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**ROAD (WITH NO DIRECTION)
TO TAHRIR SQUARE**

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Introduction

On 25 January 2011 thousands of people took to the streets to manifest against the Mubarak regime and the authoritarianism with which the dictator had ruled the country since 1981. January 25 gave birth to eighteen days of uninterrupted revolts in several squares of the country which, in the end, led to the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak (often called 'the Pharaoh').

The present work will seek to analyse the reasons (*The Road*) that brought to the revolts in Tahrir Square and provide the reader with an interpretation of the reason why, thirty months after the revolts, the situation in the country is still fluid (*No Direction*). In order to arrive to the present day (September 2013) the following chapters were conceived drawing inspiration by the metaphor of time in the book *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* by Fernand Braudel. The French historian, in fact, conceived the historical time as divided into three distinct 'times' with the *individual time* representing the surface waves in the sea, the *social time* as the middle waves and the *geographical time* as the deepest waves. Such a conception of time permits to go beyond the interpretation of history made by men who can modify single events and tries to identify the middle and deeper dynamics which are those that produce the most dramatic changes in a certain society. Far from trying to emulate the work by the French historian the narration of the events will start very far in time in order to highlight those elements that took place in a certain moment but which produced dramatic effects in a later moment.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 will seek to provide the reader with a basic knowledge in order to understand the Egyptian history from 1952 to 2010 in its *macro* dynamics.

Chapter 1 will analyse the period 1952-81 of the Egyptian history (the years of Presidents Gamal Abd el-Nasser and Anwar al-Sadat) with a focus on the economic, foreign and domestic policies. The three policies mentioned above will be analysed separately in order to emphasise the way in which they proceeded and were interconnected. The Egyptian foreign policy of this period, in fact, was tailored on the need to move to the 'seller' (the US or the USSR) that would have provided Egypt with more funds. The first thirty years of the republican history of Egypt, in fact, were marked by a strong opposition between the 'Nasser years' marked by the socialist system and the 'Sadat years' when such system was slowly changed in favour of capitalism (with the alliance moving from the USSR to the US). Chapter 2 and 3 will focus on the Mubarak presidency which will be analysed in two chapters in order to emphasise the behaviour of the regime in different periods. Chapter 2 will analyse the period between 1981 and 2004 when the Mubarak presidency was marked by the use of 'democratic doses' (apparent opening of democratic spaces) that served as a sort of carrot in order to stabilise the country in the most delicate moments. More in detail, the chapter will analyse how such a policy was adapted to the worsening economic and social conditions and the effects that it produced within the population. Chapter 3 instead will analyse the period 2005-10 where it will be possible to read the most important reasons that brought to the January 25 revolts. The chapter, in fact, will seek to describe the interconnectedness between the economic downfall, the regime's attempts to keep themselves at power and the rising trajectory of the protest movements putting the regime into increasing pressure. The conclusions of the chapter will be devoted to the chronicle of the January-February 2011 revolts whose outcome was not bound to be successful *a priori*.

Chapters 4 and 5 will analyse the Egyptian history from its *micro* dimension. Chapter 4 describes how torture, corruption and the mismanagement of funds (in the Toshka Project) could become elements that pushed people to take to the streets and oppose the regime. Chapter 5 instead will describe the Egyptian society as something dynamic and in constant change. The chapter will explore two distinct dimensions of

change: the former will be the pure social dimension with the generation of the young Egyptians that had started to experience a detachment *vis-à-vis* the generation of their parents. The latter will deal with the new media that slowly but constantly modified the way in which people lived their social relations more freely and made the political debate more efficient. In such a perspective, it will be seen how the emergence of the internet as a mean of communication represented a major leap forward that enabled people to communicate and to organize regardless of the distance and the police control.

The conclusions will bring the discourse to July 2013 when the military decided to remove President Morsi (elected in June 2012) from his position opening a new period of transition. The aim of the conclusions will be to put such action in perspective and to explain why such action should not be considered as a *coup d'état* as it was defined by several European commentators.

1.

Nasser and Sadat Years Looking for the Best Offer (1952-1981)

The scope of the present chapter is to provide an exhaustive synthesis of the first three decades of Egyptian republican era. Due to the density of the events that characterised the period and the strategic position that Egypt occupies in the area, the chapter will be divided as follows. A brief summary of the advent of the Egyptian Republic will be provided as an introduction for the years 1952-54 (Section 1.1). For the remaining years, the narration will be divided into three different *nuclei* in order to better emphasise the succession of the events. Sections 1.2 and 1.3 try to explain how the economic policy was enmeshed with the foreign policy. The two policies are presented in separate Sections in order to stress from two distinct perspectives how they influenced each other. Section 1.3 instead will try to explain the reverberations of both the economic and foreign policy on the domestic dimension.

1.1 The Advent of the Republic

The republican history of Egypt began with the July Revolution in 1952. On 23 July 1952 a *coup d'état*, led by a group of young military officers called 'Free

Officers', was successful in posing an end to the British occupation of Egypt. The revolution responded to the frustration that had emerged in the country after 1948 when the Arab-Israeli conflict broke out in the region as a consequence to the emergence of the State of Israel in the former British Protectorate of Palestine. The emergence of the State of Israel brought to a war (1948 Arab-Israeli War) which ended with an armistice deeply in favour of the Israeli faction that left to the Palestinians only 21 percent of the former protectorate. At the basis of the July 1952 revolution there was the deep unease that was generated by the Egyptian King (named Farouk) who was alleged not to have done enough to support the Palestinian cause (Campanini, 2006: 109-12).

For the reasons above described, King Farouk of Egypt was forced to abdicate and as early as 26 July was sent in exile. As P. J. Vatikiotis (1969: 179-80) affirms, the revolution was born without a real premeditation and it took place all of a sudden. The group of officers in fact was organised into a structure of cells with different tasks in order to be successful in the revolution, but they '(had) almost no ideology, and barely any "philosophy" (Roussillon, 1998: 338). As Arthur Goldschmidt points out in his *Brief History of Egypt* (2008:144),

The Free Officers had no ideology. The following six points, put forth by the secret society in 1951, would remain their guiding principles long after they had taken power: (1) destroying the British occupation and its Egyptian supporters, (2) eliminating feudalism, (3) ending capitalism's domination of political power, (4) establishing social equality, (5) forming a strong popular army, and (6) establishing a "healthy democratic life." These points were open to various interpretations: liberal, nationalist, and Marxist. They were not a detailed blueprint for governing the country.

The different interpretations of the six-point plan also resulted in different ideas concerning the form of state. Such a point was raised as early as 27 July 1952. In this day, in fact, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), formally chaired by the Free Officers General Muhammad Naguib but actually influenced by his Vice-

chairman Gamal Abdel Nasser, debated whether Egypt should have continued to be a democracy or turn into a more authoritarian regime. The vote favoured dictatorship since it was chosen with seven to one vote but it saw the opposition of Nasser. The future dictator of Egypt acted in favour of democracy since he wanted to obtain consent from the masses that wished a democratic government. The final decision proved to be favourable to Nasser since he obtained a democracy by decree (Goldschmidt, 2008: 145-48 and Vatikiotis, 1969: 378-80).

The two following years were eventful: in September 1952 the first agrarian reform was passed limiting to 200 the number of *feddans*¹ that an individual could own (Marsot: 2007: 129). The manoeuvre aimed at weakening the opponents to the regime who had in land tenure the source of their power, but it lacked a real radical imprint since the landowners received compensation for the land expropriated. In June 1953, after the monarchy was ended by the RCC, Mohammed Naguib became the first Egyptian president. This moment represented a watershed in the Egyptian revolutionary history. The RCC had in fact been successful in abolishing the old political parties and weakening the landowners' opposition and its leadership was challenged only by the Muslim Brothers². From now on, however, a dividing line started to appear within the Free Officers. Naguib still had in mind a democratic Egypt, whilst Nasser was more inclined towards a system under his control. It was in early 1954 that Nasser's opposition rose higher until he finally purged the pro-Naguib ministers and put Naguib under arrest. Egypt would remain under Nasser's control for sixteen years until he died in September 1970 (Goldschmidt, 2008: 147-52 and Campanini, 2011: 6).

¹ A *feddan* is an area equal to 0.42 hectares.

² The Muslim Brothers are an Islamic political association founded in 1928 in Egypt by Hassan al-Banna, a schoolteacher and imam. The organization had a quick spread due to the fact that it combined political activism with Islamic charity. After World War 2, the organization had about two million members in several Arab countries. The Muslim Brothers were among the earliest supporters of the Free Officers revolution, however, such a support faded in the period 1952-54 due to the fact that the difference in views had led six 'Brothers' to the gallows (Mitchell, 1993).

1.2 The Economic Policy: Looking for the Best Offer

The aim of this section is to outline the Egyptian economic policy during Nasser and Sadat's years. In the narration of the events, it should be noted that the economic policy undertaken by both Nasser and Sadat was not entirely ideology-based. Both the Egyptian rulers, in fact, opted for the party that could provide them with larger funds.

1.1.2 The High Dam of Aswan and its Donors

When Nasser arrived to power in 1954 most of the productive sectors in the country were in private hands. As quoted by Khalid Ikram (2006: 2), 'the public sector accounted for only 13 percent of the Gross Domestic Product' (Mead, 1967: 272-73). Even the agricultural reform was not aimed at tackling the private property, but rather at weakening the old oligarchy that founded its power in the large estates. In the period 1954-56, there were only laid the foundations for the upcoming watershed that was represented by the year 1956 (Ikram, 2006: 3).

At the basis of the unilateral decision of Egypt to nationalise the Suez Canal Company was the issue of the High Dam of Aswan. The Dam was considered a fundamental project in post-1952 Egypt since it would have provided the country with a stable supply of water and further supplies of electricity. The country though could not rely only on its funds to build such an expensive infrastructure. For such reason it needed to ask funds abroad and obtained them primarily from international institutions (such as the World Bank) and the United States. The problems arose when the United States, due to political reasons, decided to withdraw their funds for

the construction of the Dam³. The idea by President Nasser was then to nationalize the Suez Canal Company so that Egypt would have obtained the tolls for the crossing of the Canal and could thus replace the withdrawn funds.

The nationalization produced an unexpected consequence: along with the deportation of many British and French citizens, several aliens decided to leave the country since they felt no longer secure and protected. The feeling of insecurity transmitted to the markets and, subsequently to it, the international investors started to withdraw their investments in Egypt. The crowding out of investors and investments from the country resulted in a decrease of capitals that not even the Suez Canal tolls could repay (Marsot 2007: 137).

Such situation led Nasser to turn to the Eastern Bloc in order to obtain arms to continue to stand the conflict with Israel, diplomatic protection and especially funds to build the Dam. The months following the nationalization of the Suez Canal also represented the first step of a series of events that led Egypt to accept the nationalization of the means of production. The nationalization of the Canal represented only the first expansion of the public sector but it was made to the expense of the British and the French interests. (Ikram, 2006: 3-7). The years that followed saw the constant reduction of Western investments and the growing presence of the Eastern Bloc. It is exactly in this economic conjuncture that Egypt in February 1960 nationalised the first domestic firms (namely the Bank Misr and the National Bank), and later decided to turn definitively to East enacting the 'Socialist Revolution' (June-July 1961). A further commitment to the Socialist Bloc was enshrined in the decision to direct the economy through five-year plans (Ikram, 2006: 6-8). Such a policy produced mixed results. On the one hand, the stress on social policies was kept as a primary interest; price control, in fact, along with the protection of the minimum wages were an example of the policies directed to consumption and equality. On the other hand though, the deficit in the balance of

³ As Ikram (2006) affirms, the United States funds were the primary source for the construction of the Dam without which, the infrastructure could not be built.

payments did not show its worst downsides (by turning into foreign debt) until Egypt could rely on some spare reserves to exploit.

In 1967, Egypt was involved in a military confrontation with Israel that saw the Arab State lose both large portions of territory and military capabilities (confront section 2.2.1 for more details on the military implication of the defeat). In the aftermath of the 1967 defeat President Nasser asked his advisors to draw a more liberal strategy. The idea proposed was both to modify the long-term direction of the economy by letting the private sector play a more important role and to attract foreign investments, especially from other Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia. Given the difficulty of the moment, President Nasser decided to stick with the *status quo* and in his *30 March 1968 Paper* imposed defence, acceptable growth and governmental subsidies for the employment of his graduate students as his main aims. The Plan though, brought little relief to a country where the economic shapes deteriorated even more when public spending on defence rose by 30 percent in a year (Ikram, 2006: 8-13).

1.2.2 Sadat's (quasi) U Turn

At the death of President Nasser, but more in general until 1974, the Egyptian situation was the following:

- the Egyptian GDP grew at the same level of its population,
- the prices were kept artificially stable until late 1973,
- the minimum wages remained unchanged,
- the cost of both direct and indirect subsidies raised by almost 50 percent,
- the balance of payments deteriorated with a growing crisis of liquidity,
- the situation of the productive sector showed low productivity, underemployment and 'educated' unemployment (Ikram, 2006: 13-16).

As Ikram (2006: 17) affirms: 'in sum, the economic situation [...] was bleak'. President Sadat could do nothing but resuming the pre-existing strategy discarded by his predecessor in 1967. The strategy was recalled and proposed in late 1973 in the *October Paper* after the (supposedly) positive issue of the new confrontation with Israel (Ansari, 1986: 178 and McDermott, 1988: 103).

The new economic strategy came into being with the name of *infitah* (Open Door Policy). President Sadat's idea was to find a balance between the nationalised system of the Nasserite era and the new idea of liberalization. For this reason, President Sadat would re-affirm the legitimacy of the 1952 Revolution, the agrarian reform and the Socialist Charter in an economic system that continued to function mostly through the public sector. The leap forward, however, was constituted by the opening to foreign investments⁴, the lifting of the ban on several foreign goods and the opening of Egypt to mass tourism. All these policies were generated in order to attract funds from the International Monetary Fund that renewed its interest after Egypt's exit from the Soviet area of influence⁵ (Ikram, 2006: 20-21 and Ansari, 1985: 178, 185-86).

The results of the *infitah* were mixed. On the bright side, the 'opening' gave birth to a period of growth that lasted until 1987. The *infitah* provided Egypt with remarkable results both on the economic and social sides. On the economic side, it is important to mention the 9 percent growth of GDP performed in the period 1975-86, the investment rate passed from 13.7 to 28.7 percent on the total of the GDP and the gross domestic saving passed from 8.3 to 17.8 percent in the same period. On the social side, the policy helped to diminish the absolute poverty and the infant mortality rate and lifted the life expectancy at birth from 50 to 58 years (Ikram, 2006:

⁴ The opening to foreign investments (and the creation of Free Zones) was made possible by Law 43/1974 that, to date, still constitutes a major cornerstone of the Egyptian economic liberalization (Esfahami, 1985).

⁵ The IMF funds were of particular importance for Egypt since the tax collection system could barely work and could thus provide no guarantee at the international level (Ansari, 1986: 185).

24).Such a positive moment was produced not only by the positive effects of the policy but also by collateral causes such as the oil revenues, the income from the Suez Canal, the remittances from the emigrated Egyptians and tourism. However, such a rapid growth underwent a major crisis in January 1977. After resuming its loans to Egypt, in late 1976 the IMF asked the Government to reduce the governmental subsidies to improve the economic shapes. The cutting of the subsidies was pernicious since it affected consumer goods (e.g. flower and bread). The *de facto* soar in the prices caused a major protest from large portions of the Egyptian society in January 1977. The protest was so widespread that it could be resolved only through the intervention of the army. Such a fact preceded the restoration of the subsidies 'at any cost', but it was fatal to the image of President Sadat whose image would have further deteriorated in 1979 after the Camp David Accords and was eventually assassinated in October 1981. In the assassination of Sadat there can be read, along with concurring causes, a general malaise from part of the population that had emerged as a consequence to the *infitah* policy.

1.3 Foreign Policy: Between Two Worlds

The Egyptian foreign policy for the period 1954-81 moved along the same tracks of the economic policy. At the basis of the foreign policy there was the idea of turning to the party that would have provided the country with the best armaments in order to build the capabilities to better confront with Israel.

1.3.1 Bringing the Socialists at Home (1956-73)

Before the nationalization of the Suez Canal, Egypt had two main aims: retrieving arms in order to better stand the confrontation with Israel and looking for ways of financing the building of the High Dam in Aswan. The two projects followed different paths until 1955 when President Nasser decided to breach a 1950 Treaty (the 'Tripartite Declaration'⁶) and carried out an arm deal worth \$200 million with Czechoslovakia. The decision of turning to the Eastern Bloc came in response to some attacks of Israel in the Gaza Strip and to the Baghdad Pact that aimed at isolating Egypt⁷ (Goldschmidt, 2008: 155).

The events above, though, did not follow a linear succession. Until the purchase of arms from Czechoslovakia, President Nasser kept relations with both the Eastern and the Western bloc, looking for the best arms offering. The better contractual conditions provided by Czechoslovakia and a sentiment of general distrust for the West (here intended as Great Britain and United States) were at the basis of the arms purchase from the Eastern Bloc. The move towards the Eastern Bloc, nonetheless, should be intended as gradual and driven by necessity⁸ (Podeh, 2004: 28 and Ginat. 2004: 233-36).

The arms purchase though, did not bring to the rupture of the international relations with the United States that were well aware that instability would have benefitted the Soviet Union (Lesch, 2004: 206, 224-25). In fact, it was primarily for

⁶ The Declaration represented the implementation of the 1949 Armistice Agreement between Israel and the Arab States as a consequence to the just finished 1948 Arab-Israeli war. The 1950 agreement was signed between United States, Great Britain and France and aimed at maintaining the territorial *status quo* defined in the 1949 Agreement and set a limit to the arms race between the two neighboring countries.

⁷ The Baghdad Pact was an international treaty between Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and Great Britain that gave birth to a military alliance between the contracting parties to protect themselves against the Communist threat. The Pact was dissolved in 1979.

⁸ It would have taken five more years after the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company plus considerable funds for the building of the Aswan High Dam in order to approve the first Socialist Charter

this reason that funds continued to flow to Egypt for the construction of the Aswan Dam. It was only in July 1956, when the United States decided to withdraw their funds from Egypt that the situation degenerated and President Nasser decided to take a unilateral action. He nationalized the Suez Canal Company affirming that 'the canal tolls would pay for the building of the High Dam' (Goldschmidt, 2008: 157-59 and Podeh, 2004: 95).

The intention to nationalize the Canal increased the tension between Egypt (backed by the Soviet Union) and its opposing faction that was constituted by France, Great Britain and Israel. The relations remained tense during months with casualties from both parties and could be resolved only through the intervention of the United Nations. On 5 November 1956 a ceasefire was agreed between the parties and it was launched a mission with international forces with the scope of monitoring the ceasefire and prevent escalations. The military confrontation ended with the political victory of Egypt that had been able to stand against its opposing faction obtaining control of the Canal (Bellamy, 2010: 178-83).

The victory in the confrontation boosted the figure of President Nasser that, at moments, was seen as a potential leader of all the Arabs. The victory in the Suez Canal crisis though marked the end of the military successes for President Nasser. In 1958 Egypt and Syria gave birth to a political experiment known as the 'United Arab Republic' that tried to affirm as a regional actor but it did not survive beyond 1961.

The relations with the United States had further deteriorated in two moments: firstly in 1958 when the United States landed in Lebanon and sold missiles to Israel and secondly, in 1962 when Egypt decided to support the anti-royalist faction in Yemen. The second element is relevant since Egypt decided to confront with the Yemeni royalist faction that was backed by Saudi Arabia, which was a major ally of the United States in the region (Marsot, 2007: 141-46).

The year 1967 was the beginning of a new phase of military confrontation with Israel that would last until 1973. In 1967 in fact, President Nasser felt ready to resume the confrontation with Israel and go beyond what owned until that moment.

In 1966 Egypt decided to restart the military defensive alliance with Syria against the Israeli threat. In early 1967 Israel and Syria were engaged in a series of clashes at the borders that alimented the tension between the two factions. As a consequence to it, the two states started to amass troops at the borders. The strategy of President Nasser was to augment the tension in order to lead Israel to yield in front of a too threatening situation and consequently winning without even 'firing a single shot'. For this reason, President Nasser asked the withdrawal of the United Nation forces, seized Israeli ships in the Suez Canal but affirmed he would not fire the first shot and was ready for negotiations. President Nasser was so confident about his strategy that did not even recall his best trained troops from Yemen and relied primarily on the reserves. Israel however, considered the threat as real and decided to take the first step attacking Egypt. In an air strike the Israeli aviation were able to destroy most of the Egyptian air forces. Such a fact, constituted the prelude to the upcoming defeat and territorial loss for Egypt⁹ (Cook, 2012: 91-94 and Osman, 2011: 72-73).

In the aftermath of the war, Egypt and Israel reached an armistice that was further supplemented by the United Nation Security Council Resolution 242 (22 November 1967). In the Resolution it was asked the 'withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict'. The vagueness of the term 'territories' was at the basis of the low intensity and high price confrontation (known as *War of Attrition*) that involved Israel and Egypt in the following years. The survival of Egypt during the situation of 'no war, no peace' was allowed primarily by the military capabilities supplied by the USSR that came at a very high price. The defeat tough, resumed good relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia that had remained tense until that moment because of the war in Yemen. Saudi Arabia in fact, would have represented one of the major Egyptian financial allies during the period of the 'War of attrition' (Marsot, 2007: 150-1).

In July 1970 Egypt decided to accept the peace settlement of the United States Secretary of State William P. Rogers that aimed at composing the Arab-Israel

⁹ Consequently to the defeat, Egypt lost the control of the Sinai Peninsula.

conflict. The so-called 'Rogers Peace Plan' aimed at fulfilling the obligations established under Resolution 242 of 1967. President Nasser decided to comply with the peace process with the further intention to settle the Palestinian-Israeli problem¹⁰. The good auspices of the peace process came to a halt in September 1970 when several planes were hijacked from Palestinian part. The settlement of such situation was fatal to the Egyptian president that died after a Summit in Cairo on 28 September 1970 leaving Egypt in a delicate moment (Goldschmidt, 2008: 184-5).

