

YOUTH, GENDER, AND DIGNITY IN THE EGYPTIAN UPRISING

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ABSTRACT

Uprisings are complex, rare phenomenon, and this article suggests that the shared regional diffusion of protest in the Arab Spring was lubricated by the economic inequalities of neoliberalism. Young people in Egypt and the larger Middle East have been disproportionately disadvantaged by neoliberalism and a demographic youth bulge. They were economically excluded by high unemployment and insecure jobs in the informal sector; they were politically excluded by authoritarianism and state repression; and they were socially excluded by the limbo of “waithood,” or prolonged adolescence as marriage and entry into adulthood was delayed, in part due to the high cost of marriage. Yet, at the same time, these commonly shared grievances facilitated weak ties linking diverse constituencies together, as creative leaders built a “movement of movements.” The April 6 movement, and Kefaya before it, creatively adopted a non-hierarchical model of collective action that was organically suited to the vast informal and subterranean networks already dominant within Egyptian life. Young women and men risked their lives pursuing regime change, and one of the master frames of the uprisings that demanded “dignity” may provide particular opportunities for the women’s movement. A gendered concept, dignity suggests that the state must respect the integrity, safety, and autonomy of the body. Despite massive challenges to the women’s movement and its allies in Egypt as conservative forces are also emboldened by the Arab Spring, the master frame of dignity may resonate across the Egyptian public since it is a revolutionary frame, as well, yet lays bare long-standing grievances of the diverse Egyptian women’s movement.

This *JMEWS* Distinguished Lecture was delivered at Yale University in April 2011, as the Arab Spring was still young and change was occurring at a rapid pace. Each day brought different trajectories of change, new actors, and intensely interesting scenarios to the fore. My remarks were an attempt to bring a different lens through which to view the Egyptian rebellion. I am retaining the informal tone of the presentation in this published version, altering my talk only slightly from the context at that time.

Like everyone, I had been struggling to follow and understand the Arab uprisings and protests that swept the region. Since revolutions and uprisings rarely have distinct end points and depend on innovation and creativity, mass protest and resistance were still moving targets in April 2011. It is perhaps not surprising that scholars tend to see phenomena through their own expertise, and my recent research may be helpful in explaining why a particular constituency—youth—chose to risk their lives and lead or join the rebellion. In addition, I raise questions about why young women have vocally and strategically supported the uprising and how this diffusion of protest and the new political systems may offer new political opportunities, as well as critical challenges, to the women's movement.

As Clifford Geertz (1983, 156) argued, it is divergent data that sometimes leads to more clarity. I believe the Arab Spring can only be understood via complex analysis; thus I focus on the demographic, youthful, gendered, and neoliberal roots of this rebellion. My analysis is overwhelmingly Egypt-centric since that is the country I know best. Some of the questions that I try to explore include:

- Why did these uprisings spread so rapidly, despite the differences between nations, their political history and economic situation, the state and regime capabilities, the shape of civil society, and previous political histories of resistance?
- Why did youth lead these uprisings, although diverse collective actors were critically important to the rebellions? How did particular organizational strategies facilitate the rebellion?
- Why did women, particularly young women, join the movements and lead some of the resistance?
- How did the social movement frames of these uprisings incor-

porate the demands and claims of women? How did they resonate with women?

- What opportunities and challenges do these master frames pose for the women's movement and its ability to organize and mobilize more broadly in society? I argue that social movement frames that explained their grievances and inspired people to join and risk their lives not only argued for basic citizenship rights, the rule of law, and constraints on power, but demanded “dignity” from the state and its security forces. I argue that dignity was gendered in different ways for men and women and that it may be a particularly useful frame for the women's movement, accompanied by vernacular demands for citizenship and freedom, since it promotes a controversial narrative and discourse about enhanced personal autonomy of the body.

NEOLIBERALISM BITES BACK

Neoliberalism is one of the important structural backdrops of the uprisings and can explain—in part—the resonance of frames, the major actors of the uprisings, and the particular weakness of crony capitalist states that made them vulnerable to rebellion. It fueled economic inequality and economic grievances that were shared across the region and that challenged some parts of societies more than others. In Egypt, the state moved from a “social welfare mode of regulation” to a “neo-liberal mode of regulation” (El Shakry 2006, 74), and processes of globalization were deeply entwined with a neoliberal agenda that had (in part) dismantled, diminished, and privatized the formerly large public sector. The impact of Egypt's further integration into the world economy in the last quarter of the twentieth century, while not as extensive as that of some postcolonial nations, is profound (Vignal and Denis 2006, 17). Egypt has welcomed new capital, including franchise capital, reopened the Egyptian stock exchange, hosted millions of tourists annually, and presented itself as the “Tiger on the Nile,” in competition with other global labor markets such as India, Bangladesh, and China, while deepening its reliance on the productive, low-wage illegal, and quasi-legal “sweatshop” or informal manufacturing sector (102).

Not only are 60 percent of all workers employed in the informal economy in Egypt (and typically they lack minimum wage protection,

health insurance, pensions, sick leave, paid vacations, maternity benefits, or trade union protection), but space in Egypt is increasingly “informal” and escapes legal zoning or construction laws. Eighty percent of all new housing construction is informal, and by 2006, 65 percent, or 10.5 out of 16.2 million inhabitants, of the Greater Cairo’s Region’s population lived in informal housing (Sims and Séjourné 2008).

