

The 2011 Egyptian Revolution and Social Change:
Examining Collective Actions towards Transformations in Public Space

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores some of the ways in which Egyptian men and women changed certain aspects of their reality through collective actions in public spaces during and after the 2011 Revolution. This thesis argues that the power of collective action which Egyptian men and women successfully employed in 2011 to bring down the thirty year regime of Hosni Mubarak carried over into the post-Revolutionary era to express itself in three unique ways: the combatting of women's sexual harassment in public spaces, the creation of graffiti with distinct Revolutionary themes, and the creation of protest music which drew from historical precedent while also creating new songs.

The methodology of this study of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution lies in the use of newspaper reporting and online sources as primary source material. These sources include Egyptian newspapers such as *Egypt Independent* and *Al Ahram*, as well as scholarly websites like *Jadaliyya*, and also personal blogs. These accounts provide topical and up to the minute accounts of history as it unfolded. Primary source material is also drawn from oral interviews done during the summer of 2012 by the author and others in Egypt. The theoretical grounding lies in social movement theories that are centered on the Middle Eastern context in particular. Drawing from newspaper accounts and social movement theories this thesis is built around a notion of collective action expressed in unique ways in post-2011 Revolution Egypt. This thesis is also solidly grounded in the history of Egypt as relevant to each of the topics which it explores: combatting sexual harassment and the creation of graffiti and music. Relevant scholarly books help to inform the historical material presented here as context.

This thesis is situated within the existing literature on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and public history while also contributing something new to this area of study by examining the actions of ordinary men and women acting in public spaces in new ways during and after the Revolution. The existing literature on the 2011 Revolution generally neglects micro-level changes of the sort discussed in the topical areas to follow. The ordinary men and women who contributed to the Revolution are now part of the historical record, an example of the public making history par excellence.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Barbara and Werner, for their constant support of my academic adventures, from the deserts of the southwest to the deserts of Egypt.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 2011 Egyptian Revolution began with widespread popular protests across Egyptian cities which, after eighteen days of sustained protest, brought to an end the dictatorial thirty year regime of President Hosni Mubarak. The overthrow of this political system has led to unprecedented governmental changes including a democratic election in which numerous candidates and parties took part, as well as a later coup to overthrow the democratically elected Mohammed Morsi. Equally important, however, are the changes to some aspects of social realities for ordinary Egyptians as a result of the Revolution. The protests in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution were comprised of regular people agitating for meaningful change within their own country. By taking to the streets and protesting, their individual power combined to form a power much greater than its parts. The men and women who brought down Hosni Mubarak were actively engaged in creating history as they were protesting. The increased presence and power of collective action discovered during the Revolution continued to express itself in unique ways during and after the Revolution including the combatting of sexual harassment, and the creation of graffiti and music. The objective of this thesis is to demonstrate the diverse ways in which Egyptians rediscovered the power of collective action during the Revolution and how, after the Revolution, some of those changes empowered Egyptians to act in public spaces in new and visible ways. During and post-revolution, increased agency in public space took different forms, including the combating of public sexual harassment of women, the creation of graffiti, and the creation of protest music. These actions display

the expression and result of a regained sense of dignity, ownership of Egyptian identity, and the rediscovered power of collective public action. Addressing these underexplored topics contributes an important perspective to the conversation about the Egyptian Revolution by discussing the micro-level changes for ordinary Egyptians whose lives were impacted in ways that have nothing to do with governmental laws or pronouncements including taking actions to stop women's sexual harassment in public, as well as creating Revolution-themed graffiti and music in public space.

Contextualizing Revolution

The 2011 Egyptian Revolution is without precedent in the history of Egypt in the sense that a mass protest movement formed and carried out by the Egyptian people has not deposed a government. In 1952, the Free Officers, a group within the Egyptian Army, orchestrated a coup against King Farouk (b. 1920, d. 1965), although this action is considered historically more as a military coup rather than a revolution because the Free Officers group within the Army orchestrated the bloodless overthrow of King Farouk. The Free Officers were a cohort of young army men, educated in military schools, who sought generally to cure Egypt's ills by ridding it of continued British influences. Though Egypt had gained independence formally from Britain in 1922, British economic control continued in some parts of the economy and Britain still exerted a measure of informal influence over the government. Gamal Abdel Nasser, a member of the Free Officers group, was instrumental to the coup itself and became the President of the country after King Farouk's overthrow, ruling from 1956 until his death in 1970.¹ Shortly after the Free Officers coup, the new government quickly moved to outlaw other political parties,

¹ Robert L. Tignor, *Egypt: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 257-258.

understanding that this could jeopardize their own power; the Muslim Brotherhood which had originally enjoyed favor with the Free Officers was also outlawed because its significant power base was seen as a potential threat to the government's power. During President Nasser's time in office, the Aswan High Dam was built, an effort which first brought President Nasser to turn to the West for assistance. This relationship turned sour, however, when Nasser feared that the World Bank from whom he sought a loan for the dam's construction would "impose neocolonial restrictions" on Egypt.² An Egyptian arms purchase from Czechoslovakia in 1955 concerned the United States and western powers enough that they withdrew from backing the Aswan High Dam project. Instead, in a move that further angered Western powers, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company.³ Ultimately receiving construction aid from the Soviet Union, the Dam construction was a positive economic achievement during Nasser's tenure.⁴ Less successful were his other economic policies, and the defeat of the Egyptian army by the Israelis in the Six Day War of 1967 plunged Nasser into bad health. He died in 1970.⁵ He was succeeded by his Vice President Anwar Sadat.

President Sadat was also a member of the Free Officers group and held presidential power from 1970 until his assassination in 1981. He instituted a series of domestic and international changes during his Presidency that departed from Nasser's ideas. For example, he broke relations with the Soviet Union and also in 1973 undertook

² Ibid., 264.

³ Ibid., 266-267.

⁴ Ibid., 271-272.

⁵ Ibid., 274.

military action in the Sinai against Israel in order to take back the land Israel had captured in the 1967 campaign. This opened up negotiations between Egypt and Israel which resulted in the 1977 Camp David Accords. While this did not win him popularity at home, this move warmed relations with the West. Economically, his policy of *infitah* (opening, or open door) was designed to encourage foreign investment in Egypt.⁶ In the midst of his presidency, Sadat was assassinated on October 6, 1981 by a member of the Islamic Jihad Group, a splinter of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁷

The Muslim Brotherhood had a varied relationship both with Nasser and with Sadat. Formed in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood was formed to promote the return to a more Islamic lifestyle which would solve “modern-day problems.”⁸ Depending on political expediencies, Sadat dealt harshly or kindly with the Brotherhood. At the time of Sadat’s assassination, he had recently jailed a number of Brotherhood members fearing plots against him.⁹ His assassination was carried out by Islamic Jihad, a violent group which had split off from the Muslim Brotherhood. Some members of the group drew inspiration from the ideology of Sayyid Qutb, the man responsible for theorizing and creating the basis of Islamism based on striving for implementation of Shari‘a and an Islamic state¹⁰ whose ideas and writings have since been used by some groups to try to justify violence in the name of Islam. Qutb had been in jail intermittently under Nasser

⁶ Ibid., 277-279.

⁷ Ibid., 280.

⁸ Ibid., 252.

⁹ Ibid., 280.

¹⁰ John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 1.

and was executed in 1966 under Nasser after being convicted for being a member of the then banned Brotherhood and terrorism plans.¹¹

Sadat's vice president, Hosni Mubarak, rose to political prominence and the position of the Presidency after Sadat's assassination despite the fact that there was no particular scheme for him to succeed to ultimate power over Egypt but¹² after Sadat's assassination, Mubarak naturally succeeded him. Initially, it seemed that his presidency would not devolve into a dictatorship.¹³ Instead, he continued some of Sadat's policies like maintaining a good relationship with the United States while working on Egypt's relationship with surrounding Arab countries.¹⁴ Although Sadat had allowed some political parties to operate, Mubarak declared a state of emergency country-wide; this crackdown on social freedom included arresting Muslim Brotherhood members and outlawing the party though some candidates still ran without revealing their Brotherhood association.¹⁵ By the late 1980s, however, little real opposition existed to Mubarak's national Democratic Party¹⁶ and he never designated a vice president who might succeed him.¹⁷ The wealth gap increased dramatically during Mubarak's tenure.¹⁸ President

¹¹ Ibid., 259.

¹² Ashraf Khalil, *Liberation Square: Inside the Egyptian Revolution and the Rebirth of a Nation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011), 9-10.

¹³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴ Tignor, 285.

¹⁵ Ibid., 286.

¹⁶ Khalil, 19.

¹⁷ Tignor, 308.

¹⁸ Ibid., 291.

Mubarak's ascent to the Presidency did not initially seem to portend disaster for the nation, but it became clear over time that his policies and governance were poor; the widespread problems that are detailed below as leading to the Revolution escalated during his time as President.

A Genealogy of Protest

In terms of collective public action, Egyptians from different groups and industries have some history of protests and displays of public displeasure. Historically in the early 20th century, there were over 100 major strikes of workers, for example.¹⁹ After the 1952 Free Officers Coup, trade union strikes continued although they were discouraged by President Nasser.²⁰ In 1961, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation was formed to encompass the trade unions in Egypt; however, as an organization, it was controlled by the state.²¹ More recently in 1977, "bread riots" were prompted by the removal of subsidies on some consumer products and in the 1980s other workers actions took place as well. According to a report by The Solidarity Center, "Justice for All: The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt," "over 1.7 million workers engaged in more than 1,900 strikes and other forms of protest from 2004 to 2008" including clothing industry workers, transportation workers, food service, and others.²² Many of the most recent

¹⁹ "Egypt's Worker Rights History," *Justice for All: The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt, a Report by the Solidarity Center* (Washington, D.C.: The Solidarity Center, 2010), 6.
http://www.solidaritycenter.org/files/pubs_egypt_wr.pdf.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²² *Ibid.*, 14.

strikes are due to the lack of benefits workers receive from governmental neoliberal policies.²³ These collective actions, however, were not aimed to overthrow the system of governance of their company, let alone the entire country; the demands of workers strikes were not aimed at Mubarak and the overall system but rather sought to improve the everyday existence of Egyptian workers.

Other protests have taken place in the past several decades in Egypt, although other protests had not established such a wide support base or mobilized for so long. Under Mubarak, demonstrations were illegal but “street gatherings were a routine part of opposition politics,” though they were restricted to designated areas in Cairo and heavily monitored by riot police.²⁴ Beyond labor strikes and demonstrations, groups like the April 6 Movement and *Kefaya* (Enough) were formed particularly to protest the government and its policies. *Kefaya* was founded in the early 2000s as a group to protest “political corruption and stagnation; the blurring of the lines between power and wealth; and the regime’s cruelty, coercion and disregard for human rights.”²⁵ *Kefaya*’s protest tactics were out of the ordinary, according to the Egyptian writer Tarek Osman.²⁶ One of *Kefaya*’s main goals was to prevent Hosni Mubarak’s son Gamal from succeeding to the presidency after his father.²⁷ Groups like *Kefaya* and others were creating a challenge to

²³ Ibid., 15.

²⁴ Elliot Colla, “The People Want,” *Middle East Research and Information Project* (Summer 2012), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer263>.

²⁵ Tarek Osman, *Egypt on the Brink: From the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 149.

²⁶ Ibid., 206-207.

²⁷ Khalil, 44.

the regime's power in a way that had not happened before.²⁸ This group of left-leaning activists "played a major role in setting the stage for future events" by demonstrating the possibility of protests against the government.²⁹ Another group, the April 6 Movement, was so named because of riots on April 6, 2008 involving the Mahalla al-Kubra textile workers who protested against privatization and other economic policy changes which negatively affected their livelihoods. These riots managed to bring economic grievances to the forefront in a way that had not happened before.³⁰ Groups such as these two were able to display public grievances with the regime, but did not affect widespread change as was their aim.

For a different purpose but displaying a similar public presence, Egyptians took to Tahrir Square [Midan at-Tahrir] in March 2003 to protest the United States and coalition invasion of Iraq. The protesters were angry that Mubarak allowed U.S. warships through the Suez Canal.³¹ According to Ashraf Khalil, a reporter based in Egypt who has written extensively on regional and Egyptian politics, the legitimacy of the Mubarak government suffered in the early 2000s after events such as these,³² so much so that it could not really recover. In each of these instances of protest, the protests were not widespread enough or sustained in such a way that the regime itself would be threatened. Those kinds of protests were not seen until January 2011 when the regime was ultimately overthrown.

²⁸ Osman, *Egypt on the Brink*, 148.

²⁹ Khalil, 45.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

³² *Ibid.*, 43.

People Power: The Arab Spring and 2011 Egyptian Revolution

The Arab Spring uprisings began in mid-December 2010 with the self-immolation and death of Mohammed Bouazizi, a young, poor fruit vendor in Tunisia. His ultimate act of protest against unfair living and working conditions in his own country sparked waves of protest across Tunisia causing President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to step down on January 14, 2011.³³ This overthrow set a precedent for other countries in the region. Protests spread quickly in the Middle East and North Africa and different groups of protesters “fed off each other’s momentum”³⁴ as the “Arab uprisings unfolded in a single, unified narrative of protest with shared heroes and villains, common stakes, and a deeply shared sense of shared destiny.”³⁵ Widespread media coverage of the Tunisian Revolution allowed the world, and importantly other Arab countries, to see the precedent set by the actions of the people of Tunisia. Egyptians, seeing this precedent, were able to build off the momentum created and gain confidence from the precedent set by the Tunisians.

The causes of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution are diverse and range far back in time. Although Bouazizi’s self-immolation and the overthrow of Ben Ali’s regime in Tunisia were indeed immensely influential in modeling a successful overthrow of an entrenched dictator, Tunisia alone cannot be cited as the only contributing spark for the start of the Egyptian Revolution and the ultimate overthrow of the Mubarak regime. The

³³ “Timeline: The Major Events of the Arab Spring,” *National Public Radio*, January 2, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2012/01/02/144489844/timeline-the-major-events-of-the-arab-spring>.

³⁴ Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprisings: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012), 7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8. While this statement may be overgeneralized, the sentiment at the time seemed to support this kind of unified narrative.

Egyptian Revolution itself was preceded by innumerable factors stretching back decades into history, including but not limited to a failing education system, government corruption, widespread poverty, high unemployment, Mubarak's long tenure without democratic elections, and a general loss of national pride. The governmental system was non-functioning; for example, a businessman from Egypt who had also lived extensively abroad but returned during the Revolution, characterized Mubarak's regime in this way:

Politics in Egypt was just [...] we got this, this disease called Mubarak and the country looks like hell, but there was never the spirit of anyone really being able to do anything about it.³⁶

This “political pharaonism”³⁷ left no room for meaningful dissent, and social conditions for regular people across the country had significantly deteriorated. According to Tarek Osman, “the crushing socio-economic conditions, the wide-spread corruption, and the devastating gaps between the haves and have-nots” created widespread animosity towards the regime.³⁸ The Interior Ministry and police force were corrupt and in no way served their function as protectors of Egyptian welfare.³⁹ The semblance of elections was farcical and even in the 2010 parliamentary elections in which other candidates were actually allowed to participate, the National Democratic Party of Mubarak was able to

³⁶ “Ahmed,” Interview by Benjamin Ziegler, Logan Shea, Atticus Jaramillo, and Bret Campion, Basata, Egypt, June 2013, tape recording. This interview is part of the series of interviews conducted by myself and other students during the summer of 2012 in Egypt. The interviewee's name has been changed per the permission forms to protect their privacy. All the names of interviewees used throughout this thesis have their names changed.

³⁷ Osman, *Egypt on the Brink*, 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

³⁹ Khalil, 27.

intimidate opposition and “ensure complete control of the parliament [...] and tighten its grip over the country.”⁴⁰

Nonetheless, it is difficult to “pinpoint the moment when an already unjust and undemocratic regime starts to go really bad,”⁴¹ because so many factors over such a long span of time contributed to the ultimate overthrow of the regime. The spark that set off the Revolution seems to be the simple confluence of factors, both material and ideological, which converged in such a way to make the status quo untenable.

In a simple but telling statement about the emotional factors contributing to the Revolution, one business owner in Egypt expressed his feelings about the Mubarak regime:

He [Mubarak] put down the dignity of the Egyptians. This was the main thing, the dignity. We were mistreated everywhere, especially from the police, the Ministry for Interior [...] I mean, we don't care if we are poor [...] But he took this dignity away.⁴²

Another oft-cited event that galvanized sentiments against the government is the brutal killing of the young Khalid Said in Alexandria in June 2010 by police officers. Khalid Said was a young man who was using an internet café in his Alexandria neighborhood when he was approached by police officers, dragged into the street, and beaten to death. The officers alleged he was in possession of marijuana but it was also alleged that he may have filmed police taking bribes, an action which angered the police

⁴⁰ Osman, *Egypt on the Brink*, 204.

⁴¹ Khalil, 21.

⁴² “Amin,” Interviewed by Hannah Schmidl and Lindsey Rindo, Basata, Egypt, June 2013, tape recording.

and possibly led to his beating and death. Although the protests did not start immediately after this event in the same way as Tunisia's revolution started just after Mohammad Bouazizi's self-immolation, the "that could happen to me" (or my son, or my cousin) nature of the incident scared people.⁴³ The photo of Said which appeared in the media after his death, his face bloodied and disfigured, caused anger among Egyptians and some protests against police brutality followed Said's death.⁴⁴ The Facebook group "We Are All Khalid Said" demonstrates in its title and large following the importance of Said's death. His face was found on posters and spray painted as graffiti art during the Revolution, a topic explored later.

The protests which eventually brought Mubarak down started across Egypt on January 25, 2011 and were meant to coincide with Police Day, a national holiday.⁴⁵ In Cairo, Alexandria, and other cities, protests were well attended by a diverse group of Egyptian men and women: "from the start, it was clear that this was, at the very least, the largest demonstration Egypt had witnessed in years."⁴⁶ On January 26, 27, and 28 protests continued and numbers of Egyptians on the streets grew; cell phone service was cut off by the government in an effort to hinder communication between protesters via Facebook and Twitter. This was a clear signal that the government was worried about the masses of people suddenly demonstrating in the streets. Despite the communication shutdown, people had already made plans to protest and going to the streets to protest

⁴³ Khalil, 71.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 75-79.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 122.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 139.

seemed the natural communication strategy given such a widespread crackdown on electronic communication.⁴⁷ January 28 was designated the “Day of Rage” during which unprecedented numbers of people took to the streets. According to Khalil, it was the first time in years that he had heard the slogan: “*Al-shaab yureed isqat al-nizam* – the people demand the fall of the regime.”⁴⁸ The tone of the protests was markedly different than previous ones.

On January 29, Mubarak announced that he would make some changes to his cabinet, including appointing Omar Suleiman to the position of vice president, but little substantive change really occurred.⁴⁹ Protesters continued to mass in Tahrir Square and the military was deployed to the streets in a show of force. Mubarak held fast to his power throughout this time although the protesters were clear in calling for an end to his regime. On February 1, Mubarak announced to the nation that he would not seek reelection in September 2011, a move meant to assuage protesters. However, the numbers of people protesting grew again after this announcement, especially in Cairo’s Tahrir Square where numbers reached over a million.⁵⁰

On February 2 and 3, violence ensued between anti-Mubarak protesters and pro-government thugs⁵¹ in Tahrir Square, although the military did not intervene. The “Battle

⁴⁷ Ibid., 163-164.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 201.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 212.

⁵¹ This term is a translation of the Arabic *baltagiyya*, a word used to describe the thugs who were committing violence on behalf of the government. See for example: Adel Iskandar, “Revolution interrupted? The baltageya,” *Egypt Independent*, May 16, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/opinion/revolution-interrupted-baltageyav>.

of the Camel” (so called because pro-Mubarak forces rode into Tahrir Square on camels) on February 2 pitted pro and anti-Mubarak forces against each other in Tahrir Square. Several deaths and thousands of injuries were reported among protesters. February 4 was designated the “Day of Departure” to oust the regime. February 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 saw continued protests and thousands continually occupied Tahrir Square including men and women who camped out in the square, forming a kind of unique protest community. On February 10, Mubarak made another public statement to the nation, further galvanizing support against him because he did not announce his resignation. Protests grew again on February 11, and Mubarak finally addressed the nation at 6 p.m. saying he would resign from the Presidency. The Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) took control after his ousting.⁵² The SCAF made little meaningful change in government, only enough to appease some people and stop protests.⁵³ They held power until June of 2012 when a democratic election was held. Thirteen candidates were in the running, narrowed to two after a first round. The winner of the Presidency was the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party candidate Muhammad Morsi.

During the presidential term of Muhammad Morsi, he drew both support and criticism from different sectors of the Egyptian population. Some criticized him for being conservative and religious, while others support him for just those reasons. His Constitutional amendments were also controversial, bringing some Egyptians back out into the streets to protest his policies. Whatever the case in terms of his political

⁵² Except where footnoted otherwise, the outline of this timeline is draw from “Timeline: Egypt’s Revolution,” *Al Jazeera*, February 14, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112515334871490.html>.

⁵³ Khalil, 264.

positions, he was the winner of the first democratic election in Egypt. However, the political turmoil during his presidential term, his subsequent ouster in July 2013, and the military rule of the country as of February 2014, are outside the scope of this thesis.

Social Movement Theory and Study Methodology

Given this context, the basic questions I seek to answer are: what kinds of social change came with the Egyptian Revolution? What is out of the ordinary about the way Egyptian men and women acted in public spaces after the Revolution? How did collective action and agency on the part of millions of Egyptians during the Revolution translate into increased agency to act in public spaces during and after the Revolution? My contention in exploring several topics based on social movement theories, the power of collective action, and the use of public space is that the collective power discovered by millions of Egyptians during the Revolution translated into substantial changes in behaviors in public spaces after the Revolution. To substantiate these claims, I address campaigns to combat public sexual harassment, the creation of protest or commemorative graffiti in public space, and the creation of protest music. These new modes of widespread public acts in public spaces, taken collectively, reflect a newfound power of public, collective action and presence. Overall, this thesis argues that Egyptians rediscovered the power of collective action during the Revolution and how, through that collective power, new social realities came to fruition during and after the Revolution. The timeframe during which I examine these topics begins during the Revolution and continues for between one and two years after that. This bounded period of time is a slice of history in Egypt when people were relatively freer to act than previous to the

Revolution. This does not extend to the time after Morsi's ouster, as this is a new phase in the Revolutionary evolution. It remains to be seen how and when collective power will be used again.

