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The Promise of the Revolution Four Years on: Egyptian Youth Working for the Butterfly Effect

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This article explores the experience of being young, Egyptian, supportive of the 2011 revolution, and active in civil society in the post-revolutionary period in Cairo and Alexandria, looking into aspects of continuity and change that shape this experience. It draws on five life histories and aims to understand the reasons behind youth's engagement in the revolution beyond the framework of youth economic exclusion. The data was approached using a mixed theoretical framework, which encompasses youthfulness (Bayat) and a heuristic, as opposed to analytic, use of social generations (Mannheim). The participants were invariably guided by a concern with everyday politics in their engagement with the revolution and the civil society. Their expectations of the revolution and visions of positive change are, however, very diverse. Socioeconomic exclusion does not appear as a driving force for their engagement in the revolution, showing it is not the universal fate of Egyptian youth but one shaped by class and physical location. In terms of continuity and change, the experience of being young and active in civil society in Egypt continues to be shaped by class, while a major change happened when the military took over the country in July 2013, spurring the critical participants to re-examine and sometimes tone down their engagement, experiencing a strong sense of exclusion. Another change that dates pre-revolution is the youth's increased socio-political capital through aptitude in horizontal organizing, use of new technologies for activism, political reasoning beyond traditional ideological or societal divides, and propensity to criticize and speak back to power. The impacts of this change were still felt at the time of the interviews.

Keywords:
youth; post-revolution; Egyptian revolution; civic engagement; generation

INTRODUCTION

Although the 2011 uprisings and the Egyptian revolution have attracted a lot of scholarly attention, not much has been done on the everyday experiences of "ordinary" youth[1] (Woodman 2013) who supported the revolution, away from the small group of prominent revolutionaries at the forefront of the protests (Herrera 2014; Rennick 2015). After Herrera's pioneering work on the experiences of ordinary youth in Egypt in the early 2000s (Herrera 2006a & b; 2010; 2012), this topic has been largely understudied post-2011. Moreover, following its coalescence in January 2011, the revolutionary movement arguably entered the phase of institutionalization (Tilly 1978), suggesting that it would be worthwhile to look into the experiences of youth who supported the revolution and subsequently came to be engaged with the civil society. However, instead of focusing on the experience of civil society workers, studies of civil society in Egypt after the revolution mostly examined contextual factors contributing to youth mobilization (for example, Sika 2012) or donor funding strategies (for example, Behr and Siitonen 2013). In this article, I highlight how youth's expectations from the revolution and their views on subsequent events and circumstances in Egypt shape their experiences and influence their engagement in the post-revolutionary context. I also look for indications of continuity and change in the experience of being young and engaged in Egypt post-revolution.

Not long after I had set out to conduct this research, it became clear that class position remains pivotal in shaping post-revolutionary experiences in Egypt. In contrast to this aspect of continuity, another central factor is the major change that occurred in the summer of 2013, when a new regime increasingly hostile to the civil society and political freedoms came to power. The lived experience of the tumultuous post-revolutionary period proved to yield little consensus among the participants on most socio-political events and actors, making for a "messy" result. Further, a sense of disappointment with the current results of the revolution proved to be widely, albeit not unanimously, shared. All young people in this study became involved with the revolution, and with civil society, driven by concerns for everyday politics. However, they perceive most of their efforts to directly enact a change in political structures as unsuccessful. Disappointment notwithstanding, they remained engaged, active and committed to their civil society work, showing that the interest in everyday politics is driving their engagement once again, which might be a lesson they have learned from the revolution. Participants also voiced a sense of exclusion, very different from the economic exclusion that researchers of youth in Egypt (for example, Mulderig 2013; Singerman 2013) frequently point out.

In this article, I first present the relevant threads of research on Egyptian youth during and after the revolution and on civil society workers, providing an account of the contextual factors relevant to the experience of being young and active in civil society in Egypt today, and focusing on the socio-political changes that occurred since 2011. Then, I describe the research methodology and subsequently clarify the rationale behind the choice to use social generations and generational units (Mannheim 1952), as well as youthfulness (Bayat 2010a & b) as analytical tools, after which I highlight the factors that inform their engagement in Egyptian society post-revolution. Throughout, I show how a heuristic, as opposed to analytic, use of the concept of social generations (Mannheim 1952; Woodman 2013) is useful for shedding light on factors of continuity and change in the experience of being young. Importantly, having in mind that the sample of this study is not representative (nor does it strive to be), looking into the circumstances of the five participants can elucidate some micro aspects of continuity and change that are relevant to the participants' social position.

BEYOND SOCIOECONOMIC EXCLUSION: THE UNDERSTUDIED ORDINARY YOUTH IN POST-REVOLUTION EGYPT

Youth are commonly identified as one of the main agents of the 2011 uprisings, and many scholars (for example, Mulderig 2013; Nevens 2012; Shehata 2008 and 2011; Singerman 2013) have argued that youth's political action should be attributed to their socioeconomic, political and cultural exclusion. Moreover, youth exclusion has long been the analytical lens employed by the policy/development literature on youth in the Middle East (for example, Assaad and Barsoum 2007; Biomy 2010; Chaaban 2009; Dhillon and Yousef 2009; Gebel and Heyne 2014; Handoussa 2010; Silver 2007). In this article, I go against this approach and embrace Herrera's (2010) emphasis on the importance of involving youth's perspective on social and political events, instead of an approach that "treats youth either as

1 Woodman articulates an argument critical of youth studies' traditional focus on young people who are "most excluded or most spectacular." Instead, he calls for attention towards "ordinary" young people, or those in-between the youth "successfully following the government and society approved pathway and the most socially excluded"(Woodman 2013, 1). In the context of post-revolutionary Egypt, I take *ordinary youth* to mean young people who are not content with the status quo (the government and society approved pathway) and seek to enact change while foregoing spectacular forms of activism – those forms that would be seen as directly threatening or as openly confrontational by the authoritarian government.

