

Children's Citizenship: Revolution and the Seeds of an Alternative Future in Egypt*

'Children must be seen as actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. They can no longer be regarded as simply the passive subjects of structural determinations' (James & Prout, 1990, 4).

Abstract

This chapter explores citizenship values and political attitudes of Egyptian children during current revolutionary times. It draws on the new social studies of childhood as the theoretical framework from which to analyse Egyptian children's status as citizens. It situates children, both pupils and street children, as social actors, and shows how they have participated in revolutionary movements, in street mobilizations, school initiatives, and group actions online. Finally, it speculates on contents of citizenship education which hold a marginal place in school programs and curricula despite governmental attempts to create an "education for democracy." Even though educational institutions fail in its mission of teaching citizenship, children nevertheless prove a relevant citizenship awareness and political consciousness.

Keywords: *children; Egypt; uprising; street mobilizations; Hosni Mubarak; citizenship education; political socialization; social medias; new social studies of childhood.*

Introduction

Suleiman is an Egyptian child aged 6, one of the child-protagonists of a report dealing with feelings and experiences of children during Egypt's political uprising. Suleiman describes how he came to know about the revolutionary mobilizations from home, and his strong concerns when his family members took part in street protests. Like Suleiman, Aya, aged 14, also inquired about the street protests from her home and was explicitly prevented by her family from taking part in demonstrations. Despite her family's refusal to let her go to the street protests, she was determined to find a way to support mobilization movements, so turned to the Internet. She created a Facebook group *Thawra ma 'hash bitaqa* (Revolution without ID) to disseminate information, opinions, and enter into dialogue with other online groups. Children like Suleiman who have been emotionally affected by the uprisings, and others like Aya who have been politically involved, are becoming commonplace in the Egyptian society. Where are the origins of children's emotional and political commitments to revolution? How are they exposed to political affairs? How can revolutionary experiences mould children's political and citizenship consciousness? This chapter deals with the

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revolutionary movement in Egypt and new forms of children's citizenship. It explores the role of children in recent political changes and how they inspired a novel political and civic consciousness in public, private, institutional and digital spaces.

The political involvement of children in the events leading up to and following Egypt's January 25, 2011 revolution have gone almost unnoticed. A handful of journalists and international organizations wrote about the presence of children in the public squares during the uprising. Yet, no valuable analysis has been made about how experiencing the uprising could have a long term and ongoing impact on the personality and political preferences of these children as they enter different life stages.

This chapter seeks to give voice and visibility (Brighenti, 2007) to a social group whose opinions are not usually taken into account and whose initiatives do not always reach the headlines. I dare explore how events contributed to children's political socialization and consciousness, their experience could "bear the seeds of an alternative future grounded in participatory democracy and economic and social justice" (Lipman, 2005, quoted in Mazawi & Sultana, 2010, 17). The continuing uprising in Egypt has galvanized children's *imaginary*, creativity, and spirit of initiative, and expanded their awareness about issues such as political corruption, social justice, human rights, educational equity and inequality. It has also strengthened children's sense of their own Egyptian citizenship and sense of community.

This chapter begins with the social, economic, and political reasons that sparked off revolutionary events in Egypt. Then, using the theoretical framework of the New Social Studies of Childhood (NSSC), I highlight children's status, their citizenship attitudes and political practices. Egyptian children experienced the revolution in different settings, both virtual and physical - at school, in social media spaces, in the streets, and at homes. Did any of their political attitudes and action derive from formal teachings they were exposed to in the school curriculum about citizenship education, and "education for democracy"? How did revolutionary events affect their daily lives, allow them direct entry into the world of politics, and lead to a new citizenship consciousness?

Egyptian Children: New Social Actors in Revolutionary Times

Although children of Egypt today have neither directly experienced war nor anti-colonial struggles, they have grown up with the ravages of the neo-liberal economic and political reforms. These reforms, which dismantled the social welfare state and exacerbated inequality, have been applied through Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) imposed by global finance institutions, among other means. The young generation bears witness to their

families' everyday-life troubles, and deprivations of their own basic rights. They are affected by economic reforms that result in the reduction and privatization of government services, like education and health. All groups in Egyptian society, including the often overlooked cohort of children, especially from lower and middle classes, have been the victims of "a grand delusion" (Kienle, 2001). Indeed, the economic reforms aimed at developing economic liberalization and promoting political liberalization in the Arab states since the middle of 1980s, have rather led to a political stagnation, a so-called "political deliberalization."¹ They have even led to the repression of individual liberties with the rise of corruption and cronyism, deepening repressive mechanisms against individual liberties, and deteriorating life conditions due to the poor quality and elimination of public services (Kienle, 2008, 256-259).

