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Media and learning democracy: The face of emerging political activism in Egypt

ABSTRACT

Popular protests erupted in Egypt at the start of the second decade of the twenty-first century, inspired by similar uprisings in the Arab world. The formation of political parties following the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak allowed a variety of Islamist actors to enter the political field with relative ease. Youth activists and groups employed bottom-up activism in a process that Larbi Sadiki has described to be 'democratic learning'. In this article, I will explore the process through which Egyptian political actors, from an Islamist background, learnt democracy in a local context. Democracy is understood here in a decentred fashion: it is not necessarily tied to the institutional structures of the modern state. I shall examine Hizb al-Tayyar al-Masry (Egyptian Current Party) between 2011 and 2013 supplemented by other displays of democratic collective agency in the examples of Hizb Misr al-Qawiyya (Strong Egyptian Party) and al-Thawra Mustamirra (The Revolution Continues) alliance. I will explore how the forms of media practices deployed by activists were a key component of a broader revolutionary strategy of civic mobilization. An emerging generation of political activism based on inclusiveness and participation was evident in media practices at the grassroots and party-political levels.

KEYWORDS
democratic learning
civic mobilization
political party
youth
protests
Egyptian Current Party

INTRODUCTION

In the Arab Middle East, discussion is now seeking to transcend democratization. There is a debate today on democratic learning, focusing on the knowledge aspect of democracy, not just the practice of it (Sadiki 2015; Whitehead 2015; Moussa 2015). Democratic learning is the process by which values are acquired within specific cultural and political contexts. Democratic norms, mores and practices seek to cultivate a creative modus vivendi among citizens that eventuality empowers them often at the expense of more institutional forms of politics. In this article, I will explore the process of 'democratic learning' among Egyptian political actors from an Islamist background – how Muslims employ and are inspired by religious and civic traditions to pursue activities commensurate with democracy. I adopt a definition of democracy drawing upon the post-foundationalist interventions on the subject ranging from Benjamin Barber to Sheldon Wolin to Larbi Sadiki.

Thus, I shall attempt to sketch out an interpretive concept of democracy that privileges the political agency of individuals in *relation* with one another that shapes and is shaped by a normative ethos. Democracy is understood here in a decentred fashion: it is not necessarily tied to the institutional structures of the modern state. In this article, I will principally examine Hizb al-Tayyar al-Masry (Egyptian Current Party) between 2011 and 2013, supplemented by other displays of democratic collective agency in the examples of Hizb Misr al-Qawiyya (Strong Egyptian Party) and al-Thawra Mustamirra (The Revolution Continues) alliance. I will explore how the forms of media deployed by activists were a key component of a broader revolutionary strategy of civic mobilization. A new generation of political activism based on moderation, inclusiveness and participation was evident in the practices at the grassroots and party-political levels. Although Egyptian Current's electoral campaigning suffered from the obvious inequalities of financial resources, the experiences of youth members who participated in activism and protests were valuable learning resources. Behaviours, norms, mores and institutions akin to democracy and their limits were learnt within and across a variety of social spaces, not least through media discourses.

DEMOCRATIZING DEMOCRACY: A POST-FOUNDATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

In this section, I illustrate the diverse meanings of the 'signified' behind the originally compound word of democracy. Pejorative connotations were often at odds with the desirability of democracy in theory and experience. Debates abound in the present over how one can define democracy with or without universal pretensions, and despite the broad consensus on the variety of definitions of democracy, the borders of its meanings are continually transgressed to make way for a radical rethinking of its foundations. What it means to be democratic or to live by the ideals of democracy is not so self-evident. Nearly 2500 years have lapsed since the invention, if not of the political system itself, of the term democracy in Ancient Greece. Although the popular nature of democracy was in no uncertain terms disliked by Thucydides, Plato and Aristotle, they did the most towards preserving it as a body of knowledge, the Stagirite approvingly described the government by the many for the common good as *politeia* (Dunn 2005: 39–50). Josiah Ober's crucial distinction between *arche* and *kratos* places *demokratia* in the category of a type of power rather than an office of constitutional authority (2008: 5–6). For the *demos*, the public, is corporate in character being unable to be an 'office-holder' and thus more suited to lend itself to 'a collective capacity to effect change in the public realm […] the collective *strength* and *ability* to act within that realm and, to reconstitute public realm through action' (Ober 2008: 7, original emphasis). Democracy is likened to collective agency. While the previously examined account of *demokratia* does not entirely throw off the prerequisite of the institutional form, M. I. Finley affirms *kratos* to mean 'power' or 'rule' in the sense of a governing body (1973: 12–13).

