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A civilized revolution:

Aesthetics and political action in Egypt

ABSTRACT

Acts of aesthetic ordering dominated Egyptian protest and civic activity in 2011, around the time of former president Hosni Mubarak's downfall. They played a central role in motivating collective political action, giving form to a nationalist utopian vision and legitimizing ordinary Egyptians as active agents and upright citizens. Yet they also reproduced exclusionary middle-class aspirations tied up with state projects and related forms of citizenship that center on surveillance, individualism, and consumption. Examining such acts of aesthetic ordering reveals the tensions at the heart of many political movements, especially as people attempt to enact their utopian visions in public space. The precarity of both middle classness and utopian schemes of revolution render aesthetics a key battleground of political action. [*activism, social movements, aesthetics, space, middle class, waste, Egypt*]

هيمن الإهتمام بالأنساق الجمالية علي مظاهر الإحتجاجات المصرية والنشاط المدني في عام 2011، أثناء المطالبة بإسقاط الرئيس السابق حسني مبارك و لقد لعبت هذه الأنساق دورا محوريا في دفع العمل السياسي الجماعي، وإعطاء نماذجا ليوتوبيا قومية وإضفاء شرعيتها علي حراك المصريين العاديين، بوصفهم مواطنين شرفاء وعملت أيضا علي تكريس التطلعات الإقصائية للطبقة المتوسطة المتماهية مع مشاريع الدولة وما يتصل بها من مفاهيم للمواطنة التي تركز علي المراقبة، والفردية، والقيم الاستهلاكية. يكشف لنا النظر الي هذا الإهتمام بالأنساق الجمالية عن الصراعات داخل العديد من الحركات السياسية، خاصة وأن أفرادها يحاولون تفعيل مظاهر هذه اليوتوبيا في الأماكن العامة تتمثل خطورة قيم الطبقة الوسطى والفهم الطوباوي للثورة في أن كلاهما يجعل الأنساق الجمالية مدخلا لساحة المعارك السياسية.

There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder.

Mary Douglas (1996, 2)

February 12, 2011. The day after what many thought was a revolution in Egypt. On just a few hours of sleep after celebrating former president Hosni Mubarak's downfall the night before, thousands of Egyptians flocked to Tahrir Square on that exceptionally sunny Saturday. I went expecting to find people continuing our celebration from the night before, which included copious rhythmic horn honking, people cheering out the windows of their cars, and families milling about, ululating and buying popcorn and noisemakers from itinerant sellers. Instead, the square that day was packed with young people wearing surgical masks and latex gloves while picking up trash and sweeping the streets. They had countless brooms and dustpans, as well as large plastic trash bags that they were filling and hoisting onto piles. Standing on the overpass above the square, in the same place from where regime forces had rained bullets down on the protesters just days earlier, onlookers holding Egyptian flags could see the clouds of dust rising above the earnest sweepers. This dust was composed of not only Cairo's infamous particulate pollution of smoke-covered Saharan sand but also the remnants of the broken concrete and asphalt that protesters had used to form barriers and build projectile weapons to fight the regime, which had killed at least 800 of them in the previous 18 days. No music or cheers could be heard—just the murmur of people talking while cleaning, with the occasional smack of garbage being thrown onto piles.

The organized revolutionary groups, which had given previous protest days names like the Friday of Rage, had called this Saturday Tahrir Beautification Day.¹ By midafternoon, one could find as many as four people sweeping the same three-meter square of pavement. One of my interlocutors, an art student, explained that she and her friend had gone down to the square to help clean but found so many people already sweeping that they had nothing to do. They came of their own accord, but many others came in groups organized by social-welfare NGOs. Later that day, young people formed human chains on both sides of curbs to prevent passersby from stepping on the fresh paint they were brushing over



Figure 1. Youth brigades sweep Tahrir Square, Cairo, the day after Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's departure, February 12, 2011. (Ahmed Asad/Apaimages/Polaris)



Figure 2. Egyptian youth form a line to protect newly painted curbs in Cairo, on the day after Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's ouster, February 12, 2011. (Scott Nelson)

the government's faded curb colors. Others were painting anew the metalwork of the entire length of the Qasr al-Nil Bridge leading into the square, the same bridge where, just days before, brave Egyptians had knelt in prayer in front of water cannons in one of the most infamous scenes of the revolution. Some people were scrubbing away graffiti epithets against the regime that had been hastily written on various surfaces. Meanwhile, others were organizing to paint predesigned murals commemorating the revolution, which often featured flags and nationalist slogans. Many working in the square that day wore photocopied signs on their fronts and backs that said, in both Arabic and English (the latter for foreign onlookers), phrases such as "Clean Egypt if you love Egypt," and "Yesterday I was [a] demonstrator, today I build Egypt" (see Figures 1–3).

And so, the day after Egyptians accomplished one of the most amazing feats of modern history and captivated



Figure 3. In February 2011, Egyptians painted preplanned murals in Cairo to replace revolutionary graffiti. This one includes the popular slogan "Raise your head up high, you're Egyptian." (Yasmeen Mekawwy)

millions across the world, the most prominent scene at the epicenter of the struggle was one of earnest cleaning. People erased spontaneous graffiti off state property and painted curbs in the same manner as the city government. They decorated their bodies and the sides of buildings with nationalist slogans. What does all this mean? Lost in the initial media celebrations of Egypt's uprising, this question is critical for understanding the significance of that event and its ongoing consequences.

Indeed, to understand why the uprising did not succeed in changing structures of power, we must attend to the pervasive set of embodied aesthetic practices and discourses that dominated Egyptian protest and civic activity both immediately before Mubarak's downfall and in the months right after. These are not the aesthetics of protest as conventionally favored in subsequent media and scholarship focusing on chants, poetry, music, and anti-regime graffiti (Abaza 2012; Colla 2011; Gröndahl 2013; Saad 2012). Rather, these aesthetics pertain to collective action seeking to beautify public space and regulate behavior in it. I call these acts of aesthetic ordering. The fact that they were cultivated and extensively performed during the 18-day protest, and that they then came to dominate public action in the immediate aftermath of its success, strongly suggests that they were central to many Egyptians' sense of how to achieve political and social change and of what that change would look like. Analyzing such aesthetics helps us better understand both the motivations and potentialities of political movements in a variety of contexts, because they powerfully reveal the contradictions and class contours at the heart of such utopian visions—particularly as people attempt to enact these visions in public space.²

In Egypt, aesthetic ordering gave form to a particular nationalist utopian vision in which ordinary Egyptians were agents and democratic citizens, worthy of such a utopia and of respect from the state. Acts of ordering attracted people to collective action and were the means by which they created and became stewards of nonthreatening public spaces, which they had been increasingly denied because of spatial privatization and securitization that expanded with neoliberal economic policies and the state violence that undergirded them. Aesthetic ordering also enabled them to model the kind of state they wanted, keeping alive an earlier modernist-socialist ideal of a state that takes care of all its citizens and provides public amenities. At the same time, this ordering reproduced both the civilizing, exclusionary tendencies of that state ideal, in which middle-class people are the exemplary citizens, and, inadvertently, also reproduced neoliberal exclusions based on individualist, consumer citizenship. In Egypt, as James Holston argued for Brasília, “the paradoxes of utopia subverted its initial premises” (1989, 5; see also Muehlebach 2012).