The self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi—a Tunisian fruit peddler working in the informal sector—was the crack that broke the dam of the authoritarian age in the Middle East, and it resonated among young people, those who worked in the informal sector, and other citizens across generations and employment sectors who had suffered daily from the arbitrary and capricious power of the police and security forces. The groundswell of protest in Tunisia, enabled by its labor movement, young people, and a cross section of opposition groups and citizens unseated President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. It was this success that galvanized those in Egypt to break the fear barrier of protest and rebellion.

As James Scott (1992, 224) has argued, “Some grievances are so deep-rooted and shared by a very large group that when there is a possibility for some political action—a change in the conditions of repression—the revolt spreads like ‘wildfire’ looking like a very organized, coordinated uprising, when in fact, it was not.” Václav Havel apparently asked a similar kind of question as thousands came out to protest against the dominant communist party in Czechoslovakia: “How is it possible that so many people immediately understood what to do and that none of them needed any advice or instructions?” (220)

The uprisings were triggered by the desperation and courage of a young man, but the resonance of this one tragic act must be seen within a common neoliberal economic and political context that transcends national boundaries and links young people and other activists, cross-nationally. Neoliberalism explains, in part, the rapid diffusion of these uprisings because it created high youth unemployment and disproportionately disadvantaged young people. It also created greater inequality, which came to characterize the Middle East as multinationals settled in free trade zones and as foreign franchises negotiated incentives unavailable to domestic actors. Neoliberalism has also been problematic for women since female employment had been concentrated in the civil

service and public sector, and, as government budgets decreased, female unemployment rose throughout the region. The authoritarian practices that accompanied neoliberalism hindered the growth of oppositional politics, including the women's movement, although state feminism, lobbying, mobilization by the women's movement and its allies, and First Lady patronage had produced some successes. Certainly, there is more than one women's movement in the Middle East, although at times allies in self-described feminist organizations, legal and human rights activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) pursuing women's development, education, or public health concerns, along with more elite actors within regimes or close to them, gather to promote a particular issue or agenda.

In Egypt, former president Hosni Mubarak pursued an Open Door Policy that had been launched by former president Anwar Sadat, and the mantra of economic growth fueled the illusion that Egypt could become the Tiger of the Nile. Wholeheartedly embracing neoliberalist thought over the past three decades, the Egyptian economy has undergone dramatic structural adjustments although political constraints and the labor movement have also derailed further and deeper privatization efforts. Led by policies meant to attract greater foreign investment and facilitate increased export led economic growth, neoliberalism has also led to intensive segmentation and stratification within nearly all aspects of Egyptian life.

As the Egyptian government sold off large parts of the public sector, cut the public sector workforce dramatically, and encouraged private sector development, the country produced a great deal of new wealth. Between 1993 and 2004, nearly 200 state-owned enterprises were privatized and other strategic companies controlled by national ministries were sold (European Commission 2010, 3, Joya 2008). Globalization demanded low wages in Egypt if the country was to compete for investment and franchises, and thus wages, particularly public sector wages, stagnated in many sectors, while other salaried professionals were paid globally competitive salaries as economists, bankers, or computer programmers.

While Mubarak's neoliberal policies (and others across the region encouraged by the United States and multinational actors) led to greater vulnerability among those trying to remain economically afloat, the

political paradigm of the regime, which I only briefly discuss here, encouraged free markets without political freedoms, electoral or durable authoritarianism, crony capitalism, and tight restrictions on political organizing, whether formal or underground. Mubarak continued to groom his son, Gamal Mubarak, who had become the secretary general of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) and orchestrated its overwhelming victory in the December 2010 parliamentary elections, as his successor. Yet, some observers long before the 2011 Egyptian uprising argued that the Egyptian military would never allow Gamal Mubarak to come to power since he represented the interests of international capital and their domestic allies and, unlike Egypt's modern, postcolonial rulers since Gamal Abdel Nasser, was not a military man. Opposition forces were greatly demoralized and disgusted by the irregularities and violence of the 2010 elections, which the Muslim Brothers and other political parties boycotted.

Many of the political circumstances preceding the Arab Spring are well-known and are not addressed in great detail here. I focus on what one might call “neoliberalism from the sky,” or the ways in which a bird's eye view of the Greater Cairo Region conveys an increased physical separation and segmentation of the city's housing and residential areas—and the deepening economic grievances from below (see Deboulet 2009). While informal areas in Cairo grew tremendously during Mubarak's thirty years in power, largely housing the middle, lower-middle, and working classes, as well as those in extreme poverty, they simply constituted “affordable” housing, and thus many young couples bought land and built apartments in these areas. The government left most housing construction to the private sector, and these new areas were built informally on agricultural land or state land, ignoring zoning and construction regulations, and thus were illegal. Land is the favorite investment among Egyptians, and the demand for housing stays high, despite the huge rate of vacant apartments as families accumulate multiple apartments for their children to marry. Savings are invested in real estate rather than other commercial or investment strategies.

While the quest for affordable housing for many Egyptians of limited means remains an almost obsessive concern of young men and their parents (who typically must provide the apartment for a marriage), Egypt is awash with massive new, luxurious—largely empty—gated compounds

built in the desert. Eric Denis (2006) estimated a few years ago that approximately 600,000 residences were planned or under construction by over 320 real estate companies in the 40 “new cities” developed by the Egyptian government. Yet since there are only about 315,000 families who are upper-middle- or upper-class in the Greater Cairo region, representing the wealthiest 10 percent of the population, each family would need to buy two apartments or villas to absorb this massive construction boom (Denis 2006, 52).

