

The Tahrir Effect: History, Space, and Protest in the Egyptian Revolution of 2011

By

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DEDICATION

For the protestors who made the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 a reality. Without their courage, I could never have dreamed of writing about a revolution in Egypt, let alone participating in one.

Some of these protestors sacrificed their lives, hoping for real change in Egypt. Their dreams have not yet been realized, but I hope that by writing this story, I have begun to pay just some of the debt I owe them. I hope this dissertation serves as an adequate academic documentation of their story.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUC	American University in Cairo
CAPMAS	Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics
EDLC	Egyptian Democratic Labour Congress
EFTU	Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions
EFITU	Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions
EGP	Egyptian Pound
HMLC	Hisham Mubarak Law Center
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MENA	Middle East & North Africa Region
NAFC	National Association For Change
NDP	National Democratic Party
SCAF	Supreme Council of Armed Forces
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WAAKS	We are All Khaled Said
YCR	Youth Coalition for the Revolution

ABSTRACT

Title:

The Tahrir Effect: History, Space, and Protest in the Egyptian Revolution of 2011

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In this dissertation, I approach Cairo's famed Tahrir Square as both a political space and a lens for understanding the successes and failures of the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. I identify and explore a seeming paradox: on the one hand, the emergence of Tahrir as the central voice of the revolution amplified the event, drew attention to it, and assisted in mobilization, but on the other hand, the centralization of the revolution in one place also delimited further mobilizations, marginalized certain voices and issues within Tahrir itself, and possibly prevented a more radical revolutionary agenda from developing. Building upon and expanding the sociological literature on repertoires of contention, spaces in contention and revolutions as a processes, I argue that a diverse but specific set of historical conditions constituted Tahrir as the center of the revolution and relegated mobilization efforts beyond the square to the margins. These conditions included the media obsession with Tahrir, the regime's attempts to limit mobilization to Tahrir and the regime's own paradoxical endorsement of Tahrir as its central counterpart. They also included the historical significance of Tahrir itself, which made it an idealized location for protest, the reliance on a sit-in as the central mode of action, and the history of coalition building in and around Tahrir. Together, these conditions created a conjuncture of processes that made Tahrir the most powerful center of gravity of the Egyptian Revolution, the pivot point around which a revolutionary boundary was established. I develop a spatio-historical analysis in which I link the square's historical constitution as a political space to the long history of political protest in Egypt. I then examine how it was that Tahrir Square emerged as the central space and voice of the revolution, the point at which multiple repertoires of revolution converged. I study not only how the Tahrir sit-in became the central repertoire of the revolution, but also its relation to important modes of action such as labor strikes and popular committees in other urban centers in Egypt. I also give attention to the marginalization of certain voices and agendas within Tahrir itself. Through a close analysis of the interconnected forces of space, class, and social media, I show how the goals and demands of the revolution were distilled and, ultimately, defanged. The dissertation is based on extensive ethnographic work, historical research, and 106 interviews conducted over the course of two research trips—one from February 4, 2011, to April 16, 2011, which overlapped with the revolution itself, and another from July 16, 2012, to January 5, 2013.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Studying Tahrir, Studying Egypt's Revolution



Figure 1 Tahrir Square, February 10, 2011, one day before the ousting of Mubarak. (Picture by NBC news)

Several analysts, media circles, and scholars have described 2011 as the year of global uprisings (Schiffrin and Kircher-Allen 2012).¹ In addition to the so-called Arab Spring—named

¹ See, for example, the 2011 page for the Global Uprisings.org website, available at: <http://www.globaluprisings.org/2011/> (last accessed June 30, 2014); a Democracy Now! video feature, “Year of Global Uprisings, from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street: A Special Look Back at 2011,” available at http://www.democracynow.org/2012/1/2/year_of_global_uprisings_from_the (last accessed June 30, 2014); and Jeffrey Juris and Maple Razsa, “Occupy, Anthropology, and the 2011 Global Uprisings,” *Cultural Anthropology Online*, July 27, 2012, <http://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/63-occupy-anthropology-and-the-2011-global-uprisings> (last accessed June 30, 2014).

after the People's Spring or Springtime of the Peoples in Europe in 1848—widespread public protests spread to Europe and the US, most notably through various “Occupy” movements.² *Time* magazine chose “the protestor” as the “Person of the Year” for 2011.³ In short, there was discussion all across the globe among academics, activists, and analysts regarding how to make sense of these events and their apparent spread within and beyond the Arab world. One of the main themes that emerged was the very idea of occupation—what it meant to “occupy” both real and symbolic space, and why this was effective as a form of protest. In September 2011, the progressive magazine *Adbusters* ran an editorial that described the New York-based Occupy Wall Street movement as “America’s Tahrir moment.”⁴ And even after 2011, in events like the Taksim Square protests in Turkey in 2013 and protests in Ukraine that started in 2013 and continued until the end of February 2014, a common theme began to repeat, referencing something called *the Tahrir model*, evoking memories of the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 when Egyptians occupied Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo from January 25 to February 11, 2011, until nationwide protests led to the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak, who had ruled Egypt since 1981.⁵

References to the *Tahrir model* or the *Tahrir moment* have become widespread, yet the discussion has taken new turns as analysts debate what exactly are the lessons learned from this

² There are some debates regarding the name “Arab Spring” and its origins; see Joshua Keating, “Who First Used the Term Arab Spring?,” *Passport – Foreign Policy Magazine* blog, November 4, 2011, http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/04/who_first_used_the_term_arab_spring (last accessed June 30, 2014).

³ <http://content.time.com/time/person-of-the-year/2011/> (last accessed June 30, 2014).

⁴ Paul B. Farrell, “America’s Tahrir Moment,” *Adbusters*, September 6, 2011, <https://www.adbusters.org/blogs/adbusters-blog/occupy-wall-street-will-lay-siege-us-greed.html> (last accessed June 30, 2014).

⁵ For various takes on the legacy and/or lessons of Tahrir, see, for example, Juan Cole, “Learning the Wrong Lessons from Tahrir Square,” <http://www.juancole.com/2013/06/learning-assaults-protests.html> (last accessed June 30, 2014); and Andrew Barwig, “Why New Electoral Rules Matter,” *Foreign Policy*, February 21, 2011, http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/02/18/why_new_electoral_rules_matter (last accessed June 30, 2014).

model, and critics question whether the model can be simply exported to new contexts irrespective of its original historical circumstances (Ali 2013; Cole 2013). Patrick Cockburn (2014), a journalist for *The Independent* in the UK, specializing in the Middle East, has critiqued protestors in the region for relying too heavily on what he calls the Tahrir formula—a mode of action that he suggests has become increasingly discredited:

At this time, revolutionaries in the Arab world believed they had hit on a winning formula in confronting a repressive state. Peaceful protesters would take over a square or central space in a capital city, such as Tahrir Square in Cairo or the Pearl Roundabout, Bahrain, which became the symbol of resistance and the rallying point for demonstrators. It was also the stage where every charge by the police and counter-charge by protesters would be played out before the cameras. A simple narrative of peaceful people resisting a brutal despotic regime could be established.⁶

But is this formula as simple as Cockburn suggests? What exactly is the *Tahrir model* anyway? Implicit in most references to the model is a highly problematic suggestion that there were no other protests going on *outside* of Tahrir Square, though we know, of course, that this was hardly the case. The conflation of Tahrir with the events of early 2011 in Egypt is perhaps understandable, given the extent to which many scholars, activists, and analysts themselves have named the Egyptian Revolution itself after Tahrir Square (Cook 2011; Gardner 2011; A. Khalil 2012; Mehrez 2012; Sowers and Toensing 2012; Tschirgi et al. 2013). The issue is more than mere semantics, however. To put it in sociological terms, why conflate a major event like a revolution with one specific repertoire of protest, namely, the occupation of a public space by protestors?⁷

⁶ <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/are-protesters-overthrowing-a-brutal-despot-or-merely-bad-losers-at-the-polls-9131002.html> (last accessed June 24, 2014).

⁷ This kind of metonymic naming is not completely without precedent—see, most obviously, the student protests in China’s Tiananmen Square in 1989 (Calhoun 1989; Hershkovitz 1993; Mason and Clements 2002; Zhao 2001). The two main differences between the Tiananmen experience of 1989 and Tahrir in 2011 are: 1) the first was only a student movement, while the second was a national uprising, 2) the first was suppressed and did not continue, but the second presumably succeeded in ousting the country’s

Two main questions drive this dissertation. The first asks why this event called the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 has been attributed or reduced to what happened in Tahrir Square. The second question examines what effect this naming and focusing of attention had on events themselves—in short, to what extent and in what ways was the turning of the Egyptian Revolution into the Tahrir Revolution constitutive of what happened. The second question needs some elaboration. The event known as the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 entails many challenges for research, but for many observers, the very ousting of Mubarak on February 11, 2011 took a confusing form and remains a puzzle to be explained. On that day, the Vice President, Omar Soliman, appointed by Mubarak himself only a few days earlier, announced that Mubarak is “giving up his power, and transferring the administration of the nation to the Supreme Council of Armed Forces.”⁸ On its face, the outcome was an odd one to hail as a “victory” for a revolution: the Army, a significant component of the state, was to “administer” the transition away from the very regime of which it was part and against which the revolution took place. Yet, actors both within and beyond Egypt celebrated the announcement. The US administration, for example, praised this as an “orderly transition” and most commentators in the mainstream media followed

dictator. For an explicit discussion of the links between Tiananmen and Tahrir, see Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, “From Tahrir Square to Tiananmen: Why the Egyptians Succeeded in 2011 but the Chinese Failed in 1989?,” *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia* 10, no. 2 (2011): 41–46. Within the Arab region, one might also note the Bahrain uprising of 2011, which is named after the Pearl Roundabout, but which was suppressed. I will discuss this uprising and the role of spatialities in the Arab Spring further in the conclusion of the dissertation.

⁸ See the announcement here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzwAu8f6gG8&feature=kp_ (last accessed June 30, 2014). After the announcement, Egypt witnessed many debates at least for the first few months. One focused on why Mubarak/SCAF used the word “administration,” instead of “ruling,” while others asked on what basis and with what legitimacy SCAF was ruling the country—in short, was SCAF’s legitimacy derived from the revolution, or from the transfer of power by Mubarak? Some activists suggested that the term “administration” was used in order to give the (false) impression that military rule would be only temporary. As for the legitimacy of SCAF rule, this continued to be debated until the constitutional referendum of March 19, 2011, at which point SCAF argued that their power now derived from those results. See Ahdaf Soueif, “About the Army, the People and the Three Choices,” *El-Shorouk*, February 28, 2011, <http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=28022011&id=71e8bcf0-b3dd-4cef-9086-2f7e0be890f7> (last accessed June 28, 2014).

suit, offering few critiques of the transfer of power.⁹ It soon became clear that for both the Egyptian Army and the country's international allies, the main concern was managing the *process* of transition, rather than assuring the democratic nature of its content.

I will not focus on the question of transition here, as this is not the focus of my dissertation and others have ably analyzed the details of the process (Azzam 2012; Brown 2013; Elgindy 2012; Sharp 2012). Instead, my aim is to ask how and why protestors accepted this outcome. To the extent that all those people *had* gathered in Tahrir Square and captured both the country's and the world's attention, why then did they accept this announcement as the victory they'd been waiting for and disperse from the square shortly thereafter? There are many complex reasons why Egyptian protestors trusted the army or at least appeared to do so, some of which were historical, and others of which were simply strategic and focused on seeking the neutrality of the army during the uprising (Ketchley 2014; Said 2012). The army proposed at the time that they would manage the transition and make political reforms based on people's demands. Of course, this is not what happened, as the army resisted reforms and neither the protestors who were in Tahrir nor wider segments of the society were allowed to participate fully in the design of the supposed road map to democracy.¹⁰

⁹ See, for example, Karen DeYoung, "Obama Administration Aligns Itself with Protests in Egypt with Call for 'Orderly Transition'," *Washington Post*, January 31, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/30/AR2011013004401.html> (last accessed June 30, 2014); Adam Hanieh, "Egypt's 'Orderly Transition'? International Aid and the Rush to Structural Adjustment," *Jadaliyya-Ezine*, May 29, 2011, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1711/egypts-%E2%80%99orderly-transition-%E2%80%99-international-aid-and-> (last accessed June 30, 2014); and Mark Landler, "Clinton Calls for 'Orderly Transition' in Egypt," *New York Times*, January 30, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/31/world/middleeast/31diplo.html?_r=0 (last accessed June 30, 2014).

¹⁰ Beyond just resisting reform, the military also used excessive violence in the year and half under SCAF rule. A few month after ousting Mubarak, Abdallah El-Senawy, a prominent Nasserist journalist close to military circles interviewed a high-ranking official who described SCAF's goals during this period, saying: "It was one of our top priorities to stop the unrelenting revolutionary temper and movement. Such a movement could have led to the obliteration of the military, the economic and the security system, and the state apparatus," <http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=25032012&id=7011e40a-d983-49f6-9597-c6df582c177f> (last accessed June 30, 2014).

Fueled by disappointment and hindsight, much commentary and analysis since that moment has focused on trying to explain what went wrong, how the revolution fell short, and whether, indeed, the events of 2011 warrant the term “revolution” at all. On March 21, 2011, prominent Egyptian journalist and writer Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, described what the protestors had essentially accomplished as follows: “After an impressive revolution to the world, they reached for the moon, but then settled for just ordering some kabobs.”¹¹ Heikal was criticizing the voting patterns of the first constitutional referendum after the revolution, which revealed that many voters preferred only minor amendments to the old constitution. But why go to all the trouble of staging a revolution and then seek only relatively modest political reforms? To put it another way, how was it that Egypt witnessed a true “revolutionary situation,” yet still ended up with only a “poor outcome.”¹² On the night of January 28, 2011, Mubarak’s regime was incapable of controlling the state, after what seemed to be a major defeat and the withdrawal of police forces. As will be discussed in Chapters Two and Three, on that day, the battle between protestors and the police lasted almost all the entire day, ending with the withdrawal of police from most police stations and streets in urban centers, including Cairo and Tahrir Square. Mubarak ordered the military to intervene, but the military was unwilling or prevented from using violence against protestors given the latter’s sheer numbers and a likely calculation that it was no longer in the military’s interests to side with Mubarak. The question remains, however, why, given the existence of a revolutionary situation, protestors in Egypt did not push for more than modest political reforms?

¹¹ <http://www.almazryalyoum.com/news/details/120696> (last accessed June 30, 2014).

¹² I am using the word “outcome” here cautiously, and only for analytical purposes, as my aim is to study the revolution as a process, not to focus on causes and outcomes. The question of whether or not Egypt constituted a revolutionary situation in 2011 is discussed further in the review of literature on revolutions.

This dissertation examines the symbolic and actual containment of the Egyptian Revolution to Tahrir Square, asking both how and why this happened, and with what effects. In short, I use Tahrir Square as a lens through which to understand the seeming successes and failures of the events that took place in Egypt from January 25, 2011 to February 11, 2011.¹³ This focus on Tahrir is very useful both empirically and analytically. Empirically, several scholars have suggested, rightly, that Tahrir was an extremely important—if not *the* most important—site of the revolution. They have variously described Tahrir during the time of the revolution as a “liberated zone,” a “quasi-utopian community,” a “revolutionary space,” a “self-ruled community,” and a place that embodied a “time out of time” (Amar 2013a; Bamyeh 2011; El-Ghobashy 2011a; Gunning and Baron 2013; Holmes 2012; Sabea 2013). Authors have offered different takes on Tahrir, but the common denominator of their analyses is that the dynamics of Tahrir are read as metonymic of the dynamics of the revolution at large.

¹³ To my knowledge, there has been no comprehensive study that investigates the role of Tahrir in relation to the Egyptian revolution. One exception to this is the book *Why Occupy a Square?* by Jeroen Gunning and Ilan Zvi Baron (2013). Gunning and Baron spend one chapter discussing how Tahrir was an important revolutionary space in the revolution. I provide a similar discussion, but I go further to argue that Tahrir became constructed as *the* main revolutionary space of the revolution. In addition to this, this research differs from that of Gunning and Baron in two ways. First, I study the spatial history of Tahrir in relation to the larger mobilization political history in Egypt. Second, I also investigate the negative impacts of the centrality of Tahrir in relation to the revolution, something Gunning and Baron do not explore.

Another notable exception is an important article by Nasser Rabbat, a professor of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Rabbat focuses on the built environment of Tahrir and its complex political and cultural meaning (2011). He discusses the meaning and history of important pieces of architecture in Tahrir, but also how the built environment of Tahrir contributed to protestors’ use of and interaction with it as a space and symbol of their revolution. I discuss this in different parts of this dissertation. But while Rabbat gives some attention to history, it is not his primary focus; whereas my aim is to elaborate the different ways in which the history of Tahrir has been relevant to contention there in the present. Also, my focus is not on the architectural history of Tahrir; rather, my aim is to situate Tahrir in the history of contention in Egypt.

The focus on Tahrir is also analytically useful to understand the revolution. If we agree that Tahrir became *the* center of action (for better or worse), then Tahrir also provides us with an amplified view of the larger revolution. If we ask an average person in the US and or Europe what they know about the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, other than ousting Mubarak, they will talk about the image of Tahrir Square. And the irony is that this view exists not only in the US and Europe, but within Egypt as well. Hence, this very amplification and this very fact of reducing the revolution to its main site and its main strategy of occupation provide us with both useful analytical problems and insights about the larger event of the revolution.

As I will explain further in this chapter's discussion of methods, the main timeframe of the dissertation is the 18 days of the revolution (January 25 to February 11) and the main site is Tahrir Square. One could certainly argue that by focusing my study of the revolution in this way, I am simply repeating the problem of reductionism. While I focus on Tahrir and the 18 days, however, my point is not to suggest that other sites and times were not significant; indeed, what I seek to highlight is precisely what was afforded *and* excluded or ignored as a result of the narrowing of the revolution to Tahrir that happened at the time and shaped events and understandings as they unfolded. Once we take the centering of attention and energy on Tahrir as a social fact requiring explanation and analysis, then it makes sense to focus our own study there, while *also* seeking to locate Tahrir within the spatial, historical, and political contexts and trajectories that made it so significant.

Certainly, I argue that it is a common mistake to assume that this revolution had a clear beginning and end, and happened only in 18 days, disconnected from its previous history, and also located in a one place, disconnected from other places. This perspective is simply ahistorical, and as I will show in this dissertation, does not give attention to the complex isolation/connection

between Tahrir/Cairo and their placement in Egyptian politics and history. Also, instead of falling in the trap of only focusing on Tahrir, I have taken care to include important modes of action that took place outside Tahrir and Cairo. Specifically, in Chapter 5, I examine labor strikes leading up to and during the revolution, and also the formation of what were called “popular committees” in major urban centers to protect neighborhoods lacking any police presence.

I include these events and spaces beyond Tahrir, however, in order to explore the effect that Tahrir had upon them—how it amplified and/or delimited their scope and significance. I am well aware of radical activists’ frustration with the fact that, in the eyes of many, the revolution has been reduced to Tahrir. In focusing on Tahrir myself, I seek not to endorse or reify that reduction, but rather to investigate it—to trace how exactly it happened and with what effects, positive and negative. I similarly want to avoid overly simplistic, verging on caricatured, generalizations about the revolution—for example, that it was all about middle-class youth with social media savvy who occupied Tahrir Square until they ousted their dictator. My goal, instead, is to study Tahrir as an amplified space during the revolution and to situate the square and those who occupied it within both the mobilization history of Egypt and the country’s specific spatiality of contention, or what I describe as “political public space” in Chapter 2.

I argue that the Egyptian revolution cannot be understood without analyzing the intersections of street politics, formal politics and social media as three arenas of continuous political struggle, where tensions and battles, both virtual and real, play out between the regime and various forms of opposition. With regard to the realm of social media in particular, I offer an intervention vis-à-vis simplistic accounts that would locate this newly emergent space in a historical and political vacuum. Instead, I contextualize the role and impact of social media in

relation to both the history of protests in Egypt and other spaces in which contentious politics operate.

The main argument of the dissertation is that Tahrir Square and the mobilization around it played a significant role in the Egyptian Revolution, but this role was paradoxical. I describe this as the “Tahrir Effect.” This effect refers to the way in which, on the one hand, the emergence of Tahrir as the central voice and site of the revolution served to amplify the event, draw attention to it, and assist in mobilization; but on the other hand, this centralization of mobilization in one form and in one place also distracted from other kinds of organizing, silenced other voices and issues, and limited further radicalization of the revolution in ways that might have demanded more than political reform and a post-Mubarak transition managed by the military. In the chapters that follow, I elaborate on the historical conditions that contributed to this Tahrir Effect, explore the spatial dynamics of the effect and how it shaped the specific forms of mobilization that developed, and weigh both its positive and negative implications for what happened both during the 18 days of revolution and, to some extent, after.¹⁴

The rest of this introduction is divided into three sections. In the first section, I discuss two issues related to the focus of this dissertation: one addresses the idea of squares and public spaces in general, and the other comments on Tahrir’s position in the city of Cairo and the latter’s relation to the rest of the country. In the second section, I lay out the main theoretical framework/threads of this dissertation. And in this third section, I end with a description of my methods, as well as a discussion of my methodological rationale and my own positionality.

I. Squares, Tahrir, and Cairo

¹⁴ It is important to emphasize, however, that my focus is not on assessing the aftermath of 2011, in particular more recent events in Egypt, though I do touch briefly on the contemporary situation in the dissertation’s conclusion.

The idea of public space has existed since early Greek civilization and the Roman Empires. Ancient Greek cities had what is called *agora*, this was a central place in the city that was open for meetings and activities of citizens. In the Roman Empire, the *forum* served the same purpose and was the center of civic life for citizens. The shapes, meanings, and purposes of such open spaces have varied since ancient times through medieval until modern or so called postmodern times, and also varied across cultures and political systems (Chidester 1989; Corrigan 2011; Herzog 2006; Kleiner 2014; MacDonald 1986). Some countries do not have open public squares at all. Across history, gates and walls have been built to establish the separation and security of such spaces, which have been designated for different sorts of meetings and gatherings. Yet, despite all these historical and regional variations, the one thing common to all such public spaces is that their degree and form of openness is shaped primarily by the economic and political power structure in a given society in relation to space. In sum, the very making of public spaces entails power relations; the control of space entails both physical contestations and contestations over the meanings of places. Squares and public space are sites of contestation in relation to the social control of space and the very meaning or limitations of openness. Such spaces are also relevant to protest as, indeed, crowds need a place to gather. As such, then there may be nothing new per se in the story of Tahrir, but this does not detract from the fact that we still need to study the specificity of each case spatially, politically, and historically in order to address the following questions: How do specific governments deal with public space? How and why do protestors choose one place over others for protest? Also, why are protests in some spaces tolerable in the eyes of a ruling regime, while gatherings in other spaces are more troubling?

For example, on March 23, 2013, French anti-riot police clashed with 300,000 protestors demonstrating against gay marriage on the Champs-Élysées.¹⁵ But a few years earlier, in 2009, French farmers were not prevented from blocking the same avenue when they burned bales of hay and demanded government help with the radical fall of grain prices.¹⁶ There is no simple answer to the contrast here, but in discussions with friends and colleagues who are immersed in French politics, I learned that the *meanings of places of protest vary from one political faction to another*.¹⁷ For example, Place de la République and Place de la Nation in Paris as well as Place de la Bastille have been traditional places of protest for the left. The right, on the other hand, typically holds rallies at the Place de la Concorde, the Champ de Mars, or the Trocadéro. And the far right usually has rallies by the statue of Joan of Arc near the Louvre (on the Rue de Rivoli). Of course, these rules aren't absolute, but there are definite tendencies and longstanding traditions that have been followed to this day. On May 1, 2012, for example, Sarkozy held his election rally in Trocadéro, while Hollande held his victory party on May 6, 2012 at the Place de la Bastille.

Similar patterns can be discerned in Egypt. During the uprising of 2011, after the ousting of Mubarak, pro-Mubarak supporters protested in Al-Mohandeseen, in front of Moustafa Mahmoud Mosque. Then under the rule of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), pro-SCAF supporters rallied in and around Abbassyia Square and El Manasa/The Unknown Soldier Memorial in Nasr city in Cairo, while pro-democracy protestors reserved Tahrir Square for

¹⁵ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2298497/Riot-police-clash-protesters-Paris-300-000-streets-demonstrate-gay-marriage.html> (last accessed June 30, 2014).

¹⁶ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/10/16/champselysees-french-farm_n_323461.html (last accessed June 30, 2014).

¹⁷ I am thankful to my colleague and friend Mathieu Desan, who alerted me to these differences and provided me with some details.

themselves.¹⁸ My point here is to emphasize that the relation between space and protest is more complicated than one simple story (Sewell 2001; Tilly 2000). Factors such as capital, power relations, democracy, authoritarianism, and the history of meanings make each story of space and protest unique. It is one of the aims of this dissertation to situate Tahrir Square into the contemporary political protest history in Egypt, as I will do in Chapter Two. I will also situate my analysis in what I describe as the political public space under Mubarak's authoritarianism.

The second note here concerns Tahrir's position in Cairo. It is, of course, significant that Tahrir is located in the center of Cairo, the country's capital. Cairo is a huge, cosmopolitan city with a multilayered history, full of contradictions rendered visible in the form of highly modernized developments alongside slums. The dynamics of the city are shaped by neoliberalism and extreme poverty at the same time. The public space in Cairo reflects and is shaped by all these dynamics, but it goes beyond this research to discuss in detail how these dynamics shaped the protest in Tahrir (see, for example, AlSayed 2013; Bayat and Denis 2000; De Koning 2009; Fahmi 2009; Sabry 2010; Singerman and Amar 2006; Verdeil 2011). Similarly, it is important to acknowledge that although I focus here on Cairo and Tahrir, the events of 2011 were by no means confined to these spaces. A complete understanding of the Egyptian revolution must consider also what happened in rural and Upper Egypt,¹⁹ as well as forms of

¹⁸ After Mubarak's ouster, there were ongoing battles over who could occupy Tahrir and "to whom the square belonged," as put by Egyptian historian Khaled Fahmy; see <http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=23092012&id=e9eeb0ef-0b77-4c9f-a04a-2d09d18d8f48> (last accessed June 30, 2014).

¹⁹ Upper Egypt is the term used conventionally in Egypt to refer to the countryside in southern Egypt. In general, the question of the south's participation in the revolution is complicated. One of the reasons is the fact that many cities in the south are shaped by complex family and tribal networks, which are engaged in a different model of dealing with the government than protest. That is why protests in this area were smaller and scattered. In many of these cities, families and leaders of tribe have arms and have witnessed terrorist attacks. This also holds true for the Sinai. Elections in these cities are run differently than in Cairo and other urban centers. For more on this, see: <http://al-akhbar.com/node/182116> (last accessed June 30, 2014); <http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=17012012&id=>

mobilization and protest that took place in locations such as Mahala, Alexandria, Suez, and other cities along the Nile Delta and Suez Canal. While it has been a common assumption among many analysts that the revolution took place only in Cairo and urban centers, there is ample evidence that protests took place in the cities of Upper Egypt, especially in Assiut, Qena, Aswan, Sohag, El Minya, and Beni Suef. Most of these protests were scattered and not covered by the media. For example, a group in Egypt called the South Center of Rights engaged in a project in which they collected 300 videos on their YouTube channel of protests took place in these southern cities during the 18 days of the revolution.²⁰

The other issue complicating Tahrir's relation with the rest of the country is that many of the protestors in the square actually came from outside of Cairo. This fact gave more power of representation to Tahrir, and also complicated the story about protests outside Tahrir. As I detail further in the methods section, I conducted research in three other major cities in Egypt, all of which had a strong impact on the events of the Egyptian revolution in different ways. Mahala witnessed what may be considered a true rehearsal of the Egyptian revolution in 2008, when its textile workers attempted a general strike that was suppressed with force by the authorities, sparking mass riots in the city. Suez also witnessed serious clashes by protestors and police authorities over January 25–27, including the first death of a protestor. These events galvanized anger and protests in Cairo. Alexandria, the most populous city after Cairo, was also key in that

913e8ecb-a432-4395-8a63-0db43fa6c0aa (last accessed June 30, 2014); <http://revsoc.me/politics/lsyd-wlthwr/> (last accessed June 30, 2014); <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/16748/ي-يثر-ل-م-ل-م-اذا/> (last accessed June 30, 2014); <http://arabic.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/16843/ال-لنق-اش-ل-اس-تاكم-ال-ود-ع-و-ل-ل-فهم-م-ح-اول-ة-ال-ص-ع-ي-د-؟-ث-ار-ه-ل/> (last accessed June 30, 2014); <http://www.mandaraonline.com/ال-ص-ع-ي-د-ث-ور-ة-ل-ت-وثي-ق-ش-ب-اب-ي-م-ش-ر-و-ع-س-و-ه-ا-ج/> (last accessed June 30, 2014).

²⁰ See their YouTube channel and the project at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCe4blkcfIFJFzR2t6ihJJzg> (last accessed June 30, 2014).

it was the home of Khaled Said, the young Egyptian blogger whose torture and death served as the primary catalyst for the revolution. In each of these cities, a public square was a significant site of protest (Arbaeen Square in Suez, el-Shone in Mahala, and Ibrahim's Square and mosque in Alexandria), yet in none of these locales did protestors successfully stage a full sit-in. The only attempt happened in Alexandria, but it lasted only two days and was not even in Ibrahim's Square, but rather Masr Station Square (in front of the railway central station in Alexandria).

In my interview with Mahienour El-Massry²¹ (December 19, 2012), an activist who played an important role in many mobilization efforts before and during the uprising, she explained why a sit-in didn't develop in Alexandria:

There were many reasons activists thought it does not make sense to stage a sit-in in Alexandria. The first of these is that we do not have the same government concentrated complexes like Tahrir. So if we stage a sit-in, then there will be no disruption of the state. The second reason is the geography of Alex. We have some big squares, but rallies were more important in Alexandria. It is a coastal city, and streets are long next to the Cornish, and rallies are more effective, as to make the revolution reach wider populations. Also at the time of the revolution Alexandria was away colder than Cairo. We will be simply staying in the streets and soaking wet from the rain. Also, despite how big Alex is, it is still a small city. There is no real need for a sit-in. you can protest all day and simply go home in 15-20 min, unlike Cairo, where it is perhaps more convenient to stay in one place versus commuting in a horrible traffic.

In the same interview, however, she also described the one failed attempt to stage a sit-in nonetheless. She stated:

Despite what I told you, some activists decided to stage a sit-in on February 1st. and they chose Masr Station Square. And we said: we are here in a sit-in in solidarity with Tahrir. And we intentionally decided upon this place not Ibrahim's square, because the latter was a place of a mosque too. And we thought this place is more neutral and to avoid any religious connotation. The majority

²¹ All names in this dissertation are real names. Most of my informants were well-known bloggers and activists and all of them preferred to be quoted with their real names. The interviews happened in 2011 and 2012. Most of the informants obviously, and also I, would not have predicted the extensive degree of repression that is happening in Egypt now. I definitely plan to ask them again whether they want to keep their names as such in future versions of this manuscript, in light of the new political circumstances in Egypt.

were activists and artists from Alexandria. And some of the MB members were coordinating with us. And there were many debates with them on organization. But the total of people were 300. And actually we stayed one night. And it was without tents, despite the cold. But what happened is that on the second day, February 2. While in Cairo what is called the camel battle took place, thugs and ruling party militia and police came to attack us in the same time. Then this was simply ended in the second day. And we continued to do rallies and other things until February 11.

Of course, one of the reasons why Cairo was so significant and why protests there were so much more successful relates to sheer numbers. Cairo is not only the political capital of Egypt, but it is also the most populous city. While the population of Egypt has reached 91 million, that of Cairo is estimated to be 9 million. This means that 10% of Egypt's population is in the capital.²² Consequently, a mass protest in Cairo can have huge effects. In an unpublished paper, Ellis Goldberg (2013) proposes that whether or not the capital of a specific country is a "primate" city is crucial and played an important role in the Arab uprisings. Goldberg writes:

That the capital is a primate city matters because it allows the possibility of rapidly assembled immense protests that paralyze the administrative and political life of a country. Generally speaking the primate city is the largest city in a country and frequently contains between 10% and 25% of a country's population. (2013: 3)

Mark Traugott (1995b) has also discussed the role of capital cities in revolutions. He argues that capital cities in many cases reflect the centralization of government and politics, as well as the patterns of development and demographics within the nation. As I will discuss further in Chapter Three, the population of Cairo and the concentration of government buildings and centers of power in Tahrir Square played an important role in the revolution, as did the so-called "million person rallies" that garnered so much domestic and international attention. Tahrir is home to about ten government ministries, and in close proximity to both the cabinet headquarters and the parliament headquarters. Occupying Tahrir, in short, means effectively "occupying" and shutting

²² This is according to Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) on 2012; see <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/51634.aspx> (last accessed June 30, 2014).

down the government (see Figure 2). The ease with which we can identify this strategy now, however, should not be read as suggesting that such occupation was in any way easy or automatic. Indeed, one goal of this research is to highlight the risk and contingency of this process.

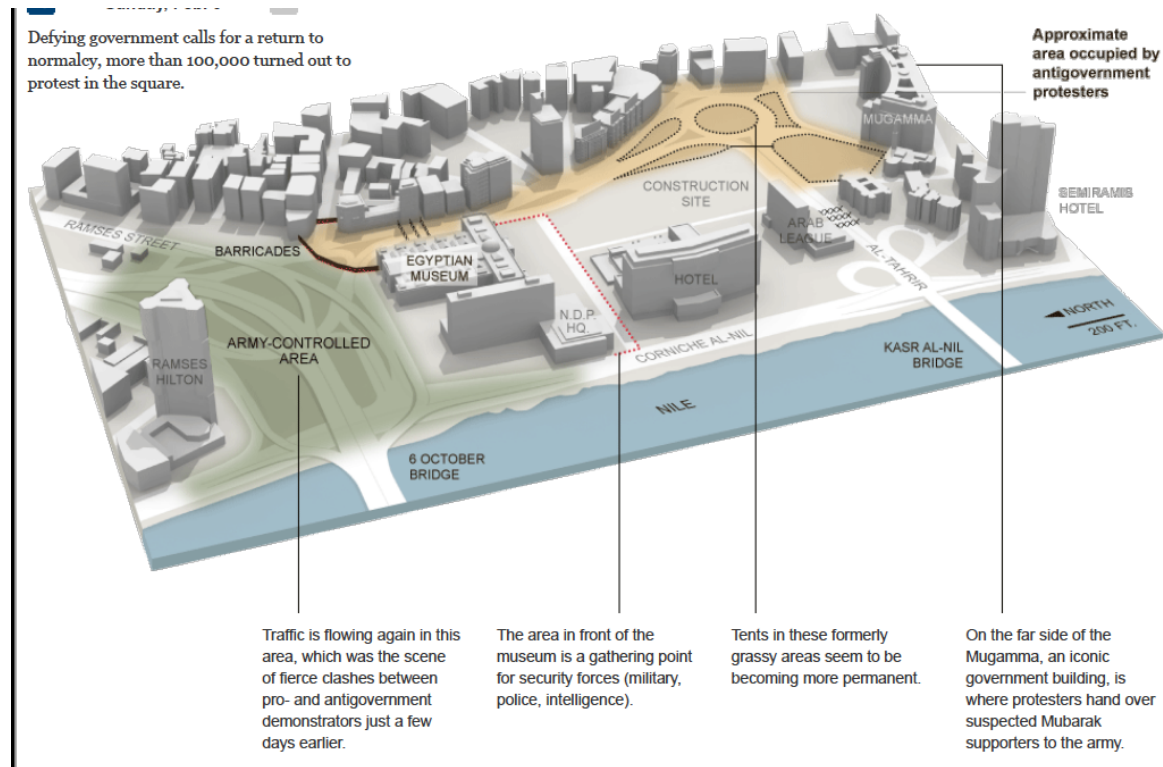


Figure 2 Tahrir Square, in relation to some important buildings in downtown Cairo. Visual designed by Stephen Farrell, Scott Nelson, Sergio Peçanha, Graham Roberts, Liam Stack, Alan McLean, and Archie Tse of the New York Times. Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/02/03/world/middleeast/20110203-tahrir-square-protest-diagram.html?hp#panel/5> (last accessed June 30, 2014).

II. Theoretical Framework

The literature on revolutions and social movements is immense. Jack Goldstone famously offered a classification of four generations of the scholarship on revolutions (2001). The first generation refers to the old natural history approach to study revolutions. This was very narrow and perceived revolutions in relation to modernization and stages. The second generation is the structural approaches to revolutions. This was very useful in understanding causes of revolutions, and limited these to structural reasons, but it gave no attention to processes. The third generation was still structuralist, but entailed comparisons. Classes, states and generally regimes were the basis of these comparisons. The fourth generation tried to give more attention to processes, agency and ideology in revolution, to overcome limitations of the previous generations, especially in understanding developing world's revolutions.

The state-centered approach is useful to study the Egyptian regime crisis and the role of the military in the Egyptian revolution.²³ I will not ignore the role of the military tout court. But I will touch upon it briefly due to its relevance of the analysis, especially with respect to the role of the military on the ground during the revolution, and how this is played out in relation with protestors. I address this issue in Chapter Four. The political economy/structuralist approach is useful to explain how neo-liberalism changed the regime structure in Egypt and also lead significant sectors in society, especially the unemployed and educated youth, to amass in critical

²³ Regarding the advantages and limitation of state-centered approaches to revolutions, see Goodwin (1997). And for analyses focusing on the role of the military during the uprising, see Barany (2011) and Nepstad (2011).

numbers in Tahrir and elsewhere in Egypt.²⁴ I do use some shadow comparisons throughout this dissertation, but my main concern is not to establish macro-causal arguments per se.

The two dominant perspectives on social movement mobilization—namely, resource mobilization and framing—accord little attention given to space. The resource mobilization perspective, for example, would approach the Egyptian Revolution by focusing on the mobilization processes that led up to it, how resources were sustained over the eighteen days of protest, or how specific political or activist groups contributed to the sit-in in Tahrir Square. At best, this perspective might even look at the space of Tahrir as a mobilization resource itself, but it would not look specifically at the space of Tahrir as a meaningful factor in the protest.²⁵

Scholars working from the framing perspective, on the other hand, might ask how initial mobilizers for the revolution called for protests, while avoiding any divisive language.²⁶ They might also examine how Tahrir became iconized after the revolution, eventually becoming a shorthand way for protesters to refer to the revolution itself. But what a framing perspective does not explain is why protesters headed to Tahrir in the first place, a question I raise in Chapter Two, and how protesters appropriated the previous history of Tahrir during the revolution.

This dissertation is concerned mainly with the Egyptian revolution as a process. Neither the causes nor origins of the revolution, nor its results are the main focus here. These issues are discussed, to be sure, but only insofar as they contribute to an understanding of the *revolutionary process*. The same goes with the state and classes. I study the dynamics of state and classes as

²⁴ For analyses of the Egyptian Revolution from a political economy perspective, see Armbrust (2011); Joya (2011); Malik (2013); and Soliman (2011, 2012a).

²⁵ For examples of resource mobilization scholarship, see Jenkins (1983), McCarthy and Wolfson (1996), McCarthy and Zald (1977), and Zald and McCarthy (1979).

²⁶ I touch upon the question of slogans and unifying language in Chapter Five, but I study this mainly with regard to the relation between mobilization in Tahrir and the actions took place outside Tahrir in mind. For examples of scholarship on the framing perspective, see Smith (2002), Snow and Benford (1992; 2000), Oliver and Johnston (2000), William and Ranter (1996a), and Zald (1996).

manifested during the protests before and during the revolution. While studying protest and mobilization, spatially, I argue that we cannot study protest repertoires without also studying their relation to the Egyptian regime. My main concern here is to understand and explain how the revolution developed as a specific set of meanings and mobilizations centered in Tahrir Square and focused primarily on an agenda of limited political reform.

Scholars of social movements recently started to express concerns that the scholarship in this field has become increasingly movements-centered or at least it does not give enough attention to the political context where movements works, (see for example Andrew Walder 2009). In the context of the Middle East, scholars also warned that scholarships about states and oppositions or movements tend to separate studying movements from states or only focus on what is described as a “polity centered analysis.” The latter refers to formal and institutional politics (Vairel 2011: 27). The outcome is that no enough attention is given to studying political and social movements in their interactions with one another. And as Zhao (2010) proposes, we cannot study movements in authoritarian contexts using the same paradigms used to study the relatively open contexts without some skepticism.

I take these warnings to heart. And I study the history of protest in Egypt before the revolution especially in the decade that preceded the revolution in relation to the Egyptian regime. I show that mobilization, the battle over space and repertoires of protest were shaped by the interactions and the tensions between the Egyptian authoritarian regime and movements in this period. In this dissertation, as the rest of the analysis shows, I emphasize the need to study authoritarianism on the ground; on the level of competing over spaces. I study the battle between protestors and movements over inches in streets. And I show how the famous Tahrir-sit in worked, where protestors were navigating their physical survival and mobilization at the same

time, in the context of the constant regime threats. The question of physical survival in mobilization is understudied in the literature of social movements.

Due to this specific focus of the dissertation, in this section, I lay out only the main theoretical threads that run throughout the dissertation—threads that are also taken up and further elaborated in the appropriate chapters. Three primary bodies of literature inform the theoretical framework of this project: literature on repertoires of contention, literature on space in contentious politics, and literature on revolutions as a process. I will discuss these in order.

Repertoires of Contention

Charles Tilly (1986, 1995, 2006) coined the term “repertoires of contention” and developed a theoretical framework for studying them based on his extensive historical research of protest methods and rebellions in England and France. Repertoires are specific techniques of protest. Tilly borrowed the idea of repertoires from theater and suggested that participants in collective action tend to select their actions from those performances with which they are most familiar. Tilly argued that the modularity of repertoires shifted dramatically after the emergence of the nation-state

For the purposes of this dissertation, the most important features of repertoires of contention is that they are: 1) context-specific, 2) shaped by the very regimes that they deployed against, and 3) temporally laden, bridging both the past and present. Let me discuss these in turn. First, despite the fact that many protest repertoires are now common and known across the globe, such as blocking roads, marching with banners, and signing petitions, Tilly’s theorization grounds specific repertoires in specific contexts. People rally with banners across the globe, but in each site, they use different approaches and methods. This distinction is crucial in this

dissertation. As I will show in Chapter 3, the formation of a culture of survival and strategies to aid protestors staging a sit-in already had a decade-long history. This was extremely important in helping the Tahrir sit-in to survive, particularly at critical moments and in the face of constant attacks by the police and ruling party supporters. Sit-ins existed and do exist in different places, they did not emerge only or without precedent in Tahrir and Egypt; rather, how a sit-in is organized and conducted reflects the history and dynamics of the space where the sit-in is staged.

Second, repertoires of protest are shaped by the very regimes against which they are practiced. According to Tilly, the repertoire-regime relation can generally be classified in three ways: as prescribed, tolerated, or forbidden (Tilly 2006: 75). But as much as regimes shape and affect repertoires, protestors in terms of their claims and efforts to negotiate the degree of government tolerance or lack thereof make their own repertoires. This relation of influence and agency is important in my analysis. As I will show in Chapter 2, for example, in the decade before the revolution, Egyptian activists learned to innovate in various ways as they dealt with the very limited space for protests under Mubarak's authoritarian regime. They developed unique repertoires, such as simply standing on the stairs of professional syndicates and chanting to the streets, or organizing "stand-ins," in which a small rally of sometimes a few hundred people would be cordoned off by a few thousand soldiers and anti-riot police. These repertoires reflected the battle with the regime over space.

Third, repertoires are temporally laden because they are, by definition, practices chosen from memory and/or based on the familiarity or experiences of protestors. Repertoires are like scripts, but this does not mean that they are rigid or that protestors apply them blindly. Indeed, as Tilly himself noted, protestors do change them (Tilly 2008 xi-xii). This aspect is important because, as I will argue in Chapter 3, one of the keys to the sit-in's success in Tahrir was the fact

that protestors employed a combination of organization and spontaneity. Experienced organizers were helpful in setting up the camp in the beginning, drawing on their experiences from previous sit-ins, but they and other, less experienced protestors were also quite innovative and skilled at adapting on the fly in ways that contributed to the durability and efficiency of the camp.

Temporality also was important insofar as the very idea of occupying the whole of Tahrir Square had deeply symbolic and historical resonance in the political protest history of Egypt. As such my study of repertoires is both historical and relational. For example, in Chapter Two, I argue that we need to study repertoires in relation to one another. I show how the sit-in became the center of revolutionary actions and how this impacted other repertoires of action in other locations. I explore, in short, how the sit-in—for better or worse—was to the Egyptian Revolution what barricades were to the French Revolution: dominant, effective, iconic, but also far from foolproof or preordained.

Space and Contentious Politics

I will move now to the literature on space and contentious politics, which also informs this dissertation. I build upon this literature and show that there was no one single meaning or way that Tahrir Square was spatially relevant to in the revolution. In Chapter 3, I show how the size of the square was crucial, especially when it came to the so-called million person rallies. Also in Chapter 3, I discuss how Tahrir constituted the endpoint for the many rallies coming from different directions and from different parts of Cairo. I examine, too, how the geography of Tahrir was significant in the battles with police. Regarding the conflicts on January 28, 2011, in particular, Ahmed Helmy, an Islamist and a human rights attorney, told me:

The police's plan A was to prevent protestors from reaching the square, and then plan B is to seize the square if some or many were able to reach it. But what happened is that due to the huge number of protestors, police was exhausted and defeated in many battles in many roads to Tahrir. Police simply was fighting with

protestors in different battles in the same time most notably in Ramses St., Qasr al-Ainy St., and Qasr El-Nile Bridge. It was protestors who surprised the police and surprised themselves indeed, to reach Tahrir from different entrances coming from many routes, at the same time, all in the afternoon of January 28.²⁷

Both the protestors' sheer numbers and the multiple points of access to Tahrir Square enabled protestors to surprise the police and even themselves, enabling them for the first time in Egyptian history to occupy and hold *the entire square* for a period that lasted for about two weeks.²⁸ But it was not only the geographical feasibility and built-in environment of Tahrir Square that mattered for the revolution; I show also how the history and contested meanings of the space mattered. I show how the square's significance in protest history impacted the mobilization for and during the revolution, and I also show how protestors themselves created and tweaked music and cultural materials to develop their own take on the meanings of Tahrir for further mobilization. In Chapter 5, I also expand on Tilly's notions of contained and transgressive contention (2000: 138) and synthesize this with a specific observation by Pierre Bourdieu (1999: 57) about the relevance of studying historical possibility, in order to argue that Tahrir created what I term a "revolutionary boundary," delimiting who and what "counted" as part of the revolution.²⁹

To study the space of Tahrir in relation to the larger revolution raises a question about the role of space in general in relation to social movements and revolutions. The literature on space in relation to both phenomena is still emerging. Some analyses focus on issues of space after

²⁷ Interview, November 2, 2012

²⁸ As I describe in Chapter 2, there were two earlier incidents in 1972 and 2003, in which protestors held only partial parts of the square and for periods of less than 24 hours.

²⁹ I am referring here to a specific idea Bourdieu made in his famous piece about the genesis of the state field (1999). In that text, Bourdieu emphasized how it is crucial for a proper historical analysis of the rise of the state as an idea/field is to reconstruct its genesis, and situate this within other conflicts and confrontations that took place at the time. In other words, he suggested that there is a need to study the historical process that enabled the modern state to emerge from the field of "discarded possibilities" (Bourdieu 1999: 57) available at the time. I elaborate further on this idea in Chapter 5 and how I found it useful to my analysis.

revolutions and focus accordingly on contests over memory and monuments.³⁰ In the literature on social movements, we may recall that streets mattered in the protest movements in Seattle in 1999 against the World Trade Organization (Smith 2001). And perhaps most famously, the Lincoln Memorial has been crucial in the civil rights movement and its legacy (Sandage 1993). These are just a few examples of scholars examining the significance of place in a movement.

Kimmel (1990) talks about the significance of space in relation to a revolution, but limits this only to the position of the state in its regional and global context. He states:

Spatial and temporal issues frame the occurrence of revolution, and they must construct our analysis of revolution. By “spatial” I mean the levels of analysis of social structures that exist within, between and among societies located within a global context. By “temporal” I mean locating the revolutionary society, as well as the phenomenon of revolution itself, within historical time. (Kimmel 1990: 218).

Here, Kimmel limits the discussion on space to the global positioning of a given revolutionary society and its relation to regional context. Recently, David Harvey also emphasized, among other things, the role of specific urban features in relation to protest:

It is also clear that certain urban environmental characteristics are more conducive to rebellious protests than others—such as the centrality of squares like Tahrir, Tiananmen, and Syntagma, the more easily barricaded streets of Paris compared to London or Los Angeles, or El Alto’s position commanding the main supply routes into La Paz. (2012: 117)

In this passage, Harvey focuses on whether urban features are advantageous or not to protest. Harvey’s point here is similar to what Dingxin Zhao describes as the “ecology-based mobilization” in the case of the Tiananmen movement (Zhao 2001: 239–66).

Sewell’s classical text about the invention of revolution in the Bastille (1996) is also worth looking at here. Sewell’s theory of historical events is mostly about action, temporality,

³⁰See, for example, Leith (1991) on battles over monuments and buildings to commemorate the French Revolution.

and the transformation power of the event, not spatiality. Sewell famously defines a historical event as: “(1) a ramified sequence of occurrences that (2) is recognized as notable by contemporaries, and that (3) results in a durable transformation of structures” (1996: 844).³¹

Sewell also invokes a note about Tilly’s notion of repertoire, acknowledging: “It is also true that in many respects the taking of the Bastille marked no great rupture with what Charles Tilly calls the “repertoire of contention” of the eighteenth-century urban dwellers” (Sewell 1996: 851).

Although the focus of Sewell’s essay is not explicitly on space, one can see space in the text in two ways. The first is that the Bastille itself was a repository of significant symbolic power. This fact contributed to constituting the transformative power of the main event, the revolution itself. The second, which may be a stretch, is to see space in general as part of the social and cultural structure or the larger conditions in which the event is taking place, and which the event itself serves to re-articulate (Sewell 1996: 861–62). These are only implicit assumptions in the text, however, as the main objective of the text is temporality and eventfulness, not spatiality. I would argue, nonetheless, that Sewell’s notion of eventfulness is not aspatial.³²

One notable exception to the virtual lack of explicit attention to spatiality in revolutions is Lynn Hunt’s work on the French Revolution (2004). Throughout her analysis, Hunt gives valuable attention to space. She shows, for example, how political space was opened in 1789 through the competition between “the crown and the nobility, and between the nobles and the Third Estate” (Hunt 2004: 223). Most importantly, she addresses the material spatiality of the revolution, its spread and its concentration in some areas compared to others. Hunt states:

³¹But see George Steinmetz’ discussion (2008) of the pros and cons of Sewell’s definition of events, particularly in Sewell’s *Logics of History* (2005).

³² I focus primarily here on Sewell’s text on the Bastille and historical event, but it should be noted that Sewell does address the issue of spatiality more in *Logics of History* (2005), which I hope to incorporate more in future revisions of this dissertation.

Divisions within the new political class had a spatial as well as temporal dimension. In 1789 people almost everywhere in France were enthusiastic about the prospect of constitutional renewal. As the potential for conflict became clearer and more threatening, some places began to demonstrate their reluctance and even resistance to the revolutionary process. By the middle of 1798 the west was in open rebellion, and several cities along the coast and along the major rivers (most notably Lyon) had announced their secession from the revolutionary movement. Spatially as well as temporally, there were multiple lines of division. In many regions, the Revolution in a sense withdrew to the towns and cities. Within the big cities, the radicals often based themselves in a certain neighborhoods. Within the country as a whole, the revolutionary movement found most determined support near the frontiers and in the left-wing regions of the center and southwest. Along both the dimensions of time and space, the process of radicalization was structurally similar: as the revolution became more radical it also became more peripheral. Yet, at the same time, the rhetoric and symbols of the Revolution retained and even enhanced their universalistic, nationalistic and rationalistic qualities. (2004: 217)

This dissertation is inspired by Hunt's work; but while her focus is more on class and space and politics, my focus is on modes of action and protest that took place in relation to space.³³

Both Roger Gould's work (1995) on protest in Paris leading to the Paris Commune and Charles Tilly's *The Vendée* (1964) are also notable here. First, an analogy about the emergence of the identity of "people of Paris" and the "Tahrir Protestors" or "the Tahrir Youth" is obvious. There are, however, other similarities. First, there is the fact that the Tahrir sit-in and Paris Commune took place in capital cities, and that the two modes of action were the center of action at the time, in terms of drawing attention and becoming the target site for protest and organizing. The main difference between the two is that, unlike the case of the Paris Commune, many important actions also took place outside Tahrir—actions that were potentially radical and had

³³ The work of Mabel Berezin (1997) on fascism in interwar Italy and how the state and different political groups negotiated public space and defined the very meaning of fascism in that space is also relevant here. Berezin was not talking about a revolution, yet her work examines rituals and specific kinds of continuous politics that are not antagonistic to the regime, such as parades. Berezin's work is important because it also examines the regime and the public. To use Tilly's terminology, the reconfigurations of public space here in relation to the regime resemble something akin to a prescribed repertoire (Tilly 2006: 75). But my aim in this research is to study a case where the practice of repertoire is more in tension and dialectical relation with the regime, rather than simply being prescribed.

the potential to change the course of events. Tahrir's relationship to mobilization can also be seen as similar to that related to the Vendée, but while the latter was the center of counter-revolution, Tahrir became/or was constructed as the center of revolution.³⁴

Regarding my own approach to space and spatiality in this dissertation, I would like to clarify two things. The first is that my main concern in this dissertation is not limited to spatiality. Yes, I want to study Tahrir Square in the revolution, but as my research shows, things shifted over time in Tahrir and in the revolution in general, meaning that any analysis must necessarily be *spatio-temporal* or *spatio-historical*. Second, as discussed above, the spatiality of Tahrir and its relation to the revolution constitutes both the empirical focus of the dissertation, but also the analytical lens I use to understand how the revolution came to have certain meanings and outcomes. Given the way in which Tahrir was both constituted by and constitutive of the events that took place within it, space appears as both part of the explanans and explanandum of the dissertation.

Revolutions as processes

As mentioned earlier, this dissertation is concerned mainly with the Egyptian revolution as a process, specifically building upon the work of Charles Tilly and Jack Goldstone. Before discussing I mean by revolution as a process, it is useful first to clarify what is meant by a “revolutionary situation.” I raised the question earlier of how it was that Egypt witnessed a true

³⁴ *The Contentious French* (1986) by Charles Tilly is very relevant here as well. In Chapters Two and Three, I study the history of protest repertoires in Egypt. Even though *The Contentious French* is a study of the *longue durée*, it is inspiring here. Another relevant study is Charles Kurzman's study of the history of mobilization that preceded the Iranian revolution in 1979, with his focus on the mobilization on the city of Qum in the few years before the revolution (see Kurzman 2003).

“revolutionary situation,” yet still ended up with only a “poor outcome.” Charles Tilly (1993: 10)

defines a revolutionary situation as a moment that has three elements:

- 1) appearance of contenders, or coalitions of contenders, advancing exclusive competing claims to control of the state, or some segments of it,
- 2) commitment to those claims by a significant segment of the citizenry, and 3) incapacity or unwillingness of rulers to suppress the alternative coalition and/or commitment to its claims.

In another piece, Tilly added that a revolutionary situation requires that one of the new emerging centers of power commands “a significant coercive force.” He states:

Revolutions are not social movements, although sometimes the two overlap and stimulate each other. A full revolution combines two elements: a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary outcome. In a revolutionary situation, at least two centers of power emerge, each of them commanding significant coercive force and each of them claiming exclusive control over the state. In a revolutionary outcome, a transfer of power over the state occurs such that a largely new group of people begins to rule. Revolutionary situation and social movements overlap when movement-based mobilization goes so far as to split the regime into at least two armed factions, each claiming the unique right to rule. That happened widely, for example during Europe’s revolutionary mobilizations of 1848. (Tilly 2008: 126–27).

Jack Goldstone (2009) has similarly argued for a disaggregated understanding of the revolutions, proposing twelve components of the revolutionary process. He emphasizes, “These twelve stages are not intended to demarcate a universal or inevitable consequence. Rather, they are components of revolutionary processes that usually occur in various revolutions” (Goldstone 2009: 19). How these components actually manifest in terms of combination, character, severity, and intensity constitutes every revolution’s unique “revolutionary trajectory” per Goldstone (2009: 20). He further coins the term “revolutionary suite” to highlight the significance of three factors: 1) elite defection and the formation of opposition, 2) polarization and coalition building, and 3) mass mobilization.

Both Tilly and Goldstone describe acute regime crises and the development of mass

mobilization that challenges the regime. Where Goldstone puts more emphasis on elite defection and coalition building, Tilly stipulates that contenders must seize control of the state and command “significant coercive force.” Looking generally at these criteria, Egypt would seem to have had a revolutionary situation, but the question remains whether it had a revolutionary outcome. The case of the Egyptian revolution is problematic when applying Tilly’s seemingly narrow definition of revolutionary situation. The reason for this is that Egyptian revolutionaries did not seek to control the state, and while they did command “some” coercive force in the form of popular neighborhood committees (discussed in detail in Chapter 5), they did not publicly claim this power, but shared it instead with that of the military. Likewise, Egyptian revolutionaries in Tahrir and elsewhere did use violence in some instances, but primarily in order to defend themselves. The Egyptian revolution may also fall short of Goldstone’s formula in terms of the presence of elite defection. If we interpret elite defection narrowly as people working within the regime, then Egypt did not witness this. Others might argue that the military’s decision to distance itself from Mubarak was a major defection that weakened the regime and created its severe crisis. Also, Goldstone defines elite broadly to include many members of the upper class such as politicians, intellectuals and professionals, not just state officials and military leaders.³⁵ Thus, combining elements of both Tilly and Goldstone’s formulations, I would suggest that Egypt did, indeed, constitute a revolutionary situation that presented the following: 1) presence of an acute regime crisis, with some elite defection and also the regime’s inability or unwillingness to control the state or suppress the opposition; 2) formation of an opposition with strong coalitions that challenged state power; and 3) presence of

³⁵ Bourdieu’s notion of field of power is also useful here, and is broader than the state field, to use his terminology. But the purpose of this discussion is simply to try to synthesize a definition about revolutionary situation. And my larger goal in this dissertation is to investigate modes of actions in Tahrir and outside Tahrir in relation to one another.

mass mobilization that supported the revolutionary forces (the opposition).

As Goldstone (1998) and the authors of *Dynamics of Contention* (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001) famously argue, there are many overlaps between collective action, social movements, and revolutions. And whether we agree or not “Successful revolutions share some characteristics with social movements, rebellions, failed revolutions and cycles of protest”(Tilly 2001: 195; see also Goldstone 1998). This perspective is very useful for me as one of my goals with this dissertation is to make connections between the mobilization history that took place before the revolution and the revolution itself. In some sense, what I am doing here can be described as a “mode of action” approach to studying revolution that uses Tahrir as a central analytical lens, but also locates that lens in time and space. Empirically, I seek to study the Egyptian revolution through a focus on Tahrir’s sit-in, while situating it in the broader mobilization politics of Cairo and Egypt during the revolution. Theoretically, through a case study of the modes of action that took place in or around Tahrir, I also explore how much a *mode of action analysis* can tell us about a revolution.³⁶ In this dissertation, in studying the revolution as a process, I also deliberately argue against any rigid boundary between social movements that existed in Egypt before the revolution and the revolution itself. I will move now to the final section in this introduction: methods and methodology.

III. Methods and Methodology

This section is divided into three parts. The first describes my methods; the second, elaborates the rationale behind these methods; and the third, discusses my own positionality vis-à-vis this research.

³⁶ Or to use Bayat’s formulation (2013: 48) of revolution as a movement vs. revolution as a change, my dissertation asks this question: what can the Egyptian revolution as a movement tell us about the limited vision or protestors’ perspective about revolution as a change.

Description of Methods

This dissertation is based on two phases of ethnographic and historical research in Egypt. I conducted the first stage of research between February 4 and April 16, 2011. The second stage of my research took place between mid-July 2012 and ended after the first week of January 2013. In both two phases, I combined the following three methods: ethnography/participant observation, interviews, and documentary/historical research. I conducted a total of 103 interviews with 106 subjects.³⁷ I discuss each of these methods below, followed by a note regarding the differences between the first and second phases of research.

³⁷ There was one interview in which I interviewed three subjects, and two people whom I was able to interview twice—once in the first phase of research and another time in the second.

