

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA: THE EXAMPLE OF THE TAHRIR PROTESTS*

Abstract

This article examines the Tahrir protests in the context of New Social Movements (NSMs) and resource mobilization and argues that the Tahrir protests can be assessed within the framework of these movements. The literature review presented evaluates how NSMs became conceptualized after different theoretical debates took place and how NSMs depart from conventional models. The main argument of this article is that due to its dynamics, the Tahrir protests present a new social movement model. It is further illustrated how social media plays an important role in the organization and diversification of information sources of social movements. It is claimed that while social media is not the absolute determinant in social movements, it brings about structural reforms such as the elimination of the hierarchical relationship model, the tendency of acting without a leader, and granting social movements autonomy.

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“TOPLUMSAL HAREKETLER VE SOSYAL MEDYA ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİ: TAHRİR EYLEMLERİ ÖRNEĞİ”

Öz

25 Ocak 2011 tarihinde başlayan ve kısa sürede önemli sonuçlara yol açan kitlesel hareketler, otoriter rejimlerin ürettiği kronik sorunların öfke patlaması olarak değerlendirilebilir. 6 Ekim 1981’de Enver Sedat’ın öldürülmesinin ardından devlet başkanı olan Hüsnü Mübarek’in uzun yıllar süren baskıcı tek adam rejimi ülke halkının otoriteriyen bir rejim altında yaşamasını beraberinde getirmiştir. Bu makale Tahrir protestolarını Yeni Toplumsal Hareketler (YTH) ve Kaynak mobilizasyonu bağlamında incelemekte ve söz konusu hareketin bu kategorilerde değerlendirilebileceğini iddia etmektedir. Bu çerçevede toplumsal hareketler literatürü ele alınmakta ve zaman içerisinde sosyal teoride yaşanan tartışmalarla birlikte YHT’nin kavramsal olarak ortaya çıkışı ve geleneksel modellerden ayrıştığı değerlendirilmektedir. Çalışmanın ana argümanı ise Tahrir protestolarının taşıdığı dinamikler itibariyle tipolojik olarak bir yeni toplumsal hareket modeli sunduğudur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tahrir Protestoları, Yeni Toplumsal Hareketler, Kaynak Mobilizasyonu, Sosyal Medya

العلاقة بين الحركات الاجتماعية ووسائل التواصل الاجتماعية: احتجاجات ميدان التحرير إنموذجاً

ملخص

تتناول هذه المقالة احتجاجات ميدان التحرير في سياق تعبئة الحركات الاجتماعية الجديدة (NSMs) والموارد، وترى هذه المقالة بأنه يمكن تقييم احتجاجات التحرير في إطار هذه الحركات. في هذا السياق تتم مناقشة أدبيات الحركات الاجتماعية وتعتبر أنه إلى جانب المناقشات الجارية في النظرية الاجتماعية مع مرور الوقت وظهور المفهوم من الحركات الاجتماعية الجديدة وتمايزها عن النماذج التقليدية. الحجة الرئيسية للدراسة هي أن الديناميات التي تتضمنها احتجاجات التحرير تقدم إنموذجاً جديداً من الناحية التصنيفية للحركات الاجتماعية. ويتضح كذلك خلال المقالة كيف تؤدي وسائل التواصل الاجتماعية دوراً مهماً في تنظيم وتنوع مصادر المعلومات للحركات الاجتماعية، وبالرغم من أن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعية ليست هي المحدد المطلق للحركات الاجتماعية، إلا أنها تجلب إصلاحات هيكلية بسيطة، مثل القضاء على إنموذج العلاقة الهرمية، وتشجع الميل للعمل دون قائد، وتمنح الحركات الاجتماعية الاستقلال الذاتي.

كلمات مفتاحية: احتجاجات التحرير، الحركات الاجتماعية الجديدة، تعبئة الموارد، الإعلام الاجتماعي

The Tahrir Protests: A General Overview

In light of Egypt's historical experience, the presence of military and bureaucratic apparatuses alongside the existence of paramilitary elements have played a function in preventing the emergence of social opposition.¹ The repressive policies of state bureaucracy and elements directly connected to the regime showed themselves in the protests of January 25, 2011, and a bloody intimidation attempt was exhibited in order prevent the demonstrators who gathered in Tahrir Square.² After becoming the head of state after the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981, the collective opposition against the strict-one man regime by Hosni Mubarak finally opened the way for mass expression of cumulative problems, and steps were taken in the sense of democratization.³

Despite the chronic one-man regime, which produced authoritarian and repressive policies, Egypt has an important historical experience and repertoire for social movements. A significant tradition of opposition was formed against the Mubarak regime and this opposition managed to keep its criticisms alive at all times. This opposition prepared the processes for mass protests such as the 1968 revolt against the government, which was perceived as the reason for the loss of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the student protests that occurred against Anwar Sadat in 1972, and the wave of social movements that emerged with the "Bread Riots" in 1977. These events prepared for the workers' uprisings during the 1990s and 2000s.⁴ The tradition of rebellion, which became institutionalized and organized in 2008, prepared the institutional dimensions of the revolution that occurred in January 2011. When looked at from this framework therefore, it can be seen that although Egypt

¹ Fulya Atacan, "Ekmek, Özgürlük, Sosyal Adalet": Mısır'da Muhaliflerin Talepleri Açık Değil mi", **Sokağın Belleği: 1 Mayıs 1997'den Gezi Direnişi'ne Toplumsal Hareketler ve Kent Mekanı**. Derya Fırat (drl). Dipnot Yayınları, 2014, p. 52.

