The Aftermath of the Lotus Revolution: The Reasons behind the Spiral Failure: A Research Paper

Abstract

Has the revolution smashed the thin crust that had been covering profound social turmoil underneath? The following research paper deals with the factors behind the phenomenal social turbulence that has followed the outbreak of the Jan 25th Revolution. It attributes such conflict to a number of social, cultural and economic factors. First, the paper demonstrates that the wide gaps which have long been characteristic of the Egyptian society have also contributed to the state of enmity that has seriously threatened societal peace ever since the revolution. In addition, the researcher has explored a number of elements that have negatively impacted cultural tolerance and acceptance and have, consequently, lead to such instability. Moreover, the assumption that social media has positively impacted political awareness is defied. The study also explains the relationship between the economic challenges the country has been facing, and the state of resentment experienced at all social levels. Finally the research puts forward a number of recommendations without which these accumulations would continue to grow seriously out of hand.
Introduction

Revolutions have been a part of politics and of world history for centuries. Their ideologies, their leaders, and their successes or failures have shaped the history of nations worldwide. Egypt in particular has been home for a series of revolts for decades now, the most serious of which are the 1919 Revolution, the 1952, and finally the 2011 – 2013 Revolution. The Egyptian Revolution of 1919 was a countrywide rebellion against the British occupation of Egypt and Sudan. It was carried out by Egyptians and Sudanese from different walks of life and led to Britain’s recognition of Egyptian independence in 1922, and the implementation of a new constitution in 1923. Britain, however, refused to recognize full Egyptian sovereignty over Sudan, or to withdraw its forces from the Suez Canal Zone, factors that led up to the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. The revolution was initially aimed at overthrowing King Farouk. However, the movement had more political ambitions, and soon moved to abolish the constitutional monarchy and aristocracy of Egypt and Sudan, establish a republic, end the British occupation of the country, and secure the independence of Sudan. The revolutionary government adopted a nationalist, anti-imperialist agenda. Agrarian reform, and huge industrialization programmes were initiated in the first decade and half of the revolution, leading to an unprecedented period of infrastructure building, and urbanization. The Egyptian Revolution of 2011, also known as the Lotus Revolution, was a diverse movement of demonstrations, marches, plaza occupations, riots, non-violent civil resistance, acts of civil disobedience and labor strikes which took place following a popular uprising that began on 25 January 2011. Millions of protesters from a variety of socio-economic and religious backgrounds demanded the overthrow of the regime of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Grievances of Egyptian protesters were focused on legal
and political issues including police brutality, state of emergency laws, lack of free elections and freedom of speech, corruption, and economic issues including high unemployment, food price inflation and low wages. The primary demands from protesters were the end of the Hosni Mubarak regime, the end of emergency law, freedom, justice, a responsive non-military government and a say in the management of Egypt’s resources. The initial stirrings of a ‘lost generation’ of disaffected and mostly educated, middle-class youth provided the catalyst for a public uprising that quickly brought in people from across different walks of life, united by their dismay with the government and its preferential policies. But, three years after the highs of the revolution, the initial optimism is now tempered by challenging developments. Though this revolution has so much in common with the past two revolutions in terms of motives and grievances, the question that needs a smart answer is why have we failed to reap any of the revolution’s fruits? Further still, why has the situation gone from bad to worse ever since the outbreak of the 2011 Revolution? Why Egypt is in a spiral of despair? The researcher attributes such failure to huge accumulations of social, cultural and economic conditions that have formed a barrier to any possible development or to the minimum achievement of the revolutions goals.

**Literature Review**

An extensive body of research has examined the correlation between socio-economic factors and the success or failure of revolutions. Michael D. Richards, Professor of History at Sweet Briar College, Virginia, argues that revolutions have been a part of politics for centuries. Their ideologies, their leaders, and their successes or failures have shaped the history of nations worldwide. This comparative survey focuses on five major case studies, beginning with the English revolutions in the seventeenth century, and continuing with the Mexican, Russian, Vietnamese, and Iranian revolutions. “Revolutions in World History” traces the origins, developments, and outcomes of these revolutions, providing an understanding of the
revolutionary tradition in a global context. The study raises questions about motivations and ideologies. In particular, it examines the effectiveness of these revolutions—and revolution as a concept—in bringing about lasting political changes.

As for the correlation between social networking and political change, Attia et al argue that social networking is a new driving force that has a significant global impact on political change. Though few research studies have been published on the impact of social networking related to political change, this commentary discusses the impacts of social networking tools on the recent political changes in the eighteen-day Egyptian “Revolution 2.0” of 2011. They discuss a number of factors related to social networking that predisposed the people of Egypt to rise up in a revolt that stunned many observers, given its speed and dramatic outcome. Contrary to the scope of the following research, Attia et al believe that social network-related factors appear to have had a positive impact on Egyptians’ attitudes toward social change, which, in turn, supported their individual and aggregate behavior, leading to the revolution.