At the same time, these policies have Janus-faced results. Simultaneous with the deterioration of basic civil rights and pauperization of the lower social classes, school enrolments in pre-school, primary, preparatory, secondary as well as higher education have risen throughout Arab states in the last decades (Assaad & Roudi-Fahimi, 2007; Filiu, 2011). In Egypt, what is worthwhile to highlight is the significant progress in enrolling pre-school children into kindergarten education between 2001/2002 (13.69%) to 2008/2009 (25.12%) (MOE, 2010, 67).

What bearing do all these economic, social, and educational indicators have on the lives and socialization of children? This question is difficult to answer with any authority since the topic of childhood has been neglected in research and in the social history of the Middle East. Very little has been written about the importance of children and childhood in contemporary Middle Eastern cultural and political contexts, and even less on issues of children and citizenship.² The chapter seeks to highlight these still unexplored issues by situating Egyptian children in the theoretical framework of the New Social Studies of Childhood (NSSC) to help to clarify concepts about children, citizenship, and political participation.

The NSSC theories developed in the last decades of the twentieth century as an interdisciplinary approach to study childhood. During the 1970s - 1980s concerns have been developing about the way in which the social sciences have traditionally conceptualized children and childhood. Those concerns resulted in the emergence of a new paradigm for the study of childhood (James & Prout, 1990).³ It tried to give a voice to children which, for a long time, were considered as "muted groups" (Hardman, 1973, 85) "passive receptors of adult culture," or " 'in progress' of becoming full, rational adults" (Caputo, 1995, 22-24). The latter has been strongly determined by Piaget's (1964; Piaget & Inhelder, 1966) theories of

development.

In order to release children from the marginalized position they occupy in social science research, with the exception begin social psychology, the new paradigm attempted to analyse childhood in relation to socio-political contexts; to study them as a social category rather than a group. Some of the main features of the paradigm are: understanding childhood as a social construction and as a variable of social analysis which can never be separated from other variables; considering children's social relationships and cultures worthy of study in their own right and independent of the perspective of adults; seeing children as active in the construction of their own social lives and not just passive subjects. Regarding childhood as a social construction and a variable of social analysis means that its perception varies cross-culturally. This theory so encouraged scholars to look at the multiple meanings of childhood through social and cultural variables, time and space.

The assumption of the paradigm is that, "a child is socialized by belonging to a particular culture at a certain stage in its history (Danziger, 1970, quoted in James & Prout, 1990, 15)." This view is echoed by Alcinda Honwana (2005, 34) who points out: "[...] in many social contexts, the notion of childhood differs dramatically. Unlike middle-class children whose parents and families are in a position to support them until they are able to sustain themselves, many children in other parts of the world are exposed to work and social responsibilities at an early age". Variables such as gender, religion, responsibilities, class, race and ethnicity play important roles in defining how individual children experience a childhood. Moreover, these variables also affect the transition out of childhood and into the next life phase. The transition between childhood and youth, and youth and adulthood, are not the same everywhere; they vary across and within societies and cultures over time (Honwana & De Boeck, 2005). Therefore, in some social and cultural settings, the age of children and its *temporal* dimension can even lose its importance as factors such as the time that adult people give them responsibilities, work and even military tasks, become more significant.

Charlotte Hardman (1973) developed the concept that there is in childhood a self-regulating and autonomous world that is not necessarily the reflection of adult culture. She pointed out to the necessity of recognizing the presence of childhood. The sociological traditional concept of socialization, based upon adult concern for the reproduction of social order and social transformation from child to adult, erased deliberately the childhood's present tense because of its orientation analysis towards the past or the future. That is why one of the tasks of the emergent paradigm was to integrate the temporal dimension theoretically and empirically into its conceptual framework. According to Caputo (1995), it is

necessary to distinguish children as active agents in the construction of their own social lives. Children are not passive recipients of social structures and processes, but they actively construct the world. Children must be seen as agents involved in social interactions, citizen cultures and political actions.

