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**THE 18 DAYS THAT CHANGED EGYPT:
THE CONCEPT OF *REVOLUTION*
IN THE EGYPTIAN ARAB SPRING DISCOURSE**

...What I knew is that we had managed to get Mubarak out and I thought 'wow' – if we, as Egyptians, can do that, we can do anything.

Mai Medhat,
participant of January 25 Revolution¹

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is not to analyze or match any theoretical constructs of *revolution*, either ideologically motivated or academic, against the sociopolitical reality of modern Egypt, but to reconstruct the popular idea of what most Egyptians now call January 25 revolution² by means of various linguistic methods.

The popular concept of the new Egyptian *revolution* took shape in its specific sociopolitical circumstances. The mass protest in Tahrir Square at the center of Cairo on January 25 – February 11, 2011 had a recent antecedent – the Tunisian revolution that ousted long-time ruler Zine El Abidine Ben Ali a mere 10 days ago. The fact that the event was from the onset framed as a continuation of the Tunisian revolution or as another episode of the Arab Spring by both participants and observers was perhaps the main reason why the public protests in

¹ Mai Medhat is a software engineer, who has developed and now is operating a successful web-based startup Eventtus with offices in Cairo and Dubai, basically, an application for event organizers, the project was inspired by Mai's engagement in Tahrir Square protests – cited in Elmira Bayrasli. Did Egypt's Uprising in Tahrir Square Launch a Startup Revolution? – <http://techcrunch.com/2016/01/25/did-egypts-uprising-in-tahrir-square-launch-a-startup-revolution/>

² There appears to be a considerable amount of agreement among different parties, nothing short of a national consensus, regarding describing the January 25, 2011 events as *revolution*, while Egyptians are in a deep disagreement regarding the revolutionary or counter-revolutionary nature of many subsequent developments, particularly, the June 30, 2013 protests, which led to the dislodging of president Muḥammad Mursī by the military.

Tahrir Square were immediately called *revolution* as opposed to merely *demonstration* or *rally* (taḏāhur, muḏāhara), although the latter terms were also widely used. This recent antecedent (and probably also relatively recent experience of so called *color revolutions*) certainly played a more significant role in shaping the popular idea of January 25 revolution than the schoolbook precedents such as the French, the American and the Russian revolutions or even the Egypt's own revolution of 1952. From the political activist as well as the general public perspective, Arab Spring was perceived as a long overdue, political change that would save the Arab World from a protracted period of stagnation. It was, therefore, almost expected to be innovative and *different* from revolutions of the old age. In this article we will be mostly interested in the semantic added value that this general concept acquired in the context of what we have broadly described as the discourse of the Egyptian Arab Spring³.

The methodology of this study draws on a variety of theoretical approaches, whose choice is primarily dictated by the complex nature of the subject of our study. Aside from Russian linguists, whom we cite specifically in relation to the semantic category of *event*⁴, our overall methodological approach is grounded in George Lakoff's theory of conceptual metaphor⁵. Our ideas regarding the interplay of visual and verbal elements in the complex semiotics of the January 25 – February 11, 2011 outdoor protests are inspired by Gunther Kress & Theo Van Leeuwen (1996)⁶, particularly the notion of *multimodality* of the text and 'inherently, different representational potentials, different potentials for meaning-making' characteristic of each mode of representation⁷, which accounts for the difficulty of making

³ For a description of the Egyptian revolutionary discourse and its key concepts cf. Alexander Bogomolov, Constructing political 'other' in the discourse of the Egyptian Arab Spring. Scripta Neophilologica Posnaniensia. Vol. XIV, pp. 7–8.

⁴ Cf. particularly N. D. Arutiunova. Tipy iazykovykh znachenii. Otsenka. Sobytie. Fakt. Moscow: Nauka, 1988.

⁵ George Lakoff, Mark Johnson. Metaphors we live by. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2003.

⁶ Gunther Kress & Theo Van Leeuwen. Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design Routledge, London and New York, 1996, 2006.

⁷ P. 41 *ibid*.

sense of such events as the January 25 revolution by means of the verbal mode alone, as reflected in a frequent resort by many writers to such unspecific expressions as ‘[all] what happened in Tahrir’, which we will address in more detail in sections 3 and 4 below. We also use key ideas and terms of J. L. Austin and J. R. Searle’s speech act theory to address pragmatic aspect in the discourse of the Egyptian revolution⁸. As the material for this study we use a sample of Egyptian media political discourse dating to the period of 2011–2013, available on the web.

2. REVOLUTION as a preconceived idea and actual event

The theoretical concept of *revolution* operates as a definition-generating device, and although social scientists and ideologues would never agree on a single best definition, the idea of such singularity, of an imminent survival of the fittest among the various closely related intellectual species competing for the status of final truth appears to be embedded in academic discourse. The folk concept, on the contrary, appears to be more flexible, context-dependent and cumulative in structure, and showing a degree of tolerance to logical inconsistencies. It has been noted that events appear to be a *split* semantic category, which includes event as (a preconceived) *idea*, *referent* event, and *textual* event (a hypothetic interpretation of a referent event in text)⁹. These three subcategories are by no means isolated and interact in a rather complex manner. Theoretical concepts as described above do influence the folk preconceived ideas, which in their turn effect social practices and the referent event representations, also in texts of different genres. But they are not the only influence – precedents, received through the medium of education, popular beliefs and

⁸ John R. Searle. *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge University Press. 1969; for the notion of *illocutionary force* cf. p. 30, *illocutionary acts* cf. p. 54.

⁹ Demiankov V. Z. ‘Sobytie’ v semantike, pragmatike i koordinatakh interpretatsii teksta. *Izvestia Akademii Nauk SSR* 1983, Seria “Literaturny i iazyka”, No. 4 – cited in N. D. Arutiunova. *Tipy iazykovykh znachenii. Otsenka. Sobytie. Fakt*. Moscow: Nauka, 1988, p. 170. Interestingly, according to Demiankov, there may be two event-ideas related to single referent event; indeed, in our material the events of January 25, 2011 may be described as *tazāhur* (demonstration) or *i’tiṣām* (sit-in strike), but also as *tawra* (revolution).

all sorts of associated ideas play an equally important role in shaping presupposed popular ideas regarding sociopolitical events. One such popular idea is that all revolutions are *bloody*¹⁰. In the course of the Arab Spring, many Egyptians may have changed their views regarding the necessity of violence as an element of political change even though the actual political reality of Egypt still remains quite brutal by European standards. Hence, the traffic among the three dimensions of the *event* as described above is not necessarily one-directional – experiencing specific referent events may also effect ideational representations, which will operate as preconceived ideas in the future.