subjects to stimulate neo-liberal development, or as essentially religious and ideological beings with either politically radical or benign tendencies," tackling them as objects rather than subjects or agents (Herrera 2010, 127). Similarly, I argue for an empirical, in-depth examination of these issues, "going to the source and talking to youth directly" (Herrera 2010, 129), instead of deriving hypotheses on youth's views, expectations, and hopes from economic and demographic tendencies (Mulderig 2013). Others emphasized youth's new ways of engaging politics that augmented their political capital in the face of exclusion. For example, Cole (2014) and Herrera (2014) describe the *wired youth's* new practices, including horizontal relationships, disdain for discrimination and traditional social hierarchies, and tendency to use new communication technologies to communicate across lines of difference. Yet, others (e.g., Kiwan 2015) have observed how politics are inscribed into youth's everyday life, for example, using the slogan "I vote I sing" to protest the arrest of a rap artist (Salime 2015) or social activism of street art collectives (Abdelmagid 2013).

Non-hierarchical organizing, communication across lines of difference, use of the Internet, and demands for justice for all are the essential features of the youth-led social movements that first called for protests that would later result in the toppling of President Mubarak. Drawing from Blumer's (1969) and Tilly's (1978) theorization of the four-phase life cycle of social movements, these movements arguably started going through the institutionalization phase in the wake of the revolution. The number of citizen initiatives and civil society organizations soared after the revolution, as the uprisings "provided a sudden boost to civil society activism across the Middle East" (Behr and Siitonen 2013, 14).

While some (for example, Behr and Siitonen 2013) have viewed civil society as a necessity in the process of democratization, others have been more critical. For example, Plaetzer (2014) argues that use of the analytical tool of civil society to study post-revolutionary contexts of Tunisia and Egypt re-inscribes social and economic injustices that had spurred the uprisings. NGOs have also been criticized for legitimizing the withdrawal of the state from basic service provision. Similarly, scholars have pointed out how NGOs can be agents of the professionalization of engagement, undermining civil society's transformative potential (Choudry and Shragge 2011; Hilton et al. 2013; Jad 2004). Other authors (for example, Abu-Rabia-Queder 2007; Townsend et al. 2004) have pointed out that both uncritical praise and undiscerning dismissal of civil society organizations (CSOs) are sweeping generalizations, and instead argued for studying concrete cases of CSOs to show how they can be complex sites of both co-optation and resistance. Ethnographers of aid ("aidnographers") have similarly advocated for ethnographic study of international development institutions (for example, Leve and Karim 2001; Lewis and Mosse 2006). Others, for example, Fechter (2012), Lewis (2011), White (2015), and Yarrow (2011; 2008) found that civil society workers have complex motivations for, and relationships with, their work. In his study of local NGO activists in Ghana, Yarrow (2011) found that, rather than having an opportunistic, principally pragmatic or even cynical relation to their engagement, activists see their engagement as part of a wider ideological project they are committed to. Therefore, motivations for professional civil society work are varied, and not precisely determined. Studies imply that the assumption of a strong opposition between altruistic reasons for engagement predicated upon giving and egoistic reasons predicated upon expectations of receiving, are not warranted.

AN UNFINISHED REVOLUTION

After a young Tunisian man in mid-December 2010 set himself on fire to protest police harassment, lack of economic opportunity and lack of government accountability, to which he had been exposed, mass protests started in Tunisia, demanding the end of President Ben Ali's regime. Amid ongoing protests in Tunisia, an Egyptian man set himself on fire on Cairo's Tahrir Square on January 1, 2011. That same day, over 20 Copts were murdered in a bombing of a church in Alexandria, causing clashes with the police. On January 16, Tunisian President Ben Ali stepped down. Then in mid-January 2011, the administrators of an Egyptian Facebook group *We are all Khaled Said*, which commemorates the 28-year-old Khaled Said who was beaten to death by the police in Alexandria in late 2010, called for demonstrations to protest police brutality on January 25, the National Police Day. Other activist groups and individuals active on social media joined the call and followed suit. On January 25, thousands of peaceful protesters across the ideological spectrum gathered in Cairo and other cities, demanding Mubarak's resignation. On January 28, a dramatically growing number of protesters defied the curfew introduced the previous day, and the number of casualties rose. General strike, the return from exile of Mohamed el-Baradei,[2] as well as continuing protests in major cities in Egypt with an ever increasing numbers of participants, culminating in hundreds of thousands, amplified the pressure on Mubarak. On February 11 Mubarak stepped down, turning over the power to Egyptian

2 El-Baradei is a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and dissident, widely seen as a possible successor to Mubarak in the early aftermath of the revolution. Heading an interim body following the ousting of Morsi in the summer of 2013, El-Baradei resigned and withdrew after the Rabaa el-Adawiya and an-Nahda massacres of Islamist protesters in August 2013.

military's Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF).

The visibility of young people during the protests, and the fact that youth-led movements and networks called for demonstrations in the first place led many scholars, analytics, and commentators to conclude that youth were at the forefront of the revolution. In fact, youth movements had been at the forefront of oppositional activity for over a decade. Scholars have emphasized how these engagements seasoned the people involved in how to send their message, how to forge coalitions, and how to do street activism in an authoritarian context (Korany and El-Mahdi 2012; Rennick 2015). The Popular Committee for the Support of Palestinian Intifada in 2000 and the *Kifaya* movement 2004-2006, with its unofficial youth wing Youth for Change, organized bigger public gatherings than any other had in the decade that preceded them. In 2008, a youth-led Facebook campaign supporting a strike of factory workers became April 6th Movement, which mobilized to support the strike and organized protests throughout the period leading up to the revolution.