The theoretical basis for this thesis draws from social movement theory, public space and use, and ideas about the media in the Middle East and North Africa, which are addressed in this and the next section. To tie together the events of the Egyptian Revolution with a theoretical background requires examination of several topics including the idea of public collective action creating change, the Arab street, and public space use.

Collective Public Action

Asef Bayat, an Iranian-born professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, writes extensively about the modern Middle East and his theoretical and historical treatment of the region is relevant in the discussion of the Arab Spring and the Egyptian Revolution in particular. Trained as a sociologist, Bayat's writings cover a range of topics including Islamist movements, nonmovements, and the *politics of presence*. Because his scholarship is centered on Middle Eastern societies, his writing is especially relevant. While there is a wealth of information on social movements and associated theories, much of that scholarship is based in European social structures and history. Bayat's framework focuses on Middle Eastern society and history so his terms and analyses are helpful in the context of the Egyptian Revolution.

Bayat's ideas of the *power of presence* and the *power of collective action* in public spaces relate directly to the ability of protesters in Egypt to gather and bring down

the Mubarak regime, and then subsequently to carry this collective power into the post-Revolutionary era. Bayat writes in the generalized context of the Middle East that “streets represent the modern urban theatre of contention par excellence” where ordinary people can gather and protest⁵⁴ because “street politics is the modern urban theatre of contention.”⁵⁵ The theatre of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution was indeed the streets. The refusal of protesters to exit the “streets of discontent”⁵⁶ evidences the power of their collective action in a public space. He writes that “[the] power of presence, the assertion of collective will in spite of all odds, refusing to exit, circumventing constraints, and discovering new spaces of freedom to make oneself heard, seen, felt, and realized”⁵⁷ is a powerful factor in protesting. This kind of direct presence in public with the objective of bringing down a regime is seen in the actions taken by protesters during Revolution. By gathering in the public and visible urban spaces of the streets and other highly visible public spaces like Tahrir Square, the protesters were taking an active role in public. According to Bayat, “Here [in public spaces] conflict originates from the *active* use of public space by subjects who, in the modern states, are allowed to use it only *passively* [...] or in other ways that the state dictates.”⁵⁸ By actively engaging in demonstrations, protesters were exercising their choice to act in public space. Egyptians demonstrating

⁵⁴ Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 167.

⁵⁵ Asef Bayat, “The ‘Street’ and the Politics of Dissent in the Arab World,” *Middle East Report*, No. 226 (Spring, 2003), 11, <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer226/street-politics-dissent-arab-world>.

⁵⁶ Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 167.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 98. He writes in the context of women’s protests in Iran.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

against Mubarak was an action clearly not sanctioned by the state, nor is demonstrating a passive use of public space. Additionally, Bayat writes “streets serve as a medium through which strangers [...] are able to establish latent communication with one another.”⁵⁹ During the protests and especially during the communications blackout, protesters communicated with one another on the street. This environment of the “political street”⁶⁰ serves as the environment in which all the later discussed actions take place: combating sexual harassment, creating graffiti art, and creating protest music. This new way of using public space, by creating a powerful presence of individuals and of the collective group, Egyptians rediscovered an agency and power to affect change in public; this newfound power continued to manifest itself in certain way after the Revolution as well. These themes of public space use, collective action, and social movement theory from Bayat and Rabbat are explored throughout the topical chapters.

An additional element of Bayat’s theorizing that is useful in this discussion is his ideas about how the collective actions of non-collective actors can coalesce in such a way as to affect change. According to Bayat,

collective actions of noncollective actors [...] embody shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices are rarely guided by an ideology or recognizable leadership and organizations.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁶¹ Ibid., 14.

This concept is directly applicable to much of the Revolution and especially the three cases of combatting sexual harassment, creating graffiti, and playing music. The people who took part in these activities were acting independently, but also in such a way that their presence in public formed a powerful collective for action, whether that action was protesting, combatting harassment, or creating graffiti and music.

Public Space and Tahrir Square

Nasser Rabbat, an architect and historian in the program for Islamic Architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, provides a useful introduction to the *maydan* [square] as public space in his article “The Arab Revolution Takes Back the Public Space” in which he writes about the way public space has been used in the Arab world and during the Arab Spring. According to Rabbat, the square existed originally as a public space in Arab cities as a place mostly for the use of elites rather than as a civic space.⁶² However, these spaces took on something of a new meaning when Europeans introduced them on a wider scale into Arab cities as a mirror to European plazas; according to Rabbat, these spaces “assumed civic meaning in the public eye [...] the squares were consecrated by the blood of protesters who demonstrated for independence and clashed with colonial forces”⁶³ when nationalist and anti-colonial movements took place. When non-colonial yet still non-democratic regimes came to power with leaders like Mubarak, public spaces were less used by the citizenry because of scrutiny by

⁶² Nasser Rabbat, “The Arab Revolution Takes Back the Public Space,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Autumn 2012), 203.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 203.

governmental forces. That being the case, the square as a fixture of public space was “denied [its] civic function for anywhere between thirty and fifty years of despotic rule across the Arab world depending on the country.”⁶⁴ Rabbat therefore writes that it was a surprise when the Arab Spring protests used these public square areas as a stage to come together with other countrymen.⁶⁵ The choice of the square as a public space in which to protest the regime is significant in that it is indeed so public and was utilized as a civic space by regular citizens.

Tahrir Square (Midan at-Tahrir) is in this instance the epitome of a public space used for civic purposes. During the Revolution, it was used as a site to express the will of the people to depose Mubarak. According to Rabbat, Tahrir Square wasn’t originally meant as a central square area but became that over time. Flanked by important buildings including the labyrinthine and confusing Mogamma government building for essential governmental paperwork, the Egyptian Museum, the Nile Hilton, and the Omar Makram Mosque, the Square became a focal point in Cairo over time.⁶⁶ During the Revolution, it was extensively used of course: “the square effectively became their [the protesters] home, their operation room, and our window onto the revolution.”⁶⁷ This unique public space is a microcosm of the Revolution is explored through the topics to follow. As the focal point of much Revolutionary activity, it is partially the focus of the topical chapters to follow.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 205.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 206.

⁶⁶ Nasser Rabbat, “Egypt Speaks for Itself in Tahrir Square: Cairo,” in *In the Life of Cities*, Mohsen Mostafavi, ed. (Harvard: Lars Muller Publishers, 2012), 199-204.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 196.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 2 examines the historiography of the Arab Spring and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, touching on the relevant and important writings which have been produced since that time. Despite the recent nature of these developments, there is a wealth of exciting and relevant writing on the topic. A brief literature review of relevant public history works is also included in order to additionally situate this thesis within the public history literature about ordinary men and women becoming part of or creating the historical record. Both sets of literature reviews help to set the context for the following topical chapters and demonstrate that the topics explored here are important and relevant in the field.

Chapter 3 examines the ways in which women have sought to change their reality after the Revolution. Specifically, this chapter focuses on several groups that have formed since the Revolution that actively seek to combat the sexual harassment of women in public spaces. Harassment is a fairly common problem in Cairo, with a range of harassment from cat-calling and yelling to physical assault. The groups which have formed go out into public spaces to patrol them to increase awareness about the problem, to document it, and to stop harassment when it is happening.

Chapter 4 examines the creation of graffiti in and around Cairo, the themes of which include satirization of Mubarak, his regime, and other political figures, the memorialization of those injured or killed in the Revolution, and the role of women in the Revolution. The creation of graffiti in this setting is evidence of a desire and ability to create artistic public forms of protest, satirization, or memorialization in a newly open public environment in which this kind of expression is more freely created.

Chapter 5 explores protest music which was created and played in public spaces during and after the Revolution as an artistic expression of protest. Both professional and inexperienced musicians created music themed around the 2011 Revolution, often drawing from the historical precedent set by formative musical figures in Egyptian figures.

In conclusion, I will consider the place of this thesis within the existing writing on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and consider some of the additional avenues of research available for the continued study of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and its consequences.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an introduction to the types and content of the sources used in the following topical chapters as well as an important overview of the historiography on the topic of the Arab Spring and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. In the case of source material, articles from online news outlets published during and after the Revolution function as primary sources, with the addition of websites of Egyptian bloggers providing important additional information. The historiography presented here on the ever changing topic of the Arab Spring and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, as well as a theoretical exploration of relevant social movement theories, provides an overview of some of the most relevant and scholarly writings on these topics. There is also a brief exploration of public history and contextual literature in order to situate this thesis within the literature of public history on ordinary men and women who help to create the historical record in notable ways. Understanding the following literature helps to place this thesis within the larger corpus of work on the Egyptian Revolution and public history.

Primary Source Material and Media

For source material, several online media outlets function as the primary sources of information including the Egyptian-produced and published news outlets *Al Ahram*, and *Egypt Independent*, as well as the scholarly “e-zine” websites *Jadaliyya* and *Muftah*. Additional online news sources are drawn upon for relevant articles on each topic, including news outlets like *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*. Each of these news providers have English versions (if they are not already primarily in English) of news and

articles accessible online, facilitating access and attracting regional and worldwide audiences. The media plays an important part in documenting certain events, especially very recent ones like the Egyptian Revolution. As such, news outlets and others serve as primary source material and are used to discuss and analyze the topics at hand. The objective in using media sources is not to compare or analyze the role of the media in reporting on the Arab Spring; a comparative approach is taken in other scholarly literature.⁶⁸ Rather, the goal is to use media as a source of up-to-the-minute topical information which was widely disseminated and read at the time and afterward. Because of the nature of the way in which newspaper sources are used, they function as primary source documents.

Additionally, the world of personal and group blogging and YouTube videos is a rich source of primary information on the topics discussed in this thesis. For example, the groups that formed to combat sexual harassment often have their own websites with a wealth of information on their purpose and activities. In the case of the graffiti art and Revolutionary music, both graffiti artists and musicians often maintain blogs about their own work, and their works are featured in interviews available on YouTube. Also, Cairenes interested in documenting and commenting on the Revolution have a strong blog presence online, allowing anyone to access relevant information on a wide variety of topics through the eyes of someone who experienced the Revolution and who continues to reflect on that process afterwards.

⁶⁸ See for example: Federica Fornaciari, "Framing the Egyptian Revolution: A content analysis of Al Jazeera English and the BBC," *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, Vol. 4, No. 2 and 3 (2011): pp 223-235.

To provide some background information on the primary news outlets: *Al Ahram* [The Pyramids] Online is the online branch of *Al-Ahram*, which was started by two Lebanese Christian brothers and has been published in Egypt since 1875.⁶⁹ In 2010, *Ahram Online* became available.⁷⁰ The publication overall has been heavily influenced by the state apparatus since the time of President Nasser when the news outlet was heavily influenced by the president through its editor. However, its prestige as a reliable source of news remains.⁷¹ *Al Ahram* is owned in large part by the Egyptian state and its coverage of the Revolution was extensive. Its coverage spans a range of topics on Egypt's news, including business, arts and culture, opinion, and heritage sections.

Egypt Independent is a newer publication started in 2009 as an arm of the *Al-Masr al-Youm* (Egypt Today) daily Egyptian newspaper. According to its own informational section, the website seeks to “challenge stereotypes and offer new possibilities to understanding the news.”⁷² The “untethered journalists” who write for the website are able to cover a wide range of stories, from mainstream stories to those that are more unusual or controversial. Unfortunately due to funding problems, *Egypt Independent's*

⁶⁹ Steven A. Cook, *The Struggle for Egypt: From Nasser to Tahrir Square* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 15.

⁷⁰ “About ahramonline,” *Ahram Online*, Accessed May 15, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/UI/Front/Aboutus.aspx>.

⁷¹ “Al-Ahram,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Accessed May 18, 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/10277/Al-Ahram>.

⁷² “About Egypt Independent,” *Egypt Independent*, Accessed May 18, 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/about>.

published hard copy English version will no longer be available.⁷³ The online version, however, is still online and available.

Published only online, *Jadaliyya* is an e-zine that publishes articles, book reviews, opinion pieces, and interviews from around the Arab world. It is part of the Arab Studies Institute which is a non-profit publishing and studying the Arab world.⁷⁴ *Jadaliyya* has topical sections, including reviews of new scholarly publications, interviews with prominent individuals, and country-specific coverage including Egypt, Syria, Turkey, the Maghreb, Syria, and the Arabian Peninsula. Topics are wide ranging and include politics, society, gender, and other important issues. The coverage of issues offered by *Jadaliyya* is more scholarly than news-based sources because its contributors seek to go beyond simply reporting the news to offer analysis and comment. The site solicits input from a wide range of scholars to supplement its own writers. *Jadaliyya* has extensively covered the Arab Spring and its aftermath across the Middle East and North Africa.

Muftah is another e-zine that was started in 2010 in an effort to publish articles which move away from the dominant conversations about the Middle East and North Africa that the website characterizes as “obsessed with terrorism, oil, and Islamism.” *Muftah* seeks to “highlight issues and concerns that mattered to the region’s people” instead. By focusing on topics outside the “normal” Western conception of the Middle East and North Africa, the website hopes to open debate, explore a wide breadth of topics, and in so doing, offer its readers a more complete understanding of the Middle

⁷³ Vivian Salama, “In the *Egypt Independent*’s closure, an end of a beginning,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, April 30, 2013, http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/egypt_independent_closes.php.

⁷⁴ “About,” *Jadaliyya*, Accessed May 18, 2013, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/about>.

East and North Africa.⁷⁵ In much the same way as *Jadaliyyah*, *Muftah*'s articles go into greater depth and analysis than regular news sources.

For scholarly writing on the topic of Arab media, Marc Lynch's writing is important as he studies the readership and evolution of major news sources in the Arab world. Lynch is a professor at George Washington University who teaches in political science and international affairs and also writes for Foreign Policy's Middle East Channel, so he is a well-informed and reliable source of media information. His writing on the media and its impact is important for understanding regional media. Some of his relevant writing appears in the historiography below. His contention that media outlets are very important in disseminating information and forming opinions help to explain why using *Egypt Independent*, *al Ahram*, *Jadaliyya*, and *Muftah* as primary sources is relevant in this instance, especially given the recent nature of the events in question.

In addition to these newspaper accounts, some firsthand oral information is relevant as well. In the summer of 2012 I traveled with University of Wisconsin-La Crosse to Egypt for three weeks to interview about ten Egyptians. As part of the study course, there were relevant readings in oral history theory and interview conduct, as well as readings on Egyptian history and the 2011 Revolution. The students on the trip were responsible for setting up interviewees with people who our group leader, Dr. Heidi Morrison, put us in touch with through her contacts in Cairo. Each interviewee was asked about their background, most were asked about anything they knew about the 1952 revolution, and all were asked to talk about the 2011 Revolution itself. The interviewees were eager and willing to talk about their own participation in the Revolution, their hopes

⁷⁵ "Our Mission," *Muftah*, Accessed June 23, 2013, <http://muftah.org/about/>.

for the future of the country, and the democratic process to elect a new President. At the time of the interviews, SCAF was still in power and elections were taking place just before we left the country – all in all, it was a very exciting time to be in Egypt and to be talking to people about the Revolution and prospects for democracy. The only down side of this information in the case of using it for this thesis is that, at the time, I was not thinking about questions that would be relevant for research for a thesis of this nature. The questions I and other students asked of our interviewees were certainly relevant, but unfortunately I did not at the time have the foresight to ask specifically about some of the topics in this thesis like graffiti and music. Some of the interviewees did talk about women taking part in protesting, especially the women themselves, but the other topics were not discussed. Nonetheless, the relevant and interesting material from these interviews supplements other material and provides first-hand, personal accounts of the Revolution through the eyes of Egyptian men and women who brought down a dictator. Because of the agreement we signed with each of the interviewees, their real names are withheld and their occupations are purposefully vague.

Literature Review: The Arab Spring and 2011 Egyptian Revolution

Despite the recent nature of the Arab Spring and the Egyptian Revolution, authors and scholars have produced a large body of work about the Arab Spring and the Egyptian Revolution in particular. During and after the uprisings across the Middle East, authors from around the world quickly took on the task of examining the historical antecedents of these uprisings, including the Egyptian Revolution, its causes, and its many implications for the future of Egyptian society and government. Each book included in this

historiography explores important facets of this conversation and contributes unique perspectives to the understanding of either the Arab Spring uprisings generally or the Egyptian Revolution specifically, covering causal factors, revolution timelines, and subsequent changes. The books included here are important for the student, scholarly, and professional understanding of the Arab Spring and the Egyptian Revolution because of each unique contribution to the conversation on these topics.

Because of the relevance of and continuing interest in the broad topic of the Arab Spring and the narrower topic of the Egyptian Revolution, scholars of this topic face the challenge (and excitement) that new scholarship is produced regularly. This historiography cannot comprehensively cover each one; the books included here are important for their high level of scholarship and the background of their authors. Each author comes at the issue from their own unique point of view and contributes their own dimension to the historiography. One common problem that all the books share is that that the authors were writing at a particular point in time about events that were still unfolding; this is not a detriment to their writing, but it is important to realize that many important events have transpired in the evolution of the Egyptian Revolution since the publishing of each of these books and that conditions on the ground in the Middle East and in Egypt are continuing to evolve and change. Because new scholarship is produced nearly every day, there is always more information for a scholar of this topic to seek out and it is incumbent on scholars to stay up to date on the latest writings.

To begin, Hamid Dabashi's *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (London: Zed Books, 2012), hypothesizes and discusses how the Arab Spring uprisings have changed everything about the Middle East. The author is an Iranian-American

professor at Columbia University. His expertise and previous writings on the Middle East and Iran put him in a unique position to discuss the upheaval to established theoretical frameworks that the Arab Spring brings into question. According to Dabashi, most existing theories about society, knowledge, revolutions, and governments are simply no longer valid because of a new kind of world that is emerging after the uprisings. These “open-ended” revolutions are ongoing, especially from the time that he wrote the book, given that the goals of the revolutions were yet unmet. Throughout his narrative, Dabashi makes the argument that scholars, media outlets, and others must reexamine their discourse on the Middle East. For example, moving past Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilization” and the East/West Orientalist binary thinking is essential; however, actually moving past existing tropes about the Middle East is challenging. He states that “we are indeed on a blank page of history.”⁷⁶ This particular statement seems over-optimistic given that no individual or government can simply wipe clean the history of one’s country. Unfortunately the ouster of Hosni Mubarak cannot, for example, erase the widespread poverty or corruption that exists in Egypt. In this sense, there is no clean slate. Dabashi also addresses the beginning of the crisis in Syria that had recently started when he wrote his book; as is the case with books that are written while events are still unfolding, much has transpired across the Middle East since the writing of his book. Because of this fact, the book itself leaves out some essential information about the continuing evolution of the uprisings, although a later edition will surely address these questions. Dabashi’s book is an important scholarly and theoretical contribution to the writings about the Arab Spring and the ways that it has challenged scholarly and popular

⁷⁶ Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 124.

perceptions of the Middle East. His questioning of the conceptual basis of the frameworks of knowledge about the way in which the Middle East is studied is helpful for scholars of this topic.

In another broad examination of the Arab Spring uprisings, Marwan Bishara's *The Invisible Arab: The Promise and Peril of the Arab Revolutions* (Nation Books, 2012) offers its readers a sweeping summary and analysis of the revolutions across the Arab world. As a journalist at *al Jazeera* with his own special program, Bishara's writing style is easy to read while covering a vast amount of historical and contemporary information. Bishara's book is different from Dabashi's in that it is an accounting of events more so than an examination of the ideology and scholarly framework of the Middle East. Providing the readers a chronological and detailed description of the various Arab uprisings, Bishara's book is important for understanding a regional context. Bishara contends that there is a kind of shared consciousness between all Arabs simply by virtue of being Arab. He does make sure to point out, however, that although the different Arab Spring revolutions have a "common sociopolitical agenda," the way that each revolution unfolded and where it will go in the future will heavily depend on each individual country.⁷⁷ This is an important fact to keep in mind in the Arab Spring narrative: each country's history will impact its future and no single model will prevail.

Bishara also discusses the power of the media to disseminate information, news, and images from the Revolution to home and international populations. His position as a journalist puts him in a unique position to evaluate the importance of news media in disseminating information and mobilizing populations to action. His writing about the

⁷⁷ Marwan Bishara, *The Invisible Arab: The Promise and Peril of the Arab Revolutions* (New York: Nation Books, 2012), 112.

media's power to aggregate and spread information to large numbers of people quickly and easily is an important point in the understanding of the Arab Spring and Egyptian Revolution.

Occasionally Bishara makes sweeping statements that seem to underplay the difficulties that will come with new governance across the Arab world. For example, Bishara writes that "the youth have broken the elites' paternalistic trusteeship on politics and power and instead embraced alternative models and modes of living that release talents, build stamina, and encourage dissent."⁷⁸ While it may be true that many youth have taken on new leadership roles and that old elite power structures may be on the decline, things simply cannot change overnight. Not unlike Dabashi, Bishara seems to be caught up in the power of the revolutionary moments to affect change. While on the one hand there will be major social overhaul on issues like jobs and education, the reality is that it will not happen overnight. Instead, those youth who want to break the power associated with the government or old elites have, and must continue, to work for their revolutionary goals. Nonetheless, his accounting of the uprisings and subsequent hopes for the future is well-written and important in the historiography of this topic.