While social scientists and ideologues tend to judge on whether a certain event is a *revolution* by the outcome of respective events (*the monarchy overthrown, the dictatorship of the proletariat established, etc.*), the folk usage does not seem content to wait until the dust settles down. Thus from the onset, when the resignation of the incumbent president was not yet in sight, and even the plight of protesters was anything but certain, the international media was already calling the January 25, 2011 events *revolution*. The situation is similar to that of a Hollywood crime movie, where *robbery* usually begins with robbers proclaiming loudly *this is a robbery*, performing a speech act, which operates as a self-fulfilling prophecy as it shapes further behavior of all parties involved. By the same token, those parties, who from the onset proclaimed the events of January 25, 2011 in Tahrir Square a *revolution*, had to a large extent predefined both the course and the outcome of those events. There could hardly be any doubt that the framing of the protests as *revolution* has reinforced the *illocutionary power* of the protesters' key demand – for the incumbent president to step down.

The folk and theoretical concepts of *revolution* reflect two different perspectives on the *event* – that of participant and/or engaged observer¹¹, and of a disengaged observer (e.g. author of an encyclopedia

¹⁰ While commenting extensively for the Arab satellite channels on the course of the Ukrainian Orange revolution of 2004, the author met an Egyptian journalist, who on the margins of an interview, opined: *this is not a revolution; you guys are wrong in defining these events revolution, for there may be no revolution without blood.*

¹¹ The term *participant* may sound insufficiently precise as the difference between an *active* participant and an even deeply engaged *sympathizer* or an

entry). In both perspectives *revolution* is conceived of as an event that matters socially a great deal, it is often associated with creating some social good and implies a positive evaluation. Ultimately, both folk and pundit's versions suggest a happy end, when suffering is vindicated and villains are punished, even though this happy end is described with different degrees of detail and technicality. From a pragmatics perspective, the folk concept is associated with a strong polarizing effect, where by the addressee is expected to take a clear *pro* or *contra* stance, while a 'theoretical' discussion has an allowance for avoiding such strong polarity and confrontation by shifting to a metalinguistic mode¹². While theoretical concept of *revolution* allows for it to be construed as a *process*, for the folk imagination it always remains essentially an *event*. As a semantic category *events* have complicated relationship with time and place¹³. For instance dating of the events demonstrates that although time is an important parameter, events are abstracted from time as length, in other words they are conceived of as dots on the timeline, e.g. January 25 revolution, despite the commonly known fact that it 'never happens overnight', for instance, it took 18 days of sit-in in Tahrir until the president Mubarak stepped down. According to Arutiunova (1988), events are "thought of as occurring not in the space of a 'boundless world', but in its narrower sphere – that of personality, family, group of people, collective, society, nation, state"¹⁴. Thus, *revolutions* normally occur in *countries*, and not in *capitals* despite the fact that most significant actions that in combination constitute a revolution mostly occur within the limits of a capital city. We know, hence, of the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, the French Revolution, but never heard of a *Paris Revolution or a *Cairo Revolution. Until recently, revolutions would

onlooker can blur; significant though this difference may seem from a social science perspective, it still appears to be quite irrelevant linguistically – unless they explicitly state it, which is rare, texts produced by active participants and sympathetic observers use similar rhetoric, and the same arsenal of semantic *empathy* (e.g. empathetic deixis).

¹² E.g. by discussion the validity of the terms characteristic of the revolutionary discourse or their applicability in specific contexts.

¹³ N. D. Arutiunova. *Tipy iazykovykh znachenii*. Otsenka. Sobytie. Fakt. Moscow: Nauka, 1988, p. 170–171.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 171.

not be identified with a specific narrowly defined urban locality, such as Tahrir Square in Cairo, or Maidan in Kyiv. But now, Google search returns as many as 4,180 results for the combination *ṭawrat maydān at-tahrīr* (the revolution of Tahrir Square)¹⁵. Both Tahrir and (Ukrainian) Maidan (the place names) are even more frequently used as metonymic nominations for the Egyptian January 25 revolution and the 2004 Orange revolution in Ukraine¹⁶. This appears to be a rather peculiar innovation, but to account for it we will have to put it in a bit broader context, which we propose to do in the next section.

3. REVOLUTION – here, now and... *hasta siempre*

In the context of the Egyptian revolutionary discourse the nomination *ṭawra* (revolution) is often used in reference to the 18 days stand-off in Tahrir Square in Cairo, which resulted in the president Mubarak's downfall, and in the context of which the concept was first applied. In contrast to this initial sit-in, a whole series of various other protests in Tahrir Square, which happened later (e.g. against SCAF, against president Mursi), are usually described simply as *events* of Tahrir Square (*aḥdāt maydān at-tahrīr*). Cf.:

(1) tarjama tullāb al-jāmi‘a al-amrīkiyya bi-l-qāhira fī kitāb “tarjamat ṭawrat miṣr... luġat at-tahrīr” *mu‘zam mā ḥadaṭa* bi-miṣr *ḥilāl ayyām at-ṭawra*, bad’an min al-hitāfāt wa an-nukāt, intihā’an bi-l-muqābalāt wa al-bayānāt al-‘askariyya...¹⁷

Students of the American University in Cairo have translated in a book [titled] ‘The translation of the Egypt’s revolution. The language of Tahrir’ *most of what happened* in Egypt *during the days of the revolution*, beginning with the chants and jokes and ending with interviews and military communiques...

Title of the cited book obviously equates the REVOLUTION and Tahrir Square protests. The paragraph (also, probably, the book) describes REVOLUTION as a period of time filled with probably an

¹⁵ See, for instance: <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=04072013&id=6f0bbe47-9629-4593-9842-00ad58a1e475>

¹⁶ Since 2013–2014 this nomination is used in reference to two events and increasingly in a generic sense for any ‘modern Ukrainian revolution’ including the one, which is yet to happen.

