

# Egyptian Revolution of 2011

Contentious repertoires and Egyptian innovation

# Abstract

This paper examines the influence on the Egyptian revolution of 2011 by preceding social movements and historical acts of contention. This is made possible through examining the history of contentious performances from the birth of the social movement up until the twenty-first century, and then comparing the results with the uprising in Egypt. The purpose of this paper is to assess and attempt to trace whether the social movement in Egypt was inspired by its predecessors and whether it made use of experience accumulated by earlier social movements. The research question is based on the hypothesis that social movements make use of accumulated experience from earlier political struggles but that there is also a cultural aspect as to how the experience is applied. The results of this paper indicate that the social movement in Egypt has been inspired by earlier social movements and imitated parts of their performances. There is however cultural aspects, and new use of technology which has been made part of the same routine.

*Keywords:* Egypt, protests, revolution, Charles Tilly, contentious performances, contentious repertoires, contentious politics

Characters: 69 102

# Table of contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Research Question.....	2
1.2	Purpose of the Paper.....	2
1.3	Method .....	3
1.3.1	Material and Previous Research.....	5
<b>2</b>	<b>Theoretical framework.....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1	Contentious Performances and Repertoires .....	6
2.1.1	How to Detect and Describe Performances and Repertoires .....	9
<b>3</b>	<b>History of Contentious Performances.....</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1	Eighteenth century and the birth of the social movement.....	11
3.2	Nineteenth century .....	14
3.3	Twentieth century.....	17
3.4	Twenty-first century .....	20
<b>4</b>	<b>Analysis.....</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1	An Introduction to the Uprising in Egypt.....	24
4.2	Egyptian Policies during the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century.....	25
4.3	Egyptian contention 2004-2011 .....	27
4.3.1	Contention during 2004.....	28
4.3.2	Contention during 2005.....	29
4.3.3	Contention during 2006.....	29
4.3.4	Contention during 2007.....	30
4.3.5	Contention during 2008.....	31
4.3.6	Contention during 2009.....	32
4.3.7	Contention during 2010.....	32
4.3.8	The Egyptian Revolution of 2011 .....	33
4.4	Analysis.....	34
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>References.....</b>	<b>41</b>

# 1 Introduction

Since the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East are still ongoing, the demands for democratic reform in the region grow stronger; much of the debate is aimed toward unveiling the source and cause of this development. Whilst looking through articles relating to the development in the region and Egypt in particular, I came across the theory of contentious politics as interpreted by Charles Tilly.

The theory of contentious politics studies groups making claims that bear on other groups' interests using public performances and displays of contention.<sup>1</sup> At the heart of the theory lies the idea that "...collective contention [...is] a product of learned and historically grounded performances".<sup>2</sup> These grounded performances or repertoires as Tilly calls them, change over time as people develop and make additions to them from accumulated experience. However in the short run, the choices which are available to claim-makers are very limited by the experience from these repertoires.<sup>3</sup>

In a 1993 article<sup>4</sup> Tilly explains how he interprets the changes which occurred during the period from the birth of the social movement in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century through the parliamentarization of contention during the earlier stages of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A period which he claims laid the foundation for and shaped modern day contentious politics.

Intrigued by this theory I wanted to find out whether this was true or not with the contention in Egypt from 2004 onwards. With this paper my aim is to find out whether the contentious repertoires of which Tilly speaks can be traced within Egyptian popular contention during the start of the twenty-first century.

---

<sup>1</sup> Tilly, Charles – *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2008) pp. 5

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 4

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. 4-5

<sup>4</sup> Tilly, Charles – *Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1834* (Social Science History, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1993) pp. 253-280

## 1.1 Research Question

The aim of Charles Tilly's research within contentious politics is to provide an explanation for how contentious performances and repertoires have evolved over time. Tilly's research brings us up to the earliest years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I would like to see whether the explanations Tilly puts forward ring true for the build-up to, and the revolution in Egypt 2011. My main research question is; *can Charles Tilly's interpretation of the evolution of contentious performances and repertoires be used in order to further our understanding of contentious performances during the events which led up to, and ended in the Egyptian revolution of 2011?*

I would then like to further analyze and present in what ways contentious repertoires can be traced in Egypt during the before mentioned period and thus I will extend the question with the following question; *in what ways does Tilly's theory of contentious repertoires further our understanding of the contentious performances during events which led up to and ended in the Egyptian revolution of 2011, and what are its shortcomings?*

Part of the second question is based on the hypothesis that contentious performances draw on accumulated experience from earlier political struggles and that there is a cultural aspect as to how this experience is applied in different settings. Depending on where and when a series of contentious performances take place, actors choose to adopt certain aspects of a repertoire, but stay away from others.<sup>5</sup> I would like to try and discern whether or not this is true for the Egyptian revolution and whether I can bring any cultural aspects to the forefront in my analysis.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to make an attempt at discerning whether the theory of contentious politics can help us further our understanding of the contentious

---

<sup>5</sup> Tilly, Charles – *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2008) pp. 15

performances which took place before and during the revolution in Egypt 2011 and the way in which claimants made their claims.

One of the more important aspects of this application of a largely western theory on an arguably non-western country such as Egypt is to see whether there are any differences in claim-making which can be traced back to cultural aspects or religious beliefs.

### 1.3 Method

I have chosen to use a hypothetic deductive method for this paper.<sup>6</sup> The hypothesis I will use is part of Tilly's take on contentious performances and repertoires. The hypothesis is that actors involved in contentious performances make use of experience from a long history of claim-making in order to make their own claims. Claim-makers may adopt certain aspects of previous repertoires while evolving others in order to suit the circumstances under which they find themselves. I wish to test whether adoptions of certain repertoires can be traced within the contentious performances in Egypt during the period 2004-2011.

In order to do this I will first of all present the fundamentals of the theory of contentious politics. I will then conduct a summary of previous research and case studies presented by and in part performed by Charles Tilly stretching from the 1760s up till the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With a brief history of the evolutionary process of contentious performances and repertoires I will make an attempt at examining whether traces of these repertoires can be found within the Egyptian struggle. The purpose of this part of the paper is to lay down the groundwork for further analysis.

Then I will conduct a quantitative study<sup>7</sup> of the development in Egypt during the period from January 2004 until April 2011. I will gather data from the Al-Jazeera online news database. The first of two reasons for choosing to solely use this database is that most of the Egypt based papers are either run by, or owned by

---

<sup>6</sup> Teorell, Jan – Svensson, Torsten – *”Att fråga och att svara: Samhällsvetenskaplig metod”* (Liber AB: Ljubljana, 2007) pp. 48-52

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp. 264-66

either the Egyptian government or the opposition. In an attempt to avoid gathering biased data I have made this decision. The second reason for using only Al-Jazeera is the fact that most western news-sources are not consistent in their reporting of the developments and often when reports do occur they cite Al-Jazeera as their source of information. I am very well aware of the limitations this puts on the results of my data-collecting. This is something I will keep in mind during my work.

I motivate my choice of method based on the fact that media outlets are able to convey facts regarding time-place setting, giving me further insight into the interaction within the contentious performances.<sup>8</sup> If I had more time, I would probably have wanted to use interviews to further my understanding of what drove people involved to choose the methods of claim-making they did.

While collecting the data, I gathered information regarding any gathering of ten or more people making claims on other peoples interests. I noted; 1) when they met, 2) what affiliation they might have had, 3) the amount of participants, 4) in what form the claim-making was made and finally 5) in regard to what issues they made their claims. Every so often data would be missing as to the number of participants or affiliation. In these cases I would leave this data out. At times more than one account of contentious performance has been reported within the same city on a given date, when this occurs, I count these as one performance since demonstrations are often interconnected. When violence breaks out within part of a performance I would count this as a separate performance since I regard this as a different form of contention than a demonstration for example.

I will then use the gathered data to see whether I can distinguish any pattern in the increase and decrease in contentious activity. Using the Al-Jazeera news database and reports from Freedom House and other independent observers I will then try and discern how and for what reason performances were altered.

I believe the intersubjectivity of this paper to be high since all the material is freely available, apart from a few articles I had to buy.