A report on the political values and norms of the voters published by the Danish-Egyptian Dialogue Institute presents the findings of three surveys conducted in 22 governorates across Egypt by the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies between August and October 2011 and additional interviews with key professors and researchers in Egypt. The report looks into four dimensions of the political values and norms of the Egyptians that all potentially have a strong impact on the workings of the future political system that will be put in place following years of authoritarian rule. These include Political participation, Political competence, Political support and Social capital. The overall conclusion is that the many years of authoritarian rule have left a severe mark on the Egyptians’ political values and norms which can have a potential negative impact on workings of a future political system, however there is cause for optimism in
the Egyptian’s ability and will to influence the political system in informal ways as well as their strong feeling of connection to the Egyptian state.

Research Methods

The following research applies the Triangulation Research Method. Theories on the effects of economic challenges on social stability, and historical data on periods of social instability following world revolutions have been gathered from books and academic journals. The researcher has conducted interviews with professors of history and political science for the sake of gathering primary qualitative data. Also a survey has been sent to respondents of different age groups, gender, social and education background for the sake of both quantitative and qualitative data gathering. Despite the limitations of the small sample size, the responses provide useful insights on the real reasons behind the phenomenal inadequacies of both the activists and the government officials. Analysis of responses has revealed a lot about the degree of satisfaction with the current situation in Egypt, and about different ways of anticipating the future.

Conclusions

The social state of affairs preceding the revolution accounts for a lot of the subsequent instability, and thus, the evident failure to achieve any of its objectives. For decades, Egypt has witnessed huge social gaps that have been manifest in most of everyday life. An alarmingly unfair distribution of wealth has marked all aspects of life. Even the basic services which are supposed to be equally granted to everyone have been denied to many! Slums neighboring aristocratic districts stand as witness to such shocking gaps. Swimming pools water flowing through North Coast beach resorts have become a stronger priority than drinking water in many Egyptian villages. Strangely, what has been the main demand of the revolution, has completely
faded as a priority for either the state or the revolting youth. As Michael Richards puts it, “Fragile social conditions turn into volatile political conflicts” (86). This is exactly the current Egyptian situation. Such social frustration and injustice may have ignited the revolution, but what is actually a more serious condition is that it is this socially cracked structure that is itself currently hindering any possible agreements or common grounds. Dr xxx, professor of history at xxx University, believes that unless such conflicts are handled with maximum professionalism, an even more aggressive wave of the revolution will very soon strike. When asked whether they believe the revolution has established social justice, 98 percent of the survey respondents answered “Not at all”. 72 percent of respondents think that an eruption of more rebellions in the near future is “Very likely”. The frustration and grievances that the activist felt, which was shared by the majority of Egyptians, were highly related to the bad governance of the past regime. However, this continues to affect the support for the policies of the present government, which remains very low. “A majority of Egyptians thus feel that government policies have a negative impact on their daily lives, that corruption still poses a problem when dealing with officials and that the government treats citizens unequally” (Earl et al 6). This low support also translates into low support for the political actors, especially political parties, unions and civil society organizations, who have failed to act as the guardians of the citizens interest vis a vis the political system. More than three years of turbulence have proven that the time, energy and resources spent on political settlement could have better been directed towards establishing social justice. Sadly, neither political nor social gain has been achieved.

An equally serious factor contributing to the current turbulent situation is the cultural aspect. The research has reached the conclusion that education and media of all types, and all sources of cultural input have contributed to the present condition of unrest. A lot of journals and articles have particularly examined the impact of education on the degree of the country’s
development. School books contain many examples of material that not only ignore the importance of social tolerance and acceptance, but that also encourage fanaticism and prejudice. A lot of voices have been calling for mending such flaws and have been pinpointing their socially explosive nature, yet in vain (Source). As for the role of school education in undermining the value of social tolerance and acceptance, 89 percent of respondents believed that it plays a seriously destructive role. Seventy-one percent said their teachers “Never” exerted any effort to inspire broadmindedness. Media is not playing a better role, still. But for one or two Egyptian movies, most works of art show complete blindness to the important cultural role they are supposed to play. Whether before or after the revolution, most talk shows have been one-sided and have thus deepened the already-too-deep social and political bias. Mohamed Shuman believes that researchers should study the private media's unilateral exploitation and looting of the fortunes of the state media. These fortunes could have been preserved and developed in order to transform it into a real public service. In spite of the potential, this mission has become difficult in the light of the predominance of Egyptian and Gulf "media capital," the growing influence of the private media and augmentation of networks of interests that protect it and provide its “raison d'etre” without bearing professional or social responsibilities. Shuman argues that public opinion is being manipulated and misinformed in a way that suits the interests of businessmen and the ruling authority, whatever these are. This requires two things: firstly, it presumes that the masses are mindless idiots; consequently, there must be others who think instead of them, falsifying their awareness and tinkering with their emotions through a domesticated media and political elite. The media and talk shows become only misleading outlets for both the political elite and the people regarding political action and public debate. The masses follow in a passive way, and from one side. This in turn does not create an original and critical political and social awareness, because all that is presented is
subject to the approaches and balances of the satellite channels' owners in most cases. This is in addition to self-censorship, preferences of every channel's crew on topics for discussion, and the chosen participants, which always concur with the preferences of those controlling the media, whether they are businessmen or advertisers. This cultural vacuum has opened the door for social media to take the lead, and what was supposed to be an independent cultural tool, has turned into mere reflection of such intolerance and even revulsion. Though most researchers applaud the widespread use and influence of social media, the research proves that the public is starting to think otherwise. In response to the survey question on how much they believed social media have increased their political awareness, 90 percent of the respondents answered, “Extremely increased”. However, more than 80 percent regarded the influence of Facebook and Twitter on the youth political culture as “Absolutely Negative”. Eighty percent of respondents regarded “Spreading obscene language” as the most serious drawback of Twitter. So, it is true that social media has truly raised much political awareness. Nevertheless, what most researchers have overlooked is the negativity this awareness has created. Facebook, Twitter and other types of social media are consciously or unconsciously boosting intolerance, enmity, and – sometimes – resentment. So, all in all, the majority of Egyptians of all ages and of different backgrounds are exposed to extremely negative cultural sources, a situation whose seriousness have been specially felt in the few years that followed the revolution.