¹⁷ A news item published on 28 July, 2012 titled The Laughing Revolution in the Language of People of the American University (*at-ṭawra aḍ-ḍāḥika bi-luġat ahl al-jāmi‘a al-amrīkiyya*), <http://www.akhbarak.net/articles/8890370>

infinite set of diverse details or, perhaps, episodes or sub-events (consider the phrase *most of what happened*), which may not even be fully described or listed in a book. Yet it is perceived as a relatively short period of time – counted in days (*days of the revolution*), which is quite probably an implied reference to the 18 days of the initial sit-in in Tahrir. Interestingly, all characteristic details of the REVOLUTION mentioned in the cited text represent various *communicative acts*, which suggests that actually ‘most of what happened’ was about communication. Protesters, by means of *hitāfāt* (chants, slogans), communicated their demands to the government, but also to a wider public. Protesters and wider public traded political jokes (*nukāt*) among themselves, which would probably helped boost their morale and build up consensuses. Political figures and officials addressed the public by means of broadcast interviews, and finally the military communicated with the public through their communiques (*bayānāt*). The apologetic tone of the phrase ‘most of what have happened’ somehow suggests that the book’s authors, haunted by the demon of perfection, were afraid that the omission of some detail could prevent the foreign audiences, of experts and politicians, to whom the book had been intended to make sense of the Egyptian revolution or of *what happened* in Tahrir. As if it were a theatrical performance or a magic ritual, where the omission of even a minimal detail may damage the show’s compositional unity or kill the spell.

While it ended in 18 days with the downfall of the autocratic president, it still left people with a feeling that it was far from being complete, cf.:

(2) min as-sābiq li-awānihi al-ān an nastaw‘ib al-aṭr al-kāmil *li-mā ḥadat fī maydān at-tahrīr* ḥilāl at-ṭamaniyata ‘ašara yawman, wa mahmā yakun fa-inna mišra wa al-‘ālam al-‘arabiy lan yakūnā abadan ka-mā kānā ‘alayhi marratan uḥrā¹⁸

It is too soon to comprehend the full impact (*lit.* trace, footprint) of *what happened in Tahrir Square* during the 18 days, but whatever it is, Egypt and the Arab world will never be the same again.

¹⁸ History of Tahrir Square (*tārīḥ maydān at-tahrīr*) <http://www.midan-masr.com/printerfriendly.aspx?ArticleID=146> – an Arabic version of the article by an architecture professor Nezar Al-Sayyad published on 1 Apr. 2011 on Harvard University Press Blog – http://harvardpress.typepad.com/hup_publicity/2011/04/a-history-of-tahrir-square.html

The semantics of Event, generally, does not presuppose human agency in a direct sense. While people may *initiate*, *plan* or *be responsible for* Events, they do not *make* them. Events *occur* or *happen* beyond or even, sometimes, against human will, while remaining essentially anthropocentric concepts¹⁹. The indirect nomination used here in reference to the key event of the Egyptian revolution (or metonymically to the Revolution as such) is a rather frequent occurrence in the Egyptian Internet – the Google search returns 16,400 results for the phrase *mā ḥadat fī maydān at-tahrīr* (what happened in Tahrir Square)²⁰. The deliberate avoidance of naming operates as a rhetorical device, which helps emphasize the enormity of the event. But in part, it also reflects a certain epistemic difficulty: much of *what happened* in Tahrir, including the very act of occupying a vast chunk of public space in a specific manner, various acts that groups of people performed over the course of 18 days, not to mention the complex role of various media, represent semantically rich material, which does not, meaningful as it is, lend itself easily to a verbal description²¹. Multiple *verbal* interpretations, which this material may prompt, would come with an attending risk of things being misnamed or miscommunicated²².

Notable in examples (1) and (2) is the metonymic use of the place name Tahrir for REVOLUTION. A similar metonymy applies in the case of the Ukrainian Orange revolution of 2004, which since became

¹⁹ Arutiunova op. cit., p. 173. Events are conceived of as entities situated in specific human spaces commensurable to individuals or groups (cp. the notion of *life changing events* in relation to individual and *historic events* in relation to large collective, e.g. nation).

²⁰ Search performed on 24 January, 2016.

²¹ For the incongruity of various semiotic modes cf. Gunther Kress & Theo Van Leeuwen. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. Routledge, London and New York, 1996, 2006, p. 41 et passim.

²² The effect of this epistemic difficulty is not limited to lay participants and observers alone: the multimodal and largely graphic nature of *what happened in Tahrir* is captured aptly in Walker Gunning, Hagop Kevorkian. *Toward a Cinema of Revolution: 18 Days in Tahrir Square*. *Political Perspectives* 2013, volume 7 (2), 11–43, p. 12 – while going into much detail describing how various graphic images were created and exchanged among the participants and various external audiences, the authors, however, do not even attempt to analyze the content of this complex communication.

known as simply Maidan – by the name of the square, where it occurred²³. While metonymy *container for contained* appears to be a linguistic universal, the choice of an urban place name as container space for a REVOLUTION seems to go against the long-established convention. The REVOLUTION normally is conceived of as event not in the life of a city, but a nation, and January 25 revolution indeed is often referred to as a (great) Egyptian revolution. Another indirect evidence that the concept of REVOLUTION is firmly associated with Tahrir Square is that such nominations as *šabāb at-tawra* (revolutionary youth) and *tuwar* or its colloquial equivalent *souragiyya* (revolutionaries) are generally used in reference to the actual participants and organizers of January 25 – February 11 sit-in.

The ambivalence of the concept's relations with TIME and, hence, a sense of incompleteness, which appears to be inherent to it, finds expression in a newly coined concept *mukammilūn* (the ones, who complete), applied to those who claim that they intend to *complete* the REVOLUTION. The term came into active use mostly in the period after the unseating of the 'revolutionary' president Mursi by the military, and is mostly characteristic of the Muslim Brotherhood polemic with the supporters of president Sisi's regime. The Muslim Brotherhood has even launched an unlicensed satellite TV channel under this name²⁴.

4. REVOLUTION and *the better self* of the Egyptian people

January 25 events have provoked a self-congratulatory strand in the revolutionary discourse, which persisted through much of the early post-Mubarak period. As encouraging as it must have been for the Egyptians, it all sounded so familiar, so much of *déjà vu* to the present

²³ Such use of the place names – mainly urban squares – has apparently become a common feature of the 21st century's civic protests – for the use of the Puerta de Sol in Madrid as another name for the Los Indignados movement in Spain cf. Luisa Martín Rojo. Taking over the Square. The role of linguistic practices in contesting urban spaces. *Journal of Language and Politics* 13:4 (2014), p. 623–652.

²⁴ Cf. New frequency of the Muslim Brotherhood's Mukammilūn channel on Nile Sat after the last jamming (*taraddud qanāt mukammilīn al-jadīd al-iḥwāniyya 'alā an-nāyl sāt ba'd at-tašwīš al-aḥūr*). 5 Dec. 2015 – <http://www.npa-egypt.com/technology/3139>

author, as a similar outbreak of collective narcissism had accompanied the early days of the Orange revolution of 2004 with similarity going as far as even petty details, such as the emphasis on supposedly unique sense of humor characteristic of the supporters of revolution (in the Egyptian case – of the entire Egyptian nation)²⁵.