---

<sup>8</sup> Tilly, Charles – “*Contentious Performances*” (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2008) pp. 10-1

### 1.3.1 Material and Previous Research

For my paper I will rely on publications by Charles Tilly and his co-workers to both explain the theory of contentious performances and repertoires and to provide a summary of case studies from different locations and eras.

I will then make use of Freedom House reports to account for the developments in Egypt for the chosen period.

For my analysis I will rely on data gathered from Al-Jazeera's online news database to attempt to present the different contentious performances and displays. I will also make use of different statistics databases from different independent organizations to argue for or against the relevance of different contentious performances and whether or not they might have actually been made part of the Egyptian repertoire.

To the best of my knowledge, there is no similar study of contentious repertoires in Egypt at the moment.



## 2 Theoretical framework

The concept of contentious repertoires which is an integral part of Charles Tilly's theory of contentious politics will be the main focus of my paper. I will therefore present a brief explanation of the main concepts within the theory of contentious repertoires and performances. I will also present a model by Tilly how this can be applied to other case studies and how I have interpreted his explanation of the model in order to be able to apply it to my own case study.

### 2.1 Contentious Performances and Repertoires

Contentious politics, as defined by Charles Tilly, has been summarily described by him as:

“...interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interests, in which governments appear either as targets, initiators of claims or third parties”.<sup>9</sup>

When it comes to contentious claim-making it is important to note that governments often act as neither makers nor receivers of claims. Often contentious claims are made and received by religious, ethnic, economic or other non-governmental actors.<sup>10</sup>

The manner in which these claims are made is determined by what accumulated experience people draw on and what constraints are put on them externally. Accumulated experience and external constraints both limit the choices available to claim-makers and at the same time help them evolve available

---

<sup>9</sup> Tilly, Charles – “*Contentious Performances*” (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2008) pp. 5

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 6-7

repertoires.<sup>11</sup> In order to explain for what reason changes in repertoires occur it is important first of all to see at what time a new type of contentious performance occur, the explanation as to why the change occurred seldom lie in the actual claim-making, but can be explained through changes in the routine social life of the claim-makers.<sup>12</sup> These social routines, the way in which claim-makers go about their daily business, interact with each other, and the way in which they relate to official figures such as politicians are aspects which will make sure no two different contentious performances will be identical. Under different circumstances, different adaptations of and additions to the routines of contentious performances will be made in order for them to fit the circumstances in question and get claims across to whomever might be the receiver. The reaction from the receiver of claims might in itself call for additional changes in the contentious performance of the claim-maker.<sup>13</sup> In this manner, over time, certain changes and additions to the performances will form an integral part of the repertoire and be made available to future claim-makers to draw on.<sup>14</sup>

Tilly is a proponent of using relational realism as a tool in order to understand social processes and the behavior of individuals within them. According to Tilly Relational realism analyzes social relations and how interactions between, and actions performed by individuals help shape both organizational and individual behavior.<sup>15</sup> Tilly himself explains his view on relational realism as follows:

“Relational realism concentrates on connections among people and social sites—for example, households, neighborhoods, associations, firms, or organized occupations. It sees those connections as concatenating, aggregating, and disaggregating readily, forming organizational structures at the same time as they shape individual behavior.”<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Tilly, Charles – “*Contentious Performances*” (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2008) pp. 4-5

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp. 8-9

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp. 11-2

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp. 12

<sup>15</sup> Ashfort, Adam – “*Charles Tilly*” (Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 153, No. 3, 2009) pp. 372

<sup>16</sup> Tilly, Charles – “*Explaining Social Processes*” (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2008) pp. 7

What relational realism means to collective claim-making and contentious performances is that it would be harder for us to gain an understanding of these processes if we were only to look at the actions of a group rather than the actions of individuals acting as part of a group. The same way, in which individuals shape the identity and performances of the group, the group in turn creates a demand for uniformity which dictates how individuals are supposed to cheer and march for example.<sup>17</sup>

The repertoires which claim-makers draw on are divided into four different categories ranging from weak to strong:

- The first category is total lack of a repertoire, where mere instinct or what would be most effective at the moment governs claim-makers actions; performances like these will not affect any further performance in any way.
- The second category is the weak repertoire where drawing on previous experience is easier than innovating new performances.
- The third category is the strong repertoire, which can be compared to a stage act or a theatrical performance, I find that this analogy provides a very good description; claim-makers much like stage actors use available scripts which leave room for innovation, however limited.
- The fourth and final category is the rigid repertoire, where claim-makers follow a strict pattern of action, much like a military drill. In this category there is no innovation whatsoever.

According to Tilly, most contentious performances fall within the third category and more rarely within the other three.<sup>18</sup>

Another factor, which shapes contentious performances, is the organizational structure of national regimes. Generally authoritarian regimes have a lower tolerance for contentious gatherings and claims than their democratic

---

<sup>17</sup> Tilly, Charles – “*Contentious Performances*” (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2008) pp. 17

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp. 15

counterparts. This will limit the choices available to claim-makers and force them to adapt the way in which they make their claims to the circumstances at hand.<sup>19</sup>

### 2.1.1 How to Detect and Describe Performances and Repertoires

When looking for repertoires within a series of performances, the first thing is to establish whether there is any repertoire at all. If a series of performances fall into one of the first two categories mentioned before, it might be hard or even impossible to determine the presence of a repertoire. If performances on the other hand fall into one of the latter two categories one should be able to discern patterns of recurring events with similar execution. It might be that a certain pattern emerges for a social movement as a whole or for individual groups within the same movement. The repertoire is usually quite similar between different actors if they stem from the same background outside of the contentious claim-making, drawing on the same accumulated experience. The most obvious evidence one might find of the occurrence of repertoires is if it is named and defined by the actors themselves. If an actor defines a contentious performance as a demonstration or a picket it is quite obvious they base their choice of action on previous experience of demonstrations or pickets.<sup>20</sup>

When repertoires as part of a series of contentious performances have been defined, they can be broken up in segments in order to determine whether changes or additions to existing performances have been made during the course of contention. If an existing performance has evolved it might be interesting to see whether it has evolved on a regional or national basis, in the performance of certain groups or for a movement as a whole or just concerning claim-making regarding certain issues. Performances often change due to adaptations on behalf of the receiver of claims. If the receiver or third party happens to be a government or head of state it might be interesting to look at changes in policy which might have forced claim-makers to adapt their approach.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Tilly, Charles – “*Contentious Performances*” (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2008) pp. 18-19

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 27

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp. 28

There's much debate among researchers about what method best helps to define segments or events of contention. The main three which are presented by Tilly are; 1) using definitions and labels actors themselves use to describe events, 2) using definitions made by the media to describe events or 3) just examining periods of contention on a day-to-day basis.<sup>22</sup> Tilly defines a contentious gathering as a group of ten people or more, gathering at a pre-determined public place in order to make claims which bear on someone else's interest.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Tilly, Charles – *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2008) pp. 10-1

<sup>23</sup> Tarrow, Sidney – *Charles Tilly and the Practice of Contentious Politics* (Social Movement Studies, Vol. 7, No.3, 2008) pp. 231

# 3 History of Contentious Performances

In order to give an understanding for what reasons, and under what circumstances, the social movement and within it contentious performances were born and with time evolved, I will attempt to briefly summarize its history starting with the birth of the social movement in England, which according to Tilly took place in the 1760s. I will then describe how performances and repertoires evolved during the following centuries up until the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## 3.1 Eighteenth century and the birth of the social movement in England

During the 1760s, before the birth of the social movement in England and its colonies, contentious gatherings mainly took on the form of physical action against persons or groups who deviated from group standards or were perceived to pose a threat to interests of other groups. During the Stamp Act Crisis of 1765-1766, Boston sailors and artisans, who were dissatisfied with the levies which were put on the colonies, took on a very hands-on approach to their displays of contention. Their repertoire of contention drew heavily on a physical approach to contentious performances and involved, apart from blockages and boycotts, sacking of houses, burning of property, breaking of windows, attacks on, and even hanging of tax collectors and British officials.<sup>24</sup>

In England routines were very similar, the same kind of aggressive claim-making dominated contentious performances, and had done so for the better part of half a century. For the last fifty years, England had been at war, growing