Anwar al-Sadat succeeded Gamal Abd el-Nasser to the presidency of Egypt. In spite of a 'light hand' on the domestic problems during the early years of his presidency, President Sadat was firm in foreign relations. He decided to continue extending the ceasefire established under the Rogers Peace Plan and offered to reopen the Suez Canal if Israeli troops would pull back a few kilometres. In spite of the Israeli refuse to comply with this request. Sadat affirmed that 1971 would have been the 'year of decisions'. In May 1971, he signed a friendship treaty with USSR but maintained indirect relations with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait that had funded Egypt since 1967 when Resolution 242 was issued. The Arab support was crucial in 1973 when Egypt, heavily unprepared and exploiting the new winds of war caused by the assassination of eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympic games decided to attack Israel (Goldschmidt, 2008: 186, 189-90).

1.3.2 US Se-ducting Egypt¹¹

The military attack led by Egypt and Syria started on 6 October 1973 and was successful only during the first day of the confrontation. Egypt had been able to cross

¹⁰ President Nasser could do nothing but accepting the terms with the further hope of putting the problem of the Palestinian confrontation with Israel under deep freeze. Compare footnote 5 for more details on the previous agreements on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

¹¹ The term seduction refers to the Latin verb *seducere* whose literal meaning is 'leading away' but more in general it means 'bringing to yourself or to your position'.

the Suez Canal, but the real success was for the oil-exporting States led by Saudi Arabia. With the upcoming winter, the Organization of the Oil Exporting Countries decided to quadruple the price of oil and affirmed that exports would have reduced by 5 percent for each additional month that Israel would have stayed in the territories occupied in 1967. The acceptance of the conditions by OPEC countries led to a peace process in Geneva in the month of November. The new peace process was mediated by Henry Kissinger and ended being favourable to Egypt that could push the Israeli forces to the other side of the Canal to the line of the Egyptian furthest advance during the war (Goldschmidt, 2008: 190-5 and Cook, 2011: 132-5).

With Resolution 340 (25 October 1973), the United Nations Security Council launched a mission with the intention to patrol the buffer zone that was created between the two countries. The mission (known as UNEF II) would stay until July 1979 when it was withdrawn as a consequence to the composition of the Egyptian-Israeli conflict after the Camp David Accords.

The Kissinger diplomacy and the launch of the UNEF II mission were able to stabilize the area, at least with reference to the most recent past. The emergence of *infitah* as economic policy was the landmark of the changing situation. Even if timidly, Egypt had started to dismantle the Socialist system put in place by Gamal Abd el-Nasser and had started to create a stronger private sector. The Egyptian alliances started to change between late 1975 and early 1976¹². The long-standing Egyptian-Soviet alliance based on military subsidies and collaboration was shaken when the economy could no longer stand the price of future military confrontation with Israel. All along 1975, Egypt had borrowed up to \$7 billion from the USSR for military components and armaments. Unable to sustain the political cost of the debt, President Sadat closed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with USSR that he himself had signed in 1971 and started delaying the payments of the Egyptian arms purchases. The deterioration of the relations with the USSR did not result in better

¹² As Stewart et al. (1989) show, the Soviets tried very hard to keep Egypt under their area of influence.

relations with the United States. The end of the Treaty of Friendship with the Soviets came at the moment of Jimmy Carter's election that, in the short run, would do nothing to tighten relations with Egypt (Goldschmidt, 2008: 199-200 and McDermott, 1988: 46). The dramatic events of 1972 Munich Olympics, where the Israeli team was decimated by a Palestinian commando, further reduced any Western sympathy for Arab leaders.

The decision by the United States administration may be due to a more subtle strategy involving the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As seen in section 2.2.2, Egypt had resumed relations with the IMF between 1974-75 and had obtained new fund. In late 1976 thus, the IMF was able to ask Egypt to reduce governmental subsidies to the population in order to improve the economic shapes of the country. Whether the poorest could stand the cutting of subsidies on unnecessary goods such as beer, macaroni and French bread, they went to the streets in January 1977 when subsidies were cut on 'bread, cooking oil, broad beans and lentils'. The protest could be resolved only through the intervention of the army and the United States were ready to provide the funds that Egypt needed in order to continue funding the subsidies (McDermott, 1988: 53-4 and Goldschmidt, 2008: 200-2). There is all likelihood that such strategy of precipitating Egypt into a negative condition was thought and applied by the United States in order to improve their bargaining power with Egypt¹³.

The 'bread riots' (or 'food riots' as they came to be known) were followed by the acceleration of the peace process with Israel after the unexpected travel of Sadat to Jerusalem on 9 November 1977. For the first time Israel was going to be recognised by an Arab State..The preliminary talks culminated in March 1979 in the twelve-day diplomatic marathon in Camp David that brought to the final peace treaty between Egypt and Israel (Goldschmidt, 2008: 201-6 and Qandt, 2005: 177-204).

¹³ A similar strategy was tried between 1954-6 when Egypt was looking for funds to build the Aswan High Dam. The difference with reference to the previous event was that in 1977 there were no other offers for Egypt and thus the United States could impose their conditions.

The Camp David Accords, while being positive for the Egyptian-Israeli relations, raised large conflicts with most Arab countries since no substantial agreement to improve the situation of the West Bank was reached. The inter-Arab relations improved only in September 1980 when Egypt decided to back Iraq in the Iraq-Iran war thus resuming good relations with several Arab countries before the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat that took place on 6 October 1981.

1.4 Domestic Situation

In the following paragraph the domestic situation in Egypt will be presented in terms of people's perception. In particular, we will show that a better economic situation along with more goods during the Sadat presidency did not result in a better condition for the Egyptian population.

1.4.1 The Era of Undisputed Consensus

The July Revolution constituted a watershed in the Egyptian history since for the first time Egypt was going to be governed by Egyptians. According to Meir Hatina (2004: 102), the political debate in the country before the Revolution was almost inexistent:

The revolution had portrayed Egypt as a poverty-stricken nation afflicted with anarchy and exploitation. Its political parties, interested only in their own survival, were perceived as clearly unable to promote the national struggle for freedom. National resources were controlled by a small group. Parliamentary life was devoid of real content, and none of the elected parliaments completed its constitutional term in office.

For such reason, when the revolution took place there was no resistance by the local population. The earliest policies put in place by the Revolutionary Command Council and later on by President Nasser were tailored in order to obtain the best result hoped and to improve popular support. Actually, the first agrarian reform and the nationalization of the Suez Canal were well hailed by the local population. After the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, the appreciation for the figure of President Nasser grew substantially. As stated by Podeh (2004: 15):

By the mid-1950s, when Nasser emerged as a charismatic leader, many migrants flocking into the major cities were psychologically prepared for the appearance of such a leader. Although their actual political contribution would be rather limited, these migrants would play an active role in demonstrations and other mass political activities.

Such a capacity of rising empathy from the population was made possible by three main reasons. First, the system of taxation affected neither the richest nor the poorest; second, the governmental subsidies helped the poorest to survive. Finally, the graduated (the ones who were effectively taxed) were guaranteed a job position within the public sector, the so called *miri* job (Amin, 2000: 65-70 and Marsot, 2007: 144). In June 1956, President Nasser proposed a new Constitution that was approved by a popular vote. The Constitution allowed women to vote and hold public offices, but instituted also a strong presidential system with a consultative assembly that substituted the Parliament and abolished all the political parties (Goldschmidt, 2008: 164).

The domestic situation remained steady until mid-1960s. Between 1960 and 1961 Egypt launched the first five-year plan (discussed in Section 1.2.1) and applied the Socialist Laws (July 1961). Such laws were relevant since the State ownership was extended to both banks and industries; wealth was redistributed and the agrarian

reform was made more stringent¹⁴. Such a comprehensive welfare State was kept stable by a bureaucratized elite and a large army. All these factor could work together until 1965, when a total lack of population planning, the cutting of their food subsidies by the IMF and the participation in the expensive Yemeni civil war, put the economic system under pressure (Podeh, 2004: 29-30 and Burns, 1985: 149-173).

The year 1965 marked the end of the rising trajectory of the Nasser presidency. The events above explained coupled with the major defeat in the 1967 war with the subsequent incapacity to tax either high and low incomes and with over one third of the State current expenditures that were allocated in the military sector (Ikram, 2006: 8-13). The defeat also provoked the first case of popular unrest with large students' revolts taking place in 1968 that were repressed by the police (Rousillon, 1998: 358).

After the issue of Resolution 242 (1967) and the beginning of the 'War of Attrition' with Israel, the Egyptian situation worsened dramatically. The State control increased on both ministers and the population, and the economy made a U-turn as seen above.

1.4.2 The Negative Side of Liberalism (1974-81)

When Anwar al-Sadat took office, the country was under a high tension and it is understandable that the new president's first actions were aimed at political liberalization. Many students were freed from jail and the spying on the ministers was diminished. People seemed to have overcome the loss of Nasser and were eager to live in a State that permitted more civil liberties (Goldschmidt, 2008: 197 and Mahfouz, 2008).

¹⁴ The landholding was halved passing from 200 to 100 *feddans* (a *feddan* is equal to 0.43 hectares)

The popular happiness improved after the victory in the 1973 confrontation with Israel but it diminished dramatically after the issue of the *October Paper* which introduced the *infitah*. The economic opening was crucial since it started to dismantle the welfare State. It gave large incentives to the Egyptian bourgeoisie to invest¹⁵ and prosper but left both poor people and governmental employees with little protection. The salary of the public employees was devaluated by between 7 and 11 percent due to no adaptation to inflation. The absence of a demographic policy resulted in a population growing at an annual rate of 2.5 percent, generating the overcrowding of cities that, together with unemployment, forced many Egyptians to travel abroad to seek work. Those who remained were forced to live in a situation of deprivation that worsened from 1975 onwards¹⁶ (Goldschmidt, 2008: 196-9). When President Sadat lifted the State subsidies on primary goods, as asked by the IMF, the revolt was to ensue.

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¹⁵ Along with the flourishing bourgeoisie, the policy magnified the problem of corruption and generated the problem of 'crony capitalism' (Waterbury: 1976).

¹⁶ To better understand the magnitude of inflation over public sector worker there will be proposed an excerpt from Ahmad El-Sayed El-Naggar (2009a: 43): 'In 1970 the monthly salary of a new university graduate appointed by the Government could buy 68 kg of meat monthly – beef is the main source of animal protein in Egyptian cuisine. In 1977 the salary was increased to E£28 monthly, enough to buy 35 kg of meat at prevailing prices'.

¹⁷ Along with the flourishing bourgeoisie, the policy magnified the problem of corruption and generated the problem of 'crony capitalism' (Waterbury: 1976).

forced to live in a situation of deprivation that worsened from 1975 onwards¹⁸ (Goldschmidt, 2008: 196-9). When President Sadat lifted the State subsidies on primary goods as asked by the IMF, the step to revolt was narrow.

The aftermath of the January 1977 food riots showed a complex situation. The social cohesion was heavily shaken on both the socio-economic and psychological dimensions. On the one hand, an imbalanced economy together with high levels of unemployment and gloomy perspectives for graduate students marked the rise of non-governmental organizations that aimed at aiding people (among them the Muslim Brothers). On the other hand, the peace with Israel widened the gap between the Government and the Egyptian population. The whole situation resulted in an increasing number of Egyptians, and among them many young graduates, finding relieve in militant Islam (Ibrahim, 2002: 1-34).

The peace with Israel in 1979 was judged negatively by the militant Islamist front, who thought that it would have allowed the Israeli Government to 'bomb civilian neighborhoods of Beirut, destroy Iraq's nuclear reactor, increase Jewish settlements on the West Bank, and oppress the Palestinians'. Such a feeling doubled in November 1979 with the Iran hostage crisis, and by Sadat's condemnation of it, a fact that inflamed the spirit of the militant Islamists. The most concrete attempt to quell the tension came when President Sadat decided to call elections for the National Assembly in July 1979 and in 1980 interrupted the 'state of emergency' that was imposed after the 1967 defeat. However, the tension rose in September 1981 and Sadat, aware of a plot aimed at killing him, decided to seize over 1,500 of his opponents. The event provoked the anger of the Islamic militants and even Sadat's ministers. President Sadat was eventually assassinated on 6 October 1981 during a military parade by some members of the Islamist group 'al Gama'a al-Islamiyya', the

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same group that led the attack in Luxor in 1997 (Goldschmidt, 2008: 209-10 and Meijer, 2011).

2.

Early Mubarak Years.

Waltzing with Democracy (1981-2004)

The sudden assassination of President Sadat on 6 October 1981 occurred in a situation of high tension in the country. The *infitah*, which was the current economic policy, had reduced dramatically the welfare of the Egyptian middle class and had also made the life conditions even more difficult for the poorest. In addition to this, the peace with Israel inflamed the conscience of the militant Islamists; indeed, the wave of repression before the assassination of the President represented the straw that broke the camel's back. The successor to Anwar al-Sadat, thus, needed to think whether he would have issued his policies in line of continuity with his predecessor or rather introduce a new program.

The scope of the present chapter is to describe and explain the events and the decisions taken by Hosni Mubarak on both the economic and the domestic policies. The chapter is divided into three sections: the first section (2.1) deals with the economic policy in terms of reflection of the Egyptian foreign relations. The second section (2.2) instead, deals with the domestic politics and with the formal introduction of democracy in the everyday life of the Egyptians; which finally represented just a system for gaining further control over the society. The third section (2.3) deals with the first years of the new millennium in which a series of

factors made the period 2000-04 ripe for change, but the Government, in the end, did not exploit such a chance.

2.1 The Era of Short-Sighted Economy

As it was analysed in the previous chapter, the economic and foreign policies were strictly related, even if they followed different tracks on many occasions. The signature of the Camp David Accords marked the end of foreign policy as if this was something independent from the international economy.

The present section aims at presenting the Egyptian economic policy during the first two decades of the Mubarak era.

2.1.1 The End of (Black) Gold Age (1981-87)

The beginning of the presidency by Hosni Mubarak saw the Egyptian economy that 'was supposed to behave like a free market economy [but] Government interventions continued to create serious distortions'. Such a situation was created by both the lack of means to direct the economy and the incapacity to understand the general functioning of the economy (Ikram, 2006: 49-50). The lack of preparation, rigour and organization in the direction of the policies resulted in a condition that was perceived negatively by the local population. As early as 1977, the Ministry of Planning (1977) issued a document that stated:

More and more young people and workers perceive the contradictions of a socialist society which thinks with a capitalist mind, which takes from socialism and communism the concepts of public ownership, dominance of the public sector, guaranteed employment, education, services and social security, but neglects to take firm enforcement of civil authority or condemnation of the carelessness which decreases productivity. Similarly, the government has taken from capitalism the features of

consumption and interclass mobility, the concept of the importance of the individual and of historical tradition. But it has not adopted from the capitalist system the stringency of market competition or the responsibility of the firm for quality control, upon which depends the success or failure of the firm. [...] the end result is a society lacking discipline or supervision, distribution without production, promises without obligations, freedom without responsibility¹.

Such a situation however, could persist and remain unchallenged since the Egyptian Government was not subjected to any form of accountability. In addition to this, the governmental strategy continued to create general long-term commitments but, in actual facts, it tended to prize the short term policies, the reason for this was a continuous need to address and resolve the immediate problems as they arose. The dichotomy between short and long run was further supported by personal interests of the Ministers in the Cabinet. Any Minister with personal interests, in fact, would have activated to quash any reform that could have limited his own privileges (Holt and Roe, 1993).

The interests of the single Ministers reduced dramatically the capacity of the Government to act in the economic field. Such incapacity, however, did not compromise the social order due to the new liberties protected by President Mubarak (confront Section 2.2) and by a quickly moving economy (6 percent growth of GDP in the period 1982-85). Such balance was only interrupted between 1986-87 when the price of a barrel of oil plummeted from \$33 to less than \$15 (Sivan, 2000).

The economic mismanagement and the slowdown of the local economy produced by the reduced price of oil generated the so called 'Dutch Disease'. The Dutch Disease is an event in which large quantities of foreign currency enter an economic geographical zone producing the soar of the currency exchange rate that erodes competitiveness and reduces exports. This phenomenon occurred in Egypt and it was most likely associated to the oil exports, to the foreign remittances and, in

¹ The current excerpt is quoted by Khalid Ikram (2006: 50).

reduced scale, to the tourism². As a consequence, the economic system created through *infitah*, and based on the three pillars just mentioned, slowly modified the structure of the Egyptian economy: the agricultural and manufacturing sectors were reduced in advantage of the industrial and the services sectors (Said, 1997: 225-29).

The final effects of thirteen years of this economic policy which was based on easy funding (oil, remittances and tourism) but also affected by a general mismanagement of resources produced the following situation:

- The Egyptian GDP lost approximately 10 to 11 percent of its GDP,
- The total oil export passed from 74 to 37 percent³,
- The total debt rocketed to 112 percent of GDP (the figures reach 184 percent if the debt is calculated on free market rates (World Bank, 1990 and Ikram, 2006: 55-6)).

The year 1987 constituted a watershed in the Egyptian economic history. Egypt had definitively missed the possibility to create a sustainable economy aimed to establish equality. As a consequence, the new phase of rescheduling of the debt with international institutions (IMF and WB) and with the Paris Club (which gathered a part of the Egyptian creditors) had to rely on the capacity of the Egyptian diplomats to influence the decisions with respect to their accounts (Ibrahim, 2002b: 226-7 and Ibrahim, 2002c: 141-44).

2 Tourism though, should be intended as a minor cause.

3 The data refer to the period 1982-87.

2.1.2 Bargaining with the Past and the Future

The re-scheduling of the debt with the IMF and the WB before and the Paris Club later presented not only problems at the economic level (e.g. the speed in the restitution or the interest rate), but also at diplomatic level. As anticipated, Egypt had lost most of its capacity to influence the decision of their counterparts, as it had often been for most of its republican history⁴. The loss of 'bargaining power' by Egypt between a first round of negotiations held in 1987 and the following one held in 1991 was primarily given to deteriorating economic conditions. In addition to the problems created by the Dutch Disease and the reduction in oil price the Egyptian economy had to deal with two additional problems. The first problem was the reduction in Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) from 1989 onwards as a consequence to the deterioration in the economy (Safadi, 1997:27). The second problem was connected to population growth. The Egyptian population in 1985 overcame the 45 million quota with hundreds of thousands of young Egyptians that every year reached their adulthood and started to look for some job. As it can be inferred from the previous sub-section (2.1.1), the economic shapes had not improved under the Mubarak presidency and the economic structure was still unable to accommodate all the new workers. The problems of overpopulation and underemployment were further exacerbated at the beginning of the 1990s by the winds of war in the Gulf area. The threat of a future war reduced both the willingness to move abroad by the workers and reduced the receptive capacity by many Gulf States. Consequently, thousands of workers came back to their own country and, in the particular case of Egypt, the increasing unemployment was further worsened by the return of emigrants and the consequent reduction in remittances (Beshai, 1993: 134-36).

4 To draw a comparison with the past, there can be recalled the 1955-56 period (sections 1.2.1, 1.3.1 and 1.4.1) in which Egypt could conclude a major arms purchase with Czechoslovakia and continue to receive funds from the US.

Given such conditions, in November 1990 Egypt started new talks with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in order to receive new funds to improve its economic shapes. The new treaty came to be known as 'Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Programme' (ERSAP). The difference between the ERSAP and the previous accords that Egypt signed with its creditors was the fact that the international institutions seemed to have learned the Egyptian economic history and how to bend it to their needs. The new adjustment programme in fact was negotiated on the need to obtain tangible results (Ayubi, 1997:131); on the one hand there were created all the macroeconomic goals that Egypt had to achieve in order to continue receiving funds. On the other hand, the social needs were kept into consideration when the schedule and the exchange rate⁵ were discussed. The memory of the 1977 'bread riots' was still vivid in the minds of the negotiators and the new re-scheduling of the debt was tailored on the actual capacity of the country to return what owed⁶. The fear that Egypt could collapse in a way similar to 1977 was at the basis of the success of the Egyptian delegation. Apart from the re-scheduling of the debt, Egypt committed to:

- The cut of the Governmental expenditure that passed from 11.4 percent to 5.4 percent on the total of the GDP,
- The cut on subsidies that were kept only for the poorest,
- The boost of the private sector to free up the economy⁷,
- The restructuring of the banking system (Ikram, 2006: 60-68).

5 The exchange rate constituted the core of a large debate since a too high devaluation of the currency would have created serious problems in terms of inflation. The final balance was found by pegging the Egyptian Lira to the US dollar in order to maintain stability.

6 For further details concerning the cognitive process of availability and vividness of information, confront the articles by Tversky A. and Kahneman D. (1974) and Reyes R. M. et al. (1980).

7 In more detail, the push of the private sector was enacted through the issue of Law 96/1992 (Waterbury, 2008: 160).

In May 1991, the United States and other creditors (such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Qatar) decided to renounce to a part of the debt that Egypt owed them. Such forgiveness was primarily given by the participation of Egypt to the Gulf war and by the Egyptian willingness to commit to the IMF adjustment plan. The creditor States renounced to a total of US\$ 19.6 billion (Ikram, 2006: 68 and Ibrahim, 2002c: 143-44).

The result of the ERSAP materialised in the second half of the 1990s. On the bright side of the policy there were the decrease of inflation and debt and the increase of the GDP. Inflation decreased by almost a half passing from 19.3 percent to 10.7 percent during the first year. The debt decreased by 30 percent in the period 1991-93. The GDP grew less than 2 percent during the first years, but rocketed during the period 1995-2000, reaching the average rate of 5.9 percent (Ramsis Farah, 2009: 42-44 and Waterbury, 2008: 250).

On the negative side though there aroused several problems. Among the primary aims of the ERSAP there was the idea to push the private sector and finally convert the Egyptian economy into a free market system. The plan should have realized through the selling of public companies and enterprises but the expectations were not met and several of the enterprises remained public. In this way, the companies continued to be controlled by the public sector (Ikram, 2006: 80-82). According to Saad Eddin Ibrahim (2002c) there is room to think that the internal application of the IMF programme did not redistribute richness among the population. The result for this was, again, a pro-rich policy that widened the gap between the richest portion of the population and the increasing number of poor people. Such a gap was worsened by the element of corruption and deviation of funds that had in the 1990s the actual possibility to flourish with a free market economy. In this perspective, a small number of people was able to exploit large benefits (El-Sayed El-Naggar, 2009a: 44-47).