In the wake of Mubarak's resignation, a number of young activists from fourteen different youth groups across the political spectrum formed the coalition Revolutionary Youth in an effort to form a platform for representation. The following months were marked by youth's protests against the rule of SCAF and violent response by the police, an increased isolation of youth from the common Egyptians who had supported the revolution and increased discord within the coalition. The group disbanded after Mohamed Morsi the candidate of Egypt's largest and oldest Islamist party, the Muslim Brotherhood, was inaugurated as president, having won the presidential election in 2012, which marked the end of SCAF interim rule (Muhammad Taha 2012).

On June 30, 2013, hundreds of thousands of people went to the street to demand the resignation of President Morsi. The military issued an ultimatum to Morsi, and he was deposed by the military on July 3. Mass protests of Muslim Brotherhood supporters ensued, including six-week-long sit-ins at the Rabaa el-Adawiya mosque and al-Nahda Square in Cairo, effectively shutting down a major traffic node of the city. The sit-ins were violently dispersed by the police August 14–16, killing over 850 protesters in an action widely condemned by human rights organizations (see for example, Human Rights Watch 2014).

Since the military deposed Morsi, and especially since SCAF chairman Abdel Fattah as-Sisi became president after an election in the summer of 2014, government pressure on civil society has substantially increased. A number of international and local civil society organizations have been shut down by the government. The law currently regulating citizen associations dates from 2002. Since the fall of 2014, its restrictive measures, alongside newly made amendments to the penal code that enable the judiciary to issue harsh sentences under vaguely defined circumstances, has been implemented to scrutinize and increase pressure to the national and local NGOs (Amnesty International 2015). Moreover, an unprecedented number of activists have been imprisoned, with an estimated 22 000 people arrested between July 2013 and 2014 alone (Stork 2015).

After briefly presenting the context, I now turn to the question of how five young people active in civil society experienced the post-revolutionary period in Egypt. In doing so, I will focus especially on the influence of their expectations from the revolution on their engagement. I will also look for aspects of change and continuity in the experience of being young and active in civil society in post-revolutionary Egypt.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article is based on five in-depth interviews, conducted in English, with five young civil society workers in Cairo in January 2015. The respondents chose the place of the interviews, and we invariably met in cafés in different parts of Cairo. The occasion of interviewing was the first time I met all of the interviewees, whom I contacted through my existing network of acquaintances. The period immediately preceding fieldwork was marked by an increasing state pressure on civil society organizations. A number of organizations were closed, forced to re-locate, or even had their staff arrested. In such an atmosphere, I was able to approach participants only with the help of personal social networks and asked a friend engaged in LGBT issues and a colleague from an international humanitarian organization, where I was an intern, to introduce me to acquaintances who fit the study's population. I, thus, sourced three participants; the fourth participant was sourced by an acquaintance of my internship colleague and the fifth was recommended by one of the participants. This procedure of sourcing participants took place alongside numerous unsuccessful attempts to reach a few other organizations without the help of personal connections.

My social position was similar to that of the participants, and this was also felt in the interviews. Like them, I come from a middle-class background, from a country arguably in the global periphery, and like them, I have spent my life so far at school and engaged with civil society. I felt that our roughly speaking similar socio-economic positions and trajectories in life greatly facilitated establishing rapport in the interview situation. In the cafés of Cairo, I felt like I was invited to visit their ground, their everyday environment. There was no sense of displacement or unease in the interviewees. They were very engaging, and it was not hard to proceed with the interview or ask any of the questions.

SOCIAL GENERATIONS – BEYOND THE CLASSICAL ANALYTICAL USE

As an approach that thematizes the interface between youth, the worldview and socio-political circumstances, sociology of generation speaks to the topic of my research. The German sociologist Karl Mannheim argued in the 1920s that sociological generations are more than mere age cohorts since members of a generation share a worldview and a set of attitudes characteristic of the predicament of being young at a certain point in space and time. Other scholars (e.g., Bourdieu 1993; Purhonen 2015) have argued against treating social generations as a societal given and not as social constructs, and have pointed out that, for the social generational framework to be empirically meaningful, the framework has to bear a link to the biological age, which then renders it theoretically untenable.

As pointed out by Purhonen (2015), the direct linkage between the biological age and societal dispositions, as well as envisaging social generations as a societal given and not as social constructs, have been powerfully, albeit only in passing, criticized by Bourdieu (1993). In the interview *Youth is Just a Name* Bourdieu (1993) states that he sees generations as social constructs resulting from the struggle of social and cultural capital, which is in line with his general theoretical framework theorizing social fields and capital. Moreover, Bourdieu emphasizes that the "relationship between social age and biological age is very complex," since social age complies to field-specific norms, which vary across fields: "each field has its specific laws of aging" (Ibid., 95). Bourdieu explicitly states that "merely talking about 'the young' as a social unit, a constituted group, with common interests, relating these interests to a biologically defined age, is in itself an obvious manipulation" (Ibid). It is clear that he rejects the association between social and biological age, an assumption made by Mannheim (Purhonen 2015).

Woodman (2013), however, argues that in spite of these shortcomings, the concept of generations is especially well equipped for arriving at findings that capture both change and continuity in the factors that shape the experience of being young at a certain point in space and time, without treating them as binary opposites. His argument is primarily aimed at the scholars of youth studies who approach the problem of youth from the analytical optics of social inequalities (class, gender, race, etc.). He argues that fundamental changes cannot be tracked down in research solely focused on identifying the existence, and more or less subtle manifestations, of enduring inequalities. Moreover, Woodman argues that approaching the task from the standpoint of generations leaves more open possibilities for tracing not only change but also continuity. It provides the conceptual framework to approach the empirical data and seek commonalities in young people's experiences. Crucially, neither the existence of common experiences nor their origin seem to be a priori assumed by Woodman, unlike Mannheim. Further, Woodman does not argue against using the potent analytical tools of class and other axis of stratification, and indeed he uses them himself as an auxiliary tool to re-examine and interpret his findings. This approach also enables capturing instances of young people's agency, as their strategies in dealing with the constraints are identified.