---

<sup>24</sup> Tilly, Charles et al. – *"Social Movements: 1768-2008"* (2nd Edition) (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2009) pp. 16, 22-3

stronger, centralizing power and in turn been forced to borrow and raise taxes in order to sustain the war effort. This had been a source of contention for ordinary citizens.<sup>25</sup> This was however about to change with the parliamentarization of British politics. With the increased parliamentarization the autonomy of the Crown and lords weakened, and with it their ability to use troops in a repressive manner in claim-making against ordinary citizens. Political rights for citizens were broadened; they could now make more direct claims on power holders through voting and running for elections which up until this point had been a privilege enjoyed only by the ruling classes. This in effect made local mediators and brokers, who had been the targets of contention, redundant. New political leaders started emerging, forming political parties and social movements. Popular contentious performances started involving organization of political meetings and manifestations of approval or disapproval of parliament through collective claims.<sup>26</sup>

During this period an antagonist and Member of Parliament named John Wilkes may have been the front figure of the first established social movement in England. In 1762, Wilkes started to edit his own opposition newspaper, which he named *The North Briton*. In issue number 45 of the paper, he criticized a royal speech and accused the King of lying, and for the offence of publicly implying that a royalty had lied he would be tried the following year. Wilkes went on to win the trial and later the same year he republished the same issue but with one addition, a pornographic pamphlet. Wilkes was ejected from Parliament and facing another trial he chose to escape the country for France. He did not however remain in France, but secretly returned to England in 1768 and ran for Parliament. Although being successful at the polls, Parliament refused to seat him and he was jailed awaiting trial for his earlier offences. During his time in jail he successfully ran for Parliament another three times, and was consequently rejected a seat in all three instances. Due to his outspoken manner and legal success he was revered among the British citizens as a champion of citizenship rights. Thanks to his

---

<sup>25</sup> Tilly, Charles – “Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1834” (Social Science History, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1993) pp. 254

<sup>26</sup> Tilly, Charles – “Parliamentarization of Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834” (Theory of Society 26, 1997) pp. 248-50

winning of court cases he established the legal right to publicly criticize governmental and royal actions. His following, calling themselves Wilkites, may have been the first organized social movement. Their performance was largely unchanged and attacks on opposition were commonplace. What they did add to the repertoire were public assemblies and marches instead of sending representatives to power holders to speak on their behalf.<sup>27</sup> Public assemblies were actually the only means for a mass-gathering as officials denied reformers access to public buildings. Instead they had to hold their meetings in the streets, and so the demonstration became part of the repertoire. The march was also added to the routine as groups of reformers made their way to the demonstrations. At this point symbolism became more important as an identifying mark for movements. For the Wilkites, the Liberty Cap was used. It held great symbolism to the British as it had been given by the Romans to emancipated slaves.<sup>28</sup> As contentious gatherings in public places became more commonplace through demonstrations and marches, authorities turned a blind eye to these as long as proceedings were kept peaceful. On the other hand, under the Riot Act, authorities still clamped down hard on any transgressions. In cases where demonstrations turned violent and targeted persons or property of the ruling classes, as had been the norm earlier, police would disperse the crowds through physical means.<sup>29</sup>

On the other side of the Atlantic, a group led by small business-owners and workers called the Boston's Sons of Liberty conducted their claim-making in an exemplary way. During the Stamp Crisis of 1765-1766 when, as mentioned earlier, violence against tax-collectors and officials was part of the routine, the Sons of Liberty, much like their English counterparts, organized public meetings, demonstrations, marches, petitioning and pamphleteering and further established the social movement as a recognized form of contentious claim-making. Their common use of the letter 45 was a reference to the issue of *The North Briton*

---

<sup>27</sup> Tilly, Charles et al. – *"Social Movements: 1768-2008"* (2nd Edition) (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2009) pp. 16-9

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp. 30

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, pp. 20-1



which had been published by John Wilkes. This serves as evidence of their inspiration from Wilkes antagonistic antics.<sup>30</sup>

## 3.2 Nineteenth century

Royal influence further decreased with the increase of capitalization and industrial expansion. With the industrial revolution came a great surge in merchant and financier influence on the government, and with the expanding market, laborers were no longer as dependent on individual landlords or masters for their wages. The increased demand for labor also made slaves a valued commodity.<sup>31</sup>

Anti-slavery campaigns first started appearing in Manchester during the 18th century. A Manchester petition from 1787 contained 11 000 signatures, which would amount to roughly two-thirds of the male population who were eligible to sign. Petitions for the abolition of slave trade had been sent to Parliament as early as 1783 by mainly Quaker and Evangelist congregations. In 1787 the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed and with it a social movement. The anti-slavery movement created its own repertoire through the means available, mass-meetings in connection with church services during which petitions would be signed, demonstrations and the addition of a new performance; a sugar boycott in which an estimated 300.000 families participated. The persistence of the movement and a surge in petitions eventually pressured the British and United States governments to abolish and outlaw the slave trade. This led to a divide in the United States which culminated in the American Civil War.<sup>32</sup> With the success of the anti-slavery movement, contentious performances had evolved from individual and violent displays of contention to organized movements capable of pressuring governments for political change. The change seems to be largely due

---

<sup>30</sup> Tilly, Charles et al. – *"Social Movements: 1768-2008"* (2nd Edition) (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2009) pp. 23-5

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, pp.26-7

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp. 33-4

to expanded liberties of citizens and merchants, decreased influence of the Crown on politics and the political entrepreneurship of individual actors.

In 1838, the Peoples Charter was published. It had been achieved through negotiation between reformist and radical leaders and issued a series of demands involving female suffrage, a ten hour working day limit and a series of electoral demands secret ballots and decreased requirements for citizens to be allowed to run for Parliament. The Chartists as they came to call themselves made claims through peaceful means such as demonstrations and petitioning even though violent incidents formed a minor part of their repertoire. In 1840 Chartists joined the ranks of an umbrella organization called the National Charter Organization which contained 400 individual branches. The National Charter Organization added a new kind of performance to the existing repertoire; organizing a mock-parallel parliament. The aim of this parallel Parliament was not in any way to pose a threat to the government or to run for elections as this would have caused reprisals from the sitting Parliament. The aim was merely to display perceived weaknesses in the governing body and thus it was allowed to carry out its performance for the following eight years. The Chartists laid the foundation for the repertoires of other social movements during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even displayed the tricolor of France during demonstrations which took place at the same time as the French Revolution of 1848.<sup>33</sup>

During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, contention had been growing in France. During the July Monarchy (1830-1848), workers demonstrated and marched, mainly during funerals or authorized public holidays, for fear of being identified as workers coalitions, which at the time were outlawed. As political organizations started emerging, certain symbols were used in connection with rallies and marches. These symbols included the red cap, which stood for revolution, the white flag which stood for liberty and the black flag which stood for insurrection. The first mass demonstrations were held in 1831, one of which led to an insurrection which put the city in a deadlock between 21<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of November. In turn the government answered with repressive measures against any public gatherings and these subsequently receded. In times of relaxed

---

<sup>33</sup> Tilly, Charles et al. – *"Social Movements: 1768-2008"* (2nd Edition) (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2009) pp. 46-8

governmental repression and increased democratization, social movements gained momentum and during times of increased repression social movements again receded, establishing a clear link between democratization and the increase in social movement activity. As unemployment rose, demonstrations and strikes became more prominent in 1848 and the social movement reached its peak in the French Revolution of 1848.<sup>34</sup>

During the years after the Revolution governmental repression tightened once again and public displays of contention disappeared during the following 15 years. Following the period of relative quiet on the social movement front, France went through a process of development not dissimilar to the British one, which preceded it. Rapid industrialization during the 1860s led to strengthening of citizens political rights and in line with democratization, the repression of social movements eased. In 1864, the government started allowing strikes to a limited extent, and in 1868 workers were allowed to hold public meetings without acquiring approval from the authorities. The frequency of demonstrations increased during 1870 and in late April a procession of torch wielding citizens marched through the streets of Lyon singing the Marseillaise following a flag bearer displaying the red flag, symbolizing revolutionary intent. By September of the same year an autonomous commune had been established by protesters. The following year authorities launched violent actions against it, which led to its demise.<sup>35</sup> The social movement in France had now taken form. The French claim-makers had created their own repertoire. The basic performances were much like the ones seen in Britain, but it had taken on its own form of identity and symbolisms which were typical for the French context at the time.

