Counter-Revolution and Egypt's Lower Middle Class

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Abstract

The Egyptian lower middle class has been declining since the 1970s. Yet since the 2011 uprising and coup d’état the lower middle class has sat in the midst of an economic and political counter-revolution carried out by the police, the military, and Egypt’s intelligence services. In particular, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has responded to Egypt’s economic crisis in 2014 and onward by engaging in a program of austerity has sped the decline of the Egyptian lower middle class significantly. The Egyptian lower middle class is in increasing danger of becoming merely educated working poor. Therefore this dissertation will examine the rapid decline of the Egyptian lower middle class after the 2011 and 2013 coup d’états, how elements of the lower middle class deal with a counter-revolution in Egypt, and the possibility that their income will become insufficient to sustain a middle class lifestyle.
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Dedication

For the three most important women in my life: my wife, SaraJane, my mother, Linda, and my grandmother Mae. This would not have been possible without you.
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There is no money, no work, and no education – Amr, café owner

This dissertation will examine the rapid decline of the Egyptian lower middle class after the 2011 uprising and 2013 coup d’état, how elements of the lower middle class deal with a counter-revolution in Egypt, and the possibility that their income will become insufficient to sustain a middle class lifestyle. The Egyptian lower middle class has been declining since the 1970s. Yet after 2013 the lower middle class sits in the midst of an economic and political counter-revolution carried out by the police, the military, and Egypt’s intelligence services. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has responded to Egypt’s economic crisis in 2014 and onward by engaging in a program of austerity has sped the decline of the Egyptian lower middle class significantly. During the time of my fieldwork between February 2016 and June 2017 the members of Egyptian lower middle class I came into contact with were demoralized, afraid to speak out, facing rapid inflation, and watching their government strip away the subsidies and price controls that underpinned their lives. The Egyptian lower middle class is in increasing danger of becoming merely educated working poor. The details and circumstances surrounding these problems are the substance of this dissertation.

This dissertation derives the bulk of its data from a period of intensive anthropological fieldwork beginning in February 2016 and ending in June 2017. However, I also lived in Egypt from August 2008-December 2008 studying abroad and again from 2009-2011 as a master’s student at the American University in Cairo. I was present during most of the 2011 uprising and the 2013 protest and military coup. I was writing my master’s thesis at the American University in Cairo during the January 2011 uprising. In 2013 I was a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas doing preliminary fieldwork and language training and living in the al-Maadi section.
of the city. Where applicable and in particular when I write about the uprisings my fieldwork data is supplemented by these experiences.

The Circumstances of Fieldwork

I arrived in Cairo, Egypt in February 2016 prepared to do fieldwork on masculinity among government workers in Egypt. My plan was to visit cafes where government workers congregated and find out how they were dealing with economic decline and the loss of the prestige usually associated with their jobs. The feasibility of this project was based on two assumptions about 2016 Cairo that were quickly derailed.

Safety

The first assumption I lost about 2016 Cairo was the idea that I would be personally safe. To explain I need to tell the story of Giulio Regeni. Giulio Regeni was an Italian researcher working with food cart vendors in Cairo. These food cart vendors exist all over Cairo selling sausages and meat, ṭammiyya, or fried bean patties with sauce, foul, or mashed bean paste, roasted sweet potatoes, and the Egyptian favorite kushari, a mix of various pastas and rice. Regeni leveraged his relationships with these men to reach out to the new labor unions that had formed in the wake of the 2011 uprising. These labor unions were arguably the real foci of Regeni’s research. The nature of Regeni’s research was very public: he was always at a labor rally or on a street corner chatting with his food cart vendor informants. Regeni also wrote about Egypt under a pseudonym for several communist periodicals in Italy. Egypt’s intelligence services had Regeni under surveillance for over a year because of his involvement with these non-state sponsored labor unions, a subject of deep concern to al-Sisi’s regime, before they finally abducted Regeni on January 25, 2016 (BBC News, 2018) near the Nile corniche in Dokki.
Giulio Regeni’s body was found by a busload of people who had stopped to relieve themselves on the Alexandria desert road on February 3, 2016, nine days after his initial disappearance. This was the day after I arrived in Cairo to do my own fieldwork. Regeni had been tortured to death (Georgy, 2016). All evidence suggests that Regeni had been murdered by the regime over the research he had been doing on labor unions (Reuters, 2018). The Italian government and his family are still demanding answers. It is clear that one of Egypt’s security agencies murdered Giulio Regeni: it is not clear which security agency killed him (Walsh, 2017). No one has been made to answer for Regeni’s death, though the regime did kill five men in a raid who they claimed were responsible for his murder. This announcement was greeted with skepticism by the Italian Government (Walsh, 2017) and by most outside observers, including myself. In truth Giulio Regeni is like so many Egyptians who have been disappeared and murdered by the regime since 2013: no one has been held to account for their deaths and disappearances either. Amnesty International estimates that the government disappeared 4 people per week in Cairo in 2016 and 2017 (Hamzawy, 2017; p. 401). Some of the disappeared re-emerge alive days, weeks, or months later at trial. Others, like Regeni, do not emerge alive at all.

Regeni’s topic, labor unions, is a politically sensitive topic in Egypt. Mubarak’s ouster in 2011 was only clinched after the state backed labor unions (the new labor unions Regeni studied did not exist at that point) hit the streets against him (Mahdi, 2012). The power of labor unions to effect change is not one that was lost on al-Sisi’s regime in 2016. Hence any foreigner seen to be meddling with labor unions was bound to face some scrutiny. Those who spoke with me about Regeni had expected, if the regime even took notice, the same consequences for Regeni that troublesome foreign researchers in the past faced: Regeni would be arrested and deported, or simply not allowed to reenter the country once he left. Instead they mourned Regeni at his
memorial service at the American University in Cairo. The preponderance of evidence suggests that Regeni was murdered to send a message to foreign researchers and journalists: we are not immune and stay away from sensitive topics.

Government workers, my original focus, are also a politically sensitive topic in Egypt, if not so much as labor unions. The government implemented raises for government workers on January 1, 2014, but these were modest and did little to improve the standard of living of this sector of the population. Government work was, during the rule of Gamal Abdel-Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s, a popular pathway to middle class life. The old saying went “If a government job passes you by, grovel in its dust” (Farag, 2001). Government salaries have not been adequate for daily living since at least the 1990s and the public sector has not held prestige since at least the early 1970s (Waterbury, 1983; p. 244). Such jobs are stable but thought of as “the pits” (Farag, 2001) and many of those who hold them work second jobs or try to develop other streams of income (Rommel, 2018; p. 11) and have done so since the 1970s (Waterbury, 1983; p. 245). The status of government jobs are a source of much grumbling among the lower middle class and the government is aware of the precariousness of its bureaucrats’ financial situation. Moreover, one of the main facets of the 2011 revolution was a rebellion against the perceived ills of the state. During and after the uprising people turned against low-level government bureaucrats. They did not just see the presidency or the parliament as corrupt, fāsad, or failing, fashla, but the bureaucracy as well. In the wake of the 2011 uprising they also called bureaucrats felūl, a term for remnants of the old regime (Rommel, 2018; p. 12). This is not surprising: the grinding low level nature of places such as the Mugamma al-Tahrir, one of Egypt’s major administrative centers, is well-known among Egyptians. Almost every Egyptian must go to one of these centers at some point in their lives. At the Mugamma in particular, the lines are long, the
directions for getting things done are unclear and sometimes arcane, and bureaucrats sometimes have reputations for being unhelpful. Moreover, while the presidency and parliament changed after 2011, the bureaucracy saw no reform. The face of the Egyptian government to Egyptians remained the same as before. The Egyptian government during the time of my fieldwork was highly sensitive to any perceived threat or slight. Studying the Egyptian government itself would have been particularly difficult and such a project would likely have branded me quickly as a spy, or gāsūs.

The second assumption I had when I went out into the field was that people would be ready and willing to speak with me. Al-Sisi’s government is highly paranoid and sensitive to perceived insult. It gins up fear in the populace about mostly fictional meddling and the regime itself fears foreigners will expose too much of what is happening in Cairo. Government workers who were keeping their heads down and trying to make ends meet did not wish to speak with me. Mostly such workers simply pretended I did not exist when I entered a café. Others were rude or avoided me. To push people who clearly did not wish to speak to me and pursue a project on Egyptian government workers would almost certainly have attracted the interest of the Egyptian security state, which would have ended the project.