Tariq Ramadan's *The Arab Awakening: Islam and the New Middle East* (London: Allen Lane, 2012) examines the political, geopolitical, and economic factors associated with the lead-up to the Arab Spring revolutions and the ways that those same elements will remain important in the future of rebuilding countries. Similarly to the preceding books, Ramadan's book traces some of the history of the multiple uprisings, although his analysis includes the question of whether or not there was more outside assistance and

⁷⁸ Ibid., 217.

training (from countries including the United States) than originally thought, as well as his thoughts on the necessary reforms in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. Ramadan includes both the broad context of events and also the local and specific contexts in each country upon which the uprisings were contingent. Ramadan details key issues including whether and how Islam and secularization will play a role in the post-uprising Middle East, given that both ideologies have a long history in the region. A new element that Ramadan's book contributes to the historiography on this relatively new topic is his discussion of the outside help that protest organizers may have had; he writes about how some young activists had received prior training from organizations from the United States and Eastern Europe. Rather than continuing to promote the idea that the uprisings were entirely contingent on time and circumstance with no pre-planning or training, Ramadan's writing suggests that there was in fact a concerted effort to train young men and women in nonviolent protests in preparation for just these kinds of uprisings.

On a conceptual level, Ramadan raises the question throughout his book of whether the successful uprisings (Egypt, Tunisia, Libya) across the Middle East can be considered revolutions or not. This particular question is one raised by several authors, and Ramadan answers it in the negative. Although he does not lay out particular criteria for what would constitute a revolution, he argues that because there was not a total social overhaul that the Arab Spring uprisings are not revolutions in the true sense.

Moving into books that deal specifically with the Egyptian Revolution, Tarek Osman's *Egypt on the Brink: From the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010) offers readers a history of the country covering politics, society, and religion. His newest 2011 revised edition includes a

conclusion that also discusses the Egyptian Revolution. Overall, his book creates a solid context for the way in which different groups of Egyptians (Copts, young people, and Islamists for example) have evolved on the political scene in Egypt since the early 20th century. He writes that “the events that were to culminate in the revolution began quietly”⁷⁹ but that the combination of multiple historical and political factors combined to create the impetus for the Egyptian Revolution. Osman’s book is unique in that it was originally written and published prior to the Egyptian Revolution, so his words about the problems facing Egypt are quite prescient. His writing is clear and straightforward, making it an excellent overview of the lead-up to and the Revolution itself.

Ashraf Khalil’s *Liberation Square: Inside the Egyptian Revolution and the Rebirth of a Nation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2011) centers, as the title suggests, on the protests and other activities that took place in Tahrir Square. Khalil is an Egyptian-American reporter who has covered Egypt for more than a decade for several publications including *The Economist* and *Foreign Policy*. Poetically, he writes that “Tahrir...became the epicenter of a revolution. Protesters not only transformed it, they were themselves transformed by their presence in it. Tahrir became a revolutionary organism unto itself.”⁸⁰ This central focus on Tahrir Square is especially useful in understanding and examining the ways in which public space was used during the Revolution and the focus on public space use. His book is structured much like that of others on the topic of the Egyptian Revolution, detailing Mubarak’s rise to power, his rule, and ultimate downfall. Unlike some of the other writers, Khalil does call the

⁷⁹ Osman, *Egypt on the Brink*, 1.

⁸⁰ Khalil, 5.

Egyptian uprisings a revolution. Because he was reporting directly from different neighborhoods in Cairo and from Tahrir Square, his perspective is unique and compelling to read. His writing style is that of a reporter: easy to read, filled with quotes from authorities and others, and informative while being accessible. He easily weaves in stories from his interviews with his writing, creating an informative but accessible narrative.

The edited volume compiled by Jeannie Sowers and Chris Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir: Revolution, Protest, and Social Change in Egypt* (London: Verso, 2012) contributes a unique dimension to the information available about the Egyptian Revolution. The volume includes articles from newspapers, as well as lengthier scholarly articles on a wide range of topics including the eighteen-day protest timeline, poetry, media, popular movements, governmental reform, the Muslim Brotherhood, gender in the protests, and youth. The volume is not meant to be a compilation of analytical or reflective essays; rather, each of the articles included is published as it was at the time during or just after the Egyptian Revolution. The decision to compile articles as they were published, without the addition of more reflective pieces, is important for readers hoping to examine media as it was produced during the Revolution and directly afterward.

Steven Cook's *The Struggle for Egypt: From Nasser to Tahrir Square* (Oxford University Press, 2011) is an excellent historical introduction to the modern history of Egypt since its time as a British protectorate to the present, including details of the 1952 Free Officers coup, the presidencies of Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat, relations with the West and other Middle Eastern countries, and finally the rule of Hosni Mubarak

and his overthrow. His exploration of the relationship of Egypt with the United States, including its ups and downs, is an interesting dimension to this historical narrative. Cook, who is the Hasib J. Sabbagh Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies for the Council for Foreign Relations, writes the detailed and interesting modern history as a way for the reader to fully understand the context in which the Revolution eventually emerged. A great asset to his writing is that he writes more comprehensive history than many of the other authors. His narrative of the Revolution itself is compelling, and his writing is engaging throughout the book. As with the others, his book was published at a point when the future of Egypt was still very much in question, so Cook writes with both hope and caution about the future trajectory of the country after the Revolution.

On the topic of media, Marc Lynch's *The Arab Uprisings: The Unfinished Revolutions of the Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012) is written from the perspective of a scholar whose writing is focused heavily on the media in the Arab world. His work on the media and internet communication in the Arab world is important for understanding the Middle East; his blog "Abu Aardvark" is a commentary on affairs in the Arab world for a global audience. In this book, Lynch details some of the failings of Arab regimes, including economic woes, a large rich-poor gap, corruption, and harsh security practices. Exacerbating these problems is the fact that everyone knew about them: "Perhaps the Arab regimes had always been bickering, incompetent, corrupt. But now, thanks to satellite television stations like *al-Jazeera* and the spreading presence of the Internet, their follies were on full display to a skeptical Arab public."⁸¹ In this statement, Lynch captures the importance of the media's role in disseminating

⁸¹ Lynch, *The Arab Uprisings*, 2.

information to masses of people quickly and efficiently. He argues that the media has had and will continue to have a profound effect on public opinion and mobilization. As with some earlier authors, Lynch is hesitant to use the word “revolution” to characterize the uprisings, arguing rather that time will tell what kinds of changes will come to each country that has overthrown its government. Lynch’s writing on the widespread importance and presence of the media throughout the Arab World helps to contextualize my decision to draw source information from several large news outlets for much of my topical information.

As an important complement to Lynch’s writing in his book *The Arab Uprisings: The Unfinished Revolutions of the Middle East*, his earlier book *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), offers important background information on the importance of media (al Jazeera in particular) in the modern Middle East in disseminating information and shaping public perception of events. Although the book focuses on Iraq, his theoretical and background information is helpful in understanding media in the Middle East.

Overall, a question addressed by several of the volumes including is whether or not the Egyptian Revolution can accurately be called a Revolution. Indeed, the overthrow of a particular government does not mean the overhaul of a social system; for example, the education system in Egypt or the government corruption will not be fixed simply because Hosni Mubarak is no longer in office. However, for the purposes of the discussion of social changes that will be the subject of this thesis, the nomenclature of whether or not the Egyptian actions in 2011 that overthrew Mubarak were or were not a

revolution does not have a direct bearing on the social changes that did take place in the public sphere. This thesis will refer to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution as such, given the dramatic ouster of Mubarak by the will of the people. Though change will certainly be slow and challenging, characterizing the events of January 2011 as less than a revolution is a disservice to the agency of Egyptians and to the changes that have come about as a result of the Revolution.

While the existing historiography is comprehensive on many topics, one under-examined topic is the changing social realities for everyday Egyptians. For the most part, the aforementioned books examine the larger historical changes associated with the Revolution, often focusing on government-level changes. This focus is understandable given the unprecedented nature of the overthrow of the government in a short span of time. However, what is excluded is often the micro-level changes for the ordinary Egyptian whose everyday lives were impacted in ways that have nothing to do with governmental decrees. By looking at several aspects of the ways in which Egyptians themselves are changing their social realities and re-taking their own agency in the public sphere, this thesis contributes an important perspective to the conversation about the Egyptian Revolution. Within the larger discussion about the Egyptian Revolution and its lasting relevance, impact, and trajectory, the social aspects of change within Egypt should not be forgotten or glossed over. This thesis seeks to explore a few of the many changes to Egyptian society.

Public History Literature and Context

This section of the literature review briefly touches on just a few of the many important writings that help to situate this thesis work within the public history field. The literature below is important within the public history discussion because the books examine some aspect of “regular” people making history or taking part in a Revolution and ending up as lasting parts of the historical record which so often favors the more powerful actors in history. This section speaks to the fact that the 2011 Egyptian Revolution was a revolution of regular people agitating for meaningful change in their own country and that thanks to social media, videos, oral histories, and the overall trend towards documenting the Revolution’s many facets, the ordinary Egyptians who brought down Mubarak will become part of well-known history.

The work of Yasmin Saikia at Arizona State University helps public historians explore again the importance of oral history and the common person to the creation of the historical record. In the case of Saikia’s recent work on the sufferings of Bangladeshi women during the 1971 war with India. Her book *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) documents her project of interviewing women who were raped during that war, as well as interviewing the men who were perpetrators of that rape. This previously unexplored topic is difficult to read about, but made more important by that fact. The experiences of the men and women she interviewed, set in a rich contextual history of the social and political situation of the time, helps readers to understand the horrors of the war and the lasting effects of the conflict even today. The ordinary people that she interviewed were finally allowed to talk about an event in their lives which was previously taboo to discuss.

Saikia's sensitive and equal treatment of all her interviewees shows the emphasis on telling the stories of ordinary men and women whose stories have now made their way into the historical record on the 1971 war. Her use of oral history to access and document these stories is notable for the fact that the stories of a wide strata of people are explored through this medium.

Additionally, Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) writes about the silences that exist in historical narratives and the way that this impacts our understandings of history. Trouillot argues that history is written by those in power. Different groups in history are represented unevenly in the historical record, largely thanks to the fact that those with power in a given situation are the ones responsible for writing the dominant historical narrative. This, however, means that the stories and viewpoints of other actors in history are silenced. One consequence of these silences in the historical record is that current teachings and of historical events or figures are skewed in favor of those who controlled power at the time of the event and because of the way history has been written about since that time.

Trouillot uses three case studies, that of Jean Baptiste Sans Souci's role in the Haitian Revolution, the Haitian Revolution itself, and Columbus's "discovery" of America to illustrate his points. In all of these cases, Trouillot also discusses how the perceptions of these events and people throughout history and how that demonstrates the silences in each case. Through these vignettes, Trouillot demonstrates that power plays an important role in the writing and the legacy of historical events. For its contribution to the field of public history, Trouillot's book reinforces the idea that public historians must

take care in their research to represent even those whose voices are not dominant in the historical record.

In the context of a more recent revolution, Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution is notable for the way in which the people expressed their popular will through demonstrations to bring about a change in government. This event is explored extensively in literature and articles and is becoming increasingly relevant again now because the country just underwent another period of sustained protest.⁸² Andrew Wilson's "Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' of 2004: The Paradoxes of Negotiation," in Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash's edited volume *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) provides an interesting context to and overview of this Revolution. The Orange Revolution was triggered by a rigged presidential election which would have brought Viktor Yanukovich to power (he who was recently overthrown in recent protests in 2014) instead of Viktor Yushchenko.⁸³ This Revolution helps situate the Egyptian Revolution within the wider context of recent governmental overthrows worldwide and demonstrates the prevalence of non-violent protests which unfortunately often turn violent because of attempts to quash demonstrations. The main tie to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution in this instance is the fact that Ukrainian protesters demonstrated in

⁸² See for example, "The February revolution," *The Economist*, March 1, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21597974-can-ukraine-find-any-leaders-who-will-live-up-aspirations-its-battered-victorious>.

⁸³ Andrew Wilson, "Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' of 2004: The Paradoxes of Negotiation," in *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*, edited by Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 335.

the streets and particularly in their own *Maidan* (square) in Kiev.⁸⁴ This directly links the tactics of the 2004 Orange Revolution to that of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution for the extensive use of public spaces to demonstrate discontent in both cases. The more recent public protests revolving around the issue of the government forging closer ties with Russia rather than the European Union is again demonstrating the power of public presence of protesters.⁸⁵

Going back in time to a somewhat similar display of the power of the citizenry to overthrow a government, the 1979 Iranian Revolution can also help to contextualize the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. The Iranian people took to the streets, a common theme again, to overthrow the Shah, Mohamad Reza Shah Pahlavi. His deposition and exile eventually brought to power the previously exiled Ayatollah Khomeini.⁸⁶ A broad base of the population protested to bring down the shah, notably including women's groups.⁸⁷ However, despite the presence of women in these protests, women's rights were not protected under the new government and some aspects of the rights of women were in fact revoked. The significant presence of women in these protests links to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution in that women actively took part in both efforts.

In the same vein as these scholars writing on significant social and political movements, I seek to illuminate the experiences of Egyptian men and women making

⁸⁴ Ibid., 341.

⁸⁵ "Ukraine profile: A chronology of key events," *BBC*, updated March 5, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18010123>.

⁸⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, "Mass Protests in the Iranian Revolution 1977-79," in *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Ghandhi to the Present*, edited by Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 162.

⁸⁷ James Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 298.

history. The 2011 Egyptian Revolution, an event very much defined by the common man rather than the government, the historical record of photos, signs, videos taken on cell phones, songs, graffiti, tweets, and Facebook posts will endure as part of the historical record of the Revolution. This will in some way help to ensure that the common and normally underrepresented voice of the common Egyptian man or woman endures in historical memory. The brief exploration here of public history and revolution movements from the past serves to contextualize the 2011 Egyptian Revolution in a longer lineage of men and women taking to the streets to create change. The Egyptians who took part in the Revolution were indeed people *in public, making history*.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN'S ACTIVISM IN EGYPT

This chapter explores the power of collective action and the ability to act in public as expressed through actions to combat public sexual harassment of women after the Revolution. It examines emerging new ideas about combating women's sexual harassment that demonstrate a new outlook on collective action and the street as a theatre of action. This topic demonstrates the social change during and after the Revolution and the new found power of collective action in public space on the part of Egyptians.

After a short examination of the role of women in Egyptian political life and collective actions including during the Revolution, the main topical focus of the chapter is on the kinds of actions taken by ordinary men and women to combat sexual harassment in the streets in the post-Revolutionary era, particularly the organization of groups to patrol public spaces to stop harassment. These actions demonstrate the discovered power of collective action that was found during the Revolution and carried over to post-Revolutionary Egypt. Asef Bayat's conceptualization of the way in which people use the streets as a theatre of action and as a place to express and use the power of collectives to change social realities are directly at play in this case. As important participants in all aspects of the Revolution, women were able to be active players in public space. I argue that this sense of collective power was manifested after the Revolution in groups whose purpose was to raise awareness of, combat, and eventually end public sexual harassment. These groups formed after the Revolution actively combat the problem of public sexual

harassment. I argue that in discovering the power of public presence to overturn a government, women's agency changed and increased as a result of the Revolution.

Women's Activism for Change in Egypt

The role of women in society and women's activism in Egypt has a long and important history. From the history explored here, it is clear that women have long been agitating for, demonstrating for, and working towards gender equality in various ways and have taken part in groups or other collective activities over time aimed towards, for example, gaining better educational opportunities or better labor conditions. The fight for gender equality has always featured prominent individuals and groups whose actions or writings were formative in the march towards an equality that has not yet been achieved and the groups who worked in public spaces to end harassment join a long history of efforts towards women's equality.

In the early 19th century, major changes were taking place in Egypt as increased contact with Western cultures through trade and easier exchange of information brought changing notions of gender roles and rights. This changed Egypt both socially and economically in ways that were important for women in society and women became a focus of debates about feminism as Western values became better known.⁸⁸ Later in the 19th century, the Egyptian state undertook some reforms that included an expansion of education for upper class girls, a change that eventually spread to lower class families as well.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 127-129.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

During the British occupation beginning in 1882, the British did not expand education for boys or girls, but local benevolent societies took up the responsibility for education expansion.⁹⁰ By the 1890s, there were women vocally advocating for more women's education through national publications.⁹¹ Around the same time, Egyptian women were taking on some of the sartorial choices of Western women like not wearing the veil, as well as becoming more visible in public spaces.⁹² Over time, the veil has become a symbol of the struggle for women's rights, with some women for or against the wearing of the veil in public spaces.

The veil proved to be an important question in Qasim Amin's *Tahrir al-Mar'a* (The Liberation of Women) which was published in 1899 and argued for education, fairer divorce laws, and the transformation of culture through changing customs like veiling. Amin's book is considered a major milestone in Arab feminism.⁹³ However, according to Leila Ahmed, one of the foremost scholars on women, gender, and equality in Islam, his advocacy for Western-style norms was akin to replacing one kind of patriarchy (Islamically-grounded male dominated society) with another (Western patriarchy).⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ibid.,137-138.

⁹¹ Ibid., 140-141.

⁹² Ibid., 142-143.

⁹³ Ibid., 144-145. Amin was a French-educated Egyptian lawyer who vocally advocated for women's rights from a heavily western influenced point of view.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 162-163.

In the early 20th century, women participated actively in protests against British occupation between 1919 and 1922,⁹⁵ while there was a concurrent blossoming of women's rights discourse through journals and other intellectual pursuits, including the founding of the Intellectual Association of Egyptian Women in 1914 by Huda Sha'rawi (1879-1947).⁹⁶ Sha'rawi was born in 1879 in Upper Egypt and she later became the leader of an Egyptian feminist movement called The Egyptian Feminist Union.⁹⁷ The Egyptian Feminist Union was founded in 1923 and with the aim of fighting for women's suffrage, legal equality, and marriage law reform,⁹⁸ as well as the promotion of women's right to work outside the home in a chosen vocation.⁹⁹ Formation of this group allowed Sha'rawi and other group representatives to attend an international women's meeting. Upon her return to Egypt, Sha'rawi made the famous gesture of taking off her veil,¹⁰⁰ in part an indication of her promotion of Western-style feminism.¹⁰¹ Her vision of total female equality was not achieved, however, at the governmental or social level during her lifetime.¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Sarah Graham-Brown, "Women's Activism in the Middle East: A Historical Perspective," in *Women and Power in the Middle East*, Suad Joseph and Susan Slymowics, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 25.

⁹⁶ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 172.

⁹⁷ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 32-33.

⁹⁸ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 176.

⁹⁹ Ghada Hashem Talhami, *The Mobilization of Muslim Women in Egypt* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida), 16.

¹⁰⁰ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 176.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁰² Talhami, 12.

On the other side of feminist discourse in Egypt is Zeinab al-Ghazali (1918-2005) who was part of the Egyptian Feminist Union but left it in favor of forming her own more Islamic-leaning group, the Muslim Women's Association in the 1930s.¹⁰³ Her group aligned itself with the Muslim Brotherhood and through the 1950s and 1960s worked with the Brotherhood on some of their efforts including Islamic education.¹⁰⁴ Imprisoned for her association with the Brotherhood and a purported plot to overthrow the government in 1965, al Ghazali spent six years in prison before being pardoned by President Sadat.¹⁰⁵ From her release until her death, she continued to be vocal in her support of women's veiling while also promoting women's work outside the home (with the consent of her husband) as well as other women's freedoms from an Islamic point of view.¹⁰⁶

In more recent years, the left-leaning Nawal El-Saadawi (1931-) has dedicated her efforts to increasing women's rights in Egypt. El-Saadawi, a doctor who served as Director General of Health Education during the 1960s and who speaks and writes about women's health issues has written and "done more to challenge the misogynist and androcentric practices of the culture" than many others after having seen physical abuses of women in her years as a doctor.¹⁰⁷ She "regards Islam as having progressive potential for women" but that women in the Middle East seem to be caught in a cycle of social

¹⁰³ Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 110.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁰⁷ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 215-216.

control in their own societies while Western influences are not necessarily positive either for their “commodification” of women.¹⁰⁸

Even at the age of eighty, El-Saadawi was a vocal proponent of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, taking part in the demonstrations. In an interview in Tahrir Square with a star-struck Nicholas Kristof from the New York Times during the Revolution, El-Saadawi speaks eloquently about how she has seen demonstrations against King Farouk, Nasser, and Sadat and that she was arrested by Sadat and Mubarak and silenced for her writings. Now, however, she says she is taking part in a true Revolution: “I am here because I feel I am born again. I am eighty years of age, eight-zero, and I am born again. Those millions speak for me and I speak for them, and now our power is here.”

Kristof asked her specifically about how many women were taking part in the protests and whether this was a unique moment. El Saadawi said that most women in the Square, some of whom were wearing *niqab*, probably did not spend much time outside their houses but they came out for this movement. She also points out that “now we say ‘Egypt’” to refer to each other rather than man, woman, or Christian, and that she hopes for a secular constitution that would make everyone equal. “We came out for freedom, dignity, equality, and justice,” including in areas of gender equality in the eyes of the law, according to El-Saadawi, reiterating her commitment to gender equality in Egypt.¹⁰⁹

In recent years, women have been active parts of protests as noted in the Genealogy of Protest section in the Introduction around issues like labor rights. What is clear from this history is that the state itself has not shown particular concern for

¹⁰⁸ Graham-Brown, 31.

¹⁰⁹ “Nawal El Saadawi in Tahrir Square,” Nicholas Kristof from New York Times, Filmed Interview, Tahrir Square, Egypt, February 3, 2011, *YouTube*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3ueZqu_FU4.

legislating for women's rights and equality. While there are some laws dictating marriage age, divorce rules, and basic rights, the enforcement of these seems to be lacking, and this leads to women and men creating their own change through taking part in strikes or other protests. The new revelation that comes along with women's participation in the 2011 Revolution and subsequent actions to deter sexual harassment is the purposeful use of public space as an arena for change.

Women in Public Space

In addition to the historical involvement of some women in political and social life, it is also important to examine some of the social conditions that existed prior to the revolution in order to establish a baseline against which to read post-revolutionary actions. In this instance, a short exploration of the prevalence of sexual harassment in public spaces is necessary for the argument that although harassment itself has not necessarily been eliminated after the Revolution, that the mode of resistance is different as a result of the power of collective action that was demonstrated in the Revolution and carried over into post-Revolutionary society. The information here is mostly centered in Cairo because of the availability of information about Tahrir Square and post-revolutionary conditions. The groups detailed here which organized to combat harassment also operate mainly in Cairo.