² The first name of Tahrir Square, located in the center of Cairo, the capital of Egypt, is Ismailiye Square. During the withdrawal of British soldiers from Egypt and Sudan protests emerged, and as a result the square was called "Midan al-Tahrir" (Freedom Square). After the decision made by Gamal Abdel Naaser, the square was officially named Tahrir Square. Tahrir Square later became the scene for political protests of university students in 1972, protests against Mubarak's support for the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the scene for protests and meetings that were arranged, which called for reform in the country in 2005-2006. See. Derek Gregory, "Tahrir: Politics, Publics and Performances of Space", **Middle East Critique**, Vol.22, No.3, (November 2013), p.238.

³ The phrase "tipping point" is used in the literature of social movements and refers to the final event that pushes forth the emergence of mass social movements. The tipping point of the social mobilization in the region was the self-immolation of the peddler Mohammed Bouazizi in December 2010 at the beginning of the Arab uprisings. Meanwhile, the tipping point in Tahrir was when the images of people who were tortured by the police of Khaled Said were shared on Facebook. This symbolic event created a tipping point for the mobilization of social masses in the region, which were already existent, to express themselves more bravely.

⁴ İsmail Numan Telci, **Mısır: Devrim ve Karşı Devrim**, İstanbul: SETA Yayınları, (2017), p.56.

has been stage to authoritarian rule, the country's history also presents rich content in terms of social movements and social opposition.

The fact that traditional politics had not been effective against Hosni Mubarak, who was in power for nearly thirty years, laid the ground for the emergence of alternative movements. The various different groups formed in Egypt, which stood in opposition to Mubarak took social opposition to different dimensions. Examples of these groups include the *Kefaya* movement,⁵ which was formed in 2004, the April 6 Youth Movement, which was formed after police brutality during the textiles strike in 2008,⁶ and other movements that include the *Revolutionary Socialists*.⁷ The political, economic, and social problems that emerged before the Arab revolts during the Mubarak regime are closely related to the mobilization of groups that were uncomfortable with the regime and their ability to expand their spheres of influence. The Kefaya movement, which came to being in 2004 in order to prevent the re-election of Mubarak in the 2005 elections, and its associate woman-

⁵ The Kefaya movement, which initially emerged as a group mainly consisting of lawyers in 2004, came together in an attempt to prevent the re-election of Hosni Mubarak in the 2005 elections as there is no statement in the constitution of Egypt that demands a restriction on electoral terms. Thus, the movement re-emerged with the "kefaya" slogan, meaning "enough." The movement expressed the demands of the oppressed people in Egypt in the fields of equality, freedom, and economy, and were the signatories of many protests. With its intensive utilization of new media tools, the Kefaya movement is an important example in terms of mobilization of social movements and the differences encountered on organizational terms. For more information on the Kefaya movement see. Manar Shorbagy, "The Egyptian Movement for Change-Kefaya: Redefining Politics in Egypt", *Public Culture*, Volume.19, No.1, (2007), p.175-196. Nadia Oweidat ve Diğerleri, "The Kefaya Movement: A Case Study of a Grassroots Reform Initiative", *Rand Corporation: National Defense Research Institute*, (2008).

⁶ The members of the 6 April Movement, which was established in 2008 with the attempt to support workers' rights, dresses in black in order to distinguish themselves, and is a movement that heavily used new social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr. Ahmed Maher and Muhammed Adel are within those that established the group. The founding members of this group were arrested after the military coup led by Sisi. For more information on the 6 April Movement see. Emad El- Din Shahin, "The Egyptian Revolution: The Power of Mass Mobilization and the Spirit of Tahrir Square", *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, Vol.3 No.1, (May 2012), p.46-69. For the observation of the 6 April Youth Movement in terms of the literature on social movements see. Hafez Bassem, "New Social Movements and the Egyptian Spring: A Comparative Analysis between the April 6 movement and the Revolutionary Socialists", *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, Vol.12, No.1-2 (2013).

⁷ Idle and Nunns, p.24., The Revolutionary Socialists, where were formed in 1991 in solidarity of the workers that went on strike during the trade union elections, have until this day defended the rights of the working class and have come to the fore due to their opposition to the government's neoliberal policies. Socialists, who continued their existence with the efforts of students and some intellectuals, displayed their opposition against the Mubarak regime actively during the revolution process. Nadia Idle and Alex Nunns (Ed.), *Tahrir Meydanından Tweet'ler*, Esra Ergün (translation.), Paloma Yayınları, 2014, p. 23.