Fear and Confusion

The time of my fieldwork, between February 2016 and June 2017, was one of general fear in Egypt. This fear emanated from government repression that I discuss in detail in Chapter 4. There are human rights reports about this period (Human Rights Watch, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2017; POMED, 2016; POMED 2018; Amnesty International, 2016) and news articles, but there is little in the way of academic research on this time period. There were few researchers in Cairo at the time I was there. The state had a stranglehold on the local media. The Egyptian
government dealt with oppositional media first by arresting journalists and later by blocking access to their sites in Cairo, a practice that began in March 2017. The news outlet *Mada Masr* is one notable example of a website blockage, though there are close to 500 other websites currently blocked (Al-Jazeera, 2018). Mada in particular can be accessed outside of Egypt, and there are workarounds for accessing blocked sites. Mada’s case is still in court as of this writing in 2018. However, just because oppositional media exists does not mean it was effective between 2016 and 2017. Mada’s readership is low compared to state media’s reach, the need to use workarounds to access Mada Masr in Egypt, and the risks involved if caught using a workaround meant that only the most committed would try. Arrest, however, was one of the state’s key methods of putting pressure on independent media. In the weeks after the July 2013 coup, five journalists were killed, 80 were arrested, and 40 news groups were attacked by law enforcement. Most journalists were later released (Al-Jazeera, 2018). In 2014 the regime arrested 20 Al-Jazeera employees, including an Australian national, Peter Greste, on claims that they had doctored video footage documenting regime repression (Zunes, 2014). In the six months prior to the March 2018 elections over 20 journalists were arrested. As of May 2018 at least 32 remain detained, 22 without charges (Al-Jazeera, 2018). Ninety five percent of the current satellite channels streaming in Egypt are now owned by the military and intelligence services (Al-Jazeera, 2018), meaning that many journalists work for the security services in any case (Economist, 2018).

The regime used the state owned media to create paranoia among Egyptians and often cranked out such paranoia at whiplash levels. Regime officials arrested a stork that had been fitted with a tracking device by an ornithologist over fears it was a spy (Zunes, 2014). They investigated a hand puppet, Abla Fatiha, on suspicion that it was a “terrorist mouthpiece”
(Mackey and Stack, 2014). The government investigation lead to a bizarre exchange with on-air TV personality Ahmed Spider in which Spider told the puppet she would go to jail, while the puppet protested, “I am a fictional character!” (Mackey and Stack, 2014). Khairy Ramadan, a TV talk show host, pondered banning Twitter after activists started a twitter campaign to mock the current president, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi (Economist, 2018). Such thoughts on the part of Egyptian television pundits and government officials are not confined to Ramadan. Occasionally the Egyptian government does consider a ban of Facebook or Twitter altogether. Yet when that same host complained about the low pay of Army Colonels, he was arrested for slandering the regime (Economist, 2018). When the BBC ran a short story on the torture and repression in Egypt, the woman from featured in the documentary, Zubaida Ibrahim, was trotted out on local media and denied ever having been tortured. Then her mother was arrested and her lawyer disappeared (Economist, 2018).

The state also accused the April the 6th Youth Movement, a secularist pro-worker movement, of collaborating with the American Government and the Muslim Brotherhood in an effort to return the Brotherhood to power (Salmy, 2014). Such a story has a grain of truth and hence had more power than a quick glance would indicate: in 2013 a series of diplomatic missteps by then-US ambassador Ann Patterson and Secretary of State John Kerry led many Egyptians to believe that the US supported the Muslim Brotherhood. Prior to the 2013 coup d’état then-US Ambassador Anne Patterson met with Mohammed al-Badei, the Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide and Khairat al-Shater, the Brotherhood moneyman. Afterwards at a June 18 address she told Egyptians to stay home (Hudson, 2013). Many Egyptians were left believing that the US supported the Brotherhood in power and the government story in 2014 found a secure hook with the populace.
Rumors of assassination plots and intrigue surrounding Al-Sisi are common, if always whispered or alluded to rather than spoken of directly, and Al-Sisi often talks about the “forces of evil” (Economist, 2018) arrayed against Egypt. According to al-Sisi defaming the regime is now a form of treason (Economist, 2018).

Political discussion in the media often blurred the line between fiction and reality. At times government officials and pundits seemed almost knowingly absurd. Egyptian security experts claimed Freemasons ruled the world. Such claims, and claims of “Masonic-Jewish” conspiracies have been circulating in Egypt at least since the 1990s (Swedenburg, 1997; p. 83), but there had been a relative break in such claims following the 2011 uprising. Now claims about the Freemasons are used to accuse protesters of being controlled by outside forces or to decry a general and widespread conspiracy against Egypt. Education officials in Giza burned books they thought “offensive to the nation” (Naeem, 2016), and an Egyptian Army General claimed that he had created a device that cured AIDS and Hepatitis C (Naeem, 2016). Armed Forces Center for Strategic Studies General Hossam Sweilam claimed the “Supreme Council of the World,” made up of foreign intelligence bodies secretly ruled the world and oppressed Egypt (El-Din, 2016).

In April 2016 ahead of planned protests I will discuss in more in Chapter 4, the regime arrested 238 people. The arrests were arbitrary (Agence France-Presse, 2016), if not completely random. The LGBTQ community, a perennial target of Mubarak’s regime, has also seen mass arrests under al-Sisi. After a Mashrou-Leila concert in which a rainbow flag was unfurled, the Egyptian media launched a campaign against homosexuality and parliament pondered a bill to criminalize it outright (Gittleson, 2017).

The years 2016 and 2017 were a stark reminder of the world of Tuhami (Crapanzano, 1980) where absurdity, truth, and lies combined to create a new reality in which my informants
and I had to live. During this period public political discussion through state controlled media tended toward outright lies (Hamzawy, 2017; p. 401) and public political discussion was almost non-existent. The kinds of claims I have described here are not entirely new for Egypt. What is significant is that after the 2011 uprising the presence and salience of these claims had diminished, only to return to prominence with dizzying force and ubiquity following al-Sisi’s rise to power. The strategy of threaten, obfuscate, and arrest was, for the time, an effective one.

People during the period of my fieldwork especially feared police informants. They did not talk to me easily but they also did not speak with one another in public with the openness that they once had. It is common practice for the Egypt’s intelligence agencies to develop informants among the general population, especially where politically sensitive topics are involved. It is likely one or more of Giulio Regeni’s own informants worked for the police (Georgy, 2018). People, including my own informants, feared these police spies greatly. As I was told by one of my informants “do not trust anyone, not even me.”

Changes

With the assumptions of safety and conviviality shattered, eventually my project, which primarily involved sitting in cafes, had to change. What I found was that my ability to interact with others was limited by their reluctance to talk to me. The nature of my fieldwork at the time was constrained by the need to both protect myself and accommodate the (legitimate) security concerns of my informants. My early work involved many casual but fairly shallow conversations with my acquaintances and a great deal of quiet participant observation.

The first few months of fieldwork most of my conversations were with waiters. This is in stark contrast to my experience at other times in Cairo. In 2009-2011 I would go to cafes almost anywhere in Cairo and could easily strike up conversations with patrons, especially if I went to a
space more than once. Occasionally I would be told that the place I was at was an “Egyptian café” and perhaps I would be happier elsewhere, but these places were the exception, not the rule. Before 2013 I had sat and relaxed in many cafes, and people had been much more willing to chat. In 2016 and 2017 café workers were usually, though not always, polite, although in several places I was ignored completely by staff and patrons until I left. I spent time in lower middle class cafes mostly in Dokki and Zamalek. Dokki offered many quiet street side and indoor lower middle class cafes, whereas Zamalek, with its status as a hot Cairo nightspot already, provided a large crowd with at least a few other foreigners where I could blend in.

In Dokki most patrons avoided me outright when they could: occasionally getting up and moving across the room to be away from me. In Zamalek café patrons simply did not communicate with me at all. Eventually I came across people I had known from 2010 and 2011, who introduced me to some of their friends. Without their help my project would have been much more difficult, if not impossible.