Ethnography:

During both phases of research, I participated in many events, including walking in rallies, gathering in Tahrir, talking to people, attending events such as the formation of new parties and new trade unions, and attending many press conferences related to the revolution. These activities were in various locations in Cairo, not only Tahrir. Ethnography was especially important in the first phase of my research, as I was in Tahrir every day from February 4, 2011, to February 11, which saw the ousting of Mubarak. My ethnographic work continued beyond Tahrir after that date, until I ended the first phase of research and left Egypt on April 16, 2011. During the time in Tahrir, my presence and participation there enabled me to talk to people in tents and behind the stages. I talked to artists, doctors, and journalists. I talked to seasoned activists and people who had never participated in a protest before but were drawn to see what was going on in Tahrir. I sometimes saw the aftermath of violent events. I myself witnessed police and pro-Mubarak thugs attacking the square, and I saw many injured people in Tahrir. I experienced the process of going in and out of checkpoints around and outside of Tahrir. Being in Cairo during that time, I was also able to participate in one of the popular committees at night as well (discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5). I participated in many unplanned conversations, as well as organized meetings. Some friends asked me to help with translations or editing or contributing to magazines distributed around Tahrir after ousting Mubarak. One of the magazines I contributed to was called “The Voice of the Revolution.” In the second phase, I also participated in many rallies and attended many events protesting against SCAF and against the elected president at the time, Mohamed Morsi, though these latter activities are less relevant to this research.

For the most part, I did not plan what I was going to do on any given day, but rather, I sought to adapt my research to the unfolding of events—events that were often profoundly overwhelming. Seeing a million people protesting and seeing military tanks in the streets of Cairo were experiences I had never had before and could hardly have planned around. Some days, I went directly to Tahrir; other days, I met friends first and we went there together. In some instances, I planned to participate in specific rallies when I heard in advance about their route, and if it was not too far from where I was staying. Other times, I simply found myself participating in a rally almost before I realized what was happening. On February 6, 2011, for example, I was visiting friends at an NGO that was helping to collect aid for the protestors in Tahrir. After the meeting, but while I was still downtown, I saw a rally of lawyers heading from the Egyptian Bar Association headquarters to Abdeen Square, which also houses the presidential palace. I spontaneously decided to join the rally, as many of my lawyer friends were also participating.

In these rapidly changing and often unpredictable circumstances, it was difficult to keep up with writing ethnographic notes every day. Another complicating factor was the security situation. During the time I was able to participate in events, from February 4 to February 11, efforts to intimidate and attack protestors was still intense. I made an effort to walk away from all events empty-handed and to keep my minimal notes at home.³⁸ I wrote only scattered notes when it was possible, but I knew after the ousting of Mubarak that I would need to do interviews as well in order to gather a more complete picture of Tahrir and the revolution.

Interviews:

³⁸ During this time, pro-government media targeted Tahrir and protestors in Tahrir, and labeled them as infiltrators and also emphasized that many foreigners were in Tahrir. Mubarak's thugs arrested many journalists, especially foreigners, especially in the first week before my arrival. I had to ensure that my wallet contained only an Egyptian ID and Egyptian money; I hid all my American IDs, such as my student ID or my driver's license, as well as any American money in a secured place in my parents' home.

I conducted 103 interviews with 106 subjects over the course of the two phases. I did not have a comprehensive plan regarding the number, selection, or content of interview given the fluidity of the situation.³⁹ My only main criteria were that: 1) I would recruit interviewees using snowball sampling, but also that 2) that I would try to include a diverse group of people in terms of gender, political experience, class. In the first phase, I did not interview anyone over 50, but in the second phase, I realized this mistake and made an explicit effort to include people who were 50 or above, as I needed some experienced informants to tell me more about history.⁴⁰ In the first phase, the interviews were semi-structured. I asked my informants questions about their participation in activism or protests both before and during the revolution, as well as questions about how they saw the demography of Tahrir and the protests, and questions about the revolution in general, among many other questions. Examples of some of the questions I asked are:

- Did you participate in any protests before the January 25, 2011 revolution? If so, which ones/where?
- Describe to me what you did generally in the days from January 25 to February 11, 2011?
- Most analysts and media circles have portrayed the revolution as mainly initiated and led by middle class Egyptian youth (particularly those who have smart phones and are savvy in social media). Do you think this portrayal is accurate? Why or why not?
- Did you participate in the sit-in in Tahrir Square from January 25 to Feb 11, 2011? (This section in the questions may be skipped if the subject did not participate, and she/he can answer only relevant questions)
- If yes, describe to me your participation during this time?

³⁹ I conducted all the interviews in the second phase by myself without assistance. But in the first phase, I conducted some interviews with assistance from others. Due to the fluidity of the situation and the tight schedule, for example, I sometimes interviewed one person, while one of my assistants interviewed another subject nearby. And in some cases, my assistants did the entire interview by themselves based on instructions and guidance from me.

⁴⁰ Because the first phase of research was done in a rush, dictated by the speed of the events themselves, I did not have time to obtain an IRB before leaving for Egypt. I told my informants about this issue and they simply did not care. I did, however, obtain IRB approval for my second phase of research (IRB HUM00053086).

- Describe the sit-in in terms of the organization of space?
- Describe the sit-in in terms of social life and daily/nightly activities, etc.?
- From your observations and experience in the sit-in, how was the diversity of opinions managed in Tahrir?⁴¹

In the case of participants in protests outside of Cairo, I asked them the same questions about the types of actions in which they were involved in their cities. And I asked them questions about why or why not they or their friends, if any, left their cities to join the protest in Tahrir.

Most of the interviews in the first phase took place in downtown in cafés or in the political offices of organizations. Several young activists and researchers helped me and were provided with an honorarium. Others volunteered to help without any honorarium. Given the concentration of people in downtown Cairo, and the assistance of many people, I was sometimes able to conduct 3–4 interviews in a row in one day. In this phase, all interviews were on a snowball basis, whereby I interviewed some people, and then they introduced me to others and so forth. I also asked friends to introduce me to people to interview or asked the activists and researchers who assisted me to introduce me to people they knew in Tahrir. Out of the 56 persons interviewed in the first phase, I knew about 7 personally from my previous activist life in Egypt before 2004, and the rest I did not know.

After the first round of interviews, as certain gaps began to emerge, I shifted away from snowball sampling and tried to target specific groups. For example, I made an effort to interview some of the founders of the blogging movement. I also made an effort to talk to people connected to the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook page, and I was fortunate enough to interview one of its two administrators. I sought out some of the founders of Kefayya, and the National Association for Change. I also made an effort to talk to key activists in Alexandria,

⁴¹ See Appendix 1 of the dissertation for a complete list of interview questions.

Suez, and Mahala—cities whose significance I discussed briefly above. The following table summarizes the demography of my informants in the two phases.

Table 1 Demographics of Interviewees

Phase 1 (February 4 – April 16, 2011), N = 56					
Gender	Class⁴²	Place	Age	Previous political experience	Participated in Tahrir?
22 women	16 WC	53 Cairo	33 (age 20–30)	40 had prior protest experience	48 yes
34 men	40 MC	2 Alexandria 1 Banha	16 (age 31–40) 5 (age 41–50) 2 (age 51–60) 0 (age 61–70)		16 had not protested before the revolution
Phase 2 (mid-July 2012 – early January 2013), N = 50					
23 women	10 WC	29 Cairo	11 (age 20–30)	32 had prior protest experience	33 yes
27 men	40 MC	4 Giza 6 Alexandria 6 Mahala 5 Suez	28 (age 31–40) 7 (age 41–50) 3 (age 51–60) 1 (age 61–70)		18 had not protested before the revolution

⁴² Self-identified class of interviewee; WC is working class, MC is middle class.

Documentary/Historical Research:⁴³

I conducted documentary and historical research during both phases of the research. This included examining both primary and secondary sources about the revolution, Tahrir Square, and the broader protest history of Egypt. Primary sources included leaflets and statements issued by various groups, such as foundational or key statements by Kefayya and the National Association for Change, as well as various leaflets distributed in Tahrir during the 18 days. I also consulted some of the diaries of activists from earlier periods who wrote about their political history before the revolution and also diaries published from 2011–2013 about the 2011 uprising. As for secondary sources, this included researching newspaper and other media coverage of the protests, with particular focus on the 18 days of the revolution, though I also looked at coverage of key protests before 2011 and after, where relevant. Specifically, I looked at important newspapers in Egypt, some of which are pro-government such as *Al-Ahram*, and some of which are independent such as mostly *El-Shorouk* Newspaper and *Al-Masry Al-Youm* newspaper. These three were the main focus of my research. In these papers, I searched for key words such as Tahrir and protests, class in the revolution, life in the square, rallies of the revolution and so forth. In addition to taking pictures in Tahrir and some protests and events, I also contacted artists and photographers who were known to have participated in previous protests, and some of them kindly talked to me and shared important pictures of previous protests.

⁴³ I am using here Robert Cooley Angell's differentiation between documentation and archival work, not only because this project is mostly concerned with a contemporary issue, but also given that the main difference between documentary work and archival work is that the first is based mainly on reading primary printed or online sources, while the latter is based mainly with old historical materials and records. See Angell, Robert Cooley, "What does History offer Sociology," notes for a seminar discussion (n.d.; ca. 1962), in Robert Cooley Angell papers, Bentley Historical Library (Ann Arbor), Box 2, folder "Outlines of Talks," cited in George Steinmetz, "Issues and Agendas The Relations between Sociology and History in the United States: The Current State of Affairs," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 20, no. 1/2 (2007).

Note on the two phases of research

It is important to provide some context for the two phases of research. Each phase had its own unique context, each of which had various advantages and limitations. The first phase was primarily exploratory, though also the most ethnographically rich, while the second phase was much more organized and, in some respects, more crucial. As noted above, the chaos and unpredictability of the first phase during the revolution made research both extremely memorable, but also stressful and erratic. The nature of this period also shaped my interviews. I was able to conduct 56 interviews, but many of these were conducted in a hurry and under what felt like conditions of extreme urgency. At the end of February 2011, I realized that the end of my trip was approaching and I had not yet conducted a single interview, as I had been so busy actually participating in events and attending various meetings. Consequently, when interviews finally began, they felt quite rushed. I realized that many of the interviews lacked depth and/or that there were many gaps. Since I did not do any purposive selection, I realized that most of my informants in this stage were youth, many of whom had only recently begun to engage with politics. I also realized that talking to people outside of Cairo was going to be important and I began to add this to my list of things to ensure for the return trip.

Similarly, while the ethnography was rich and the interviews were hectic, the archival work was also limited during my first phase of research. During my time in Tahrir itself, I was able to collect some original copies of the various newspapers and leaflets that were being distributed there, which was very crucial. But I was not able to do any rigorous archival work. The event was unfolding and also my sense of where the research was going was developing over time. In a word, my documentary work in this phase was not systemic enough. Priority was given instead to ethnography and witnessing and participating in events themselves.

I treated my second trip as my main research trip. I was more prepared, I obtained an IRB before leaving Ann Arbor, and the trip lasted for almost 6 months. After listening to most of my transcripts and looking at my notes, it was clear to me that on this trip, 1) I had to visit some important cities outside Cairo that were relevant during the revolution; 2) I needed to interview more experienced activists and bloggers, particularly those who participated in important mobilizing efforts before the revolution; and 3) I needed to look for people who played key organizing roles in Tahrir to help me develop a fuller picture of what was going on in the square. By mid-2012, I had also noted that some activists had begun to talk critically about Tahrir—a stark contrast to the generally reverent and utopian tone that inflected most discussions in 2011, so for the second phase of research I was more attuned to issues that would eventually become the focus of Chapter 5, the margins and silences of Tahrir. Because the trip was longer, and events were less intense (protests were still taking place against the new president and police brutality, but everything was still less intense than before), my interviews and archival research were much more organized and rigorous. I planned trips in advance to Suez, Mahala, and Alexandria, with the assistance of key organizers and some friends in Cairo. I was still conducting ethnography, but this research was less relevant to the focus of the dissertation. One might say that in the first phase, my ethnography was mostly first-hand ethnography, whereas in the second phase, it was mostly historical ethnography. I discuss this further in the following section.

Methodology/Rationale

During my interviews, one of my informants said the following: “You know, every inch in Tahrir has a story and it is impossible for you to know or claim to be able to know all these stories” (Interview, November 2, 2012). This comment was in one of the earliest interviews in

the second round of research in 2012. The same informant told me that, “to claim that you know enough about Tahrir, you need the work of hundreds and hundreds of researchers who go around and collect stories of people who were there. Of course, this should be combined with many first-hand testimonies written by participants themselves.”⁴⁴ I reflect on these comments often, as they remind of two important things. The first is that, despite my best efforts as an ethnographer, I simply cannot do justice to all the stories of Tahrir. I thought about this quote while doing my research in Egypt, as well as when I began organizing and analyzing the data back in the United States. I remembered, too, many other quotes from informants and participants in the revolution. Some told me stories about where they slept at night in Tahrir, or where they lost loved ones. Some told me about fighting with the security forces, while others recalled the first moment they entered Tahrir after it was “liberated” by protestors. Some of these stories are discussed in the dissertation, but others are not. And while some stories were related to the sit-in itself and the actions related to it, many other stories were connected to past actions that happened in the square or to protestors themselves. This was the second lesson for me: my ethnography had to be historical, which I will explain in a second. But in general these comments forced me to acknowledge that my job in this research is only to collect as much data as possible, then to construct one large story about Tahrir and the revolution. My story is only one among other stories.

Below, I discuss how this research was driven by three methodological approaches. The primary of which is historical ethnography. And the second one is historical sociology, and the

⁴⁴ The informant was an attorney and not a researcher, but it was interesting to me that he talked about research in this way.

third is auto-ethnography. As part of the discussion I will show how mixing ethnography, documentary work and interviews was necessary in this research.⁴⁵

Historical ethnography

As any typical cultural and social anthropologist would say, a good ethnography should include some historical background. But historical ethnography requires more than briefly providing some background, it requires that we take seriously the meaning and import of history and temporality for ethnographic work (Balandier 1974; Comaroff 1984; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; de Dampierre 1957; Goodson and Ball 1984; Kirch and Sahlins 1994; Michelet [1831] 2013; Middleton 2003; Zeitlyn 2012).⁴⁶ For example, in *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, Jean and John Comaroff write against “traditional anthropology” that relies on and reinforces the colonial dichotomies and models of knowledge that exist about Africa. They argue that the binary itself between anthropology and history is superficial and critique not only rigid disciplinarity, but also casual notions that the two fields should “draw on” one another.

They state:

To assert that anthropology should be “more” historical, or history “more” anthropologist, may be well-intentioned, but the assertion remains vacuous without further theoretical specification. [in our view] there ought to be no “relationship” between history and anthropology, since there should be no division to begin with. A theory of society which is not also a theory of history, or vice versa, is hardly a theory at all. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 13)

⁴⁵ In this research, I used three kinds of ethnographic approaches, namely 1) first-hand ethnography as participant observer, 2) historical ethnography, and 3) auto-ethnography.

⁴⁶ As indicated by this list of works cited, historical ethnography has a long tradition, arguably dating back to the works of Eric de Dampierre and then Georges Balandier in France or even earlier by the work of Michelet on “resurrectionist history.” I cite Jean and John Comaroff’s work as an example only. Tracing the genealogy and the history of the practice of historical ethnography goes beyond this dissertation.

Of course, similar discussions have gone on in sociology, history, and other disciplines, and the idea of historical ethnography is not strange to historical sociologists.⁴⁷ Charles Tilly (2007) suggests “retrospective ethnography” as one of the key forms of historical sociology, describing it as work that involves “empathetic reconstruction of alien times and people and uses current understandings of social processes to show how those instances fit into a known range of variations” (2007: 327). Simply put, retrospective ethnography means to “reconstruct actors’ dispositions from the historical record” (Tilly 2007: 326).

Without a single consensus definition of historical ethnography, and at the risk of simplification, my interpretation of historical ethnography is to study people and records simultaneously and in relation to each other. For me, historical ethnography means doing rigorous societal contextualization of records and archives, and also situating people, their actions, and understandings “thickly” within the records of their period. In terms of methodology, this means either combining ethnographic methods with archival work or combining both with other relevant historiographical materials such as oral history and art.

Historical ethnography was crucial for this research because my aim was to study the Tahrir sit-in as the culmination of a long history of protest in Cairo and in Tahrir. A rigorous historical contextualization of why protestors wanted to form a sit-in in Tahrir in the first place required that I study the sit-in in the context of previous relevant repertoires in Egypt, as well as in the context of the battle for and about political space between the government and opposition groups in the decade prior to the revolution. Many of the stories about previous sit-ins in Cairo

⁴⁷ See, for example, Philip Abrams’ argument (1988) that there should be no binary between sociology and history at all; Sewell’s discussion that historians and sociologists have much to learn from each other (Sewell 2005: 1-21); George Steinmetz’s contention (2005) that any division between historical sociology and history is “disastrous.” Finally, let us recall that C. Wright Mills suggested that all sociological analyses should be situated in their historical circumstances in his famous piece, *The Sociological Imagination* ([1959] 2000).

and in Tahrir do not exist in documents, but are scattered instead in people's diaries and in journalistic accounts. When I conducted my interviews in 2012, most of my questions were about informants' memories and testimonies about the revolution in 2011. Similarly, accounts of the various political coalitions prior to 2011 are not properly documented in Egypt due to the authoritarian conditions under Mubarak rule, where it was difficult to have any proper documentation for security reasons. Interviews about the past were crucial to fill in this history for me. Any proper understanding of the coalitions that emerged in Tahrir would be inadequate if not situated in the history of political coalitions in Egypt. In sum, using a historical ethnographic approach meant that I needed to combine ethnographic work, documentary/historical work, and interviews as complementing one another. In many ways, all of these different methods combine to constitute what we might call a *historical sociology of the Egyptian state*, and specifically the relationship between that state/regime and the various repertoires developed in relation to it.⁴⁸

Auto-ethnography:

There were many instances in this research when I found it necessary to do auto-ethnography. Auto-ethnography is a specific methodological approach in anthropology whereby the researcher systematically analyzes her or his experience or biography and situates it in the larger cultural and political context in order to understand the latter (Bochner and Ellis 2006; Chang 2008; Denzin 2006; Ellis and Bochner 2000; Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011; Hayano 1979; Reed-Danahay 1997). As some proponents of auto-ethnography suggest, the method is a combination of autobiography and ethnography, and it is both a process and a product (Ellis,

⁴⁸ Studies of the state are particularly popular among historical sociologists; see, for example, Abrams (1988); Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol (1985). Here, my focus is more on the specifically authoritarian nature of Mubarak's regime and the implications of this for the forms of protest that regime engendered, but I hope to further flesh out a comprehensive historical sociology of the Egyptian state in the book manuscript.

Adams, and Bochner 2011). Unlike traditional positivist anthropology, auto-ethnography is based on the assumption that the subject of the researcher is strongly present and should be acknowledged and examined. Not only that, but if an analysis of the researcher's experience is relevant to the research, why not study it as well. In simple terms, in auto-ethnography, researchers are self-reflexive and constantly study themselves in addition to their subject matter, especially when they are part of the context they are studying. And this is not about the researcher's emotions, but rather about locating their experience and biography within the relevant social and cultural context.

Because I was fortunate enough to be present for and participate in many of the crucial events of the revolution, I decided that it would be enrich the research to draw on my own insights and experience of those events. For example, given my prior experiences in the field as a pro-democracy activist and human rights attorney in Egypt, it was impossible for this personal history not to shape my own experience and observations about how anti-riot police in Tahrir developed strategies against protestors, as well as how the latter developed their own strategies in response. Also, before conducting this research, and in the period from 2000 to 2004, I was working in a human rights NGO which was hosting many anti-war and pro-democracy groups and coalitions, for whom it was difficult to meet elsewhere. My own experience about the place and these meetings were crucial part of the story of place and space and coalitions work under Mubarak. I was fortunate to be in these important places and experience these important experiences. I thought it would be a big fault to simply suppress these insights.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ I acknowledge that auto-ethnography may be a less accepted method for traditional anthropologists and sociologists who do qualitative research. Some of the critiques of it include that it simply involves studying the self, not communities or societies. Others contend that it blurs the line between social science and humanities. I am aware of these critiques. My use of auto-ethnography in this research was limited, but I felt that the nature of this research and my location within it required some explicit thought and

Positionality

Scholarship, especially in sociology, anthropology and feminist studies, has addressed the significance of the positionality of the researcher while doing research. The overarching assumption within this body of literature is that there is *no such thing as objectivity* and every researcher approaches their research with their own set of biases, experiences, and identities. This scholarship has thoroughly explored how the social position of the researcher in regards to race, class, gender, sexuality, and/or nation shapes the kinds of questions the researcher asks and the knowledge the researcher produces. While acknowledging that every researcher comes with a “position,” one strand within these methodological discussions explores the differences between researchers who are “outsider” vs. “insiders” in relation to the communities they study (Abu-Lughod 2006; England 1994; Huisman 2008; Jacobs-Huey 2002; Sultana 2007). Such analyses illustrate that there is no simple binary between “the outsider” and “the insider” and that insiders are also, to some extent, outsiders, while outsiders often become insiders in one way or another. This is why many scholars have critiqued the concept of the “native researcher,,” as it reduces people conducting research in their own communities to a one-to-one relationship with their research subjects. Anthropologist Kath Weston (2000: 142) replaces the “insider-outsider” binary or the idea of native vs. non-native researcher with the idea of the “hybrid researcher,” which I think more accurately captures the multiple kinds of relationships and power relationships between any researcher and their research subjects.

The main conclusion from these discussions suggests that researchers should emphasize their positionality and state clearly their relation to the study she or he is conducting, and the implications of this for the research. Feminist scholars have especially called for self-reflexivity

theorization. The advantages of drawing on my own experiences, I argue, outweigh the benefit of simply attempting to deny or ignore them.

about this rather than claiming a false objectivity. Reflexivity and admitting that all knowledge is situated will make the research findings stronger rather than simply claiming a surface objectivity, which does not exist. Many critical qualitative sociologists and anthropologists alike emphasized how self-reflexivity and positionality are a must, especially in contexts where questions of power are relevant to the research (Bourdieu 2003; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Salzman 2002; Wacquant 2004). These authors do not reject objectivity, but they argue against mendacious objectivity, and they argue for a need to objectivize the researcher's own position.⁵⁰

It is useful here to clarify how my positionality shaped this research since, like all researchers, my positionality indeed shaped every stage of my research and writing. I will highlight only three features of my positionality in relation to this research. First, my positionality was multi-layered. Specifically, I identify at least five interwoven layers that shaped my positionality: 1) as an outsider coming from the US (at the time of the research, I had recently been naturalized as a US citizen); 2) as an insider returning to a familiar context (I grew up and lived in Egypt until 2004 and still maintain my Egyptian citizenship); 3) as a scholar coming to conduct research in pursuit of a degree at a US institution; 4) as a former human rights and leftist pro-democracy activist in Egypt who still maintains connections with activists and activist networks there; and 5) as simultaneously a participant in and an observer of the revolution.

⁵⁰ In an important piece, Bourdieu (2003) differentiates between three kinds of reflexivities. The first is scientific reflexivity, where the researcher takes into account her or his social experience and applies sociological critique to her or his reflexivity (2003: 288). The second is narcissistic reflexivity, which . This refers to the reflexivity of postmodern anthropology, where some researchers—as a reaction to positivism—have become interested in simple “verging on exhibitionism” (2003: 281). And finally, egological reflexivity, which refers to a case where the “social scientist increases scientificity and uses objectivist tools of social science for the sake of the private person of the researcher and the field of research and the members of this field while objectifying and increase despositions of the subjects she or he studies” (2003: 281).

These aspects of my positionality shaped my research, but they also shifted over time, with different dimensions becoming more or less relevant in different instances and as circumstances changed. Sometimes aspects of my positionality was a burden, other times, aspects of it were very helpful. Specifically, my positionality vis-à-vis other activists in Egypt gave me great access to many “insider” points of view. But at the same time, these connections made my experience of being there and writing about it later emotionally intense. It was difficult to feign any level of detachment from either the events themselves or my informants. As I write this, for example, two of my informants are serving jail sentences. Both are icons of the revolutionary youth movement and are people I know personally and whose families and close communities or loved ones I have known for over a decade.⁵¹

In the first round of research, I felt my positionality was a burden preventing me from being fully engaged with the events. Only later did I realize that my anxiety and feeling of being overwhelmed was shared by many of the people I interviewed, as well as other friends and activists due to the enormous intensity of the event. I was not alone in this. I was perhaps particularly prone to anxiety because I was coming from the US. At the time, the regime was spreading rumors about foreign spies and/or agents paying the protesters to destabilize the nation. Of course, I was concerned that people might not fully trust me because I am now a US citizen and no longer live in Egypt.⁵²

As noted above, my positionality and being known to many activists over the years assisted me in accessing offices and political organizations meetings easily. Of course, many of

⁵¹ Indeed, at different stages of this writing, several of my informants have been in jail.

⁵² Not many people in the activist scene even knew that I had become a naturalized US citizen, but I still worried given the context of distrust regarding foreigners, and my own internal sense of responsibility and positionality. I should note that my immigration and naturalization processes were not easy either, not least because they took place after September 11, 2001. I cannot say with certainty that my history as an activist in Egypt caused the various delays and harassments in these processes, but I do know for certain that my research has been always been shaped by my positionality and political choices.

these offices were also opened to journalists, but I was given access as a friend or as one of the group. It was also easy for me to find young researchers and activists to assist me in conducting interviews or recruiting people for interviews. At the same time, however, my positionality also became a problem. Precisely because I knew many activists and leading bloggers personally, I was reluctant to impose on their time or seem like I was seeking to exploit our relationship. I understood on a very deep level how intense and tragic some of the events were, and I could not bear to disrespect anyone enduring these horrors by asking them to take time away from their struggle in order to sit down with me for an interview. Also, some of them were being interviewed all the time, especially by western researchers, and there was already a growing discourse among Egyptian revolutionaries that was critical of the ways western researchers were entering and exiting Egypt simply to collect people's stories, only to disappear from the scene and publish their work elsewhere.⁵³ I was deeply conscious of this dynamic and sometimes found it difficult to request interviews for fear of being perceived as a selfish researcher.

On my second trip, I was more relaxed about what I had early seen as the burden of positionality. The trip was longer and I was more prepared. I also had time to reflect on the emotional intensity of the first round and realized it was not unique to me and my research project. After a few months into conducting archival work, I started to schedule interviews. Because I have many contacts, and I was more specific in doing more targeted interviews, things were a bit easier. But this time there was the added complication of doing research in outside Cairo in Suez, Mahala, and Alexandria. But a friend of mine, who worked previously as a reporter for Al-Jazeera during the revolution gave me many contacts in one of the cities where she was the main correspondent. A young blogger also shared with me his entire address book.

⁵³ Sociologist Mona Abaza (2011) wrote about this phenomenon and described it as “academic tourists sight-seeing the Arab Spring”; see also El-Mahdi (2011).

Instances in which a leading activist would call other people for me to arrange an interview was not uncommon; this happened at least three or four times. My whole trips in the three cities outside Cairo occurred with help of activists. In this period, positionality was not a burden at all, but allowed for easy accessibility. It is this positionality that enabled me to meet and interview some key people, such as the founders of the Youth Coalition of the Revolution (YCR), one of the administrators of “We are All Khaled Said” Facebook Page, some of the founders of Kefayya and the National Association for Change, some of the workers who were crucial organizers in the Mahala Strikes in 2007 and the attempt of 2008, and some of the founders of the blogging movements in 2005 and beyond.

The coding of information and data analysis and writing have also been very difficult given the massive changes that have taken place since 2011 in Egypt and which continue to twist, turn, and unfold unpredictably today. My sense of attachment to some of the subjects targeted after the revolution led me to feel a constant sense of responsibility to keep the research up to date in light of these changes and to avoid leaving out new crises and attacks on the activists. Yet, because the main purpose of the research was for my dissertation, I was forced to detach myself from this role of a witness documenting every development, and to focus instead on writing a dissertation that begins and ends within a specific historical time period.

The rest of this dissertation is divided into four substantive chapters followed by a conclusion. In Chapter 2, I examine the history and significance of Tahrir Square in Egypt and situate this in the history of political protest, as well as the larger political public space under Mubarak’s authoritarianism. In Chapter 3, I contextualize the Tahrir sit-in in relation to the other repertoires of protest taking place in Cairo, and examine how survival and mobilization were

effected through an innovative blend of organization and spontaneity. In Chapter 4, I address the questions of how and why the revolution became focused on a reformist agenda, and how and why Tahrir, in particular, became the main political voice of the revolution. And in Chapter 5, I turn to the other side of the picture and investigate how the unity and centrality of Tahrir delimited and led to the marginalization of other issues, voices, and revolutionary possibilities. Finally, in the conclusion, I summarize my arguments, discuss some of the events that have followed since 2011, and reflect on the difficulty of writing about a phenomenon, the contours and implications of which people are still living and dying to define.

CHAPTER 2

Historicizing Tahrir: Protest and Political Public Space before the Revolution

Introduction

In 2011, while conducting fieldwork in Egypt during the events known as the Egyptian Revolution, I interviewed numerous participants and asked them all the same question: why did you go to Tahrir Square? Almost all of them explained that they already thought of Tahrir as a place where important protests were staged, so when the protests began in January 2011, they just knew to head there. In short, Tahrir was simply understood as where the revolution would take place, where the protestors knew the action would be. Their answers speak to the existence of something that precedes the mobilization to a revolution, something that challenges dominant frameworks in social movement scholarship that underplay the role and significance of space and time. In this chapter, I discuss the historical significance of Tahrir as a space for mobilization and protest prior to the 2011 revolution, noting how and why Tahrir held a special attraction for protesters, and how images and meanings of the square were re-appropriated by protesters during the revolution. But in order to properly understand the history of Tahrir Square and its significance to the revolution, it is important to situate it within the broader context of political public space under the authoritarian state. We need first to understand how the boundaries and practices constituting political public space came to be contested in Egypt.

My goals in this chapter are, thus, twofold. First, I want to highlight the significance of what I describe as public political space for understanding contentions in Egypt, especially under the authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak. As I will argue, public political space was a crucial site of struggle between the undemocratic regime and the opposition. While the opposition aimed to expand and, when necessary, reconstitute this space through innovative new practices, the

regime sought constantly to control and limit this space. Understanding this struggle, especially in the last decade before the revolution, will help us to understand the political tensions at play leading up to the Egyptian revolution. Then, in the second part of the chapter, I will try to answer the question I posed in interviews: why did protestors target Tahrir Square specifically? And in what ways did the history of political protest in Tahrir shape mobilization and protest activities there? I argue that we not only need to widen our understanding of the role of space in mobilization politics, but we also need to give greater attention to spaces' historical significance. The mobilization for the Egyptian revolution must be connected to a history of protests in and around Tahrir that stretches back almost a hundred years, for my research reveals that this historical spatial legacy was certainly present in the memories of many protestors in 2011. This collectively remembered legacy played a key role in the construction of Tahrir Square as the main site for the revolution.

I. Authoritarianism, Protest, and Political Public Space in Egypt

The first half of this chapter is divided into four main sections. In the first, I define what I mean by “political public space,” contrasting it with other concepts of public space, and emphasizing the importance of locating it with a specific socio-historical context. In the second section, I begin to fill in this background context by reviewing the consolidation of Mubarak’s regime from the 1990s onwards, with particular attention to the changing capacity, targets, and tactics of Mubarak’s repressive apparatus. Third, I examine the specific rise of “street” politics in Egypt and the public’s growing disillusionment with formal politics. And finally, I chart the emergence of social media in Egypt and review the multi-layered ways in which such media have been employed to both expand and navigate political public space in recent years.

What is Political Public Space?

The concept of space in general has garnered increased attention in the social sciences and humanities in the last few decades (Castells 1985, 1999; Foucault 1986; Harvey 1990, 1999; Lefebvre 1991). At the end of the day, people and institutions exist and interact in spaces and places with both physical and symbolic dimensions. In addition to the sociology of space in general, a growing body of scholarship has emerged that specifically focuses on space in relation to contention. Prominent geographers in a special issue of the journal *Mobilization*, for example, focused on space in contentious politics and noted: “Research on social movements and contentious politics has generally downplayed the spatial constitution and context of its central concepts such as identity, grievances, political opportunities, and resources. As such, this body of scholarship remains by and large aspatial” (Martin and Miller 2003, 143). As the editors of the special issue emphasized, we ought to think of space not simply as “a container of activism, but also constitutive of it” (Martin and Miller 2003, 144). Notably, William Sewell Jr. and Charles Tilly have both tried to address the significance of space in contentious politics. Sewell proposes “to provide a rudimentary theoretical vocabulary for thinking about space in contentious politics and to begin putting such a vocabulary to work” (2001, 52), while Tilly argues that space interacts with contentions in different ways, including, for example, “the geography of policing, safe spaces, spatial claim making, and control of places as stakes of contention” (2000, 135).

Public spaces and spheres have attracted particular attention in the social sciences and humanities for various reasons, including their status as ostensibly communal, but also contestable spaces, and the political potentials and practices that they are theorized to foster. Roads, parks, beaches, squares, libraries, markets, and streets—all are considered public spaces, but have all members of the public always had equal access to and status within such spaces?

Such questions make public spaces fertile sites for sociological analysis. Jürgen Habermas famously explored the implications of political public space in his classic work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), which outlined the emergence of a (largely white, male, bourgeois) public sphere in 18th- and early 19th-century Europe. As subsequent scholars have noted, however, Habermas' focus on the autonomy of such a sphere from the state made him less attentive to the various forms of exclusion that characterized the public sphere.⁵⁴ Pierre Bourdieu's theorization of overlapping and internally dynamic *fields* can be seen as similarly engaged with questions of social space (1985, 1989). In Bourdieu's work, individuals navigate and compete with others, armed with the volume and forms of capitals they hold in semi-autonomous fields (e.g., social, cultural, political, economic); social space is the larger social structure that contains all of these fields is called social space. Bourdieu's conceptualization of space, then, is much broader than what I mean to analyze here.

In this chapter, I use a concept of “political public space” that is distinct from a general concept of public space. The main reason for this is that despite the great advances in scholarship that deals with the idea of public space in social sciences and the challenges of the concept, as mentioned above, most analyses have been Eurocentric, making claims to universality that do not stand up to scrutiny. The concept I use here emphasizes public space as a site struggle between the powerful elite and powerless populations, and is specific to the complexities of navigating politics under authoritarianism. The second reason I use the term “political public space” is that I am not conferring in public about politics in general (as per the Habermasian

⁵⁴ See, for example, Nancy Fraser (1990), who suggests that marginalized groups were not included in Habermas' analysis and that the idea of “common concern” is problematic as it is primarily defined by the bourgeoisie class. She further suggests that we need to think of subaltern publics and/or counterpublic sphere(s) (Fraser 1990).

usage); rather, I am specifically highlighting the public expression of political dissent and opposition to the government.⁵⁵ As the rest of the chapter will demonstrate, Mubarak sought to strictly control, if not entirely eliminate such expression in Egyptian public space. Scholars who study Egypt have rightly noted that before the revolution, the mere presence of opposition groups, and perhaps any strong political voice in public space is only to be permitted by the state (Ismail 2012; Jerzak 2013; Winegar 2012). Yet opposition *was* expressed and the term “political public space” is meant to capture the formal and informal ways in which this was done.

I define political public space, then, as the specific domain in public space where citizens can practice their opposition to the government. The space does not so much operate in parallel with or opposition to the more narrow realm of formal politics; rather, it seeks actively to expand and challenge the limitations of formal politics. It may include protests in public squares, but it

⁵⁵ To be fair, Habermas was writing about a context without parliamentary politics, which only developed later. He was theorizing an entire model of rational communication, something he sees as the basis for deliberative democracy. European regimes at the time of his writing could have been seen as authoritarian, or at least there were no clear bounds to authorities. In some sense, the rise of the bourgeois public sphere has some similarities with what I am discussing here, when activists take politics to the streets and also when they discuss and or resist the limitation of formal politics in the public spaces.

I am not using the Habermasian perspective for two reasons. I am not very familiar with the period that he is talking about. And it seems to me that the context I am discussing here is different. This is mainly because the idea of public space does exist today, and yet, activists yearn for democracy and do not find democracy in these spaces. Also, it seems to me that in the Egyptian case, activists are not only taking politics to streets, but also fighting for this with their bodies and protesting tyranny in the public space. This is something that I am not sure it happened in the context that Habermas is talking about.

Also, the concept of political public space I am advocating here overlaps with what Asef Bayat (1997, 2010) describes as “spatialities of discontent.” Bayat, one of the few sociologists who has examined the connections between space and social movements, has written about urban movements and revolutions in Egypt and Iran. He highlights the need in authoritarian contexts to look for “spatialities of discontent” or “[h]ow particular spatial forms shape, galvanize, and accommodate insurgent sentiments and solidarities” (2010, 162). Bayat does attend to the spatial history of contentions, but the strength of his analysis lies in showing how actual physical space shapes specific moments of mobilization. I thus see my work as contributing to his by providing a more historical understanding of how such spatialities of discontent emerge over time, sometimes becoming—as in the case of Tahrir Square—spatialities of revolution, as I will show in the second part of this chapter.

may also include public debates about the “democratic” character of elections (for it is important to remember that elections sometimes occur under authoritarianism too). According to this definition, the parameters of this space are admittedly amorphous, but we can begin to trace their contours by exploring questions such as: Where and how are citizens permitted to express dissent? In what spaces can they protest or even just talk politics and carry banners freely without being harassed by police? And how the rules about practicing politics, especially oppositional politics, are being made? Also, in what ways the openness and the usage of public space reflect the struggle between a given regime and the population over public space?

A clarifying example is useful here to make a difference between public spaces in general and political public space. Coffee houses have been always places for public discussions in the Arab and the Muslim world. If we focus on the mere fact that people gather here to converse and express opinions, then such spaces contribute to a Habermasian notion of a public sphere/space. But when we look more specifically at how these coffee houses have become sites for people to discuss political views and ideas otherwise silenced in Egyptian politics, and to host meetings of activists and political dissidents, then we are talking about political public space.⁵⁶ In the following section, I review the conditions of Mubarek’s regime that provide the necessary backdrop to this form of space—both how Mubarak sought to limit or disallow such space, but also how, ironically, his regime spurred its expansion and forms of innovation within it.

⁵⁶ I am not the first to use the term political public space. Other scholars have recently used it in various ways. Avritzer (2009), for example, has used the concept in the context of post-authoritarian regimes in Latin America; see also Parkinson (2013) and Barnett (2013). Avritzer’s work is especially relevant to my analysis here; he writes that in Latin American “social movements occupied the public space at a moment when there were serious restrictions on the free organization of political parties in Brazil and Argentina and on the forms of political competition in Mexico” (2009, 11). Avritzer, however, defines political space in more egalitarian terms than I, as a space that is open to larger segments of society, in comparison to the political society, which is open mainly for elites (2009,12). In contrast, I use the term to focus on voices of dissent in the public space.

Political Public Space under Mubarak's Authoritarianism

Protest and mobilization under authoritarianism are difficult. Analyses in social movement studies that deal with this subject have focused mostly on the idea of political opportunities and regime threats (Schock 1999; Suh 2001). Despite the usefulness of the political opportunity and regime threat frameworks, their focus tends toward formal politics, rather than how such dynamics play out on the ground. Here, I argue that one of the most useful ways to examine how social movements both maneuver and are challenged under authoritarianism is to examine their operation in public space specifically. In the sections that follow, I historicize how social movements—specifically, pro-democracy movements—negotiated political public space in Egypt in the decades leading up to the revolution. First, however, it is necessary to understand the context of Mubarak's authoritarianism—specifically, the lessons learned by the regime, its neoliberal economic agenda and its need for an increasingly repressive state apparatus, and how the tactics and targets of this apparatus shifted over time.

The Egyptian state under Mubarak has been described variously as a failed state, a crony capitalist state, and/or a police state (Amar 2013b; Brumberg and Sallam 2012; Ismail 2011, 2012; Jerzak 2013; Lazard and Diwan 2012; Lesch 2011; Teitelbaum 2012). Arguably, each of these descriptions focuses on only one element of a broader picture, and the labels are by no means mutually exclusive.⁵⁷ The presence of an extensive state repressive apparatus, however, is an element common to all analyses. But perhaps the more important question is why the Mubarak state requires such an apparatus. Egyptian analysts have offered various explanations; I review two of the most compelling here. The first is that the inflation of the repressive apparatus

⁵⁷ For the purposes of conciseness, I use the term “police state” in what follows to emphasize the repressive capacities of the Mubarak regime, while acknowledging that some umbrella term that captures the various dimensions of the state would be ideal.

in Egypt is an outcome of Mubarak's consolidation of power/dictatorship. According to Bassma Abdel-Aziz (2012), a writer and physician who has written about torture in Egypt, the political regime has lacked accountability for the last decade thanks to the fragile state of Egypt's democracy. On the ground, police officers who have been practicing torture for decades have not been questioned or prosecuted. Abdel Aziz calls this (and her book) "the temptation of absolute power." The other explanation comes from late Egyptian political economist, Samer Soliman (2011), who attributes the rise of the police state in Egypt to a deep crisis in the state's economy that, in turn, has triggered a crisis of legitimacy for the regime. According to Soliman, the Egyptian state reached a point where it was no longer able to operate without increasing taxation and, hence, the impoverishment of the majority of the population—policies that could not be enacted with expanding and intensifying its coercive machinery.

Such explanations remain relatively abstract, however, without a more concrete understanding of recent events in Egypt, specifically, how the Mubarak regime has responded to political and economic conflicts. Here, I identify three defining moments that solidified the police state in Egypt from the mid-1990s onwards. The first of these moments is the battle between the state and militant Islamists from 1990 until 1997. Fuelled by their belief that the state was not Islamic enough, militant Islamists launched a new campaign of attacks that aimed to destabilize the "infidel" state and punish it for not complying to what the militants saw as "true" Islam. Tourists, state officials, and Egyptian Christians were targeted. In response, the Egyptian state launched its own war on terror. The entire state apparatus, as well as even opposition groups and intellectuals were united in their opposition to terror, but the central figure in this battle was the state security apparatus. Resources and powers both legal and extra-legal were granted to the police. Special units were made and devoted to combating terror. Arbitrary

detention, killing, and torture became pervasive and even normalized. This moment had two important outcomes in relation to the state and the police. The first was the strengthening of the repressive apparatus. Notably, Habib Al-Adly started his career as Minister of the Interior in 1997; the ministry's primary objective was combating terror. Framed as such, its actions were elevated beyond critique, except for some pesky voices in the emerging human rights movement who criticized torture, military trials for civilians, and arbitrary detentions.⁵⁸ The second outcome was that the state reached the conclusion that a security-based solution works. Some immediate successes led to the premature assessment that expanded state repression was effective in controlling militants, an assessment that no one in the state seemed to question. All evidence to the contrary that has accumulated since then notwithstanding, this remains the fundamental logic behind repressive state security as the solution to all problems to this day.

The second moment occurred around the same time, in conjunction with Egypt's economic structural adjustment programs. Such programs officially began in 1991, but were applied gradually, with their tempo increasing steadily from around 1997 onwards. It bears emphasizing here that the police apparatus in Egypt cannot be separated or seen as operating independently of the interests of the privileged elite. A significant portion of high-ranking police officers come from the middle class and many of them joined the police to maintain the interests of this class; some actually entered the police academy through corruption and bribery (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005; Lindsay 2011b; Nice 2006).⁵⁹ Of course, there

⁵⁸ In a book I published in Arabic, titled "Torture in Egypt is a Judicial Reality" (2000), I analyzed 1124 civil compensation lawsuits for torture victims covering the years 1981 to 1999. I found that out of the 1124 cases, 1117 occurred during arbitrary detention under emergency law. It was during this period that political torture became *de rigeur* in Egypt, leading several national and international human rights groups to conclude that torture in Egypt was now systematic.

⁵⁹ The idea that to enter the police academy in Egypt you have to pay a bribe to some officials has been known, especially under Mubarak. In 2012, the Ministry of Interior officials implicitly admitted that the practice of offering bribe does exist, and urged the public "not to try to pay a bribe" before admission.

is nothing new about the police becoming an apparatus for the privileged, but with the escalation of structural adjustment programs, crushing the protests of peasants and workers who resisted the harsh laws and new so-called economic reform laws became a major task of the police. Peasants resisting the application of land reforms were arrested, beaten, tortured, and, in some cases, even killed by police. Even when peasants secured court decisions to delay the application of land evacuations, police ignored the decisions and evacuated the land by force. In 1997, when peasants/tenants were forced to leave land by force, about 100 were killed by the police, more than 1000 were injured, and the police also arrested about 1400 farmers. All of the arrested farmers were subjected to investigations before state Security Prosecutions or State Security Court. These bodies only apply Emergency Law (Saber 2006). In later years, as the application of neo-liberal policies escalated, many urban areas witnessed restructuring in which poor neighborhoods were razed in order to build new projects or roads, with the most famous being the ring road around Cairo. Many of the people who lived in these areas received no compensation and when they resisted, they were beaten and arrested by police. Human rights groups and experts studying torture in Egypt noticed the emergence of new categories of torture, most notably what may be described as “complementary torture”—instances in which powerless individuals are tortured at the request of or as a favor for a powerful, influential person, usually to force the former to sign certain papers or give up some rights.⁶⁰

The third moment began in 2005 with the formation of the Egyptian pro-democracy group Kefayya (Enough), which soon sparked many similar groups opposing Mubarak’s extension of rule and the apparent plans for his son to succeed him. It was around this time that

Those officials announced that the practice is no longer acceptable “presumably.” See the relevant report in Al-Masry Alyoum Newspaper (Hussein 2012).

⁶⁰ See examples of “complementary torture” in *Torture in Egypt*, a blog about torture practices (Said). Also see the report by El Nadim Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence in Egypt, “In Mansoura Station Sexual Assault Is Complementary,” <https://alnadeem.org/ar/node/8> (last accessed July 23, 2014).

the police state truly solidified in Egypt and became practically synonymous with the protection of Mubarak's family and interests. As protests challenging Mubarak grew, the security apparatus kept pace and suppressed resistance whenever and wherever it showed itself. As this back and forth struggle between police and protestors continued, both sides learned important lessons and developed strategies for dealing with each other. From the regime's side, new tactics included using plainclothes security to infiltrate protestors and using organized sexual harassment and assault to disperse female protestors in particular.⁶¹

These three moments were crucial in creating a context in which Egypt's repressive apparatus became the dominant force in Egyptian politics. In addition to expanding their powers greatly, the police also become less accountable. The first moment witnessed the rise of the idea that policing is the solution to most problems. The second moment saw the crystallization of the idea that only through harsh policing could the state deal with marginalized groups and populations. And the third moment saw policing reach its ultimate, corrupt logic, whereby the

⁶¹ While many reports have been documenting the role of plainclothes security in Egypt in the last decade, there is no proper historicization of the rise of this issue. My claim that the first appearance of this in the decade before the revolution was in 2000, with the rise of protest in streets. This is based on my field notes and participation in some of the protests in 2000. The first patterned sexual violence against female protestors was in 2005. This is documented by many human rights and feminist organizations in Egypt as well as international human rights groups.

It is useful to note that the plainclothes police are actually either from the security state intelligence or informants and thugs hired by the police, or even soldiers in the State Central Security (Anti-Riot Police), but were instructed to wear civilian clothes and spread among protestors, before attacking them or arresting them or to help in dispersing protest by force later. See Baheyya Blog for discussion of the use of plainclothes police in 2005 ("Saturday, July 30, 2005" 2005). And see statement by Joe Stork of the Human Rights Watch (Stork 2005). Even though the phenomena is older, as I suggest and it goes back to 2000, I think that it caught the attention of analysts only in 2005. I think this is due to the rise of Kefayya activists and protests.

Regarding the rise of patterned sexual violence by the police against female protestors since 2005, I discuss this issue further in Chapter 5. See also Amar (2011), the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights fact sheet campaign against sexual harassment (n.d.), and Women Under Siege Project (Zaltzman 2012).

police became an explicit tool in the hands of Mubarak's family, using any means necessary to serve its interests. What did this mean for social movements in Egypt, especially those calling for reform or democratic change in Egypt?

It is telling to look at the right of citizens to participate and take part in formal politics, defined here as their right to join and/or form political parties, unions and NGOs. These things are supposedly protected by the Egyptian constitution and the law, but in practice, these rights were so eviscerated under Mubarak that they didn't exist—in any meaningful sense—at all. Under Mubarak, Egyptians' rights to form or join a political party, NGO, or union were severely restricted. In order to form a political party, for example, one had to get a license from a committee chaired by a member of the ruling party. Not surprisingly, the license was rarely granted; indeed, most of the political parties that existed before the revolution gained their license only after suing the government and challenging the committee's prior refusal. Then, even after getting a license, political parties were not really allowed to practice politics. Often, their work was reduced to small gatherings of people in closed rooms, struggling simply to publish a newspaper criticizing the government. But the newspaper could be banned if it dared to criticize Mubarak himself or talk about his health or his family. Similarly, in order to form an NGO in Egypt under Mubarak, one needed to obtain a license. In theory, the license was supposed to be granted by the Social Affairs Ministry, but in practice, such decisions were made by the police (HRW Report 2005). The law in Egypt also restricted union activities during elections and non-union members could be arrested if they practiced politics (Ali 2009). Active union members known to be critical of the government often were confronted with many barriers to be able to run in trade union elections in the first place—or rather, they could run, but it was understood that they would never win thanks to the police and corrupt officials' control over the

electoral process (Ali 2009).⁶² Many of these practices can be traced to Nasser's rule, but what was new under Mubarak was the expanded use of police forces and the security apparatus—compared to military intelligence and national security agencies—to manipulate domestic politics.

Another telling indicator is to look at parliamentary election results and the number of election boycotts that occurred under Mubarak. In parliamentary elections between 1990 and 2010, the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) entirely dominated the process and controlled no less than 70 percent of the seats in parliament throughout this period (BBC 2010; H. Moustafa 1995, 2000, 2005) Furthermore, opposition political parties came to see the process as so meaningless and corrupt that they increasingly turned to boycotting elections altogether. It should be noted that boycotting elections was never simply or only about pressuring the regime to implement reforms; it was also about taking a public stance to expose the falseness of the process. In the period from 1990 to 2010, Egypt witnessed five parliamentary elections. In 1990, three important parties and forces boycotted the election: Al-Wafd, the Labor Party, as well as the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which was not a party. In 1995, 2000, and 2005 elections, although important parties did not boycott elections, their participation was limited, as they could not compete with the ruling party, as well as they did confront many challenges in the electoral process. In 2010 elections most political parties boycotted the election after the fraud in the first round of the election. The logic of the boycott was also to embarrass the regime internationally and to send the message to the public that there were, essentially, no elections. It is against this

⁶² Egypt has been listed in the International Labor Organization blacklist for decades before January 2011 revolution, due to the fact that the government's restrictions on labor union freedoms. The listing was lifted briefly after the revolution, but was made back into force in 2013. See the article "Egypt on the blacklist" in *Al-Ahram Weekly* (El-Fiqi 2013).

backdrop that many Egyptians' began to reassess the relevance of participating in formal politics, and to look instead for alternate political public space.

The Rise of “Street” Politics in Egypt

From 2000 onward, major shifts began to transform the battle between the opposition and the regime over political public space. “Street” politics emerged, marking not only new sites of protest, but also new strategies on both “sides.” I use the term “street(s)” here to refer to actual physical streets, but also to other public spaces of protest such as building stairwells, squares, bus stations, lawyers’ offices, police stations, and courtrooms. Whether staging large-scale street rallies or merely occupying stairwells in key government buildings, protestors used their bodies and their mere presence to politicize public spaces and register their opposition to the regime. For their part, state security forces became increasingly aggressive and violent in their attempts to repress and control these spaces, developing new tactics and specific targets along the way. And over the years, all parties involved began to recognize just how much was at stake in these spatialized struggles. It is important to stress, however, that the relationship between street politics and formal politics is complex. As noted earlier, to the extent that Egyptians began to seek out new political public space, their goal was not so much to sidestep or oppose formal political channels, but rather to challenge and expand the latter, to expose them as corrupt and demand that they be made more democratic.

Street Rallies Since 2000

The first major street rallies in Egypt since 1977 were sparked, in fact, not by domestic conflicts but by regional politics. On September 28, 2000, Israeli Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon made a visit to the Temple Mount/Aqsa Mosque, the most important religious site in old

Jerusalem. The visit was seen by most Palestinians in the occupied territories and other Arabs and Muslims in the region as deeply provocative. The Israeli army arrested some protestors and dispersed others using force. The visit triggered a Palestinian uprising, described as the second Palestinian intifada, which was met, in turn, by further violence from Israeli authorities. Before long, Arabs and Muslims throughout the region and in various parts of the world launched protests in solidarity with the Palestinians. In Egypt, the protests began spontaneously. A group of Egyptian activists and intellectuals formed the Egyptian Popular Committee in Solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada, and began collecting medical and food donations to be sent to Palestinians. The group also sponsored protests in the street, which were joined by other spontaneous protests, especially on Fridays after prayers in the mosques. This situation of spontaneous rallies lasted for a few months.

The first few protests were very surprising to the regime. Indeed, the huge numbers of participants were a surprise to the protestors themselves and the police. I, myself, participated in a few of these protests and saw tens of thousands of people gathered in the streets of downtown Cairo, met by similar numbers of security forces who were, ultimately, unable to prevent the rallies. Street protests occurred almost every day for the first few weeks of October 2000, in front of the journalist syndicate and the Egyptian Bar Association headquarters in downtown Cairo (at Ramses Street and Abdel Khaleq Tharwat Street). Police used violence and arrests, but the sheer number of protestors created a momentum that buoyed the rallies and encouraged others to join.



Figure 3 Faculty and students of the American University in Cairo in October 2000, rallying in Mohamed Mahmoud Street in solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada. The event was celebrated by opposition activists as one of the first time protestors took to the streets en mass since the 1970s. (Photograph taken by Nadine Naber, used here with her permission).

Protests spread to colleges and even to elementary, junior high, and high schools, where kids and teenagers started to carry small signs and chant against Sharon and in solidarity with Palestinians. Faculty at the American University in Cairo (AUC) formed a Faculty for Palestine group that met and worked with students groups to organize protests and solidarity events on campus. One rally organized by AUC faculty in October 2000 (see **Figure 3**) was seen as a particular success by activists and, indeed, became somewhat infamous for the arrest of Hossam El-Hamalawy who went on to become one of Egypt's most famous bloggers.⁶³

Protests in solidarity with the intifada continued for a few months, until they finally died down and eventually vanished, with very few exceptions especially when there were attacks by

⁶³ It is important to note here that it is not only the AUC that was protesting. As mentioned above, students of different campuses and different schools, and sometimes even kids of elementary schools were protesting. I gave some attention to the AUC protest here because this was crucial in the dynamics of protest in Tahrir. This is because the AUC campus is literally in Tahrir.

Israeli occupation forces on Palestinians either in Gaza or the West Bank (see **Figure 4**). This could be explained by the continuation of police assaults on protestors as well as protestors themselves were exhausted, and the movement started to lack momentum.



Figure 4 Protestors in Al-Azhar Street, marching from Al-Azhar Mosque after the Friday prayer to different areas in downtown Cairo. Protestors were rallying against the attacks by Israeli occupation forces on Palestinian Jenin Camp in the West Bank. Picture taken by Nadine Naber in April 2002 and used here with her permission.

Large-scale street rallies were not seen again until March 2003 when, again, external events prompted widespread public reaction—this time, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Activists in Egypt announced their plan to gather in protest in Tahrir Square. Once again, AUC students were key participants as the university’s main campus is literally in Tahrir Square. Indeed, AUC

students were the first to arrive to the square and though their numbers were not large (a few hundred), the police were reluctant to disperse or attack the protestors because so many AUC students are from upper class and elite Egyptian families, or are the children of high ranking military or police officers or government officials. This fact created just enough leverage in terms of time. While police hesitated, thousands of protestors from mosques and elsewhere joined the rally and the anti-war protests of March 20–21, 2003 soon grew to become the largest sit-in in the history of Egypt prior to the 2011 revolution.

The 2003 protests in particular will be discussed in further detail in the second half of this chapter, given their location in Tahrir Square specifically. For now, what I want to highlight are the various lessons learned by both protestors and police as a result of this re-emergence of street rallies in the early 2000s. Though sparked initially by Egyptians seeking to show support for the Palestinian intifada, the protests in 2000 were met, nonetheless, with violence on the part of the Egyptian police. According to many activists with whom I spoke, the 2000 protests and the police response to them served as a turning point, after which they became increasingly critical of the Mubarak regime and determined to organized against it. Many found themselves asking, “We were simply protesting in solidarity with the Palestinians, why is the regime attacking us with such force?” Between 2000 and 2003, and then after the March 2003 sit-in, street rallies did not disappear entirely; rather, protestors began to adapt their strategies. Youth activists, in particular, learned the value of extremely sudden, spontaneous rallies in popular neighborhoods. As one youth activist explained to me in 2010, by which time such tactics had become common, “the main reason for police to attack rallies is that they knew the time and the location of the protest. Hence, we decided to surprise them.” Using this method, small groups of activists gather in neighborhoods that are central, but often suffering from terrible social and economic

conditions. The protestors suddenly start to chant and sing, confident that the public will join, given the local conditions. The rallies generally last only an hour or an hour and a half at most before the police show up, but by then, the protestors have already achieved their more modest purpose: to carve out, even if only temporarily, new political public space.

For their part, police also began to adjust their tactics. From 2000 onward, it became common to use plainclothes officers and informants to infiltrate and spread chaos among protestors, spy on activists, and even assist in dispersing rallies by force. The police also learned that it is best to stop rallies at their source before they can gather momentum. In many cases, the sources were mosques and thus these were increasingly targeted by police, who would occupy the space or prevent worshippers from leaving after the prayer as a group. Police were also quick to recognize the threat posed by student activism and they began to work closely with AUC security to prevent a repeat of 2003 Tahrir Square sit-in. Some AUC students received threats from the police and warnings from their parents that such protests would not be allowed again. Many foreign students at the AUC were even threatened with deportation if they participated in future protests.⁶⁴ Perhaps the most pernicious new repressive strategies, however, were those the police developed targeting female protestors in particular.

“The Street Is For Us”

In 2005, the Mubarak regime decided to make some constitutional amendments and put them to a referendum. The changes to the constitution, on the one hand, opened the door to multi-candidate presidential elections for the first time in Egyptian history. But at the same time, the changes also established extremely difficult stipulations that candidates, both within and outside of the party system, had to meet. Ultimately, the changes were designed to pave the road

⁶⁴ This is based on my field notes.

for Mubarak's son to run in the future and also to give Mubarak himself one more chance to run for a fifth term. Recognizing this, pro-democracy activists gathered in Cairo on May 25, 2005, particularly in front of the Egyptian Higher Courts Complex (Dar Al-Qadaa Al-Alyy), and in front of both the Press Syndicate and Egyptian Bar Association headquarters. In response to this protest, the police used for the first time in a very expanded way, organized sexual harassment and rape against female protesters. Many female protestors were taken and dragged in the street by policemen and plainclothes police. Some were kidnapped and left out in the desert after being sexually assaulted. As many activists told me, "targeting women reflected many things: sexist and patriarchal assumptions that women should not be in public space to protest, targeting them to shame them in front of the public and also targeting them based on a police assumption that they are 'weaker,' and need solidarity and help." From the police point of view, an attack on women protestors was an effective tactic for two main reasons. The first of these is that it would discourage women from protesting in public again in the future. And second, it would also render men easier targets for violence, as they would be busy "protecting" women or the number of protestors overall would simply be lower thus making men easier to isolate and attack.

Perhaps not surprisingly, some of the leaders in the Kefayya movement decided to stop protesting in the streets for a while due to the risks involved. Resisting this specific attack on women, however, and also resisting the Kefayya leaders' decision, many Egyptian feminists and activists launched a new campaign and movement named "The Street Is For Us."⁶⁵ On June 1,

⁶⁵ The name was taken from a song in an important political movie produced in 1972 and directed by Youssef Chahine. "Al-asfour" or "The Sparrow" focuses on a family dominated by a patriarch. The family members end up being fragmented and subjected to violence and abuse. The story was presented as symbolic of the Egyptian people under Nasser, captured like a "sparrow in a cage." The song "The street is for us" refers to the legitimacy and power of the people in the streets specifically and in politics in general.

2005, the group organized a protest on the outside entrance stairs of the Egyptian Press Syndicate headquarters in downtown Cairo, carrying banners with the slogan, “We will not be scared.” The police force were standing outside cordoning the syndicate. Since then, the idea about protesting on the syndicate’s entrance or stairs, while being sized by the police became a pattern in the few years until the revolution. The movement lasted for a while, organizing a few more small protests and releasing documents about the right of women and pro-democracy movements in Egypt to have a political public space. Many female activists who participated in the revolution told me that the police attacks on May 25, 2005 and then the subsequent “The Street Is For Us” campaign in June changed their lives. Indeed, since May 25, 2005, feminist and progressive activists in Egypt have continued to organize an annual conference or protest every year to commemorate the attacks and remember the movement. As even the name of this group revealed, the “streets” had become a potential political symbol and site for both police and protestors, but as I will discuss next, the actual spaces in which “street” protests took place began to shift, as did the specific repertoires of protest.