Social movements and the manner in which they made claims evolved in quite a few ways during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through gradual democratization, the Crown had lost influence over politics, the power had shifted to the Parliament and in turn citizens had gained the power to affect governmental decision-making in new ways. Displays of contention were no longer restricted to funerals and authorized public holidays which made organization of street marches, demonstrations and

---

<sup>34</sup> Tilly, Charles et al. – *"Social Movements: 1768-2008"* (2nd Edition) (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2009) pp. 39-40

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp. 39-40

political rallies possible. As organized political opposition had begun to be tolerated by authorities, the violent performances, which had dominated the contentious repertoire of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, became less appealing to claim-makers and appeared mainly at times when demonstrators clashed with police. Organizations took on different symbols, cultural markers such as songs and labels as part of their performances and thus created an identity for themselves. National politics and government became the receivers of claim-making instead of local power-holders, which made claim-making less personal and local and this further dampened the aggressive nature of claim-makers. And finally, social movements had started to show signs of interconnectedness between themselves both within nations and even stretching across borders. The further internationalization of social movements will be the main topic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century expansion and transformation.<sup>36</sup>

### 3.3 Twentieth century

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, international connections between social movements had grown in importance. Flows of migrants between countries had increased and with it the interconnectedness of social movements had been strengthened. This had been used by claim-makers in order to outflank authorities. Governmental claims of being democratic and social movement claims of the opposition became more important. It grew more important for a state to get validation from other nations in order to avoid scrutiny and even intervention by actors outside of the state.<sup>37</sup>

In the more democratic West, where democracy had been established to a greater extent, contentious performances had come to be a more accepted part of everyday life and the terms under which these would take place had been negotiated which minimized the violence. Outside of the democratic West, in countries such as Russia and the colonies, leftist and anti-colonial movements had

---

<sup>36</sup> Tilly, Charles et al. – *“Social Movements: 1768-2008”* (2nd Edition) (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2009) pp. 51-6

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pp. 63-4

started emerging. In Latin America and Asia contention had started to grow among workers against their colonial masters. With the Russian Revolution of 1905, Russian workers had brought the revolutionary repertoire of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to their homeland. After a series of revolutions, the Comintern was established. The Comintern or Communist International was an attempt at uniting workers in the communist struggle worldwide and create an international communist state. This was an attempt to create an international coalition of social movements on an unprecedented scale.<sup>38</sup>

Taking a leap forward in history we arrive at the tumultuous year of 1968. Inspired by the communist revolutionaries, university students and social movements around the world started making socialist claims and hosted anti-colonial demonstrations. In France, a student movement effectively paralyzed the state. Through demonstrations and petitions they had achieved nationwide strikes and factory occupations through a student-worker alliance. Although the movement never had any intention of overthrowing the government, it now seemed quite possible. This of course never happened since concessions were made on behalf of the government which split the movement. Student movements in Canada gained momentum, demanding the establishment of an independent socialist state and in Mexico hundreds of thousands of students took to the streets demanding political rights.<sup>39</sup>

In Eastern Europe contentious performances on the other hand bore no socialist aspirations, quite the opposite. In Poland, students and intellectuals defied the severe repression which they suffered and organized demonstrations and petitions demanding civil rights and economic reform. In Prague dissidents were speaking out against communist censorship and brought reformist Alexander Dubek to power of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. In response to this liberalization Soviet invaded the country. These social movements have one thing in common even though the demands vary greatly between them. During the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century claims generally involved demands for autonomy, rights to self-expression and a great deal of critique aimed at the bureaucratic governing of

---

<sup>38</sup> Tilly, Charles et al. – *"Social Movements: 1768-2008"* (2nd Edition) (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2009) pp. 67-8

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, pp. 68-9

the post-industrial era. The importance of identity within these struggles grew stronger; feminist groups demanding gender equality, groups promoting homosexual rights, Native American rights and demands for more environmentally conscious policies started emerging.<sup>40</sup>

In 1989, anti-communist movements had gained great support. The use of banners with slogans written in English became more prominent in countries where the mother tongue was different. This serves as a testament to the influence of international actors and states during this era.<sup>41</sup> In Soviet Russia, demands for autonomy in the occupied states of Eastern Europe grew stronger and weakened Soviet leadership and eventually it was overthrown. In Beijing, a student memorial turned into demonstrations amassing hundreds of thousands of protesters demanding civil liberties and economic reform. The demonstrations showed cultural symbolisms such as the old ritual of kneeling on the steps in front of the Great Hall, humbly asking for a meeting in order to hand over petitions, singing songs and shoe tossing, which was a great insult. The demonstrations got inspiration from existing repertoires, staging marches, public assemblies, chanted slogans and arranged hunger strikes. Following the bloody military intervention, public displays of contention disappeared altogether despite international attention.<sup>42</sup>

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the invention of the radio, TV and different forms of electronic messages played a more integral role in making models for contentious performances more readily available to social movements across the globe. As contentious performances were carried out in one country, viewers could draw experience from reports of successful acts of contention and apply the experience to their own repertoire.<sup>43</sup>

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, contentious repertoires evolved in a few ways, but they do not seem to have evolved as much as they intensified existing performances, mainly the importance of identity. As more countries started allowing contentious performances to take place or at least turn a blind eye to

---

<sup>40</sup> Tilly, Charles et al. – *"Social Movements: 1768-2008"* (2nd Edition) (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2009) pp. 69-71

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, pp. 76-7

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, pp. 73-5

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, pp. 79

their existence, and with the increased reporting of the media, I would speculate on the importance for individual social movements to form a clear and distinctive identity in order to be recognized and remain in the media spotlight. In North America for example, the hippie movement of the sixties and seventies formed a clear identity with their own style of clothing, music, festivals, slogans and symbols as part of their movement. The same can be said for the student movement in China. They applied their own take on identity as a part of their repertoire.

The presence of media and the ability for social movements to, in a more direct way, get their message across to more people altered performances. The increasing display of placards and banners with slogans written in English, instead of local languages, stands as a testament to the fact that social movements had become very aware of the media and the influence it had on an international scale. Tilly does however point out that even though the means in which media can cover contentious performances have evolved greatly, there is no evidence that media cause social movements.<sup>44</sup>

Quite possibly the biggest change in social movements during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the rate at which it spread outside the countries where they were originally born and routines were quickly adopted by new social movements. Authorities had also adapted to the rise in contentious performances and made interaction with claim-makers and riot control part of their routine.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.4 Twenty-first century

The rapid development of mobile phone technology and increasing access to cellular networks and the internet during the 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century has made a great impact on the way in which social movements operate. In May 2007, in the small town of Xiamen in southern China, construction of a chemical plant was under way and was a source of contention in the community. Activists started

---

<sup>44</sup> Tilly, Charles et al. – *"Social Movements: 1768-2008"* (2nd Edition) (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2009) pp. 85, 88

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, pp. 82

sending out a mass-SMS stating that the chemical plant was a threat to the community and would cause leukemia and deformed babies. The SMS which was circulated among the inhabitants called for a mass demonstration on 1<sup>st</sup> of June in front of a government building. Protesters were instructed to wear yellow ribbons to display their solidarity with the cause of the movement. The perceived threat had been observed by local bloggers through an online petition which was going to be handed over to the authorities. Despite attempts by authorities to restrict access to information regarding the chemical plant or any searches regarding the dangers of the chemical used, over 10,000 citizens took to the streets in protest singing local songs and using blogs onto which they uploaded pictures and videos, which effectively halted the construction and forced a relocation of the plant.<sup>46</sup>

This contentious performance shows a great deal of evolution of the existing repertoire. Demonstrations were held with ribbons and local songs as a form of identification with the cause. There are however a few additions to the repertoire. Firstly; the use of SMS-technology as a means of rallying people and calling on them to join the upcoming protest proved to be an effective use of the available technology. Secondly; bloggers gained information about the potential hazards of the plant through an online petition. Although the use of petitions had been part of repertoires for a long time, the accessibility, which the internet provided the means for, meant it would reach more people in a shorter amount of time. The Chinese authorities on the other hand seem to have added means of countering this type of contentious performance to their own repertoire, and in an attempt to exert censorship they blocked certain search words and domains.