Egyptian planners have launched three generations of new city construction, and, during the second generation, beginning in the mid-1980s, twenty new towns were constructed with another forty-four new cities and communities in the development stage (World Bank 2008, 61). These new cities, surrounding Cairo, constitute about one-third of the physical area of the Greater Cairo Region. Between 1998 and 2002, 22 percent of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development’s national investment budget went to the New Urban Communities Authority to “conquer the desert” although these communities included less than 2 percent of the population (World Bank 2008, 56).¹

By contrast, after the devastating 1992 earthquake, which exposed substandard construction and serious political violence in the *‘ashwa’iyat* (literally, random or spontaneous areas), the government drafted a national Program for Urban Upgrading. A recent review of it points out that the investment was extremely modest, when considering population density. While the government targeted 5.7 million beneficiaries (yielding investments per capita of LE 335), there were really more than 16 million living in these areas, which reduced the investment to less than LE 115 per capita (World Bank 2008, 65), or about US\$25. The initiative was bureaucratically elite-driven, with no public participation in conceptualizing the program, its implementation, or monitoring (World Bank 2008, 65).

With names like Beverly Hills, Dreamland, and Hyde Park, suburbanized extravagant gated communities with golf courses, playgrounds, and sidewalks are marketed and publicized to domestic and international buyers. The new Ring Road facilitates access to these new cities, and buses bring workers from central Cairo to the new factories that surround some of the more successful cities, such as 6th of October. Many neighborhoods in Cairo have traditionally been economically het-

erogeneous, since there had been little residential mobility and mixed-use areas. Yet now, workers from central Cairo and its informal areas pass gated compounds with golf courses as they endure long commutes to factories, warehouses, or government institutions that have moved into these new cities (often under pressure from state planning agencies or due to state-subsidized financial incentives or public loans). Denis and others would argue that the Egyptian government has been selling off its patrimony, as the government and the military sell public lands at very low cost to attract investors and the state subsidizes roads and other needed infrastructure with cheap public sector loans to private developers. Shortly after the revolution, former Minister of Housing Ahmed al Maghrabi was arrested and charged with personally profiting from land sales, as were many other officials.

While Egypt witnessed an explosion of gated communities, those who lived in poor informal housing areas or *'ashwa'iyat* were demonized by the upwardly mobile and state-supported media. Various discourses of exclusion or danger, supposedly emanating from crime, pollution, terrorism, Islamism, or the uncivilized, rural, and backward “demographic masses” of informal areas were embodied by a “security risk discourse” which legitimized the flight of the rich and upper-middle class (Denis 2006). The government, which ignored these areas for decades, suddenly discovered them when Islamist groups launched opposition movements from some of these areas. In this kind of Othering, the residents of these areas needed an upgrade and were discounted as uncivilized, unworthy citizens, consuming hard-won economic growth (El Shakry 2006, Singerman 2009). Most importantly, the government and most elite Egyptians denied the history of these communities and dismissed their right to make public and collective demands or simply to voice their opinion and claim a fair share of public services. Young people were also molded by this stigma and political exclusion, since so many grew up and worked in these areas and endured the effects of poor services, oversubscribed schools, police abuse, and government indifference. Young people—particularly young men—were surprisingly aware of the neoliberal housing market because they must first securing housing in order to marry (a groom and his parents typically provide housing in a marriage). As a result, they are very knowledgeable about the price of housing and land, the rental market, and construction, furnishing, and

renovation costs. The financial impediments young men face in buying or renting apartments for their marriage abodes intensified their economic and social grievances, even if they could not mobilize around them due to the authoritarian regime.

WAITHOOD: THE YOUTH BULGE, DELAYED MARRIAGE, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND COSTS OF MARRIAGE

As noted earlier, it seems important to question why young people, at this particular moment in time, led and propelled mass mobilization during the Arab Spring. I cannot describe or analyze the timing and strategy of political movements that worked together to organize the mass protest with any detail since this will only emerge after careful study from scholars who were on the ground in 2011 and who research previous cycles of protest. But, what I argue here is that young women and men were faced with a phalanx of challenges, which may explain their propensity to rebel once it seemed new political horizons were possible. This argument is partial, at best. It is meant to explain some of the root economic and social challenges that young people faced due to structural factors, demography, and gender norms. It should not be understood as diminishing the importance of contingent factors, such as Bouazizi's tragic death and Ben Ali's fall in Tunisia, or the strategic actions of key collective actors in Egypt, such as the April 6 movement, the youth of the Muslim Brothers, the labor movement, or regime and state institutions such as the military and security sector.

Yet, the fact is that young people in Egypt and the larger Middle East have been disproportionately disadvantaged by neoliberalism and a demographic youth bulge. They were economically excluded by high unemployment and the difficulty of securing what are considered to be good jobs in the formal sector; they were politically excluded by authoritarianism and state repression; and they were socially excluded by the limbo of "waithood" or prolonged adolescence as marriage and entry into adulthood was delayed, in part due to the high cost of marriage.

Economists speak of the phenomenon of "wait employment" or the pattern of young people enduring temporary employment in order to find a high-status, permanent position. In a similar vein, many young Egyptians experience "wait adulthood," or what I call "waithood," as

they remain in a liminal position between childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, which is socially equated with marriage. Adolescence no longer falls between the ages of ten and nineteen, but for many it can extend into a young man's thirties, or mid-twenties for educated, urban women. While analysts of the Arab Spring identified high youth unemployment and the youth bulge as a factor in the prominent role of young people in these uprisings, they failed to recognize the tremendous economic burdens and social constraints on young people as they face daunting marriage costs—thus underappreciating the economic grievances of this generation.