Moreover, Bayat (2010a; b) has built on Mannheim's conceptualization and argued that the particular "flavor" of youth's spatiotemporal location in modern times is youthfulness or youthful *habitus*. According to Bourdieu (1992), habitus is an ensemble of acquired, unconscious interpretive schemes that govern practice, and are developed through experience. Habitus is expressed in taste, style, and other practices in which people engage without reflection or self-awareness (Scott and Marshall 2009). Youthfulness is an outcome of the contemporary youth's spatiotemporal position: spatially, it is situated within the city but transcends the city due to the globalization of youth culture; temporally, it is situated in the late modernity up to contemporary times, when an intermediary stage in life, between being dependent and having dependents, first came to be a mass experience. Like Mannheim, Bayat claims that youth as a social group comes about when a common spatiotemporal location is coupled with a generational consciousness. In Bayat's theorizing, this consciousness entails awareness and affirmation of youthfulness: "'Young persons' turn into 'youth' by developing a particular consciousness about youthfulness" (Bayat 2010a, 119).

I concede that theorizing generations as givens and not as constructs is indeed problematic, but will also argue that the latter problem may be resolved if generations are thought of as a heuristic, rather than an explanatory device. I argue that Woodman (2013) employs the notion of generation in this manner, although Woodman himself does not articulate his use as such. In addition to using youth as a heuristic device, I also draw on Bayat's (2010a; b) conception of youth as possession of youthful habitus in my analysis of the data collected for this research.

TAKING THE REVOLUTION IN ONE'S YOUNG HANDS – FIVE STORIES

At the time of the interview, Rana was in her mid-twenties and single. Her father, the first university graduate in a rural family, worked in the Gulf for a number of years and could thus afford the hefty fees of the very prestigious private school in Cairo that Rana attended, before studying sociology at Cairo University. While at school, Rana was actively playing handball. With peers at school coming

from the Egyptian high social classes and handball team-mates coming from very modest social backgrounds, Rana struggled to find a sense of belonging and identity. While on this journey, she intimately linked her identity to being Egyptian. While identity is fundamental for her to find purpose and agency, she believed one chooses one's identity. "Belonging to these many social groups was how Egyptian I am: Egypt is African, it is Arab, it is Islamic, rural and urban." This prompted Rana to start wearing traditional Egyptian garb in her everyday life, and when I met her, she was wearing a veil with an iconic Egyptian pattern. At the same time, her father was nurturing a keen interest in ancient Egyptology, which exposed her to alternative discourses on Egyptian history and diverse traditional Egyptian artifacts. As a consequence, Rana started seeing the official narratives and histories she was taught at school as homogenizing and untrue.

Rana started working as a sales assistant immediately after school, thinking that "experience will get me a job," and aware that a degree was not enough to find employment. As a teenager, she was an active literary blogger and, in the lead-up to the revolution, connected to other bloggers and became more politicized. She was demonstrating since day one of the revolution and continued to demonstrate against SCAF rule until she was severely beaten up by the army in Mohammed Mahmoud Street.[3] At the time, she was juggling a conventional job at a risk management company and NGO engagement as librarian and teacher working with members of a low-income urban neighborhood in Cairo. After the beating, she quit her company job, as the manager was one of the many, including members of her own family, who blamed her for being beaten. Feeling anger and resentment because of this, she decided to attend training on peace and non-violence and subsequently became a trainer with the same organization, training different groups, including teachers and other public servants. At the time of our conversation, she felt she needed a change. She had minimized her involvement with the organization "because with all the violence around me it felt to me like la-la-land," and was planning to go to France for a year to volunteer as an animator for children.

Ahmed was in his late twenties when we met in a café as he was reading a book on Islamic jurisprudence that he hoped would give him an idea of possible alternatives to the Muslim Brotherhood's use of religion in politics. He was newly married to a French woman. When talking about the political situation in Egypt, Ahmed was clearly invested and impassioned. He seemed breathtakingly knowledgeable and moved effortlessly between the subjects of actualities in Egypt and the Middle East, critical social theory, feminism, and others. Growing up, Ahmed was exposed to societal issues alongside his father, a professional journalist at a major newspaper. He watched his father having to comply with the red lines of censorship. Ahmed studied journalism and started his professional engagement as a journalist, but was disillusioned with the pervasive corruption and censorship he encountered and then joined an international body working in development. He was active during the revolution from the very first day, and spoke of the revolutionaries as "us." Immediately after the revolution, he founded a political party he describes as "center-right,"[4] but before it won seats in the parliamentary elections in the fall of 2011 he left it, disappointed with what he perceived as a lack of focus and seriousness. He then joined an international humanitarian organization, which he subsequently also left, having become frustrated with what he saw as the organization's role in the "endless vicious circle" of suffering of its beneficiaries. When we met, he was thinking what his next move would be, ever in pursuit of enacting change.

Shady, an unassuming, soft spoken, cheerful and calm man in his early thirties, grew up in the Gulf. His parents, originally from Egypt, met in the early 1980s. He is gay, and he is out with his family, who disowned him at first, but with whom he now has contact. His family came back to Alexandria before he started his medical studies. While working as a medical doctor, in 2005 he joined an organization working for women's empowerment and was providing computer courses for housewives who wanted to join the workforce. Then in 2008, he joined a project on prevention of HIV/AIDS and realized he was particularly passionate about working with an issue so central to the gay community. When we met, he was working at a hospital, and also engaged with awareness and prevention of HIV/AIDS and fighting discrimination against people living with HIV. He was planning to establish his own NGO, but after July 2013 decided to wait and "lay low" for a bit, occupying himself with underground LGBT activism and compiling an oral history of the gay rights movement in Egypt in the 1990s and 2000s.