Examining the nexus of aesthetics, space, and class, then, allows us to see the tensions at the heart of many political movements emerging with the intensification of capitalism around the globe. The impulse to clean, beautify, and regulate behavior was not limited to the uprising in Egypt. From Tahrir to the Occupy sit-ins, from the Spanish *indignados*’ encampment to Ferguson and Baltimore in the United States, from Hong Kong to Istanbul’s Gezi Park, cleaning practices point to how hegemonic systems and social inequalities may be perpetuated even in the midst of seemingly revolutionary action. By broadening our attention beyond the obvious indicators of revolution or counterrevolution—for example, popular culture, military and police violence, politicians, party politics, and elections—we can better understand the less obvious yet perhaps more powerful (or insidious) ways that the avenues for political action and imagination are simultaneously opened up and foreclosed—all by seemingly insignificant things such as how people celebrate a revolution, how they decorate and move through urban space, and how they judge others’ appearances and behavior.³

Aspiring to middle-class dignity

The Middle East uprisings quickly came to be known as the Dignity Revolutions. The word dignity (*karāma*) came to symbolize all they felt they had lost (or never had) and all they were fighting for. *Karāma* was a locus for the central chant ringing out in Tahrir: “Bread, freedom, human dignity!” To have *karāma* meant being treated as worthy of respect, honor, and basic bodily and material rights (Bernoussi 2015; Singerman 2013). That *karāma* became such a central trope should lead us to foreground the aesthetics of political movements in our analyses, because

karāma is often experienced through the senses and frequently demanded and performed through aesthetic practices. We need to ask what pathways to *karāma* became paramount in the uprising, and what this tells us about its potential futures.

The specific practices of aesthetic ordering that began during the 18 days and came to dominate the subsequent period both reflected and consolidated a notion of *karāma* in which yearning for civilized middle classness was central. It is not that everyone in Tahrir was middle class, but it is clear that particular aspects of middle classness were pervasive. Middle-class aspirations and the tensions within them are thus key to understanding the relationship among aesthetics, political action, and, ultimately, the shape of Egypt’s revolutionary process. Here I use the term *aesthetics* to understand the sensibility that governs certain practices and judgments—especially when people present such judgments as true, pure, and universal, even though they may actually be structured by a bourgeois emphasis on containment (especially of the senses) and by certain notions of being civilized that are based on values of propriety and productivity (Bourdieu 1984; Eagleton 1990). In many societies, those whose aspirations focus on entering (or staying in) the middle classes occupy ambivalent and unstable social positions, especially during large political-economic transitions such as coming out of socialism or moving toward neoliberalism. Such people often seek to distance themselves from what they view as rich people’s immoral extravagances and poor people’s lack of sophistication (Armbrust 1999; Heiman, Freeman, and Liechty 2012; Liechty 2003; Patino 2008; Zhang 2010). The middle-class emphasis on kinds of productivity (such as cleaning) protects one from the perceived laziness, vulgarity, and corruption of both the rich and poor. Becoming middle class in Egypt, then, as in many contexts, is a deeply moral project, one linked to notions of honor and prestige as defined against other social groups.

Yet “what constitute[d] the sense of middle-classness” in Tahrir was *not* “necessarily a common lifestyle or a uniform set of values” (Liechty 2003, 67). There were protesters whose middle-class status or aspirations were marked by color-matched and well-pressed shirts and bottoms, with headscarves tied in a way common to those with education beyond primary school. In contrast, others sported un-oiled, loose hair, boots, tight jeans, and T-shirts. These differences could generally be taken to have a generational cast, as well as to signal different segments within the middle class and those who aspire to it. Such differences were related to attendance at different kinds of public and private schools, which sometimes map onto differences between the “old” middle class of civil-servant families and the “new” middle class of those working in the recently expanded private sector. Such differences could also reflect different values regarding premarital gender mixing,

drinking and drug use, and musical preferences. Nonetheless, such taxonomies both within the middle class and between it and other classes are always porous, variegated and shifting, not to mention difficult to pin down ethnographically in a context of mass protest.⁴ What is important is that the emphasis on cleaning with professional accoutrements such as gloves and masks—by people of all sorts of backgrounds and values—signaled a “shared project of locating oneself in a . . . legitimate space between two devalued social poles” (Liechty 2003, 67), a way of legitimating and distinguishing their forms of protest from those of leftists, the poor, and religious extremists. The classic middle-class dilemma of distinguishing one’s place became extremely intensified with the dramatic rise in income inequality in Egypt resulting from structural adjustment.

This is because the two social poles bearing negative values—the poor and the rich—grew exponentially under Mubarak and thus made distinguishing the middle that much more difficult. Wages stagnated and inflation rose, yet the prestige goods (such as refrigerators) and semipublic consumption spaces that had once distinguished the middle class became more broadly affordable. The middle then became “lost in the crowd,” with little means for segments to distinguish themselves from others, let alone from the poor (Amin 2011, 23). In the last decade of the Mubarak regime, two-thirds of the middle class lived on \$2 to \$4 a day, just barely staying above the international poverty line, and the number of poor and lower middle-class people increased (Ghanem 2013). At the same time, Egypt came to rank second among African nations in numbers of millionaires, which in 2000–13 grew by about 150 percent across the continent (*AfricaRenewal Online*, April 2015). Neoliberal policies led to these disparities and were a key factor in the theft of *karāma* from the middle class and from those aspiring to rise to, maintain, or distinguish their middle-class status.

