents an issue, he sees support and engagement from a wide audience, and he feel he is fighting within a big block and not a single fighter. Eid even receives comments from people that say that they disagree with him, but they respect him and his opinion, and this is a good start for a discussion and indication of change.[832]

6.7. Post #6 (Tweet by Esraa Abdel Fattah on Twitter)

6.7.1. Screenshot of Original Post

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[830] ibid
[831] ibid
[832] ibid

مُتابع ⚙ مش هبطل أحلم لمصر ✔
@Esraa2008

ومع بداية العام الجديد نستقبل خبر وقف برنامج
ابراهيم عيسي ،،، وعلي راي ابلة فاهيتا لو كنتوا
متخيلين انها سنة احلي ، يا اخي احلي !!

Illustration 6: Screenshot of post by Esraa Abdel Fattah on Twitter

6.7.2. Transcript of the Post in English

"With the beginning of a new year, we receive news of the suspension of Ibrahim Issa's TV show … and as Abla Fahita said: "If you think this is going to be a better year, hell no bro!"[833]

6.7.3. Historical Background

This Tweet was posted on 1 January 2017, during a time when Egypt was witnessing a full crackdown on media, and state-owned media took over all media outlets. Earlier that day, a statement issued by prominent journalist, novelist and TV presenter Ibrahim Issa announced that the TV program "With Ibrahim Issa" that he was presenting on the "Cairo and the People" TV channel, which had recently criticised some of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's policies, would stop after Issa had been subjected to "pressure."[834] The announcement of the suspension of the Issa's program, who was a fierce opponent of the government of President Hosni Mubarak as well as the government of former Islamist President Mohamed Morsi, came after sharp criticism of the policies of the Sisi government and of its supporters in Parliament. On 19 December 2016, pro-government representatives in Parliament,

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[833] 'Esraa Abdel Fattah Tweet on Twitter' (Copts United, 1 January 2017) <https://www.copts-united.com/Article.php?I=507&A=296191> accessed 1 November 2020
[834] 'Egypt Suspends Ibrahim Issa's TV Show' France 24 (Paris, 2 January 2017) <Link> accessed 2 November 2020

including speaker of the house, Ali Abdel Aal, launched a violent attack on Ibrahim Issa, which reached the point of accusing him of inciting violence and sectarian strife in his program.[835] Local media said that the channel's management was pressured to stop the Issa program. However, the channel's statement said that Issa presented to its management "the reasons for his decision, his motives and justifications, and his aspiration to reduce some of his workloads to devote himself and focus on his writing and creative projects in the coming period."[836]

According to a report issued in May 2016 by the Association on Freedom of Thought and Expression, the report monitored 438 cases of violations against the press and the media in 22 governorates, and journalists were at the forefront of the groups most exposed to violations, as 164 journalists were subjected to direct violations, while media professionals were subjected to 62 direct violations. Violations were divided into several forms. For example, the Foundation documented prevention from performing journalistic and media work. According to the report, the Egyptian Parliament was one of the bodies that "violated the freedom of the press and the media," as 30 violations against the rights of press and media workers were monitored, which varied between preventing the broadcasting of its sessions, preventing certain journalists from covering Parliament news, and preventing others from entering the parliament by order of the chairman of the Parliament.[837] The Association said that the year 2016 witnessed the most violation of freedom of creativity in Egypt, as the report monitored 78 violations that creators were subjected to in Egypt, compared to 46 violations in 2015, and 21 violations in 2014, which shows how the state of freedom of creativity has moved from bad to worse. The violations monitored by the report varied between the prohibition and censorship of artistic works, the deletion of scenes from TV series, the ban on travel or entry into Egypt, and the imprisonment of creative people for publishing works of art.[838]

Despite the absolute support on the part of the Egyptian media for the government of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, and the great control of the security services over what is said on the screen; However, this did not prevent the government from harassing media professionals, and it prevented many of them from appearing. From 2013 till 2017, a large

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[835] ibid
[836] 'Ibrahim Issa' TV Show Stops after Pressures' DW (Berlin, 1 January 2017) <Link> accessed 25 November 2020
[837] 'One Voice Republic' (AFTE, 9 May 2016) <https://afteegypt.org/publications_org/2016/05/08/12179-afteegypt.html> accessed 25 November 2020
[838] ibid

number of media professionals were suspended, permanently or temporarily. Journalist Amr Adib said on his "Everyday" programme that the number of media professionals who were prevented from appearing on the screen in 2016 only is "enough to run an entire channel."[839]

There is a long list of TV presenters who were banned from appearing on Egyptian TV in 2016. Journalist Amr Al-Laithi's programme was banned, as punishment for broadcasting the video of the "tuk-tuk" driver, through his programme "One of the People" on Al-Hayat channel, which has achieved tremendous popularity among Egyptians, after it caused great embarrassment to the government, and the security saw that it incited the people to demonstrate.[840] In June 2016, the Egyptian authorities deported the Lebanese journalist Lilian Daoud out of Egypt, under the pretext that her residency had expired, a few hours after the OnTV channel terminated her contract. Security dealt with her in a manner described as "acute and degrading", forcing her to leave the country in her pyjamas. Daoud was known for supporting the Arab Spring revolutions and the attack on the Muslim Brotherhood, but she entered into clashes with the ruling regime in Egypt after the July 2013 due to her criticism of the repression and restrictions on freedoms.[841] Also in June 2016; OnTV suspended the Manshet programme presented by the journalist Gaber al-Qarmouti, after he criticised the officials in the regime, and the channel asked him to change the idea of the programme and the political dimension, but he refused, so the contract with him was terminated.[842] In April 2016, OnTV suspended the media presenter, Youssef al-Husseini, after he criticised Egypt's "ceding" of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia. Al-Husseini remained banned from appearing for about a month, before returning to his program again, and declaring that he re-evaluated many things during his break.[843] This wave of suspension of TV programmes started in 2013 and included many prominent TV presenters who were suspended before 2016, such as Bassem Youssef, Reem Maged and Yousry Foda.[844]

6.7.4. International Human Rights Law Element

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[839] Tamer Ali, 'Media People Betrayed by El Sisi after the Coup' Arabi 21 (London, 24 October 2016) <Link>
26 November 2020

[840] ibid

[841] Ashraf Abdel Hamid, 'Why Egypt Deported Presenter Lilian Dawood?' Alarabiya (Cairo, 28 June 2016) <Link> accessed 28 November 2020

[842] 'Gaber Al-Qarmouti Leaves OnTV' Propaganda (Cairo, 27 June 2016) <Link> accessed 27 November 2020

[843] 'After Rumours of his Escape, Hussaini Reveals the Truth' CNN Arabic (Dubai, 19 April 2016) <https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2016/04/19/egypt-saudi-youssef-alhosiny> accessed 28 November 2020

[844] 'Media People Stayed at Home after Opposing the Regime' Akhbarak (Cairo, 2016) <Link> accessed 2 December 2020

The Egyptian Constitution of 2014 affirmed freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of the press, freedom of scientific research and creativity, and therefore its texts are considered legal texts that are valid and enforceable before all the authorities in the country, whether legislative, executive, or judicial. Based on that, the international agreements to which Egypt has joined passes through several stages and procedures that begin to be studied with the knowledge of the concerned authorities to decide to sign and approve them. And to ensure that it does not violate the Egyptian legal system and the Constitution in particular, then this is followed by signature and procedures for presentation to the People's Assembly for approval, depositing ratification documents, and then publishing the agreement in the Official Gazette after determining its international entry into force. Its provisions and principles contained therein in corresponding texts in the Egyptian Constitution enjoy additional special protection, which is the protection established for the constitutional texts.[845] Article 45 of the Egyptian Constitution stipulates: "Freedom of thought and opinion shall be guaranteed. Every individual has the right to express an opinion and to disseminate it verbally, in writing or illustration, or by any other means of publication and expression."[846] While Article 48 stipulates: "Freedom of the press, printing, publication and mass media shall be guaranteed. The media shall be free and independent to serve the community and to express the different trends in public opinion and contribute to shaping and directing in accordance with the basic principles of the State and society, and to maintain rights, freedoms, and public duties, respecting the sanctity of the private lives of citizens and the requirements of national security. The closure or confiscation of media outlets is prohibited except with a court order. Control over the media is prohibited, except for specific censorship that may be imposed in times of war or public mobilisation."[847]

The right to freedom of opinion and expression is a fundamental right that appears in a number of international and regional agreements. Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is the basic international framework that codifies this right. Article 19 states the following: "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any

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[845] 'The Egyptian Constitution of 2014' (Constitution Project, 19 February 2021) <https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2014.pdf> accessed 16 March 2021)
[846] 'The Egyptian Constitution of 2014' (Constitution Project, 19 February 2021) Article 45 <https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2014.pdf> accessed 16 March 2021)
[847] ibid Article 48

other media of his choice."[848] Egypt signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1969, and ratified it in 1982, which means that Egypt has the legal obligation to implement the provisions of the covenant.[849]

6.7.5. Vernacular Element

In this tweet, Abdel Fattah used colloquial Egyptian Arabic to convey her message. Most of Abdel Fattah's posts on Twitter are in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, as she is always targeting young Egyptians and she understands that the use of simple language is the easiest way to reach to them.[850] Besides the language, Abdel Fattah also wanted to use the timing of the Tweet to add to the strength of the message, referring to the beginning of a new year, and reflecting on the previous year's violations. In such context, she is implying that the violations of freedom of expression are continuing in the new year, and the year starts with a violation directed towards a prominent media figure, namely Ibrahim Issa.

Issa is an Egyptian journalist and writer, known for his opposition to the Egyptian authorities and dictatorial regimes, three newspapers he was editor-in-chief were suspended. Ibrahim Issa started in journalism since the beginning of his studies in the media and was known for his political and religious troubles in his first series of articles, and despite his great exposure to problems and dangers at times, he was able to become the editor of a good number of the most prestigious Egyptian newspapers. He also enriched the Egyptian library with numerous publications estimated at about thirty-five authored articles, collections of stories and novels, some of which were prevented from displaying and publishing because of the religious and political ideas that they expressed with all boldness and transparency. Some of his works received distinguished awards and successes.[851] In June 2006, Issa was convicted of defaming former president Hosni Mubarak in an article calling him corrupt. He was sentenced to one year in prison, along with his lawyer, Saeed Abdullah. However, the verdict was overturned in February 2007 after Issa paid a fine of 3,950 US dollars.[852] In March 2008, he was convicted of destroying the national economy after the Central Bank testified that 350 million dollars of investments left Egypt in the days following the

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[848] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 Article 19
[849] 'Egypt Status of Ratification' (OHCHR) <https://indicators.ohchr.org/> accessed 29 December 2020
[850] Interview with Esraa Abdel Fattah, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 16 May 2017)
[851] 'Who is Ibrahim Issa' (Arageek, 24 October 2020) <https://www.arageek.com/bio/ibrahim-eissa> accessed 5 December 2020
[852] ibid

publication of his book and articles on government corruption in Egypt. In September 2008, the Appeals Court in Bulaq Abu Al-Ela upheld the conviction but reduced Issa's sentence to two months in prison, accusing Isa of reporting and disseminating false information.[853] In 2011, Issa played a great role in leading the public opinion during the revolution. In February 2011, Al-Tahrir channel was launched, and Ibrahim Issa was one of the owners of the channel. This channel was one of the first Egyptian TV channels to be launched after the revolution and enjoyed the relatively open margin of freedom of expression at the time.[854]