In some quarters, when the presumed basic character has been settled, the peculiarity of the provenance and journey of democracy has been disputed. For Jack Goody, the false contrast between democracy and despotism conceals past examples of the practice of democracy in various guises, tribal, agricultural and clan (2006: 50–54). Athenian democracy was neither the best nor the only inspiration for governments based on representation and the common weal. Constant musings on the journey of democracy from the antiquity of Athens to the modernity of the West express the Eurocentric preoccupation with linear evolution that fails the test of the historical record. No historic and uninterrupted continuity of democratic institutions can be readily identified or recognized in the past 2500 years. During the middle decades of the twentieth century, Robert Dahl pondered over the most appropriate unit for democracy on a spectrum ranging from the nation state to the city-state. However, to seek democracy in the village or a small town based on 'tribal solidarity' is likened by Dahl to 'the childhood of man' to which there is no return (1967: 960–61). Decreasing the scale of a self-governing body is indeed fraught with challenges revolving around the degree of efficacy to be truly autonomous and the scope of direct participation.

A post-foundationalist understanding of democracy thus consists of the disruption of the taken for granted linear evolution of the Athenian experience to the present when as noted above the historical record does not bear it out. Democracy as a body of knowledge can be prescribed or proscribed as the situation requires and according to the convictions or whims of human beings. Most importantly, the survival of ideas and ideals depends largely on a process that can be best described as learning that takes place in a context shaped by the political praxes of a multitude of social actors. If indeed democracy can be considered a body of knowledge that is learnt and imparted through associations, one can begin the search for its political practice beyond the state. Such an intellectual enterprise is necessarily postcolonial in memory and critical in theory. Democratic theory can only acquire relevance through the interruptions of experience from various local milieus into its normative and descriptive formulations. Recent rejections of foundationalist presuppositions about the nature of the social world and politics have led to the rise of interpretivist approaches that privilege the situational formations of democracy. An unlikely source for the interpretivist account of democracy is Hannah Arendt's discriminating classification of power, violence and force. Power as distinct from violence garners its salience through both the number of participants and acting in concert (1970: 43–47). Thus, mass mobilization is an instance of unadulterated power in a theoretical challenge to the centredness of the state and its apparatuses.

More robust retorts to the singularity of democratic norms and mores have also appeared in the field of political thought. Benjamin Barber and Sheldon Wolin agree with Hannah Arendt's scepticism towards the overly abstract. Any presumed essence of democracy is subjected to its practice. The presumed foundations of democracy are rejected for a post-foundationalist approach.

Indeed, Barber's echoing of Arendt's conception of politics pays attention to process rather than provenance,

> And while in seeking common ends democracy processes prospective norms, values, and rationales that may be rooted in metaphysics, religion, or foundational ethics, their *legitimacy* is a function not of their genealogy but of their status as products of democratic choice.
>
> (1996: 353, original emphasis)

What defines democracy is the unfolding of a democratic or commonly enacted experience. At once open-ended and civic, the above-sketched account of democracy precludes the fixity that is a typical characteristic of Eurocentric assumptions of an ahistorical social contract or state of nature and institutions such as a constitution. Structural and formal properties are discarded for the process-based and informal facets of political praxis. How democratic action is pursued in a specific context is afforded far more importance than its proposed ideological sources and traditions. Similarly, for Wolin, non-conventional democracy based on the common well-being experience of 'citizen-as-actor and politics-as-episodic' is contrary to the assumption of the state as the 'fixed center of political life' (1996: 31, 38, 42–43). The unpacking of democracy in the Arab world by Larbi Sadiki is situated within an authoritarian milieu. While the concept is '*essentially* contested', it is nonetheless 'a widely *uncontested ideal*' among Arab nationals for the intuitive demand of making 'the state and officialdom accessible as well as relevant to their lives in a positive way rather than in a negative way' (Sadiki 2004: 4–6, original emphasis). Arbitrary forms of government, in this post-foundationalist reading, provide the impetus and attraction, rather than abstract theorizing, to democracy as good government. The potential for diffusion and to be multicultural enables democracy to be adopted and adapted by all cultures accompanied by an ethos that rejects the 'fixity, hegemony and homogeny' engendered through exclusion (Sadiki 2004: 12). Predominance of the political centre is inconsistent with the normative demand for greater agency within the margins and communities of societies. Post-foundationalist interpretations of democracy have increasingly brought into play the role of participation into normative criteria to critique conventional politics (the state) and to propose an alternative politics (the grassroots).

Arendt's arguments of the essentially diffusive nature of power have also influenced the study and practice of nonviolent resistance. Politics as process is highlighted by Gene Sharp on the efficacy of strategic nonviolence. For Sharp, the internal organization of non-violent movements alerts us to their democratizing consequences. Leaders are not in a position to wield violence or the threat of violence to enforce their will on the rank-and-file (Sharp 1993: 57) who are certainly not mere apparatchik. Civic activism or the political planning and action undertaken by citizens has important implications for democratic learning. When the exercise of force to coerce others to obey commands is in principle rejected and absent, the ability to persuade needs to be learnt and repeatedly deployed to train both leaders and their members to coordinate effectively with each other, anchored in both a sense of belonging and a unity of political purpose. Laurence Whitehead suggests that the context disagreements about what democracy can be restrained through an 'anchored' and 'floating' meaning of the term derived through the filter of 'collective deliberation' (2002: 6–8). Proposed definitions of democracy must indeed go through a process in which citizens are able to accept as 'valid', reject as 'invalid' or are exposed to 'a variety of credentials' from challengers such as 'clear logic, good evidence, familiarity with the culture, and a reputation for sound judgement' (Whitehead 2002: 21–23).