In this sense, the uprising can be viewed as one “against neoliberalism” (Armbrust 2011) for the poor, as well as for both the traditional middle classes of civil servants who had faced increasingly stalled wages for decades (Schielke 2012), and the new middle-class private-sector employees, who often also had depressed wages in addition to no benefits.⁵ These factors, as well as the deterioration of state supports and significant price inflation, meant that most Egyptians could not easily provide the accoutrements of recognizably middle-class life for their families. People struggled to acquire gainful employment with job security and to purchase the expected marital apartments, furniture, and cars without relying on credit. Going to restaurants and taking vacations became more difficult because resources had to be diverted to pay for quality education and health care once under the purview of the state. Even those in the new middle classes who had moved to gated communities or originally got jobs in the neoliberal economy still found it

impossible to avoid the decay of public infrastructure, parks, and clubs resulting from state negligence and the “lost in the middle” phenomenon, to the degree that there were even protests in gated communities.

Thus, this was not only an uprising against neoliberalism and against a state that perpetrated violence in part to protect neoliberalism’s beneficiaries. It was also, in part, an uprising that made demands on the state to support the public good, the welfare of its citizens. The revolution became “a middle-class one insofar as it [was] carried by a deep frustration caused by the elusiveness of the promises about a decent, comfortable, middle-class life” (Schielke 2012, 31). These promises were an integral part of colonial-modernist discourse and were cemented in the post-independence era by the new modernist state, which, with some socialist rhetoric, provided free or low-cost education and health care, guaranteed jobs, and established other public goods, such as quality transportation, sanitation, and parks (Bier 2011; Ryzova 2014; cf. Watenpaugh 2012). This kind of state, which both makes and supports middle-class life (even for those with private-sector jobs), is disappearing in Egypt and around the world, but the protesters were refusing to give up on its promises. This is why, for so many, the middle class became an “imagined site that directs people’s aspiration and trajectory” (Schielke 2012, 34).

A key component of being middle class is to be socially recognized as such, since the construction of social class is relational. This is why aesthetic ordering, and specific modes of it, became so important in the public performances of Tahrir and after. And since public spaces are where people viscerally experience and present their social position in relationship to others, they became key sites of struggle for *karāma*. While the inability to have a dignified lifestyle inside the home could potentially be hidden from public judgment, it could not be hidden in the new malls and coffee shops or on the city streets—a matter of extreme discomfort and discontent. Living a life of dignity from this perspective meant being able, among other things, to be recognized as having propriety, style, and cleanliness while moving through urban space and having affordable public places for socializing and consumption, the latter being a “main conduit [for middle-class aspirants] to gain cultural and symbolic capital, and the key for claiming and authenticating social status” (Zhang 2010, 9; cf. de Koning 2009). It was even more fundamental to be able to do these things without the constant threat of harassment from police or private security guards.

Neoliberal policies and related state violence made it impossible to experience and represent this kind of dignity in public. State, business, and military elites stole, cordoned off, and reshaped that space by building exclusive clubs, golf courses, and expensive shopping centers, often on state land sold to cronies for below market rates. The lower echelons of such spaces were within reach of those in the

upper middle class, but such individuals often had to save up to actively consume within them. The rest of public space became subject to neglect of basic services—as garbage piled up, public parks became derelict, roads remained unpaved or became spotted with potholes, and sewage leaks became an everyday occurrence. Public transportation was filled to the gills as more and more people were forced to take it, and those who could retreated into private cars (often bought on new forms of credit) that started to fill up the already-congested roads and were impossible to keep clean and free of damage. Spewing black clouds out of run-down public buses cast dust and dirt on riders and passersby. This state theft of and negligence toward public space combined with increased state surveillance and violence. People faced humiliating treatment by traffic police sergeants and other upper-level officials, and random arrests sometimes led to arbitrary detention and torture in police stations. As class itself became “spatialized” in new ways as part of economic restructuring (Guano 2002; Zhang 2010), the availability of decent public space and the right to enjoy it became increasingly contested (Ghannam 2002; Kuppinger 2004; Mitchell 2002; Singerman 2011; Singerman and Amar 2006). The sheer inability to publicly present dignified middle classness centrally shaped the utopian aesthetics of the uprising.

Achieving dignity by reclaiming public space

As Egyptians cleaned and encouraged people to behave properly, they were reclaiming public space from the decades of neglect and threat by the Mubarak regime. For the first time perhaps in their lives, they could work, laugh, and play together in public space without an overwhelming sense of state surveillance. When people implored others to treat public space as they would their “own home,” or even claimed it as “our home” (meaning the home of Egyptians), they were reworking the definition and experience of what counts as public space. They were claiming ownership over it from those who had robbed it from them and taking beautification into their own hands. They were also extending the care of self and family into society, framed in nationalist terms. The head of one of the big NGOs that organized the cleaning crews, Resala, even used garbage as a prime example to describe the group’s goal of making Egyptians more “society-oriented.”⁶ “In Egypt,” he said, “we don’t care about throwing garbage in the street. But no one can throw garbage in front of my house” (Mittermaier 2014, 518–31).

Acts of aesthetic ordering were not only literal but also metaphorical acts. The word for garbage, *zibāla*, while most commonly used to refer to material waste resulting from human activities, was also sometimes used to describe groups of people, practices, or entire systems—such as the regime. When the brigades of youth cleaned Tahrir Square and other neighborhoods, they were not only picking up

the garbage created in the first 18 days of the revolution by protesters or by the garbage collectors who halted pickup during that time. They were also expressing their desire for an urban space cleared of refuse, something that they in their lifetimes had never enjoyed because of the *zibāla* that was the regime. This was a metaphorical form of *zibāla* exemplified by the story of how the regime handled literal *zibāla*.

That story encapsulates the extreme sensory difficulties and elitist prejudices that most Egyptians faced as the state restructured the economy. As Tessa Farmer has argued for Egypt and elsewhere, waste is “at the center of contentions over systemic inequalities” (2012, 24). During the Mubarak era, the amount of garbage on the streets of Cairo increased exponentially. There were several reasons for this massive increase, most having to do with the intensification of neoliberal policies, especially as these played out in the areas of urban development and waste management. The implementation of structural-adjustment programs in the 1980s and 1990s on the heels of President Anwar Sadat’s shift toward a free-market economy sucked capital out of the rural areas and concentrated it in the hands of city elites. Massive labor migration accompanied this shift, contributing to a major population surge in Cairo. The government poorly managed, and in many cases ignored, the needs of low-income migrants. Densely populated informal settlements sprung up all over. The government was slow to provide adequate public services to these new communities, from clean water to trash collection (Kuppinger 2012; Leven 2006).

Economic policies were at the root of the garbage problem in another way. The number of mass-produced consumer goods grew at astonishing rates after the neoliberal economic “reforms” announced in 1990 and 1996, and especially 2004. Soon Egyptians aspiring to middle-class transnational modernity were eating elaborately packaged snacks and fast-food meals made by corporations instead of meals made in the home or at corner eateries whose takeout option usually involved recycled packaging, such as newsprint (cf. Guano 2002).