See, İsmail Numan Telci, "Mısır'da Devrim ve Karşı-Devrim Sürecinde İç ve Dış Aktörlerin Rolü: 2011-2015, (Unpublished PhD thesis, Sakarya Üniversitesi SBE, 2015), p.62-65.

wing Harakat al-Tag'eer are both examples of how mass mobilization occurred against the hegemonic understanding of politics created by the Mubarak regime.⁸ These political practices can also be interpreted as opportunities allowing for the institutionalization of social unrest, which can be regarded as the early signs of the democratization wave in Egypt and the Middle East.

Due to the fact that *Kefaya* had a heterogenous appearance, with the inclusion of liberal, Islamist, Nasserist, and Marxist identities, it had no difficulty in establishing its legitimacy both on the national and global level. The fact that the *Kefaya* movement depicted the regime's pressures through bloggers prior to the Arab uprisings illustrates its experience in individual and mass opposition. In order to break the political and social pressure imposed by the Mubarak regime, the *Kefaya* movement increasingly used the international press and independent media organizations. The documentaries and other documents prepared by *Kefaya* have been serviced by media outlets such as *Al Jazeera*, *BBC*, *Washington Times*, *CNN*, *New York Times* and other nongovernmental organizations such as *Human Rights Watch* and *Amnesty International*. The utilization of media and civil society expanded the scope of the opposition against the Mubarak regime. The fact that the group was able to utilize these kinds of materials and make the unrest in Egypt known worldwide played an important role in Mubarak minimizing his pressure on the opposition. As a matter of fact, Condoleezza Rice, who was the then acting U.S. Secretary of State, cancelled her visit to Egypt in 2005 on the grounds that the demonstrations were violently suppressed by the state.⁹

The acceleration of mass demonstrations with the support of different social sectors resulted in the Mubarak regime increasing its censorship on information and communication technologies. The Mubarak regime prevented communication and interaction through mass media in order to prevent the demonstrations from moving to a different dimension. Despite the prohibition of mass media and social media, demonstrators eventually reached Tahrir Square and protests were suppressed violently by the regime forces. While the political atmosphere in Tunisia changed as a result of the army siding with the ordinary people, violence was intact in Egypt. The use of violence against the growing opposition as a reflex of protecting the Mubarak regime left hundreds of people dead, and therefore, the army,

⁸ Rabap El- Mahdi, "The Democracy Movement: Cycles Protests", Rabap El- Mahdi, Philip Marfleet (Ed.), **Egypt: The Moment of Change**, London: Zed Books, 2009, p.87.

⁹ Oweidat vd., p.24.

which depicted somewhat unclear policies relatively close to Mubarak, had to change its position.¹⁰

The endeavor of the mass opposition to influence politics in Egypt had achieved relative success through the protests that took place in the squares. Thus, with the beginning with what became the anger riots on 25 January, 2011, the Hosni Mubarak regime, which ruled for 30 years, came to an end. This event has become accepted as one of the most important events that occurred in the recent history of Egypt.¹¹ Following the fall of the Mubarak regime, a transition period took place where the army seized power, the constitution was suspended, and parliament was dissolved. The demands of change that occurred during the transition period were not taken into consideration by the army and violence continued to be adopted against the public gathered in the squares. Despite all the pressures felt during the transition period, the requests for democratization continued, and as a result during the second round of presidential elections that took place on 16-17 June 2012, Mohammad Morsi – who came from a Muslim Brotherhood background – was elected with 51.8% of the vote.¹² After a short while, those that expressed their dissatisfaction of the Morsi regime took to the streets again and not only did a chaotic environment emerge in Egypt, but the revolution process also evolved to the contrary. While it was expected for Egypt to take steps in the way of democratization, the military took advantage of the chaotic environment that occurred and on 3 July, 2013, a military coup occurred.

The success of the first phase of the social movements that began in Tunisia and made its impact in other Middle Eastern countries in a short time can be explained in this respect with multiple reasons. While mass media and social media had an impact on these movements to find space for themselves, the relationship between domestic political and social groups, the utilization of resources, and the political atmosphere of countries are also extremely important in this regard. Likewise, the preventative, or facilitating, role that the army played in influencing the power of social movements is also a very important factor that allowed for these

¹⁰ For a comparative analysis of the role of the army and other factors in the region see. Zoltan Barany, "Comparing the Arab Revolts: The role of the Military", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.22, No.4, (October 2011) p.28-40. For a study that shows how social movements evolved to a different phase due to the fact that the Egyptian army did not show a clear reaction and sided with the people within itself during the early phases, considering the necessity of a division within the coalition forming the regime so that a regime change can occur see. Edip Asaf Bekaroğlu, Veysel Kurt, "Mısır'da Otoriter Rejimin Sürekliliği ve Ordu: 'Arap Baharı' ve Sonrası Sürecin Analizi", *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi*, Volume: 2, No: 2, 2015, p.1-36.

groups to reach such results. From this perspective therefore, it is not enough to analyze the developments of social movements in the Arab world solely through the perspective of new media and term them as social media revolutions. As a matter of fact, the effect that social media had in Tunisia and Egypt was not replicated in the case of Syria, as with the involvement of regional actors, the process evolved into different points.¹³ For this reason, when analyzing an issue, rather than taking a deterministic approach, it is more useful to take a multi-cause approach in order to understand the issue at stake.