The third factor perceived by the researcher as absolutely hindering any real progress following the revolution is the economic aspect. Three and a half years after the energy of Egypt's revolution, economic challenges have only grown bigger. The economy has paid a heavy price for the political instability and mismanagement of different governments who have been in power since then. Since 2011, unemployment has increased, as has poverty. According to the latest reports by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), the
budget deficit has widened, a liquidity shortage of foreign currencies appeared, the Egyptian pound officially lost around 22 per cent of its value, inflation has risen and social discontent has grown, with increased levels of labour action. There is also the major issue of eroding net international reserves; reserves started falling immediately after the 2011 revolution, when they stood at $36 billion, but the decline has been sharp over the last year. The significant decrease in revenues from tourism and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is the main reason for the foreign currency shortage and the devaluation of the pound. The latter has helped push inflation up, as Egypt is a net food importer. The weakness of the Egyptian currency has also created pressures on the budget as the government import bill for subsidized oil products and food swelled. The national unemployment rate rose to 12.7 percent in 2012, from 9 percent in 2010. Urban consumer inflation edged up to 8.2 percent in the year to May. The budget deficit reached 11.7 percent in the fiscal year 2012/2013. The political transition has generated some desired outcomes, yet change has not come as fast as people hoped and discontent is spreading among ever more groups of the population. Dr. Samir Radwan, the first post-revolution finance minister, believes that “in this volatile environment, it is difficult to anticipate how events will unfold and the implications thereof” (qtd by Hussein). As is the case with the complicated social and cultural aspects of the Egyptians’ lives, the economic challenges have had their toll on their day-to-day existence. The researcher has reached the conclusion that even this economic failure has its roots in the way the media handles the present challenges. Instead of practicing its initial role of “calling for action”, the media never seems to help in taking a single step in the right direction. The so-called activists are permanent talk-show guests, whereas economists and successful businessmen with real vision do not have even the minimum media attraction. Moreover, a true viscous circle is consequently being created. The frustration and resentment generate strikes which in turn damage production and harm the
future of investment of the country. An interview with two business investors revealed that businessmen are aware of the new risks they have to deal with now, compared to before the 25 January 2011 revolution and that these risks affect the way they manage the business. The interviewees also expressed medium-term expectations for their business in Egypt, some of which showed reserved optimism and some obvious pessimism. These serious challenges have unfortunately contributed to the obvious failure of the revolution to reach any of its goals.

**Recommendations:**

Having pinpointed the major factors behind the spiral despair Egypt has been suffering ever since the outbreak of the Lotus Revolution and the actual elements igniting the endless conflict, the researcher is putting forward the following recommendations that would get the country out of the preset bottle neck. The researcher believes that the key to any possible solutions is all about strategic planning and decision making.

To start with, in the socio-cultural field, all factors contributing to the present conflict have to be examined, and so have their mutual influence on each other. An urgent committee has to study the content of humanities school courses, and has to omit whatever inspires intolerance. Such committee has to introduce different material that encourages understanding, co-existence, tolerance and all kinds of fine social attitudes. In the meantime, workshops and training sessions for teachers should be conducted for the purpose of boosting a culture of broadmindedness and tolerance.

An equally important kind of training is also recommended for journalists, TV presenters, anchors and all those in charge of the media. Not only a code ethics is required, but also clear objectives should be set before any material is aired to the public. Such objectives should be
examined and verified by a professional well-selected board, and penalties should be inflicted whenever any violation is detected.

In the field of economics, it is strongly recommended that the new government put a short term plan that equals in duration the transitional period to be. The first thing that should and can be done very urgently is to allocate money to the basic needs of the population: fuel, gas and bread. The government should also assign committees to find out the reasons behind the closure of 4,500 factories, according to figures announced by the Egyptian Federation of Industries, and to see how the factories can be helped to reopen. Moreover, a social contract between the government, businessmen and workers has to be created. The idea is to respond to at least part of the demands of the workers in exchange for stopping protests during the transitional period. A minimum wage is a must, and if the businessmen will not listen to workers they will face the same fate as the Muslim Brotherhood. It is also strongly recommended that the government should fix a growth target over five years along with a plan to reduce unemployment.