Said, a young man in his early twenties, was not married when we met; and he is the only Christian among the participants. Said started his engagement

3 Violent dispersal of a peaceful sit-in in Cairo's Mohamed Mahmoud Street, just off Tahrir Square, took place on November 19, 2011. The sit-in, demanding that SCAF relinquish power to a civilian authority, consisted in part of the relatives of people killed in January/February 2011. The violent dispersal turned into a four-day-long street battle between the police and the protesters. It ultimately left 47 people killed, and hundreds injured. The event is also known for police's deliberate targeting of protesters' faces and eyes with rubber bullets, and many people were blinded or injured in the face.

4 Ahmed's party was a party with a moderately Islamic identity and moderately traditional values.

immediately after the revolution, which inspired him "to try something new." He spontaneously started helping street children find shelter, after he had been talking to them as they frequented the cafés he was going to with his friends. He was then active in an initiative to engage local communities in the debate on the proposed constitution. He traveled to different places in Egypt, and was personally especially interested in the provisions of the constitution that impact women. He was also active as a trainer in an NGO on sexual harassment from the human rights perspective. When I asked him what made him interested in women's rights and harassment, he recounted how he used to have longer hair, and how he got a taste of harassment during that time. He attributes the harassers' behavior to ignorance and refuses to judge them, choosing instead to try and work with them. Similarly, he completed a human rights program and says that, once he encountered the idea of human rights, he "became someone else," as it finally provided a framework for his lifelong intuition that people should be treated as equals. He liked the program so much he stayed with it as a volunteer administrative assistant, and was subsequently helping with the curriculum, emphasizing that "it was the best thing I've ever done." For him, working in the civil society sector was a priority over employment opportunities in other sectors. He was also working in an organization working with architecture and public space, which he considered "elite," and explaining that he would prefer his work to be linked to more basic needs of people. However, he was happy he was able to find this job after a grueling four-month search.

Leyla, a well-groomed young woman in her late twenties, was clutching her Starbucks coffee cup when we met after her work. Although she was obviously tired, she was focused, precise and energetic. I had the impression that she approached our interview very professionally. Leyla grew up in another, smaller city in Egypt and came to Cairo to study journalism. Her family had always supported her to be a "strong and independent woman," and still supported her in living on her own as an unmarried woman, resisting the pressures and judgments of the extended family. Leyla's father worked in the Gulf for three years in the early eighties, and Leyla was quick to point out that, in contrast to many others, he did not bring conservatism with him back home to Egypt. Leyla started working at an outlet as a journalist while still studying, at 17. Disappointed with the training she received while studying, and aware that media houses did not invest in the training of staff, Leyla saw an opportunity to address this gap by founding her organization, which provided free training to journalists, and in 2010 left her job and focused on her NGO. Leyla pointed out to me in an assertive, precise and proud tone that the organization had trained over 700 journalists, and that many of them occupy high positions within their media outlets, and also that some of the trainers had a very high profile. Leyla's tasks in the organization were managerial. However, she had not lost interest in journalism, and at the time of the interview was going through a selection process to be a TV presenter at a major media outlet. Leyla supported the revolution from the beginning, and demonstrated on January 28.

THE MANY FACES OF DESIRE FOR CHANGE

All participants came to be involved in the revolution driven by concerns for everyday politics. While their opinions on particular post-revolutionary actions and events vary dramatically, making for a "messy" result, most participants shared a sense of disappointment with political developments and the current results of the revolution, as well as a sense of exclusion, which is very different from the economic exclusion Mulderig (2013) and Singerman (2013) point to. Further, in spite of being wary of the increasing socio-political constraints on the impact of their activism, they shared a commitment to continue their efforts to bring about positive change.

The factors that spurred these young people into their first activist stints invariably included a concern with everyday politics. For example, explaining why she became involved in the revolution, Rana said:

> It was political but with a social flexion, because I wanted Mubarak to go out, and I was there because I didn't want this regime, because people weren't living the best they can live in Egypt, so I wanted people to live better, and the only way for this to happen was for Mubarak to resign.

Likewise, Shady described why he became engaged with the civil society. He was first providing skills for employability to housewives and then he shifted his focus on HIV/AIDS awareness raising within the gay community, to which he belongs:

> I wanted to help, to help anyone, but then I felt like I would like to serve people most that I belong to, because they are the most in need... I thought that there's an obligation to society that I have to do and... I would say like, in part I'm a little bit privileged, so I want to use my experience to do it and also maybe it was also that I wanted to get in contact with a different variety of people than the ones I'm with.

Similarly, the participants' expectations of the revolution and understanding of what would qualify as success were very diverse. They included the protection of freedom of speech, a civilian rather than a military government, and an environment that does

not condone political violence. Ahmed exclaimed:

> I want people to be empowered: to have the right to choose who is governing them, how they are governed... I want this country to be developed and to be respectable. It has... to respect its people... That people cannot walk to reach their work easily is not respect. When someone has certain ideas and writes a blog about it and is put in jail – that's not respect.

Leyla called for the complete secularization of the state and a loosening of religiously-inspired social conservatism:

> [I would like] to go back to social life of Egyptian society, because, in my opinion, the shift from Egyptian traditional society to [the] other culture, like Gulf or Salafist, made us stop to produce... If you are thinking in a secular way, you will be more creative than when you're thinking in a religious way, because... if we just rely on that everything is *haram*, we won't create anything... I want to see Egypt... go back to the forties as a society. People were very open-minded, very educated, and... respected the differences between each other... And in this time, the forties, Egypt was secular, a secular state. And this is what I want to see.