Assuming that children's cultural development takes place on the social and individual levels (Vygotsky, 1978), then social interactions play a fundamental role in the formation of a child's cognitive development, the time when children acquire basic cultural ideas and formulate their own views. Children's everyday social interactions with adults and peers can provide a key to knowing about their citizenship values and even political attitudes. For example, analysing alignment structures during children's fights with peers, Maynard observes that children form partisan behaviour. Their disputes are political to the extent that the realization of one party's position, claim or interest, is dependent upon how other parties align themselves relative to it. Children are social and political actors very early in life and not only after they learn about government, adult political roles, and major political events (Maynard, 1985, 213).

In the light of these approaches and theories about child's development and participation in their social and cultural contexts, I will go on to analyse children's citizenship attitudes and political practices during current revolutionary times in Egypt in different spaces: in public (in the street); in private (in family); in institutions (at school); as well as in digital society (on the Web).

Street mobilization

During the initial and central period of the revolution (January-February 2011) all schools in Cairo were closed. School children were at home, freed from school tasks and activities, and so had the time to follow revolutionary events by television, radio and adult conversations. They even attended protests, alone or together with their families who participated in mobilizations. It was also common in the street mobilizations to find homeless children living in Cairo streets, who wandered and sometimes took part in manifestations and clashes between pro-Mubarak protesters and pro-democracy supporters (Fisk, 2011).⁴

Despite the little attention paid to the role of children - whether school pupils and street children - in the revolution, their participation and presence at *Tahrir* square - the core of revolutionary events - have been largely documented on amateur videos or by mobile phones (Preston & Stelter, 2011), then uploaded on YouTube⁵, Citizentube, or on the more militant Bambuser.⁶ The most common images in these homemade videos are of children

carried by adults whom, amidst the protesters on the street, night and day, scream out slogans against the old system (*nizam*) in order to demand Mubarak's resignation. Sometimes a child leads the protest on the shoulders of an adult, encouraging crowds of people gathered around by chanting slogans from a piece of paper, or just improvising them on the spot.

School as well as street children's participation in the second phase of the revolution during the sit-in at *Tahrir* started on July 8, 2011 (the first phase ended on February 11, 2011 when Hosni Mubarak stepped down as president). The square turned into a people's city where the community setup tents, started social activities such as a library (books donated by libraries like *Dar Al-Shorouk*), and a school and a playground for children (Doss, 2011). *Tahrir* School was an initiative of the protesters to allow children to keep learning and to express themselves through games and drawings. A video about this school experience shows children's excitement and enthusiasm for this educational experience, especially by children who had never before attended an actual school.⁷

In another video, Rabah, a school science teacher, talked about her initiative for the children of *Tahrir* square. Many children come to the square, sometimes accompanied by their parents, and sometimes with a group of friends or alone. She has created a public tent-space where they could express their feelings on revolution and the current political situation through drawings. The children on the video are aged between 8 and 11 and explain their drawings. Noha's, aged 8, draws Egyptian flags and houses built at *Tahrir* square showing how her creative imagination could contribute to express the affection for her country. Nine-year-old Fatma speaks in support of the revolution and the protesters because they have finally banned the leaders of the regime and those other bad people in power. According to Islam, 11 years, although many things have already changed thanks to the revolution, the population needs to continue occupying the square because the corrupted people are still in power.⁸

It's worthy of specifying that the initiatives described above were born and occurred during the *Tahrir* sit-in by pro-democracy protesters for informing children - whatever they were school children, boys, girls, accompanied by their families or alone, or begging street children - about what important changes were happening in their country and giving them the opportunity for expressing themselves.

Beside these short-term projects, another relevant cultural initiative appeared called *Al Fan Midan* (Art is a Square). Launched two months after the fall of Hosni Mubarak by the Independent Artists Coalition - born during the revolutionary period - and supported by civil society and volunteers, *Al Fan Midan* holds monthly workshops in cities all over Egypt.

Thanks to this initiative, *Abdeen* square, in Cairo, the site where it was born, has become the public place of street art, of cultural events and exhibitions for artists, musicians, performers, and also for children called for giving their contribution by painting revolutionary slogans and images on streets' asphalt (Habib, 2011; Montasser, 2012). By these cultural and public experiences, organizers and volunteers explore ways of expressing democracy and citizenship through art.

The French-German channel ARTE presented a short story-interview to Suleiman Abdel Hakam, a child aged 6 who, from his home, talked about his experience of the Egyptian revolution and his awareness of danger associated with the street protests as well as the crucial importance of people in the country supporting the demonstrations (Raheb, 2011a).