The problem was compounded when, starting in 2000, the government privatized its sectors responsible for waste collection and staged an industrial takeover of the *zabbālīn*, the independent workers who had collected garbage from many doorsteps since the 1940s. Several European companies were given contracts of hundreds of millions of dollars, and substantial tax breaks, to replace these systems. Their employees complained about low pay, lack of health insurance, illegal dumping of waste near residential areas, and low recycling rates (the *zabbālīn* had traditionally recycled 80 percent of trash).

What most Cairenes began to notice, and smell, was the buildup of trash in the streets. By the end of the Mubarak era, it became clear that this new “system” was even

more incapable of dealing with the 10,000 tons of garbage produced every day in the city. Citizens complained of erratic service and a garbage tax that the government tacked onto already-skyrocketing electricity bills. Much of the foreign companies' imported equipment could not fit down the narrow streets of the informal settlements, so they placed trash bins in central areas of the neighborhood. Company executives complained that Egyptians were too lazy to take their trash to the bins, without considering that some people might feel ashamed carrying garbage in front of their neighbors or angry at the disappearance of convenient *zabbālīn* doorstep service. As garbage piled up, the *zabbālīn* went on strike against these conditions, and the government culled its organic waste-eating pigs in response to 2009's swine-flu scare. All these developments brought a unique stench to the hottest summers on record in Egypt in the 2000s and a profound assault on dignity.

In Tahrir, that dignity was restored. During those days of revolutionary *communitas*, the link between aesthetic ordering, dignity, and political action was clear. When I first visited Tahrir with an artist I call Mona, we were amazed at the extremely organized and welcoming process of entry into the square. Citizen volunteers had set up separate lines for women and men so there would be no danger of mixed gender impropriety, something increasingly unattainable on packed public buses, for example. The volunteers very politely welcomed people to the square, and to the revolution (they used the phrase "ahlan wa sahan," the equivalent of a robust "welcome" in Arabic). To screen out undercover Interior Ministry operatives, they asked, "Can I see your ID, *please*?" To ensure no weapons were brought into the square, they said, "*Excuse me*, but I need to look in your bag." These volunteers moved the lines along efficiently. This whole process explicitly signaled a contrast to similar situations in Egypt in which those who held access to anything (space, documents, power more generally) could bark orders and dispense with niceties like *please*, *thank you*, and *excuse me*, and where lines were meant to be broken because people were never sure if their turn would be respected when they got to the front. It was only those socially prominent people, those with bribe money, or those willing to rudely push people around who could jump the line.

After experiencing this spirited and dignified welcome into the square, Mona and I were astonished at the sight of performative garbage collection. Not only were there huge bins for garbage stationed at strategic points in the square, but there were also people busy going around with garbage bags picking litter off the streets, often while wearing latex gloves. Latex gloves, bags, and regular bins transformed the shameful experience of trash disposal caused by Mubarak's garbage politics into a dignified one. The bins were emptied regularly. Some were marked for recyclable waste with computer-printed signs in both Arabic and English, the latter—like much of the English-language signs

and graffiti—in part intended for a global audience. I had rarely seen public waste bins with signs and regular emptying in Egypt before, and it was typically sanitation workers and street sweepers who collected garbage, often, like those in New York, "*willfully* unseen by the public" (Nagle 2013, 23).

Later in the protests, on the evening of February 10, the square was packed with people anxiously awaiting what was rumored to be Mubarak's resignation speech. A young woman dressed in pants and a blouse (not the long robes that mark the lower classes, or the designer clothes of the well-off) was busily walking through the crowd, wearing latex gloves and carrying a big black plastic bag. She was conscientiously picking up garbage under the feet of the crowds. Mona and I once again looked at each other in astonishment. A man standing behind us noticed our amazement and, with great theatricality, bent down to pick a tiny cigarette butt off the pavement, held it up to us, then dropped it in the woman's bag. He grinned and said to us, "Have you ever seen anything like this in Egypt before?"

In episodes like these, Egyptians were connecting the civic action of cleaning to a possibility for a different politics, one that foregrounded a particular kind of dignity. These politics were part of what Judith Butler (2011) called "bodies in alliance" that were "productive and performative" in making "political claims" and that were sustained in doing so by the specific kinds of "sociality and belonging" forged in Tahrir. Aesthetic modes of forging sociality and belonging were simultaneously acts of mutual care that enabled people to live the utopia as a kind of "time out of time" (Sabea 2011; see also Mittermaier 2014). They were also a mode of honoring God for the victory of getting Mubarak out of power, to build a society pleasing to God, to literally and figuratively clean up the mess of Egypt, to reclaim public space from decades of government neglect and harassment by police forces, and to claim nationalist, democratic citizenship. None of these precluded the other; they were all interwoven into a bigger vision of the ideal Egyptian society. Aesthetic ordering thus became a major means of giving form to this vision.

Cleaning operations, for example, were "enactments" of citizenship (Ismail 2011b, 989), indeed performances of citizenship—both for foreign audiences (e.g., the recycling signs in English) and for fellow citizens and the government. While the newly installed crony vice president Omar Suleiman was saying in an ABC interview with Christiane Amanpour that Egyptians lack a "culture of democracy," meaning that they were not ready for their demands to be met, protesters cleaned and organized entry into the square and created libraries and medical tents.⁷ For many, these acts evidenced their civilized behavior, their upright citizenship, and their ability to make decisions and work collectively—hence their right to participatory democracy. Here we see a definition of democracy that

emphasizes not simply the regular election of a new president but actual participation in decision-making, care for others (e.g., providing food and medicine), and being polite and organized as a collective. But there was an ambiguity in this notion of participatory democracy that Julia Paley also found in her work on a garbage campaign in Chile: is it citizen participation in state decision-making, or citizens “providing services formerly delivered by the government itself” (Paley 2001, 187)? That remains an open question.