Further, the participants' perceptions and lived experiences of particular post-revolutionary periods were dramatically different, and at times opposing, making for a "messy" result. Ahmed felt his rights as a citizen were increasingly threatened during the rule of Mohammed Morsi, culminating in Morsi's *Constitutional Declaration* in November 2012, when he felt deeply pessimistic about the positive outcomes of the revolution for the first time. He feared that the street clashes that were happening every Friday during that period would "turn into clashes 24/7." Hence, he joined the protests against Morsi on June 30:

> For me those people [the Muslim Brotherhood in power and their supporters] weren't just idiots, they were trying to create an Islamic dictatorship where you won't be able to say anything, because I will be cut, I will be muted out, they will be killing me while saying *allahu akbar*, believing that they're doing a favor to god. I will never allow something like that to happen.

In contrast, Shady recalled the rule of Mohamed Morsi as one of the periods of optimism:

> I was extremely positive when Morsi was in power. Like, he wasn't my number one, but... [I thought] 'At least now I have a civilian president; this itself is enough success'... I supported Morsi, because even if it was Islamic, since 1952 we always have in power presidents who are ex-militants. And to be honest, I was born and brought up abroad, in the Gulf, and I didn't see Islamic [sic!] government as that problematic...[During that time] there was this big, extreme urge that we need – there was a conflict – that people were ready to sit and talk. They were clashing... but there was some communication going on, rather than being polarized and, if you're not with my side, you don't have nothing with my business, which is happening now.

As a result, the participants made dramatically different assessments of what was the revolution has achieved as of early 2015, when the interviews were conducted, and consequently have diverging outlooks for the future. Rana, who was severely beaten up by the army in Mohamed Mahmoud Street, described a culture of violence:

> Now this same person who was responsible for me being beaten is public figure, and now everybody respects him, everybody loves him, even my parents who know what happened to me in Mohamed Mahmoud... I didn't feel safe beside Egyptians anymore, and I love Egypt so much... It's not easy to live among people who accept what happened at Rabaa and have a regular life... I am not for Muslim Brotherhood. I hate them. But still, you support the blood – I can't live this way... It reached the maximum when al-Sisi was elected to be president. I couldn't move on... I'm thankful that I didn't die that day [in Mohamed Mahmoud] and I don't want to die the same way again, because it doesn't mean anything to anyone. I'd be called a spy corrupting the system and against the country.

In strong contrast to Rana, Leyla was optimistic and confident and felt Egypt was on a good track to achieving the goals of the revolution. Leyla held that al-Sisi became president at an exceptional time of conflict and polarization and thought his actions were justified by the circumstances. She was optimistic that "we will be able to measure one of the results of the revolution after another electoral cycle," when people would be choosing their president in normal, and not critical circumstances like in 2014.

THE MANY GLARING FACES OF EXCLUSION

Throughout the interviews, none of the participants ever invoked socioeconomic exclusion of young people, as playing a part in their support for the revolution, or in any other way. Rather than going against the arguments of Singerman (2013) and especially Mulderig (2013) that the systemic socioeconomic exclusion of youth lies behind their support for the revolution, this contributes to refining that

argument in two ways. First, exclusion is not the universal fate of Egyptian youth, but one shaped by class position and spatial location, bearing in mind that the participants of this study come from two big urban centers in Egypt. Second, instead of reducing youth's involvement in the revolution to socioeconomic grievances, research should further investigate the multi-faceted and complex nature of this issue, its aspects that are specific to various social positions and locales, and, most importantly, should do so by "going to the source" (Herrera 2010) and talking to the youth themselves.

Said described his experience of not being able to find a job for months in late 2012. Otherwise, unemployment or the inability to marry did not come up during the interviews either in relation to the participants themselves or to their social surroundings. Similarly, they did not express or recount having encountered the belief that being young meant one cannot expect to be treated as a full citizen or political actor. At the time of the interviews, all participants who wanted to work were employed, despite the already ongoing crackdown on civil society. This is partly linked to the post-revolutionary boom of the civil society sector (Behr and Siitonen 2013), which had opened some more opportunities for employment that the participants clearly took advantage of. They were all the more able to do so due to their social position: their language skills and education are at least in part enabled by their socioeconomic location and may have put them in a better position to profit from these opportunities than their less privileged peers, making up for another aspect of social reproduction found in this study.

However, it is likely that, in the longer run, the situation will influence individual participants differently. Like other civil society workers, the participants' jobs are dependent on availability of funding and on the social cost of civil society engagement (Behr and Siitonen 2013), and some are more likely to find this dependency to be a challenge than others. Namely, those who have proven to be able to quickly switch from one engagement to another, like Rana; those whose engagement involved more high-profile organizations, like Ahmed; or who have been in the field of civil society for a while, like Shady and Leyla, may find it more easy to navigate the volatility of the job market in civil society under current conditions. In contrast, Said, who was relatively new to the civil society sector and who recounted having encountered difficulties to find his current job, may be more likely than the others to have the same problems with employment in the future. This is all the more so if Said's family does not have the financial means to cushion the possible periods of unemployment. In this regard, the contrast between Ahmed, who can afford to choose to be unemployed and Said, who recalls his feverish four-month job search, is quite telling, and can too be seen as social reproduction.

In contrast to socioeconomic exclusion, the experience of being excluded in the wider sense was very present in my participants' accounts. Most dramatically, after she was beaten, Rana had a strong feeling of isolation and misrecognition when she encountered the reaction of her nearest circle, including her family, and also the atmosphere in the wider society. For her, just staying in Egypt under current circumstances was traumatizing, and she felt like her values and beliefs, which she had acted upon with telling determination and principle, had no place in Egyptian society. In Said's words, although he was unhappy with the outcome of the revolution given the current situation in Egypt, he conceded that: "We are few people. We don't have the opportunity to do something huge like the revolution. People agree with as-Sisi." Likewise, Ahmed emphasized that "the revolutionaries are either frustrated and don't want to do anything, or very busy with civil society work." He felt out-numbered, and possibly even isolated, with observations like "the revolution is now lost" and "we were all fooled." These remarks very much echo the argument of Nevens on how youth have been side-lined after the uprisings (2012).