As a consequence to twenty-six years of *infitah*, the Egyptian economy had created a non self-sustaining system. The economy had prized primarily a small elite and had left to the other social groups less than what proportionality should have suggested. Such a situation reflected on the wages of the ordinary Egyptians, as Joel Beinin affirms (2001: 167):

In Egypt, real wages in the private sector rose over 50 percent from 1975 to 1985, while public-sector wages rose by more than a third. By 1990 wages had fallen to their 1972 level, and they continued to decline during the early 1990s [...]. Real wages in manufacturing, which rose nearly 50 percent from 1975 to 1982, fell 40 percent from 1985 to 1995 [...]. Income distribution worsened.

These data, united to the general macroeconomic figures presented above provide good hints on the real effects of disproportion created by the Egyptian economy before the year 2000. The life of the ordinary Egyptians at the turn of the new millennium was not different from the life of the characters by Naguib Mahfouz in his novel *The Day the Leader was Killed*. The novel, first published in 1983, describes the life of those people that, consequently to the *infitah*, had lost most of their wealth and from relative richness at the end of the 1960s, they found themselves to be poor one decade later. At the end of the 1990s, the situation had not changed and the lack of population control had made the state of affairs even worse.

2.2 Bargaining with Democracy

Hosni Mubarak, Vice President of Egypt since 1975, succeeded to Anwar al-Sadat on 14 October 1981. Unlike his two predecessors, Mubarak 'possessed neither Nasser's grandeur, nor Sadat appeal, [Mubarak once] was described as severely lacking in the leadership department but excelling in executive tasks and delivering policies'. Hosni Mubarak was thought to be the right man in a moment in which

Egypt needed to forget the demons of its most recent past which had remained vivid after Sadat's assassination (Osman, 2011: 180-81).

The aim of the current section is to outline the major policies put in place by Hosni Mubarak during the first two decades of his presidency. In particular, there will be stressed the technique of balancing the internal inability to resolve problems with the promise of more democracy. In order to better comprehend the current section, it is important to keep in mind the economic trends during such period since several policies were issued in order to limit the popular anger when the economy was producing negative results.

2.2.1 The 'Friendly Dictatorship'

When Hosni Mubarak took office as President of Egypt on 14 October 1981, he had to face the first difficult decision. He had to decide between two options⁸: either continuing the repressive *status quo* that had characterised the last years of the Sadat presidency or rather softening the approach in the management of the domestic order. The choice for the latter policy however, was not obvious.

President Mubarak in fact, had to decide whether he preferred to continue repressing the opposition or rather listening to the population by guaranteeing them with more liberties. The former choice was to be preferred in a perspective in which the threat to the Government was local. In such a situation, the Government may have preferred to pass through a period of major imbalances going against the anger of the local population but composing the Government-opposition conflict in the long run obtaining peace and stability. The latter choice (the selected one eventually) aimed at maximising stability in the short-medium run since it would have improved the perceived conditions of living by providing people with what they would have

⁸ In order to better comprehend the psychological implications of continuity *versus* discontinuity of a policy please confront Quattrone and Tversky (1988).

called more liberties. Such policy though would have revealed ambiguous results in the long run. From 1987 onwards, the economic slowdown generated disquiet among the population and the repressive wave to maintain the public order was perceived as major reduction of freedom⁹.

President Mubarak apparently decided to opt for the latter choice, thus prizing the short-medium term balance. Among his first policies, the new president decided to loose the vice on the civil society, he opened some space to a (controlled) opposition and decided to release from jail several opponents to former President Sadat (Gervasio, 2011: 135-37). The new President tough, did not have in mind a democratic Egypt but rather a dictatorship that could appear more friendly to its citizens¹⁰. President Mubarak never really decided to reverse the *October Paper* (1973), but he simply applied the provisions of the Paper with a more relaxed schedule¹¹. As a proof for it, all the norms that were applied by the new executive to protect the liberties were not given a clear constitutional status and could be reversed by decrees.

The events that prove such theory can be found in the public sector protests between 1986-87¹². As a consequence to the worsening conditions of the economy, the public sector started to put in place a series of protests aimed at adapting their

9 On this particular account, it is fundamental to understand that the human brain does not analyze situations in absolute terms, but it actually assesses them according to the way in which the new facts modify the current *status quo*. Such 'perspective' system further affirms that, given a *status quo*, the improvements to the current situation are felt less intense *vis-à-vis* the worsening to the *status quo*, in other terms, this means that 'losses loom larger than gains'. Such cognitive process was theorized by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1979).

10 The strategy applied by Hosni Mubarak is not different from the strategy applied by Gamal Abd el-Nasser on 27 July 1952 when he tried to gain support by the local population by affirming that he wanted a democracy (compare Section 1.1).

11 President Mubarak himself talked about 'democracy in doses' (Zahid, 2010: 64).

12 In historical terms, the earliest protests of the public sector trace back to 1984, but here they are employed the years 1986-87 since they were the years in which the phenomenon started to verify in a larger scale.

wages to the new costs of living. The major problem that the workers had to face though, was the framework in which their protests took place. In theoretical terms, the workers could make resort to two instruments to have their voice heard: the strike and the trade unions.

The strike was permitted as early as 1953, but no workers' manifestation until that moment had taken place under the label of 'strike'. There was needed a ruling from a Court in April 1987 to reaffirm that the strike was a right for the worker under the Labour Law. The Government though, seemed to prove little interest for such sentence and decided to do nothing to better protect the workers.

The Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) was founded in 1967 and was a trade union system divided into twenty-three sections that had always been controlled by loyalists to the Government. All the twenty-three sections were directed by executive committees for which no elections had ever taken place (Beinin, 2001: 165-66 and Beinin, 2009: 68-72).

All of this resulted in scarce protection for the workers that, by 1987, started to abandon the civil dimension and started to give a political and radical turn to their protests. The element of politicization of workers' movements had two main consequences. The first consequence was the fact that the local population realized that the 'democratization in doses' was not what President Mubarak really intended to realize but rather a tool for his internal control. The second consequence was the fact that this event constituted the terrain in which the Islamic non-governmental organizations could gather support and prosper.

Further from the workers' demonstrations movements, the 1981 idea by President Mubarak to stabilize the situation in the short-medium run came to terms with its limitations. Among them there can be acknowledged:

- The 'democratic doses' after the economic slowdown had widened the gap between the small elite that was at power and the local population that had to confront with worsening conditions of living,

- The dismantling of the Nasserite system made the workers weaker and with less protection (Podeh, 2004: 100),
- The protection of more liberties during half a decade had widened the gulf between expectations and real protection leading the citizens to look for protection in other institutions,
- The partial opening to opposition movements had created vacuums in which non-governmental organizations (e.g. the Muslim Brotherhood) had increased their popularity among the population and had gained a large popular support (Ates, 2005).

The non-governmental organizations at first pursued charitable aims (such as providing medical aid for people or helping young people to go to university), but later on they became the main actor against which the Government would have directed his repressive policies. The non-governmental organizations started small but later on started to have larger aims. Hesham al-Awadi describes the strategy by one of these organizations (2004: 126-27):

In 1988, the Islamists introduced their health care scheme into the medical syndicate. It offered subsidized treatment in private hospitals and clinics to members and their families and in 1988 the beneficiaries of the scheme included more than 17,600 doctors and 43,960 dependents. The popular project was extended the following year to the engineers' syndicate where the number of beneficiaries reached 72,000. Both cases showed the extent to which this kind of service was needed, despite the existing state system of health insurance. [...] The Brothers also organized massive sales of furniture, washing machines, gas cookers, refrigerators and other items that young professionals needed for their flats, at subsidized costs or through interest-free installments.

In practical terms, the non-governmental organizations created a parallel welfare system that was able to provide protection to those who belonged to the syndicate. Their point of strength was represented by their capacity to operate both within and beyond the walls of the syndicate, obtaining an increasing consent.

The increased influence and popular support to the non-governmental organizations materialised in the 1987 results of the parliamentary elections¹³. The participation of the Egyptian population to the elections was low since 1974 (the year of the first parliamentary elections), but in 1987 the figure produced only in 25 percent of voters casting their ballots. What was unexpected though, was the fact that the so called 'Islamic Alliance', a political group formed by the Socialist Liberal Party, the Socialist Labour Party and the Muslim Brothers were able to obtain 17 percent of votes and 60 seats in the National Assembly on a total of 458¹⁴. During 1987, there was held a referendum for the confirmation of President Mubarak for another five-year term. As it could be expected, the President was confirmed with 97.1 percent of the votes, but only 50 percent of those having right to vote presented to the voting booths (Nohlen et al, 1999: 341-43).

In late 1980s, however, the need for political stability represented a primary concern for the Government. Consequently to it, after both calls to vote and in spite of the electoral turnout in favour of the opposition in the National Assembly, Hosni Mubarak, enforced by his confirmation for a new mandate, continued to trust the non-governmental organizations and thought he could tighten his relations with them in order to use them as an instrument for control. As a proof for this, President Mubarak continued to fund the religious institutions (such as Al-Azhar) in order to prize the pro-system Islamists against the militant Islamists that had continued to play an underground role in the country since the late Sadat's years¹⁵ (Al-Awadi, 2004: 128-33).

13 There should be started from the premise that parliamentary elections were held in Egypt since 1974 but the 'hard power' did not lie in the legislature. The elections were more a system aimed at providing the sensation of democracy.

14 The 1987 electoral turn was relevant since it came after the dissolution of the National Assembly in order to allow the citizens to vote in free elections after the 1984 turn was thought to have been held under irregular conditions (Kienle, 2000: 52-3).

15 Between 1986-7, for example, a group called 'Those Saved From Hell' was held responsible for attempted assassination against former Ministers of the Interior under Sadat presidency who were responsible for anti-Islamist repression. The same group committed

At the turn of the 1990s and from a foreign perspective, Egypt was providing its citizens with apparently good protection of liberties (Kienle, 2000: 51). The elections were apparently free, the economy was worsening but still proceeding on the tracks of the free market and Egypt was playing a core role in the Gulf war supporting the United States. The situation from the internal perspective though was much different. Protests started to become more frequent¹⁶, the workers movements had politicised and people still relied on the welfare system which existed primarily in the parallel form of the non-governmental organizations. As a consequence to the Gulf War and the reduction of the remittances, there opened a new phase of confrontation between the Government and the militant Islamists.

The change in the state of affairs during the early 1990s led the Government to suspend its 'friendly' behaviour. In order to push the Islamic Alliance out from the National Assembly, during October 1990 there was held a referendum involving the legality of the 1987 elections. The referendum dissolved the National Assembly and consequently to it, in November there were held new elections. The new electoral turn saw the boycott of the 'Islamic Alliance' since they decided not to accept the result of the referendum. In addition to it, the new elections were held with a new electoral mechanism that would have prized only the National Democratic Party (the regime's party) and the independent candidates. The anger of the 'Islamic Alliance' was magnified by their belief that the 1990 electoral turn was a step back *vis-à-vis* the 1987 elections which they perceived as democratic (Kienle, 2000: 52-56).

other violent crimes such as attacks on video clubs which served alcoholic beverages or theaters as application of the principle 'commanding the good and forbidding the evil' (Rousillon, 1998: 388).

¹⁶ Steel industry workers put in place a large scale protest in 1989 (Gervasio, 2011: 134)

2.2.2 The Government trying to catch up with the opposition

The Egyptian domestic situation during the 1990s was characterized by the radicalization of those political and religious groups that were present in the country. As it was seen in subsection 2.1.1, the fundamentalist drift started in the year 1990 after the referendum quashing the 1987 elections, the Egyptian participation to the Gulf war and the plans for the recovery of the Egyptian economy exacerbated the domestic situation (Gelvin, 2009: 338). The militant Islam, however, brought the confrontation to another level after the assassination of the professor and columnist Farag Fuda on 8 June 1992. The terrorist threat thus resurged by hands of the group 'al Gama'a al-Islamiyya' (the same group that assassinated Sadat) who gave birth to a period of major confrontation with the Government where many people lost their lives¹⁷ (Rousillon, 1998: 388).

The governmental response to the assassination was immediate. As early as 1992 the penal code was modified and the repressive branch of the Government could use the new far-reaching definition of 'terrorism' to arrest, interrogate and send the suspects to Special Courts for almost any crime. In addition to it, the charge of terrorism permitted the 'use of force' for any action aimed at 'violating public order'. The broad formulation soon resulted in the disappearance of many citizens as early as 1992 (Kienle, 2000: 15-16, 93-94).

The gap between the Government and militant Islam was further widened by a natural catastrophe that took place in Heliopolis in October 1992. The non-governmental organizations arrived short after the earthquake and were immediately operative in assisting the local population. The governmental forces instead took hours before they could arrive and produce their first results (Zahid, 2010: 119-20 and Cook, 2011: 165). Natural disasters represent delicate events since they test how much a Government is ready to face an unexpected and disastrous situation for which

¹⁷ Between 1992 and 1997, the terrorist group killed over 1.200 people.

they are supposed to be prepared (Smith and Quiroz Flores, 2010). The Government thus, appeared inefficient and slower in comparison to the non-governmental organizations (in this case the Muslim Brothers).

The years that followed were years of tough confrontation between the Government and militant Islamic groups. In 1995 and in particular its second half represented the year of the radicalization of tension. On 26 June 1995, the terrorist group al Gama'a al-Islamiyya tried to assassinate Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa, provoking the response from the Government before the celebration of the upcoming elections. Consequently to it, the 'democratic doses' were retained in favour of the expansion of the executive and repressive branches.

The 1995 elections in fact, were held in a state of tensions since the Government needed to regain the terrain lost in favour of the opposition. The executive thus, chose to employ the legal framework as its sharpest instrument. During the pre-election phase, the Constitution with its schedules for elections was used to delay as much as possible the beginning of the electoral campaign. The Government decided to limit the freedom of speech of the journalists¹⁸ using the provisions contained in the penal code (modified in 1992). In such a way, the opposition barely appeared on the news. The Muslim Brotherhood was formally banned from Egypt and eighty among its leading members were arrested and several others followed suit without any credible charge¹⁹ (Zahis, 2010: 64-66 and Kienle, 2000: 56-57).

The elections were celebrated in two turns between November and December 1995 with frauds reported from the most remote countryside to the voting booths in

18 The law limiting the journalists' freedom of speech came to be known as 'law on publications'.

19 Such a strong response is the ultimate product of the fear by the governmental during that period 1992-95. As Michel G. Nehme affirms (2003: 5-8) the authoritarian regimes fear their political opponents and the more they feel threatened, the more they resort to violence. In addition to it, the author affirms that 'the greater becomes the potential power of the nation-state to channel both their longings and resentments [the larger it becomes their power to] direct their lives and fate'.

Tahrir Square. The frauds were so widespread that the Government could report only the names of the candidates that had obtained a seat in the National Assembly but not the votes that each candidate had obtained (Kienle, 2000: 58).

The conformation of the new Assembly delivered the idea of emergency in which the Government was living. Firstly, the opposition was reduced to silence since the only deputies that could earn a seat were people that the Government wished to have as opponents in the Assembly since they could do no harm. As a proof for this, almost the totality of the 'Independent' deputies passed in the group of the National Democratic Party short after the elections. Second, the male chauvinism dominated the elections since the number of women sitting in the National Assembly reduced by 50 percent. Such a deplorable choice may find its trails in the idea of emergency and the presumption that women could have been inadequate for such responsibility. Lastly, in spite of the reduced number of women, the new Assembly was stabilised with 179 *novi homines*, 20.7 percent of whom were businessmen²⁰ (Kienle, 2000: 59-67).

The 1995 elections, in very practical terms, served to reaffirm the power and the legitimacy of the Government in contrast to the opposition forces that had acquired power in the period 1992-95 by using a democratic system (the elections) for non democratic scopes.. Whether the elections were held in a state of clear fraud, the Government managed to fulfil its aim. After two more years of tough confrontation with militant Islam, and especially with the group al Gama'a al-Islamiyya, the Government was successful in driving the terrorists towards an eventual surrender in 1998-99²¹ (Gervasio, 2011: 143).

20 The new economic elite, enriched through the opening to the free market will create strong ties with the Government. One of the basis of the manifestations in Tahrir Square in January 2011 was the wish to eradicate such elite from power.

21 The confrontation between the two government and militant opposition reached its apex on 17 November 1997 when the al Gama'a al-Islamiyya killed 62 people at the Hatshepsut Temple (Luxor) and injured 30 more.

2.3 The *Inter Regnum* (2000-04)

The period of time 2000-04 is a period of transition. It was in fact a sort of *inter regnum* between the tumults of the late 1990s and the beginning of a long-lasting awakening against the Government that started in 2005 with a protest movement known as *Kefaya* (enough). The reason why such period is here labelled as *inter regnum* is given by the fact that between the years 2000 and 2004, the Egyptian Government possessed all the means to apply those changes that would have led the country toward long-term stability. What made such moment ripe for change was the altogether positive macroeconomic trend, the alarm bells that were ringing as a consequence to the 2000 electoral turnout and the mismanagement of population growth.

At a pure economic level the Egyptian economy seemed to have benefitted from the recovery plan that had started in late 1990 (the ERSAP). Inflation, estimated at 15.7 percent in 1995, dropped to 2.1 percent in the year 2000 and continued decrease up to 1.2 percent during 2004. The economic shapes further prized the ERSAP since the good economic trends produced between the years 1990 and 2003 resulted in the doubling of mathematical per capita income of the Egyptian population²². The currency stopped to be devaluated and started the evaluation trend. Such policy would have reduced the exports but it would have helped dramatically the imports (Waterbury, 2008: 58 and Kenawi, 2009).

During the year 2000 there were celebrated the elections to the National Assembly²³. Unlike the previous elections, held in 1995 (compare section 2.2.2), the Supreme Constitutional Court asked for a better supervision because of the major

22 The term 'mathematical' is given by the fact that richness was not redistributed and a good growth rate did not necessarily resulted in a proportional increase in welfare for the whole strata of society.

23 As seen in Chapter 2, the previous elections were held in 1995 with the strength demonstration by the Government against the militant Islamists.

frauds and violence registered in the previous elections. The results from more transparent elections still delivered the idea of a very strong majority but in actual facts, the elections produced an interesting result. The opposition obtained only 33 seats over a total of 444, but the National Democratic Party secured only 172 seats or 38 percent of the total. Such event alerted the majority since they could maintain the control of the National Assembly only through the system of the 'friendly opposition' that had characterised the 1995 electoral turn. After the elections in fact, 216 Independent candidates migrated within the NDP majority, making the governmental party arrive to 388 seats (Al-Anani, 2005).

The mismanagement of population growth represented a considerable problem for Egypt. In 28 years (1985-2013) the Egyptian population has almost doubled; in 1985 the Egyptian were 45 millions, in 2005 they had reached the quota of 74 million and in 2013 it was overcome the 85 million threshold (Rivlin, 2009: 95-100 and CIA, 2013). Such a strong population growth was made worse by two elements: the composition of the Egyptian population and unemployment. As the CIA (2002 and CIA, 2004) figures show, one-third of the population is included in the age group 0-14 years and a further 20 percent lies in the group 15-24 years. The latter group though is of particular relevance since, on average, 25 percent of young Egyptians are unemployed with women unemployment being beyond 50 percent.

The elements mentioned made the moment ripe for change due to the positive economic shapes (at least at a macroeconomic level) and the altogether stability of the country. In September 2003 Mubarak decided to exploit such a situation and 'invited opposition parties to the dialogue in the hope of establishing a package of political and economic reforms, as well as a charter of honor meant to govern electoral campaigning and funding, and ensure the transparency of partisan activities' (El-Din Gamal, 2003). The propensity toward dialogue by the NDP, which gave birth to such national dialogue in its annual convention, was not backed by the real intention to resolve the problems. On a total of 17 opposition groups there were invited only 10 with the Muslim Brothers excluded from the process. The national

dialogue though came quickly to a stalemate since the proposals advanced from large part of the opposition did not see the endorsement by the NDP²⁴. At the beginning of 2004 the NDP had created a distance between the reforming opposition and itself and by the September 2004 annual convention they announced the creation of a 'Joint Platform for Political and Constitutional Reform'. Such a lack of willingness to commit to a constructive dialogue for change resulted in the 2005 unilateral constitutional reform that gave birth to the first anti-government protest movement known as *Kefaya*.

In such unexploited possibility for reform of the period 2000-2004 there lied one of the reasons that brought to the 2011 uprising. From 2005 onwards, the Egyptian economy entered into pressure and the marginal increasing of population of 10 million units between 2005 and 2011 made the system unstable. In very practical terms, the Government had missed their last possibility to keep their power before the massive protest movements started to be more and more frequent.

24 As 'Ala Al-Din Arafat (2009: 101-02) writes, the oppositions agreed on three main points: direct presidential elections with multiple candidates and judicial oversight, abolishing the emergency law, and easing restrictions on political parties.

3.

Late Mubarak Years.

Keeping the Elite at Power (2005-11)

The present chapter will be dedicated to the explanation of the years preceding the January 25. These years will cast several lights on the reasons why millions of people decided, at the beginning of 2011, to manifest against the regime's establishment after the revolutionary Tunisia had got rid of their ruler. The period that runs between 2005 and 2011 was eventful both at the economic and the political level. The Egyptian economy and the political life of Egypt, in fact, were at the centre of the debate within the United States' House of Representatives that threatened to reduce the amount of aid that was delivered every year to the Arab State. Such debate was primed by both domestic and international events and most likely was at the basis of the change in the US strategy that withdrew the support to the regime when the January 25 revolts started. The chapter will conclude with the chronicle of the January-February 2011 revolts which will be explained as an event whose outcome was not bound to be successful.

