Tahrir's Youth

LEADERS OF A LEADERLESS REVOLUTION

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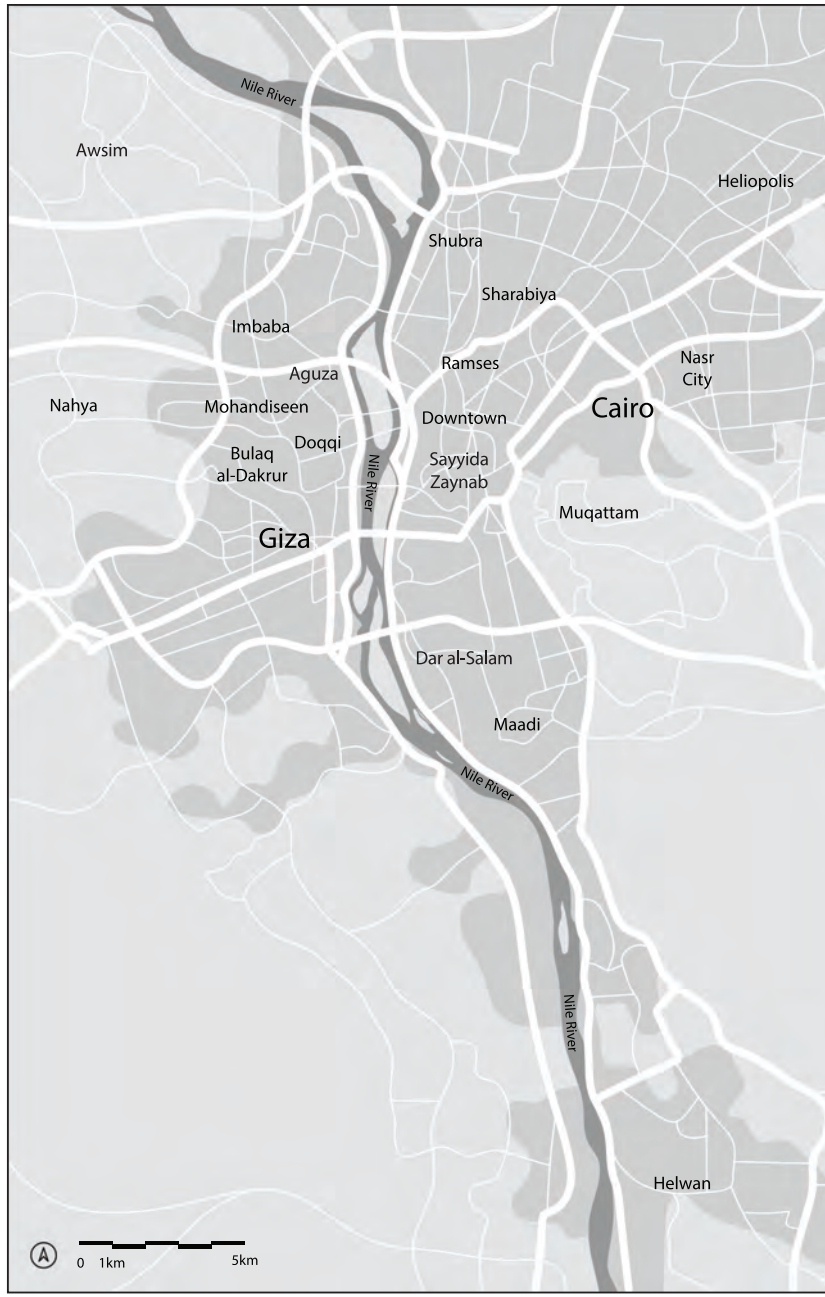

Map 1. Map of Greater Cairo showing the major districts cited in this book. Map courtesy of CLUSTER.

Introduction

Deadly clashes between protesters and police had been raging on Muhammad Mahmud Street off Tahrir Square for nearly four straight days as I made my way to the vicinity, which I had done daily since the battle first erupted. It was Tuesday, November 22, 2011, and activists had called for mass protests nationwide to force the generals of the Security Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), who had been ruling Egypt since the fall of President Hosni Mubarak, to relinquish power immediately to a civilian transitional government. Dubbed the "Second Revolution," the demonstrations were the largest Egypt had seen since the president stepped down earlier that year on February 11 and exposed SCAF's vulnerability and failures at governing. The activists hoped to press the advantage the new November uprising had given them to wrest control of the country from the generals and set it back on track toward their revolutionary goals. I was eager to return to Tahrir to find out the latest developments and learn how the revolutionaries were organizing themselves and their new sit-in to capitalize on this unexpected and hopeful political opening.