Sexual harassment in public spaces was a prevalent problem in Egyptian society prior to the Revolution. Sexual harassment includes any kind of unwanted sexual advances by males towards females in public space. This can include "behavior such as ogling, gestures, offers to perform sexual acts, questions of a private and sexual nature"

or other actions including verbal harassment.¹¹⁰ These harassing actions interrupt a woman's ability to freely move through public spaces and participate in public life as equal members of society. In this instance, the term "public spaces" or "public sphere" is meant to include the street and sidewalk, subway cars, or public gathering spaces such as cafés.¹¹¹ The state does not exercise explicit control over public space; the public sphere is different from "the official sphere and the private sphere... located *between* the official and the private spheres."¹¹² Public spaces function often as spaces of movement from one place to another, places for commerce or for meeting, as well as relaxation like public gardens or cinemas. As active members of Egyptian society, many women of course use public spaces extensively on a daily basis.

The prevalence of sexual harassment in public places is a phenomenon documented and noted by various historians and groups in their own writing. For example, Galal Amin, an Egyptian professor at the American University in Cairo, wrote in 2000 about his personal observations about the differences between his mother's generation and his daughter's generation. According to Amin, "Egyptian women have achieved remarkable progress in their relationship with men, in their intellectual

¹¹⁰ Rasha Mohammed Hassan, Aliyaa Shoukry, and Nehad Abul Kosman, "Clouds in Egypt's Sky – Sexual Harassment: From Verbal Harassment to Rape, A Sociological Study," *The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights*, 2008, 13. http://egypt.unfpa.org/Images/Publication/2010_03/6eeeb05a-3040-42d2-9e1c-2bd2e1ac8cac.pdf.

¹¹¹ Nadia Ilahi, "You Gotta Fight for Your Right(s): Street Harassment and Its Relationship to Gendered Violence, Civil Society, and Gendered Negotiations," (Master's thesis, American University in Cairo, 2008), 27-28. https://dar.aucegypt.edu/bitstream/handle/10526/3259/Ilahi_Thesis_AUC.pdf?sequence=1.

¹¹² Shmuel Eisenstadt, "Concluding Remarks: Public Sphere, Civil Society, and Political Dynamics in Islamic Societies," in *The Public Sphere in Muslim Societies*, ed. Miriam Hoexter, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, Nehemia Levtzion (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 140.

emancipation, in their self-confidence, and in their ability to speak out.”¹¹³ In particular, Amin notes that his mother rarely left the family house; in contrast, his married adult daughter goes to school and works outside the home.¹¹⁴ In all the changes he observes, a common thread is that intellectual development and the “ability to speak out” all require an increased and visible role of women in the public realm. The increased presence of women in new spaces and roles in society evidences the increased mobility of women in society to attend school or go to work. This increase in mobility and presence in society was not without issue, as sexual harassment of women in public spaces is a problem in Egyptian society today.¹¹⁵

The issue of sexual harassment of women in Egyptian public space is also examined as a social issue by scholars and human rights or women’s rights advocacy groups. For example, Nadia Ilahi’s American University in Cairo 2008 Master’s thesis “You Gotta Fight for your Right(s): Street Harassment and Its Relationship to Gendered Violence, Civil Society, and Gendered Negotiations,” details the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in Egyptian society coupled with a survey of Egyptian men and women about their own experiences with sexual harassment. Her thesis finds that sexual harassment in public space in Egypt is a widespread problem which “hinders women’s mobility and infringes on their access to public spaces.”¹¹⁶ While women are frequent users of

¹¹³ Galal Amin, *Whatever Happened to the Egyptians* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 83-84.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹¹⁵ This is not to say that the women are responsible for their harassment because they chose to enter the public sphere. This is certainly not the case.

¹¹⁶ Ilahi, 1.

Egyptian streets and public spaces including the metro to go about their personal or family business, or to travel to and from school or work, “gendered hostility” is a problem for many women on a regular basis.¹¹⁷ Ilahi notes that in some cases of public sexual harassment which she examined dating from 2006 the police did arrest some harassers which was a significant change from the past; however, social attitudes towards sexual harassment still tend to blame the woman.¹¹⁸ In terms of systematic police action to stop harassment in the street, Ilahi’s writing makes it clear that the police are uninterested in being active in harassment deterrence. Ilahi’s research and interviews with Egyptians evidence the apathy of the police. She writes that the combination of “the absence of any anti-harassment laws” and police apathy is problematic because it seems to validate harassment in public.¹¹⁹ Because there are not lawful safeguards or social condemnation of public harassment, it condones the actions of the harassers as having the power to make those actions. Ilahi’s studies and writing clearly demonstrate the widespread presence of sexual harassment; in the post-revolutionary environment, making this kind of harassment unacceptable by policing public spaces is a significant change which is explored later.

In 2008, The Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights, a non-governmental organization working to promote gender equality in Egypt since 1996, published a report called “Clouds in Egypt’s Sky – Sexual Harassment: from Verbal Harassment to Rape.” This extensive report documents the fact that that 83% of Egyptian women surveyed by

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 94.

the group reported “exposure to harassment” and 46.1% had been harassed themselves.¹²⁰ The report also finds that although women think they will be safer in a crowd, this was not found to be true through the study (a fact unfortunately borne out by the fact that women were harassed during protests).¹²¹ Additionally, women who were dressed wearing the *hijab* or the *niqab* were subject to harassment in nearly the same numbers as their un-veiled counterparts, disputing the common idea that only “inappropriately” dressed women are harassed.¹²² However, these instances of harassment, many women chose not to report these problems because they worried about not actually receiving help, or that they would earn a bad reputation.¹²³ It is clear from these studies that sexual harassment is a common problem in Egyptian society. There was awareness of the problem of sexual harassment and groups fighting to combat it. The Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights identifies a number of routes to curb harassment, including police training, increased security on the streets, anti-harassment laws, an effective reporting mechanism, and creating jobs for young people who are common harassers.¹²⁴ While the ECWR survey identified these mechanisms towards a safer public space, men and women in the post-Revolutionary environment are creating new and unique public and collective deterrence methods. The recommendations are all important and useful ways to

¹²⁰ Hassan, Shoukry, Kosman, 16.

¹²¹ See for example: Jadaliyya Reports, “This is a Mass Sexual Assault... We Will Resist (Video),” *Jadaliyya*, February 4, 2013, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/9972/this-is-a-mass-sexual-assault-...-we-will-resist>.

¹²² Hassan, Shoukry, Kosman, 16.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

curb sexual harassment, but the post-Revolutionary mechanisms go beyond those outlined by ECWR.

Women in the 2011 Revolution

Women participated actively in protests across Egypt to bring down the Mubarak regime. Women's participation in the protests and their later actions to form groups to combat harassment post-Revolution point to the same change: increased agency and ability to act in public. Each instance of an Egyptian woman choosing to protest in public alongside her male Egyptian countrymen demonstrates a willingness to come together for a common goal. This common purpose served to lessen the gender divide during the protests. Protests continued following the ouster of Mubarak including on the first and second anniversaries of the Revolution, protests in which women were again active participants.

Many women who took part in the Revolution likely share the sentiments of Asma, a young woman working in education in Cairo who protested and was detained by state security while protesting. She said that being a woman did not make her feel apprehensive about her participation in the protests and that she did not fear harassment:

You know actually, that's the first time I ever walked confidently in the streets of Cairo. It was really the first time because otherwise I would always be wary of what I'm going to wear, where I'm going to walk, the way I walk [...] I remember on the last day, on the 11th of February when we knew Mubarak was out, I took the car with three guys I don't know, they drove me home. You could trust anyone during those days, because all the people had just the same cause, we're all down the street for one

main thing we all want and we all share. So nobody had the time to harass a woman [...] [it] was very safe back then.¹²⁵

One middle-aged businessman expressed his admiration for the Egyptian women who took part in the protests, responding to a question about whether women were harassed during protests:

Now when that [organized harassment] didn't work [to get women to stay out of protests] and the women got even more courageous, until a certain point where I would say the effect of a woman chanting something, and all the group the group of people around her chanting after her, that's really empowering. So the Egyptian woman proved so courageous sometimes you feel like a wimp just watching them. Really courageous, really persistent, and not really fearing anything.¹²⁶

Tahrir Square and other areas were not always safe for women during the protests, as physical sexual assaults were reported and recorded. Another woman, Leila, who works in a medical profession in Cairo, also took part in the protests and acknowledged that there was some level of harassment, saying: "It happened, but even happened more from the army, not the police [...] It was very bad."¹²⁷ Another man spoke of organized groups of "thugs," possibly government-sponsored in his opinion, which systematically harassed women in an effort to keep women from demonstrating.¹²⁸ "Female protesters have been beaten, dragged through streets, and shot at along with their brethren

¹²⁵ "Asma," interviewed by Hannah Schmidl and Logan Shea, Cairo, Egypt, June 2012, tape recording.

¹²⁶ "Ahmed" interview.

¹²⁷ "Leila," interviewed by Hailey Tyznik and Alison Weiler, Cairo, Egypt, June 2012, tape recording.

¹²⁸ "Ahmed" interview.

protesters. They have been imprisoned...and repressed just as ruthlessly as their male comrades” writes *Jadaliyya* co-founder Maya Mikdashi about protests after Mubarak’s ouster. However, despite this parity of desire to oust Mubarak and later to continue to fight for a better future, “they [women] have been pinched, grabbed, and harassed by both regime supporters and their political allies in Tahrir. They have been stripped and they have been raped...”¹²⁹ The experience in the Revolution included men and women, and “all the people had the same cause.”¹³⁰ It is clear from news stories and accompanying photos that women were out in the streets as much as their male counterparts; they too had a stake in ending Mubarak’s rule,¹³¹ but their presence was also met with harassment in some cases.

In the aftermath of the Revolution, the conscious choice to form groups like *Basma*, Operation Anti Sexual-Harassment (*OpAntiSH*), and others detailed below to patrol public spaces to combat harassment or to educate others about harassment demonstrates a newfound power to act in public that did not exist in such force before the Revolution. The contention here is not that sexual harassment was absent from arenas of protests or that the Revolution erased harassment as a social problem in Egypt. Rather, these new actions demonstrate women have found new ways to combat this harassment in a public way that did not exist prior to the Revolution. The newfound power of being able to participate in large-scale and impactful public action in the Revolution imbued

¹²⁹ Maya Mikdashi, “The Gendered Body Public: Egypt, Sexual Violence and Revolution,” *Jadaliyya*, January 28, 2013, http://photography.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/9826/the-gendered-body-public_egypt-sexual-violence-and.

¹³⁰ “Asma,” interview.

¹³¹ One need only Google image search “Egyptian Revolution” and look at the makeup of crowds to see the gender mix.

certain women with more power to continue to act to combat harassment after the Revolution. The power of collective action was demonstrated on a large scale during the Revolution and that power continued post-Revolution.

Post-Revolutionary Collective Actions Against Sexual Harassment

During and after the Revolution, women continue to be part of the active public sphere in Cairo street life. The power of public, collective action discovered in the Revolution by millions of Egyptians translated into a blossoming of groups whose mission it is to stop sexual harassment of women in the streets through a variety of methods. Through their actions, groups are exemplifying Asef Bayat's concept of the *power of presence*, defined as "the assertion of collective will in spite of all odds, refusing to exit, circumventing constraints, and discovering new spaces of freedom to make oneself heard, seen, felt, and realized."¹³² By being in public space and exercising their freedom to go to school, work, and go about their lives, women are exercising the power of presence on a daily basis. Unfortunately, many women are also harassed on a daily basis. By forming groups to combat sexual harassment, women are indeed "discovering new spaces of freedom" that will make them "heard, seen, felt, and realized" in public spaces without the fear of harassment. Bayat also suggests that "alternative forms of struggle must be discovered"¹³³ to old methods. Here, those alternative forms of struggle are to form groups to combat harassment in the streets. By not depending on the police to work to curb harassment and instead forming groups to

¹³² Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 98.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 52.

combat it themselves, women and men in those groups can affect change on a local level and in new ways.

Since the Revolution, the power of collective action is once again being evidenced by these new groups formed to combat harassment, in that these groups are working in public spaces with the expressed intent to change the norm of sexual harassment. Similar to before the Revolution, the police force continues to be unconcerned with the widespread problem of sexual harassment in public space, although President Morsi ordered an “investigation” into the issue.¹³⁴ Reports vary on who can be considered accountable for the assaults themselves: is it organized groups? Individuals who turn violent in a protest situation? In the protests that have continued since the Revolution, is harassment a spontaneous product of gender mixing, or an organized campaign to keep women from participating for fear of harassment? Some groups like “Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment” (*OpAntiSH*, detailed below) believe that the attacks are orchestrated by some individual or group because the attacks appear to be fairly organized and happen in a consistent manner.¹³⁵ Some Egyptians blame sexual assault on the women themselves because of the clothes a woman chooses to wear for being too provocative, or the fact that she was participating in something like a public demonstration,¹³⁶ a mindset which is common. The widespread problem of harassment

¹³⁴ Leila Fadel, “Vigilantes Spray-Paint Sexual Harassers in Cairo,” *National Public Radio*, November 1, 2012, <http://m.npr.org/news/World/164099058>.

¹³⁵ Elisabeth Jaquette, “The Heroes of Tahrir: Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment,” *Muftah*, February 4, 2013, <http://muftah.org/heroes-of-tahrir/>.

¹³⁶ Virginie Nguyen, “Women’s group: authorities “blame” victims of sexual assault,” *Egypt Independent*, February 12, 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/women-s-group-authorities-blame-victims-sexual-assault>.

prompted many groups to form during and after the Revolution with the goal of curbing, deterring, and eventually stopping sexual harassment in public spaces. For example, the groups “Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment,” (*OpAntiSH*) “*Basma*,” and “*Estargel!*,” the activities of which are further discussed below, patrol public space to deter harassment. These groups demonstrate the collective will and active power of certain Egyptian men and women who have decided to act outside of any official source of power to combat a social ill. These groups work in explicitly public spaces, outside of official channels. The groups use varied tactics to achieve their goals, ranging from acting as aggregators of sexual harassment reporting, to spray painting harassers to publicly mark them, to patrolling protest areas during demonstrations. Their actions are undertaken as groups of individuals who choose to do this kind of volunteer work.

While there were fewer modes of resistance available to women to combat harassment before the Revolution, the *Estargel!* or “*Be a Man!*” campaign, among others, has been working in public spaces to minimize harassment since the Revolution. This group composed mainly of young men wearing vests with “Harassment Prevention” on the back, works in public spaces including Tahrir Square in Cairo to keep a lookout for men who are harassing women. Then, they use spray paint to tag them with the word “harasser.”¹³⁷ This kind of do-it-yourself law enforcement indicates that men and women are taking it upon themselves to curtail the harassment of women in public. By exercising the newfound power that Egyptians have, some have taken it upon themselves in this kind of group to very openly combat harassment in the streets. One member of *Estargel!* says that he hopes the public shaming his group inflicts on harassers will deter further

¹³⁷ Fadel.

harassment, while another says he hopes it will send the message that harassment is unacceptable.¹³⁸ Because of the institutional or top-down lack of concern for this problem, small collective actions are the mode of prevention chosen by some young men and women. This group is demonstrating that there are those who are against harassment and are willing to take it upon themselves to change the norm.

Another group with a similar mission but different mode of operation is a group called *Basma*, or “Imprint.” The group was started by a young Egyptian woman, Nihal Saad Zaghloul after she herself was harassed in the street during a demonstration. She recounts that she was assaulted by innumerable men in a mob in Tahrir Square. Nihal Saad Zaghloul says she thinks that the attacks are “orchestrated, by anyone who benefits from having Tahrir not secured...”¹³⁹ implying a rather sinister connotation to the attacks.

Nihal Saad Zaghloul and the group she formed, which is mostly composed of men, take collective public action to protect women from harassment. This includes public patrolling as a group and helping women safely onto women’s only subway cars.¹⁴⁰ According to the group’s active Facebook page,

Imprint Movement is a voluntary social movement that strives for radically changing all that distorts the society of ignorance and backwardness and to support and help develop all that serve society in every field possible.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Bel Trew, “Breaking the silence: Mob sexual assault on Egypt’s Tahrir,” *Ahram Online*, July 3, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentPrint/1/0/46800/Egypt/0/Breaking-the-silence-Mob-sexual-assault-on-Egypt-.aspx>.

¹⁴⁰ Rosie Swash, “How Egyptians are fighting harassment in the streets,” *The Guardian*, November 5, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2012/nov/05/egyptians-fighting-harassment-streets>.

This aim is clearly wider than simply combating sexual harassment; however, the main activity of the group is harassment deterrence.¹⁴¹ Saad Zaghoul says that men feel they can harass women in public without consequence, so her group seeks volunteers to form patrols for public spaces, including gender-segregated subway cars which are a common place where men harass women.¹⁴² The group aims for “individual engagement” with men who might be treating women disrespectfully in an effort to “change social attitudes.”¹⁴³ The mobilization of men and women to go into public space expressly to combat harassment demonstrates that harassment is an acknowledged problem to which people are finding new remedies. Similarly to *Estargel!*, the members of this group not only aim to combat harassment but also to make it a socially unacceptable practice by trying to stigmatize it in some way.

In the digital realm, the project called “HarassMap” which claims to be the first “independent initiative” to work against harassment in Egypt, allows women to use SMS messages to report sexual harassment to the website, which features a map pinpointing sites of harassment.¹⁴⁴ The “HarassMap” records instances of harassment reported to the group in real time. This interactive map is accessible online to anyone and is meant both

¹⁴¹ “About,” Imprint Movement Facebook page, Accessed June 12, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/Imprint.Movement.eg/info>.

¹⁴² Borzou Daragahi, “Patrols help protect Egyptian women,” *Financial Times*, August 24, 2012, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/018a4fc6-eddd-11e1-8d72-00144feab49a.html#axzz2CVeP0gH0>.

¹⁴³ Kelby Olson, “Sexual Harassment and Social Change in Cairo,” *Muftah*, May 16, 2013, <http://muftah.org/sexual-harassment-and-social-change-in-cairo/>.

¹⁴⁴ “Who we are,” *HarassMap*, Accessed June 12, 2012, http://harassmap.org/en/?page_id=2.

to allow reporting of incidence and also for people to see where problem areas might be.¹⁴⁵ Their website provides information on their mission:

HarassMap lets women join with other women – and men – in speaking out against what has become a social cancer that infringes upon women’s access to the public space [...] together, our voices can change the social norm that causes victims to remain silent.¹⁴⁶

To work to give women a voice, the group provides the opportunity for women to share their harrowing experiences digitally while also identifying “hotspot” areas where harassment seems to be frequent.¹⁴⁷ By “encouraging bystanders...to speak up against harassers and have a zero-tolerance attitude toward harassment” the group seeks to return to a time when it was socially unacceptable for women to be publicly sexually harassed.¹⁴⁸ The HarassMap website differs from *Estargel!* or *Basma* because it is web-based, but the aim to curb harassment and create a safe public sphere for women is the same.

Yet another group that has garnered media attention for its activities is Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment/Assault (*OpAntiSH*) whose mission is to stop sexual harassment in protest settings in Tahrir Square in particular. The group organizes patrols composed of both men and women to go into Tahrir during protest times, and also responds to

¹⁴⁵ “The Map,” *HarassMap*, Accessed July 7, 2013, http://harassmap.org/en/?page_id=93.

¹⁴⁶ “Executive Summary,” *HarassMap*, Accessed November 21, 2012, http://blog.harassmap.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/harassmap_executive_summary.pdf.

¹⁴⁷ “About,” *HarassMap*, Accessed November 21, 2012, <http://blog.harassmap.org/about/>.

¹⁴⁸ “What We Do,” *HarassMap*, Accessed July 7, 2013, Available at http://harassmap.org/en/?page_id=16.

reports of incidents of assault in case women need medical or psychological assistance.¹⁴⁹ The group has been active since the Revolution and patrols other organized protests. In 2013, the group had about 30 members who participated in anti-harassment activities, wearing shirts emblazoned with “Against Harassment” and “A Safe Square for All”¹⁵⁰ to distinguish themselves. The members of this group are described as “visceral, principled, and uncompromised” in choosing to take part in *OpAntiSH* despite knowing the risk of violence or assault themselves while they are patrolling.¹⁵¹

Aalam Wassef, an Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment Coordinator, says that “Some cases of harassment are spontaneous” but that his group “noticed that coordinated and organized mobs of harassers [...] are quite likely paid and armed to do so.”¹⁵²

Another volunteer, Salma Shamel, recounted her own experience of being a volunteer for *OpAntiSH*, and then herself being assaulted while out patrolling with her group. She was volunteering with *OpAntiSH* during January of 2013 during a time of protest and was sent to Tahrir Square after reports of an assault happening; she and her companions spotted the problem, but were quickly assaulted themselves by some men. The men grabbed Shamel all over her body; Shamel recounts that she was groped everywhere, violently violated, and stripped of her clothes. She screamed to no avail. She was able to escape

¹⁴⁹ Jaquette.

¹⁵⁰ Jano Charbel, “Hands off: Initiatives grow fighting sexual harassment in Tahrir and elsewhere,” *Egypt Independent*, August 12, 2012, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/hands-initiatives-grow-fighting-sexual-harassment-tahrir-and-elsewhere>.

¹⁵¹ Tom Dale, “Sexual assault in Tahrir: What it means, and how to stop it,” *Egypt Independent*, January 27, 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/opinion/sexual-assault-tahrir-what-it-means-and-how-stop-it>.

¹⁵² Charbel, “Hands off.”

with the help of some of her own group who showed up with hairspray cans and lighters to create a stream of fire to deter the harassers.¹⁵³

Shamel's story demonstrates that no woman, even one who is trained in how to get women out of harassment situations, is necessarily safe in a protest environment. That being the case, however, Shamel and *OpAntiSH* still work to deter harassment. Shamel wrote after her attack that "The attempt to terrorize us will not succeed. Our anger and determination have doubled...I promise we will not be silent."¹⁵⁴ The power to stop some instances of harassment and protect some women in protests is a step towards harassment deterrence on a wider scale. Although the problem clearly has not been eradicated, the willingness of individual citizens to take it upon themselves to patrol public spaces evidences just the kind of power of collective action in public space of which Bayat writes.