Sit-ins, Stand-Ins, and Strikes: Fighting for Even the Smallest Spaces

Particularly in the years after 2005, a new pattern began to emerge. In the face of intense police repression and the development of specifically gendered tactics, large-scale street rallies subsided once again and protest took on smaller, more diffuse forms. Petition campaigns were launched around various issues, and boycotts were organized—not only against elections, but also big corporations such as cell-phone companies, to protest the bad service or the exaggerated bills or constant increase in the bills. In some cases, people simply refused to pay things like electricity bills, in order to protest bad service and the constant lack of power in various areas of

Egypt, especially in urban centers. In other cases, individual government officials were sued for corruption, or to try and force a release of information about a detainee. But the most visible forms of protest—albeit less visible than large-scale street rallies—were those that involved crowds of people using their bodies and their mere presence to politicize public space. I’m talking here about the numerous small sit-ins, stand-ins, and vigils that characterized the years directly preceding the revolution, revealing the ongoing battle over space between the authorities and the protestors.

Here, I build on Tilly (2006) who argues that we need to look at repertoires not in abstract terms but in relation to the regimes in which they operate. Just as political regimes vary, so too do the repertoires of protest opposing them. In the case of Egypt in the years prior to the revolution, protest strategies adjusted in ways that reflected both the increasing authoritarianism of Mubarak, and the highly contested boundaries of political public space. As large street rallies declined, lower-profile tactics such as “sit-ins” and “stand-ins” became more common, targeting not only streets and outdoor spaces like squares, but also the indoor and outdoor premises of key buildings often concentrated in downtown urban centers. The most common targets were court buildings, police stations, and particularly the headquarters of the Press Syndicate and Lawyers Syndicate in downtown Cairo.⁶⁶ The range of spaces was captured in a 2010 study conducted by Essem Syam that mapped the main places of protest in the decade before the revolution, especially between 2005 and 2010 (see **Table 2**).

Protestors would gather in front of, around, or even inside the stairwells of buildings, knowingly drawing the police, but also hoping that their efforts would encourage the public to

⁶⁶ While these efforts were focused in urban areas, it should be noted that spatial battles played out in rural areas also. Rural villagers, for example, attempted to block roads in particular, protesting the fact that many Egyptian villages still lack tunnels or bridges to cross highways, resulting in many road-related deaths every year.

join or the media to cover the event. Protest signs were specifically crafted to speak to the public, featuring slogans such as “we are here for you and us,” “our people, listen to us, we are standing here for you and us.” Other signs even addressed police themselves, targeting the lower ranks of

Table 2 New Spaces of political protest in Egypt prior to the revolution. Adapted from Essam Syam (2010)

Places of Protest	Examples
In front of court buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Supreme Court complex (Dar al-Qadaa Al-Aaly) in downtown Cairo • the Supreme Administrative Court in Dokki • inside Lawyers’ Rooms in the courts
In work places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bus and subway stations • schools and colleges • headquarters of education districts • hospitals • main railway station in Cairo
In front of government buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • government Cabinet headquarters in Cairo • Parliament buildings in Cairo • specific Ministry buildings • police stations • governorate headquarters • local government buildings
In front of trade unions and syndicates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions headquarters • various professional syndicates’ headquarters (e.g., Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, Press) –all near Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo
In streets and public spaces in general	Various streets, highways, and squares, especially Tahrir Square in Cairo

the anti-riot police by telling them “you are poor or marginalized and oppressed like us, and one day you will join us,” or “do not do violence or shoot at your people.”

One of the most important of these protests was a stand-in in front of the Ministry of Interior in June 2010, in response to the killing of the young activist Khaled Said (an event discussed in further detail later in the chapter). The initial protest drew no more than a hundred protestors, yet was surrounded and cordoned off by thousands of soldiers and anti-riot police. Pictures of this protest later became iconic for many activists after the revolution, who looked at

the image and often commented something along the lines of: “Remember, we were always as small as this” (see **Figure 5**). The meaning is that even a big revolution has to start small.



Figure 5 Protest against police brutality and the killing of blogger Khaled Said in June 2010, in front of the Ministry of Interior in Cairo. (Photograph taken Moureed Barghothi, used here with his permission)

The other forms of protest that emerged prominently during this period were strikes and labor sit-ins. Between 2006 and 2008, there was a particularly steep increase in labor protests in Egypt. In an article co-written by Joel Beinin and Egyptian blogger Hossam El-Hamalawy about this period (Beinin and El-Hamalawy 2007) they stated:

The longest and strongest wave of worker protest since the end of World War II is rolling through Egypt. In March, the liberal daily *al-Masri al-Yawm* estimated that no fewer than 222 sit-in strikes, work stoppages, hunger strikes and demonstrations had occurred during 2006. In the first five months of 2007, the paper has reported a new labor action nearly every day. The citizen group Egyptian Workers and Trade Union Watch documented 56 incidents during the month of April, and another 15 during the first week of May alone.

In 2006, there were 200 strikes and in 2007, 850 strikes and sit-ins.⁶⁷ Many of the labor sit-ins were against closing factors and neo-liberal policies, and most of them targeted the Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions (EFTU) headquarters in downtown Cairo, near Tahrir Square. In May 2010, hundreds of workers occupied the EFTU headquarters protesting the closing of factories. In many ways, workers during the period were the most prominent practitioners of the sit-in strategy. One of the important events was in December 2007, when a group of state employees, tax collectors, decided to stage a sit-in at the headquarters of the ministerial cabinet. Around 3,000 men and women participated in the sit-in, which lasted for eleven days, effecting a 90 percent drop in tax collection. Protestors even managed to occupy the space in front of Parliament, though not the building itself. Ultimately, the sit-in was successful because it was backed by a parallel strike of 55,000 real estate tax officers throughout the country and culminated in the launching of a free union. The formation of the union was celebrated by all the opposition in Egypt, being the first independent trade union outside state control in contemporary Egypt.⁶⁸

Before moving to the U.S., I participated in many such sit-ins and stand-ins, and around 75 percent of the activists I interviewed told me that they also participated in these kinds of protests. Based on my field observations and these interviews, I note that these protest methods shared the following three features. First, the protests tended to be small and short. Protestors focused on occupying very limited spaces—often a court entrance, the stairs of a syndicate, or a

⁶⁷ For more details about the history of the Egyptian working-class struggle see the booklet of Said and Bassiouni's *Banners of Strikes in the Egyptian Sky* (Bassiouny and Said 2008).

⁶⁸ I am not discussing in details the question of labor strikes here, as a repertoire. But my aim was to provide show the larger context of the rise of the labor movement at the time. Also, in this context, the labor movement relied heavily on the sit-in as a repertoire and this practice was very common near the cabinet and also in downtown Cairo especially in the EFTU headquarters.

very small space in the middle or a narrow corner of a square, for a short period of time—usually one to two hours, on average. Multiple squares saw such sit/stand-ins: Tahrir Square, most importantly, but also Sayyeda Zeinab, Shoubra Circle (Dawaran), Talaat Harb Square, and Mataryya Square. The small size of the protests often served as a self-fulfilling prophecy; as one protestor put it, “This is like a vicious circle. Public do not participate in the first place because the small place and small crowd does not guarantee protection.” In short, the limited space often had an anti-mobilizing effect. In a 2006 piece, titled “The anatomy of a downtown demo,” leftist writer Hani Shukrallah described these protests as “invitation-only” demonstration (Shukrallah 2006) and noted the way police sought to control (and literally compress) protestors’ space:

At last, I felt, I had uncovered the full subtleties of the police counter-demonstration strategy. It was brilliant in its simplicity. Huge contingents of anti-riot police laid a tight siege to the demonstrators, who, squeezed into a small corner of the "square, were surrounded by wider circles made up of hundreds of civilian-clad and uniformed policemen. The encirclement was nearly 10 tight circles deep.

Despite such tactics of police intimidating, often paired with violence, such protests continued nonetheless.

Part of this resilience can be linked to the second feature of the protests: their concentration in urban centers, most specifically, in Cairo and in or near Tahrir Square. The focus here was hardly surprising: in general, the area near Tahrir has more governmental buildings and centers of power than anywhere else in Egypt. But by targeting such central locations, protestors held out hope that some of their sit-ins and stand-ins might transform into rallies that could move around downtown and/or expand to fill the square. Importantly, such central locations also provided protestors with multiple spaces to stop and rest, and also multiple routes they could use to disperse and escape police if necessary. Finally, many human rights NGOs have offices downtown. Hence, protestors could seek legal aid or assistance when the

police became abusive. Many of these offices, like the headquarters of the syndicates, became central places for protestors to meet, plan logistics, and seek medical aid.

The third feature shared by these protests strategies is the fact that, regardless of how small or peaceful they were, they consistently provoked an intense and aggressive police response. The police intentionally cordoned protestors into limited spaces, once this was accomplished, they also started to crush and squeeze them in an effort to break the protest as soon as possible. In the simple terms, this was a battle over even the smallest amount of political public space and the state came to the battle prepared to use violence. In the same piece cited above, Shukrallah, described how police not only tried to limit protests to only well-known activists (thus enforcing a strange form of elitism), but also tried to control literally who could enter the protest space and who could leave it:

The “invitation only” police strategy works this way. As you approach the tiny spot in which the early arrivals have been squeezed already, dozens of police officers will rush you along - and away from the site of the demonstration. When you insist on veering toward the demonstration in any case, you are told in no uncertain terms that it is “prohibited to go there.” But I want to go there, I say, pointing to the spot where portraits of Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nassrallah, nervously joined by red and Lebanese flags, could be seen over the helmeted heads of encircling anti-riot police. A ranking officer then gives you a penetrating look, presumably assessing whether you belong to the “ordinary masses” (and thus have no business there) or to the self-styled “political elite,” which does. Evidently, I passed the test. My trump card, which happens to be my ID, outdatedly identifying me as the editor of *Al-Ahram Weekly*, remains snug in the wallet in my back-pocket. This process is repeated several times, and finally you come up against the wall of anti-riot police encirclement. Again, you are to seek, and be given, permission to wade through.⁶⁹

I have participated in many protests and recognize the pattern Shukrallah explains. And though I agree with his description, I would also argue that things began to change after 2006, in the years leading up to the revolution. Increasingly, protestors began to gain confidence and some started

⁶⁹ Shukrallah’s example refers to the case of a small protest in downtown Cairo in solidarity with Lebanon during the Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006. But the pattern he is discussing was common to most protestors in Cairo, such as the anti-Mubarak protests.

to challenge and even break down cordons. Some protestors, especially in the year before the revolution, started to intentionally stand outside of the cordon and talk to the public. Thus, as discussed above the usage of specific protest repertoires reflected the battle over space in Egypt between the regime and the opposition. The most notable of these is the rise of repertoires such as stand-ins and sit-ins which took place in very limited space. But even when the opposition movements was challenged in the street, they tried find alternative or parallel venue for their grievance next to the street. I will discuss this in the next sub-section, about how social media became this alternative and or parallel political public space to the street.



Figure 6 Protest in front of the Press Syndicate in January 27, 2011, during the 18 days of the revolution, one day before excessive battles took place between the police and protestors and ended with protestors liberating Tahrir and formed a sit-in in Tahrir. (Photo by Asmaa Waguih of Reuters, used here with permission).

Social Media and Its Impact on Political Public Space

The role of social media in the Egyptian revolution has garnered much scholarly attention (Bhuiyan 2011; Choudhary et al. 2012; Eltantawy and Wiest 2011; Khondker 2011; Tufekci and Wilson 2012; Zhuo 2011), yet I would argue that much of this literature has two flaws: first, analysis is too often ahistorical, failing to examine the longer history of social media in Egypt; and second, not enough attention has been given the dynamic relationship *between* online and offline forms of activism.⁷⁰ In this section, I historicize this relationship by tracing the interaction between social media and street protests over time. I argue that whenever street protests took place, social media served more of a supportive, backseat role; but in the absence of physical protests, social media emerged as an alternate space in which political protest could be staged. In other words, I show that the rise of social media activism in Egypt is a story about political public space.⁷¹

Social media in general has a very strong presence in the lives of Egyptian youth. In the years before the revolution, for example, many talk shows and mainstream media outlets in Egypt discussed this relationship (Eickelman and Anderson 2003; Ghannam 2011; Malin 2010). According to a report about Facebook usage in 2010, Egypt has the largest Facebook community in the Middle East and North Africa Region (MENA). Of North Africa's 7.7 million Facebook users, Egypt accounts for 3.4 million users (or 44% of all North Africa users) (Malin 2011b). Egypt also has the largest number of users of Facebook's Arabic interface (2.2 million Facebook Arabic users in Egypt, versus 1.8 million in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), and 30 percent of Egypt's 17 million Internet users are Facebook subscribers: up from 20% in May 2010 (Malin 2011a).

⁷⁰ To my knowledge, only few scholars have given attention to the role of social media before the revolution (Ghannam 2011; Hirschkind 2011; Lim 2012).

⁷¹ I build here on the work of Merlyna Lim who argues that we should conceive social media as both a *tool* and also a *space* and that the relationship between social media and protest in Egypt should not be seen as only technological but sociopolitical (Lim 2012: 234).

But as impressive as these numbers are, what's even more significant is social media's political impact. Most scholars of social media in the region, as well as bloggers in Egypt specifically, affirm that social media in Egypt—especially blogging, which started before even Facebook and Twitter—was politicized right from the very beginning in Egypt. Three main factors were involved. The first is that social media constitutes an alternative to official media, most of which is heavily censored. And the more official media was censored, the more Egyptians turned to social media to express their views and talk about social and political issues. The second reason is the general exclusion of youth perspectives from mainstream politics, social and political talk shows, and printed mainstream media. Youth were eager for a medium to express themselves, making them, not surprisingly, the most frequent and enthusiastic early adopters of blogging and social media. According to the same report on Facebook usage cited above, nearly 2 million of Egypt's Facebook users in 2010 were under 25 years of age, representing 61% of its total users (Malin 2010: 8). Finally, the third factor contributing to the political nature of social media use in Egypt was the concomitant rise of pro-democracy protest movements, particularly after 2005. Prior to 2005, blogging existed and was somewhat political, primarily insofar as it provided a forum in which people broke taboos by discussing politics, religion, and sex. A key shift began in late 2004, however, as bloggers increasingly began to lend support to and collaborate with pro-democracy protests in Egypt, especially the Kefayya (Enough) Movement. Some bloggers assisted Kefayya with its website, while other bloggers actually started to organize themselves in support of the movement.

Based on my own observations and participation in activism in Egypt, as well as the recollections of many of my informants, I identify the following seven moments or events as particularly crucial in shaping the relationship of social media and politics in Egypt before the

revolution of 2011. In each of these instances, social media served as mobilizing tool both before and during protest.

The first significant instance of activists using social media was in 2003 for the protests against the US-led war in Iraq. Though the blogger movement had not yet developed, these protests marked the first expansive use of cell phone texts to mobilize people for protests. In addition to widely circulated e-mails at the time, most anti-war and anti-imperialist activists in Egypt used their phones' Short Message Service (SMS) to send the following text: "On the same day the US attacks Iraq, let us gather and protest at noon in Tahrir." Such use of texting for mobilizing purposes has since become a regular feature of Egyptian activism, especially given the high number of cell phones in Egypt.

The second moment came in late 2004, with the formation of the Egyptian Movement for Change, otherwise known as "Kefayya" or "Enough." As noted previously, Kefayya was formed to protest Mubarak's plans to run for another term as president, and also to challenge the assumption that his son, Gamal, would succeed him. In 2005, some of the key founders of the blogging movement in Egypt joined Kefayya and its campaign to mobilize for democracy. These bloggers assisted in launching Kefayya's website and became its web administrators. By matching Kefayya's protests in the street with activities online, bloggers brought new energy and expertise to promoting Kefayya's ideas and helped to build a network for the movement across different regions of the country.

The third moment culminated in the March 2006 sit-in in solidarity with judges. When Mubarak put two prominent judges challenging election corruption on trial for ostensibly violating their impartiality and discussing politics, pro-democracy activists in Egypt launched campaigns and protests declaring their solidarity with the judges. Bloggers were pioneering

forces in these campaigns both online and offline. In March 2006, bloggers used their sites and virtual connections to organize a sit-in in Tahrir Square to support the judges. Most political groups and parties opposed the action at first and were reluctant to join. But once the sit-in started and began to attract attention from the media, more political groups joined.

Fourth, social media was a key factor shaping the April 2008 strike at the Al-Mahala Textile Spinning and Weaving Company. Al-Mahala is a public sector company located in the Nile Delta. In the spring of 2007, workers there staged a strike that successfully led to an increase in their bonuses. A year later in April 2008, workers announced a new strike demanding a minimum wage for them (and for workers across Egypt) of no less than 1200 Egyptian Pounds (EGP) a month. Many activists—including Kefayya and other pro-democracy and also socialist activists—seized upon the Al-Mahala workers' plan for a strike as a nationwide call for strikes and civil disobedience across Egypt. A group of activists launched a Facebook page to promote a general day of striking in Egypt. The police intervened in Al-Mahala, preventing the strike, but city-wide riots lasting three days broke out and one protester was killed. Many activists describe the events in Al-Mahala as the true rehearsal of the 2011 revolution. On April 6, 2008, protests in solidarity with Al-Mahala were staged in Cairo and a few other cities. The police arrested Israa Abdel Fatah, one of the administrators of the above mentioned Facebook page—a move that served only to draw further attention to Facebook as a medium for organization and mobilization. The 6 April Youth movement was formed and named after this event. While the group started as a support to Al-Mahala workers, it expanded its role to become one of the main youth groups in Egypt to call for democracy. And it was one of the main groups to assist on the ground in the revolution.

The fifth “moment” of social media I would emphasize is not so much a single instance, but rather a growing trend, specifically, the use of blogger campaigns to publicize and protest police brutality and torture. In 2008, there were many groups and individuals working on human rights and trying to draw attention to police brutality and the issue of torture. The most notable of these was a group called Egyptians Against Torture, formed in 2008 by group of individual human rights activists. The group led a number of campaigns that sought to document cases of torture, raise awareness about police torture in Egypt, and file actual criminal and or civil cases against police torturers. Bloggers played (and continue to play) an important role in these campaigns, devoting significant space on their blogs to writing about torture. One blogger, Noha Atef, for example, launched a special blog titled “Torture in Egypt,” which became the central site for collecting data, books, and reports about torture (Atef 2014). Prominent blogger Wael Abbas also spent much time and space writing about torture and uploading videos of torture both to his blog (Abbas 2014) and to YouTube.⁷² Other bloggers even invented new forums for discussing the issue: blogger Hossam El-Hamalway, for example, created Piggipedia, a site using the photo sharing program Flickr to post pictures of police officers accused of torture and other forms of brutality.⁷³ These efforts not only raised awareness and helped to mobilize people within Egypt around these issues, they also drew considerable international attention.

When Mohamed ElBaradei, the former Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), returned to Egypt in February 2010 and announced his willingness to run for the presidency, it had a hugely energizing effect on pro-democracy groups. After Mubarak amended the constitution in 2005 and extended his power for another term (moving the new end-date to 2011), many Egyptian activists became depressed and discouraged. While the

⁷² See Abbas’s blog (Abbas 2014) and his YouTube Channel (Abbas 2006).

⁷³ For more on Piggipedia, including screen shots of the site, see “Piggipedia: Egypt’s Human Flesh Search?,” <https://storify.com/ajstream/egypt-story-state-security-officials> (accessed July 3, 2014).

constitutional amendment allowed multi-candidate elections for president *in theory*, in practice, the amendment actually instituted stipulations that made things more difficult for opposition candidates. It was a gloomy time for pro-democracy organizing, thus when ElBaradei returned and was very vocal in criticizing Mubarak, many Egyptian youth started Facebook groups and Twitter accounts calling for his presidency. Bloggers devoted their pages to writing about ElBaradei's return and a special campaign was created offline to collect a million endorsements by Egyptians for ElBaradei's bid. As one leading blogger who was also an administrator of ElBaradei's Facebook page put it: ElBaradei's return and campaign was like a stone thrown into previously stagnant water.⁷⁴

The seventh and final moment of social media mobilization that I wish to highlight is the June 2010 creation of the We Are All Khaled Said Facebook page. On June 6, 2010, a young blogger and activist named Khaled Said was tortured to death because he posted a leaked video about police corruption in Egypt. Soon after Said's death, blogger Wael Ghoneim created a Facebook page not only to commemorate Said, but also to draw attention to the circumstances of his death and mobilize others against police brutality. Abdel Rahman Mansour, another activist, assisted Ghoneim.⁷⁵ Despite being anonymous, the two were targeted by the police, but they managed to remain unknown until after the revolution. As I will elaborate later, the page's members reached about half a million in the day before the revolution and the page itself became the central site for mobilizing the protests that eventually culminated in the revolution.

In each of the moments/events I identify above, social media activism was intertwined with organizing in the streets in almost all of the cases. In short, social media emerged during the decade prior to 2011 as a key medium through which political activists of many different kinds

⁷⁴ There were a few Facebook pages calling for ElBaradei as president. I am quoting here Abdel Rahman Youssef, one of the administrators of ElBaradie's page and campaign before the revolution.

⁷⁵ Mansour is also one of my informants in this research.

could connect, share information and resources, and mobilize for offline activities. In this way, social media was a major tool in expanding political public space under Mubarak's authoritarian rule. As noted above, activists and bloggers in Egypt quickly seized upon social media as both a means and a place to break taboos related to discussing sex, religion, and politics. Given the difficulty of censoring social media, contrasted with the strict censorship of most mainstream media, the blogosphere and later Facebook and Twitter further developed into spaces in which alternate voices and ideas could be expressed, even when activism was repressed in the streets and in official political spaces. Many people who cared about democracy did not trust political parties, most of which were seen as co-opted at the time; also, not all those who were in favor of democracy actually went so far as to join the emerging movements. With social media, people suddenly had a new space in which to discuss ideas and a new, lower-investment way to get involved in politics. This was especially important in the years from 2008 to 2011, given the almost complete absence of serious and organized venues of free political discussion at the time.

II. Space, History and Mobilization in Tahrir Square

In this half of the chapter, I shift to a more specific focus on the political public space of Tahrir Square. In what follows, I use the square as a lens through which we can examine broader questions about the significance of space for social movements, but I also seek to highlight the historical and spatial specificity of Tahrir itself. On the one hand, my analysis is driven by the fact that Tahrir become iconized *as* the revolution by February 2011; but at the same time, I want to show the much longer historical trajectory that both led people to Tahrir and led Tahrir to have so much meaning for the people.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed examples of how social movements theorists have dealt with the question of space in relation to contention. Nonetheless, analyses of space and social movements still tend to deal with space as a set of geographical conditions that become relevant only once a specific movement arises, relatively disconnected from history. At the risk of simplification, I argue that this literature conceives space in relation to social movements in the following ways :1) space as simply the built-in environment that helps to enable or disable the movement; 2) space as shaping the scale of the movement; 3) space as a network that reflect and or embodies the movement; and 4) space as an idea or set of symbols that provides the meaningful context and vernacular of the movement. This scholarship has made important contributions, particularly the conception of space not as a concrete/physical container of activism, but as “structures of relationships and networks, and the context of repertoires of contention” (Martin and Miller 2003: 144; Sewell 2001; Tilly 2000). But despite these advances, the general trend in this literature is to examine space in relation to movements *synchronically*.

With the exception of the works of Sewell and Tilly, less attention has been given to the historical making and usage of space in relation to social movements. In rest of this chapter, I use the following observation by Sewell as a point of departure: “While insurgent movements make sure of the preexisting meanings of places, they can also—either intentionally or unintentionally—transform the significance of protest locations” (Sewell 2001: 65). I would like to apply and test this observation to the case of Tahrir and the Egyptian revolution. My aim is to expand our understanding of space historically. As I will show in this chapter, spaces have histories that exist prior to social movements, and the influence of those histories are not confined to the past.

Tahrir Square: Background

Located in the heart of downtown Cairo, Tahrir Square is about 11.5 acres of open space, in which one can see layers of architecture representing different eras of Cairo's unique history. It was designed to emulate Charles de Gaulle Square in Paris and was constructed in 1865 under Khedive Ismail (Taher 2012), after whom it was originally named Ismailyya Square. Having lived in Paris during the remaking of that city by Baron Haussman, Ismail's vision was to modernize Cairo and create a "Paris on the Nile." What began as an area of sand and swamp has since become the most vibrant and famous public space in Cairo. Near the heart of the square is Qasr El-Nile Bridge. Historically, the area near the bridge was occupied by British barracks until 1947. Under King Farouk, a huge all-in-one administrative building known as Mogamma in Arabic (or "the complex") was built in 1951. The name Tahrir Square, meaning "Liberation Square" in Arabic, was first used informally in Egyptian mass protests against British rule in 1919. The name was made official under Nasser when Egypt became independent and changed from a constitutional monarchy into a republic (Farag 1999). The area around Tahrir Square includes other important buildings such as the Egyptian National Museum, the Nile Hotel, the Kasr El Dobara Evangelical Church, the original downtown campus of the American University in Cairo, and buildings housing the headquarters of the Arab League and Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP, formed under Sadat), respectively. The NDP headquarters were burned down during the 2011 revolution. Between the Nile Hotel and the Kasr El Dobara Church is the Omar Makram Mosque. Named after one of Egypt's revolutionaries during the French occupation of Egypt (1798–1801), the mosque was used as one of the field hospitals during the violent clashes of 2011. Also near the square are key government buildings including the Egyptian Parliament, the Shura Council, the headquarters of the Cabinet, as well as the Ministry of Interior.

The layers of architectural history in Tahrir square are rich with symbolism about the history of Egypt itself, but the focus of this chapter is the broader meaning of the square in relation to the history of mobilization politics in Egypt, up to and including the 2011 revolution.⁷⁶ Even the name of the square took on special meaning during the revolution, as I discuss later in this chapter.



Figure 7 The middle of Tahrir Square, where the most tents were concentrated during the revolution. (Picture taken by the author)

⁷⁶ On the architectural layers of Tahrir and downtown Cairo as a mirror of Egyptian history, see ElShahed (2007, 2011), Rabbat (2011), Ahmed and Kamel (1996) and Nassar (2011).

Tahrir Square as Site of Egypt's Protest History

To locate Tahrir Square in the history of political protest in Egypt, I have constructed a table listing all the major political protests that have taken place in Egypt in the twentieth century, (see Table in Appendix 2). I used the following criteria, combined: 1) political protests, meaning protests that targeted the government and/or raised demands/grievances against the ruling regime; 2) protests by Egyptian masses, meaning protests not limited to any one specific class, sect, or religious group, and 3) protests that exceeded 2000–3000 protesters. I excluded protests of smaller numbers for practical reasons, as they are difficult to document and because protests involving 2000 or 3000 people more clearly suggest a decent level of mobilization and participation. Using the above criteria, 15 major political protests have taken place in contemporary Egypt since 1919. All of these protests took place, wholly or in part, in or near Tahrir Square. Of course, each case has its own distinctive historical and political context and mobilization circumstances. For example, the mass revolt in 1919 against British occupation was a nationwide protest that took place all over Egypt, and was not limited to Tahrir Square. Also, some of these events may have overlapping grievances. By putting them in one table, I do not mean to diminish their historical specificity; my goal is only to highlight the significance of Tahrir in each case.

It is important to note that despite this long history of protests, actual occupation of the square has only been realized three times: once in January 1972, once in March 2003, and once with a smaller sit-in in March 2006. By occupation, I mean when protesters have established a sit-in and maintained control of the square for a substantial period of time, varying from just under 24 hours, as was the case in January 1972 and March 2003, to roughly 18 days, as happened during the January 2011 Revolution.

The historical significance of Tahrir Square took three forms in relation to mobilization for the 2011 revolution. The first is as *known target*: Tahrir Square has long been the best-known target for political protests since before the Egyptian revolution. The second is as *source of strategies*: the history of political protests in Tahrir provided participants in 2011 with some tactical lessons, namely how to stage an occupation. The third is as *site of meaning*: Tahrir Square itself, given its historic and symbolic significance, provided inspiration during the revolution. Protesters in the Egyptian revolution appropriated this history and also produced a narrative about the liberation of the square.

I- Tahrir: Where the Action Takes Place

Many of the 2011 protesters remembered Tahrir as the meeting point of other protests. As noted above, they explained spontaneously heading for Tahrir by saying that the space was (and is) already established and understood as a gathering point for protesters. Some remembered that Tahrir was the site of an important anti-war protest in 2003 (against the Anglo-American war on Iraq), while others remembered protests organized by *Kefayya* (a pro-democracy coalition formed in 2005). Writing in his diary about the student protests in Egypt in 1972, Kamal Khalil, a student leader at the time and still a leftist organizer and a leading activist of the last decade, stated:

Against the regime detaining some of the students leaders, students who have been in a week long sit-in in Cairo University and Ain Chams University, have moved their sit-ins to Tahrir Square. Sadat's regime after detaining some of the leaders, also cordoned campuses with heavy security and armored vehicles to prevent students from entering campuses. Students response was quick, to rally and go to Tahrir. Tahrir became their new sit-in. (2013: 76)

The idea of Tahrir as a space of protest stretches back even earlier than 1972. The fact that the barracks for British troops were located near Tahrir during the colonial period made Tahrir a

target of protests since 1919. Leaders of student movements in Egypt in the 1940s also recalled protests against the British occupation in 1946, led by the National Committee of Workers and Students. The committee called for a general strike against British occupation and proclaimed February 21, 1946, the day of the evacuation of British troops. A massive demonstration of students marched from Giza to the center of Cairo. When the demonstrators reached Ismailia Square (Tahrir), they were confronted by the British garrison and began to burn the barracks and fences. British army vehicles moved towards them and a barrage of machine-gun fire opened on the protest. Twenty-three demonstrators were killed and some 120 injured (Farag 1999). The day was later chosen to mark an international student's day.

Contemporary activists recall Tahrir as the space of more recent protests in the last decade—protests that have highlighted, in fact, that protesting in Tahrir is not an easy thing. It is always a battle to control the space, especially under an authoritarian regime and heavy police state. Yet, for many of the activists with whom I spoke, Tahrir had become an important, if unattainable (or, perhaps, *because* unattainable) meeting point for demonstrations. The idea of controlling Tahrir took on special meaning for protestors precisely because the space was rarely under their control. All this is then supplemented by the fact that Tahrir has a number of physical features that make it a convenient and strategic target. These include the massive width of the space; its location in downtown Cairo; its proximity to numerous cafes, where activists and intellectuals can meet and write statements; and the central pedestal, which provides a convenient and symbolic platform for protest leaders.⁷⁷ It is Tahrir's central location, then, in

⁷⁷ The pedestal at the center of Tahrir Square has a storied history. Originally, it is said that it was meant to be the base of a statue of Khedive Ismail that was never installed. After the 1952 *coup d'état* that made Egypt a republic and eventually led to the presidency of Gamal Abdul Nasser, there was talk of installing a statue of Nasser on the pedestal. Then Nasser's successor, President Sadat, removed the pedestal and built a fountain in its place.

both literal and historical space that leads some analysts to say: “Whatever happens in Tahrir immediately becomes a national concern” (Frag 1999).

II- Tahrir: A History of Sit-ins

As noted above, actual occupation of Tahrir has taken place only three times in the history of political protests in contemporary Egypt. For many of the protesters I interviewed, these incidents hold an important place in their memory, even if they only heard about them second-hand. It should be noted here that Egyptian activists mostly use the word “sit-in” (in Arabic *ieetsam*, اعتصام), rather than the word “occupation.” Though the latter is used internationally to describe this mode of action (perhaps due to the rise of the Occupy movement), in Arabic “occupation” is associated more with the history of colonialism. In this chapter, I use the words “occupation” and “sit-in” interchangeably in order to avoid confusion and because “occupation” is the term most often used by the media and in scholarship about Tahrir.

The first known historical occupation of Tahrir was a student-led sit-in in 1972. In January of that year, students rallied, calling for democracy and a more equitable, less corrupt economic system, and protesting Sadat’s repression of opposition. The students also echoed existing critiques of Sadat for failing to regain the Sinai Peninsula after 1967. The larger protests were triggered when Sadat’s regime arrested 1500 students engaged in a campus sit-in on January 24, 1972 at Cairo University. The previous week had seen many sit-ins at various universities, organized by student unions and groups. In response to the arrests, about twenty thousand students from Cairo and Ain Chams Universities (both in Cairo) rallied in Tahrir Square. The students occupied the square all day, despite police efforts to dispel them by force. One activist recounted the sit-in experience:

They (students) started gathering around the campus, and the spontaneous cry was “to Tahrir,” this being the closest thing we have to the center of Cairo. The pedestal was probably an obvious choice, being the closest thing to the center of Tahrir. It was also, as I recall, surrounded by a sort of circular garden. It therefore offered an obvious focal point to gather round. It also provided a sort of platform, which was used for speeches, and for Sheikh Imam and Ahmed Fouad Negm to sing their revolutionary songs (quoted in Farag 1999).

Throughout the day, more students and other groups soon joined the students in solidarity, supporting their demands for the release of their colleagues. At midnight on January 25, police came and evacuated the square by force (A. Abdalla 2009).

This occupation became a significant symbol in Egyptian intellectual and cultural history.. A key factor was the writing of poet Amal Donqol, who penned the famous poem “*Oghneyet El-Kaaka El-Hagareya*” (The Song of the Brick Cake) in reference to pedestal in the center of the square. The poem describes the protesters’ chants and determination against the tyranny of Sadat; it enjoys a powerful place in Egyptian memory and was cited by participants in later events.

Regarding the March 2003 occupation of Tahrir Square, journalist Amira Howeidy wrote: “It took 31 years and an American-led war on Iraq for the rare occurrence—of people occupying Tahrir Square—to be reenacted” (Howeidy 2003). In anticipation of the Anglo-American war, Egyptian anti-globalization groups and leftist activists circulated e-mails calling for protests on the first day of the war. Daaa Rashwan, a journalist and political analyst, wrote: “It's *not* a ‘war.’ This is the first kind of occupation the Arabs have experienced since the 19th century. Its magnitude shouldn't be underestimated” (quoted in Howeidy 2003). On Thursday, March 20, 2003, thousands of protesters rallied in downtown Cairo, near Tahrir. At noon, a small group of activists assembled in the square. Anti-riot police attempted to cordon off the protests, but more protesters showed up unexpectedly and in large numbers via the surrounding streets. They carried signs and chanted “Down with Powellian democracy,” “We won't be ruled by

imperialism,” and “Down Bush, down Blair, down Aznar!” (Howeidy 2003). Police arrested about 1500 protesters, including the activists who had called for the protests, as well as ordinary citizens. After the arrests and blockading of the streets, protesters left, but even larger protests took place the next day, Friday, March 21.

On that day, more than 20,000 protesters gathered—a number that seemed to surprise both police and activists. As Howeidy put it, “the capital’s most famous and strategic square was occupied by people from all age groups and walks of life: activists; politicians; students; children; passers-by; families; housewives; professors; beggars; journalists; and downtown Cairo residents” (2003). One activist told me, “this was one of the few 10 hours where we had a bigger number, and it felt as if there was no police cordon outside.” The occupation of the square lasted all day; at night, the police came to evacuate the square by force. Despite the fact that the number of protesters was actually largest on March 21, activists launched a movement named after the March 20th sit-in. Activists started to link anti-imperialism with the question of democracy in Egypt and the dream of liberating the square again was rekindled. This fueled another, smaller attempt to occupy the square in March 2006, when protesters staged a small sit-in in solidarity with pro-democracy judges who were prosecuted under Mubarak.

In 2011, this history of sit-ins in Tahrir provided protestors with not only the idea of occupying the square, but also concrete strategies for doing so. People gravitated to the square spontaneously, but once there, the massive crowds and space needed to be managed. Experienced activists who had participated in previous sit-ins knew that focusing on issues of survival, such as food, water, and sleeping equipment would be crucial. Other activists knew that communication would be key and brought large speakers and set-up stages throughout the space. Most of these ideas emerged from previous protests. Egyptian bloggers, in particular, who had

led the small 2006 sit-in were key players in 2011 who drew on their past experiences and used social media to mobilize protestors in 2011.⁷⁸ For example, Amr Ezzat, one of the founders of the blogging movement in Egypt in the decade before the revolution, told me that “for many bloggers the experience in the sit-in during the revolution reminded them of their own sit-in in Tahrir in 2006.” Seham Shawadda, a labor organizer and journalist, became the key person for organizing survival issues, mainly food, for the Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution. She explained how she ended up with this role:

I did not want to do this role in the beginning. But I could not say no. They chose me because I was used to do this role in previous protests. In the last few years before the revolution, I was one who is organizing donations, mainly food and blankets, for workers in sit-ins, many of these were in downtown and near Tahrir. I became very experienced with types of food that was good in storage. A huge sit-in like the one in Tahrir needs lots of organizations with logistics, food and blankets are of the most important things of these logistics. In Tahrir, many of us knew what we were supposed to do on these issues.

Protestors’ shared memories of their own and others’ experiences during previous protests thus informed both the very idea of occupying the square, and the specific strategies and people employed to do it.

⁷⁸ As I mentioned in the introduction, I conducted research in three other major cities in Egypt, all of which had a strong impact on the events of the Egyptian revolution in different ways. Mahala witnessed what may be considered a true rehearsal of the Egyptian revolution in 2008, when its textile workers attempted a general strike that was suppressed with force by the authorities, sparking mass riot in the city. Suez also witnessed serious clashes by protestors and police authorities over January 25-27, including the first death of a protestor. These events galvanized anger and protests in Cairo. Alexandria, the most populous city after Cairo, was also key in that it was the home of Khaled Said, the young Egyptian blogger whose torture and death served as the primary catalyst for the revolution. In each of these cities, a public square was a significant site of protest (Arbaeen Square in Suez, el-Shone in Mahala, and Ibrahim’s Square and mosque in Alexandria), yet in none of these locales did protestors successfully stage a full sit-in. There was only a failed attempt in Alexandria, which I discussed in the introduction.



Figure 8 Protesters assembled in Tahrir Square on March 20, 2003, for what later became a sit-in that lasted for one day. (Photo by Randa Shaath, used here with her permission).

Because many of my interviewees had memories of unsuccessful attempts to occupy the square, their narratives of occupying Tahrir in 2011 involved a distinct sense of pride that this was the longest period they had held the square, and that this represented a new form of liberation. In this sense, Tahrir was not only an important geopolitical site for protesters, but also a historic site over which they had been struggling for decades. One of the most important components in protesters' narratives was the idea that Tahrir should finally live up to its name (liberation). Their hope was that the liberation of Tahrir would lead to the liberation of Egypt from dictatorship. Implicit in activists' narratives was an understanding of Tahrir as not only liberated during the sit-in of 2011 itself, but also as a symbol of liberation both historically and for the future. Ahmed Bahaa Eddin Shaaban, one of the leaders of the student movement in 1972, became the general coordinator of the National Association for Change, a coalition of different

political groups that came together to mobilize for democracy under Mubarak. Shaaban himself comes from a leftist background and is about 63 years old. He has spent most of his life involved in political activism against both Sadat and Mubarak. When I interviewed him, he told me how the revolution was in many ways a culmination of all the political activism in his life: “I learned from this revolution and I found in it the reward for all of our sacrifices in our political career since the student movement in 1972. In Tahrir we were liberating ourselves.”

Previous protests and occupations of Tahrir were an important source of inspiration, and also provided a reference against which to measure contemporary efforts. In an interview, Nermine Nezar, an independent activist, stated:

In all my life, I have been reading the poem about the “brick cake,” and I have been hearing stories about the students protest and their occupation of Tahrir. And I have older friends and family members who participated on this. I thought that this was the highest point in the political protest history in Egypt. But when the 18 days in Tahrir came, I felt like we are making new and a stronger history. I was proud of my generation. It was like a dream.

And while the history of protests in Tahrir made it the most well-known target for protesters who wanted to join the sit-in spontaneously, other activists explicitly used this history and the image of Tahrir to recruit more protesters. The idea of borrowing meanings from the past to encourage more newcomers to join the protests was an important aspect of the first eighteen days of the revolution.

One of the best examples was the use of important political songs from Egypt’s history. Protesters sang old national songs, particularly those advocating resistance against occupation and/or liberating lands. One of the most significant songs appropriated and redeployed in Tahrir in 2011 was a song written by poet Ahmed Fou’ad Negm and composed and sung by Sheikh

Emam.⁷⁹ The song, named “The valiant is valiant and the coward is coward,” was written in 1969 in the context of the six-year war between Egypt and Israel, when the idea of continuing resistance/war until liberating the occupied Sinai figured prominently in the political debates and protest at the time. Protesters in the 2011 revolution appropriated the 1969 song to refer to Tahrir and sang it to those who entered the square. The message was clear: Tahrir is for those who are valiant. The song’s words emphasize the significance of resistance and that only brave people will go to the field (square):

We will raise the strife
Above all storms
We will be proceeding all nights
And bring the morning
We will defeat defeatism
If you want to redress all the lost,
Go to the field
The valiant is valiant
And the coward is coward

Since 2011, the song has also become popular among protesters trying to re-occupy Tahrir. On April 13, 2012, for example, in one of the so-called “million person rallies” to protect the aspirations of the revolution, tens of thousands of protesters were recorded singing the song at the same time.⁸⁰

Memories of more recent protests were also present in the minds of many protesters. Activists talked particularly about efforts in the early 2000’s. Speaking about his experience in 2003, Mohamed Sanad, a young leftist activist, recounted:

This was my first participation in a demonstration ever. I was in Cairo University, where the students’ rally started. I knew that the target was Tahrir. I joined the protesters. In Tahrir, I saw Kamal Khalil leading chants against Mubarak. The atmosphere was

⁷⁹ The works of both Negm and Emam are significant Egyptian political protest history. The two artists were present in 1972, and visited student protesters in the square. They have been heroes of resistance movements throughout the 1970s and beyond, including the 2011 revolution. Their songs were banned in Egypt throughout the 1970s and the 1980s.

⁸⁰ This video can be viewed on YouTube (*The valiant is valiant and the coward is coward* 2012).

impressive for me. I saw young people, men and women, chanting and signing old songs of Sheiekh Emam. At night, protesters lighted many candles. For somebody who never experienced or saw any protests outside the university, this was very memorable and impressive experience. I remembered this during the revolution. It was almost the same environment.

This sense of participating in something with longer historical roots and meanings was cited by numerous protestors. Whether recalling songs and narratives passed down through generations, or drawing on their own personal memories, participants in the 2011 revolution consistently framed the meaning of contemporary events in their historical context.

Conclusion

In this chapter I tried to study the history of protests in Egypt in two ways. The first way was to locate the problem of Tahrir in the larger context of political public space under authoritarianism and also to understand why protestors were always in urban centers and located in downtown Cairo. In the second part of the chapter, I examined how the history of Tahrir as a space of mobilization shaped the 2011 revolution and its meaning for participants. Of course, mobilization and political protests before the revolution are connected to the latter in many ways, not only through the space of Tahrir. But this chapter shows that the power of the square as a historical idea and inspiration played a constitutive role in the revolution itself. Recent scholarship has brought more attention to the meaning and effects of spaces in which significant events take place. But as Tahrir and, hopefully, this chapter reveal, even before or in between moments when events take place, spaces carry meanings that are constructed over time, redeployed and reconfigured in the present, and carried forward as inspiration for the future.

CHAPTER 3

Repertoires of Revolution: Tahrir as Convergence of Multiple Modes of Action

I first entered Tahrir Square on February 4, 2011. The events that would eventually become known as the Egyptian Revolution began nine days earlier on January 25, when protestors first began their sit-in in the square. Just two days before my arrival in Tahrir, on February 2, a huge crackdown took place in which pro-Mubarak supporters, protected by the police, attacked the protesters with sticks, rocks, Molotov cocktails, even live ammunition. Despite this siege, the sit-in survived. It was a tumultuous and violent time, but when I entered Tahrir Square on February 4, I was still shocked to see what was going on. To be sure, there was evidence of recent violence. Pro-Mubarak supporters continued to clash with pro-democracy protestors. Some people were still fighting, but others were simply gathered together. Huge debates were going on everywhere. There were two big stages with huge speakers in the square. Impromptu field hospitals had been established and volunteers were treating people with injuries. Protestors erected barricades to protect the square from intruders. In the midst of what could all too easily be seen by outside observers as chaos, there was evidence of extraordinary organization. How had this been achieved? Who built those stages and how did they get sound equipment into the square in the context of the recent siege? When and how were the field hospitals set up? Who was coordinating issues like food, water, and hygiene for these huge numbers of people—numbers that, during the days, were reportedly reaching a million? Over the next week, I moved in and out of Tahrir Square, talking to people both inside and on the outside, looking in. By February 11, 2011, the day Mubarak was ousted from power, Tahrir had become

firmly established in the media and in the minds of Egyptians as *the* site of the revolution. In this chapter, I examine how this was possible.

As discussed in the previous chapter, there is an important history of protests in Egypt and much of this history has centered around Tahrir Square. Yet, there was nothing inevitable about Tahrir's emergence as the center of the Egyptian Revolution, nor was there anything that guaranteed that the sit-in there would simply *survive* past the first day, let alone grow to become so successful. Thus, the central question of this chapter is: how did the Tahrir Square sit-in become the main mode of action of the revolution? And secondarily, how despite an almost continuous state of siege and attacks by security forces and regime supporters, did the protests in Tahrir not just *endure*, but *grow*, continuing to mobilize people while also dealing with the monumental task of survival for so many people in such a space.

I draw in this chapter on Tilly's (1986, 2006) concept of repertoires of contention in order to understand the various modes of action that converged in and around Tahrir Square. Borrowing from the realm of theater and performance, Tilly argues that participants in collective action tend to select their actions from those performances with which they are most familiar. Using a wide range of historical examples, Tilly proposes that in specific periods, specific techniques of protest or *repertoires* become prevalent, shaping the ways in which people engage with political regimes. Importantly, Tilly also stresses the adaptive, creative ways in which people employ the repertoires specific to their historical and geographical context. Sidney Tarrow (2011) later elaborated on Tilly's concept by theorizing about the *modularity* of repertoires, or how they are diffused through various media and processes over time and space. Modular repertoires, according to Tarrow are "diffused through print, association, and state building that national social movements developed" (2011: 7).

Building upon and expanding Tilly's arguments, I want to highlight specific features of the repertoires that constituted the Egyptian revolution, how and why they came together at Tahrir, and how they interacted with one another. Specifically, I examine how the actions and events that unfolded in and around Tahrir were: 1) characterized by a complex interplay of organization and spontaneity; 2) centrally concerned with issues of *both* basic survival and political mobilization; 3) constituted through multiple repertoires of contention, in which the sit-in was central, but also supplemented in various ways by other actions such as barricades, rallies, and targeted attacks on government buildings; and 4) given added symbolic and practical efficacy through social media and what I refer to as the *virtual making of Tahrir*. My arguments here are constructed, in large part, in response to problematic characterizations of the Egyptian revolution that would paint it, alternately, as *purely* spontaneous, entirely reducible to a social media phenomenon, confined completely to the sit-in at Tahrir, and/or remarkable only as a political accomplishment and not also (and just as importantly) as a stunning *practical* achievement. In what follows, I hope to show why every one of these depictions is a simplification, and to offer instead a more nuanced understanding of what it means to talk about *repertoires, leadership, organization, strategies* and *survival* in a revolution. But first, it is important to outline a basic description of the sit-in in Tahrir, and the shifts that occurred there between January 25 and February 11, 2011.

The Tahrir Sit-in

Although the idea of occupying Tahrir Square until Mubarak left was present in the minds of many protesters from the first day onward, there was little actual equipment such as tents or other supplies that would facilitate occupation at first. As protesters clashed with the police, some slept on the ground, while others went home and returned the next day to continue

protesting. On the evening of January 25, 2011, the day named by many as the start of the revolution, protesters decided to occupy Tahrir, but police eventually evacuated them by force. The square was a site of continuous protest and confrontations until the afternoon of January 28, 2011, when protesters succeeded in finally establishing a mass sit-in that the police were unable to clear. In many ways, then, one could argue that Tahrir's occupation was not *fully developed* until at least January 28, 2011, thus throwing into question the accuracy of the oft-cited reference to the "18 days of the revolution." Nonetheless, from January 28 to February 2, despite the continuation of violent clashes, more and more people came to sleep at night in the square, bringing blankets, tents, and food. Others who could not sleep there brought whatever they could to support the sit-in. Conditions were difficult, as the military, which was present in the streets from January 28 onward and until February 2, 2011, was not allowing food, medicine, or blankets into the square. There may seem to be a contradiction here: while the square was under regime siege, at least during this period, protesters were still able to bring things in—indeed, as I will show later, protesters never stopped their efforts to bring materials in.

On February 2, a large group of pro-Mubarak supporters, alongside plainclothes policemen, came to evacuate the square by force in what became known as the "camel battle," as some people arrived with horses and camels. Though some protestors were killed in the ensuing violence that took the form of twenty hours of continuous clashes, ultimately, the protesters succeeded in holding Tahrir and protecting the sit-in. Most of the clashes occurred without any interference from the military, which remained neutral. After the battle, protesters decided to establish their own security system of groups of guards at all entrances of the square. A looser version of this had already been established prior to February 2, but not at all the entrances, and without any formal organization. After February 2, all the entrances had a checkpoint and every

single visitor had to be inspected before entering. As more and more people joined and brought supplies, the sit-in grew in strength and became more established after that date until February 11, when Mubarak was ousted.

I asked many protesters to estimate the number of people sleeping in the square at night. They all had different estimates, but many confirmed that until February 2, the number ranged from around 5,000 to 10,000 protesters, climbing to between 10,000 to 20,000 throughout the rest of period, and that in the last days before ousting Mubarak, the numbers may have reached as high as 200,000 people actually sleeping in Tahrir at night. Media descriptions of million-person rallies organized by protesters were referring to numbers during the day, when the numbers for the mass rallies in the streets peaked. The highest density of people actually sleeping in tents was in the center of the square, though they dispersed further over time. I did not document the exact number of tents, as this was difficult due to the sheer number of protesters and how events unfolded while I was there from February 4, 2011, onward, but I would estimate there were several hundred. These tents were of different types, ranging from ready-made tents designed for hiking and camping, to handmade tents fashioned from pieces of cloth and sticks (see Figure 9). Other protesters simply slept on the ground with sheets, plastic mats, or cardboards beneath them, with or without blankets. The scene was an incredibly dynamic one, with the appearance of the square shifting every day as tents moved and people joined and left over time.

Here I would like to highlight two points. First, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, Egyptian protestors mostly used the word “sit-in” rather than the word “occupation.” After the first 18 days of the revolution, protesters continued to rally in Tahrir and there were many sit-ins that took place there. Activists referred to these sit-ins by different names, naming them after the

dates they occurred—as was the case for the March 2003 sit-in, or after the purpose of the sit-in, such as the Shafeeq sit-in, in reference to activists’ protests against the Prime Minister appointed by Mubarak. The first famous 18-day sit-in of the revolution is still known as the January sit-in or the main sit-in, because it started the whole 2011 revolution. And I use the words “occupation” and “sit-in” interchangeably, to avoid confusion as mentioned earlier. Second, as much as the occupation of Tahrir was planned by some activists, it was for other protesters simply a spontaneous development in which they found themselves with so many others in the biggest square in Cairo. During that 18-day period, authorities tried many times to evacuate the square by force or through other methods. But the more protesters succeeding in maintaining the space for themselves through hard battles, the more they became committed to holding it and keeping the occupation going. Protesters invented a famous chant on January 30, 2011, in which they said, “We will not leave; he should leave,” in reference to Mubarak. The chant captured the importance of safeguarding Tahrir and the sit-in as a significant part of their strategy.

The authorities deployed various means to try to evacuate (or prevent protesters from entering) the square. As noted above, there was the successful push on the eve of January 25, 2011, when the police fired live ammunition and also a massive amount of tear gas. Due to the small number of protesters (a few thousand), they were forced to leave. The second major battle for the square began on January 28, 2011. This lasted all day and took place in different locations, including a very famous battle between central security forces and protesters on Qasr El-Nile Bridge. This ended with a victory for the protesters and after this point, protesters did not leave the square until February 11, 2011 when Mubarak was ousted. On the afternoon of January 30, 2011, F-16 planes flew very low above protesters in an effort to scare them. But many protesters insisted on staying, and continued their chant of “We will not leave; he should leave!” From

January 30 to February 2, the Egyptian military deployed in the area, and pro-Mubarak supporters and thugs nearby prevented medical supplies and food from entering the square. Then, on February 2, there was the “camel battle,” but still protesters succeeded in protecting the sit-in and the square. This incident and the military’s failure to safeguard protesters and the square forced activists to form their own security system and checkpoints to protect their sit-in. As a result, the situation was relatively calmer from February 4 to February 11, 2011. I will move now to the first feature of the sit-in in Tahrir, which about the question of organization and spontaneity in Tahrir.



Figure 9 Protestors chanting and talking in Tahrir, in the background varieties of tents. (Picture taken by the author on February 8, 2011).

I. Tahrir as Site of Organization and Spontaneity

How exactly did protestors in Tahrir Square manage to organize the sit-in? Is it even possible to speak of “organizing” a camp that has millions at one time? Answering such questions is incredibly difficult in the case of Tahrir for there were so many different actors and dynamics at play. Though references to “complexity” can come off as overly pat, it is hard to over-emphasize this feature of Tahrir. I refer here and throughout this chapter to Tahrir, the specific space and place of the sit-in, but Tahrir can also be seen as an event, a point of convergence of multiple processes, and a heavily-laden symbol. Understanding what was going on there requires looking in many different directions at once. There were people who worked to shape the sit-in from within the square, and others who worked to shape it from without. There were experienced protestors and activists who could draw on past memories of mobilization in Tahrir and elsewhere, and there were those who were politicized for the first time and who decided spontaneously to participate in the sit-in and to help keep it going in various ways. In an effort to highlight the intersection of these various dynamics, I focus here on two issues: first, I look closely at the first day in Tahrir, January 25, 2011, asking how it was that the idea of a sit-in was established; and second, I show how organized and spontaneous actions were densely interwoven during this early period, leading both to the extraordinary scale of mobilization *and* the impression that no one person or group was in charge.

January 25: The First Meeting in the Square

Several of my informants told me about a meeting that took place in Tahrir Square on the evening of January 25, 2011. There were many conflicts about the number of protestors who were present in the square at the time; estimates vary between 5,000 and 20,000 protestors. At

around 8 pm or so, some known activists called for a meeting to discuss what to do next. As I was told this story by different people, each of them focused on different elements. Indeed, some were even skeptical about calling it a “meeting.” But for my purposes here, I will refer to it as the “tree meeting,” as it later came to be called, in reference to a tree in Tahrir Square near the KFC store and the entrance to Talaat Harb Square.⁸¹

Most of my informants agreed that, at its peak, there were about 200 people present for the meeting. But they also emphasized that the term “meeting” was misleading insofar as it suggested any kind of agreed upon agenda, set structure, formal speakers, or even start or stop time. Rather, the gathering was a relatively spontaneous one. Some people called for it and some people came. Not everyone stayed the whole time, people joined and left over the course of an hour. As my informants explained, this kind of fluid participation is normal given the culture of coalitions that existed among political factions in Egypt in the decade before the revolution. The main purpose of the meeting was just for these various groups and individuals to exchange information, particularly pertaining to when and where the police were planning to focus their energies next. Participants also talked generally about what to do next, but only two clear goals were agreed upon: 1) to stay in the square—in short, to stage a sit-in, and 2) to release a statement of the protestors’ demands (see **Figure 10**).

⁸¹ Tahrir Square and Talaat Harb Square are connected.

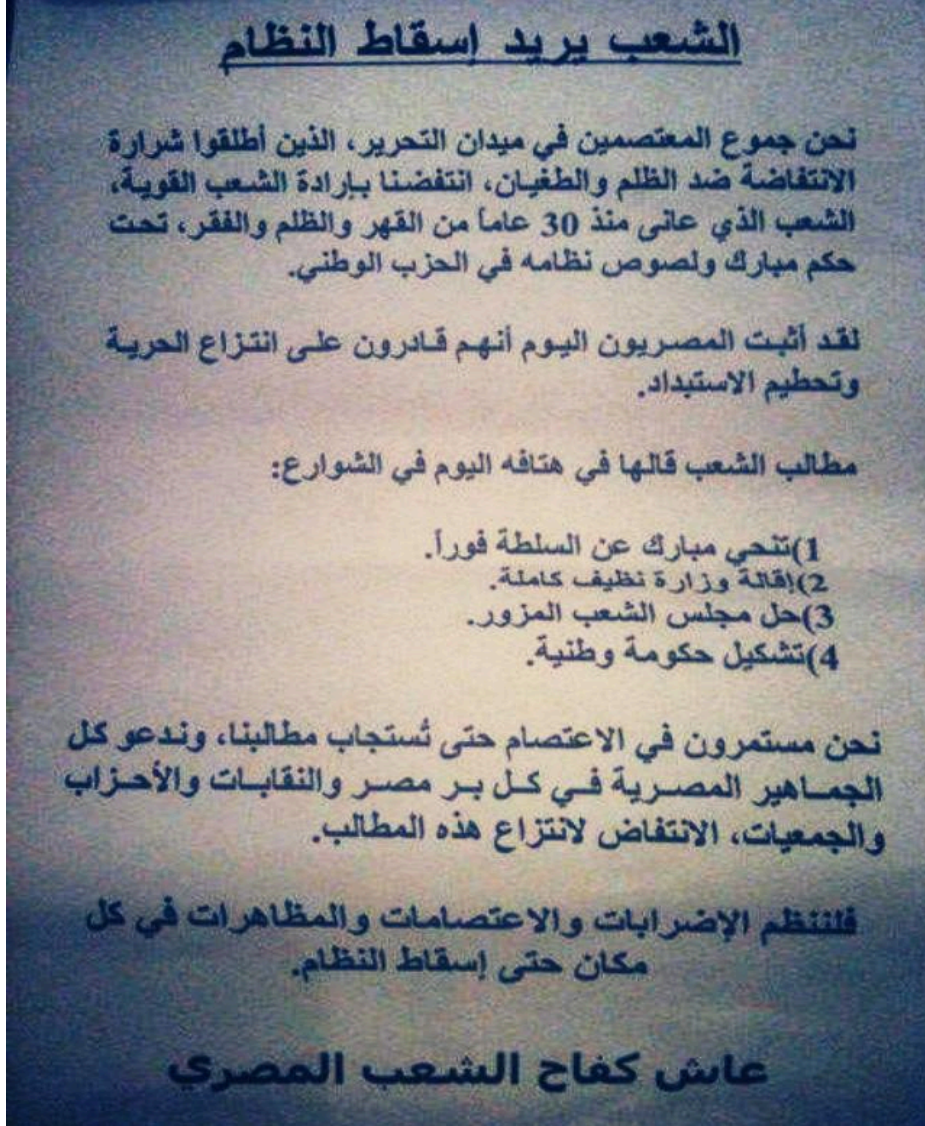


Figure 10 First statement issued by protestors in Tahrir Square, distributed on the evening of January 25, 2011.¹ The statement was distributed as a hard copy in Tahrir and it was scanned and distributed in social media among activists during and after the revolution.

The story of how the statement was drafted is, itself, telling. The first draft was prepared by an experienced activist, Dr. Abdel Galeel Mustafa, the coordinator of the pro-democracy movement Kefayya (Enough), and included many demands, such as ending emergency law and firing the Minister of the Interior, Habib el-Adly. According to many of my informants, most of the people present—particularly the youth—disagreed with the statement at first. They felt that the statement should include as its first demand that Mubarak should step down (Raheel Mubarak, رحيل to leave in Arabic). This opinion eventually prevailed and when the statement was released later, its first demand was for Mubarak to leave. My informants stressed that this interaction encapsulated some of the tensions and dynamics between older and younger protestors that would shape the weeks to come.

Amre Ghrabiya, a leading blogger in Egypt, described the meeting in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, caricaturing the various “types” of people and stances represented there that day. Ghrabiya thought that the meeting is best descriptions of what happened later and symbolizing all the stances of the Egyptian activist elites from the revolution and what happened in the year after:

This person...was enthusiastically discussing things, while not being practical at all, have no plan, simple words such as: “I am willing to die here in Tahrir.” And then there is this person....whom you feel in every single word he is saying that he is willing to negotiate with the regime. And also a third person, who is making a huge effort to end the meeting with a very practical and even detailed plan. And this person who really does not care about the meeting or any discussion and left the meeting to stand with others who are in the square, ready to battle with the police and defend the square.

Wael Tawfeeq, a leftist activist, recalled this about the meeting:

That night in the square on January 25, 2011, I had the same similar feeling to what I had in the sit-in of March 2003 in Tahrir. Yes, few thousands were around. But I also looked around to see familiar faces. I talked to known activists such as Kamal Khalil and Kamal Abu Eita [two known pro-democracy activists; the first is a radical Marxist and the second is a Nasserite/Arab nationalist]. There were also many others, from Tagamou’ Party, the Egyptian communist party, Karama Party, many liberals, and revolutionary

socialists as well as revolutionary left. We knew we had to meet. Someone called for the meeting. And we ended with the statement and, some rushed to collect blankets and tents, and organize collecting food. We were ready for the sit-in. But only after few hours, the police attacked.