3.1 Economic Fall

The aim of the current section is to provide a general idea concerning the economic trends during the period 2005-11. The narration of the events will be divided into two parts in order to emphasize the two major levels that influenced the economic policy during such period. The first level deals with the United States subsidies that were at the centre of a debate concerning their reduction from 2005 onwards. The second level deals with the internal economic policy which was conducted on the apparent reduction of poverty (years 2005-08) and on the attempt to respond to the Global Financial Crisis (2008-11).

3.1.1 Remodelling of the US Subsidies

Foreign subsidies have always played an important role throughout all the republican history of Egypt. The research for marginal units of subsidies, or rather the attempt to keep a certain amount of them, was at the centre of the policies by Presidents Nasser and Sadat. After President Mubarak arrived to power, the research for more or new subsidies passed through the bilateral relations with the US due to the fact that the USSR was no longer able to supply Egypt with aid. Such a balance had remained relatively stable throughout all the Mubarak presidency with Egypt receiving considerable sums of money every year¹.

After the attack on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001 and the subsequent US military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq the balance above mentioned changed. Consequently to these events, the US willingness to neutralize the possible terrorist threats had as a by-product the reduction of the US-Egypt bilateral relations. In 2005 there opened a four-year period finishing in 2009 when

¹ An interesting example is provided by the military aid since Egypt had always received two-thirds of what the US had given to Israel (Cook, 2012: 223)

Mubarak decided not go on his yearly trip to the US. The cooling down in relations was further alimented by a series of Amendments proposed at the US House of Representatives aimed at reducing the aid to Egypt as a reprisal against a series of shocking events that had taken place in the Arab country (such events will be explained more in detail in chapter 4).

The first Resolution (H. AMDT 694 of H.R. 4818) was proposed by Mr. Lantos, a Republican Representative from California that was strongly in favour of Israel. His proposal concerned the movement of \$325 million from the military assistance funds to the country support funds. The rationale behind the Amendment was to reduce the funds to the military since Egypt was thought not to be facing any serious threats and thus there was no necessity to fund a worthless item of expenditure. The amendment was firmly objected from large part of the Egyptian institutions and civil society and several US institutions as well (among them the Pentagon). The proposal was eventually quashed but 131 Congressmen (out of 435) voted in favour of it. The Lantos amendment though raised problems at two distinct levels: the first level was constituted by the Egyptian military hierarchies, the second level instead was the presentation of the amendment to the Egyptian public opinions.

The military hierarchies needed to close ranks against the amendment since its approval may have had negative consequences for them. The amendment, in fact, could have opened the door for a wider debate concerning the overall military assistance to Egypt was worth \$1.3 billion per year. Such item of expenditure was of particular importance to Egypt due to the fact that it was never put into discussion since Mubarak started his presidency in 1981. The potential reduction, or redirection, of such a considerable amount of money was perceived negatively by the Egyptian military because of the fact that only a portion of that money was effectively employed for armament purchase. As it is possible to read from Ibrahim A. Karawan (2011), the subsidies to the military were fundamental since, without them, the officials would have had no shelter from the rising inflation and thus their wages would have been equal to any public employee in the country.

The second level concerned the presentation of the problem to the domestic public opinion. Such point is particularly interesting due to the fact that the Government was successful in finding a way according to which they managed to keep two opposite opinions at the same time. In the bilateral relations with the US it was stressed the point of bilateral obligations. At home, instead, it was emphasised the nationalist point which was further helped by the fact that Mr. Lantos was a strong supporter of Israel (Cook, 2012: 221-23).

After the Lantos Amendment was quashed, the attention concerning the Egyptian domestic situation remained high, especially after 2005 with the beginning of a phase of widespread manifestations in the country². In 2007, the Representative David Obey (considered one of the Egypt's best friends in Capitol Hill), decided to propose a Resolution (H.R. 5522) aimed at reducing the military assistance package by \$200 million. Unlike the Lantos amendment that rose on the basis of sympathy for Israel, the second amendment was proposed on different grounds. According to the words by the Representative the decision to reduce the funding came after the 'backsliding on municipal elections, and extension of emergency laws, repression of judicial freedoms and a crackdown on demonstrations and rallies' (Brownlee, 2012: 111-16). Similarly to the Lantos amendment, the new proposal was quashed but, differently from the former, such proposal was not advanced on the basis of international antipathies but rather on the perceived misconduct by the Arab State.

During 2008 a third amendment was presented from Congresswoman Nita Lowey (H.R. 2764) which aimed at reducing the funds to Egypt by \$200 million. The reason for such a renewed interest was given by the fact that the situation in the Arab State was escalating with increasing breaches on human rights³, constant attacks on the judiciary with the Constitution modified in order to enhance the margins of manoeuvre by the executive. For such reasons, it was proposed the reduction of the

² As it will be seen in section 3.2, a period of major manifestations that saw a brutal response by the Government opened in Egypt from 2005 onwards.

³ The cases of brutality by the police on Imad el Kabir and Mohammed el Sharkawi made the headlines throughout the world and they will be analyzed in perspective in Chapter 4.

aid in case Egypt had not issued a set of norms aimed at re-educating the police towards more humane treatment and if it had not passed a law to enhance the independence of the judiciary. Such amendment saw the approval by the Congress, but eventually Egypt was saved *in extremis* by the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The so called 'national security waiver', a mechanism that can block a decision by the Congress, was used as a mean of last resort in order to stop such a decision with the argumentation that the blackmail of funds for reforms could have constituted a threat for national security⁴.

Steven A. Cook (2012: 227) summarizes as follows the reduced willingness of the Congress to let free hand to the Egyptian Government on domestic affairs:

Efforts to slash Egypt's assistance package reflected the fact that, as time has gone on, the dominant image of the country in Washington was no longer a triumphant Anwar Sadat grasping the hands of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and President Jimmy Carter after signing the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, but rather of a sixty-something Saad Eddin Ibrahim in his courtroom cage or the paramilitary Central Security Forces beating demonstrators, or haunting photos of Mohammed Atta, the Egyptian ringleader of the September 2001 attacks on New York and Washington. As a result, the Egyptians had few, if any, champions left in official Washington.

In 2009, with the resume of direct relations between Hosni Mubarak and the just elected Barack Obama, the military and security aid to Egypt was put aside in favor of socially connected measures. The strategy put in place involved the reduction of the social subsidies by \$200 million (similarly to the amendments presented in the previous years) and the tailoring of new policies towards more social aims. On the one hand, micro-credit was proposed as a strategy to help the large groups of unemployed people, on the other it was proposed the reclamation of the northern

⁴ The usage of aid in order to obtain the wished results was a strategy that had characterized the US foreign policy towards Egypt. There should be recalled the 1970s mechanism that aimed letting Egypt fall into crisis in order to rescue it and bring it to a peace Accord with Israel. In the early 2000 the same strategy was applied with the scope of promoting reforms within the country (Dunne, 2004)

Egypt lands in order to push agriculture (El-Sayed El-Naggar, 2009b). As it can be read in the 19 May 2009 Ambassador Margaret Sobey cable, the interest by the US towards the redirection of the aid to Egypt had a strong social connotation. At point 10 of the cable it can read as follows:

Based on our assessment of Egypt's most pressing assistance needs, and broad public consensus in Egypt that the educational system is seriously deficient, we would like to focus on education. We believe the Egyptians would welcome a new presidential level initiative in this area, which would also be in U.S. national interests given the critical role education will play in Egypt's political and economic development.

Such events demonstrate that there was a certain distance between the public and strategic needs by the United States. The duopoly of keeping good relations with Egypt and the Congressional need to compose a situation beyond the borders of human rights standards brought to a dissonance in the actions of the US executive and legislature. Such dissonance will be at the basis of the 2009-2011 run for power between the Mubarak establishment and its competitors that can be summarized within the person of Mohammed ElBaradei (Section 3.2.3).

3.1.2 Domestic Economy

The period 2005-11 was marked by the Global Financial Crisis which represented an important moment of passage for the Egyptian economic history. Before such event, in fact, Egypt was experiencing a moment that could have been easily defined as positive. The GDP of the country was growing at a considerable speed with little doubts that such a pace could slow down. Such event, united to the reform policies introduced by the Government during the period 2005-08 improved dramatically the confidence of the international investors on Egypt. During this period, the Arab State was considered by the World Bank among the most reforming countries in the world

and further from it, in 2006 it signed an international accord in Agadir with Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan in order to establish a free trade area to enhance production and commerce (Behr, 2011).

The years 2006-07 were particularly important since the good international image that was constructed through the economic reforms started to pay off. In 2006 Egypt was celebrated by the investors at the New York Stock Exchange and according to *BusinessWeek* was identified as one of the top emerging countries in the world. In 2007 the trend was confirmed since more than \$40 billion were attracted in foreign direct investments (Cook, 2012: 174). The positive trend of the period 2005-08 was further backed by the soar in the oil price. From 2005 onwards, in fact, oil will restart appreciating hence providing Egypt with a marginal amount of revenues (Waterbury, 2008). The positive auspices concerning the economy were additionally supported by a record in tourism; in the year 2008 (solar year) the country was visited by 12.8 million tourists (Abdel-Razeq, 2009).

Made due exception for the management of growth, the years 2005-08 could altogether be considered positive. According to the World Bank (2011a), growth in this period was managed in an arguable way. On the one hand the stress on poverty was major with 4.5 percent of the population that was rose from poverty only in three years. On the other hand, the effort put in place to redistribute wealth between the middle class and the richest percentiles of society was minimum. The richest percentiles of society received the largest increase in terms of welfare during this period of time whilst those belonging to the middle class experienced a growth lower than 1 percent with economy increasing seven times faster.

The Global Financial Crisis (GFC), started in 2008, set an end to the period of major growth. The GDP, estimated to grow at about 7 percent in 2007, lost more than a percentage point during both 2008 and 2009. As a consequence to it, in 2010 the GDP would have grown by 4.5 percent according to the most optimistic forecasts. The GDP, though, was the reflection of a much worse situation; inflation started to grow out of control arriving to almost 12 percent in the fiscal year 2008/09.

Consequently to the soar in prices, real consumption decreased with job opportunities following suit. The largest problems, however, were caused by the international slowdown in economy. The GFC, which had origin in the US, spread to large portions of the world and, as a result, reduced wealth in the richest countries. Such an element decreased both the propensity and the possibility for investments hence generating a negative loop for Egypt. The reduction in propensity to investment decreased the FDI which halved in a single year and with several foreign investors who decided to liquidate their assets in the eve of the mortgage crisis.

The figures produced by the crossing of the Suez Canal showed an even worse situation: in 2009 the number of ships crossing the Canal reduced by 22 percent and the net tonnage by 37 percent. Analyzed in perspective, the negative figures above entailed that there were less and smaller ships crossing the Canal. The reduction of commerce at the international level produced a major drop for the Egyptian manufacturing sector whose growth was halved in two years passing from 8 to 4 percent (Abu Hatab, 2010).

The GFC had further consequences since it reduced the possibility to spend by the individuals. As a consequence to it, tourism was reduced dramatically and so did the remittances coming from the Egyptians living abroad. Such effects were particularly negative for the local population since the lack of tourism and remittances undermined the informal system that constituted a shelter against poverty. The result to it was the reversal of the 2005-08 trend which had brought to an overall reduction in absolute poverty (World Bank, 2011a). According to the World Bank research (2011b), between 2008-09 *absolute* poverty⁵ rose according to the acceleration of inflation thus producing a particularly negative situation.

When the so called *Arab Spring* started in Egypt in late January 2011, the situation in the country had not improved from the figures presented above. The

⁵ Absolute poverty is considered when a person lives with less than \$1.25 per day (World Bank, 2009)

Egyptian institutions had produced two major stimulus packages worth 15 and 6 percent of the GDP respectively. Both packages aimed at maintaining reasonable levels of employment through Keynesian measures (by building major infrastructures such as roads, bridges or ports in the Red Sea) and through guaranteed three-year maturity stocks in order to convince private investors to reinvest their assets (Abu Hatab, 2010). Such a plan though did not produce the hoped results due to the fact that the country was trapped in a negative spiral which constituted one of the foundation to the January 25 revolt.

3.2 Political Management

In the present section the political maneuvers during the years 2005-11 will be analyzed in terms of preservation of the ruling elite once Mubarak would have left office. The section will be articulated into three parts: the first sub-section (3.2.1) will be devoted to a brief historical analysis of the successions in terms of mechanisms and challenges both before and after Mubarak. The second sub-section (3.2.2) will be dedicated to the amendments of the Constitution that took place between 2005 and 2007. The amendments apparently served to liberalize the system and make it more democratic but, in actual facts, it was only the attempt to create a system that would have made the way easier to Mubarak's son: Gamal Mubarak. The closing sub-section (3.2.3) will deal with the game of alliances in the period between the elections to the National Assembly (December 2010) and in the view of the 2011 presidential elections which were not eventually celebrated in the previous form due to the January 25 revolts.

3.1.1 Succession: A Problematic Process

Since the advent of the Republic, succession constituted one of the main problems to the ruling elite. Once Nasser had effectively gained power in 1954, a first mechanism for his succession was established only after ten years in the 1964 provisional Constitution. According to such mechanism, the Vice President would have succeeded to the President of the Republic. The problem, though, was that the mechanism was accepted in the form but not in the substance. The first two successions (from Nasser to Sadat and from Sadat to Mubarak) were marked by the use of violent means by the various challengers in order to drive the opposing faction within the ruling elite towards irrelevance⁶.

The problems of succession emerged as early as 1969 when President Nasser had suffered his first heart attack. Anwar al-Sadat was soon nominated Vice President at the end of the same year but he was not the only to exercise executive powers whilst Nasser went to the USSR to recover from his worsening health conditions. When President Nasser eventually died in September 1970, Anwar al-Sadat took office as President according to the Constitution but his new position was not unchallenged. All the closest friends to Nasser intended to take actions in order to destitute the new President. Sadat thus, needed to affirm his allowance to the 1952 revolution, the Continuation and the socialist system with the only aim to take time and eventually get rid of the opposition. Ali Sabri (Sadat's Vice President), was the first to be imprisoned, and after Sadat discovered a plot against him in May 1971, all the other opponents followed suit (Goldschmidt, 2008: 158). After the 1971 arrests, Sadat could govern the country almost unchallenged until the problems resurged the day after his assassination.

On 7 October 1981, in fact, there was little certainty that the attack on Sadat was an isolated event. The fear of escalation made the succession in favour of the Vice President Hosni Mubarak much easier, but his presidency could be considered

⁶ Interestingly enough, all the challengers proceeded from the military elite.

as safe until 1988. The first seven years of the Mubarak Presidency were characterised by the bulky presence of the Field Marshall Abu Ghazala. The man was perceived as much more skilled in politics in comparison to the President and his good relations with the United States made him be perceived as a dangerous contender. Even if the Field Marshal never made a move for the presidency, Hosni Mubarak needed to maintain a strong control over him until Mubarak could dispose of him after he was caught transferring technology to Saddam Hussein in the autumn of 1988 and was eventually arrested (Cook, 2012: 156-58).

The problem of succession resurged at the turn of the new millennium when President Mubarak was well into his seventies. The difference with the two former successions, though, was the possibility to plan the handover of power since there was no need to find rapidly a new President to respond to possible instability or to a potential threat. For such reason and probably inspired by the Syrian succession⁷ after the year 2000 Mubarak started to pave the way for the succession of his son: Gamal. In order to provide his son with a smooth succession several actions in order to create an architecture in which there could be no real challengers were taken once President Mubarak would have been too old to govern the country. From 2003 onwards thus, Gamal started to play an increasingly important role within the Egyptian institutions: he was given a primary role within the National Democratic Party and was called to be part of the delegation that visited the US President in the yearly visit to Washington⁸. Between 2005 and 2007 the Constitution was changed twice in order to both dismantle the previous architecture and create a new one. The new system substituted the confirmation referendum for the President of the Republic with multi-candidate elections. The new system was tailored in a way such

⁷ In July 2000, Bashar al-Asad succeeded his father Hafez al-Asad giving birth to an unprecedented event in the Arab world: 'a succession in an ostensibly democratic republic' (Wahid Hanna, 2009).

⁸ The yearly visits to Washington did not take place between 2005 and 2008 due to divergence between Egypt and the US. However, the relations between Gamal Mubarak and President Bush seemed to continue also during this period when Gamal was seen at the White House on a personal trip to the US in 2006.

that it would have prized dramatically a 'political candidate' and would have substantially closed the door to a military one. The January 25 revolts never let such architecture really enter into force but, as it will be seen in section 3.2.3, it was likely that the mechanism would have worked in the practice.

3.2.2 The Tailored and Re-Tailored Constitution

The Egyptian electoral system and the referendum for the confirmation of the President of the Republic were designed in order to provide the people with the idea of open choice but, in actual facts, there was no possibility for unexpected results. The basic reasoning behind the confirmation referendum was to propose to the population the idea that, with a six-year cadence, the support for the leader was near to unanimous (Blaydes, 2011: 66-67). At the turn of the year 2000, President Mubarak started to face a delicate moment: the 2000 electoral turn was supervised by judges and it opened a fracture since it was showed that the support for the President was not so wide as presented until that moment. In addition to it, the President had entered into his seventies and he had started to think about his succession. By the year 2000, hence, Mubarak started to work on a new State's architecture that would have safely delivered the country in the hands of his son Gamal.

The response to all these problems passed through a series of actions that started in 2003. During 2003, in fact, Mubarak decided to recall his son from abroad where he had been working in the banking sector managing businesses at the edge of fraud both in Cairo and in London. When Gamal Mubarak returned to Cairo to 'serve the country' he was nominated as deputy Secretary General of the National Democratic Party and Secretary of the Policy Committee of the Party⁹ (Dunne, 2006: 5). Such event was followed, at the end of the same year, by the beginning of the

⁹ The former charge was accepted only in virtue of the second that endowed Gamal with considerable powers.

'National Dialogue' in order to find a common accord on several political issues (as seen in section 2.3).

The National Dialogue constituted the opportunity for the opposition to express their ideas concerning the political life of the country. Such moment stood out in importance since it mirrored the general sentiment for change by large portions of the society. The main problem though was represented by the fact that the National Dialogue never expressed its potential and after having started with good intentions it ended in nothing.

The wish for change thus took a concrete shape by the end of 2004 in a movement known as *Kefaya* (the transliteration for the Arabic word 'enough') when Mubarak started and implemented the amendment of the Constitution. The modification, desirable in the concept, aimed at modifying Article 76 of the Constitution which, in its new formulation, would have introduced multi-candidate election to the office of the President of the Republic¹⁰.

The amendment of the Constitution inscribed in a larger framework that the local population deciphered as deceptive. It had already happened in Tunisia that President Ben Ali had formally made competitive the election of the President of the Republic but, in actual facts, the reality was different since he had ran against chosen 'opponents' and was re-elected with 96 percent of votes (Ibrahim, 2005). In addition to such a precedent, the words by President Mubarak pronounced in 1986 were still valid. President Mubarak, in fact, affirmed ' "When I seek to delude the people, I would start amending the Constitution to attract the attention of the people away for one or two years' (Arafat, 2009: 109).

The quote just mentioned above started to be effective after the 2000 electoral turn, when the local population started to understand that the support for the regime

¹⁰ The amendment to Article 76 created rules that were so stringent that only the NDP could comply with all of them. However, the decision to put the leadership of the country under popular vote there interrupted a tradition that had lasted five millennia. As Steve A. Cook (2011: 173) points out 'no Egyptian leader dating back to the Pharaoh Menes—who ruled around 2900 BC—had ever permitted a challenge to his rule'

was not so widespread as it was presented and thus they could play an active role in the country. For this reason, when the President sought to change the Constitution in order to pave the way for his son, the new phase of political activism rose after the year 2000 made it more difficult for the President to have his way (Al-Anani, 2005). Such event was followed by the 2001 manifestations in favour of the *Intifada* and the 20 March 2003 manifestation in Tahrir Square to manifest against the invasion of Iraq. The latter manifestation registered the presence of 40,000 people and helped the demonstrators to acquire awareness that they could play an active role in the country (El-Mahdi, 2009: 95). When on 12 December 2004 *Kefaya* held its first public manifestation, the movement possessed all the means in order to be effective.

Whether the amendment of the Constitution in order to propose a formal multi-candidate competition was something innovative for Egypt, so was its opposition. The movement was innovative under several aspects since; in the first place, it was able to gather large portions of opponents to the Government against the amendment. In second place, the movement was heterogeneous in its composition since it was made up by the communist, the nationalists, the Nasserites and even the Islamists. In the third place, *Kefaya* constituted the first civil movement that opposed Mubarak since he had taken office in 1981. Finally, the movement was based on a simple and immediate message ('no to a fifth term and no to hereditary rule') that had the double effect of being easy to understand and to spread¹¹ (Oweidat, 2008: 18-22).

The innovation presented by the movement in the Egyptian history was only proportional to its threat to the Government. The rising trajectory of *Kefaya* ceased after February 2005 when President Mubarak formally asked to the National Assembly to call for a referendum to be held in May aimed at approving Article 76 of the Constitution. After the procedures started, the Government showed its most violent face in order to secure the results. As early as March 2005, there started a widespread wave of repression aimed at discouraging the demonstrators with

¹¹ The movement made resort to all the new technological means (e.g. satellite television, internet) in order to spread the message and acquire consensus.

violence and terror. In order to reach such goal, the repressive efforts were led against all the protesters but particular attention was addressed towards the heads of the revolt and women (Oweidat, 2008: 27-32). According to Ala' Al-Din Arafat (2009: 115), it was Gamal Mubarak himself to order to beat on women in the attempt to reduce the number of protesters between one-third and one-half.

On 25 May 2005 the referendum held for the amendment of the Constitution which, as expected, passed by a large majority. The vote set an end to *Kefaya* that was no longer able to keep the harmony between all the different groups that composed it once the movement failed to reach its result. Nonetheless, the referendum produced an unintended consequence: the generalised frauds in which the vote was held gave birth to a confrontation between the Government and the Judges Club (an informal group gathering the judges).