Social Movements, Social Media, and the Tahrir Protests

The emergence of new media tools and especially with the line of publication pursued by Al Jazeera in the Middle East, diversified information sources and this accelerated the process of the revolts. With the establishment of this channel, the Arab media and discourse became relatively pluralized. As a result of Al Jazeera's practice of reporting in the process, social movements became known in countries outside the region and the oppression inflicted by the regimes on the people became more apparent. This change in the Arab media played an important role in restructuring the Middle East.¹⁴

Following the success of the Tahrir protests, research emerged which questioned the relationship between social media and protests, and the extent to which these relationships occurred. It was thus claimed that social media is an effective tool in weakening authoritarian regimes and an influential tool in mobilizing the opposition. A study that was conducted after the Tahrir protests illustrates that participants used social media to a great extent.¹⁵ Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and YouTube made it possible for the opposition to make their voices heard and to become an organized power. The process of revolt, which

¹¹ İsmail Numann Telci, "Mısır'da Geleceğini Arayan Karşı Devrim", **SETA Analiz**, No.149, (January 2016), p.7.

¹² Fulya Atacan, "Duvar: Devrim mi, Geri Dönüş mü?", **Moment Dergi**, Vol.1 No.1, (2014), p.61.

¹³ For a study that is concerned with how the authoritarian one-man regimes tried to block the flow of information on the internet see. Philip N. Howard ve Sheetal D. Agarwal, "When Do States Disconnect Their Digital Networks? Regime Responses to the Political Uses of Social Media", **The Communication Review**, Vol.14, (September 2011), p.216-232.

¹⁴ For a comprehensive analysis of the changes and innovations that Al Jazeera brought in the media structure in the Middle East and the Arab world, and how it played a role in the re-structuring of the region see. Mohammed El Ofi, "Influence without Power: Al Jazeera and the Arab Public Sphere", Mohamed Zayani (Ed.), **The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media** içinde (66 - 80), Pluto Press, 2005.

¹⁵ Zeynep Tüfekçi, Christopher Wilson, "Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations From Tahrir Square", **Journal of Communication**, Volume62, Issue2, April 2012, p. 363-379.

is known with its TV, mobile phones, and internet-based social media platforms, allowed for the opposition to not only expand the scope of their struggle against the regime but also strengthened the legitimacy of their demonstrations in the international arena.¹⁶ The monopolistic attitudes of countries against the flow of information and the censorship they implemented by controlling the domestic media monopoly triggered individuals to turn to alternative and new media instruments.¹⁷ After Facebook launched its Arabic version in 2009, the number of its users in the region increased dramatically. While in 2008 the number of users were 1 million, this figure reached 2.2 million in 2009, 4.2 million in 2010, and 9.8 million in 2011.

Opposition groups that emerged during the Tahrir protests benefited significantly from traditional and new media tools in order to make their political and social struggles more effective. The April 6 Youth Movement, which includes names such as Ahmed Maher, Asmaa Mahfouz, Mohammed Adel, Waleed Rashed is among the most important examples of this.¹⁸ A Facebook account, which was set up to make the movement heard of reached 70.000 followers in a short amount of time and this figure later reached up to millions. This group was influential in the occupation of Tahrir Square during the January 25 revolution and used social media in order to reach to the masses, which played an important role in the mobilization of demonstrators. Another example of the important role played by social media during the uprisings is the Facebook account of *We are Khaled Said*, which was established after the police killed Khaled Said in an internet cafe in June 2010.¹⁹ In addition to this, the Facebook accounts that were created by Egyptians

¹⁶ Nurullah Ardiç, "Understanding the 'Arab Spring': Justice, Dignity, Religion and International Politics", *Afro Eurasian Studies*, Vol.1, Issue.1, (Spring 2012), p.14.

¹⁷ Al Jazeera's contribution to the distribution of knowledge and to the process of democratization in the region has been the subject of many studies. Prior to the internet and satellite conventions, regime forces heavily censored in the countries throughout the regime and this prevented the people from being informed about the outside world. Especially after Al Jazeera began to broadcast and after the increase of the use of the internet in the region, a new public sphere for the Arab world (voices of the new Arab public) was created. Together with these developments, the Arab people gained a more autonomous ground for both regional and global issues, and have been able to discuss their own political and social future. For the arguments on the Arab public sphere after Al Jazeera and internet Technologies see: Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, And Middle East Politics Today*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2006.

¹⁸ Castells, p.61.

¹⁹ The Facebook account, *We Are Khaled Said*, is well-known to have had an effect on the process of the Tahrir protests and the expansion of the scope of the protests. The subject of the roots of the rebellion tradition in Egypt expressed in detail above is also the case for various websites during similar dates. The "We are All Laila" Facebook account that was established in 2006 by bloggers in order to criticize the injustices and oppression against women is an early example of the culture of criticism online. See: Linde Herrera, *Revolution in the age of Social Media*, Verso, 2014, p.14.

living abroad, such as “Voice of Egypt Abroad” and “Egyptians Abroad in Support of Egypt” played an important role in expanding the scope of the social movements to a global level. The fact that these pages reached significant numbers of followers in a short period of time made it possible to make this phenomenon known as an individual case in the eyes of the masses, which increased the sensitivity towards the subject.