Khaled Abdel Hameed, one of the founders of the Youth Coalition of the Revolution, corrected one point of confusion, noting that in fact there was not one single meeting, but more like a series of meetings:

The meeting took place three times, at 7:00, 9:00, and 12:00 PM, before the square was evacuated by force. At 7:00 in the first meeting, the following forces were there: Youth for Justice and Freedom [a leftist coalition of youth, and not to be confused with the Freedom and Justice party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood that was formed later after the revolution], some youth from the Muslim Brotherhood, youth from the Democratic Front Party, youth from ElBaradei Campaign, from the 6 April Movement, and some members from the Revolutionary Socialists. In the meeting we talked about what to do next. It was surprising that many people showed up in the protests that day. And we suggested that we will meet in two hours to assess the situation and see how many people in the square. At 9:00 we meet another time. And we decided that the next step is to call for collecting donations and food and blankets and equipments for forming sit-in in Tahrir. In the second meeting some political figures attended too such as Ibrahim Esssa [journalist and critic of Mubarak], Kamal Abu Eita [Nasserite and labor organizer], and Kamal Khalil [radical Socialist]. In the end of the meeting, we issued a statement in which we called for firing the minister of interior, and all the cabinet, and all those who are responsible for torture in the police in Egypt. At 12:00 we met one more time, but after a few minutes...the police started to attack the square and we end up leaving.

These narratives are important for they reveal several things. First, that though protestors met to exchange information and agree upon some minimal goals, there were no efforts to develop a plan as such for the revolution. Organizing efforts took the form, rather, of meetings that were scheduled in advance, but only minimally and loosely so. Participants were well aware of their differences, but saw these as neither an immediate stumbling block *nor* something that necessarily had to be resolved before moving forward. As activists told me later, awareness of this meant that nobody dared to claim in retrospect that they were in control of the events that came later. There was no guarantee of any sort about how things were going to unfold. Short of

agreeing to simply stay in the square until Mubarak was gone, there was no grand plan. And yet people did meet and there was from the start a collective sense of the need to coordinate and support one another. People were talking not only about political statements, but also about blankets and food and equipment. Still, the question remains: why didn't the square simply descend into chaos as security forces stepped up their attacks *and, despite this*, more and more people flocked to Tahrir? Here, I turn to the complex interplay of organization and spontaneity that characterized those first days in the square.

Spontaneous organizations and organized spontaneity

From my own observations during the revolution, and my discussions with many activists and protesters who were present at the time, there was no *central* organization for anything. Rather, there were multiple, simultaneous organizing efforts that took place before and during the key 18-day period. In terms of organization formation, there were two kinds of organizations. First, there were organizations that existed before the revolution; this includes mostly organized political parties, activist coalitions, and other interest-based groups. The best examples of these are Kefayya, the National Association for Change, and the Muslim Brotherhood.⁸² Another interesting set of groups, however, that existed before the revolution were the “ultras,” or organized groups of football fans that were able to draw upon their experience of fighting with police in violent clashes related to football games. These groups played an important role in protecting the square, particularly during the first week of the revolution.

⁸² The National Association for Change is another group that was evolved from Kefayya. Kefayya did not disappear from politics until the revolution and its aftermath. But the National Association for change was a broader coalition that did not include only leftists (Nasserists and Marxists as the case in Kefayya), but it included many liberals and also Islamists. I discuss both Kefayya and the National Association for Change in chapter 4.

Second, there were the organizations that were formed during the revolution, primarily in order to do specific things, like taking care of the wounded, providing art and entertainment, or ensuring ongoing mobilization for the revolution. The most important of these organizations was the Youth Coalition for the Revolution (YCR). The YCR announced itself as an entity on January 30, 2011, only five days of the start of the protest, but it was, in fact, several months in the making. Members of several youth organizations had been working together to plan large-scale protests in the few weeks leading up to the revolution, and it was these groups that made the initial call for protests on January 25. The coalition included six youth groups: Justice and Freedom (leftist), the 6th of April group (liberally oriented), ElBaradie supporters (liberally oriented), youth of the Muslim Brotherhood, and youth of the Democratic Front Party (liberally oriented). Later, the YCR launched a Facebook page and its press releases were circulated widely, but from the beginning in Tahrir, the tents and the corner claimed by the coalition quickly became an important center for spreading news. Another group that formed in Tahrir was called the “January 25, 2011 movement,” though it did not gain the same attention as the YCR. The former was based on individual membership and was more radical, refusing membership to liberal and/or Islamist members. The Youth Coalition of the Revolution, on the other hand, gained more attention and was more effective because it was a coalition of strong, effective, already existing groups.

Other specialized groups that formed during those first days in Tahrir included: Physicians for Tahrir, the main group responsible for managing and working in the field hospitals for the wounded; Artists for the Revolution, tasked with boosting morale and filling the square with different types of creative art made especially for the revolution; and Journalists for the Revolution, who organized displays of pictures and newsstands and wall magazines in Tahrir.

Scriptwriters, filmmakers and workers in Egypt's cinema production as well made their own statements and had some sort of organization in Tahrir. Grouped loosely according to the coalitions to which they belonged, protestors throughout the square created their own "corners" to display their work, offer assistance, and talk to members of the public who came to talk to activists or just to learn about what was going on. In addition to these groups, there were also various committees that were formed spontaneously to deal with practical issues such as health (general medical care), food (food and survival committee), hygiene (waste management and garbage disposal), and security (security/check-points committee) as the sit-in grew in size. Ahmed Douma, a leading activist and a founding member of the YCR told me, "The square was like a complete republic: we had ministries of health, food, and defense." To deal with morale, there was more of a fluid network of activists who circulated through the crowd, especially at night, singing to boost people's spirits or even creating false alarms to ensure people were remaining alert. Other protestors spontaneously took it upon themselves to clean the square regularly or they encouraged others to help clean the square and collect the garbage in one or two locations.

In other words, organization emerged organically in Tahrir Square, building upon existing networks and practices, but also coming together in new and unique ways. Some people came to the square as part of groups, but once there, they interacted within the space as part of a larger whole. People volunteered to do things all the time, with little, if any, concern for who was "in charge." Norhan Tharwat, a leftist activist who works as an IT support person for a human rights NGO, described the scene:

When it comes to food, water and cleaning the square, people volunteered to do jobs with others in coordination, or simply just stood up to do things without being asked. For example, many activists decided to clean the square. Some mocked them and described them as the green youth of the square. But they were persistent. Perhaps it was a middle

class thing, but many of them were wearing gloves, and have many trash bags, sweepers and shovels. Most people had to do specific jobs or knew what to do. It was like a state of multiple or parallel initiatives.

The general feeling among the crowds was that what was happening was too large for any one group to control. Khaled Abdel Hameed, one of the founders of the YCR, quoted above, emphasized that what was going on in Tahrir was way bigger than the YCR or any other organized group. Perhaps the most telling phrase was one uttered by many protesters and activists during this period: “Tahrir has no owner.” And as others said to me, “Tahrir only belongs to the revolution.”

In short, there were many types of organizing efforts in Tahrir, but paradoxical though it may seem, these efforts were decentralized and combined with spontaneous actions. It is important to contrast this with the common depiction in media analyses that talk about the Egyptian revolution as a leaderless movement (The Christian Science Monitor 2011; Hais and Winograd 2011; Slaughter 2011; Tugal 2013). The revolution may not have had a single leader in the traditional sense, yet the tendency in these analyses is to equate this absence with a corresponding absence of organization. Similarly, other important analyses of the Egyptian revolution have focused on the prominence of spontaneity in mobilization and on the streets during the revolution (Bamyeh 2011). Yet, as the discussion above has sought to demonstrate, simply describing people’s actions as spontaneous fails to capture the ways in which people drew on pre-existing patterns of behavior and already established networks built around skill-sets and interests, but also adapted their actions creatively as new circumstances arose. There were, in fact, multiple forms of organization on the ground, including groups that existed before the revolution and groups that emerged organically to respond to needs within the square as they developed. Indeed, I would tend to argue along similar lines as John Chalcraft (2012) who has

suggested that there actually so many different “leaders” and organizers on the ground that the media simply didn’t know how to characterize what it was seeing.⁸³ Ultimately, what was going on in Tahrir involved a complex interplay of organization and spontaneity and the two dynamics must be examined together.

II. Tahrir as Site of Survival and Mobilization

Again, we arrive at the (only seemingly) simple observation that in Tahrir, many things were going on at the same time. As one activist told me in an interview, “Every inch in Tahrir witnessed a story, or even many stories, nobody can claim or is capable of collecting all these stories.” Though we may never be able to collect all of the stories, we can at least examine Tahrir from multiple angles. In this section, I focus on the dual attention given to two immediately pressing goals: survival and mobilization. On the one hand, protestors within the square were faced with the very real, logistical problem of how to ensure the basic survival of so many people in a space not designed to accommodate such day-to-day habitation. On the other hand, protestors also needed to ensure that those within the square *and* those who might join in the future remained mobilized, committed to the cause of holding Tahrir and insisting that their demands be met. Both goals were imperative and each served to counterbalance the other. If either one fell apart, the whole endeavor would have unraveled. Protestors thus needed to maintain a persistent double vision, attentive to both short-term practicalities and long-term visions for Egypt’s future. In short, neither the *physicality* nor the *politics* of Tahrir could be ignored.

⁸³ Chalcraft proposes that revolution actually may be described as “leaderful” as opposed to leaderless.

The problem of survival was crucial. At issue was not only how to survive under the constant threat and regular reality of violence, but also how to address only seemingly banal needs like food, water, and bathrooms for tens of thousands, even up to a million people, with limited resources. For a one-day rally, this is a manageable problem, but a sit-in lasting over two weeks was something with which *no one* in Tahrir had previous experience. As with so much else that took place in the square, these issues were also managed on a dynamic, ad hoc basis, combining elements of organization and spontaneity.

The simple provision of blankets, tents, and food was a contentious issue from the very beginning. On the very first night, January 25, 2011, after the “tree meeting” described above, many activists brought tents and blankets and food to Tahrir. Their efforts did not last long, however, as the police attacked at midnight and evacuated the square by force. In the days that followed, things began to assume a familiar pattern: people would bring supplies to the square, while police tried to keep these things out—whether by arresting people bearing such items before they could even reach Tahrir, or by periodically using force to disperse those who were set up in the square. Over time, despite police efforts—or arguably even *because of them*, the numbers of protestors kept growing and the sit-in kept expanding. An informal network connected protestors within the square and a more fluid group of people both inside and outside of the square who moved back and forth, simply bringing what they could, when they could.

Water provides an interesting example. There were many ways to get drinking water, and these varied in terms of class and preferences. Some people drank only mineral water and were careful to always bring water with them. Visitors and protestors also brought boxes of mineral water to share with others, either distributing the bottles themselves or giving them to one of the survival committees to distribute later. Other people just drank tap water, and many protestors

volunteered to collect water bottles, wash them, and refill them at nearby taps. The many cafes and restaurants around the square could have served as resources, but most were closed after warning from the police not to open. Ever adaptive, protesters turned instead to nearby churches and mosques. Both Omar Makram Mosque and the Qasr El-Doubara Church served as places people could go to for water, in addition to serving as sites for two of the major field hospitals. Other small mosques were used as similar resources, and in one case, a simple *zawya* (corner in Arabic) on the other side of the Egyptian Museum used for prayer found itself pulling double duty when a long hose was connected from there to Tahrir Square.

When it came to sanitation, bathrooms, and provisions for basic hygiene, there was no single system and, like so much else, strategies shifted over time and among the protestors. For example, there was no central plan to collect garbage, after a few days some people just volunteered to collect it, gathering it all in one or two corners. Bathrooms were another big problem. There are no public restrooms in the square, and most of the stores and cafes in the area were instructed/threatened by the police not to open at all, as part of the plan to put the protest under siege. A small number of stores violated the police order and stayed open, and protestors could also use the bathrooms in the church and mosques mentioned before. For everyone in the square, simply attending to this basic need could become a time- and energy-consuming proposition. Protestors walked distances that varied from a few hundred feet to one mile or more to find bathroom. Some informants told me they would get up at 4:00 or 5:00 AM or even earlier to stand in the line to be able to wash in the Omar Makram Mosque. Others simply went home to take showers, then returned to Tahrir. It is important to remember here that there was always this mix of people in the square—those who were there for the full 18 days, not leaving at all; those who stayed for a few days at a time; and those who came and left on daily basis. Pictures

circulated later, in which activists carried signs reading: “To Mubarak, you should leave because I want to take a shower.” Some activists jokingly told me: “I was a hero to survive being dirty, with no shower for 15 days in the square.” By the second week, some protestors had begun to build public restrooms in the square.

As for sleep, this was not an issue for the daily visitors, but for members of the core sit-in that held the square, it was a nightly concern. From the beginning, people brought tents and blankets and again, there were variations in terms of class and availability. Some protesters, for example, slept in camping tents and sleeping bags, while others improvised simple tents using sticks and big pieces of cloth. It rained twice during the 18 days of the sit-in—once during the “camel battle” and then again on the Friday, February 11, when Mubarak left. Some protesters simply slept on a top of a blanket in the open air. And some female protesters told me they slept at the headquarters of the leftist political party Tagamo, about half a mile or so from the square.

I detail these practical matters in order to emphasize that survival was not a simple thing. The sit-in in Tahrir was a mode of collective action, yes, but it was also a social and physical space in which revolutionaries needed to attend to basic human needs in order to survive. All too often, social movement theories (and perhaps also revolution theories) give scant attention to such issues in their analyses. Social movement theorists ask how social movements endure, referring to the challenges associating with maintaining or reviving mobilization, or the issue of continuity between two movements (Rupp and Taylor 1990⁷; Taylor 1989). But such questions are really concerned with broader issues of movement organization and structure, not the mundane tasks of providing food, water, and places for people to sleep and go to the bathroom. And yet, for an action as large as that staged in Tahrir Square, such issues *were* mobilization issues. They spoke not only to people’s basic physical needs, but also to ensuring that people

would remain in the square, either sleeping there or returning on a daily basis, despite discomfort and despite the constant threat of violence.

There were four features of the actions in Tahrir that addressed these issues of survival and, simultaneously, contributed to keeping the movement alive over the 18 days. The first is the existence of a culture of survival aid that existed before the sit-in, having been strengthened in the decade before the revolution in particular. Some of my ethnographic notes from the years before 2011 are telling here. In 2003, I was the director of a research unit at the Hisham Mubarak Law Center (HMLC),⁸⁴ an NGO that offers legal aid to victims of human rights abuses in Egypt. In addition to legal assistance, however, the offices also provided space for meetings of antiwar and pro-democracy activists, who otherwise had no place to meet. The office was messy—not just full of legal files, but also crowded with blankets, food cans, and medicine. Sometimes you couldn't even walk in without tripping over blankets and packets of medicine. The NGO offices had basically become one of the most well-known, if not the main center in Egypt to collect donations and medical aid for political prisoners in Egypt. When Mubarak was detained a few months after the January revolution, activists mocked his detention, saying, “Perhaps we should contact the HMLC to offer him legal aid, and also send him food in jail.”⁸⁵ In short, there developed among activists and organizations a culture of assisting one another with practical issues related to basic survival. This culture was already in place when the sit-in began and thus,

⁸⁴ The name does not have any connection to Mubarak's family. It was named after a human rights attorney, who died young, after generating lots of initiatives in human rights, especially in the field of legal aid for human rights victims.

⁸⁵ Two days before my arrival to Tahrir Square on February 4, 2011, the HMLC was stormed by the military and state security intelligence, as well as a group of Mubarak supporters. They arrested the executive director of HMLC and two other researchers who work for Amnesty International. The authorities confiscated many things in the office, including blankets, medicine, food, as well as computers and other office equipment.

as a result of this history of organization, protestors were able to draw on these already existing networks *and* spontaneously develop new ones.

This connects with the second feature that facilitated both survival and mobilization: the emergence of parallel patterns of organization to deal with practical issues. On the one hand, there were older activists with past sit-in and protest experience, who quickly began to deal with logistical issues systematically in the square. On the other hand, there were also newly politicized participants, often younger, who simply volunteered to do things like collect garbage or bring food and water randomly, sometimes on a daily basis, sometimes just one time. In other words, there was no single pattern of assistance; people helped out according to their own prior experience and preferences. On February 11, for example, I and a friend decided to bring lots of sandwiches and water to the sit-in, along with bottles of water that we planned to go around and distribute. When we got to the square, we were told to leave everything at one of the central places for distributing food. It would be difficult to characterize these actions as purely spontaneous *or* organized; rather, they were a mixture of both and involved multiple parties working in tandem, but without a pre-existing plan.

Such exchanges were also facilitated by the third feature that developed in Tahrir—or rather, between those inside *and* outside the square. Here I refer to the emergence of multi-sited networks of volunteers. Much attention has been given, understandably, to people who were *in* Tahrir Square, but equally important were the many people who sent assistance from outside the square. I talked to many informants who told me about families and people who couldn't participate directly in the revolution for various reasons—some of them upper class people or even people with ties with the ruling regime, but who were also sympathetic with the revolution—who organized campaigns to collect donations of money and/or food to send to the

square. The sit-in represented, in many ways then, only the most visible part of an iceberg, kept afloat by unseen people and resources beyond the square.

The fourth feature of the sit-in that highlights the intertwined organizing for survival and mobilization is the division of labor that not only emerged among protestors themselves, but also manifested in how resources themselves were used. As noted above, there were pre-existing organizations and political and/or interest-based groups in the square, but also random volunteers who simply started to assist with things. Regardless of who initiated the action, a division of labor always developed. Some people took care of food and tents, while others took care of political negotiations, meetings and mobilization. Big organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, played an important role in collecting food and blankets, and also in manning the checkpoint system established at entrances to the square. For its part, the Youth Coalition of the Revolution helped with food and tents, but also played an important role by giving speeches and maintaining mobilization.

One of the most telling and symbolic images here is that of the large stages installed in the square. The first stage was erected on February 3 by the YCR⁸⁶; the next day, the Muslim Brotherhood installed another (see **Figure 11**).

⁸⁶ It is also interesting to note that the YCR's stage was mainly financed by Mamdouh Hamza, a civil engineer and businessman critical of Mubarak. Some businessmen, especially those who suffered from the monopoly of Gamal Mubarak's networks, did participate in the revolution and contributed donations to assist organization in Tahrir. This is discussed further in the following chapter.



Figure 11 One of the two main stages in Tahrir. By February 11, 2011, there were 6 stages in Tahrir. Picture taken by the author on February 8, 2011.

By February 11, at least four more stages were installed, complete with huge speakers. These stages were crucial in spreading messages and delivering speeches. They served as an important means of communicating in the immense square. What I did not know at the time, but was told later by Seham Shawadda, the main person who worked with the Youth Coalition of the Revolution in collecting and organizing food, was that the stages also provided crucial space under which food could be protected from the elements and stored. This is a profoundly telling image, for it captures the way that survival and mobilization efforts reinforced one another. A stage serves as both a platform from which to politicize a crowd of people *and* a place to keep

food safe and away from the eyes of police who might otherwise have targeted such resources. It speaks, in other words, to the multiple ways in which a movement needs to be nourished to stay alive.

III. All Roads (and Repertoires) Lead to Tahrir

If we use the language of repertoires, one question we need to address is how and why the Tahrir Square sit-in emerged as *the* central repertoire of contention vis-à-vis other modes of action such as erecting barricades, street rallies, and/or attacking centers of power, for example? Again, my argument here is somewhat paradoxical. I affirm that the sit-in was, indeed, the central repertoire, but I also argue that this very centrality was possible due to the way in which this particular repertoire interacted with and was supported by others. In other words, it is not so much a question of one repertoire triumphing over others in some sort of zero-sum competition; rather, repertoires comprised a multi-dimensional, multi-sited palette from which protestors could draw. But as the title of this sub-section puts it, all roads and repertoires really did lead—both literally and figuratively—to the sit-in in Tahrir.

Looking back at my field notes, I could offer various descriptions of Tahrir Square during the revolution: 1) a huge sit-in that occupied one of the main squares in Egypt's capital, Cairo; 2) the target and end-point of multiple rallies originating in various places both within and beyond Cairo; 3) the center of organized attempts to attack key sites of power, such as various government buildings, political party headquarters, and the Egyptian Parliament. In this section, I discuss, in turn, barricades, rallies, and targeted attacks of key buildings as the repertoires that worked together and converged to constitute the Tahrir Square sit-in as the central mode of action.

Barricades

I will start with the barricades. Barricades are barriers, objects, or structures that are erected across a street to stop traffic and prevent or delay the movement of opposing forces. Barricades have long been known and used by protestors in various kinds of protests, urban warfare, and revolutions. Many scholars have written about the emergence and use of barricades during the French revolution (Bos 2005; Harsin 2002; Traugott 1995a, 2010). Recently, sociologist Christian Scholl (2013) wrote about the use of barricades during protests at the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001 and argued for a spatial analysis that conceives barricades as symbolizing the struggle over social control and space between hegemonic powers and protestors for social justice. The point here is that this old tactic of protest is relevant to our contemporary world. Like Scholl, I argue that barricades are not only roadblocks, but in times of revolution or mass protest, they are also much more than that. They are about having the authority to control or separate two zones, and in so doing, define who belongs in each space and what those spaces mean.

Barricades appeared in the Egyptian revolution in many streets in urban centers as well as in Tahrir. To my knowledge, only few scholars have given much attention to the question of barricades in the Egyptian revolution, the most notable exception being El-Ghobashy (2011a). Barricades first appeared the afternoon of January 28, 2011. On that day, there were fierce battles between the police and protestors in many places in Egypt, especially in main streets and squares in most urban centers in cities like Cairo, Alexandria, Suez, Mahala, Mansoura, Islamilia, and Portsaid, among others. Two main patterns for barricades soon developed. The first was barricades established by neighborhood watch groups, formed spontaneously in the streets of major urban centers in Egypt. These neighborhood watches were formed under the name of

popular committees. They were simply groups of neighborhood residents who stayed up at night to protect the streets from robbers and prisoners who escaped from the jails when many of the prisons were left unattended by the police on January 28 (Steinvorth and Windfuhr 2011). I participated in one of these committees in the neighborhood where my extended family was living, after being in Tahrir during the day. The other type of barricade was established in battle zones—the most important of which was in Tahrir Square. The barricades continued in Tahrir as a form of protection of the square after February 4, 2011, when the battles with the police and pro-regime militia/thugs generally stopped.

The barricades in Tahrir became more important than those in other locations, or at least were given more attention in the media, for at least two reasons. The first is that the fiercest and most strategically significant battles with police took place in the roads leading up to Tahrir, especially close to the main entrances to the square. Media and activists alike focused primarily on efforts to control Qasr El-Nile Bridge, but my informants told me about other battles, such as in Abdel-Mone'm Riad Square, a small square leading to Tahrir, also in Al-Qasr Al-Aeiny, and also in Ramses Street. My aim here is not to document all these different conflicts, but to note that notwithstanding this existence of conflict across multiple sites, it was control of Tahrir that garnered the most attention from both onlookers and participants, partly because of the numbers involved, but also partly given the history of Tahrir as discussed in the previous chapter.

At first, there were no real barricades; only impromptu barriers constructed using any available materials on hand. But then, on January 28, 2011, protestors ended up setting fire to and burning two armored military vehicles that were suspected of bringing weapons for the police.⁸⁷ These burned vehicles were then re-purposed as makeshift barricades. As plainclothes

⁸⁷ Informants explained to me later that they based these suspicions on the fact that police would fire on protestors any time one of these vehicles entered the square.

police attacks continued and combined with those of pro-Mubarak supporters, protestors started to take more seriously this question of how to protect the square and restrict access to it. In addition to erecting more barricades, they also developed a system of checkpoints to try to ensure that those entering the square were there to support the revolution. These checkpoints were known as the protestors' gates and they depended entirely on volunteers. Pro-Mubarak supporters and thugs continued to attack the square until February 5, but protestors developed a low-tech tool to sound the alarm when there were intruders by sitting traffic lights and banging on them to alert others.

The barricades eventually enclosing Tahrir soon came to serve as symbols, too, of the division between revolutionary and non-revolutionary space. Over and over again during the revolution, I heard protestors in Tahrir say things like, "When you enter Tahrir you are in the revolution," or "You are now in the most important liberated zone in Egypt," or simply "Welcome to the revolution." Indeed, some of my informants noted that, despite the dangers, they "never felt safer" than when they were in Tahrir. They would explain that outside of Tahrir, they were anxious and worried about the future of the revolution and the future of the country, but once they entered Tahrir, all their fears and worries went away. Barricades, then, served as an important repertoire that worked to affirm the centrality of the sit-in by demarcating the square, both literally and figuratively, as something that protestors controlled.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ I am not all suggesting here that what was going on in Tahrir was more important compared to many repertoires of protest or actions taking place else where, especially the formation of these popular committees or the escalation of labor strikes took places in the last couple days before ousting Mubarak on February 11, 2011. As many radical activists suggested to me, and as I will discuss later in Chapter 5, these other forms of protest had more potential for radicalizing the events of the revolution. According to them, both labor strikes and popular committees, if more politicized and if events lasted for more time, could have lead to different outcomes, at least this could have lead to more "revolutionaries" participation in the transitional governments and or limit the military's control of the transitional process at the time. The focus of my discussion here is that Tahrir was constructed by the regime and activists as more

Rallies

As discussed in the previous chapter, large mass protest rallies in Egypt essentially disappeared from 1977 until 2000.⁸⁹ After that, they reappeared briefly as people mobilized around the Second Palestinian Intifada and then the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2000 and 2003 respectively. Rallies then disappeared again until January 25, 2011—at which point, they reappeared in various places in Egypt. But particularly after January 28, the point of every rally was to end, ultimately, in Tahrir.

During the 18 days of the revolution, there were four so-called “million person rallies.” These were on the following days: February 1, 4, 8, and 11. My first day in Tahrir was during the second of those rallies (Feb 4). Activists of the Youth Coalition of the Revolution invented attractive names, for mobilization purposes, for these rallies. The first one on February 1 did not have a name as such—activists figured the very idea of “million person rally” would be enough to get the world’s attention and scare the regime. But the second million person rally was described, along with the day on which it took place, as the “Friday of *Israr*, or determination; the Friday after, which ended with Mubarak’s ousting, was described as “the decisiveness or the great marching,” in reference to the plan to march, if necessary, to the presidential palace and force Mubarak out. These are the ones during the so-called 18 days of the revolution. After ousting Mubarak protestors also came to the square and in the first Friday after the revolution, Friday, February 18 they gathered in Tahrir and called this day the “Friday of victory.”⁹⁰

important to other locations/actions. I discuss the relation between Tahrir and some important modes of actions took place outside it, especially popular committees and labor strikes in details in chapter 5.

⁸⁹ The exception in this long period is a big riot of the soldiers of police central security forces in Egypt in 1986. But this was limited to some areas in Giza, where the camps of the soldiers camp is located, and also was not a mass riot, in the sense I am discussing here.

⁹⁰ From the time of the revolution until the end of June 2012, Egypt has witnessed 40 million person rallies. The name became less accurate, but the media and activists continued to use the name to describe the big rallies. Some of these rallies did not reach half a million, or even they were limited to several tens

The places from which rallies started were determined by activists, mainly the Youth Coalition of the Revolution, and this information was disseminated via traditional and social media, particularly the “We Are All Khaled Said” site. The starting points were often mosques or other smaller squares both in Cairo and in other cities, and rallies were often scheduled for Fridays. The idea of choosing mosques and Fridays is an old idea that capitalizes on the fact that Friday prayers guarantee a big gathering of already present people. But once the revolution got going, activists were also able to choose other days during the week, in order to maintain mobilization and keep pressure on the regime. When and how the calls for million-person rallies were issued seemed to be an open question and many activists did not have an answer to this. But two of the founders of the Youth Coalition of the Revolution told me “the name [“million person rally”] and the idea was simply a bold move from the coalition. We called for it, after seeing the critical mass that participated on the ‘Friday of rage’ on January 28.”

In general, such large rallies were an important way of getting international attention and they also increased mobilization of protestors and put pressure on the regime locally. The important thing here is that the rallies targeted Tahrir. The routes of the rallies announced by activists were crafted to end in Tahrir. In other words, while rallies and the sit-in in Tahrir were two separate and distinct repertoires, they were linked. Rallies served their own functions, but by having them all end in Tahrir, activists reinforced the notion that Tahrir was the culmination—literally and symbolically—of the revolution. At the end of each rally, one of the concrete goals

of thousands. There were always debates in the media and also some attempts to make scientific measurements to know whether or not Tahrir Square can fit one million person at a time. But it is important that most of the rallies in Tahrir, in the so-called one million person rallies, specially during the revolution, protestors were not only present in the square itself only, but in all or most neighboring streets as well. Sometimes, protestors occupied a space of one mile, half a mile or quarter a mile in these neighboring streets to Tahrir. See these articles about the list and the names of these rallies (Abdel Kareem et al. 2012; M. Moustafa 2011). And also see these articles for the debate concerning how many people could actually fit in Tahrir Square (R. Alexander 2013; Jensen 2011; Shachtman 2011).

was to produce yet another picture of Tahrir, filled with a million people, for international circulation.⁹¹ But it is also important to note here that not all protestors in Tahrir participated in the rallies. Some protestors just went directly to Tahrir, as mentioned in the previous chapter, without traveling there via a mass rally. As I was told by some protestors, “The rule when you do not want to or cannot participate in the rally, you can go directly to Tahrir.” It is impossible to tell how many participated in the rallies compared to those who went to Tahrir directly, but from my observations, and from talking to many protestors, the number of people who participated in the rallies dramatically exceeds those who went directly to Tahrir. But the general idea is that Tahrir was always the target.

Attacking Centers of Power

During the so-called 18 days of the revolution, there were several attempts to attack centers of power. By centers of power, I refer to government buildings, including not only those of the executive and or the judiciary and the police, but also the ruling party offices. These attempts varied over time in terms of their method of attack, their outcome, and their implications. Generally, however, the attacks did not aim to occupy the buildings, but rather to storm them, with an eye to emptying and then burning them. The other aim of these efforts, of course, was the symbolic victory of protestors, and sometimes even the simple act of revenge after long years of repression by the buildings’ inhabitants. The most notable and visible examples of these sorts of attacks were the burning of the headquarters of the ruling party (the

⁹¹ It is important to note here that most media coverage, Egyptian and international, at the time of the revolution was right to associated the rallies with Tahrir. But at the same time, the coverage sometimes did not separate the two things, the rallies/the march and the sit-in, in a way that leads to confusion.

National Democratic Party or NDP) near Tahrir, the burning of many police stations, and the burning of the court complex in Galaa Street, also close to Tahrir (see Figure 12).

On Sunday, January 30, protestors tried to storm the Ministry of Interior building near Tahrir; they did so from various directions, but primarily from Mohamed Mahmoud Street and also Rihan Street, both of which are connected to Tahrir. But police personnel and snipers were concentrated in this area, many on the rooftops of buildings, and as an outcome many protestors were killed and/or wounded. After this, protestors did not make any further attempts to attack the Ministry of Interior. But, for many, the Tahrir sit-in itself symbolized a form of attack on the centers of power, for, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Tahrir holds the greatest concentration of government buildings in all of Cairo and, hence, Egypt. As the Tahrir sit-in expanded, many protestors decided to establish smaller sit-ins in front of Cabinet and the Egyptian Parliament, both of which are in parallel streets and about 50–100 feet from the edge of Tahrir in Qasr Al-Ainy Street. Protestors did not try to occupy the buildings in these instances; rather, their presence was seen as important enough. For even though these were smaller than the Tahrir sit-in, there were still somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 participants, as estimated by many of my informants, and the protestors successfully blocked access to both buildings and occupied the street in front of them.⁹²

It is also important to differentiate between attacks on buildings in or near Tahrir, and those that took place elsewhere in Egypt. The latter were more likely to be random, spontaneous acts of violence and revenge directed at the symbols of power, particularly in the case of local police stations. In contrast, with the exception of the burning the NDP building, similarly targeted attacks in Tahrir were rare conducted simply for revenge, but also as a form of pre-

⁹² Even though I was in Tahrir every day at the time in this period, I did not see this sit-in by the parliament building. Hence, I am relying on the estimate by my informants.

emptive self-defense for those engaged in the sit-in in the square, as in the case of the attempt to attack the Ministry of Interior. Other efforts to target building, such as the occupation of the Parliament and Cabinet, were done to put pressure on the regime and to physically expand the reach of the Tahrir sit-in outward. In other words, these attempts near Tahrir can be seen as part of the sit-in, an extension of it in many ways. There were logistical reasons for this also, given that the square was where the field hospitals and most other resources were located. Sometimes protestors tried to save lives of others who were seriously injured and tried to take them to hospitals, but the most immediate form of help was always to send protestors to Tahrir first. Also, as many informants told me, even when protestors were not injured, but were simply tired and needed food or drink, they would come to Tahrir right away. So, again, whether participating in a rally, targeting a government building, or even just looking for a place to rest, all roads and repertoires led to the sit-in in Tahrir.



Figure 12 The Headquarters of the National Democratic Party (NDP) on the afternoon of January 28, 2011, after protestors burned it down. Picture taken by Hossam El-Hamalawy and used here with his permission.

IV. The Virtual Making of Tahrir

Many analysts have emphasized the significance of social media in the Egyptian revolution. And to be sure, the impact of social media warrants attention as both a relatively new and a potentially powerful social phenomenon. Yet, too often, analysts have exaggerated the role of social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter, at the risk of reducing the complex dynamics of the revolution to a form of technological determinism. These analyses have oversimplified the complicated role of social media and failed to explore their connection to various forms of off-line activism, and to broader and historically longer political dynamics.

Even within the eighteen days of the revolution itself, the role of social media shifted over time, becoming minimal at some moments and generating paradoxical effects at others. The more accurate and productive question, therefore, is not whether the Egyptian revolution was a “social media revolution,” but in what ways social media facilitated, impeded, and/or influenced the revolution.

In this section, I distinguish between the online and offline dimensions of the revolution, and chart how the connections between the two shifted over time with various effects. Specifically, I examine how online-offline interaction drew attention to the Tahrir Square sit-in, practically assisted those who were gathered there, and eventually constructed Tahrir as an icon of the revolution. I call this *the virtual making of Tahrir*. This was a unique process whereby the sit-in was connected both to the larger Egyptian population and to an international audience, making Tahrir *the sit-in of and for* Egypt’s revolution. I argue, however, that the relationship between the space of Tahrir and the forms of cyber-activism before and during the revolution was more multi-layered and dynamic than has been previously acknowledged. First, while cyber-activism was significant in both the initial mobilization that led to the occupation of Tahrir Square and the subsequent iconization of the sit-in there, the physical square itself must also be remembered as a major site of bloggers’ and activists’ organizing efforts and campaigns during the revolution. It is this reciprocal dynamic between online and offline dimensions of activism that I seek to emphasize here. In doing so, I argue against technological determinism and affirm the insistence of many of my informants that, for all their virtual dimensions, revolutions are, ultimately, fought out on the ground.

Second, the role of social media in the revolution was not static over time; rather, it took different forms and shifted through various phases. I divide my analysis of the interaction

between online and offline activism into four phases: 1) From June 2010 to January 27 2011; 2) January 28 to February 1, 2011; and 3) February 2 to February 11, 2011. As discussed in Chapter 2, social media contributed in various ways to expand and transform political public space in Egypt in the years leading up to 2011. Here, I focus more specifically on the revolution itself, noting how social media facilitated mobilization at key moments, provoked various government responses, and sometimes produced paradoxical effects.

Social Media and Initial Mobilization for the Revolution

The period during which social media arguably played the most decisive role in the Egyptian revolution was in the few months leading up to the revolution. The most important and obvious example is the role played by the We Are All Khaled Said Facebook page, introduced in the previous chapter. The page was central in what I describe as the initial mobilization for the revolution. Between June 2010 and January 2011, the page brought widespread attention to the issue of police brutality, in general, and the case of Khaled Said, specifically. Activists used the page to organize various demonstrations related to the case. Over this seven-month period, the page attracted more and more visitors and built up credibility—in large part by avoiding association with any one political party. By the time of the revolution, the page had almost half a million members.⁹³ And in the weeks immediately preceding the revolution, the page became the primary virtual meeting place for discussions and publicizing events—including, most crucially, the protests in Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011.

As activists discussed various details regarding where, when, and how to stage protests, the We are All Khaled Said page provided an important site through which participants

⁹³ At the time of this writing, the page has 3.5 million members (or “likes” for the page). The page also released statistics showing the number of visitors since its formation: one billion and 300 thousand by the end of March 2011.

themselves developed patterns of online-offline communication and instituted collective forms of discussion and decision making. Members of the page proposed ideas about places and slogans and shared practical strategies. The administrators simply facilitated the discussion and highlighted conclusions reached through some form of consensus. Some of my informants, especially the founders of what later became the Youth Coalition for the Revolution described to me how, in the weeks leading up to the revolution, they regularly interacted with the administrators of the page, even though the identities of the latter were still unknown at the time. YCR members sent the WAAKS page administrators numerous e-mails and Facebook messages, discussing various ideas for the prospective protest. This mediated relationship between participants who eventually gathered in mass numbers at the same place at the same time make it very difficult to assert a rigid dichotomy between the virtual and the real. They also indicate that social media was providing participants with an opportunity to practice and produce new forms of dialogue and interaction. And for all that my informants insisted that the revolution absolutely could not be contained or enacted online, neither would it have been possible without the forms of planning and mobilization made possible there.

The Social Media Blackout: January 28 – February 1, 2011

Egyptian authorities shut down the Internet and all cell phone communication in Egypt at midnight, January 28, 2011. For almost one week, Egypt was returned to a pre-digital age. The measure was described by the US-based Internet-analysis firm Renesys as “an action unprecedented in Internet history” that rendered “every Egyptian site inaccessible, from any part of the world” (Toor 2011). And yet, despite this drastic action, the revolution continued. The significance of this pairing cannot be overemphasized, particularly in light of the analyses mentioned at the beginning of this paper that would attempt to reduce the revolution to a form of

technological determinism. Too often, enthusiastic, yet overly simplistic claims about the role of social media in the Egyptian revolution ignore the question of how the protests continued and even intensified after the Internet shutdown. The answer to this is three-fold. First, protestors returned to using pre-digital methods of communication, from landlines to satellite phones and, perhaps most importantly, word of mouth. Second, they developed “backdoor” social media strategies whereby they would speak to friends and family outside of Egypt who would post to social media on their behalf. Thirdly and most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, there was a paradoxical effect of the social media and communications ban—namely, the blackout served to anger and mobilize a greater number of people, but at the same time, it spatially compressed their energies, by necessity, on a smaller space, specifically, Tahrir.

January 28, 2011, also described as the “Friday of Rage,” was a decisive day in the events of the revolution: Mubarak’s brutal Central Security Forces police suffered a major defeat in their street battles with protesters in many neighborhoods in urban centers—the most famous of which were in downtown Cairo near Tahrir, and relatively more restrained army troops were deployed in the streets (Cole 2011a). These two things: the defeat of the police and the deployment of the army signaled an important victory for the revolution—a victory that depended, in large part, upon the large turnout of protestors on the streets that day. The irony, of course, is that this was right in the middle of the Internet and communications blackout in Egypt. But even more ironic is the following possibility: that the absence of social media actually helped to increase the numbers of protesters who participated that day. I interviewed many activists about their participation in the revolution, particularly focusing on specific days such as January 25 and January 28. Even more interesting, however, were my interviews with everyday citizens who didn’t identify as activists prior to the revolution, but who ended up in the streets

participating in it nonetheless. These informants told me: we and many of the other people we know just went to the streets to check things out; we wanted to see with our own eyes what was going on, *given the lack of news and communications*.

Some background context is helpful here: according to a 2011 United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) report, the number per 100 people in the Egyptian population who had cell phones was 101, and number per 100 who were Internet users was 36 (UNICEF 2013). If we exclude elders and children, every Egyptian has more than one cell phone. Many households have more cell phone lines than family members. People do this for a variety of reasons, from marking class status, to securing privacy between family and work and in society in general, to maneuvering between all these spheres. But as a result, many Egyptians were even more angry about the shutting down of all cell phone communications than they were about the Internet blackout. Eliminating cell phone conversations—both voice and text—meant, for many, essentially stopping life for millions of people in Egypt—many of whom might not otherwise have been mobilized to participate in the revolution. As one informant told me: “This was the decision that made critical mass participate in the revolution.”

Thus, by the morning of February 2, 2011, when Internet and cell phone communications were restored in Egypt, the plan had already backfired. Far from ensuring the world would see images of only pro-Mubarak supporters, the return of the Internet at this time enabled protestors to show the world the exact opposite of what Mubarak’s regime wanted to portray: its brutality and authoritarianism. Images of protestors being beaten in Tahrir, and attacks with camels and live ammunition were circulated worldwide. While the shutdown had contributed to stir up international sympathy for the protestors in Tahrir, this ill-timed (from the regime’s perspective)

return of the Internet and its rapidly circulating images, Tweets, and videos contributed to make Tahrir the icon of the Egyptian revolution.

By “iconization,” I mean the process by which the circulated images of and messages regarding Tahrir Square transformed Tahrir into the most potent symbol and representative sign of the revolution. This happened through multiple channels. The first was the immediate coverage of events through social media. Egyptian bloggers and activists, and also regular citizens who became politicized through the protests, used their cell phones and smart phones to take pictures and send/post messages about Tahrir. The second channel was the creation of the Twitter topic or “hashtag” #Tahrir (other famous hashtags of the revolution being Egypt, Jan25, revolution, and Mubarak). Using this hashtag, sympathetic activists from around the world started to share and spread words and images from Tahrir. The phrase “Tweets from Tahrir” became widespread in the days immediately preceding the ousting of Mubarak on February 11.⁹⁴

In short, social media interacted with offline events and actions to constitute the sit-in in Tahrir as the central icon of the revolution. And to the extent that this “making” of Tahrir was effected in part through virtual channels, the process highlights the immediate *modularity* of the repertoires that converged at Tahrir. The sit-in itself may not have been replicated per se elsewhere in Egypt, particularly not at the same scale or with the same level of success, yet through social media and iconization of Tahrir, I suggest that we might find in this example new ways of thinking about repertoires and their transferability/transposability, as highlighted so famously by Sidney Tarrow (1993).

⁹⁴ Notably, it was only a few months after the revolution that books began to appear with the words “Twitter” “Tahrir” in the title; the most important of which was *Tweets from Tahrir*, edited by Alex Nunns and Nadia Idle (Idle and Nunns 2011). The book also has a website that features important tweets from Tahrir during the revolution (“Tweets”). And also see some pieces written about this period (Nunns 2011).

Conclusion

This chapter was devoted to investigate how the sit-in in Tahrir became the central repertoire in the Egyptian revolution, and how all repertoires that took place in Tahrir became the central mode of action in the revolution. Empirically, the discussion in this chapter shows that the discussion about spontaneity in the Egyptian revolution and Tahrir is exaggerated. As I show in the chapter, actions in Tahrir entailed a mix of organization and spontaneity. Theoretically, Tahrir sit-in represents a challenge to the scholarship in repertoires in three different ways. The first of these is the problem of scale. As I showed in this chapter, while Tahrir sit-in was bound by space of Tahrir, the sit-in was transformed into the center of all main protest actions in the revolutions. In other words, seemingly the sit-in repertoire was bound by space, but it was connected to different places, and also wider impact that goes beyond Tahrir. My study of the sit-in in Tahrir exposes the limitations of conventional theories of repertoire which do not deal with how repertoire may have scale up and down. The second way is the problem of repertoire's connections to other repertoires. Most of the literature in collective action repertoires does not deal with this issue. This literature tends to analyze repertoires as separate from one another. A close reading of some of the foundational literature about repertoires sheds light about how historical contexts mattered (such as the French revolution and barricades), but also that we need to study them in relations to one another. As shown in this chapter, Tahrir was not only a sit-in, but was in a sort of organized and messy connections with other repertoires such as rallies, building barricades and also attacking government buildings. Third, this chapter is also an invitation to expand and problematize the question of modularity as developed by Sidney Tarrow. Tarrow's modularity simply means the transferability and or the transposability of modes of

collective action. Even though Tahrir sit-in was not transferred to other parts in Egypt (there is only one failed attempt only in Alexandria as I showed in the introduction), but the fact that Tahrir was iconized and virtually constructed, while it was happening in the same time, as a global phenomena (which latter inspired occupy movement) makes one wonder, can we speak of “immediate modularity?” As the chapter shows, social media contributed to process of iconization of Tahrir, and globalizing its image at the time of the protest during the revolution.

CHAPTER 4

The Tahrir Effect, Part I: A Reformist Revolution and the Embodiment of Revolutionary Legitimacy

Introduction

From February 4, 2011, I was in Tahrir Square every day until the ousting of Mubarak on February 11, 2011. Things were changing on a daily basis in Tahrir, including the relation of the protestors themselves to the square. As protestors began to feel increasingly comfortable in the space and confident in themselves, they began to integrate more of the square and its surroundings as part of the sit-in. Soon, people were climbing buildings and traffic lights not only to hang banners, but also to provide a form of security that would sound an alert when intruders (mostly armed thugs aligned with Mubarak and the ruling party) attempted to enter the square. The grounds filled up with tents, posters, communication centers, and impromptu field hospitals, while barricades were erected at the square's borders. As discussed in the previous chapter, as the sit-in progressed, it expanded beyond the square itself as checkpoints and gates were established in neighboring streets. Protestors also tried to encroach or occupy government buildings and centers of power; some attempts were successful and others not. It was in this context that I witnessed an important incident. On February 6, I saw protestors on top of one of the tallest buildings in Tahrir. The building is at the corner of Tahrir, in the entrance of Talaat Harb Square. On the side of the building, protestors began to unfurl a banner as tall as the building itself; as they did so, hundreds of thousands in the square cheered. On the banner were written a list of demands (see **Figure 13**):

Our Demands:

1. *Ousting Mubarak*
2. *Dissolving the illegitimate Parliament and Upper House (Shoura Council)*
3. *Ending Emergency Status immediately*
4. *Forming a transitional national unity government*
5. *Election of a Parliament to enact constitutional amendments, based on which a presidential election will take place*
6. *Immediate trials for all officials who were responsible for killing martyrs (protestors) of the revolution.*
7. *Immediate trials for all corrupt officials and those who stole the nation's wealth.*

The Youth of Egypt in the sit-in (in Tahrir)

The banner and the story of both its origins and its impact highlight questions about the role of Tahrir's sit-in in the larger revolution. Here we have Tahrir protestors presenting what seem to be the demands of the revolution at large. Indeed, the banner and the revolution's demands became virtually synonymous in popular discourse over time. I cannot point to any process by which these demands were drafted, voted upon, and granted consensus—and yet, it is precisely this apparent *absence* of process that makes the banner's unquestioned acceptance so remarkable. What made so many protestors in Tahrir and beyond accept these as *the* demands of the revolution? The question is all the more pressing because, as I will argue in this chapter, these demands effectively delimited the revolution as a politically reformist one—a strategy that, as I will argue in the following chapter, simultaneously marginalized other possibilities. The widespread acceptance of the banner as representing the demands of the revolution also cemented the understanding of the Tahrir sit-in as *the* site of the revolution and the symbol of its legitimacy. Tahrir Square and the banner hung within it became essentially the face and the voice of the revolution, respectively. How did this happen?

This chapter seeks to explore these questions: Why did so many protestors accept the reformist demands of the banner as those of the revolution as a whole? And how and why did Tahrir become the embodiment of revolutionary legitimacy? As I explore these questions, my argument is twofold. First, the event known as the Egyptian Revolution witnessed a specific historical conjuncture where three types of coalitions peaked at the same time: political coalitions, cross-class alliances, and youth coalitions. The specific composition and development of each of these led to a minimalist consensus regarding political reform that identified ousting of Mubarak as the foremost goal. Second, I argue that during the 18 days of the Tahrir sit-in/revolution, the relationship between the protestors in Tahrir and the regime itself entailed a form of mutual recognition and opposition at the same time that constituted Tahrir as the embodiment of revolutionary legitimacy. From the regime's perspective, focusing on Tahrir was a way to isolate the square and contain nationwide protest, whereas for protestors in Tahrir, continuing to occupy the largest liberated zone in the country took on enormous symbolic power and generated its own form of mobilization. Though the motivations of the two "sides" varied, by each focusing on the other, the protestors of Tahrir and Mubarak's regime co-constituted one another as the main parties to the revolution. The chapter is thus divided into two main sections; each is devoted to the discussion of these two arguments, respectively. But first, let us return to story of the banner and further elaborate the problem of a reformist revolution.



Figure 13 The banner hung in Tahrir Square, displaying the demands of the Tahrir protestors. The picture was circulated widely in social media. Picture Adel Wassily, used here with his permission.

A Banner For All and the Problem of the Reformist Revolution

When the banner was hung in Tahrir Square, I cheered along with everyone else. It was truly an exciting moment. Several large banners had been hung in the previous days and, indeed, continued to be hung all the way up to February 11. But the banner pictured in Figure 13 was the biggest and it was the one everyone embraced as outlining the revolution's demands. At first, I made no effort to find out who exactly was behind it, and I was not alone in this (in hindsight) curious indifference—it would be difficult to overstate the extent to which no one seemed to know *or* care. When I finally began to ask people about it, they all simply said, “We do not know who hung it. It has our demands, it belongs to Tahrir and the revolution.” I remained in Egypt until April 16, 2011, and during that whole time, I could not find an answer to the question: who hung the banner. I took to social media, asking connections on Facebook and Twitter, but still no response. In my second fieldtrip, in the summer of 2012, I made an extra effort to ask all my informants and friends—many of them leading bloggers, activists, and/or founders of the Youth Coalition of the Revolution. Most of them really did not know, but they gave me clues about who to ask: Pierre Sioufi, the person whose apartment was on the top floor of the building from which the banner was hung, and whose home many bloggers and activists, as well as international and local journalists, used to take wide-angle pictures of Tahrir.⁹⁵ Others told me: you have to ask Kefayya activists and/or the National Association For Change (there is an overlap between the two organizations). After a long time, one of the older activists from the

⁹⁵ Sioufi is an artist. He also became one of the informants for this dissertation. There were several media reports about Sioufi; the fact that his apartment hosted many activists and international media led some reporters and analysts to describe his home as the headquarters of the uprising, or to describe him personally as the “guru” or the “watchdog” of the revolution. See, for example: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/egypt-s-man-in-the-moon-the-watchdog-of-tahrir-square-fears-for-the-revolution-a-759025.html> (last accessed May 28, 2014); and http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/18/opinion/18iht-edcohen18.html?_r=0 (last accessed May 28, 2014); and <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/06/magazine/06YouRHere-t.html> (last accessed May 28, 2014).

National Association for Change (NAFC) finally told me it was their organization that hung the banner—but by that point, the issue was practically moot. For his part, Pierre Sioufi had only this to say when I asked him about the banner’s origins:

I really do not know. There were a few youth from Tahrir, and [they] came to ask me to hang it from the top of the building. At the time, I was receiving many police harassments. Police told me to prevent journalists and foreign nationals from taking pictures from my apartment of the square. After these harassments, I did stop allowing journalists. But I made an extra effort to know who is being filming or taking pictures from my balcony. In the end of the day, I did not prevent anybody who seemed to belong or be sympathetic with the revolution. I saw the banner and I did not say no.

When I asked him why he allowed people to do things related to the revolution from his balcony despite the attacks and police harassment, he simply said: “Tahrir protected me.” He explained:

At the time, everybody knew that the apartment, which overlooks the square, belongs to many friends and journalists, and people belong to the revolution. Nobody can attack the apartment, since there are millions there. If anything happened to me at the time, or if they attacked the apartment, it will be Tahrir who will fight back.

In the end, it was likely the very anonymity of the banner that fuelled its acceptance and power. With no one specific author or owner, the banner—and its demands—belonged to everyone and could thus be accepted as those of the revolution. Whether it was the National Association for Change or not matters little at this point, for it was during the revolution that the banner was powerful, and that power was understood to belong to those who cheered as it was hung: the protestors of Tahrir.

If the power of the banner rested not in its known authorship, then, let us turn to consider its content. What was it about this set of demands that made them so widely acceptable to what was (as I will elaborate shortly) a diverse group of protestors? Had these demands sprung out of nowhere or did they have, in fact, a long process of genesis? In order to explore how the demands listed on the banner established (for better or worse) the agenda of the Egyptian

Revolution, I should clarify first what I mean by a “reformist revolution.” It should be acknowledged that the very premise of describing the banner’s demands as “reformist” implies the existence of a continuum, along which *other kinds* of demands might have been articulated. I use the term reformist revolution here to describe the case of a mass uprising in a revolutionary situation, which focuses its demands around political reform—as opposed to, for example, more widespread social or economic reform. I draw here on the insights of Goldstone (2009), who usefully reminds us that political revolutions may be of different types,⁹⁶ and Tilly (2001: 194–95), who notes that the heavy focus of revolution scholarship on successful social revolutions has prevented scholars from giving enough attention to other types of revolutions, which share characteristics with these, but do not qualify as complete social revolutions (2001: 94–95).

The term reformist revolution, as I use it, overlaps with another term, *refolution*, which warrants some discussion here. Originally coined by British historian Timothy Garton Ash,⁹⁷

⁹⁶ In his 2009 essay, Goldstone argued for a new typology of revolutions: color revolution and radicalizing revolution. The first is the model after the democratic revolution that took place in Eastern Europe. According to him, “color revolutions tend to occur in societies with substantial urban and commercial sectors, organized labor and moderate social and economic inequality (2009: 31). In this type, defected elites, and also the decent industrialized economies as well as state institutions that do not resist the reform. And the second type is radicalizing revolution. This occurs in countries where there is a great economic inequality, and where there are “leaders seek to position themselves as leaders of radical class-based or ideology based movements that target entire groups of elites or the population for attack (2009: 31). Radicalizing revolutions are also do thrive in civil or international wars, which can create a context for “extreme politics for the redistributive or ideological restructuring of society” (2009: 31).

⁹⁷ British historian, Timothy Garton Ash coined the term *refolution* in two essays about the revolutions in Hungary and Poland, published in *The New York Review of Books* in 1989. See <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1989/jun/15/revolution-the-springtime-of-two-nations/> (last accessed May 28, 2014) and <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1989/aug/17/revolution-in-hungary-and-poland/> (last accessed May 28, 2014). In the former piece, Ash states: “But what is happening just now is a singular mixture of both reform and revolution: a ‘revorm,’ if you will, or perhaps a ‘refolution.’ There is, in both places, a strong and essential element of voluntary, deliberate reform led by an enlightened minority (but only a minority) in the still ruling Communist parties, and, in the Polish case, at the top of the military and the police. Their advance consists of an unprecedented retreat: undertaking to share power, and even—*mirabile dictu*—talk of giving it up altogether if they lose an election.”

refolution has been taken up and variously defined by a number of different authors. Goldstone emphasizes that it is a type of democratic revolution in which changes are limited to electoral reforms (2009, 19), while Goodwin (2001, 260) defines refolution as negotiated reform and specifically suggests that refolutions result from collaboration between reformist movements and factions of the old communist parties (both Goldstone and Goodwin specifically discuss the concept in relation to the eastern European revolutions of 1989). Bayat (2013), on the other hand, discusses the concept specifically in the context of the Arab uprisings of 2011 and describes them as “revolutions that aim to push for reforms in, and through, the institutions of the existing regimes” (53). He describes the Egyptian revolt as embodying the paradoxical “discrepancy between a revolutionary desire for the ‘new’ and a reformist trajectory that...lead to harbouring the ‘old’”(Bayat 2013: 52).

Not surprisingly, I find Bayat’s take on refolution the most applicable to the Egyptian context, but I use the seemingly paradoxical term “reformist revolution,” rather than “refolution,” in order to foreground more explicitly this disjuncture between the aspirations and outcomes of the Egyptian uprising. By retaining both terms, “reform” and “revolution,” I seek to acknowledge protestors’ demands for both, or more accurately, their hope that the latter could be attained through the former. Protestors called for political reform, but they described (and, in many case, continue to describe) the events of 2011 as a revolution, and this terminology is still meaningful, even if strict definitions of the term “revolution” would suggest otherwise. As I will discuss further in Chapter 5, I also retain the label of revolution as a way of recognizing the more radical potential that, I argue, the uprisings did indeed have, even if this potential has not (yet) been realized.

It is telling to compare the demands outlined on the banner and generally accepted as *the* demands of the revolution, and the more general slogans of the revolution that circulated throughout Tahrir and beyond. The banner's simplest and most powerful demand is its first: Ousting Mubarak. This radical demand is then followed by a series of reformist measures that, far from dismantling and rebuilding Egypt's political system anew, seek rather to make the existing system work properly. Consider, in contrast, two of the main slogans of the revolution: "The People Want the Downfall of the Regime," and "Bread, Freedom, Human Dignity, and Social Justice." Interestingly, the first slogan was also displayed prominently on a banner in the square, but its deceptively simple statement likely prevented it from being seen as outlining an entire agenda. In actuality, however, it goes beyond the demand to oust Mubarak, calling instead for the downfall of the entire *regime*.⁹⁸ The second slogan goes even further, articulating the specific components of an imagined future, but the very breadth of its terms are not only more radical than the demands of the banner, but also harder to operationalize.

I asked many activists after the 18 days what they thought about this seeming disjuncture between the specific demands of the square (reformist) and the general slogans of the revolution (revolutionary). I received different answers. Some noted that the slogans emerged organically in the streets and took on a life of their own; nobody could have tried to stop or question them. It's also worth noting that "The People Want the Downfall of the Regime" was a slogan that appeared first in Tunisia and had traveled from there to Egypt.⁹⁹ But mostly people pointed out that it was the banner's first goal—ousting Mubarak—that became the focus of everyone's

⁹⁸ There was a debate among activists about the meaning of the regime.. and many said, the Egyptian wanted to change the regime in the narrow sense, i.e., the government including ousting Mubarak and the ruling party, but not this does not mean to dismantle the state, in the Leninian fashion. I was personally one of the people who disagreed with this (not that my voice was heard or particularly important), but this was part of the debate.

⁹⁹ See Gana (2013) about the appearance of the slogan first in Tunisia.

attention and energy, precisely because it had previously seemed so impossible. And here, it is crucial to recognize the extent to which Mubarak and the regime had come to be seen as one and the same—so much so that the gap between the demands of the banner and the slogans didn't actually seem that significant in the minds of many protestors.

As I will elaborate in other sections and in the next chapter in particular, ousting Mubarak was not the only demand voiced by protestors in Tahrir and beyond; and hindsight makes it all too easy and tempting to look back and critique the fact that Mubarak's ouster became such a primary, even exclusive, focus. But we need to scrutinize protestors' ambitions and actions in their specific political and historical context, and it would be difficult to overstate the extent to which the figure of Mubarak (and by extension, his family) loomed over this landscape. Over and over again, informants described to me how unthinkable the prospect of usurping Mubarak had become after thirty years of increasingly authoritarian rule. Statements to the effect of "I could never have imagined ousting Mubarak this way" were repeated infinitely by Egyptians in the streets at the time. Sharif Abdel Kadous, a journalist and reporter for Democracy Now, stated in his 2012 documentary, *In Tahrir Square: 18 Days of Egypt's Unfinished Revolution*, "If you would have told me a few weeks ago, that we will oust Mubarak by a mass rebellion, I would have thought you are crazy."¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the idea existed among not only ordinary people and activists within Egypt, but also domestic and international media that Mubarak was a kind of present-day pharaoh who, like the rulers of old, would not relinquish power until he was dead.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ http://www.democracynow.org/2012/1/25/in_tahrir_square_hbo_doc_on (last accessed May 28, 2014).

¹⁰¹ See, for example: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/11/hosni-mubarak-resigns-analysis> (last accessed May 28, 2014); and <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67687/dina-shehata/the-fall-of-the-pharaoh> (last accessed May 28, 2014).