After disembarking at Sadat metro station and passing through the dimly lit underground tunnels, I emerged from the exit near Qasr al-Nil Bridge to find Tahrir basking in the glow of the last bit of sunlight before dusk. In the distance, near Hardee's and Pizza Hut, a thick cloud of tear gas and black smoke hovered over the street where mostly poor, young men hurled their righteous fury at bullet-firing police in the form of stones, Molotov cocktails, homemade bombs, and the fuming tear-gas canisters also shot at them by police. A swarm of spectators had convened to spur them on from behind. The rest of the square was jostling with the thousands of Egyptians who had turned out to show their solidarity—many of them provoked by the footage that had just surfaced of soldiers coldly dragging the dead bodies of protesters across the concrete and piling them

on mounds of trash—but also to enjoy the convivial, street-fair atmosphere typical of Tahrir protests. Most incongruous was the cotton-candy man, whose enormous pink cloud of spun sugar floating over the sea of demonstrators offset the intensity of the smoke-filled scene with a bit of whimsy. Ambulances and volunteer motorcyclists transporting the scores of injured from the field clinics to the hospital rushed in and out of the precinct (a total of fifty-one killed and three thousand injured during the Muhammad Mahmud street clashes meant this was the worst incident of state violence against protesters since the revolution's start).[1] Meanwhile, wailing sirens and explosions near the protesters sporadically ripped through the murmur of conversation, battle racket, and revolutionary chants against the army—"*al-sha'b yurid i'dam al-mushir!*" (The people want the execution of the field marshal!) was just one of the refrains the more militant protesters shouted during this latest revolutionary upsurge. Near the center of the square, an effigy of Defense Minister Muhammad Husayn Tantawi dangled by the neck from a high lamppost, illustrating what they meant.

What stood out to me the most that day was not the conflicting elements of the scene—by then I had grown accustomed to Tahrir's discordant violence and ebullience. Rather, what caught my eye was a giant, white banner that was newly raised in this seemingly ever-morphing square. Unlike the usual banners that articulated the revolutionaries' demands for the state elite and greater public beyond Tahrir, this one addressed the protesters onsite. In large Arabic letters, it read,

> Rules of the Square
>
> 1. It is absolutely prohibited to establish any independent stage in the square.
> 2. It is absolutely prohibited to raise any slogans pertaining to any particular political party or movement.
> 3. The square has one microphone. No other is permitted.
>
> One voice . . .
>
> One battle fought by us all under the slogan
> "Sovereignty for the Egyptian people!"
> We are all Egyptians!

The sign was oddly captivating. The voice behind the text was crisp; it spoke rightfully and authoritatively but also anonymously. It was as if its creators

were trying to incite the people to take ownership of these rules as though they had written them, to stir their consciousness as a unified, revolutionary, collective actor. To me, this nondescript sign evoked the behind-the-scenes struggle of Egypt's leading revolutionaries to impose order and organization on the movement and give it direction without stepping to its forefront as leaders. In many ways, the artifact spoke to the paradoxical story of the simultaneous presence and absence of leadership in the Egyptian revolution that had fascinated me since the revolutionary movement first erupted. It might not have been clear to the average protester where this sign had come from, but I had some idea. It had all the markings of the youth activists I had been following for my fieldwork, the leaders of this leaderless revolution.

The story of how this movement first erupted is familiar to many by now. On January 25, 2011, the people of Egypt burst onto the stage of history and improvised a spectacular eighteen-day drama in revolutionary resistance that captured the imagination of audiences around the world. The rage that drove them was fueled by at least a decade's worth of crushing poverty, government neglect, political repression, police brutality, rampant corruption, and an enduring foreign policy subservient to US imperial interests and impervious to their own. Armed with nothing but their grievances and the righteousness of their cause, Egyptians of every stripe shook off their fear and joined hardened activists in the streets and city squares to challenge the people and system that oppressed them. Their resistance culminated in the spectacular fall of Mubarak, the man who ruled them for thirty years like a pharaoh, hastening what felt like an irreversible turn toward a new era of openness, accountability, opportunity, and political freedom. Excluded, demoralized, voiceless for decades, Egyptians unleashed a wave of hope with their revolutionary upheaval, which ripped across the region and evoked the faith of believers and skeptics alike in the power of the people. In so doing, they quickly became global heroes.

In the wake of this extraordinary event, one nagging question occupied observers of Middle East politics: how did this happen? How did a people berated for their apathy and stereotyped as politically backward and unready for democracy suddenly come together in one of the most astonishing revolutionary mobilizations of our time and manage to evict their deeply entrenched leader in less than three weeks?

There is no single answer to this question. Revolutions are, after all, complex processes that lend themselves to many readings, and Egypt's

revolutionary movement has been no exception. Early attempts to explain the sudden outburst celebrated it as a spontaneous expression of popular frustration that was facilitated by technology such as the Internet, especially social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. They also cited the significance of its leaderless nature, noting the remarkable absence of a single galvanizing charismatic leader—think Lenin, Mao, Castro—or a vanguard organization at its helm as has been the case in most revolutionary movements. On the other hand, the role of youth as a collective that ignited and spurred this movement has been duly noted. However, discussions about young people's role have been problematic for several reasons. First, their story has often been limited to how they used Internet tools to organize. Second, discussions about youth have mostly referenced them as a homogenous category, overlooking significant structural differences that have historically separated them, such as class, gender, and religion, in addition to other factors that might have shaped their trajectory into politics and their organizing activities during the movement. Third, they have offered little insight into how individual youth leaders—the actors in real time and space—organized for the January 25 uprising and attempted to sustain it the following eighteen days and ensuing revolutionary period.[2]