People were informed of the mass protests and the oppressive policies of the Egyptian regime through these accounts.²⁰ The success of the social media accounts named above in depicting the oppression of the regime both in Egypt and on a global level was a factor that facilitated the ability of drawing international supporters. The fact that the events go beyond national borders reflects how social media tools can influence social movements and the dimensions of the relationship between social media and social movements.

Within this process, which can also be considered as a communication revolution, the structural change created by the information and communication technologies undoubtedly shook the regime-controlled monopoly. During the beginning of the process, groups that were directing mass demonstrations through social media accounts were able to exchange information about the time, place, and the attitude to be displayed by protestors, without being affected by censorship unlike conventional channels. The role that was played by social media accounts, where traditional media is under regime control in the Middle East, is therefore important in this respect. Contrary to the cautious attitudes of Western media organizations such as *CNN* and *BBC*, by displaying support towards the public and by utilizing their social media in this regard, networks such as *Al Jazeera*, *Al-Arabiya*, and *TRT al-Turkiyya* allowed for the process of revolution to widen its audience.

Apart from the very social media accounts that were effective in the adoption of social media by the masses, those people that were behind these social media accounts also played important roles within this process. The activism Asmaa Mahfouz, one of the founders of the 6 April Youth Movement and a student at Cairo

²⁰ For more information on the We are All Khaled Said Facebook group, which was established by Wael Ghonim after Khaled Said was tortured and killed by regime police forces see. Jose Antonio Vargas, “Spring Awakening: How an Egyptian Revolution Began on Facebook”, *The New York Times*, 17 February 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/books/review/how-an-egyptian-revolution-began-on-facebook.html> (10 March 2018).

University, can be cited as an important example in this regard. The videos that Mahfouz shared on social media even before the overthrow of Mubarak contributed to the acceleration of the process and allowed it to be known in the public space. The video that Mahfouz shared on her Facebook page on January 18 reached thousands of people in a short amount of time and was instrumental in the intensification of the protests. In the video, Mahfouz reaches out to the silent opposition and prompts them to mobilize:

Four Egyptians have set themselves on fire... People, have some shame! I posted that I, a girl, am going down to Tahrir square and I will stand alone and I'll hold up a banner... I'm making this video to give you one simple message... We want to go down to Tahrir Square on January 25th... If you stay at home, then you deserve all that's being done to you and you will be guilty, before your nation and your people. Go down to the street, send SMS's, post it on the internet, make people aware.²¹

As can be understood from the statements made by Asmaa Mahfouz, due to the pressure felt by the oppressive one-man regime, channels in which social unrest could be made heard of were abolished. In fact, in her call for mobilizing the masses, Mahfouz's suggestions for using channels of communication aim at making the existing pressure known to the public in some way. The fact that Mahfouz's video reached hundreds of thousands of people in a short period of time, which eventually led to these people filling Tahrir Square, illustrates the importance of social media and communication channels. The fact that the majority of the people who took part in the protests were young was another factor that enabled the effective use of social media, which eventually led to the protests being adopted by a wider audience. Tahrir Square, which became the site of social mobilization, and the synchronization of protest calls from social media networks emerged as an important feature of the revolution. Some of these movements, which later emerged as leaderless movements,²² were carried to the streets through some symbolic names. This enabled the re-discussion of the role of mass media in the policy-making processes. The impact that was made through the interactions of the demonstrators on social media platforms was summarized by Manuel Castells as follows:

²¹ Manuel Castells, "İsyân ve Umut Ağları: İnternet Çağında Toplumsal Hareketler", Ebru Kılıç (translation.), Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2013, p. 62.

²² Yeni toplumsal hareketlere ilişkin yapılan değerlendirmelerde hareketlerin merkezi bir programa ve lider figürüne sahip olmadığı vurgulanır. Claus Offe, "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics", *Social Research*, Vol.52, No.4, Social Movements, (Winter 1985).

Social media networks played an important role in the revolution in Egypt. The demonstrators recorded the events with their phones, and shared the events live with the nation and the world through YouTube and Facebook. They decided on what to do on Facebook, coordinated themselves through Twitter and used bloggers to express their views.²³

As stated by Castells, who openly highlights the relationship between social mobilization and technology, new media tools were used extensively during the Arab revolts. Within this context, the dimensions of the relationship between technology and social movements have been re-discussed and different opinions have been put forward. As a matter of fact, it is well known that there exist different opinions on the social and political effects of technological tools and communication technologies, and new analyzes are being made based on these views. There are three different schools of thought in the debate on the effects that the use of communication technology has on the social and political realms: transformants, continuists, and structuralists. According to the transformists, there will be an increase in political activities through the use of communication technologies and social change with information technologies is inevitable. The argument that information technology is going to make a difference in terms of revolution is among the claims of the transformists. However, continuists, who claim that the revolutionary change of information technologies is exaggerated argue that change will not come from these technologies but from social and political initiatives. Contrary to the argument that means of communication will be the determinant factor, according to continuists, a contextual analysis that brings social and political relations to the foreground seems more reasonable. Structuralists however present a thesis that communication technologies are effective on economic structures and that if desired, these technologies will affect many areas in social and political life. While structuralists do not believe that this change will occur alone, they argue that it is possible to act on a social medium in which the individual is kept at the forefront, and that this will bring change.²⁴

²³ Castells, p.64.