Egypt at the start of 2011 was, in many ways, what Goldstone (2011a) terms a “sultanistic regime.”¹⁰² Such a regime revolves around the person of the leader or dictator, who uses a system of rewards and punishments to “keep populations depoliticized and marginalized...control elections and political parties and sometimes...pay subsidies for populations” (Goldstone 2011a: 9). A regime is sultanistic when “a national leader expands his personal power at the expense of formal institutions” (Goldstone 2011a: 9). Examples from history include Suharto in Indonesia, Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, Reza Shah Pahlavi in Iran, the Samosa dynasty in Nicaragua, the Duvalier dynasty in Haiti, and Porfirio Diaz in Mexico. According to Goldstone, such regimes are particularly prone to revolution given their fragility, especially in times of economic and political crisis. He explains:

Sultans must strike a careful balance between self-enrichment and rewarding the elite: if the ruler rewards himself and neglects the elite, a key incentive for the elite to support the regime is removed. But as sultans come to feel more entrenched and indispensable, their corruption frequently becomes more brazen and concentrated along a small inner circle. As the sultan monopolizes foreign aid and investments or gets too close to unpopular foreign governments, he may alienate elite and popular groups even further. (Goldstone 2011a: 10)

While the relation between ruler and elites is, indeed, a central consideration in such regimes, it is also important to look at this idea from the perspective of protestors. Mubarak’s personalist form of rule had existed for decades prior to the 2011 revolution, but became increasingly crystallized in the ten years directly preceding 2011, particularly with the strong indications about plans to transfer power to Mubarak’s son, Gamal.¹⁰³ My ethnography and interviews repeatedly suggest that this idea of Mubarak’s personal rule had a significant impact on the

¹⁰² Goldstone here is building on the work of H. E. Chehabi and Juan Linz (1998), who coined the concept “sultanistic regime” and elaborate on it in the context of revolutions.

¹⁰³ In addition, from 2004 to 2006, prominent intellectual and former judge Tareq El-Beshry wrote a series of articles in the opposition paper *al-Araby* that described the state as “personalistic.” The articles were widely debated and discussed among activists in Egypt. The articles were published later in a book, see <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8166575> (last accessed May 28, 2014).

political psychology of many protestors and, indeed, many Egyptians in general. For almost everyone in Egypt, getting rid of Mubarak *was* getting rid of the regime. The result was a sort of a tunnel vision that limited the political imagination of many protestors. Perhaps nothing captures this more succinctly than one of the most common slogans featured on signs and in chants throughout Egypt: “Leave.” But though the subject of this slogan was obvious to everyone, its limitations as a revolutionary agenda took longer to apprehend. As Bayat notes, the speed with which some of the dictators fell across the region “gave the impression that the revolutions had come to an end, achieved their goals, without a substantial shift in the power structure” (2013, 54). My point in this chapter, I wish to emphasize, is not to point out the short-sightedness of protestors’ demands, but rather to emphasize how and why they called for such a reformist revolution. Having established how pervasive and powerful the figure of Mubarak was, I turn now to tracing how Egyptians nonetheless constructed a vision of revolution.

I. Three Roads to Consensus: The Making of a Reformist Revolution

To properly answer the question of how Tahrir came to stand in as the political voice of the majority of Egyptians, it is useful to step back and ask who exactly participated in the Egyptian revolution? To my knowledge there has been no rigorous analysis of the demography of the participants in the revolution. Various studies have, however, focused on particular groups of participants and/or coalitions across groups (Amar 2013a; Goldstone 2011b; Holmes 2012; Shehata 2012). It is important, however, to avoid conflating the various levels at which one can examine coalition politics in Egypt. In this section, I examine each of the following: a) political coalitions, b) cross-class coalitions, and c) youth coalitions. I seek to show how and

why the various groups that formed these types of coalitions all arrived at the same outcome (a shared consensus regarding the reformist, Mubarak-focused demands of the revolution) via distinctive, but overlapping, processes. All three types of coalition building have distinct histories and temporalities. Political coalitions were a decade in the making, whereas cross-class coalitions intensified in the years from 2005 to 2010, with 2011 representing a “final straw” moment when economic elites became alienated from Mubarak as well. As for the youth coalitions, many of these emerged first as part of larger, umbrella political coalitions such as Kefayya, but went on to become more independent, especially from 2008 (the birth of the April 6 movement) onward. The peak of youth organizing can be seen with the birth of the Youth Coalition of the Revolution (YCR) during the revolution itself.

Despite their significance, coalitions are understudied in social movements scholarship (Meyer and Corrigan-Brown 2005: 342; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010: xii). Granted, studying coalitions is difficult for a number of reasons. There are methodological challenges when, for example, coalitions involve the work of both individuals and organizations, in terms of the components of the coalitions. Also, in terms of the demands and the substance of the coalitions, it is difficult to establish clear criteria about what degree of cooperation constitutes a coalition. Indeed, coalitions themselves are often unclear regarding their strategic goals and/or the nature (long-term vs. temporary) nature of their partnership. Finally, it is even more difficult to study coalitions in authoritarian contexts, where there is no transparency and it is difficult to access information about the groups involved in coalitions (see Beamish and Luebbers 2009; Diani and Bison 2004; Meyer and Corrigan-Brown 2005; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010).

For the sake of my analysis, I define a coalition as a temporary agreement between some social and/or political movement organizations/parties/forces to work together to achieve one

goal. A coalition does not entail the dissolution of the respective groups and their reconstitution as a single new groups; rather, each party to the coalition may continue to work autonomously under its own banner at the same time that it is involved in a common project that involves some degree of coordination and collaboration. The dynamic is similar to what Trotsky (1938) called the strategy of the united front, in which the communist party established a common platform with reformist parties temporarily in order to work together.¹⁰⁴

Scholarship examining coalitions during the time of revolutions tends to focus on cross-class coalitions in particular. A cross-class coalition refers to the presence of an organization or a spontaneous collective action in which many classes participate, despite the class divide. Such coalitions are usually temporary and their work is limited to a specific goal. Cross-class alliances are significant in a variety of political contexts and situations,¹⁰⁵ but it is their role in revolutions that has garnered the most scholarly attention (see, for example, Everingham 1996; Nepstad 2011; Thompson 2004). John Foran points out that “multiclass alliances, often motivated by diffuse ideals such as nationalism, populism, or religion rather than particularistic ones such as socialism, have made most of the revolutions in world history, and all of the third world” (2005: 15). And as Goldstone (2011b: 457) notes, the formation of a cross-class alliance can have multiple benefits:

If a protest draws support mainly from just one class or group (peasants, workers, students, urban shopkeepers, professionals), the state can confront that group as a disruptive force, and seek to unify elites from other sectors against that threat. However, if protestors represent many different groups, it is much harder for the state to find allies against them. Moreover, while a state can claim to be preserving a society by acting against isolated disruptive elements, it is far from difficult to maintain legitimacy when acting against a broad cross-class coalition. Elites are

¹⁰⁴ Available at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1922/02/uf.htm> (last accessed May 29, 2014).

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Busemeyer (2011), who also notes that there are different types of cross-class coalitions; he differentiates between a conservative cross-class coalition and a segmentalist class coalition. Available at: http://www.mpifg.de/pu/mpifg_dp/dp11-13.pdf (last accessed May 28, 2014).

more likely to desert the state, creating crippling divisions, if protesters represent a broad spectrum of society. In addition, a broad cross-class coalition facilitates further mobilization by creating ‘mega-networks’ linking prior, tightly linked within-group networks to each other. The impact of public media in favor of the protesters is also greater if media representation shows protesters as representative of the whole society, rather than as one particular group seeking partisan advantages for itself.

It is important to note here that while coalitions are, indeed, often crucial in revolutions, this does not mean that they are adequate conditions to make a revolution. As Goldstone rightly reminds us, the revolutionary conjuncture requires many things—above all, a state crisis, a major defection of elite from the regime, and mass mobilization (in addition to formation of an alternative or competing opposition/coalition against the state) (2009: 19). Revolutions “do not arise simply from mounting discontent over poverty, inequality, or other changes. Rather, revolution is a complex process that emerges from the social order becoming frayed in many areas at once” (Goldstone 2014: 15). The existence of polarization and coalition building, argues Goldstone, is one common element in revolutions (Goldstone 2009: 20).

What coalitions do offer is the seemingly paradoxical benefit of unity in diversity. To the extent that they bring diverse groups together around a common goal, they widen their potential base of appeal, while focusing their collective energies. But if diversity and appeal increase together, so too does the difficulty of arriving at a consensus regarding goals and strategies. I turn now to tracing the “path” to consensus for each of the three types of coalitions significant to the Egyptian context, noting along the way what was gained—and lost—in the process. The focus of this chapter is on the process and benefits of coalition building; the following chapter will focus more exclusively on who and what was marginalized as a result.

Road 1: Political Coalitions

On January 2014, Mohamed Fadel, professor of law and an expert on Egypt, wrote an op-ed for the *Al-Jazeera* website, asking whether Egypt's revolutionary coalition—what he called the “Tahrir coalition”—could be resurrected?¹⁰⁶ Fadel acknowledged how difficult it would be to reconstitute the coalition of diverse groups that came together to oust Mubarak, particularly given the divisions among factions that seemed only to deepen after the ousting of elected president Mohamed Morsi in 2013. What Fadel reiterated, however, was this idea that coalitions were crucial in ousting Mubarak, and that the only hope for moving forward lay in reconstituting such alliances. In order to understand how the political coalitions of Tahrir arrived at a set of revolutionary demands focused primarily on democratic reform and the ousting of Mubarak, we need to study the history of political coalitions in Egypt, particularly in the decade before the revolution. A quick analysis of political protests in Egypt since 2000 shows a diverse range of demands and grievances, not all of which were necessarily and/or explicitly about democracy. There is a general consensus among several analysts, shared by many of my informants, that there were three connected waves of protest in Egypt since 2000 that paved the road to the revolution.¹⁰⁷ The first wave from 2000 to 2003 began with protests in solidarity with Palestinians during the Second Intifada and then continued with protests in 2003 against the war on Iraq. Activists describe this as the anti-imperialist and anti-Israeli wave. As emphasized by several of my informants, this wave then led to the second: when protesters in the first wave were severely beaten by police in the streets and then faced a general increase in repression, they

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/01/can-egypt-revolutionary-coaliti-201412510437753102.html>

¹⁰⁷ See, for example: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/mar/02/egypt-revolution-mubarak-wall-of-fear> (last accessed May 29, 2014); and <http://www.masress.com/elakhbar/32264> (last accessed May 29, 2014).

realized that the question of democracy was the priority in Egypt. The second wave can thus be described as the pro-democracy wave, which started at the end of 2004, with the formation of the Egyptian Movement for Change, Kefayya (Enough), and lasted until the revolution in 2011. This wave witnessed many ups and downs throughout this time, but opposition movements continued to focus on democracy as the key to solving Egypt's problems. The clearest expression of the second wave's focus came with Mohamed ElBaradie's National Association for Change movement, discussed further below.¹⁰⁸

The third wave can be described as the economic and social justice wave. This wave of protest and mobilization was unprecedented in Egypt's recent history. Lasting from 2006 until the revolution, this wave included workers' strikes and sit-ins that took place across Egypt and focused on economic demands—in particular, a guaranteed minimum wage of 1200 EGP for the working class. Though this wave's focus was primarily economic, its momentum and support helped to re-energize the pro-democracy wave when it began to wane from 2008 to 2010 (Beinin and El-Hamalawy 2007; Blaydes 2010).¹⁰⁹ Also, in Mahala in April 2008, a failed strike attempt by Al-Mahala Al-Kobra Misr Spinning and Weaving workers was met with violent police repression, setting off riots throughout the city. El-Hamalawy (2011d) suggests these riots served as a rehearsal for the revolution in 2011, since protesters included not only workers but also members of the general public, and ended with protesters tearing down a billboard of Mubarak's image—a hugely symbolic gesture that had an energizing impact on opposition groups throughout the country.

¹⁰⁸ http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2010/05/10/ElBaradei-backers-call-for-change/UPI-21291273506745/ (last accessed May 29, 2014); and <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748703757504575193960660230840> (last accessed May 29, 2014).

¹⁰⁹ Also see the *New York Times* editorial from May 6, 2007; available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/06/opinion/06sun2.html?_r=0 (last accessed May 29, 2014).

Drawing on a variety of primary and secondary sources, as well as my own observations and interviews, I have compiled a list of 33 different political coalitions and/or temporary campaigns that involved the collaboration of various groups and individuals from 2000 to 2011 (see Appendix 3). The point of the list is simply to highlight the breadth and significance of coalition building during this period. Some coalitions were extremely short-lived and narrow in focus, while others were more general and continue in some form today. Some involved the coordination of pre-existing organizations, while others were open to individual members as well. But what all share in common are demands for democracy and either explicit calls for political and electoral reform or a general call for increased freedom of organizing.¹¹⁰

I identify two key instances and organizations in this history of coalition-building that illustrate not only peak moments of mobilization, but also the process by which demands became increasingly focused on the removal of Mubarak and the institution of political reforms. The first is the formation of Kefayya in 2004 and the second is the formation of the National

¹¹⁰ I also added two coalitions, The Popular Committee for the Solidarity with the Egyptian Intifada and Campaign Against the War on Iraq, whose platforms did not explicitly include calls for democratic reform, but which were against the Mubarak's regime's involvement in the war on Iraq or the complicity on attacks on Palestinian rights. I included them because they were crucial in dealing with the regime repression on streets and were also instrumental in giving birth to other groups that did make democracy the center of their organizing. I have also included the Anti-Globalization Egyptian Group (AGEG), which was formed in 2011, as its efforts included grassroots organizing and distributing leaflets and protests in neighborhoods. I did not include important movements such as the April 6 movements and also the Youth for Justice and Freedom, because these did not entail coalitions of different groups per se. The first was mostly liberal democratic and the second was mostly socialist oriented and also democratic.

I also had some difficulty classifying the many groups that emerged after 2005, and which were inspired by Kefayya. These groups were named after Kefayya (the Egyptian Movement for Change, Enough) but specifically organized in terms of particular interests or professions. Examples include Labor for Change, Engineers for Change, and Lawyers for Change. These groups were described as Kefayya's siblings by leading activists in Kefayya. Although they are worked with Kefayya and coordinated with its members, and some of these groups' founding members were also members of Kefayya, I considered these as separate groups, because their aim was to mobilize on the ground, while Kefayya aimed to mobilize nationally for democracy.

Table 3 Comparing the Platforms of Political Coalitions in 2004, 2010, and 2011.

Kefayya Platform/Demands 2004	The NAFC Platform/Demands¹¹¹ 2010	Tahrir Banner Platform/Demands 2011
<p>1) The constitution (of 1971) should be amended to allow a multi-candidate presidential election, and that presidency should be limited to two terms for one person, and that the presidential power should be reduced to guarantee some sort of separation of powers;</p> <p>2) End emergency status and all despotic laws in Egypt as well as release all political prisoners and prisoners of conscious; and</p> <p>3) Amend election laws in Egypt to allow full supervision of the judiciary over all stages of the electoral process.¹¹²</p>	<p>1) End emergency status;</p> <p>2) Grant the Egyptian judiciary full supervision of all the stages of electoral process;</p> <p>3) Grant national and international NGOs with the right to monitor election process;</p> <p>4) Ensure equal opportunity in the media to all candidates in elections, especially in the presidential election;</p> <p>5) Ensure that Egyptians abroad have the right to vote in Egyptian embassies and consulates abroad;</p> <p>6) Ensure that the right to run in presidential election is not restricted with tough stipulations, according to Egypt commitments with ICPR, also restrict presidents to two terms;</p> <p>7) Ensure voters vote only with their national ID.¹¹³</p>	<p>1) Ousting Mubarak;</p> <p>2) Dissolving the forged based Parliament and Upper House (Shoura Council);</p> <p>3) Ending emergency status immediately;</p> <p>4) Forming transitional national unity government;</p> <p>5) Election of a Parliament to enact constitutional amendments, based on which a presidential election will take place;</p> <p>6) Immediate trials for all officials responsible for killing martyrs (protestors) of the revolution;</p> <p>7) Immediate trials for all corrupt officials and those who stole the nation's wealth.</p>

¹¹¹ As outlined specifically in the 2010 “We Will Change” campaign.

¹¹² I was one of the signers of the statement in my first year of immigration to the U.S. See statement at: <http://www.m.ahewar.org/s.asp?aid=24022&r=0&cid=0&u=%C7%E1%CD%E3%E1%C9+%C7%E1%D4%DA%C8%ED%C9+%E3%E4+%C3%CC%E1+%C7%E1%CA%DB%ED%ED%D1&i=0&q=> (last accessed May 29, 2014).

¹¹³ <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/35381> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

Association for Change (NAFC) in 2010. A quick comparison of the respective platforms of Kefayya in 2004, the National Association for Change in 2010, and the Tahrir banner in 2011 reveals significant similarities (see Table 3). The platforms are almost identical, with the 2011 addition of ousting Mubarak and an increased focus on immediate punitive measures for those associated with the Mubarak regime. All three, however, reveal the focus on political and electoral reform.

a) Kefayya

The founding statement of Kefayya had a major impact on the political map in Egypt. On September 9, 2004, a group of organizations (both political parties, and political groups as well as civil society organizations) and individuals issued a historic statement against Mubarak's plans to run for a fifth term in 2005. The statement announced the launching of a campaign under the name, the Popular Campaign for Change, as well as a slogan: "No to the Extension of Power [for Mubarak Sr.] and No to Succession [for Mubarak Jr.]" The statement was headed with this slogan, as well as the demand that the presidential election should be a multicandidate election. At the time, Egypt's constitution of 1971 was still in force, with an amendment that allowed the president to run for unlimited periods, and for the election to be based on only one candidate nominated by the parliament. By September 23, 2004, the statement had 26 signatures of organizations and 489 of individuals. The statement was historic because most political parties at the time were co-opted by Mubarak and the security state apparatus. The statement, which was openly critical of Mubarak's false democracy and his foreign policy, took great courage. The signers of the statement vowed that Mubarak's fourth term would be his last, and included three general demands, as listed in the table above. The seemingly simple list of demands was, itself, the culmination of years of experience dealing with forged elections.

This statement gave birth to the Egyptian Movement for Change, or Kefayya, which in English means Enough. The new coalition put the demands and the slogan of the previous statement in institutional form by bringing together organizations and individuals in Egypt to mobilize around electoral reform and a pro-democracy platform in general. Importantly, the very rise of Kefayya built upon movements and coalitions that preceded it (Howeidy 2005a, 2005b),¹¹⁴ and thus its platform represented a process of both refinement and compromise over time. Kefayya made a strong impact in Egypt's political culture for many reasons. First, Kefayya took the opposition to the street, and constituted a clear signal that the formal opposition (political parties which were co-opted by Mubarak) was a failure in Egypt. Kefayya's message was that no reform would come to Egypt without pressure and protest; the existing political system was broken. Second, Kefayya offered a wide platform which was not rigid and included a wide range of new opposition based on a consensus. Though dominated mainly by Nasserites and socialists (both organizations and parties), Kefayya focused broadly on democracy and just the traditional working class focus of the Left. Also, crucially, although the Muslim Brotherhood was not part of Kefayya, individual members of the MB were. Third, Kefayya was mostly dominated by middle class professionals. The wide platform and the lack of democracy in Egypt at the time made Kefayya a great space for many professions and their syndicates to join. This generated a series of off-shoot Kefayya organizations such as Lawyers for Change, Artists for Change, etc.—what Abdel Haleem Qanddeel, prominent Nasserist and founder of Kefayya and others, call Kefayya and its sisters (Essmat 2010; Qandeel 2007).

¹¹⁴ For more on Kefayya, see also Clarke (2011), Onodera (2009), Oweidat et al. (2008) and Shorbagy (2007a; 2007b). See also: <http://www.aucegypt.edu/research/conf/eureca/Documents/BahaaEzzelArab.pdf> (last accessed June 1, 2014) and in the *Washington Post*: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A35379-2005Mar14.html> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

When I interviewed Yehaia Fekry, a leftist organizer and founding member of many of the coalitions listed in Appendix 3, in March 2014,¹¹⁵ he noted that the biggest problem in coalition building was “mostly about who will join in,” rather than “the political ceiling of the coalition” per se. In other words, priority was given to building the numbers of people in any given coalition, rather than maintaining a rigid conception of the coalition’s goals. It was this quantitative strategy, I argue, that led to the adoption of a relatively “watered down” reformist agenda that would appeal to the widest number of people and groups possible. Again, my point is not to critique this strategy with the unfair advantage of hindsight, but to note its emergence as a response to the very authoritarianism of Mubarak’s regime. Protestors were pushed to form coalitions due to the repressive nature of the regime, and this meant compromises. Compromises, in turn, meant a relatively stable, generic agenda that focused on political reform.

Fekry noted that one of the biggest recurrent questions was whether and how to include the Muslim Brotherhood:

The Nasserists were against the MB joining Kefayya and also the MB was not interested and preferred to form their own dominated coalition. Even among the coalitions to coordinate between socialists parties, there was always a battle between the groups about whether or not to include the old leftist party (known for its close relation with the regime), the Tagamou party.

The MB was an outlier, in a sense, in that it preferred to work on its own or, if it did form coalitions, it tended to dominate them given its sheer numbers.¹¹⁶ Appendix 3 shows that there were many coalitions created for the same purposes. This was often due to disagreements regarding who to include. For example, there were two different attempts to unionize socialists

¹¹⁵ Phone interview, March 30, 2014.

¹¹⁶ Because the MB has been an underground organization it is difficult to know its members’ numbers exactly before the revolution. Estimates that the group had no less than 2 or 3 hundred thousands at the time. Compare this for example with another group, the revolutionary socialists, also an underground organization. This has only few hundred members at the time. Some reports shows that the MB has no less than half a million member after the revolution, in 2013. See Kingesly (2013)

during 2005 and 2006; likewise, there were two or three other groups that had the same aims as Kefayya—one initiated by Marxists, and another by the MB—but it was Kefayya which succeeded because it managed to unite all the opposition under a single umbrella, with the exception of the MB—though, as noted above, individual MB members did join. The MB-led coalition was the National Campaign for Change, which it formed with the Revolutionary Socialists—a new Trotskyist group that justified its partnership with the MB with the slogan “With the Islamists? –Sometimes. With the state? –Never!” (Abdelrahman 2009). The short-lived National Campaign for Change was also formed in 2004 and had the same goals as Kefayya, yet it failed precisely because it was seen as dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, whose members outnumbered the Revolutionary Socialists. The relative fates of Kefayya and the National Campaign for Change reveal how crucial it was for coalitions to ensure they were seen as expansive, rather than exclusive, in membership and, conversely, how this pushed coalitions towards the one goal on which everyone could agree: political reform.

b) The National Association for Change (NAFC)

The NAFC was formed after Mohamed El-Baradei, the Egyptian diplomat and former director of the International Atomic Energy (IAEA) arrived in Egypt in February 2010 and announced that he would join the Movement for Change in Egypt.¹¹⁷ When ElBaradei arrived, he was welcomed by youth groups as well as figures of the opposition. Within a week, he hosted a big meeting in his home, attended by the leaders of Kefayya, other major figures of political opposition, and also leading members in the MB. As Yehia Fekry put it, “Almost all Egyptian

¹¹⁷ For more about the NAFC, see the following: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/05/can-mohamed-elbaradei-lead-change-in-egypt/56613/> (last accessed May 29, 2014) and <http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/09/22/national-association-for-change/h417?reloadFlag=1> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

important political figures, who represent all the opposition were in that meeting.” In addition to convincing ElBaradei to run in the presidential election, the meeting founded the NAFC. With its inclusion of the Muslim Brother, the NAFC was the biggest political coalition in the decade before the revolution, representing, in many ways, the culmination of all the previous coalitions. It released a founding statement, *Together We Will Make Change*, listing seven demands (see **Table 3** above), and clearly establishing its focus on political reform:

Egypt is suffering from very serious problems. Despite Egypt’s resources, and capacities, which should enable Egypt to be placed in a distinct position in the advanced modern world, all aspects of life in Egypt became seriously deteriorating. The best approach to combat this deterioration is political reform.¹¹⁸

Within seven months, the NAFC had collected 1 million signatures in support of the statement—a major achievement, as in previous years, people were too scared to sign petitions in the context of a police state.

The NAFC was important for many reasons. First, it was the largest organized effort of the opposition in Egypt before the revolution. Though the MB’s membership was tenuous, with MB members specifically opposing ElBaradei’s candidacy for president, the inclusion of the MB made the NAFC the largest and most significant opposition entity to confront Mubarak in his thirty-year rule.¹¹⁹ Second, despite the stagnation of politics and the pervasive levels of

¹¹⁸ <http://www.almazryalyoum.com/news/details/35381> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

¹¹⁹ It is difficult to summarize the relationship between the MB and its role in the NAFC in a few sentences. Due to its size, the MB has always preferred to act independently. Within the NAFC, the MB’s role was delicate. On the one hand, the MB supported the NAFC, but on the other hand, they did not support ElBaradei for president. For example, though the MB signed the “We Will Change” statement and devoted some members to collect signatures for it, a key MB spokesperson noted that “collecting signatures does not mean that the MB is supporting or will be in coalition with ElBaradei. We are collecting signatures, but we did not decide officially that we are part of the NAFC.” For more on the MB’s membership within the NAFC, see, for example: http://www1.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=238703&SecID=65&IssueID=54#.U3Tq4_0RB4M (last accessed June 1, 2014) and <http://www.almazryalyoum.com/news/details/702> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

depression and discouragement among political opposition in the period from 2006–2010,¹²⁰ the NAFC gave renewed energy to the opposition and was seen as a major threat to the regime. In parliamentary elections in November 2010, the NAFC sponsored a bold idea at the time—the formation of an alternative parliament. This parliament actually met a couple times before the revolution and included some of the former MPs ousted in the forged elections. One of my informants was a member in that parliament. The idea of a counter parliament was a big threat to the legitimacy of the regime at the time. Third, the NAFC’s petition whipped up a great deal of enthusiasm and momentum in the streets. Many youth joined the campaign for ElBaradie’s election and worked in organized groups to collect petition signatures. Youth groups were also very active in the spontaneous street protests described in Chapter 2. Finally, when the protests in Tahrir began in January 2011, the first formal statement appeared on the night of January 25, 2011 and was written by Abdel Galil Mosstafa, the then secretary general of the NAFC. And as I noted above, I later learned from Taqadom Al-Khateeb, an active member of the NAFC, that it was NAFC activists that made and hung the famous banner that hung from the tallest building in Tahrir. No one realized this at the time, but it was arguably the NAFC’s reformist language and aspirations demands that made the banner’s demands so easily and unquestioningly accepted.

Road 2: Cross-Class Coalitions

Unlike the case of political coalitions in the decade before the revolution, there was no evidence that would have led one to expect the kind of wide cross-class coalition that developed

¹²⁰ Widespread depression resulted as opposition groups saw themselves as failing to stop the constitutional amendments of 2005. Between 2006 and 2011, there was no strong political resistance on the pro-democracy front. The only major forms of mobilization were labor strikes from 2006–2008, and also the April 6, 2008 attempted strike and national civil disobedience in Mahala, mentioned above and discussed further below.

in and around Tahrir in 2011. Though the opposition had long been trying to highlight the inequities of Mubarak's political economy—namely, the impoverishment of the majority of Egyptians and the collapse of the middle class—the regime itself proclaimed satisfaction with the numbers it presented (or fabricated) regarding the economy. This narrative of success was supported by the “complementary” reports of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which declared that Egypt's economy was performing well.¹²¹ The unprecedented participation of people from all class backgrounds in the revolution, however, reveals the reality of widespread dissatisfaction and disillusionment across Egypt's class structure. In this section, I explore the factors that brought the different classes to Tahrir and shaped their participation therein.¹²² I also note how cross-class coalitions, like wide political coalitions, diluted the aims of the revolution and focused attention on goals to which the members of all classes could agree.

The diverse class participation in the revolution of 2011 has been noted by a number of commentators. Prominent Egyptian blogger Hossam El-Hamalawy (2011b) writes:

All classes in Egypt took part in the uprising. Mubarak managed to alienate all social classes in society. In Tahrir Square, you found sons and daughters of the Egyptian elite, together with the workers, middle-class citizens and the urban poor. But remember that it's only when the mass strikes started on Wednesday that the regime started crumbling and the army had to force Mubarak to resign because the system was about to collapse.¹²³

¹²¹ See for example a report by the IMF about Egypt, just few months before the revolution, in which the reports suggests that Egypt's economic performance is better than expected (IMF 2010).

¹²² I am using the term class here in very descriptive sense that relies on how people define themselves. There are, of course, various typologies of class in sociology, based on Marxian, Weberian, or Durkheimian theoretical foundations (see, for example, Wright 1978, 1979a, 1979b; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Hauser and Featherman 1977; Weeden and Grusky 2005; and Sorenson 2000). My aim here is limited to analyzing the idea of cross-class alliances in the revolution, rather than performing a rigorous class analysis of the protestors per se.

¹²³ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/feb/14/egypt-protests-democracy-generals> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

As El-Hamalway suggests, however, the mobilization of the working classes provided what we might consider the crucial foundation of the revolution. The Egyptian working class was crucial in the revolution in two ways. The first is the role of working class strikes in the years from 2006–2008 and also the series of sit-ins in downtown Cairo and in front of the Egyptian cabinets and the parliament in the few years prior to 2011. And the second way is the role of key labor strikes that took place in the couple days before the ousting of Mubarak. These strikes, which are not highlighted enough in analyses about Egypt, played a crucial role in paralyzing the economy at an important junction and costing the government major economic losses. On January 9, 2011, for example, public transportation workers announced that they were organizing a strike in solidarity with the revolution’s demands. They released a statement calling for an end to Emergency Law, a national minimum wage of \$1200 EGP, and the drafting a new constitution—echoing the same demands hung on the banner in Tahrir Square.¹²⁴ When I interviewed Tareq Al-Behreery, a leader of the independent union of public transportation workers, he told me about the significance of these late January strikes.

Within Tahrir, the presence of working class and labor organizations was easy to see. I saw a banner by the newly founded Independent Trade Unions of the Tax Collectors (see **Figure 14**) for example in Tahrir. As I have discussed in chapter 4, and as political economists in Egypt suggest (such as the late Samer Soliman 2012a) Egypt under Mubarak has moved from a *rentier state* to a *predatory state*, or a *tax state*. In the last decade under Mubarak, the Egyptian government has been increasingly dependent on taxes revenues, in addition to international aid, while the government continuously suffering budget deficiency. The real state tax collectors are state employees, as discussed earlier in chapter 4. Their union has about 55,000 members. Not

¹²⁴ <http://www.arabawy.org/2011/02/09/jan25-public-transportation-workers-call-for-overthrowing-mubarak/> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

only because they are state employees, but also because this is one of the strongest trade unions in contemporary Egypt, their presence in Tahrir marked an important marker in the revolution. This showed that a critical sector in the state bureaucracy is against the regime; giving so much power to Tahrir specifically and the revolution at large.

In Tahrir, I also saw many the banners of workers from many different locations outside Cairo who came to join the sit-in. Some of the key organizers of labor from outside Cairo were present in Tahrir too, such as Wael Habib and Kamal al-Fayoumi, two of the key workers who planned the labor strike in Mahala in April 2008. I interviewed both of them in the summer of 2012. In my interview with Habib in November 2012, he stated:

I did join protests in Mahala in days 25, 26 and 27 of January, but after then I did go to Cairo. I was in Tahrir sit-in all the time until ousting Mubarak. And I did only leave Tahrir every day for couple hours and when needed to go to the bathroom. In Tahrir, I was with many people, workers and others from Mahala. And I also saw workers from Suez, from Islamiyya.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Interview, November 15, 2012.



Figure 14 Banner in Tahrir belonging to The Union of Tax Collectors. The banner reads: “The Union of Tax Collectors endorses the demands of the January 25, 2011 revolution.” Picture by the author, taken on February 7, 2011.

Despite their presence in Tahrir, however, workers did not mobilize visibly *as* workers and join the protests until February 8 and 9, in the last couple days before ousting Mubarak. Habib noted that, at first, workers felt that simply participating in the street protests was the best way to contribute, but when they saw the numbers of people in Tahrir, they were encouraged eventually to attempt to organize strikes. Hossam El-Hamalawy (2011c) also explains this period, stating:

From day 1 of our uprising, the working class has been taking part in the protests. Who do you think were the protesters in Mahalla, Suez and Kafrel-Dawwar for example? However, the workers were taking part as “demonstrators” and not necessarily as “workers”— meaning, they were not moving independently. The govt [sic] had brought the economy to halt, not the protesters by its curfew, shutting down of banks and business. It was a capitalist strike, aiming at terrorizing the Egyptian people. Only when the govt [sic] tried to bring the country back to “normal” on Sunday that workers returned to their

factories, discussed the current situation, and started to organize en masse, moving as a block.¹²⁶

Mustafa Bassioni, a labor organizer and journalist, also told me that one reason the workers delayed striking during the 18 days was the implementation of a curfew by the military. With the curfew, as well as the closing of banks and government buildings, a strike—particularly one involving government workers—would have been ineffective anyway. Then, when businesses opened again on February 6, it took them two days at least to organize, and thus the strikes started on February 8, 2011.

To the extent that working class participants in Tahrir were present, but less immediately and visibly involved in leadership roles, middle class participants more than compensated. In my two rounds of interviews in 2011 and 2012, I interviewed a total of 106 people who were present in Tahrir Square during the 18 days of the revolution.¹²⁷ Of those 106, only 23 clearly identified

¹²⁶ <http://www.arabawy.org/2011/02/12/permanent-revolution> (last accessed June 1, 2014). There are no documented statistics about labor strikes during the time of the revolution, but labor organizers I spoke to estimated that there were at least 1500 industrial actions in February 2011 alone (also mentioned in El-Hamalawy at: http://www.newsocialist.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=551:the-egyptian-revolution-continues-an-interview-with-hossam-el-hamalawy-&catid=51:analysis&Itemid=98 (last accessed June 1, 2014). Despite joining late in the revolution, workers had high hopes and protested as an organized group not only in the last few days in the revolution, but also after the ousting of Mubarak. Indeed, as a result of their actions, one of SCAF's first actions was to issue a law banning strikes. El-Hamalawy (2011d) discusses the increased stakes for working class participants:

When Mubarak was toppled on the 11th of February and the middle class and most of the youth groups were more than happy to suspend the Tahrir sit-in and there were calls for everybody to go back to work amidst all of this nationalist propaganda – you know, 'let's build a new Egypt' and 'put 110 percent of your effort into work' – the working class did not go. A journalist like myself, I can afford not showing up to work for 18 days, but then go back to my editorial position where I will get several thousand Egyptian pounds a month. But a public transport worker cannot basically suspend his strike and go back home to his kids and tell them, "I'm still getting paid 189 Egyptian pounds after fifteen years of service; let's wait for another six months while the ruling military junta gives us a civilian cabinet so as to solve all our problems.

See interview with el-Hamalawy (2011d) in http://www.newsocialist.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=551:the-egyptian-revolution-continues-an-interview-with-hossam-el-hamalawy-&catid=51:analysis&Itemid=98 (last accessed June 1, 2014).

¹²⁷ 90 of the 106 said they were present in Tahrir Square in various ways, such as going to the square regularly without necessarily being part of the daily sit-in and sleeping in Tahrir.

themselves as working class, while the rest identified themselves as middle class.¹²⁸ I fully acknowledge that my sample may not be representative; indeed, it is likely impossible to construct in hindsight a clear picture of the exact class composition of the protestors in Tahrir. Nonetheless, based on my own observations and conversations, I would still argue that while there was a range of classes in Tahrir, the most dominant class was the middle class. Many of my informants were working professionals—IT persons in universities, employees in NGOs, engineers, or publishers. Middle class protestors such as journalists and doctors and lawyers set up stages and banners and established professional association tables in the various corners of Tahrir. And as many of them acknowledged, participating in a constant action for 18 days requires the freedom to either miss work or simply leave your job—a luxury that only the middle class can afford. The prominence of middle class protest leaders was, in many ways, unsurprising, given the fact that Kefayya and many other core opposition groups and coalitions of the last decade were comprised primarily of middle class participants, particularly in leadership positions.

Middle class participants went to Tahrir not out of some sense of altruistic solidarity with workers and the poor, however, but because they too were weary of the economic disparities and lack of opportunities under the Mubarak regime (Kandil 2012). The application of structural adjustments programs since the mid-1990s and then Gamal Mubarak's excessive neo-liberal reforms seriously affected both the lower and middle classes. The protection of the welfare state under Nasser had steadily given way under Nasser and then Mubarak to an increasingly repressive police state, the crony capitalism of which offered few opportunities for those outside of a ruling inner circle. As Juan Cole (2011b) put it:

¹²⁸ Some informants further specified a rank within the middle class—i.e., lower middle class—while others did not; interviews were based on snowball sampling that built upon my initial contacts.

The failure of the regime to connect with the rapidly growing new urban working and middle classes, and its inability to provide jobs to the masses of college graduates it was creating, set the stage for last week's events.

Likewise, Francis Fukuyama (2013), connects this narrowing of economic opportunities to the emergence of a politically reformist revolution:

The authoritarian governments of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak were classic crony-capitalist regimes, in which economic opportunities depended heavily on political connections. Neither country, in any event, had grown fast enough economically to provide jobs for ever-larger cohorts of young people. The result was political revolution.¹²⁹

Fukuyama and others have gone so far as to describe the Egyptian revolution as a middle-class revolution. Talking to people in Tahrir Square, I got the sense that, for the working classes, this politicization of the middle classes was welcome, if somewhat bittersweet. Some working class leaders recalled a sense of betrayal by the middle classes, whose political actions in previous years had not extended to supporting strikes in places like Mahala. But those same working class leaders noted that in Tahrir, it was enough for workers to come and be part of the story without necessarily being visible; if middle class protestors played a leadership role in Tahrir, it was fine because, ultimately, it was the revolution that mattered.¹³⁰ As Wael Habib, the leading labor organizer from Mahala, put it:

I think that workers role and all political oppositions are not against one another. But at the same time, we have some sense of bitterness against the political oppositions since 2008, specially because in a sense they betrayed us. After announcing the strike, they told people it is better to stay home and hang banners in your balconies.etc. In April 2008, there was a civil war in Mahala and most of the opposition seems not to care. But today we join here in Tahrir, and we forget about that past. We only

¹²⁹ Francis Fukuyama, "The Middle-Class Revolution," *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 June, 2013; available at: <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887323873904578571472700348086> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

¹³⁰ Though, for an argument that the middle class has not yet done enough, see <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/01/egypt-missing-middle-class-politics.html#> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

care about the revolution.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Tahrir sit-in, however, was the extent to which it received the support of the upper classes—in particular, many key Egyptian businessmen. Why did so many upper class Egyptians participate in the revolution and why were they were so angry at Mubarak’s regime? Here, it is useful to situate the question of the cross-class coalition in the larger picture of Egyptian political economy under Mubarak. Late political economist Samer Soliman (2012a) identified three main features of the political economy of the Mubarak regime: 1) the state moving from a semi-rentier state to a predatory tax state (where taxation increases constantly without true representation); 2) the decline of the regime’s public purchasing power; and 3) the “bourgeoisification” of the ruling party. The third feature is especially relevant to the question of upper class Egyptians in relation to the revolution. Soliman was discussing a major shift in the practices of the Egyptian state, especially after the rise of Gamal Mubarak to politics. Historically, Hosni Mubarak, who came from the army and inherited a bureaucratic economy from Sadat, acted as an arbiter between the military and the upper classes. As Gamal Mubarak became increasingly involved in politics, however, this formula changed. The ruling party and its relation to “business” began to change; in short, the inner circle of the regime narrowed ever more tightly around a small group of businessmen close to Gamal Mubarak. Soliman states:

The bourgeoisification of the ruling party reflected Egypt’s changing political economy from bureaucratic to neo-liberal authoritarianism. The shift was meant to strengthen the party by supporting it with the financial and human resources in the hands of businessman. Instead, this metamorphosis of the party and its leadership had a destabilizing effect in the political sphere. It created resentment among other social groups, especially when the businessman joining and leading the party were accused of monopolistic and corrupt practices. (2012a: 58)

Not only the military, but also wider segments of Egypt's upper classes were threatened by this shift towards Gamal Mubarak's inner circle.¹³¹ Soon, only small segments at each level of Egypt's class structure stood to benefit from their connections to the Mubarak family network. Soliman describes the situation:

The neo-liberal "reforms" Gamal Mubarak made had a strong impact on Mubarak's support on the higher circles of state bureaucracy. And also did not have enough support outside the state. Groups that supported Gamal were very narrow strata from the upper class, and also narrow strata from upper middle class, those who directly benefited from the economic policies of Gamal Mubarak, and saw Gamal's role as an opportunity to modernize or innovate July state/regime smoothly. And lastly very narrow strata from the poor, those who benefited from charity and the "crumbs" given to them by Gamal and his mother's NGOs.¹³²

Of course, how exactly the upper classes participated in and supported the sit-in in Tahrir varied was quite different from the participation of the lower and middle classes. Some business tycoons, for example, offered their own private TV channels to cover protests, thus violating the government ban and censorship on Tahrir; Naguib Sawiris, CEO of the telecommunications companies Wind Telecom and Orascom Telecom Holding, was one such example. Two businessmen, Tawfeeq Kamel Diab, and Ibrahim El Moallem own the two main independent newspapers, which were exceptionally covering protests, and tried to offer perspective from the ground. These two papers are *Al-Masry Alyoum* and *El-Shorouk*, respectively. El Moallem also has some important business partners in Egypt. Despite the threats the newspapers received, they

¹³¹ The military's relation to Gamal Mubarak and how this motivated the military to sacrifice Hosni Mubarak during the revolution goes beyond the scope of this discussion. But, briefly, it is important to mention that many people have pointed to evidence that Gamal Mubarak and his circle were attempting to encroach on military lands and business in Egypt. Also the rise of Gamal Mubarak angered the generals, as his planned succession to power disrupted the long-standing tradition of all previous presidents coming from the military in Egypt, from Nasser to Mubarak Sr. See, for example, *Ahram Online*, "Tantawi Was at Odds with Gamal Mubarak: Wikileaks," May 7, 2011; available at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/11559/Egypt/Politics-/Tantawi-was-atodds-with-Gamal-Mubarak-Wikileaks.aspx> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

¹³² <http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=08042012&id=827835fd-2fd1-4658-a064-e4811851dcf3> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

continued to cover protests and go to Tahrir. During my fieldwork in Tahrir, I heard many stories from journalist friends about the threats that the workers in these two papers received from pro-Mubarak thugs, but yet they continued to do their work.

Some businessmen, such as Mamdouh Hamza, an engineer and industrialist, and founder of Hamza Associates, a major engineering company in Egypt, also helped to finance protests in Tahrir by offering assistance with logistics.¹³³ As several representatives from the Youth Coalition of the Revolution (YCR) told me, Hamza provided some of the finances to build a stage in Tahrir. One of my informants also mentioned to me that some of the activists of the National Association for Change rented an apartment overlooking Tahrir Square and used it for meetings. He spoke critically of the idea that a group holding meetings above the square had an important impact on the dynamics within the square, but regardless his critique, this idea that certain businessmen connected to the movement assisted in financing things did exist during the sit-in and was expressed by a number of participants.

Businessmen from the Muslim Brotherhood and its networks also supported the sit-in. Seham Shawadda, the key organizer of the survival committee of the YCR, told me that she asked MB contacts to provide her with money and donations for the square. In addition, the MB had their own survival committees, and also provided tents and blankets to many of their poor members who came from the countryside to Tahrir. I personally saw much of this kind of assistance, and many of my informants said that the MB and the Salafies brought many of their members from the countryside. Indeed, on my first day of arrival to Tahrir on February 4, 2011, I helped two old men who appeared to be Salafies or from the MB to carry in huge piles of blankets and tents.

¹³³ <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3181/mamdouh-hamza> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

In general, as discussed earlier, political coalitions in Egypt were a decade in the making, but the widespread participation of different classes in the revolution was sparked by more recent changes in politics and the economy that occurred mainly after 2005. The inevitable outcome of such cross-class coalition, however, was that the only consensus capable of uniting everyone was an agenda that focused on political, as opposed to economic, reform. Though members of each class had their own ideas about what the uprising should be all about, political reform was the one idea that all could rally behind.

Road 3: Youth Coalitions

Most of my informants were youth. 87 out of my 106 informants were under the age of forty.¹³⁴ The YCR was very crucial in the mobilization for the revolution and in presenting the most solid, concrete coalition during the uprising in Tahrir. One could say that while the NAFC was the most important political coalition prior to the revolution, it was the YCR that played the most effective role during the uprising itself. In order to understanding the role of youth in the revolution, however, it is crucial to locate them in their political and economic context (Korotayev and Zinkina 2011).

Scholars have noted that Egypt has a “youth bulge” (LaGraffe 2012; Shahine 2011; Shehata 2011). Defined as those between the ages of 18 and 29, youth in Egypt comprise about 24.3 % of the population, according to a report by Egypt’s Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics published in 2012.¹³⁵ And according to a Carnegie Middle East Center report, two thirds of the Egyptian population is under 30 (Achy 2010). Before the

¹³⁴ The age breakdown was as follows: 52 out of 106 were between 20–30; 35 were between 30–40; ten were between 40–50; 6 were between 50–60; and 1 informant was above 60.

¹³⁵ The report is published in Egypt Independent (August 12, 2012). Available at: <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/youth-are-quarter-egypt-s-population-and-half-them-are-poor> (last accessed June 9, 2014)

revolution, a number of studies revealed the extent to which Egyptian youth were excluded from politics and also lacking opportunities (Assaad 2008; Assaad and Barsoum 2007; Assaad and Roudi-Fahimi 2007; Hassan and Sassanpour 2008). According to survey conducted in 2009 by the Egyptian Population Council, nine out of ten jobless in Egypt are under age 30, and it is estimated that 51.3% of those aged 18–29 in Egypt live in poverty. And though most Egyptian youth are educated, only 1% are members of political parties, revealing the extent of disillusionment with the formal political system (Achy 2010).¹³⁶ Highlighting this combination of education and unemployment, sociologist Asef Bayat (2011) calls for studying the new uprisings in the Middle East with a focus on what he calls the “poor middle class.” This group acts with the high aspirations and expectations of the middle class, but they are constantly frustrated by economic hardship. Many of my informants under 30 cited this lack of opportunities and their perception of politics as corrupted as major reasons why they decided to participate in the revolution.

In terms of their patterns of mobilization, this young generation was also heavily influenced by the coalition politics of the early 2000s. Perhaps one of the most influential coalitions was Kefayya, which led to the offshoot organization, Youth for Change. And just as Kefayya served as an umbrella organization for various offshoots, so too did Youth for Change generate a number of other groups. By the time the Youth Coalition of the Revolution was created in 2011, it included six youth groups: the April 6th Movement, the Youth for ElBaradei, the Youth of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Youth of the Democratic Front Party, and the Justice and Freedom Movement, the latter of which included Marxists, Islamists, Arab nationalists and

¹³⁶ See also http://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2010PGY_SYPEPrelimReport.pdf (last accessed June 1, 2014).

Nasserists.¹³⁷ Many of my youth informants told me that they were members of at least one of these groups. They and the founders of the YCR emphasized to me the impact the history of youth organizing and coalition building had leading up to the revolution.

The following excerpt is from my November 9, 2012, interview with Mohamed El-Qasass, one of the founders of the YCR and a key member in the Youth of the MB. el-Qasass was one of the activists who later violated MB orders to leave Tahrir and not join the revolution on that first day of January 25, 2011. As a consequence, the MB fired him after the revolution. I cite El-Qasass at length as his narrative reveals the subtle way in which the growing authoritarianism of the Mubarak regime itself pushed youth to gravitate towards a more coalition-based form of politics, focused more on building numbers and strength than adhering to any rigid ideology or agenda:

I am now 38. And I work in a small media company that I own. I was an active member in the MB in college. I was in college in the 1990s. My father is a scholar in Al-Azhar. I studied in Dar El-Oloum College, one of the main centers Islamic studies in Egypt. . . .

The 1990s were unique in college activism for many reasons. The first is that it was obvious that Mubarak's regime is very authoritarian. And it is getting worse. Also we were very strong as Islamic students activists in camps (Cairo University). The regime was very hostile to us and students activism. Yes, the Islamists were the strongest group in campus. But we realized that coordinating with other groups will make the students movement stronger.

I have known many of my friends and colleagues who formed the YCR with me in this period in campus such as Khaled Abdel Hameed, the socialist, and Mohamed Abdel Haleem, the Nasserist, from my generation. I continued working with the MB after graduation. And I was active in the MB student office. And I did know newer generations such as Zyaed Al-Eleemy, the socialist, and also Islam Lotfy, who is also an MB and founder of the YCR and also this party (the Egyptian Current). And I can give you many other names such as Kharyi al-Sayed, Mosysfa Shawky, and Mohamed Abbas—all are Islamists and colleagues in our party.

¹³⁷ This preceded and should not be confused with the Freedom and Justice Party of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was banned in 2013 after the military coup.

The years from 2004 to 2008 were very crucial in making of our generation and the experience of working together. In the context of Kefayya, some of us, the young MB, were became very interested in joining the movement and working with others. Also, we participated in something called the International Cairo Conference Against the War and Zionism. This was coordinated by the MB, socialists, and Nasserists in that time. This started out of the efforts against the war on Iraq and then continued for few years in Cairo. In this conference, I was one of the organizers of panels on student activism, and also anti-discrimination panels. In 2006, I participated with others in the protest in solidarity with the prosecuted judges.

When I asked him why he did not follow the instructions of the MB, he responded:

I cannot attribute this to one factor. Some of us were not really so committed to the rigidity of the orders and instruction of our senior folks in the MB. I was arrested many times. And I was in the military trial against the MB in the 1990s. And I did not like some aspects of this disciplining way perhaps. And probably these experiences of working with others affected me. I have always valued the experience we shared with others, and perhaps also this context of participating in the streets that made our experience unique, as an MB and also as working with others. Then the April 2008 strike occurred followed by the movement that took its name. In other words, these years created a unique generation, those who are graduated earlier and politics absorbed them.

Many other members of the YCR told me similar things. It seems that by the time the YCR was organized in Tahrir, it brought together a generation of youth uniquely predisposed to build consensus across more traditional political lines. Having witnessed the growth of authoritarianism under Mubarak, and paired with their own lack of economic opportunities, El-Qassass and others seemed to understand that only by working together could youth ensure their voices would be heard. As a result, the YCR was the most visible organized coalition in Tahrir and the revolution. And it was a coalition that truly represented a consensus—a consensus built on the common ground of political reform. The very fact that the YCR contained youth ranging from Marxists to liberals to Islamists made it impossible to go beyond political reform as their main agenda. Once focused on this goal, though, the YCR held fast—they remained the only

organized voice during the 18 days of the revolution that insisted upon ousting Mubarak before engaging in any negotiations (unlike, by contrast, the MB, which engaged in negotiations with the regime before Mubarak was out).

In this section, I have examined the three roads that led to a consensus around political reform as the main goal of the revolution: the specific history of political coalitions in Egypt, the creation of an impromptu cross-class alliance, and also the crystallization of youth coalitional experiences in the YCR. This explains how the revolution was confined to a specific list of demands that represented, in many ways, a compromise on the part of all the groups involved. In reality, of course, these three roads overlapped with one another in various ways, and are only separated here for analytical purposes. I have discussed them separately so as to avoid conflating the different dynamics at work, but the point is that there were many factors that shaped what came to be seen as the demands of the revolution—demands spelled out on a banner that hung over Tahrir Square and were embraced precisely because they seemed to belong to no one and everyone at the same time. In the next section, I turn to examining how and why Tahrir itself came to be seen as the symbol and site of the revolution's legitimacy.

II. Tahrir as the Embodiment of Revolutionary Legitimacy

Soon after the ousting of Mubarak on February 11, 2011, and for many months afterward—including both before and after the first parliamentary elections held after the revolution, from November 28, 2011 to January 11, 2012—talk continued to circulate within political circles about something called revolutionary legitimacy. Khaled Abdel Hameed, one of

the founders of the Youth Coalition of the Revolution, told me that the first time the slogan, “The Legitimacy is for the Square” appeared was during the 18 days of the revolution, specifically on February 1, 2011, in opposition to the idea of negotiating with the regime. It was coined in conjunction with another slogan, “No Negotiation Until Mubarak Leaves.” But even once Mubarak was gone, “The Legitimacy is for the Square” revealed itself to be more than just a slogan; it was an idea with profound political purchase both in Tahrir Square and beyond. After the parliamentary elections, heated discussions talked about a presumed conflict between “electoral legitimacy” and “revolutionary legitimacy.” The former, the regime (now controlled by SCAF and the MB) argued, came to the fore with the election of the new parliament, whereas the latter, according to many activists and protestors, continued to reside with the revolution, as embodied in the space of Tahrir.¹³⁸ For this second group, a form of revolutionary legitimacy emerged during those 18 days in Tahrir that was grounded in, yet not limited to the actual square; nor, they argued, did that legitimacy dissipate when the protests subsided and SCAF took power.¹³⁹ And it was this legitimacy, they argued, that should still be acknowledged and used as a guide in the transition period. Politicians, academics, and protestors debated the issue and many continued to explicitly connect this idea of revolutionary legitimacy to the symbol and space of Tahrir (Adly 2012; Bamyeh 2012; Helal 2012).

¹³⁸ For the argument that legitimacy now rested with Parliament, see “Parliament, not Tahrir, now the legitimate authority, says Brotherhood leader,” *Ahram Online*, 24 January 2012; available at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/32579/Egypt/Politics-/Parliament,-not-Tahrir,-now-the-legitimate-authori.aspx> (last accessed June 1, 2014); also the comments of Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and intellectual leader of the MB and also the chairman of the International Union for Muslim scholars, available at: <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=15022012&id=36209e08-1dde-4588-95a6-1d99b50677eb> (last accessed June 1, 2014). Not surprisingly, most of the voices arguing that parliament was now the legitimate authority were either from SCAF or pro-SCAF or from the MB or pro Islamists, now that the parliament was dominated by the MB.

¹³⁹ See <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/218046> (last accessed June 1, 2014); <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/213762> (last accessed June 1, 2014); <http://www1.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=651945#.UzGWKv0RB4M> (last accessed June 1, 2014); and also <http://www.aawsat.com/leader.asp?section=3&article=664516&issueno=12137> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

Legitimacy is a relational concept; it refers to how and why citizens are willing to obey the commands of a ruler. Sociologists know, of course, the famous three sources of legitimacy defined by Max Weber: tradition, charisma, and legality (Weber 1984). In “modern” constitutional democracies, the most relevant of these is the form of political legitimacy that is based on legality, which means that a government’s actions should always be made according to just laws. In times of revolution, the authority and legitimacy of the government is called into question. The existing regime will always try retain and uphold the “old” form of legitimacy, whether based in tradition, charisma, or the law, but the revolution—or so it hopes—always brings with it a new form legitimacy, based on the revolution’s ideals (Applewhite 1978; Edelstein 2002; Greene 1974; Holbig and Gilley 2010). This is described as revolutionary legitimacy.

In order to understand how the protests in Tahrir Square came to assert a new form of legitimacy that challenged that of the existing regime, it is necessary to grasp the extent to which the legitimacy of the Mubarak regime was already in crisis. When exactly the Mubarak regime lost its legitimacy and/or what kind of legitimacy it had by January 2011 has been much debated among academics and scholars in Egypt and beyond (Cole 2011b; Heikal 2002; Younis 2012). But most commentators agree that compared to those he succeeded, Mubarak’s legitimacy was always in question. Nasser’s legitimacy was rooted in revolution—a revolution that ended colonial rule, established a welfare state, ended the monarchy, and formed a republic. Sadat’s legitimacy was based in war—the liberation of the Sinai from Israel and then the establishment of the post-war peace. Mubarak’s rule, on the other hand, with its inauspicious start following the assassination of Sadat, lacked any solid basis of legitimacy. Though constantly seeking to maintain the appearance of a legalistic state, Mubarak’s regime quickly revealed itself to be one

buttressed by the massive build-up of state security apparatus, the continuation of emergency law, the escalation of police brutality, and rigged elections. There is a consensus at least that the regime had become increasingly authoritarian by 2011, and that although there were “elections,” there was no democracy in Egypt (Blaydes 2006, 2010; Brownlee 2002; El-Ghobashy 2006). In a famous lecture delivered at the American University in Cairo in 2002, prominent writer Mohamed Hassanin Heikal, emphasized “it is not enough that you are in power to be a legitimate leader” (Heikal 2002).¹⁴⁰ Indeed, several critics suggested that the regime had become so powerful that it had essentially swallowed the state, or as political economist Samer Soliman put it, Egypt had become that paradox of a “strong regime and weak state” (2011). The rise of the police state under Mubarak actually constituted a hollowing out of the state, in terms of a state apparatus with any level of autonomy from the ruler, and this only intensified the legitimacy crisis of the regime. Sherif Younis (2012: 97), an Egyptian historian and critic, explains:

The already repressive state of July [in reference to Nasser’s state] is transformed into a crude free market state. This means combination of both neo-liberal and repressive state at once. The regime simply became lacking any legitimacy. Why is that? The regime is made of mere networks of corrupt gang, or cronies, their main job becomes loyal to this regime. Despite this loyalty, the regime, also can get rid of any of these elements or eliminate them at any time, since there is no real constitutionally controlling rules. The state in its core is nothing but police machine that protects corruption. When the regime simply thinks that they can do it all with police machine, then it lacks any legitimacy.

The last parliamentary elections under Mubarak, only a few months before the revolution, and widely understood to have fraudulent, were arguably the “last straw” in the regime’s legitimacy.¹⁴¹ But while Mubarak’s legitimacy was already in crisis, it was by no means clear at the start of 2011 who or what could step in to assert a new form of legitimacy that would be

¹⁴⁰ The full Arabic text of the lecture is published in this link: <http://www.mafhoum.com/press4/118P56.htm> (last accessed June 9, 2014)

¹⁴¹ Some scholars argue that we need to think more seriously about cases of stolen elections, and consider them as part of the revolutionary process, namely, as triggers; see Thompson and Kuntz (2005).

accepted by the Egyptian people. The question is thus: how and why did the protests and sit-in staged in Tahrir become the center of revolutionary politics and, ultimately, the embodiment of revolutionary legitimacy?

The answer, I suggest, is partly thanks to the regime itself. During the 18 days of the revolution, the Mubarak regime used multiple strategies, all aimed at Tahrir; these varied from using force, to trying to isolate and demonize the protests, to negotiation. The use of force has been well documented and culminated in the now infamous Battle of the Camel Battle on February 2, 2011, which left 11 people dead and over 600 injured.¹⁴² Such violence on the part of the state and pro-Mubarak supporters had the opposite effect of what was intended, leading some to identify the Battle of the Camel as the moment the tide of opinion shifted against Mubarak and in favor of the protestors.¹⁴³

The second strategy involved using official media and state propaganda to isolate the protests, and construct those in Tahrir as enemies of the state, un-representative of what was felt by the rest of the nation. Despite the fact that protests took place in many locations in Egypt (something I explore further in the following chapter), the regime continually tried to portray the uprising as taking place only in Tahrir, in order to justify the idea of speedy repression targeting the single place that was supposedly witnessing trouble. On February 2, 2011, the new prime minister hired by Mubarak at the time ordered that government work go back to normal, after only a few days being closed. Some of my informants told me this was part of the plan to isolate

¹⁴² See also a report of the fact-finding mission mandated by the Egyptian government after the revolution, in which the report that at least 846 were killed during the revolution and the injured were about 6467. This includes the dead and the injured in the revolution in general including the camel battle. The report (in Arabic) is available in this link: http://www.ffnc-eg.org/assets/ffnc-eg_final.pdf (last accessed June 9, 2014)

¹⁴³ See, for example about how crucial this battle in turning the public against Mubarak at the time: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/33470.aspx> (last accessed June 1, 2014) and <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/02/03/the-battle-of-the-camel-the-final-straw-for-mubaraks-regime/> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

the square, to get normal citizens to go back to normal, while, hopefully, the protestors would get exhausted and leave the square.

Meanwhile, the official media targeted Tahrir, labeled protestors as infiltrators or troublemakers, and disseminated images purportedly showing violent instigators and groups of irresponsible, destructive kids.¹⁴⁴ Many conservative prominent actors and actresses, politicians, and state intellectuals were interviewed extensively on state TV to praise Mubarak's reform and/or demonize Tahrir. Over and over again, the protestors were referred to, in a reductive and pejorative manner, as "the kids of Tahrir."¹⁴⁵ Yet the ironic effect of the excessive propaganda against Tahrir, in the context of the revolutionary crisis at the time, was to construct and inadvertently acknowledge Tahrir as the counterpart of the state in the conflict. The political climate had become acutely polarized, such that society was essentially divided into three main camps: pro-Mubarak/regime, pro-Tahrir/revolution, and a third party, known at the time in Egypt as "the couch party"—in reference to the significant part of the population who were reluctant to participate in the revolution, and overwhelmed with anxiety and worries about the stability of the country. As several activists pointed out to me, the obsession of the official media with Tahrir was ironic and contradictory: if the Mubarak regime was as strong and stable as it asserted, why so much concern over a bunch of kids? The regime's response to Tahrir belied its own discourse that Tahrir was an isolated, aberrant uprising and inadvertently contributed to constructing the square as the symbol of the revolution, the "other side" with which the regime had to contend.