Later in my fieldwork personal events changed my status, leading to new and different interactions. I was employed at an American School in August with predominantly lower-middle class teachers and administrators, thus expanding the reach of my research. In June 2016 I met the woman who is now my wife. Over Christmas 2016 SaraJane and I were married in Texas. My informants, who then included employees at the private American-style school, greeted my marriage with great joy, as is the Egyptian custom. I was also treated with a level of respect and openness afterward that I had not experienced before.

Locations: Dokki

For the first seven months of my fieldwork, from February 2016 to August 2016, I lived in Dokki near a major square. While my corner of the street tended to be quiet, the much busier
streets around me were filled with noise during the day. However, after 11:00 PM the streets in this area were empty. This was an eerie experience because Cairo is a night city: people are often out and about until very late. I have seen in previous visits cafes open at three and four in the morning and still serving patrons. My informants told me this was because people in the area were respectable: they went home to their families. But the silent streets after 10:00PM were also due to the security presence in that section of Dokki. That part of Dokki was only a few minutes from downtown and police patrolled it extensively. This policing was an extension of the heavy policing Tahrir received as well as an attempt to protect the nearby parliamentary building.

The streets around the square near my flat were lower middle class. A major market street existed about 15 minutes walk away. The cafe I call Refuge, one of my most important field sites, was on the same quiet street as my apartment. The other cafes I frequented were situated either on the major market street or the back streets around my house. Being in a lower-middle class neighborhood provided me with valuable ethnographic experience. Dokki was also heavily monitored by the security state due to its nearness to Tahrir Square. Thus I learned much about the fear that people felt and the mood and feel of the city in 2016 by staying in Dokki.

In Zamalek I went to cafes directly on or near a well-known major road. Lower middle class juice shops, koshary joints, and eateries interspersed with more expensive upper class coffeeshops, bookstores, and restaurants populated the road. The road itself was very noisy at almost all hours with heavy foot and car traffic. Zamalek was subject to a heavy security presence as well, but the sheer number of people on the streets diluted this presence, providing me with a less conspicuous place and lower pressure place to do fieldwork than Dokki sometimes was.
The Tutankhamen School

After seven months of doing fieldwork in Dokki I was running out of money and so began to look for a job in order to continue to fund my research. After over two months of searching the Tutankhamen school hired me. The Tutankhamen school employed mostly members of the lower middle class, and one of my most important informants, Hind, was an administrator there.

The Tutankhamen School is divided into two divisions: the National School and the American School. The National School was fee-paying and for-profit, and offered an upscale version of Egyptian public school Arabic-language curriculum. Students who finished the National School curriculum then sat for the Egyptian government’s dreaded graduation exam, the Thanaweyya ‘Amma. American School teachers worked only at the American School and most of my work-related interactions were with these individuals.

The American School where I worked was a Kindergarten through 12th grade school with about 400 students. Most of the Tutankhamen school’s teachers and administrators were lower middle class. Working there provided me with intensive day-to-day workplace interaction with a larger section of the lower middle class than I would have had access to otherwise.

Locations: Maadi

In August 2016 I moved to a place near Midan al-Hooreya, a very large square in Maadi, which was closer to the school than Dokki. Maadi itself has a reputation as an upscale area and a haven for foreigners. Those who work for major foreign corporations often live in Maadi. The US State Department keeps much of their employee housing in Maadi, and foreign American University in Cairo (AUC) students and professors seeking a more easily accessible Egyptian

1 A pseudonym
experience tend to gravitate towards Maadi as well. Maadi is also the location of Cairo American College (CAC), the highly prestigious private English language school where diplomats send their children. AUC professors also receive discounted or free tuition for their children at CAC, giving them another incentive to live in Maadi. Maadi is home to a number of upscale cafes and restaurants that are not often found together in parts of Cairo such as they are clustered in Maadi.

Maadi had several advantages for a researcher interested in staying out of trouble. Even though the population of foreigners had dramatically diminished by 2016 when I moved there, Egyptians in Maadi were used to foreigners. I was less likely to be branded or treated like a gāṣūs, or spy, or treated with overt suspicion. In Maadi I was treated with relative indifference wherever I went.

Maadi has a high number of middle class residents. The majority of upper middle class Egyptians in Maadi live near Road 9, Digla, or on the roads leading further out of Maadi. These areas are also where most foreigners are found. The majority of lower middle class Egyptians live near the massive al-Hooreya square, Hadayek al-Maadi, or in Sakanat al-Maadi. The upper middle class and lower middle class are not rigidly separated in Maadi. Instead, they are sprinkled in with one another, with different parts of the middle class dominating different areas. Maadi provided insight into both upper middle and lower middle class living arrangements.

Distrust

In general, members of the lower middle class I encountered were distrustful of outsiders. This was true of Maadi, Dokki, and even at the Tutankhamen school. My informants were under a great deal of economic and social strain. They had very little money to spare when I arrived and less money to spare as time went on. My informants feared the state as much as they feared not being able to pay the bills. Any mistake threatened to make one or both fears a reality. So my
informants made the safe choice and held me at arm’s length until they were sure I could be trusted. Even then, for the safety of all, some distance remained. The ways in which my informants reached this point I will return to in Chapter 4: Fear. Now in order to more fully understand the Egyptian middle class I will locate the Egyptian middle class in ethnographic research.

*The Middle Class in Ethnography*

My informants came mostly from the Egyptian lower middle class. Some had higher incomes than others, but they all were ultimately lower middle class. To clarify my informants’ positions I will discuss the history and definition of the middle class in Egypt and track the formation and growth of the upper/lower middle class divide across time since the 1950s.

Despite the wealth of ethnographic work on Egypt, writing about the Egyptian lower middle class means working with a patchwork of sources. Other populations have historically been more popular subjects of research. The poor and working classes are a popular topic of study in Egypt. Farha Ghannam (2013) did an intensive study of working class masculinity that spanned over 10 years as well as a study of the relocation working class residents of Bulaq to Zawiya al-Hamra (Ghannam, 1997). Julia Elyachar (2005) studied informal economies among working class youth. Uni Wikan (1980) studied life in an Egyptian slum the 1980s. Karen Van Nieuwkerk (1997) studied female dancers living on Muhammad Ali Street. Rural studies hit their heyday in the 1970s and 1980s, and have continued to see work into the 2000s. Amitav Ghosh (1980) studied rural Egypt in the 1970s, Nicholas Hopkins (1987) wrote a detailed ethnography of agriculture in the Egyptian village of Musha, Lila Abu Lughod’s (1997) multi-site ethnography looked at how working class upper Egyptians, particularly female domestic workers in Cairo and semi-proletarian or working class rural villagers in Luxor consumed television, and
Robert Fernea wrote about Egyptian Nubians (1991). Several compilations (Hopkins and Westergaard, 2001; Bush, 2002) of works on rural studies have also been produced.

There are fewer ethnographic treatments of the Egyptian middle class, let alone the lower middle class, to draw on than the other topics I have mentioned. However, Darlene Macleod (1991) studied veiling among lower middle class women, and particularly government workers. Macleod’s work is one of the few ethnographies of Egypt to deal explicitly with the lower middle class. Macleod argues that this veiling was a form of accommodating protest that allowed women to reclaim ideas of a settled identity, integrity, honor, and dignity, even while they went to work. Women who worked were able to marry better, and married women who worked were able to help their families maintain the accouterments of middle class status even as prices rose and opportunities for advancement diminished. The veil allowed these women to assert a Muslim identity and connects them to a rich and vibrant cultural tradition even while they contributed to their families’ upkeep and middle class lifestyles. However, Macleod argues that veiling is a concession to gender inequality: it allows women to move about freely with less harassment, but it reinforces their own inequality with men.

Walter Armbrust (1996) uses cinema and popular culture to discuss foiled middle class aspirations. Armbrust argues that in the 1980s and 1990s, the idea of middle class modernity fused the best parts of western culture with the best parts of Egyptian culture. That aspiration was a difficult one to achieve, and was largely foiled from the outset. The belief that a middle class life could be achieved through education and hard work began to diminish.

Middle class aspirations and cosmopolitanism are currently popular topics. Anouk de Koning (2009) has studied Egyptian upper middle class cosmopolitanism. In particular, Koning discusses the ways in which the upper middle class separates itself from the lower middle class.
Upper middle class institutions engage in class sorting by pricing: only the upper middle class can afford to go to the more westernized cafes daily. Staff also weeds out those who they believe do not belong either by shooing them away or ignoring them outright. Those without a command of English would find it difficult to understand the menu in any case. Koning speculates that the separation created by these places deepens the divide between the upper middle class and lower middle class by creating new imagined communities. This separation, according to de Koning, ultimately threatens to fracture the national community itself.