Waithood, as a phenomenon, is fueled by four factors: the youth bulge, delayed marriage, youth unemployment, and the high costs of marriage. These phenomena have local, global, political, economic, gendered, and social dimensions that are too complex to explain here. While they have not directly caused young people to rebel, they have influenced their grievances and broadened disaffected constituencies that in other situations may not have shared a common cause. The youth bulge is the product of the demographic transition, urbanization, and development. As more women and infants survived longer, even with declining fertility, populations grew rapidly in the past few decades. Two-thirds of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region's population is under the age of twenty-four (Silatech, Gallup, and World Bank 2010, 16), and one-third of the population, according to another study, is between the ages of ten and twenty-four (World Bank 2004, 5). By 2009, youth between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine made up 30 percent of the region's population and nearly 47 percent of its working-age population (Dhillon and Yousef 2009, 11). In Egypt, 40 percent of population is between the ages of ten and twenty-nine (Population Council and The Egyptian Cabinet: Information and Decision Support Center 2010, vi).

A demographic phenomenon about the age structure in the Middle East became more politically salient when neoliberal economic policies, mixed with global recession, and the growth of insecure jobs in the informal sector led to high youth unemployment. The International Labor Office (ILO) found that only 19 percent of Egyptian men aged eighteen to forty-nine who ever worked obtained "good" jobs, as defined by ILO indicators (Binzel and Assaad 2008, 18). Many of these young people were also better educated than earlier cohorts and were looking

for white-collar and government positions, which were in lower supply. Dashed expectations for work that was related to young people's education also added to generational grievances. Fifteen to twenty-four-year-olds in the Middle East have the highest unemployment rate in the world at 28 percent. In a 2006 Egyptian national survey, 83 percent of all the unemployed fell between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine (Amer 2006, 11).

Young women in Egypt suffer from egregious unemployment rates of 32 percent, which are even higher among educated women (Population Council and The Egyptian Cabinet: Information and Decision Support Center 2010, 13). These unemployment rates mask a deeper problem because so many young Egyptian women withdraw from the labor force immediately after marriage. Thus, these women are deemed inactive and discounted from unemployment figures. In 2006, 87 percent of female young Egyptians were out of the labor force, compared to 39 percent of males (Population Council and The Egyptian Cabinet: Information and Decision Support Center 2010, 13). The Middle East has the lowest rate of female labor force participation globally (World Bank 2013). The education of women has been one of the most successful strategies to improve the status of women in Egypt and elsewhere in region, yet women are now far more unemployed than men for various reasons (see Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam 2003, Sieverding 2012). The neoliberal reduction in government employment has hit women particularly hard since they tended to work for the civil service and public sector due to its reputation as a safe workplace, its maternity policies, and other benefits.

Educational gains and changing norms means that young women are marrying in their early or mid-twenties rather than in their teens, whereas men are now marrying in their mid- to late-twenties and thirties (in both urban and rural areas). According to a comprehensive national 2006 survey, the median age at marriage for men in Egypt has risen significantly over the past half century and is now twenty-nine for men born in 1970, compared to twenty-four for men married in 1935 (Assaad and Ramadan 2008, 1). Only 50 percent of MENA men between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine are married as compared to 77 percent of East Asian men and 69 percent of Latin American men (Lloyd 2005).

We can begin to track "delayed marriage" in the 2006 Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey (ELMPS),² which includes a small module on the

costs of marriage in Egypt (see Singerman 2007, Singerman and Ibrahim 2001). This report shows that 73 percent of Egyptian urban males marry over the age of twenty-five and that 57 percent of rural males marry over the age of twenty-five (see Table 1). Age discrepant marriages are decreasing in Egypt, but older men still commonly marry younger women. While the age at marriage has increased for women, as well, waithood is not as extensive for young women since only 24 percent of

Table 1: Age at First Marriage by Gender and Region (%)

Age at First Marriage	Urban		Rural	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Under 15	0	4	0	6
15-19	4	34	8	54
20-24	22	39	35	31
25-29	40	18	38	7
30-34	24	4	15	1
35-39	7	1	3	0
40 and Over	2	1	1	0
Total	100	100	100	100
Waithood Total	73	24	57	8

Source: Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey 2006

young urban women and 8 percent of young rural women marry over the age of twenty-five.

Delayed marriage, which many would argue is a positive trend, particularly for women, is problematic in other ways since sexuality and intimacy is linked socially and legally to marriage, both within Christian and Islamic traditions. The new demographic norm of delayed marriage puts unmarried young people in a predicament since moral (and legal) norms frown on pre-marital dating, intimacy, sexuality, and co-habitation. While we know gender norms and sexual practices are always changing, the risks for transgressing norms vary, as well, and women are under greater social and familial pressure than men to avoid intimate relations until marriage. Yet marriage remains out of reach for many years, if not a decade for many young men, as they finish their

education, begin working, seek a spouse, and finance their marriage.