A BBC Arabic documentary titled the Laughing Revolution (*aṭ-ṭawra aḍ-ḍāḥika*)²⁶, which was released hot on the heels of Hosni Mubarak's ouster, opens with a long list of characteristics supposedly unique to Egyptians that they had demonstrated during the January 25, 2011 revolution. The list is organized around anaphorically repeated phrase *faqaṭ fī miṣr* (only in Egypt), e.g. *fī miṣra faqaṭ tastaṭī' an-nuktata an takūna bayānan ṭawriyan* (only in Egypt the joke may become a revolutionary proclamation)²⁷. The list reflects the *proud feeling* that was dominant during the early days of the revolution, which is also reflected in the word *karāma* (dignity) being hailed as part of the official slogan of the Revolution. Being part of a coherent and purposeful mass of people, was indeed an *empowering* experience making many feel proud of themselves and one's fellow countrymen, which is captured particularly well in the following poster held by one of the protesters: *i'tadtu an akūna ḥā'ifan – al-ān anā miṣrī* (I was used to be afraid – now I am Egyptian)²⁸.

The characteristically Egyptian qualities that the local commentators found reflected in the January 25 events included the *uniquely Egyptian joking spirit*, cf.:

taqūl haba: rūḥ ad-du'āba al-miṣriyya al-farīda min naw'ihā li-anna al-qalīl min an-nās faqaṭ hum alladīna yastaṭī'ūna as-suḥriyya min anfusihim miṭṭamā yaf'al al-miṣriyūn, lāfitan anna ad-du'āba kānat 'unṣuran ra'īsiyyan fī aṭ-ṭawra...²⁹

²⁵ During the more recent civic uprising of 2013–2014 in Ukraine there was no such self-congratulatory rhetoric any more.

²⁶ The movie may be found at <http://www.akhbarak.net/videos>; or at <http://goo.gl/3jkPrB>

²⁷ The Laughing Revolution (documentary), min 4:26.

²⁸ <http://www.akhbarak.net/articles/8890370>

²⁹ The quotation represents part of an Arabic language book review with quotation of the book written by a group of students at the American University of Cairo: Mehrez, Samia (ed.). *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press. 2012. <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/UI/Front/Inner.aspx?NewsContentID=234990>

Heba (Heba Salem, one of the coauthors of the cited book. – A. B.) says: the Egyptian joking spirit [is] unique in its kind for very few are people who are able to mock themselves like Egyptians do, pointing out that the joke was a key element of the revolution...

Here is another text elaborating on much the same idea:

ḥattā al-aḍrār allatī qad tusabbibuhā al-muzāharāt li-ba‘ḍ al-fi’āt lam tatrukhā ḥiffat ad-dam al-miṣriyya fa-inṭalaqat al-nukāt li-tu‘abbir ‘an ḍālika sāḥiratan...

even the damage that may be caused by (lit. cause it. – A. B.) the demonstration to some [social] categories, was not left untouched by (lit. did not leave it. – A. B.) the Egyptian gaiety so the jokes set off to express this mockingly...³⁰

The revolutionary 18 days sit-in of January 24 – February 11 provided Egyptians with an opportunity to reflect, not over politics or power struggles, but *themselves*, and to see themselves the way they would wish themselves to be seen.

The reflective discourse as described above finds a perfect match in similarly self-conscious behavior of the protesters in Tahrir Square. We are obliged to Gunning & Kevorkian (2013)³¹ for turning our attention to the role of various media during the January 25 – February 11, 2011 sit-in in Tahrir Square and, specifically, to the enormous fascination of the participants at the sight of themselves on the Al-jazeera live TV stream projected onto makeshift screens, which activists had installed across the area of protests, but also on multiple smartphones and portable computer screens, with the latter being simultaneously used to contribute content to the ongoing Tahrir streaming on various TV and social networks. The site of protests, according to Gunning & Kevorkian (2013), became a scene of a great spectacle, which they have aptly described in Debordian terms as “not a collection of images, but a social relation among people mediated by

³⁰ <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/37552.aspx> This statement is then illustrated with a rather amusing joke, which became popular on Twitter and Facebook, about a schoolboy asking the revolutionaries not to overdo it on various demands and other things for when the events will become part of history, if too much happens, students will have more to study.

³¹ Walker Gunning, Hagop Kevorkian. *Toward a Cinema of Revolution: 18 Days in Tahrir Square. Political Perspectives 2013*, volume 7 (2), 11–43.

images” (Debord, 1994:7)³². Importantly, “the protesters, the Mubarak regime, and the military all recognised this function of the Square and sought to project their own spectacular images to greater or lesser success” to the extent that “Tahrir Square was contested through spectacular imagery rather than brute force”³³. What has probably escaped Gunning & Kevorkian’s attention is that mediating the events through screened images changes not only the participant – observer statuses, but the entire mode of public communication and by extension the meaning associated with the event as such³⁴. It also involves considerable amount of editing usually unnoticed by a lay observer, which includes not only editing away some segments and foregrounding the others and thus producing an idealized picture of the filmed reality, but, importantly, it also allows for the insertion of specific messages – such as the one conveyed via a split screen showing the image of the outgoing president on one side and the triumphant masses on the other³⁵.

Beautiful though the metaphor of *society as a theater* may be, most what is going on around us usually is not much of a spectacle, as many details escape our attention for the reason of their seeming irrelevance to what we happen to be preoccupied with. In the case of Tahrir protests, it was not just any or all social relations that have

³² Debord, G. 1994. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone, p. 7 cited in Walker Gunning, Hagop Kevorkian. *Toward a Cinema of Revolution: 18 Days in Tahrir Square*. *Political Perspectives* 2013, volume 7 (2), 11–43, p. 12.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Protesters presence in a certain place is a physical reality even though it has a semiotic angle to it, while a broadcasted image of the same crowd is a visual sign, which *iconically* represents REVOLUTION, as such visual images of Tahrir came to be associated with the idea of REVOLUTION through efforts of a whole legion of international TV journalists; and it points for the observers – participants through white screens installed right there in Tahrir or their smartphone screens – to their place – not only in the physical reality, but within the mediated image of the REVOLUTION, while physical reality around them is lending to this televised image the quality of being *real*.