¹⁴⁴ See J. Alexander (2011) who created a cultural coding analysis about how the media constructed Tahrir and how Tahrir was seen compared to the regime. It is useful to contrast the media's perspective on Tahrir with how protestors in Tahrir saw the state and the media coverage on the other hand. But this goes beyond my research.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zacNVc9nGjU> (last accessed June 1, 2014); <http://www.masress.com/search?q=التحرير+بتوع+العيال> (last accessed June 1, 2014); and <http://www.masrawy.com/Ketabat/ArticlesDetails.aspx?AID=87727> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

On February 4, 2011, I witnessed an incident that illustrated this unintended interpellation of Tahrir's legitimacy by the state when a high-ranking military general came to the square, and talked on one of the main stages. Protestors did not know who he was, but the initial rumor was that he was Sami Anan, the military chief of staff at the time. The general talked to the protestors through the speakers, saying: the regime heard you, and your demands are respected, and it is now the time for you to leave the square.¹⁴⁶ Protestors refused to listen and chanted back, "We will not leave, he [Mubarak] should leave." We learned later from the media that the speaker was General Hassan Al-Rouiny, the Head of the Central Command in Egypt. Sending such a high-ranking individual sent the protestors in Tahrir an unintended message of recognition and acknowledgment. Even asking the protestors to leave the square seemed to validate the idea that Tahrir *was* the revolution—if only it would empty out, the uprising would be over. Al-Rouiny was not the only representative of the regime to speak in the square, other messengers were sent, asking the protestors to accept Mubarak's offer to make reforms and continue his presidential term.¹⁴⁷, ¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ For footage of this incident, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lem36h5kSZE> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

¹⁴⁷ Other messengers were Amre Moussa, former Secretary General of the Arab League, and also Ahmed Kamal Abu Al-Magd, a former minister from Nasser's time. Abu-Almgd with some other intellectuals and elite formed what is called the "committee of the wise," which sought to play a role as arbiter between the regime and the protestors. The committee was not effective.

¹⁴⁸ One can argue that the regime's grand strategy was to end the Tahrir protests as soon as possible and to absorb their now contained legitimacy via negotiated electoral reform. Scholar Amr Adly (2012) states, for example:

Days after the breakout of the 25 January revolt and before the ouster of Hosni Mubarak, his chief spy, Omar Suleiman, proposed a long and detailed legalistic plan to solve Egypt's political impasse. Suleiman was planning to buy time until Mubarak's official term expired in six months. The proposal included the introduction of constitutional amendments and the dissolution of Parliament by enabling the Court of Cassation to invalidate the fraudulent membership of the MPs. The idea behind Suleiman's proposal was simple: deny any form of revolutionary legitimacy and subject any political demands to legalistic and procedural measures set by the regime itself. In other words, it was a practical move to contain the upheaval of the revolution. Fortunately enough, the people in Tahrir Square were adamant on killing Suleiman's plan, especially after the Battle of

This third strategy of negotiating for reform was attempted first with political parties and some important groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Mubarak authorized his VP at the time, who was just hired by Mubarak, Omar Soliman, to lead negotiation with opposition groups.¹⁴⁹ The protestors in Tahrir were not properly invited to these talks.¹⁵⁰ The talks started and only a few youth figures were invited, most of whom later wrote testimonies that they were marginalized at the meetings.¹⁵¹

It is telling also to consider the three speeches Mubarak gave during the 18 days in response to the protests: on the evening of January 28, on the evening of February 1, and on the evening of February 10, 2011. While he addressed his remarks to the nation in the first two speeches, without a single mention of the word “Tahrir,” Mubarak’s third speech invoked Tahrir in the first sentence: “In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, dear citizens, I am addressing the youth of Egypt today in Tahrir Square and across the country.”¹⁵² But this belated attempt to appeal to the protestors was too late; Mubarak’s third speech was the last time he would address the country as the president.

The idea of Tahrir as the center of revolutionary legitimacy grew also among the public within and beyond Cairo. In many areas in Egypt in general and in Cairo specifically, people

the Camel. Mubarak had to consequently step down in a move that effectively annulled the 1971 Constitution.

¹⁴⁹ For Soliman’s talks with opposition, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dp4oWUKkGYQ> (last accessed June 1, 2014); and for a statement by Soliman about his mandate from Mubarak to talk with the opposition, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrnkbdGVuZQ> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

¹⁵⁰ For Soliman’s talks with youth, see: <http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=349281#.åUzXYRv0RB4M> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

¹⁵¹ Of course the fact that the regime targeted Tahrir and its youth, in attempt to isolate them, and then inviting some of the youth to the talks with Mubarak’s VP, Omar Soliman, needs an explanation. My guess is that this was simple tactical move to make divisions among the youth. The goal is to show the negotiators as good citizens, and those who refuse negotiations as insisting on troublemaking. Ironically the youth who met with Soliman were marginalized in his meeting with the political opposition. And they had a small very short meeting with him afterward. See Abdel Rahman Youssef’s account of the meeting and the marginalization (Youssef 2011: 142–48).

¹⁵² For Mubarak’s last speech, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbIBXNKMUhs> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

could not walk around without being asked whether or not they were going to Tahrir. At the time of the revolution, so-called popular security committees were created in many neighborhoods in Cairo and most urban centers in Egypt. The relationship between these committees and Tahrir is complex and I discuss this further in the following chapter. Suffice it to say here that these committees established a form of self-rule or, at the very least, security for a number of neighborhoods, where the police were lacking, albeit with some coordination with the military. Importantly, not all of the committees were necessarily pro-revolution. In such cases, the committees created difficulties for many protestors, especially in light of the curfew that went into effect on January 28, 2011. For people coming from or going to Tahrir, they would inevitably be stopped by one of these committees and asked many questions. One of the most common questions was whether or not they were coming from Tahrir. Yet again, the result was a form of recognition, performed at checkpoints and on corners throughout Egypt, that Tahrir was the center of action.

Importantly, Tahrir was not only a sit-in and a symbol, but also a very real and strategically effective center of mobilization, given its proximity to all of the major political power centers of Egypt. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the area of Tahrir houses no less than ten ministries, as well as the cabinet and the parliament. There was a constant sense of struggle between the regime and the protestors in Tahrir about occupying this space. For many protestors, their successful occupation of Tahrir both symbolized and literally demonstrated their ability to shut down the government. Writer Assem El-Qersh conveyed this idea when he wrote: “Who occupies Tahrir Square grasps the nation’s neck and controls the rhythm of life. The ruling regime cannot afford but to maintain this control. If the regime lost this control, this will be this regime’s end” (2012: 123–24). Protestors used this idea to mobilize further, building up a

discourse that constructed Tahrir as the revolution and the future of Egypt. This idea was common and reflected in banners in Tahrir—just one example: on February 11, 2011, a protestor, who was also a lawyer, carried a sign that read:

This is the Tahrir state, it is based on justice, dignity, liberty and respecting diversity. Outside this square is Mubarak's state, which is based on corruption, despotism and humiliation.¹⁵³

In sum, there was a form of mutual recognition between the regime and Tahrir protestors. The regime sought to end the protests by isolating Tahrir, by negotiating with protestors to buy time, and by simply trying to crush them with force. But for protestors, the idea that Tahrir was the center of the revolution provided a means and an opportunity for further mobilization. To put it simply, the regime, the media, neighborhood committees, and the media all contributed to create a dichotomy between the regime on the one hand and the revolution on the other; the first was reduced to Mubarak and the latter was reduced to Tahrir.

Perhaps no greater affirmation of Tahrir's ongoing embodiment of revolutionary legitimacy even after the 18 days of the revolution can be found than in the actions of political authorities since the ousting of Mubarak. After February 11, SCAF kept Mubarak's cabinet for a few weeks. Protests continued opposing this, and protestors called for a new cabinet, arguing that this was the least that SCAF could do to signal real change in Egypt. On March 3, 2011, SCAF authorized Essam Sharaf to form and chair a new cabinet. Sharaf is a professor of engineering and was a minister under Mubarak, but was viewed favorably as he had joined the protests in Tahrir during the 18 days, as part of the faculty rallies that marched to Tahrir on several occasions. After calls from some protestors that the new prime minister should take his oath in

¹⁵³ Related in Saad (2012: 53).

Tahrir, Sharaf went to Tahrir the next day, March 4, and joined protestors who were still protesting SCAF rule and calling for real change. Sharaf did not take the oath of office in Tahrir, but he did give a speech and told protestors that the legitimacy of his new job was derived from the protestors of the revolution and from Tahrir.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, when Mohamed Morsi was elected President in 2012, on June 29, the day before he officially took office, he went to Tahrir. Morsi joined the protestors who were celebrating the first civilian elected president in Egypt, gave a speech, and in a hugely significant gesture, he took the oath of office in front of the protestors in Tahrir.¹⁵⁵ A few months before this, on the first anniversary of the revolution, protestors themselves also invoked the memory and ongoing legacy of Tahrir when they mobilized in the streets against military rule and widely distributed a leaflet simply titled “The Revolution First and Legitimacy for Tahrir.”¹⁵⁶

Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to answer two questions. The first is how and why a consensus was formed that established (and limited) the demands of the Egyptian revolution to political reform. And the second is how and why Tahrir came to embody the voice and legitimacy of the revolution. I began by discussing the concept of a reformist revolution and relating it to the concept of a “refolution.” I argued that while it is useful to develop classifications of the different types of democratic revolutions, it is also important to understand how a specific type

¹⁵⁴ See http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/03/110303_egyptpm.shtml (last accessed June 1, 2014). For Sharaf’s speech in Tahrir, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFH8X_-TxtY (last accessed June 1, 2014).

¹⁵⁵ For the text of Morsi’s speech, see: <http://marsadpress.net/?p=4860> (last accessed June 1, 2014); and for video of the speech, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWPVCUtpNWw> (last accessed June 1, 2014). Morsi took the oath again later at the Supreme Court.

¹⁵⁶ See this leaflet at: <http://www.tahrirdocuments.org/2011/12/the-revolution-first-and-legitimacy-for-tahrir/> (last accessed June 1, 2014).

of revolution is constructed and accepted by the protestors themselves. Also, it is important to understand the kind of impact a regime type (whether we call it “personalistic” or “sultanistic” or something else) has on the political imagination of protestors. I have suggested in this chapter that in Egypt, the very concentration and authoritarianism of Mubarak’s regime created a form tunnel vision on the part of otherwise diverse opposition groups, such that coalitions became focused on simply getting rid of Mubarak and establishing a set of demands to which the largest number of people and groups could agree. Finally, I examined how Tahrir became both seen as both the symbol and the site of the revolution’s legitimacy. In the same way that the objectives of the revolution were reduced over time to a relatively generic platform of political reform, so too did the revolution itself become reduced, imaginatively and practically, to the symbol and space of Tahrir. As I have sought to highlight in this chapter, critical assessments of this development in hindsight must take into account the context at the time, and recognize that this focus gave the very idea of Tahrir enormous mobilizing power. Nonetheless, as I will discuss in the following chapter, this concentration of energy within and around Tahrir also had a downside.



Figure 15 Two signs hung by protestors during the revolution on the door of the Egyptian Parliament. The first sign reads: “This building is closed until the regime would fall. January 25, revolutionary youth.” The other sign reads: “Yesterday, it was Tahrir [read being closed or being liberated], today is the Parliament, and tomorrow is.....” [in reference to the idea that the occupation of Tahrir is expanding its power and the mobilization continues]. The sign was hung on February 5, 2011. (Picture by Ara-Bi Website, <http://ara.bi/photos/6762/> (النظام-إسقاط حتى مغلق))

Chapter 5

The Tahrir Effect, Part II: On the Margin of the Revolution, On the Margin of Tahrir

I am not planning to watch any movie, whose title is “The Square,” without specifying that it is talking about Tahrir. I personally started to become pessimistic since that moment when some of us have started to drop the word “Tahrir” and talk only about the square, as if it is self-identifying. Since that moment the main questions [of the revolution] have changed and became: How’s the square? And what is the message of the square today? And is the legitimacy from the square or the parliament? And “Oh....the Square.”¹⁵⁷ I would argue that this pedophilic relation with the “square” was the natural starter to our crisis today. I do not want to watch anything that would deepen such “sexual disorder.” In truth, I do not miss Tahrir Square, and I do not want to remember it, and I do not want to see anything that reminds me of Tahrir!!

On January 22, 2014, Egyptian activist and scholar Amr Abdel Rahman wrote the above as his Facebook status.¹⁵⁸ He was commenting on the Tahrir-focused Egyptian Revolution documentary *The Square* (2013), directed by Jehane Noujaim, which was receiving much attention and acclaim at the time, but which remained controversial among Egyptian activists and bloggers. Specifically, Abdel Rahman was expressing a certain level of fatigue and frustration regarding the attention accorded to Tahrir and the discursive tendency to reduce the events of 2011 to Tahrir. This idea that the revolution had somehow become limited to Tahrir Square and that this had contributed to what some saw as the revolution’s failure was, in fact, a relatively new discourse. During the 18 days of the uprising itself, and also in the immediate aftermath, one would have been hard pressed to hear any negative remarks about Tahrir among activists. Tahrir was constituted at the time as a remarkably utopian space, a site of intense emotions,

¹⁵⁷ “Oh the square...” “is the title of a famous song made after the January revolution by Aida Al-Ayoubi; available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hp6nx7wJRZk> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹⁵⁸ Quoted here with his permission.

optimism, and a sense of profound solidarity. In the months that followed, however, as the post-Mubarak transition stalled and began to veer in disturbing directions, people began to talk about another “side” of Tahrir. In my first round of fieldwork in 2011, which included my own ethnographic observations and numerous interviews, the general attitude was one of admiration for and positive feelings regarding Tahrir, with little to no criticism. But by the time I conducted my second round of fieldwork and interviews in the summer of 2012, I noticed that many informants had begun to speak critically about Tahrir and its effect. The partially longitudinal aspect of my research design enabled me to note this variation, which I might otherwise have missed or seen at only one stage or another. Ultimately, this complicated and evolving set of understandings and expectations regarding Tahrir became the major inspiration for this dissertation. While Abdel Rahman in the quote above was referring to the larger problem of Tahrir and its relation not only to the revolution, but also to its aftermath in the years that followed, his words serve as a warning to investigate the full extent of the Tahrir effect—its positive *and* negative dimensions—during the time of the revolution itself. The latter is the focus of this chapter.

As noted in the introduction of this dissertation, the main goal of this project is to investigate the paradoxical role of Tahrir Square in the Egyptian revolution. By paradoxical role, I am referring to the way in which, on the one hand, Tahrir Square came to represent the central voice of the revolution—a fact that amplified this voice, garnered it unprecedented domestic and international attention, and assisted in mobilization—but also how, on the other hand, this centralization of the revolution in one place and in one set of demands simultaneously marginalized other voices and other, sometimes more radical, forms of mobilization. In Chapter 3, I analyzed how Tahrir sit-in became the central mode of action of the revolution. And in

Chapter 4, I investigated how Tahrir became the main voice of the revolution, and an embodiment of revolutionary legitimacy. In this chapter, I analyze the other side of the paradoxical impact of Tahrir on the revolution, specifically how some possibilities *outside* Tahrir were obscured and/or truncated in ways that left their true potential unknown, and how some voices *within* Tahrir itself were marginalized. The discussion in this chapter focuses specifically on the 18 days of the revolution, though I do discuss some examples from events that happened afterwards for elaboration, when needed.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I discuss two main modes of action that took place outside Tahrir Square that presented promising revolutionary possibilities, but which were not fully elaborated as a result of the centralization of attention and energy around Tahrir. These two modes of action are the popular committees, which were formed to protect neighborhoods in urban centers throughout the country, and working class strikes that took place in the three days before the ousting of Mubarak. In the second section, I investigate those voices and issues that were present, yet variously de-prioritized or silenced within Tahrir. Finally, I end the chapter with some theoretical reflections on how to understand this phenomenon of marginalization, or what I describe as the making of a revolutionary boundary. Unlike previous chapters, I focus first on simply presenting the data—an intervention in itself, insofar as empirical analyses of the revolution have replicated the narrow focus on Tahrir; then, at the end of the chapter, I elaborate a framework for thinking about marginalization and social movements more generally. A spatial analysis, I argue, provides both methodological and theoretical tools for understanding *how* social movements and revolutions are constituted as such, as well as who and what are left out of this process.

I. The Road Untraveled: Possibilities Beyond Tahrir

Before talking about possibilities outside Tahrir Square, it is useful to briefly describe what was going on in Egypt outside of Tahrir and outside of Cairo in January and February 2011. It is very difficult to describe things accurately during this period, because so much was changing from one day to the next, in terms of mobilization and in terms of the regime crisis. To recap in general: Mass protests arose on January 25, 2011, with people mobilizing around a number of issues, but the main goal was calling for democracy. Prior to January 25, protestors did not explicitly call for a regime change, but rather, protested mainly against corruption and police brutality. With Mubarak's refusal to offer concessions and then the deployment of violence against protestors, demands shifted to the downfall of the regime and continued until Mubarak's ousting on February 11, 2011. Below, I provide a more detailed version of this narrative that focuses on mobilization and protests; in it, I highlight important temporal markers, as well as note significant spatial dynamics and things going on outside of Tahrir.

1) On January 25, 2011, mass rallies took place in most major urban centers—not only in Cairo near Tahrir Square, but also in Alexandria, Canal Suez cities, and Nile Delta cities.

2) On January 26 and 27, 2011, scattered rallies took place in Cairo, especially in the downtown area. At the same time, heated battles took place on the 26 and 27 January in Suez, resulting in the deaths of some protestors. As my informants affirmed, this latter event was temporally significant because it angered and, consequently, energized protestors nationwide.

3) On January 28, 2011, even bigger rallies took place in most urban centers in Egypt. These rallies ended with some very important battles between protestors and police, in which the latter used live ammunition and violence. These battles were extremely significant as they demonstrated the protestors' resilience and ability, despite intense violence, to defeat the police. Both "sides" began to sense that Mubarak could no longer simply crush protestors—in other words the regime lost its significant coercive force.

Mubarak thus deployed the army instead—a move seen as a “last resort.” On the ground, this meant an increase in military presence on the streets, but at the same time, urban riots and looting began to spread. On the night of January 28, people in various locales formed the popular committees, which I will discuss later in this chapter. On that night, several riots also included attacks on government centers of power.

4) On February 1, 2011, the first million-person rally¹⁵⁹ took place in Cairo and rallies generally increased throughout the country. The one in Cairo soon became the largest and most visible, however; the Cairo rally ended in Tahrir.

5) On February 2, 2011, the so-called Camel Battle took place. This was an attack of pro-Mubarak militia on Tahrir Square. This was an important temporal and spatial marker. Protestors succeeded in protecting Tahrir Square, while the army was forced to appear neutral. Spatially, the attack served to focus energy and attention on protecting the sit-in in Tahrir; symbolically, the attack increased both popular sympathy for the sit-in and critiques of the regime. Although spatially focused in Tahrir Square, the defeat of Mubarak's militia gave more energy to the revolution elsewhere and sent a signal regarding the failure of Mubarak's legitimacy.

6) On February 4, 2011, the second million-person rally took place in Cairo. This was larger, stronger, and even more successful than the first. Bigger rallies took place throughout the country, especially in main urban centers. What happened in the Camel Battle two days earlier compelled even more ordinary people (more critical mass) to join the protests.

7) On February 6, 2011, the government ordered state employees to go back to work (this had ceased after the events of January 28, 2011), in an effort to force things “back to normal.” Instead, working class strikes were launched in many parts of Cairo and in other important urban centers.

8) On February 9, 2011, the Egyptian working class expanded their strikes to include key strategic sectors such as the Suez Canal, railway, public transportation, and telecommunication workers.

9) On February 10, 2011, the military began to distance itself from Mubarak in a

¹⁵⁹ As noted in Chapter 3, in Egypt, the term “rallies” is used to describe mobile protests or marches, in which participants begin at one location and protest while marching towards and ending at another strategic and/or symbolic location.

statement.

10) On February 10 and 11, protesters make plans to march to the presidential palace, and working class strikes escalated.

11) On the afternoon of February 11, 2011, Mubarak steps down and transfers power to the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF).

But what about life in general in Egypt during this time? How did all of the above play out on the ground? How did it shape the texture and tone of people's everyday lives? This is also difficult also to capture, but I can share from my own experience in Cairo, at least after February 4, 2011, and from my many conversations with my friends and informants. Despite media efforts to downplay the protests in the first two days, people were talking about the protests every day and everywhere. As events escalated, the protests and news about Tahrir became the center of attention. Much of the news coverage was hostile to the protests and people became increasingly anxious and worried about the future. Society became sharply politicized as media-fuelled rumors circulated everywhere, via conversations, cab drivers, cafes, and families, that the protestors were foreigners and spies simply attempting to destabilize the country. Soon, broad sides emerged with those in favor of Mubarak and stability, and those in favor of revolution and change on either side of a broad middle that wanted to remain neutral and uninvolved. On the afternoon of January 28, 2011, army checkpoints were established everywhere. People became concerned to protect their homes. One of the common themes of discussion was when or whether people could return to work or when banks would reopen, as many people were worried about not having cash. Another common theme of discussion was stock market news, as the government media blamed stock market losses on the uprisings. Reactions to this varied, to some extent, according to class. Some people were sympathetic with news about poor or urban riots,

while others were not. Other people were hostile to the revolution and Tahrir, until violence escalated, at which point they started to become sympathetic with protestors.

This is the general picture of life in Cairo, outside Tahrir Square. Drawing on both archival research and interviews, I have identified what I describe as four “revolutionary possibilities” beyond Tahrir—meaning, any organized or unorganized modes of protest or rebellion or action in general that spread at the time against the government or ruling elite, irrespective of their outcome. These are: 1) the battles in Suez between protestors, police, and the ruling party militia, which took place on January 26 and 27, 2011; 2) poor and urban riots that took place in various places in Egypt, such as the Nile Delta, upper Egypt, and some Suez Canal cities; 3) the formation and operation of popular committees in Cairo and most urban centers from the night of January 28, 2011 onward; and 4) working class strikes that started on February 6 and lasted until the ousting Mubarak¹⁶⁰ (they also continued after the revolution for a while).

My focus in this section is on the last two: the neighborhood popular committees and the working class strikes. There are two reasons for this. The first is that these two modes of actions took organized forms involving large sectors of the population (Egyptians from a wide range of classes in urban centers in the case of popular committees, and workers in the case of strikes). The organization of these groups carried, I argue, potential for further radicalization. The second reason is that these two modes of action lasted for a while, and played an important role in ousting Mubarak, despite the focus on Tahrir in ousting Mubarak. As I will discuss below, popular committees secured people’s neighborhoods and homes at a time when the state simply

¹⁶⁰ Some actually continued after this, as I will discuss below, but the primary focus is on the strikes and their effects leading up to February 11. Also in addition to the four modes of actions stated above, there were some scattered and small protests in southern Egypt, as I discussed earlier in the introduction. I do not discuss these further because they did not build sufficient momentum to develop further.

was not present in the streets (or to be accurate the state was partially present in the form of the army, which ended up distancing itself from Mubarak). And working class strikes were crucial in putting strong political and economic pressure on the ruling regimes, especially when the strikes targeted key locations and industries that bring in revenue for the state.

But, first, a brief note about the first two possibilities. The first is the battles in Suez. Protests started in Suez on January 25, as in many other places in Egypt. And while the police did not use violence in most cases all over Egypt (until the end of the day in Tahrir), in Suez, police forces, joined by some of the ruling party militia, attacked and killed protestors, sparking huge riots in the city. Protestors concentrated in Arbeen Square, demanding to receive the bodies of their dead, but the police prevented families from receiving the corpses of the dead, causing more anger. The entire city was more or less in a riot. In sum, the violence started in Suez and the first so-called martyrs of the revolution fell there. Riots and protests escalated over the next two days, and the city was not calm until the army was deployed on January 28, 2011. It was one of the earliest places where the army was deployed (as in some important places in Cairo). Though things calmed down after this, rallies continued throughout the revolution.¹⁶¹

As for the cases of poor or urban riots, these took place mostly on January 28, in the context or alongside battles between police and protestors, when some protestors and ordinary citizens started to attack certain centers of the government. Similar to the burning of the ruling party's headquarters in the Tahrir area, protestors and ordinary citizens burned some governorate offices, ruling party offices, and police stations in places outside Cairo. Some of the governorate

¹⁶¹ For more about the battles in Suez, see: http://www.gemyhood.com/2011/04/3.html?utm_term=%23Genyhood&utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter (last accessed June 6, 2016) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WemMEqvG9u4> (last accessed June 6, 2016).

buildings that were burned were in Port Said, Alexandria, and Kafr Al-Skeikh in the Nile Delta; a few court buildings were also burned in Cairo and Alexandria. At the same time, some poor people and ordinary citizens attacked and looted some big department stores, most notably stores owned by the French multinational retailer, Carrefour. This took place in different areas in Cairo, but also in Alexandria. It was in response to this kind of lack of security that popular committees formed, after which looting stopped and the burning of government sites also reduced after the deployment of the army in the streets.¹⁶² I include the incidents in Suez and the phenomenon of poor/urban riots as instances of mobilization and protest *outside* of Tahrir and which constituted, at the time, other directions and spaces in which the revolution could have developed—but which, ultimately, faded from view and/or did not develop further. Before discussing these two modes of action, however, it is useful first to talk about what the military’s presence on the ground meant for protestors.

Discussing the role of the military in the Egyptian Revolution goes beyond this dissertation. But what is important here is how military intervention affected the course of events on the ground. Some scholarship as well as media coverage at the time would note simply that the military sided with the Egyptian protestors (see for example Barany 2011). My ethnographic and documentary work, however, suggests that this vision is far from accurate. I divide the military’s role during the 18 days of revolution into three stages. The first stage is from January

¹⁶² See the following sources and links about these incidents: regarding the protests in Alexandria, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5u4m-Po2U0>; and see here documented videos of the burned ruling party in Egypt at the time in different places, outside Cairo: http://arabic.rt.com/news/62337-المصرية_المحافظات_جميع_في_التجول_حظر_يفرض_مبارك/; regarding the burning of police stations by both protestors and the police themselves, see <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/193671>; regarding the burning of court buildings, see: <http://www.masress.com/almessa/13350>; regarding the burning of the Dekhyla court complex in Alexandria, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f41ucaYDZbk>; and regarding the burning of a Carrefour store in Alexandria, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgNhSQu_7O4 (all links last accessed June 6, 2014).

28 to February 2, the second stage is from February 3 to February 10 and the third stage is from February 10 to February 11, 2011. In the first stage, the army intervened in Egyptian streets based on orders from Mubarak to assist the police and restore order. The army assisted the police, and after the withdrawal of police, the army took over the main police/coercive force in Egypt. In some cases, the army even assisted the police by providing them with weapons in Tahrir, something confirmed by many eye witnesses there. During this stage, the army forces near Tahrir also prevented food and tents and medical supplies from reaching the square. It would be inaccurate, then, to say that the army was neutral at this point; rather, it was still operating in accordance with and according to the orders of the regime.

February 2, 2011 represents a turning point. On this day, pro-Mubarak thugs and armed police and militia came to attack protestors in Tahrir. Army forces were present in Tahrir, but did not intervene to prevent the attacks on protestors. Indeed, only one officer violated orders and intervened to help protestors by shooting in the air to scare the militia. The incident forced protestors to develop their own security system to protect the square. The incident also highlighted for protestors the army's complicity with the regime, but simultaneously prompted increased effort on the army's part to appear neutral. It was this effort to appear neutral that, I argue, defines the second stage. During this period, the army was not hostile to Tahrir and allowed food and tents to enter the square.

The third stage included the last two days of the revolution (understood here as the 18 days). The army did not make a statement until February 10, one day before the ousting of Mubarak. And only then did the army acknowledge the demands of the Egyptian protestors and, I argue, it was thus only during this stage that we can see the army actually distancing itself from Mubarak.

In other words, to say simply that the “military sided with protestors” is an extremely generous reading, if not totally inaccurate. I would counter that the military would have liked to control events, but could not. In the simplest terms, it had guns on its side and thus it retained the upper hand in terms of literally policing the situation. But far from facilitating the protestors’ revolutionary agenda, the military merely replaced the regime and to the extent that it shared power with the protestors, it did so only when it couldn’t avoid doing otherwise.

How protestors themselves saw the role of the military at the time, however, is more complicated. Many saw the army presence as a good thing, symbolic of the extent to which Mubarak and his police force were incapable of controlling the situation. The army presence in the streets embodied an escalation of events in some sense. When I talked to protestors at the time, they told me the army was like a black box. They did not know what to expect from it, and they worried about what role it would assume in both the revolution and the future of Egypt. But at the same time, they preferred not to chant against the army so as not to antagonize it while events were still uncertain and unfolding. Some protestors came up with a famous slogan designed to neutralize the army at the time: “The people and the army are one hand” (Kitchley 2014). Others protestors put graffiti on army tanks, writing things like “Fuck Mubarak” or “down with Mubarak” in order to send a message to the army that the protestors’ battle was specifically focused on the army’s commander in chief and his regime. A leading blogger, Wael Khalil, told me in an interview on April 5, 2011, that “ it is this mix of feelings/actions toward the army that sums it up: on the one hand we have chanted ‘the people and the army are one hand,’ and on the other, protestors decided to sleep under tanks and block them from encroaching on the square or dispersing the Tahrir sit-in.” This complex sentiment concerns primarily the protestors *in* Tahrir. But for protestors and populations outside Tahrir, at least in the popular committees which I will

discuss in further detail later in this chapter, people tended to cooperate with the military. The military for them was the main coercive force in Egypt. I will move now to the discussing the popular committees and labor strikes.

Popular Committees

In this section, I discuss the first important revolutionary possibility outside of Tahrir, namely the popular committees. As I will show, despite the fact that these committees constituted an important form of mobilization, through which ordinary people seized the normally state-controlled domain of policing in the streets, they did not, ultimately, shift sufficient attention or energy away from the sit-in in Tahrir. I discussed the spontaneous formation of these popular committees (*legan shaabiyya*) briefly in Chapter 4. The committees were formed in many neighborhoods in most urban centers in Egypt. Their general purpose was protection—something much needed given the security vacuum that had developed. This vacuum occurred due to the following reasons. Most of the police force was focused on attempting to crush protests; significant portions of the force were involved in major battles with protestors especially in Tahrir and in other major urban centers areas, with the most important of these battles taking place on the afternoon of January 28, 2011. These battles ended with what seemed to be a major defeat of police forces, due to police exhaustion and the mass numbers of protestors. Meanwhile, police stations and streets throughout Egypt were left unattended. There was evidence, too, that many prisons were left unattended (or according to the police narrative, stormed by people). Rumors circulated that convicts had escaped the prisons and were roaming the streets of many urban centers in Egypt. This major withdrawal of police, as well as the news

about escaped convicts, motivated people to form committees to protect themselves and their homes.¹⁶³

In an interview with Ahmed Ezzat, one of the organizers in Tahrir and also one who worked to coordinate the popular committees in Cairo and nationally, he stated:

The security vacuum may not only or simply be a plot. But it is a fact that the entire police apparatus did focus on the protests that time. And on January 28, 2011, there was a major battle with protestors. The battle ended up with sort of a major defeat for police in the streets in the battle with protestors. Police defeat ended up with a major withdrawal of police force from most streets in Egypt. If most of the police force was centered around protests, and the entire police apparatus was organized around the goal of ending protests, and then their defeat affected the entire network and communication. Police force simply lost directions and were clueless about what to do. I do not deny the plot. I am just saying that police were defeated and withdrew due to the heroic actions of protestors too.¹⁶⁴

The members of popular committees armed themselves with guns, sticks, and whatever else was at hand, as they stood at night in their street to protect their neighborhoods. The committees established checkpoints everywhere and used barricades to control the entrances of streets and control the flow of traffic (people walking and driving cars). When deemed necessary, the committees arrested people and sent them to the army to be dealt with. At the time, there were many reported incidents of looting and also burglary. I, myself, participated in one of these committees in one of the neighborhoods in Al-Nozha al-Gadida (Near Cairo Airport). Ahmed Ezzat further explained the role and significance of these committees:

¹⁶³ Some speculated that, in fact, the mass police withdrawal and lack of security at the jails were all part of a Ministry of Interior plan to combat the protests, with the goal being to scare people and make them end the protests and go home; see <http://www.masress.com/kelmetna/10331> (last accessed June 6, 2014). For footage of the jails and people escaping, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxSHvOJVzpg> (last accessed June 6, 2014). The narrative offered by the regime and state intelligence was that infiltrators and members of Hamas got into Egypt and attacked the jails in order to release prisoners, especially Islamists. The question how jails were opened and/or who was responsible became one of the mysteries in the Egyptian revolution.

¹⁶⁴ Interview, November 29, 2012.

After we organized ourselves in Tahrir, we realized the significance and the need of protection beyond Tahrir. Then, we started to organize ourselves in Tahrir and asked protesters to go to neighborhoods, specially those are in touch with or have networks there or if they do live there, and talk to them. These were groups of 2 and or 3 did go to these neighborhoods. We learned that committees were made fast in *ard alliwaa, almatariya, roud alfarag, ain chams, almarg, helwan*. And then the idea spread to many other areas. The independent media caught the idea and started to circulate it widely after the media showed images of people protecting their areas. This was a revolutionary moment; ideas and initiatives were spreading like fire. People were empowered and they were the authority. They stopped cars and looked at licenses. They inspected cars and look at the IDs of strangers, especially whom they think not from the neighborhood. And when random people attack the checkpoint, the committee reacted with violence, or another committee intervened in solidarity or then they arrested the people and gave them to military, which was dispersed at the time.

On February 1, 2012, *Al-Ahram* newspaper published testimonies from people who participated in these popular committees in 2011.¹⁶⁵ For example, one person, whose name is Mohamed Emam, stated:

These were great days. In the committee, I have learned responsibility. I felt like I am responsible on my entire district (Abbasyya). I have made many friends in the committees. My father owns a Taxi. We used to drive the taxi and go around from one committee to another and to exchange information and supervise things in the neighborhood. Yes we have arrested many thugs. We had the power to arrest anyone, and we were capable of arresting poorest or the richest person (*al-ghafeer wa-al wazeer*, literally the door man and the minister).

When I was on one of these committees, I have heard many stories of committees in other, nearby communities actually arresting police personnel. At the time, police personnel were hiding and not wearing their uniforms in the streets. There was no proper documentation of these cases, but there are a few cases where members of committees were filmed stopping, inspecting, and/or arresting police.¹⁶⁶ In many locales, the committees were extremely organized, not only

¹⁶⁵ Available at: <http://digital.ahram.org.eg/articles.aspx?Serial=796179&eid=1187> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹⁶⁶ See, for example, the following videos posted on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFcgEz8dQds> (last accessed June 6, 2014);

establishing networks of communication, but also dividing the city into numbered districts. Of course, there were also cases in which the committee members abused power, or used it to enact revenge on the police. Ahmed Ezzat conceded, “Yes, this happened and it was impossible to control things in this chaotic situation.”

Perhaps the greatest evidence of the committees’ significance and revolutionary potential is the fact that after Mubarak’s ouster, both “revolutionaries” and state officials rushed to try to work with the committees—whether to further radicalize them, in the case of the former, or to co-opt them, in the case of the latter. After ousting Mubarak, and to overcome the lack of proper connectivity between these committees, socialist activists and revolutionary youth tried to form a national network for these committees. They held a national gathering in Tahrir where many people from within and outside of Cairo gathered and re-formed the committees under the name “The Popular Committees to Defend the Revolution.”¹⁶⁷ Ahmed Ezzat, my informant, was one of the key activists who worked on this effort.

The state and the police tried to use a double strategy after ousting Mubarak. On the one hand, they tried to push some of these committees (or committees comprised of state informants) to use more aggressive measures and abuse their power, in an effort to increase people’s fear of such committees and turn the public against them. On the other hand, they disseminated a discourse that referred repeatedly to the committees as militias and criminals (a strategy offset by media coverage during the revolution that was actually quite positive, portraying the committees

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8yL9eyCQgY> (last accessed June 6, 2014); and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEoxtd2TJE> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹⁶⁷ See the web page of the national popular committee at: <http://leganthawrya.blogspot.com> (last accessed June 6, 2014); also, see this discussion of the emergence and role of popular committees, available at: <https://revolutionaryfrontlines.wordpress.com/2011/07/04/egypt-a-report-on-the-emergence-and-role-of-popular-committees/> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

as great protectors of Egypt, not unlike the much vaunted army).¹⁶⁸ Some funding agencies saw the committees as an opportunity to build a culture of civic engagement in Egypt and tried to find ways to fund them, though some activists worried that such funding might lead to the committees co-optation and corruption.¹⁶⁹

The popular committees thus constitute one of the most important forms of mobilization during the revolution with significant potential for further politicization and radicalization. This was for two main reasons. First, they were fundamentally democratic in nature, formed spontaneously without hierarchy. They were like small communities or congresses that gathered to talk about politics every day, especially at night. I remember participating in many such discussions, devoted to topics such as the news update of the day, how we saw the revolution, and what Egypt would be like with or without Mubarak. Second, these committees exercised a form of collective authority. I am not speculating here; rather, I am analyzing a case of actual power practiced on the ground. As an outcome of the lack of security in Egyptian streets, the committees claimed power. They had the authority to stop “strange” people in the streets and in neighborhoods. They also targeted and arrested police officers and personnel—many of whom were in hiding, embarrassed by what was seen by many as the police’s great betrayal of the Egyptian people (when they left most areas unattended without protection). And in terms of their own operations, the committees developed a coordinated form of power that increasingly resembled and took responsibility for the operations of the state itself. Members of the committees volunteered to organize traffic in Egypt. They developed a system of checkpoints,

¹⁶⁸ See here a police general referring to the members of such committees as criminals and militia: <http://www.alwaqe.com/news-action-show-id-11390.htm> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹⁶⁹ For a particularly good discussion of the committees and the transformation of some into NGOs, see this report by El-Meehy (2012) in the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP): <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer265/egypts-popular-committees> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

passwords, and walkie talkies. In many ways, one could say that state power was divided at the time between the army (which was dispersed in the streets) and these popular neighborhood committees.

If we agree that policing in general (and *especially* during a time of unrest) is a crucial component of state authority and one of the most important issues related to state power, then these committees represented a major opportunity for the revolution—an opportunity that could have led to a much more decentralized form of revolutionary power *outside* of Tahrir. It is important to note here, however, that not all the committees were necessarily pro-revolution. Indeed, I argue that one of the main factors limited the further development and radicalization of these committees was their ambivalent relationship with the revolution (and with Tahrir). In the committee in which I participated, the members did not think of themselves as part of the revolution. They told me: we are here just to protect our homes. But Ahmed Ezzat and many other informants told me that some of the committees were more radical than others. Overall, the common denominator that united the committees was not any particular political stance, but anger towards the police. This ambiguity regarding the committees' positions vis-à-vis the revolution meant that encounters between committees and protestors were often tense. I heard testimonies from many friends at the time and protestors in Tahrir about being stopped by these committees. They all said it was a difficult experience to be stopped at the checkpoints of the committees, for one never knew whether the committee was sympathetic with the revolution or not. This was an intense experience, especially in light of the political polarization and the dissemination of negative propaganda against the protests in Tahrir. At the checkpoints, people were asked “Are you coming from or headed to Tahrir?” Protestors and friends told me, we had to look the committee and make our judgment and figure out what would be the safe answer. In

sum, popular committees were so important that they constituted an alternative to state power in the streets, and/or could be seen as sharing power with the military. But even though many committees became more sympathetic towards the revolution as events escalated and attacks against Tahrir continued, those involved simply didn't see themselves as part of, let alone representatives of, the revolution. They kept their distance from the revolution and this a limit on their role in the events.

Here, it is important to consider how these committees related to Trotsky's concept of dual power. Dual power refers to a situation in which revolutionaries establish institutions that perform the same functions as the government. In *The History of the Russian Revolution* ([1932] 2013), Trotsky discussed this concept in reference to the period when the Provisional Government was in power, while the Soviets, the assemblies created by the Bolsheviks started to do some works of the government, at least started to claim representation of all working classes in Russia during the revolution, which comprised the major bulks of revolutionaries (Trotsky [1932] 2013: 259–69). Trotsky was clear that dual power does not mean that the two competing powers are equal at the time, or represent a formal equilibrium. He stated:

This double sovereignty does not presuppose—generally speaking, indeed, it excludes—the possibility of a division of the power into two equal halves, or indeed any formal equilibrium of forces whatever. It is not constitutional, but a revolutionary fact. It implies that a destruction of the social equilibrium has already split the state superstructure. It arises where the hostile classes are already each relying upon essentially incompatible governmental organizations—the one-outlived, the other at every step in the sphere of government. The amount of power which falls to each of these struggling classes in such a situation, is determined by the correlation of forces in the course of the struggle. (Trotsky [1932] 2013: 261)

One could certainly argue that the popular committees in Egypt represented a form of dual power in Trotsky's sense, given that they were like true parliaments in the streets and also had arrest powers. To be most accurate, they shared power with the military in the streets. The question

here is how to reconcile this with the fact that it was Tahrir and the sit-in there that was seen as the embodiment of revolutionary legitimacy—and that the committees had, at best, an ambivalent relationship with Tahrir. The point is not to try to determine whether Tahrir or the popular committees had greater power; rather, the point is to consider the nature of the power of each and its potential impact on the revolution at the time. The popular committees were grassroots organizing efforts that actually claimed state power (and perhaps created an alternative state, in the form of organizing efforts and constituting a form of grassroots democracy). But Tahrir represented the voice of the revolution and, as such, specifically challenged the authority of the regime. To put it simply, while the committees claimed and practiced power on the ground, their participants did not articulate themselves as claiming this power or in any way representing the revolution.¹⁷⁰ The protestors in Tahrir, on the other hand, effectively practiced power on the ground in a much smaller area (the Tahrir sit-in), but articulated their role and power as representative of the entire revolution. Ultimately, the ambivalent relationship between the two modes of action prevented further coordination that may have led to greater radicalization and power for both.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ I am using here the term articulation in a general sense, that protestors talked explicitly about being the power of Tahrir and the central representatives of the revolution. For more on the concept of articulation in cultural studies, see Slack (1996). This also overlaps with another important question regarding whether this articulation presented a social narrative about power and liberation. There is some indication of this, as discussed in chapter 2, when protestors simply said that Tahrir is liberation and they lived liberation. But social narrative is a complex body of representation and a discussion of this goes beyond my research here; see Steinmetz (1992).

¹⁷¹ As for how to reconcile the idea of dual power with the idea of revolutionary legitimacy, this perhaps goes beyond this research. I would note that the two concepts have some similarities. Both are relational: revolutionary legitimacy implicitly suggests an old legitimacy, which is not revolutionary and may be in crisis. The same goes with dual power, which assumes that there are two power contenders in the time of revolution. At the risk of simplification, and despite this similarity, it seems to me that the main difference between the two is that the idea of dual power is temporally limited to a specific moment in the revolutionary situation, during which two competing claims over power and/or the state are present. The idea of revolutionary legitimacy, in contrast, may last for a while, even during the transition in a post-revolutionary situation. Importantly, much confusion can probably be traced to the fact that Trotsky himself did not actually use the word power as such, because the term he used did not have an equivalent

Working Class Strikes

When analysts address the role of the Egyptian working class in the revolution, the discussion mostly focuses on the role of labor strikes in the years leading up to the revolution—primarily from 2006 onward—and the constant labor sit-ins in Cairo and near Tahrir, as well as the Mahala uprising in 2008. And to be sure, these events and actions are important. As put by Haitham Mohamadeen, a socialist lawyer and labor organizer: “To argue that the Egyptian revolution has nothing to do with workers is obsolete. Let us just remember Mahala strikes in 2007 and the failed strike of 2008 that turned into an entire city riot. The latter was a true rehearsal for the revolution.”¹⁷² But the role of labor during in the 18 days of the revolution itself is understudied. Labor was far from absent during these days. As I will argue in this section, the working class joined the protests and their role was significant in ending Mubarak’s rule. First, however, it is useful to review some basic information about the Egyptian working class.

An organized Egyptian working developed in the nineteenth century. In 1899, Egypt witnessed the first strike by tobacco workers. Afterwards, labor played a prominent role in protests against British occupation in 1919 (El-Merghany 2009).¹⁷³ According to unionist and labor analyst Elhamy El-Merghany, Egypt had 21.7 million workers in 2007. Divided by the type of ownership of the sector, 48% of those workers were in the private sector, 46% worked in the government, and 2 % and 1% worked in investment and cooperative sectors, respectively. The

in English. As noted by Max Eastman, translator of *The History of Russian Revolution*, “dual power is the phrase settled upon in communist literature as the English rendering of *dvevlastie*. The term is untranslatable both because of its form—twin-powerdom—and because the stem, *vlast* means sovereignty as well as power. *Vlast* is also used as an equivalent of government, and in the plural corresponds to our phrase the authorities. In view of this, I have employed some other terms besides dual power: double sovereignty, two-power regime, etc.” (Trotsky 2013, Translator’s Note, p. 259).

¹⁷² Interview, December 18, 2012.

¹⁷³ <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=176711> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

government has about 5.4 million workers, 2.7 million of which are in urban centers and 2.6 million of which are in rural Egypt. 69% of those are males and 31% are females. And divided by the activity of the sector, 32% of workers in Egypt work in the agriculture and fishing sectors, 13% are in the mining sector, 11% are in small businesses, 10% are in construction and education, 7% are in communication and transportations, 5% are in service sector, 3% in health and social work, and 2 % are in hotels and restaurants (El-Merghany 2009). Only about a quarter of this labor force is organized in unions. Most of the organized workers have been part of a one-union-per-sector policy, which was applied since Nasser's time in 1959. The result was a very hierarchical union system, on the top of which sits what is known as Egypt's Trade Union Federation (ETUF). This body became essentially a front under Mubarak, with most of the leaders being part of the Mubarak's ruling party. Only in December 2007, did Egypt see the birth of its first independent trade union not part of the ETUF, following an eleven-day strike in December 2007 by tax collectors.¹⁷⁴ In the strike, fifty-five thousand workers participated and the strike led to a 90% drop in tax collection. The Independent Union of Tax collectors has 29 offices in Egypt, and has more than 3000 members.¹⁷⁵ The union gave birth later to a new movement for independent unions after the revolution. The Mahala uprising in 2008 and the tax collectors union in 2007 were two major turning points in labor history before the revolution. While industrial labor still composes the significant chunk of striking labor against neo-liberal policies in Egypt in the years before the revolution, Egypt witnessed an increase in the participation and role of state employees, best exemplified by the tax collectors. And while most analyses focus on the years 2006 to 2008 as a peak for worker's protest in Egypt, the truth is that these protests did not stop at all. According to a report by two organizations in Egypt (The

¹⁷⁴ See <http://today.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=83054> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹⁷⁵ http://www.ctuws.com/labour_movements/?item=394 (last accessed June 6, 2014).

Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, and the Awlad Al-Ard Center for Human Rights), the year 2010 was a crucial one for labor protests, with workers' actions serving as a "prelude to the revolution." That year alone witnessed, for example, 209 labor sit-ins, 135 strikes, 80 demonstrations, 83 stand-ins, 23 unplanned rallies, 52 workers committing suicide protesting economic hardships, over 6,000 workers injured in labor sites, and about over 40,000 workers compelled to resign from their jobs.¹⁷⁶

Looking at the role of the Egyptian working class during the 18 days of the revolution, one can divide it into two main stages. In the first phase, from January 25, 2011 to February 5 (though there is some debates about this end-point), many workers participated in the in the revolution as protestors, but not as an organized force per se. In the second stage, workers joined the revolution as an organized force, with many critical sectors staging action in support of the revolution. Mustafa Bassiouni, a socialist activist and labor organizer, explained to me why workers' participation was not as visible during the early days of the revolution:

Labor action did not stop throughout the 18 days. It just was not visible until the final days before ousting Mubarak. Workers came to Tahrir and participated in rallies. They could not do action for two reasons. The first reason is that many jobs were closed for security purposes, especially government employees, where Mubarak regime ordered closing of government buildings and they paid workers. They assumed that this would impact negatively protests, as to reduce workers interaction with protests, and also reduce their chances of participation. Government works are significant number of work force in Egypt. Then there was no government works simply. In that context, when there is no work, workers simply cannot go to work and then strike (in a work that is already closed). This does not make sense. And the second reason was the curfew, which was imposed by the military since January 28, 2011. The curfew made movements is limited only to limited hours in the day. This limited their ability to organize in these days, until February 6th when jobs and banks were opened again. During that time, workers just participated in rallies and in Tahrir.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ See the website of the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights: <http://ecesr.org/?p=2967> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹⁷⁷ Phone interview, February 28, 2014.

Haytham Mohamadeen, another labor organizer, also spoke about this relationship between workers and the events in Tahrir:

If you remember, the leaders of the official union participated in camel battle on February 2, 2011. But and the numbers were funny, it was only the thugs and corrupt unionists. But the workers boycotted this, as they do not feel to belong to the official union. When the government's decided to open government works on February 4, 2011 their plan was to bring [so they think] the society back to normal life. And they intended to isolate Tahrir. The prime minister at the time, Ahmed Sahifq, said we do not mind the Tahrir folks, and we can make Tahrir even a Hyde Park. Workers first participated in the rallies. But after opening works, while worker seem not to take actions, this was not true. There was a low-key moment for the first few days before they decided on strikes . This included workers releasing statements about the revolution or raising their demands linking them to the revolution. In addition to this, some political forces released statements asking the labor to intervene in joining and supporting the revolution.¹⁷⁸

On February 4, 2011, the EFITU issued a statement calling upon Egyptian workers in the nation to strike. Two days later, workers were ordered back to their work. As suggested by Hossam al-Hamalawy, "the real action started really on Sunday February 6, 2011, this was when all works are back (government and banks, in addition to the private sector which in theory did not stop). This when workers were able to meet and talk and started to organize."¹⁷⁹ After this, the second phase began, in which workers in many important sectors mobilized to join the revolution *as* an organized force.

On February 6, public transportation workers in Cairo announced their strike. They issued a statement in which the first demand was supporting the revolution's demand to oust Mubarak, and the rest of the demands were to increase the minimum wage to \$1200 EGP a month and to reform the Cairo Transport Authority to end corruption. Workers in the Suez Canal Authority, and Egypt's Railway Authority followed with their own calls for strikes. The railway

¹⁷⁸ Interview, December 18, 2012.

¹⁷⁹ <http://archive.today/wAtI#selection-223.0-226.0> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

authority had strikes in Bani Suef, Sharabiya's workshops (in Cairo), lines in Alexandria. Tanta also witnessed strikes in cement factories and chemical manufacturing plants. Hossam el-Hamalawy (known also as 3arabawy on Twitter) posted in his Twitter account on February 9, 2011, that there were four military production companies on strike that day. Despite the focus on Tahrir, some local and international media wrote briefly about strikes that took place especially on February 9 and 10, the last two days before Mubarak's ousting.¹⁸⁰ On the day Mubarak was forced to step down, there were at least 60 strikes in Egypt, most of them in critical and strategic places (Beinin 2012: 7).

Did the mobilization of the working class represent an alternate revolutionary path in 2011, at least as important as Tahrir? My aim here is not to speculate in the abstract, but to discuss the actual modes of action taking place at the time. I suggest that working class mobilization constituted another revolutionary center of gravity, so to speak, which had links to Tahrir, but was also distinct from it. This form of mobilization had long roots and, contrary to analyses that downplay strikes *during* the revolution, working class action did not stop and continued, in fact, until April of 2011.¹⁸¹ As discussed above, the working class organized a number of strikes in significant sectors in the last few days before Mubarak's ouster—strikes that put substantial pressure on the regime and, arguably, were crucial in leading to the ouster. According to Khaled Ali, a prominent labor lawyer, the average number of labor strikes was between 30 and 60 strikes per day from the period of February 12 (the day after Mubarak

¹⁸⁰ See, for example: <http://www.thenation.com/article/158680/egypts-workers-rise#> (last accessed June 6, 2014); <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/feb/10/trade-unions-egypt-tunisia> (last accessed June 6, 2014); and <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2011/02/09/egypt-strike-strike-strike/#> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹⁸¹ See <http://www.npr.org/2011/02/14/133741350/egyptian-labor-unrest-grows-after-uprising> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

stepped down) to February 16, 2011.¹⁸² On February 16, Suez Canal workers went on strike. After only partial strike from some of its workers few days earlier, this time they joined with a full board strike.¹⁸³ Fatma Ramadan, a unionist and organizer, wrote on the day after Mubarak's ousting about a series of strikes in different places in Egypt, including one company, Grain Mills Company of East Delta, which has branches in Ismailiyya, Suez, Port Said, and Mansoura. Also worker strikes took place at the Sugar Factory in Mansoura and also by Egypt's Post Office Workers. The workers of the Petro Trade Company, which belongs to the Ministry of Oil, also continued a sit-in in front of the ministry.¹⁸⁴

Of course, numbers alone do not demonstrate the significance of these protests for the revolution. In fact, reports after this period show that workers strikes and protests in Egypt have increased from year to year before and after the revolution. According to a report by the International Development Center, the total number of workers' strikes and protests were 2,210 in 2010; 2,532 in 2012; and 2,782 in 2013.¹⁸⁵ But what was different about the strikes during the revolution and in the immediate aftermath was the following: 1) Workers strikes, especially in the final days of the revolution, rose almost to the level of a national strike in Egypt, and given their focus in critical, strategic sectors, were crucial in leading to Mubarak's ouster; 2) the strikes during the uprising were also more political, specifying demands such as ousting Mubarak in addition to their demands about minimum wage, etc.; and 3) the revolutionary momentum was high and many protestors were talking about the need for working class to intervene in the

¹⁸² Interview of Khaled Ali by Amy Goodman of Democracy Now, available at: http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/18/egyptian_uprising_fueled_by_striking_workers (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹⁸³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/18/world/middleeast/18egypt.html> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹⁸⁴ <http://tadamonmasr.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/strikes/> (last accessed June 6, 2014)

¹⁸⁵ <http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=1044586&#.U4IKXNz90ds> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

revolution.¹⁸⁶

Some of the demands of the striking workers were very radical and called for confiscations of public sector factories, which were sold in the privatization programs, and forming workers committees to supervise these factors in addition to ousting Mubarak. For example, the Iron and Steel Workers in Helwan released a statement on February 9, 2011 in which they called for:

1. Immediate resignation of the president and all men and symbols of the regime.
2. Confiscation of funds and property of all symbols of previous regime and everyone proved corrupt.
3. Iron and steel workers who have given martyrs and militants call upon all workers of Egypt to revolt from the regime's and ruling party workers' federation, to dismantle it and announce their independent union now and to plan for their general assembly to freely establish their own independent union without prior permission or consent of the regime which has fallen and lost all legitimacy.
4. Confiscation of public sector companies that have been sold or closed down or privatized as well as the public sector which belongs to the people and its nationalization in the name of the people and formation of a new management by workers and technicians.
5. Formation of a workers' monitoring committee in all workplaces monitoring production, prices, distribution and wages.
6. Call for a general assembly of all sectors and political trends of the people to develop a new constitution and elect real popular committees without waiting for the consent or negation with the regime.¹⁸⁷

On February 14, 2011, only three days after ousting Mubarak, the SCAF responded to the escalation of labor strikes by issuing a statement denouncing strikes and labeling them as chaotic, "illegitimate works that aim to damage the nation...disrupt citizens' life...and disturb the economy and the wheel of production."¹⁸⁸ Strikes did not stop and on March 24, 2011, the SCAF issued a decree to ban strikes in Egypt. The SCAF and the government media, still under SCAF's

¹⁸⁶ Some scholars have argued that this period can be seen as a mass strike in Rosa Luxemburg's sense, see, for example Zemni, De Smet, and Bogaert (2013).

¹⁸⁷ This was according to the Socialist Renewal Current Group in Egypt and it is cited in <http://www.counterpunch.org/2011/02/25/conflicts-of-economic-interests-in-egypt/> (last accessed June 6, 2012).

¹⁸⁸ <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Ar/Templates/Articles/tmpArticles.aspx?ArtID=44125#.U4EPH9z90ds> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

control, launched a campaign against strikes and protests in Egypt, describing them “sectional demands” (*Mataleb Faaawyeea*).¹⁸⁹ Many of the Egyptian elite joined the campaign, though some did defend the workers.¹⁹⁰ Pro-government writers and, ironically, the MB and some liberals who were part of the revolution joined the SCAF and denounced the protests, arguing that national interests should be a priority more than the sectional demands. In some of the protests I witnessed against the law to ban strikes, workers raised the slogan, “It is social justice not sectional demands.”¹⁹¹ The SCAF and the transitional government used force to apply this law, and in one instance, they used armored vehicles to attack workers at the Shebeen El-Koum Textile Factory on April 7, 2011.¹⁹²

The second reason that I argue that workers’ action constituted an important center of gravity outside of Tahrir is the speed with which workers organized. Before the revolution, there was only the ETUF, and there was an attempt to form a new independent federation for independent unions. The former was government-controlled, and the latter, the Egyptian Federation for Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) was the one initiated by the tax collectors and newly formed unions on January 30, 2011. Before the revolution, there were only three

¹⁸⁹ The word *faaawyeea* has a negative connotation, it reads like selfish demands.

¹⁹⁰ See <http://www.ahram.org.eg/Archive/672/2011/9/30/4/104347.aspx> (last accessed June 6, 2014) and <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/716/ولا-اجتماعية-حقوق-قل-say-social-ri> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹⁹¹ <http://www.masress.com/misrelgdida/53332> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹⁹² It goes beyond the aim of this chapter to talk in detail about the question of labor strikes in the period after the ousting Mubarak; I have discussed it above only to show the continuation of the protests from the time of the revolution and to argue the strikes constituted a mobilizing center of gravity both within and outside of Tahrir. It is worth noting, however, that for a long time after the revolution, people continued to debate whether the revolution was only a political one or whether it had the potential to become a social revolution. Recall that one of the revolutionary slogans was: “Bread, liberty, human dignity and social justice.” What the latter was understood to mean varied from one political faction to another. As discussed in the previous chapter, a consensus developed that political reform and the ousting of Mubarak were the minimal agenda, but beyond this, protestors had many different ideas about what would constitute social justice. Many liberals and Islamists (and the military at the time) seemed to agree that social justice had to be delayed until democracy was established; but many socialists and working class organizers and activists disagreed.

independent trade unions, but by October 2012, this number reached 507. In the first few months after the uprising, Egypt saw the formation of new trade unions every day. Some of my informants, lawyers and others assisting workers to form these unions, such as Haytham Mohamadeen, told me that in the months between February to April 2011, “I was assisting trade unions to form a new union almost every day.” The EFITU officially announced its formation on March 2, 2011.¹⁹³ In addition to the EFITU, is the Egyptian Democratic Labour Congress (EDLC) was formed on April 2013.¹⁹⁴ There were many meetings and press conferences for workers, some of which I attended. The following table shows the distribution of trade unions in Egypt by October 2012, in relation to the Egyptian labor force.

Table 4 Labor Union Federations in Egypt in relation to labor force

	Number of affiliated Unions	Number of workers (in millions)	% of labor force (23.346) million; working with or without salaries ¹⁹⁵
ETUF	23	3.8	16.2
EFITU	261	2.4	10.2
EDLC	246	n.a.	n.a.

Source: N. Abdalla (2012).

This level of organization would not have happened without the revolutionary context that developed in 2011; as my informant, Mohamadeen put it, this “massive organization was like a fervor.” This center of gravity was spatially outside of, and loosely connected to, Tahrir, yet did not develop to significantly challenge Tahrir as the dominant force of the revolution. Why is that?

The first reason is that workers themselves were ambivalent about where the center of the

¹⁹³ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/6901/Egypt/Politics-/Workers-lay-down-demands-at-new-trade-union-confer.aspx> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹⁹⁴ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/70102/Egypt/Politics-/Egyptian-Democratic-Labour-Congress-officially-lau.aspx> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

¹⁹⁵ Workers without salary here refers to the case of family members who work in family owned business and where there is no way to document them. Some of those yet may join unions.

revolution was. They knew that their strikes were important and part of the revolution but, at the same time, they did not see their efforts as separate from Tahrir. Two of the main organizers of the public transportations workers, Tareq El-Beheery and Fatouh Ahmed, affirmed this view in their interview with me. Both said: “Our strike was complementing Tahrir.”¹⁹⁶ Second, workers were not as adept as the youth in Tahrir at using social media. They organized separately, on their own to support the revolution, but they did not have independent media tools compared to the youth of Tahrir. As a result, their strikes received less media attention. Though my informants, as well as analysts such as Joel Beinin (2011) have suggested that this social media gap has lessened since the revolution, the point is that it existed at the time and shaped the relative impact of the Tahrir sit-in and the workers’ strikes. Kareem El-Beheery, one of the leaders of the strike in Mahala in 2007, who now works as an independent journalist, confirmed to me that this was the case in an interview.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Interview, December 19, 2012.

¹⁹⁷ Interview, November 12, 2012.



Figure 16 Suez Canal Workers protest in front of the company’s headquarters, February 9, 2011. AP Picture. Source NPR: <http://www.npr.org/2011/02/09/133615261/egypt-protesters-fear-revenge-if-mubarak-remains> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

I will move now to the second section of this chapter, which examines the marginalization of voices *within* Tahrir.