Peterson (2011) discusses cosmopolitanism among the middle classes and particularly the ways in which foreign institutions are changed when the enter Egypt. For example, members of the middle class, and particularly the upper middle class, patronize McDonald’s, Pizza Hut, Hardees (Carl’s Jr.), and Kentucky Fried Chicken. Egyptians see these chains as foreign institutions, yet they are localized and Egyptianized. While McDonald’s is cheap food in America and is predominantly patronized by the lower middle class, working class, and the poor, in Egypt it is a cosmopolitan place patronized by the upper middle class.

Samuli Schielke (2015) discusses transplanted members of the provincial middle class in Cairo. Schielke argues that middle class, and particularly lower middle class Egyptians use love, Islam, revolution, and migration as strategies for navigating a diminishing set of options for social and economic advancement. Schielke argues that romantic love, with its consequent frustration, is balanced against destiny and arranged marriage. Yet marriage itself is difficult to achieve. While economic times have gotten worse, marriage expenses themselves have increased. Conservative interpretations of Islam with their connotations of personal and material austerity also provide a fulfilling framework for living (Schielke, 2009), but only temporarily. The human will to live out these kinds of strict dictates over time is limited. Migration provides
some opportunities, yet it is difficult, not available to everyone, and is never as fulfilling or profitable as migrants imagine. Moreover, it exposes those who undertake it to the true limitations of their lives. Last, revolutionary defiance has been limited by the ability of the state to coopt (or crush) such energies (Schielke, 2015).

These ethnographic and cinematic studies paint a picture of the slow decline and fragmentation of middle class life. Macleod provides an examination of how women managed keeping their dignity and respectability while going to work, even as such work became a necessity due to growing economic strain on families. Armbrust discussed how in the 1980s and 1990s the aspirations of middle class life and the very idea of modernity was foiled. Koning discusses how the separation of the upper middle class from the lower middle class threatens to damage the national community. Schielke discusses how people in the late Mubarak era used ideologies and strategies to navigate diminishing choices and opportunities.

The most recent of the studies I have discussed here is Samuli Schielke’s work (above), which was published in 2015 and took place at least partly after the 2011 uprising. However, much has changed since 2011. The 2013 protests began a counter-revolution that as of this writing (2018) continues apace. My dissertation will provide a ground-level view of what life looks like for the lower middle class after 2013 and in the midst of a powerful counter-revolution. I will begin by defining the term middle class and then placing Egypt in a global context. Then I will locate the middle and lower middle classes within Egypt.

**Defining the Lower Middle Class**

Social class is most generally defined as relations to the means of production. Specific social classes can more easily be grouped and located when seen as “common positions within the social relations of production” (Wright, 1980; p. 326) that are defined by a set of relations of
domination and/or subordination (Wright, 1979). Basic class locations (top and bottom) are understood through absolute polarization (Wright et al., 1982; p. 710): the bourgeoisie have a relationship of domination with the proletariat where the proletariat are defined as those who have only their own labor to sell and the bourgeoisie are the owners of the means of production (Marx and Engels, 2010; p. 15). The power of the bourgeoisie lies in its ability to exploit the labor of the lower classes, and in particular the proletariat.

The middle class occupies a “contradictory location” (Wright, 1979; p. 10), in that they possess characteristics of two social classes: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. In this definition we can finally locate the modern middle class in Egypt and elsewhere. Middle managers are in such a contradictory location because they control the labor of members of the proletariat, the use of the means of production, and may even make investment decisions, but they are still subject to the bourgeoisie (Wright, 1979; p. 10). Likewise small business owners and shopkeepers who employ others are middle class because they occupy a similarly contradictory location: they control some labor from the proletariat and make some decisions about the use of the means of production, but they typically work alongside their employees and do not accumulate much capital (Wright, 1979; p. 10).

The middle class developed to balance the overproduction of the capitalist system. Workers produce more than they and the bourgeoisie can consume alone. Thus a class of consumers was necessary. The usefulness of the middle class is that it consumes more than it produces (Urry, 1973; p. 177). On a practical level it is necessary as business expands to farm out managerial tasks to others. These “unproductive service workers” (Urry, 1973; p. 173) are both more necessary and more financially possible as business expands. Moreover, the middle
class expands dramatically as a proportion of the population as the economy grows (Hughes and Woldekidan, 1994; p. 139).

The growth of the middle class creates professional positions and helps in the creation of new technologies that in turn feeds the growth of the middle class (Hughes and Woldekidan, 1994; p. 141). While a middle class siphons income from the working class, overall a strong and thriving middle class increases economic growth (Hughes and Woldekidan, 1994; p. 142). A middle class also produces managers and educators, which can further train and sort the populace. Thus states such as Morocco and Egypt have supported its growth at certain times throughout their histories.

_Egypt’s Middle Class in Global Context_

Much of what we understand as the modern, professional, educated middle class in the developing world arose after World War II. In the Global South, and in the Middle East in particular, such a middle class begins after colonialism.

While relationships with the colonized could be complex, colonialism primarily sought to extract labor and resources from the colonies (Bannerjee, 2008; p. 1543). To that end, colonial governments tended to invest in only the infrastructure necessary to extract the resources they desired. Other infrastructure was largely created for the leisure and pleasure of colonizers (Rodney, 1973; p. 3). In Morocco, a former French colony, colonizers left behind a predominantly rural country (Cohen, 2004). Colonizers underdeveloped their colonies (Waterbury, 1983). For example, there were not enough Egyptian schools to serve the populace at the time, and extensive schooling prior to the end of colonialism was the province effendis and elites: those with enough money to pay for it (Ryzova, 2017). In general, colonial schools, where they had been built, had been built to create an elite to help the colonizers. Schools in former
colonies were essentially foreign (Rodney, 1973; p. 379). When the colonizers left, development fell to the new independent states themselves and these states found they had little in the way of infrastructure or education.

As I have noted above, many of these emerging post-colonial states found that an increase in the middle class resulted in increased productivity and access to technology. Thus they set about policies that encouraged the growth of the middle class. Middle class consumerism then drove the industrialization and market growth of these countries as well (Davis, 2010; p. 245). New members of the middle class who worked in the private sector thus joined members of the old middle class who such as small shopkeepers, the self-employed, or those with family firms in agriculture (Davis, 2010; pp. 250-251).

More recently large financial institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the African Development Bank see the middle class as an important means to entrench and stabilize the current capitalist status quo (Sumich, 2016; p. 838). By the standards of the elites, the outlook for the global middle class looks rosy. The World Bank expects the middle class to grow from 430 million in 2000 to 1.5 billion in 2030 (Davis, 2010; p. 241). Yet for elites, talking about the middle class is often a means of carefully avoiding discussion of social class: the middle class is merely an integral part of trick-down economics from an “enlightened capitalist elite” (Sumich, 2016; p. 838).

In reality there are multiple middle classes in multiple segments (Li, 2006; p. 71) and the middle class across the globe is stratified. For example, the Tijuanan Mexican middle class models itself on the American middle class instead of the rest of the Mexican middle class. Nonetheless it has far less wealth and power than the American middle class (Yeh, 2012; p. 189) Cosmopolitan longings often clash with economic realities the world over. Likewise the
Egyptian lower and upper middle classes have far less wealth and power than members of the middle class in the West. States developed industry and a middle class to support it, but this industry was developed in service to their former colonial masters. More wealth was and is produced in the west and for their middle class from production in the Global South than wealth was produced in the Global South itself.

The middle classes in the Middle East, such Egypt and Morocco, arose in the 1950s and 1960s as the state-sponsored result of socialist redistributive policies, rents (natural gas and tourism in Egypt), and funded religious networks (Doraid, 2002 in Bellin, 2010; p. 135) and not capitalist expansion. Thus when states such as Egypt began to withdraw their support for the middle class, many of those individuals who relied on it for support fragmented, declined, and otherwise did poorly.

