THE *KIFAYA* GENERATION
POLITICS OF CHANGE
AMONG YOUTH IN EGYPT

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ABSTRACT

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In this paper, I aim to shed light on the lived experiences of young opposition activists in today's Egypt. I discuss the emergence of youth-based action groups, such as Youth for Change, since the beginning of 2000s and argue that much of their grievances have to do with wider predicaments and uncertainties that Egyptian youth face in their everyday lives. The activists' main political assets, however, pertain to a simultaneous engagement on the street—as the physical realm for public dissidence—and the internet—as the primary means and compensation for political communication in authoritarian settings. I suggest, although with reservations, that the activists' collective actions are better viewed as 'submerged networks' rather than through the conventional analytical prisms of civil society and social movement. Furthermore, I argue that while the young activists assume a degree of autonomous political action from the various structures of the existing political establishment, they operate on the margins of larger processes of contentious politics and, at the same time, their social interactions continue to be structured by the prevailing social norms.

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Keywords: youth, social movements, political agency, generation, Egypt

Introduction

> "The space of freedom (*missahat il-hurriya*) in Cairo starts from Ramsis and ends at Tahrir square. Here we can find places where to sit and talk."

Thus spoke 'Ahmad' (24),[1] a blogger and opposition activist, in October 2008 as we passed an afternoon in an *'ahwa* (popular coffee shop) in central Cairo. Bantering as usual, he waved his hands in the air to delineate the few square kilometres and, to reinforce his meaning, slammed them on the table to form a restricted space between the palms. My question was: Why do all the same young activists seem to sit in these down-town *'ahawi* almost every day? For Ahmad there was no question of paying five-fold prices or more, in the polished Western-style cafés that are mushrooming around the city; nor did he want to go to them and be overlooked for his somewhat ragged appearance, and all his friends come here anyway. Beyond this 'space of freedom', an hour away, lies his home in an impoverished neighbourhood on the northern outskirts of the city, where he lives with his parents, and where he would not disclose his real interests and political activities. Also, in this particular *'ahwa* everyone at least knows 'who's who' and which waiters are potentially

44

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government informants (*'umala' il-hukuuma*). Phone calls to friends may be tapped and, in any case, too expensive. So it makes a worthwhile daily journey to be with friends, hear the latest news and joke around. The alternative of staying at home was boring because the home computer was, for the time being, infected with viruses, and surfing on the internet—his favourite pastime—practically impossible.

As I befriended Ahmad during Ramadan (September) 2008, his stories of the everyday presence of the police (*shurta*) revealed the multiple and refined boundaries that young opposition activists are constantly obliged to bear in mind. They are almost certain that, sooner or later, the State Security will be secretly listening to their phone conversations and keeping records of their activities. Their efforts to assemble and express opinions publicly are effectively curtailed by the paramount security apparatuses under the Ministry of Interior and the Emergency legislation promulgated at the outset of President Mubarak's term in 1981. Engaging in public dissidence—such as unlicensed protests, holding banners and distributing leaflets in public spaces—carries the risk of detention, violent interrogations and imprisonment, and their future lives could be hampered due to personal files kept in the Ministry's archives. In short, the impression that an observer gets is that their everyday lives are confiscated as a 'risk factor' to the maintenance of public order. Thus, the young opposition activists represent rather marginal actors in Egyptian society which is governed by an authoritarian state and its overwhelming opposition towards popular agencies of resistance.

Nevertheless, the new millennium has witnessed a growth in the number of young Egyptians who engage in public oppositional activities. Their activities range from street protests and awareness-raising campaigns to internet-based discussions and, especially, political critique through weblogs. Young people emerged as potent members of the prodemocracy coalition, Egyptian Movement for Change—generally known through its slogan Kifaya, or "Enough"—in the run-up to the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2005. The Kifaya movement called for free elections and political rights, an end to the Emergency Law and the consolidation of political power by President Mubarak and the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). It also mounted fierce criticism against Mubarak's alleged manoeuvres to pass his presidential office to his son Gamal Mubarak. The foreign press and policy think-tanks often presented the Kifaya movement's young members as an emblem of democratisation, secularism and human rights culture in Egypt and the wider Arab world; and as an antidote to growing fears of religious fundamentalism and radicalization of young people in the region.

This paper aims to shed light on the lived experiences of young opposition activists in today's Egypt. In the first section, I discuss the recent emergence of young opposition activists and argue that much of their grievances have to do with wider predicaments that afflict youth in Egyptian society. I also propose, albeit with reservations, that their collective actions are better viewed as 'submerged networks' than through the conventional prisms of 'civil society' or 'social movement'. In the second section, I discuss the experiences of Youth for Change that practically functioned as the Kifaya movement's 'youth wing' during the electoral period in 2005. I then focus, in the third section, on more recent experiences of young opposition activists in the context of a popular uprising in al-Mahalla al-Kubra in April 2008. I specifically mention two network initiatives—April 6 Youth, and Solidarity—that drew in some of the disbanded Youth for Change activists. Then, in the fourth section,

I raise the notion of a '*kifaya* generation' in this context and argue that the young activists have deliberately created spaces for autonomous political action that distance them from various structures of the state-oriented political establishment, including gerontocratic practices within the political opposition. This leads me to conclude, among other things, that while the young activists currently operate on the margins of larger social movements—such as the workers' strike movements—their social interactions are structured by the prevailing norms within society, for instance, with regard to notions of class and gender. Their central characteristics and political assets, however, pertain to their seemingly youthful and transnationalized 'activist' strategies that combine nonviolent civil disobedience on the streets with dissident knowledge management through avenues provided by the emerging new media.