ARAB 'DEMOCRATIC LEARNING'

In the Arabo-Islamic context, Larbi Sadiki's post-foundationalist conception of democracy and democratization rejects a one-size-fits-all model. For he argues 'democracy may be a universal good, but operationalizating it cannot escape the linguistic, cultural, historical and power-based facts specific to the host context' (2015: 6). Neither prevailing political culture approaches with their essentialist reductionism nor transitology perspectives that fail to see potential or actual political change in the Arab Middle East provides adequate interpretive lenses. Sadiki thus presents an alternative to both these two schools of thought in his double critique and proposal of democratic learning. Recent unfolding events of the Arab Spring, both the putative progressions and regressions, display the analytical weaknesses of the dominant Eurocentric paradigm 'when the utility and explanatory power of Western transitology is subject to revision and problematization', as anticipated by Carothers and Whitehead (Sadiki 2015: 8). The 'decolonisation' of knowledge on Arab societies can engineer the complex transcending of the transitology paradigm. Contradictory stereotypes of the passive or unruly Arab citizen can be jettisoned through such an intellectual venture. These stereotypes that discipline and contain Arab subalterns for Sadiki are,

> Like Foucault's prisoner, the Arab 'non-democrat' is a discursive formation, a peculiarity, a perversity, not devoid of the entanglements of knowledge and power, a subjectivity reconstituted their attendant discourses. Along the same lines of profiling the prisoner, the 'Oriental' is objectified in knowledge and discourse practices as mostly inhospitable to democracy or civil society.
>
> (2015: 9)

Orientalist 'knowledge' of the Oriental supposedly unveils Arabs mired in despotism. A thorough critique of the processes and effects of disempowering discourses is to be followed, if not accompanied, by the contextualizing of the local experiences and practices of Arab societies. Rethinking Arab democratisation must stem from the acknowledgement that 'good government must be in the first instance rooted in a system of local knowledge' (Sadiki 2015: 2). Pursuit of the two interacting conceptual elements of the *makhzun* (repertoire of local knowledge) and the *mikhyal* (collective social imaginary) provide the entry point to study 'democratic learning' in the Muslim world. What emerges from such a venture is the identifying of the Islamic tradition and practice and group solidarity (Sadiki 2015: 5) to be the primary facets of Arabo-Islamic specificity. Conflict or a dialectic does not drive sociopolitical processes, contrary to Marxist or political science wisdom, but cooperation. Democratic learning is a didactic process in which collaboration between masses and elites occurs (Sadiki 2015: 5). A definition of democratic knowledge directly quoting Sadiki can be offered here whereby,

> the intellectual and practical capacities, skills, ethics whose primary cognitive weight lends itself to democratic learning, and civic habituation

> and socialization via an open-ended, constructivist, interactive, cross-cultural but also reflexive process, across time and space, cumulatively and collaboratively. Democratic knowledge is relative to the local context in which good government is formed, grounding it within the inherited repertoire of ideas, morals, including faith-based, and within institutions, significations, and experiences, but without excluding global adaptations.
>
> (2015: 5)

Conceptualising democracy as both process and knowledge leads to the theoretical assumption that it is an open-ended experience that eschews privileging an institutional edifice. Bottom-up mobilizations and participation among citizens are the sources from which democracy can be interpreted in the conscious effort to identify and explore the skills, practices and values of popular challenges to authoritarianism. This article seeks to explore the mores, norms and practices of Islamists and political party formation since the eruption of the 2011 uprising until 2013 through the conceptualisation of democratic learning.

REVOLUTION, SOCIAL MEDIA AND CIVIC MOBILIZATION IN THE EGYPTIAN CURRENT PARTY

Democratic behaviours are better understood to be instances of collective agency that do not necessarily presuppose state-centric democracies. Political parties can possess values, practices and mechanisms that are normatively regarded to be democratic in nature and form. In the cases of the parties of Egyptian Current and Strong Egypt, the Arab uprisings created a new context in which political party formation and activism experienced a new proliferation of opportunities. Certain types of activisms, particularly social media, supplied the very means to organize demonstrations and spread civic values and news leading up to the ousting of Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. In this section, I will examine how political activists in Egyptian Current and Strong Egypt developed or enhanced their capability to mobilize citizens in nationwide campaigns. Protests, electioneering, political office and petitions appear to have been deployed by party members using social media platforms to shape the fluid political landscape in the absence of Mubarak and the ruling National Democratic Party. The existence of media spaces in society was possible due to the possession of the skills needed to create and sustain them and the awareness of the advantages of such spaces. Egyptian political parties of different backgrounds thus enhanced their media presence to reach broader constituencies for the twin purposes of recruitment and mobilization.