In another video, Suleiman and his friends, Karim and Farida aged 7, talk about the specifics of Mubarak's incarceration, the complicity of his wife Suzanne Mubarak, and the need for justice and respect of civil rights *vis-à-vis* poor people. They also were very up to date on the young martyrs whose lives were taken during violent clashes between protesters and police (Raheb, 2011b). They seem to be well informed about current events and have strong opinions about political changes that they are keen to express.

Children's public performance, their participation in movements on and offline, look like a form of pride for their kinship that galvanized their children into taking part to events and being witness of such historical political changes; a parents pride's form which could nearly overstep in form of manipulation of children's image for political purposes.

In Egypt, the image of children serves political ends and their lives are viewed as integral to the process of nation building and national development (Karimi & Gruber, 2012, 211). In 2005, encouraged by a flurry of anti-Mubarak initiatives led by the *Kefaya* (Enough) movement, the first ever public demonstration by "Children for Change" took place in Cairo. This group of children, aged 5-16, was led by Mohamed El-Kazzaz, aged 13, following his father's arrest during a *Kefaya* demonstration (Howeidy, 2005). Even if they were strongly ridiculed as immature by critics of the *Kefaya* movement, such children displayed awareness of citizenship values, knowledge of rights and laws for the liberation of their kinship.

If children from politicized family background like young members of "Children for Change," are more active and more attentive agents (Dupoirier & Percheron, 1975), it doesn't mean that depoliticized young generation or those from depoliticized *milieu* could not acquire a "political socialization." Indeed, for them, political circumstances could prompt them to be involved in public protests, either alone or with their families. Street children, who have been

very active during different revolutionary stages, “were sucked into the vortex of the revolution, following crowds out of excitement and a sense of adventure” (Fisk, 2011). Some spent time in *Tahrir* square hoping that the uprising would change their everyday street reality and terrifying conditions. Alone on the streets they face the horrors of rape, abuse, and arrest, and are sometimes forced to pose as drug dealers or prostitutes by the police themselves (Ali, 2013; Itameri, 2011).

Student Initiatives

Soaked in revolutionary principles like justice and democracy, Egyptian school children organised their own revolution in schools, launching initiatives and calling meetings with other students and school staff in order to discuss and improve school conditions (BBC News, 2011). Some of them created the movement, Egypt’s School Students for Change Movement (*Harakat tullab madaris masr li taghyyr*), with various sections in different Egyptian cities founded by primary, secondary as well as college schools. The movement, with others student associations and organizations formed by most of Egyptian schools and universities, called for a general strike on February 11, 2012, the date which marked a year since president Hosni Mubarak was ousted (Reem, 2012).

Students for Change, another student initiative launched on September 5, 2011 was spearheaded by four high school students aged 16-17 from different schools, united by a common enthusiasm to find valuable solutions to educational issues, more specifically, disparities between private and public schools in terms of quality of education, marginalization of students considered as a second degree citizens. As a solution, they proposed to give voice to students as well as teachers in the educational process, then they suggested activities that should take place in each school such as the creation of a school parliament by students and teachers, planning of stimulating workshops for students, organizing scientific debates and sport competitions, and collaborations with students groups from foreign countries. This initiative, similar to other ones not mentioned here, represents the expression of the young generation’s movement to become new social and political forces to demand equity and quality in Egyptian education.

Online Action

Although some children had the opportunity to experience the uprisings first hand in the streets and public squares, many were confined to the home. From their domestic and protected space, children experienced feelings of fear and danger *vis-à-vis* their family and

friends who protested in the street as well as feelings of happiness and enthusiasm for successful moments of the revolution. These children belong to the so-called *hisb al kanaba* (Sofa Party), who made the revolution from their “sofa” instead of going into the street. They are children whose families didn’t allow them to participate in protests and demonstrations because of the risks involved. Many of them who wanted to offer their support to the revolution from home, explored useful and practical tool of the Web in order to launch activities and participate in the creation of groups and pages on social networks sites, Facebook and Twitter. That is what fourteen-year-old Aya Mohsen decided to do. Coming from a military family, her parents did not let her participate in street demonstrations, so she decided to support the revolution her own way with the use of the Internet. She started by posting comments on the Facebook page of the Military Council. She then became more and more involved in revolutionary and political issues through her Twitter (under age) account. In collaboration with other children having a Twitter account, she launched the Facebook page, *Thawra ma ‘hash bitaqa* (Revolution without ID),⁹ a group of Egyptian children and young people under 18 who want to contribute to the Egyptian revolution in whatever ways they can. Five boys and three girls serve as the page administrators (admins), including Aya. Even though they don’t know each other, they work together in order to plan activities and upload news and information onto the page. They also drafted a declaration where they explained the reasons for creating the page, some of which are: using their creative capacities for the development of Egypt; disseminating their messages, opinions and remarks, their only condition being that don’t clash with religion values.¹⁰