Approaching 'youth' as a political category in contemporary Egypt

As suggested above, any discussion of 'young opposition activists' in Egypt refers to a rather restricted section of the population at large. In a general sense, youth refers to a particular life situation or, as Bayat (2009: 116) notes, a "distinct social location between childhood and adulthood, where the youngster in a relative autonomy is neither totally dependent (on adults) nor independent, and is free from being responsible for others". As in other Middle Eastern societies, there is an apparent 'youth bulge' in Egypt whereby some two-thirds of the total 80 million population were between 15 and 30 years of age in 2007 (Assaad and Barsoum 2007: 16). The vast majority of young people and university students however, refrain from public 'high-level' politics. They have largely become, as Assaad and Barsoum (2007: 29) observe, "cynical and unwilling to participate in what they see as a closed system":

> Social disparities, widening gaps between rich and poor, a sense of limited future prospects given high unemployment rates among graduates, and the difficulties in forming families create a general sense that the system is corrupt and caters only to privileged elite. Besides, for many youths, the main contact with the state is through the police, who are widely considered to be hostile and needlessly violent. (Assaad and Barsoum 2007: 29)

Furthermore, Bayat (2009: 119) reminds us that youth as a social category and a source of collective actors is an urban phenomenon in Egypt, and largely machinated by a modern education system that "serves as a key factor in producing and prolonging the period of youth, while it cultivates status, expectations, and, possibly, critical awareness". Today, Egyptian youth faces another factor that curtails transition to adulthood, namely, wide-spread unemployment and severe difficulties in saving for the costs of marriage and householding that specifically affects the lives of young men in the cities.[2] Furthermore, in terms of youth involvement in politics, public constructions of youth (*shabab*) as a politically active category are highly gendered and, effectively, refer mostly to well educated young men from the urban middle classes (Farag and Bennabi-Chraïbi 2007: 25–26). The majority of young opposition activists studied in this paper are 20–30-year old unmarried men who live with their parents but, compared to young women, are free from domestic duties. They have received higher education in both national and private universities and are

affluent enough to accumulate various new media and computing skills. Some of them were mobilized in party-affiliated groups during university while others were sensitized to public politics through parents who have been involved, to varying degrees, in opposition parties, civil society organizations or trade unions. The current activists, however, aim at distancing themselves from opposition parties and formal organizations, and prefer to organize their campaigns through loose networks, developing new ways of doing and experiencing opposition politics. Shehata (2008) observes that contemporary youth activism has emerged outside the university campuses that represent traditional spaces for youth mobilization in Egypt. She also points out that contemporary youth activism is predominantly inclusive and internally heterogeneous, making generalizations difficult.

Youth activism in Egyptian politics is, however, not unprecedented. During the colonial period, young Egyptians were at the forefront of nationalist struggles for independence in, for instance, the popular uprising against the British in 1919 and the nationalist scouts' movement in the mid-1930s (Erlich 2000). Leftist students were at the core of protest movements on university campuses during the turbulent years between the 1967 Six-Day war and the 1973 October war with Israel (Abdalla 2000). While the 1980s witnessed growing levels of Islamic activism among young Egyptians, the 1990s marked a period of demobilization whereby the government placed severe restrictions on Islamist groups and, more generally, circumscribed the already narrow political rights of Egyptians—a move which did not leave the more secular-oriented groups unattended. The youth activism that emerged in the early 2000s represents the first instances during President Mubarak's term when young people have claimed public spaces, organized unlicensed street actions on their own and engaged in political dissent against the state and its upper echelons. They were largely sensitized to public politics through solidarity and protest movements that emerged in the early 2000s. For many, the solidarity movement during the second Palestinian *intifada* (2000–2002) provided their first experiences of voluntary public engagement in order to collect humanitarian aid—food, clothes and blood donations—for the Palestinians. They also participated in popular protests against the war in Iraq (2003) and then the pro-reform movements 'for Change' in the run-up to presidential and parliamentary elections in 2005. During the electoral period, the young members of the Kifaya movement played a crucial role in actual mobilization efforts.[3] While not all of them feel strong affiliation with the Kifaya movement as an organization, its central slogan—*kifaya* (enough) is a daily expression of frustration and instantaneous disagreement in the Egyptian dialect—gave expression to their widely shared rejection of social injustices and structural constraints on political participation and, importantly, on their narrowing future prospects.

Contemporary youth activism and the challenges it presents to state legitimacy should be viewed in the light of growing polarization, deepening social inequalities and transformations in the information ecology of today's Egypt. President Sadat's *infitah* (open door) economic policies of the mid-1970s, the IMF-driven economic structural adjustment programs into the 1990s, and the rapid privatization schemes of the 2000s have benefited only a marginal sector of Egyptians.[4] The rest have endured the downsides of a neoliberal economic restructuring that is often couched in the rhetoric of development, sustainable growth and, even, modernity (Kienle 2000; Mitchell 2002).

The majority of young opposition activists in this study represent today's withering economic middle classes. Their extended families benefited from Nasser's post-independence

socioeconomic reforms—in land ownership, higher education and employment—but they have become disenchanted with the authoritarian government under which they were born and raised, as well as the growing technocratic classes and the 'new money' dating from Sadat's economic reforms. There is an apparent gap between their aspirations and their narrowing prospects for attaining them. Thus, the activists' understandings of the 'politics of change'—as transformative action—comprise more than persistent outcries against an authoritarian and despotic regime, human rights violations and prevailing police violence. In an important way, their demands seem to reflect the overpowering uncertainties of everyday life (see Herrera 2006; Assaad and Barsoum 2007; Singerman 2007). At the same time, the new nongovernmental press, and communication technologies such as the internet and mobile phones, provide young Egyptians with better opportunities to receive diversified information on current affairs and, importantly, to express personal grievances and political dissent to wider audiences than ever before.

It is quite evident that the new forms of youth activism evade conventional approaches to civil society in the Middle East (e.g. Norton [ed.] 1995, 1996). Firstly, the normative concept of civil society seems to give credence to rather teleological narratives of social reform and 'democratic opening' in the region. More problematically, its emphasis on sectoral analyses of society and organizational forms of collective action—such as community development organizations (CDOs), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs)—seems misplaced and disorientating in postcolonial contexts that encompass multiple and overlapping modalities of collective action and locally rooted conceptions of sociality (e.g. Hann and Dunn [eds] 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Antoun 2000). Most Caireans, as Singerman (1997) and Hoodfar (1999) suggest, rely on fluid and interstitial personal networks of the everyday as the most meaningful avenues for political participation, since formal organizations and institutional channels are often scarce and ineffective.

In trying to avoid the analytical pitfalls of the civil society framework, several recent studies of opposition movements in the Middle East account for the contentious character of collective actions through recourse to social movement theories (Munson 2001; Wickham 2002; Wiktorowicz 2004 [ed.]; Clark 2004a, 2004b). My approach in this article departs from this growing body of literature mainly on two accounts: firstly, the latter focuses on Islamist movements, that is, on state-oriented groups that seek political power and promote wider application of religious codes in the regulation of social, economic and political affairs, both as basis of public morality and a remedy to the ills of society.[5] Despite the salient role religion plays in the lives of some of the young activists in this article, they largely belong to a secular opposition which is often neglected in studies of political opposition in the Middle East (Al-Ali 2000: 130). By secularism I do not indicate atheism or even agnosticism, but a subjective and normative preference for the civil state, if not a secular state, over an Islamic state as the ideal arrangement of state-society relations. This separation represents a persistent boundary within Egyptian political opposition which also dichotomizes professionalized 'civil society' (Abdelrahman 2004: 115–117) and the young opposition activists themselves. In this way the latter align, however unwittingly, with the secular logic of the modern nation state (Tripp 1996), only partially interfacing with the Muslim Brotherhood—by far the largest opposition group in the country—and the more pious and non-statist constituencies (Ben Néfissa 2002; Mahmood 2005).