This book's reading of the revolution, then, focuses on its youthful leadership. I examine the unfolding of the revolutionary process from the perspective of the young, organized activists who were some of its main drivers. As I illustrate in this book, this process does not begin on January 25 but stretches back much further, deep into the lives of these activists and the history of their country. Specifically, I focus on those activists based in Cairo who played an instrumental role in instigating January 25 and would become the leaders of the Revolutionary Youth Coalition (RYC). The RYC was the first revolutionary entity to announce itself from Tahrir Square during the early eighteen-day uprising and functioned as one of its main nerve centers. It was comprised of the political youth groups that had been the most active before January 25 and whose collaboration had begun long before the revolt. Together, they reflected the diverse political ideologies that existed in Tahrir. In telling the story of these young protagonists, I complicate the discussion on leadership and leaderlessness in Egypt's revolutionary process. In keeping with Antonio Gramsci's contention that there is no such thing as a truly spontaneous movement,[3] I argue that the existence of the RYC and the organizing its members undertook before and during the eighteen-day uprising demonstrates that the uprising was not

entirely spontaneous, leaderless, or rooted in social media, but led by young activists with a history of political engagement predating the revolution.

I have chosen to emphasize the narratives of ten RYC leaders who reflect the diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, ideological leanings, personal histories, and subjective transformations of the youth activists who participated in this movement. I trace the trajectories of these activists from when they first became politically conscious and active before the revolution up until about 2015, after they had endured nearly four years of intense revolutionary struggle against four different regimes: first Mubarak's, then SCAF's, then the Muslim Brotherhood's, then the ascendent General Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi's. In the process, I reconstruct the stories and emergent revolutionary subjectivities of these youth leaders, taking into consideration questions of gender, class, religion, and ideology. What emerges is a nuanced portrait of revolutionary youth leadership that challenges the dominant media constructs circulated in the early days of the revolt. The RYC leaders I profile in this book differ from those who appeared frequently in international news media outlets during the initial uprising. Mostly secular, upper-class cosmopolitan youth who garnered fame outside of Egypt for their English updates on Twitter, very few of these latter activists appeared to have acted in a visible leadership capacity on the ground as organizers before or during the revolution. The RYC activists differ in this respect, and in that many of them identified as members of the subaltern communities whose grievances were the main thrust behind the revolt. Through the experiences of this cohort and an understanding of their motives, hopes, visions, and struggles, we can access many of the forces that shaped the emergence of Egypt's revolutionary movement and get a sense of the people and the political ideas that will continue to compete for the country's future.

What that future will look like has always been unclear, but as of this writing, it appears far less fluid than it did during the heady days of the eighteen-day uprising. Back then, as Egypt's masses started to command more and more power and the long odds against them started to shift in their favor, the revolutionary movement's prospect for sweeping away the old order and ushering in the kind of radical social and political change the activists aspired to felt excitingly promising. But the story turned out quite differently. The unbridled optimism and creative energy that animated revolutionaries during those triumphant days would melt into bitter disillusionment, despair, and even trauma as they watched the hard-won gains

they had made toward a more open, free, and fair society disappear and the dictatorship they thought they had dealt a permanent death blow prevail. Indeed, if the question analysts were asking in 2011 was how this remarkable revolutionary struggle erupted, the question that would occupy them after the coup in 2013 is how the movement was so roundly defeated by the counterrevolution. This book addresses this question too. Understanding the challenges these youth leaders faced early on in trying to direct and sustain the revolution offers one explanation for why the movement unravelled. Most notably, as we will see, their decentralized and diffuse leadership structure had its advantages in the early days of the revolt but proved a liability later, as stronger organization was needed for the movement to assert its dominance and capture the state.

Consistent with wider global trends in antisystemic movements that had moved away from rigid mass organizational structures characteristic of twentieth century struggles, activists in Egypt had adopted this fluid, horizontal, informal mode of organizing typical of New Social Movements (NSMs) in the decade before January 25 as a radical reaction to the oppressive, top-down power structure of the state and formal opposition parties.[4] At the time, this NSM approach to resistance was appropriate, given the activists' focus on developing tactics to disrupt authoritarian politics as usual and pressuring for reform. But as this study will illustrate, it had its limits when their status suddenly changed from activists to revolutionaries and they were faced with the overwhelming task of wresting power from a heavily armed state, dismantling the regime, and building the polity anew. It was one thing to challenge the regime and its institutions, they would learn, and an entirely different matter to topple and replace it. Simply put, that was never part of their plan. It was a task that required organizational capital and skills, strategic visions and transformative projects outlining a radically new social order, and schemes for taking over governance that they simply did not have and could not easily develop within the span of eighteen days. Indeed, strikingly absent from the activity of Egypt's January 25 revolutionaries during the uprising were the kind of features and radical undertakings that we have come to associate with revolutions: there was no revolutionary guard ready to seize power when it fell in the streets, no "storming of the Bastille" or takeover of other strategic institutions like state media, no attempts by revolutionaries to take up arms against the state and muscle their way into power by force. These activists had dreamt of revolution, but they had never seriously entertained the possibility and were

therefore unprepared when it suddenly presented itself. Remarkably, the revolutionaries were able to push out Mubarak, but when it came time in the period that followed to compete with the mighty military establishment and the highly organized Muslim Brotherhood to take charge of Egypt's future, they were at a loss. In the end, both the revolutionary youth and the Brotherhood would lose this high-stakes political contest; far from being uprooted, the authoritarian order Egypt's masses rebelled against recovered its grip on power that had been loosened by years of political turmoil. In fact, not only does that order survive unchanged, but it appears stronger than ever under Sisi, whose regime is widely regarded as more repressive than Mubarak's.