This kind of public deterrence measure taken by organized groups of people was not present before the Revolution. The boldness with which men and women patrol the streets, subway cars, and other public spaces after the Revolution affirms the internalization of the idea that collective public presence can make a difference. The added ability to be able to report harassment to a website like HarassMap and be able to check it for potentially hazardous areas, or to be able to call a group like *OpAntiSH* to assist in a harassment situation adds yet another new dimension to combating harassment. By challenging the idea that men can openly harass women in the street without fear of consequence, these new groups and initiatives demonstrate the power of collective action

¹⁵³ Salma Shamel, "Testimony from a Survivor of a Group Sexual Assault in Tahrir Square," *Muftah*, February 4, 2013, <http://muftah.org/testimony-of-a-group-sexual-assault-in-tahrir-square/>.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

towards the goal of preventing and ending sexual harassment. The power discovered by the ability to demonstrate in public against Mubarak and bring him down carried through to the post-Revolutionary environment in this way.

Conclusion

Examining these new ways of combating harassment, it is clear that some Egyptian people, men and women, took to heart the notion of collective action and use it as a mode of resistance to address social problems even after the Revolution. The public presence and impact made by the protesters during the Revolution and in Tahrir Square demonstrated the power of collective action to affect huge change; as a carry-over of a mode of collective action, the men who spray paint harassers, or who patrol the streets, or respond to incident reports, may see themselves as protesting again, this time against the harassment of women in public. After seeing the grand success of public protests in bringing down Mubarak, Egyptians are empowered to perform more acts of resistance that impact a different negative part of public life: harassment. The very presence of these groups and new modes of resistance to harassment indicates a serious shift in societal attitude towards public actions. The problem of women's harassment is certainly a different kind problem than the overarching one of the Mubarak regime, but the problem of harassment is now being fought in a similarly public and visible way as was the regime during the Revolution. The problem of harassment itself has not disappeared since the Revolution, this deep problem still exists. However, these new groups are challenging the idea that men can openly harass women in public spaces without fear of consequence in what will probably be a long-fought campaign.

To discuss this issue in the context of a major social change is to see that it is not so much a reduction in sexual harassment which marks post-revolutionary Cairo as different, but the mode with which people are choosing to combat that harassment. By continuing to harness the power of collective action which was initiated during the Revolution, combating sexual harassment is taking on new forms. As mentioned previously, police were not responsive to the problem, and in a society now aware of its own collective power, individuals are taking it upon themselves to make a change. It is these new forms of combating harassment that show social change is taking place and that women continue to take matters into their own hands; this rediscovered power of public action came through the realization of the power of public action that came through participation in the Revolution.

CHAPTER 4

GRAFFITI: PAINTING REVOLUTION

This chapter considers the ways in which graffiti art created during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and the following two year's time displays the power and creativity of collective action expressed through the artistic venue of graffiti. The ability of members of the public to create public graffiti with varying themes evidences a power of public action re-imagined in a creative way. In creating this graffiti, men and women are demonstrating the newfound and prolific ability of "atomized" noncollective actors to create and display Revolutionary statements through public graffiti artwork in the post-Revolutionary environment. Prior to the Revolution, graffiti did not exist in the volume or with the critical themes of memorialization and social and political commentary that emerged during and after the Revolution.

The majority of the chapter focuses on the graffiti created during and after the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, its creators, messages, and how this graffiti is evidence of a new, unique, and powerful form of social expression by Egyptian men and women. The post-Revolutionary graffiti can be generally categorized into themes: memorialization of those injured or killed during demonstrations, political statements, and displays of empowerment, defiance, or refusal to abandon the goals of the Revolution. I argue that this process of memorialization, satirization, and political commentary through graffiti creation demonstrates that ordinary Egyptians, men and women, recognized and drew upon the importance of representing the Revolution and its goals, while also reclaiming public space in the process of doing so.

This chapter is inspired in part by the research trip during the summer of 2012 during which time I saw numerous displays of graffiti throughout Zamalek and other neighborhoods in Cairo. At the time, I was curious about who created the displays and for what purpose, how long they had been there, and whether they would be whitewashed by the owners of the buildings where it appeared. This exposure to the amazing, colorful, touching artwork created during and after the Revolution stayed with me after the end of the trip, and here is an optimal opportunity to explore the topic of graffiti in greater depth.

Before delving into the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, this chapter begins with a short exploration of the way in which graffiti has been used in the past in three different settings: ancient pharaonic Egypt, Cold War Berlin, and contemporary Palestine. These elements provide brief historical context through which to help understand the creation of graffiti as a social phenomenon and how it has been used to publicly display a social or political message in relevant contexts. This is not designed as a comparative exercise, but rather to acquaint the reader with other places and contexts in which graffiti has played a visible role in social commentary.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines graffiti as “writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in a public place.” Graffiti is technically the plural term, but because graffiti is the more common term it will be used throughout. The “illicit” factor in the definition is important to keep in mind, given that the people who create the graffiti are doing so without the sanction of authorities, and that the authorities often whitewash the pieces. Nonetheless, in each of the settings discussed for context here (excluding pharaonic Egypt), graffiti was created as a way to make a publicly visible and often deep statement about a particular social or political ill.

Graffiti Theory: Public Art with a Purpose

During the 2011 Revolution, graffiti was created in most of the major metropolitan areas in Egypt with the walls of buildings as the primary canvas. The “streets of discontent,”¹⁵⁵ in which much of the Revolutionary action took place are public venues for displaying new messages through graffiti, and some areas are particularly popular for graffiti creation by amateurs and artists. Asef Bayat writes about the “streets of discontent” as spaces in which ordinary people can express grievances against the state apparatus. He writes in the context of Iranian, Egyptian, and Turkish use of public urban space for street politics. For example, Bayat writes about how certain areas of Tehran were instrumental to the mobilization of the population during the Iranian Revolution.¹⁵⁶

Translating this idea to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution is relevant and helpful for understanding the use and reclamation of public space for graffiti art. For example, Mohamed Mahmoud Street that leads to Tahrir Square in Cairo is lined with graffiti featuring political themes, as well as memorial artwork to those who were killed or injured during the protests. This process of memorialization through highly visible public art signifies a shift towards recognizing the importance of publicly creating these impactful works of art. By creating graffiti art in highly visible and public spaces across Cairo past which many people pass each day, the message of the graffiti is transmitted to a wide audience. At the same time, the interesting element of the intransigent nature of graffiti is at play: a certain piece of work may not be there from one day to the next. In

¹⁵⁵ Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 167.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 164-167.

this way, the evolution of a particular area or piece of graffiti can be instructive of the changing political and social environment expressed through what is displayed to a public audience through graffiti.¹⁵⁷

I argue that this process of memorialization, satirization, and political commentary through public graffiti art signifies a shift towards recognition of the importance of publicly representing the Revolution visually and to a wide and general audience. The ability of members of the public to create this graffiti evidences the power of public action discovered during the Revolution and carried through to the post-Revolutionary era to be expressed in a new way. The similar activities of the graffiti creators across cities like Cairo ensure that the graffiti message is widely disseminated; although there is no unified message which runs throughout all the pieces, the graffiti works stand to draw public attention to certain issues. These activities are very public, transmitting the graffiti message to passers-by and the authorities in a particularly visible way.

Discussing the artists (or non-artists) who create the graffiti is essential as well. Drawing from Asef Bayat's theories again, his discussion of what he calls "nonmovements" is important. He explores, for example, the struggles of ordinary men and women to survive in urban environments by pirating power off the municipal power grid without paying for it. He defines nonmovements as

¹⁵⁷ This is informed by particular writings including but not limited to: Samia Mehrez, ed., *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press), 2012; Mona Abaza, "Intimidation and Resistance: Imagining Gender in Cairene Graffiti," *Jadaliyya*, June 30, 2013, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/12469/intimidation-and-resistance_imagining-gender-in-ca.; Bahia Shehab: A thousand times no," *TEDtalksDirector*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_U9GUISOC4.; and Mia Grondahl, *Revolution Graffiti: Street Art of the New Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press), 2012.

collective actions of noncollective actors; they embody shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices are rarely guided by an ideology or recognizable leadership and organizations.¹⁵⁸

The creators of the Egyptian Revolution graffiti are indeed working as noncollective actors who are not directed by a central authority or guided by a particular ideology, as shown later. Graffiti creation is a different representation of collective action than participating in a mass protest such as the Revolution but its creation is nonetheless significant for the way in which many individuals undertake the activity to transmit messages to a large audience without direction from a centralized authority. The potential for social change is also present in the way that the graffiti represents to its viewers the ongoing post-Revolutionary struggles. These “atomized individuals” who work to create graffiti art can recognize the presence of one another on the streets (like street vendors, for example), without knowing one another. The “passive network”¹⁵⁹ that exists between these noncollective atomized individuals has the possibility to be “mobilized to act collectively without active or deliberately constructed networks.”¹⁶⁰ For example, when authorities whitewashed particular graffiti displays, graffiti artists took it upon themselves to re-paint the censored material, or to create something new in its stead. In this context, the artists act non-collectively, are not guided by central leaders, do not coordinate messages, and often (though not always) paint solo.

¹⁵⁸ Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 14. Bayat’s specific discussion in this case centers on individuals changing their circumstances by, for example, tapping in to the electricity grid in a city without paying for that service. This definition, however, is useful in other contexts as well.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

Historical Context: Graffiti Art as Public Spectacle and Statement

Though in quite a different way than contemporary graffiti, graffiti was present during Egypt's pharaonic era with a historical presence dating back thousands of years in different forms. Graffiti found at ancient Egyptian sites was not created with paint but more often etched into the stone. The content varied during different time periods, but according to Egyptologist Alexandre J. Peden, royal names, descriptions of expeditions, and military campaigns made up much of the content of this ancient graffiti.¹⁶¹ In this instance, graffiti was not illicit and was instead a purposeful element at the sites where it appears. Describing ancient Egypt as a place where "mankind has left his most casual and intimate inscriptions...over a longer stretch of time than perhaps anywhere else on Earth,"¹⁶² Peden goes on to explore the importance of studying graffiti over time. Stating that graffiti is a "form of written communication that is invariably free of social restraints,"¹⁶³ Peden bridges the time gap between pharaonic Egyptian graffiti to the present issue of graffiti with Revolutionary themes. His work is useful in linking the ancient Egyptian graffiti to that of Revolutionary graffiti creation.

To help in further bridging the gap between ancient expressions of graffiti and those in a more contemporary context, it is useful to consider that if "...a group - or an individual - sees itself as part of a chain or lineage depends, to some extent at least, on mention of the past and memories that are consciously shared with and passed on to

¹⁶¹ Alexander J. Peden, *The Graffiti of Pharaonic Egypt: Scope and Roles of Informal Writings (c. 3100-332 B.C.)* (Brill: Leiden, 2001), 289-290.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, xxi.

others.”¹⁶⁴ This theorization is drawn from writing on the question of religiosity in contemporary society, and it can be usefully applied to consider how the creators of graffiti in different contexts can consciously or unconsciously draw upon a kind of historical “chain”¹⁶⁵ of thought, an idea borne out fruitfully in the fact that pharaonic themes appear in some of the graffiti created as part of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution.

To continue with some context on the topic of graffiti’s historical presence in protest contexts, the graffiti created on the West German side of the Berlin Wall, erected in 1961 and dismantled 1989, garnered domestic and international attention during the time that graffiti appeared on it from the early 1980s to its dismantling on November 9, 1989. Characterized as “one of the most abominable structures ever,” the wall became home both to protest slogans and pop culture artwork.¹⁶⁶ The variety of graffiti art sprawled across different sections of the Berlin Wall ranged in content and message. The anti-wall messages are clear: “Die Mauer Muss Weg” (The Wall Must Go)¹⁶⁷ or “Berlin Wird Mauerfrei” (Berlin Will Be Wall-Free).¹⁶⁸ The political statements on the Wall were widely seen by passers-by in Berlin, as well as international audiences. The highly public nature of this graffiti created by a variety of members of the public, from artists to those wishing to make a mark, provided an important outlet for political commentary.

¹⁶⁴ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, trans. Simon Lee, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 123. Hervieu-Léger writes specifically in the context of the sociology of religion and the ways in which societies pass on their religiosity, or do not, in the modern age.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁶⁶ Christian Bahr (text), Gunter Schneider (photos), *Berlin Wall Art* (Berlin: Jaron Verlag, 2010), 7.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁶⁸ Hermann Waldenburg, *The Berlin Wall Book* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 67.

The Wall itself fell, in parts, starting on November 9, 1989. Fragments of the Wall are in public parks or museums across the world, some parts are in the hands of private owners who came to the Wall to fell it with sledgehammers, and some parts were left standing as reminders of a grim chapter in German history. After the fall of the Wall, West German artist Ben Wargin took it upon himself to use a still-standing section of the wall near the Reichstag to create a piece called the “Parliament of Trees” which memorializes some of the Cold War “victims of division.”¹⁶⁹ The piece includes painted memorial elements for many people who died along the wall, as well as outcroppings of trees around the pieces of the Wall. Similarly, Egyptian graffiti artists memorialize those wounded or killed in the Revolution on the walls of Cairo through various murals, detailed below.

In a contemporary context, graffiti is also a powerful statement in the setting of the Israeli Palestinian conflict. The wall that was erected by the Israeli government to separate itself from parts of the Palestinian territories provides a potent site for public graffiti to bring attention to the untenable situation created by the physical partition of this land. Palestinians and other international actors like the graffiti artist Banksy¹⁷⁰ have chosen to create graffiti as one form of resistance and to visually convey their messages. The graffiti created on this wall is decidedly pro-Palestinian and pro-freedom (though not necessarily anti-Israeli). In 2007 the international graffiti artist Banksy and several collaborators created a variety of murals in Bethlehem and Jerusalem called “Santa’s Ghetto” in order to draw attention to the problems faced by Palestinians. According to

¹⁶⁹ Bahr and Schneider, 119.

¹⁷⁰ Banksy is a semi-anonymous British graffiti artist who has worked internationally. His graffiti sometimes provides social commentary, and sometimes is simply artistic.

William Parry, an artist who joined Banksy in his 2007 project, the Wall serves as “an enormous visual petition...a pictorial rant and reprimand, calling for resistance, justice, freedom and solidarity, and a plea for understanding and humanity.”¹⁷¹ Banksy’s creations of graffiti art included pieces on the Palestinian side of the Wall; striking pieces include paintings of windows through which one can look out and see beautiful vistas, and another of children breaking through a hole in the wall to reveal a lush tropical landscape behind.¹⁷² Clearly here the graffiti is making a political statement about the state of affairs between Israel and Palestine. The international and regional attention that the project garnered brought, if nothing else, more attention to this long-standing issue,¹⁷³ including questions of the quality of life of Palestinians and expansion of Israeli settlements.

Also present on the separation wall is art created by unknown artists making political statements, including a direct link to the idea of tearing down the Berlin Wall: “Ich Bin Ein Berliner,” quoting former United States President John F. Kennedy’s famous quote when he was in West Berlin in 1963 extolling the virtues of the city and its people. Just next to this quote is the exclamation “Tear Down this Wall, Mr. Olmert,” a nod to a later time period and former United States President Reagan challenging Mikhail Gorbachev to dismantle the Berlin Wall.¹⁷⁴ Clearly Palestinians are aware of the history

¹⁷¹ William Parry, *Against the Wall: The Art of Resistance in Palestine* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2011), 9- 10.

¹⁷² Sam Jones, “Spray can prankster tackles Israel’s security barrier,” *The Guardian*, August 5, 2005, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/aug/05/israel.artsnews>.

¹⁷³ For more discussion of this history, see for example: Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.

¹⁷⁴ Parry, 25.

of the Berlin Wall, including the significance of its renowned graffiti, and the eventual demolition of the Wall. The diverse nature of subjects and messages of graffiti on the separation wall provides useful context for understanding the way graffiti has been and is used internationally to comment very publicly on political or social problems as in Cold War Berlin or current Israel/Palestine.

Linking all these different contexts of graffiti creation is the underlying desire to make public statements about a particular political and social situation. In each instance, men and women, individually or collectively, chose to take their messages to a public place to display their work in full view of the public and the government in each setting. The idea of public commentary is very much present in the themes of the Egyptian Revolution graffiti discussed below. The ancient expressions of graffiti present in pharaonic times and other historical precedent for graffiti as a protest form is clearly drawn upon in some of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution graffiti.

Themes in Revolutionary Graffiti, or Graffiti of Revolution

Graffiti art commemorating the Revolution has become a prevalent feature of walls in major cities including Cairo especially around Tahrir Square. The graffiti art appearing on walls in neighborhoods in Cairo, inspired by the moments of protest and sacrifice that existed during the Revolution, evidence a unique expression of the different modes of commemoration and memorialization about the Revolution. With the newfound inspiration of the Revolution, men and women, both artists and non-professionals, found the freedom of expression after the Revolution to create major graffiti art in public places. In Luxor too, where ancient Egyptian temples are major tourist attractions, graffiti

in the post-revolutionary era has become a way to publicly express sentiments about the Revolution.¹⁷⁵ While not easy to categorize, graffiti works have a few prevalent themes no matter the location of the graffiti itself: memorialization of people killed, political commentary, or encouragement to remember the Revolution's goals. The theme of women's empowerment and respect is also common in different ways in the graffiti.

Graffiti of the type and displaying the themes seen during and after the 2011 Egyptian Revolution was not present prior to this new phase of artistic expression. Although Amnesty International's writing on the topic states that the "walls lining Cairo's streets stood in stark silence"¹⁷⁶ before the Revolution, other bloggers and writers have stressed the idea that the streets were not devoid of graffiti but simply that its character and themes were different. Naturally, without major social upheaval, revolution, martyrs,¹⁷⁷ and new hope for the future, the need to paint those themes onto the walls was not present; pre-revolutionary graffiti more often included advertisements for services or businesses, or sometimes political statements for different parties.¹⁷⁸ When political graffiti did appear during the Mubarak era, it was quickly painted over,

¹⁷⁵ Ahmed Zaki Osman, "Graffiti Fervor Reaches its City of Origin, Luxor," *Egypt Independent*, September 11, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/graffiti-fervor-reaches-its-city-origin-luxor>.

¹⁷⁶ "Egypt: These walls can speak – Cairo's Mohamed Mahmoud graffiti," *Amnesty International*, November 15, 2012, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/news-item/egypt-these-walls-can-speak-cairo-s-mohamed-mahmoud-graffiti>.

¹⁷⁷ The term "martyr" denotes an individual who has unjustly died for a particular cause and is the common term in this context for those who were killed in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. In this context, it is not an explicitly religious term.

¹⁷⁸ Samuli Shielke and Jessica Winegar, "The Writing on the Walls of Egypt," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, Vol 42 (Summer 2012), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer265/writing-walls-egypt>.

demonstrating the non-permanent nature of this form of public expression¹⁷⁹ and the tight censorship of this kind of expression.

The range of artistic expression is wide, with some graffiti created from stencils and some painted freehand. No group dictated what kind of graffiti is created and where, and its non-permanent nature highlights the egalitarian nature of the medium.

“Reclaiming public space – this is what street art does,” according to one journalist who supports the graffiti’s presence.¹⁸⁰ The extremely visual and visible nature of the graffiti pushes itself into the consciousness of anyone who passes by. As a visual representation of sentiments about the Revolution, the graffiti art is “revelatory of developments, trends, and attitudes in man’s history,”¹⁸¹ in this instance the history of the Revolution. On the streets, the “atomized” individuals who create the graffiti took it upon themselves to present their ideas to the public in a way that was simply not possible before the Revolution.

The graffiti created during and after the Revolution not only spreads a message but also attracts people to look at and think about the themes featured in the murals. People walking down the streets of Cairo pause to look at the artworks and sometimes pose for pictures as well.¹⁸² By drawing people in, the murals are helping to create a

¹⁷⁹ Bel Trew, “When walls talk: Documenting Egypt’s revolutionary graffiti,” *Al Ahram Online*, September 23, 2012, english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/0/53631/Arts--Culture/0/When-walls-talk-Documenting-Egypt-s-revolutionary-g.aspx.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Robert Reisner, *Graffiti: Two Thousand Years of Wall Writing* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1971), 1.

¹⁸² Ebony Coletu, “Visualizing Revolution: The Politics of Paint in Tahrir,” *Jadaliyya*, April 18, 2012, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/5136/visualizing-revolution_the-politics-of-paint-in-ta.

space to think about how to continue the Revolution and “develop new strategies to resolve persistent political and social problems.”¹⁸³ The highly visible nature of this public art ensures a wide audience and therefore at a wide consideration, if not necessarily agreement, of the issues raised by the artwork by those who pass by it. The artists who create the works are not organized, nor does each piece of graffiti transmit the same message to its viewers, but the public statements are evident. The artists (or regular people who create graffiti art) are noncollective actors whose political statements are displayed in a public forum for general viewing. In Bayat’s creation of this nomenclature, he writes about people subverting state systems.¹⁸⁴ In the context of graffiti, the creators are subverting the government in order to make claims about the ongoing nature of the Revolution’s goals.

Women on the Wall

Women played a major part in the Revolution and in other activities like harassment deterrence post-Revolution as demonstrated in the previous chapter. In the case of graffiti, women are both artists creating some of the art while also appearing as subjects of artwork by various artists. The presence of female graffiti artists as well as women as a theme demonstrates the continuing conversations both around women participating in Revolutionary efforts and the fight for gender equality in the post-Revolutionary era.