During the Mubarak era, opposition actors were contained or repressed and routinely refused official recognition. The experience of a small group of former Muslim Brotherhood members and the failed attempt to register al-Wasat as a political party in the 1990s were indicative of the active efforts to exclude Islamists from the formal political sphere. Civil society organizations, primarily professional unions, experienced the peaceful rise of Islamists amid their ranks and under their control (Ibrahim 1993: 301). In the period following the millennium the opposition continued to coalesce in spaces outside of the direct control of the Mubarak regime such as the professional syndicates and the Internet. While the former was certainly a continuation of political action, leading to successful outcomes, the latter introduced novel methods of organizing, mobilizing and disseminating. Physical spaces in the streets and public squares of Egypt were heavily policed and surveilled. New territories of political activism were charted with radical consequences for raising political awareness and sharing knowledge.

The deployment of the Internet to organize protests and conduct media campaigns against Mubarak proved to be an invaluable experience in learning how to circumvent Egypt's security apparatus, obtain much-needed publicity and reach Egyptian citizens. Civic mobilization in the informal sphere was motivated by discontent with the status quo and the prospect of the formal succession of Gamal Mubarak to presidency. Social media played a vital role in diffusing democracy alongside internal and external factors (Moghadam 2013: 398–99) in a politically tumultuous context that saw the formation of Kefayah, 6 April movement and National Association for Change. Youth members of the Muslim Brotherhood led and joined protests in January and February 2011 in a remarkable demonstration of collective action (Egyptian Elections Watch 2011b). Ideological and political loyalties were subordinated to the revolutionary activism shaping the grassroots. Against this backdrop, Egyptian Current and Strong Egypt developed a pronounced and distinctive youth identity.

The process of formalizing the Strong Egypt Party followed the 2012 presidential elections in which Abdel Moneim Abul Fotouh won millions of votes only not to proceed onto the second round. One of the exacting criteria for the registration of political parties was the stipulation of 5000 founding members in ten governorates. Although the Strong Egypt Party was officially licenced on 12 November 2012 with 8500 signatories (Abdel-Baky 2012), Egyptian Current's estimated membership stood between 3000 and 4500. The latter figure fell short of the requirements for the aforementioned stipulation. Formalization of the status of Strong Egypt reflected the general shift of functions and attitudes of the political authorities, namely the newly empowered judiciary, towards political participation in the absence of a ruling party. The focus by youth activists on the formation of political parties did not neglect the importance of bottom-up strategies of political change. Collective action through the mobilization of citizens for the purpose of demonstrations and protests brought to bear unruly forms of politics that nonetheless remained peaceful.

Egyptian Current and Strong Egypt were able to organize themselves in the form of political parties with memberships numbering the thousands. Two key factors contributed to the recruitment capacity and limitations of these two political parties. The first factor was directly related to the decision of the Muslim Brotherhood leadership to establish a political party that its members were obliged to join. The hierarchical structures of both the Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party provoked dissatisfaction with the nature of the decision-making process and a sense of exclusion among some youth activists who had participated in anti-Mubarak protests (Egyptian Elections Watch 2011a). The second factor of the experience of cooperating with activists from different ideological or political affiliations was crucial in the formation of Egyptian Current and later Strong Egypt. Mass demonstrations against Mubarak and the military transitional government were organized by individuals from a cross-section of the political spectrum. Dramatic changes appeared afoot for 'a more open, transparent, efficient and civic political process' anchored by the increased importance of the youth, middle classes and revolutionary groups (Osman 2013: 111). In the case of the Egyptian Current Party, the youth dimension was instrumental in shaping both its ideological platform and political practice. It was founded, despite no formal recognition by the Political Parties Committee, by Muslim Brotherhood youth members and April 6 activists.

Alliance building through political parties subsequently followed the mass demonstrations that brought Mubarak down. Political alliances were fostered with socialist and protest groups. For Abul Fotouh, the maintenance of distinct and separate political parties would prove to be more conducive for an environment of political pluralism and alliances rather than the moves towards merging (Mahmoud 2012). Greater participation through independent organizations was perceived to be a positive value within the Islamist current in Egypt. The existence of a diversity of parties holds the potential for alliances not only among Islamists but also, as past experience attests, between actors with different ideological backgrounds. Moreover, cooperation with activists from dissimilar ideological affiliations extended beyond the party membership to other newly founded political parties or organized groups. Revolution for Egyptian Current was perhaps the defining characteristic of the political identity of the party's avowed objectives. The meaning of revolution incorporated the value of pluralism in an Egyptian society.