After presenting the issue and the violation, Abdel Fattah wanted to put the message in a comic and sarcastic frame, she used the reference to a very well-known puppet character, Abla Fahita. Abla Fahita is an Egyptian puppet character and embodies the role of the self-made widow. Abla Fahita joined the Egyptian CBC television network with a comedy program called "Duplex" to compensate for the absence of parody programs from the channel's screen.[855] Her first appearance was on YouTube in April 2010, with a video titled "Abla Fajita". Abla Fahita began to climb the ladder of success in June 2012, by appearing in a video clip entitled "Fawazir al-Weiba" on her YouTube channel. The one who introduces the character of Abla Fahita is Hatem al-Kashef, the author and performer of the idea.[856] Hatem al-Kashef is an Egyptian director, who studied at the American University in Cairo with his friend Shady Abdel Latif, and then moved together to the United States of America to study directing and cinema.[857] After completing their studies, Hatem al-Kashef and Shady worked in Egypt in an advertising company and created their character.[858] Abla Fahita is a very controversial character, known for crossing redlines and also for use of profanity.[859] Abla Fahita was the target of conspiracy theorists and was reported to authorities accusing her of plotting against Egypt using deciphered messaging in a Vodafone TV advertisement that Abla Fahita played the main character. The Public Prosecutor's Office issued a statement on the case saying that "a commercial advertisement attributed to Vodafone Communications Company under the name (segment of the deceased) contained phrases and symbols in a

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[853] ibid
[854] ibid
[855] '42% of Egyptians See Abla Fahita Profane' Elbashayer (Cairo, 3 June 2015) <https://elbashayer.com/988566/510825/> accessed 6 December 2020
[856] ibid
[857] ibid
[858] ibid
[859] '42% of Egyptians See Abla Fahita Profane' Elbashayer (Cairo, 3 June 2015) <https://elbashayer.com/988566/510825/> accessed 6 December 2020

manner contrary to what is usual in commercial advertisements."[860] He added, "The Public Prosecution ordered the summoning of the regional director responsible for Vodafone in Egypt to clarify the matter, and instructed the National Security Sector and the competent authorities to conduct investigations regarding the report."[861] On the other hand, the representative of Vodafone in Egypt denied all these accusations to the media and said that the issue is not serious and that the puppet Abla Fahita was used in a purely commercial advertisement to encourage customers to purchase the new chip only.[862]

Ahmed Ragheb, a human rights lawyer and member of the National Group for Human Rights, told BBC that the Egyptian authority is trying to discredit all potential opposition and the story of Fahita is an inconceivable comical part, but behind it is a message that the authority wants to pass through, by raising the issue of espionage, external relations, and the involvement of external and internal parties in the plots being hatched, and the Public Prosecutor's investigation of a subject like this raises more than one question mark about the extent of the state's tenacity, which wastes its time in such matters.[863]

With the strong spread of the character of Abla Fahita on social media and the presence of sincere followers of her repeated words and ideas, and with the restriction on the Egyptian programmes and suspension of programmes, such as Bassem Youssef, from appearing with what he was forming of a new comedy wave that the audience loved and responded to, the opportunity became available for a new programme that fills the void left by Youssef's programme. Abla Fahita's personality has changed and transformed from how it appeared in 2010, into something that will attract the audience and gather viewers even more. This shiny character, with her expensive dresses, accessories, and profane language. Abla Fahita's programme was criticised for a lot of reasons, especially with outward speech and open gestures, and the profane expressions that come on the character's tongue and are covered by a peep in television broadcasts. She used vulgar talk that presents almost pornographic comedy in some episodes, such as her episode with Mido, the retired soccer player, for example. This did not lead to a decline in her popularity, but to more fame,

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[860] Basma Karasha, 'The Story of Abla Fahita and State Security' BBC Arabic (London, 2 January 2014) <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2014/01/140102_egypt_puppet_vodafone> accessed 7 December 2020
[861] ibid
[862] ibid
[863] ibid

advertisements, and viewership rates, although it is facing strong and harsh criticism among those interested in art.[864]

In this tweet, Abdel Fattah used one of Abla Fahita's profane jokes that is based on play on words in Arabic. Abdel Fattah said in her tweet: "If you think it will be a better year, hell no bro!" where "better" here in Arabic is "*ahla*," أحلى then used "*ahha*" أحة to rhyme with it which is a profane expression of rejection. The word "*ahha*" is commonly used as an objection word to express surprise or dissatisfaction with a certain thing. It developed later and became now a common term and one of the most popular words that young people repeat daily to express surprise, criticism, anger, or sometimes fascination in many situations. With the development of time, some people began writing the word *ahha* on social media sites and messages in a different way to evade social stigma, for example, they write: "*bahha*" or "*a7a*." The term is widely used among the poor class, and those who use it in the middle classes and above are stigmatised with vulgarity.[865] The word is used in a specific phoneme, as it is often said aloud when expressing anger and intense emotion. Despite the extreme reservation and even banning the use of the word *ahha* and considering it a swearword in Egypt, the inhabitants of the Alexandria governorate pronounced the word "*ahaih*" as an alternative to the word "*ahha*" without any stigma and without considering the person as vulgar.[866]

There were many stories about the beginning of the use of the word *ahha*. In the book *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary* by Sir Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, a scholar who specialises in Egyptology, mentioned that the origin of the word is Pharaonic, and it was pronounced "aia," meaning "alas!" or "oh hail!"[867] The use of the word developed in the Egyptian dialect and some other dialects, so that it became an abbreviation of the phrase: "I really object," or "I have the right to object."[868] Some say that there is a sexual connotation of the word "*ahha*" and that it is a pornographic term related to sounds that a woman makes and sexual groans upon reaching orgasm, which makes the word socially unacceptable.[869]

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[864] Ingy Ibrahim, 'How Abla Fahita Turned to a Sex Symbol?' Arabic Post (London, 18 September 2018) <Link> accessed 2 December 2020
[865] 'Ahha' (Wiki Gender) <https://genderiyya.xyz/wiki/%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%91%D8%A9> accessed 7 December 2020
[866] ibid
[867] Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, 'An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary' (Vol. I John Murray 1920) 30
[868] 'Ahha' (Wiki Gender) <https://genderiyya.xyz/wiki/%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%91%D8%A9> accessed 7 December 2020
[869] ibid

6.7.6. Social media interaction

Abdel Fattah was arrested on 14 October 2019, and she is still on pretrial detention until the writing of this research. Right after she was arrested, her social media accounts were closed, a procedure that human rights activists are familiar with in order to avoid any of their posts being held against them during interrogations. Due to this, it was not possible to acquire the full interaction record for this Tweet for the purpose of this research. When Abdel Fattah's account on Twitted was closed, she had over half million followers, and around 400,000 around the time of posting this tweet. This Tweet was widely reposted on media websites with high viewership, such as Copts United[870] and Egyptian in Kuwait.[871] From the high number of followers and that the Tweet was reported in mainstream media, that gives an indication that the Tweet received a considerable number of retweets and comments.

6.7.7. Reflection from the cyberactivist

In this Tweet, Abdel Fattah used her political and human rights background to formulate a message mainly addressing young Egyptians using comedy reference using colloquial Egyptian Arabic. Abdel Fattah always uses Egyptian colloquial Arabic in her posts on social media, and she uses classic Arabic when she writes an article in newspaper. She was also aware of her target group, which made her use colloquial Egyptian Arabic in her public posts on social media, while using proper academic language in her lectures and intellectual events. When Abdel Fattah launched the call for the 6 April 2008, strike on Facebook, she chose a simple Egyptian term "*khaleek fi baitak* خليك في بيتك or "stay at home," as she was aware that any complicated or classical slogans will result to people distancing themselves from the strike call. The call for the strike on 6 April 2008, used a direct simple language that touched on the people's needs and suffering, and gave very simple instructions on how people can go on a strike no matter what their role in the society is. These instructions included simple action that people can take to show their participation, such as carrying the Egyptian flag, dressing in black, or standing silent in public places. In drafting the call for the strike, Abdel Fattah avoided using complicated terms such as

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[870] 'Esraa Abdel Fattah Tweet on Twitter' (Copts United, 1 January 2017) <https://www.copts-united.com/Article.php?I=507&A=296191> accessed 1 November 2020
[871] 'Esraa Abdel Fattah on Ibrahim Issa's Show' Egypt Kuwait Portal (Kuwait, 2 January 2017) <Link> accessed 8 December 2020

"inflation" and used instead terms like "rise in prices" and terms from the Egyptian daily language.[872]

The language and messaging formulated by Abdel Fattah were highly influenced by the shift that happened from blogs to social media. Abdel Fattah was a blogger herself, but she sees blogs as something personal to the blogger that represents his or her own language, while social media changed this radically as messaging and language of the cyberactivist became a reflection to the interaction process that happens with the followers.[873] This made shift changed the face of cyberactivism completely, as this process of interaction that was missing from blogging created some kind of collective language over social media. This process of continuous interaction and dialogues over social media, with high level of exchange of ideas, information, and terminology, created a homogeneous environment that cyberactivists became part of.[874] This environment shaped the way cyberactivists formulated their messaging, as they became part of a whole harmonic system that speaks the same languages, uses the same references, and above all sharing the same concerns. Also, when comparing social media with blogs, in blogs most of users know the blogger in advance and know their blogs and they take the proper action to visit those blogs, while in social media, users are already on the platform and as they scroll down, they see posts from all different kinds of currents, and they are very likely to interact with posts that resonate with them, whether because of the language, or the cultural reference of the issue discussed.[875] Also, the option of sharing or retweeting content on social media became an indicator for cyberactivists that their followers fully understood the message and willing to take it upon themselves to have it on their own accounts and spreading it more. This option showed the level of self-association from followers with the message posted as users identified themselves with the cyberactivists, declaring that what cyberactivists posted represents them and they are willing to take the further action to interact and spread.[876]

Abdel Fattah is fully aware of the tools that are available to her and she knows where and when to utilise the vernacular discourse to gain maximum impact. Abdel Fattah sees that the vernacular discourse at some point was going in parallel with more sophisticated political language, for example in 2010 when Mohamed ElBaradei established the General

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[872] Interview with Esraa Abdel Fattah, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 16 May 2017)
[873] ibid
[874] ibid
[875] ibid
[876] ibid

Association for Change, it had seven main political demands.[877] Those who were active in that movement, including Abdel Fattah, worked on presenting those demands in a simpler language over social media to reach to a wider audience.[878] Activists started to explain the problem with the Constitution back then which did not allow candidates to run for presidency unless they are approved by the ruling party, which meant that no one other than Mubarak or his sone would be able to run. Activists found themselves in the position of the translators from the complicated legal language to street language in order to make people understand and get engaged. This was a real challenge for activists, as discussing constitutional issues which legal implications was not at all part of any public dialogue and it had to be dumped down to street language. Abdel Fattah and her colleagues used some frames and contexts the average people would understand, such as comparing the Constitution to a commercial contract, and that the provisions of the Constitutions are the contract terms between the citizen and the president or the government.[879]

In this tweet, Abdel Fattah used two main vernacular elements to convey her message on freedom of expression, sarcasm and play on profane words. Abdel Fattah believes that Egyptian vernacular language has evolved over the last few years. It started from a simple language that the average street Egyptian can understand, but then it evolved into two main streams, sarcasm and profane insults.[880] These two streams made their way very fast in the realm of political discussion on social media. One well-known example is the most famous hashtag that his social media under Sisi's regime is during the presidential elections in 2014 was "#انتخبوا_العرص *entekhboh al-'ars*" or "elect the pimp!".[881] '*Ars* here is the colloquial word that is deemed profane and counted among swearword. The way this hashtag was spreading showed that this profane language became acceptable in the daily language and is integrated within the vernacular discourse used by average Egyptians without the feel of shame of using a vulgar term in their posts on social media.