My analysis of Aya’s experience through the theoretical lens of childhood as a shifting stage defined primarily through its opposition to another moving phase of life that is adulthood, and hence measured as a growing up period in which children should be left out the adult domains and practices, like political affairs, makes me assert that the boundaries between “childhood” and “adulthood” seem to have become increasingly blurred. I dare add that in changing and unstable political contexts, such as the Egyptian revolutionary period, it’s more and more difficult to distinguish boundary lines, which separate children’s action spaces from adults’ ones. The revolution context, combined with technological social media, gave them the opportunity to explore “adult” aspects of life such as politics and instil some concepts and ideas necessary to build a political consciousness and citizenship values.

Raising Political Socialization and Citizen Consciousness

The results of the opinion poll, “how to make a better Egypt,” launched by *Edrak for*

*Edutainment Project Development*¹¹ first months following the outbreak of 25th January revolution, confirmed political concerns and commitments of young generations during those crucial moments of Egyptian history. The main targets of the poll were to reveal the thoughts and opinions of the children on the recent political events, to understand how the children integrated those important occurrences in order to measure the degree of their political consciousness. The poll concerned children aged between 6 and 15. The children aged 6 represented the lower group of the poll participants (10) whereas those aged 13-15 the highest (312) followed by children aged 10 (188). The interviewed children come from public national and international schools in Cairo (85%) and in Alexandria (15%). The poll bore 20 questions.

According to the answers of the 1105 questionnaires received out of the 1200 distributed, the poll revealed that children were highly affected by the revolutionary events. To the question, “what do you know about the revolution?” 52% of the children answered that the population was protesting because people were angry, and 42% thought that it was a Facebook revolution, because Facebook was the protesters’ communication tool. More than one child out of four declared having joined *Tahrir* square with their family or friends, either during the revolution (27%) or after (20%). And as for their participation to the events, 79% of the children answered that they would have taken an active part to the revolution they had been older. Proud of the revolution as they are, they could contribute to the development of their country through study and work (52%) and cleaning to make their country a better place to live (37%). This last question of cleanliness seem to be one of their priorities since 65% of them helped cleaning the streets after the revolution, and 38% of them declared that dirt was one of the negative aspects of Egypt.

Among the questions pertaining the role models children would like to follow as adults, some pointed to the “youth of the revolution,” (*shabab al-thawra*,) while some others expressed their admiration for some important Egyptian bloggers. Since Mubarak’s resignation, the Egyptian children wondered about the personality of their next president. The majority (61%) asserted that new president should help people solve their problems giving priority to the eradication of poverty (50%), to education issues (35%) and Egyptian foreign policy (14%). The question of national unity and nationhood were the major concern for the children, as it was shown by the drawings with the symbols of the two religions (Muslim and Copt) and expressive images of love for the country and its people. In the end, the most relevant point resulting from the opinion poll is that the revolution has instilled a strong sense of belonging and a political conscience to the Egyptian nation, even to children, 79% of

whom would have wanted to participate in the riots with the adults (Helmy, 2011).

To put it in Durkheim terms (1966), Egyptian children who experienced revolutionary moments have acquired a “collective conscience” that arises from the sharing of a “community of ideas and feelings” and an “ideological proximity” (indispensable to master the political tradition of society).¹² The development of this kind of conscience endowed Egyptian children with a political socialization, political leanings and strong partisan preferences that could last until adulthood (Hyman, 1959), which has already present in them because, as Cullingford (quoted in Buckingham, 2000, 177), argued “[...] children develop ‘political’ concepts at a very early stage, through their everyday experiences of institutions such as the school and the family: notions of authority, fairness and justice, rules and laws, power and control, are all formed long before they are required to express their views in the form of voting [...]”.