Because cleanliness, purification, and proper behavior are also associated with strong religious values, we should also understand aesthetic ordering as part of reinvigorating faith in Egypt as well as in God.⁸ Many Egyptians attributed the revolution’s success to God, as evidenced by the unforgettable sight of hundreds of people pouring out of the subway stations the night of Mubarak’s departure with resounding celebratory chants of “God is the greatest!” (*Allahu akbar*). In later weeks, a sign was posted in a mixed-income neighborhood that also captured the religious dimensions of this aesthetic ordering. In the center of a mimicked Egyptian flag, in a populist style of script characteristic of postindependence-era newspapers, was the common Islamic phrase “cleanliness is faith” (*al-niẓāfa min al-īmān*). The sign was placed above a handmade garbage basket for passersby to use. Notably, this emphasis on cleanliness and order foregrounds certain elements of religious practice over others, such as camping out at saints’ birthday celebrations (*mūlids*)—widely denigrated as uncivilized behavior of the poor in public space and thus the target of state disciplinary sanction (Schielke 2008). “Cleanliness is faith” is, notably, an Islamic principle favored by the state: there is a whole section in state textbooks discussing this phrase and asserting that “cleanliness . . . is a token of advancement and civilization” (Starrett 1998, 140).

The fact that the focus on cleaning and order rested partly on certain interpretations of the religious tradition suggests that, in such a focus, certain other traditions and activities might be legitimized as “revolutionary” or, in contrast, delegitimized. More broadly, the aesthetic ordering in Tahrir worked to define what a revolution means, which reverberated way beyond the 18 days. But it also created and revealed tensions that would portend the fracturing of the fragile collective that had formed during those days. Just as the dominant middle-class/state nexus frowns on camping out at *mūlids*, so would an encampment in Tahrir become the subject of admonishment.

Directing the revolution

The tensions started to appear as the sun began to set over that Day of Beautification. I stood on the west side of the square with my then four-year-old son, waiting for my spouse. He had lingered to listen to an argument between some Cairenes and a group of villagers from the provinces.

The villagers had, days before, set up a makeshift camp in front of the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities. The Cairenes were yelling at the villagers with an air of superiority and disgust, telling them to “pack up their things and leave” now that Mubarak was out. The women villagers took the lead in screaming back at the Cairenes, with tears streaming down their faces. Hurling insults and beating their breasts (a class-marked way of emoting), they said that they were the ones who had done the hard labor of protecting the square, and the museum especially, during the worst fighting, and that they would stay until the revolution was finished. As I kept my son away from the fight and looked on from afar, I was startled by a woman who appeared (by dress) to be from the civil-servant middle class. She admonished me for standing near a pile of garbage bags, especially with my son. The clear implication was that it was improper for the two of us to be standing next to this pile, and perhaps that I was a negligent mother because I was polluting my child.

The fight and the woman’s lecturing to me were early signs that the *communitas* of Tahrir was falling apart. While aesthetic practices like songs, chants, and cleaning supported that *communitas*, and were the basis for political claims, now these practices were cracking that collectivity along long-standing hierarchies of class and geography. Proper revolutionaries do not sit in makeshift tents in the center of Cairo, proper people do not stand next to garbage, spontaneous graffiti is in poor taste (though preplanned murals are beautiful), and to clean one must wear masks and latex gloves.

In the following weeks, Cairenes continued to beautify public space in particular ways and regulate the positions of bodies in that space as they celebrated reinhabiting it after the fall of Mubarak. Subways became a prime location for such political action, in part because they were sites where extremely large numbers of Egyptians interacted. Cairenes often preferred the subway for its cleanliness and speed as compared to polluting public buses and private minivans clogging the roadways. The subway, then, became not only a site for the “anxious coexistence of various middle classes” (Heiman, Liechty, and Freeman 2012, 14) but also a place for performing and, in the wake of the revolution, demanding middle-class respectability.

To get on or off a subway car before the doors close in this city of 18 million people, one often had to enter a mass of bodies that pushed and shoved its way in and out at the same time before the doors closed. The week after Mubarak’s resignation, an eager rider in her early 20s wearing a T-shirt, newly fashionable tight jeans, and sneakers boarded one of the women-only cars and gave a speech to the riders about proper behavior. She was part of the volunteer youth corps of Resala, “Egypt’s largest volunteer-driven charity organization” with Islamic leanings (Mittermaier 2012, 518). She wore an official-looking badge around her neck issued by the NGO. She got the

riders' attention and said that she had several "things" to remind them of in the interest of "social change." Enthusiastic, serious, and determined, she listed these things in order. First, riders should use the correct doors for exit and entrance to avoid crowding. A woman near me asked her seatmate what was meant by the correct doors, and she pointed out the signs above the doors and said, "You know, the ones they put up a while back." "They" in this case refers to the state; the metro authority had, in the past five years, put Entrance and Exit stickers above the doors in an attempt to regulate the crowds. The volunteer then went on to her next point: "Now after the revolution, we can all change and we are in a period of change." She implored them not to throw their garbage everywhere. They must "protect and keep clean public property, *just as you would do in your own homes*. If you have garbage, put it in your pocket until you see a wastebasket." After she left the train, some women wearing the long robes common to the "popular" (*sha'bi*) classes looked at each other in amusement. When one started to get off the entrance door, her friend called out to her in a joking voice, "Hey, remember what she said. Go out the exit door!" Her friend giggled.

A week later a similar, more spontaneous attempt at human traffic control happened at what is arguably the busiest station in the whole system, because it connects several municipal and national rail lines. A woman spoke loudly to the crowds bustling to enter the car through doors marked Exit. She said firmly, "You need to be orderly. Aren't you orderly in your own home?" And yet another day, groups of youth positioned themselves on the platforms just where the car doors would open. They held large computer-printed placards that said Entrance and Exit. While some tried to obey the signs, this was difficult with the large crowds of people focused on getting to work and school.

These aesthetic campaigns extended into other areas of public space and continued in earnest for at least a month after Mubarak's downfall. People provided waste bins in front of their homes and businesses. On one street in my upper-middle-class neighborhood, someone posted a flyer asking people not to dump trash there so as "not to cause embarrassment." The choice of the word "embarrassment" suggested that garbage in public space was a direct challenge to dignity (and honor). It was also common to see teams of youth out collecting trash and painting curbs, some organized by NGOs. All around the city, people embarked on nationalist beautification projects. These included decorative street murals with nationalist messages, and numerous tree trunks and light posts painted the red, white, and black of the national flag dotting the streets (see Figure 4).