The need to synchronize top-down (parliamentary) and bottom-up (protests) forms of politics culminated in the formation of The Revolution Continues electoral alliance for the 2011 parliamentary elections. For one of the founding members of Egyptian Current, this alliance of 'a middle way' dedicated to realize the revolutionary objectives of social justice, democracy, freedom and building the country followed successful efforts at bridge-building between civic or secular and Islamist actors based upon trust (interview, 2018). Even raising Egyptian Current's political activity to the level of the top–down necessitated the use of the Internet, a decentred virtual universe, for the goals of revolution. On The Revolution Continues list, electioneering among the candidates from diverse ideological backgrounds was driven by the unified stance of realizing security, freedom and social justice (TM Party: Hizb al-Tayyar al-Masry 2011c). The Internet, specifically Facebook, provided yet another social space through which activists could share crucial electoral information such as the candidate running for which district, political platform and avowed values with a constituency of voters. YouTube was also an additional medium for civic engagement. An official political party channel on the video-sharing website was supplemented by the presence of other channels devoted to Egyptian's burgeoning open and democratic spaces. In a YouTube interview, Muhammad Qassas reiterated alliance's three basic principles to be security, freedom and social justice (Al-Dayira Al-Waiyah 2011). Social network platforms can be employed to reduce the limitations of resources, especially funding, in public outreach strategies. Political actors are able to share their values, aims and visions through the simple yet effective method of interviews between two individuals in a new virtual environment.

Between January and April 2011, one Egyptian newspaper article noted the fourfold increase in Egyptian users of Facebook compared to half a million in the previous year (Mubarak 2011). While there is an exaggerated tendency to consider the Arab uprisings as a 'Facebook revolution' (Reardon 2012), it must be borne in mind that the social media enterprise proved to be helpful in creating a real-time connection between account holders and other users. A virtual relationship was continually maintained by the daily and hourly updates of posts by the former and the logging-in and viewing by the latter. However, a caveat ought to be mentioned that the virtual presence of the Egyptian Current Party could only exist and depend upon the political activism of its members as they interacted with other members and voting constituencies throughout Egypt. Cyber politics would not be saving grace for the political parties founded in the wake of the demise of Mubarak's reign but merely added a relatively freer social space for the articulation of party political stances and mobilizing capacity. Greater access to constituents through technical know-how complemented traditional forms of engaging and mobilizing ordinary Egyptians. The parliamentary elections between November 2011 and January 2012 provided the impetus for the recruitment of members by the recently founded Egyptian Current Party. Popular mobilization was centred upon the need to broaden the party's appeal for the successful contesting of elections in a new climate of a diversity of political actors.

External activities consisted of travelling throughout Egypt to interact with citizens in various cities and towns. In the 2011 elections, the electoral map was divided according to 27 governorates in a country, albeit sparsely populated, that covered nearly a million square kilometres. Such a vast geographic expanse posed challenges to political activists in elections. Civic engagement thus required both utilizing the Internet, namely Facebook and Twitter, and face-to-face meetings with ordinary Egyptians. Regular publicizing of events through Facebook posts mirrored the grassroots activities of activists. During the run-up to the parliamentary elections, Facebook invitations to Egyptian Current meetings in the Red Sea and Beni Sweif regions (TM Party: Hizb al-Tayyar al-Masry 2011a, 2011b) appear to have targeted a constituency presumed not to have much knowledge about the new political party in an attempt to remedy such a situation.

These invitations were part of a nationwide campaign undertaken by activists involving meetings with fellow members and voters travelling from Cairo to the Red Sea to the Western Desert to Beni Sweif within 48 hours (interview, 2018). Although induction meetings were organized to publicize the party's existence and values, self-admittedly the message of participatory democracy did not resonate well with people. What proved to be a defining characteristic of these efforts on the part of political activists is the articulation of an Egyptian political strategy presupposing a national electoral constituency despite the Islamist background of some of the founding party members. According to one of the party's founders, the Egyptian Current party envisaged itself to be a channel or a conduit, in a display of 'populist democracy', for conveying the views of the people to political elites (interview, 2018). Thus, the existence of the political party straddles the spheres of the bottom-up and the top-down. Democracy is largely understood to be located within the communicative channels bridging the gap between the wider society and politicians. Another dimension of democracy blurs the lines between inclusive participation in the decision-making process and normative values such as social justice. Furthermore, Pan-Islamic or Islamist motifs were relegated, if not absent, from the party's repertoire that sought to speak directly to the presumed expectations and wants of Egyptian citizens in an emerging post-authoritarian and post-ideological polity.

Electoral success for the Egyptian Current Party and al-Thawra Mustamirra list paled in comparison to the better funded and larger political parties of the Freedom and Justice Party and the Salafi Nour Party on the one hand and Mubarak era stalwarts on the other. Seven seats for the alliance in a parliament dominated by a seeming Islamist coalition severely restricted the channelling of political activity from the bottom-up (Tarek 2012). The institutionalization of the revolutionary goals of security, freedom and social justice did not proceed smoothly due to the appearance of political factions divided according to ostensible ideological lines. Nonetheless, Abul Ezz El-Hariri, a socialist on the shared list of candidates, once upon entering parliament immediately called for the prosecution of Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, then head of the Supreme Council of the Egyptian Armed Forces, part of the mandate of the parliament of revolution (Anon. 2012).