²⁴ Ian Miles, Howard Rush, Kevin Turner, John Bessant, **Information Horizons: The Long-Term Social Implications of New Information Technologies**, Edward Elgar Pub, 1988. Aktaran: İtir Akdoğan, **Digital-Political Fantasies in Istanbul: An analysis of the perceived role of ICT in changing institutional politics, activism, and identity**, Communication Research Centre CRC, Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki, 2012, p. 37. Turkish version, İtir Akdoğan, **Dijital Politik Fantaziler**, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2014.

As is seen above, there are important debates regarding the extent that communication technologies have an impact on social movements. Are technological tools determinants of social movements? How important is technology in the social action of an individual? It is known that social movements do not determine direct actions but are effective in shaping and spreading actions. Philip Howard's *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Information Technology and Political Islam* also touches upon these debates and argues that there is a positive correlation between technology and socio-political environments, and that the use of technology by society can lead to positive consequences in political terms. According to Howard, the use of technologies opens up channels that will strengthen democracy, expand civil society, and contribute to the democratization of the state. Technology-based communication environments, which form the basis of the uprisings against dictatorial and authoritarian regimes, also contribute to the re-opening of blocked sociological structures. When viewed from this perspective, it can be stated that social movements that effectively utilize digital tools have a higher chance of reaching their objectives. As a matter of fact, parallel to the increase in the number of users of social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter during the Arab revolts, the number of people that embraced these protests also increased. It was with this that the protestors received results in some countries in a short space of time. Studies that compare the number of social media users before the uprisings and the number of users after this process provide important data, which highlights the importance between the number of social media users and the development of social movements.²⁵

People that could not express their problems in the public sphere due to political, social, and economic pressure were able to find a space by using the opportunities offered by the internet. What is noteworthy here is the contribution that internet-based new communication technologies had on opening new spheres for different experiences. The fact that the mobility of large masses in the social media realm later transformed to the squares became a new feature in the nature of mass demonstrations. From this point of view, social media has become the place of rebellion against political functioning, which is observed as the source of unrest.

²⁵ For detailed information and data about the use of traditional and social media by the Egyptian people in the protests of 2011 see. Christopher Wilson, Alexandra Dunn, "Digital Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Descriptive Analysis from the Tahrir Data Sets", *International Journal of Communication*, 5 (2011), p. 1248-1272. , Jonh B. Alterman, "The revolution will not be tweeted". *The Washington Quarterly* 34(4): (2011) , .103-116.

More, as social platforms and public places joined, new hybrid public spaces were created.²⁶ People that formed their own kind of civil society and who voiced their concerns through these channels influenced the political process in many ways and cooperated with both local and international networks. After being imprisoned by the regime for 12 days, the founder of the We are All Khaled Said Facebook account, Ghoneim's #Jan25 is Revolution 2.0 tweet is a representation of the effect that new media channels had on the Tahrir protests.²⁷

After overcoming the imposed embargos through satellite telephones and the broadcasts of Al Jazeera, the protesters were able to carry out their communication through different channel sources. Just like in the case of the *Iranian Green Movement*,²⁸ social media was an important tool for mass mobilization in Tunisia and Egypt and was perceived as an apparatus of freedom. The fact that the oppression inflicted by the regime was overcome through a new technology attracted the attention of different groups of people and in this sense it was made possible for society to embrace the unrest. Individuals that belonged to different political and ideological groups used these new communication channels in order to mobilize and expanded the scale of opposition against Mubarak.

The Tahrir Protests from the Sociology of Social Movements

When considered in the framework presented above, the events that began in Tunisia and spread to Egypt's Tahrir Square, and which later became known as the Arab uprisings, are an important example in the sociology of social movements. Standing in a different position from traditional social movement typologies, with its own characteristics, the Tahrir Protests can be evaluated in terms of "New Social

²⁶ For the transition from spaces to flows and for the definition of "Hybrid Public Space," which represents a combination of virtual and real public spaces see, Manuel Castells, "**İsyan ve Umut Ağları: İnternet Çağında Toplumsal Hareketler**", Ebru Kılıç (translation.), Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2013, p.61.

²⁷ Derek Gregory, "Tahrir: "Politics, Publics and Performances of Space"", **Middle East Critique**, Vol.22, No.3, (November 2013), p.237. For arguments that depict how Facebook was an effective instrument in the Arab revolutions but how on the other hand it caused problems in coordination and loosened bonds see, S. Joseph, "Social Media, Political Change and Human Rights", **Boston College International and Comparative Law Review**, Vol.35, No.1 (Winter, 2012), p.145 - 188.