In Egypt, young people are typically not considered adults unless they are married and cannot marry unless they find appropriate spouses (approved by their parents) and accumulate the sums needed to marry (assisted by their parents). Almost all families across the economic, regional, social, religious, ethnic, and cultural spectrum in Egypt demand that, before a young couple can wed, all the necessities of a household must be secured including an apartment or room in an extended family household, furniture, furnishings, a dower (*mahr*), clothes, appliances, celebration costs, and jewelry before the couple cohabitates. This material cushion supports and protects the new couple, as they soon have their own children. Since Muslim women inherit less than men do, marriage can be seen as an intergenerational transfer of assets as a young woman's parents invest in the marriage. Engaged young women (and their families) can be very demanding of their grooms in marriage negotiations because their financial future is at stake (particularly in the event of a divorce). While the financial requisites of marriage vary among different groups and change over time, marriage costs are expensive and take years, if not decades, to accumulate among the four parties to the marriage: the groom, the bride, the groom's parents, and the bride's parents.

In the first small survey in Egypt (and the region) to investigate the national costs of marriage (COM), our analysis found that the COM were LE 20,194 (approximately US\$6,000 in 1999) and *eleven times* annual household expenditures per capita (or the market value of all goods and services, including durable products purchased by a household [excluding one's home]) or four and a half times per capita Gross National Product.³ The marriage burden was particularly challenging for those households living below the poverty line in rural areas whose marriage costs were *fifteen times* per capita household expenditures (see Singerman and Ibrahim 2001).⁴ In the much larger Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey in 2006, which included more than 8,000 households,⁵ marriage costs had risen to approximately LE 36,789 or US\$6,400 (see Table 2).⁶ Certainly, these sums are large and a financial challenge to Egyptians across society, particularly to young men, who contribute 40 percent of the marriage costs.

To understand the financial stakes surrounding marriage and its place in the economic logic of young people's lives, the aggregate cost

Table 2: Average Nominal Component Cost of Marriage by Cohort

Marriage Cohort	Cost (LE)
1975-1979	5,734
1980-1984	9,489
1985-1989	15,700
1990-1994	21,735
1995-1999	25,704
2000-2004	32,329
2005-2006	36,789
Total	23,022

Source: Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey 2006

of marriage was compared to the value of other major economic infusions into the Egyptian economy. Since an estimated one in twenty of all 13 million households in Egypt experienced a marriage each year, according to the 1999 survey results, the national cost of all 650,000 marriages equaled LE 13.11 billion or *US\$3.867 billion*. This figure, by comparison, dwarfs total economic aid to Egypt from the United States in 1999: US\$2.1 billion. It also exceeds total foreign remittances (US\$3 billion) from 1.9 million Egyptians migrants working abroad (Vignal and Denis 2006, 116) and approximately equals tourist revenues (US\$4 billion) from the five and a half million tourists who visited Egypt in 2000 (Saad 2002).

How can families possibly accumulate these marriage costs? That is still a mystery, but, because our 2006 Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey included detailed information about wages and salaries, we were able to calculate that the poorest quartile of grooms had to save 100 percent of both their income and their father's income for eighty-eight months, more than seven years, to accumulate the costs of marriage. The next poorest quartile of grooms and their parents must invest fifty-nine months of 100 percent of their wages, just short of five years, to accumulate their marriage costs. Of course, no one can save 100 percent of their income; thus it takes much longer to save for marriage costs, and parents often begin these savings strategies as soon as their children are born.⁷

A clear understanding of waithood in 2011 and the related issues of the youth bulge, delayed marriage, unemployment, and the costs of

marriage illuminate some of the grave challenges that young people were experiencing in Egypt, as political opportunities shifted in the region, fueling mass protest that became larger, more creative, and more widespread. The disappointing December 2010 parliamentary elections and Tunisia's successful rebellion encouraged Egyptian political forces to coalesce around the idea of the fall of the regime. If neoliberalism added to general economic woes and waithood exacerbated them, it is not surprising that young people felt that the state had broken its social contract with them. Waithood was waiting no longer.

The symbolism and tragedy of Bouazizi's self-immolation in Tunisia on December 17, 2012, resonated in many ways with young people as the pictures spread instantaneously through social media. Bouazizi was a fruit peddler trying to earn a living in the informal sector; his cart was impounded, and he was fined repeatedly for practicing without proper licenses. Finally he was slapped and humiliated by a police woman. Like many young people he was simply trying to earn a living and support his family. Although President Ben Ali visited him in the hospital, Bouazizi's act mobilized protestors around the country, forcing the president to flee in great haste to Saudi Arabia on January 15, 2012. The success of rebellion in Tunisia and massive non-violent mobilization across Tunisia was powerful fuel for the spread of protest across the region.

Serendipitously, Ben Ali fled Tunisia only a few days before National Police Day in Egypt on January 25, 2011 (shortly after the exclusionary Parliamentary elections in November and December 2010, which most opposition parties had boycotted). During the same holiday the previous year the April 6 movement had made National Police Day a target of protest but few had joined it. The April 6 coalition had been formed during the important labor strikes in 2008, centered in industrial Muhalla al-Kubra, and it reunited—in a new formation—with some of the young people that had been deeply involved in the Kefaya movement back in 2005 and 2006. Moreover, the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook campaign had publicized the shocking death of a young Alexandrian man for not showing the police his identification card quickly enough. When the government got wind of the planned protest on National Police Day, the president made the mistake of giving everyone the day off, thinking it would keep people at home. In 2011, 20,000 people did not celebrate the police but condemned their endemic policies of violence, abuse, and

torture. The large turnout inspired planning for more protests, which eventually unseated the regime.⁸

“THE MOVEMENT OF MOVEMENTS”

The April 6 coalition in 2008, and Kefaya before it, strove to create a new kind of political model designed to work across ideological lines to build a more diverse, internally democratic, and youthful coalition for Egyptian oppositional politics (see Shorbagy 2007a, 2007b). Although most analysts and scholars dismissed the importance of the Kefaya movement as it lost steam in 2007, Kefaya's political innovation was critical to the success of the April 6 movement in the Egyptian uprising.