Following the relocation of the abovementioned chemical plant, the community of Guangzhou found itself in the same situation as the citizens of Xiamen had previously. The inhabitants of Guangzhou imitated the repertoire which had been successful previously. Having learnt from their previous experience in Xiamen, authorities attempted to block bloggers sites, but where they managed to shut one down, another took its place. The authorities then made an attempt to disperse the crowd using police intervention which led to extensive fighting. Despite the efforts on behalf of the authorities to put a stop to the

---

<sup>46</sup> Tilly, Charles et al. – *"Social Movements: 1768-2008"* (2nd Edition) (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2009) pp. 95



protests, the claim-makers pervasiveness showed results. Protests subsided when authorities gave in and reported that the chemical plant would be built away from urban areas.<sup>47</sup>

During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the use of mobile telephones has increased greatly, allowing for citizens to communicate with greater ease than before. In developing countries where poor infrastructure or forbidding landscape has made it hard or even impossible for people to communicate by landlines, the increase in mobile telephone use has been great. This increase has not slipped by the watchful eye of oppressive regimes. Since 2006, many of these regimes including, Iran, Burma and China have impeded the use of, or even blocked SMS-services, internet-services and the use of cellular phones.<sup>48</sup>

Even though it might seem like technological innovations have revolutionized the way in which social movements organize themselves, Tilly airs a word of caution of technological determinism. The change in repertoire during the first few years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century hasn't really been revolutionary. Social movements operate in much the same way as they have previously, changes in social movements stem from changes in their political and social context rather than through technological breakthroughs. As new means of communication become available to claim-makers it only really serves to strengthen the structure of those already involved in the movement. In a way it is as inclusive as it is exclusive to those who can't access the information which is spread.<sup>49</sup> Tilly goes on to claim that previous innovations such as the radio and television during the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not transform social life or political action. The 20<sup>th</sup> century innovations provided a means for those, who didn't know how to read to take part of news, since newspapers had been the main source of information in previous centuries. The internet however poses a similar problem as newspapers did previously; while it is true that access to information is more readily available, it still excludes a large part of developing countries since most web sites are produced by

---

<sup>47</sup> Tilly, Charles et al. – *"Social Movements: 1768-2008"* (2nd Edition) (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2009) pp. 96

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp. 96-7

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, pp. 98

Americans in English. All those who do not possess sufficient knowledge of English are thus excluded from taking part of that information.<sup>50</sup>

For those who are not excluded from taking part of information posted by bloggers, news sites and social forums, international activism has changed in a number of ways. Social movements are not as close-knit as they used to be but have taken on the form of a loosely structured organization reducing the importance which ideology play on personal involvement. The gap between national and local issues has been decreased; it has become easier for local issues to be raised on a national scale through involvement in larger social movements and easier for resource-poor organizations to voice their own issues and opinions within larger social movements. And finally, protests do not seem to fade away in the same manner as before, but more often result in lasting campaigns.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Tilly, Charles et al. – *"Social Movements: 1768-2008"* (2nd Edition) (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2009) pp. 102-4

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, pp. 106

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 An Introduction to the Uprising in Egypt

To briefly summarize the history of Egypt, it gained independence from Great Britain in 1922, and full sovereignty following the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. The newly established monarchy was overthrown in a 1952 coup led by Colonel Gamel Abdel Nasser. During Nasser's rule a repressive police state was established and he remained its ruler up until his death in 1970. Nasser was succeeded by Anwar al-Sadat, who established a presidential political system which guaranteed political and civil rights to Egyptian citizens. The political and civil rights which were promised were however never put into practice. Sadat ruled Egypt until his assassination in 1981 and was succeeded by Mubarak, who immediately declared a state of emergency which has been renewed every third year ever since.

Despite receiving large amounts of foreign aid, the socio-economic situation in Egypt has been one of steady decline. As living conditions became steadily worse an Islamist insurgency was fueled during the 1990s. Authorities reacted by arresting thousands of suspects and cracking down on dissidents. By the late 1990s high levels of economic growth alleviated Egypt's socioeconomic problems. In 2001, the positive development turned following the September 11 attacks. Fewer tourists visited Egypt and foreign investment subsided. Anti-war protests in connection with the American-led invasion of Iraq spurred widespread protests in Egypt during 2003. These protests shifted focus and became anti-government protests as numbers increased; demonstrations were quickly dispersed by security forces in a harsh and violent crackdown.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2005, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2005&country=6730>

## 4.2 Egyptian Policies during the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The Egyptian state has been formally democratic since the establishment of the presidential political system in 1971. This has however never been put into practice. Religious parties are prohibited in Egypt and the establishment of non-religious parties has to be approved by the Political Parties Committee. Since the establishment of the Committee in 1977 only four political parties have been approved and more than 60 have been rejected.

Corruption is widespread in Egypt and poses serious problems – foreign investors have been complaining that bribes have become an integral part of doing business in Egypt. According to Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, the rate of corruption has become progressively more widespread during the period 2004-2008, until the trend turned and improved during 2009/2010.<sup>53</sup>

Freedom of the press is extremely limited; the state controls all terrestrial television channels and the three leading daily newspapers, with the President even appointing the editors. A few private satellite channels and radio channels have been established. They are subject to state influence and limited to entertainment. The government has encouraged publishing of opposition newspapers, but since the state controls publications through its monopoly on printing and distribution, opposition papers have to be printed outside the country. The state has the legal right to censor any publications brought in to the country, which is a right it has been practicing to its full extent. Direct criticism of the President, his family, the government, the military, and discussions regarding Christian-Muslim tensions or perceived criticism aimed at Islam are all prohibited. Many bloggers, journalists, as well as their publications have been affected by this, resulting in severe prison sentences and closure of publications.

Freedom of assembly and association is restricted. In order to organize a demonstration or a public meeting of any kind, organizers must apply for permission from the Ministry of the Interior. These applications are usually

---

<sup>53</sup> Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index: Egypt, 2004-2010, retrieved 2011-05-22, [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi)

rejected. In 2003 a new law went into effect. The Law of Associations prohibits any association “threatening national unity [or] violating public morals”. The law prohibits unlawful associations from receiving foreign aid without the approval of the Ministry of Social Affairs, requires NGO board members to be pre-approved by the state and enables the ministry to dissolve any NGO without judicial order. Another law passed in 2003 was the Unified Labor Law, limiting the right to strike to “non-strategic” industries, and any strike would need the approval of the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation.

The judiciary is independent and impartial, and regarded as one of the more independent judiciaries in the Arab world. However, with the state of emergency, certain Emergency State Security Courts have been established, denying defendants many of their legal rights. These courts issue verdicts which cannot be appealed and may only be appealed to the President. The Emergency Law denies citizens many of their basic rights. Under this law, the government is authorized to wiretap telephones, intercept mail, and conduct searches without a warrant. Suspects may be detained and held without charge as long as they are deemed a threat to national security. The UN Committee against Torture has concluded that there is “widespread evidence of torture and ill-treatment” against suspects by the State Security Intelligence Agency.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2005, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2005&country=6730>