The second trend that made it to the daily vernacular language is sarcasm. After the presidential elections in 2014, and what could be seen as a defence mechanism to avoid accepting the new reality that the army took over the country again after the revolution, social media users resorted to extreme sarcasm when it came to reacting to political news. This sarcasm wave developed from written words to the use of pictures and videos, or in the social

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[877] ibid
[878] ibid
[879] ibid
[880] ibid
[881] ibid

media language comics and memes. Social media users extensively used captured stills from famous Egyptian films and added their own sarcastic comment that responds to a current political news or governmental decision. Also, the use of the moving picture in GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format)[882] was widely used in producing moving frames to present a very short scene instead of a full video.[883]

The main human rights issue that Abdel Fattah is addressing in this Tweet is freedom of expression, specifically on state-controlled TV channels. Abdel Fattah believes that one of the main challenges she was facing while using a vernacular discourse over social media was the counterattacks by the state-owned media. Whenever a cyberactivist posts something on social media that resonates with the public audience, immediately you see these posts been picked up by talk shows in TV channels owned by the state and undergoes a harsh campaign of attacks and defamation to the authors of the posts. The state had these strong tools to cripple the calls for change or criticising the regime, which made the cyberactivists exposed whenever they post something with a clear, simple, and vernacular language that goes viral over social media. It became very challenging to cyberactivists to exsert the effort to change the awareness of the public in one post that contradicts with what they watch over TV of many hours every day. Also, cyberactivists are not given the same space to respond to all these attacks and allegations by TV presenters with their guests, who are mainly from public and governmental positions. At the end of the day, cyberactivists use social media as there only tool to address such issues depending on that they are presenting the truth and relying on the awareness of the public to identify the level of truth in what they say compared to the governmental statements that are full of white washing.[884]

Abdel Fattah understands that the vernacular tool is very important, and she understands that the government knows that too, and it is using a vernacular discourse to address the public too and blocking those who oppose their messages and ban them from talking on TV, like what we saw in this Tweet about Ibrahim Issa. This became obvious during Mubarak's era, when the National Democratic Party started to organise the Youth Forums, something that the current government is still using too. However, this competition on the use of the vernacular discourse with the government is not a fair competition, as the government has much capacity, tools, means and resources to push their message. For

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[882] 'GIF' W3 (CompuServe Incorporated, 1987) <https://www.w3.org/Graphics/GIF/spec-gif87.txt> accessed 7 December 2020
[883] Interview with Esraa Abdel Fattah, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 16 May 2017)
[884] ibid

example, the state-owned media uses sponsored posts, which means that they pay to the social media platform to increase the dissemination of the post and the rate of the appearance of the post on the users' accounts.[885] The government's strategy is to use vernacular language to ignite people's fears and the threat to their security, such as the rise of terrorism or chaos that would lead to a failing country with mass waves of refugees like what happened in Syria. This strategy would promote people to choose a military rule over the risk of bringing democracy and human rights, a message that is opposite to what cyberactivists would have in their vernacular messaging.[886]

Abdel Fattah believes that if cyberactivists would be given the space and the chance to address political and human rights issues in a free manner without security risks and persecution, they would achieve a great deal of change in the society and public awareness. This awareness will lead to more political participation among the youths, which is what Abdel Fattah believes is the key for change in the coming future.[887]

6.8. Conclusion

From what we have seen from the previous six examples, the cyberactivists that I presented tried to convey a message of human rights on a vernacular level that could resonate with their followers. This process of vernacularisation of human rights was carried out whether on the language level or in terms of framing the context within a local frame to resonate with audiences on social media. The cyberactivists followed a vernacularisation process to reframe local grievances by portraying them as human rights violations. Cyberactivists translated transnational concepts and practices down to the vernacular level to present local problems.[888] Cyberactivists managed to transform international ideas into local context and, at the same time, reinterpret local values and violations of the international human rights language within a local framework.[889] The cyberactivists used their knowledge of the language, their familiarity with what local frame to put their message in, and their background in human rights that they gained from earlier stages to create social media posts that achieved a high level of resonance with audience and with high level of impact.

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[885] ibid
[886] ibid
[887] ibid
[888] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 40
[889] ibid

Cyberactivists also played the role of intermediaries or translators who are working on different levels to intermediate between local, regional, and global.[890] They took the task of taking international human rights and presented them to another group over social media, and the audience were by thousands. They carried the task of the human rights translators who worked on translating the international human rights discourse and its legal form into a specific situation of suffering and human rights violation within a local frame that is familiar with the audience.[891]

The main strength point that those cyberactivists had is their knowledge of both sides of interchange and the way they were able to control the flow of information back and forth using the framing concept. Using framing, they managed to assign a meaning to the text, and interpret relevant events and conditions aiming to achieve the maximum impact and also in mind to mobilise the masses to take further action towards the negative aspects they are suffering from.[892] Within the frames they created, cyberactivists achieved resonance within the Egyptian culture traditions and narratives so it became appealing to the majority of local Egyptian followers, and the more the resonance the more successful the frame was. For example, how Asmaa Mahfouz used all frames that are available to her to convey her message, including gender roles within the Egyptian society, and religion and its implications on individuals. By creating such frames, Mahfouz managed to introduce to her followers an integrated vernacular frame that made her YouTube video an icon of a revolution. Cyberactivists also used one specific form of framing in the human rights field which is "indigenisation," as they managed to change the meaning and the way new ideas are framed and introduced within existing Egyptian cultural norms, values, and practices. We have seen how cyberactivists like Abdel Fattah or Eid manipulated the language in order to create new meanings to existing concepts that would fit within the local context.

Another aspect of framing that cyberactivists followed while formulating their social media posts is avoiding the direct reference to international human rights law. According to Sally Merry, in framing human rights ideas into local concepts and adapting them to existing frames of justice, the process might include abandoning the explicit references to human rights language altogether, which means that international human rights ideas are reframed

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[890] ibid 39
[891] ibid
[892] David A. Snow, and Robert D. Benford 'Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization' (1988) 1 International Social Movement Research 197

totally to fit into existing local ideologies.[893] As we will discuss more in the next chapter, sometimes the level of resonance in the vernacularised post is very high, which makes the message less radical, hence reducing the level of social change infected by such message. Cyberactivists willingly chose this high level of resonance knowing that they are sacrificing some of human rights idealism and accepting compromises related to the expected demands and possibly exclude some groups, such as the Christians while using Qur'anic references.

Cyberactivists were also aware that the localised human rights issues presented resonate to an international legal framework of human rights so it can gain the legitimacy of a legal claim, which what gives human rights its true power of being a legally binding mechanism. They were aware that when ideas transform or travel from their original form, they lose the power and rebelliousness associated with them and they become more domesticated, historicised and assimilated within the local framework, hence losing their effect. One other issue that faced the cyberactivists is the theoretical or rhetorical acceptance of human rights by the locals but failing to put them in practice. In both issues, cyberactivists used the mobilisation element in a vernacular manner to bypass such issues and avoid any negative aspects associated with them.

If there is a path forward for human rights development, vernacularisation of human rights is a step forward. When human rights cyberactivists can address individuals using their own language, the human rights message will speak to more individuals. This will make way for prompting radical changes—ones that these social orders probably would not otherwise acknowledge, imagining that these are outsider qualities—once these qualities are placed in a language they comprehend. Human rights values are made to be agreeable to individuals so they can live a better existence with more dignity and opportunity. However, human rights maintained in a structure that is strange to a particular society will be dismissed and might induce a violent reaction in response to it. Vernacularisation can take diverse structures too. Vernacularisers—in our case the cyberactivists, who are viewed as human rights activists—are the key actors in the vernacularisation interaction.

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[893] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Human rights issues are among the most important topics that needed to be raised on social media. The process of communicating human rights issues involves vernacularisation, whereby the texts of treaties are phrases familiar only to jurists are transformed into intelligible phrases for a broader public. However, the process of vernacularisation itself is not without challenges, which the examination of Egyptian cyberactivists has attempted to explore. Through the examples that we studied in the previous chapter, by the study of the content that Egyptian cyberactivists presented, I have answered the research question: how and to what extent cyberactivists used the concept of vernacularisation of human rights to convey their messages.

In this final chapter, I will draw an overall conclusion on the analysis from the previous chapter. The first part of the chapter will address the first question and connecting the selected Egyptian cyberactivists to the concept of vernacularisation of human rights. I will present the different elements, techniques, and terms of vernacularisation in parallel with the analysis of the content from the cyberactivists to establish a connection and show how those cyberactivists effectively used the concept of vernacularisation of human rights. Then I will address the second question in this dissertation to shed light on the relation between the vernacularisation of human rights carried out by the selected cyberactivists and the January Revolution, while taking into consideration that proving a direct relation requires further investigation and would exceed the limitations of this research. This chapter will present the social media content in the framework of vernacularisation of human rights as an attempt to contribute to the debate on the influence of social media on the mobilisation process during the January Revolution. This chapter will also address the two sides of the vernacularisation process, the strength elements such as viral widespread, strong mobilisation and self-association, and the weakness elements such as emphasising anti-human rights ideas and stereotypes, compromise of ideologies, double-edged tool, social risk, and exposure, and increase in profanity and obscene content. The chapter will also present the security risk the

cyberactivists are subjected to, and how it is related to their cyberactivism using the vernacularisation of human rights.

In this chapter I will talk about implications of this research for the field of study, and what its contribution to knowledge. I will also address what are the next steps to build on this research and how it could be a base to a further and broader research. Finally, I will use the last pages of this dissertation to talk about the January Revolution and how it inspired this research, connecting the online activism with the street, and how change is still a possibility in Egypt.

7.1. Cyberactivists and Vernacularisation

Despite that this research used the work of Sally Engle Merry on the vernacularisation of human rights as the theoretical framework, some of the findings proved to be taking a different course and line of application. While Merry's studies placed the vernacularisers in a clear position between the international organisations and international law, and the local discourse, this research had the challenge to place the Egyptian cyberactivists in such place while they did not have the official status of being so. One main aspect that I took into consideration while articulating the interviews questions with cyberactivists is to ask directly if they see themselves as human rights defenders or representatives of the international human rights law, or have an affiliation with international institutions, but rather used questions that if combined with my knowledge of the role and definition of human rights defenders, I would be able to deduce that they are part of the human rights defenders movement. Except for Gamal Eid, who is a director of a local human rights organisation, the rest of the cyberactivists would not classify themselves as human rights defenders, and through going through the interview questions this affiliation started to articulate. The aim of the interview questions was to prove that the cyberactivists were engaged in the process that Merry referred to in translating international human rights law language into local discourse, a process that the cyberactivists themselves may have not recognised that they were carrying out, while consciously recognising that they had the intentions and the aim to do so, namely, to convey human rights values to the local level. By integrating their answers to the questions, and studying their online posts, the process of vernacularisation became clearer and that enabled me to draw this conclusion and the answer to the thesis question. In reaching such conclusions, I positioned myself in a middle ground where I used by knowledge and background to draw the connection between where the Egyptian cyberactivists stand and the

theory set by Merry. Despite the differences mentioned above, the vernacularisation of human rights theory set by Merry was applied to different aspects in the case of the Egyptian cyberactivists, and aspects, terms, and definitions set by Merry were in a suitable place to be applied as we will see next.

One other aspect that might not place the Egyptian cyberactivists directly within the vernacularisation theory is that Merry's most of work and case studies were placed in a position where the vernacularisers are performing a one-way process, which is translating from the international to the local, while it was clear that the Egyptian cyberactivists are carrying out a partially different process that reflected more on reporting local violations to the international level. However, in her literature, Merry covered this point in what she explained as a two-way approach or, as Merry puts it, up and down. In this case, the translators may reframe local grievances up by portraying them as human rights violations, and as they translate international ideas to the local level, at the same time they reinterpret local ideas and violations into international human rights language. In this situation, they are well placed to represent the local violations to the international level without trying to appeal to donors or media, rather doing what they believe will help the cause they fight for and attract international solidarity.

In her writings on vernacularisation of human rights, Sally Engle Merry stressed on the element of distinctive content as the main element of the local context in the replication form of vernacularisation where transnational ideas remain as in their original form, while the local cultural understanding shapes the implications and the way the work is carried out.[894] By following the examples we studied, we can see how Egyptian cyberactivists followed different forms of vernacularisation as presented by Merry. The replication of vernacularisation of human rights is seen in the content of social media posts we studied. International human rights concepts and ideas constituted the message that the Egyptian cyberactivists wanted to convey in their social media posts. We have seen a range of human rights issues present as main aims of these posts. Cyberactivists used both their human rights background and their authentic knowledge of local culture to create posts that resonated with their followers, aiming to shape their awareness and to stimulate the potential of mobilisation. For example, we have seen how cyberactivists like Asmaa Mahfouz and Gamal Eid addressed the issue of police brutality and freedom from torture while using the local context

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[894] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 44

to present such issue. When Mahfouz decided to convey a message of exposing human rights violations and push for a mobilisation towards democracy, she drew upon her background and cultural knowledge to create a very distinctive content that would meet a high resonance level with young male Egyptians. Wael Khalil had a clear message in his mind that he wanted to convey to the Egyptian public, which is freedom within its international context, he used a local frame of localised Egyptian commercial pop culture that would resonate with Egyptians. The same was done by Wael Ghonim in his message on Khaled Said's page addressing the concepts of freedom, torture, and corruption within a local context of Egyptian family dynamics and the concept of breadwinning within the Egyptian culture. In such narrative, cyberactivists practiced the form of replication of vernacularisation, where the international ideas were presented as they are without renaming them, while the local culture created the context that shaped those posts and acted as the body of the message and the actual implication.