Kefaya's master frame was explicit in its name (the Egyptian word for “enough”): Egyptians had had “enough” of Mubarak, enough of the rumors that his son, Gamal Mubarak, was ready to succeed his father, enough corruption, enough repression, enough economic calamities, etc. It was a “super-target” in the sense that many issues and grievances were condensed into a single frame (Tarrow 2003). The simple word “enough” implicitly conveyed the target of mobilization (the Mubarak regime) and was able to motivate people to action, to some degree. Its weakness was that “enough” did not convey the alternative to the Mubarak regime beyond the end of the regime. Kefaya's goal was to open up political and public space in Egypt, to create “new language and cultural codes that organize information” and to provide a new system of meaning (Shorbagy 2007b, 54).

Egyptian activists needed to broaden political participation if they wanted to have more of an impact on the regime. Donatella Della Porta has written extensively about the mobilization of the anti-globalization movement against neoliberalism, and her theories are useful in understanding the fallout of neoliberalism in Egypt and the Arab Spring. She argues that “[s]ocial movements are informal networks linking a plurality of individuals and groups, more or less structured from an organizational point of view. Social movements are composed of loose, weakly linked networks of groups and individuals who feel part of a collective effort” (Della Porta et al. 2006, 20). This “movement of movements,” in the late 1990s in Europe and Latin America had a “loosely networked and heterogeneous structure,” which made it easier to mobilize, yet

“various groups [could] maintain their separate identities” (236 – 7). The movement embraced the theme of participatory democracy and tried to create a new model of democracy with a new grammar and vocabulary to promote internal democracy (50). The movement rejected leaders, centralized decision-making bodies, or hierarchy, and experimented with facilitators, spokespeople, regional assemblies, principles of dialogue, linkage, and consensus-building.

The consensus model built “agreement within disagreement” (54). The movement of movements linked together many diverse networks of anti-capitalists, anti-neoliberals, environmentalists, feminists, students, artists, labor unions, anarchists, and social action and progressive religious communities, each of which had an ideological, organizational, and national identity. But the strategy that is useful to note here is that the network model of transnational movement, through weak ties, connected different political entities and constituencies and used its strong commitment to internal democracy to overcome the challenges of heterogeneity. This approach facilitated solidarity through continual negotiation and the building of master frames and the super target of neo-liberalism. While there was competition among “families of networks,” their heterogeneity and diversity strengthened the movement, at times reconfiguring it, formalizing some networks and breaking up others (60). A significant number of participants in huge demonstrations were not really members of organizations or networks, but the compelling master frame had attracted them. Others were engaged in many organizations simultaneously or serially, which serves to facilitate inter-organizational exchanges and relations among different groups (Diani 1995).

I argue that this transnational model of a movement of movements should sound familiar to students of the Egyptian uprising in 2011. The April 6 movement, and Kefaya before it, creatively adopted a model for collective action that was organically suited to the vast informal and subterranean networks already dominant within Egyptian life (see Singerman 1995). The Egyptian regime had been more effective at co-opting, destroying, imprisoning, or dividing formal institutions and membership-based organizations, weak opposition parties, or NGOs. But it was less successful when the April 6 movement and other young leaders, including Egyptian feminists, invited a wide range of diverse networks to protest the regime and its authoritarian politics and repres-

sion over the last thirty years, eschewing formal leadership roles and hierarchies (to a certain extent). Again, it is important to note that this is not only an argument about intentional organizing strategies but about neoliberalism's ability to make allies of different political, economic, and ideological constituencies, whether in Italy, Brazil, or Egypt in 2011. In Egypt, the April 6 coalition and other youthful members of the Muslim Brothers, who had grown to respect and support one another as their bloggers and activists were arrested and harassed, built a movement of movements, linking networks of all stripes including political parties, the Left, young Islamists, the unemployed, youth, the labor movement, Kefaya, independent unions, residents of informal areas with grievances against the regime or the police, the Muslim Brothers, the women's movement (in all its diversity), intellectuals, artists, bloggers, Facebook (itself a social network), coalitions, professional syndicates, soccer fans, and more. This big tent strategy swelled the numbers at demonstrations, and some protesters had multiple loyalties or associations to various political groups and were long-time activists, while others had never before protested in the streets or joined opposition groups. It is not clear, for example, whether young women joined the protest because they were highly educated, yet unemployed, whether despite the inclusion of an electoral quota for women in the 2010 Parliamentary elections they were disgusted by the one-sided NDP victory, whether they were followers of the Muslim Brothers or Leftist parties and thus critical of the regime, whether they were associated with a feminist organization and angry at the undue influence of First Lady Suzanne Mubarak in the National Council of Women, or whether they were supporters of the National Council of Women or development NGOs and frustrated by the slow progress in Egypt over women's rights, sexual harassment, or female labor force participation. Overlapping interests and multiple political identities were common among young people and their elders, yet their grievances coalesced at a particular political moment in 2011. The protesters realized their strength in solidarity and the surprising weakness of the state and the ruling party.