Although politics is usually a sensible topic discussed only in adult circles from which children are generally excluded, the results of the opinion poll proved instead that the Egyptian children possessed a well-developed conceptual understanding of current political issues, even if they probably lacked information on specific topics or their information were influenced by their parents’ political preferences. This is why their political consciousness is not at all independent by others development fields where family plays an important role as well as external social *milieu* in which they are living and growing up. Moreover, the experiences of others Egyptian children mentioned above, as Aya’s experience demonstrates, that the new technological and social media can also contribute to the development of children’s political personality and expression of their citizenship values.

Citizenship Values in Egyptian Education?

According to Dewey (1916), the school is a small community where an embryonic society is formed. Students are prepared for democratic citizenship if they are educated to participate actively. Democracy can be achieved through the education system, if the political system established an educational system that incorporates norms and democratic values. The acquisition of direct political knowledge represents an important step in the political socialization process (Campbell, 2008). The term, “citizenship education,” refers to institutionalized forms of political knowledge, values, and attitudes that take place within formal and informal educational frameworks. The content of citizenship education is complex and multidimensional in nature, time and space. Nevertheless, following Foucault’s thinking, educational institutions, in which relations of power and knowledge are legitimized and

exercised, constitute a “block of capacity-communication-power.” Within it, process of teaching and learning is developed by means of a whole of “regulated communications” and “power processes” which adjust abilities and inculcate behaviour producing effects of power (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, 217-218). In light of those statements, it is worthwhile to explore citizenship values and practices transmitted and experienced by children in Egyptian school contexts and how they differ from those experienced in others contexts, like the public sphere and in digital spaces.

In Egypt, a juridical framework guarantees important relationship between education and citizenship: “the purpose of basic education is developing the students’ abilities and readiness [...] to prepare the individual to be a productive citizen in their environment and community” (Education Law 139/1981). During 1990s, Ministry of Education introduced important innovations in curricula of primary level of education, with particular attention to democratic education. Governmental education policies have been founded on the slogan: “from democratic education to education for democracy” in order to encourage educating students to acquire democracy and citizenship values in the school institution, in family and society (Mourad, 2010, 48-49). There are nevertheless no programs with specific goals for teaching citizenship in the public schools. They are still traditional institutions based on traditional curricula that do not prepare suitable citizens for social participation. Social sciences curricula instil obedience and submission to the regime instead of freedom of thought and critical thinking in order to produce dependent and submissive students. The teachers, curricula, activities and administration in public schools have failed to promote or support democratic values and practices. Basic concepts in citizenship education are rarely mentioned. The term “authority” prevails in the social studies textbooks over the term “citizen” (Baraka, 2007; Qasim, 2006, quoted in Faour & Muasher, 2011, 11). Discipline, obedience, oppression and commitment are the principal aspects of the educational system, which begins with the decision makers at the top level and extend to pupils in the classrooms. These circumstances resulted in the dominance of paper work in the state educational system because its priority lies in following instructions. As a consequence, the concept of citizenship education disappears from the Egyptian education system (Moughith, 2002, quoted in El-Nagar & Krugly-Smolka, 2009, 48-49).

In this kind of education system, educational institutions represent a hideout of power and authoritarianism on behalf of obedience (of regime) and discipline, imposed by the highest actors to the lowest actors. Although young generations do not acquire democratic and citizenship attitudes in the school institutions, that does not mean they do not have democratic

or citizenship attitudes. School aged children and young generations' active engagement in public life as citizens, should rise from different learning *venues* (family, extra-school activities, associations) and by other tools like social media. The media and social media particularly are strongly implicated in changing the nature of young generation today. In the digital era, children are more and more spurred to develop imagination, creativity and awareness by electronic and technological means. By using the new communication and information tools, children shift from being passive recipients to active producers of knowledge, and become themselves messengers of information. Indeed, the flourishing of educational, cultural and informative content on the Web is a visible demonstration of the new media's capacity to play a significant role in helping children become informed and engaged citizen for the future. In some cases, they can also fill the gap left by the school institution concerning civic and democratic education, and be able to build new forms of knowledge and learning which is an expression of informal education.