Egyptian cyberactivists also carried out the two-way vernacularisation process as explained by Merry.[895] In this two-way process, cyberactivists reframed the local human rights violations within the international context, from down to up. We have seen how Esraa Abdel Fattah used a local incident to address the concept of freedom of expression while using a reference to a comedy show that resonated with the local audience. At the same time, we saw how the concept of freedom of expression was explained and the violation put in an example that the Egyptian audience are familiar with, hence the up to down. The main element that Merry stated in this process is the motive behind cyberactivists carrying out such process. In this process, they are not doing a paid job or appealing to a specific international donor or trying to attract the attention of international media, but rather they are loaded with a message they believe in within the context of the Egyptian revolution. The activists' main audience is the Egyptian people aiming to raise awareness and create a momentum for mobilisation, and at the same time they are aware they are being watched by international institutions and media that would recognise the international human rights elements they are addressing.

According to Merry, cyberactivists are seen as the key factor of vernacularisation, they are the intermediaries or the translators of the process. The task of those actors is to take the international concepts and ideas and present them to the public in a locally accepted

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[895] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 42

context.[896] Those vernacularisers are seen as the knowledgeable ones who carry the process of knowledge transfer through innovative and transnational networks such as the social media. According to Levitt and Merry, those vernaculariser cyberactivists are well-positioned to carry out the role of the messenger in the process and carry out the message between UN's international law and the local audience within the local context.[897] In the examples we studied, we have seen how Egyptian cyberactivists placed themselves in such intermediate position between global and local, using international human rights norms such as torture, freedom of expression and others as references for their message, while placing them in the local context to appeal to the local public Egyptian narrative.

Within the vernacularisation process, Egyptian cyberactivists also placed themselves as "activists' packages" as described by Tsing.[898] In our examples, the activist packaging were the cyberactivists we studied themselves. Those cyberactivists packaged themselves in the allegorical bundle of translation from global to local and put themselves as the example of such bundle. With the frame of their activism background, their stories, their suffering under suppressive governments, while formulating the vernacularised message, those cyberactivists self-packaged themselves in a bundle that they were one of its elements, not just a carrier of the message nor a distributer, but rather a comprehensive bundle with them in it as the activist presented in the package.

Levitt and Merry set out different types of vernacularisers such as the anointed, the cosmopolitan elites, and beneficiaries and enactors.[899] The cyberactivists we studied mainly fall in the third category, the beneficiaries, and enactors. They are mainly based inside Egypt within the local culture mentally and physically. They acquired their human rights knowledge through interacting with local human rights movement and other activists within the Egyptian revolutionary movement. They also acquired some of the knowledge of international human rights law through interacting with international elites and international human rights organisations through exposure of knowledge over different outlets including the Internet or lectures or conferences or different readings. In that case, they are considered to be carrying out a second level of vernacularisation after they received the first level from the international elites. However, the second level vernacularisation they carried out constituted

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[896] ibid

[897] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441 .

[898] Anna Tsing, Friction: an ethnography of global connection (Princeton University Press 2005) 250

[899] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441

the main part of the process, and they were placed in a position that they were immersed in the local culture with all its aspects and tools, while receiving the knowledge from the elites who are by default detached from the local culture and only maintaining the connection with just the local activists. According to this scheme, this leaves the main responsibility of the vernacularisation process in the hands of the local activists and the main controllers of the flow of the knowledge until it reaches the final local audience.

Merry explains the two sides of vernacularisation the cyberactivists may experience. From one side, vernacularisers have the power of knowledge that might enable them to "manipulate" those with less knowledge.[900] This power gives the cyberactivists the ability to influence the audience using the powerful tool of vernacularising the higher knowledge of international human rights to the local context and language that the cyberactivists also master. This gave the cyberactivists the upper hand in the vernacularisation process and granted them the ability to choose the human rights element to deliver, the vernacular context they want to frame such element, and the word choice within the local context to create posts. Even though the motive of the posts is emerging from the locals' suffering, but the initiation and the control of the vernacularisation process is fully controlled by the cyberactivists. In the examples we studied, we saw how cyberactivists carried out the vernacularisation process based on their personal preferences and reflecting personal identities and choices related to their background and interests.

The other side that vernaculariser cyberactivists would experience as Merry explained is being subjected to different kinds of vulnerabilities such as being accused of having loyalty to external entities and double-faced dealing.[901] Those cyberactivists are placed in a position between strong international standards and deeply rooted local culture. As they carry out the vernacularisation process and act as a bridge between the outside and the inside, and as they control the flow of information back and forth, they were always putting themselves in the risk of suspicion from both sides, the local and the international. The local would think they are inducing foreign ideas, that are sometimes in contradiction with local culture and religion. While international entities would see them compromising human rights international standards in favour of local standards and culture. These are not the only vulnerabilities that cyberactivists face. As I will explain more later, cyberactivists face a variety of risks and negative backlashes due to carrying out the vernacularisation process.

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[900] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 40
[901] ibid

7.2. Vernacularisation and the Revolution

The second question I tried to answered in this research is the relation between vernacularisation carried out by cyberactivists and the mobilisation leading to the 25 January Revolution. As stated previously, there is no definitive means to measure the relation between vernacularisation from Egyptian cyberactivists and the mobilisation of masses before and during the January Revolution, and further research is required with resources and techniques means that are beyond the limits of this research. However, this study might have opened the door to explore more qualitative approaches to such issue. As we discussed in Chapter 4, there has not been much academic literature addressing this question but the existing journalistic commentary and reported views of participants are divided about the role cyberactivists in Egypt played in politics, human rights awareness, and mobilisation in Egypt before, during and after the 25 January 2011 Revolution and the Arab Spring in general. Some researchers think that the decline in the periphery of freedom has pushed Egyptian youth to political work and to exercise their freedoms via the Internet and in virtual reality, so that they enjoy their citizenship and rights on the network in a digital world that practice politics consciously and form virtual societies away from the political struggles, censorship of security services and defamation campaigns waged by government media against activists.[902] The 25 January Revolution is the first popular revolution in the world that is believed to be depends on networking and virtual political participation, and the rapid transformation to actual participation and action on the ground through peaceful demonstrations and success in achieving many of its goals with the least possible amount of material and human losses. This success was one of the reasons for the world's astonishment with what was made by the Egyptian people in an unprecedented and unique revolution.[903]

However, on the other side many researchers disagreed with this notion and had their reasons. Anne Alexander, a specialist in new media and political changes in the Middle East at Cambridge University, was present in Cairo's Tahrir Square in early February, a few days before the rule of former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was overthrown. "It is difficult to convert popular support on Facebook into street demonstrations," she said.[904] Activists in

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[902] Hala Ahmed, 'Virtual World for Youth from the Revolution to Guardianship' (EIP, 25 January 2019) <Link> accessed 5 February 2021

[903] ibid

[904] 'What is the Role of the Internet in Change Revolutions in Arab World?' (Zaman Alwsl, 26 February 2011)

Egypt gathered thousands of supporters on the Internet, but large numbers of these did not participate in the Tahrir Square protests.[905] The world war was not called the "telephone war", and the Algerian revolution was not called the "radio revolution," and the Iranians removed from their media the name that everyone tried to attach to their revolution when they called it the "Cassette revolution". The protests of African Americans in the sixties and seventies were not known by the name of "the television protests," despite the enormous role these media played in them. From this idea, the Egyptian journalist Muhammad Dahshan from the newspaper "Al-Masry Al-Youm" set off, stressing that: "it is not permissible to say that what happened in Egypt and Tunisia is the "Facebook" revolution, because that undermines the revolutionaries on the streets."[906] Revolutions occurred at all ages, long centuries before the emergence of social media sites. From here it can be said that social media sites formed the modern tool for communication and spreading news during the events. In other words, based on this opinion, it would be an exaggeration to say that the events are tantamount to the "Facebook Revolution", as Facebook and other websites have assumed the role of accelerating the pace of events and facilitating the processes of organising and mobilising, but these sites would not have had any role without the presence of factors that motivate people to revolt, especially factors of poverty, unemployment and suppression of public freedoms.[907] Researchers believe that the description of the revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia, and other Arab countries as "electronic" might not be accurate, because the social explosions in these countries did not happen entirely thanks to the Internet, as many believe, because blocking the Internet in these countries and elsewhere, has happened and is happening now, and neither it reduced the intensity of the protests, nor does it prevent the fall of the authority of Ben Ali or Mubarak.[908] Sultan Al Qasimi, an Emirati writer who covered the events in the region extensively, explained that "social media played an important role in the spring of the Arab revolutions, but its influence is exaggerated because the Internet has been cut off from Egypt for several days, but the revolutionary movement has not stopped."[909]

While others refuse to acknowledge the ability of computers, networks, and communication sites to create a revolution, it is necessary to differentiate between

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[905] ibid

[906] Hala Ahmed, 'Virtual World for Youth from the Revolution to Guardianship' (EIP, 25 January 2019) <Link> accessed 5 February 2021

[907] ibid

[908] Jonny Jones (trs), 'The Relation Between the Internet and Revolutions' (Socialist Studies Centre, 20 May 2011) <https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=259803> accessed 20 February 2021

[909] ibid

technologies or social media sites, and programming or loading them with content that requires the intervention of participants to use these sites and make them effective. Therefore, the act of programming or loading content is more important than the technology itself, and from here it is the act of creating the content that has the effect and not the technology itself. It is this content and the efficiency of charging social media channels with it, which enabled the revolutionaries, according to Fahd al-Khaitan, editor-in-chief of "Al-Arab Al-Youm" newspaper, to play the role in change during the Arab revolutions, especially in Egypt, "by networking between groups, organising sit-ins, announcing them and determining their time."[910] With this networking, the new content has replaced the role of parties, trade unions and the paper press.

Even those who resist naming the revolution as the Facebook Revolution and attributing a decisive role to social media websites acknowledge the importance of content delivered through these websites. One of the most important aspects of the content that has been uploaded to social media sites in the Arab revolutions in general and in the Egyptian revolution in particular, is that extraordinary ability to link events with both sound and image, as well as the language that young people have adopted to circulate among themselves and to communicate with others during the transmission of news and the developments of events, away from the traditional press and media moulds. Everyone was talking about unemployment, a bleak future and freedom, but not every social media post is able to grab the attention of the target with the speech, which is what the youth of the Egyptian revolution succeeded in through social networks.[911] In light of this, it became crucial to study the content of these social media activities to determine their actual value and their level of influence, and this is what this research tried to do. This research focused on the vernacular content in the Egyptian cybersphere, aiming to determine the strength of the content of social media, hence, answering the debate on the real role of social media in the Egyptian revolution.