The 25 May 2005 Referendum, in fact, registered flagrant frauds. The judges could supervise only a limited number of voting stations, leaving all the others with no control. The result to it were so widespread frauds that the post-electoral debate rotated around the number of voters which was disputed between 3-10 percent, according to the opposition and 54 percent, according to official figures. The debate between the judiciary and the executive opened a wide fracture between the two powers. On the threat that the judges may have not supervised the upcoming Presidential elections, an *ad hoc* committee called Presidential Election Committee was created¹². The role of such committee was to supervise the election and, incidentally, approving them if the elections were held lawfully. The committee was built on the US Federal Election Commission model, but the Commission had so deep connection with the executive that a negative verdict concerning the lawfulness of the elections was near to impossible¹³ (Arafat, 2009: 109-16). The first multi-

¹² The threat by the judges stemmed from the fact that the judges claimed full independence for their job.

¹³ The debate was further alimeted by a series of side-reforms called second and third package reforms that were voted in July 2005. The second package had the scope of reforming the law governing political parties (Law 40 of 1977). The law was given a new

candidate elections for the President of the Republic were held on 7 September 2005 and, as expected, confirmed Hosni Mubarak with 88.6 percent¹⁴ (Cook, 2012: 173 and Hanzawy, 2005a and 2005b).

Between November and December 2005 further elections were held to the National Assembly¹⁵. In this case, there verified the same situation that had marked the 25 May referendum. Over one hundred supervising judges registered infractions and, consequently, the Judges Club decided not to certify the elections. Such state of events radicalized the confrontation between the executive and the judiciary. In February 2006, two leading judges were stripped of judicial immunity and prosecuted under the crime of 'defaming the State'. The day of the High Court hearing a large crowd gathered in front of the tribunal in support of the judges¹⁶. The Government responded with a widespread repression that lasted until May 2006 when, after the Muslim Brotherhood joined the protest, Cairo downtown was blocked in a mass protest. The assaults by the Government were directed against anyone who was in the streets, both Egyptian and foreigners. Such events attracted both the attention of several international actors, among them there was Human Rights Watch organization that immediately condemned the event. As it was seen in section 3.1.1, the event had such a large impact that it was able to urge a change in the US aid policy in order to bring Egypt back to formally acceptable standards of legality (El-Mahdi, 2009: 99-101 and Marflett, 2009).

formulation that was so vague that it changed the sole text of the Law but not its substance. The third package could altogether be considered as the Mubarak electoral campaign since it introduced all his proposals of modification of the Constitution if he was elected in September 2005 (Arafat, 2009: 111-14).

¹⁴ Apart from the usual frauds that marked the Egyptian approach to elections, Mubarak had issued a set of reforms during July 2005.

¹⁵ The NDP won the elections by securing 311 seats on a total of 454. Interestingly enough, though, the Muslim Brothers through their Independent candidates obtained 88 seats (their best result) obtaining 20 percent of the total votes.

¹⁶ It should be noticed that most of the demonstrators had participated to *Kefaya* during 2005. Even if the movement no longer existed in 2006, many people continued their civil commitment to change the country,

The internal conflict on the judges' trial ended when one of the two judges was finally absolved, but the result for it was a major soar in tension between the Government and the population. What had changed from the previous experience of manifestations in the Arab State, was the entitlement of the regime as one of the elements to protest against.

The political reforms remained at the centre of the political debate throughout the period 2007-11. A new process of reform started in September 2006 at the annual convention of the NDP. During such event there the amendment to the Constitution was first discussed, but the drafts were discussed out of public view. It was only in January 2007 that the final draft was made public. The final text counted thirty four amendments to the Constitution and it was approved with procedures that were as rapid as the controversy of the amendments. The text was approved with a single vote by the National Assembly on 19 March 2007 and the referendum took place one week later (on 26 March). The rapidity was such that 'many Egyptians seemed unaware that the poll was actually taking place' (Shehab, 2007). President Mubarak, though, needed to hurry up the procedures since he presumably did not want to give time to the opposition to start their 'no' campaign. The results eventually rewarded the strategy; officially, 75.9 percent of the almost 10 million voters (27.1 percent of the total having right to vote) expressed in favour of the referendum. Independent monitoring groups affirmed that the Government had inflated the numbers and the actual voters were as much as 4 percent (Slackman, 2007).

The constitutional amendments moved in four main fields and they tried to set an end to the controversies that were raised with the 2000 elections and the 2005 amendments and its additional reform packages. The first dimension in which moved the new reform moved was the one of the apparent enhancement of the legislative authority. Until that moment the Egyptian 'balance of powers' had reflected a major disproportion of power in favour of the executive. Such point of law increased the power of manoeuvre by the National Assembly in two point; firstly it gave to the chamber the possibility to vote the approval of the budget on an article-by-article

basis¹⁷ (Article 115). Secondly, it enabled the National Assembly to give or withdraw the confidence to the Prime Minister (who was appointed by the President) without passing through a popular referendum (Article 127). Such increase in powers was unprecedented and it could have created a real system of checks and balances however, the Egyptian balance moved differently from canonical democracies and thus, the powers of the President of the Republic were enhanced proportionally. Consequently to the amendments, in case of necessity, the President could have dissolved the Parliament without passing through a referendum (new formulation of Article 136) (Bernard-Maugiron, 2008: 402-05).

The second dimensions was connected to the political parties and the presidency of the Republic. The 2005 resolution had the twofold effect of reducing the possibility of religious parties to participate in the political life and making the multi-candidate elections more competitive. On the religious side though, it added a provision to Article 5 which affirmed as follows:

Citizens have the right to form political parties in accordance with law. It is not permitted to pursue any political activity or establish any political parties within any religious frame of reference (*marja'iyya*) or on any religious basis or on the basis of gender or origin (Brown et al, 2007: 11).

In such a way, the possibility for any religious organization to play any role at the daylight was curtailed. Further from it, after the 2005 results of the Muslim Brothers who obtained one-fifth of the votes led the Government to amend the Constitution in a way such that the electoral districts would have played against the independent candidates of the Muslim Brothers (Article 62)¹⁸. Several changes were produced

¹⁷ This element marked an important change since until that moment the budget was discussed in a rather approximate form and there was no discussion over the budget of the military since it lied within the boundaries of national security remaining thus secret.

¹⁸ Such manoeuvre is typical of those political systems that try to reduce the impact of a certain constituency. A similar case can be found in the French Fifth Republic when Charles de Gaulle created an electoral system that would have rewarded his party and would have led the Communist towards irrelevance (Gildea, 2002).

around Article 76 (the article regulating the election of the President of the Republic), in order to make the elections more competitive. In fact, the minimum requirements were lowered for the presentation of a candidate, but the restriction were tailored against the Muslim Brothers in order to have them out of the presidential game. There was, in fact, the need to have representation within the Egyptian Parliament, to be presented by a party compatible with Article 5 and having been a senior leader of that specific party for at least one year. All these provisions, united to the fact that the minimum threshold for election was set at 3 percent completely excluded the Muslim Brothers from the Presidential run (Brown et al, 2007: 6-8). Such changes, even if undemocratic, could deliver a positive image abroad due to the fact that there was a general sentiment of distrust towards the Muslim Brothers.

The third dimension was connected to the monitoring of the elections. According to the Constitution, 'balloting [must] take place under the supervision of a judicial body' (Article 88). Interestingly enough, no further detail was added to the phrase 'judicial body' hence leaving the door open for different interpretations. From the year 2000 onward, there had been several interpretations: in the year 2000, consequently to a Supreme Court decision, the judges managed to schedule the election in three days so that they could effectively control a large number of voting stations. In 2005 the effective control was dismantled and at the presidential elections there was instituted a Presidential Election Committee that could (or would) not control the balloting. The rise of the tension between the judges and the executive between 2005 and 2006 urged the Government to find a final settlement. The Government thus decided to opt for an 'independent electoral commission' based on the international models. The final settlement left the ordinary law manage the electoral supervision, thus driving the judges towards deprivation of authority (Brown, 2007: 2-4).

The fourth dimension was connected to the emergency laws. The state of emergency that was called in 1981 had been for long among the elements that

provoked major unease within the population but the first proposal for its elimination came only in 2005. As a consequence to the multi-candidate elections, Mubarak proposed the substitution of the emergency laws with more specific laws on terrorism. The promise was not kept but in 2006 a two-year extension of the emergency laws was requested. During such period there remained into force the possibility by the authorities to arrest people on the general charge of 'terrorism' and later referring people to military courts for the sentence. The amendments to the Constitution on this particular issue were proposed in the measure of restricting the liberties of the local population in order to enhance the margin of manoeuvre of the executive. The provision by Article 179 to refer people to a military court was secured in order to continue breaking the principle of being tried by the 'natural judge' (contained in Article 68). Such violation of human rights was further sided by the possibility to suspend without warranties Articles 41, 44 and 45¹⁹ regulating privacy (Bernard-Maugiron, 2008: 405-06).

The amendments to the Constitution raised the popular anger but the new liberticidal provision contained in the fourth dimension enabled the Government to take all the steps to repress any popular uprising. Such possibility, however, did not entirely dissuade the local population from expressing their support or unease for events that shaped the Egyptian everyday life. In such perspective the largest events that took place were the *April 6 Youth Movement* (2008) and the *We are all Khaled Said* Facebook page (2010) that soon became a major hub for dissidents and later they inspired revolts in both Alexandria and Cairo (Gervasio, 2011: 147-48)

¹⁹ The three articles previously regulated the need for a Public Prosecutor in order to restrict someone's liberties (article 41), the inviolability of the property (article 44) and of the public life of the citizens (article 45).

3.2.3 Shifting Alliances

The years that separated the 2007 constitutional amendments from the January 2011 revolts were years in which a large debate concerning the perspective 2011 elections of the President of the Republic took place. The 2011 run to the top office of the executive presented to be much more competitive *vis-à-vis* the 2005 electoral turn. In fact, in February 2010 Mohammed ElBaradei (former director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency) landed in Cairo and was hailed by a large crowd that asked him to run in the presidential elections. For such purpose he created a movement called National Association for Change (NAC) and appeared as the candidate that could really represent large portions of the opposition to the Mubarak regime. ElBaradei was presented as the man that could really bring change to the country and was even able to overshadow Gamal Mubarak who was often defined as the man of change²⁰.

The electoral game rewarded ElBaradei throughout all 2010. The man from the IAEA was an independent figure and thus, all the campaign against him seemed not to work. Such element was particularly interesting since, in few months, ElBaradei had been successful in gathering large portions of the opposition to Mubarak. The importance of this element stemmed from the fact that ElBaradei was successful where generations of intellectuals and dissident had failed, thus injecting a considerable fear within the regime²¹ (Ambassador Sobey, 2010).

The power relations in the perspective of the 2011 elections to the presidency of the Republic however, showed situation that went beyond the candidate-voter relations. If it could have been easily predictable that ElBaradei may have attracted the direct votes of large portions of the opposition, the international support for him,

²⁰ Since 2004 it was possible to see Gamal Mubarak in the Delta region (Northern Egypt) distributing free food to people in order to build his public image (Cook, 2012: 203).

²¹ The most important name among the intellectuals to which is made reference is Saad Eddin Ibrahim, that was sentenced both in 2000 and 2008 and lived two years in exile before the revolution for fear of being arrested by the regime.

however, was not so obvious. As pointed out by Michelle Dunne (2010) and Steven A. Cook (2012: 203-06), the resuming of direct relations between US and Egypt under the Obama presidency could have been intended as an international endorsement to the regime. The yearly visit to Washington by Hosni Mubarak with the presence of his son may have hidden the attempt to tighten relations in the perspective of succession. Such a state of events would have played against ElBaradei whom, even if very well known in the US, could have changed the balance that had maintained the Egyptian situation under relative tranquillity both at home and internationally. In such perspective, the popular unease about the figure of Gamal may have not constituted an impediment by the US in supporting the regime if the incumbent candidate had presented good guarantees concerning the stability of the area. Eventually, the January 25 revolution arrived and, consequently, the 2011 elections to the presidency of the Republic were never celebrated under the previous state of affairs.

What remains unresolved under the framework that had just been presented was the reason why the United States, apparently supporting the regime, let the revolts make their own way driving both Hosni Mubarak and Gamal Mubarak out from the political life. The answer to this may be found recalling the debate concerning the financial aid to Egypt (section 3.1.1) and the elections to the National Assembly that were held between November and December 2010. The elections to the Egyptian Parliament were held in the usual fraudulent environment with a weak supervision on the voting stations. The outcome, thus, was an NDP super-majority which was able to secure over 90 percent of all the seats in the Assembly. Such victory was important in the perspective of the 2011 elections since the electoral outcome had not permitted to most of the party to enter the Assembly and thus have the possibility to take part to the elections that had to take place the following year. Such electoral outcome may have constituted the reason that convinced the US executive to follow the trend that had marked the 2005-07 debate concerning the

Egyptian aid within the House of Representative and lift their support to the regime when the revolution took place less than two months later.

3.3 Tahrir Square: Chronicle of An Unpredictable Success

The 2011 revolts were the outcome of a series of constant and casual happenings that eventually made the revolt turn into a revolution on 11 February 2011. Such success was built through the high number of public manifestations taking place in the country from 1999 onwards which constituted a sort of *substratum* that helped the organizers of the revolt to create a sort of 'revolutionary know-how'. Until 2008, in fact, the resistance techniques employed by the organizers of the manifestations were particularly ineffective and thus they would have hardly produced a result.

The situation changed after the failure of the April 6 (2008) strike in support to the workers of El-Mahalla El-Kubra when the secular opposition of the young and educated Egyptian took a different shape. They reached the conclusion that the transition to democracy could be achieved only by winning or outsmarting the Egyptian security services on the streets. For such reason, one of the organizers on the *April 6 Youth Movement* (Mohammed Adel²²) decided to go on a trip to Serbia where he was trained to the art of non-violent protest by former members of the *Otpor*²³. The new techniques of non-violent revolts were put in practice in a few manifestations during 2008 and 2011 and they could be altogether considered learned when the January 25 revolts started. As the documentary *Seeds of Change* made by the Reporter

²² Mohammed Abdel was among the organizers of the January 25 revolt.

²³ The *Otpor* was a group of young activists that, through their non-violent means were able to overthrow dictator Slobodan Milosevic in the year 2000 (Nenadić, 2004).

Elizabeth Jones from Al-Jazeera shows, the organizers of the 2011 revolts were being instructed through video by former members of the Serbian resistance movement.

The January 25 revolts, however, were also made stronger by a series of ideological elements that transcended the new techniques of manifestation. Tahrir Square and January 25 were two elements that had the deepest meaning for the Egyptian population. Since 2003, in fact, with the manifestations in support of Iraq, Tahrir Square constituted the 'place' in the Marc Auge meaning²⁴ (1995: 77), where there had taken place some of the most important manifestations in the country, Tahrir Square was basically assumed as the 'place' that was unconsciously connected to the protests and opposition to the Government. January 25 instead was a particularly meaningful day for the opposition since it was the day in which it was celebrated the Egyptian Police. During that day there were frequently held manifestations for two main reasons: there was a general negative sentiment for the Police and the day was national holiday. Therefore, the decision to hold a very important manifestation on January 25 and in Tahrir Square was not the result of a casual event.

On January 25 thousand of people took to the streets and converged in Tahrir Square, all together, to ask for those questions that had characterized the activity of the opposition since 2008. The questions were the following:

- Mubarak or his son should not stand for the presidential elections (due in late 2011 but never celebrated because of the January-February revolution),
- Dissolution of the National Assembly,
- Repealing the Emergency Law,
- Immediate reform of the Constitution (Teti and Gervasio, 2012).

²⁴ According to Marc Auge, a place can be described as a location which is 'relational, historical and concerned with identity'. 'Relational' means that there are certain agreed rules regulating the relations of the people that stay in that location. 'Historical' means that there is a history connected to it and thus the location of the present also represents the events of the past. 'Concerned with identity' it means that the specific location is strictly entrenched with the identity of the people who frequent that specific place.

The January 25 revolts, however, should not be seen with the present eschatological perspective of success. The revolts, in fact, continued throughout all the night but no one seriously believed that the revolt on the Police Day would have represented the beginning of a period of change. As it was pointed out in the documentary *Seeds of Change*, very few among the people interviewed were seriously convinced about an actual possibility of success. The author Steven A. Cook (2012: 284) describes the scene of the morning of January 26 as follows:

Average Egyptians—launderers, shopkeepers, and butchers—went about their routine business despite the events going on just a few blocks away. This was likely a function of the fact that over the previous seven years protests had become routine and, like almost everyone else, these people must have thought that, at most, what was going on in Tahrir Square would last through the night and perhaps into the next day, but not beyond.

As it can be inferred from the passage, the revolt was not perceived immediately as a watershed in the Egyptian history. On January 25 and 26, the revolt still lacked two important features that would have eventually led it to success; first, a common view that could have gathered everyone toward the final result still lacked and second, people still lived in fear of the police repression.

It was only in what was called the 'Day of Rage' (January 28) that the manifestations started to take the shape of an actual revolution. On that day, in fact, the secular wing of the opposition received the support from the religious opposition²⁵, finding a compromise with the aim to overthrow the Mubarak regime. Such element was particularly important and gave strength to the revolts since it was able to bring a shared view in the Square. The common view and the common aim were supported later on January 25 by the conquest of Tahrir Square that had been

²⁵ The preeminent group within the religious opposition were the Muslim Brothers. On January 28 they decided to leave the members of the Brotherhood free to join the revolution but they also decided not to endorse the revolts as an organization. Such element was particularly important later in 2012 and 2013 since the secular groups accused the Brothers to have seized power without ever being involved in the revolts.

contended between the protesters and the police during the previous two days. The conquest of the square against the police forces in a day in which the two largest poles of the opposition gathered brought a wave of optimism for all those that had been active in making the revolts reach their aim.

At a theoretical level, the events on January 28 acquired a political significance due to the fact that the *available resources* (the people in the Tahrir Square and several more squares in Egypt) had experienced a so-called *cognitive liberation*. In concrete terms this meant that the fear of contrasting the regime that had accompanied their lives up to that point was slowly dismissed in favor of confidence. In such a perspective, the precedent of the successful Tunisian revolt and the information of uprisings arriving through analogical means (compare section 5.2) from many parts of Egypt led the demonstrators to think what was unconceivable on January 25: overthrowing the regime was possible (De Giovannangeli, 2011: 1-6)²⁶.

The revolts would have finished on February 11 with the forty-one words pronounced by the then Vice President Omar Suleiman that ended the thirty-year long Mubarak regime. However, in the fortnight elapsed between the Day of Rage and the eventual overthrowing of Hosni Mubarak there can be found the trails of the reasons of the post-revolutionary lack of direction. During the revolts, in fact, people were exposed to all sorts of brutalities and attempts to make the revolts fade thus bringing to surface problems that in the first days of the revolts did not constitute an immediate problem²⁷. For such reason, the proposals of amendments of the Constitution advanced by Omar Suleiman offered an incentive to people to think more carefully about the Egyptian problems. The outcome to this was the increase in the number of demands by the demonstrators between the beginning and the end of the revolution (Wahba, 2011). Such increase, nevertheless, should not be intended as

²⁶ The terms written in *Italics* are borrowed from the sociologist Doug McAdam (1982: 43-52).

²⁷ In more theoretical terms, this meant that most of the problems that arose as the revolts continued, were not immediately available for the population (Tversky and Khaneman, 1974).

a positive element due to the fact that it suggested that the demonstrators were thoroughly focused on the core elements asked on January 25. The problem though arose once the revolts were having success since an increasing number of demands denoted the fact that the revolts possessed no long-term planning²⁸.

The consequence to the Day of Rage with the creation of a single and unified vision in Tahrir Square, and several other squares of Egypt, constituted a double-edged sword. Similarly to the *Kefaya* movement six years before, the shared view and the common aim lasted until revolts were taking place and there was nothing to 'win' exception made for the overthrowing of the regime. What happened after the revolution did not differ from the events observed in chapter 3. After the *Kefaya* movement was dispersed by the Government all the group returned to fight their own battle. The primary difference between *Kefaya* and the January-February 2011 revolts was the sole fact that the former movement did not achieve the aim for which it was created whilst the latter did. In post-February 11, in fact, the situation was not different from the 2005 one but, this time, the revolts had been successful and the various groups had the tangible possibility to enter the decision making process and thus modify the country according to their view

²⁸ In the documentary *Seeds of Change*, there appears Mohammed Abdel (see footnote 1) who appeared particularly surprised when the revolts started went beyond January 25 and they started to turn into an actual revolution.

4.

Exacerbating Factors

Torture, Corruption and Unfinished Projects

The aim of the current chapter is to provide the reader with the idea of what was concealed beyond the macro-economic data and the major political happenings within the country. In such a perspective, an attempt will be made to speak not only to the rationality of the reader but also to his or her emotional part with the idea to provide, in a wide perspective, the sense of what it meant living in Egypt. In order to achieve such aim, the chapter will be divided into three sections: section 4.1 will deal with torture which will be presented as a constant practice in the country. In section 4.2, there will be provided a wide perspective on the topic of corruption which is far from being an attitude that includes the sole upper strata of society. The concluding section (4.3), constitutes a bridge between the everyday life and the major political happenings since it tries to analyse the events beyond the Toshka project.

4.1 Torture: a Matter of Tradition

From the post-World War II, Egypt committed to all the international mechanisms aimed at improving the standards of living of the population. The shift to the Republic between 1952-54 did not void the compliance with the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (signed in 1948) which, at Article 5, affirmed that 'No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment' (Abdoun, 2008). Such a point was ideally strengthened in 1986 by the acceptance without any reservation of the 'Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment' (El-Dawla, 2009: 128). However, the international treaties were posed only as a token in order to show an internationally acceptable façade. The 1971 Constitution apparently proscribed any mistreatment but, in actual facts, the Constitution left ordinary law manage it. Article 42 of the Constitution affirmed:

- 1) Any person arrested, detained or his freedom restricted shall be treated in such a manner that preserves his human dignity.
- 2) No physical or moral harm shall be inflicted upon him.
- 3) He may not be detained or imprisoned in places other than those defined by laws regulating prisons.
- 4) Any statement proved to have been made by a person under any of the aforementioned forms of duress or coercion or under the threat thereof, shall be considered invalid and futile.