Employees also formed brigades to clean up their workplaces. Those working at a dilapidated government cultural center where I had been doing fieldwork decided to fix the



Figure 4. Following the ouster of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, Egyptians mounted wastebaskets on poles. This one is painted the colors of the Egyptian flag. (Jessica Winegar)

broken pavement and nationalize the trees in their garden by painting the trunks the colors of the Egyptian flag. When I asked various interlocutors why they were doing all this work, several replied that after the revolution, the change would "begin with" themselves, a slogan that also proliferated at that time as "more and more volunteers signed up at charity organizations" (Mittermaier 2014, 519). Two of the employees told me that they were beautifying their workplace because they now felt like the place was "theirs" or "their home." Behavior regulation continued too, with one employee admonishing another to work harder because "that's [why you get] your salary." This notion that one should actually do work for the pittance of a government salary (usually in the range of 200–300 Egyptian pounds per month at this location) was a new one at the center, and no doubt in other government offices hit hard by wage deflation.⁹

These themes entered commerce as well, linking political action with classed consumption. Billboards for Snickers, a brand of chocolate bars, proclaimed, "Build your country... don't stop!" (Snickers became more widely available after the 2004 neoliberal "reforms" but were still pricey for most.) A ceramics company whose floor tiles were much desired also erected billboards saying, "Clean your street." And a clothing detergent company aired a commercial starring a popular actress sweeping a street with other Egyptians, wearing latex gloves.

Containing revolution through utopian distinctions

Acts of aesthetic ordering constrained the achievement of the revolutionary goals of bread, freedom, and human dignity (*'aysh, hurriyya, karāma insāniyya*) because of what



Figure 5. A makeshift Egyptian flag, inscribed with “Cleanliness is civilized behavior,” posted on a tree in Cairo in February 2011. A wastebasket is attached below on the tree, which is painted the colors of the Egyptian flag. (Jessica Winegar)

they excluded and what they emphasized. This is partly because, as Li Zhang argues, there are “two parallel processes of middle-class making, namely the politics of exclusion and the politics of aspiration” (2010, 12). It is also because these acts foregrounded sensory containment, a classic feature of bourgeois modes of being (Eagleton 1990). Certain things should be out of sight and sound, such as spontaneous graffiti, garbage, remnants of street battles with security forces, as well as people engaged in activities viewed as unproductive in a narrow sense. Listening or dancing to music, boisterous joking, doing motorcycle wheelies, having picnics, continuing a sit-in—all activities that now and then popped up in Tahrir—came to be criticized in favor of other kinds of social labor. Those seeking to control traffic entering Tahrir during the demonstrations, entering and exiting subways, and around freshly painted curbs emphasized individuated bodily containment—no pushing and jostling of bodies against one another, no “wayward” walking in public space, no crowds spontaneously rushing to join demonstrations. This meant the sidelining, if not outright prevention, of certain ways of defining a revolution or continuing political action. These were modes that other Egyptians might emphasize in their alternative visions of how their country should be.

The ubiquitous civilizing discourses in such projects of aesthetic ordering point to their distinction-making aspects and focus on productivity (Bourdieu 1984). For example, another sign mimicking the national flag that went up in the mixed-income neighborhood of Sayyida Zaynab read, “Cleanliness is civilized behavior” (*al-nizāfa sulūk ḥadārī*; see Figure 5). The highly performative cleaning and behavior regulation provided a way to actually be *in* public space in a visibly *productive* way, but it also created distinction

from the upper classes, who drive through public space in luxury cars, as well as from the so-called uncivilized, lazy poor and working classes.

The attire of the citizen cleaning brigades and their method of cleaning also underscored sensory containment and distinction. Masks, gloves, plastic brooms, and bags were ways to create privileged bodily distance from dirt and pollution. These accoutrements distinguished the brigades from lower-class cleaners of homes, streets, and businesses who typically cleaned barefoot with buckets of water and used brooms made from palm fronds and dustpans jerry-rigged from cardboard or flattened metal cans. These cleaners had to resort to throwing trash into open piles and using little plastic bags acquired free from small grocery purchases.

The cleaning brigades’ modes of cleaning suggest that they conceived of their bodies as especially vulnerable to contamination in public space, which points directly to the increasing difficulty of maintaining or achieving middle-class status in the Mubarak years. At that time, the squeezing of the middle class put them in closer bodily proximity to the poor and working classes and did not enable lower segments of the middle class to distinguish themselves from those of similar backgrounds in that space. Professionalizing and scientizing cleanup by collectively wearing gloves and masks became one way to avoid this “contamination” of class mixing. As the government turned a blind eye to food-safety standards and defunded the public-health system, commercials directed at the middle class for food, hospitals, and apartment complexes increasingly emphasized sterile environments.

These utopian actions also partook in the relatively new aesthetics of entrepreneurial volunteerism—often via youth-oriented NGOs—which swept Egypt in the 2000s (Atia 2013; Mittermaier 2012). Middle-class board members have long run NGOs in Egypt (Abdelrahman 2004), and in the years immediately preceding the uprising, volunteering became very attractive to the middle and upper-middle classes (Atia 2013).¹⁰ In the NGOs’ new social-development and charity projects, volunteers embraced corporatized material culture such as name tags, matching T-shirts, slick advertising, and computer-printed signs. Such programs tend to focus on specific social problems and behaviors without addressing broader structural inequalities, and end up reproducing the very problems they seek to solve (Abdelrahman 2004; Elyachar 2005; Li 2007).

In these senses, the emphasis on a particular kind of order to be implemented by individual Egyptians fit with the Mubarak government’s neoliberal economic initiatives. Some NGO programs, like the aesthetic orderers of the uprising, frequently prioritized taking personal responsibility and initiative to solve Egypt’s problems rather than demanding that the state uphold its obligations to the citizenry (Atia 2013). Although we should be wary of attributing

all dimensions of this activity to neoliberalism (Mittermaier 2012), the stress on asking people to avoid littering or to let others on and off the subway in an orderly fashion did take precedence over collective demands on the state for better trash collection, or for more trains or better train scheduling.

In many ways these beautification projects also extended the Mubarak government's emphasis on appearances (*mazāhir*) over substance in its public-works projects. New professionally photoshopped signs and banners had come to adorn government offices in the 2000s, but many still lacked modern office systems and equipment. The Ministry of Culture, for example, would frequently open new museums and libraries to great fanfare, yet within weeks they would fall into disrepair, often lacking budgets for simple things like lightbulbs.

In their theatricality and fancy signs, the aesthetic initiatives emphasized appearances as they also promulgated definitions of citizenship that stressed individual responsibility. They still wanted certain state supports historically provided, but they also made it the citizens' prerogative to keep the state working properly (hence the ambiguity at the heart of their participatory democracy). And these notions of citizenship were infused with bourgeois consumerist nationalism. One example illustrates this particularly well. After Mubarak's departure, a list of utopian principles appeared in a mural in Tahrir and on a huge banner in a prominent traffic island in a neighboring mixed-income area (see Figure 6). The list takes on the voice of an imagined citizen. The way the principles are framed clearly indicates that they were created by one group of citizens (who believe they are already proper) to another group that needs civilizing.