Instead of relying on or sponsoring market forces, several Middle Eastern states in the 1950s and 1960s, paid for the middle class themselves. Gamal Abdel Nasser’s Egypt in particular engaged in state-led import substitution industrialization, a mode of production in which the state attempts to lead the way in producing goods that were once imported under the idea that a state should be self-sufficient (Waterbury, 1983; p. 10). The state also engaged in a redistribution of wealth (Waterbury, 1983; p. 10). They gave the nascent middle classes land, subsidized their educations, and made prices of foods and consumer goods lower through subsidy. This produced a large middle class compared to other sections within the developing world (Bellin, 2010; p. 135).

Yet compared to other places in the Global South whose states do not sponsor the development of the middle class, the state sponsored middle classes of the Middle East are not integrated well globally: too many of their connections are local and state subsidized (Bellin,
In addition, much of the supposed wealth of the middle class in Egypt and the rest of the Middle East is mere “flash” (Bellin, 2010; p. 135). Cell phones, clothes, and outings cover poorer housing, shrinking real wages, and prices that have been kept artificially low through subsidy. Most members of the middle class do not have much accumulated wealth to protect them from economic shock. Most Middle Easterners still live on less than $13 a day (Bellin, 2010; p. 137). They are barely “holding on” (Bellin, 2010; p. 137) to middle class status. The vast majority of members of the middle class in the Middle East, (indeed, 1/3 of Egypt’s population (Abdalla, 2003; p. 13)) work for the state (Bellin, 2010; p. 138).

Moreover, the global labor supply has always exceeded the needs of capital, meaning that not everyone can find wage labor (Ballard, 2012; p. 565) and the competition between the reserve pool of labor and the rest of the world threatens to depress wages worldwide (Ballard, 2012; p. 565). The middle class in this context was a “normative political project” (Ballard, 2012; p. 567) meant to stabilize governments in the face of vast inequalities.

As I have noted above and will discuss in more detail shortly, Egypt’s middle class has experienced a decline in living conditions over time. Yet growing division between the upper middle class and the lower middle class is not confined to Egypt. The Global North is in the midst of the “Great Regression” which is undoing the middle class gains and prosperity that once defined the developed world (Reich, 2010 in Ballard, 2012; p. 563). For example, between 2007 and 2010 the middle class in the United States saw the value of their homes drop 21% on average (Wolff, 2012; p. 2) and their overall wealth dropped by 18% (Wolff, 2012; p. 16). In the past, economic nationalism had at least ideologically tied the fates of the rich and poor together. Keynesian economics had championed a measure of redistribution (Ballard, 2010; p. 564). Yet in the latter part of the 20th century elites began to recapture power (Ballard, 2010; p. 564; Harvey,
A belief in limited government has stripped protections from workers and the middle class (Harvey, 2009).

Outside of the developed world, market liberalization is fragmenting the Indian middle class (Fernandes, 2000; p. 89). The more well to do members of the middle class are able to take employment at large multinational corporations and like Egypt, government bureaucrats and traditional office workers are suffering restructuring (Fernandes, 2000; p. 89). Middle class Indian aspirations have changed as well. The upper middle class is getting richer, while the lower middle class is getting poorer. Privatization of public goods means that not everyone has the same chances: previously public goods must be paid for, and members of the middle class are able to do this with varying degrees of success or failure.

While Egypt’s lower middle class is being squeezed, a few sections of the middle class worldwide are expanding. One million Chinese are estimated to be entering the middle class every month (Zhang et. al, 2008; p. 3). This new Chinese middle class owns houses and cars and enjoys a much higher income compared to most of China (Cai, 2005; p. 778). However, this expansion is fragile. Compared to China’s actual population the number of people able to engage in middle class consumption is small (Zhang et. al, 2008; p. 4). China is instead made up of consumption “hot spots” (Zhang et. al, 2008; p. 4) mixed with rural areas where people can afford very little.

A new Indonesian middle class arose in the 1970s in connection with an oil boom (Dick, 1985; p. 72). It consists of civil servants, doctors, lawyers, airline pilots and business executives (Dick, 1985; p. 74). In general, Southeast Asia has a new and growing middle class that includes members in Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia (King, 2008; p. 73). Yet many of these people’s parents come from working class backgrounds or from low-level white-collar jobs (King, 2008;
p. 78). They are not far removed from the working class or from poverty themselves. Entering the middle class happens from the lower end of the economic scale, and it is inherently unstable. Moreover, the Southeast Asian middle classes are largely urban: the countryside remains poor (King, 2008; p. 73).

Aspirations for Global Consumption

Bourdieu argues that each social class is defined, in addition to its relation to the means of production, by its particular distribution of social and cultural goods (Bourdieu, 2010; pp. 1-2). While some members of Egypt’s middle class, particularly the upper middle class, are part of a global middle class, (Cohen, 2004; p. 5-6) not everyone who has a middle class education or is locally defined as middle class has access to the same levels of education and forms of consumption. The chief strategy for reaching or maintaining a middle class lifestyle is a college degree. Another strategy for achieving a middle class lifestyle is ownership of a small business. Such individuals usually undergo an apprenticeship with another small business owner to obtain the necessary knowledge and skills.

Yet not all paths to the middle class lead to the same levels of consumption. Members of the Egyptian lower middle class cannot regularly afford trips to Cilantro or Pete’s Coffee and Tea Leaf, places more globally connected and cosmopolitan (Koning, 2009) than cafes like Refuge, where I did much of my fieldwork. Much of the Egyptian lower middle class is like my informants and other lower middle classes elsewhere: they aspire to cosmopolitanism but are unable to pay for that consumption (Schielke, 2012; p. 154). These members of the middle class consider themselves above the working class yet have no great education and little money with which to engage in more cosmopolitan forms of consumption (Felski, 2000).
Whether it is expanding or contracting much of the world’s middle class is fragile and so is the Egyptian lower middle class. In the past some middle classes such as those in the Middle East and particularly, Egypt, have been sponsored and protected by their governments. However, this makes the middle class largely dependent on government largesse to maintain its status. Market liberalization such as I will discuss in more depth in this dissertation directly undermines middle class protectionism. Privatizing education, lowering subsidies, and removing regulations on corporations places risk squarely on the shoulders of the middle class. As I will discuss further in this dissertation in relation to Egypt, when market liberalization begins to take hold it threatens middle classes who are barely hanging on to begin with. Yet for the sake of clarity and completeness, I will first give a brief introduction to the history of the Egyptian middle class and its slow decline over time.

*The Egyptian Middle Classes*

In post-colonial Egypt the middle class was known as the *efendiya*. In Egypt the *efendiya* were created under Muhammed Ali as “citizen-soldiers” (Ryzova, 2017; pp. 88-106) in the 19th century. They later became leaders of the nationalist movement against the British (Ryzova, 2017; pp. 105-106). The *efendi* were “the first self-consciously modern generation in Egyptian history” (Ryzova in Booth, 2016). They were the ideal emblems of Egypt’s national state sponsored modernity (Ryzova, 2017; p. 106). *Efendi* masculinity (*efendis* were always male) and identity between 1870 and 1940 was the result of a convergence of class-based factors including scouting, physical culture, and fashion that were meant to construct a modern class-based masculinity against other classes such as peasants as well as reclaim a fractured masculinity from the British colonizers (Jacob, 2011). However, like the modern Egyptian middle class I will describe later, *efendi* eventually became an aspirational title with education that might be basic

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or employment could be less than professional. It was aspirational and could be a temporary identity or an “assertion of identity and cultural capital that parents wanted their children to acquire” (Booth, 2016).

Despite the popular and efendi drive to post-colonial independence and identity in the 1950s Egypt was a veiled British protectorate ruled by the wildly unpopular King Farouq. In 1952 the Free Officers, including future Egyptian Presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser, Mohammed Naguib, and Anwar Sadat overthrew King Farouq (Waterbury, 1983; p. 48). Later in 1954 Gamal Abdel Nasser took power from Mohammed Naguib in a coup.

Upon taking power Abdel Nasser found himself opposed by the old aristocracy who had originated under Mohammed Ali in the 1800s. Nasser wished to break the back of the old regime, redistribute (modestly) some rural assets, and encourage rural capitalists to invest in industry (Waterbury, 1983; p. 60). Thus Nasser instituted a program of land reform that stripped the old aristocracy of their assets and redistributed them to the populace, creating a class of smallholders (those holding roughly 5 acres or less) (Bush, 2002; p. 9). Nasser made public education free and promised a government job to every university graduate (Bach, 2002; p. 160).

