Egypt Before and After 2011: An Uncertain History of Revolution

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Chapter 1: 1952-

Despite the harsh repression imposed by the counter-revolutionary regime led by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the nature of the Egyptian revolution that began in 2011 remains uncertain. Whether or not historians will even label it a revolution remains to be seen. The ideological and institutional battle between the new regime and any remaining opposition has drowned out the diverse voices of the revolution that initially challenged the status quo in Tahrir Square and around the country. I business of historians of grappling with the present and conceptualizing the future, while contemplating the significance of the past.

This thesis is divided into four main sections: the rest of the introduction unveils the theory I apply to the Egyptian case study; chapter 1 analyses Egyptian history roughly from 1952 to 2011 as to contextualize chapter 2, which examines contemporary Egyptian history since 2011 through the application of revolutionary theory; the conclusion explores what revolutionary theory suggests about the present and future of Egypt.

The fourth generation of revolutionary theory developed as a revision of the third by a Marxist

historical perspective prevalent in the 1970s and 80s, third generation scholars claimed that the emergence of a revolution was determined by particular structural alignments, domestically and internationally.¹ Theda Skocpol, a benchmark structuralist scholar in In an attempt to capture and

theory, interdisciplinary scholars have redefined revolutions. Jack Goldstone, a crucial

political institutions and the justifications for political authority in a society, accompanied by formal and informal mass mobilization and non-institutionalized actions that undermine

³ Essentially, fourth generation scholars cease to attempt to define reasons why revolutions take place, and focus on studying the conditions under which states become unstable; they treat revolutions as emergent processes arising from a multiplicity of causes rather than as static entities.⁴ Fourth generation scholars legitimize the phenomena that occur outside the system by studying it.

Fourth generation scholarship has grown in many directions. Sondra Hale, writing with feminist and postcolonial theoretical lenses, discusses how postmodernism has influenced the nature of contemporary insurrections in the way they seek to dismantle the

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Chapter 1: 1952 to 2011

800 Egyptians.¹⁶ The British finally terminated the protectorate in 1922, formally recognizing King Fuad as the sovereign of Egypt while maintaining key restrictions on Egyptian independence to protect their interests.¹⁷ For instance, the British interfered with the drafting of the constitution, enabling the crown (their allies) to dominate parliament.¹⁸ It was in this context that Hassan al-Banna, a charismatic schoolteacher, founded the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, seeking to expel foreign influences while maintaining support for economic modernization.¹⁹

-Israeli War, there was an

upsurge of tension against the government of King Farouk.²⁰ The Muslim Brotherhood assassinated Prime Minster Mahmoud Nuqrashi in December 1948; in response, thousands of Islamists were arrested and government agents murdered Hassan al-Banna in February of 1949.²¹ Then, in January of 1952, British forces crushed nationalist protests in the Suez Canal area, leading to widespread riots in Cairo.²² The Muslim Brotherhood, who 7.95[(wide)4(spre)6(a)4(d) of the revolution broadcasted on national radio:

We have undertaken to clean ourselves up and have appointed to command us men from the army whom we trust in their ability, their character and their patriotism. It is certain that all Egypt will meet this news with enthusiasm and will welcome it.²⁶

Key themes of the ideology of the incoming Free Officers regime are tangible in this

internal despots and British influence, as the ideology of the movement was socialist and anti-imperialist.²⁷ The declaration depicts the Free Officers as the honourable guardians of the nation, and the coup as the mechanism for modernizing the country. The tone of the declaration is at once celebratory and forceful in its assertion of the legitimacy of the coup

fs are still reverberating today.