Presidential elections during May and June 2012 witnessed the pitting of Islamists, socialists and revolutionaries against Ahmed Shafiq, who was widely considered to be one of the *felool* (Mubarak remnants). After the first-round defeat of Abul Fotouh, Egyptian Current and the members of his presidential campaign, the Strong Egypt was not yet founded, committed themselves to the Islamist candidate Muhammad Morsi in a bid to prevent the reversal of the revolution's fortunes and election of Shafiq. On 22 June 2012, what became known as the 'Fairmont Agreement' was in essence a revolutionary agenda of representative government advancing the claims of grassroots activists and political organizations under Muhammad Morsi's presidential platform going into presidential election's second round (Qandil 2012). Ideological considerations were hugely consequential in the forging of an electoral alliance among previously divided political actors who had campaigned and voted for other candidates, to wit Abul Fotouh and Hamdeen Sabahi, in their millions. The participants included a key segment of Egypt's expanding political society: the revolutionary youth, Islam Lofty and Muhammad Qassas, from the Egyptian Current Party (Sayyid and Abdellah 2012). Crucial political tests involving perceived challenges or even retrogressions on the path towards democracy led to the difficult process of (a) making the decision to negotiate with electoral competitors, (b) negotiating differences and identifying common aims and (c) supporting an eventual agreement.

For the former youth members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the opening decade of the twentieth century allowed the later founders of Egypt Current and Strong Egypt to acquire the know-how of organizing politically across ideological and political borders. Throughout Morsi's presidency, protest marches remained a major component of civic mobilization among youth activists in political parties and social movements. The Strong Egypt Party marking of the anniversary on 25 January 2013 of the outbreak of the protests that brought down Mubarak confirms the relevance of revolutionary sentiments and values. Party participation in a march from al-Istiqama mosque after the communal Friday prayer to Tahrir square was perceived to be one element of a dual strategy of protests and electoral contestation (Taha 2013). Popular demonstrations still continued unabated two years after the collapse of the ruling National Democratic Party. Grassroots activists from opposition movements and groups identified and critiqued the lack of the institutionalization of what they believed to be the aims of the 25 January revolution. Among political parties, particularly on the left, the varying combinations of bottom-up and top-down tactics were dependent on the efficacy of the adopted methods of mobilization in light of changing circumstances.

IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF MORSI'S OVERTHROW

The survival of political parties in Egypt following the ousting of Morsi in 2013 has followed the trajectory of either co-optation or marginalization. Egypt's new regime has elevated the role of the executive while attenuating pluralism in the form of political parties in political life and despite the shrinking of the spaces in civil society, an evolving virtual identity in direct response to events unfolding in Egyptian politics is evident. From street protests to electoral competition, the parties of Egyptian Current and Strong Egypt have largely abandoned the political field. The Protest Law of 2013 has effectively criminalized bottom-up forms of politics, particularly the right to protest (El-Fekki 2016). Declared boycotts of a string of elections since the summer of 2013 are in part a recognition of the intrusive role of the security services and the arrests of party activists when they were campaigning during the referendum for the constitution (Ateyya 2013). Recent years have brought a lot of pressure on youth activists in the peaceful quest to achieve political transformation. To learn democratic modes of organizing and mobilizing had been a high priority and a real possibility through the open spaces created within political parties and the wider society.

When the available room for political activism was reduced, the organizational emphasis shifted from alliances among like-minded political parties to mergers of their organizations. In the above discussion, Abul Fotouh in autumn 2012 advocated pluralism at the level of political parties and the creation of a coherent political and ideological trend. However, the announcement of the merging of Egyptian Current and Strong Egypt appeared to be motivated by the need to coordinate revolutionary political activity under a single organizational structure (Abaza 2014). Both these political parties possess a shared and particular youth identity underpinned by social ties created through years of membership of organizations (Muslim Brotherhood) or activities (anti-Mubarak protest campaign). A Facebook post replayed the same repertoire of a common revolutionary agenda by the youth and the need to merge the political parties in a changing context (Haridy 2014). Higher levels of repression and surveillance have produced a status quo that does not permit, at the very least drastically reduce, the opportunities for democratic learning in open social spaces, whether virtual or physical.