As part of his strategy of state-led import substitution, Nasser also nationalized a number of previously private industries. In the late 1950s Nasser nationalized foreign-owned industries in Egypt and also those belonging to those he deemed as “borderline nationals” (Waterbury, 1983; p. 424) such as “Jews, Armenians, and Syro-Lebanese” (Waterbury, 1983; p. 424). Then between 1961 and 1965 he nationalized all remaining private banks and insurance companies, fifty shipping companies, and a series of heavy and basic industrial firms (Waterbury, 1983; p. 73). These newly nationalized industries provided some (if eventually inadequate) places to keep this promise of government jobs to graduates.
Newly created smallholders, now-secure tenants, and members of the working class took advantage of free education and sent many of their children to college and their college educated children rose to create a much-enlarged Egyptian middle class of muwazafīn, or government workers. By 2001, one third, or roughly seven million, of Egypt’s population were muwazafīn (Abdalla, 2003; p. 13).

Gamal Abdel Nasser also expanded a system of subsidies that had begun during World War II. In particular Nasser used these subsidies to reduce the domestic prices of flour, rice, and sugar to the average Egyptian buyer (Dethier and Funk, 1987). Subsidies on staples such as rice, flour, sugar, fuel, and electricity encouraged economic development by making the living wage lower (Dethier and Funk, 1987). In addition to helping the poor, these subsidies partially underpinned middle class life by allowing people to spend less money on food and more on other consumer goods. Lowering the basic cost of living encouraged middle class consumption by allowing members of the middle class to spend more money on clothing, appliances, certain foods, and restaurants.

Between 1950 and 1970 the middle class expanded considerably (Mellor, 2016; p. 74) and in some cases, the upper middle class contracted (Pettit, 2017; p. 105). Specifically, those who benefitted from land tenure reform, land redistribution, or simply free education and a government job saw their opportunities expand. However, some members of the upper middle class lost land or saw its use restricted by Nasser. Education expanded and university enrollment tripled (de Koning, 2009 in Pettit, 2017; p. 106). For example, there were 216 law graduates in Egypt between 1926 and 1940. In 1965 alone 1600 people graduated with law degrees (Mellor, 2016; pp. 66-67). There were also significant increases in the number of graduates from the schools of medicine, education, and engineering (Mellor, 2016; p. 66). Officer positions in the
military, previously the province of elites, were opened to middle class and lower middle class youth. In 1950 23.5% of military officer recruits were middle class, but by 1984 90% of military officer recruits were middle class (Mellor, 2016; p. 66). Under Nasser and later Sadat military salaries were higher than many other middle class occupations, and hence seen as more desirable (Mellor, 2016; p. 66). Families that entered the middle class under Nasser did so under the sponsorship of the state with a combination of public sector jobs, public education, and increased subsidies (Schielke, 2012; p. 107).

Gamal Abdel Nasser died of heart failure in 1970 and Anwar Sadat took the presidency of Egypt. Abdel Nasser had allied with the Soviets to build the Aswan High Dam after the Americans and British withdrew their offers for assistance over his socialist and anti-colonialist stances (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 1). Yet Sadat turned from the Soviet Union and towards western capitalists for alliances following the failure of the 1967 war against Israel and the diplomatic success with the West provided by the 1973 war over Sinai (Pettit, 2017; p. 112). Moreover, in 1976 Egypt had a stagnating economy and rising debt. There were “over one million unemployed in Cairo alone” (Waterbury, 1983; p. 209). Sadat sought out loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in an attempt to deal with these budget gaps (Pettit, 2017; p. 112). Rapprochement with the west allowed in greater amounts of western aid as Sadat tried to prevent larger economic collapse (Beinin, 1999; p. 21). In exchange for these loans the IMF expected economic policy change. Therefore in advance of IMF loans and in the way of rapprochement, Sadat instituted his program of economic reform, the *infitah*, or opening, in 1974.
Infītāḥ

In practice Sadat’s opening relaxed economic controls and allowed in foreign investors. Facing large domestic unemployment Sadat increased the number of exit visas available to Egyptians in an effort to allow more workers to go abroad (Weyland, 1993; p. 6). Many made their way to Libya, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait, and Iraq (Weyland, 1993; p. 4) and sent home remittances to their families that were used to make home improvements, pay for education, and rise in status (Weyland, 1993; p. 150). By contrast those members of the middle class that had arisen under Nasser and stayed home during the infītāḥ found their government jobs paid far less than laboring abroad. Small-time entrepreneurs, teachers, doctors, and lawyers, and others were all affected differently by the infītāḥ. State-led development seemed to have been “thrown into the wind” (Waterbury, 1983; p. 146) and those who could “scrambled…. to get in on the action” (Waterbury, 1983; p. 146). Those who managed to secure new and lucrative jobs in the private sector enjoyed higher living standards than those who accepted lower paying jobs in the public or private sector. Under the infītāḥ, the middle class became more divided than under Nasser (Mellor, 2016; p. 69).

By the 1970s and 1980s the dominant ideology about middle class modernity and success was under strain. This ideology originated in the 1960s under Nasser and held that the truly modern were cultured, educated, and fused the best parts of Egyptian culture with the finest parts of western culture. Yet the middle class of the 1970s and 1980s was embattled (Armbrust, 1996; p. 25) because of the “flux and confusion” (Waterbury, 1983; p. 154) created by the infītāḥ. Those who went abroad under Sadat’s new exit visas and sent home large remittances were both middle class and the working classes. Money earned abroad caused inflation as it entered the local economy (Shechter, 2009; p. 25), constricting the budgets of those who remained home or
did not find success in the private sector. The working classes in particular did not have the college educations of the middle class and often did not even have high school diplomas but, if they managed to go abroad to work, some elements quickly rose in income. Those who found new success in the private sector or abroad were known in derogatory fashion as *bitu’ il-infitaḥ*, or *infitaḥis* (Armbrust, 1996; p. 27). The image of the new upper middle class held by those who were left behind was that *infitaḥis* were vulgar former members of the working classes who had made the transition to the moneyed classes without the accompanying knowledge of comportment and consumption (Armbrust, 1996; p. 27). In truth, the new upper middle class was not necessarily composed of former members of the *ahl il-balād*. They were also business executives and professionals in the private sector (Armbrust, 1996; p. 135).

During Sadat’s rule the quality of education declined. The World Bank and IMF encouraged Egypt to divert public funds from higher education into primary and secondary education. Further, Egypt invested substantial public funds into private education. The result was that public education was underfunded on the whole and private tutoring, the informal side of privatization, rose to fill the gap in public education, taking up as much as 22% of family budgets (Dixon, 2010; p. 43).

Government jobs and employment in general became harder to acquire. There had never been enough government jobs to fill the number of graduates that Nasser’s policies had allowed. The bureaucracy could only provide so many jobs and the expansion of the bureaucracy over time never kept up with demand. After 1978 the government allowed public enterprises to ignore the grantee scheme, and also began allowing some who worked in the public sector to take unpaid leave to work in the private sector (Binzel, 2011; p. 8). By the end of the 1980s the waiting list was more than five years (Binzel, 2011; p. 8). Migrant members of the working and
middle class returned with newfound cash they could use for better education and better living, eclipsing the Nasserite middle class’ opportunities (Shechter, 2009; p. 25). Overall possibilities for lower middle class social mobility had significantly declined by the end of the 1970s (Armbrust, 1996; pp. 134-135) even while those members of the middle class with more connections and better education experienced rapid mobility as the Mubarak era began (Ates, 2005; p. 140).

*Hosni Mubarak and Structural Adjustment*

Mubarak succeeded Sadat in 1979 and continued and expanded on Sadat’s economic reforms. By the late 1980s and early 1990s Egypt faced 15% unemployment and domestic inflation (Abdel-Khalik 2002; p. 33). Foreign debt was 50 billion dollars and export payments consumed 25% of gross domestic product (Richards, 2014). In response the Egyptian government and then-president Hosni Mubarak entered into negotiations with the IMF in 1989, and in 1991 signed an agreement with the IMF and received a Structural Adjustment Loan (Abdel-Khalik 2002; p. 33).