Being the Seeds of an Alternative Future

The events leading up to and following Egypt's January 25, 2011 revolution are permanently changed the political path of the Egyptian society as a whole, including everyday life of its youngest citizens. Like adult people, children - described in that chapter aged from 6 to 17 - have been emotionally and politically affected by revolutionary facts, of which they had the opportunity to become aware in different settings, both virtual and physical, at school, in social media spaces, in the streets, and at homes. In a general turmoil context like the Egyptian one before and after Hosni Mubarak stepped down as president, children - whatever they are pupils, boys, girls, or begging street children - are often enough exposed to political affairs by following events by television, radio or adult conversations, by attending protests alone or together with their families who participated in mobilizations, and even by taking part in manifestations and clashes, between pro-Mubarak protesters and pro-democracy supporters, in the case of street homeless children. The political uncertain moment and civil society mobilization for change - which are not at all new in Egypt since the *Kefaya* movement have already organized anti-Mubarak initiatives in 2005, as I outlined above - allowed them familiarizing themselves with and expanding their awareness about issues commonly considered of adult domains, as corruption, cronyism, social justice, human rights and so on. So doing, children's creativity has been galvanized and their spirit of initiative facilitated, the both are converted into novel forms of political and civic participation. Indeed, new initiatives launched by Egyptian children and young generation (under 18) in various

settings - public, private, institutional or digital ones - appeared like the Facebook page “Revolution without ID” (*Thawra ma ‘hash bitaqa*) for disseminating information about the revolution and using children’s capacities for the development of the country, and the “Egypt’s School Students for Change Movement” (*Harakat tullab madaris masr li taghyyr*) organized by school children which, in the wake of revolutionary principles, called for a general school strike on the first anniversary of Mubarak ouster. Moreover, children’s participation in protests in *Tahrir* square leading protesters as documented on various amateur videos, and their strong affection for the country and for its major concerns - poverty, education, nation unity - emerged by the results of the opinion poll “how to make a better Egypt”, demonstrate how revolutionary experiences can concretely mould youngest generation’s political socialization - understood as the process by which citizens acquire their attitudes and beliefs about the political system in which they live and their roles within that system (Rimmerman, 2011, 19) - and defining their partisan preferences in the future. Nevertheless, it’s worthy of writing in that though the Egyptian revolution context has given children opportunity to explore adult political aspects of life and has instilled concepts and ideas for building a citizenship consciousness, new digital social medias have also contributed to the development of their political personality. That is because today children are more and more galvanized to develop imagination and awareness by social medias and shifting from being passive recipients to active producers of knowledge and messengers of information. In regard to it, Aya’s practice of new social medias - Facebook and Twitter - in order to dodge parental decision of preventing her from taking part in demonstrations is worth considering. Besides, new technological and digital tools have also filled the gap left by the school institution regarding citizenship and democratic education. That is precisely the case of Egyptian education which, even though one of its purposes is to prepare the individual to be a productive citizen, no programs with specific goals for teaching citizenship in the public schools are expected. To the contrary, discipline, obedience, oppression and commitment are commonplace of that educational system instead of freedom of thought and critical thinking.

By analysing revolutionary context, interaction with adults and peers, and - in certain cases - use of modern social medias, what has emerged is that children are social actors. As emergent social actors, they contributed in their own ways and in different spaces: in the street protests and strikes, by initiatives within the school institutional space, on the Web by social networks. Generally considered as a generation to be excluded and separated from fields pertaining to adulthood (Buckingham, 2000), such as politics for example, they nonetheless have invaded these spheres, and have been developing a valuable conceptual

understanding of political issues thanks to their family environment and external social - revolutionary - *milieu* in order to acquire what Durkheim calls “collective conscience”.

Supported by new forms of informal education and thanks to such an early political and citizenship consciousness, they could be the vectors of change, bear the seeds of an alternative future for the Egyptian society as well as for the school institution. The latter could become the place where all new-born aspirations and experiences find an immediate application. Such a case has already been witnessed in a school where a group of children taking part to the revolutionary events, drew their aspiration from the experiences of *Tahrir* square, to bring the revolution into the school. Presenting a list of demands, the group claimed real changes that improved the structure and the management of their school (BBC News, 2011). Following the spirit of the revolution, the teachers are bound to change their vision about students - until now considered as a second degree citizens without rights to express their opinion - and to give them a whole new place in their school as well as in their society. Doing so, school can become a laboratory for developing long-lasting democratic skills and values such as freedom, equality, social justice and respect for basic human rights, which are the main demands of the Arab revolutions.

These initiatives - as well as mentioned above throughout that chapter - stemming from the ‘core of society’ represent the highly neglected and hidden potential of the new emergent social actors who are children whom, by the means of their growing political and citizenship consciousness, want to be involved first hand in the process of transformation of the Egyptian society and politics as a whole.