## 4.3 Egyptian contention 2004-2011

### Contentious performances reported by Al-Jazeera in Egypt 2004-2010

Period	Demonstrations/Rallies	Strikes	Violent Action	Other	Total	Mean Size
Jan-Feb-Mar 2004	1	0	0	0	1	3 000
Apr-May-Jun 2004	0	0	0	0	0	Unavailable
Jul-Aug-Sep 2004	0	0	0	1	1	Unavailable
Oct-Nov-Dec 2004	1	0	0	1	2	1 000
Jan-Feb-Mar 2005	8	0	1	3	12	260
Apr-May-Jun 2005	9	0	1	3	13	2 800
Jul-Aug-Sep 2005	4	0	1	2	7	2 480
Oct-Nov-Dec 2005	3	0	8	2	13	1 472
Jan-Feb-Mar 2006	0	0	0	0	0	Unavailable
Apr-May-Jun 2006	4	0	2	0	6	933
Jul-Aug-Sep 2006	4	1	0	0	5	175
Oct-Nov-Dec 2006	1	0	0	0	1	Unavailable
Jan-Feb-Mar 2007	2	2	0	3	7	567
Apr-May-Jun 2007	1	0	2	2	5	260
Jul-Aug-Sep 2007	0	1	0	0	1	27 000
Oct-Nov-Dec 2007	0	2	0	0	2	27 000
Jan-Feb-Mar 2008	2	3	1	0	6	11 325
Apr-May-Jun 2008	5	0	4	4	13	15 288
Jul-Aug-Sep 2008	0	0	1	0	1	300
Oct-Nov-Dec 2008	1	0	0	0	1	300
Jan-Feb-Mar 2009	1	0	0	0	1	50 000
Apr-May-Jun 2009	0	0	0	0	0	Unavailable
Jul-Aug-Sep 2009	0	0	0	0	0	Unavailable
Oct-Nov-Dec 2009	4	0	0	0	4	423
Jan-Feb-Mar 2010	1	0	2	0	3	80
Apr-May-Jun 2010	5	0	0	1	6	614
Jul-Aug-Sep 2010	0	0	0	2	2	750 000
Oct-Nov-Dec 2010	5	0	9	2	16	1670
January 2011	14	1	11	2	28	48 958
February 2011	30	12	9	0	51	182 021
March 2011	4	0	2	0	6	1 750
April 2011	5	0	0	0	5	1 666
<b>Total:</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>43 573</b>

Compiled from 2521 Al-Jazeera Articles relating to Egypt during the period Jan-2004 - April 2011

The above table is the result of my compilation of data from Al-Jazeera Articles<sup>55</sup> relating to contentious performances in Egypt from the start of January 2004 until the end of April 2011. The column which I've designated *other* contains events such as boycotts, petitions, written reports and internet campaigns that are not as prominent as the other categories.

#### 4.3.1 Contention during 2004

According to Al-Jazeera, the year 2004 was fairly quiet regarding contentious performances. The few performances which occurred were two accounts of demonstrations, one account of students handing out pamphlets and a series of car bombs which hit resorts in Sinai. Following the bombings, 5000 residents in the local area were arrested and some were reportedly tortured. The relative quiet regarding contentious performances might be due to repressive actions taken by the state during the past year. In 2003, protests against the American invasion of Iraq turned into mass demonstrations against the government. The demonstrations triggered harsh crackdowns by security forces leaving hundreds injured.

Under growing pressure from both within the country and from outside, calling for political and economic reform, Mubarak appointed a new prime minister and replaced nearly half of his cabinet. The new Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif introduced a number of changes involving an overhaul of customs regulations and reduced import tariffs. These promises of reform might also account for the relative calm in the year of 2004.

26 citizens were jailed and sentenced to between one and five years accused of having belonged to the outlawed Islamic Liberation Party.<sup>56</sup> A consensus had been reached among the opposition parties, demands were presented calling for political reform including multi-candidate elections supervised by the judiciary, abolition of restrictions to form political parties and revoking of the state of

---

<sup>55</sup> Al-Jazeera in English, *Country: Egypt*, Al-Jazeera, 2004-2011, retrieved during April 2011, <http://english.aljazeera.net/category/country/egypt>

<sup>56</sup> Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2005, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2005&country=6730>

emergency. In December the first demonstration by the Kefaya movement took place.<sup>57</sup>

#### 4.3.2 Contention during 2005

With the previous demonstration by the Kefaya movement in December 2004, public displays of contention gained new force. In February Mubarak called for a constitutional amendment, allowing the first multi-candidate election in Egyptian history. After 12 years of resisting demands for multi-candidate elections, it seemed he had finally had given in to the demands of the opposition.<sup>58</sup> But the referendum restricted presidential candidates to those nominated by licensed parties, which in turn have to gain the approval of the Political Parties Committee. In response, major opposition groups called for a boycott of the referendum.

Demonstrations were kept peaceful with little police interference in the run-up to the elections and an unprecedented amount of demonstrations took place in 2005. Turnout for the election was low, under 25 percent. The election saw a surge of violence as security forces and pro-Mubarak activists attacked opposition voters and denied them access to polls in opposition strongholds.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4.3.3 Contention during 2006

Compared to the previous year, few demonstrations took place during 2006. Contentious performances were largely conducted by religious groups and journalists. Mubarak postponed municipal elections, claiming that reforms to ensure more democratic elections would take time. In reality it seems the government was afraid the Muslim Brotherhood would gain additional support in

---

<sup>57</sup> Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2006, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2006&country=6956>

<sup>58</sup> El-Mahdi, Rabab – “*Enough! Egypt's Quest for Democracy*” (Comparative Political Studies, Vol. 42, No. 8, 2009) pp. 1013

<sup>59</sup> Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2006, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2006&country=6956>



these elections.<sup>60</sup> The government also extended the Emergency Law despite having made promises to the contrary.

Tensions between Coptic Christians and Muslims rose following stabbings in three churches in the city of Alexandria. Clashes between the two sides erupted in connection with the funeral procession of one of the victims.

Demonstrations staged by the Kefaya Movement and the Muslim Brotherhood were attacked by security forces and hundreds of protesters were reported to have been arrested on charges of spreading propaganda and insulting the head of state. Following the success of the Muslim Brotherhood in the elections, it had nearly multiplied its parliamentary representation five-fold, 400 members of the organization were arrested. Reports of torture and sexual abuse of detainees kept coming in as detainees were released.

Following these incidents, journalists called on a nationwide journalist strike and took to the streets in protest. One of these demonstrations, numbering 200, was reported to have been attacked by security forces, resulting in severe beatings leaving one journalist raped and one murdered. Foreign journalists covering the demonstrations had their equipment seized by the police.<sup>61</sup>

#### 4.3.4 Contention during 2007

Constitutional amendments passed in 2007 allowed citizens to form political parties, as long as they were not of religious, gender or ethnic origin. The amendments also put limitations on judicial monitoring of elections. Independent monitors put the turnout of eligible voters at about 5 percent as the political opposition had called for a boycott of the referendum.

As the election for the Shura Council, the upper house of the Egyptian Parliament was set to be held in June, the Egyptian authorities intensified the crackdown on members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Prominent members of the Brotherhood were arrested and had their assets frozen in order to limit their ability

---

<sup>60</sup> Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2008, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2008&country=7387>

<sup>61</sup> Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2007, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2007&country=7170>

to participate in any form during the elections. On election day, a major operation was launched arresting many members of the organization including six candidates for the election. 40 members of the Brotherhood were tried in August the same year, charged with terrorism and 29 financiers of the organization were tried for financing terrorism.

Several newspapers had reported of Mubaraks declining health, resulting in the arrests of four editors of prominent newspapers. The four editors were charged with *insulting the president* and were sentenced to one-year prison terms. Following the verdict, twenty-two newspapers went on strike.

2007 was also the year of the first formal prosecution of a blogger. The blogger was sentenced to four years in prison for *inciting hatred of Islam* and *insulting the president*.<sup>62</sup>

#### 4.3.5 Contention during 2008

With the intensifying arrests and detention of Muslim Brotherhood members, demonstrations by both the Brotherhood and other organizations were held, demanding the release of political prisoners. On April 6, a new organization was formed on the internet called The April 6 Movement, quickly gaining members, and a month later 75 000 people had signed up in support.

Most contentious performances took place around the time of the postponed municipal elections, protesting the hundreds of arrests of Brotherhood candidates and thousands of Brotherhood candidates being excluded from registering as candidates. 24 members of the Muslim Brotherhood were convicted of *belonging to a banned organization* and received prison sentences ranging from three to ten years.

Journalists were being harassed on a larger scale by security forces. They were prevented from covering events and were fined or even jailed on dubious charges. It became clear the government intended to assert control over the press.

Another four bloggers were prosecuted in 2008, three of which were still being detained by the end of the year.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2008, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2008&country=7387>

#### 4.3.6 Contention during 2009

There were very few demonstrations reported in 2009, Al-Jazeera reported four demonstrations in total, none of which were in relation to domestic politics. Several hundred protesters were arrested at the Gaza-Egypt border at the start of the year. This was the lowest number of demonstrations since 2004.