Social movement theorizing establishes a strong link between the functional role of networks and the formation and growth of social movements. Sidney G. Tarrow (1998) argues that sustaining mobilization is the most difficult challenge for social movements and that it is

networks that not only channel financial resources, moral support, and cadres to movements but that are critical to forging solidarity in the face of risky and costly political mobilization, undergirded by moral commitments.⁹ Roger V. Gould (2003, 236) argues that social networks are a critical component in the mobilization of protest, since “social ties to people not yet mobilized are a crucial resource in movement expansion.” The trajectory of protest snowballed in a few days, as the April 6 movement mobilized Egyptian networks across the society and the polity.

What was the commonality that brought and held them together? One demand was the fall of the regime, which became the uprising’s master frame, as “enough” had been Kefaya’s. Frames represent interpretive schemata that offer a language and cognitive tools for making sense of experiences and events in the “world out there.” David Snow and R. D. Benford (1988) suggest three core elements of a master frame that galvanize and mobilize protest: First, movements construct frames that diagnose a condition as a problem in need of redress. This includes attributions of responsibility and targets of blame. Second, movements offer solutions to the problem, including specific tactics and strategies intended to serve as remedies to ameliorate injustice. Third, movements provide a rationale to motivate support and collective action.

There were several master frames of the Egyptian uprising: One coalesced around justice and demanded the fall of the regime, the end of corruption, and the prosecution of Mubarak and his family. Another called for *huriyya* (freedom): freedom to vote, freedom to participate in free and fair elections, freedom of the press, freedom to choose their own leaders, and freedom from fear. For young people, this demand also meant personal freedom and voice. Protests, many noted, were marked by displays of optimism, volunteerism, creativity, and personal expression in music and the arts, even architectural interventions in the small city Tahrir Square had become. A third demanded *karama* (dignity) and the end of police abuse, through humiliation, bodily harm, and state torture. All young Egyptians under the age of thirty had never experienced anything but Mubarak, yet many had a deep disgust for the corruption, injustice, and humiliation associated with his regime. In Tahrir Square protesters built solidarity with slogans such as *Karamitna munhana* (our dignity is humiliated), *Namut bikarama* (we will die with dignity) and *Inha’i el zul wa zulm* (the end of humiliation and injustice).

Dignity is a gendered concept, and its most basic meaning implies that the state must respect the integrity, safety, and autonomy of the body. This demand calls upon the state to recognize limits to its authority and supports due process and the rule of law. Women have struggled for recognition as voters and citizens for many decades, seeking personal autonomy to voice their opinion, become part of the body politic, and engage in public debate. Today, this demand for respect of the body, and, in a more general sense, the individual, articulated by protesters in country after country, resonates in particular ways for women.

The master frame of dignity has the potential to support campaigns for women's access to public space, for the integrity of women's right to protest, and for protection from arbitrary coercive authority (torture, sexual violence, arbitrary arrest without due process) through the rule of law and the justice system. Clearly, public campaigns are still needed to support the demand that women's bodies deserve respect and autonomy in public spaces linked to the wider notion of the basic and universal (and liberal) claim to human dignity. The presence and commitment of women to protest is not new in the region, but women's claim to public space and defense of a public right to protest with their lives not only inspired many women (and men) and brought women further into the public realm, but it also included women in many active, supportive capacities, both personally and professionally as protests continued.

Male protesters, many noted, intentionally refrained from sexualizing women during mass public and long-lasting mobilizations in places such as Egypt, Yemen, and Bahrain. These new norms of public respect were promoted by an ideological cross-section of protesters in public spaces including those from Islamist orientations, at least initially. Perhaps this public celebration of a safe zone for women in Tahrir Square was overdone, particularly after the controversial march on International Women's Day on March 8, 2011, when a small group of 200-300 women were physically attacked and verbally abused by counter-demonstrators. In addition, many Egyptian and foreign female journalists were sexually harassed and physically assaulted particularly as the transitional military government, after the fall of the Mubarak government, used a xenophobic discourse to bolster its national legitimacy and political control and did not distance itself from the repressive and illegal tactics of the previous era. Campaigns against sexual harassment continue, but they need to be

linked to the rights of women in public space, to be watchdogs and activists not only in squares during protests, but in every local neighborhood. While threats to the safety and autonomy of women's bodies have typically been used by conservative forces to preserve gender inequality and suggest that women need male protection or guardianship or should stay at home and remain in so-called safe segregated spaces, the Arab uprisings made an important connection between arbitrary arrests, military tribunals, torture, state violence, thuggery, and the violent discrimination and harassment of women.

The women's movement may also be able to extend and deepen its followers by raising the question of dignity in relationship to safe and liveable public spaces for women and their families in rural and poor, urban neighborhoods. Like their sisters in other democratic transitions such as in Latin American, women organize around consumption issues and demand public services such as education, youth centers, health care, and food subsidies to maintain their families. The women's movement, linked with the labor movement and housing activists, may soon be able to make more successful claims to utilize public resources to improve communities, whether informal housing areas, slums, provincial cities, or rural areas.

The demand for dignity might include public appeals, from a cross-section of political actors, to retrain military, police, and intelligence officials by integrating more women into these institutions and by redesigning policing policies to protect rather than abuse citizens. Important, public, aggressive campaigns need to neutralize and reform the intensely hierarchical, patriarchal, sexualized, militarized police and security forces—to civilianize these forces and improve their ability to protect and serve women, as well as men. This goal is extremely daunting considering how little has changed despite a new government in Egypt, but women's groups and coalitions may be well-suited to lead this charge.