The presence of women as a theme in graffiti is found in various displays in Cairo. For example, in a nod to pharaonic-era Egyptian artwork, Professor Alaa Awad

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 57.

who moonlights as a graffiti artist takes themes and images directly from tombs of pharaohs including a particularly recognizable “Marching Women” scene which he created in Cairo. The colorful work is about a dozen women dressed in long robes and with their heads covered, marching shoulder to shoulder wielding sticks, seemingly in a war march.¹⁸⁵ This graffiti work highlights the important role that women played in the Revolution and the artistic style and content mirrors a scene found in an ancient temple in Luxor; Awad is obviously aware of the graffiti from the pharaonic era and takes that as a starting point for some of his own work. “Marching Women” re-imagines the image of the women from the Luxor temple for contemporary times, “plac[ing] them in a new context referring to Egyptian women who have led movements for social change in the past and the role of women in the Revolution today”¹⁸⁶ according to American University in Cairo professor Ebony Coletu. Awad consciously created the piece as a tribute to the women who contributed to the contemporary Revolution, while also choosing to do so in a way that acknowledged ancient Egyptian heritage, bringing to bear the idea of a historical “chain” of thoughts or a “cultural memory”¹⁸⁷ from which Awad can draw themes and imagery.

As atomized actors contributing to the collective whole of graffiti creators, women are actively engaged in creating graffiti on the streets, the contentious theatre of the Revolution. A notable and publicly known Egyptian woman graffiti creator is Hend

¹⁸⁵ “Women in Graffiti: A Tribute to the Women of Egypt,” *SuzeeintheCity*, January 7, 2013, <http://suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com/2013/01/07/women-in-graffiti-a-tribute-to-the-women-of-egypt/>. Suzee’s real name is Soraya Morayef and she keeps an extensive blog on life in Cairo. She has extensively documented Egyptian Revolution graffiti.

¹⁸⁶ Coletu.

¹⁸⁷ Hervieu-Léger, 124.

Kheera, a twenty-five year old engineer in Alexandria. One of her remarkable works is a stencil of a woman, the caption reading: “Don’t touch, or castration awaits you.” In an interview with *Rolling Stone Magazine*, Kheera emphasizes that people are more able to speak out in public since Mubarak’s overthrow. Nonetheless, she is careful about when she is out in public creating graffiti because she is aware she might be harassed because she is creating what some people consider an eyesore. She adds that graffiti art is a way to get the public’s attention whether they want it or not.¹⁸⁸ The “shocking and provocative” nature of her blunt message has brought attention to her artwork.¹⁸⁹ The highly public nature of the graffiti ensures a wide audience for the message of the artist. She is significant not only because she is a woman creating graffiti but because of the clear message it sends about gender relations and the treatment of women in the public sphere. Through this medium, women have found another outlet for promoting gender equality in a public space.

Another woman heavily involved in the creation of and conversation about graffiti art is Bahia Shehab, an Egyptian art historian and associate professor at the American University in Cairo. In 2010, before the Revolution began, she participated in an exhibition commemorating Islamic art in Europe for an exhibit in Germany; the art she created featured Arabic script reading “no, a thousand times no.” Shehab drew from sources reaching back in time through Islamic history and civilization like calligraphy and tombstones which featured this expression. She, like Awad, is keenly aware of

¹⁸⁸ Michael Downey, “The Writings on the Wall,” *Rolling Stone*, June 3, 2012, http://www.rollingstoneme.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1570.

¹⁸⁹ “Women in Graffiti: A Tribute to the Women of Egypt.”

drawing on historical themes for her work, in this case drawing from more than 1,000 years of Islamic representations of “no.”

When the Revolution and its concurrent widespread euphoria was quashed by the realities of subsequent Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) rule, she took her message “no, a thousand times no” to the streets of Cairo in the form of a variety of graffiti stencils. This simple stencil appeared in various parts of Cairo alongside other graffiti works or sometimes standing alone.¹⁹⁰ She modified the message as conditions changed and as she felt compelled to make political or other statements. Her captions to the ever-present “no” include:

military rule

new pharaoh (the next ruler needs to understand dictators won't stand)

violence (Rami Essam, a popular singer, who was beaten during the protests)

blinding heroes (in recognition of those who lost their eyes to snipers)

killing (men of religion, referring to a particular sheikh who was killed)

burning books (Institute of Egypt burned, major loss of culture and information)

stripping the people (in reference to the blue bra incident and to remind people of the shame when a veiled woman can be stripped and beaten in the street)¹⁹¹

barrier walls (like the one erected as roadblocks to protect Ministry of Defense building from protesters)¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ For a summary of the “blue bra” incident in which a woman in an abaya was brutally beaten in the street and her blue bra revealed, see <http://rt.com/news/egyptian-military-cruelty-beating-079/>.

¹⁹² “Bahia Shehab: A thousand times no,” *TEDtalksDirector* on YouTube, published September 28, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_U9GUISOC4. The list and descriptions of stencils are paraphrased directly from her speech.

The addition of her stencil to the work of others shows the evolutionary nature of graffiti and the non-centralized nature of the creation of graffiti. Her work also combines both the fact that she is a woman creating graffiti and that some of her work features protecting women as a theme. She draws from historical representations of “no,” integrating themes that include women’s rights but also reach across the spectrum of Revolutionary goals. Her public expressions of “no” to social and political ills in public spaces demonstrate her continued promotion of some of the Revolution’s goals, as well as an anti-violence message.

Egyptian artist Hanaa El Degham also took part in the creation of graffiti; in her case as well as the others, both the creator and the theme of the piece are women. One particular mural by El Degham is a collage of veiled women who are carrying gas cylinders on their heads. The piece is unique in that it is layered with paint and newspaper clippings. The newspaper pieces pasted onto the mural are all pertinent to the difficult living conditions for Egyptians post-Revolution.¹⁹³ The commentary that this piece provides is pointed towards the difficulties faced by ordinary women post-Revolution; in this case, the piece provides a criticism of gas shortages after the Revolution and demonstrates that women, “suffering in silence,” are the ones who often bear the burdens of this kind of problem.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ “Women in Graffiti: A Tribute to the Women of Egypt.”

¹⁹⁴ Osama Kamal, “You’ve seen the writing on the wall,” *Al Ahrām Weekly Online*, Issue No. 1093, April 12-18, 2012, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2012/1093/ee1.htm>.

Serious Fun: Satirization and Political Commentary

Post-Revolutionary Egyptians also created graffiti with political themes including anti-Mubarak, then anti-SCAF graffiti, and then anti-Mohammed Morsi graffiti once he was elected to office. The graffiti art with political statements clearly demonstrates the evolutionary nature of graffiti as a form of public expression: the issues of the day are literally painted on the wall. Depending on the problem perceived by the graffiti creators, different pieces were created. This expression is not limited to a critique of just one man, one political party, or one social ill. Rather, the nature of the graffiti evolved over time depending on political realities.

One work of graffiti which represents the changing nature of this form of expression is a mural on one corner of Mohamed Mahmoud Street, a street leading into Tahrir Square and which was a major conduit for protesters in and out of the Square. One particular corner of the street features a popular and long-standing mural of a man's face. The face is split in half down the middle: the right side is always half of Mubarak's face. The left side is the face of Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi who served as the head of SCAF after Mubarak's ouster prior to the election of Mohammed Morsi. As politics evolved after the Revolution, other faces appeared to the left alongside Tantawi's face, including Amr Moussa and Ahmed Shafiq, both of whom worked in the Mubarak government (Shafiq briefly as Mubarak's Vice President and Amr Moussa as Minister of Foreign Affairs under Mubarak) and both of whom ran in the Presidential election in the summer of 2012.

In each of the iterations of this particular piece of graffiti, the men's faces are slightly distorted and look menacing; there is nothing flattering behind the representation

of these figures. The conflation of Mubarak with Tantawi, Amr Moussa, and Shafiq is meant to indicate that there is no separation between the offenses of Mubarak and those of his administration; just because those men were participating in the political process after Mubarak's ouster did not mean that they could be trusted or that their own past political affiliations could or should be forgotten or excused.

The evolution of this specific work of graffiti is demonstrative of the open-ended nature of graffiti. As the political situation changed over time, the combination of faces reflected this. The ability for graffiti artists to create this kind of work is unique, and although the mural has been whitewashed on several occasions by the government, the artists chose to re-create the piece again and again. That simple fact also demonstrates how much more agency Egyptians have in this particular avenue of expression after the Revolution.

The above graffiti featured old regime figures, but political graffiti appeared against Mohamed Morsi as well once he became President. In December 2012, protests took place opposing President Morsi's political decisions regarding the constitution. A group of anti-Morsi demonstrators covered the walls of the Presidential Palace with political graffiti and images of people who had recently lost their lives demonstrating. This public and artistic form of government opposition was painted over by Morsi supporters.¹⁹⁵ Here again, the graffiti pointed towards current social problems as perceived by the creators of the graffiti.

Another notable piece of graffiti art discussed extensively by Hania Shehab in her TED Talk is a life-size piece of graffiti art created in the Zamalek neighborhood (the

¹⁹⁵ Schielke and Winegar.

largest of the islands in the Nile) of Cairo by several artists who participated in “Mad Graffiti Weekend” in spring of 2011:¹⁹⁶ a man on a bicycle balancing a large tray of bread on his head, a common site in Cairo. Facing the man on the bicycle, however, is a life-size tank with its barrel pointed at the man. The work is in black and white. The tank represents the post-Revolution military SCAF leadership in its continued repression of the Egyptian people who are here represented by the man on the bicycle carrying a tray of bread. The word *‘ish* in colloquial Egyptian Arabic means “bread,” which in standard Arabic translates to “life;” the work is also meant to demonstrate how harmful military rule through SCAF is to Egyptian life.¹⁹⁷ The “struggle to make ends meet” is summed up by the opposition of the man and the tank.¹⁹⁸ In this instance, the statement made by the piece is both political and social: it is still difficult to be an Egyptian, the threat of violence is still present, and the government is not helping.

Shehab describes how the piece has evolved; first the piece included just the man riding his bicycle and the tank. Next, protesters and blood were added around the tank. The SCAF authorities soon whitewashed the wall, but left the tank and added the message “Army and People, One Hand” seeking to promote the togetherness of the military and the people. Over this whitewashing, another artist added an anti-military message; the military whitewashed this as well. This is when Shehab took the next

¹⁹⁶ “Mad Graffiti Weekend: Results,” *Blog.Ganzeer*, July 22, 2011, <http://ganzeer.blogspot.com/2011/07/mad-graffiti-weekend-results.html>. This event is discussed in more detail in the next section.

¹⁹⁷ Lewis Sanders IV, “Reclaiming the City: Street Art of the Revolution,” in *Translating Egypt’s Revolution: The Language of Tahrir*, edited by Samia Mehrez (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 170-171.

¹⁹⁸ Mia Grondahl, *Revolution Graffiti: Street Art of the New Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 25.

artistic step and added her own variety of “no” slogans all over the graffiti wall at which point it featured the tank, and an anti-military image that was partly whitewashed. “Until further notice,” she says, that is how the wall stands as of her presentation in September 2012.¹⁹⁹

The evolution of this piece of graffiti, with contributions (and erasures) from different parties interested in what kind of message the bike/tank piece was displaying, exemplifies a few of the important points about all the graffiti pieces. First, the multiple and varied people who took place in the creation of the piece in the first place demonstrates Bayat’s point that there are atomized actors whose actions, when taken as a whole, create something impactful although there is no centralized authority directing their actions. The continual modifications of the piece demonstrated the iterative nature of the medium. Second, and perhaps most obviously, the piece delivers both a social and a political message to passers-by, no matter what stage of its evolution it is in.

Faces on the Wall: Martyrs and Memorialization

Memorialization of those killed or injured in the Revolution also emerged as an important theme in the graffiti art created after the Revolution. About 800 people died during the Revolution and roughly 6,000 were injured.²⁰⁰ The graffiti created as memorials to these men and women are most often murals of faces, usually accompanied by a message of some kind about remembering their sacrifice or criticizing the regime for

¹⁹⁹ Shehab video.

²⁰⁰ Grondahl, 153.

its use of violence. The post-Revolution violence perpetrated by SCAF against protests is also memorialized through graffiti murals. The messages range in content, including “Raise your head high, you are an Egyptian,” “Remember them,” and “To those who sacrificed their lives for the future of the nation: a salute of glory and pride to the Martyrs of the 25 January Revolution.”²⁰¹

One particularly interesting public display of memorial graffiti is found along the walls of Mohamed Mahmoud Street in Cairo leading to Tahrir Square. During the Revolution, this street functioned as a major artery for protesters to move in and out of the Square. Many people were injured in this area as well, with the loss of eyes as one of the most common injuries; the street has been called “the street of the eyes of freedom” because the eyes of protesters were targeted by police snipers during the Revolution.²⁰² This area has featured a wide variety of graffiti expressions, with one of the most prevalent themes being the remembrance or memorialization of those killed or injured during the Revolution and in post-Revolution violence as well. The graffiti around Tahrir and particularly on Mohamed Mahmoud Street opens a space for discussion based on the idea that it can be a “call to action, a way to provoke a public conversation about how to hold the government accountable, resist army rule, and creatively develop new strategies to resolve persistent political and social problems.”²⁰³ By publicly creating this art, a

²⁰¹ Ibid., 156-160.

²⁰² Mona Abaza, “An Emerging Memorial Space? In Praise of Mohammed Mahmud Street,” *Jadaliyya*, March 10, 2012, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4625/an-emerging-memorial-space-in-praise-of-mohammed-m>.

²⁰³ Coletu.

conscious comment is made about the memory of Revolutionary goals and those killed or injured in the pursuit of as-yet-unrealized Revolutionary goals.

One section of graffiti along Mohamed Mahmoud Street is filled with paintings of the faces of men with eye patches. During the Revolution and during post-Revolution protests against SCAF, the eyes of protesters became common features for the security forces to target. This horrific reality is reflected in some of the pieces of graffiti on Mohammed Mahmoud Street. This particular section of graffiti along the street features the faces of eighteen men and women who have eyes covered with bandages. This mural is an anti-SCAF statement, abhorring the violence they continued to perpetrate against protesters after Mubarak's ouster.²⁰⁴

A young Egyptian man who identifies himself as Ganzeer undertook a variety of graffiti projects after the Revolution. He is careful, however, to state that he does not identify as a graffiti artist.²⁰⁵ He and his cohort were part of an effort to create murals commemorating those killed in the Revolution, including making some art during Mad Graffiti Weekend discussed below. His Martyr Murals project to paint a mural of the face of each person killed in the Revolution is not a one-man effort; a video produced by *Ahram Online* features several people involved in the effort. Ganzeer articulates the purpose and motivation of creating these murals, saying:

If a person walks down a street named after a martyr, it won't have as much impact on a person as staring, looking at a big mural of the martyr. So I think it's

²⁰⁴ Grondahl, 166.

²⁰⁵ "Conversation with Ganzeer: the Tank, Buddha and Mad Graffiti Week," *SuzeeintheCity*, January 11, 2012, <http://suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com/2012/01/11/conversation-with-ganzeer-the-tank-buddha-and-mad-graffiti-week/>.

important, its effect on people on a daily basis walking by looking at it. I think it's a good reminder, constant reminder of Revolution, the reasons behind the Revolution.²⁰⁶

Echoing the words of others on the topic of these special murals, these words define the motivations behind creating Revolutionary graffiti, and especially the mural memorials to those who were killed. Ganzeer was arrested for his work at one point, but commented that that meant "...I'm probably doing something right."²⁰⁷

In a visible and unusually united effort to create graffiti, numerous graffiti artists and artistic individuals took part in "Mad Graffiti Weekend" in May 2011. Ganzeer, whose real name is Mohamed Fahmy,²⁰⁸ was one of those participants. The idea for Mad Graffiti Weekend was in part inspired by the whitewashing by the government of a memorial portrait (part of the Martyr Murals project) by Ganzeer of eighteen-year old Islam Rafaat who was run over and killed by a security truck during the Revolution.²⁰⁹ The purpose of the weekend was partly to protest the whitewashing of graffiti pieces, some of which had been painted over by SCAF in the months since the Revolution during which time SCAF held power. Additionally, some of the artists sought to publicize their protest of unjust military tribunals being conducted to try civilians for their roles in the

²⁰⁶ "Martyr Murals Project," *Blog.Ganzeer*, March 16, 2011, <http://ganzeer.blogspot.com/2011/03/martyr-murals-project.html>.

²⁰⁷ Grondahl, 165.

²⁰⁸ Kristen Chick, "Egyptian graffiti artist Ganzeer arrested amid surge in political expression," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 26, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/0526/Egyptian-graffiti-artist-Ganzeer-arrested-amid-surge-in-political-expression>.

²⁰⁹ Mohamed El Hebeishy, "Mad Graffiti Weekend Storms the Egyptian Capital," *Ahram Online*, May 23, 2011, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/25/12720/Arts--Culture/Visual-Art/Mad-Graffiti-Weekend-storms-the-Egyptian-capital.aspx>.

Revolution.²¹⁰ In this instance, the political and memorialization motivations behind graffiti creation overlapped; Mad Graffiti Weekend was a coming-together of various graffiti artists to make pointed statements on what they saw as continued problems after the Revolution itself. The recreation of the portrait of Islam Rifaat during Mad Graffiti Weekend in the same original site on the side of a public restroom indicates that Ganzeer “reterritorialize[d] a government service,²¹¹ lending it to the Egyptian people and the passerby.”²¹²

The unusually coordinated nature of Mad Graffiti weekend sets it apart from the usually individual graffiti creation efforts. However, the artists who did participate were able to do so in a new environment post-Revolution in which this kind of activity was not often curtailed by more than whitewashing. In the instance of the Martyr Murals project, the artists who participated were coming together in an effort to create the kind of change that can be affected when atomized actors come together, as defined by Bayat.

Writing for *Jadaliyya*, American University in Cairo sociology professor Mona Abaza calls Mohammed Mahmud Street an “emerging memorial space.” In preparation for the one-year anniversary of the revolution, the walls [of Mohamed Mahmoud Street] were whitewashed by the government to cover the graffiti; however, within a day they were again covered in graffiti.²¹³ Clearly, the graffiti functions as a special space in which art is used as memorial and also as a way to continue the conversation about change after

²¹⁰ Jano Charbel, “Mad Graffiti Weekend challenges military tribunals,” *Egypt Independent*, May 22, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/mad-graffiti-weekend-challenges-military-tribunals>.

²¹¹ The mural of Islam Rifaat’s face was on the side of a public toilet.

²¹² Sanders IV, 162.

²¹³ Abaza.

the Revolution. This kind of public memorialization of those killed in the revolution is another unique expression of Egyptians regaining a sense of power to be able to use public space in new ways after the Revolution, whether on an individual or a collective level.

Khaled Said as Emblematic Martyr

The face of Khaled Said, the young Alexandrian man beaten to death by police who was mentioned in the introductory chapter, became an important symbol of the Revolution. The iconic photo of him is a simple portrait from the shoulders up; he looks like a regular twenty-something Egyptian man. Indeed: Said was 28 years old and lived in Alexandria before his death. He was interested in computers and was spending time online in an internet café when policemen came in questioned him about video footage he allegedly took of police corruption. The policemen started to beat him and the incident escalated: Said was beaten to death in the street. The widely-circulated photo of him after his death, his face bloody and distorted, makes it clear that the police brutally killed him.²¹⁴

His death, although it occurred about a year and a half before the Revolution, pointed to the broad problems of police brutality and the subsequent fact that the police were not held accountable for their torture and killing of Said. The brutal nature of his death as well as the lack of accountability for those who perpetrated the crime created around Said a martyr's persona. The Facebook page "We Are All Khaled Said," created

²¹⁴ Lina Attalah, "Alexandria policemen beat young man to death, says rights group," *Egypt Independent*, June 11, 2010, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/alexandria-policemen-beat-young-man-death-says-rights-group>.

shortly after his death, drew thousands of followers and the title alone is an indication of the fact that people understood that Said's fate could befall anyone. The page's organizer Wael Ghonim, who worked for Google in Egypt, helped to popularize the page and engage people in discussion about dissent and protests.²¹⁵

On the first anniversary of his death, his face was stenciled across Cairo by activists hoping to continue to draw attention to his story. Notably, activists painted his face onto the building of the Ministry of Interior, the agency famously unconcerned with human rights.²¹⁶ As Ahmed stated in his interview quoted in the introduction, Egyptians were "mistreated,"²¹⁷ especially by the police and Ministry of Interior, so spraying his face onto this government building held symbolic importance considering the brutal nature of his death.

In graffiti still evident in downtown Cairo two years after the Revolution, Said's face and those of others killed during the Revolution and in subsequent violence cover large swaths of the sides of buildings as explored above. Additionally, Said's likeness appears in Alexandria, his home city. In one instance, his portrait is painted next to a list of his killers. In another, his face again appears with the caption "Khalid is *not* happy," a play on his full name, Khalid Said, which means "Khalid is happy."²¹⁸ In downtown Cairo, "Mohamed Mahmoud [Street] and Tahrir have always been museums of memories

²¹⁵ Lynch, *The Arab Uprisings*, 86.

²¹⁶ Lisa Hajjar, "Following the Torture Trail through the Arab Spring: First Speculations," *Jadaliyya*, June 8, 2011, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1792/following-the-torture-trail-through-the-arab-sprin>. And "Khalid Said," *Arabawy*, <http://www.arabawy.org/2011/06/07/stencil-khaled-said-moi/>.

²¹⁷ "Ahmed," interview.

²¹⁸ Grondahl, 162.

to many of us...especially through the graffiti..." according to "Suzee," a young woman living in Cairo who blogs extensively about her experiences in the city and her reflections on the Revolution, especially graffiti.²¹⁹ She recounts being moved to tears by some of the memorial murals because the artwork brings the brutal side of the Revolution to the attention of the public again and again.

Conclusion

The creation of graffiti during and after the 2011 Revolution demonstrates the ongoing nature of trying to achieve the goals of the Revolution. The men and women, professional artists and amateurs, who created the above mentioned graffiti, and the thousands of other pieces scattered on walls across Egypt, most often work alone but their work reaches masses of people who walk their artwork every day. The noncollective artists have been in a sort of artistic conversation with one another, aware of each other's presence even if they are not collaborating. The existing literature on the graffiti created during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution provides an important lens through which to understand certain aspects of collective action and the creative repossession of public space by ordinary Egyptians. The argument in this chapter, that graffiti creation in this context was unique for its imagery and messages and for how it became a mechanism for the reclamation of space while making a political or social statement, contributes to the overall body of writing on the topic for its consideration of the historical roots of graffiti and for its use in the 2011 Revolution in particular.