Secondly, these studies on opposition movements mostly draw on North American traditions of social movement theory and, consequently, emphasize resource mobilization, political opportunities and movement organization as the main dimensions of collective action. It seems, however, that identity-oriented approaches to social movements (Touraine 1981; Melucci 1996; Castells 2004) remain scarcely examined in the Middle East. These argue for the centrality of culture and the formation of new meanings and collective identities as the basis for collective action, rather than superimposing a specific rationality (e.g. cost-benefit calculations and class reductionism) on social movement actors. Identity-oriented social movement theorists generally aim to de-essentialize social actors and to unveil the processes of collective identification in relation to the social environment in which they attempt to gain a degree of autonomy for political action.

This latter approach emphasizes the benefits of ethnographic research into young activists' understandings of their social position as 'youth', and the consequent processes of group formation. Their periodic street activism and internet-based dissidence do not fall into the conventional category of 'social movements' (Tarrow 1998) but consist of "hidden networks of groups, meeting points, circuits of solidarity which differ profoundly from the image of the politically organized actor" (Melucci 1996: 115). As such, their actions may be part of, but generally do not lead to, mass movements or major changes in public politics on which grounds the successes and failures of social movements are conventionally assessed.

Nonetheless, applications of identity-oriented approaches to social movements in Egypt should be made with care, as I will discuss below. In the mean time, it is necessary to have a closer look at the actual experiences and lived realities of young opposition activists themselves.

Kifaya youth: setting a precedent

Today, the majority of young opposition activists identify with the innovation that characterizes the Egyptian Movement for Change (Kifaya) or, more precisely, Youth for Change (*shabab min ajl al-taghyir*), which was initiated in 2005 under the auspices of the Socialist Research Centre in Giza—but soon encompassed a variety of partisan and nonpartisan members across the political spectrum. It had direct links to unlicensed political parties and groups associated with Kifaya, namely the Trotskyist Revolutionary Socialists, neo-Nasserist Karama (Dignity), liberal Ghad (Tomorrow) and leftist Islamist Amal (Labour) parties and, to a lesser degree, centrist Islamist Wasat (Centre) and Nasserist parties. The majority of members were students, young professionals as well as unemployed, who had close ties and constant negotiations with the Kifaya movement but remained, by and large, an independent group. While exact numbers are difficult to ascertain, Youth for Change activists themselves estimate that membership was about 500, with 50–100 core activists in Cairo. Members were mostly well educated, unmarried men in their early 20s with family backgrounds in the urbanized middle-classes. Despite prevailing social norms that discourage the participation of young women in public protests, Youth for Change attracted a considerable number who came from wealthier and more liberal family backgrounds than their male peers. The group emerged as a potent collective actor after Black Wednesday (May 25, 2005) when security personnel mounted a violent attack on protesters, including female activists and passersby, at the Journalists' Syndicate in Cairo.

Compared with the more organized Kifaya movement and its older leadership, Youth for Change activists operated more through interpersonal networks, meeting in a variety of places (e.g. coffee houses, parties and NGO offices) and communicating through emails and blogs. Indeed, they were—and are—more attuned to the use of the latest communication technologies which proved to be important tools in organizing popular opposition to the National Democratic Party and President Mubarak in the summer of 2005. The young activists distributed protest calls via SMS messages, web-banners and email lists as well as streaming video clips from demonstrations and confrontations with the police (occasionally captured by national nongovernmental press) to international human rights organizations and media outlets such as Human Rights Watch and the Washington Post.[6] They also drew on vernacular cultural resources as well as locally rooted grievances to create new strategies of political action, deliberately using the Egyptian dialect in banners, leaflets and web-based communications. They distanced themselves from literary Classical Arabic— the official language of the state and public politics, including the established political opposition—which many Egyptians regard as an obstacle to their participation in the political realm. (Haeri 2003: 151)

There were further strategic choices that separated the young Kifaya activists from the older opposition leaders, one of which was the relocation of unlicensed protests away from the conventional protest sites at the city centre. On June 15, 2005, for instance, they organized a successful protest in front of the shrine of Sayyida Zeinab which reveres the memory of Zeinab, Prophet Muhammad's granddaughter and patron saint of Cairo. The protesters appropriated a popular belief that by dusting the shrine's premises one can demand justice against a wrongdoer. Participants brought along brooms and wished that the president would "go away"; even the Ghad party's presidential candidate Ayman Nour paid a visit and media attention was assured. They also created a new strategy of 'rapid protests' in the run-up to the presidential elections. They assembled in popular areas of Cairo—such as Nahya on August 21, and Rod al-Farag on August 26, 2005—for a mere 5–30 minutes at a time. "It was like guerrilla tactics in urban warfare", a former member and secular-leftist blogger 'Hafiz' (28) remembers, since public assembly of more than five persons is prohibited: 'pioneer activists' first made sure that the area was safe from security control, and 'minders' watched their actions from a distance. The exact location was kept a secret until the last moment and organizers escorted others there personally or through mobile phones. The protesters aimed to talk to local residents and passersby about their daily hardships and encourage them to join the wider pro-reform campaign. Youth for Change activists especially argued for connecting the somewhat abstract, Kifaya-movement demands for constitutional democracy, freedom and human rights with pressing socioeconomic issues such as unemployment, high prices, poor housing and deteriorating services.