The government stepped up its efforts on repression of the press. Foreign journalists were expelled more often during 2009 and five journalists were fined after reporting on a murder trial of a former member of parliament. Several more bloggers were detained and the bloggers who were detained in 2008 were still detained at the end of 2009.<sup>64</sup>

#### 4.3.7 Contention during 2010

Tension grew strong during 2010 following reports of Mubaraks failing health sparking severe crackdowns by security forces. Parliamentary elections were to be held in November and even before the official campaign had started demonstrations held by the Muslim Brotherhood were forcefully subdued and an estimated 700 members were detained. Following the violent actions by the security forces against the Brotherhood, mass demonstrations broke out and in an attempt to quench the protests authorities restricted protesters ability to send SMS between each other.

As in previous elections the security forces prevented opposition supporters from entering polling stations by the use of force and shut down polls in opposition strongholds. Realizing there was no point in voting, the opposition called for a boycott of the elections.

Imposing further restrictions on the press, the government barred international observers from reporting on the elections and domestic observers were forced to register in advance in order to cover the proceedings. Several political columns

---

<sup>63</sup>Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2009, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2009&country=7601>

<sup>64</sup>Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2010, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2010&country=7816>

were cancelled by the authorities. Four independent television channels were also closed and widespread arrests of journalists were reported. One blogger was reported to have been beaten to death in an Alexandria street by police after posting a video showing police splitting the spoils from a drugs bust.<sup>65</sup> The Committee to Protect Journalists ranked Egypt as the tenth worst country in which to be a blogger.<sup>66</sup>

#### 4.3.8 The Egyptian Revolution of 2011

2011 got off to a violent start as demonstrations continued from the previous year. As the number of demonstrators soared, the security forces stepped up their violent efforts in an attempt to stop the protests. Reports of cs gas and live bullets being fired are common throughout Egypt as the protests spread through the country. The government accused the Muslim Brotherhood of organizing the uprising, claims which were denied by the Brotherhood. The demonstrators relied heavily on social media outlets such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook to organize the protests. In response, the government shut down all internet and SMS-traffic in major cities.

Following threats of “decisive measures”, the army was ordered into the streets of Cairo. This seems to have been a miscalculation by the authorities since most men have served with the armed forces for up to three years as part of their military service and have close ties with the army personnel. As masses grew too big for authorities to handle, the police was forced to step down, although attacks from pro-government supporters were still occurring.

At the end of January Mubarak seemed almost desperate, sacking his whole cabinet, appointing a vice-president, releasing political prisoners and making promises of concessions and talks with the opposition, but to no avail. Mubarak’s pleas fell on deaf ears, the demonstrators were adamant in their demand for the President’s resignation. On the eleventh of February an announcement was made

---

<sup>65</sup>Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2011, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2011&country=8031>

<sup>66</sup>Committee to Protect Journalists, *10 Worst Countries to be a Blogger*, Committee to Protect Journalists, retrieved on 2011-05-24 <http://www.cpj.org/reports/2009/04/10-worst-countries-to-be-a-blogger.php>

by the Vice-President. Mubarak was to resign effective immediately and power was to be handed over to the military.

Demonstrations quickly subsided following the president's resignation, although protesters still demanded that the former government be tried for their crimes against the people.<sup>67</sup>

## 4.4 Analysis

I base my analysis on information gathered from Al-Jazeera online news database.<sup>68</sup> The following is thus collected from Al-Jazeera unless I've put down a specific reference.

Delving deeper into the reasons as to why the revolution took place at this particular time, with Egypt already having missed three democratization waves in the Middle East, would require a lot more time than I have at my disposal. I will therefore focus on the contentious performances themselves and not the reason for their occurrence.<sup>69</sup> I believe it would suffice to say that the Egyptian people seemed to have grown tired of low salaries, inflated prices of foodstuffs, the increasing repression of political and civil liberties and the reoccurring promises on behalf of President Mubarak, which were seldom realized.

Egyptian demonstrators seem to be very well informed and public displays of contention most often coincide with political rulings and elections. Although demonstrations were not allowed without prior consent from the authorities, they were in no way limited to funerals or authorized public holidays, as had been the case during the more repressive regimes of nineteenth century Europe.

On the whole, anti-government protesters do not seem to have incorporated any violent performances in their repertoire, although skirmishes with police have

---

<sup>67</sup> Al-Jazeera in English, Middle East: Timeline: Egypt's revolution, Al Jazeera, retrieved on 2011-05-22, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112515334871490.html>

<sup>68</sup> Al-Jazeera in English, *Country: Egypt*, Al-Jazeera, 2004-2011, retrieved during April 2011, <http://english.aljazeera.net/category/country/egypt>

<sup>69</sup> El-Mahdi, Rabab – *"Enough! Egypt's Quest for Democracy"* (Comparative Political Studies, Vol. 42, No. 8, 2009) pp. 1011

occurred. I would see this as a result of provocation, not a premeditated performance. I have noticed that the likelihood of violent performances by the anti-government protesters seem to have increased in connection with the rise of living costs. For example, as the price of bread rose in 2007, protesters seemed more intent of causing harm than during earlier contentious performances.<sup>70</sup> From the government and pro-Mubarak protesters, violence and intimidation have been a large part of the repertoire.

There have been a few prominent actors during the period 2004-2011, all successful in forming their own identities as movements and all with different repertoires.

- The Muslim Brotherhood, which has been around for decades, chose mainly peaceful political performances. Apart from demonstrations which occurred mainly in connection with arrests of members, they ran for elections and called for boycotts of polls they deemed unjust.
- The Kefaya Movement, making its first appearance in December 2004, relied heavily on demonstrations but also on pamphleteering, petitioning and in a few instances organized sit-ins.
- The April 6 Movement, established in April 2008, organized strikes and petitions through online media such as Twitter and Facebook, calling on their sympathizers to wear black.

According to the information I have obtained from Al-Jazeera, the different opposition groups seem to merge in early 2008, forming a larger coalition. This is reflected in the increased turnout of protesters in demonstrations the following years.

There are quite a few symbolic performances which make up the anti-government protesters repertoire, some borrowed from earlier repertoires and some unique to Egypt. The black flag of insurrection, which was displayed during marches in early nineteenth century France was used in Egyptian demonstrations.

---

<sup>70</sup> Al-Jazeera in English, *Soaring food prices anger Egyptians*, Al-Jazeera, retrieved on 2011-05-25, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2008/03/200852514402604842.html>

Citizens were also instructed to hang a black flag next to an Egyptian flag from their windows as a display of solidarity with the opposition. As I mentioned earlier, the April 6 Movement instructed people to wear black while going on strikes. In December 2010, one hundred former MPs were reported to have intentions of establishing a parallel parliament much like the one established by the Chartists in the 1840s. The plan was never realized since the Muslim Brotherhood stated they did not condone the performance.<sup>71</sup>

There have also been reports of more culturally inspired performances; according to Al-Jazeera demonstrators have displayed their contention through waving their shoes, a similar gesture to the shoe tossing by students at Tiananmen Square, a display which is considered to be very defamatory in the Arab world and throughout Asia. Prayers have been held during demonstrations. They are part of everyday life however and can not be counted as a contentious performance. Another very important symbolism was the choice of Tahrir Square as the main site of the demonstrations in 2011. Tahrir, or Liberation Square had been a gathering point for celebrations following the 1952 revolution, which also was the event after which the square was named.<sup>72</sup> The tents which were raised on the square, resembling a small community was a contentious performance added to the repertoire. The square remained a popular location for demonstrations even as the revolution died down and probably will be a site for popular contention in the future, should they occur.

Charles Tilly warns of technological determinism when it comes to technological innovations and in what way and to what extent they affect social movements. In Egypt I do not think cell phone or internet use has been more exclusive than for example newspapers with the adult female literacy rate at 57,8 percent and adult male literacy rate at 74,6 percent in 2006.<sup>73</sup> Subscribers of cell phones and internet users have increased steadily during the twenty-first century as can be seen in the following statistics.