Structural Adjustment was a series of neoliberal policies. Neoliberal ideology argues that the role of government should be to facilitate market freedom. In places such as Egypt neoliberal ideology argues that public spending should be cut and regulation relaxed. In Mubarak’s Egypt market freedom and neoliberal reform entailed the privatization of public assets, the pegging of the pound to the dollar in an exchange scheme managed by the Central Bank of Egypt, and cutting subsidies for food and fertilizer (Abdel-Khalik, 2002; p. 35). Cutting fertilizer subsidies drove up the cost of agricultural production and along with the cut in subsidies, caused a rise in the price of food, which directly affected all Egyptians, including the lower middle class.
**Privatization**

As a result of Nasser's nationalization program the government of Egypt owned and ran a number of manufacturers, industries, and even a department store, Omar Effendi. Indeed, at least part of the 1/3 of people classed as government workers in 2001 worked in these industries (Abdalla, 2003). Mubarak engaged in a strategy of privatizing businesses in order to shrink the government. Under Mubarak these enterprises began to be divided up into holding companies and their assets sold to regime cronies. Egypt's bottling company was sold to Egyptian buyers in 1994 for 150 million LE, and then sold to Pepsi a few years later for almost 2 billion LE. The Egyptian American Bank was a state owned asset trading at 56LE per share in 2000 that was sold off at 40LE per share (Shenker, 2015; p.65). The sectors of “tourism, telecommunication, transportation, and construction” (Mellor, 2016; p. 70) came to be owned by just 24 families. These sales shifted a number of previously stable, if low paying, lower middle class government jobs into the much more precarious private sector in short order.

This was problematic because the core of Egypt’s economy (and governmental system) is based on a network of personal connections (wāsta) between businessmen and power elites (Shenker, 2016; p. 64). Building permits, visa problems, school changes, jobs, appointments to officer school in the military: nearly every important thing in Egypt is done or can be done more quickly and more reliably through a wāsta, or connection than through bureaucratic system itself. The same is true of job placement in the private sector, except that the connections there are more expensive and harder to come by. Government jobs were stable and low paying, but even if the waiting list to get one could be long, at least when did land such a job it eliminated the need for a wāsta, or connection, once they had been obtained. Certainly obtaining such a job could be sped up by the use of a strategic connection, but if someone had a connection capable of placing
one in a job there were better ways to use it than to achieve a low paying job stamping papers at the Mugamma, the chief administrative center in Egypt. Therefore the waiting lists, while long, would at least eventually result in the desired job and those without connections could have some small opportunity. These jobs were still seen as desirable because of their stability in 1992, as evidenced by the mass resignations in the private sector when Hosni Mubarak decided to take those with jobs in the private sector off the government job registry (Binzel, 2011; p. 8). This preference is also in the face of the fact that jobs for existing grantees are being preserved by an unspoken suspension of that guarantee for the young (Richards, 2014). The lower middle class need for the stability and security of a government job is in contrast to members of the upper middle class whose trip through more expensive educational institutions naturally provides them with powerful connections. Through these connections are more able to leverage their skills and educations to their highest and most profitable effect in the private sector (Mellor, 2016; p. 70).

The Egyptian private sector strongly favors the connected and the need for a connection to truly advance one’s station remains an issue today (Schielke, 2015; p. 155).

Public services such as health, transportation, and education further deteriorated under Mubarak (Mellor, 2016; p. 72). These are services that all Egyptians rely on including the lower middle class. Nasser had promised the nation free education, but the money necessary to do this was never adequately invested in schools. Moreover, roughly 40% of Egypt’s population was under the age of 24 in 2006: there were almost as many youth relying on the education system as there were adults to pay for it (Richards, 2014). USAID-backed “cost-recovery” measures during the Mubarak era pushed school wages below the rate of inflation (Armbrust, 2011). Egyptian teachers believe themselves to be underpaid and roughly 90% of them engage in private tutoring (Chapman and Miric, 2009; p. 334). Private tutoring increases teachers’ salary by 5-10 times and
allows them to remain middle class (Chapman and Miric, 2009; p. 334). The World Bank in 2006 estimated the student/teacher ratio in Egypt to be roughly 20:1 in 2000 (Chapman and Miric, 2009; p. 320). Favorable student teacher ratios were achieved by running some schools in double or triple shifts. Despite a massive school building campaign in which the Ministry of Education built 11,000 new schools between 1992 and 2001 (Assaad et. al, 2010; p. 86), forty six percent of students in 1998 went to schools that ran double shifts: one in the morning and one in the afternoon (Assaad et. al, 2010; p. 85). Six to 14 year olds spent an average of 5.9 hours in school a day (Assaad et. al, 2010; p. 85).

Nonetheless school enrollment increased substantially under Mubarak. Rural girls enrollment increased from 65% to 81% between 1988 and 1998. Rural boy’s enrollment increased from 88% to 91%. Urban girls enrollment went from 89% to 93% and urban boys went from 93% to 95% (Assaad et. al, 2010; pp. 85-86).

Despite the substantial push toward education in the Mubarak era, educational quality was low in public schools (Chapman and Miric, 2009; p. 311). New schools were built, but not enough of them, and money for operations was never adequately provided. Misallocation was a problem: one third of educational funding was allocated to public universities, which served six percent of students (Richards, 2014). Vast expansions also did nothing to increase teacher pay or to increase the quality of the facilities themselves. Moreover, much of a student’s future is based on the success of the Thanawyeya Amma, an all-important exit test that determines which students will go to college and which will not. A student’s success in the Thanawyeya Amma in turn is based on rote memorization and often, expensive private tutoring (Buckner, 2013; p. 531).

The public university situation in Egypt is complex. Access rules to public university have become more restrictive under Mubarak in an effort to limit the number of graduates.
Instead the government began to emphasize vocational and technical education (Binzel, 2011; p. 6). Nonetheless public university enrollment went from 1.49 million in 2001 to 1.93 million in 2009. In perspective, 40% of enrollment is still from the highest quintile, while only 10% of enrollees come from the lowest quintile (Buckner, 2013; p. 527). Drawing from the data, 50% of university enrollment, or about 1.8 million people, were from the middle-income quintiles and probably middle class in 1999. The availability of college, at least in theory, improved.

Nonetheless, university professors are government employees and are also poorly paid. Like primary and secondary school teachers, they supplement their income with private tutoring. Moreover, in the 1970s and 1980s many of the best Egyptian professors travelled abroad to teach instead of staying home (Weyland, 1993). Even in the 1990s and 2000s Egyptian professors could earn ten times in Saudi Arabia what they did at home leading many to go and stay abroad (Richards, 2014).

The availability of education expanded, but its quality declined as “massification” (Buckner, 2013; p. 528) policies meant to make it more accessible to youth took effect. Again budgets for expanding schools did not keep up with operational costs or the cost of improving existing facilities. There were also few jobs waiting at the other end of a university education except for government jobs. University became a waiting room for the unemployment line (Romani, 2003; p. 9) and the retention of Nasser’s policy of guaranteeing government jobs meant that graduates often waited for a government job, generating further unemployment (Richardson, 2014).

While public healthcare declined, due to Mubarak’s market liberalization policies private healthcare expanded dramatically (Rafeh, 1997; p. 116). Between 1975 and 1990 the number of private hospital beds rose 180% (Rafeh, 1997; p. 116). Despite the expansion of private care, in
1997 there were still only 19.6 doctors and 19.6 nurses per 10,000 people in Egypt (Rafeh, 1997; p. 116). Under Mubarak the Ministry of Health’s budget, which pays for the public hospitals and the free healthcare Egyptians are promised, increased slightly each year. These increases did not keep pace with inflation and in real terms the ministry had slightly less funding each year. Medical care became increasingly limited by volume and quality by budget constraints (Rafeh, 1997; p. 118).

By the late Mubarak years in 2008 when I began to go to Egypt, the metro lines were hot and crowded, but at least relatively quick. The rail system (different from the metro line) that provided transport between cities in Egypt, however, had a history of derailments and accidents with large numbers of casualties. Between 1992 and 1999 alone there were 10 major train collisions with over 280 people died in train collisions (BBC News, 2006). Train car conditions were poor: many people carried large amounts of baggage, small animals, and even cooked their own meals on gas cookers on longer journeys (BBC News, 2006). The trains themselves were old and slow (BBC News, 2006). In 2002 one of the worst disasters on record occurred when a train traveling south from Cairo into Qaylub Station caught fire and killed 373 people (BBC News, 2006). In August 2006 again near Qalyub, one train rear-ended another, killing 51 and injuring 138 (Staff and agencies, 2006). In May of that same year 45 died when two trains crashed in the Delta near the village of Alshat and 20 died in a crash near Alexandria (Staff and agencies, 2006). In 2009 there were 1,577 train accidents (Pasha-Robinson, 2018).