To establish the legitimacy of the emerging regime, the Free Officers played a

command and distancing themselves from the Muslim Brotherhood. To embody the coup, the Free Officers turned to General Mohammad Naguib, one of the few generals not arrested on July 1952, who became president in June 1953.²⁸ After a failed (and probably staged) assassination attempt against Nasser by the Muslim Brotherhood in Alexandria, the regime cracked down on the Brotherhood.²⁹ Although the Brotherhood had originally partaken in the Cairo riots of 1952 and had joined the rest of Egypt in celebrating the coup,

²⁵ Filiu, From the Deep State to Islamic State: the Arab Counter-Revolution and its Jihad Legacy, 34; Wickham, The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement.

²⁶ Filiu, From the Deep State to Islamic State: the Arab Counter-Revolution and its Jihad Legacy, 34.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 49; Joshua Stache The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa, edited by Mark Gasiorowski (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2014), 375.

²⁹ Filiu, *From the Deep State to Islamic State: the Arab Counter-Revolution and its Jihad Legacy*, 50. The details regarding the motive for and origin of the assassination attempt remain unclear. For an example of conflicting narratives, see Ibid, 48-51 and Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement*, 27.

it soon became one of the main targets of the new government. There is even a historical anecdote that as a Colonel, Nasser had visited Sayyid Qutb

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promisrti massi education, i subsidiesi fori basici commoditiesi andi e conomici independence fromi thei twoi superpowersi ofi thei Coldi War, i thei Sovieti Unoosi andi thei Unitedi States^{5,1} Having inheritedi ani underdevelopedi colonial economy in 1952, i thesei reforms were derivations ofihowiNasserianditheiFreeiOfficersiunderstooditheiriroleiinEgyptianihistory as theigearsifor economic modernization andiemancipt $.5^{2}$ i

Inihisibookiositheiphilosophyiofitheicoup,iNasseripondersihisirolei(andithatiofihisi fellowi Freei Officers)i in Egyptiani history,i comparingi his writingi process to a

narrative.⁵³i Hei situatesi thei reasosi fori thei coupi isi thei contexti ofi ai grievousi historicali strugglei fori Egyptiani liberation fromi thei timei ofi Muhammadi Alii andi thei constitutionali revolution ofi1919iagainst theiBritish.⁵⁴iNasseridescribesitheiprocess ofidiscovering within

Egyptianisovereignty, iwhile fighting to protectiPalestineiisi1948: 55i

Ii usedi toi ofteni sayi toi myself:i Herei wei arei ini thesei foxholes,i surrounded, and thrusti treacherouslyi intoi ai battlei fori whichi wei werei noti ready, our lives thei playthings ofi greed,i conspiracyi and lust,i whichi havei left us herei weaponlessi under fire.i Andi wheni Ii would i comei toithisi pointiini myithinking, Ii useditoi find myithoughts suddenlyi leapingi cross thei field andi overitheibo

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cause for full independence with the preservation of an Arab Palestinian state. His rhetoric reflects Egyptian nationalism as it does pan-Arabism. These recollections characterize his own experience in foxholes in Palestine as a microcosm of European imperialism in which Nasser begins to understand his place in history.

Interestingly, Nasser claims that he saw the role of the military in government as only a temporary guardianship, a reluctant sacrifice to allow for a social revolution that would catch up to the political revolution that was already unfolding.⁵⁷ He expresses the sorr

funneled most of its resources to maintain a large army, an inflated state bureaucracy, an ambitious foreign policy, and its welfare state.⁶⁰

apparatus was decentered in that many aforementioned institutions carried out the same task without communicating between themselves.⁶¹ There was even an expression that to convey the ambiguity of not knowing which

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This intelligence institution feud affected the regimes strategy for the Six Day War of 1967. With a third of the Egyptian army tied up in Yemen, Israel delivered almost a fatal blow to the Egyptian military.⁶³ In a dramatic speech delivered on June 9, Nasser including Amer and his

own while the ASU arranged mass demonstrations all over Egypt begging Nasser to stay in power.⁶⁴ Nasser retracted his resignation as president two days later, having finally ousted Amer.⁶⁵ After Egypt was defeated in the 1967 War against Israel, Nasser began to restrict the role of the military, withdrawing its post in internal surveillance, policing, and domestic intelligence.⁶⁶ Nasser was unable to regain the Sinai Peninsula and restore Egyptian territorial integrity lost in the Six Day War.⁶⁷ In September 19 the heads of three national security agencies chose Anwar Sadat as the new president, expecting him to be a mere placeholder.⁶⁹