²¹⁹ "Return to Tahrir: Two Years and Graffiti of the Martyrs," *SuzeeintheCity*, December 29, 2012, <http://suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com/2012/12/29/return-to-tahrir-two-years-and-graffiti-of-the-martyrs/>.

The conversation about the creation of graffiti is ongoing, and thanks to the continuing political and social strife in Egypt, it seems likely that more people will take to public places and create graffiti to make new statements about the government or other problems. While it is not possible to speculate on the kinds of artwork that might be created in the future, it is an area of public expression which is worth noting on a continual basis as Egyptians continue to struggle for the future of their country and society. Tracking this trend through internet postings, including news reports and blogs, provides those not on-site in Egypt with access to information that was not possible in the past. The highly visual nature of graffiti makes it conducive to photographing and sharing with other people via the internet. Continuing into the future, it will be important for those inside and outside of Egypt to watch the way that Egypt's Revolutionary graffiti evolve and be remembered in the future; because of the transient nature of the physical graffiti, the internet may be the holder of this particular aspect of the history of the Revolution.

CHAPTER 5

MUSICAL EXPRESSIONS OF REVOLUTION

This chapter explores the presence of protest music in the 2011 Revolution and the ways in which men and women created a distinct and meaningful “soundtrack” for the Revolution. I argue that the creation of music in the context of the 2011 Revolution is important for its historical influences, its departure from the norms of everyday Egyptian life, and for the creative way that music allowed musicians to express Revolutionary sentiments and goals in a way that also involved the protesting crowds. The chapter first begins by exploring some relevant theoretical background for the discussion of music in a protest setting. The chapter continues with an explanation of the historical context of the past intersections of revolution and music in Egyptian history, a precedent upon which the musicians of the 2011 Revolution drew. The substance of the argument lies in the remainder of the chapter which addresses the music created as a part of the 2011 Revolution itself which was created by noncollective actors whose artistic musical talents coalesced to form a unique “soundtrack” of the Revolution.

To begin, it is important to understand the theoretical and historical background for the presence of music in recent Egyptian history to better understand how music was a distinct element of the atmosphere of the 2011 Revolution. In the 2011 Revolution, some protesters, both amateurs and professional musicians, who created music in the protest context drew from their own knowledge of historical protest music and used that to inform their own new music. A unique combination of old and new songs, sung in new and old styles, propelled certain bands and individuals into the spotlight for their own renditions of classic songs or for the creation of new and moving songs. Some songs from

Egypt's musical past were given renewed importance and new life when protesters sang them in a new era and this synthesis of old and new styles is notable.

The atmosphere of Tahrir Square in particular inspired music that was reflective of the unique moments of hope, struggle, and uncertainty during the Revolution. Alongside particular songs that were popular with the crowds in Tahrir Square, these same crowds also sometimes chanted slogans famously including “*Al-shaab yureed isqat al-nizam*” (The people demand the fall of the regime).” This chant is interestingly in Modern Standard Arabic, not colloquial Arabic,²²⁰ allowing its use across different countries including Morocco, Bahrain, Tunisia, Egypt,²²¹ and other countries demonstrates one of the most basic demands of the Arab Spring: new governance. This slogan was heavily present in the Egyptian Revolution and eventually found its way into one of the most famous songs of the Egyptian Revolution, discussed below.

The theoretical underpinning behind the creation and dissemination of protest music in the context of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution is similar to that behind the creation of graffiti art as discussed in the previous chapter. The people who created protest songs in the heady atmosphere of sustained public protests during the Revolution were a mix of amateurs and established musicians and were not led by any sort of institution interested in putting the Revolution to music; individual musicians or bands took it upon themselves to take part in the protests and create music in that context. These acts of creating and performing music in the Revolution reflect Asef Bayat's concept of

²²⁰ Laura Gribbon and Sarah Hawas, “Signs and Signifiers: Visual Translations of Revolt,” in Samia Mehrez. ed.. *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 118.

²²¹ Rashid Khalidi, “Reflections on the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt,” *Foreign Policy*, February 24, 2011, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/02/24/reflections_on_the_revolutions_in_tunisia_and_egypt.

noncollective actors²²² coming together, in this case doing so to stir crowds to unity and continued action. Despite the fact that the musicians themselves were not part of a collective, their music in fact ended up serving to unite the protesters, a unique function of music both in the recent Revolution and in earlier music in Egypt. Famous Egyptian musicians like Sheikh Imam and Sayyid Darwish reached a wide audience with their impactful music, and in a similar way the music of the 2011 Revolution was able to unite protesters while also spreading a common message of the ideals behind the Revolution.

Some people who created music during the Revolution were amateur musicians, like Ramy Essam, who eventually earned himself a great deal of fame as a result of his protest music. Others, like the band *Eskenderella* or *El Tanbura* (discussed in detail below) were already established as musicians in Egypt and brought their talents to the Revolutionary process. In each case, however, the musicians drew from a strong historical precedent of protest music from Egypt's own past and acted as independent actors within the Revolutionary process, taking it upon themselves to play music for the protesting crowds.

Elliot Colla, Chair of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University, writes about how certain people within the protest setting galvanize other people to participate in chants or songs; these people are good at drawing the attention of a crowd, as well as holding that attention with a catchy slogan²²³ like “erhal!” (leave), for example. Here, Colla's analysis of the way that slogans functioned within the Egyptian Revolution can be usefully translated to also apply to certain songs

²²² Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 14.

²²³ Colla, “The People Want.” This article is instructive for slogans in the Tunisian Revolution as well, and also for more in depth discussion of the use of slogans in the Egyptian Revolution.

that were popular in Tahrir Square during the protests. As is discussed and demonstrated later, there were certain individuals and bands whose songs became especially popular and during the protests. Building upon Bayat's idea, these individuals were just that: people creating music as enthused individual protesters whose musical talents helped to entertain and unite crowds.

The musicians and protesters in Tahrir Square who created and sang protest music were engaged in some instances in a "fun" activity in the sense defined by Bayat as "an array of ad hoc, nonroutine, and joyful pursuits, where individuals break free temporarily from the disciplined constraints of normal life."²²⁴ While of course the Revolution itself was quite a serious undertaking, the creation of music is often a joyful activity; in this case, a certain joy was present in the presence of music in the context of protesting. Some of the artists themselves are quoted later as saying the music was meant to lighten the mood or lift the spirits of the weary protesters. The departure from normal, routine life is obvious in the act of protesting at all, with the creation and performance of music being one aspect of breaking the mundane cycle of everyday life.

In the process of breaking free of everyday life, Egyptians in the protests also formed a unique community in Tahrir Square. The music which was created in this atmosphere contributed to the formation of that special communal atmosphere of Tahrir Square. According to Colla,

²²⁴ Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 138.

the act of singing and shouting with large groups of fellow citizens has created a certain and palpable sense of community [...] and the knowledge that one belongs to a movement bound by a positive collective ethos is powerful...²²⁵

Colla writes here about the slogans and music that were used in Tahrir Square, providing an important context for understanding the way that people drew from past precedents in creating the sounds of the protests. For example, Colla writes that “slogans always draw on a wealth of discourse that is already known: famous lines of poetry or song...and slogans from previous actions, with some or no modification...”²²⁶ The songs that were created about and during the Revolution draw from strong historical precedents and contributed to the communal nature of the protests. As is demonstrated throughout this chapter, the historical precedent of protest music in recent Egyptian history is drawn upon in contemporary times; according to the musicians themselves, this tradition carried over and not only informed the writing and content of the songs that were created as a part of the 2011 Revolution, but in some cases musicians also re-sang classic songs from Egypt’s past.

Egypt’s Tradition of Musical Protest

Musical expression has been an important part of protest movements. Historically in Egypt, music has been a part of social movements or provided topical commentary about a particular government, person, or social problem. This context is important to explore as a way to understand why musicians during the 2011 Revolution chose to draw

²²⁵ Elliot Colla, “The Poetry of Revolt,” *Jadaliyya*, January 31, 2011, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/506/the-poetry-of-revolt>.

²²⁶ Colla, “The People Want.”

from historical Egyptian musical themes and sources. According to Colla, “there is nothing unusual about poetry playing a galvanizing role in a revolutionary moment.” Indeed, previous major revolutions in Egyptian history (the 1881 Urabi Revolution, the 1919 anti-British Revolution, and the 1952 Free Officers Coup) have had poetry and music associated with the action.²²⁷ In more recent history but preceding the Egyptian Revolution, the Tunisian protesters whose own 2011 Revolution overthrew longtime dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s regime also used music in their own protests.²²⁸ The historical and regional precedent for musical expression as part of dissent is strong.

In Egyptian history, several individuals have formed the strong foundation of music being associated with social upheavals or protests. Their examples of musical expressions tailored for a particular time, place, and circumstance proved to be timeless in the recent context of the 2011 Revolution. For example, Sayyid Darwish (1892-1923) is a prominent figure in Egyptian musical history. He is credited with creating a “distinctly Egyptian and ‘modern’ compositional style” from older styles of music in Egypt in the early 20th century. Some of the songs written and performed by Darwish were critical of social conditions at the time in the early 20th century, a period during which the British were in control of Egypt and social conditions were difficult due to World War I.²²⁹ One of Darwish’s songs, “*Salma ya Salama*” (Welcome back to safety), became a huge national hit for its relevant discussion of the return home of Egyptian men

²²⁷ Colla, “The Poetry of Revolt.”

²²⁸ Colla, “The People Want.”

²²⁹ Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation Through Popular Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 115.

who had been pressed into service of the British war effort.²³⁰ According to Ziad Fahmy, Cornell professor and expert in mass media culture creation of Egyptian national identity, Darwish's songs entered a "national anthology of songs heard and, more important, sung by most Egyptians" thanks to their mass appeal and the gramophone.²³¹ This linkage of music and protest set the stage for more protest music to follow in this same spirit.

Of particular relevance to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution is Darwish's song "*Qum Ya Masry*" (Rise You Egyptian), which he wrote in 1919 in the context of uprisings against British rule of Egypt. During the Revolution in 2011, protesters sang this song,²³² linking their understanding of the history of the song and its meaning to contemporary circumstances. The reuse of this song in a new and updated context points to the facts that protesters were not only aware of the legacy of musical protest, but also possibly that the defiant nature of the song would find renewed relevance in the context of a new revolution. Some excerpted lyrics include:

Rise up o Egyptian
Egypt always calls for you
Lead me to victory
My triumph is a debt you must repay...
Restore my glory
The glory which you wasted away...
Love your neighbor
More than you love your own existence
What's the difference – Christian, Muslim or Jew

²³⁰ Ibid., 116.

²³¹ Ibid., 116-117.

²³² Ahmed Zaki Osman, "Celebrating Sayyid Darwish: Egypt's revolutionary singer," *Egypt Independent*, March 27, 2011, 2013. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/celebrating-sayyed-darwish-egypt%E2%80%99s-revolutionary-singer>.

The real essence

Is that we're all descendants of the same ancestors²³³

Additionally, Darwish is credited with having written the Egyptian national anthem “*Beladi, Beladi*,” (My Country, My Country),²³⁴ which was sung during the 2011 Revolution as “part of their effort to regain patriotic symbols for the people.”²³⁵ The protesters who took part in the protests and who sang these two songs penned and performed by Darwish were drawing upon an important history of musical protest and again drew a linkage between historic and contemporary protests.

In a similar spirit of pride and social commentary, a historically relevant pair to bring into this discussion is the duo of Sheikh Imam Eissa and Ahmed Fouad Negm. Ahmed Fouad Negm has “played the leading role as lyricist of militant opposition to the regimes of Egypt [...] set to music by Sheikh Imam.” These poems set to music have helped to unite movements since the 1970s.²³⁶ The pair met in 1962 and began creating their “popular, political form of song, hymns of justice for poor and working people.”²³⁷

The duo spoke out against different regimes and policies over time, including the 1967 war and Arab defeat. Their songs became popular in this era among radicals and

²³³ Fahmy, 161.

²³⁴ Serene Assir, “Sayyid Darwish: Voice of the People,” *AlAkhbar English*, December 28, 2011, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/sayid-darwish-voice-people>.

²³⁵ Ted Swedenburg, “Troubadours of Revolt,” *Middle East Research and Information Project*, Vol. 41 (Winter 2013), http://www.merip.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/mer/mer258/troubadours-revolt?ip_login_no_cache=3fa155c5720ab966fc470a3ed138f2b9.

²³⁶ Colla, “The Poetry of Revolt.”

²³⁷ Ed Emery, “Songs from a prison cell,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 20, 2006, <http://mondediplo.com/2006/05/20prison#nb1>.

protesters looking for songs to accompany their protests.²³⁸ Targeting any political figure or group with which he disagreed, Negm's words sometimes earned him time in jail under Presidents Nasser and Sadat.²³⁹ In the same spirit of dissent as Negm, Sheikh Imam criticized certain aspects of life in Egypt, including criticizing President Nasser, an act for which he too was jailed in the 1960s.²⁴⁰ Negm was himself a supporter of the 2011 Revolution (Sheikh Imam died in 1995), even taking part in some of the protests,²⁴¹ so it is a fitting historical carry-over that some of his words worked their way into the 2011 Revolution. The songs of these two men were used by protesters during the protests; these re-used songs that dissented against the ruling status quo were translated for a new time and space.²⁴² Their music and that of previously mentioned groundbreaking musicians set a strong and well-known precedent for music accompanying protest activities or expressing dissent in Egypt.

Later, the 1952 Egyptian Revolution has a musical soundtrack of its own as well. Abdel Halim Hafez is considered "the voice of revolution"²⁴³ for his work in this time

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Kareem Fahim, "Ahmed Fouad Negm, Dissident Poet of Egypt's Underclass, Dies at 84," *The New York Times*, December 6, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/07/world/middleeast/ahmed-fouad-negm-dissident-poet-of-egypts-underclass-dies-at-84.html?_r=1&.

²⁴⁰ Adel Darish, "Obituary: Sheikh Imam," *The Independent*, June 10, 1995, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary--sheikh-imam-1585763.html>.

²⁴¹ Sayed Mahmoud, "Obituary: Ahmed Fouad Negm – The Protest Poet," *Ahram Online*, 8 Dec 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/18/88548/Books/Obituary-Ahmed-Fouad-Negm-%E2%80%94-The-protest-poet.aspx>.

²⁴² Walid el Hamasy and Mounira Soliman, "The Aesthetics of Revolution: Popular Creativity and the Egyptian Spring," in *Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa: A Postcolonial Outlook*, Walid el Hamasy and Mounira Soliman, eds., (New York: Routledge, 2014), 253.

²⁴³ El-Saket, Ola. "Remembering Abdel Halim Hafez, the voice of revolution," *Egypt Independent*, June 21, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/remembering-abdel-halim-hafez-voice-revolution>.

period. Hafez (1929-1977) became a widely popular figure in this era both for his acting in movies and especially for his songs.²⁴⁴ He was known for his love songs and for those songs reflecting his social conscience and attention to social issues. According to Abdel Rahman al-Abnoudi, a friend of Hafez and a poet who was close to the government, Hafez believed in what he sang about – “the values of the 1952 revolution at times of victory and defeat alike.”²⁴⁵ As a supporter of the 1952 Free Officers Coup, Hafez sang numerous songs in praise of new President, Gamal Abdel Nasser.²⁴⁶

Hafez’s lyrics also featured commentaries on domestic Egyptian problems which helps explain why Hafez’s songs have renewed importance in the context of the 2011 Revolution. One of the songs sung by Hafez decades ago that found new resonance in the 2011 Revolution features the following lyrics:

I swear on its sky and soil
I swear on its roads and doors
I swear on the wheat and factory
I swear on the minaret and the gun
On my children,
On my coming days
The Arab sun will never set
As long as I live.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Nevine El Shabrawy, “Abdel Halim Hafez: The Dark Nightingale, 1929-1977,” *Egypt Independent*, March 30, 2010, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/abdel-halim-hafez-dark-nightingale-1929-1977>.

²⁴⁵ El-Saket.

²⁴⁶ Ahmed Zaki Osman, “The 1952 Revolution: A legacy of cultural transformation,” *Egypt Independent*, July 27, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/1952-revolution-legacy-cultural-transformation>.

²⁴⁷ El-Saket.

Another noteworthy figure in Egyptian musical history is Umm Kulthum (1904-1975). She was born in 1904 and came to prominence as a singer in the 1920s, and grew to huge fame and popularity which she maintained through the 1960s.²⁴⁸ Her popularity was enhanced through media dissemination of her songs on the radio and films featuring her songs, while President Nasser after the 1952 coup was a huge promoter of her music in Egypt and across the Arab world.²⁴⁹ Later in her career after the 1967 defeat of Egypt by Israel, Umm Kulthum's role evolved into one which was "political and nationalist" as she performed to raise money for Egypt. Even after her death, her music has remained "ubiquitous" in Egypt.²⁵⁰ Despite her huge popularity in the past and present, her music did not feature in discussions by the below artists during the 2011 Revolution. This is certainly not to say that her music was not drawn upon for style, tune, or lyrics by some of the artists present in Tahrir Square. However, the artists detailed below did not happen to reference her explicitly. Nonetheless, her influence in the history of Egyptian music is essential.

The important precedent set by each of these artists develops a clear linkage between music and dissent against a government. The individuals mentioned above had nationwide messages, not unlike the musicians of the 2011 Revolution, for their music broke the confines of Tahrir Square. The musicians of the 2011 Revolution knew and drew from the historical figures whose music preceded their own but informed it nonetheless. The reinvention of traditional music for contemporary times shows a unique

²⁴⁸ Laura Lohman, *Umm Kulthum: Artistic Agency and the Shaping of an Arab Legend* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 1.

²⁴⁹ Scott L. Marcus, *Music in Egypt: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 118-119.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

relationship of the past with the present in this context. History found its way into the Revolutionary process for the way in which historical ills and the rulers of Egypt who presided over the deterioration of the country as it fell apart inspired the music which inspired a new generation of Revolutionary singers in 2011.

Music in the 2011 Revolution: Revisiting Old Themes, Inventing New Lyrics

During the 2011 Revolution, Tahrir Square was the focal point of protests in Cairo. Within this space, as has been discussed in the introduction and subsequent chapters, men and women of different social, economic, and political backgrounds converged to protest for the common cause of ousting Mubarak and creating a better country. Emotions ran high, and music emerged as a popular form of expression. In this discussion of protest music, Tahrir Square emerges as the natural hub for production of the moving songs of the Revolution. The music which was performed in Tahrir Square was drawn from a “repertoire that the crowds could sing along with, a body of songs that connected the artists and their audience to a history of struggle.”²⁵¹ As such, the remainder of this chapter focuses primarily on the crowds and performers who were present and the songs that were created about and in Tahrir Square during the eighteen days of the 2011 Revolution.

The activists and musicians who took part in the Revolution drew from historical precedent, re-singing some of the songs of Ahmed Fouad Negm’s poetry set to Sheikh Imam’s music while also creating new and unique songs to fit the time and

²⁵¹ Ted Swedenburg, “Egypt’s Music of Protest: From Sayyid Darwish to DJ Haha,” *Middle East Research and Information Project*, Volume 42 (Winter 2012), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer265/egypts-music-protest>.

circumstance.²⁵² The music played by individuals and groups of protesters served very important functions including keeping the energy high during protests, as well as creating solidarity with one another. For example, one protester who brought instruments to Tahrir Square during the Revolution is quoted in *Egypt Independent* as saying that the music “boost[s] the morale of the people fighting for [their] rights.”²⁵³ The actors who created the music, whether professionals or those who came to fame through the Revolution, were not organized in any particular way. Their performances were ad hoc and took place whenever and wherever within the Square. This atmosphere arguably fits well within the confines of Bayat’s discussion of “fun” for its impromptu and out of the ordinary nature; the protests themselves were quite out of the ordinary and music contributed another unique dimension to the atmosphere with musicians acting independently within the Revolution who created meaningful music inspired by the goals and mood of the protests and the Revolution.

The traditional nature of the relationship between performers and audience in which the audience is non-participatory was challenged in the sense that performers interacted with the audience, and vice-versa, in unique ways. Protests no longer saw “professional artist[s] performing for a passive recipient...”²⁵⁴ but the crowds were engaged in a call-and-response” relationship.²⁵⁵ This relationship can be seen in the performances of artist Ramy Essam and the band *Wust al Balad* in particular. Their

²⁵² Elliott Colla, “The Poetry of Revolt.”

²⁵³ Ali Abdel Mohsen, “Revolutionary music: the noise from Tahrir,” *Egypt Independent*, February 8, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/revolutionary-music-noise-tahrir>

²⁵⁴ El Hamamsy and Soliman, 251.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 256.

YouTube recordings of their Revolution performances have received millions of hits, and in these videos, the nature of the relationship between artist and audience is revealed to be reciprocal in a unique way. Because of the way that people took part in the Revolution, sharing space, food, and ideology with one another, the presence of music within Tahrir Square functioned as another way in which people could unite with each other.

Ramy Essam, Singer of the Revolution

Much like the protester quoted above, Ramy Essam used his music to inspire and unite protesters in Tahrir. Eventually he was dubbed the “singer of the revolution,” referencing the designation given to Hafez regarding the 1952 Revolution; importantly, however, Hafez sang in support of the government of the Free Officers while Essam was singing against the Mubarak government. Ramy Essam, a young man born outside Cairo, made his mark on the musical landscape of protesting in Tahrir Square and gained national and international notoriety for this role through his songs disseminated mostly online. Essam is not trained as a musician he says, but rather has completed a portion of his education in engineering.²⁵⁶

Essam said that his musical style was influenced by a few different sources, including American music like Nirvana and Metallica, but also by the Egyptian legends Sheikh Imam and Sayyid Darwish. In discussing how he drew from his Egyptian predecessors, Essam said that he was influenced by the “embodiment of the idea of a

²⁵⁶ Eman Morsi, “An Interview with Ramy Esam,” *Jadaliyya*, September 8, 2011, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2578/an-interview-with-ramy-esam->

political singer and how they succeeded in representing the demands and aspirations of the people in Egypt.”²⁵⁷ In fact, during the protests Essam played “The Donkey and the Foal,” which is a composition by Ahmed Fouad Negm and set to music by Sheikh Imam.²⁵⁸

Essam participated in the Revolution as a protester and as a musician. Prior to the protests, he had written and performed political songs but had not gained a wide audience for his music. According to Essam, he did not at first take part in the protests, but when he saw the incredible turnout each day, he too joined in.²⁵⁹ Fully participating in the Revolution not only as a singer but as a protester, Essam was subject also to the violence that took part in the Square; he was injured during one violent crackdown, but this didn’t stop him from performing again the next day.²⁶⁰ Bringing his guitar with him to Tahrir Square proved to be an important decision, one which would lead to the composition of important protest music and widespread recognition for songs; especially widely known and sung was his song “*Erhal*” (Leave).²⁶¹ Essam says that he “thought that songs could

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Swedenburg, “Troubadours of Revolt.”