Such a vague formulation was particularly positive for the government of a country whose history was marked by a certain continuity of both internal and foreign events that were able to affect its internal stability. In such a perspective, the 1977 bread riots (compare chapter 1) were the case that best exemplified such a state of affairs. The event was born spontaneously and it was able to gather large crowds who posed a serious challenge to the government. For such reason, after the riots finished, the police control through the means of repression allowed by the Constitution started to have a more serial and widespread application. The assassination of Sadat and the

shift to the Mubarak presidency was apparently marked by the widening of civil liberties. However, an apparently more tenuous control of the Government united to an important demographic soar generated phenomena of street gangs in the poorest districts of Cairo. Such street gangs had become so powerful that it was proportionally easier to subcontract police action to them rather than fighting against them. For such purpose, they were well paid and trained to commit sexual abuses on both men and women in order to be as threatening as possible (Amar, 2011 and Brusadin, 2011). These people remained within the police forces for decades and their police control through violent means remained the general practice for the everyday patrolling throughout the following decades.

When the terrorist attacks by 'al Gama'a al-Islamiyya' reached their apex during the 1990s (chapter 2.2.2), the Government simply needed to modify the legal system in order to make the everyday abuses easier to use. For such purpose, in 1992 Penal Code was modified in order to be more effective *vis-à-vis* the Islamic threat. From that moment onwards, in fact, the Emergency Laws was used under all its provisions with several people arrested without having committed any crime and sentenced by the Special Courts which were enabled to hear any case. An interesting feature of the Egyptian Penal Code was the fact that 'torture' constituted a subspecies of 'abuses' where it could be considered 'torture' only when a confession was extorted with coercion or a person was arrested for a specific crime. For such reason, the 1992 Penal Code permitting arrests without charges, on the grounds of 'terrorism' and 'drug smuggling'¹, left an enormous vacuum in which the policemen could move without being responsible for any of their actions. The condemnations by NGOs engaged in the fight to enhance human rights such as the FIDH (Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme) and Amnesty International did not change the path by the Government (El-Dawla, 2009: 123). The State of Emergency was not interrupted after the terrorist threat was resolved at the end of the 1990s. According to the

¹ As it will be seen later in this section, the policemen that killed the 28-year old Khaled Said affirmed he was a drug smuggler in order not to be held responsible for their actions.

Egyptian Organization for Human Rights official statistics, between 1993 and 2004 there were officially reported 532 cases of torture that did not result in death (El-Dawla, 2009). Even if such figures are likely to be far from reality, they are useful to deliver the idea of how frequently the Egyptian State made resort to torture.

As anticipated in the previous paragraph, the *raison d'état* remained a constant practice by the Egyptian police well after the end of the intra-state confrontation. The figures in the new millennium, in fact, did not differ from those that marked the 1990s: in 2008 the citizens reported over one case a day of misconduct of the police (Abdoun, 2008). The police abuses, nevertheless, could remain confined to the police buildings and the testimonies of the people until the advent of the internet. Through the new media, several abuses started to acquire a public dimension and some of them became sadly famous even at the international level.

Imad el Kabir, a bus-driver, was arrested after having intervened in a discussion between the police and a member of his family. For such action, which constituted no crime, he was bitten and sodomized several times while he was in custody. His case received justice since one of his detainers filmed his acts against Mr. el Kabir and later sent the video to the family and the neighbours with the intention to further humiliate his victim. However, justice was achieved due to the fact that the video was also given to an Egyptian blogger (Wael Abbas) who posted it on his blog reaching and horrifying people both in Egypt and abroad. The video came to the attention of the Congresswoman Nita Lowey that, for this action and several more, proposed to reduce the US aid to Egypt due to these events (compare section 3.1.1).

A second case which reached notoriety but received no justice was the case of Mohammed el-Sharkawi, a blogger active in anti-torture campaign who was arrested in April 2006 during a demonstration in favour of the judges. During his detention he suffered from torture and raping by policemen but he could not obtain justice since, even if there were video proofs about those happenings, there were no pressures on

the political system and thus no policemen was ever sentenced for his torture (Cook, 2012: 195, 223-25).

Both the two cases above are connected by the fact that the existence of video-proofs concerning the acts of torture, but the lack of political involvement in the second case did not bring any justice to Mohammed el-Sharkawi. Several cases of arrests and subsequent tortures were registered during April 2008 when a major manifestation was held in favour of the workers of the industrial town called El-Mahalla El-Kubra. The movement, known as *April 6 Youth Movement*, attracted the interest of several young people and its political meaning was perceived by the institutions as a potential threat² (Al-Aswani, 2011: 184-91).

As a consequence to the three cases reported above, the attention concerning the misbehaviour by the police remained high. After these events, and several more receiving mention on the newspapers, the attention on this topic remained high. In this particular perspective, the case concerning the 28-year old Khaled Said, killed by two policeman in an internet cafe, caused a large indignation. In an article from the US *San Diego Times* (Schemm, 2010) it is possible to read the most probable succession of the events:

"[The cafe owner said] we thought they would just interrogate him or ask him questions. But they took him as he struggled with his hands behind his back and banged his head against the marble table inside here," [...]. A fact-finding mission by the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, confirmed the cafe owner's account."They dragged him to the adjacent building and banged his head against an iron door, the steps of the staircase and walls of the building," the Cairo-based organization said in a statement Sunday. "Two doctors happened to be there and tried in vain to revive him but (the police) continued beating him," the statement said. [...] The official police statement, however, said he was a known drug user and the cause of death was suffocation from "a cigarette containing drugs" lodged in Said's trachea. It also said he was wanted for convictions

² As widely proved by a 2007 Amnesty International Report, arrests and torture of demonstrators were frequently used by the authorities to maintain the public order and enhance security.

in absentia for theft and weapons possession, in addition to evading compulsory military service.

The death of Khaled Said immediately acquired a large importance and the circumstances of his death led the local population to consider him as representative of the Egyptian citizen. Such identification could happen because of the fact that misconducts and torture by the police were a recurrent event in Egypt. In fact, not only adults were made object of 'abuses' by the police forces, but also adolescents, both male and female. Even children were made subject of abuses³ (El-Dawla, 2009).

The specific case of Khaled Said, however, took a different route from the majority of cases of torture in the country. It was the digital media that played an important role since a page was immediately created on the social network Facebook that in a few days catalysed the interest of over half a million people⁴. An internet page registering thousands of contacts in a day could in no way be considered a self-supporting data since no Facebook user needed to move from his or her house, but it is certainly interesting to notice that it was precisely torture to attract such a large attention by the virtual community. The further action by the Facebook users of setting the image of the mutilated body of the young man as 'profile picture' in the platform kept high the attention on the topic (Hamam, 2011: 101-04). The indignation of the international community over Egypt moved the Government to bring to Court the policemen that materially killed the young man. Such state of affairs maintained the tension high and few days after the death of Khaled Said a manifestation was held in Alexandria where the regime deployed ten thousand policemen against three thousand protesters in order not to let the case enlarge (Gervasio, 2011: 155).

³ As reported by El-Dawla (2009: 123): 'A child of 11 was burned on an electric stove in the local police station with the aim of retrieving three packets of tea he was alleged to have stolen from a café in the neighborhood'.

⁴ In an article dated 17 February 2012 written by José Antonio Vargas, it is possible to read a more comprehensive story of the genesis of the Facebook page *We Are All Khaled Said*.

The case of Khaled Said, however, did not finish in Alexandria. In fact, the wave of indignation for his murder remained in the mind of the Egyptians and it constituted one of the reasons for anger by the population in Tahrir Square. The popular anger on this specific topic remained high because the period of the revolts knew several acts of torture within the institutional building but also acts of violence against the demonstrators in the squares⁵ (Sayed, 2011). Under this perspective, the tear gas and the snipers could not be considered as the last resort of a Government that wanted to remain into power, but rather the continuation of a practice that had marked over forty years of the Egyptian history.

4.2 Endemic Corruption

According to the definition by the Encyclopaedia Britannica, corruption may be defined as follows:

Improper and usually unlawful conduct intended to secure a benefit for oneself or another. Its forms include bribery, extortion and the misuse of inside information. It exists where there is community indifference or a lack of enforcement policies.

Such a formulation is particularly interesting since it is broad enough to include the forms of corruption that are present in Egypt. Even if corruption is an element that can be found in any country in the world, Egypt presented (and still presents) a situation in which it can be considered as endemic given its radicalization in any strata of society.

⁵ It will not be casual the fact that when the internet was shut down Al-Jazeera decided to broadcast two documentaries where one of them was focused on the constant practice of the police torture (Colleoni, 2011:199-200).

Whether corruption of the top levels of society is much easier to find since it leaves traces (for example money), the most minute corruption is much more difficult to detect. In order to find the most minute corruption, it is necessary to leave the academic textbooks to read the work of the novelists. In such a perspective, the pages by 'Ala al-Aswani⁶ (2006) and Khaled al-Khamissi⁷ (2008) are not built on philosophical theories but are particularly successful in describing the everyday life of the Egyptians and delivering the idea of how the Egyptian society moved and worked internally. The two books are completely different in the concept and in the perspective, in their pages it is possible to read that corruption permeated society

⁶ *Yacoubian Building*, by 'Ala al-Aswani, first published in Arabic in 2002 became immediately a bestseller, since its pages described the real face of Egypt through the lives of the people living in the Yacoubian building. The building was commissioned in the 1930s by Hagub Yacoubian, an Armenian billionaire that wanted to acquire fame through his personal pyramid. For such purpose he commissioned the building in one of the most important roads of Cairo, he had it adorned with all the comforts that the period could offer (such as the elevator) and, once finished, he sold the houses to the most noticeable people of the period. After the 1952 revolution took place, the residents were substituted by the generals who soon left the building to middle and later low rank officials in a spiral of decadence. At the present of narration, the building was inhabited by all sorts of humanities where even the larders were converted into rooms. The decaying scenatio of the building is used as a metaphor for the entire Egyptian society where none of the tenants, apart from a single character, succeeds in improving his or her situation. Particularly bitter is the life of Taha, a brilliant young man, son of the building's doorman, that was studying in order to become police officials. However, his humble origins were considered insufficient to wear the officials' star and the day of the exam he was publicly humiliated for this reason. The attitude toward corruption in this case brought a potential good police official in the hands of militant Islam. The police, through abuses, will try to persuade him to leave that way but the more they humiliated him the more he found a sense to his life through martyrdom.

⁷ *Taxi* by Khalid al-Khamissi, is quite a different book, in fact it collects some of the stories that the author heard while he was on the taxis during 2005 and 2006. The sensation delivered by the book is the one of a social structure in which everyone needs to do that bit more in order to survive or not to renounce to their dignity. In such a perspective, the smuggler that drives the taxi without even knowing the streets and the one that comments the wave of discovery of fake passports in the latest period are only two of the stories that belonged to everyday Egypt. All of these characters are the ultimate product of a system in which poverty brought almost everyone to exploit those little advantages that their profession permitted them, thus creating phenomenon of widespread corruption.

from top to bottom. The books are particularly successful in delivering the idea of corruption as an element that corroded society.

The corruption described up to this point was, and still is, a system in which the aim was that of finding those small marginal units of money in order to survive. However, such a form of corruption represented only one side of the coin, in fact, as it was seen in the previous chapters, there existed forms of corruption which affected the top level of the state.

By 1973, the emergence of capitalism created forms of corrupted capitalism where those who were close to the decision-making level could make considerable amounts of money through the exploitation of their position. In such a way, the ministers that blocked laws due to the fact that they had interest in a certain field of investment and the military being a State within the State, represented the ultimate result of the same process. An internal system for self-protection was created according to which no minister was ever charged of corruption until he was in office (Nkrumah, 2006 and King, 2007: 439).

The situation ought to have changed in 2003 when Egypt signed the United Nation Convention Against Corruption and further approved it in early 2005. However, the informal system that had marked the latest thirty years of the Egyptian Republic had gone too far to be stopped. The iron and petroleum companies were hardly subjected to any control by the authorities. The ministers and the members of the National Assembly continued to buy, sell or rent governmental properties in plain daylight and in total disrespect of Article 95 of the Constitution which banned such actions (Salama, 2007). The rest of the problems were caused by the military that, as written before, constituted a 'State within the State' (Gervasio, 2011: 142 and Amar, 2011). As it was seen in section 3.1.1, the secrecy surrounding the budget of the military that formed exception within the National Assembly could leave free hand on corruption and mismanagement of the funds.

The whole system combined together, with the corruption of both the poor and the richer people resulted in an average annual cost of over \$35 billion (Nowar,

2011 and Wahish, 2012). From the year 2000 onwards, the situation of corruption in Egypt had generally worsened. In the year 2005 corruption was brought to a (relatively) acceptable level with Egypt that reached the 70th position (on a total of 158 countries) in the rank of the Berlin-based Transparency International. However, the overall trend lasted only one year and in 2008 the situation of the Arab country worsened with Egypt reaching the 115th position on a total of 180 countries (Osman, 2011: 152-53).

For these reasons, when the January 25 revolts started, corruption represented one of the elements that moved people to manifest against the regime and ask the President to retire. Unfortunately, the Egyptian figures have not improved from that period, according to Transparency International (2012), the Arab country had worsened slightly and had sloped to the 118th position (on 184 countries) always keeping a low score, marking a strong level of corruption.

4.3 Toshka: Sixty Years of Egyptian History in a Project

A fragile equilibrium of seasonal floods and silt was at the basis of the ancient Egyptian culture. Such equilibrium had accompanied the heir of the ancient Egyptians across the millennia. However, during the 19th century when the population started to grow faster, a scheme aimed at sheltering the population in those years when the floods were weaker was needed. Such a need first brought the British occupants to build a first dam near Aswan (1898-1902) and later Gamal Abd el-Nasser to build a new one that could store larger quantities of water.

The demographic growth, however, started to pose serious threat to the Egyptian water supplies when the population overcame the 50 million quota during the 1990s. It was precisely in this moment when a part of the Nasser scheme abandoned during 1964 was revived. The plan consisted in the construction of a

canal rooted west from Lake Nasser, the lake that emerged from the construction of the High Dam. Hence, in 1996 it was presented the so called 'Toshka project' with the aim of building a 240 km canal that would have created 3.4 million *feddan*⁸ of virgin land (Wahish, 1998, El-Din, 2006 and Fecteau, 2012).

The plan had a large political eco since it could have responded to a set of problems. At the international level, the New Nile Valley would have helped the Government to provide a dynamic image of Egypt after the massacre in Luxor (Wahish, 1998). At the internal level the construction of the Canal (entitled to Sheikh Zayed) was supposed to generate tens of thousands of job positions and, once completed, the New Valley of the Nile would have constituted a new house for between 8-10 percent of young Egyptians. The long term effects of the project were even more positive since it would have 'turned to green' as much as 3.4 million *feddans* of virgin land (about 15,000 sq/km) that would have been destined to the cultivation of high quality vegetables and fruits to sell in Europe⁹ (El-Samman, 2003).

The project was as much interesting as the possibilities that it opened for speculative investments. In 1992, in fact, a Law numbered 96 in which it was affirmed that the previous provision concerning the limits on land were dismissed was passed. According to this Law, the new land would be allocated according to market rules. Such new provision, created the substrata that made the new investment worthy and thus, it attracted several investors (Waterbury, 2008: 160 and Bush, 2009: 59-62). Of the LE300 billion (about \$90 billion) that the project was estimated to cost¹⁰, only 20 percent of this money was to be financed by the government. The remaining 80 percent was divided between both domestic and international investors where Al-Walid bin Talal (the Saudi Prince), played a central role. The prince decided to commit himself to invest as much as \$1 billion with a

⁸ A *feddan* is equal to 0.42 hectares.

⁹ The products would have taken the TOP denomination, acronym for 'Toshka Organic Product' (El-Samman, 2003)

¹⁰ The price was estimated for the construction of the whole infrastructure.

contract for the ownership of 120,000 *feddans* of land (about 500 sq/km) and the prospect not to destine the land only to agriculture but also to industries (Sami, 1998).

The political and economic commitment, however, did not proceed at the same pace of the material feasibility of the plan. The work on the pumping station that served to pump the water into the new Canal to deliver the water to the New Valley never proceeded on time. As early as the year 2000, it was noticed that the project was not expressing its potential. It took almost twice the scheduled time for the construction of the sole pumping station which was due on middle 2002, but it was completed only during 2005 (El-Din, 2000 and Hope, 2012).

During 2005, the considerable delays in the plan brought the Government to renounce to the so-called 'second phase' of the plan and to extend the completion of the first phase by ten years, moving the deadline to 2022. In fact, it was decided to conclude the project with the 74 km of the Sheikh Zayed Canal and to stop at a quota inferior to one million *feddans*¹¹ (about 4000 sq/km) (Fecteau, 2012).

The lack of results and the three years delay in the construction of the sole pumping station were at the centre of a major debate within the National Assembly in 2006. By 2006 the project should have provided Egypt with 520,000 *feddans* of land (over 2,000 sq/km) devoted to agriculture but the reality was different. Only 20,000 *feddans* of land were irrigated and the auspicated tens of thousands of job

¹¹ Even if there exist no academic literature for such argumentation, it is plausible to think that there were international constraints behind such decision. The Toshka project with the idea to cultivate high quality fruits and vegetable to export would have helped dramatically the Egyptian economy but, incidentally, it would have also harmed the Israeli one. In fact, an extension of the Egyptian arable land by some 15,000 sq/km would have posed serious threats to the Israeli agricultural export. According to some informal sources and without any formal proofs, it is plausible to think that the November 1997 Luxor massacre was an action led against Egypt in order to make it renounce to the Toshka project. Such fact, again supported by no formal proofs, is able to explain why the Government decided to renounce to a project financed with considerable funds in a positive economic period (2001-05) and that was of major importance to help the economy and relocate people.

positions that would have opened resulted in only 10 thousand people employed at Toshka (Khalil, 2003, El-Din, 2006 and El-Sayed, 2007).

The project was kept alive throughout the early years 2000 by a strong marketing campaign (Wahish, 2006 and Al-Khamissi, 2008: 91-93), but the lack of results tackled dramatically the margin of movement of the government. Initially land was assigned to four investor groups (three of them were Egyptians) but, as the project was not implemented, they started to lose interest for the plan (Bush, 2007: 1610-11). The idea of buying underpriced lands and then selling them once the price soared started to have no longer a real application during the years 2005-06 and the crowding out by the investors groups left the sole Prince Al-Walid to defend the scheme.

The collapse of the plan was marked by two main elements: the first was the call by the Government to the Armed Forces and the universities to buy the land that emerged from the construction of the Canal (El-Sayed, 2007). The second element was the gulf that emerged after the 2011 revolts between the money spent (about \$25 billion) and the real achievement which were far from being proportional¹² (Sarhadoi Nelson, 2012).

Even if the Toshka project was not one of the reasons that moved people to manifest in Tahrir Square, it certainly possessed a large explanatory power for the Egyptian history. The project was born under the best auspices and it would have helped both the poorer and the richer strata of society. Whether from a European perspective a speculative plan born with a Government in concert with foreign investors is quite a deplorable action, such relation would have most likely enabled the project to see its completion. However, the paralysis of the construction during the first years of the works casted lights on the effects of unsustainability of the plan. The possible Israeli interferences in late 1997 in order to secure their agricultural exports and the later crowding out of the investors represented the failure of a project

¹² According to informal sources, in June 2012 there were dig only 60 of the 74 km of the Canal which was originally due in 2005.

that, in the end, presented only its worst downsides to the population. After fifteen years from the beginning of the works, the total price of the project represented about 30 percent of the estimated GDP of 2013. The misemployment of \$25 billion further worsened the condition of life of the people in the delta area since the water pumped in the new Canal would have never reached the villages in which water was increasingly scarce. The project that was initially called 'the fourth pyramid', ended up being an incomplete cathedral in the desert.

5.

Road to Tahrir Square.

A Thrilling Society

The present chapter is aimed at providing an idea about the Egyptian society from its interior in the perspective of the January 25 revolts. In order to achieve such aim, two perspectives will be analysed. In the first perspective (5.1), the Egyptian society will be presented in its most dynamic aspects. In the second perspective (5.2) instead, the impact of the Egyptian media, both the television and the internet, will be inscribed in the circle of a society in constant evolution.

5.1 Egyptian Society

The current section seeks to provide the reader with a general overview of the Egyptian society in its most dynamic aspects. Differently from the general perception that sees the 'Arabs' as a stalled society, there exist a crowd of adolescent and young Egyptians that are changing their perception of the world surrounding them. In such a perspective, there will be analysed the modifications experienced by the Egyptian younger generations in its least aesthetically appreciable features.

In sub-section 5.1.1 there will be given attention to the changes in the social relations within the family and the new idea of couple relations for the young

Egyptians during the early years 2000. The sub-section will conclude with an explanation of the impact of the new means of communication on the individual. The following section (5.1.2) is aimed at providing the reader with a general idea concerning the condition of the woman in Egypt, both at an individual level and in a more collective perspective. More in detail, there will be given attention to the women's participation in public life in the period 2006-11 and the 'unstable' condition of the women. The closing sub-section (5.1.3) tries to reconcile the trajectories presented in the first two sections and put them in perspective. Sub-section 5.3, in fact, is aimed at providing the reader with the data concerning the frequency of the demonstrations in Egypt and inscribing them within a larger framework.

5.1.1 The Generational Detachment

As it was analysed in the previous chapters, the Egyptian population made a considerable leap forward in the twenty-eight years between 1985 and 2013 passing from 45 million to 85 million units. Such an increase was also marked by the fact that over one half of the population is comprehended in the group between 0 and 24 years and the average age that splits into two parts the Egyptian population is 24 years (CIA, 2013). Such data means that over a half of the population lies in that age group where there are less constraints and thus there is a higher propensity for change.

In order to understand the impact of a generational detachment, it could be useful to consider the studies led in the post-war Federal Germany which evidence how the gap between one generation *vis-à-vis* another was able to bring to radically different behaviours. The generation of those who were adolescent or adult during the World War II (1939-45) was radically different from the generation who had the

same age twenty years later¹. In fact, the new young generation started to relate differently with their parents and responded differently to the innovations. As a consequence to these changes, the social structure of Germany started to change during the 1960s. (Sigfries, 2005). Even if the German history is different from the Egyptian one, it was possible to notice that the Egyptian young population at the beginning of the new millennium was experiencing changes in comparable with the generation of their parents.