As a result of this major change, most of the participants had toned down their civil society engagement. Both Rana and Ahmed felt so much at odds with the fundamental premises of the situation as of January 2015 that they both found it impossible to continue their engagement in a business as usual manner. In early 2013, Shady had intended to found his own NGO, but decided not to do so and opted for less visible engagement after June 30. Shady is also older than Ahmed, and especially Rana, and the accomplishments of his decade-long engagement might have served to tamper the disappointment. Thus, the participants' negative experience of change that occurred in the summer of 2013 brought them away from prominent positions in civil society and from more visible accomplishments, drawing them away from the center of the shrinking civil society sector towards its periphery. That said, the participants still chose to continue being engaged, in spite of the substantial challenges they must overcome.

In contrast, Leyla's support for the current regime allowed her to be more fully and more visibly engaged in the civil society. The similarities between the limitations of the freedom of media under as-Sisi and Mubarak did not figure in how Leyla felt about working in journalism in post-revolutionary Egypt. This can in part be attributed to her primary focus on the training of journalists, rather than journalism itself, which means she might simply not have first-hand experience of pressure and censorship on a daily basis. As for the influence of Leyla's ideological position on her engagement and predicament, the fact that she saw continued progress (a result of her support for the fundamental premises of the current

regime) may aid her in being oriented towards seeking, finding and benefiting from more visible civil society engagement. More generally, this may also have enabled Leyla to seize and benefit from whatever changes introduced by the revolution still remain, which where the advantage of the supporters of the current regime comes to the fore. Moving away from the question of ideological position to other factors, it can also be argued that other aspects of Leyla's position – that she is a woman, that her family is not from Cairo, and that she started working at 17, which might indicate that her family cannot provide her a financial safety net – have made and will make her engagement harder on an everyday basis (gender) and on the long-run (necessity of relying on herself). This shows that factors of class, gender and ideological affiliation interact in a complex manner.

NEW CAPABILITIES OF YOUTH

Participants are found to harbor youthful habitus, which, following Bayat, includes outlooks and practices such as non-conformity, outspokenness, and the willingness to experiment (Bayat 2010a). They also engage in other practices, like horizontal, informal organizing to directly tackle specific societal issues of concern, using new technologies to create counter-publics, forging alliances across traditional social cleavages, and daring to speak back to power, which have substantially increased the social capital of youth in Egypt over the last couple of years (Herrera 2014). For example, Said and Rana were part of groups of friends and acquaintances who would observe a societal issue and tackle it directly together. With a group of friends, Said was active helping street children find shelter. He and his friends saw that there was a need when they encountered many child beggars while going to *balady*[5] cafés, and then they did something to address that need:

> We tried to have fun with some of those children. We talked to them and learned of their suffering. They only wanted a place where they could come and have food, so we worked as outreach for that kind of organizations offering shelter.

Further, Rana was active in street demonstrations after the revolution, together with a loose group of young people who were opposing SCAF. The sense of community around a shared purpose is clear when she described how she cared when some of them would get arrested, and how she would demonstrate against their arrest, as in the example of the protest at Majlis ash-Shura. Further, Ahmed described his desire and efforts to find a way to communicate a political message that would bridge the cultural cleavages in Egypt. He was one of the founding members of a new political party in early 2011, after the revolution. Here is how he explained the reasons behind the ideological profile of the party:

> I joined a center-right party, a conservative party, which people would accept, because I wanted to establish a post-ideological situation, gathering people from different backgrounds around more pragmatic goals. I was doing pragmatic stuff within the party, recruiting new members.

Rana had resisted the pressure of her environment to change her attitudes towards political actors or the decision to engage in demonstrations. Arguably, this pressure was inherent in the experience of isolation that she had gone through while injured. Nonetheless, Rana kept her ground and demonstrated strong non-conformity. Similarly, together with Said and Ahmed, she demonstrated the readiness to criticize political actors or decisions boldly, feeling comfortable and confident in the role of the critic of power, as opposed to being reticent or fearful, doubtful or hesitant. Likewise, throughout his many and different civil society engagements, Ahmed displayed an openness to experimentation and willingness to try different ways of thinking, different sites and manners of engagement.

Moreover, Rana, Leyla and Shady all mentioned the Internet as serving them in their civil society engagement, helping them stay informed, and playing a part in their outlook on social and political issues. Rana was an active blogger. Although politics was not the subject of her blogging, as part of the blogging community she developed a passion for following the news and being well-informed of political actualities. She quickly joined a discussion circle on politics, and experiencing those sessions was for her "the main reason why I joined the revolution." Similarly, experience with alternative on-line radio before the revolution showed to Leyla that the objective of free media in Egypt was attainable, which emboldened her to found the NGO for education of journalists that she was running. Shady described having used social media for highly successful campaigns against stigmatization of people with HIV/AIDS: "The thing that makes me happy is that I... still find people talking about it." Shady also said that he started relying exclusively on social media and the Internet for staying informed, feeling that there he could find more trust-worthy sources than the traditional press or TV. Importantly, in the context of LGBTQ issues, when talking about the possibilities he saw for a change in prevailing attitudes on these issues, he mentioned the importance of social media:

5 *Balady* or popular cafes are affordable ones on the sidewalks of busy streets in Cairo, recognizable by their emblematic plastic chairs. They stand in contrast to the commercial chains that support a different lifestyle and income group.

> If there is, for example, a platform where I can express my own views without being worried about getting arrested, whether online or written or whatever, and where I can be anonymous, surely there are people who would like to be out – I mean, express and declare their own identity [as gay]. But this would make more and more people change their point of views against this topics, and this would help to make politicians realize for example, they don't have to be extremely conservative on that topic and they can change.