II. The Marginalization of Voices Within Tahrir

A high degree of unity of the opposition exists, at least temporarily, in most revolutions. Scholar of revolutions John Foran states: “Multiclass alliances, often motivated by diffuse ideals such as nationalism, populism, or religion rather than particularistic ones such as socialism, have made most of the revolutions in world history, and all of the third world” (2005: 15). In some sense, unity of the opposition is a must during a revolutionary situation, and can guarantee the success of the revolutionary process. This unity is not permanent, however, and often dissipates soon after the revolution. As Goldstone notes, “Even where revolutionaries have united solidly against the old regime, following its collapse their internal conflicts eventually cause problems.

After enjoying a brief euphoria over the fall of the old regime, the revolutionary opposition becomes rapidly disunited” (2003: 3).

How did unity of the opposition play out in Tahrir? It is hard to overemphasize the extent to which many experienced Tahrir as sort of utopian alternative community during the 18 days of the revolution, despite the attacks on the square and the difficulty of basic survival. One writer, for example, stated:

During the 18 glorious days of the revolution, there was no divide between men and women, between Muslims and non-Muslims, between rich and poor and between the educated and the illiterate: all were undertaking the same responsibilities and acting freely by disregarding the conventional gender relations that have been entrenched in our minds by a vicious media, unethical education and an inconsistent political discourse. The former regime sometimes used religion and sometimes used culture to justify the strict gender division that put women aside and that prevailed for decades.¹⁹⁸

Though this sort of utopian description of Tahrir was not uncommon, particularly among those who were actually present in the square, my own observations and interviews suggest the existence of subtle, yet significant forms of division just below the surface of this self-consciously united image. In this section, I discuss four dimensions along which divisions existed, but were submerged, so to speak, in Tahrir during the 18 days. In each of these cases, the possibility existed to discuss and potentially address such divisions openly, but instead, voices raising these issues were marginalized in order to emphasize unity. Indeed, as I will suggest, this emphasis on unity in Tahrir seemed to have a performative quality. These four dimensions/divisions are: 1) class, 2) gender, 3) the question of Islam, and 4) the revolutionary agenda.

Class

¹⁹⁸ <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1035/op222.htm> (last accessed June 6, 2014)

The emphasis on class unity in Tahrir, during the 18 days, was a common theme in my interviews, like many other forms of unity (religious, politics, and gender as well). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Egyptians of all classes were present in Tahrir. I heard many stories about upper class people sending food or aid to Tahrir. In one YouTube video, for example, an upper class woman is shown bringing food to the square and distributing it to protestors.

¹⁹⁹Others remarked on cross-class unity in their testimonies about Tahrir; as one writer put it:

One person was saying this was very humbling when I saw doctors, engineers and professors working with you and serving the rest, this was an incredible solidarity atmosphere that I have never seen in my life.

(Saad 2012: 43)

As such, Tahrir represented for some a kind of commune, where many classes participated and lived together for one goal. Nonetheless, as noted in the previous chapter, it was the middle classes that were the most visible, at least when Tahrir was presented in the media. I noticed this during my own time in Tahrir, and it was a sentiment I heard expressed by multiple informants. As one interviewee, Tamer Wageih, stated: “The media obsession with the middle-class kids with iPhones simply meant that know body knew stories of poor people and workers participated in the revolution.”²⁰⁰ Wageih and others informants emphasized that the role of marginalized groups in the revolution and in Tahrir was left out of mainstream media coverage. My research shows, for example, that street children played an important role in Tahrir Square, particularly in the battles between protestors and the police. Street kids were crucial given their mobility and their knowledge of materials available in the streets. Several of my informants told me stories about the role of street kids in battles in Ramses Street and in Qasr Al-Ainy Street on January 28, 2011. Many street kids came to the sit-in and lived there during the 18 days. One informant told

¹⁹⁹ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EE57XIM49AA> (last accessed June 6, 2014); in the video, the woman is interviewed and speaks explicitly about her class position and support for the protestors.

²⁰⁰ Interview, October 12, 2012.

me that the street kids were very excited to fight alongside the protestors; according to him, “They told me they finally got a chance to revenge from police violence and the abuse they receive all the time.” He also said, “ I have tried to give them money and help. And many of them refused, and they told me: we are here to fight with you, we are not beggars.”²⁰¹

Despite the solidarity and unity atmosphere in Tahrir, it seems that the dominance of middle-class voices sometimes led to another group being targeted within Tahrir.²⁰² This group is street vendors. The presence of street vendors in Tahrir is a complicated story. This is mainly because, after the revolution, some protestors said that the police had been using the vendors to spy on protestors. But during the 18 days, their presence—at least at first—was just normal and accepted; they were part of the culture of Tahrir. But as media attacks tried to portray Tahrir as not a place of protest, but a market filled with kids doing drugs and other illegal activities, some protestors began to think that it would be better to force the street vendors in the square to leave. I discussed this issue with many protestors at the time, and they were divided. Some agreed that it would be better to let the vendor stay, since “Tahrir belongs to all,” but others said “No, it would be better if Tahrir is without street vendors” (see Figure 17).

²⁰¹ It seems that this role of street kids in battles between police and protestors has continued beyond the revolution, as they also played an important role in what are known as the Mohamed Mahmoud battles in Egypt in November 2011; see: http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8638/dispatch-from-mohamed-mahmoud-street_egyptian-revo (last accessed June 6, 2014); also see: <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/nov/27/world/la-fg-egypt-homeless-boy-20111128>(last accessed June 6, 2014).

²⁰² This idea of solidarity was prevalent in most of my interviews, with informants emphasizing that this was one of the crucial values present in Tahrir at the time. I do not discuss this in detail here, but regarding the importance of solidarity in social movements, see Kimeldorf (2005) and Kennedy (2011).



Figure 17 A street vendor in Tahrir. The vendor was selling tissues, but he was also very creative, making up chants such as “Mubarak: leave, you traitor, you made us survive by selling tissues.” Picture taken by the author, February 8, three days before Mubarak was ousted.

The situation of street vendors was a delicate one and for a while, revolutionary youth simply avoided taking a stance. Eventually, however, the view developed that it would be better if street vendors were all concentrated in one area. The nearby Qasr El-Nile Bridge was suggested as one possibility. In one video,²⁰³ a youth can be seen talking over a speaker, saying:

The street vendors issue is becoming out of control, and we ask them to go now, and we ask people to show restraint, and please do not talk bad to them, but please, we ask the vendors now to move to Qasr El-Nile Bridge.

While agreeing that Tahrir was a place for unity, some of my informants were critical of this decision, and suggested that the upper class participants were just romanticizing Tahrir. Ahmed Samir, an Islamist journalist and ex- member of the Muslim Brotherhood stated:

The diversity of Tahrir as a social space came from different factors. But I would say that one of the main factors is the dominance of the discourse of the upper middle classes who participated in the revolution. Those people have a specific self and class-centered perspective about social networking and social interactions. They have nothing to do but to talk about consumer culture and themselves, unlike people in poorer neighborhoods who have different perspective about social interactions, where they experience more communalities and they share life in a sense. The upper class people were more impressed with Tahrir's shared community. It was the community where you can talk with strangers as if they are close friends and you trust. In other words, they became obsessed with Tahrir because they miss this intimacy.²⁰⁴

Of particular relevance to the question of classes in Tahrir and the dominance of some voices over others, especially in the media, was the usage of the phrase "our image in the world."²⁰⁵ This phrase appeared a lot in the media, and was also frequently invoked by protestors,

²⁰³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rozs33CAYrU> (start at 1:00) (last accessed June 6, 2014).

²⁰⁴ Interview October 11, 2012.

²⁰⁵ This idea of "our image in the world" reveals how significant performance was in Tahrir. In this sense, I agree with Jeffery Alexander (2011) who described the Egyptian revolution as performative. There was, indeed, a war of meanings between protestors and the regime. Also, as many scholars and analysts have rightly pointed out, actual performances were important, with art, poetry, music, and changing all playing roles in Tahrir (see, for example, Colla 2011; El-Khatib 2013; Lindsay 2012; Pahwa and Winegar 2012; Saad 2012; Makar 2011). Here, however, I am focusing on the performance of unity itself, a collective performance that had a particular class twist.

arguing that the image they presented to the world was important. Some informants saw this as a reflection of the dominance of a middle-class mindset, while others simply saw it as a necessary focus on strategic unity in order to gain support. Members of the former group blamed middle-class participants for obscuring a more complex reality with their concern over image. In one instance, for example, one of my interviewees criticized middle-class kids who returned after Mubarak's ousting to clean and paint the square. In his view: "They reduced the power of celebrating ousting the dictator to some painting action."²⁰⁶ Others supported the emphasis on unity and emphasized the idea that the whole world was watching; another interviewee, Laila Soueif, stated:

Part of the construction of the Tahrir as a legend is this idea of "our image in the world." My nephew has this fascinating phrase. He said: Tahrir was a show. And I agree with him. Everybody in Tahrir was making an effort to be part of the show. We knew we are sending a message to all Egypt, all those who are not yet with the revolution. And also we were sending a message to the world, that we are doing something right. We are telling all, we know what is right, and we can do it, we are doing all the right things here.²⁰⁷

It seems to me that these two points of views were not actually contradictory; the performance of unity was, indeed, largely middle-class driven, but it was also a strategy designed to portray a positive image of the revolution. The larger picture here was unity, not just class unity, with an emphasis on portraying Tahrir as a great community. In the same interview, Soueif added:

Part of the show also was the emphasis on showing the peacefulness of the uprising. And protestors also wanted to emphasize unity and show off unity to the world. Look at for example, the emphasis on taking pictures of different people. To show for example the non-veiled, next to the neqabi (almost totally covered) women. The point here in the show was to send a message to all that we are united and nobody can separate us.

²⁰⁶ For footage of the clean-up, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwxmfMY7MXTI> (last accessed June 6, 2014) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c74BoOY7Y-Y> (last accessed June 6, 2016); for further discussion of the clean-up and its symbolic significance, also see Winegar (2011).

²⁰⁷ Interview, November 20, 2012.

Gender

When it came to gender, the events in Tahrir entailed both a continuation of existing patriarchal structures as well as the emergence of new possibilities for challenging patriarchy. I will focus here on two aspects of patriarchy: the gendered division of labor within social movements and the problem of sexual harassment in the streets. The ongoing problem was that Egyptian social movements, like most social movements internationally, are structured by a gendered division of labor—a division of labor that did not disappear during the 18 days of the revolution. At the same time, the events in Tahrir opened up new possibilities for Egyptians to overcome the problem of sexual harassment. Thus, Tahrir did indeed represent a new Egypt, an Egypt without injustice, even when it came to gender violence. Yet, when it came to the structures of political participation, patriarchy was strongly kept in place.

Sexual Harassment

From activists' rhetoric to social media and the news, a shared analysis emerged: Tahrir square represented an alternative, non-hierarchical Egypt and the lack of sexual harassment exemplified this. In nearly every interview I conducted, interviewees talked about the positive transformations that took place during the first eighteen days in Tahrir with references to the lack of sexual harassment. This transformation in social norms was exceptionally powerful and the lack of sexual harassment in Tahrir became a marker that distinguished the boundaries of two worlds, one "inside" and one "outside" Tahrir. The following quotes illustrate the magnitude of this social transformation for Egyptian people and explain just how other-worldly or utopian Tahrir Square became during the 18 days for those who experienced it. Fatma Khafagy, a women's rights activist in Egypt, writes this about this period:

Despite the millions in Tahrir Square, women of all ages were treated with

respect, and there was not a single case of sexual harassment reported. Some young women slept side by side at night in Tahrir Square, and women prayed side by side with men during Friday prayers. Men and women kissed one another when victory was achieved. Before the revolution, no one could have thought that these things could happen. We spent much of our time as feminists counting cases of sexual harassment and trying to explain them. Other people kept themselves busy answering questions such as should women pray beside or behind men. Now, the revolution has put such petty discussions aside, and Egypt's young people have acted freely to throw away in 18 days what we have speculated about and analyzed for decades.²⁰⁸

Similarly, Norhan Tharwat, one of my interviewees, stated:

In Tahrir, gender stereotypes were challenged. For example, most of my male friends, some of the most solid activists, I saw them crying many times. The experience in Tahrir had a transformative power.²⁰⁹

Tharwat and other female protestors told me about this pattern: the areas surrounding Tahrir, specially in Abdeen and Bab El-louq/Talaat Harb Street and Maarouf were full of hostility towards the revolutionaries. This happened mostly in the first week, particularly in Abdeen area and Maarouf. Many women found it difficult to go to Tahrir from these areas. They were sexually harassed on their way to Tahrir, which only served to emphasize the sense of difference once inside Tahrir, where they felt safe.

Despite the overwhelming agreement regarding the lack of sexual harassment in Tahrir during the 18 days, some informants told me, “We heard a few stories about some incidents that happened, but people did not want to talk about it.” In the same vein, some women bloggers admitted that it was possible that such harassment didn’t so much stop, as it was now frowned upon and/or prevented. As one blogger put it:

In Tahrir, I did not hear or seen complaints about sexual harassments, or people pushing each other and complaining about how crowded it is. I think, I saw those who were coming to sexually harass girls, but the situation was controlling that

²⁰⁸ <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1035/op222.htm#1> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

²⁰⁹ Interview, November 19, 2012.

nobody is able to do this.²¹⁰

Protestors also emphasized how important the square experience was in terms of lack of sexual harassments, not only because of the big shift between what was inside and outside the square, but also in comparison to what happened after, when harassment returned to normal levels or even worsened. Only one month after ousting Mubarak, when women, men, and feminist groups rallied in Tahrir to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, 2011, they were severely harassed by police, as well as thugs and Salafi groups.²¹¹

In sum, the activists I interviewed interpreted the lack of sexual harassment as an example of not only a new sense of social equality that developed within Tahrir, but also as an example of a new form of governance based on the principle of community accountability. What stopped potential perpetrators of harassment is that they knew they would be stopped and held accountable by collective groups of people in Tahrir. While these accountability structures were not explicitly or strategically established, they emerged organically, out of the power of the collective commitment to the larger cause of creating a better Egypt. I will move now to the question of the gendered division of labor in Tahrir.

Gendered division of labor

A great deal of feminist scholarship has established that the gender structures within

²¹⁰ <http://anegyptiangirlsdiary.blogspot.com/2011/12/blog-post.html> (last accessed June 6, 2014). The most (in)famous exception to this narrative, of course, was the assault of American news correspondent, Lara Logan, of CBS News, who was assaulted in Tahrir on the night of February 11, 2011. Some informants emphasized that this happened only once things in the square became chaotic, and when the square was no longer controlled by protestors. Others said that it was pro-Mubarak thugs who did this. Regardless of how exactly they interpreted the incident, all my informants insisted that it was an exception. See: <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/MindMoodNews/cbs-reporter-lara-logan-opens-tahrir-square-assault/story?id=13492964> (last accessed June 6, 2014); and <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/16/egyptian-activists-condemn-brutal-attack> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

²¹¹ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/03/08/egypts-women-march-in-cairo-will-they-be-heard.html> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

contemporary social movements tend to mirror the gender structures of the larger society (Robnett 1996, 1997, 2002). Although every movement is distinct, a common pattern within social movements in contemporary nation-states around the world is to position male activists within masculinized positions such as decision makers, public speakers, and fighters on the front lines and to position women within feminized positions such as grassroots labor (such as caring for the communities—including cooking, distributing food, and providing emotional support) or administrative labor (such as mailing, typing, or accounting). A similar gendered division of labor existed within most of Egypt’s social movements before the revolution and a wide range of Egyptian feminist organizations have been challenging these structures for decades (Al-Ali 2000).²¹²

A gendered division of labor also structured the labor involved in keeping the sit-in alive in Tahrir during the 18 days. Yet, this hierarchical structure received virtually no attention or recognition within the rhetoric of activists committed to the vision of a new Egypt without oppression and injustice. Even activists who celebrated the lack of sexual harassment tended to remain silent on the gendered division of labor in Tahrir and almost anyone who was actively involved in keeping the sit-in alive was complicit in maintaining this gendered hierarchy in one way or another. Here are some few examples from my research.

I interviewed many women who ended up being responsible for or volunteered to collect and make food for protestors. I asked them the same question: why did women have to make or collect the food, why couldn’t men do it? One female informant responded:

To be honest with you, I do not care. I never cared about politics. And I did not

²¹² Regarding gender in general in the Middle East, see Gocek and Balaghi (1994) and Moghadam (2003), and on gender and revolutions, see Moghadam (1997). And on gender in Egypt see the articles at Nazra for Feminist Studies, available at: <http://nazra.org/en/terms/gender-perspective> (accessed July 22, 2014).

want to participate at all. I also blame my sister for participating in politics and bring trouble to herself and the family. As you can see, I am an old lady. But I am a mom. This is what got me to this. First, I heard stories about the insults and the attacks on protestors. And I was angry. Then I was just helping my boss, who is a known leftist woman, helping the movement. I did not want to go to the square at all in the beginning. But when I saw the young kids being injured I felt responsible as a mom. My daughter is 15. And one day she insisted in going to the square. I refused. But when there were calmer days in Tahrir we went together. I could not help but to work on this.²¹³

Another female informant who helped to collect food also stated:

They asked me to do this because I am experienced, not because I am a woman. I have used to do this as a journalist. I used to collect donations for protestors and specially workers in sit-ins in the last few years. They told me I am good at it. I was reluctant in the beginning, because I wanted to participate and be free. But many comrades and friends said, no you are very good and we trust you to do this.²¹⁴

This story of middle-aged female participants in the revolution being worried about their kids and starting to cook was a common story to me during these days.

The second example is from the Youth Coalition of the Revolution. The YCR was a coalition of six youth organizations, with a political office comprised of 16 members—of whom, only one was a woman. One female informant who was a member in the YCR told me:

The founders of the YCR needed a woman, and they also needed a Coptic person. She was both a woman and Coptic. She was the only person who did not represent a group and she was friend with some of the founders of YCR. She is my friend and I admire her. And she was an amazing addition to the YCR. But when they thought about this addition, they thought that they will bring a nice person, friends with them may help in the voting, but she ended up really independent and a great bad ass if you might. I just want to be frank with you.²¹⁵

A few of my informants were female members in the YCR, and I personally witnessed their essential role in assisting and preparing everything around the YCR stage in Tahrir. But they never spoke. They told me they were too shy to do so. As a result, most of the speakers on this

²¹³ Interview, November 5, 2012.

²¹⁴ Interview, November 21, 2012.

²¹⁵ Interview, November 26, 2012.

stage, as one all the other stages too, were men.

The third example is about the dominance of the idea that only men were in the front lines during the battle with the police and Mubarak's thugs, while women helped only by breaking rocks for the men to throw, and taking care of the wounded. I learned later from some of my women comrades and female informants that this was not completely true. Many women activists, who identified as feminists, were critical of some forms of hierarchy in Tahrir and tried to challenge it all along. Nermeen Khafagy stated:

I was in the front line, near Abdel Monem Riadd, where the attacks came during the camel battle. I was doing everything, breaking rocks, and giving them to protestors to throw them, giving water to protestors and also throwing rocks myself. It is not completely true that the MB only or the Ultras youth protected the square. We are all did. And many of our friends, men and women, were in the front lines.²¹⁶

She told me many stories about participating in different battles during that time. Women also participated in checkpoints around the square. Despite these exceptions, a dominant narrative circulated among activists and in my interviews that on the front lines, women did nothing more than help break the rocks that men would use to fight the police, or that protection was only men's job.

The Question of Islam

Based on my research, I argue that at least one form of strategic unity did exist in Tahrir—specifically, between secularists and Islamists. Activists took great care to emphasize that Tahrir was a place that unified secular as well as religious people. Indeed, one of the most common themes that activists and the media stressed was the unity between Christians and Muslims. But as an outcome of this unity, any voices that were seen as being divisive were

²¹⁶ Interview, December 11, 2012.

marginalized. While many leftists and seculars made an effort to demonstrate that they did not fear Islamists, Islamists, for their part, also tried to silence members who raised religious slogans in Tahrir.

It goes beyond my research to explain why the question of Islamists occupied most of the space in the discussion and emphasis about unity, though one can briefly note some possible reasons. One is that the state propaganda machine focused on the idea that the Muslim Brotherhood was using Tahrir and manipulating the revolution for its own advantages. In this way, state media attempted to scare protestors and the public by raising the specter of an Islamist state. If the revolution succeeded, it was suggested, Islamists would hijack it and turn Egypt into a theocratic state. In one instance, for example, the headline of the major newspaper *al-Akhbar*, on February 3, 2011, warned Egyptian youth (see also Figure 18):

To the patriotic faithful Egyptian youth, who have legitimate demands, be worried. There are documented evidences that there is a foreign conspiracy against Egypt. The MB, works with Hamas and Iran to occupy the TV building, burn all government buildings and burn all police stations.

As my informants told me, the regime kept insisting on a dichotomy: either us or the Islamists, as if there was no other opposition or alternative. Western media, for its part, was all too happy to play into this worry about Islamic rule.²¹⁷ As a result, one of the protestors' most common slogans attempted to counter this idea by emphasizing that "Muslims and Christians are one

²¹⁷ See examples of reports in major western news sources, during the first week of the revolution, all of which focused on the fear from Islamic rule in Egypt. These include the *New York Times*, CNN, Fox News, *Der Spiegel* and *Slate*. See: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/03/opinion/03atran.html?_r=0 (last accessed June 10, 2014); <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/01/31/egypt.muslim.brotherhood/> (last accessed June 10, 2014); <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/02/08/leading-egyptian-businessman-fears-muslim-brotherhood/> (last accessed June 10, 2014); <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/concerns-about-the-muslim-brotherhood-israel-fears-regime-change-in-egypt-a-742186.html> (last accessed June 10, 2014); and http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2011/02/should_we_fear_the_muslim_brotherhood.html (last accessed June 10, 2014).

Hand.”²¹⁸ Yet, regime pressure and the western media’s Islamophobia created the constant need to show off this dimension of unity. The problem with this emphasis on strategic unity, however, was that it forced people to delay discussing some important issues (thus leaving them unresolved), and it silenced any voices that could be perceived as divisive.



Figure 18 Headlines of the Pro-Government *Al-Akhbar* Newspaper on February 3, 2011, talking about a regional plot by Islamists in the region to target Egyptian state. Source: http://www.umh1.com/2013/04/blog-post_1284.html (last accessed June 10, 2014)

The slogan describing Egypt as a “civil state” was particularly telling. Protestors in Tahrir kept saying that the future state needed to be a civil state; they explicitly avoided the term

²¹⁸ For footage of protestors chanting this in Tahrir, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkrlz7iFi7Y> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

“secular.” At first, this was not clear to me; only later did I realize that this was a strategic semantic choice that sought to avoid any divisive issues. As I talked to protestors, it became clear to me that they were using the term “civil” to indicate that they were including Islamists in the future state. From their perspective, the civil state was not going to be anti-religion; rather, it was to be a state that would acknowledge the role of religion, and not necessarily be a radical secular state. Thus, as many told me, “we saw this at the time, as one way to unify all secular and Islamists in Tahrir.”²¹⁹

The following excerpt is from the 2012 novel *7 Days in Tahrir* by Egyptian novelist Hisham El-Keshen. In the novel, the author combines many real scenes that happened in Tahrir with fiction. The excerpt is of a conversation between Egyptian protestor, Sherine, and her American friend, Carol, who happened to come to the square during the sit-in. The focus of the conversation is the fear of Islamist rule:

[In the midst of action and the overwhelming scene in Tahrir] Carol used the opportunity and surprised Sherine with a question.

Carol: Are not you scared or worried that the MB may rule you?

Sherine: You have also been always worried about being ruled by blacks and Jews, and even Christian fundamentals?

Carol: But we do have a stable democratic system where things are under the control and the supervision of the people.

Sherine: And we are here in Tahrir to call for a similar system.

Carol: But in our society most of the people are educated and many of them are enjoying better life conditions or high levels of political awareness. This helps them to decide.

Sherine: When your country started its democracy, you did not have the same literacy rates. And your nation perhaps was founded with some criminals in a new land. Look at India; they do have high illiteracy rates but they do have an exemplar democracy. Why you think we do not deserve or not capable of what you are enjoying?

Carol: But the MB will make Egypt another Iran?

Sherine: And they perhaps make us another Indonesia or Turkey. These are partner countries to you too. Carol, Egypt is not Iran and I assure you, it will not

²¹⁹ See scholar Hussein Agrama (2011), who argues that the Egyptian Revolution is best described as an “asecular revolution,” specifically because of this stance that attempted to maintain a fine balance between religion and secularism in Egypt.

be Iran. (El-Keshen 2012: 137)

Regardless of the generalizations about the US and Egypt here, this conversation and the theme of the worry of Islamist rule were very common during this period in Egypt. Protestors worked hard to emphasize unity and that they were not worried about MB rule. Sometimes, friends and activists who were interviewed by international media in Tahrir asked me to translate for them. The question of whether they were concerned about Islamist rule was typical in many of these interviews. And the attitude of most of the activists was to emphasize that they were not worried; democracy, they insisted, would take care of everyone.

Perhaps nothing captures the imperative to silence any discussion of potential political issues than the actual stages erected in Tahrir. It is difficult to summarize the important symbolic and practical role of the stages here, but it was commonly understood that the stages represented a significant space of unity. One of the coordinators of the YCR stage, activist Haytham Gabr, explained to a reporter from *Al-Masry Al-Youm* newspaper the following:

There was only one main rule in the stage of the YCR, no to any religious or sectarian slogans; no to calling or voicing out specific political party or a group over others. The main aim of the radio (the stage, as it was described as the revolution radio) revolution was simply unifying the slogans. Also we had other objectives such as telling the protestors the news, or recent updates, and in some cases to announce cases about the lost ones in the square. We did not ban anybody from talking; the only credibility for speakers at the time was that if they belong to the one cause of the revolution.²²⁰

While secular activists in Tahrir spent time defending the revolution against the attacks of the regime labeling it as a MB plot and against western media's constant emphasis on the

²²⁰ <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/113337> (last accessed June 6, 2014). Another theme that was emphasized in the media and among protestors was the unity of Christians and Muslims together in Tahrir; see, for example: <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2011/02/07/muslim-christian-unity-at-tahrir-square/> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

Islamists, many of the MB activists themselves silenced members who tried to raise religion slogans. Scholar Khalil Al-Anani describes this period and states: “Islamists deliberately kept a low profile during the uprising to avoid regime repression and to diffuse western fears of their powerful representation” (2013: 31). This was exactly the sentiment I heard from many protestors. Islamist groups joined the protests on January 28, 2011; when they did so, some of their supporters started to raise religious slogans, declaring that Egypt should be an Islamist state, but other protestors—liberals and secularists, but also senior members of the MB—suppressed those Islamist protestors who raised religious slogans. This phenomenon was captured also in a 2011 PBS Frontline documentary about Tahrir, in which reporter Charles Sennott visited Tahrir during the sit-in, accompanied by an activist from the MB named Mohamed Abbas. When they entered Tahrir, an Islamist protestor came up to Sennott and raised a pocket Quran in his face. Abbas took the protestor to the side and admonished him; when Sennott asked Abbas why he did this, Abbas responded: “We do not want to show this in the media. We want to show only unity here. Most protestors here raise Egyptian flags and emphasize unity.”²²¹

I conducted my second round of fieldwork in the summer of 2012. By that time, the MB had formed the new government and the president was a member of the MB. One of my informants was Dr. Laila Soueif (one of the founders of Kefayya and a long-standing democracy activist in Egypt).²²² She told me she understood why many of the youth of the revolution became angry at the MB (at the time of the interview on November 20, 2012), when the MB failed to be more inclusive. The youth, she explained, felt the MB had betrayed their prior stance of unity and defending one another. She states:

²²¹ The documentary, *Revolution in Cairo*, can be viewed at: <http://video.pbs.org/video/1810338755/> (last accessed June 6, 2014). The incident I describe occurs at 36:00.

²²² For more about Dr. Soueif, see: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/03/201131512328730636.html> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

[Because protestors were insisting and making an effort for unity and showing unity in Tahrir] this is why I totally understand how the youth of the revolution became angry now with the MB. They are like saying to the MB: you are saying you played an important role in protecting the square during the revolution. But we also did protect you; we stood in Tahrir and told all Egyptians and the world, it is not of your damn business about the question of Islamists. We are not scared of them. We will build our Egypt together. But now this youth felt betrayed by the MB, when they worked closely with SCAF against reform and the revolution during the so-called transition period.

It was precisely because the question of Islamist rule had been so deliberately suppressed during the 18 days of the revolution that its reemergence during the transition period struck many who had participated in Tahrir as such a betrayal. But as Goldstone and others have noted, the “brief euphoria” following revolution was, perhaps, destined to be short-lived, particularly as so many deeper issues were forcibly marginalized in the name of unity.

The Revolutionary Agenda

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the ousting of Mubarak and electoral political reform emerged as the main revolutionary demands. This is not to suggest, however, that alternative voices arguing for wider and/or more radical reforms were not present in Tahrir. Nor does it mean that there were not people arguing that, in fact, longer term goals should be discussed and a post-Mubarak plan developed. As hindsight has made clear, one of the most problematic aspects of the Egyptian revolution was the role of the military and the lack of a clear plan of transition. Yet, my research reveals that during the 18 days, there were, indeed, efforts to consider these longer term questions. My interviews and archival research find that there was much discussion within Tahrir Square of alternative plans, but these discussions remained relatively diffused and/or, in some cases, actively suppressed.

Alternative plans here are defined as proposals about the future and how to organize the transfer and reorganization of power after Mubarak. Though diverse, what all such plans shared in common was a concern regarding what role the military would play in the transitional government. In my field notes for February 7, 2011, I wrote: “I have heard different stories about power arrangements and the future, but everybody is worried about Mubarak first, and that they are worried the most about the military’s stance in the events.” In my November 20, 2012 interview with Dr. Laila Soueif, she talked about the idea that protestors missed an opportunity to have more say in the transition:

I cannot talk about the potential or strong plans at the time. But there was this critical moment in February 9th. It was this time after the army sent a message to the protestors that we will not be attacking. But they did not show any clues, or perhaps did not decide yet about resuming power from Mubarak. There were perhaps diffused alternatives in the square and in Egypt. But these were not clear and strong. I would say that if the political forces were strong enough, during this revolutionary momentum and while the attention is there, and told the army we decided about temporary revolutionary government, the army would have been forced to accept.

I asked Dr. Soueif whether she really believed the army would have accepted this, and she responded:

I think yes. They would have accepted this (to give power to a transitional revolutionary government or leadership). At the time, they did not have a choice, the people in the streets and the power of the revolution was on. But of course, after they give the power to this leadership, they would maneuver and go around and try to control things. My point is that the alternative was not strongly formulated and there. To be precise there were alternatives, and we discussed it, and I will give you examples, political forces and protestors did not push hard on the question of alternatives. There was one of the proposals about forming a presidential council, which includes a representative from the MB, ElBaradie and a representative from the army. And there was another one; I worked for it with others about a presidential council to include two judges and one representative from the military. We sent these proposals to the army and we worked hard for it. But the time was passed and the events were running fast. Then Mubarak did transfer power to SCAF, people were celebrating in the streets. And the opportunity was gone.

During the revolution, two entities created for the purpose of mediating between the regime and protestors and ostensibly representing the voice of revolution issued various statements and launched initiatives. One was called the Committee of the Wise, and was comprised of 22 intellectuals, former diplomats, and elites. The other entity had 26 members, was called the Council of the Trustees of the Revolution, and was founded by members of the MB.²²³ Both entities were viewed with suspicion, however, by many in the square. Some protestors worried that the groups had plans to hijack the revolution and impose their own solutions, while others simply felt that the entities' demands would not be radical enough and that they would be compromised by negotiating with the regime. In the first statement of the Committee of the Wise, for example, they praised the national patriotic role of the army, and also stated that they trusted the Vice President at the time, Omar Suleiman, the former Chief Spy in Egypt, who was hired as VP on January 28 by Mubarak.²²⁴ In response, many activists in the square developed the slogan: "No negotiation until Mubarak leaves" (*la tafawed ella baad al-raheel*). The committees were seen as insisting on negotiation, something many radical protestors felt would be fatal to the revolution. They also developed the slogan "No to Mubarak and No to Suleiman." But interestingly, while the slogan "No negotiation until Mubarak leaves" was very radical at the time, it's important to note that it ruled out only negotiation with Mubarak and his VP, not negotiation altogether. Indeed, the slogan's use of the word "until" indicated that protestors were open to negotiation; the problem was just that it was unclear who they were open to negotiating with, and what exactly that negotiation would look like. The implicit assumption was that the other party to the negotiations would be the military.

²²³ See: <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/13/55/40657/الأخبار/مدني-مجتمع/الأمراء-مجلس-مدني-مجتمع/الأخبار> (last accessed June 6, 2014); and: <http://digital.ahram.org.eg/articles.aspx?Serial=425804&eid=2166> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

²²⁴ <http://www.masress.com/shorouk/385610> (last accessed June 6, 2014).

But the point here is that proposals about the future did indeed circulate throughout Tahrir. During my time in the square, I saw many leaflets discussing various ideas being distributed all the time in the square. Some activists, for example, distributed a leaflet on February 2, 2011, in which they asked the military to state a clear stance, indicating whether it sided with Mubarak or the revolution.²²⁵ But while most proposals for alternatives remained diffuse and not strong enough, my research also shows that many protestors who tried to discuss plans about the future were silenced. Ahmed Gharbiyya, one of the founders of the blogging movement in Egypt, was one of my informants. When I interviewed him on March 10, 2011, he told me the following story:

In one of those days, I think it was the February 8th or February 9th, it was clear to many that Mubarak will be leaving any way. I found it is strange that we are not talking about the period in post-Mubarak. I wrote something in a small banner about plans for the future. I do not recall the exact plan. But it has ideas about forming a presidential council from independent forces, and also has judges who are known for their work on democracy, and the council to be chaired by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, or something. I thought it is weird to leave all things to the military, to be honest. But when I got to Tahrir with the banner, many protestors, who seem to be from political forces, came to me and asked me not to carry this around. They got angry and said we not talking about any other thing now but ousting Mubarak. This is the priority.

Others told me of similar stories happening in Tahrir at the time. The gist of the stories was always the same: protestors were silenced when they talked about ideas regarding the future and how to distribute power in a post-Mubarak Egypt. And the rationale given was also the same: that these were divisive voices. Some protestors were told frankly “any voices that are not focusing ousting Mubarak first are divisive.” Still, despite the strength of the consensus that

²²⁵ Abdel Rahman Youssef, an Egyptian poet, told me the story. He is also an activist who worked closely with the ElBaradei campaign in the revolution, with Kefayya, and within pro-democracy circles in Egypt in general. He also relates the story in his book (Youssef 2011). He said that on the night of February 1, he and other activists met and decided to write a statement. In the statement, they called upon the military to take a clear stance, about whether to side with Mubarak or the revolution. They wrote the statement together, printed it, and early the next morning, they distributed it in Tahrir (Youssef 2011:91)

focused only on the ousting of Mubarak, Gharbiyya dared to carry a sign that read: “Downfall, Not Reform” (see **Figure 19**), challenging the conflation of Mubarak with the entire regime, and suggesting that simply reforming the post-Mubarak regime would not be enough.

My memories of this period are that events were going very fast and everything was very overwhelming. The sentiments of those around me were similar. Some plans were circulating and being discussed but, at the same time, other plans were being silenced. There was so much emphasis on the ideas of unity and consensus that people’s concerns about future conflict just got pushed to the side. People simply didn’t want to create (or acknowledge) divisions by talking about the question of power in the future. The mood was so optimistic that raising the issue of potential conflicts genuinely did seem to many to be divisive.

It was in this context that the decision, eventually, to leave Tahrir Square became hugely symbolic. After Mubarak was ousted on February 11, many people wanted to remain in the square for awhile. The army allowed protestors to remain for two days to celebrate, but on February 13, military, security forces, and also some ordinary citizens began to evacuate the square by force.²²⁶ The square was cleared, but not without some reluctance on the part of protestors. For many activists, a sense of regret and nostalgia has only increased since then, with many repeating the statement: “Our biggest mistake was to leave Tahrir Square after ousting Mubarak.”²²⁷ I asked Dr. Laila Soueif for her thoughts about this decision and she stated:

Yes the army used force in evacuating the square on February 13. But let us be frank. The Egyptian people wanted us to leave the square on February 11, the time when Mubarak did transfer power to SCAF. People went to the streets, celebrated. Their message was like: yes, it is successful revolution, we celebrated, ok, you should go home and no further protest is needed. Yes, they were happy

²²⁶ Contradictory stories circulated about the role of the MB in this evacuation—some said they were involved, others said they were not.

²²⁷ The sentence is also stated by one of the main characters in the documentary, *The Square*, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

that the dictator is gone. This is one thing. But also many people just wanted to go back to business and normal life. They may be trusting the army or not. The point is that to go back to normal life. This is about the sentiments of ordinary people. But as for the revolutionary youth, and who were skeptics about the role of the army, they could not do any better. Also some of them really wanted to try the army. Their logic was like this; if the people wanted the army and there is no alternative, ok, let them try the army. The idea was about testing the army in reality. For example, it took few months until many people realized that the army is standing against Mubarak's trial. It was people's protests, which lead the army to accept this.



Figure 19 Activist and blogger Ahmed Gharbiyya carrying a sign in Tahrir that reads: “Downfall, Not Reform.” The picture was taken in Tahrir on February 1st 2011, during the first one-million-person rally. (Photograph shared by Gharbiyya with permission).

I will move now to the last section of this chapter, in which I reflect on how to make sense of these processes of marginalization, which took place both within and outside of Tahrir Square, and which shaped the revolutionary possibilities that were explored, as well as those that weren't.

III. The Making of a Revolutionary Boundary

To recall, in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively, I discussed how the Tahrir Square sit-in came to be the central mode of action of the revolution, and also Tahrir came to represent the central voice and source of legitimacy for the revolution. Of course, the very idea of Tahrir becoming the center of the revolution means that there existed other revolutionary possibilities—alternately beyond or even within Tahrir—that were *not* central; voices, modes of action, and forms of political imagination that, unlike Tahrir, did not come to be understood as *the revolution*, and remained instead in the *margins of the revolution*. How can we make sense of this? Literature regarding social movements and revolutions has dealt with the question of marginalization primarily in the sense of recognizing that social movements and revolutions, themselves, are usually collective actions on the part of groups that are already marginalized (Ballard et al. 2005; Bandy and Smith 2005; Bayat 1997; Hall 1995; Piven and Cloward 1979). But the question of how processes of marginalization shape the constitutive internal and external boundaries of movements and revolutions themselves remains understudied. But with a deeper look we may see answers in this literature to the following questions: Why are some voices heard more than others during a revolution? And how do certain voices become dominant or hegemonic in a revolution or social movement?

There are four answers from the literature to these questions. The *first answer* can be found in the framing perspective. According to this perspective, one can argue that protestors in Tahrir seemed to agree in general that focusing on electoral reform was the an effective (hegemonic or master) frame that had the best chance of gaining the support of the widest

segments of participants in the revolt and the population.²²⁸ A *second answer*, which is very close to the framing perspective, comes from the application of Gramsci's concept of hegemony to social movements and revolutions. Frames themselves develop through the constant conflict between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses of power (Carroll and Ratner 1994; Steinberg 1998). Using Gramsci, for example, sociologist of law, Alan Hunt, distinguished between "'single issue' movements and those whose goals would constitute a wider set of social changes than their immediate objectives" (1990: 319). The first type of movement is one that revolves around a single, master issue, but includes a larger people, than dividing the issues into separate issues, which may create more conflict and disagreements in the movement. Other scholars have also discussed the question of movement unity in the context of a diverse field (Levitsky 2007). One can argue that the Egyptian Revolution became defined as a single issue movement, one in which protestors decided to unify the movement by focusing only on political reform and ousting Mubarak. But as an outcome of this, other issues not seen as immediate and urgent, were suppressed.

A *third answer* comes from what can be described as the "critical opportunity structure approach." In his classic piece, "States and Opportunities: The Political Structuring of Social Movements" (1996), Sidney Tarrow advocates a thicker understanding to the political opportunity structure approach with a special focus on the state. By looking at deeper structural factors, Tarrow argues, we can think about how specific movements opportunities vary. He states: "Mobilization into social movements varies as opportunities for collective action open and close, allies appear and disappear, political alignments shift, and elites divide and cohere" (Tarrow 1996: 54). In this approach, Tarrow defines political opportunity structures as "consistent—but

²²⁸ On hegemonic frames, see Benford and Snow (2000); on master frames, see Carroll and Ratner (1996b).

not necessarily formal, permanent, or national—signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use internal resources to form social movements (1996: 54).

According to Tarrow, political opportunities have three components: the “opening up of political access,” “stability or instability of alignments,” especially between government and opposition in our context, and the presence or absence of “influential allies” (1996: 54–55). According to this perspective, one can argue that being in Tahrir was the main visible window or political access for the revolution’s voice. And that because the legitimacy of the regime was already in question thanks to the plans for Gamal Mubarak’s succession and the rigged elections in 2010, there was an important opportunity for temporary alignment, through which most, if not all, opposition groups were united against Mubarak. This included the very important and influential ally of the Muslim Brotherhood, which though initially hesitant to join the protests, did join as events escalated on the ground. But protestors in Tahrir knew that this alignment and opportunity of taking the square was only temporary. And knowing this, protestors pushed for consensus and marginalized non-consensus voices, namely, any voices that could disrupt the unity—however brief—that was possible in Tahrir. And as expert on the Middle East, Jillian Schwedler (2004) once argued, we ought to think of coalition building and political opportunities in the same framework.

A fourth answer comes from the applying the idea of cross-class solidarity during revolution, as elaborated by Goldstone (2011b) and discussed in the previous chapter. As explained by Goldstone, the very nature of the alliance between populations from different classes, which are in opposition in normal circumstances, requires a compromise. And the very nature of such a compromise, by definition, requires the suppression of many issues normally advocated by the different groups taking part in this alliance. Here, one example for elaboration

is important. As discussed in the previous chapter, there was a degree of consensus in Tahrir that the revolution was about democratic change. But suggesting that the revolution was reformist and that Tahrir and its banner were constructed around this demand does not mean that everybody in Tahrir and the revolution agreed with this particular compromise. On the contrary, different people had different perspectives about the revolution and its potential. Indeed, after the revolution, it became clear that for the MB, revolution entailed only a narrow vision of electoral democracy; for the army (the institution that was presumably “guarding” the square and the revolution), the revolution was only about ending the plan for Mubarak’s son’s succession; for many people in the middle class, the revolution was primarily about ending cronyism; and for the upper classes, the revolution was about mainly ousting Mubarak and restoring the conditions that would favor their businesses. For other groups, it became increasingly clear that the agenda for revolution had not been wide enough: for many liberals and for many liberal-leftists, the revolution should have included not only about democracy but also a social democratic state; and for communists, the revolution should have been a more radical, social revolution. The point, however, is that had a consensus not developed around the idea of a reformist revolution—one focused on electoral reform, or even more minimally, simply the ousting of Mubarak—then the cross-class alliance so remarked upon in Tahrir would not have been possible. As I discussed in the previous section, there were, indeed, voices that tried to broaden the discussion, but these voices were suppressed in the interest of maintaining unity.

These four perspectives are useful, especially insofar as they highlight the necessary, yet inherently problematic nature of compromise. To a certain extent, compromise inevitably entails silencing and marginalization. Yet, the above perspectives are also limited in two ways. First, they mainly shed light on only one kind of marginalization—marginalization *within* a movement

and/or revolution. And as my discussion has demonstrated, there were, in fact, two forms of marginalization: the silencing of voices and issues within the revolution, but also the unrealized revolutionary possibilities *outside* of Tahrir that, for various reasons, never gained momentum, were incomplete, or simply did not develop further. The second limitation in applying these perspectives is that they fail to capture the complexity of Tahrir's relation to the revolution. For, as much as one can point to Tahrir and these processes of both internal and external marginalization, the truth is that Tahrir was also a powerful force of mobilization—and it is this simultaneous dynamic of giving voice and silencing that I want to highlight and theorize.

I propose another explanation derived from the theorization of space in contentious politics, which is very relevant to this research. I also invoke an observation from the work of Pierre Bourdieu that relates to the question of revolutionary possibilities existed outside Tahrir. I synthesize these to present the idea of a “revolutionary boundary,” but before I elaborate this concept, I will explain briefly its theoretical basis.

As elaborated earlier in Chapter 2, the literature on space in contentious politics calls for thinking of space as serving as more than just the built-in environment or a simple container of activism (Martin and Miller 2003; Sewell 2001; Tilly 2000). Spatial analysis in a revolution or a movement is not limited to how the environment enables or disables protests. We also ought to think of how claim making is, itself, spatial, and also how a movement is bounded by a specific network and idea about specific place(s). Of particular relevance here is Tilly's idea about spatial claim making in contentious politics (Tilly 2000: 137). In his discussion about the relationship between claim making and space, Tilly argued for two types of contention: contained and transgressive. The latter is the case when claim making involves new actors and employs innovative means of collective action (2000:138). Tilly argues the distinction is important

“because transgressive contention more often disrupts spatial routines in its setting, and more often involves deliberate occupation, reorganization, or dramatization of public space” (Tilly 2000:138). As my research above shows, however, Tahrir was an instance of both contained and transgressive contention.²²⁹ Tahrir was contained in the sense that the central mode of action of the revolution (the sit-in) and also the main claims of the revolution were literally located in and symbolically represented by a relatively contained space in the center of Cairo. But Tahrir also represented a transgressive contentious case, insofar as it was constructed as the center of action and mobilization for a nationwide revolution. In sum, Tahrir became the center of the revolution, and this fact involved both mobilization opportunities and also limitation.

Next, let me turn to Bourdieu’s observation. In a discussion elaborating his theorization of the state as a field, Bourdieu (1999: 57) states the following:

...there is no more potent tool for rupture than the reconstruction of genesis: by bringing back into view the conflicts and confrontations of the early beginnings and therefore all the discarded possibles, it retrieves the possibility that things could have been (and still could be) otherwise. And, through such a practical utopia, it questions the “possible” which, among all others, was actualized.

Here, Bourdieu talks about possibilities not as mere speculation, but as moments and opportunities that had genuine potential based in historical reality. Hence, the value in tracing the specific historical processes that led to one social institution arising as opposed to others—in this case, the particular formation of the state. I find Bourdieu’s comments useful because Tahrir’s effect on its outside was not only one of spatial marginalization, but also a culmination of historical conditions that favored Tahrir and not the possibilities that existed beyond its borders. As I discussed at the start of the chapter, the popular committees and labor strikes were not airy

²²⁹ See also Kevin O’Brien (2003) for a discussion of how movements sometimes challenge the idea of either contained or transgressive contention.

possibilities or pipe dreams; they were actual mobilizations that had important effects and had the potential to shift the revolution beyond its narrow revolutionary boundary.

What do I mean by a revolutionary boundary? I am proposing the term to refer to the creation of a dual-sided boundary that simultaneously marks mobilizations and actions within this limit as part of the revolution, and denotes others forms of mobilizations and actions outside the boundary as not part of the revolution, or at least less relevant to it. As I have tried to demonstrate, Tahrir itself and its demands constituted the boundary of the Egyptian Revolution. In relation to those events and activities that were beyond or outside of Tahrir, this boundary worked through ambivalence, the failure to resolve the relationship between the various spaces. And in relation to those voices and issues that were silenced or suppressed within Tahrir, the boundary operated through the idea of unity. Any voices deemed harmful to this unity were constituted as outside the revolutionary boundary.

It is important to say a few things about this idea. First, this boundary was not created only in 2011. Rather, a diverse yet specific set of historical conditions constituted Tahrir as the center of the revolution and deemed mobilization efforts outside the square as in the margins. These conditions included the media obsession with Tahrir, the regime's attempts to limit mobilization to Tahrir and its own paradoxical endorsement of Tahrir as its central counterpart, the historical significance of the place itself that made it a target of protest, the reliance on a sit-in as the central mode of action, and the history of coalition building in and around Tahrir. Together, these conditions created a conjuncture of processes that made Tahrir the most powerful center of gravity of the Egyptian Revolution, the pivot point around which a revolutionary boundary was established.

So, there were multiple historical factors that led to the revolution becoming defined as and reduced to Tahrir. But what about the agency of protestors in Tahrir? Did they intend to marginalize voices within Tahrir and overlook opportunities outside? This is my second point. If we agree that there were diverse factors that led to this outcome, then things like the ambivalence of protestors and the nature of compromise within Tahrir are just one factor among many. The making of the revolutionary boundary cannot be attributed to any particular group or decision; instead, the process by which the revolutionary boundary was constructed was, in fact, replete with contingency—there were multiple moments at which a different conjuncture of events and actors might have shifted the boundary. But changing one factor alone does not guarantee a different outcome. Thus, whether or not protestors in Tahrir intended to marginalize actors and events outside the square is not the right question. Indeed, I suggest that to the extent that protestors in Tahrir marginalized voices inside Tahrir, and gave insufficient attention to possibilities outside Tahrir, they did so primarily “un-intentionally.” My point is not to say that they weren’t aware of their own actions, complete with their various pros and cons; but rather, to say the making of a revolutionary boundary is a complex and contingent process that no one person or groups of persons controls. I wish to make two points here. The first is to emphasize how overwhelming the situation was for most protestors. Not only did they have to contend with issues of basic survival and continued mobilization, but as many of my friends and informants told me, most people simply didn’t know what to do. The YCR itself was deciding on things on daily basis. Wael Khalil, a leading blogger and activist stated, for example:

What I can describe as our “revolutionary psyche” shifted not only from one day to another, but also within the same day. The typical daily curve was as follows: in the morning, concern that not enough people would show up; by noon, confidence upon seeing mass numbers turning up, then later, as people start to

leave the square, anxiety and eagerness to know what is really happening outside the square.²³⁰

Likewise, Laila Soueif stated:

Things were fluid and in flux all the time, from the first moment. On the night of January 25 for example, if Mubarak make some reforms, things may have been different. But instead they attacked protestors. The more they attacked the more things escalated. People on January 28 were angrier and more determined and away bigger numbers than January 25th. The more the regime is resisting reform and also attacking the more the people raise higher demands. This is a revolutionary moment where intensity and unpredictability was ruling the situation.²³¹

As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, the Tahrir sit-in was not really established until January 28. Even on this day, the protestors were scattered throughout the square, still navigating the situation with the army presence (see Figure 20). On the night of January 28, protestors decided to form the sit-in. At this point, they had no system of security per se; it was not until February 3, following the attacks of pro-Mubarak thugs, that protestors decided to develop a more advanced security system—and it was only at this point that the sit-in was really formed.

Laila Soueif and several informants told me different stories about people from both southern Egypt and also from the Nile Delta cities coming to Tahrir and joining the sit-in with their own tents. I myself saw many tents bearing the signs of different cities in Egypt (see **Figure 21**). Also many poor villagers who belong to the MB and Salafies came and joined Tahrir. These protestors were supported financially by the networks of the MB and Salafies. The presence of population from outside Cairo gave more representation power to Tahrir, but also contributed to negatively affecting mobilization outside Cairo.

And to share a personal example, I consider myself equipped with some decent organizing skills. I gained a great deal of experience working in different spheres in Egypt under

²³⁰ Interview, April 10, 2011.

²³¹ Interview, November 20, 2012.

Mubarak from 1995 to 2004. And yet, when activists running the YCR stage asked me at least twice to speak, I felt overwhelmed and intimidated by the tens of thousands of people in front of the stage and I refused. In my field notes, I find over and over again some variation of the following comment from protestors: “We were just walking around and looking at the faces, enjoying the moment, but also directionless.” Yes, protestors were talking about Tahrir as “the safest place in Egypt” and as a utopia, but they also experienced it as a disorienting, overwhelming space in which they simply didn’t know what to do from day to day, often focusing instead on the mundane realities of survival. Activist Ahmed Ezzat told me :

When Tahrir protestors started the sit-in on January 28, 2011 at night, they did not have any other choice. At the time, there was the Mubarak regime and his security apparatus (seemed to be defeated at the time) on one side, and protestors have this [liberated] square on the other. If we have left the square, we would have being killed. The protestors will receive a worse repression than what they have received. We saw it very well in the days from January 25 to January 28 (until late afternoon), where Mubarak and his security apparatus did nothing but to arrest leading activists and kill protestors. At the time, we could not think of any big strategies, just save ourselves and save the uprising. If we could die outside the square any way, why not die here, for the sake of the uprising?²³²

Here, Ezzat was talking especially about the first night when protestors had to decide whether to continue the sit-in, but this survival mode continued for some time. The only central plan was to keep the revolution going until the demands (political reform and ousting Mubarak—and over time, maybe even just the latter) were met.

It should be noted that some of my informants who can be classified as experienced organizers did work with others to try to bridge the gap between Tahrir on the one hand and the popular committees and the working class on the other. They told me that at the time, especially in the early part of the 18 days, it was understood that the greatest danger was that Tahrir would be isolated from the rest of society. One of those organizers is Wael Tawfeeq. He told me the

²³² Interview, November 29, 2012.

story of forming an impromptu movement/organization in Tahrir, which they called the 25th of January youth movement. The first meeting was spontaneous, but one of the first tasks discussed was the need to reach out to neighborhoods, and especially the popular committees. In my interview with Tawfeeq on November 21, 2012, he stated:

The meeting was on the night of January 30, 2011. And this was the second meeting for the group that met in the square, after our first meeting which was spontaneous in Tahrir in the same day during the day. We had the meeting in the Press Syndicate in Ramsis St. We did not meet in Tahrir just because we wanted a more quiet place. No less than 500 persons attended the meeting. And the meeting was in the floor of the syndicate as we were not allowed to meet in one of the rooms. Our main discussion was how to reach out to people outside Tahrir. Then we decided to talk about division of labor and we divided the (new) movement into groups, and which group is to work on one issue. These were four groups: provinces, labor, media and legal issues. If you notice, three of the committees were about reaching out outside Tahrir.

Tawfeeq told me that the first thing the group did was issue a statement that was distributed in neighborhoods and in working class areas both within and outside Cairo. The statement talked about bridging the gap between Tahrir and the neighborhoods; as Tawfeeq described it:

The main focus of the statement was to explain to the public what is Tahrir all about. Who are the people in Tahrir, and what are their demands, and we tried to tell the public, either the labor or the people in neighborhoods that Tahrir's demands are also their own demands. We distributed the statement in 7 areas, in Cairo and outside Cairo. These are: Helwan, Shoubra, 6th October City, and Sadat City, Mahala, Alexandria, Kafr al-Dawar. Most of these are labor concentrated areas. We distributed 60 thousand copies, and this was a big number for us, at the time. Labor entered the revolution strongly with strikes in the last few days of the revolt. I cannot say that this is because of our statement of course. But I would say that our statement was important in mobilizing labor.

Ahmed Ezzat, another experienced organizer in Tahrir, worked with others to form the so-called the Egyptian Committees to Defend the Revolutions a couple months after the ousting of Mubarak. These committees were based on networking the popular committees which were established during the 18 days to continue to defend neighborhoods. He told me how many

activists in Tahrir worked to spread the idea of popular committees and reach out to what were formed from these committees during the 18 days. He stated:

Tahrir was liberated by protestors but still under attack. Protestors came up with the idea of protecting themselves and establishing check-points and security committees. And some said we have to inform our neighborhoods and networks about the idea. The idea then started to spread. We simply were hoping to spreading the [logic of the revolution in the] square to these neighborhoods, not only the popular committees idea. But in the beginning, we started to receive news about attacks on neighborhoods, or people are frightened by the lack of security. Then there were many groups and open discussions in the square about the need to spread the idea of popular committees to neighborhoods. I cannot confirm that it we in Tahrir are the only reason to spread the idea outside. But we wanted to reach out, one to make sure that people are safe, and also to spread the revolution.

The idea of “spreading” the square or making all Egyptian squares parallel to the main square (Tahrir) existed among many activists, but as noted above, activists themselves were ambivalent about the relationship between the square and its outside. One slogan that was common at the time is very telling. The slogan goes “Do not come to Tahrir empty handed.” On the surface, this was just a message circulated among activists and told to daily visitors to Tahrir that they should bring food, water, blankets, medicine, and other supplies with them, or even better yet, other friends, family, or neighbors with them the next day. It was a great thing to support the square. But as another activist pointed out to me, the imperative to support Tahrir raised the question: “How do you want to spread the revolution everywhere and at the same time focus mainly on Tahrir to make it stronger?”

In sum, Tahrir’s effect on the Egyptian Revolution was a complicated, often paradoxical one. As one informant, Norhan Tharwat, put it:

This specific charm of the square comes from many things. Yes, we lived together there. We had lost ones there. But the media was insisting that the revolution is only in Tahrir. It is like we were admitting this and we acting accordingly. There was a construction of a myth about Tahrir, and we all contributed to it, not only the media. I would not say there is a conspiracy, but the insistence of the regime

and international media that the revolution is only on Tahrir created this myth. It was unfortunate that we were not very critical of that at the time.²³³

At the same time, it was difficult to be critical of this effect precisely because it was so powerful;

as Dr. Laila Soueif stated:

Tahrir [read protestors in Tahrir] was aware that the millions come during the day and leave. The power of Tahrir was not from the few hundred thousands or so sleeping at night, in the last few days. It was from the millions coming every day, and from the sometimes 10 million persons or even more in all over Egypt. Tahrir was not authoritative to the rest of Egypt. Tahrir was kind of bragging about this power. Tahrir was telling the regime, we are those millions. We are true representation of the nation. And our message is the people's message.²³⁴



Figure 20 Tahrir was like a battle zone on the afternoon of January 28, 2011. The sit-in was formed only on the night of January 28, 2011. Picture taken by Hossam El-Hamalway and used here with his permission.

²³³ Interview, November 19, 2012.

²³⁴ Interview, November 20, 2012.



Figure 21 A sign on a tent in Tahrir. The sign reads: “This is the camp of the peasants of Faqous Ash Sharqiyah.” Faqous is a town in Ash Sharqiyah province in the Nile, Delta Egypt. Picture by the author, taken on February 9, two days before ousting Mubarak.

Conclusion

This chapter has three empirical and two theoretical implications. The first empirical implication is the importance of studying the working class action in Egypt, not separately but in relation to other dynamics that took place in Egypt, especially during the time of the revolution. Most research about the role of the working class during or after the revolution has not given

enough attention to the question of Tahrir's relation to working class strikes. The second related empirical implication is that while most research continues to focus on Tahrir, it is important to provide a larger spatial map of the various modes of action that took place in Egypt during the 18 days of the revolution. It is worth noting also that the important role of popular committees during the revolution is still understudied.²³⁵ The research in this chapter is a contribution to the discussion about the nature and the role of these committees. The third empirical implication is the value of ethnographic analysis that can shed light on how the question of the unity in Tahrir played out and was experienced and negotiated on the ground. As the discussion in this chapter shows, that unity had some fragility, but it is important not to look back with the full benefit of hindsight and pronounce what should have been done differently. Was the coalition between liberal and Islamist groups a tense and temporary one? It's easy enough to offer that diagnosis now, knowing what we do about the failed transition to democracy and the polarization that has developed around the MB, but it's important also to recognize the spirit of compromise and solidarity that led protestors at the time to form that coalition and defend it so fiercely.

As for theoretical implications, there are two. First, this chapter serves perhaps as an invitation to study coalitions in social movements and revolutions (and the larger question of oppositions under authoritarianism) more rigorously. As noted above, Goldstone reminds us that revolutionary unity is often short-lived, disintegrating shortly after "a brief euphoria over the fall of the old regime" (2003: 3). Goldstone also suggests that when revolutionary coalitions fracture after the revolution, the fracture can take various forms: "constructive opposition, paralysis, or polarization" (2011b: 461). Close ethnographic and historical analysis of coalitions and the

²³⁵ The only exception to the lack of study of the popular committees is Asya El-Meehy, "Egypt's Popular Committees: From Moments of Madness to NGO Dilemmas," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 42 (Winter), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer265/egypts-popular-committees> (last accessed June 6, 2016).

process of their making may well shed light on where, when, and why they might fracture after a revolution. As for the second theoretical implication, this chapter is also an invitation to expand our analyses of cases in which movements are simultaneously contained and transgressive at the same time. Last, though my proposal about the idea of revolutionary boundary is case specific, I also think it has some theoretical implications beyond the argument against the rigid dichotomy of contained and transgressive contentions. Not only the concept is an invitation to broaden our spatial analysis to revolutions, but also the idea is an invitation to historically and rigorously study cases of suppressed and incomplete or failed revolution at large.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I examine Tahrir Square as both a political space and a lens for understanding the successes and failures of the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. I argue that Tahrir Square and the mobilization around it played a significant role in the Egyptian Revolution, but that this role was paradoxical. I describe this as the “Tahrir Effect.”