One of the most important vernacularisation tools that cyberactivists used in mobilisation for the revolution is framing as defined in Chapter 2. Framing is an essential tool used by social movements to convey and spread an idea among the social movement that

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[910] Rania Tadros, 'The Idea of the Revolution Grew in Cyberspace' Ammon News (Amman, 21 May 2011) <https://www.ammonnews.net/article/87972> accessed 3 February 2021
[911] Hala Ahmed, 'Virtual World for Youth from the Revolution to Guardianship' (EIP, 25 January 2019) <Link> accessed 5 February 2021

is mainly concerns the way the idea is presented rather than the idea in itself.[912] According to David Snow, framing is used by activists to mobilise and garner bystander's support based on an interactive interpretive process.[913] Putting an idea into frame into something that have special meaning to the audience that would promote them to take action.[914] The frame chosen by activists has to resonate within the local culture and tradition of the targeted group to render it appealing to the locals with a high degree of resonance to guarantee maximum effect.[915]

One important form of framing that was extensively used by Egyptian cyberactivists is "indigenisation", which means changing the way of the newly introduced idea and introduce it within the already existing culture, values, norms and practices.[916] In the examples we presented in Chapter 6, we have seen how Egyptian cyberactivists used indigenisation to introduce their messages on human rights and democratic change within a local context that has a strong root to create a resonance. We have seen how Mahfouz used local cultures and norms such as the concepts of masculinity, gender roles and religion to convey her message and inducing mobilisation. We have seen in Chapter 6, cyberactivists such as Wael Khalil, Gamal Eid, Esraa Abdel Fattah used cultural references that are popular and well known to Egyptians such as religious values, social traditions, comedy, or pop culture to bring ideas of human rights knowing that these elements will create the desired resonance among audience.

One known aspect of framing is that it might require abandoning the direct and explicit reference to international human rights and using its legal terminology.[917] Thus, we saw how the vernacularisation process using framing carried out by cyberactivists ended up dramatically reframing the ideas of international human rights to fit within the local context without explicit use of human rights terms. In all the examples we studied we have seen the complete absence of direct reference to human rights law or using its legal language, but rather a full local narrative using a local context, while it was obvious that the original

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[912] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 41
[913] David A. Snow, and Robert D. Benford 'Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization' (1988) 1 International Social Movement Research 197
[914] David A. Snow, and Robert D. Benford, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment' (2000) 26 Annual Review of Sociology 611
[915] Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle' (2006) American Anthropologist 41
[916] ibid 39
[917] Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry, 'Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States' (2009) 9 (4) Global Networks 441

message implied in the post is directly related to international human rights law as explained in the analysis. In examining the posts of the selected activities based on the selection criteria presented in the methodology, we discovered that none of the posts made explicit reference to human rights law or standards A successful process of vernacularisation through framing could be detected in the posts we studied as we saw that the posts presented appeared drafted fully and originally within the local, using language, cultural references, and context, while the message is a human rights message. A successful process in such case is determined by how the audience received the post and absorbed it as if it is purely local content without any international element and reacted with it within such knowledge. Posting such content by the cyberactivists in such manner guaranteed the required effect and influence and achieved the mobilisation effect and induced the change they aimed for.

7.3. Vernacularisation: A Double-sided tool

As Merry explained, there are two sides of vernacularisation as we mentioned above, positive, and negative. From one side, vernacular discourse and content contained elements of strength, but on the other side, it contained elements of weakness and vulnerabilities. Strength elements could be seen in viral widespread, strong mobilisation and self-association. While weakness points could be seen in emphasising non-progressive ideas and stereotypes, compromise of ideologies, double-edged tool, social risk and exposure, increase in profanity and obscene content, normalisation of violations, and security risk.

First point of strength of the vernacular content is the widespread of the posted content using social media. Social media in Egypt has become a powerful tool that extinguishes the glamour of traditional media, which has recently been noticed its interest in the issues raised on those sites, which have become alternative source for traditional media. Indeed, it can be said that the arrangement of the media's agenda and priorities has become a reflection of the most prominent "trends" on social media sites. According to a study by Euromonitor, in 2011, only 35% of Egyptian population can speak and read English.[918] This means that social media content that was presented in Arabic would have a much higher viewership compared to social media content posted in other languages.

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[918] Sowmya Ramaswami, 'English Language Quantitative Indicators: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen' (Euro Monitor International, May 2012) 125 <https://web.archive.org/web/20140513152359/http://www.britishcouncil.org/new/documents/full_mena_english_report.pdf> accessed 17 February 2021

Second element of strength for vernacular discourse on social media in Egypt is ability to mobilise masses. As we have seen in examples such as the video by Mahfouz, demonstrators used social media to organise demonstrations, as well as spread information about their activities and raise the recipient's awareness of what is happening in some areas. When cyberactivists spoke in a language that the people, especially young people, understand, they reacted very positively to such calls for interaction. In such calls, the message was clear, and the actions were clear too, thus the reaction was immediate and strong. From the examples we have seen in Chapter 5 how "We are all Khaled Said" Facebook page became a vital platform for criticising the corruption of the Egyptian government and its security apparatus, and then proceeded to call for and organise demonstrations.

Another strong element of vernacularisation on social media was the element of self-association. Millions of followers and readers from Egyptian youth saw themselves within the text of the posts by cyberactivists. This self-reflection came in different levels, such as they saw the authors as young people similar to them, compared to the mainstream media presenters who are mostly from an older age. The followers also saw in these posts their own personal experience and suffering, written in a language that is similar to the way they talk to each other. Other users saw personal connection in these posts related to their association with religion, of social traditions, which created a strong personal connection within a frame that is familiar to them. One clear example for that is what "We are all Khaled Said" Facebook page created. The "We are all Khaled Said" page created this association between the followers and Khaled Said on a very human level. Khaled Said was a young Egyptian man, aged 28, who was beaten to death by police informants in Alexandria. These characteristics could easily be associated with millions of young Egyptians from the same age and social standards. This self-association revealed to the followers the fact that anyone of them could be the next Khaled Said. This element encouraged the many who had never participated in a demonstration to go out and take a risk on 25 January 2011.

Finally, as argued by some of the interviewed cyberactivists, the 25 January Revolution needed more vernacularisation in order to succeed and have a long-term effect. Revolution's leaders, such as Mohammed al-Baradie and Amr Hamzawy, used a very elitist language when they used social media that was very distant from street movement, which caused a disconnection with those who would have the chance to play much bigger role in inflecting change. Someone like al-Baradie, who was seen as a presidential candidate at some point, always spoke on social media in classic Arabic and using complicated political terms,

to the level that when he once used some vernacular terms, people thought that his account was hacked.[919] Cyberactivists in Egypt realised the importance of localising their language, and how this opened them to new horizons. We have seen how cyberactivists have successfully framed human rights issues to the public instead of reproducing repeating the language of international human rights. Within the vernacular context, those human rights issues had more resonance in Egyptian local social milieu and slang was used more widely. It is simply the portal through which cyberactivists can reach a larger audience and convey the human rights message in the people's language.

Localising human rights narrative also reduced the fear of the majority of the population about activists and human rights in general. We saw how classic human rights activists spoke an unfamiliar language, introduced new values and concepts, and tried to make a difference in the lives of the majority, like El Baradie. Merry discussed this phenomenon, explaining how it is a natural reaction by the public to those who speak an international language that makes them appear as enemies of the state and the people, when in reality they are working for the people. The problem is that they often speak a language that people do not understand. If leaders were able to address people in their own language, they will no longer be seen as outsiders or traitors. Human rights values are designed to serve people so that they can live better lives with dignity and freedom. Societies tend to reject what is alien to them, and that what made vernacularisation significant, as it managed to be that compromise where alien language and ideas were introduced to the locals in a way that they can understand and associate with. As we will see in the next section, vernacularisation came with its downsides too.

7.4. Vernacularisation: The Downside

Vernacularisation is not always seen as the magic solution to change awareness and topple governments. As Sally Merry explained, and as we mentioned above, there are downsides of vernacularisation of human rights that might be as intense as the positive effect. The nature of vernacularisation is that it coats itself with the old and the traditional in order to smuggle a new idea and inspires a change. If vernacularisation failed to induce change within such mechanism, that means that it will end up confirming and stressing the old, which could

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[919] 'He Tweeted About Haisa' Akhbarak (Cairo, 2016) <Link> accessed 13 February 2021

be seen as setback and regress. There are many elements that we can consider as the downside of vernacularisation. Based on the examples that we studied in this research, we can identify some of these downside features of vernacularisation, such as, emphasising non-progressive ideas and stereotypes, compromise of ideologies, vernacularisation as a double-edged tool that could be used by the opposite side, normalisation of profanity and obscene content normalisation of human rights violations, social risk and exposure, and finally security risk.

The first downside element of vernacularisation is that through carrying out the process of vernacularisation, the aspects of the tradition and the existing context that the vernaculariser is trying to challenge might be emphasised, such as aspects contradicting with human right or stereotypes. As we discussed in Chapter 2, there is a very thin line in adopting the vernacularisation and the risk of reaching a high level of compatibility between international human rights norms and local norms to the extent to fail to induce change to the status quo.[920] Excessive resonance will make the idea less radical, which will reduce the level of social change induced by such idea. Using high level of vernacularisation will always have the risk of sacrificing of human rights idealism and accepting compromises related to the demands from the audience. If human rights ideas were completely blended in the surrounding social environment, this might result in losing the radical possibilities of human rights, because the unfamiliarity of the ideas that makes them affect traditional ways of thinking.[921]

We have seen in the YouTube video by Asmaa Mahfouz that she used vernacular elements that are very deeply rooted in the Egyptian society such as muscularity and religion to convey her message. When Mahfouz summoned values such as the male dominance and the men's obligation to protect women to invoke mobilisation, by doing this she emphasised this aspect and confirmed it. Within the overall aim of the revolution, equality and women's rights were called for, however, within such context that Mahfouz used as means of mobilisation, she compromised such goals. Men who reacted to Mahfouz message and saw it calling to them personally went to the street believing that this revolution will not challenge their role in the society and will preserve their concept of manhood they have in mind. Hence, a radical change that might result from this revolution on social level is not expected, while a political change might be. In such context, the expected change would be partial, and

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[920] Enrique Larana and others, New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity (Temple University Press 1994) 6

[921] Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence* (1st edn, University of Chicago 2006) 178

the price would be compromising women's rights in that case. This could be perceived as an anti- women's rights action overall, even if it achieved gains on the political level. Within such frame, social stereotypes are reintroduced in a revolutionary context with specific gains to one sect over the other. Another element that Mahfouz used also is religion.

In the context of Egypt, religion is seen as a general obstacle to achieve full equal rights to all citizens. By emphasising the voice of religion to the mobilisation call, the overall change of human rights awareness is compromised. Scholars such as Merry are aware of such issue and they see that vernacularisation of human rights is most likely to happen in such closed social community or a group where individuals seek to translate foreign values into local norms. In these societies, coating human rights ideas in an Islamic approach make them more effective and presenting human rights through culturally familiar images and sources of authority such as the Qu'ran. This what made Mahfouz's message very strong and effective, however, this came with the risk of reintroducing values that might be in contradiction with human rights on the long run or in the overall context. Merry believes that there might be other alternatives to avoid such clash, which is not to consider human rights framework as a replacement of already existing frameworks, but rather an additional dimension to the way individuals approach problems. In this approach, victims are not expected to abandon their earlier perspectives, such as social and religious traditions, but rather add a new layer of rights framework over the existing one.[922] Consequently, this will lead to a more two distinct coexisting sets of ideas rather than there merging and blending, that on the long term and through changing circumstances, one set of ideas will prevail over the other.[923]

Another downside of vernacularisation that we have seen from the studied examples is the willingness of the cyberactivist to compromise their ideologies for the sake of wider impact within the vernacular framework. One example we have seen is when Wael Khalil, who is prominent socialist activist, used capitalist and commercialist references to convey his message. Khalil in his Tweet used references to commercial brands and famous commercial campaigns that are well-known to the Egyptian public to convey his human rights and mobilisation call. Even though this tactic achieved a higher viewership and interaction, at the same time it clearly deviated from the socialist path that Khalil took for many years before. Khalil believed that it is important to use what he called the snowball effect, which means that the author had a clear simple message, and represented it in a clear, strong, understood

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[922] ibid
[923] ibid

language, this message will spread much more than the author thought. In that case, more people will understand the message, and they were able to identify with it and interact with it, which lead to amplifying the message and causing a large scale widespread. This means that by using vernacularisation, the cyberactivist separated the final outcome or form of the message from his deeply rooted political ideology. By utilising this approach, it gave the impression that cyberactivists are using Machiavellianism, employing cunning and deception in political competence or public behaviour. The problem with such approach is that the message the cyberactivist is trying to convey will lack a proper well-established reference when it is challenged. Within the Egyptian Revolution context, despite that those who participated in the revolution came from different political spectrum, leftist, liberalist or Islamist, and the majority had no political ideology or affiliation at all.