²⁸ For the article written by Chantal Mouffe, an important post-Marxist scholar, which takes into account an "agnostic" model within the radical democracy theoretical framework and which is applied on the green movement in Iran and the role that social media played in this movement see, Babak Rahimi, "The Agonistic Social Media: Cyberspace in the Formation of Dissent and Consolidation of State Power in Postelection Iran", **The Communication Review**, Vol.14, (September 2011), p.158-178.

Movements” and “Resource Mobilization.” The class system that emerged after the industrialization period was the starting point for traditional social movements. The main characteristics of traditional social movements were class differences, discontent that emerged due to these differences, and rebellions based on national independence. When observing the reasons for the emergence of new social movements, it can be seen that the main difference between NSMs and traditional social movements is the idea of democracy and pluralism, the recognition of differences in society, and keeping the understanding of civil society at the forefront. New social movements emerged as a result of the reactions that were expressed against violations of democratic rights and freedoms, which were considered to exist in the social sphere. The new social movements, which have placed themselves at the center of civil society, concentrate on issues such as equality, differences, identity building, and the defense of identity politics.

New social movements also differ from traditional social movements in terms of their actor identity. While traditional social movements consisted mainly of the working class, new social movements consist of educated individuals who are active in civil society, mainly middle class, and who are able to make use of technology. While individuals such as Mohammad Bouazizi and Khalid Said came from relatively working class backgrounds, their ability to utilize technology channels and mobilize the masses illustrated that they were among the educated in comparison to others that participated in the protests.

When one observes the requests and complaints of those that took part in the Tahrir protests, the social traumas caused by the economic crisis are clearly seen. However, despite this, the economy factor is not a determinant on its own. The one-man regime that lasted for years and the political attitude that suppresses pluralism in the public sphere stand out as the main causes of these movements. The death of Khalid Said, who was the symbol of the outburst of anger of the crowd that gathered in Tahrir Square, is also a symbolic event that erupted with the combination of different reasons. An individual who was exposed to police violence and the pressures inflicted by the regime was killed by the police, and this event shaped the symbolic character of the movement by bringing forward the “honor” theme of the protestors. While this concept is relatively important for traditional social movements, it can be interpreted as the starting point of new social movements.

When examining the Tahrir protests through the literature on social movements, these protests can be approached through a framework of "Resource Mobilization." The studies that believe Resource Mobilization will help understand the Tahrir protests accept the following parameters as the variables of the protests and assesses them through these variables: the use of communication resources for mobilization, the existence of a global audience, and the instrumental resource created by social media platforms in terms of collective action and social change. Arguments such as the conjecture in Egypt at the time of the protests being effective in the use of resources, and the different political and social groups trying to achieve their goals by acting in alliance with each other, are used as arguments that support this perspective.²⁹ The fact that individuals who were excluded from the political and social realms got together with others disregarding their differences in ideological beliefs and utilized resources in this way, gave the opportunity to assess the Tahrir protests in this framework.

Time, money, organizational talent, and social and political opportunities are considered as important factors that determine the success of social movements according to Resource Mobilization. When viewed from this perspective, as stated earlier, although the protestors were in ideologically different positions from each other in the era before the revolution in Egypt, the fact that they all positioned themselves in opposition to Mubarak gave them the opportunity to work and act together. The Nasserist group that came together to defend the second Palestinian Intifada, which began in 2000, and the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood and Socialists came together to form the "People's Front" is an illustration of the social consensus during the process of revolution. Similarly, the fact that the socialists, Nasserists, liberals, and Muslim Brotherhood merged together under the Kefaya movement allowed for opposition groups to consolidate against Mubarak. The unification of people and groups with different opinions against Mubarak and the fact that they distanced themselves from a monolithic structure reinforced the legitimacy of the opposition. Although the anti-Mubarak coalition displayed a heterogeneous character in connection with each other during the revolutionary process, with the military coup by Sisi on 3 July, 2013, these groups became disorganized and took different positions during the counter-revolution.³⁰ In this respect, when

²⁹ Nahed Eltantawy ve Julie B. Wiest, "Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory", *International Journal of Communication*, Vol.5 (2011) , p.1207 - 1224.

³⁰ Telci, p.66.

compared to the examples of Gezi Park and other social movements, the participant profile of the Tahrir protests exhibited a heterogenous character and the reasons that gave rise to the protests were different from each other.

Theories of social movements also provide an important analytical framework in order for us to understand the different aspects of the Tahrir protests. At this point, the three components that Alain Touraine refers to in order to put forward the typology of social movements provides a useful model for highlighting the characteristics of the protests in Egypt. According to Touraine, the following aspects of a social movement will contribute to the categorization of the movement and make it more understandable:

The movement's identity

The movement's opposition

The movement's objective (social aim)

By expanding Tourain's social movements typology, Castells argues that the identity of the social movement is the core of what constructs it and who it acts on behalf of. The opposition coincides with the main enemy in the form clearly defined by the movement, and the social objective of the movement is the social order that it aims for in its final stage.³¹ Tourain's analytic model provides a useful framework that demonstrates which category a social movement should be assessed in and what kind of typology it has. Observing social movements within this framework will facilitate the interpretation of the protests in concern of this article and enables to provide an integrative approach.