From today, the country is my country
 I won't throw garbage in the street, and it will be clean.
 I won't run the light, and I'll fasten my seat belt.
 I won't pay a bribe, and I won't forge papers.
 I will register a complaint about any public office that doesn't do its work.
 I will stand in line in an orderly fashion.
 As much as I can, I will buy Egyptian products instead of imported ones.
 If I see anything wrong, I will point it out, and I won't ignore it.
 I will make every effort and do right in my work.
 I won't swear or do drugs.
 I will get well educated and skilled and will not look for a connection (to get a job).
 I will be proud to be Egyptian.
 We love you, Egypt.

As Salwa Ismail has argued, "The civilities encouraged by the ... injunctions are linked to imaginaries of modern citizenship and the subjectivities through which it is



Figure 6. Principles of citizenship printed on a large banner in a Cairene traffic circle, with flags as bullet points, February 2011. (Jessica Winegar)

performed" (2011b, 990). She also notes that such civilities are "informed by techniques of government." While they imagine a "different normativity" from the status quo, it is a normativity nonetheless. The middle-class aspirations embedded in these injunctions align with the multiple historical and contemporary state projects mentioned in this article. The sign focuses on certain kinds of behaviors—swearing, standing in line, driving a private car, patriotic consumption. It emphasizes formal education and productivity, of using formal bureaucratic procedures in situations of grievance, of compelling "correctness." It also stresses the propriety of denying the privileges typically enjoyed by the well-connected who can pay bribes and get jobs through friends. Yet tellingly, it does not implore state officials to cease demanding bribes or the state to enforce its traffic rules. The banner takes on the voice of the reader—who becomes responsible for creating the new Egypt through proper behavior.

This is not to say that most Egyptians, no matter their class background or class-inflected desires, do not also share these ideals. But others might make very different signs emphasizing other demands, such as a national minimum wage, inflation control, or that bribes not be demanded of them. Surely, equal educational, job, and

health-care opportunities would be foregrounded. Other Egyptians also concerned with cleanliness might demand that the state reverse the privatization and industrial takeover of garbage collection, fix sewage lines, and enforce air-pollution controls. Instead of tending to a mythic and abstract nation, and to individual responsibility, they might emphasize proper attention to the well-being of kin and neighbors.

Thus, certain political actions were constrained by the erasing nature of aesthetic ordering, preventing a fuller panoply of aesthetics, and politics, to flourish. The literal erasure of spontaneous graffiti silenced the vulgar insults of the regime. Cleaners categorized as dirt that which could also be the grounds of continued protest—whether that be continuous occupation of the square with tents and blankets, broken-up pieces of pavement to resist security forces, or human waste intended to show the regime exactly what some people thought of it. In her work on civilities and authoritarianism, Ismail quotes a low-income man who told her,

I take every opportunity to throw rubbish on the street. If it was not shameful, I would do my need [i.e., defecate] on the street . . . They add a cleaning charge of three pounds fifty on the electricity bill every month, but do not provide cleaning services. So, I will dirty the place more. It is the state that makes us behave like this. (Ismail 2011a, 851)

By barking orders to leave Tahrir, to not litter, to exit through exit doors, to speak respectfully, and so on, certain Egyptians were demanding that everyone behave according to their vision. And by invoking domestic order, they were bringing values central to bourgeois discourses on the home and demanding that all Egyptians abide by them. These have long been promoted by different state projects at various times, whether in the colonial period, the time of the postindependence Nasserist state, or the neoliberal era.

Counterrevolution

The alignment between these acts of aesthetic ordering and such state projects allowed them to be easily co-opted into counterrevolutionary discourses espoused by the regime, as well as increasing numbers of Egyptians who wanted an end to protests they increasingly viewed as disruptive. In the week following Mubarak's resignation, I visited an arts NGO whose members criticized the way protesters chanted (which they said was too loud or obnoxious) and the way they smelled from lack of bathing (they heard). These college students were also upset with other students' attempts to bring change to the gerontocratic college administration. They argued that their colleagues disrespected their professors because they did not speak to them in a well-behaved (*mū'addab*) manner.

As the months wore on, an intensified set of aesthetic judgments about behavior emerged that emphasized stability, productivity, and joining the so-called democratic process. Many who initially supported the revolution came to vehemently criticize strikes and sit-ins, and especially public demonstrations, as indicating uncivilized behavior or lazy people who did not want to go back to work. In aesthetic judgments that relied on a mixture of classed and generational paternalism, many middle-class Cairenes (and those aspiring to join their ranks) accused demonstrators of being social delinquents—uncouth, unbathed, and sexually immoral drug users. With the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and state media calling for people to stop protesting and instead focus on “the wheel of production” (*'agalit al-intāg*), these criticisms of protesters were wed, though not reducible, to middle-class and state discourses of productivity.¹¹

Similar depoliticizing aesthetic judgments prevailed in the year when the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Muhammad Morsy was president (2012–13). Within days of taking office, he embarked on what he called his national Renaissance (*nahḍa*) plan. One of the top five priorities of this plan was the Clean Homeland campaign, which aimed for a “civilized Egypt . . . clean of all corruption and neglect.” Volunteer cleaning brigades were the first step in this campaign. Meanwhile, opponents of the Brotherhood often resorted to aesthetic discourses to criticize Morsy supporters as uncivilized fanatics. And when some of these opponents pitched tents to stage sit-ins against Morsy's disastrous constitution-writing process, Brotherhood supporters tore them down and decried the protesters' supposed moral depravity and elitist consumption styles (as exemplified by the fact that they found apples and packaged triangle cheese—two products that are not exactly “salt of the earth” in Egypt).

Civilizing aesthetic judgments also, in part, legitimized the military coup that ousted Morsy in the summer of 2013, and then obliterated his supporters. When Morsy proponents set up their own encampments in Nahda and Rabia Squares to protest the coup, they were quickly subject to the same aesthetic critiques (of their clothes, voices, styles, consumption) that they had leveled on others, with the additional accusation that their religiosity was vulgar and extremist. For some Egyptians, discourses about the necessity of civilized aesthetic ordering partly justified the government's subsequent massacre of nearly 1,000 at those encampments in August. In the subsequent era of President Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, similar aesthetic discourses became central to cultivating support for the regime—especially among middle-class aspirants—and justifying its brutal crackdowns on dissidents. Supporters of Morsy, and Islamists more generally, were even more maligned as barbaric, uncivilized Others, while the original youth organizers of the revolution were dismissed as unpatriotic, coarse,

immature, and prone to criminality. At the time of this writing, many are jailed, in exile, or underground as a result.