Egyptians commonly refer to the eighteen-day uprising in early 2011 along with the turbulent cascade of events that followed as the "January 25 Revolution," and this is how I refer to it in this book. But the resilience of the neoliberal authoritarian order after the fall of Mubarak and its reassertion post July 3, 2013 under Sisi have led many to question whether the word "revolution" is appropriate, and it is for this reason that I often use the term "revolutionary movement" in its place. No doubt, Egypt had experienced the kind of massive uprisings and dramatic changes that come with revolutions—not the least of which was the politicization of broad swathes of society and a shift in the way people understood their relationship with the government—but ultimately, the upheaval failed to produce the kind of radical social and political structural change that informs classical definitions of the term. I am referring here to Theda Skocpol's conceptualization of social revolutions. Limiting her study to a handful of "great revolutions," she defines the phenomenon as "rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures . . . accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below,"[5] the implication being that revolutions can only really be categorized as such on the basis of their successful outcomes. Her definition was the most widely accepted until a host of new and very different revolutions[6] from the 1970s through the 1990s defied this state- and class-based understanding of revolution, prompting the search among scholars for a new approach.[7] This study aligns with the view of scholars like Charles Tilly,[8] who suggests we are better served in our analysis of revolutions by less restrictive definitions that accommodate a wider array of cases, including those in which, as he puts it, a "revolutionary situation" occurred but did not result in a "revolutionary outcome,"[9] a description that accurately captures what transpired

in Egypt. Consistent with this idea are scholarly works on Egypt's 2011 rupture that make the distinction between "revolution as process" and "revolution as change" in their analyses of the movement's trajectory.[10] The benefit of this framing, as these works demonstrate, is that it allows us to meaningfully examine the January 25 phenomenon as a revolutionary movement that was unsuccessful in the short term, without diminishing its significance as a momentous turning point in a deeper social process underway in Egypt long before the uprising, one that arguably still holds the potential to bring about revolutionary transformation. Adopting this perspective, this study sets out to understand how Egypt's revolutionary situation emerged and make sense of why it unfolded the way it did during the eighteen-day uprising and the period that followed.

In foregrounding the people behind January 25 and the micro-processes they engaged in, this book does not dismiss the many macro structural explanations for the struggle's eruption that have traditionally been the focus of theoretical literature on revolutions. Some of the most common identified by Jack Goldstone[11] and others—demographic change, shifts in international relations, uneven or dependent economic development, new patterns of exclusion against particular groups, changing urban landscapes, and the evolution of personalist regimes—all played a role in precipitating Egypt's historic rupture. But macro structural explanations alone are not enough; in privileging the vulnerability of the state over the agency of actors, their capacity to explain the causes and outcomes of Egypt's upheaval is limited. Drawing on social movement theory as it relates to leadership, I lean toward a more holistic approach for understanding the emergence of the revolution, one that accounts for the conscious agency of some of the key grassroots actors who mobilized within their structural contexts and constraints to drive it from below. After all, as Eric Selbin argues, "people's thoughts and actions—even if haphazard or spontaneous—are the mediating link between structural conditions and social outcomes. . . . Structural conditions may define the possibilities for revolutionary insurrections or the options available after political power has been seized, *but they do not explain how specific groups or individuals act*, *what options they pursue*, *or what possibilities they may realize*."[12] This study is premised on the notion that revolutions are fundamentally "human creations—with all the messiness inherent in such a claim—rather than inevitable natural processes."[13] Following this claim, it illuminates the messy, human, relational side of Egypt's

revolutionary movement through an exploration of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the youth leaders who were some of its main creators.

Not all analysts of the revolution place as much emphasis on youth, let alone the RYC, as I do in this book. Of course, there were many other actors who played a critical role in propelling the movement. They included workers, farmers, intellectuals, student groups, professional syndicates, human rights activists and organizations,[14] Ultras football fans, cyber-activists, political parties, citizen and professional journalists, and other civil society groups, as well as the plethora of non-activist protesters representing a radically diverse cross-section of Egyptian society. Along with the RYC, they formed the constellation of actors who sustained the eighteen-day uprising and worked in varying degrees to drive the struggle forward in the months and years that followed and to advance its agenda. But the youth from the RYC deserve our attention because, as this book illustrates, they were consequential for the movement in ways the others were not. Without their organizing efforts, for example, it is difficult to imagine how January 25 would have achieved the critical mass that transformed the pre-2011 protest movement into a revolutionary one. The RYC was also one of the first and most effective initiatives of its kind in Egypt where liberals, leftists, and Islamists attempted to bridge their deep political divides and work to realize their shared vision for a more just, equitable, and democratic Egypt. In the early days of the struggle, this gave them a degree of legitimacy and clout in the eyes of the public and state actors that other groups did not enjoy. As such, it held the most promise as an organizational model for advancing the revolutionary movement toward the realization of its goals. As we try to assess the factors that led to the defeat of the revolution and identify how the cause might be salvaged, we must take into account the RYC and consider its challenges, both internal and external. Focusing on them as a pivot in the revolution is one way to bring into focus the set of changing political, social, and economic dynamics as well as the shifting alliances that precipitated and ultimately thwarted the revolution. Indeed, as an important contemporary experiment in revolutionary vanguardism, the RYC deserves our attention for the lessons it offers in revolutionary leadership and the viability of participatory democratic practice as its praxis, not just for Egyptian revolutionaries, but for social and revolutionary movements across the world.