²⁵⁹ Morsi.

²⁶⁰ Dorian Lynskey, “Ramy Essam-the voice of the Egyptian uprising,” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/jul/19/ramy-essam-egypt-uprising-interview>

²⁶¹ Morsi.

sooth and motivate protesters,” so he began singing²⁶² in a style and with lyrics that encouraged people to sing along and eventually composed this iconic song.²⁶³

Regarding his performances and the composition of “*Erhal*,” he is quoted as saying that he “wanted to motivate the protesters...they were chanting the same slogans over and over again, and I thought turning them into a song would make them easier to memorize and more fun to recite.” This resulted in the creation of “*Erhal*” which became emblematic of the Revolution in Tahrir.²⁶⁴ His use of the simple slogan “Leave!” which was a prominent chant demanding Mubarak’s resignation which was already a common chant during the protests is indicative of Colla’s statement that musicians drew on known or existing words and sounds in order to create protest music. The desire to unite crowds and lighten the atmosphere also points to Bayat’s conception of “fun.” Here, though the business of the Revolution is serious, Essam and the crowds who participated in the call-response singing were departing from everyday life to take part in a nonroutine activity.

The song “*Erhal*” is comprised of a few different prominent chants or slogans from the protests. These include “*Al-shaab yureed isqat al-nizam*” (The people demand the fall of the regime), “Down with Mubarak,” and simply the titular word: “erhal” or “leave” in reference to Mubarak leaving office.²⁶⁵ Essam’s style was to “sing part of the

²⁶² Heba Afify, “Ramy Essam: The Singer of the Revolution,” *Egypt Independent*, April 4, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/ramy-essam-singer-revolution>.

²⁶³ “Ramy Essam: Voice of the Midan,” *Daily News Egypt*, May 11, 2011, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2011/05/11/ramy-essam-voice-of-the-midan/>.

²⁶⁴ Salonaz Sami, “The sound of resilience,” *Al Ahram Online*, edition 24 February-2 March 2011, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1036/cu221.htm>.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

lyrics and wait for the audience to finish the slogan that he had started...²⁶⁶ The lyrics of the song are not complicated but are highly conducive to the call and response type of music present during the protests. “*Erhal*” effectively conveys the essential messages of the Revolution in such a way that people can sing along.

Some of the lyrics are reproduced here:

All of us are standing together
Asking for one simple thing
Leave leave leave leave leave (repeated 3-4 times)

Down, down with Hosni Mubarak (Essam sings, then crowd responds, Essam sings again, crowd responds, etc.)

The people demand the regime to step down (repeated 3-4 times)

He will leave because we won’t leave, you gotta leave because we won’t leave
(crowd repeats)

All of us are standing together asking for one simple thing
Leave leave leave leave leave (Essam sings, crowd repeats, etc.)²⁶⁷

As we now know, Mubarak did indeed leave his office as a result of the protesting. In post-Mubarak Egypt, however, Essam’s initial euphoria eventually gave way to a struggle with the realities of post-Revolution Egypt like many of his

²⁶⁶ El Hamamsy and Soliman, 256-257.

²⁶⁷ Ted Swedenburg, “Music of the Egyptian Revolution,” *Hawgblawg*, February 9, 2011, <http://swedenburg.blogspot.com/2011/02/music-of-egyptian-revolution.html>. Swedenburg adds his notation that it is Ramy Essam singing in the video. The translation is also taken from this video.

countrymen. After Mubarak stepped down and after SCAF took power, Essam continued to participate in protests aimed at SCAF and was even detained and tortured for his participation in protests.²⁶⁸ Later, when the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Mohamed Morsi was elected to the presidency, Essam was again displeased and he protested with the aim of ousting the Brotherhood from power. In the post-Revolutionary environment, Essam has found it more difficult to write songs about protesting for a better Egypt, something which had been easier in the past when "the lines of right and wrong were clear and messages could be simple," like during the original Revolutionary protests.²⁶⁹ His songs that were aimed at inspiring crowds and bringing people together for a common purpose no longer held the same kind of power in the post-Revolutionary environment.

Wust al Balad and Cairokee

Several songs alongside "*Erhal*" were also popular in the Square during the Revolution and afterwards. One such song, "*Sout al Horeya*" (Voice of Freedom) is a collaboration between musicians from two different bands: *Wust al Balad* and *Cairokee*. *Wust al Balad* is a band formed in 1999 by different musical talents coming together to form what is now a seven member band.²⁷⁰ Similarly, *Cairokee* (the name formed from a combination of "Cairo" and "karaoke" to signify singing along with Cairo), was formed

²⁶⁸ Lynskey.

²⁶⁹ Hannah Wilkinson, "Singer without a Cause," *Daily News Egypt*, August 20, 2013, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/08/20/singer-without-a-cause/>

²⁷⁰ "History," *Wust al Balad* site, <http://www.wustelbalad.com/history.html>.

in 2003.²⁷¹ Their collaborative song “*Sout al Horeya*” (Voice of Freedom), written and popularized during the Revolution, has moving lyrics which are indicative of the struggles faced by Egyptian men and women, as well as their resolve to protest and create a better country. The song sounds like pop music, especially the catchy chorus and guitar music. Some of the lyrics are worth reproducing here:

I went down to the streets, vowing not to return
And wrote with my blood on every street...
And we broke through all barriers
Our weapon was our dreams
And tomorrow is looking as bright as it seems

Chorus: In every street in my country
The sound of freedom is calling (repeated)

We held our head up high to the sky
And hunger didn't matter to us anymore
The most important thing is our rights
And write our history with our blood²⁷²

The most watched version of this song on YouTube, with nearly 2.5 million hits as of February 2014, is the version filmed in Tahrir Square during the Revolution. The band members wrote the song in the early days the demonstrations and then went to the Square and asked people to sing the lyrics they had written.²⁷³ The end product is a

²⁷¹ “Cairokee Info,” Official Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/cairokee/info>.

²⁷² “Sout al Horeya, Amir Eid, Hany Adel, Hawary on Guitars and Sherif Mostafa on keyboards,” YouTube, uploaded February 10, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fgw_zfLLvh8.

²⁷³ “Amir Eid and Hany Adel CNN Interview,” YouTube, uploaded February 19, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMbl8rzLZkM>.

compilation of various protesters in the Square lip-syncing the lyrics of “*Sout al Horeya*” with the band playing music and singing.²⁷⁴ The composers and singers of this song, Amir Eid and Hany Adel, said in a CNN interview that the song was meant to reach the protesters on a special level and to encourage non-violent protesting as a means of struggle. Whoever they asked in the Square to be a part of their music video was happy to participate and eager to be a part of visually and musically documenting the Revolution. The band said that there was a certain “magic” in putting together this snapshot of protesters as part of the song.²⁷⁵ The tempo of the song is upbeat, and the people who were filmed to be in the video look genuinely thrilled to be singing the song in the unique environment of Tahrir Square, with looks of joy and hope on their faces. Here, Bayat’s idea of fun is evident in the way that people singing the song do so seemingly with sincere intention and with joyfulness. Although the themes of the song are quite heavy, including talk of bloody history, the hope is clear.

Additionally, the song “*Ya El Midan*” (Oh Square) became a Revolutionary hit. This song, again by a combination of existing band members from *Cairokee* but this time pairing up with Aida El Ayouby, is a heartfelt ode to Tahrir Square itself. The playing of the oud (a stringed instrument similar to a lute) by El Ayouby, a German-Egyptian songwriter and performer,²⁷⁶ and the slower meter of the song makes it a woeful and contemplative companion to “*Sout al Horeya*.” The focus of “*Ya El Midan*” on Tahrir

²⁷⁴ “Sout al Horeya, Amir Eid, Hany Adel, Hawary on Guitars and Sherif Mostafa on keyboards,” YouTube, uploaded February 10, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fgw_zfLLvh8. As of February 2014, this video had nearly 2.5 million views.

²⁷⁵ Eid and Adel CNN interview.

²⁷⁶ “About Aida,” Aida El Ayoubi Official Web Site, <http://www.aidelayoubi.co/>.

Square in particular is indicative of how important Tahrir Square was as a revolutionary space. The lyrics address the square as if it is a living space, one which has lived and suffered along with the Egyptian people, but also a space within which revolutionary change is possible:

Hey Square, where have you been all this time?
With you we sang and with you we labored
We brought our fears and we prayed...
The voice of freedom brings us together
Finally our lives have a meaning
There is no going back, our voices are heard
And the dream is not forbidden anymore
Hey Square, where have you been all this time?²⁷⁷

The song also alludes to the difficulty of creating true change as a result of the Revolution in the lines:

Sometimes I fear you'll be a memory
And when we leave you, the idea will die
And we'll go back to forgetting the past
And telling stories about you²⁷⁸

The lyrics capture the centrality of Tahrir to the Revolution and reflect the post-Revolutionary reality that true social change will be slow and difficult even though so

²⁷⁷ Video and lyrics translations from: "Cairokee ft Aida El Ayouby, Ya El Medan," YouTube, uploaded November 29, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umlJFVgYVI> and "Cairokee ft Aida El Ayouby Ya El Medan-a song about the Egyptian Revolution," *WikiLeaks Forum*, December 14, 2011, <http://www.wikileaks-forum.com/music/91/cairokee-ft-aida-el-ayouby-ya-el-medan-a-song-about-the-egyptian-revolution/7206/>.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

many people protested to bring down the Mubarak regime. The popularity of the song, with over 2 million hits of the music video on YouTube as of January 2014, demonstrates the draw of the song, both for its musical beauty and its message.

El Tanbura

Additionally, the established band *El Tanbura* took part in creating the soundtrack of the Revolution. Its founder Zakaria Ibrahim started the band about 25 years ago, so the group has extensive experience performing together. The band plays what Ibrahim characterizes as “folk music,” which he describes as a “style that gets renewed by each generation who introduce new instruments or new shows, to keep up with what is happening in their generation and to reach a greater audience.” Integrating commentary on social issues into their music, Ibrahim and his band have performed songs in a folk style about a variety of domestic and international issues in the past including the 2008 invasion of Gaza by Israel.²⁷⁹

Ibrahim, older than Essam or members of *Wust al Balad*, is not a stranger to political protest, having joined demonstrations in the 1970s in Tahrir Square during Anwar Sadat’s rule (r. 1970-1981). According to Ibrahim, however, Mubarak’s regime was something especially sinister for its ability to create fear of crackdowns against dissenters. Accordingly, when the 2011 Revolution was underway, he and his band performed in Tahrir Square during the protests to bring down Mubarak. Using traditional music in these performances, Ibrahim said in a *Guardian* interview, was a purposeful

²⁷⁹ Abdel-Rahman Sherief, “El Mastaba preserves Egypt’s musical heritage,” *Daily News Egypt*, January 21, 2013, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/01/21/el-mastaba-preserves-egypts-musical-heritage/>.

choice meant to “remind people of their history [...] traditional songs and revolutionary songs have a common desire for freedom.”²⁸⁰ Their traditional folk music style and use of traditional songs deliberately draws upon the strong history of protest music of which Ibrahim is aware. His comments demonstrate that he sees the importance in connecting contemporary struggles with those of the past, and he is in a unique position to do so considering his past protests in Egypt.

Eskenderella

The band *Eskenderella* also drew from historical protest music for their performances during and after the Revolution. A band already formed prior to the Revolution, *Eskenderella* is led by Hazem Shaheen, a musician from Alexandria. *Eskenderella* in the past had drawn specifically from Sayyid Darwish and Sheikh Imam’s music and some of their performances prior to the Revolution in fact featured updated interpretations of the music of these men. The music of Darwish and Sheikh Imam drew people to *Eskenderella*, defying a common idea that people might not be interested in hearing traditional music. In fact, during a pre-Revolution performance when the band started singing “*Qum ya Masry*,” (Wake up Egyptians), a song mentioned earlier as written in 1919 against British occupation, the audience sang along.²⁸¹

During the Revolution, *Eskenderella* continued to draw from these historical precedents for their performances. In Tahrir Square, a stage area was set up for

²⁸⁰ Lynskey.

²⁸¹ Lina Attalah, “Reviving tradition,” *Egypt Independent*, December 6, 2009, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/reviving-tradition>.

performances and *Eskenderella* took advantage of this opportunity and joined in the anti-Mubarak protests in their own way: playing music for the crowds. They played Darwish's "*Qum ya Masry*," (Wake up Egyptians), as well as "*Yetgamaa El Oshaq*" (All lovers gathered) by Ahmed Fouad Negm and Sheikh Imam. According to one of the band members, Darwish's song in particular was meant to appeal to the patriotism of the crowd and encourage them to continue protesting.²⁸² Their performances in the Square served to boost the morale of the crowds using historical music, the content of which found renewed importance for the Revolution and in fact also after the Revolution. *Eskenderella* kept performing in Cairo after the Revolution, offering their continuation of the Revolution through their music.²⁸³ Their continued musical production responded to the changing political environment, even after the end of the Revolution to overthrow Mubarak.

Conclusion

It is inevitable that many more bands and individuals took part in creating the soundtrack of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution than can be discussed here, and certainly more than became famous for their performances. The nature of the performances in Tahrir Square was ad hoc and no centralized authority directed who would perform what or where. The presence of music, performed by amateurs or established musicians, playing original or historical songs, helped to unite the protesters with one another and

²⁸² Farah Montasser, "Eskenderella perform to anti-Mubarak protestors in Tahrir," *Ahram Online*, February 7, 2011, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/33/5154/Arts--Culture/Music/Eskenderella-perform-to-antiMubarak-protestors-in-.aspx>.

²⁸³ Doaa Hamza, "Life in Tahrir Square, everywhere..." *Ahram Online*, March 2, 2011, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/35/6798/Arts--Culture/Stage--Street/Life-in-Tahrir-Square,-everywhere-.aspx>.

keep spirits high. Bands like *Wust al Balad*, *Cairokee*, and *Eskenderella* drew from important historical precedents from noted artists like Sayyid Darwish, Sheikh Imam, and Ahmed Fouad Negm. While drawing on the influence of earlier songs that promoted the togetherness of the Egyptian people in times of struggle, artists during the Revolution built upon those foundations to create new songs about the struggle for and dignity of being an Egyptian.

As is the case with the graffiti, the way that the music of the Revolution may be catalogued and accessible in the future is through electronic means. The wide accessibility of YouTube videos, recordings, and blogs with Revolutionary music means that any curious person can access this information now and hopefully into the future. However, digital means of preservation are not permanent since videos or audio clips can easily be removed from the internet. Therefore, the preservation of the music and lyrics of the Revolution's music are important in order to fit them into the longer historical context formed when considering the use of music in previous revolutionary settings in Egypt.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The current political turmoil in Egypt belies the positive changes which took place in the period immediately following the ouster of Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. The positive nature of the expressions of publicly combatting women's harassment, creating meaningful political and commemorative graffiti, and the creation and playing of new music to accompany the Revolution seem like facts of the past. Nonetheless, understanding the period in time during which men and women undertook those actions is essential for its hopefulness, creativity, and positive messages.

At the same time, examining and understanding the history behind the 2011 Egyptian Revolution is essential. The 2011 Egyptian Revolution did not occur in isolation and understanding what historical conditions led to such a dramatic Revolution is necessary to fruitfully study contemporary phenomena like sexual harassment deterrence and graffiti and music creation. The historical precedents in Egypt of labor protests, women's actions to gain equal rights, and historical protest music set the stage for the 2011 Revolution in ways that could not have been foreseen. By asking questions about increased agency in public spaces stemming from rediscovered power of collective agency, we can begin to understand how and why the Revolution transformed public space in Egypt in certain ways.

This thesis has explored the 2011 Egyptian Revolution through the lens of social movement theory and the changes which individuals can bring about by reclaiming public spaces. These creative means of rediscovering power in public spaces include the

deterrence of sexual harassment of women, the creation of graffiti art, and the playing of music; these three topics were examined through the lens of social movement theory and using media sourcing. The historical context in each of the cases discussed is essential to examine because the Revolution did not occur in isolation. Years of hard economic conditions, educational breakdown, government corruption, and other factors culminated, as we have read, in the epic eighteen days of protest that brought down Mubarak. In the environment of the Revolution and for about two years afterwards, the social changes in Egypt were unique; it is the aim of this thesis to demonstrate the ways that Egyptians were empowered to act in public spaces in visible ways and how these actions demonstrate ownership of and pride in Egyptian identity.

The men and women who formed groups to publicly combat sexual harassment on Egypt's urban streets were demonstrating the power of collective action to bring about social change in a way that was not possible prior to the Revolution. Their actions in public spaces to deter harassment illustrate the power of collective public action undertaken by regular men and women for the betterment of their own society. The desire to better conditions for women using and traversing public space, and the means through which people chose to deter harassment are unique Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary innovations. Their actions, while not on a grand scale, are meant to affect positive change for women in public spaces in a novel way, using the power of public actions discovered in the ouster of Mubarak.

Similarly, graffiti artists who took to the streets during and after the Revolution worked as noncollective actors whose actions, taken as a whole, display the new ability of individuals to publicly and artistically display the themes of the Revolution. Their

artwork was available for viewing by a wide segment of the population and displayed important themes of memorialization, satirization, and social commentary centered on the Revolution and its goals. The proliferation of graffiti in Cairo where this expression was not formerly present points to a unique way in which Egyptians started using public spaces to express Revolutionary themes. Even in the post-Revolutionary environment, the graffiti endured, continuing to memorialize those who were killed in protests or to poke fun at those who held power. Graffiti functioned as a highly visual indicator of public sentiment, painted on the walls for everyone to see.

Additionally, the music created in the atmosphere of Tahrir Square which remained popular afterwards also clearly demonstrates the way in which individuals took it upon themselves to create a musical soundtrack for the Revolution featuring both old historical songs and ones of their own composition. The musicians and crowds who created the unique chants and songs accompanying the Revolution did so in a unique environment of protest and newfound power. The repetition of some songs of earlier political protests indicates an understanding of the power of history on the part of musicians creating the soundtrack to the Revolution. The new tunes and themes that musicians created in this environment drew upon the old songs, but many new songs also emerged in the charged moments of the Revolution.

All three instances of reclaiming of public space point to a particular common theme: ordinary Egyptians taking on new roles in public spaces. Using Asef Bayat's social movement theories, these seemingly disparate phenomena can be linked effectively to one another because they demonstrate collective action by noncollective actors and the purposeful repossession of space. These spaces which were not previously able to be used

in such ways were opened thanks to the precedent set by the eighteen days of protest and then the subsequent ouster of Mubarak.

This thesis contributes to the field of knowledge on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution by examining important issues through new theoretical perspectives which are particularly relevant to the time and space in which the Egyptian Revolution took place. The application of social movement theories is especially relevant to the three topics covered here. Much of the literature on the Revolution focuses on the overthrow of the government and the ways in which that change can affect policies, but the topics above are more concerned with the experiences of individual men and women who chose to participate in the Revolution and then to continue to act in unique ways in public afterward.

The implications of this work can be broadly defined as both understanding how the history of Egypt led to and contributed to the unique nature of the Revolution and how these social changes can be traced through into the future. The history which lies behind the 2011 Revolution is rich and deep and the factors contributing to the Revolution are innumerable. The Egyptians who took part in the protests likely all had different reasons for doing so. Because of the open-ended nature of the Revolution and its yet unattained goals, the significance of this research lies also in part in the fact that the Revolution is incomplete. Although Mubarak was ousted, the goals for which the protesters were risking their lives during the eighteen days of the 2011 Revolution have not yet been realized. It is, therefore, critically important to understand how these particular issues will illustrate the progression or digression of meaningful change.

To continue to track the fervor for change, these same phenomena should be tracked into the future. To develop these ideas further, it will be important for the scholarly world to keep a close watch on social changes such as those evident in the combatting of harassment and the creation of graffiti and music. As indicators of Egyptians reclaiming their own public spaces for themselves, it is important that attention is paid to ongoing efforts against harassment, the continued creation and whitewashing of graffiti, as well as music which may be produced in the aftermath of the Revolution and all the subsequent upheavals. Repression of these kinds of activities could point to a regression back to a strongman government or repressive police tactics, while continued growth of these three areas could indicate more positive social trends.

In researching these three particular elements of the Revolution, the importance of the digital realm comes to the fore for its transmission of information on these topics and for the way digital means (news, websites, blogs, social media) allow individuals to connect with others wishing to deter sexual harassment, or to see graffiti or hear Revolution music – in short, to join in with the continued Revolution or to vicariously experience the Revolution in some ways after the fact. However, these digital means are fleeting, so scholars have a special obligation to study the facts as they happen in order to document them. There are, luckily, book compilations of graffiti, for example, which will ensure that some aspects of that phenomenon can be examined in the future even if the graffiti no longer exists on the walls of Cairo. The non-permanent nature of both graffiti and music argues for the close documentation of these phenomena as they happen.

The political and social future of Egypt remains uncertain and speculating on the future would not be fruitful. To read the news today about Egypt is to see a state of

turmoil with the ouster of President Morsi in July 2013 and continued social, political, and economic problems. Suffice to say, however, that the precedent set by the millions of Egyptians who took to the streets during the Revolution and after those who stayed in the streets afterwards combatting sexual harassment, creating graffiti, and playing music will certainly not give up their hopes and goals for their country. As barometers of the ability of Egyptians to act in and reclaim public spaces, these three topics will surely remain important in the future.

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