³⁵ Walker Gunning, Hagop Kevorkian. *Toward a Cinema of Revolution: 18 Days in Tahrir Square*. *Political Perspectives* 2013, volume 7 (2), 11–43, p. 20.

been mediatized or even turned into a spectacle as Gunning & Ke-vorkian (2013) seem to propose. By making specific aspects of *social relations* more visually salient³⁶, esthetically attractive, and even more understandable³⁷ the media was not only making protesters more enthusiastic about continuing their protests, raising their voices even louder, but was also engaging them in a different type of social setting that was being constructed with the help of images. This new type of social relations was characterized by an unusual sense of communion and equality, camaraderie, and above all the reversal of power relations³⁸: on a split screen juxtaposed to the image of jubilant crowd the bogymen of the past – the autocratic president and his henchmen, who still dominated the state-controlled TV channels, appeared as powerless, lonely people.

From the perspective of most participants of the 18 days sit-in in Tahrir Square, as well as those, who participated in similar protest camps in other places all over the globe in the span of the last two decades, that was a genuinely unique experience. It is a common perception that the essential characteristics of the spatially focused modern protest movements, from the *color revolutions*, to the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street could be largely accounted for by the effects of new media. The success of such broad scale mobilization, when the size of the protests rapidly grow in numbers to hundreds of thousands or millions, as well as the attendant phenomena of enhanced social communication, may indeed be attributed largely to modern information technologies³⁹. But the very social setting that

³⁶ For an individual it is always difficult to wrap one's mind around what is going on in a large social setting that one is part of – seeing it all within limits of a screen provides one with a sense of *grasping* it all at once.

³⁷ The media images offer a concise reading of the event for the viewers.

³⁸ As a participant observer of 2004 Ukrainian Maidan, the author witnessed and experienced a similar situation of collective euphoria, which in Ukraine also became a matter of intense public reflection with people comparing what they felt when they 'going out on Maidan' with attending a church service, or, for the older generation, with 'how it felt when the war (WWII) was over'; it is these feelings of catharsis and relief that have perhaps contributed to an unusually high level of optimism that people felt in the wake of the Orange revolution regarding the country's future.

³⁹ The media from the onset tool to calling the Egyptian protests in Tahrir Square a Facebook revolution; the social network factor was not independent

emerged in Tahrir Square at a closer glance doesn't appear to be so much of an innovation. In its essential parameters, it could be well described in classical cultural anthology terms – as type of *communitas* – a state that a group enters in a situation of crisis, which may be achieved through ritual and is characterized by the collapse of social structure (notably, hierarchical relations), an unusual sense of equality, when people communicate with each other on person to person basis and are not divided by their roles and statuses. This state of affairs is described as unstable, *liminal* situation, which ends, when the ritual is over⁴⁰. European carnivals and rites of passage in tribal societies are cited as examples, but the cited setting should not be seen as immanent feature of only traditional societies. The Foucauldian concept of *heterotopia*⁴¹ suggests yet another theoretical framework that may help make sense of modern protest camps. According to Foucault, *heterotopias* are to be found in any type of society from the 'primitive' to the industrial one and represent 'a kind of effectively enacted utopia, in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'⁴². Among the two common historic types of heterotopia Foucault mentions the *heterotopia of crisis*, which includes *sacred places*, 'reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis'. In the same text Foucault describes utopias as 'sites with no real place', 'sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society'. A description that rather aptly matches

or more important than the more traditional TV – as we have tried to demonstrate above, the powerful images of Tahrir were shaped, transmitted and enhanced by Aljazeera, and there could be no such pan-Arab phenomenon as the Arab Spring, if not a sustained long-term effort of the Arab satellite channels in creating a unified Arab media space – so far the most successful initiative inspired by ideas of Arab unity.

⁴⁰ Both terms – *communitas* and *liminality* – were made popular by the cultural anthropologist Victor W. Turner – cf. V. Turner, Chapter 3. 'Liminality and Communitas', in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co. 1969; the term *liminal* was introduced by an earlier author, Arnold van Gennep, in his classical 1909 book *The Rites of Passage*.

⁴¹ Foucault, Michel. *Of Other Spaces*, *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986), 22–27.

⁴² *Ibid.*

the way the Tahrir encampment appeared to function. For an autocratic state, which strived to organize society on the principles of a single crosscutting hierarchy, such a large and autonomous section of public space as Tahrir Square with its multiple replicas across Egypt, clearly represented an enormous challenge, the likes of which this state had never faced before.

Interestingly, the doubling participant – observer perspective created by the presence of media on the site of January 25 events, even together with its feedback loop noted by Gunning & Kevorkian⁴³, is echoed in the verbal discourse of Tahrir. Consider the two slogans reflecting the key demand of the January 25 – February 11 sit-in and the only one of the Egyptian Arab Spring that was fulfilled: *irḥal* (go) – an instance of a direct speech addressed to the president Mubarak, and *aš-ša'b yurīd isqāṭ an-niẓām* (people want the downfall of the regime) – a 3rd person descriptive text⁴⁴. The descriptive phrase is said *about* the participants, but participants pick it up and use it as a chant again thus closing a loop. Similar to the images of the REVOLUTION on the screen as opposed to the physical reality of protest on the ground, the 2nd slogan is more elevated in style⁴⁵. It brings in a political category of PEOPLE and awards those who are chanting the slogan with the feeling of being part of it, empowering them, just as while watching images of themselves on the screen protesters felt being part of a greater whole of the REVOLUTION. The two slogans also reflect two different perspectives on POWER as embedded in their underlying spatial metaphors. The first slogan *irḥal* (go) –

⁴³ Such as Wall Street Journal photograph showing a man borne on the shoulders of other protesters holding a laptop playing Al Jazeera's feed of Tahrir Square – cf. Walker Gunning, Hagop Kevorkian. *Toward a Cinema of Revolution: 18 Days in Tahrir Square. Political Perspectives 2013*, volume 7 (2), 11–43, p. 20, and Figure 11 (Appendix: Figures), p. 36.

⁴⁴ The second slogan is basically a paraphrase of the first one reflecting a change in perspective – from actor to observer.