Leadership in Social Movements

My focus on leadership in the Egyptian revolution is informed by an understanding that the agency of leaders is critical to movements, making them indispensable to our understanding of how such movements unfold. Leaders help movements and revolutions turn from prospect into reality by recognizing favorable political and economic circumstances—or the right structural opportunities—and taking appropriate action to exploit them. Defined as "strategic decision makers who inspire and organize others to participate in social movements,"[15] leaders perform a number of functions at different levels that are crucial for the mobilization, development, and outcomes of these struggles. Their roles vary: (1) there are people-oriented leaders who frame grievances and articulate the vision and aspirations of the movement, inspiring others to participate and stay hopeful, unified, and committed during the setbacks they will invariably face on the path toward change; (2) and there are task-oriented leaders who manage the practical side of the movement, devising strategies, mobilizing resources, organizing constituents, and implementing plans.[16] Indeed, a movement's success—as Egypt's recent experience with revolution confirms—rests in large part on how effectively its leaders are able to perform these functions. Leadership is vital to movements and revolutions because it is the "key mechanism by which people transform the individual resources they have"—including their backgrounds, finances, networks, knowledge, skills, and tactics—"into the collective power they need to get what they want."[17]

This study of the RYC fits in with a handful of others that have developed our understanding of the various ways leadership manifests and functions in movements, demonstrating how different leadership modes have both empowered and disempowered activists to advance and undermine their struggles.[18] As alluded to in the previous section, these leadership arrangements range from rigid, centralized structures to loose, decentralized formations that are "shifting, interactive, and fluid" in nature.[19] Also highlighted in these studies is how leadership roles within these configurations are gendered and classed. They note, for instance, how gender inequality in the societies and institutions of the challenging group usually translate into the preponderance of men in the top, formal layer of movement leadership and women in the informal, intermediary layers.[20] The literature also calls our attention to why movement leaders tend to be from middle- and upper-class backgrounds: class privilege provides them with the resources

needed to lead movements—namely, money, contacts, and time. But more importantly, their class privilege provides them with educational capital. Education is critical because the tasks involved in leading social movements, such as recognizing opportunities, devising tactics and strategies, and framing grievances and demands, are seen as intellectual in nature, and the skills required to carry out these tasks effectively—reading, writing, analyzing, and public speaking—are usually developed in formal educational institutions. The significance of education is demonstrated in the fact that those from working-class backgrounds who have been able to rise to leadership in movements have generally attained a higher level of education than their peers, a trend that is reflected in the experience of the RYC leaders.[21]

My study follows the path of previous scholarship by critically examining how gender and class dynamics play out in the Egyptian revolution's leadership processes. However, the historical conditions of Egypt demand a more nuanced analysis of how these variables intersect with and are influenced by a third: religion. In Egypt, Muslim religiosity[22] is seen as an indicator of class and is associated with a well-defined gender normativity. Moreover, Islam has historically played a significant role in political movements and has been a major issue of contention between self-described secularists and Islamists. An examination of leadership in this context would therefore be incomplete without an investigation into how religion informed the participation and ideologies of youth leaders and how they might have negotiated it as they attempted to come together to realize their shared goals.

This study takes as its starting point the importance of learning more about those who come to take on leadership roles and how their different backgrounds and experiences inform their participation and leadership strategies. Understanding the process through which leaders shape movements and are shaped by them allows us insight into the movements themselves.[23] Here, the changing subjectivities of the actors involved becomes relevant as a window into this dialogic process and will therefore occupy an important part of the following analysis on youth activism in the Egyptian revolution. By subjectivity, I am referring to the "inner life process and affective states"[24] of social actors, or more specifically what Sherry Ortner describes as "the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, and fear that animate acting subjects . . . as well as the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and provoke those modes of affect, thought, and so on."[25] As she puts it, subjectivity matters in our analysis of political struggle

because it is the "the basis of 'agency,' a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon."[26]

In keeping with this idea, my analysis of Egyptian youth leaders will emphasize in chapters 4 to 6 that movements are not just gendered, but *gendering*. Gender, after all, is "not fixed in advance of social interaction, but is constructed in interaction,"[27] and social movements are a key site where this dynamic plays out. Through their participation in movements, activists might contest the social and political meanings of gender and rework them in their own subjectivities, which in turn reflects back on their activism, reshapes the landscape of the movement, modifies its agendas, and generates new meanings of femininity and masculinity for the wider public.[28] In short, the study of activists' masculinities and femininities is critical to understanding movements, since "their making and remaking is a political process affecting the balance of interests in society and the direction of social change."[29] The same can be said of the study of activists' subjectivities in terms of class, religion, and ideology, as demonstrated in the following chapters.