The experiences of members of Youth for Change circulate today as individually and collectively memorized narratives of collective action, resistance and consequent disillusion- ment. The elections reinstated Mubarak as president for the fifth six-year term in office, and the NDP retained its overwhelming majority in Parliament. The presidential elections marked the peak of protest activities and, while several secular opposition parties boycotted the elections along with the Kifaya movement, the Muslim Brotherhood won an unprecedented 88 parliamentary seats (19 percent). The State of Emergency was renewed the following year while the government was preparing widely contested anti-terrorism

laws to eventually replace the emergency legislation. After the electoral period, as the foreign press and strategic allies like the US State Department gave less attention to 'democratic reform' in Egypt, the Ministry of the Interior increased restrictions on protest activities. During the 'Judges' Crisis' (*azmat il-'udaa*) in spring 2006, Youth for Change activists mounted their final wave of public actions in response to allegations by two judges that the parliamentary elections were fundamentally 'flawed'. As the government took action against the judges, public debate expanded to encompass the judges' right to supervise elections and, more broadly, the independence of the judiciary in the face of encroaching executive powers. In April and May 2006, Youth for Change staged solidarity protests in front of the Judges Club in Cairo. The police arrested some 60 of its members for periods ranging from a couple of days to several months. Most of the detainees did not belong to political parties and were disillusioned by the lack of moral and practical support from the elder opposition leaders.

While the spring of 2006 was full of collective protest actions, the period also restructured, in an important way, social boundaries and "circuits of solidarity" (Melucci 1996: 115) among the young activists themselves. For some, the extended detentions in shared cells fostered new ties of friendship and solidarity between, for instance, secular-leftist activists and Muslim Brothers. They would share food or mobile phones, books and other utilities and, in short, endure a collective experience of imprisonment. For others, the imprisonment came to represent an overpowering personal crisis, especially when it involved experiences of physical and psychological violence during interrogations. Some walked out extremely disappointed that their fellow activists—at the time of a crisis when solidarity is of prime value—chose to disown them on grounds of political and personal differences. At these particular junctures, the only persons to be trusted were their closest friends, family and human rights lawyers.

After the 'Judges' Crisis', Youth for Change members grew disillusioned with the purpose of protest activity and lost heart due to the strengthened security constraints over street activities. The group's internal organization had also become a contested issue between partisan and nonpartisan young people. The latter remained somewhat uninterested in ideological strife and competition for various committee positions within the group itself.[7] After the group's disintegration, the partisan sector refocused its efforts on various arenas provided by established networks and personal contacts during their involvement in the pro-democracy movement. Some have joined, or returned to, existing political parties and groups such as the Karama Party, Labour Party and Revolutionary Socialists. The nonpartisan started working in private firms, newspapers and civil society organizations or focused on their own campaign initiatives; others distanced themselves from public politics altogether, choosing to pursue university studies and careers or prioritizing their responsibilities as parents. The majority of occasional participants, as one activist recalls, "simply vanished". A disengaged former member recalls that his personal involvement in protest actions effectively cost him his small trade and created difficulties in renting an apartment due to records kept by the security services.

By the time of my fieldwork in Egypt in 2007–2008, it was clear that the main fronts of political and social struggle operated beyond the streets and public spaces of Cairo. Thousands of textile workers have mounted massive and successful strikes against Misr Spinning and Weaving-company in the Delta city of al-Mahalla al-Kubra (Beinin and Hamalawy

2007). Similar strike movements have emerged to demand pay-rises and allowances in the other industrial cities. Farmers have mobilized in protest movements against large land-owners and local authorities in the Nile Delta. Local residents, for instance, in Alexandria, Cairo and Giza have resisted their forced evictions. University professors and students have organized their own initiatives (Dessouki and Galal 2007). In summer 2007, various locally-based action movements arose to demand clean water and sanitation services from the authorities while, in December 2007, real estate tax collectors staged a successful ten-day strike. It was the first strike by public sector workers since Egypt's independence.

The strike day as 'a turning point'

The single most important event that rekindled the interest of young activists in public politics was the popular uprising by textile workers and local residents in al-Mahalla al-Kubra on April 6–7, 2008, which preceded the workers' call for a simultaneous general strike and nationwide solidarity actions.[8] These calls came against a backdrop of worsening socioeconomic conditions in Egypt and the 'bread crisis' that, for many, demonstrated Egypt's failure to adjust to fluctuations in the globalized market economy. The prices of wheat and other daily commodities had skyrocketed during the preceding months, and people by the dozen were either injured or killed in daily clashes in front of subsidized bakeries. The political opposition and nongovernmental press evoked memories of the 1977 'bread revolution' in Cairo wherein protesters, impoverished by Sadat's economic reforms, died in clashes with the military. Importantly, the strike event also encouraged former Youth for Change members as well as previously demobilized youth into public political dissidence.

On April 6, 2008, as the Central Security Forces filled central Cairo with troops and wagons, 'Huda' (18)—a veiled university student—was sitting in an *'ahwa* with some new Facebook 'friends'. Like her peers, she had no prior experience of public activities (*'amal 'aam*) but was deeply touched by the bread crisis and stories of women and children fighting over a loaf. She had come to witness a popular uprising on Cairo's streets but her experiences fell short of expectations. Police officers forced her and her companions into a wagon and subsequently interrogated her for fifteen hours at a local police station. After the initial shock, she simply could not believe the extent of control and injustice inflicted upon them. Her immediate response was to pray for God "to take me out". Upon her release, she returned home a new person: "It opened my eyes, and I loved Egypt more than ever before. Everything about it, even the traffic jams (*zahma*)." She does not subscribe to a political ideology or party: "I am just an Egyptian girl who loves Egypt, the greatest country in the world—and who believes that change is possible even if one does it alone."

According to prevalent norms within society, young and unmarried women are expected to participate in domestic work and stay away from public anti-government actions. Huda, therefore, considers herself privileged: her parents allow her to participate in protest actions. Despite her detention, the family lets her stay out late in the evening which allows her to take part in campaigns, protests and informal discussions in down-town coffee shops like the one frequented by Ahmad and his friends. Such family endorsement is rare and deflects the normative gaze and rumours that such late home-comings of a young unmarried woman

easily generate in the neighbourhood and the extended family. Huda points out that detention is always a graver experience for a young woman than it is for a man. It is also my observation that the male activists seem to gain respect and credibility from being detained. Huda suggested, however, that for young women detention seems to imply—at least in the public eye—a possible exposure to sexual or other forms of harassment. Even a brief visit to prison is more directly connected with a woman's honour and family reputation and may endanger the long-term marriage arrangements that constitute important economic endeavours for most Egyptian families (Singerman 1997: 109–131). Many of Huda's female peers hide their political activities from their families for fear of disciplinary action and home arrest. On the other hand, young women activists from wealthier and more liberal family backgrounds seem virtually unaffected by these normative sanctions. Following her arrest on April 6, Huda joined the April 6 Youth Movement (*shabab 6 april*) in an attempt to fight prevailing social injustices.