⁴⁵ As it has been noted by some the slogan also implies a negation of what People are expected to be saying to their Ruler in a perfect (media) world of an autocratic state, as it repeats the rhythmic structure of a well-known Arab chant used to cheer political leaders: *bi-r-rūḥ bi-d-dam naḥdīk yā mubārak* (actually, the name of another Arab dictator – Saddām – would be a better match, which does not contradict the message, maybe even reinforces it).

represents an act (movement) performed on a *flat* surface, putting the ruler and people symbolically on the same footing in contrast to the common conceptual metaphor POWER is HEIGHT. It is addressed to the ruler as a common person in 2nd person singular imperative form⁴⁶. The slogan *irḥal* (go) stimulated creativity of multiple individual protesters who composed quite a few posters following the same basic template *go + the reason why* (usually, very banal one, pertaining to the sphere of common everyday human activities, clearly contrasted to autocrat's superhuman status), cf.: *irḥal – waga 'nī katfī* (go [for] my shoulder aches – probably from holding the poster); *irḥal al-waliyya 'āwiza tulid wa al-walad muš 'ā'iz yišūfak* (go [for] the old lady wants to give birth and the kid doesn't want to see you), *irḥal – marātī wahḥašatnī mutazawwag munḍu 20 yom* (go – I miss my wife – married 20 days)⁴⁷. This feeling of being equal to the mighty ruler is aptly expressed in a popular graffiti, which appeared during the early days of the uprising *anā bukra mubārak* (tomorrow I [will be] Mubarak). The colloquial Egyptian Arabic of the posters was apparently meant to be contrasted to the high-pitched style and refined Standard Arabic of Mubarak's speeches during the 18 days of Tahrir Square sit-in. Meanwhile the metaphor that underlies the second slogan represents (state) POWER as a *high vertical construction* towering above PEOPLE. The verbal slogan was complemented by a graphic image⁴⁸ on the TV and social media screens of PEOPLE chanting while being spread around the visible space (of Tahrir⁴⁹).

⁴⁶ In our opinion, this isn't really an intended degrading, even though polite 2nd person plural does apply in modern Arabic for higher status figures in person to person communication; the social deixis should not apply in situations when the (implied) speaker is an overwhelming superhuman force such as God or People; the singular form therefore is rather applied to emphasize not the lower status of the addressee but rather the higher one of those who say the phrase, in other words, it is meant to empower the protesters.

⁴⁷ Haba 'Abd-us-Sattār. The Egyptian buoyance... another face of the Tahrir demonstrations (ḥiffat dam al-miṣrī... al-wajh al-āḥar li-muzāharāt at-taḥrīr). Al-Ahram. 7 February 2011 – <http://gate.ahram.org/News/37552.aspx> For graphic images see <http://goo.gl/2HdqR0>

⁴⁸ The slogan is constructed as if it is a *caption* to a video image of a chanting crowd.

⁴⁹ Tahrir as the center of Cairo and by extension of Egypt here stands metonymically for the whole country (cf. CAPITAL for COUNTRY metony-

Viewed in Talmy's force-dynamic terms⁵⁰, a tall standing object has a natural tendency to fall down, while the PEOPLE's *will*⁵¹ pushes it exactly that way.

Activist element among the protesters usually described as ŠABĀB (YOUTH)⁵² spared no effort to engage the participants of Tahrir Square sit-in in various educational activities, chief among them political theater⁵³. These and other collective activities have helped structure both time⁵⁴ and space on the site of protest and create its internal dynamics that set the encampment off from the rest of the city as a special space with a different mode of relations among people. These observations bring us to the discussion of a conscious element in the protest movement, the role of specific leftist groups operating under the general heading of revolutionary YOUTH⁵⁵, and the ideological concepts that had probably inspired them, such as the notion of *prefigurative politics*⁵⁶. It is notable that the European new my universal for media political discourse), people in Tahrir for the entire Egyptian PEOPLE.

⁵⁰ Leonard Talmy. Force Dynamics in Language and Cognition, *Cognitive Science* 12, 49–100 (1968).

⁵¹ On the concept of IRĀDA(t) aš-ŠA'ĀB (PEOPLE'S WILL) in the context of the Egyptian revolutionary discourse see A. Bogomolov. Kontsept IRĀDA(t) aš-ŠA'ĀB (VOLIA NARODA) v diskursie 'Arabskoi viesny', *Skhodoznavstvo* No. 4 (64), 2013, pp. 15–27.

⁵² On YOUTH as a socio-political category in the context of the Egyptian Arab Spring see A. Bogomolov. Makers of Revolution: the Concept of ŠABĀB (YOUTH) in the Discourse of the Egyptian Arab Spring. *Skhodoznavstvo* No. 69, 2015, pp. 3–28.

⁵³ For the list of stage plays see Haba 'Abd-us-Sattār. The Egyptian buoyance... another face of the Tahrir demonstrations (ḥiffat dam al-miṣrī... al-wajh al-āhar li-mużāharāt at-tahrīr). Al-Ahram. 7 February 2011 – <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/37552.aspx>

⁵⁴ According to a social network commentator *innahumistaṭā'ū at-taṭallub 'alā al-mala bi-l-ibdā'* (they have managed to overcome boredom by creativity) – <http://goo.gl/2HdqR0>

⁵⁵ The two groups that appear to have contributed the most to the organization of January 25 – February 11 protests are the Revolutionary Socialists and April 6 movement.

⁵⁶ An idea popular among the 'new left' that a radical social change may be prefigured within a social movement advocating such change, notably, be means of re-organizing public space, cf. Fabian Frenzel. Exit the system?

left immediately recognized the makers of the Egyptian revolution as ones of their own, which is attested by frequent references to Tahrir Square in the writings of both participants and sympathizers of such movements as the Spanish Los Indignados and Occupy Wall street⁵⁷ contrasted with the lack of merest mention of the Ukrainian Orange revolution of 2004, let alone the earlier protest rallies of 2000–2001, despite the fact that they also used the encampment to occupy socially and politically significant urban spaces in combination with an extensive use of Internet⁵⁸ even before the now popular social media were launched⁵⁹. While the Western media were quick to herald a new era of democracy in the Middle East, the common Egyptians and the Egyptian media did not show many signs of loving them back, neither have they appreciated the Western new left's efforts to replicate Tahrir from Madrid to San Francisco. Discourse of the revolution has inherited the usual conspiracy theories regarding the Western role in Egyptian politics and tapped extensively on the national, including Sharia-inspired concepts. The two social semiotic realities, nevertheless, do not

Anarchist organisation in the British climate camps. *Ephemera. Theory & Politics in Organization*. Volume 14(4), p. 905.

⁵⁷ For references to Tahrir in the context of Indignados movement alongside with the U.S. Occupied cf. Luisa Martín Rojo. Taking over the Square. The role of linguistic practices in contesting urban spaces. *Journal of Language and Politics* 13:4 (2014), 623–652.

⁵⁸ Participants of 2000–2001 rallies against president Kuchma created an exceptionally popular website maidan.org.ua which operated as a virtual mirror and amplifier of the encampment on the central square that carries the same name – Maidan.