According to Herrera (2014) and Cole (2014), the increased capabilities and power resulting from these practices have been re-positioning youth and putting them in a more powerful position in relation to other age groups. As already indicated, the participants occupy a relatively privileged position compared to other youth in Egypt. Their use of the above practices as a source of capital can serve as a reminder that, in addition to helping bridge intergenerational inequalities, these practices can also deepen intra-generational ones. Thus, the conjunction between the participants' engagement in these practices and their active and visible quest to change Egyptian society indicates change in the circumstances that shape the experience of being young in Egypt, both on the inter-generational level (in lessening the inter-generational gap that disfavors youth) and on the intra-generational level (in deepening the intra-generational gap between the youth who have engaged in these practices and have thus increased their political capital, and those who have not).

While the participants did not articulate a strong sense of generational consciousness, the youth's substantial, albeit gradual and interrupted move away from the political periphery to which they had historically been reduced (due to the ageist political culture and socioeconomic exclusion) should also be seen as shaping what it means to be young in Egypt today. Hence, research should ponder the question of the relationship between this development and youthfulness, and the extent to which this move should be factored in when considering youthfulness as the shared habitus of youth at a certain point in space and time (Bayat).

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

Despite mostly being disappointed with the outcomes of the revolution, the participants were still committed to enacting positive change in the social rather than political domain, if we conceive of the political in the traditional sense. As indicated below, Rana, who was disappointed in the political process, turned to activism in which she sought to help people improve their everyday lives through non-violence. Shady continued his engagement, although he was disappointed. Said preferred to be engaged in his NGO, which he saw as elitist, to working outside of the civil society sector.

For example, Ahmed started out as a professional journalist, out of the commitment to "uncover corruption and change the patterns of our society." Having faced censorship, he changed direction and engaged in the development field, then politics, and then humanitarian work with refugees. Throughout these transitions, he would engage a field for as long as he felt that desired results could reasonably be expected, and was actively considering his next move at the time of our meeting. Commitment and determination transpired from Ahmed's considerations:

> That's why I'm telling you I'm thinking a little bit differently – in terms of my friends, who are very active in civil society now. They believe that, even if you can't make a big change now, maybe you can make [it] in some people's lives, and those people can affect other people, you know, the butterfly effect... I don't know. I'm still researching. I want to know that will reach a certain effect afterwards. I don't want to just assume that it will have effect afterwards.

Similarly, Rana was aware that her engagement as an anti-violence trainer working with public servants, teachers among them, had very limited impact. In spite of the tension between her wish to achieve wider change and the constraints, she was still committed to continue engagement:

> The system is corrupt, so a five-day camp isn't enough to change the system... If the teacher isn't paid enough money, is facing oppression from the ministry, so how can I, as a reasonable person, ask him not to oppress children?... I'm still doing it, because I can't do anything not related to civil society or my field... And I'm doing it for participants, I know my participants need the chance of being introduced to these new terms, having a safe place to express themselves during workshops. But I'm aware Egypt will not change because of the workshops... Because everything around me – it's not about the people, culture; it's about the system. The system is deeply corrupted, and we're not taking any moves, were taking backward moves, in education, in everything.

CONCLUSION

This study uses the analytical tool of social generations to identify continuity and change in the circumstances that shape the experience of young Cairene and Alexandrian civil society workers of the post-revolutionary period (Woodman 2013). Importantly, generations are not presumed to be monolithic groups, as exhibited by the strongly diverging opinions of the participants throughout, including

on the outcome of the revolution as of the time of the interviews. In terms of continuity, class position continues to be a significant factor. Youth socioeconomic exclusion is not found to have played a role in the participants' support for the revolution or their civil society engagement. Rather than going against the arguments of Singerman (2013), Mulderig (2013) and others that the systemic socioeconomic exclusion of youth lies behind their support for the revolution, this article refines that argument in two ways. First, exclusion is not the universal fate of Egyptian youth, but one shaped by class position and spatial location, bearing in mind that the participants of this study come from two big urban centers in Egypt. Second, instead of reducing youth's involvement in the revolution to socioeconomic grievances, research should further investigate the multi-faceted and complex nature of this issue, its aspects that are specific to various social positions and locales, and, most importantly, should do so by "going to the source" (Herrera 2010) and talking to the youth themselves.

Furthermore, the aspects of change are twofold. The first one predates the revolution, and its impacts are still felt. In line with arguments of Herrera (2014) and Cole (2014), practices and capacities that these young people have developed over the recent years have significantly increased their socio-political capital: aptitude to organize horizontally, use the new information and communication technologies for activism, reason politically beyond the traditional ideological or societal divides, and have the courage and propensity to criticize and speak back to power. While the participants did not articulate a strong sense of generational consciousness, the youth's substantial, albeit gradual and interrupted move away from the political periphery to which they had historically been reduced (due to the ageist political culture and socioeconomic exclusion) should also be seen as shaping what it means to be young in Egypt today. Hence, research should ponder the question of the relationship between this development and youthfulness, and the extent to which this move should be factored in when considering youthfulness as the shared habitus of youth at a certain point in space and time (Bayat).

The second aspect of change was triggered when, in July 2013, the military took over the country and a new regime hostile to the civil society and political freedoms came to power. This change spurred the participants critical of the new government to re-examine their engagement, at the same time experiencing a strong sense of exclusion in a decidedly polarized society increasingly inimical towards critics of the government. As a consequence, those participants have discontinued their efforts to enact political change, investing their time and labor in civic activism instead. Frustration and disappointment have led some of them to seek new sites of engagement, while others have opted for toned-down, less visible forms of activism. However, they remain committed to their engagement and efforts to enact change within the constraints, which is one aspect of the agency they are exerting in the current circumstances.

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