Yet, Sadat constantly surprised his allies and enemies as he stayed in power for more than a decade.⁷⁰ In 1972, Sadat expelled fifteen thousand Soviet troops and military advisers from Egypt, who remained from the Nasserite era, thus compromising the Soviet grip in the Middle East.⁷¹ Although Israel did not consider Egypt a threat without Soviet support, the Egyptian army managed to cross the Suez Canal in early October of 1973.⁷²

was able to shatter the perception of Israeli military superiority following the Egyptian defeat in the Six-Day War of 1967.

Under Sadat, the Egyptian economy turned away from socialism, as it incorporated neo-liberal economic policies.⁷³

altered them to ensure they would follow his directives.74

announcing them.83

Egyptian economy was still reliant on tourism, remittances sent home by Egyptian workers abroad, and the Suez Canal tolls.⁸⁴ Thus, the government retreated from the promises of welfare it had made in the 1960s.

Politically, Sadat allowed a measure of opposition from the left, from the Muslim Brotherhood, and from liberals, seeking to co-opt criticism unlike Nasser who repressed opposition directly and immediately.⁸⁵

domestic intelligence network.⁸⁶ In response to the *Infitah* riots of 1977, Sadat had to send in the army to quash protests. Over a hundred demonstrators were killed or injured but the protests did not cease until the government restored the subsidies.⁸⁷ As a result of the protests, Sadat strengthened the Ministry of the Interior with a paramilitary branch named the Central Security Forces (CSF) determined that his regime should not depend on the loyalty of the military.⁸⁸ Sadat sought to present himself as a leader tolerant of certain forms

repressive.89

In October 1981, Muslim radicals assassinated Sadat during a public military parade in Cairo commemorating the 1973 Yom Kippur War with Israel.⁹⁰ It is within this context that Hosni Mubarak -president, chief of the air force, and the man sitting next to Sadat when he was killed took office.⁹¹

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⁸³ Shenker, The Egyptians: a Radical History, 46.

⁸⁴ Lapidus, A History of Islamic Societies, 570.

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⁸⁶ Filiu, From the Deep State to Islamic State: the Arab Counter-Revolution and its Jihad Legacy, 55-6.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 56.

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Ibid; Shenker, *The Egyptians: a Radical History*, 47.

⁹⁰ Lapidus, A History of Islamic Societies, 571.

⁹¹ Lapidus, A History of Islamic Societies, 571.

Having instituted Emergency Law upon his arrival in office, Mubarak maintained it throughout the entirety of his thirty-year rule in the name of fighting terrorism. In effect, this chronic state of emergency ena network to arbitrarily detain individuals, suspend constitutional rights, and engage in collective punishment and the extensive use of torture.⁹² In contrast with Nasser but similar to Sadat, Mubarak sought to control rather than stifle political opposition or criticism entirely.⁹³ Although he allowed protests on university campuses regarding foreign policy issues, like the American invasion

industrial town of Mahalla.⁹⁴ To a certain extent, Mubarak also allowed private media channels, newspapers, and talk shows to criticize him occasionally. Political sociologist, Hazem Kandil posits that these avenues for controlled criticism became proxies for political activism that worked to bri1(Ka2)5(k1(town)-139(ora)7(t w)-139(.ETBT/F6 12 TfTf1 0 0 1 225.53) this statistic reflects the divisions between the beneficiaries of

rest of the population.⁹⁸ Additionally, all opposition parties boycotted the parliamentary elections of November 2010 because they were so conspicuously controlled by the security apparatus.⁹⁹ Businessmen with both close ties to the

half the seats of the legislature and rose up through the ranks of the political party.¹⁰⁰ -patrimonial regime.¹⁰¹ There was wide opposition against

ather; this, as Gamal was perceived as

an outsider who favored only the new elite in contrast with the three armed services officers that had ruled since 1952.¹⁰² The succession predicament and the neo-liberal reforms enacted by Mubarak ate away at the socia *Infitah* policies and established by Nasser and whereby the government promised economic rights in exchange for Egyptians surrendering their political rights.