⁵⁹ Ukrainian Maidan and rallies under the slogan 'Ukraine without Kuchma (UBK)' predate by a large margin not only Tahrir and various 'occupied' movements of 2011 but even earlier British protest camps such as the Camp for Climate Action, which was initiated only in 2006 (cf. Fabian Frenzel. Exit the system? Anarchist organisation in the British climate camps. *Ephemera. Theory & Politics in Organization*. Volume 14(4), p. 902); The only reason why the Western left failed to acknowledge the Ukrainian Maidan activists as their precursors, while much information was available to them on both the substance and the tactics of the Ukrainian mass protest through international media and research, was the ideological alienation – Ukrainian protests were mostly driven by liberal and nationalist ideas, moreover, they enjoyed much empathy and moral support on the part of governments and politicians who the European leftists so vehemently opposed.

contradict each other but combine as *backstage*, inhabited by the activists (usually described as *šabāb* – i.e. *youth*, which include mainly leftists or left-leaning Islamists), and *front region* colonized by an incremental flow of ‘masses’ inspired by the growing power of protest⁶⁰. The latter may participate in various dramatic episodes staged for them by the former (whatever theses might be meant to *prefigure* or *foreshadow*⁶¹) without having to *speak* the same language. In fact, according to some accounts, the need for finding a *different* language that the mass participants could accept and use had even become a matter of conscious reflection among some protest organizers⁶².

The two perspectives (discourses) of REVOLUTION, at least at the onset, didn’t seem to be at cross purposes, as the immediate goal of ridding Egypt of its longest-ruling autocrat and the bright, but poorly defined, future of ‘*bread, freedom, human dignity and social justice*’ also appeared equally inspiring and attainable to both the socialist revolutionaries, the liberals and the Islamists. An idealist vision of the new left appeared to be coherent with popular the REVOLUTION as MIRACLE metaphor, identified in one of our previous publications⁶³. Media and IT prowess demonstrated by activists

⁶⁰ For the opposition between *backstage* and *front region* as two interrelated but relatively isolated social spaces, whose ‘language of behavior’ differs substantially, and a detailed exposé of how it functions in various social contexts cf. Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books, NY, 1959, p. 111–140.

⁶¹ *Foreshadowing* is a term borrowed from literary studies and used by the left in much the same sense as *prefiguring*. Cf. Luisa Martín Rojo. *Taking over the Square. The role of linguistic practices in contesting urban spaces*. *Journal of Language and Politics* 13:4 (2014), 623–652.

⁶² According to Walaa Quisay, now young researcher and student activist at the time of the events in Egypt (private communication), the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists had a dispute regarding the use of the Sharia term *qiṣāṣ* (retaliation) in protest rallies with those objecting against its use referring to the group’s official atheism, while their opponents justified it by its being part of *the language of masses*.

⁶³ REVOLUTION as MIRACLE cognitive schema is characteristic of all strands of the Egyptian revolutionary discourse; the schema represents REVOLUTION as an almost instantaneous change from a *bad* condition to a *good* one, cf. *[they] woke up from their sleep to find that the state of injustice had fallen with no [possibility of] return* (saḥaw min nawmihim waktāṣafū anna dawlat az-ẓulm qad saqāṭat ilā ġayr ruj’a). For details cf.

had even lent this general impression of MIRACLE a bit of futuristic touch. The true contradictions between the backstage and front region visions only began with what some local observers described as the ‘great secular – Islamist rift’, which happened much later.

5. Tahrir Square as a site of POWER

Tahrir Square becoming an icon of the Egyptian revolution provoked a steady flow of texts dedicated to this part of Cairo and its supposedly unique role in the Egyptian history. These texts represent an interesting material related to what could be described as the semiotic structure of the urban space, cf.:

šahida al-maydān aḥdāt kubrā fī tāriḥ miṣr minhā⁶⁴ wa dālika li-anna-hu maydān kāna yaqa‘ fī qalb al-qāhira wa yuṭillū ‘alā kāffat al-mabānī al-ḥassāsa wa al-fā‘ila fī tāriḥ miṣr, fa-huwa yuṭillū ‘alā maqarr al-mandūb as-sāmī al-brīṭānī wa kaḍālika ṭakanāt jays al-iḥtilāl wa yatafarra‘ minhu šawārī‘ ilā bayt sa’d zaḡlūl (bayt al-umma) wa qaṣr ‘ābidīn al-maqarr al-malikī wa kaḍālika wizārat ad-dāḥiliyya wa mabnā jāmi‘at ad-duwal al-‘arabiyya⁶⁵

The square witnessed great events in Egypt’s history, and that is because it was a square located in the heart of Cairo overlooking all sensitive and important (lit. acting) buildings in Egypt’s history and it is overlooking the headquarters of the British High Commissioner, and also the barracks of the army of occupation, and streets branch out from it to the house of Sa’d Zaḡlūl (the House of the Nation) and ‘Ābidīn (Abdeen) Palace, the royal headquarters, and also the Ministry of Interior and the building of the League of Arab States⁶⁶.

A. Bogomolov. Makers of Revolution: the Concept of ŠABĀB (YOUTH) in the Discourse of the Egyptian Arab Spring. Skhodoznavstvo No. 69, 2015, pp. 3–28.

⁶⁴ The text seems to have been accidentally truncated here as *minhā* (lit. from it/them) in such position would normally introduce a list of specific events to illustrate the author’s point, as no such list follows, the phrase doesn’t make much sense, we have therefore neglected it in translation.

⁶⁵ <http://goo.gl/zxIoW2> – For an exposé of Tahrir Square’s role in other protests and 1952 revolution see Ahmad Kamālī. Tahrir – the square of revolutions (at-tahrīr maydān at-tawrāt), al-Ahrām, 5 July, 2013 – <http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsPrint/219221.aspx>

⁶⁶ The list of historically significant buildings cited here is not complete – other landmarks located around Tahrir Square include Nile Palace, the former site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Umar Makram mosque and, notably,

Anthropomorphic metaphors underlying descriptions of urban spaces, particularly the metaphor of *heart* for the city center, appear to be common place for all major human languages and cultures. It is not uncommon either for various symbols of power, such as government buildings, to be placed at the city center. The situation seems to be quite self-evident and simple. A few details, however, would merit a closer look. The design of the square does not appear to be accidental, the square's central space was almost certainly meant to be protected from any unwarranted penetration through sealing it off from the pedestrians by a circular motorway filled with an extremely intense traffic most of the time, rendering this largest urban open space in Cairo effectively empty and inaccessible for common citizens. Overcoming this difficulty was a tour de force on the part of the protesters, an unparalleled spatial expression of defiance, which the political elite appeared unable to adequately confront. Analyzed as a communicative act, Tahrir sit-in, complex as it is in its multimodal form of expression, loaded with a number of sub-themes, which we have briefly addressed above, carried a simple and clear message – *go* – which achieved its full *perlocutionary effect*. The felicity conditions for such act imply that the sender of the message has enough power to ensure compliance with his demand. Every spatial, visual and verbal resource available was then used to ensure the status of sender as the one who commands enough power over the addressee. If the addressee is RULER, the prototypical party commensurable to him, having the power to order him to do things, is the PEOPLE. The spatial component was by far the most important one, which enhanced and multiplied by the media and articulated through verbal chants and incessant commenting flow, created a great metonymy of a million-strong unyielding crowd standing and speaking for the entire Egyptian nation⁶⁷.

the Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party and former Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arab Socialist Union headquarters, which was set ablaze and destroyed during the January 25 – February 11, 2011 protests.