The demand for dignity also needs to be supported through the ability of women to exercise their freedom of expression and choice, meaning that public debate about media freedom and artistic expression and creativity needs more attention. Although incredibly controversial as more socially conservative Islamist groups win electoral support in transition governments, renewed public debate should also support discussing sexual freedom and individual rights to privacy. Reproductive

health and sexual education, as well as a range of other policies, need to be rethought to include training and public information for unmarried women and men.

The slogan of dignity might also be useful in the face of strategies to roll back previous legislation that is widely seen as positive for women. A more inclusive and representative women's movement, strengthened through hard fought democratic and electoral initiatives across urban and rural constituencies, may be able to use the master frame of dignity to educate voters and the public about respect for women's bodies, their autonomy, and their privacy. As Georgina Waylen (1994) has noted in comparative research, democratization is typically problematic for women's movements because patriarchal and conservative voices, often with popular support and deep financial pockets, can also take advantage of new political freedoms, a more robust media, and electoral opportunities. The women's movement needs to shift gears to seek electoral office across the entire nation, which will be extremely difficult, yet it must continue efforts to train and support female candidates and to cultivate a new generation of leaders. Electoral politics is the new game in town, and laws will hopefully be made through contested legislative sessions rather than by a small group of elites (with occasional help or patronage opportunities from their wives).

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, shortly after the success of the uprising in January and February 2011—and across the Middle East and North Africa—despite the massive participation of women in the revolts and the prominent role of some female leaders, few women became leaders of the transition process, whether as popular national politicians, poised to run for presidential or leadership roles in legislatures (although many women did try to run for office, including presidential office). For example, no women were appointed to the patriarchal Committee of Wise Men, which was tasked with writing the new Egyptian constitution although public outrage forced the committee to appoint a female member later. Certainly, there were no female leaders when the Supreme Council of Armed Forces took over power, as the “interim” authority until parliamentary and presidential elections could be held. Since the military and

police continue to yield considerable economic and political power in Egypt, women need to make inroads in those sectors as well.

There is a great deal more to say and understand about these issues. By trying to link the particular predicament of young women and men to economic, social, and political grievances, I attempt to explain why this constituency seized this political opportunity and was able to attract massive public support for regime change. Unemployed, mature, well-educated, urban, and unmarried women and men had reasons to risk their lives for political change. The dignity of Egyptian women had been compromised too often as they negotiated public and political spaces. Young men suffered the abuse of the police, the anxieties of disappointing jobs and wages, political exclusion, and “waithood.” These indignities unfortunately continue in Egypt after the revolution as women are subjected to “virginity tests” by the military, young people are tortured and arrested for political reasons, and sexual harassment on the streets becomes both more violent and publicly contested and debated. Yet for all the tremendous economic and political challenges that remain for young people in Egypt and for the women’s movement, the creativity and mobilization during the revolution will hopefully continue to inspire the hard work of realizing its potential.

NOTES

1. See also Sims (2011) and El Shakry (2006).
2. Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey: <http://www.erfdataportal.com/index.php/catalog> (accessed on June 11, 2013)
3. The first survey research using a “marriage module” was added to a small nationally representative household expenditure survey administered in 1999 (400 households) asking very basic questions about marriage costs to the female in the household. It was conducted by the International Food Policy and Research Institute in conjunction with the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Trade and Supply (See Singerman and Ibrahim 2001).
4. The survey collected data on the six component parts of marriage costs: housing; furniture and appliances; *shabka* (a gift of expensive jewelry (usually gold bracelets) to the bride from the groom); *mahr* (the dowry, an advanced portion of which is paid at the time of the marriage by the groom’s family and a deferred portion stipulated in the event of divorce); celebrations; and the bride’s *gihaz* (trousseau) including clothing, kitchenware, less expensive furnishings, and smaller household items. In both the 1999 and 2006 surveys, housing absorbed about one-third of the marriage costs, furniture and appliances another third, and the *gihaz*, 14 percent;

the shabka 9 percent; the mahr 5 percent; and wedding celebrations approximately 6 percent.

5. A simple marriage module was added to the first Egyptian longitudinal survey, the Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey of 2006. It asked questions of women aged fifteen to forty-nine nested within the larger labor force survey (N= 8,349 households; 37,140 individuals), allowing the creation of age cohort data and the synthetic analysis of demographic, marriage, education, employment, and earnings questions. The sub-sample for the analysis of costs of marriage included 4,696 ever-married (married, divorced, or widowed) female respondents ages sixteen to forty-nine who married in 1975 or later and who reported values on all six component costs of marriage. I am very grateful for the generosity of Ragui Assaad, the Population Council, the University of Minnesota and the Economic Research Forum for providing access to the data and for their collaborative support in designing and conceptualizing the marriage module and its relationship to the larger survey.

6. The national estimate of the cost of marriage from our smaller 1999 data is similar to the much richer 1995-1999 cohort data from the Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey (LE 25,704 in 2006 survey and LE 20,194 in 1999). There was only a LE 5,000 discrepancy, which suggests our 1999 costs of marriage may have been slightly underestimated. For further detail on the two studies and datasets see Singerman (2007).

7. For further detail, see Singerman (2007) and Salem (2012) for research on marriage costs in Jordan using the 2010 Jordanian Labor Market Panel Survey.

8. This includes Wael Ghonim, the now-famous Google executive who administered the "We are All Khaled Said" Facebook campaign with members of the April 6 coalition, but it was also Khaled Said's mother and sister who fought back against the government and demanded that the police officers be put on trial. Later they joined demonstrations in Alexandria and spoke with the media to prevent other young people from suffering the same fate.

9. See also Jenkins (1983, 538).

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