Mubarak presented himself as a benevolent, tolerant, and compassionate father in contrast to Na -than-thou,

repressive policies, there was no meaningful avenue for political involvement for every citizen.

Chapter 2: 2011 to Present

mass protests throughout Egypt, Vice President Omar Suleiman announced the resignation of President Mubarak, tasking the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) with managing the nation.¹¹¹ Through a few weeks of mass demonstrations, the Egyptian people had exercised their collective sovereignty, and forced out an autocrat who had maintained power for thirty years.

Yet, by ousting Mubarak, the military, as a major part of the Egyptian deep state, sacrificed only the head of the regime in an attempt to maintain power.¹¹² The provisional government and the security forces maintained a confrontational posture towards continuing strikes and demonstrations.¹¹³ SCAF also gave itself executive control exceeding that of the incoming president, as well as immunity from oversight, and control over the national budget.¹¹⁴

democratically elected president. All the while, Sisi asserted that the coup was apolitical in a press statement:

The armed forces could not close their eyes to the movement and demands of the masses calling them to play a national role, not a political role, as the armed forces will be the first to proclaim

cooperation with the ministry of interior, any violation of public peace.124

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recollections in *Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution*, Sisi caveats the s not only temporary,

but also necessary for the betterment of Egypt.¹²⁵ Like the opening salvo to the 1952 coup read by Sadat on national radio, the tone of the statement is forceful in its assertion that the peech are indisputably aligned with public

interests.

Soon after ousting Morsi, the security forces began a violent repressive campaign targeting the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters. On August 13 2013 at 7am, the security forces opened fire without warning on a sprawling tent-city outside the Rabaa al-Adawiya Mosque in East Cairo.¹²⁹ *Human Rights Watch* documented at least 817 deaths and more than a thousand individuals injured. ¹³⁰ The coalition began to disintegrate as some of the liberal officials of the new government resigned in protest. Nevertheless, thereafter, the government continued to employ the security forces to target Muslim Brotherhood supporters before gradually expanding the scope to any other voices

attention to and seeming to combat any threat to Egyptian national security. As of June 2015, the Sisi regime had increased media censorship, banned protesting, incarcerated over 40,000 political prisoners including photographers and human rights activists, and issued mass death sentences.¹³¹ More civilians were killed from August 14 to 18 (928 individuals killed) than during the 18 days of revolution (846 deaths).¹³² The army ceased being the

any dissent.133

established. Had the revolution failed? Could it even be called a revolution?

A fourth generation revolutionary scholar might argue that the Egyptian revolution achieved enormous successes that cannot be measured structurally so far, nor could they be essentially reversed or discredited through temporary harsh repression. In the early

¹³⁰ Ibid.

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The Guardian (August 16, 2014).

Al Jazeera (June 7, 2015).

¹³² Filiu, From the Deep State to Islamic State: the Arab Counter-Revolution and its Jihad Legacy, 176. ¹³³ Ibid, 175.

months of 2011, the Egyptian people asserted their collective agency, setting aside differences in political priorities, and demanded the fall of the regime. Together, the diverse ensemble of revolutionary voices in Tahrir Square and throughout the country was so effective that President Mubarak resigned after thirty years as an autocrat.¹³⁴ The Egyptian people had successfully asserted their sovereignty over their own politics, a sphere previously closed to them.¹³⁵ Jack Shenker, a journalist for *The Guardian* who covered the revolution, describes how his experiences in Egypt influenced his understanding of revolutions:

[t]hat newfound sense of agency, of an ability to shape things around you in ways you never knew existed that gave me my definition of revolution: not a time-bound occurrence, nor a shuffle of rules and faces up top, but rather a state of mind. It felt as if nothing could be the same again.¹³⁶

challenging any rigid, temporal or structural definitions of revolution. Witnessing and participating in this revolution changed the way people understood themselves in relation to the state.