⁶⁷ A case of *pars pro toto* with the size of part iconically pointing to the scale of total. While the Tahrir tactic of protest remained peaceful throughout the 18 day period, its largely symbolic power was considerably reinforced by violent events unfolding across the nation toward the last two days of January with police, detention facilities and state security premises being assaulted by crowds of people and burned down, etc.

The symbolic centrality and, hence, the power of Tahrir protests was immensely reinforced by the media. The protests would soon become not only physically central due to their location on the city map, but they would also occupy a central place on the pan-Arab and international TV screens, by displacing and marginalizing gradually those, who dominated the national media space before, including, notably, the key target of the protests – president Mubarak, who had thus symbolically been deprived of power even before he succumbed to the protesters' demands and stepped down.

Oriental metaphor, which could be formulated as CENTER is POWER, plays a key role in the semantics of POWER in Arabic. It appears to be even more *central* to the way this concept operates than the other, more familiar in the case of European languages, orientational metaphor POWER is UP, which we have briefly mentioned above, while discussing the revolutionary slogans *irḥal* (go) and its paraphrase *people want the downfall of the regime*. The two metaphors appear to reflect two different aspects of POWER: that of *status* and *potency/might*. There are multiple entailments connecting the latter idea to the notion of centrality, one of which we have already discussed elsewhere, viz. that in order to deprive someone from the ability to influence one should be sent to the periphery of the social space, as reflected in the concept of IQṢĀ' (exclusion, removal, displacement)⁶⁸, while someone, who wants to acquire influence would strive to take the central position (*ṣadāra* – center, central part) of whatever sector of the social space that they aspire to control (*taṣaddara* – lit. to become central, used in the sense of gain control of smth)⁶⁹, including, notably politics, which would be normally described as *mašhad siyāsī* (lit. political scene).

6. CONCLUSIONS

In a short period of time, the international media managed to convert the visually attractive and unusual images of the mass protests in

⁶⁸ The word *iqṣā'* is a verbal noun from 4th form verb *aqṣā* whose 1st form *qaṣā* or *qaṣiya* means *to be far away, to be removed*; the cited concept is used in the sense of *depriving of political authority or voice* cf. Alexander Bogomolov, Constructing political 'other' in the discourse of the Egyptian Arab Spring. Scripta Neophilologica Posnaniensia. Vol. XIV, p. 21–22.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 11.

Tahrir Square of Cairo into a powerful icon of new Egyptian *revolution*⁷⁰, having thereby greatly contributed to the success of the protesters in achieving their primary goal of ousting the president Mubarak⁷¹. The imagery tagged as the *Egyptian revolution* has also become one of the icons of a wider phenomenon of the Arab Spring.

The visual and spatial semiotics of the January 25 protests reflect an intense, unusual, diverse⁷², dramatic but ultimately liberating and empowering human experience of the 18 days sit-in. The visual and spatial language of the REVOLUTION appears to be far richer semantically than the verbal discourse that the revolution has produced. The complexity of Tahrir Square revolutionary experience and its every individual aspect can only be appreciated fully, if analyzed as a complex act of multimodal communication. It is the visual imagery that has lent the simplistic verbal slogans of the revolution their exceptional illocutionary force. From the point of view of language functions, if described in Jakobsonian terms, this immensely enhanced collective communication was mostly limited to three functions: the emotive⁷³, the conative ones with the dominant role among

⁷⁰ *Icon* doesn't mean a single snapshot – such as the famous pictures of Tahrir taken at night with brightly lit circular middle ground – but a dynamic *visual narrative* with multiple subplots, such as the famous 2 February Camel Incident (wāqi'at al-jamal), and the main story line ending with Mubarak's resignation and final celebrations.

⁷¹ Arrest, long-term incarceration and trial of several Aljazeera journalists and staff in the wake of the president Mursi's overthrow is perhaps the best acknowledgement of role of the media in the making of political change on the part of the Egyptian government; the other party, whose role has received a similar appraisal from powers that be was *šabāb at-tawra* (revolutionary youth).

⁷² We have highlighted mainly elements related to the role of media and practices that may have been inspired by left ideologies, but Tahrir imagery also includes panoramic views of mass Muslim prayers covering almost the entire square, which reflect a strong Islamist presence on the site of the protest, but also such culturally inclusive images as Coptic Christians forming a protective chain around praying Muslims – see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0uIa3jL2Kg>

⁷³ Notably, the 1st day of the revolution – January 25 – was named *jum'at al-ḡaḏab* (the Friday of Wrath), equally emotive is the rhetoric of *qiṣāṣ* (retaliation) widely used by the protesters.

them allocated to the phatic function. Often seen as secondary in normal daily communication, in the exclusive circumstances of a large scale collective action with its attendant need for coherence as well as motivation for an ever growing number of participants, it is the phatic function of communicative codes, both verbal and otherwise, that appears to be the dominant one and the one, which continues to affect the participants the most even when the act is over.

In a highly emotional way Tahrir Square collective communicative engagement helped articulate, graphically represent and animate for the benefit of all Egyptians a whole range of their most powerful collective value concepts, including *dignity* (karāma), *justice* (‘adāla), *unity* (waḥda), Egypt (*miṣr*), Islam and nationhood. It became a Revolution immediately from the moment it was proclaimed as such, long before it could bring about any tangible result, for, seen from the perspective of its participants, the 18 days sit-in in Tahrir square rapidly and dramatically reversed the power relations both within that large collective of people, and between these people in Tahrir, who symbolically represented the entire Egyptian nation, and their rulers. Both the actual participants and millions of common Egyptians felt empowered by these events as they never had before. Many felt that this change will persist and engulf the entire country. As they soon had to realize, it had come for a brief moment only. However, the events of January 25 revolution did create an important collectively shared value, and became a point of reference and a source of inspiration for many Egyptians, as they planted a seed of hope that someday the revolution will live up to its generous promise.