The April 6 Youth Movement was established on June 28, 2008, at the Journalists' Syndicate in Cairo. As indicated by its name, its members pay tribute to the largest popular uprising and the first general strike attempt in recent Egyptian memory. Initially they mobilized around a group on Facebook—a social networking website—that attracted over 70,000 members in a few weeks before and after the strike day. The group continues to offer heated debates, action calls and statements to its members.[9] The active members who participate in street campaigns and protests are however much fewer, numbering about fifty activists in Cairo, although local groups exist in other large cities. At the outset, its core members included several former Youth for Change activists from, for instance, former Ghad and current Labour Party youth sections. The majority were, however, new to politics: university students, young professionals and unemployed who were mobilized through the Facebook group or mutual friends.

Despite salient links with existing opposition groups, April 6 Youth claims autonomy from political parties and rigid ideologies. Its members claim to be united, much in line with Huda's account, in their patriotic love for Egypt.[10] They generally feel that Egypt does not belong to them anymore—*masr mish bitaa'itna*—and that Mubarak's regime is based on, as Fahmy (2002: 242) calls it, "an alliance between the state, the military, and selected segments of the bourgeoisie who have established direct links with foreign business interests". In line with nationalist (*watani*) opposition, they reject Egypt's natural gas deal with Israel. They also criticize the government's dependence on US economic and military aid and its intemperate attempts to attract foreign direct investment into the country. April 6 Youth activists have joined in various campaigns that support, for instance, the journalists who face libel charges, and they have organized 'solidarity visits' to Tussun (Alexandria) and Abu Regeila (Cairo) where local residents face forced eviction. They have also protested for the release of detained bloggers in Cairo, local farmers in Serando—a small village in the Nile Delta—as well as the 49 persons who were arrested in al-Mahalla al-Kubra in April 2008. Beyond public protests the April 6 Youth members engage in daily communications and debates in Facebook groups, email lists and other electronic fora. They have also launched parallel, web-based conferences with articles and speeches by several opposition leaders and activists from the NDP's annual conferences in 2008 and 2009.[11] Compared with response to their internet-based dissidence, the Central Security Forces are quick to deter any street actions. On July 23, 2008, the police detained fifteen

April 6 Youth activists as they marched in Alexandria and celebrated the 1952 July Revolution. On November 4, 2008, they tried to assemble in various parts of central Cairo—such as Nile Corniche and Tahrir Square—so as to celebrate a national Day of Love (*'iid il hubb*). Finding it impossible due to the plain-clothes police, they hurried to Al-Azhar Park where the police eventually arrested them and confiscated their belongings: a few cardboard banners and dozens of red plastic hearts that they intended to distribute to by-passers.

The appearance of April 6 Youth inspired mixed opinion within the political opposition. On the one hand, older Kifaya and other opposition leaders welcome the group as a follow-up to Youth for Change that brings new vitality to street protesting. However, leftist groups in particular do not see the group as a meaningful actor and argue that urban 'Facebook youth' (*shabab fiisbuk*) can not make real impact without a wider support from, for instance, the workers' strike movements. Analysts also doubt the long-term survival of the group, and argue that internet-based loyalties can wane as easily they form (Faris 2008: 8). Some Nasserist youths further complained to me that April 6 Youth does not provide concrete alternatives to, nor a future vision of, changes and policies for a post-Mubarak society.

In my view, these estimations are somewhat appropriate in that periodic street actions and internet dissidence alone do not suffice to build mass movements. April 6 Youth activists are, however, highly reflexive about this constraint. 'Hamdi' (26), a former Ghad and current April 6 Youth activist, acknowledges that transforming digital contentions into concrete actions presents the main challenge for the group. On the other hand, he argues against the need to promote a rigid political ideology. He optimistically envisions, should Mubarak's regime fall, a provisional government governing the country for a transitional period of two years before organizing a free referendum on a new constitution that represents a negotiated consensus of all political forces in Egypt. As with many of his peers, Hamdi favours a combination of different elements from four intellectual trends.[12] From the left, he adopts the principle of prioritizing the poor (*il-inhiyaaz ma'a il-fu'araa'*) and from the Islamists he takes the social values (*qiyam il-mugtama'*) and moral codes. From the liberalists he appropriates the central principle of freedom (*hurriya*) while from Arab nationalists (*qawmiyiin*) he borrows loyalty and allegiance to Egypt (*il-intimaa' li-masr*) and the Third World or, currently, the 'global South'. During the 2005 elections, Hamdi was at university but never joined Youth for Change; he would, however, publicly declare himself a member of Kifaya. Once he joined the April 6 Youth in 2008, the police detained him several times; his last visit to prison lost him his job.

Hamdi wishes that localized protest movements and the numerous opposition forces in Egypt would unite into a subversive and critical mass that would lead to the downfall of Mubarak's regime through non-violent popular revolution. This scenario represents a common aspiration among secular opposition groups, including the Kifaya movement, prior to the 2011 presidential elections. The strategy of a united front is especially envisioned by Solidarity (*tadaamun*), another network-based initiative that was established in February 2008. Solidarity was joined by former Youth for Change activists, especially those with Trotskyist and Marxist orientation who do not emphasize a particular youth-based identity. They largely argue that democratic demands cannot be divorced from their social conditions and economic base. In this view, the most meaningful tactic is to build concrete social

relations between the existing protest movements that would otherwise be confined to the local level. At the outset, Solidarity focused on the daily struggles by fishermen to maintain their livelihood, but later extended their activities to a wide range of localized protest movements across the country. In comparison with April 6 Youth, Solidarity activists work in closer cooperation with the workers' strike movements. During and after the April 6 strike day, for instance, Solidarity activists held frequent meetings at the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre in Cairo, practically turning its premises into a press and contact centre for al-Mahalla al-Kubra activists. Solidarity members were prepared to provide media support and legal aid to strike movement activists, detainees and their families. On another occasion, in Ramadan (September) 2008, they hosted an *iftar* dinner bringing together various protest and labour activists such as real estate tax collectors and teachers from greater Cairo, fishermen from Port Said and labour leaders from al-Mahalla al-Kubra.