¹ I dare share the definition of ‘political liberalization’ as well as Kienle (2008) conceived following Isaiah Berlin’s (1969) theoretical construction. The political liberalization is defined as the development and the strengthening of positive liberties (participation of governed people to decisions concern them) and negatives ones (human rights, citizen rights).

² A reference book about contemporary children’s experiences and childhood in Middle East still remains the book edited by Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (1995). Avner Giladi’s (1999) work has also contributed to the development of childhood studies in Islamic contexts. Recently, the latest edited volume entitled “Images of the Child and Childhood in Modern Muslim Contexts” (2012) of the journal *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and Middle East* seems to bring new scientific interest on the issue, as well as Heidi Morrison’s monograph (under peer review) will surely bring it.

³ Currently some researchers have raised the question if a ‘new paradigm’ or an ‘epistemological break’, as some leaders of the NSSC have usually called it, has really occurred in the study of childhood (Ryan, 2008). Nevertheless, this chapter doesn’t intend to come down in favour of this thought’s school or that one, and approaching deeply this kind of debate because it is not its main focus.

⁴ According to a report on the situation of street children in Cairo and Alexandria (WFP, UNICEF & UNODCCP, 2001), the general profile of street children in Cairo is the following: children less than 18 years old, males or females, who spend all or most of their time on the street, with minimal or no contact with their families, with lack supervision, protection or guidance, which makes them vulnerable to a wide range of health and psychological hazards. At governmental level, street children in Egypt had historically been labelled as ‘delinquents’, ‘juvenile delinquents’, until recently they were recognized as ‘children exposed to delinquency’,

according to the Child Law 12/1996, in order to change the negative attitude of the society towards street children and consider them as victims and at-risk rather than as criminals.

⁵ Though the observers of the revolution have focused their attention on the social networks Facebook and Twitter, the protest is also being conveyed through the videos posted on YouTube and other save and storage sites (O'Neill, 2011).

⁶ Interviewed in Cairo during revolutionary protests, the founders of the Bambuser described their platform as a tool used by citizen journalists, friends and family, not only to disseminate information, but also to act as a vanguard of justice. When Egyptian activists like Ramy Roof started to use the service to live-stream the protests, the Bambuser staff contacted Egyptian users in order to better understand what they could do to improve the service for them on the ground. Moreover, Bambuser was also used to monitor the Egyptian parliamentary elections since over 10,000 broadcasts from the one-day of the election were disseminated by its platform (Messieh, 2011).

⁷ *Tahrir School*. Youtube video. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZwouv_ynE

⁸ The *Children of Tahrir Square* video has been uploaded 22 December 2011 but shot before military's recent attacks on protesters and dismantling of tent city on *Tahrir* square. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDB0XJ2hfH4>

⁹ Since its born date in 2011 to April 2013, the Facebook page of the group of young people under 18 <https://www.facebook.com/Thawra.ma3hash.beta2a> is followed by more than 52,300 people.

¹⁰ During an interview in the TV program *Akher Kalam* (The last word), one of Egypt's most popular talk shows hosted by the presenter Yousri Fouda on February 15, 2011, members of the group explained a Salafist young member suggested the last sentence.

¹¹ *Edrak for Edutainment Project Development Company* is an Egyptian shareholding company established in Cairo in 2010. It manages three international brands: *KidZania*, a real city for playing for kids from four to fourteen years old; *The Little Gym*, a space where children between four months and twelve years old can develop motor skills in a fun and supportive environment; and *Jazzercise*, a workout program which makes a fusion of jazz dance, resistance training, pilates, yoga and kickboxing movements, for women of all ages. According to the managing director, Tarek Zidan, the ambitions of the company is "to reach-out to the community in order to create positive change through innovative and life changing development projects" as the three innovative brands described above. For more information, please check the *Edrak* website <http://www.edrak.com.eg/web/edrak>.

This kind of company is an example of *trans-nationalization* and globalisation of Education concepts as « *edutainment* » (association of *Education* and *Entertainment*): "this concept gives children aged 4-14 the role-play opportunities and exposure to real world professions". It has branches in different countries of the world: United Arab Emirates, Mexico, Japan, Indonesia, Portugal, India and so on (AME info, 2010).

¹² According to Annick Percheron, "ideological proximity" is actually the only explanatory concept of "political socialization" (Reginensi, 2005).

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