REFLECTIONS ON THE NORMS OF INCLUSIVENESS AND CIVIC MOBILIZATION

A post-foundational conceptualising of democratisation in a local context derives its interpretive strength from following the trajectory of democratic learning as an ‘open-ended, constructivist, interactive, cross-cultural but also reflexive process, across time and space’ (Sadiki 2015: 706). Political actors deploy a repertoire shaped by tradition and local cultural imaginaries that are filtered through lived experiences and practices. In a process that is far from linear, the line between political activists and their constituents is blurred. Practical and intellectual skills and normative values at the heart of civic habituation are developed and shared (Sadiki, 2015). Inclusiveness and civic mobilization perhaps best represent two of the values of a repertoire, embodied in the Arab Spring, Islamists and other actors learnt in practice. Conceived in post-foundationalist terms that emphasize the ‘local’, democratization as a (non-linear) trajectory of *democratic learning* is fluid rather than fixed, in a ‘cross-cultural’ rather than ethnocentric conceptualization that travels well temporally and spatially (Sadiki 2015: 706). Here, according to Sadiki, agential individuals and collectivities draw on repertoires of tradition and invoke local cultural imaginaries that are filtered through lived experiences and not untouched by engagements with the West. In so doing, both elites and masses develop and disseminate the practical and intellectual skills and normative values key to the civic habituation conducive to democratic change (Sadiki 2015). Among such values are *inclusiveness* and *civic mobilization*, as arguably embodied in the Arab Spring popular uprisings, including Islamists in Egypt's revolution.

Hence, democratic learning presupposes a discontinuity of practices and orders such as the spread of popular uprisings in authoritarian states in North Africa. The looming prospect of revolution from 2010 ushered in a period of creativity in the realm of political organizations and movements. Party founders of Egyptian Current drew upon the extant knowledge of values and practices to create a new politics that was both unruly and peaceful, mobilizing citizens. Two norms stand out during the process of acquiring democratic knowledge within the Egyptian Current Party: inclusiveness and civic mobilization. Persuasive alternatives to authoritarianism and the Muslim Brotherhood presented themselves for these budding political party activists. Against this backdrop, the members, especially the founders, of the Egyptian Current Party began a process of what can be considered the knowledge-making of democratic values, norms and practices. For Egyptian Current, the internal structures of decision-making and membership were deliberately formulated to expand the possibilities for inclusive participation. Among the founders of the party, the principal priority was to empower members. Referendums took place to approve every decision (interview, 2018). The ideological motivation of such a stance can be traced back to the agenda of direct democracy in public life. Internal practice of popular participation at meetings and decision-making procedures was a prelude to convincing the wider public of the strengths of direct democracy at the level of government. Internal spaces of participation were supposed to dovetail with external spaces of mobilizing in civil society. Direct democracy was contrasted with representative democracy and the latter was found wanting in its ability to empower Egyptian citizens. Accordingly, the espousal of this conception of democracy, coexisting with security, freedom and social justice, aimed to decentre democracy from conventional understanding of the concept. Democracy could function within the political associations of a political party and of the state.

The creation of internal structures of decision-making privileging a more horizontal form of political organizing was inspired by both the experience of the founders and the shared normative repertoire of revolution. Hierarchies were unequivocally rejected. Collective attempts to set up an equal relationship between leaders and members were facilitated by regular meetings. A genuine attempt at engendering inclusive forms of organizing and maintaining a political party experienced the difficulties of imposing order on the rank-and-file. Rebelliousness had replaced obedience. Sari Hanafi observed the formation of a new political subjectivity resulting from the Arab uprisings among the revolutionary youth. He describes it in the following way:

> It is a type of individualism that involves the constant negotiation for an actor with the existing social structure in order to realize a (partial) emancipation from it. This is an act of self-reference of an agent that recognizes forces of socialization but alters their place in the social structure and resists their disciplinary power.
>
> (Hanafi 2012: 203)

In the making of democratic knowledge among within Egyptian Current, the individual played a critical role in cultivating the awareness of the undesirability of obedience stemming from ideological and political considerations. The 'goods' of globalization, especially the Internet, had directly intensified state-society contests in which technologies of protest posed intractable challenges for the police state (Sadiki 2011: 240–41). Following Mubarak's departure from power, the very same information technology was used not only to hold accountable the interim military government but also contributed to the intensification of electoral competition among political parties.

Increased activity in cyberspace was accompanied by the necessary organizational building within political parties. Internal and external spaces, noted above, were subject to a constant synchronizing of collective activities. The virtual communications network contributed to expanding the available spaces for activists to engage with not only members but also constituents. Facebook and Twitter were effective tools for the party to become far more inclusive than it would have been possible under a hierarchical party structure. Social media reproduced the party's radical democratic ethos in a fashion that allowed members, at least those with Internet access and accounts, to read party news, attend political events and communicate with other members. The repertoire of the Egyptian Current Party resembled that of the Strong Egypt Party in their common goals of broadening the participation of Egyptian citizens, specifically the youth, within party organizations and in society. Mobilization through the political association of a political party redrew the boundaries between members and their constituents. A radical democratic ethos, noted above, shaped the priorities and functions of Egyptian Current in its national context of an emerging democracy. Party activities ranging from meetings to electoral campaigning were instances of democracy understood to be collective action by citizens as members. Inclusive structures of organizing were synchronized with internal and external modes of civic mobilization. For party members, in the case of Egyptian Current, it appears that the forward thrust of their organization was anchored in and led by the youth whose awareness of cooperating with other political actors was motivated by the need to achieve revolutionary goals. Motivated by a normative struggle against authoritarianism, the practical demands of organizing dissidence against Mubarak and Sissi's regimes feed into 'democratic learning'. Members of the Strong Egypt Party and Egyptian Current Party thus appear to exhibit values of civic mobilization and inclusiveness amenable to democratic transformation – even as the country's political institutions remain locked in the iron embrace of Egypt's 'deep state'.