In the perspective of change, the family still remained the place in which the young Egyptians (both male and female) received their education and values, this meaning that the family remained the central unit of the society. What changed, though, was the approach and the internal relations that were kept within the family. In fact, more education, the new media and urbanization were playing a dramatic role in the modification of the family. Under such perspectives, the family that had remained in the rural areas, thus with less access to the media and with little experience of urban life, would have much more likely remained a traditional family². By contrast, the family living in the cities (like Cairo or Alexandria), whose children attended school up to the middle or superior level and well exposed to the media would have likely be a modern family.

A study conducted by Sahar Al-Tawila et al (2001) on over 3,000 young Egyptian aged 16-19 evidences the magnitude of these changes. The new generation of Egyptians (today aged around 30), was different from the generation of their parents. The new generations received a better and higher education *vis-à-vis* their parents, on average almost seven out of ten young Egyptians arrived to the secondary cycle of education. Interestingly enough, the study evidenced how women were more likely to drop school before the age of ten but if they overcame such threshold, they

¹ The difference was calculated between the generations called 'forty-fivers' *vis-à-vis* the 'sixty-eighters', basically those that were young men and women in 1945 and in 1968.

² In the studies consulted for the present topic there was not given a normative definition of traditional family. From this element it could be inferred that a traditional family is that type of family where there is a patriarchal structure, gender segregation and imbalances in the division of the housework (e.g. cleaning, cooking, children rising).

were much more likely than their male counterpart to arrive up to the end (Al-Tawila, 2001: 226).

The new and improved education produced appreciable within the younger generations. In fact, the macro-data showed how much the new and younger generation perceived the relations without the glasses of tradition. All the indicators showing the parental role and the propensity for a joint administration of the couple-life experienced a positive trend. Translated into material data this meant that the new generations saw both man and woman more aware of their role within a family. Male adolescents, in fact, agreed on a much wider scale on the need of having both husband and wife educating and playing with their children. Female adolescent, on their account, agreed on the fact that the budget should be a shared decision between husband and wife and were totally against (only 0.7 percent agreeing) combined marriages (Al-Tawila, 2001: 230-34).

The tendencies above presented were confirmed by a second study by Jeffrey L. Sanders (2001) appeared on *The Journal of Social Psychology*. In the American journal, in fact, it was presented how there were basically no differences in the perception of the family by Egyptian and American university students. All of this meant that the young society that would have reached the adult age before the Global Financial Crisis was a generation that was little prone to accept the state of events.

The fact of being born in the Mubarak era and having matured during the 1990s when the regime showed its worst face with little possibility to reach a decent standard of living was at the basis of the refusal of the *status quo*. For such reason, when the internet started to have a decent spread within the country (more details will be provided in section 5.2), the first curiosity to satisfy was to look abroad and then compare the foreign situation with the Egyptian condition of life³. In order to

³ The access to the internet brought also more awareness concerning the universal standards of human rights and their proper application. Thus, when the local population acknowledged about abuses by the police and they confronted the foreign procedures with the internal Egyptian ones, the gap between the standards to apply and the situation experienced became increasingly evident.

better understand the impact of the new means of communication in the Egyptian society there can be used the experience transmitted by Professor Fatema Mernissi (2002) in the introduction to her book *Islam and Democracy*. In the introduction of the book, in fact, the author tells about a conversation between her and a graduate named Karim. The young man finds himself with a university degree but without any job perspective, the only thing he does is working in a 'cyber-cafe' where he can have free access to the internet. They are precisely the new means of communication that gave meaning to the life of this young man, in fact, the knowledge of the English language obtained through the satellite television, the *English Without Teacher* booklets and the time spent on the internet in the cyber-cafe. In such a perspective, the cyber-cafe in which there was killed Khaled Said represented the Egyptian equivalent of the Moroccan cafe. The cyber-cafes and the internet, in broad terms, represented the icon of a new form of sociality that gathered young people and ideas and whose outcome were real movement aimed at obtaining a result. *Kefaya*, the *April 6 Youth Movement* and all the blogs criticizing the conduct by the regime were the outcome of underground changes that had matured throughout decades within the country.

For such reasons, the revolt in Tahrir Square and other squares of Egypt from 25 January 2011 onwards were the outcome of the modifications that had been taking place within the society in the latest decades. There exist a correlation between the decreased identification in the rules of the previous society by the Egyptian adolescent of the year 2000 and the demonstrators in 2011. A new idea of the interpersonal and perspective couple relations among the young Egyptian along with a more structured idea of the 'self' by the women, constituted the bases for the endogenous modification of the new generation. The generational gap was further alimented by the exposition of the younger generations to the new media, especially the internet which, united to the knowledge of the English language, was a factor that could change the balances. The generation of adolescents of the early 2000s, could

altogether be considered as a generation mature enough to make the leap forward to start contrasting the regime.

5.1.2 The Egyptian Woman on 'Shifting Ground'

The changes described in sub-section 5.1 referred to the Egyptian population as a whole, however, a more detailed discourse should be made for the women. From the late 1980s, in fact, the condition of the women has improved steadily but, such modification should not be deceptive. The improvements just mentioned, in fact, rather than being an advantage for women *vis-à-vis* men, constituted only the filling of an enormous gap between the two sexes. The changes within the female part of society are particularly important since they move in a cultural *substratum* that both directly and indirectly puts the women in a lower position *vis-à-vis* men⁴.

The change in the condition of women may be inferred from a series of data collected between the late 1980s and the early years 2000. As documented by Saad Eddin Ibrahim (1997: 90), the diminishing number of children per woman, the increasing years of the first marriage and the soaring figures in the use of contraceptives were landmarks of a changing situation. The use of contraceptives between married couples doubled between the years 1980 and 1990⁵. Such element had two main causes: the first was the increasing success of the birth control policies by the government, the second (and more important) was the fact that women started to attend school on a larger scale.

⁴ In the classical Islamic contract law, a woman is worth half a man and thus, if there were needed two witnesses (for example for a marriage) and one witness was man, then there would be required two women to give validity to the marriage (Schacht, 1982: 161). As Wael Hallaq (2009: 119-26) points out, traces of the subordination of the women remained in the modern age in several legal texts.

⁵ According to the figures, in 1980 it was only one married couple out of four to make use of contraceptives, in 1990 it was almost one couple out of two.

The data concerning the age of the first marriage and the use of contraceptives, however, happened in a larger framework. As a matter of fact, the research led by various groups of sociologists (Ibrahim B. et al, 1997 and Al-Tawila et al, 2001) showed that the propensity by the women to continue being subordinate to their husbands was decreasing. The figures showed a general tendency according to which women started to be less and less prone to accept arranged marriages, have more than two children or not having a job. Such changes should be intended as general tendencies due to the fact that the propensity for change was higher for young and highly educated women and quite contained for older and not educated women. In general terms, though, the data showed a general tendency according to which even the poorest, oldest and least educated women started to seek more liberties and more say in both the private and public life. In the substance, this meant that, at an individual level, women started to develop a more emancipated idea of themselves⁶.

The new perception by the average women⁷ that she herself was more than a bride and a mother evidenced in the increasing presence of women in the public sphere in Egypt. As described by Beth Baron (1994 and 2007) and Earl L. Sullivan (1986), the women's activism and their presence in public life could be considered as a constant within the Egyptian history⁸, but it is only in the most recent period that such tendency acquired a more practical dimension. These movements are particularly interesting for their capacity to move among levels; women's

⁶ The economist and commentator Galal Amin in two consecutive books (2000: 77-84 and 2006) on the Egyptian society confirms the fact that there existed a positive difference between the women of his generation and the women of the younger generation

⁷ According to Marcel Mauss (2010), the average man or woman of the modern time is anyone that does not belong to an elite.

⁸ A fundamental character in the Egyptian history is Nawal al-Saadawi. Born in 1931, in 1957 she published her first collection of short stories in the volume *I Learned Love*, followed during the 1960s and the following decades with several pieces of writings denouncing the genital mutilation and the general ignorance concerning personal hygiene (Corrao, 2011b: 52).

movements, in fact, operated (and still operate) from the NGO to the micro-welfare level (Daly, 2010).

The work of the women's movement, though, did not take place in a favorable environment. On the one hand, an helping hand was constituted by those international organizations which tried to put constraints on the policy making bodies to pass laws in favor of the women's condition. On the other hand, however, the intention by Hosni Mubarak not to come excessively to terms with the supporters of traditional Islam, deprived such laws of any capacity to change the situation. In the volume by Nadje Al-Ali analyzing the women's movements in Egypt such situation was well described with the phrase 'standing on shifting ground' (Al-Ali, 2004: 216).

The precarious situation just mentioned certainly did not facilitate the work of the women's movement, but it neither prevented it. The advent of the internet constituted a watershed for such movements. Until the early 2000s, the major place of debate and aggregation were the mosques, but in such places the debate for the women's enfranchisement could difficultly produce concrete results⁹. After the creation of the 'virtual squares', women could better connect between themselves, tighten their ties and better organize their actions.

Women's activism nevertheless, did not exist in the sole form of NGOs or the intellectual effort to improve the situation, but it also had a more material form. From 2006 onwards, in fact, there can be observed an increased presence of women, both at a collective and individual basis, in the organization of protest movements.

As it was anticipated in chapter 3, during 2006 in Egypt there took place several demonstrations by students in favor of the Judges and in support to the action to modify Article 76 of the Constitution (amending the election of the President of the Republic). The demonstrations were so widespread that the Government could respond only with its most crude actions by beating on the demonstrators and raping

⁹ As Corrao (2011a: 46 and 2011b: 58-59) affirms, there are intellectuals like Hasan Hanafi that have produced a more dynamic interpretation of the *sharia* (in maximal terms, the 'Islamic law) which, if implemented, could bring to a considerable improvement of the women's condition.

women in order to make them desist from their actions. Whether such a violent action could be successful to convince some women not to continue to manifest, it also produced an unintended consequence. Shortly after the raping, there was born a movement called *We Are Watching You* in which both Islamic and civic groups of women, backed by the Nasserites, gathered to denounce the increasing abuses on the women during demonstrations (Osman, 2011: 149). Such event did not produce appreciable changes in the executive, but it certainly made the regime appear weak at the international level.

The 2011 revolts moved on different tracks *vis-à-vis* the 2006 demonstrations. The latter manifestation, in fact, was successful in the aim of condemning the action of the regime against women and demonstrators more in general, but it raised as a responses to a momentary stimulus. The 2011 revolts, in contrast, had deeper roots and the role of women in such scenario was of first order. In 2008, in fact, the blogger Israa Abdel Fatah co-founded the *April 6 Youth Movement* and had a role in directing the action both before and during the manifestations. Being reputed dangerous for the regime she was arrested and driven away from political activism. Though renouncing to the political action, the blogger remained very important (almost an iconic figure) for the women who understood that they could play an active role within the Egyptian political life (El-Ghitany, 2008 and Meringolo, 2011: 61-62). The earliest days of the 2011 revolts, though, saw a limited presence of women, most likely for the instilled fear of police beatings but, as soon as the revolution grew larger, women started to be more and more present. Azzurra Meringolo (2011), an Italian researcher and journalist acknowledged the importance of women playing both a frontline role, manifesting side by side with men, and working in the rear line, by bringing food and beverages to the demonstrators. Nevertheless, the equity between men and women ended with the resignation of Hosni Mubarak.

The final picture in 2011, however, can be explained with the phrase by Nadjé Al-Ali: 'on shifting grounds'. As Mubarak resigned, in fact, the fraternity

between man and women was put aside and women were pushed back to their initial position where they had to fight fierce battles to see their basic rights effectively respected. Nevertheless, the circumscribed experience of enhancement of rights in the moment of risk and bargain could be considered as a potentially positive element. In fact, if women could have an important role within the January 25 revolts this meant that there existed the ground on which the work of women to enhance their rights can point toward a concrete destination.

5.1.3 Road to January 25

According to the words by Asef Bayat (1997: 158-60 and 2010: 210-12), there is a general misperception concerning the so called 'Arab street'. From a foreign perspective, in fact, there is a duopoly according to which the streets (metonymy for the people who manifest in the streets) are either 'irrational and aggressive' or 'apathetic and dead'. Such a misperception towards the Arabs, perceived as irrational, finds its roots in the media coverage concerning such countries. As a matter of fact, the foreign lights steadily turn on the Arab countries only when there is a happening which has such a wide magnitude that it deserve to be news-worthy. For such reason, the 1977 revolts, the Gulf War, the 1997 massacre in Luxor and the revolts in Tahrir Square from 2011 onwards are those cases in which the total absence of information is abandoned for an overload of them.

However, a much more attentive eye on the Egyptian internal situation would have showed how the country had been simmering for decades. According to Saad Eddin Ibrahim (2002a: 35-36), there were material signs of political unrest. The sociologist analysing the period 1952-93 identified that during the first eleven years of the Mubarak presidency (1981-92) there gathered over 50 percent of the demonstrations and almost 90 percent of the riots and casualties. In order to deliver the magnitude of the events, during the Nasser years the average casualties (emerged

from clashes between police and civilians) were 2.5 per year, during the Mubarak years they were 13 until 1992 when the figures plummeted to the annual figure of 677.

The feeling of major unease by the population, however, did not cease with the end of the intra-state conflict between the Islamic terrorism and the government. As Joel Beinin (2011: 181) shows, in 1999 there opened a period of major confrontation between the civilian population and the government. Whether the period 1952-95 was marked by less than 2000 demonstrations and riots (Ibrahim, 2002a: 35), the period 1999-2008 was marked by a strong use of the civil protest. During such period, the civil manifestations were over 3,300, which meant that there was almost a manifestation a day¹⁰.

Keeping into consideration such data, it is possible to understand how the revolts in Tahrir Square were not the simple outcome of chance but they grounded their roots in a solid social tendency. From 2001 onwards, in fact, Egypt saw the soar in large civil manifestations. On 10 September 2001, the day before the attack on the Twin Towers, there was held a manifestation in Tahrir Square in favour of the Palestinians with the aims to condemn the Egyptian foreign policy judged too kind towards Israel. During March 2003, it was held a manifestation in Tahrir Square where thousands of young Egyptians demonstrated against the invasion of Iraq and there they had their first experience of the violence of the police¹¹. Such event was particularly important since it was followed by the *Kefaya* movement between 2004-05 which laid the basis to constant demonstration in the period before the January 2011 revolts (Gervasio, 2011: 148-49). Whether it is true that the revolutionary substrata was created and alimanted by the workers' movements from 1984 onwards

¹⁰ As Nader Fergany (2010: 201) affirms, in the sole year 2007 it was estimated that the number of demonstrations reached the figure of 1,000, where 400 were workers' manifestations.

¹¹ As it was seen in the previous section, the Young Egyptians in Tahrir Square in March 2003 were those adolescents from whom Sahar Al-Tawila et al (2001) reported an appreciable generational gap in comparison with their parents.

(compare chapter 2), in the years 2000 these frequent demonstrations could rely on the support of the juvenile movements that had grown in the most recent period.

Such support firstly materialised in the 2008 *April 6 Youth Movement* which represented an important event since it set the basis for the January 25 revolts. In 2008, in fact, it was understood that the opposition to the Government could have a voice and the new digital system may have helped the demonstrators in reaching their aims in the squares (Sibilio, 2011). When the revolts in Tahrir Square and other squares of Egypt broke out at the end of January 2011, the demonstrators already possessed all the means and the knowledge in order to be effective (Cannistrato, 2011: 38). The January 25 revolt, therefore, should not be intended as an event that came out of the blue, but rather as the termination of a trajectory that was constellated by several revolts that, eventually, ended up with the resignation of Mubarak.

5.2 Egyptian Media

The current section seeks to provide the reader with a view on the importance of the emergence, diffusion and impact of the media in Egypt both before and during the 2011 revolts. In order to better understand the impact of these means of communication, there will be provided a brief historical introduction portraying the shift from the State's television, to the satellite television and concluding with the advent of the internet (sub-section 6.1). The following sub-section (6.2), analyses the gradual impact of these technology within the country. More in detail there will be explained how there existed a temporal gap between the first appearance of the new technologies and the moment in which they produced their deepest impacts within the country. The concluding sub-section (6.3) gives account of the importance of the media during the revolts.

5.2.1 From 'MTV' to 'Al-Jazeera' and the Internet

Since its foundation in 1960, the Egyptian Radio and Television Unit (ERTU) has constituted a monopoly for the Government and, as such, it was controlled by the Ministry of Information. As it was possible to infer from both the history textbooks (Kallis, 2005) and the utopian literature that had in 1984 by George Orwell its major masterpiece, the control of the means of information constituted an element of major interest for the government. The regime's control over both the means of information and entertainment was barely challenged until the mid-1990s when the satellite technology started to become cheaper with satellite dishes appearing on the roofs of many Egyptian houses. The control by the regime could be considered as particularly effective due to the fact that a considerable part of the Egyptian population was barely interested in the information due to their extreme poverty and another large part did not possess either the knowledge or the means to analyse the information given the widespread illiteracy. According to the following figures:

- The level of literacy¹² in 1995 was estimated just above 50 percent (51.4 percent with female literacy at 38.8 percent)
- Over 20 percent of the population was below the poverty line (CIA, 2002)
- Newspapers were read by only 3 percent of the population (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004)

At the presence of such figures it is possible to imagine which was the importance of the ERTU which mostly reached the middle class. In a perspective of immobilism where the *status quo* was the real aim of the government, the State's Radio and Television played a proactive role in the maintenance of the state of affairs. The monopoly of the means of information constituted a fundamental element since it

¹² According to the CIA definition, literacy is the ability to read and write for those aged 15 and over.

permitted the regime to broadcast the information that better reflected their position. In William A. Rugh (2004: 15-17) volume it is possible to read that the presentation of biased information in order to support the regime's position was not an uncommon practice¹³.

The 1990s, insteadm constituted a decade of transition. In this decade, in fact, the ERTU monopoly started to face the challenge of the satellite television. Such change though, happened gradually due to the fact that the price of satellite dishes and instruments to decode the data received were expensive and the number of channels was limited.

The 'MBC' (Middle East Broadcasting Corporation), founded in 1991, marked an important step in the private satellite production since it constituted the first privately owned pan-Arab satellite channel¹⁴. The London-based channel was particularly important during its first years of life since it was able to cover large part of the 1994 Yemeni civil war thus attracting the interest of several international platforms. Nevertheless, the importance of the channel laid more on the fact that the MBC constituted the first pan-Arab channel and it paved the way to several more satellite platforms rather than from its programmes schedule.

The actual satellite revolution started in November 1996 when it was launched a new television channel that would have revolutionised the access to the media and information. The new channel, named 'Al-Jazeera' (literally 'The Island'), constituted a major leap forward within the Arab world since it was completely devoted to the broadcasting of news. The importance of the channel may be easily inferred through the criticisms that it received over time, in fact, Al-Jazeera was alleged to be on both the al-Qaeda, United States and Israel parts, depending on the news presented. The reporters from the Al-Jazeera were always in the fore-line of

¹³ For such deep entrenchment between politics and journalism, the Egyptian State's television took the appellative of 'MTV', the abbreviation for 'Mubarak TeleVision' (Sibilio, 2011: 85).

¹⁴ The Egyptian 'Nilesat' preceeded the MBC in terms of foundation, but it distinguished from the former channel from the fact that the Egyptian satellite channel was public and it proposed the same broadcasting of the terrestrial channels (Rugh, 2004: 212).

information (e.g. in Afghanistan in 2001 and in Iraq in 2003) and were given no instruction concerning which information to broadcast and which not. For such reason, they made themselves very interesting both within and outside the Arab world. At a pure internal level, Al-Jazeera made it possible for the first time to inform the Arab people with real information in a language of their comprehension and without any governmental filter. At an external level, they were able to sell information even to the largest US networks due to their presence in several Arab countries (Rugh, 2004: 215-18 and Sibilio, 2011).

The impact of the satellite television was relevant, but the actual leap forward was constituted by the internet technology. Whether the satellite television was able to provide people with unbiased information about both internal and external events, the internet was able to move the balances to another level. In the year 2000, the internet penetration within Egypt was very scarce (about 450,000 users), but such ratio would have improved exponentially in the following twelve years. According to the statistics generated by Internet World Stats (2013), the internet users in Egypt in June 2012 were estimated at about 30 million, which meant that in twelve years the users multiplied by over sixty times¹⁵. Such element permitted to the internet users, not only to obtain first hand information from almost any website in the world, but also to connect among themselves with the possibility to discuss on a wide variety of topics with both close and distant people without moving from their chairs.

¹⁵ It was particularly interesting the fact that the internet revolution took place after 2004 when it was less than 4 percent of the population to have access to the internet (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004).

5.2.2 The Media and Their Impact

The history of the means of communication above described represented just one side of the coin due to the fact that the impact of the new means of communication transcended the mere improved interconnectedness. As anticipated in the previous section, during the era of the 'Mubarak TeleVision' ('MTV') the people were scarcely connected due to the fact that the places where they could meet and socialize were material (e.g. the mosques or the universities)¹⁶. In a perspective in which the physical presence was a basic element for communication, it can be inferred that the circulation of dissenting opinions could not happen in a free and unconstrained way.

The emergence of the satellite television constituted an important leap forward. In fact, the news by Al-Jazeera and the other satellite channels slowly eroded the roundness of the information presented by the regime. Such a change, though, did not damage the ERTU system in a dramatic way since it took almost ten years for the satellite television to become a real alternative. The reason why the satellite television was not able to change the system can be found in the communication theories. If it is considered that the satellite broadcasts brought to a changing 'addresser' (the emitter) and 'message' (e.g. the unbiased information), there should be considered the fact that the number of 'addressees' (the people that received the message) were limited¹⁷. In less theoretical terms it meant that, even if there arrived fresh and unbiased information, the number of people actually exposed to them was particularly limited. Given such limited potentiality it was difficult for this new technology to have a dramatic impact within the country.

The approach to communication further changed during the years 2000 with the spreading of the internet. The change, nevertheless, should not be intended as

¹⁶ Even the telephone lines had a limited spread. According to the figures by the CIA Factbook (2002), in 1999 there were less than four million lines in use and about four hundred thousand mobile phones.