Youth as Agents of Revolution

A study on youth requires a definition of the term. I understand "youth" as a socially and culturally constructed category, not a universally agreed-upon fixed age group or a natural stage in human development. "Youth" denotes the liminal phase of life between childhood (a time associated with dependence, innocence, and vulnerability), and adulthood (a time associated with independence and responsibility for oneself and one's own family). In premodern times, young people transitioned through this stage quickly, as families married off their children shortly after the onset of puberty and charged them with the responsibility of maintaining the family's agrarian livelihood. But with the onset of modernity and the forms of mass schooling that its capitalist production system required in order to thrive, marriage was delayed, and the period of youth was considerably extended and associated with new ways of being young.[30] Some observers argue that the prolongation of youth has reached new levels today in the Middle East, where economic crisis and lack of employment opportunities have made it difficult for young men to marry, extending the age of youth well into the late thirties.[31] However, while the ability to provide for a family is seen as an important marker of manhood, it is also important to note that in Arab culture, one is typically considered a youth until the age of forty, employment and marital status notwithstanding.

One of the main concerns of this study is how youth acquire their political consciousness and activist agency, the kind we saw on remarkable display in Egypt and across the Arab world in 2011. Observing Egyptian youth activists through the lens of political generation as conceptualized by Karl Mannheim in his classic thesis[32] allows for an understanding of this process. He describes generation as the dynamic interplay between the biological life-cycle and the evolving sociocultural context it is embedded in. For Mannheim, a generation is comprised of a cohort of people who share "a common location in the historical dimension of the social process, . . . predisposing them for a characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action."[33] Accordingly, what defines a generation are the pivotal events and trends its members live through in their youth—economic crises, wars, revolutions, natural disasters, and other social ruptures—and the social solidarity that arises among them as they develop a consciousness of their common circumstances and plight. In other words, much like members of a social class, members of a generation achieve "actuality" when they realize their problems are not personal but social.[34] This realization might in turn awaken them to the knowledge of their collective power and trigger their political action, as we witnessed in Egypt and other Arab countries in 2011.

The youth life stage figures centrally in Mannheim's schema as the formative moment in the life of a cohort. He saw that the young were the most likely to become agents of change, free as they are from the burden of responsibilities that come later in life with marriage, parenthood, and career. Compared to adults who have settled into their social roles, youth are more malleable, more willing to take risks, more susceptible to new ideas, and more prone to social change and historical reorientation. Mannheim also emphasized that youth are not as easily socialized into the status quo. As they grow autonomous in their engagement with the world and its challenges, the young begin to rely more on their direct experiences for meaning and less on the "appropriated memories" of older generations—the social norms, attitudes, and value systems imparted to them through schooling, family, and media.[35] Mannheim speaks of "fresh contact," a history-catalyzing process whereby the young encounter the received social and material order anew and evaluate it from the perspective of their novel context. In response, they might grow to oppose the structures they have inherited, and, to the extent that they become conscious of their shared sentiment, take collective action to change it. Whereas their elders might be more gray in their

views about justice and jaded about the efficacy of action and possibility of change, youth tend to see right and wrong in black-and-white terms and are more compelled to act on the idealistic belief that the justice of their cause will prevail.[36] Fresh contacts are important because they facilitate the regeneration of society and polity through the critical participation of youth, inspiring them to steer us away from "that which is no longer useful" and toward "that which has yet to be won."[37]

While the focus of this book is not on generational agency per se, Mannheim's ideas help us understand why youth were the impetus and leading actors in the Egyptian revolt. Chapter 3 takes its cue from his ideas. It highlights the youth activists' embeddedness in the historical dynamics and sociopolitical circumstances of Egypt, noting the formative experiences—or "fresh contacts"—that provoked their political consciousness and activism. One of the main themes of this chapter is how the multiple symptoms of neoliberalism and authoritarianism—what Mannheim would characterize as "a process of dynamic destabilization"[38]—played out in their personal lives. Of course, not all members of a youth cohort will experience and react to the problems of their age in the same manner. Mannheim addresses this inconsistency with his notion of "generation units," positing that structural differences like race, gender, class, religion, ideology, and geography will separate members of a generation into subgroups that will have varied if not antagonistic responses.[39] Chapters 4 to 6 will examine the youth activists' subjectivity formation as revolutionary leaders during this pivotal historical moment along these axes of difference.

What Follows . . .

In this book, I tell the story of the revolutionary movement specifically as it relates to the youth protagonists who were so central to its unfolding. I begin in chapter 1 with a discussion of my research methodology, explaining my personal trajectory into this research, my positionality in the field, and the challenges I faced trying to collect data in Cairo's revolutionary environment. This discussion provides a clear window into the dynamics of the revolutionary process and illuminates the challenging context the youth actors found themselves in as they attempted to sustain this movement. It ends with a discussion of my interviews and interviewees. Chapter 2 provides context for the rest of the study by examining the historical processes from the 1952 revolution onward that shaped the emergence of this movement. It focuses on the erosion of the social contract that locked the

people of the newly formed Egyptian republic into a relationship with the state that was based on the exchange of political quietude for social welfare, giving special attention to the political and economic developments under Mubarak that led to the final severance of that pact. It also traces the emergence of the military and the Muslim Brotherhood as two of Egypt's strongest political players and describes the decade-long resistance movement that paved the way to the January 25 uprising and forged the nation's new generation of revolutionary youth.