Despite evident differences in profile, strategy and membership between Solidarity and April 6 Youth, there are similarities. Both groups operate on the margins of the larger social movements, such as the workers' strike movements, and are in many ways dependent on the latter's protracted collective actions. They plan and engage in political dissidence through personal networks in physical spaces (such as coffee shops) and virtual channels (the internet and its social networking sites). Since early 2008, many activists have refrained from using mobile phones and free wireless networks (WLAN) when service providers like Mobinil began to require personal identification from phone subscribers and WLAN users. In addition, both Solidarity and April 6 Youth activists argue that Egyptian society is afflicted with a myriad of political, economic and social problems. In this view, the lack of democratic freedoms, widespread police violence and political detentions are part and parcel of a wider set of predicaments that afflict Egyptian society. The opposition activists accuse the current regime of failed policies, bad management and concrete negligence towards its own people. They claim that the Egyptian people (*sha'b*)—or the average citizen (*muwaatin 'aadi*)— are not only stripped of their basic rights, but also suffer from a lack of adequate housing, poor public services and continued humiliation at the hands of powerful political, business and military elites. They point to the three-decade long monopoly of political power in the hands of a despotic president, a corrupt government and its affiliated interest groups, as the image of state authority is increasingly permeated by the public profile of Gamal Mubarak—the President's son and Secretary-General of the party's influential Policies Committee—and other younger 'NDP reformists' such as the steel tycoon and parliamentarian Ahmad Ezz. The young activists take it for granted that the government promotes a self-image that stands in stark contrast to its practices on the ground (Migdal 2001: 15–23). Thus, the new state discourses of citizen rights and democracy—largely initiated by the Policies Committee and, in March 2007, inscribed into the new draft of the constitution—seem to represent to these youths mere 'cosmetics' for the sake of foreign states and funding agencies.

A generation of no return?

On September 14, 2008, I witnessed a sit-in protest in front of the City Municipality in central Cairo. Some fifty protesters, mainly women and children, demanded alternative

housing after the military forced them to leave provisional shelters in al-Duweiqa, one of the city's most impoverished shanty-towns. A major landslide had destroyed their homes there a week earlier and resulted in more than one hundred reported deaths among their relatives, friends and neighbours; informal estimates held the numbers closer to five hundred. The police periodically entered the lawns of Abdeen Square where the protesters had settled themselves but faced energetic abuse, especially from young mothers who blamed the police and the city authorities for mismanaging the crisis. On the scene, bloggers and journalists as well as Solidarity and April 6 Youth activists acted and mingled with each other—now mobilized in an *ad hoc* Committee for the Support for the Families of al-Duweiqa. The activists had promised to stand by the families in case the police suddenly decide to evict them. Some provided the families with basic necessities—food, drink and blankets—so that they could continue with the protest activity. Others arrived to photograph and interview the protesters and hurried to publish the news online. Sitting on the lawn, I felt slightly intimidated by the police presence and the fact that we were being cordoned off with metal fences. I expressed to Ahmad—now on the fringes of his 'space of freedom'— how bewildered I was by the courage and perseverance these women had in the face of the police. Ahmad replied that they reminded him of a song by System of a Down, an American rock band he truly adores:

I've got nothing, to gain, to lose
All the world I've seen, before me passing by
You don't care about how I feel, I don't feel it any more

The final line in particular stuck in his mind. And, for him, it provided meaning to the scenario unfolding before our eyes: "They don't have anything to lose, no home, their children and relatives have died, so why should they care about what the police do?" Later on, when next we met, he played with these words in English—"I feel that I don't feel, I don't feel that I feel…"—although we normally conversed in Egyptian dialect. He used this wordplay to explain something that I could not quite capture. I however understood that it expresses his inner state and feelings, or the lack of them, and the way he connects to the outside world.

The title of this paper—"The *Kifaya* Generation"—alludes to generation as a meaningful category. It is based on Erlich's (2000: 48) observation that "tensions and conflicts between 'political generations' provided a main sociopolitical dimension in the making [of] the 20th century Arab and Islamic history". For Erlich, who studied the nationalist scout movement of the mid-1930s, 'political generation' does not represent an age cohort but is a result of shared formative experiences in the face of rapid social changes and political upheavals; in his case, the Great Depression and the fury of educated middle classes at the failures of local parliamentarism to advance the project of anti-imperialist struggle and national liberation. Similarly, in the post-independence era since 1952, Abdalla (2000: 71) argues that the 'generation of 1967' was formed after the national defeat to Israel as a result of young Egyptians' disillusionment with the "world view and the ideas and concepts they had been brought up on and had cherished". It is also relevant to note that the founders and leaders of the Egyptian Movement for Change (Kifaya) regard themselves as members of the '1970s generation' because of their direct involvement in the students' protest movements on university campuses; then, partly on the basis of these shared experiences,

they forged the pro-democracy initiative in the run-up to the 2005 elections (Browers 2007: 83; Shorbagy 2007: 180–182). Accordingly, it seems that the pro-*intifada* and anti-war movements in 2000–2003, the Kifaya movement and the parallel movements 'for Change' and that involved in the 'Judges' Crisis' in 2005–2006, as well as the various localized protest movements across the country, have provided the current young activists with a shared social memory and narrative of civil disobedience. At the same time, many of them refer to "we, the youth" (*ihna ish-shabab*) and "our generation" (*giilna*) as a social position and realm of experience that they regard as largely disenfranchised and neglected in the prevailing society. *Kifaya*, or 'enough', as a political statement rather than an organization, seems to epitomize much of the activists' shared anxiety and frustration with the current state of affairs as well as their determination to exert personal efforts in the name of change. It is in this sense that I refer to a new generation of political activists or, indeed, the '*kifaya* generation' that has been in the making since the early 2000s.

On the face of it, the young activists' political dissent targets the ruling elite including President Mubarak and the NDP, as well as the military and business-related interest groups. Clearly, they want the share in public politics and decision-making that they feel they are due. At the same time, however, they seem to challenge the wider gerontocratic power structures that prevail in Egyptian society at large. The vast majority of private and public institutions, including the government and private firms, trade unions, civil society organizations and, importantly, the established political opposition and Kifaya movement itself, are ruled by elderly men. Youthful critique of gerontocratic structures and practices does not only take place within the secular-oriented opposition but also manifests itself in the emergence of a young generation of Muslim Brotherhood bloggers (Lynch 2007). These constructions of youth-based collective identities—in whose creation Youth for Change was instrumental—represents a conscious step out of the ageing networks of allegiance, solidarity and clientelism within the formal institutions. I once asked a secular political blogger, 'Mahmud' (27) who was detained for a prolonged period during the al-Mahalla al-Kubra uprising, whether he was a member of any opposition group or political party. I sensed that he was somewhat offended by the framing of my question, and he went on to explain:

> You have to understand that I am an activist, not a member in any group or party. To be an activist, you have to understand this: it means that if you see any kind of injustice anywhere, at any time, you have to go there and try to help. If it's the political prisoners, you go and protest. If it's the university students against rising fees, you go and join them. If it's the poor people, you go and support them. Sometimes you can't do much, but even small things can be very important. Sometimes the only thing you can do is to be present, like with the families of al-Duweiqa. If there are enough activists and journalists around, the police may not get violent. Sometimes, the only thing you can do is to take a photo and send it onwards; to write on your blog so as to make things exist. Otherwise no one hears anything about what's happening in this country.