Transformative aesthetics?

Has the revolution, then, been successfully contained by the reiteration of exclusionary aesthetic utopian visions? Perhaps. But given that middle classness is inherently precarious (Heiman, Freeman, and Liechty 2012; Zhang 2010) and continues to be so in Egypt, and since precarity itself is a prominent feature of the contemporary global economic moment in ways that connect labor conditions to the senses and desire (Millar 2014), any attempt to contain precarity without addressing the structural conditions that produce it will be, in itself, precarious. The example of Cairo's garbage history suggests that attempts to do away with problems without addressing their political economy may merely recycle them (pardon the pun).

Meanwhile, to paraphrase Mary Douglas (1996), dirt will always exist in the eyes of some beholders. She wrote,

Whenever a strict pattern of purity is imposed on our lives it is either highly uncomfortable or it leads into contradiction if closely followed, or it leads to hypocrisy. That which is negated is not thereby removed. The rest of life, which does not tidily fit the accepted categories, is still there and demands attention. (1996,163)

Paradoxically, a new trend among disgruntled middle-class youth emerged alongside the push for purity that embodies this demand for attention, as Douglas called it, and suggests that something fundamental has changed with the uprising, something that cannot be contained. During the 18 days and increasing exponentially thereafter, many adopted forms of verbal vulgarity previously more common among the lower classes to express views about the political situation. What has been especially notable is the circulation of these words and phrases in public—in graffiti, on social media, in cartoons and songs. Before 2011, for example, it would have been extremely shocking to read or hear words such as “fuck this” (*aha*) being publicly uttered or accepted by anyone trying to be respectable according to middle-class norms. But the uprising overturned those conventions for many, who feel that the mess of the situation demands attention through “dirty” words (Colla 2013). Dirt, as Douglas also taught us, can be powerful, often creative, and can never really be contained (1996, 94, 159).¹² Nor can the senses, which is why bourgeois projects persist in distinction-making practices and attempts to civilize (Bourdieu 1984; Eagleton 1990; Elias 2003).

Furthermore, not all aspects of aesthetic ordering are contained in ways that fit with the interests of regime and elites, or with those of the counterrevolution. As Zhang has shown for China, even an “embrace” of middle-class

aspirations and lifestyles does not entail “a total endorsement of neoliberal governance” (Zhang 2010, 11), especially when people engage in collective actions. While utopian aspects of collective aesthetic action may lean in the direction of regime interests, their present-oriented aspects do not. Emerging forms of affective labor that started out with cleaning moved into providing free or low-cost food, health care, and education to particular communities. These are collective actions that continue to this day in various locales around the country. Some of these directly call the state, especially as embodied in local officials, to abide by certain responsibilities. These practices create alternative modes of togetherness, experiences of working horizontally on very local issues (Abu-Lughod 2014; see also Schielke 2015). They can be “distributive practices that do not mesh with the logic of neoliberalism, microenterprise, and productivity” (Mittermaier 2014, 63).

Recognizing the present-embedded aspects of aesthetic ordering means considering the possibility that another kind of aesthetics is operative—one that does not rest on discriminating hierarchies, sensory containment, and neoliberal subjectivities. In Jacques Rancière's (2004) formulation, the aesthetic is at the core of the existing political and social system (what he calls the distribution of the sensible), but it is also the grounds for and means of transformative political action. As they were cleaning, painting murals and curbs, and directing human traffic, Egyptians were also redistributing the sensible. They transformed what could be “seen and what can be said about it,” they claimed “the ability to see and the talent to speak,” and they shifted the “sensory properties of spaces” (Rancière 2004, 12–13). It is an open question whether the aesthetic ordering, and reordering, that originally flourished in Tahrir will solidify the counterrevolution or eventually be transformative on a larger scale. In 2015 a new citizen garbage cleaning initiative began in Alexandria, Egypt's second-largest city. A post about it on Facebook spurred hundreds of posts debating the role of citizens and the state in the garbage crisis, with some castigating “ignorant” Egyptians who throw trash, and some lauding the cleaners as civilized. But no one argued that the state was civilized. One commenter wryly noted, “What does the government have to do with cleanliness when it is the government that dirtied [everything].” Dirt is in the eye of the beholder, and utopian schemes are always exclusionary.

Notes

Acknowledgments. The American Council of Learned Societies and the Buffett Institute at Northwestern University provided research support for this article. A number of very generous colleagues gave helpful commentary on parts of the manuscript: Hamdi Attia, Elliott Colla, Lara Deeb, Jessica Greenberg, Sherine Hamdy, Salwa Ismail, Yasmeen Mekawy, Kirsten Scheid, Samuli Schielke, Shalini Shankar, and Mary Weismantel. I would also like

to thank the anonymous *AE* reviewers, Pablo Morales, and Niko Besnier, who were all immensely helpful.

1. The biggest protests occurred on Fridays, because the gathering of people for weekly prayers facilitated protests afterward.
2. This article is based on fieldwork conducted in Cairo in January–March 2011, December 2012, May 2013, and August–September 2014, as well as on analysis of Egyptian media and Facebook discussions.
3. Norbert Elias's (2003) work suggests that etiquette and practices of judgment are not insignificant but completely intertwined with larger processes of power, such as state formation.
4. For Egypt, as elsewhere, there is considerable debate over what constitutes the middle class and how to measure it. (For a comprehensive analysis of the different models, see Abu-Ismaïl and Sarangi 2013.)
5. There is ample anthropological work analyzing the negative effects of economic liberalization on Egyptian society, including different segments of the middle class (de Koning 2009; Elyachar 2005; Ghannam 2002; Hamdy 2012; Hoodfar 1997; Peterson 2011; Schielke 2015; Winegar 2006).
6. I use pseudonyms for interlocutors' names but refer to organizations by their public names.
7. Hani Attala, blog post on *Mada Masr*, "But When?," accessed July 20, 2016, <http://www.madamasr.com/opinion/when>.
8. Douglas's (1996) work highlights this phenomenon across multiple religious contexts.
9. Equivalent to about \$35–\$40 a month, below the World Bank's poverty level of \$2 a day. Many were able to supplement their income with bonuses or additional jobs.
10. Amira Mittermaier (2012) notes that not all volunteers came from middle-class neighborhoods.
11. Some in the poor and working classes joined in these criticisms, especially those with the kinds of jobs that did not allow them to take days off to protest (Winegar 2012).
12. Dirt/garbage can be "a source" of both "suffering" and "refuge" (Millar 2014).

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