---

<sup>71</sup> Al-Jazeera in English, *Egyptian opposition mounts protest*, Al-Jazeera. Retrieved on 2011-05-25, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/12/2010121214281133115.html>

<sup>72</sup> Tour Egypt, *Liberation Square*, Tour Egypt, retrieved on 2011-05-25, <http://www.toureygypt.net/featurestories/midanaltahrir.htm>

<sup>73</sup> UNESCO Institute For Statistics, *Data Centre*, UNESCO Institute For Statistics, 2006, retrieved on 2011-05-25, [http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143&IF\\_Language=eng](http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143&IF_Language=eng)

**Mobile cellular subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in Egypt 2000-2009**

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
1,94	3,91	6,17	7,8	10,09	17,67	22,9	37,59	50,64	66,69

Statistics published by International Telecommunication Union<sup>74</sup>

Compared with the availability of fixed telephone lines which can be seen below, it becomes quite apparent that the ability of reaching large masses by means of telecommunication was relatively new.

**Fixed telephone lines per 100 inhabitants in Egypt 2000-2009**

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
7,81	9,36	10,69	11,76	12,59	13,58	13,85	14,03	14,54	12,42

Statistics published by International Telecommunication Union<sup>75</sup>

The increase in access to the internet also saw a rapid increase during the twenty-first century as can be seen below:

**Estimated internet users per 100 inhabitants in Egypt 2000-2009**

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
0,64	0,84	2,72	4,04	5,15	11,7	12,55	16,05	18,05	24,26

Statistics published by International Telecommunication Union<sup>76</sup>

Technical innovations provided tools which the claim-makers made sure to take advantage of. Protesters would SMS each other, updating each other on their whereabouts and meeting points. I do not think this could have been exclusive, if two-thirds of the population had cell phones. It would be fair to assume that the one-third of the population without cell phones wouldn't be left out.

Internet use on the other hand might be more exclusive with only 24 percent of the population using the internet. On the other hand the April 6 Movement managed to get 75 000 people to join their facebook group in just under a month.

---

<sup>74</sup> International Telecommunication Union, *Mobile Cellular Subscriptions*, 2000-2009, retrieved on 2011-05-25, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>

<sup>75</sup> International Telecommunication Union, *Fixed Telephone Lines*, 2000-2009, retrieved on 2011-05-25, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>

<sup>76</sup> International Telecommunication Union, *Estimated Internet Users*, 2000-2009, retrieved on 2011-05-25, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>



Tilly talks of new technology excluding certain groups from participating. I believe there is another factor which might inhibit future use of social media as a platform from which to organize contentious performances. While reading about the increasing number of bloggers being arrested I came to the conclusion that there is another possible problem with the use of new technology which I believe Tilly might have overlooked. The reason being that oppressive regimes might have an easier time tracking bloggers and movement leaders through their activity on the web or intercepting SMS traffic. An additional problem which is not mentioned is the amount of photos and videos which have been uploaded to blogs, showing protesters participating in demonstrations. If the Egyptian revolution had not been successful, Mubarak and the Egyptian police would have gained vast amounts of evidence which they could have used to take action against individual participants of demonstrations. Following the resignation of Mubarak, the new military regime has also attempted to use social-networking sites to promote their cause.

I do not believe that new technology was a key factor in the contentious performances of the Egyptian Revolution. I believe the revolution was inevitable under the circumstances. New technology and new media just made the organization of it all that much easier.

## 5 Conclusion

The different actors of the uprising in Egypt seem to have both drawn inspiration from their historical predecessors and invented their own symbolisms and performances. For the most part, contentious performances involve classic displays such as demonstrations, political rallies, pamphleteering, petitions, strikes and boycotts. On the other hand, the incorporation of contemporary technology with existing routines goes to show how the repertoire has evolved within Egyptian contention. Although it does present new risks, as anonymity can never be guaranteed on the internet, it has shown itself to be effective. Social-networking sites have provided the means for what are arguably online demonstrations if we consider Facebook-groups to be the online equivalent of protests or rallies. Online petitioning is another example of an old contentious performance which has entered the twenty-first century. Although signatures were collected in quite an effective way, there are clear limitations to both social-networking sites and online petitions, the limitation being internet users. With only one quarter of the Egyptian population using the internet, and the authorities just realizing the potential threat, I think it might still be a bit early to determine the effectiveness of contentious performances online.

It seems clear that the Egyptian claim-makers borrowed symbolisms from previous social movements. I am primarily referring to the use of the black flag of insurrection, first used by the French and the establishment of a mock-parallel parliament which had previously been done by the English. The similarities could be coincidental. However I find this unlikely.

The Egyptian social movement also made additions to the borrowed repertoire by adding cultural symbolisms such as using Tahrir Square as the focal point and assembly area for the revolution. I believe the square served as an important symbol of Egyptian freedom during the uprising, as it had been 59 years earlier, following the revolution of 1952.

As far as the repertoire goes I think it is quite clear that the Egyptian claim-makers found plenty of inspiration from their contentious predecessors. They made some quite distinct additions to it however.

Religion plays a central part of the claims presented, especially for the Muslim Brotherhood, since religious political parties are banned. In contentious performances I have not seen any signs of religion affecting the displays of contention.

It seems true for the Egyptian study that social movements flourish in times of liberalization and quite easily succumb to repression. In times of intense crackdowns by the security forces, all was quiet on the contentious front. The government probably thought the same thing would happen in 2011 but was gravely mistaken.

## 6 References

Al-Jazeera in English, *Country: Egypt*, Al-Jazeera, 2004-2011, retrieved during April 2011, <http://english.aljazeera.net/category/country/egypt>

Al-Jazeera in English, *Soaring food prices anger Egyptians*, Al-Jazeera, retrieved on 2011-05-25, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2008/03/200852514402604842.html>

Al-Jazeera in English, *Middle East: Timeline: Egypt's revolution*, Al Jazeera, retrieved on 2011-05-22, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112515334871490.html>

Ashfort, Adam – *"Charles Tilly"* (Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 153, No. 3, 2009) pp. 372-380

Committee to Protect Journalists, *10 Worst Countries to be a Blogger*, Committee to Protect Journalists, retrieved on 2011-05-24 <http://www.cpj.org/reports/2009/04/10-worst-countries-to-be-a-blogger.php>

El-Mahdi, Rabab – *"Enough! Egypt's Quest for Democracy"* (Comparative Political Studies, Vol. 42, No. 8, 2009) pp. 1011-1039

Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2005, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2005&country=6730>

Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2006, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2006&country=6956>

Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2007, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2007&country=7170>

Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2008, retrieved 2011-04-11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2008&country=7387>

Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2009, retrieved 2011-04-11  
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2009&country=7601>

Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2010, retrieved 2011-04-11  
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2010&country=7816>

Freedom House, *Country Report: Egypt*, Freedom House Inc., 2011, retrieved 2011-04-11  
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2011&country=8031>

International Telecommunication Union, *Mobile Cellular Subscriptions*, 2000-2009, retrieved on 2011-05-25, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>

Tarrow, Sidney – “*Charles Tilly and the Practice of Contentious Politics*” (Social Movement Studies, Vol. 7, No.3, 2008) pp. 225-246

Teorell, Jan – Svensson, Torsten – “*Att fråga och att svara: Samhällsvetenskaplig metod*” (Liber AB: Ljubljana, 2007)

Tilly, Charles – “*Contentious Performances*” (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2008)

Tilly, Charles – “*Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1834*” (Social Science History, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1993)

Tilly, Charles – “*Explaining social processes*” (Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, 2008)

Tour Egypt, *Liberation Square*, Tour Egypt, retrieved on 2011-05-25,  
<http://www.toureypt.net/featurestories/midanaltahrir.htm>

Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2004*, Transparency International, 2004, retrieved 2011-05-22,  
[http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2004](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2004)

Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2005*, Transparency International, 2005, retrieved 2011-05-22,  
[http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2005](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2005)

Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2006*, Transparency International, 2006, retrieved 2011-05-22,  
[http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2006](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2006)

Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2007*, Transparency International, 2007, retrieved 2011-05-22,  
[http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2007](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2007)

Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2008*, Transparency International, 2008, retrieved 2011-05-22,  
[http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2008](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2008)

Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2009*, Transparency International, 2009, retrieved 2011-05-22,  
[http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2009/cpi\\_2009\\_table](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table)

Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2010*, Transparency International, 2010, retrieved 2011-05-22,  
[http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2010/results](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/results)

UNESCO Institute For Statistics, *Data Centre*, UNESCO Institute For Statistics, 2006, retrieved on 2011-05-25,  
[http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143&IF\\_Language=eng](http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143&IF_Language=eng)