Chapter 3 is an attempt to look past the Facebook and Twitter tropes that have been associated with the youth who instigated this movement to tell the deeper story of their revolutionary becoming. It begins by profiling the ten activists whose stories are the focus of the study. It then goes on to highlight their trajectories into the revolution, examining the formative experiences and circumstances that shaped their early politicization and budding activism. I highlight the recurring themes in the various narratives I collected and the specific circumstances that drew this disparate group of youth actors together into a network. This chapter illustrates that the revolution was not spontaneous in the sense that it erupted from nowhere, but that it was at least ten years in the making and initiated by activists who were deeply embedded in the historical processes that gave birth to the uprising.

Chapter 4 details the eighteen-day uprising as it unfolded from the perspective of these youth activists who were deeply engaged in it, focusing specifically on their organizing efforts and challenges. This process was characterized by a series of ups and downs as well as the complex dynamics of a fluid, changing reality involving the interaction of activists, protesters, workers, the non-protesting public, the state, global powers, and international sympathizers. It unfolded in phases after critical junctures, which forced the actors involved to constantly negotiate and act around two recurring, corresponding questions: "What is happening?" and "How should we act?" It was in response to these questions that the youth activists formed the Revolutionary Youth Coalition and attempted to create other revolutionary vehicles from the square that would see the demands articulated by the people through to their realization. Why they ultimately failed in this endeavor becomes clear in this chapter and those that follow.

Chapter 5 examines the transformation in the personal and political subjectivities of the RYC leaders over the course of their engagement before and through the eighteen-day uprising. It begins with a discussion of the ways in which their sense of selves changed as a result of their participation

as leaders in the movement. It also considers the ways in which gender, class, and religion shaped their participation and agency in the revolution and how their attitudes with respect to these categories changed or remained constant. It ends with an examination of the political imaginaries that drove their activism, especially their visions for the new nation-state. This chapter illustrates the kind of subjectivities this upheaval fashioned and offers insight into the development of the movement and where it might have been headed had it not been derailed.

Chapter 6 reviews the most crucial findings of this study, especially as they relate to the multiple expressions of leadership in the revolution with respect to youth as an analytical category, class, gender, and religion. It also provides theoretical insight into the organizing challenges youth activists faced and why the Egyptian revolutionary movement continued to struggle after the eighteen-day uprising.

Chapter 7 closes this book. It offers a synopsis of the major political developments since I conducted my field research in 2011 (including the eighteen months under SCAF transitional rule, President Muhammad Morsi's brief tenure, and the coup in the summer of 2013 that led to Sisi's ascent as president) and discusses what happened to the revolutionary movement and the youth who were its early leaders. It incorporates a fresh set of interviews with these activists conducted in the aftermath of the summer of 2013 crisis to illustrate the continuities and changes in their political subjectivities since our first formal set of interviews. These narratives offer insight into the predicament Egypt found itself in almost four years after the January 25 uprising and what hope might exist for the revolution's reemergence.

Notes

Introduction

1 *Amnesty International Report 2012: The State of the World's Human Rights* (London: Amnesty International, 2012), 136.
2 For exceptions, see Jeroen Gunning's and Ilan Zvi Baron's *Why Occupy a Square? People, Protests and Movement in the Egyptian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) and Anne Rennick's *Politics and Revolution in Egypt: Rise and Fall of Youth Activists* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).
3 Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 196–97.
4 Immanuel Wallerstein, "New Revolts against the System," *New Left Review* 18, November–December, 2002; Maha Abdelrahman, *Egypt's Long Revolution: Protest Movements and Uprisings* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 81.
5 Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 5.
6 Examples include transitions to democracy in Europe, anti-colonial and anti-dictatorial revolutions in the third world, and Islamic revolutions in the Middle East (Jack Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory," *Annual Reviews of Political Science* 4 [June 2001]: 141).
7 Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation," 141.
8 Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison-Welsley, 1978).
9 Analyzing Tilly's concept of revolution, Jésus de Andrés and Rubén Ruiz Ramas explain, "A revolutionary situation arises from the sum of three causes: the appearance of two or more contending blocs who aspire to control the state, citizen support for this aspiration, and the rulers' inability to suppress the alternative coalition. A revolutionary outcome results when a transfer of power takes place—from the hands of those who had it before a situation of multiple sovereignty arose—leading to a new governing coalition. Hence, Tilly's main contribution is his characterization of revolution as a political event, a perspective which would deprive the great revolutions of their conceptual monopolization of the term" (Jesus De Andrés and Rubén Ramas, "Charles Tilly's Concept of *Revolution* and the '*Color Revolutions*,'"

in *Regarding Tilly: Conflict, Power, and Collective Action*, edited by Maria J. Funes [Lanham: University Press of America], 2016, 137).

10 See Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprisings*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013); De Smet, *A Dialectical Pedagogy of Revolt; Gramsci, Vygtosky, and the Egyptian Revolution* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Asef Bayat, *Revolution without Revolutionaries: Making Sense of the Arab Spring* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017). In his analysis of the Egyptian revolution, Brecht De Smet makes the distinction between the "*object* produced by mass political activity" and the "*activity itself*" as a way of separating between process and outcome. For him, the emergence of *al-sha'b* (the people) as a new collective subjectivity is what makes this activity revolutionary (De Smet, *A Dialectical Pedagogy of Revolt*, 105). As for Asef Bayat, his analysis of the revolutionary movement led him to coin the term "refolution" to capture its peculiar nature: "revolutionary in terms of movement and mass mobilization, but reformist in terms of strategy and change" (Bayat, *Revolution without Revolutionaries*, 159).