CONCLUSION

Post-foundationalist conceptions of democracy have the potential to expand the scope of interpreting how political actors imagine and pursue democratic ideals in practice. A theoretical elaboration of democracy from the bottom-up and horizontal spaces of society is derived from the principal frame of reference of the actual experiences of citizens and activists. Contemporary Egypt is a case-in-point for the re-imagining of democracy through a political praxis enacted by political parties and social movements. Furthermore, the focus in article on the Egyptian Current Party, despite the lack of formal recognition, appears to demonstrate the rise of a new generation of political activists organized within a political association, the political party, espousing a repertoire of revolution. Recent advances in democracy at the level of the state in Egypt have also been accompanied by retreats in form and substance. It is, however, short-sighted to limit the study of democracy to formal and institutional forms. Any approach that ignores social media, grassroots organizations and the cultural repertoire of political activisms will certainly conclude, erroneously, that democratic ideals, values and practices are absent. The post-foundational framework developed in this article seeks to ameliorate the anaemic accounts of autocracy versus democracy in the Arab world. When the formation and activities of Egyptian Current and Strong Egypt are examined there appears to be a radical shift from familial or patronage relations to an internally democratic membership. Furthermore, the youth segment of these parties was instrumental in not only their foundation but also the adoption of specific ideals, values and types of activism.

A new generation of political activism was in the making between 2011 and 2013 driven by youth activists who acquired experience, values and skills from cooperating with political actors from across the political spectrum. Youth activists from the Muslim Brotherhood and April 6 movement had formed a political association of the like-minded in 2011, drawing upon the experience and knowledge of political organizing from the preceding years. Revolutionary discourses were disseminated, with obvious limitations of resources, through various forms of media as newly empowered social spaces. Increased Internet use among the youth in Egypt was duly recognized by Egyptian Current and Strong Egypt. Nationwide campaigns to recruit and mobilize members in these years demonstrated a capacity to deploy Facebook and Twitter to publicize events, meetings and protests, in tandem with direct face-to-face civic engagement with a diverse and vast Egyptian constituency. In the period after summer 2013, the decreasing spaces in civil society have further eroded the mobilizing outreach of both Egyptian Current and Strong Egypt under the structure of the latter, which announced their merger as a single party in autumn 2014. Internal activities within the Strong Egypt Party supplied limited spaces for the cultivation of democratic values and practices. While current challenges to democracy at the level of state have severely weakened the capability of Strong Egypt, often culminating in mass imprisonment and strict electoral laws, the knowledge of democratic organizing and values has an intangible quality that can be learnt, preserved and shared for the future.

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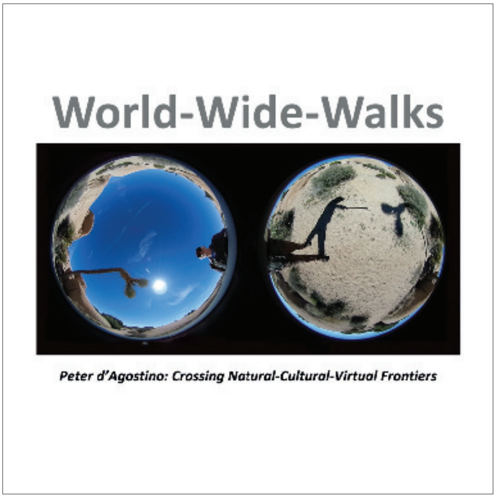
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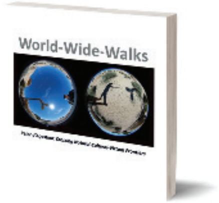

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This book presents Peter d'Agostino's *World-Wide-Walks* project, providing a unique perspective on walking practices across time and place, considered through the framework of evolving technologies and changes in climate. Performed on six continents over the past four decades, d'Agostino's work lays a groundwork for considering walks as portals for crossing natural, cultural and virtual frontiers. Broad in scope, it addresses topics ranging from historical concerns, including traditional Australian Aboriginal rites of passage and the exploits of explorers such as John Ledyard, to artists' walks and related themes covered in the mass media in recent years. D'Agostino's work shows that the act of walking places the individual within a world of empirical awareness, statistical knowledge, expectation and surprise. In mediating the frontiers of human knowledge, walking and other forms of exploration remain a critical means of engaging global challenges; especially notable now as environmental boundaries are undergoing radical and potential cataclysmic change.

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