Although a third generation scholar may argue that fourth generation scholars are merely pretending to distance themselves from structural analysis of revolution, fourth generation does offer a nuanced account of how these internal revolutions take place within an individual as well as through institutions. Goldstone refers to this change as generating

justified grievances,

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Revolution in the Making of the Modern World, edited by John Foran, David Lane, and Andreja Zivkovic (London and New York: Routledge, 2008): 153. ¹³⁵ Jack Shenker, *The Egyptians: a Radical History*, 3. ¹³⁶ Ibid, 12.

¹³⁷ As was explored in

Chapter 1, Egypt has a venerable pedigree of rebellion and revolution against the state and so has been generating protest identities for centuries.

However, particularly in 2011, Egyptians used their imagination to construct different

powerful political voice, no longer the subjects of an autocrat.¹³⁸ Negri argues that the

future and the diversity of their fellow protesters, Egyptians demonstrated a powerful commitment to the development of political pluralism in lieu of a repressive, autocratic stability.

Yet, much like the Egyptian revolution, fourth generation revolutionary theory still has to follow through on promises and objectives. This generation of theory has not yet been able to detach from a state-centred analysis of revolution.¹⁴² The Egyptian revolution is at risk of being labeled a failed or abortive revolution, the kind that fails to secure power after temporary victories and large-scale mobilization.¹⁴³ The messiness of a revolution

anger towards a unified national movement.

Goldstone argues that although it is normal for a revolution to include a variety of objectives, the disintegration or success of the movement depends on three crucial factors.¹⁴⁴ How extreme are the differences that exist within the coalition of revolutionary groups? In the case of Egypt, the revolutionary movement included feminists, the Muslim Brotherhood, liberals, movements against police brutality and torture, labor movements, and youth activists.¹⁴⁵ This inclusive, diverse group was united in opposition to the autocratic regime, and in demanding political rights. What circumstances accentuate these differences and give leverage to different factions in the revolutionary leadership? One of the main difficulties for the Egyptian revolution was that the party that came to power in

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Comparative Studies of South

Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Vol. 29, no. 1 (2009): 21. ¹⁴⁴

Party, retained its insular character of opposition to the regime, acquired from a long history of government repression even once it was in power. In an imperfect continuation ght to de-

legitimize the Brotherhood, depicting them as religious extremists endangering the goals of the revolution. The Sisi regime continues to employ this rhetoric of fear and difference to, from its point of view, hold the state together.¹⁴⁶ How crucial to the survival of the revolution and the revolutionary state is it for one group to triumph? Unfortunately, in Egypt, the two entities that did hold power, however briefly, during and since the revolution ance of the military and the deep state) did

not work to institutionalize the diverse goals of the revolution, but rather to entrench their own power. In search of legitimacy, the counter-revolutionary forces have presented the struggle for power between t

Sisi (military authoritarianism) as a deadly tug of war with no room for alternatives, in which the latter must win if the state is to survive.¹⁴⁷ President Sisi has equated the violent repression of dissenters with promoting stability for all Egyptians. However, it is worth noting that Egypt has an estimated population of 100 million with forty percent living on less than two dollars a day.¹⁴⁸ There is a real need for economic prosperity and social stability in the lives of the majority of the population. This crucial dimension that informs when and for how long individuals are willing to revolt underscores the strengths of third generation theory in its sensitivity to basic economic and structural realities. As much as

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Graham-Russian Passenger Jet was Fowned Guardian, November 8, 2015. ¹⁴⁷ Shenker, *The Egyptians: a Radical History*, 13. ¹⁴⁸

an academic might value the tool kit that fourth generation scholarship provides to peel back the nuanced layers of protest identities, third generation scholarship continues to prove its relevance to a world still made up of nation-states wrought with class conflicts.