11 Jack Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 21–23.

12 Eric Selbin, "Revolution in the Real World: Bringing Agency Back In," in *Theorizing Revolutions*, edited by John Foran (London: Routledge, 2005), 121 (emphasis added).

13 Selbin, "Revolution in the Real World," 118.

14 Some of the most notable of these organizations include the Hisham Mubarak Law Center, the Nadim Center, and the Egyptian Initiative for Human Rights.

15 Alan D. Morris and Suzanne Staggenborg, "Leadership in Social Movements," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by D. Snow, S. Soule, and H. Kriesi (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 171.

16 Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation," 157; Aminzade et al., "Leadership Dynamics and Dynamics of Contention," in *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, edited by Ronald Aminzade et al. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 129–33; Sharon Erickson Nepstad and Clifford Bob, "When Do Leaders Matter? Hypothesis on Leadership Dynamics in Social Movements," *Mobilization: An International Journal* 11, no. 1 (February 2006): 3–4. Some scholars believe these two forms of leadership can be combined in one individual; others see that two or more individuals or groups are generally required to fill these visionary organizer roles, though in practice the division of tasks might not always be clearly distinguishable (Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation," 157).

17 Marshall Ganz and Liz McKenna, "The Practice of Social Movement Leadership," *Mobilizing Ideas*, June 23, 2017.

18 Max Weber, "The Types of Authority and Imperative Coordination," in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, edited by T. Parsons (New York, NY: Free Press, 1964), 324–423; Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is*

Watching: Mass Media and the Making and Unmaking of the New Left (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980); Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," in *Radical Feminism*, edited by Anne Koedt, Ellene Levine, and Anita Rapone (New York, NY: Quadrangle, 1972), 285–99; Helen Brown, "Organizing Activity in the Women's Movement: An Example of Distributed Leadership," *International Social Movement Research* 2 (1989): 225–40; Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ann Herda-Rapp, "The Power of Informal Leadership: Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement," *Sociological Focus* 31, no. 4 (November 1998): 341–55; Ganz and McKenna, "The Practice of Social Movement Leadership"; Jennifer Leigh Disney and Joyce Gelb, "Feminist Organizational 'Success': The State of US Women's Movement Organizations in the 1990s," *Women and Politics* 21, no. 4 (October 2008): 39–76; Simon Western, "Autonomist Leadership in Leaderless Movements: Anarchists Leading the Way," *Ephemera* 14, no. 4 (November 2014): 673–98; Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation"; Marshall Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

19 Colin Barker, Alan Johnson, and Michael Lavalette, "Leadership Matters: An Introduction," in *Leadership in Social Movements*, edited by Colin Barker, Alan Johnson, and Michael Lavalette (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 16.

20 Robnett, *How Long? How Long?*; Morris and Staggenborg, "Leadership in Social Movements," 177.

21 Morris and Staggenborg, "Leadership in Social Movements," 174–75. Of course, this is not to say that all movement leaders have university degrees or even high school diplomas. See chapters 5 and 6 for more on this subject.

22 Since the activists I profile in this book are all Muslim (see the section on my sample in chapter 1 for my reasons), the focus of this study is on Muslim religiosity, but this is not to diminish the experience of Coptic youth activists and how their religion might have informed their ideologies and participation in the revolution.

23 Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation."

24 João Biehl, Byron Good, and Arthur Kleinman, "Introduction: Rethinking Subjectivity," in *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations*, edited by João Biehl, Byron Good, and Arthur Kleinman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 6.

25 Sherry B. Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 107.

26 Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory*, 110.

27 R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 35.

28 For excellent examples of how this gendering dynamic plays out in other movements, see Say Burgin, "Understanding Antiwar Activism as a

Gendering Activity: A Look at the U.S. Anti-Vietnam War Movement," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13, no. 6 (December 2012): 18–31; Julia Peteet, "Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian *Intifada*: A Cultural Politics of Violence," *American Ethnologist* 21, no. 1 (February 1994): 31–49.

29 Connell, *Masculinities*, 43.

30 Ted Swedenburg, "Imagined Youths," *Middle East Research and Information Project* 245 (Winter 2007); Asef Bayat, "Muslim Youth and the Claim of Youthfulness," in *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North*, edited by Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6–7.

31 Diane Singerman, "The Negotiation of Waithood: The Political Economy of Delayed Marriage in Egypt," in *Arab Youth: Social Mobilization in Times of Risk*, edited by S. Khalaf and R. Khalaf (London: Saqi Books, 2011), 67.

32 Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, edited by P. Kecskemeti (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 276–322.

33 Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," 291.

34 Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," 302-304.

35 Herrera, "Youth and Citizenship in the Digital Age: A View from Egypt," *Harvard Educational Review* 82, no. 3 (September 2012): 333–52.

36 Constance A. Flanagan and Amy K. Syversten, "Youth as Social Construct and Social Actor," in *Youth Activism: An International Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, edited by Lonne R. Sherrod (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 17.

37 Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," 294.

38 Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," 303.

39 Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," 304.