It is understood that when the cyberactivists used different ideology than their own to deliver their message does not mean they are abandoning their own ideologies. It could be acceptable within the momentum of a great revolution and fast-paced events, that those with standing political ideologies can resort to different tactics to be able to follow the pace and take part in an ongoing mobilisation process. Cyberactivist such as Khalil believed in spontaneity as an important factor to ignite the momentum of the revolution. But he also believed that spontaneity in itself will not work, it needs a message the author is passionate about and fully understand, understanding of your audience, ability to simplify your message based on your understanding of your audience and the context. Khalil believed that within such compromise, he is creating the magic recipe to create a new type of content that could contribute to creating a collective mentality.[924] In order to bypass such downside, it requires a skilled activist with outstanding understand and mastery of their background ideologies, to be able to put the vernacular element within an overall context that does not weaken the message and at the same time does not compromise the political ideology.

Vernacularisation of political ideologies in general, different from vernacularisation of human rights, is a tool that is not only exclusive to the revolutionary and progressive side, but it is also available to the conservative, anti-change side, and also the governments. In the last case, when political leaders use vernacular discourse, it borders on the definition of populism. In such context, populism could be seen as an "unmediated and direct communication between the leader and the people, creating popular consent for anti-

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[924] Interview with Wael Khalil, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 July 2018)

democratic authority exercised by the leader."[925] We have seen this clearly in the American politics under President Trump and how it led to violence.[926]

Similar trends can be found outside the Western world. The rise of Western populists appears to have encouraged a number of leaders to escalate their human rights violations. For example, the Kremlin has vigorously defended Vladimir Putin's tyranny, believing that it is no worse than the West's deteriorating human rights record. As with Putin, President Xi Jinping has continued the largest campaign of persecution of dissenting voices in China in two decades. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan used a coup attempt against him to crush dissenting voices. And within the Egyptian contexts, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi stepped up his crackdown after taking over power using a populist discourse and speeches.[927] A follower of Sisi's speeches, at first glance, concludes that it is not a political discourse, not even a military one, but rather a populist discourse that does not go beyond Egyptian populist terms such as "You are our eyes", "I love you" and "I am the minister of the women."[928] This kind of speeches that uses local language and less political terms appeal to the public in a manner similar to what we discusses in relation to vernacularisation of human rights. In such context, we can see similarities between populist speech and the process of vernacularisation when it is used on the leadership level, which makes the vernacular tool a double-edged weapon.

On the popular side, vernacularisation was also used by anti-revolution and those who opposed change too. One other aspect that promoted the use of a vernacular discourse is that during the revolution and after, Egypt public opinion witnessed a rise of extreme polarisation that created dedicated revolutionists and created a block of anti-revolution and government supporters. Cyberactivists found themselves in this defensive position against those who favoured a stable dictator over the uncertainty of a revolution. Those in anti-revolution groups existed on social media also, and sometimes they outnumber those in favour of the revolution. In that case, revolutionist cyberactivists played a role in defending the revolution

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[925] Shreyya Rajagopal, 'A Tool in the Hands of the Populists? The Role and Operation of social Media by the BJP for Populism' (2019) South Asia Journal <http://southasiajournal.net/%EF%BB%BFa-tool-in-the-hands-of-populists-the-role-and-operation-of-social-media-by-the-bjp-for-populism/> citing S. Sinha, 'Fragile Hegemony: Modi, Social Media, and Competitive Electoral Populism in India' (2017) 11 International Journal of Communication 4158
[926] 'The Guardian view of Trump's Populism: Weaponised and Silenced by Social Media' the Guardian (London, 15 January 2021) < https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/15/the-guardian-view-of-trumps-populism-weaponised-and-silenced-by-social-media> accessed 14 February 2021
[927] Kenneth Roth, 'The Dangerous Rise of Populism' (Human Rights Watch, World Report 2017) <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/global-4#> accessed 20 February 2021
[928] Malika Bokhary, 'Why the Threat Tone in Sisi's Speech?' (ZDZ, 3 February 2019) <Link> accessed 20 February 2021

through endless discussions on social media. These discussions by default had to be in the most vernacular form and simplest language as possible, considering that the target audience here has much less potential and awareness to comprehend the vision of the revolutionists that had politically complicated goals such as democracy, rule of law, human rights, social justice and other and they were mainly concerned with daily matters. In that context, cyberactivists played a greater role in addressing the worries and the concerns of those who are sceptical about the revolution. Through social media, cyberactivists worked their way to explain the connection between having a real democratic system and the daily needs of ordinary people. Those people saw a dark side of the revolution that included violent protests, curfews, scarcity of goods, absence of police and security, drops in the economy and all these phenomena that were associated with the revolution. It is extremely hard to explain to those who do not fully comprehend the value of the end goal that these negative aspects are a temporary price that they must pay until they reach a stable democratic system. To explain this, cyberactivists stretched their vernacular skills to the limit in order to convey the message of the importance of democracy and human rights to those who believe these things are destroying their country. These online dialogues and discussions took the form of heated debates that took the vernacular discourse to higher level, as both sides were very loaded with the positions they believed in, which constituted a matter of life and death to both sides, as both were defending their own existence in way. In that context, cyberactivists used a vernacular language to refer those they are debating with to sources such as the Constitution, the Penal Code, international human rights treaties, and also political books that are the source of what they wanted to convey. These fuelled debates played a role in shaping the public opinion at a critical point of Egypt political history, probably leading to the first free elections in Egyptian history in 2012.

Another aspect that could be seen as a downside of the use of vernacular language is its negative effect on the classic Arabic language. The Arabic language was not immune to the digital development witnessed in various aspects of life. Some information technology tools relied on the use of the classic Arabic language in its contents and was able to provide many useful services to it, but on the other hand the Arabic language was negatively affected, which led to a decline in its use among large number of users of various digital technology tools, who have gone to use the more localised language and other languages to communicate between them. Arabic language, in light of this digital development, is facing a clear challenge that needs careful study and analysis inn order to ensure that the Arabic language is

on the right track to deal with this digital development.[929] The vast majority of those who deal with the Internet do not write their opinions and do not record their impressions except in the vernacular dialect, using street vocabulary and vulgar expressions. Also, many readers, and even some writers, who are keen on using the classical language, their grammatical and spelling skills do not help them to write their opinions and comments in a sound Arabic language, so the writings and comments are piled up with egregious spelling and grammatical errors.[930]

Another issue that could be seen as negative from the view of a religious and conservative society like Egypt, is the wide use of profanity in the language over social media. In a society such as Egypt, where freedom of expression is limited, it became normal that young people would react in extremes to the suppression, whether from the family or the society, or the government. So, we can now see that the use of profane language over social media causes public anger, especially from older population, against social media users and cyberactivists. This negative reaction from the public could reflect in different forms, first the way the public perceived the message over social media could be limited, as some followers might automatically block cyberactivists who use such language. On the other side, the use of such language or show of progressive attitude could lead to security risks to the activists or those posting such content. In summer 2020, the two bloggers faced charges of "assaulting family values" after they posted social media content that the Egyptian prosecution described as outrageous and immoral. Security forces arrested more than 15 women on the same charges, at least five of them are facing court sentences and fines, according to Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch accused the Egyptian authorities of launching an "abusive campaign" against women influencing social media sites and prosecuting them on charges that "violate their rights to freedom of expression and privacy."[931] In such totalitarian and patriarchal environment, vernacularisation on social media could constitute a risk element to cyberactivists who are using it.

7.5. Vernacularisation and Risk

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[929] 'The Influence of Digital Development on Arabic Language' (Alddad, 1 July 2017) <Link> accessed 15 November 2020

[930] 'The Influence of Digital Development on Arabic Language' (Alddad, 1 July 2017) <Link> accessed 15 November 2020

[931] 'Egypt: Spate of 'Morality' Prosecutions of Women' (Human Rights Watch, 20 July 2020) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/17/egypt-spate-morality-prosecutions-women> accessed 23 February 2021

Vernacularisation comes with more than one risk element. One of the issues that were addressed in this research is the relation between the level of vernacularisation used by cyberactivists and their security and risk levels. This question became more relevant during and after the 2011 revolution where grass-root movements and protests took place and many of cyberactivists were involved. As we mentioned above, many of the cyberactivists felt safe during the Revolution and right after as they believed they had the support of the street. Their posts and opinions were appealing to the masses and people were willing to march to protest any violations against cyberactivists. On the other hand, some cyberactivists believed that too much vernacularisation might sometimes cause extra risk. For example, once a cyberactivist posts something that would show criticism to religion, this might expose him or her as a non-true believer and this will bring accusations of being infidel by the religious majority of the population. Another example is talking about sexual orientation in a local language understood by the majority and less educated, which might show the opinion of the cyberactivists as pro LGBT rights, which exposes them in a conservative society and increase the risk factor. [932]

Esraa Abdel Fattah believes that using the vernacular discourse comes with its own risk when you open socially tabooed issues in language that everyone can understand. For example, when she posts on religious issues such as the hijab and its sources in the Islamic religion. Bringing such issue to the light in a vernacular frame causes a shock to the more conservative audience, which is the majority of Egyptians. This risk is not just from the reaction of the audience, but also it puts you at risk of legal prosecution. In the case of the feminist activist Mozn Hassan, the Public Prosecution faced her with charges such as "calling for irresponsible emancipation" over her activities on social media. The ruling regime uses this legal language to stigmatise activists as perverts or religiously disobedient. This means that cyberactivists like Abdel Fattah, whenever they post on such controversial issues, they expect the risks that come with it, and they understand that they are stepping in the hornet's nest. These risky issues also include liberation of women, sexual harassment, homosexuals' rights, and abolition of death penalty. Abdel Fattah totally understood the risk that comes with these issues, however, she decided to continue posting about them along her posts on politics and human rights, knowing that this is the price that activists would pay to continue fighting for what they believe in.[933] Abdel Fattah cyberactivism caused her damage on

[932] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)
[933] Interview with Esraa Abdel Fattah, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 16 May 2017)

different levels. Beside the risk of legal persecution, Abdel Fattah also was forced to leave her job as a journalist in the newspaper Alyoum Alsabea, a newspaper that started supporting the ruling regime since 2013. Abdel Fattah was given the choice to stop posting about politics and human rights, or to leave her position in the newspaper, she chose to continue posting and had to leave her job. Despite all these challenges and risks, Abdel Fattah decided to continue writing on social media, as she believes that this is the only free space, and she has to express her opinion and ideas freely.[934]

This takes us to the last important negative element of vernacularisation which is the security risk it constitutes on the cyberactivists who use it. Security of human rights defenders and activists became one of the important topics to be discussed in the human rights field due to the increase in harassments and intimidations towards them. Human rights defenders' security is directly related to freedom from threats, political security, economic security, environmental security and others in the frame of 'freedom from want' and "freedom from fear."[935] Despite that in theory, according to international documents related to protection of human rights defenders[936], the State is the main responsible for the protection of human rights defenders, in practice the State is the main perpetrator of violations committed towards HRDs in most of countries.[937] In addition to the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, states should also legislate and implement local measures to insure it's respect to its international obligations, such as the Mexican 2012 Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists that allows HRDs in Mexico to access additional protection, locally, regionally and internationally.[938] However, this is not the case in many countries where there is no recognition of HRDs rights nor any special measurements adopted for their protection.[939]

Since they started their activism, Egyptian cyberactivists faced risks and different kinds of intimidations by the authorities for crossing many redlines, exposing violations perpetuated by the government, exposing violations done by security bodies including killings and torture, organising protest, demonstrations, and other events including the uprises

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[934] ibid

[935] Alice Nah and others, 'Critical perspectives on the security and protection of human rights defenders' (2015) 19:7 The International Journal of Human Rights 883

[936] Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 1984.