¹⁷ The terms 'addresser', 'addressee' and 'message' are taken from the communication theory by Roman Jakobson (Pomorska and Rudy, 1985).

instantaneous due to the fact that it took almost ten years to the technology to spread, but once the transition was complete, its effects were dramatic. In fact, whether the spread of the satellite television brought fresh information to Egypt, the satellite technology was unable to 'activate' the audience, in theoretical terms it meant that those individuals exposed to the satellite programmes remained a 'broadcasting audience'. The internet, instead, revolutionised such paradigm and made the audience become 'active'¹⁸ (West and Turner, 2010: 400). The 'activation' of the audience happened in a large scale during the years 2000 and in this process there can be distinguished two main phases. The first phase started in the year 2000 and concluded in late 2003, the second phase instead brought up to the 2011 revolts in Tahrir Square and beyond.

The first phase was a moment of radical change. As a matter of fact, there closed the trajectory according to which the people (the 'addressee' in the Jakobson theory) were mere receiver of message and there started a new one in which the communication networks amplified up to a point in which it was possible to talk about a 'virtual arena'. Such a moment of change may be exemplified through the public manifestations in 2001 to oppose to the Egyptian policy on Palestine and the demonstrations in favour of Iraq in late 2003. In this moment, in fact, people ceased to be mere receiver of information and they actually organized in order to oppose to such action. Under a certain perspective, the manifestation in support of Iraq constituted the consecration of a process of improving interconnectedness between people.

The improved network between people seemed to respond to the same coordinated presented by David Held (2007) in his theory on globalization. The Arabs in the larger framework and the Egyptians in a restricted one started to

¹⁸ The first time in which the audience behaved very actively was consequently to the attack on the Twin Towers. Such event, in fact, horrified not only the Western people but also the Arabs as acknowledged by Fatema Mernissi (2002) and it urged to start a discussion both between the Arabs and the 'West', but also between the Arabs themselves (El-Nawawi and Khamis, 2009: 109-11).

experience the *stretching* of social and political activities across frontiers, the *intensification* of interconnectedness and flow of culture, the *speeding up* of interactions and information sharing with the production of *deeper impacts*. In such a perspective, the virtual organization before the manifestations in support of Iraq represented an actual watershed in the Egyptian (and Arab) history. From that moment onwards, the individuals ceased to be atoms in a country to become part of a broader community.

The second phase of the 'activation' of the individuals saw the materialization of the changes described above. In fact, whether before the advent of the internet the manifestations of dissent were triggered by microscopic needs (e.g. a closing factory affecting its workers and their respective families), with the new technology, the manifestations started to be triggered by more abstract needs. The movement *Kefaya* could be understood as the first attempt in which the 'virtual square' that had emerged in the early years 2000s organized in the 'real square' in order to obtain tangible changes at the political level. The efforts of the single organizers of the microscopic events eventually coalesced in a macroscopic event that had a large international resonance. As it was seen in the previous chapters, however, the *Kefaya* movement was only the first mass event to take place in Egypt; after the thriving virtual debate that had taken place consequently to the clash of positions between the regime and the Judges, the virtual arena was catalysed by another mass event: the *April 6 Youth Movement*. The year 2008, in fact, can be considered as the moment in which there concluded the transition from a passive audience towards an active one. According to the figures by CIA (2010), in 2008 about 25 percent of the population was connected to the internet (approximately 20 million users) with a magnified possibility by all the single individuals to obtain information and generate their own individual opinion.

Consequently to the spread of the internet, the interconnectedness of Egypt had reached a point in which any single event could have a quick spread and it could have been shared and known by people almost in real time. It is precisely in this

moment in which the regional interconnectedness met all the features of globalization above mentioned and thus it was only a matter of time when all the economic, social and political reason of malaise would have coalesced in a single and strong request to the government: the eventual January 25 revolts. In such a perspective, the means that were used during the revolt (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube) more than the trigger to the revolution, constituted the mean that enabled the revolts to reach its most immediate success: the overthrow of Mubarak in February 2011 after eighteen days of revolts.

5.2.3 Within the Revolts

Apart from the State's television (the ERTU), the 2011 revolt made use of all the means of communication presented in the current chapter. Al-Jazeera, far from being ousted from the internet, played a key role during the revolution. As it had been for several events. The satellite platform proposed an around the clock coverage of the revolution, both in Arabic and English, so that people could follow the revolt in any moment and everywhere in the world. The satellite television, in fact, played a core role during the revolt, especially after the internet was shut down as early as January 28. Interestingly enough, the Al-Jazeera support to the revolution was tangible due to the fact that they found several ways in order to fight the obscuration of their frequencies by the regime. Even when they were obscured and were finding a new plan, they decided to keep the anger high by transmitting two documentaries: one on torture and the other on censorship (Colleoni, 2011:199-200). According to the title of an article appeared on the Italian geopolitics journal *Limes*, it can be read directly what it could be inferred from the paragraph above: 'Al-Jazeera and the revolution helped reciprocally' (Valeriani, 2011).

Whether the role played by Al-Jazeera during the revolution was important, the role played by the internet was even more dramatic. At the internal level, the

revolution was alimeted and revived through the use of the so called 'social media' offered by the internet. The decade of constant manifestations had brought the organizers of the manifestations to know deeply how to use the means provided by the internet. In such a perspective, "Facebook [was] used to schedule the protest, Twitter to coordinate and YouTube to tell the world' (Bhuiyan, 2011: 16).

According to some authors as Serajul I. Bhuiyan (2011), the revolution was successful due to the fact that the social media (and the satellite television) were able to provide the protest with enough international visibility to be successful. According to the author, in fact, without the social media rebounding the information abroad, the revolt would have been suppressed as any other previous manifestation that had taken place in the country. Such a vision is probably too enthusiastic about the role and the importance played by the social media due to the fact that other authors such as Malcolm Gladwell (Ingram, 2011) deny the fact that the new media were the key for the success of the revolution.

What remains beyond the academic discussion was the fact that, even assumed the fact that the media were not basic, they certainly constituted the mean that permitted to the Egyptians to create those links that eventually brought to the revolt. And even during the revolt, the necessity by the people to continue to inform both internally and abroad with all the possible 'tricks'¹⁹ was telling about the willingness by the people to obtain their final aim: overthrow Mubarak and his entourage.

¹⁹ When the internet was shut down and thus the Twitter communication was interrupted, there was created an alternative system called *Speak2Tweet*. The system permitted to the Egyptian demonstrators to leave messages that were immediately translated into English, French and German by over 1,000 translators abroad in order to continue keep everyone informed (Bhuiyan, 2011: 18).

6.

Conclusions

Popular Will through Military Lead (2011-13)

This study has explored the history of the Republic of Egypt from 1952 to 2010 when Egypt was on the verge of entering into a new phase of its political life. The previous chapters aimed to explain how the revolts in Tahrir Square were not an altogether unpredictable event. The current conclusions instead will explore the events taking place in the country from February 2011 to July 2013 when the first democratically elected President of Egypt was removed by the military entourage. Section 6.1 will enter in detail in the post-revolutionary period and will seek to explain how the secular and religious groups that gave strength to the revolution started to abandon the common good for more particular interests. The concluding section (6.2) tries to give hints on the reason why the arrest of President Morsi on 3 July 2013 was not an actual *coup d'état* but rather the reclaim of power by the military after the religious wing at power had jeopardised the fragile equilibrium of the country.

6.1 A Contended Nation

The *ad hoc* shared vision to which it was made reference in section 3.3, started to show its worst downsides precisely after the stepping down of Hosni Mubarak. After Mubarak was deposed, the SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces) took the control of the country nominating the Minister of Defense Mohammed Hussein Tantawi to lead the State before electing a new National Assembly and a new President of the Republic. The SCAF, decided to dissolve the National Assembly, call for new elections in six months and suspended the Constitution with the aim to modify it in its most controversial passages¹. The military, however, should not be intended as a pro-democracy group *per se*. The military Council, in fact, was interested in the group that would have brought stability in the country without a real preference for one group or the other (Cook, 2012: 298).

The first step in the post-Mubarak era was taken on 19 March 2011 when eighteen million Egyptians casted their ballots to modify the Constitution and 14 million people voted in favor of it. The changes seemed to respond to the questions asked by the people during the manifestations concluded few weeks before. The following chart lists the most relevant changes:

- (Article 76) The requirements to become a presidential candidate were made less stringent so that all the different parties were free to present their candidate in the upcoming presidential elections,
- (Article 77) A President could stay in charge for only two consecutive terms, each four years only,
- (Article 139) The President must appoint a Vice President within 60 days,

¹ The dissolution of the National Assembly was later ruled unconstitutional and the Egyptian Parliament was reinstated. The recall of the Assembly and the compliance with the principle of equal treatment between the parties made the elections be postponed by two months from September to November 2011-January 2012.

- (Article 148) The declaration of the state of emergency would be subjected to heavier restrictions (e.g. the National Assembly approval),
- (Article 179) The provision regulating the use of force under the offense of 'terrorism' would be dismissed,
- (Article 189) After the elections, the new National Assembly would draft a new Constitution (El-Khawas, 2012).

Such changes, however, did not see the joint approval by the two groups that gave strength to the revolution. The 'secular wing' affirmed to be against the Constitutional amendments due to the fact that they wished the plain modification of the Constitution before the elections and not just a provisional amendment. The Muslim Brothers instead were in favor of the changes because they thought that the country was too unstable to discuss a new Constitution. In actual facts, the Muslim Brothers were those who would have benefited from a provisional Constitution in the upcoming elections. The division between the two groups would have further widened by the end of 2011 when there were celebrated the elections to the National Assembly.

The call to vote to elect the new National Assembly was held in three turns between November 2011 and January 2012. The elections were particularly meaningful since they saw the predominance of the religious parties. The Muslim Brotherhood (which constituted itself in the 'Freedom and Justice' party) and the most intransigent Salafi wing (grouped in the Al-Nour party) obtained two-thirds of the 27 million votes. Even if the two parties did not form an alliance such fact was very telling about the importance that the religious groups had had before and after the 2011 revolts. The outcome of the elections was finally communicated on January 21 and two days later an overwhelming majority elected the speaker of the National Assembly who proceeded from the Freedom and Justice party (Sullivan and Jones, 2013: 341-42).

The two calls for vote of March 19 and the elections to the National Assembly composed the image of the post-revolutionary Egypt. In January 2012, in fact, the country seemed to have undertaken a 'religious path', nevertheless, the situation was more complex. On the one hand, there was the Security Council of the Armed Forces that was eager to endorse a party that could have provided the country with stability and with whom they could communicate (Cook, 2012: 298). On the other hand, though, the electoral turnouts showed a situation in which abstention continued to represent the first choice for the Egyptians. On March 19 abstention was chosen by two-third of the voters whilst on the November 2011-January 2012 National Assembly elections the figures improved and abstention remained at 50 percent. The perspective of abstention and the majorities built on the expression of the 'will' of a minority of the population could be considered the progenitor of the present situation in the country².

The gap between the two groups further widened six months later at the presidential elections celebrated in two turns between May and June 2012. The first turn was celebrated in May 23-24 among thirteen candidates and it served primarily to select the candidates for the run off in June 16-17. The second turn of the elections resolved in the challenge between two candidates: a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood (Mohammed Morsi) and a man representing the old regime (the former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafik)³. The electoral turnout of the challenge between the two candidates delivered the image of a divided Egypt. Mohammed Morsi, the candidate by the Muslim Brothers did not win the elections hands down since he took only 3 percent more votes than his opponent thus winning with 51.7 percent of the preferences.

² The electoral turnout further alimented the hatred between the secular and the religious wing. Those belonging to the secular wing felt betrayed by the electoral outcomes due to the fact that they reproached the Muslim Brothers for not having formally taken part to the revolutions but they had seized power later.

³ The latter candidate needed a ruling from the Egyptian Constitutional Court to run as candidate due to the fact that after the revolts the former Prime Ministers were prevented from running for any public charge.

Such fact was particularly telling about the actual direction taken in the country. Eighteen months after the end of the revolution the internal opposition was no longer directed against a dictator that had stayed in power for thirty years but it had moved between the groups that had actually composed the spine of the 2011 revolution. The SCAF, understanding the fact that the country may have passed through new moments of tension decided to take a precautionary measure. When it became clear that the presidency of the Republic was passing in the hands of Mohamed Morsi, the SCAF decided to change the Constitution (already subjected to the 19 March 2011 referendum) in order to reduce the powers of the President of the Republic. Taking Article 53 as the key article for all the changes, there can be read as follows '[the] SCAF members are responsible for deciding on all issues related to the armed forces including appointing its leaders'⁴ (Ahram Online, 2012a). Under a certain perspective, the facts taking place in the second half of 2012 proved the fear by the SCAF that there were attempts to impose the vision of a single group on the country regardless of social cohesion. The common and shared view that emerged in the Tahrir Square manifestations seemed to have been definitively abandoned for more selfish purposes.

During summer 2012 a Constitutional Assembly that would have drafted the new Egyptian Constitution was nominated. The work of the Assembly lasted a few months and by 30 November 2012 a 234 article draft Constitution was presented. The modality of the approval of the Constitution brought to the surface all the contradictions that had opened after the January 2011 revolts. On 22 November 2012, President Morsi took advantage of his position and issued a Constitutional Declaration immunizing the Constitutional Assembly from the threat of a judicial dissolution (Ahram Online, 2012b). After the Constitutional Declaration on 22 November, the country presented all the symptoms for a regression to the January

⁴ The facts taking place in the second half of 2012, under a certain perspective, proved the fear by the SCAF that the Muslim Brothers were trying to take advantage from their position.

2011 revolts but, this time, the people manifested against those who had supported the 2011 revolts. The sheltering of the Assembly by the reaching of the Judiciary brought to an intensification of the protests in the biggest cities of the country. The fear that the Constitution could have been *de facto* quashed by the increasing violence in the country led the Constitutional Assembly to pass the whole draft Constitution on 29 November in an extraordinary 16-hour session. The draft Constitution was passed to the President on 30 November and the President himself called for a popular approval through a referendum two weeks later⁵.

The increase in the tension in the country after the issue of the Constitutional decree was proportional to the disapproval of the new draft Constitution. They were only the Muslim Brothers and the workers' syndicates under the control of the Brotherhood that were in favor of the new text. The large majority of the country, in fact, opposed to the new draft Constitution. The secular wing perceived the new Constitution as too much tailored on the needs of the Muslim Brothers. The Salafi argued that the new text should have made Shar'ia itself the main source of legislation, not only the principle. The women's rights movements argued that there were no explicit references to the women's rights and this could have exposed women's rights to an easy amendment (Halawa, 2012 and Nguyen, 2012).

The electoral results of the referendum were made public on December 23 and the figures converted the controversy into tangible figures. Only one in three Egyptians showed up for vote (32.8 percent turnout) with the new Constitution approved only by 62 percent of people voting. Translated into more material data this meant that the new Constitution was approved by about ten million people representing only 20 percent of those having the right to vote (Bradley, 2012).

In absolute terms, the Egyptian Constitution represented an important leap forward *vis-à-vis* the constitutional framework that had emerged after the 2007 referendum (compare chapter 3). The new Constitution apparently complied with the universally accepted human rights standards. The right to assembly, the freedom of

⁵ The Referendum was later held in two turns on 15 and 22 December.

expression, the right to appear before a competent judge and the prohibition on torture entered within the Constitution. Such rights, nevertheless, appeared in a form in which they could be easily derogated; the freedom of assembly was subjected to 'notification', the freedom of expression banned any form of 'insult' without further description and the military could still conduct trials of civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2012). The Constituent Assembly also implemented the point approved in the 19 March 2011 referendum regulating the charge as President of the Republic. In order to avoid another 30-year regime similar to the Mubarak one, an Egyptian citizen could not be elected President of the Republic more than twice and each term was limited to four years.

In relative terms though, no change (or progress, depending on the view) was made on the main sources of law and the special position of the military. The principles of Islamic Law continued to be the 'primary source of legislation' for the country. As said, such element did not satisfy the Salafi who wanted the country to be based more closely on the Shar'ia but it certainly dissatisfied the secular wing that firmly opposed to such point. The military, as far as they were concerned, continued to have guaranteed a special position. The charge of the Minister of Defense could be vested only by a general of the army and the military would have kept the exclusivity on the military and defense affairs. Similarly to the Mubarak architecture, the budget of the military would be kept secret and therefore it would not be discussed in the National Assembly (Kirkpatrick, 2012a).

At an ideal level, the new Constitution should have been the text around which to rebuild the post-Mubarak Egypt; the situation however was quite different. The road that brought to the approval of the Constitution was paved by fraudulent measures and the Constitution was approved only by a 20 percent of the population. President Morsi himself had no other strategy than trying to put the situation under the positive framing of the dialectics of different views. In a discourse on television President Morsi affirmed as follows

'This is their right, because Egypt of the revolution — Egypt's people and its elected president — can never feel annoyed by the active patriotic opposition [...] we don't want to go back to the era of the one opinion and fabricated fake majorities' (Kirkpatrick, 2012b).

The words by President Morsi, though, had neat to no effect since the first half of 2013 was marked by a continuous confrontation between the 'secular wing' and the 'Islamic' Government. The country was living in a situation of permanent unrest up to the point in which the confrontation between the two groups started to grow in intensity. The confrontation was later brought to a more radical level on 30 June 2013, the first anniversary of the Morsi presidency, when fourteen million people took to the streets to manifest against the Islamic agenda, the disrespect for the rule of law and the increasing authoritarianism by the President. The manifestation gave birth to pro- and anti-Morsi manifestations which immediately seemed to operate out of any control and entailed the death of several demonstrators. On July 1 General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi gave President Morsi two days to respond to the demands posed by the demonstrators otherwise he would have 'followed his roadmap'.

On July 1 and 2 the situation became increasingly tense with direct and armed confrontation between the pro- and anti-Morsi groups. On July 3, the ultimatum expired and General al-Sisi decided to remove President Morsi and nominate the President of the Egyptian Constitutional Court as *interim* President. General al-Sisi proposed a transition plan in order to drive the country to stability. In order to achieve such aim he affirmed that the Constitution approved in December 2012 was suspended, a Committee of Judges would revise it and the Supreme Court would work on a new electoral law to elect a new National Assembly and President (The Economist, 2013).

6.3 July 3: Not a *Coup d'état*

From January 25 to the present day (September 2013) Egypt has experienced a period of transition where many European commentators saw an early potential for the establishment of democracy followed by a late 'military betrayal' after the so-called July 2013 *coup d'état*. The perception could altogether be considered as correct if it is considered the sole aesthetic presence of the demonstrators in the streets and the following response to their demands. Such a view though does not take into consideration the actual equilibrium of powers of the Arab country. In fact, at the basis of the success or failure of any revolutionary event there was the consent or the dissent by the Egyptian military entourage.

The January 25 revolution, the two Constitutional Referendums and the election of both the National Assembly and the President of the Republic were all democratic events taking place with the consent of the SCAF. In actual fact, the aim by the military establishment was not to endorse democracy *per se*, but rather to endorse a system that could have provided the country with stability. Thus, when the Mubarak regime was no longer able to keep the country stable after the major unrests in Tahrir Square and several more squares of Egypt, the SCAF decided to force Mubarak to resign and nominated the Minister of Defense as *interim* President. In such a perspective, the 19 March 2011 Referendum allowing several improvements on the field of human rights' protection was a necessary manoeuvre aimed to stabilize the country on the social side by providing people with the perception of the improving condition of living.

After the referendum, the military made an apparent step back and left the management of the most superficial political process to the new parties. Such a moment of apparent irrelevance by the military though would have lasted only fifteen months. The SCAF, in fact, 're-activated' only in June 2012 when there were counted the votes of the second round of the Presidential elections. According to a confidence received by the former Israeli negotiation Yossi Beilin, Ahmed Shafik had

actually won the elections but the military gave the presidency to Mr. Morsi fearing a major popular unrest (Beilin, 2013). The fear that the Muslim Brothers with a wide control on the National Assembly and the presidency of the Republic could go beyond their explicit powers constitute a reason of major concern for the SCAF. For such reason, after such event, the SCAF decided to operate a major change within the institutional system and removed the control of the Army from the exclusive competence of the President of the Republic. Their fear, in fact, would have been confirmed a few months later on late November 2012 when the new Constitution was approved through fraudulent measures. The wave of disquiet rising in the country after the approval of the Constitution, however, did not see any tangible countermeasure by the SCAF for one main reasons. The new Constitution even if approved through fraudulent means did not modify under any point the privileges of the military therefore there would have been no reason to act against it.

Six months later, the ultimatum arriving on 1 July 2013, after more than fourteen million people took to the streets on the 30 June protest, represented the last attempt by the military to stick with the *status quo* in order to keep the country under a situation of stability. The decision by President Morsi not to comply with the demands advanced by the population led the SCAF to pursue their 'roadmap' and retain the power they had given to the President one year before. In such a perspective, the arrest of Mohammed Morsi and the 'military roadmap', called by General al-Sisi cannot be considered as an actual *coup d'état*. In fact, the ending of the Morsi presidency on July 3 can be considered as an action going in the opposite direction *vis-à-vis* the election of President Morsi himself when he was given power in spite of the electoral turnout. The military were simply involved in a more direct action *vis-à-vis* the ordinary in order to support the growing opposition against the Muslim Brothers as they tried to play a new card in order to keep the country stable⁶.

In September 2013, the challenges in Egypt remain those that had characterized the latest fifteen years of its history: a more substantial respect of the rule of law, the enhancement of the democratic process and the direction of the economic policy towards

⁶ The military intervention of the army also responded to the need for stability by the US which most likely threatened the withdrawal of their aid to Egypt in case the situation was not resolved quickly (Baker, 2013).

more sustainability still remain the first problems in the country. As the ascending and descending trajectory of the Muslim Brothers demonstrated, such goals are open to the interpretation of the various groups and they are not bound to happen through a secular perspective. In broad terms, the group that will be more skilful in convincing the military of their position will also be the group that will have the actual possibility to shape the country according to their view.

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