This effect refers to the way in which, on the one hand, the emergence of Tahrir as the central voice and site of the revolution served to amplify the event, draw attention to it, and assist in mobilization; but on the other hand, this centralization of mobilization in one form and in one place also distracted from other kinds of organizing, silenced other voices and issues, and limited further radicalization of the revolution in ways that might have demanded more than political reform and a post-Mubarak transition managed by the military.

In the introduction, I established the paradox that the dissertation sought to address, and presented a theoretical framework that combines insights from theories of space and contentious politics. Then, I outlined my data and methodology. I described the two phases of historical and ethnographic research I conducted in Egypt between 2011 and 2013, and provided a discussion of how this data was then organized and analyzed. I also discussed my specific positionality vis-à-vis this research, given my own status as a human rights researcher and activist in Egypt.

In Chapter Two, I investigated why it was that protestors went to Tahrir Square in the first place. Drawing on the accounts of participants, my own observations, and the long history of protests in Egypt, I emphasized the meanings and dynamics that precede the mobilization to a revolution, and that challenge dominant frameworks in social movement scholarship that underplay the role and significance of space and time. I began by explaining the necessary

backdrop to any study of political contention in Egypt: the authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak. I argued that public political space was a crucial site of struggle between the undemocratic regime and those who opposed it. I highlighted, in particular, the significance of social media and its expansion of political public space, and the rise of “street” politics in the years directly preceding 2011. In the second part of the chapter, I focused specifically on the spatial and political history of Tahrir Square. I argued that we not only need to widen our understanding of the role of space in mobilization politics, but we also need to give greater attention to spaces’ historical significance. I connected mobilization for the Egyptian Revolution to almost a hundred years of protest history in and around Tahrir Square, and I examined the various ways in which this history was present in the memories of many protestors in 2011, actively shaping both their actions and the meanings they assigned to events as they unfolded.

In Chapter Three, I explored how and why the sit-in in Tahrir Square emerged as the main mode of action of the revolution. And I asked, how, despite an almost continuous state of siege and attacks by security forces and regime supporters, at least in the first week of protests, the protests in Tahrir were not only able to literally *survive*, but also continue to mobilize and expand? I highlighted specific features of the repertoires of contention that constituted the Egyptian revolution, how and why they came together at Tahrir, and how they interacted with one another. Specifically, I examined how the actions and events that unfolded in and around Tahrir were: 1) characterized by a complex interplay of organization and spontaneity; 2) centrally concerned with issues of *both* basic survival and political mobilization; 3) constituted through multiple repertoires of contention, in which the sit-in was central, but also supplemented in various ways by other actions such as barricades, rallies, and targeted attacks on government buildings; and 4) given added symbolic and practical efficacy through social media and what I

referred to as the *virtual making of Tahrir*. My arguments here were constructed, in large part, in response to problematic characterizations of the Egyptian revolution that would paint it, alternately, as *purely* spontaneous, entirely reducible to a social media phenomenon, confined completely to the sit-in at Tahrir, and/or remarkable only as a political accomplishment and not also (and just as importantly) as a stunning *practical* achievement. Theoretically, I reflected on how the analyses in this chapter build upon, but also refine Tilly's concept of repertoires of contention. Specifically, I suggested that the events in Tahrir point to new ways of thinking about the *scale* of repertoires, how repertoires *interact* with one another, and the ways in which repertoires become *modular*.

In Chapter Four, I explored a twofold question: why were the various demands of the revolution ultimately limited to a call for democratic reforms, focused almost exclusively on elections, and how did Tahrir Square—and only Tahrir Square—become privileged as the legitimate voice of the revolution? To address the issue of the revolution's demands, I look at the history of the various coalitions that came together in Tahrir: a) political coalitions, b) cross-class coalitions, and c) youth coalitions. I showed how and why, despite their differences, the various groups that formed these types of coalitions eventually settled on a shared agenda that focused on the ousting of Mubarak and an essentially reformist revolution. Next, I argued that during the 18 days of the Tahrir sit-in/revolution, the relationship between the protestors in Tahrir and the regime itself entailed a form of mutual recognition and opposition at the same time that constituted Tahrir as the embodiment of revolutionary legitimacy. From the regime's perspective, focusing on Tahrir was a way to isolate the square and contain nationwide protest, whereas for protestors in Tahrir, continuing to occupy the largest liberated zone in the country took on enormous symbolic power and generated its own form of mobilization.

Chapter Five was devoted to a close study of the various modes of actions that took place outside Tahrir, but which were negatively affected by the centralization of Tahrir in the revolution, as well as the voices and issues that were marginalized *within* Tahrir. My arguments in this chapter built upon Tilly's theorization of space in contentious politics, specifically his discussion of spatiality of claim making as well as notions of contained and transgressive contention. I also took inspiration from a specific observation by Pierre Bourdieu that directs our attention to the revolutionary possibilities that were *not* realized—the various paths *not* taken in the Egyptian Revolution, so to speak. I synthesized these insights from Bourdieu and Tilly to argue that Tahrir was constructed both physically and symbolically as the “revolutionary boundary” of the revolution, thus limiting both the revolutionary possibilities beyond the square, as well as which actions and agendas were given priority within it.

The rest of this conclusion is divided into two parts. In the first, I discuss political developments in Egypt since the ousting of Mubarak, with a special focus on issues related to mobilization and spatiality and Tahrir. In the second, I review first the empirical, then the theoretical implications of this research. I will start now with the developments in Egypt after ousting Mubarak.²³⁶

²³⁶ I originally planned to devote one section of this conclusion to discussing the spatiality of the Arab Spring in general and to relate this to the spatiality of events in Egypt specifically. Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to develop this discussion to my satisfaction given time constraints, though this remains a priority as I look toward converting this project into a book manuscript. Briefly, and at the risk of some simplification, I will make just a few observations here. There were certainly some similarities/and or connections between Egypt and space and contention in the rest of the so-called Arab Spring. The first of these is the export of the idea of occupying a major public square from Egypt to other cases. This happened most notably in Yemen and in Bahrain. In Yemen, protestors staged sit-ins in both Change Square in Sanaa and Liberation Square in Taaz. In Bahrain, protestors occupied the Pearl Roundabout, and the uprising was even named after it. The regime then demolished it on March 18, 2011. Sit-in as a main mode of action of the uprisings was not common then, it only existed in Egypt, Yemen, and Bahrain. The second similarity is the dominance of the idea of marches after Friday prayers, when protestors capitalized on the convenience of mobilizing the crowds that gather immediately following prayers. In

I. Political Developments Since the Ousting of Mubarak

So much has happened in Egypt since the ousting Mubarak on February 11, 2011 that it would be impossible to summarize it adequately here. In the previous chapters, I have mentioned some scattered examples related to mobilization and Tahrir. Here, I provide only a broad overview of developments, then a general discussion about spatiality and mobilization and the revolution at large. The simple story about events in Egypt from 2011 to the time of this writing (end of June 2014) could go something like this. Egyptians took to the streets in huge public protests on January 25, 2011. After 18 days of protest that included a major sit-in in Cairo's famous Tahrir Square, Egyptians successfully ousted Mubarak from office. The Supreme Council of Armed Forces, the leadership body of the Egyptian military, succeeded Mubarak in ruling Egypt. This situation lasted for almost a year and a half, then in June 2012, Egyptians

terms of differences, I saw two things. First, I would argue that the relationship between social media and places of contention varied from place to place in the Arab Spring—there was no one pattern, rather this relationship was place-specific. In the case of Tahrir, social media helped to amplify the event and fed into the iconization of Tahrir, but this was not the case in later uprisings in the region. The second main difference between Egypt and other cases in the Arab Spring is that it seems that the question of regionalism was very important in many of these cases, but not in Egypt. Regionalism refers here to major splits and/or economic and social, cultural, or political differences between different regions, and how this factor affected the trajectory of the uprisings. Regionalism appeared to be a particularly important factor in Yemen and Libya especially. All of these issues warrant further discussion, which I hope to include in future writing about this research.

For an interesting, recent take on the relation between urban public squares and revolution, see Matt Ford, "A Dictator's Guide to Urban Design," *The Atlantic*, February 21, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/02/a-dictators-guide-to-urban-design/283953/> (accessed July 3, 2014). For a discussion of the importance of the Avenue Habib Bourguiba in the Tunisian revolution, see Kareem Fahim, "Tunis Journal: Revolution and its Aftermath Play Out on an Avenue that Defines a City," *New York Times*, March 12, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/13/world/africa/tunis-journal-a-front-row-seat-for-an-uprising.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed July 3, 2014). For video footage of Liberation Square during the uprising in Benghazi, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3j67Q3Je2c> (accessed July 3, 2014), and for discussion see Leela Jacinto, "Benghazi's Tahrir Square: Times Square Style Meets Revolutionary Zeal," *France24.com*, April 25, 2011, <http://www.france24.com/en/20110425-libya-benghazi-tahrir-square-times-reporters-notebook-leela-jacinto/> (accessed July 3, 2014). Regarding the symbolic destruction of the Pearl roundabout in Bahrain, see Martin Chulov, "Bahrain Destroys Pearl Roundabout," *The Guardian*, March 18, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/18/bahrain-destroys-pearl-roundabout> (accessed July 3, 2014). And finally, and most importantly, see the works of Nasser Rabbat (2011, 2012) on the spatiality of the Arab Spring.

democratically elected a new president, Mohamed Morsi. Morsi, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood-backed Freedom and Justice Party,²³⁷ took office on June 30, 2012. But by the end of June 2013, Egyptians took to the streets once again to oust the new president. The Egyptian military intervened and removed the president from office on July 3, 2013. In June 2014, the minister of defense, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was elected as a new president. In many ways, one could say that since ousting Mubarak, Egypt has been caught in an endless state of “transition”—a transition supposedly leading to democracy, but in which true democracy has yet to be realized and, indeed, in which democracy has arguably been even further eroded.

The process of writing a new constitution, for example, was fraught with problems and undermined by a lack of societal consensus, including in particular the marginalization of most liberal and leftist groups. The process was controlled by the MB and political Islamists on the one hand, and by SCAF on the other. After the ousting of Morsi in 2013, the process of writing yet another new constitution was almost entirely controlled by the military. This new constitution also excluded the MB from the writing process, as they were being targeted and prosecuted by the new leadership in Egypt. In general, the entire transition (now two transitions) was dominated by two powerful entities in Egypt: SCAF and the MB, while youth groups, or what can be described as the coalition that emerged in Tahrir, did not participate as such, or at the very

²³⁷The difference between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party may confuse many observers of Egypt. In theory, the reason for this is that the Muslim Brotherhood existed historically as a group that preaches for Islamic morals and education. However, the group became politicized over time. It existed illegally under Mubarak but continued to survive and grow. After the revolution, the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood established the Freedom and Justice Party in order to run for elections and participate in official politics. Not all members of the Muslim Brotherhood are members of the party and, indeed, the relationship between the two remains ambivalent. Several of my interviewees who were former Muslim Brotherhood members told me that the Muslim Brotherhood will continue separately from the Freedom and Justice Party. These same interviewees admitted that it would be difficult to separate the two. The interviews took place before the ousting of Morsi in the summer of 2012. After Morsi was ousted, the military-led government continued to target the Muslim Brotherhood, prosecuting its members and issuing court orders to ban the party and the organization.

least, the democratic vision of Tahrir was never reflected in either the constitution or the new governments.

Consider also what some view as one of the major achievements of the revolution beyond ousting Mubarak—namely, the post-revolution opportunity to form new political parties. Under Mubarak, forming new political parties was very difficult and involved an onerous legal and political process of submitting a request to an administrative commission that was, in turn, controlled by state security and the ruling party. After the revolution this process changed and the commission was replaced by a judicial one. But this openness also meant opening the door to several parties, including “religion-based parties,” a move many activists saw as deliberately fueling sectarianism and going against the democratic nature of the revolution.²³⁸ The revolution also opened the door for the formation of new independent trade unions and ended the control of the dominance of the state and the security-controlled trade union federation. But the irony is that while these developments took place, despotic laws, especially those governing rights to assembly and strikes, remained unchanged. In other words, Egyptians may have gained the right to organize legally, after decades of severe restrictions, but their rights to practice politics in the broader sense were still controlled and repressed. Not only that, but new despotic laws were enacted. None of the administrations since the ousting of Mubarak have fully guaranteed

²³⁸ There remain many debates regarding religion-based parties in Egypt and how to define them. The simple definition is that these are parties that explicitly invoke religion in their program. The grey areas of this definition were exploited by the MB and Islamist parties during the first transitional period (under SCAF and, indeed, with the blessing of SCAF, according to many activists). This fact created divisions within the Tahrir coalition, with some groups feeling betrayed by the MB in the immediate post-Mubarak period. But in the new constitution under the military, religious parties are banned: political parties may not be formed based on “religion, race, gender or geography.” Nonetheless, the military regime has been cooperating with some salafies in order to avoid appearing anti-religion and in order to further its own goals in the context of the war against the MB. Thus the main salafi group has a party, the Nour Party, which cooperated with the military to oust Morsi and continues to cooperate with the military today.

freedom of expression and right to assembly. Indeed, a new draconian law that limits (indeed, practically bans) protest has just been enacted by the current military regime.²³⁹

This is the general picture, put simply. But looking beyond the surface, Egypt witnessed many important debates at each stage and under each different form of rule: under SCAF, then SCAF/MB/Morsi, and then back again to military rule. Briefly, I argue there are three main debates. The first concerns the very meaning of democracy, with some arguing that democracy is more than just a ballot box, while others emphasize that even flawed elections are better than no democracy at all. Activists have been strongly critical of the narrow, procedural definition of democracy that both SCAF and the MB have relied upon during their respective periods of rule, and deployed to suppress politics by other means. Both SCAF and the MB resisted reforms by insisting that democracy was already in place thanks to the holding of elections. One can't help but note, of course, the irony that Tahrir's consensus was centered around the model of representative democracy, and after the revolution of 2011, it was precisely this narrow model of democracy that came back to haunt activists, so to speak, now redeployed as an argument *against* more substantive forms of democracy, including broader forms of social and economic justice.

Over the last three and a half years, some activists have pointed out that Egypt has now witnessed so many elections and referendum that people have become exhausted with formal politics and procedural democracy. They declare the absence of "real" democracy, which they argue means respecting public opinion and allowing freedom of expression and the right to

²³⁹ Also, as discussed earlier, one cannot underestimate the victory of ousting Mubarak by popular rebellion. Juan Cole (2014) reminds us that the Arab Spring still had several key accomplishments. The most important of which are ending the idea of president-for-life, and also ending the idea of "family cartels as the leadership of the Arab republics." See http://www.huffingtonpost.com/juan-cole/arab-spring_b_5542452.html?utm_hp_ref=yahoo&ir=Yahoo (accessed July 3, 2014).

assembly. On the other hand, both the MB and SCAF and many conservative voices have argued that elections are a crucial step recognized as the main mechanism of representative democracy throughout the world. These debates over the meaning of democracy are not merely semantic, they have had serious implications. For example, MB supporters and those who voted for Morsi now say that democracy has been betrayed in Egypt. They date the failure of the revolution to the moment that Morsi, the democratically elected president, was ousted in July 2013. Others argue that this is a simplistic reading that overestimates the democratic character of the transition from the very beginning; they note that the transition at all stages has been controlled by some combination of the SCAF, the MB, and the military and security apparatuses. In other words, democracy has been failing throughout the entire transitional process.²⁴⁰

The second debate is linked to the above, and centers around whether the events of July 3, 2013—when the military ousted Mohamed Morsi—constitute a coup or a revolution.²⁴¹ The question is significant because there was both mass mobilization against Morsi and a military coup. Some other complications relate to evidence revealed later, which showed that the deep state/intelligence apparatus of the military and the security were in touch with some of the leaders of the youth movement (*Tamaroud*, or rebel campaign) that played an important role in the protests against Morsi. The story is not that simple because to argue that millions took to the street against Morsi because they were all complicit in a military plot and security plan is illogical. Many Egyptian activists at the time avoided this discussion and/or argued that this was

²⁴⁰ See also a debate among experts of Egypt about the coup in relation to democracy in Egypt, discussed in Mohammad Fadel, “What Killed Egyptian Democracy?,” *Boston Review*, January 21, 2014, <http://www.bostonreview.net/forum/mohammad-fadel-what-killed-egyptian-democracy> (accessed July 3, 2014).

²⁴¹ Ironically, the new military-backed constitution in Egypt, put in force in January 2014, acknowledges the “25th, January 2011 revolution and also the “June 30th, 2013 revolution.” The irony is that while the constitution acknowledges these events, the current regime is restoring the old regime and targeting everything related to these “revolutions” and protests. For the text of the constitution, see <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Newvr/Dustor-en001.pdf> (accessed July 3, 2014).

simplistic framing of the discussion. To say it was a coup means admitting that Morsi was democratically-elected and ignoring the mass protests against Morsi; to say it was a revolution means you have to deny the election of Morsi as democratic and ignore the military intervention. If there is one main lesson I have learned from writing this dissertation, however, it is the significance of time and its ability to destabilize meaning. It was time that led activists to eventually become more critical of Tahrir, as I explained in Chapter Five. And likewise, as I have been writing this dissertation, activists in Egypt have started to become more critical of the events that led to the ousting of Morsi. At the time, events were a mixed bag of protest and military intervention, fuelling confusion and a lack of certainty regarding how to classify what happened. But in hindsight, things have become clearer. It is a fact is that the military seized upon the opportunity presented by people's protests against Morsi. The security apparatus and the media also contributed to fueling anger with Morsi, and, indeed, Morsi himself and his administration exacerbated the problem by continuing to exclude all the secular parties from the constitutional writing process. Events since show that the military has now regained total control of Egypt, making the events of June/July 2013 almost certainly a coup.²⁴² On June 30, 2014, the first anniversary of the June 30, 2013 protests, Big Pharaoh, an Egyptian blogger, wrote on his Twitter account, "June 30 was definitely not a revolution and it was not just a coup. June 30 + July 3 = popularly backed coup."²⁴³ Similarly, Amr Khalifa, a journalist and political

²⁴² As I mentioned in the introduction, my positionality continued affecting this research and while writing this dissertation. On June 29, 2013, one day before the protests, I published an article (in Arabic) in the *Socialist Papers*, a magazine in Cairo, published by the Revolutionary Socialists Group. In this article, I warned the revolutionaries that they should not be fooled by the military twice. See <http://revsoc.me/politics/l-tldg-lthwr-mn-jhr-mrtyn-ljysh-wlthwr-fy-msr/> (accessed July 3, 2014).

²⁴³ What Big Pharaoh is referring to here is that there is a difference between June 30, 2013 and July 3, 2013. Interpreting what happened on these dates is also a reason for debates in Egypt. June 30, 2013 was the day when there was mass protests against Morsi in Egypt. And July 3, 2013 is the day when the military announced ousting Morsi. Some activists in Egypt said we agree and endorse protests against

commentator, Tweeted on the same day: “On Jun 30 2013 I termed what occurred as a Revolutionary Coup. I was wrong. It was a coup but [only] few of us had the right glasses.”²⁴⁴

The third debate, and the one most relevant to this dissertation, concerns the outcome and meaning of the “original” revolution itself, not only in light of the troubled three years and half, but also in light of the point we are at now. In the current context, the new military regime is not only restoring the pre-Mubarak order, but also punishing the society and the youth for the revolution with excessive repression. A major part of the debate in Egypt now is whether the January revolution was a failure or not? In many ways, this debate has been ongoing since Mubarak was ousted on February 11, 2011. From that moment on, both SCAF and the MB, as well as significant parts of the ruling elites and intellectuals, emphasized that the revolution had already “succeeded” in ousting Mubarak and thus urged all the radical voices in Tahrir and elsewhere to stop protesting, and to practice democracy only through formal channels. But many protestors resisted this narrative, argued that nothing had really changed, and raised the slogan “the revolution continues”—meaning that the revolution will continue until its broader demands of “bread, liberty, and economic justice” have been realized.

Mainstream scholarship regarding Egypt has not been that dissimilar to this conservative and ruling elite narrative in Egypt, but a few scholars have echoed the arguments of activists. Gilbert Achcar (2013), for example, argues that what is happening in Egypt (and the Arab Spring at large) must be seen as a long-term revolutionary process. Achcar points to two things to support this argument. The first is the continued spreadability or contagion of the events; he speculates that it is highly likely that many countries in the region will continue to see uprisings in the months and years ahead. The second is that only “profound socioeconomic transformations” —

Morsi, but we were not necessarily pro coup. Big Pharaoh here is suggesting that combining what happened on June 30 and July 3 means a “popularly backed coup.”

²⁴⁴ Both of them are quoted here with permission.

the real reasons behind the uprisings— not just mere superficial political reforms will satisfy the populations (Achcar 2013: 4). Earlier, I used the term “reformist revolution” to describe the consensus in Tahrir. We might also recall Asef Bayat’s description that this was a “refolution.” In the last three and a half years, some activists have suggested that the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 was an “incomplete political revolution” or a “failed social revolution.” It is telling that the same activists, who have been saying over and over, “the revolution continues,” are now beginning to mock the slogan, saying instead “the revolution will not continue on its own.” In other words, they have started to judge the event by its outcome, suggesting that the January revolution failed (at least for the time being).

These different views above, either academic or activists, reflect differences in the theoretical angle one uses to look at the revolution. If we look at the larger historical trajectory of events, we can see that events are still unfolding; whereas, if we look at immediate outcomes, one could certainly argue that the revolution has, indeed, failed. Even this bold claim can be questioned though, insofar as one can argue that the revolution succeeded in its narrow goal of ousting Mubarak. In this dissertation, I argue against the idea that the revolution has a clear beginning and end, and I have sought to focus on the revolution as a process. Having said that, I do not reject an outcome-based analysis altogether. It is accurate to say that those who protested in January 2011 have witnessed major setbacks, if not a “decisive victory” of the old regime over the revolution. And this situation may last for a while, but not forever. I agree here with H. A. Hellyer who suggested recently that the Egyptian revolution is not over, despite the fact that the military reestablished its control in 2013.²⁴⁵ Of course, to have another revolution in Egypt (or to continue what began with the January revolution in the same way) is unlikely; revolutionary

²⁴⁵ See H. A. Hellyer, “A Year After Morsi, Egypt’s Revolution is Not Over,” *The Guardian*, June 30, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jul/01/a-year-after-morsi-egypt-revolution> (accessed July 3, 2014).

conjunctures do not repeat themselves in the same way in history, at least in a short period of time. I also agree with Gilbert Achcar's insightful point that while a revolutionary conjuncture is overdetermined, revolutionary success is not. As he puts it:

Overdetermination should not...be understood as overdetermination of the revolution's success — that is, of the overthrow of the political powers that be and the shattering of ...“the legal and political superstructure.” Only the revolutionary explosion is overdetermined. It is overdetermined in the sense that the exacerbation of the structural blockage holding back the development of productive forces, in combination with local, regional, and international conjunctural factors that contribute to heightening tensions, inevitably culminates in a popular revolt leading to a grave political crisis. If this popular uprising is to set a process of revolutionary change in motion, the rebellious masses must be capable of organizing to that end and acting effectively to achieve it. In other words, the transformation of a rebellious uprising into a revolution necessitates a subjective capacity. This subjective capacity cannot, for its part be “overdetermined.” (2013: 115–16)

Let us look now at how issues of spatiality and protests have been shaped by these developments since the ousting of Mubarak. One can simply suggest that the overall relation between regime and repertoires of protest continued. Specifically, I would argue that in the case of street politics, every administration in Egypt since the revolution has continued to use violence to varying degrees and has been intolerant to some degree to street protests. Based on my observation and discussions with activists, I have come to discern the following pattern: the violence will be high if the number of protestors is low. This does not mean the absence of police violence against protests when the number of protestors is high. But state violence will be lacking or minimal when the number of protestors is very high, such as the case when it exceeds a few hundred thousand. The logic here is that it is difficult to target a big number and this may increase the outrage against the regime. In sum, all administrations have used violence, but the violence reached its maximum with the regime that followed Morsi. Ironically, the state under Mubarak did not use live ammunition against protestors before the revolution. But during and

after the revolution, shooting at protestors with live ammunition has continued, reaching a terrible climax in August 2013, when the state evacuated and open fire on pro-Morsi and MB supporters staging a sit-in at Rabaa Al-Adawia.

From the side of protestors, the regime attacks did not lead to them to stop protesting in the streets. As noted in Chapter Three, common repertoires in the last three years and half have included street rallies (the so-called “million person rallies”), sit-ins in Tahrir and in other key places, as well as labor strikes and “stand-ins” in downtown Cairo and in other urban centers. But while these are common protest repertoires, in no way am I suggesting that things have simply remained the same way (or have the same degree of tolerance or violence by the consecutive administrations in Egypt). On the contrary, as suggested earlier these were always produced in a context of a battle between the regime and protestors. Things got worse to the extent that shooting at protestors –with live ammunition-- became very normalized under the new military regime in Egypt, and also protests is almost banned in Egypt now, as I will explain below.

Specifically, I suggest that there were three main features in the context of spatiality and protests in Egypt in the last three and a half years and half.²⁴⁶ The first feature is the presence of a battle about Tahrir. And this was not only between the regime and protestors but also amongst the different factions, which were once united during the revolution. Because of the symbolic power of Tahrir, something that existed historically before the revolution and then was intensified by the revolution, different groups started to rally in Tahrir in the aftermath of the revolution. But while doing so, groups had many disputes about which groups are entitled to

²⁴⁶ There is a fourth feature that I am not discussing here. Which is the continuation of street rallies, known as the one million person rallies. I am not discussing this here because there was nothing new about them. I discussed this earlier in Chapter 3. These rallies continued until ousting Morsi. The name continued, while in many cases, there was no real millions in these rallies.

claim that space and, in so doing, represent themselves as embodying the spirit of Tahrir and the revolution. Protests started right away after ousting Mubarak, under SCAF, when Tahrir protestors started to realize that SCAF was resisting reform. Protestors continued to rally to Tahrir and attempted many times to stage sit-ins there. In the first year after ousting Mubarak especially, secular and leftists groups and parties on the one hand, the Islamists on the other did diverge. One reason for this divergence was presumably the close relation that appeared between the MB and the Islamists on the one hand and the SCAF on the other. During that time, secular and leftists groups and the youth continued to rally to Tahrir and also to stage sit-ins, inspired by the famous one that took place during the revolution. In some cases, these sit-ins were left unattacked by the state. But in most cases, the SCAF and the security attacked. Also, during its own negotiation and coordination with SCAF at the time, the MB also preferred to organize its own rallies in Tahrir. MB in general preferred not to organize sit-ins with few exceptions.²⁴⁷

The regime continued to attack Tahrir and blame protestors for the lack of stability, using various excuses, but in most cases simply reusing narratives familiar from the revolution: the protestors are just a bunch of infiltrators and thugs. Also the regime started to use live ammunition. Protestors on the other hand, blamed the MB for what seemed to be a deal with SCAF. This does not mean that the MB stopped protesting. But in general, it did so only with Islamic forces, not in coordination with other secular and liberal forces. On July 29, 2011 for example, all Islamic forces, MB, Salafies and a wide range of Islamic groups, including what

²⁴⁷ This is mainly about the period under SCAF. At the time, some leftist youth activists started to mock the MB and the Islamists style of protesting at the time. At the time, the MB and Islamists never staged a sit-in as such, aiming instead to organize a rally and some speeches in Tahrir and then to leave in the end of the day. So some activists started to mock the MB, and said that the MB slogan for the period is “a revolution until the afternoon.” The slogan is a modified version of another famous slogan, protestors chanted in the revolution, which goes “revolution until victory.” But while the MB was in power, Islamic groups did stage sit-ins. Some were outside the Supreme Court, and sometimes outside media centers in Egypt. And the main case was the sit-in in Rabaa Al-Adawia, after ousting Morsi, which ended with a massacre by the military and police against the protestors.

activists and journalists identified as jihadist groups, rallied together in Tahrir.²⁴⁸ The crowd chanted Islamic slogans including chants that Egypt should be an Islamic state. Some activists said that the Islamists were showing off their power in their negotiation with the regime. The larger picture here was not only that the unity of Tahrir was gone, but also that the disunity of the Tahrir coalition was reflected symbolically in the battles over who could speak for Tahrir.²⁴⁹ For most of time since 2011, Tahrir has been reserved primarily for pro-democracy protestors, but after the military regime took over in 2013, protests in Tahrir were practically banned, except in the case of supporters of General Sisi and the new regime. On the third anniversary of the revolution, pro-democracy activists were arrested in Tahrir and now faced trial. Meanwhile, when Sisi took office, his supporters celebrated in Tahrir.

The second development in the area of spatiality and protest is the emergence of what I describe as competing squares of protests. I mentioned this briefly in the introduction. This refers to the case when different groups occupy or rally in different squares at the same time. This has happened in during the revolution itself, when pro-democracy protestors occupied Tahrir, while pro-Mubarak and then pro-SCAF supporters rallied near Moustafa Mahmoud Mosque in Mohandesseen (also used sometimes but briefly for rallies by pro-democracy activists) and also other squares such as Abbassyya and also Nasr City's El Manasa/The Unknown Soldier Memorial. But throughout that time, Tahrir always maintained its privilege as the main symbol

²⁴⁸ The main reason for this is that observers and activists saw Al-Qaeda's famous black flags in the crowd. Activists in Egypt described the day as the Friday of Kandahar, named after the second largest city in Afghanistan, in reference to the idea that the MB is now in coalition with Islamic extremists. Some activists wrote about that day, and said: "We knew the revolution has been stolen that day." See a collection of YouTube videos about that day at <https://m.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnJKbEpCMbiG3iKGTvfeIQ2sy1aEQQjza> (accessed July 3, 2014).

²⁴⁹ I mentioned this earlier in the introduction. Egyptian historian Khaled Fahmy also described this period in an article titled "To Whom the Square Belonged," see <http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=23092012&id=e9eeb0ef-0b77-4c9f-a04a-2d09d18d8f48> (accessed June 30, 2014).

of the revolution and as the biggest square, hence why there is so much fighting over who occupies Tahrir now. This increased competition over public space also reflects the increasing polarization of the situation in Egypt. The phenomenon of competing squares reached its peak of bloody upheaval after the ousting of Morsi. While supporters of the coup were gathering in Tahrir for different days, in the aftermath of July 2013, MB supporters and Islamists occupied two squares to protest the oust of Morsi. These were in front of Cairo University (Nahda Square) and in front of Rabaa Al-Adawiya Mosque (Rabaa Al-Adawiya Square in Nasr City, Cairo). They succeeded in occupying these squares for almost a month and a half. But On August 14, 2013, Egyptian security forces and military raided the two camps and evacuated them by force. The authorities used excessive violence and many were killed. Different human rights groups estimate that no less than 1,000 people were killed in these raids. Human Rights Watch described this as the “most serious mass unlawful killing in modern Egypt.”²⁵⁰

The third main feature of spatiality and protest since the revolution is the intensification of the battle over the streets between the regime and protesters. This confrontation reached a new level when the government put severe conditions on protests in 2013. On November 24, the new government issued a law to supposedly regulate the right to protest, but which, in reality, essentially aimed to limit or even ban protests altogether. Human rights groups described it as draconian law.²⁵¹ And it seems that this was truly the case, as many activists have been targeted

²⁵⁰ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/19/egypt-security-forces-used-excessive-lethal-force> (accessed July 3, 2014).

²⁵¹ Throughout this dissertation, I have not discussed the question of the legality of protest in Egypt. The main reason for this is that legality has been historically manipulated by the regime and was never respected anyway. In other words, historically, activists and rights groups used to submit requests to the police to organize protests, and these requests are never honored. And this goes not only to what the regime saw as illegal groups, but also with the actual existing political parties. Even in the times of elections, rallies are controlled by the police and not allowed. What was allowed during election times were only confined gatherings. Also, earlier in this dissertation, and in Chapter 2, I discussed the colonial legacy of choosing Tahrir as a center of protest since 1919. This was due to the fact that the British

since the law was put in place. Some have been sentenced to 7 years or 15 years, just for protesting without permit. Alaa Abdel Fatah, one of the icons of the revolution and one of the founders of the blogging movement, has been sentenced to 15 years in jail, just for supposedly protesting without a permit. Also Ahmed Maher, one of the founders of the April 6 movement has also been sentenced to 7 years in jail, for the same reason.²⁵² Developments such as these are very important because, as discussed earlier, many activists in Egypt and especially after the revolution found that formal politics were too narrow and corrupt to effect any real change. In short, many activists thought that formal politics were still controlled by the old regime. Scholar Mona El-Ghobashy rightly suggested that in Egypt in the aftermath of the revolution, only street politics had a strong enough voice to make real change.²⁵³ This is exactly what was affirmed by many activists. Many of them have confirmed to me “the only and the main gain from the revolution was that we gained our right to protest in the street.” This law is ending this. This feature reflects the larger issue I described earlier about the fact of many activists in Egypt still distrust formal politics, and see it, especially after their experience under authoritarianism, as simply one more way for regimes to manipulate politics and delay real change.

barracks were concentrated in the Tahrir area, in what is now known as Qasr Elnile Bridge. There is another colonial legacy of protest control in Egypt, and this is the Illegal Assembly Law of 1914, Law 10 of 1914. This law was enacted by the colonial administration in Egypt in 1914 and remains in effect to this today. But it seems that the new regime thought that this “repressive” law was not enough, hence their enactment of an even more repressive law against protests. See <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/10/30/egypt-draft-law-would-effectively-ban-protests> (accessed July 3, 2014).

²⁵² See coverage of these arrests and sentences at: https://www.ifex.org/egypt/2014/06/27/23_anti_protestlaw_activists_detained/; http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/26/world/middleeast/egypt-law-street-protests.html?_r=0; <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/06/30/ngo-shocked-continued-detention-anti-protest-law-demonstrators/>; and <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/53e7b196-551f-11e3-86bc-00144feabdc0.html#axzz36LP7st5I> (all accessed July 3, 2014).

²⁵³ Mona El-Ghobashy, “Politics by Other Means,” *Boston Review*, November 1, 2011, <http://www.bostonreview.net/mona-el-ghobashy-egypt-revolution-tahrir-square> (accessed July 3, 2014).

II. Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This research has three empirical implications and six theoretical implications, as well as one conclusion with both theoretical and empirical significance. I will begin with the empirical implications. The first of these is the potentiality of future political coalitions in Egypt. As this research shows, there has long been tensions regarding the inclusion of the MB and Islamists in political coalitions in Egypt, dating from well before the revolution. These tensions were not only on the side of leftist and secular groups, but on the “side” of the MB side as well. And as we have seen since 2013, these tensions have only gotten worse in the aftermath of the ousting of Morsi. Thus, even though it is difficult to predict or be certain with respect to a big state/society like Egypt, given the history of coalition building in Egypt as well as the events in the aftermath of ousting Morsi, there appears to be little chance for coalitions between Islamic forces and secular/liberal forces in Egypt in the near future.

The second empirical implication that this research highlights concerns the various protest repertoires that took place outside of Tahrir. The emergence of the sit-in as the central mode of action reflects the centrality of Tahrir and the class consensus that existed there. As I will discuss below, this raises theoretical questions regarding whether or not some repertoires are shaped by the dominance of populations of specific classes. But on the empirical level, it is fair to say that any mass actions in Egypt in the future may suffer the same outcome and limitation of what happened during the revolution if they remain centralized in downtown Cairo and/or become dominated by the pattern of a “peaceful limited gathering of some population,” without any intention of escalation against the state. Yes, my research shows that Tahrir protestors planned to escalate and attack centers of power, and some of this happened on the day before

ousting Mubarak with plans to march to the presidential palace. But in general, the protest was peaceful and did not entail major escalation or plans to seize power, something crucial in revolutions. In other words, the main lesson that activists may learn in Egypt is that protestors should think outside the Tahrir model of organizing. And the main lesson for observers about Egypt and analysts is to investigate carefully how repertoires reflect specific types of class politics.

The third empirical implication is the very characterization of the revolution as a process or as unsettled as discussed above. Even if we agree that the revolution failed (at least for now), and that the old regime—led by the military now explicitly, despite the superficial changes took place with election—is in total control of the state, this does not mean that the state is stable. Surely one of the main lessons from the Arab Spring is that theories regarding “robust authoritarianism” that have dominated analyses of the Middle East need questioning and revisiting (see Bellin 2012). As the research shows, things are still in flux in Egypt. The old regime may have won a decisive battle against the revolution, but if we look at the revolution as a process, and that robust repression does not work, this tells us that Egypt will not be stable for a while.

I will move now to the theoretical implications. The first of these is that a mode of action analysis can tell us a lot about a big event like a revolution. As I have hopefully demonstrated, such an analysis can inform us about many things—not only the spatial power of the revolution, but also its spatial limitation. We saw, for example, how the scope of protestors’ grievances and subsequent demands were limited by the (constructed) concentration of the revolution in one place—a concentration that reflected and in some ways intensified the consensus of the revolution’s participants. I would argue that a mode of action analysis of the revolution tells us a

lot about its successes and limitations. It directs us to investigate closely when repertoires and revolutionary forces converge and when they diverge. It can help to provide some clues about the discrepancy between a “strong” revolutionary situation and a “poor” revolutionary outcome. As Tilly rightly suggested before, dominant frameworks in the study of revolutions suffer a major drawback in terms of their lack of “systematic investigations of how revolutionary situations turn into revolutionary outcomes” (Tilly 2001: 195).

The second theoretical implication is that this research is an invitation to rethink the meaning and application of the notion of rupture in revolutions. In the literature on revolution, there is a common idea that revolutions entail a major split or break from the past or at least an emergence of new paradigms of thinking or knowledge. Of course, this idea may be referring mainly to cases of “successful revolutions,” something Tilly has already noted the scholarship tends to focus too narrowly upon (Tilly 2001: 194). Revolutions always entail a conjuncture of historical conditions that make them occur, but this conjuncture does not come out of nowhere. My analysis shows that the revolution was connected to the past in many ways. The revolution itself in Egypt did not cut the relation with the past. In one sense, the Egyptian revolution may be a failed revolution. But if we looked at it as a process, this research is also an invitation to rethink the meaning of rupture in relation to revolution.²⁵⁴

The third theoretical implication of this research is its contribution to understanding the process of marginalization in social movements and revolutions. I proposed that marginalization in the case of Tahrir was effected through what I described as a “revolutionary boundary.” And

²⁵⁴ For a similar point as I am making here, see historian Irène Herrmann’s, “Introduction–Ruptures in Revolution,” *La Révolution française*, December 9, 2011, <http://lrf.revues.org/319> (accessed July 3, 2014). See also Olivia Harris (2004) argument that Braudel focused on long time spans, the *longue durée*, and history as continuity, thus giving insufficient attention to the idea of rupture or breaks in time, and that he avoided clear periodization.

this worked through two mechanisms: internally through the dominance of the idea of unity, where, as a price of unity, many voices got marginalized. And this also worked externally, where the main mechanism was the ambivalence of the relation between other revolutionary forces or modes of actions taking place outside what was constructed at the time as the center of action or the revolution. Again, this is only one case study and my proposed explanation in this research may not be generalizable to other cases. But this idea is worth investigating further; specifically, it worth examining how mechanisms of marginalization coincide with (both physical and symbolic) spatial marginalization.

The fourth theoretical implication of this research is that it highlights the need to take not only spatiality, but also temporality seriously in the study of mobilization and social movements. Much social movement literature underestimates the impact of temporality on framing or resource mobilization, even though the literature admits that mobilizations are processes that vary over time. In 2001, McAdam and Sewell, for example, suggested that the two main temporal logics that dominate the study of social movements are studying them as part of a “long-term change process” or as protest cycles (2001: 90). One can add to these two other logics. The first is from the work of Sewell, which is to study movements—in this case, studying a revolution as a movement—as contingent events (Sewell 1996). The second is studying movements in terms of their continuity and with respect to the question of abeyance (Taylor 1989). My research shows that previous movements were connected to the new movements—in this case the revolution itself—in different ways. This included: 1) temporal connection through the spatiality of Tahrir, as an important historical protest site, 2) through repertoire, in terms of the idea of occupation itself, 3) through grievance, in terms of the dominance of the idea of political reform over a more revolutionary agenda, and 4) through the actors themselves, some of

whom participated in older protests where their old experience shaped their participation in the revolution. In other words, one can suggest that instead of studying only one movement in the past or in the present, it is important to study the connections between old movements and new movements, and to investigate rigorously the different types and logics of temporal connections between the two. My aim is to expand this research with the enormous data I have and to investigate seriously the idea of movements' temporal successions/connections: in terms of logics space, repertoire, agenda, and actors.

The fifth theoretical implication of this research is its invitation to question the very meaning of regime change in revolutions. Scholars of revolutions coined the term “refolution” after the Orange Revolutions, where they saw change limited to negotiated or electoral reforms. And we learned from both the Orange revolutions of 1989 and the Arab Spring, as has been made very obvious here in the Egyptian case, that ousting dictators does not necessarily mean per se the downfall of the regime. If we agree that the Egyptian regime was personalistic (or “Sultanistic” to use Goldstone’s term), then the capability of the regime to survive and fight back, if not also reversing the revolution, is a puzzle that needs an explanation. The puzzle here is how a regime that seemed to be personalistic, a dictatorial regime that was centered around one leader, was capable to adapt and not only to survive, but also to fight back after the ousting of that leader. Of course, in the case of Egypt, this means delving further into the specific history of the military and its complex relation with the state, and also examining the role of significant superpowers like the U.S. in sustaining the regime. Egyptian revolutionaries themselves were divided and argued about the difference between regime change and seizing state power or change in the

state. In other words, the tension and relation between the regime and the state is something that warrants more investigation.²⁵⁵

A sixth theoretical implication of this research is its challenge to literature in social movements and communication studies that creates a rigid binary between online and offline activism. In this research, it was showed that this binary is faulty, and maybe exaggerated. In many cases, activists who have been working online took their actions to the streets. And likewise, activists who worked primarily online nonetheless coordinated behind the scenes (due to security reasons) with activists working on the ground. In other words, what often appeared to be online activism only was, in fact, an outcome of coordination between online activists and offline activists. Of course, in a major event like a revolution, the argument that the revolution was made or decided on-line is obsolete. But in general, this research is still an invitation to re-think this binary. This binary may be created only for analytical and academic purposes, but it is important to acknowledge its limitation.

I will end here with a specific conclusion from this research that has both empirical and also theoretical implications. This refers to the idea of political public space, and specifically how activists or concerned citizens navigate their actions among three spaces: formal political space, social media space, and the space of street politics. A close analysis of the history of mobilization in Egypt before the revolution reveals all three as spaces in and through which the broader political public space was constituted. By examining the history of mobilization in these three space, particularly in the decade before the revolution, I was able to identity a pattern whereby Egyptian activists turned to social media space and street politics when formal political space was virtually closed. The general logic was that street politics were used as an alternative

²⁵⁵ The different meanings of regime change in revolution have been much discussed, particularly in political science. See, for, example Bermeo (1990), Hale (2005, 2013), and Kis (1995).

to and against the restrictions in formal politics. Social media in general was in the backseat to street politics, but it sometimes came into the front seat when street politics were blocked or banned. But the aim of both the spaces of social media and street politics was to expand the formal politics space. They were alternative and against formal politics in general, sometimes against it altogether, but the aim was always to expand and push the limits of formal politics, and pave a road to democracy in Egypt.

Empirically, in the context in which the current regime is essentially shutting down street politics, and has plans to spend enormous amount of money for surveillance of social media, there will be nowhere for Egyptians to practice politics *other* than the realm of formal politics.²⁵⁶ The new regime would do well to recall that this narrowing of political space was one of the main triggers of the revolution against Mubarak. Regardless of how fair elections might be under the current military regime in Egypt in the future, given the relatively recent occurrence of a revolution and the renewed context of a closed civil society featuring censorship and repression, these conditions will not be satisfactory to many Egyptians. At the very least, the situation does not bode well for a stable regime. Theoretically, then, the relationship between these three spaces (formal politics, social media, and street politics) within the overall political public space, with the specific formulations and conclusions learned from the Egyptian case before the revolution, is worth more investigation and application in some other authoritarian contexts.

²⁵⁶ See Patrick Kingsley, "Egypt's Police Seek Ability to Monitor Social Media for Signs of Dissent," *The Guardian*, June 2, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/02/egypt-police-monitor-social-media-dissent-facebook-twitter-protest> (accessed July 3, 2014). See also reports that the plans for new electoral laws in Egypt seem to be privileging individual businesspersons and not political parties, where about 2/3 of the parliamentary seats will be reserved for individual candidates not political party candidates. This will mean limiting the changes of political parties, and gave more changes to old elites with money. see <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/06/us-egypt-election-idUSKBN0EH16L20140606> (accessed July 3, 2014).

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

(University of Michigan-Ann Arbor IRB No: HUM00053086)

Investigator: Atef Said, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Sociology, University of Michigan

First: General Demographic Information

- 1) Name:
- 2) Age:
- 3) Gender:
- 4) Occupation:
- 5) How do you see yourself in terms of class (choose one of the following: working class, middle class, upper middle class, capitalist class)? And tell me why you chose so?
- 6) Also if you do not feel comfortable or have difficulty choosing from the above, please choose from the following options (you are economically: barely surviving, have a little extra income beyond surviving, have a lot of money beyond surviving)

Second: General Questions about activism, participation in the revolution:

- 1) Did you participate in any protest before January 25, 2011 revolution? What are these?
- 2) Did you consider yourself a political activist before the revolution? Why?
- 3) Describe to me what you did generally in the days from January 25 to February 11, 2011?
- 4) Do you have important stories that you do not mind sharing about these days? What are these?

Third: Questions about classes in the revolution:

- 1) Most analysts and media circles portray the revolution as initiated and led mainly by middle class Egyptian youth (those who have I-phones and activists in the social media?). Do you think that this portrayal is accurate? Why or why not?
- 2) Do you remember the presence of trade unions and working class protesters in Tahrir? Tell me more about that, if yes?
- 3) Did you learn that many workers' strikes took place in the last days of the revolution? Do you think these were important? Why or why not?
- 4) Many activists I talked too, and also when I was in Tahrir, told me that many owners of small businesses and white collar workers were in Tahrir and participated in the revolution? How do you explain that?
- 5) If all of these stories are true, how do you explain that blue collar, white collar, and small business owners/middle class people participated in the revolution?

Fourth: Questions about Tahrir:

- 1) Did you participate in the famous sit-in in Tahrir Square from January 25 to Feb 11, 2011? (this section in the questions may be skipped if the subject did not participate, and she/he can answer only relevant questions)

- 2) If yes, describe to me your participation in these days?
- 3) In your opinion, why protesters decided to hold a sit-in in Tahrir in the first place?
- 4) Describe the sit-in in terms of the organization of space?
- 5) Describe the sit-in in terms of social life and day and night activities..etc?
- 6) Did particular political movements and coalitions organize the sit-in? If yes, what are these?
- 7) From your observations and experience in the sit-in, how was the diversity of opinions managed in the sit-in?
- 8) In the media and according to many analysts, the Egyptian revolution was referred to as the Tahrir revolution? Why is that in your opinion?
- 9) Are there any specific reasons why Tahrir Square was geographically important?
- 10) After the revolution, activists kept coming back to Tahrir, why is that?

Fifth: Questions about the revolution/demands and vision about the state?

- 1) In the revolution, protesters raised a general slogan: “ the people want the downfall of this regime.” Do you remember the first time this slogan was raised?
- 2) Protesters tried to translate their general demands into another slogan: “bread, freedom and social justice.” What does this mean?
- 3) Protesters also made a list of demands about the revolution, do you remember these demands? Tell me some of them?
- 4) One of the key demands was to establish a democratic state, which is based on parliamentary democracy? Why is that?
- 5) Do you think that this demand is sufficient or may be seen as the corner stone of the list of demands? Why, why not?
- 6) Do you remember any discussions in Tahrir and or during the time of the revolution about the experience or the failure of parliamentary democracy in Europe, and hence, it is not enough to raise this demand in the Egyptian revolution? If this happened, tell us about these discussions?
- 7) Were you and or others worried about the role of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces leading the transitional period in Egypt? Why?

Last:

- 1) In your opinion, what happened in the transitional period so far, in terms of factor that make you worry or make you assured about the future democracy in Egypt?
- 2) Do you have any general comments you want to add about the revolution?

Appendix 2: Political Protests in Contemporary Egypt since 1919

Date	Protest for/against	In or near what is now Tahrir Square?
1919	Protest against British Occupation.	Protests throughout Cairo and Egypt, but especially in Tahrir, given the location of British Army barracks there.
February 1936	Protest against the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, guaranteeing superficial independence for Egypt.	Yes, for the same reason above.
February 21, 1946	Protest calling for British forces to evacuate the Nile Valley completely (Egypt and Sudan).	Yes; evacuated by force when police and British military opened Abbas bridge and many students protestors drowned in the Nile.
December 14, 1947	Protest against UN resolution number 181 creating a partition between Palestine and Israel.	Yes; but even more in Cairo Opera House Square, also known as Ibrahim Pasha Square.
November 14, 1951	Protest against British occupation.	Yes; again targeting location of barracks. Students and protesters marched from Tahrir to the King's palace in Abdeen Square nearby.
June 9, 1967	Sparked by Nasser stepping down following military defeat by Israel; Egyptians took to the streets to demand his return.	Yes; crowds also gathered in front of Nasser's home in Qouba.
February 1968	Student demonstration calling for more freedoms and protesting the verdicts in the trials of military personnel charged as responsible for the 1967 defeat.	Yes
January 1972	Student protest of the lack of an equitable social justice system and democracy, and President Sadat's failure to liberate the occupied Sinai peninsula.	Yes; students occupied Tahrir for almost one day.
January 1977	Popular protests against end of state subsidies	Yes

	for basic foodstuffs, Sadat's first introduction of IMF policies in Egypt.	
September 10, 2001	Part of a series of protests across Egyptian universities following the second Palestinian Intifada (uprising) in 2000, in solidarity with Palestinians	Yes; protests were blockaded by the police in the area in front of Mogamma.
March 20-21, 2003	Popular protest against the Anglo-American war on Iraq	Yes; protestors occupied Tahrir for roughly one day
March 2006	Protestors staged sit-in in solidarity with pro-democracy judges prosecuted by Mubarak regime	Yes; protestors occupied Tahrir for roughly one day.
July 2006	Demonstration in solidarity with Lebanon during the Israeli war	Yes
April 6, 2008	Demonstration in solidarity with Mahala Kobbra workers	Yes
January 25, 2011	Egyptian Revolution	Yes; protesters occupied Tahrir for the 18 days of the revolution.

Table compiled by the author (sources: Abdel Razeq (1985), El-Hamalawy (2001), Farag (1999), and Taher (2012), as well as interviews conducted with Egyptian activists).

Appendix 3: List of Major Political Coalitions in Egypt, 2000–2010²⁵⁷

Date of formation (approx.)	Name of coalition	Component groups/forces	Main objectives	Status
2000	The Egyptian Committee for Defending the Prisoners of Consciousness	Formed by leftists and Islamist lawyers and hosted by the Egyptian Bar Association and the Egyptian Press Syndicate.	To defend prisoners of consciousness in Egypt	Continues today, mainly hosted by the Egyptian Press Syndicate.
September 2000	The Popular Committee for the Solidarity with the Egyptian Intifada	Formed mainly by activists from the 1970s generation; also included members of these groups: Karama Party (new Nasserist group), Egyptian Communist Party, Tagamou leftist party, revolutionary socialists, and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB).	To collect donations, food and medical aid for Palestinians, as well as to protest against Mubarak regime's complicity/biased role in the peace process.	Divisions developed between reformist and more radical members; reemerged in April 2002 for a short period, and again in 2009 after the siege of Gaza. No longer exists in practice.
August 2001	Coordinating Committee for Workers and Trade Union Rights	Started as an initiative by unionists and human rights NGOs working on labor issues; later joined by many parties and groups	To assist trade unions and workers with labor rights/organizing issues; provides legal aid and awareness campaigns	Continues today

²⁵⁷ I constructed this table based on my own experience and knowledge, and also on discussions and interviews with many activists, including Ayman Abdel Moati and Yehia Fekry, both of whom participated in many of these coalitions. Abdel Moati, in particular, assisted me in constructing the table. Four articles by Amira Howeidly about the period from 2000 to 2005 published in *Al-Ahram Weekly* were also especially useful. See: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/731/eg10.htm>; also, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/748/eg10.htm>; also, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/748/eg8.htm>; and <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/748/eg9.htm> (all last accessed June 1, 2014).

		and other additional unionists later		
September 2001; first formal founding meeting on June 28, 2002	The Anti-Globalization Egyptian Group (AGEG)	Leftist and socialist organizations, but also open to individual members.	To mobilize against globalization and neo-liberal policies in Egypt, particularly those negatively affecting workers, peasants, and the poor in Egypt. Organized a public conference opposing visit of the World Bank president to Egypt on October 12, 2003.	Defunct
September 2001	Coalition Against the War on Afghanistan	Impromptu coalition that included socialists, Nasserists, and other independent members	To mobilize people in the streets in opposition to the U.S. war on Afghanistan	Defunct
December 2002	Egyptian Popular Campaign Against the War, Imperialism, and Zionism	Founded by the Nasserists party, and also Karama party, as well as socialists, mainly the Revolutionary Socialists, as well as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian Communist Party.	To coordinate and organize efforts to support anti-colonial and anti-war movements in the region. Organized an annual international conference in Cairo against the war for six years, from 2002–2008.	Ended in 2008.
January 2003	Campaign Against the War on Iraq	Leftists (socialists and Nasserists, and others)	To mobilize people in the streets in opposition to the U.S. war on Iraq. Developed as part of an international campaign (and regular conference in Cairo) against war and imperialism.	Faded after 2005.
March 9, 2003	Movement for Independence of Universities (March 9 movement)	Mostly individuals but many of them belong to political forces and parties, mostly liberal and leftists.	To defend universities against state control, and expose corruption on campuses (sparked by Cairo University's administration	Continues today.

			appropriating a building for Gamal Mubarak's Association- Al-Mostaqbal)	
January 4, 2004	Committee to Defend Pension Rights for the Retired	Mostly leftist lawyers and unionists, but joined with workers and unions and groups.	To save pensions and pension rights (due to the fact that the government under Mubarak wasted most pension money).	Now defunct, but did give birth to a union of the retired which was founded after the revolution
Founding meeting on March 13, 2004	20 March Movement for Change (named after the protest held the year before against the war on Iraq)	Mostly socialists from different groups, but also open to individuals	To mobilize against despotism, dictatorship, poverty, and imperialism.	Defunct.
September 4, 2004	Kefayya (Enough), The Egyptian Movement for Change	Nasserists, Socialists and members in different political parties, and also NGOs, with individuals from the MB	To mobilize around amending the constitution to allow multi-candidate based presidency and free elections, among other things.	Active until the revolution (but became less visible after the formation of the National Association for Change in 2010, see below)
September 2004	National Coalition for Change	MB and Revolutionary Socialists (RS), as well as members in the March 20 movement	To mobilize for democracy in Egypt, specifically, to end succession and make constitutional amendments. Organized some press conferences and protests.	Short-lived and generally ineffective; seen as largely dominated by the MB members, who outnumbered RS members.
2005	Leftist Union	Many socialist organizations and parties in Egypt (mostly underground) such as the Egyptian Communist party, the People's Party, and the Revolutionary Socialists.; did <i>not</i> include the Tagamou Party.	To build a general socialist network (and, hopefully, a Socialist Party in the future); activities were limited to meetings and writing papers.	Did not continue beyond 2005.
2005	Workers for	Unionists, NGOs,	To apply minimum	Defunct

	Change	and individuals.	wage in Egypt; change bonuses regulations; enact laws about work space health conditions, and laws related to health and social insurance to workers; criminalize child labor; and change laws related to labor organizing rights to make sure they meet international standards.	
February 2005	Youth For Change	Youth from different parties such as the Nasserist party, Ghad party, Karama party, Revolutionary Socialists, and also Wasat party, and labor party, and independent youth	Started as part of Kefayya, but split off when youth wanted to be more flexible with organizing activities. Works mostly for the same goals of Kefayya but in campuses and streets.	Now defunct, but gave birth to many later youth groups such as the April 6 movement and others.
June 2005	Journalists for Change	Members in press syndicates from different parties, but mostly members in Kefayya	To end emergency status in Egypt and release political prisoners; also to change press laws in Egypt to make sure journalists not jailed for their writings.	Defunct
June 2005	Writers and Artists for Change	Artists, writers, and public intellectuals, some independent and some belonging to parties.	To mobilize for democratic change in Egypt and also to defend the rights of artists who died in Bani Suef (a theatre which was burned in 2005). Organized a number of protests in downtown Cairo, particularly Talat Harb Square.	Defunct
2005	Engineers for Change	Engineers, mostly members in Kefayya	To mobilize for the independence of the Engineers Syndicates from the control of	Defunct

			the state, and also mobilize for democracy in Egypt	
June 29, 2005	Lawyers for Change	Lawyers, especially members in Kefayya	To mobilize for democracy and liberties in Egypt, including rights to organize and personal freedoms and also to end emergency status.	Defunct
July 30, 2005	Students for Change	Students members in Kefayya and political parties	To end Mubarak rule and stop succession in Egypt, end security control of campuses, and expand free education to all, end emergency status, and establish independent universities	Defunct
April 2006	Egyptians Against Religious Discrimination	Founded by 200 Egyptian individuals—mostly public intellectuals, writers, academics, and activists—many of whom are members in various parties, groups, and associations.	To defend citizens and citizenship rights, especially those of minorities facing religious discrimination.	Continues today.
August 2006	Leftist Coalition	Many socialist organizations and parties in Egypt (mostly underground) such as the Egyptian Communist party, the People’s Party and the Revolutionary socialists; <i>did</i> include Tagamou Party.	To build a network of socialist groups in Egypt to work together around issues of poverty and social justice; activities were limited to meetings and writing papers.	Did not continue.
December 28, 2006	Front to Defend Peasants (Peasants Strife Campaign)	Political parties and NGOs and leaders of farmers movements	To support struggle of peasants in Egypt, end peasants debt in Egypt, and combat the negative implication of law number 96 for year 1992 (The purpose of	Defunct

			this law was to undo the policy of land appropriations and rent laws for poor peasants set since Nasser in 1952, which means more privatization of agriculture, seen as more bias for land lords and old feudalists in Egypt)	
2007	Doctors without Rights	Individual doctors and activists, especially in the doctors syndicates, and doctors who are members in political parties .	To apply special laws for underpaid doctors, who work in the government, increase bonuses related the conditions of doctors work, and improve the health care budget in Egypt.	Continues today (and gave birth to Doctors of Tahrir, an entity that assisted the injured in Tahrir during the revolution and in the transitional period)
May 2008	National Committee to Defend Egypt's Wealth	Mostly individuals but members in political parties and other groups too	To organize campaigns against exporting Gas to Israel, end and/or limit monopoly in Egypt, and also organize campaigns against the government wasting natural resources in Egypt.	Unclear when it ended, but probably gave birth to a similar group after the revolution that aimed to get back money stolen by Mubarak officials.
February 19, 2008	Tadamon (Solidarity)	Revolutionary socialists, unionists, and some members in NGOs	To support social movements in Egypt especially labor movements and economic and social justice based movements	Did not continue, but there were some attempts to revive it in 2009.
September 21, 2008	Egyptian Movement for Democracy (Shorakaa-Partners)	Individuals, and NGOs	To make constitutional amendments to article 76 (facilitating Gamal Mubarak's succession), and limit presidential terms to two.	Defunct
May 22,	Popular	Revolutionary	To assist workers in	Ended before

2009	Preparatory Commission for Labor	Socialists, unionists and some members in NGOs	Egypt to unionize, launch campaign to enact a minimum wage law in Egypt, stop privatization, and end monopoly corporations in Egypt and/or nationalize these.	the revolution.
October 2009	Egyptian Campaign Against Succession	Members from different political parties and NGOs	To campaign against the succession of Gamal Mubarak to his father's position; involved political, constitutional, media and legal fronts, as well as raising awareness about the issue.	Ended with the revolution.
December 8, 2009	Egyptian Campaign to Boycott Gas Companies	Open to individuals and political parties and groups	To boycott natural gas company in Egypt (through not paying the monthly bills) to protest overpricing and also to stop exporting gas to Israel.	Defunct
January 9, 2010	Egyptian Campaign to Combat the Wall of Shame	Individuals and groups from different parties	To protest against the building of an underground steel wall between Egypt and Gaza, and to organize campaigns to collect donations for Palestinians	Defunct
March 2, 2010	The National Association For Change	Almost all opposition political parties in Egypt, with NGOs and political groups from socialists to Islamic groups. Was the main platform for youth groups and demands in the revolution. Collected over a million signatures to endorse demands, and chaired by El Baradei.	To end emergency status, and demand judicial supervision of election, as well as constitutional amendments.	Continues today and played an important role in the revolution.
June 2010	Democratic	Mostly leftist	To mobilize masses	Continues today

	Popular Movement for Change (Hashd)	individuals and organizations, but coordinated mainly by Revolutionary Socialists	for change in Egypt, and to build a radical revolutionary alternative in Egypt.	but is largely ineffective.
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