[937] Enrique Eguren and Marie Caraj, 'New Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders' (Protection International 2009) 13

[938] Alice Nah and others, 'Critical perspectives on the security and protection of human rights defenders' (2015) 19:7 The International Journal of Human Rights 883

[939] ibid

in 2011, which angered all those who were in power. As a reaction to this online activism, the government, represented by the Egyptian security apparatus, carried out suppressive measures that included arrests, physical assault, stalking, blocking websites, and judicial prosecution. Human rights organisations documented hundreds of cases of violations against cyberactivists every year under different ruling regimes. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information report "The Internet in the Arab World" published in 2015, documented waves of arrests to admins of Facebook pages that are pro revolution and critical to the regime such as "Ragab Elmasry" page and "Afariet Damanhour" page, in addition to many similar cases in 2014.[940] From the first moment the cyberactivists started their online activism, the Egyptian authorities started the crackdown, once the authorities realised how influential this new group of activists is and how they can influence public awareness by exposing more human rights violations and talking about social sensitive issues. According to Gamal Eid: "Egyptian government will never forgive bloggers for continuing to expose many severe violations of law and human rights, as well as their role as part of the pro-democracy movement in Egypt."[941]

The issue of security with Egyptian HRDs got more complicated during and after the revolution in 2011. During and right after the revolution, HRDs and activist shared this feeling of strength and over-confidence. They became heroes and celebrated by people. Also, they felt they are protected by the support of people.[942] Most of cyberactivists did not mind even taking risks deliberately just to make a point. For example, when cyberactivist Alaa Abdel Fattah refused to be interrogated by military investigation office just because he wanted to show that no civilian shall stand before military tribunal. Alaa knew he will be arrested if he refused, and he totally understood the risks associated with his action, and he insisted on his right as a civilian to be interrogated and tried before a civilian tribune. He was released short after because of public pressure.[943] Alaa was arrested again after security forces stormed in his house in November 2013 and later faces charges of inciting protests.[944] On 23 February 2015, Alaa was sentenced to five years of imprisonment, and he served the five years.[945] Alaa was arrested again amid a widespread campaign of arrests in September 2019, while he was leaving the police station, according to the description of his mother,

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[940] Gamal Eid (ed), The Internet in the Arab World (ANHRI 2015) 72
[941] Katib, 'The Egyptian Security Wages War on Bloggers' (Katib, 2008) <http://www.katib.org/node/6851> accessed 15 March 2019
[942] Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)
[943] Interview with Gamal Eid, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 June 2018)
[944] Interview with Mona Seif, Egyptian Human Rights Activist (Online, 10 May 2019)
[945] ibid

university doctor Laila Soueif, and he was accused of spreading false news and joining a terrorist group. Alaa is still in pretrial detention until the writing of these lines.[946]

What happened after the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi by the army on 30 June 2013 was much worse for cyberactivists than ever before. Cyberactivists were hated by those who rejected the revolution and were also hated by the government. Cyberactivists suffered a severe crackdown, and they became under threat all the time. Once the situation changed, many cyberactivists were arrested, and the rest whether they decided to leave the country or decided to quit human rights altogether.[947] However, all six cyberactivists that we studied in this research decided to continue their activism, especially the cyberactivism after the events of 2013. Since January 2011 and before 2013, human rights activists, cyberactivists, and political activists gained much popularity, and they were also recognised by the ruling regime at the time, the Military Council, and mainstream media. They were included in meetings and debates about the future of the country. But since the army took over again in 2013, activists witnessed a widespread campaign of persecution. This change in attitude, in addition to the regime taking over media outlets, the public opinion shifted towards the support of the regime and developed an unwelcoming attitude towards the activists and human rights movement in general. This shift in the attitude constituted a challenge to the work of the cyberactivism, but the six cyberactivists that we studied in this research did not stop their online activism. They understood the risks that came with such decision, and they knew that they will be subjected to high risk, never the less, they decided that they still want to post on social media using the same vernacular discourse. For that reason, it was important for this research to study content that was produced after 2013 to show that the work of cyberactivists continued and that the vernacularisation process was still taking place even after the drastic changes that happened in 2013 and after.

At the time of writing these lines, four out of six cyberactivists who were studied in this research are under one kind or another of legal prosecution, while the rest faced persecution at earlier time. Esraa Abdel Fattah was first arrested on 6 April 2008 and taken to the Qasr al-Nil Department for investigation. The Egyptian authorities charged her with incitement to riot and was kept in detention until she was released on 14 April 2008. However, the Egyptian Minister of Interior issued a decision to arrest Abdel Fattah again without reasons, and she was released on 23 April 2008. Egyptian security forces arrested

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[946] Interview with Mona Seif, Egyptian Human Rights Activist (Online, 10 May 2019)
[947] Interview with Gamal Eid, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 June 2018)

Abdel Fattah again on 15 January 2010, while she was performing a duty of condolences to the victims of the Naga Hammadi massacre.[948] After demonstrations that took place in September 2019, the government led a campaign of arrests against political activists. Although Abdel Fattah did not call for demonstrations, Egyptian security forces arrested her in October 2019 on charges of joining a banned group, spreading false news and misusing social media. Abdel Fattah is still in pretrial detention until the writing of these lines.[949] Abdel Fattah believes that her social media accounts are monitored by security bodies all the time, probably more than other cyberactivists in Egypt who write on similar issues. This might be related to her previous cyberactivism that lead to actions on the street, such as the 6 April 2008 strike.[950]

Another cyberactivist that we studied faces legal prosecution for his cyberactivism, Wael Abbas. Abbas was detained in May 2018, in connection with Case 441 of 2018, and the charges against him included "joining a group established in contravention of the provisions of the law and the constitution, breaching social security and peace, publishing false news, misusing social media, and broadcasting videos on his network on social communication website "Facebook" as a means of inciting to overthrow the Egyptian government and destabilising the country's internal security.[951] An Egyptian court had ordered his release 7 months later, with the implementation of precautionary security measures, but he was not released until 12 December 2018.[952]

Cyberactivist Gamal Eid also faced persecution and intimidation for his cyberactivism. On 29 December 2019, a group of officers and ranks of the security services attacked Gamal Eid near his home, where he was beaten, and his face and body were covered with paint. This was the fourth attack on Eid in one year. The attack was carried out by a group of about 10-12 policemen, including a national security officer whom Eid knew, and other members of the security forces who arrived in three private cars without license plates. They attacked Eid on the street near his home in Cairo, while he was waiting for a taxi, and threw him on the ground. When neighbours and other bystanders tried to intervene to help him, the security men pointed pistols in their faces and told them to leave. Eid was told that

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[948] Interview with Esraa Abdel Fattah, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 16 May 2017)
[949] 'Esraa Abdel Fattah Detention Renewed 45 Days' (AFTE, 27 May 2021) < https://afteegypt.org/law_unit/law_unit_news/2019/11/05/18175-afteegypt.html> accessed 30 May 2021
[950] Interview with Esraa Abdel Fattah, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 16 May 2017)
[951] 'Who is the Activist Wael Abbas who was Released?' BBC Arabic (Cairo, 13 December 2018) <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-44210898> accessed 20 May 2021
[952] ibid

he was doused in paint in order to "blame himself."[953] On 17 September 2016, the Cairo Criminal Court confirmed the order to freeze the funds and assets of a group of prominent human rights defenders including Gamal Eid, Hossam Bahgat, Bahi El Din Hassan, Abdel Hafeez Tayel, Mostafa al-Hassan. The five defenders are accused of illegally receiving foreign funding. If found guilty, they would face up to 25 years of imprisonment.[954] In February 2016, Eid was stopped at airport and was informed that he is banned from travel while facing persecution in the infamous case 173/2011, which is known as the "foreign fund" case.[955]

Asmaa Mahfouz is also facing the same persecution as Eid. Mahfouz said that she was prevented from traveling in October 2014, to attend a United Nations conference, after passport officers informed her that her name was on the lists of those banned from traveling, according to a decision from the Attorney General, without giving any reasons.[956] The Cairo Criminal Court rejected all appeals submitted by Asmaa Mahfouz, about the decision to ban her from traveling, and supported the continuation of the decision to include her on the lists of those banned from traveling.[957] Mahfouz is not allowed to travel until the writing of these lines.

Also, Wael Ghonim faced different kinds of persecution for his cyberactivism. As we mentioned before, during his work at Google, Ghonim launched the page "We are all Khaled Said", which accused the Egyptian police of being the reason for the death of a young man while he was being held in a police station in Alexandria Governorate. The page was a major driver behind pushing Egyptians to take to the streets and protesting the political, security, and economic conditions in the country. Then protests developed to demand the overthrow of the government and the departure of Mubarak. Ghonim was arrested at the beginning of the events, and many did not know that he was responsible for managing that page, and was detained for several days, before he was released on the second of February, after which he went out and appeared directly in a television interview on an independent Egyptian channel,

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[953] 'Egypt: Rights activist Gamal Eid brutally attacked by security forces' (IFEX, 30 December 2019) <https://ifex.org/egypt-rights-activist-gamal-eid-brutally-attacked-by-security-forces/> accessed 20 May 2021
[954] 'Judicial Harassment of Gamal Eid' (Front Line Defenders, 18 July 2020) <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/judicial-harassment-gamal-eid> accessed 20 May 2021
[955] Ibrahim Qoraa, 'Rejection of Appeal on Travel Ban for 14 Activists' Almasry Alyoum (Cairo, 18 July 2020) < https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1999118> accessed 18 March 2021
[956] 'Asmaa Mahfouz to CNN: I was Surprised to Find I am on Travel Ban' CNN Arabic (Dubai, 22 October 2014) <https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2014/10/22/egypt-asmaa-mahfouz> accessed 20 February 2021
[957] Haitham Elborai, 'Criminal Court Confirms Travel Ban for Asmaa Mahfouz and Esraa Abdel Fattah' Elwatan News (Cairo, 7 December 2015) <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/852659> accessed 20 February 2021

and he ended the dialogue in tears after knowing the number of people were killed during the protests, which greatly affected the course of events, and increased the momentum of the protests. Ghonim, who is currently residing in the United States, returned to the front again after years of absence from the political scene in Egypt, through a series of videos in which he talks about the situation in Egypt. On 20 September 2019, Ghonim published several videos announcing that the security forces in Egypt had arrested his brother, the dentist Hazem Ghonim, and he added that this came because of what he publishes on his personal Facebook page from California.[958] With the exception of Wael Khalil, all cyberactivists that we presented in this research have faced different kinds of security risks due to their activism on social media.

7.6. Implications and Future Research

One of my motives behind this research is to find an answer to how or to what degree social media influenced the January Revolution in initiating mass mobilisation. As mentioned before, when reviewing literature written about this topic, I realised that most of this literature did not dig deep in the actual content, but rather took it for granted that social media was influential just by calling for demonstrations or tending to dismiss the importance of social media and put it secondary to other elements that caused street uprising. This research aimed to carry out a deep analysis of the content posted by the selected cyberactivists. Through this deep discourse analysis to the posts and studying every term and concept and connecting them to their vernacular discourse and local source using the vernacularisation of human rights theory, I created a new approach to understanding social media content, and accordingly, shedding some light on the issue of the mobilisation factors impeded within such content. This approach opened the door to a more thorough understanding of the social media content that avoided drawing conclusions without deeply rooted foundation. Therefore, using such approach has the potential to fill in the academic gap when it comes to the issue of the influence of social media on Arab Spring uprisings.

However, this approach required an insider that belongs to the same background, shares the same culture, immersed in the political dynamics and course of events, acquainted with the language and terms in their local form without any layers of translation or

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[958] 'Who is the Egyptian Activist Wael Ghonim?' BBC Arabic (Cairo, 20 September 2019) <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-49774659> accessed 20 February 2021

ethnography. That does not mean that this approach is blocked before those who do not share these criteria, however, as a starting point of such approach, an insider eye was needed to avoid misunderstanding, cultural sensitivities, misconceptions, pretentious claim of local knowledge, or misuse of language and local terms. This research serves as a base for further studies for those who are seeking answers about the influence of social media on Arab Spring's street movements, and it could be applied to other similar cases such as in Tunisia or Bahrain. This approach can be also used on a more general level to understand the influence of social media on mass mobilisation. Despite that this research was focused on the human rights aspect of this mobilisation in connection with vernacularisation, but through methodological adaptation, this approach could be applied to other fields that are connected to social media influence such as collective behaviour or marketing.