Since his release, Mahmud has continued blogging, and deliberately covers the workers' strike movements and cases of police brutality in Egypt. While the young and older opposition activists share many political demands and grievances with regards social illnesses in contemporary Egypt, the former seem to express themselves through the seemingly transnationalized habitus of an 'activist' (*naashit*) who asserts self-identity not only through

assuming a degree of autonomy for youth-based political dissent but, importantly, through the ways in which the activists *are*, and not only through what they *do* (see also Bayat 2009: 120). In my observation, the young activists are action-oriented and prefer to socialize and plan future campaigns on the fringes of public opposition events—in staircase corridors, lounge sofas, and the like—rather than following official programs and listening to premeditated speeches by older opposition politicians. They converse in Egyptian dialect rather than literary Arabic and wear trendy loose jeans and T-shirts rather than collared shirts and trousers. They use the latest communication technologies while some of the older politicians may not use computers at all. They draw on global youth cultures and listen to, for instance, American rock bands or Bob Marley as easily as Sheikh Imam—the revolutionary singer who inspired the students' protest movements in the 1970s. Thus, while the contemporary activists seem to draw inspiration from the experiences of earlier political generations, they are in the process of reinventing 'youth' as self-claimed agents of social change.

It seems, indeed, that one major characteristic and political asset of these young activists is their double engagement on the street and the internet; the former functions as the physical realm for public dissidence and non-violent civil disobedience, while the latter offers the primary means and compensation for political communication. These two avenues of political participation should not be regarded, however, as in any way distinct spheres of action but as part and parcel of the young activists' everyday existence. Their protest campaigns and media tactics are important in so far as they expose the realities on the ground—"what's happening in this country"—to the nongovernmental press and human rights groups in Egypt as well as transnational media outlets and human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX). In practice, however, their immediate goal is to support and show solidarity to disenfranchised members of Egyptian society. Consequently, young opposition activists feel increasingly compelled to become involved in various and coinciding networks and campaigns that, for instance, focus on political detainees, corruption and police brutality, as well as forced evictions and housing rights. While the Central Security Forces are quick to devise new tactics to contain street protest, internet activism represents a new front line to which the state is not yet, if it ever will be, capable of responding. The Ministry of Communication has placed restrictive orders on service providers and internet cafes, and the Ministry of the Interior has increasingly detained young bloggers since 2007 (see ANHRI 2008, 2009). Nevertheless, the number of political bloggers in Egypt increases day by day. In April 2008, at the time of the popular uprising in al-Mahalla al-Kubra, Egyptian weblogs amounted to over 160,000 and one fifth of them focused on political affairs (IDSC 2008).[13] Due to their rather specific technical knowledge, several activist-bloggers also play an important role in designing and maintaining the websites of a number of civil society organizations, action groups and protest campaigns which resonates with Appadurai's (1996: 35–36) notion of transnational "mediascapes" as the rapid "distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information" and of multiple "images of the world" that, in the bloggers case, are often counter-hegemonic depictions of social realities in Egypt. In this sense, they seem to promote a resistance identity (Castells 2004: 8–9) that conjoins certain libertarian and universalized notions of citizenship with a new form of media activism, dissident knowledge management or, simply, political agency.[14]

Concluding remarks

The future will tell us to what degree the collective experiences of the young activists with whom I spent nearly a year between 2007 and 2008 will structure their involvement in the making of a post-Mubarak Egypt. Towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, they experience growing uncertainties about future trajectories in Egyptian politics and society at large. "God knows" (*allah 'aalim*) is a common response. They hope that neither Gamal Mubarak—an apparent heir to the presidency—nor the Muslim Brotherhood will seize political power in Egypt. Nor do they find the competing, and at times parallel, ideologies of neoliberal consumerism and moralist Islamism particularly attractive alternatives. For the young urban activists who talked to me during fieldwork, the various localized protest movements seem to represent both a strategic opportunity and the allure of social change. Living in Cairo, they have relatively few options at their disposal, but they still share Hamdi's rather optimistic goal of mobilizing Egyptians into a critical mass, and of sensitizing them for a post-Mubarak era (i.e. a transitional period and free elections). In this sense, they are in many ways dependent on the existing social movements—such as the mass wave of labour protests—in order to operate on their margins. Youth activism *per se* without a wider support base and further network coalitions hardly suffices to build a mass movement that leads to large-scale historical changes that they so much anticipate. There are also internal constraints on 'coalition politics' among the activists themselves, as the somewhat bitter disbandment of Youth for Change suggests. The membership and boundaries of youth networks in Egypt seem to change constantly and contain, as Melucci argues, "interactive and sometimes contradictory processes lying behind what appears as a stable and coherent definition of a given collective actor" (1996: 72). In June–July 2009, the April 6 Youth experienced similar internal strife which resulted in the Labour Party youth forming their own network initiative Don't Pass By (*Lan Tamurru*).[15] Thus, in the late 2000s, former Youth for Change members seem dispersed in various directions: many of its leftist members have joined Solidarity; liberals are more attracted to April 6 Youth; party-affiliated groups act on their own, while the non-partisan activists—especially the more individuated bloggers—seem virtually unaffected by these internal differences.