The paternalistic, authoritarian model has excluded the Egyptian public from the political sphere for decades. As evident in Chapter 1, President Gamal Abdel Nasser asked his people to relinquish political rights in exchange for social justice and economic prosperity in the 1950s. In his work, *Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution*,

Although there is no certain answer to the question regarding the sustainability of the Sisi regime, revolutionary theory and historical analysis does offer some insight. As Goldstone warns, repression is a double-edged sword that can spur on revolution in an attempt to repress it.¹⁵⁰ As Negri couns

development, relied exclusively upon violence and war, the more the problem of violence ¹⁵¹ So the use of

violence for legitimacy only renders the regime more reliant on the existence of that violence, but it also makes violence the only medium for political interaction or struggle. As evident after various moderates resigned from the government following the Rabaa massacre, the government is promoting a renewed phase of violence to cement its hold on power. Looking back on the origins of the revolution and the fall of Mubarak, the Sisi regime has learned that that am6()-1ckeC5ncy

on the Ministry of Interior, tasked with internal security, than on health and education combined.154

¹⁵⁵ There are a weak

and a strong interpretations of this definition: the weak version is that the revolutionary or counter-revolutionary forces are no longer actively challenging the basic institutions of the

room for alternatives or enough safe space to foster the development of political pluralism in Egypt. The government has had to continue to repress its people for the creation of the conditions of legitimacy. Even if there slowly emerges a stable bureaucratic government, the failure of this revolution may just be a temporary set back in political change. Hale

156 in the toxic positivity of contempor which a revolution has ended only when key political and economic institutions have

time, invites the onlooker to be patient.¹⁵⁷

[are] the roots of, and the reasons for, this revolution, it would be naïve to expect its victory ¹⁵⁸ Therefore, both the strong and weak

interpretations of when a revolution is finished cautions historians from falling prey to the presentism and disillusionment that would preclude an open-minded study of the

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¹⁵⁴ Shenker, *The Egyptians: a Radical History*, 8. 155

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complexity of the revolution of 2011. Indeed, if Mubarak was never able to escape the circle of repression that eventually ousted him, can President Sisi do so?

The Sisi regime remains fluid. One of the main consequences of 2011 was that the

institutional setting.¹⁵⁹ Sisi is having to work though the presidency without a ruling party;

decentered.¹⁶⁰ Individual members of the old regime are now negotiating with the government for greater concessions in exchange for compliance.

President Sisi. In the beginning of his presidency, he was perceived as a wise and pensive figure with concrete plans to reshape the country

of an alternative world that could steer patriotism and engage the passion and imagination of every Egyptian, Sisi is only selling fear of uncertainty and insecurity to build his legitimacy.¹⁶⁵

The preamble to the Egyptian Constitution of 2014, provides a glimpse into how the Sisi regime is seeking to represent itself within the context of Egyptian history. First, whenever the revolution of 2011 is mentioned in the preamble, it is conceptualized together ¹⁶⁶ This phrasing insinuates that

the contemporary Sisi regime represents itself as the incarnation of the goals of 2011. The

analyze this emerging, uncertain history.¹⁷² I have framed my study of Egyptian history since 2011 around the ongoing historiographical debate on the nature of revolutions as to emphasize the delicate business of historians of grappling with the present, anticipating the future, while contemplating the significance of the past. Whatever the future will bring, the Egyptian revolution of 2011 represents a widespread commitment to fight injustice. The consequences of that collective choice remain open-ended. Perhaps the revolution has marked the beginning of the end of military authoritarianism in Egypt, a work in progress.¹⁷³

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