In light of this analytic framework, it is possible to define the identity of social movements in Egypt as a heterogenous community that includes people from different social classes and social organizations. As expressed above, Liberal, Socialist, Nasserist, and Islamist groups are the ones that realized the January 25 revolution in Tahrir. From this point of view, the identity appearance of the Tahrir protests from a socio-political and socio-cultural perspective are close to the social movement typology that is a heterogenous variety. While these groups were all in common against Mubarak, which allowed them to form the opposition, there social goals started to differ and therefore there was a change in the identity of the social

³¹ Manuel Castells, **Enformasyon Çağı: Ekonomi, Toplum ve Kültür: Kimliğin Gücü**, Ebru Kılıç (translation.), İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2006, p.100-101. Alain Touraine, **Sociologie de l'action**, Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1965.

movement. The main problem that constituted the identity of the Tahrir protests, regardless of the socio-political differences of the protesters, was the one-man regime that had been pursued for a long time. The one-man regimes perpetrated by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Gaddafi in Libya, and Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen play an important role in the anger outburst experienced by the people in the region. Movements that have a psychologically motivating characteristic in the sustainability of the social movement itself also ensures that the forces of different structures and ideologies are consolidated for a short period of time. Groups in opposition that actually allow social movements to construct their identity and which shape their objectives are irrevocable aspects of these movements. In fact, the names that were mentioned above, who continued to oppress their peoples during their one-man regimes, are the main actors in the positioning of social movements.

The social goal of the movements can be described as a social medium in which social relations take place according to democratic standards, a political environment brought by free and fair elections, a politically negotiated communicative ground of action, where economic deprivations are eliminated as much as possible, and where people can pursue an honorable social life. As a matter of fact, the themes of bread, justice, and honor are social realities that are prominent in the social movements in Tahrir. The fact that the social aims of a group of people who had been subject to the regime's pressures included democratization, economic development, and recognition, can be interpreted as a very natural need.

Conclusion

The protests that were a result of the social, political, and economic problems of the countries in the region climbed to its peak before the Arab revolutions, and this made it possible for the discontent to be known within the masses. The main objective of the crowds that gathered in places such as Cairo and Alexandria was the immediate end to the discontent felt by the social inequalities and repressive practices of those in power. Protestors that took to the streets on the themes of bread, freedom, and social justice (ıyş, hurriye, adale içtimaiyye), demanded for improvements in these policy areas. Following the demonstrations of anger accumulated against the Mubarak regime, large-scale demonstrations took place on January 24, and with the involvement of various social groups, the Mubarak regime came to an end. The fact that “Al sha’ab yureed iskat al-nizam” (the people want to topple the regime) was the most popular slogan used in the protests that reached from Tunisia to Egypt pointed to the reason of such social anger.³²

By becoming an important issue on the agenda with the Arab uprisings, when observing the profile that emerged during the Tahrir protests, it can be stated that social movements are confronted with an important example. The Tahrir protests can be distinguished from traditional social movements due to their de-centralization, the reverse of hierarchical relations, and due to the fact that they introduced a relatively autonomous relationship model. More, the Tahrir protests contain certain parallels with New Social Movements and Resource Mobilization. While there are figures and groups that stand out in the Tahrir Protests, the absence of a leader mechanism and the appearance of a heterogeneous identity stand out as its distinctive features. This allows us to evaluate the protests within the new approach models in the literature. In addition to the fact that different political and social groups were not united under a single authority and did not organize horizontally, the mass utilization of new communication technologies during the Tahrir protests is also another feature that distinguishes this movement from traditional social movements.

The fact that the authoritarian regimes controlled traditional media channels and limited access to internet-based communication mediums led protestors to

³² Jeannie L. Sowers ve Bruce K. Rutherford, “Revolution and Counterrevolution in Egypt”, Mark L. Hass ve David W. Lesch (Ed.), **The Arab Spring: The Hope and Reality of the Uprising** içinde (40-72), Westview Press, 2017, p. 41.

utilizing these methods. These new mediums facilitated participation in the social movement. Social media environments acted as a tool that increased the participation in social movements during the protests and individuals were able to create public awareness about the protests by using social media. Social media played an important role in the Tahrir protests as it became a platform where protesters shared live pictures, where negotiations were made in regards to the admission of the protests, and a platform that enhanced the ability for crucial events to be heard of. While social media tools were not the absolute determinants of the social movements, they had positive effects on the questioning of the authoritarian regimes and the dissemination of the scale of the opposition. Thus, in conclusion, as is seen in the Tahrir example, many structural differences occurred as a result of the effect social media had on social movements. These include not being subject to a leader, and the existence of a relatively autonomous mode of operation instead of traditional hierarchical relations.

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