It is clear that the collective actions of the members of the *kifaya* generation can hardly be described as a social movement in the conventional sense (see Tarrow 1998). They do not necessarily share a single vision or strategic goals for the society unfolding before them, yet many of them still insist that doing *something* is better than nothing. Glossing them as mere human rights or democracy activists, as is often done in the foreign press, remains partial and neglects the simultaneous and multi-dimensional engagements they pursue on a daily basis. It is thus more appropriate to view their collective actions as "submerged networks" (Melucci 1996) that constantly mutate and, to a large extent, remain beneath the public realm without necessarily leading to mass movements. Identity-oriented approaches to social movements in Egypt should, however, only be used with certain reservations. These approaches seem to assume that the 'information society', 'complex network society' or even 'late modernity' represent the main references for collective action and identity formation in today's globalizing world (Melucci 1996; Castells 2004; Ellison 1997). In a sense, the young urban activists do seem sensitized to global cultural flows and transnationalized information ecology. At the same time, they argue and write politics in

Egyptian dialect and articulate new political meanings on the basis of popular religion (e.g. Youth for Change's event at Sayyida Zeinab) and rather conventional forms of patriotism (e.g. April 6 Youth's celebrations of the 1952 Revolution and the Egyptian Day of Love). Some of the activists' strategies seem to reflect what Bayat (2009: 134) terms "accommodating innovation" or an attempt to use the available cultural resources in order to redefine and reinvent the "prevailing norms and traditional means to accommodate their youthful claims". Indeed, they seem highly reflexive as to the constraints and opportunities of their actions as they respond to a disintegrating and increasingly complex public sphere. Thus, they are entangled in a "general process, driven by social, political and economic change, by which social actors, confronted with the erosion, or transformation, of established patterns of belonging, readjust existing notions of rights and membership to new conceptions of identity, solidarity and the institutional foci of redress" (Ellison 1997: 711).

Egypt's young activists, therefore, operate not only betwixt and between childhood and adulthood, but also the local and the transnational, the personal and the political and the predicaments of today and the uncertainties of tomorrow. It should be noted, however, that the dilemmas and contradictions of 'network society', reflexivity and competing claims to universalized knowledge are diffused unevenly in Egyptian society—as anywhere else— and refer to rather restricted sectors of the population. Firstly, even the submerged networks of young activists continue to be relatively gendered. It seems that the prolonged period of adolescence before marriage, or "waithood" (Singerman 2007), provides young men with extended opportunities for active networking and the forging of loyalties, allegiances and collective identities. These social interactions, however, often take place—at street level— through situations, such as public demonstrations and late night meetings in coffee shops, in which the participation of young unmarried women can easily be circumscribed by prevailing social norms. Nevertheless, young women find their political agency on a more equal level through the internet and its social networking sites and, at least for some, the prolonged period before marriage and reproductive roles take over seems to allow for relative leeway and wider options to participate in dissident public actions. Secondly, the vast majority of Egyptians continues to live at the fringe of daily subsistence, to rely on state-owned print and broadcast media and, effectively, to be socially positioned outside the 'network society' and transnationalized status so often attributed to, and appropriated by, the relatively well-educated and affluent male activists in the capital city. In this vein, the class-based grievances may represent much more relevant notions when examining, for instance, the protracted collective actions by impoverished industrial workers in today's Egypt. The youth-based activism and workers' strike movements represent rather distinct, yet coexistent, operational logics and modalities of collective action that do not easily fall into a unified theoretical scheme.

By way of conclusion: one can not over-emphasize the impact of young activists and the social interface they have with the larger processes of contentious politics in Egypt. At the same time, they assume important roles in fragmenting and challenging the state discourses of the social predicaments and everyday realities. It is not for me as a researcher, however, to judge their prospective failures or successes in the future. However, many of the young activists who were politicized in the first decade of the new millennium will, if some prediction is allowed, continue their political engagements in one way or another throughout their lives. For the young blogger Ahmad, whom I introduced at the beginning of this

paper, it certainly made a great difference to his part in the 'politics of change' when his home PC was again clear from viruses and he could continue his political dissent online.

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NOTES

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[1] In order to preserve anonymity, the persons in this article appear as pseudonyms. I have also modified some minor details of their biographical information and changed their real ages with the accuracy of (+/-) 2 years.

[2] Singerman (2007) poignantly calls this period of prolonged adolescence "wait adulthood" or "waithood".

[3] The role of young people in the actual work of distributing leaflets, designing and putting up posters and websites, and attracting the media, is acknowledged by the interviewees (both older Kifaya leaders and younger activists).

[4] According to Beinin (2008: 4), less than 10 percent of Egyptians actually benefit from the privatization schemes of the current Egyptian government.

[5] This tendency is not without criticism. Bayat (2005) argues that strict applications of social movement literature to Islamist movements veil their internal heterogeneity and variations. Similarly, Beinin (2005) argues against viewing "political Islam" as a social movement and points to its internal contradictions as well as external ties to regional and global political economies.

[6] See, for instance: "Appalled at Beating of Protesters, Egypt's Opposition Leaps to Action" (*Washington Post* 6 July 2005).

[7] At the outset, Youth for Change activists comprised a loose network. However, they gradually acquired an organizational form with a general coordinator and five committees that were elected for three consecutive months.

[8] Kifaya was among the groups that endorsed the strike call as were the Karama, Wasat, Amal and Democratic Front Parties as well as the strike movement of Real Estate Tax Collectors and Grain Mill workers.

[9] See, for instance, Samantha Shapiro's "Revolution, Facebook Style" (*New York Times* 22 January 2009).

[10] "April 6 Youth (…) youth who love Egypt: We are a group of young Egyptians who are united solely in our love for Egypt and our desire for its reform" (Translated by the author). Source: <http://shabab6april.wordpress.com/about>, accessed 14.1.2009.

[11] The site for the 2008 conference (<www.anti-ndp.com>, accessed 16.1.2009), was down by June 2009. The 2009 site was hosted at a new address (<www.6april.org/anti-ndp>, accessed 29.11.2009).

[12] This theoretical framework (*itaar nazari*) is mainly drafted within Niqdar ('We can'), another small collective of a dozen young people that focuses on theoretical discussions. Like Hamdi, most Niqdar

members are also active in April 6 Youth. In Hamdi's view, the division of labour between the groups is clear: Niqdar focuses on theory building, while April 6 Youth on execution. Interestingly, Hamdi's views correspond to the delineation by Abu-Rabi' (2004) of four major intellectual trends and ideologies in the Arab World: Left/Marxism, Liberalism, Islamism and Arab Nationalism.

[13] 73 percent of Egyptian bloggers are male and 27 per cent are female, while over half of them are aged between 20 and 30 (IDSC 2008).

[14] Castells (2004: 8–9) proposes that "resistance identity" is "generated by those actors who are in positions/ conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society".

[15] The internal differences were initially concerned with the visit of two April 6 Youth members to Washington in May 2009 and the group's general position on the visit of US President Barack Obama's to Egypt on June 4, 2009. Also, the internal elections were highly contested between Labour youth activists and the rest. Sources: <http://6april.org/modules/news/article.php?storyid=2> and <http://6april.org/modules/news/article.php?storyid=34> (accessed 3.9.2009).

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