Future research could build on this approach to examine more cyberactivists from Egypt or other Arab Spring countries. Through new technologies that are developing every day, future research could use more advanced techniques, better archiving tools to avoid the absence of data at the time of the detention of the study subject, apply the study in a more safe environment with less security strains and risks, use of in person interviews for a more personal experience with the interviewee, use of more recent data over a longer time period to study long term development, and in a world free from pandemics that add to the strains and challenges of the research. Further studies could also use more quantitative approach that might require more resources and technologies that were not available for this research to reach more definitive conclusions about the effect of cyberactivism on mass mobilisation using more accurate measuring tools.

The 25 January Revolution was in the heart of all parts of this dissertation, and it was my main inspiration. One of the reasons I became interested in the concept of vernacularisation of human rights is that I believe it could be the future and the step forward for the chain of change that the Revolution started in 2011 believing that the more cyberactivists use vernacularisation, the more people gain awareness of human rights issues. It will be harder considering the current security situation in Egypt under the military dictatorship and their war against human rights activists, but as long as there are activists who are still willing to give their lives and freedoms to convey such message, there will always be hope. At the time of writing those words, there are eleven human rights activists who are close friends and colleagues of mine in detention, among them one of the cyberactivists I

presented in this dissertation, Esraa Abdel Fattah. There are more than that number who were in detention before and after they were released, they continued their activisms in human rights with no fear of being arrested again. I believe that cyberactivism using vernacularisation of human rights is an ongoing process, a torch carried by those cyberactivists and every day more people know more about human rights issues and know more about their rights in face of the suppressive regime.

7.8. Final Words

Sometimes words fail us to record history because of the weight of what we have witnessed and lived through. But with the breezes of the Arab Spring approaching and after the end of the first decade of the Egyptian Revolution, whose climate has turned into a bitter winter, it has exhausted all who participated in it and whoever chanted the unified slogan of the revolution, "Bread, freedom, social justice. While emphasising the urgent need to complete the Egyptian revolution, we have to highlight the role that some people played, the children of this revolution, despite all the attempts to distort and the crises they were exposed to.

No Egyptian can forget the Revolution's calls to go out and march to Tahrir Square on 25 January 2011. We cannot forget that the movements were purely popular movements organised by different movements such as the 6 April Youth Movement, the *Kefaya* movement, as well as groups of independent youth through the social networking site Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, the most famous of which was the "We Are All Khaled Said" group and independent cyberactivists such the ones we presented in this paper. Then After that, most of the political forces announced their participation in the demonstrations until the goals and demands were initially met. And we cannot forget the revolutionary scene outside Cairo, as the crowds gathered in the big squares in various governorates, such as the Square of the Leader Ibrahim Mosque in Alexandria, the Square of Arbaeen in Suez, the Orabi Square in Zagazig, Omar Makram Square in Assiut and the Shouneh Square in Mahalla, the Martyrs Square in Port Said, and the revolution Square in Mansoura.

Given that the January Revolution has not yet been completed, there are many losses that got worse over time; but we can consider the revolutionaries themselves, such as the cyberactivists to be the ones to pay the heavy price on the list of losses for the Egyptian revolution, and this was confirmed by the political scene.

And since 2013, the Revolution turned to the biggest nightmare for the revolution's youth and cyberactivists, who became an easy target for the government. The fate of these young activists was to flee, whether inside or outside Egypt, arrested, and forcibly disappeared, or to surrender and recognise the de facto situation. Some even arrived to ally with the security services that they revolted against in Tahrir Square.

Despite the failures, regional and international counter-interference, the quiet normalisation of some comrades of the revolution between the ruler and the ruled, the economic pressures and the ensuing unemployment, marginalisation, poverty, security concerns, and unprecedented social repercussions on Egyptian society, killing, arrest and immigration during the last ten years, the dreams of January have stalled until this moment. In fact, we can say that the spirit of January still resides in the souls of Egyptians, wandering the streets and squares, searching for those who can give them hope again. This is what we see in the repeated calls to demonstrate over the past years. Despite the difficulty, seriousness, and randomness of the calls, we are nevertheless surprised by the turnout of the demonstrators to complete the demands of the January revolution.

Ten years have passed since the 25 January Revolution, and unfortunately so far, no scholarly organisation or historical body has written a well-documented history of the January Revolution. They watched it, whether Egyptians, Arabs, or foreigners, but a number of those who wrote about January turned on their heels in their position on it, and their writings became suspicious, as they turned from revolution to counter-revolution. And now, many of those who participated in the January Revolution woke up, some of them wrote, some of them broadcasted live on Facebook, and views began to differ about the same incident. There is no harm in that, as such massive events in the history of nations differ in visions and details. It is a healthy aspect for every person to mention what they have to say about their personal experience with the revolution, so in the end we will have writings, and whenever there are papers and writing, then it is easy to comment, and it is easier to search, comment on what was said, and search for its validity, and other opinions and testimonies that are rejected or supported, in the end. The history of this revolution will benefit by monitoring experience, and then it will be easy to know: Where did the revolution come from? How? when? Why? And what is the way out?

The January Revolution did not begin on 25 January 2011 only, but rather began years before, preceded by a societal and political movements. It is not fair to consider its beginning only from the day it came to the field, all of these are atmospheres and events that paved the ground and paved the public sphere for the movement. The January revolution did

not end on 11 February 2011 when Mubarak stepped down. The January revolution extends its line to this day, so it is not possible to separate what preceded the revolution, its context, and what followed it.

One way to study this revolution, is to study individuals who took part in the revolution and study their contribution in detail. The first thing to start with is for everyone who participated in the revolution even a little, to write what they saw and their contribution., especially those who had collective roles such as the cyberactivists. The history of the single faction is collected, without courtesy, nor self-flagellation, but with all historical faithfulness, for its benefit first, before it is in favour of the revolution and history. And we have to realise an important thing in the writings of individuals, to give them freedom in what they write, no matter how we see the error in their vision, because they depicted the situation in how they saw it, and their vision may be complete, as the testimonies and memoirs of individuals are not history, but rather a tool of history, complemented by other tools on which the prudent, audited historian depends. Also, by studying and analysing the cyberactivists actions within the vernacularisation of human rights context, we give a potential for this vernacularisation process to continue and to increase the awareness of the new generations when they read about the stories and the experiences those cyberactivists have to tell.

This research's approach was to use this individual experience and the content of the case studies produced to add to the history of the January revolution, aiming to answer a question that was associated with this revolution from the first day about the role of cyberactivists and social media in it. The vernacular discourse of social media content is one aspect of many aspects that if put together, we can get a full picture of what happened and answer those questions associated with the revolution. This research does not undermine or overwrite any other social or political theories that tried to analyse the Egyptian revolution. However, this research attempted to dig deeper and scratch the surface and tried to go further in a lower level, below big events, and revolutionary leaders' speeches. This paper tried to find the deep connection between the content that was created on social media and the people in the street. It was easy for analysts to claim that a call on social media lead to a street movement, however, without explaining or analysing why such call would succeed, this claim would be easily challenged. And without further and deeper analysis, this claim would fail to stand no matter how much public support it has. To resolve such issue, a deeper analysis was required, and this is what this paper attempted to do. We all agree that there is something that happened on social media that affected the course of the revolution, but that belief came with many questions. This paper tried to shed light on what happened on social

media and turned into street movement Through introducing the concept of vernacularisation of human rights., We have seen in this paper how cyberactivists used vernacularisation to turn human rights concepts into street language and the audience were easily able to associate themselves with, and how the human rights message found resonance in them, that might have promoted them to take action and take it to the streets.

The Egyptian Revolution of 25 January 2011 by all means was a street and popular revolution, but those who called it the "Facebook Revolution" are not totally wrong too. Social media and cyberactivists played a great role in this revolution, and their role was on the same street and popular level as the people in the street. It was the language and the vernacular frames that cyberactivists used that made this impact to reach the street level. This street language and frames that integrated with the street movement, creating a collective popular movement, is what made this revolution unique and this what created such controversy about the nature of such revolution. In conclusion, this revolution was a pure street movement, even the cyber and social media aspect of the revolution was on the same street and popular level as the people in the street. The full impact happened when the online realm spoke the same language as the street, acting as a communication medium on the same level of a physical gathering in the street. This unification and integration of language became much stronger as it presented the same issues and worries of the street. These issues were mainly related to human rights issues, even though the street did not fully place it as a human rights dialogue, the cyberactivists played the role of the moderator and translator of such international concepts, taking them to the same street level as it would be found between two Egyptian street citizens sharing their suffering and worries over a cup of tea in a local café in downtown Cairo. In this context, street dialogues and online dialogues became one, forming one integrated movement that is fully loaded with local context and fortified with vernacularised international human rights values, while putting the online dialogue on the same level as the street dialogue.

As argued before, the outcome of Egyptian Revolution would have been different in a positive way if those who were on the leadership level would have used more vernacular language and frames. Once the whole becomes one, leadership, online activism and the street, the revolution would be completed. It is the people's revolution, from the people and to the people. If this revolution is a direct reflection of people's sufferings and human rights needs and presented on all levels including leadership and political figures level, it would turn the whole country on all levels to one movement loaded with the same values and agreeing on the same goals and vision for the future of the country. This paper gave a small example on

how this happened in the past and would be a step towards further research on the content that was produced before, during and after the revolution, to open the door for further research of the content and how it is connected to the street movement. No political nor sociological research would put the context of the revolution into perspective that neglects the popular and vernacular element, as the 25 January Revolution did not follow a specific political ideology or classic social movement, but rather a pure spontaneous, popular, and vernacular street reaction to the situation in Egypt. When all Egyptians spoke one language, their scream turned into a massive street movement that managed to achieve change. But the change is a very long process, and a more sustainable and durable change could be achieved once all levels are unified and integrated in one frame that fully represents the Egyptian street, as it was felt during the first 18 days of the revolution in Tahrir Square.

Appendices I

Interview Questions:

Background:

- When did you start being active online? Why?

- What topics encouraged you to be active online? What topics you cover?

- How did you learn about human rights?

- Did you attend any human rights workshops or conferences? When and with which organization?

Vernacularisation:

- Who is the target audience of your posts?

- What can you identify as street language in Egypt?

- Can you tell me when you used Vernacularisation?

- Give me 6 examples/incidents when you decided to use a vernacular language or frame to convey a human rights message.

- How did you do it?

- What was the reaction of the followers to these posts? Positive? High sharing/participation rate?

Vernacularisation and Revolution:

- How the Revolution affected your online activism?

- Did the Revolution encouraged you to use specific style/language/topic/theme?

- Did you change Vernacularisation tactics before and after the Revolution?

- As a cyberactivist during the Revolution, did you feel the reaction of followers as supportive/not-supportive? Explain.

- Do you think that there was a shift in public perception towards human rights activists before and after the Revolution? How?

Risk:

- As a cyberactivist, do you feel you are at risk? Why?

- What is the primary source of risk (government/individuals) that is related to your activism?

- Are there specific topics/keywords/themes that you use that you feel they trigger risk?

- Did using Vernacularisation change the risk you face? how?

- Is there a specific post or tweet you posted using a vernacular language caused you to feel more at risk? safer?

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List of Interviews Conducted

Main interviews with cyberactivists:

Interview with Asmaa Mahfouz, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 3 March 2018)

Interview with Esraa Abdelfattah, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 16 May 2017)

Interview with Gamal Eid, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 June 2018)

Interview with Wael Abbas, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 4 February 2018)

Interview with Wael Khalil, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 10 July 2018)

Interview with Wael Ghonim, Egyptian Cyberactivist (Online, 20 January 2019)

Additional interview for background:

Interview with Mona Seif, Egyptian Human Rights Activist (Online, 10 May 2019)