Emigration benefits declined: remittances entering the economy were reduced versus inflation and as a result construction slowed for new homes. Moreover, after the 1980s declining oil prices slowed emigration and the percentage of Arab migrant workers in the gulf decreased 49% between 1985 and the 2000s (Karakoc et. al, 2017; p. 733). The number of Egyptians
abroad remained high, as many as 900,000 (Karakoc et al., 2017; p. 733), but emigration benefits were also balanced by the fact that when Egyptian men emigrated to the more conservative gulf countries, one value they did bring back was an emphasis on larger families (Fargues, 1997; p. 125) over and above the already extant belief in the value of children in Egypt. Thus emigrant families were larger and more financially costly, especially in the face of declining real wages and the declining value of remittances. Emigrants saw their own social mobility decline by the late 1990s (Fargues, 1997; p. 125).

Under Mubarak education expanded and private sector options became more widely available, even while most public sector services declined. Enjoying a better lifestyle under Mubarak came to mean private education, private transport, and private hospitals. Good connections and plenty of money could acquire all of these things. The lower middle class had neither money nor connections and found themselves left out in the cold. Overall, the benefits promised by Nasser only partially materialized, and despite the expansion of education and the availability of new consumer goods under Mubarak, social mobility declined.

*Middle Class Housing Arrangements: Informal Settlements and New Cities*

By the end of Mubarak’s tenure in 2011 66.7% of Greater Cairo’s total population lived in informal housing, or ʿashawiyāt (Sims, 2013; p. 91.) This included members of the lower middle class, along with millions of inhabitants of Cairo, who could not afford to live in formal government recognized housing and instead took residence in massive ʿashawiyāt, or informal housing areas that exist throughout the city and its outskirts.

Such areas began to develop as early as the 1950s, and while they occupy 39% of city space, their density means they contain far more people than official areas (Sims, 2013; p. 96). These unofficial developments do not have legal power or water and are not recognized as legal
housing and landownership by the Egyptian government. Power and water are often pirated. Developments may be ramshackle, but are usually surprisingly well-built: people pay for and build their own houses without the use of formal contractors and thus have incentive to see it done correctly, in contrast to often less scrupulous contractors in formal areas who build with substandard materials and in areas where collapse is a possibility (Sims, 2013; pp. 99-100).

The poor and sometimes lower middle class tactic (Certeau, 1984; p. xix) of living and building in the ‘ashawiyāt, an area that the Egyptian government wishes to dispose of and render under state control, is a response to the very levers of power that the state itself is operating (Bayat, 2012; p. 114). High unemployment, frequent layoffs, and low pay push lower middle class and working class individuals out of formal housing which they cannot afford. State-led gentrification projects and land seizures disperse people further. The poor and some members of the middle classes choose to live in informal settlements where it is cheaper. ‘Ashawiyāt, like other unofficial or underdeveloped areas, help to maximize business profits (Massey, 1994; p. 51). The existence of these areas allows businesses to pay lower wages to members of the middle class because living expenses are cheaper in unofficial zones.

Formally recognized areas of Cairo are sometimes decaying as well. The upper middle class has been steadily leaving formally recognized areas of Cairo since the infītah in the 1970s. They have moved to new cities and areas outside of Cairo proper such as Sheikh Zayed City, 6th of October City, and New Cairo (Dixon, 2010; p. 42). These members of the upper middle class once lived in older neighborhoods in the city alongside the lower middle class. They moved out to increase their quality of life: better services exist in the new cities, they are quieter, and the air is cleaner. Buses are cleaner and more likely to be air-conditioned, streets are clean and well paved, and power and water services are more reliable.
By contrast old neighborhoods where the rich, middle class, and poor once mixed have faced neglect, especially as the city has expanded. Places such as al-Tayyibin near the Pyramids did not even receive streetlights until the 1990s (Kupping, 2006). Elites see these older areas and much of the city, as backward, criminal, violent, and polluted (Denis, 2006; p. 55), and have neglected them accordingly. Many of these neighborhoods are now little different than slums (Bayat, 2012; p. 112).

Sections of the Middle Class

Middle class-ness is the way Egyptians define “social normality” (Schielke, 2015; p. 110) and Samuli Schielke argues that being middle class and cosmopolitan is an aspiration for many Egyptians (Schielke, 2015; p. 112). Yet while this statement captures the way many Egyptians feel about middle class-ness, it does not well-describe the Egyptian middle class. Individuals claiming to be middle class range from the poor to the very wealthy.

Specifically, the Egyptian lower middle class includes public employees of all kinds: bureaucrats, (lower) military officers, and teachers. They may or may not have a command of English or another foreign language. Command of a foreign language allows better opportunities, but it also carries training costs in the way of special schools and courses that members of the lower middle class may not be able to afford. The lower middle class also includes some who work in the private sector: teachers, principals, semi-professional store employees whose English is fluent, some managers, and public and private university professors, and owners of small businesses. The lower middle class may live, as discussed earlier, in ‘ashawiyāt, but they also reside in and around almost all areas of the city. They are more much more likely to rely on the metro, public buses, and microbuses than the upper middle class. They may travel over two hours a day to work and back. They frequent cafes that spill out into the street and the occasional
café such as my fieldsite, Refuge², which I will discuss more in a later chapter. They sometimes go to malls, but not the larger more expensive malls like City Stars: they cannot afford to buy anything in these places.

By contrast members of the upper middle class almost always have a working knowledge of English and possibly, though not always, a command of another foreign language such as French or German. In Cairo proper members of the upper middle class may live in Zamalek, the better parts of Maadi, or other more expensive areas of the city. Members of the upper middle class are also more likely to live in the new cities out in the desert along with members of the Egyptian elite. The upper middle class shops in more upscale malls such as City Stars for clothes and higher-end chain stores such as Spinny’s or Metro Market for groceries. Their shopping habits are opposed to the lower middle classes who may shop at the souq, in local grocery shops, or at a kushk, or kiosk. The upper middle classes travel by taxi or private car. They go to Western style coffee shops such as Pottery Café, Pete’s Coffee and Tea Leaf, or Costa Coffee to socialize. Members of the upper middle class work at multi-national corporations, in lucrative industries such as petroleum, and are some of the more successful private sector engineers and doctors.

This can also be contrasted with working class men, who tend to wear slacks and button-ups when they are not at work, and working class women, who tend towards the veils and flowered dresses or abayas. Working class women can also be found selling small items on the metro steps and wearing niqab, a full body covering. Working class men go to cafes, which are often little more than what appear to be one car garages in which a man with a hot plate stands behind a bar and makes coffee and tea for patrons and a coal barbecue burns for sheesha (hookah) coals. Women do sometimes appear at working class cafes. However this is rare and

² A pseudonym
regarded as somewhat scandalous. Men often regard such women as prostitutes. Working class men work at the factories in the Delta, at cafes nearly all over Cairo. Some work in skilled trade that grant higher social distinction than other members of the working class. These *ustas*, skilled tradesmen, might repair cars, electronics, be machinists, bakers, tailors, house painters, and plumbers (Ghannam, 2013; p. 13). Members of the working class may engage in manual labor, drive taxis, or do nearly any other task that does not require a great deal of education. While some members of the working class do own workshops and command small amounts of labor, they usually do not possess the cultural capital or the material goods and consumptive tastes to be considered middle class.

I do not contrast the lower middle class to a secure middle here because a secure middle class in Egypt no longer exists by any reasonable measure (Muller and Ndoye, 2017; p. 17). Much of what was the secure middle class in Egypt arose under Nasser as government workers, but wages never kept pace with inflation. By 2011 government workers were firmly part of the lower middle class (Abu Ismail and Sarangi, 2015; p. 14). What remained of the secure middle fragmented and became part of either the upper or lower middle class during the late Mubarak years (Muller and Ndoye, 2017; p. 16) as part of the general decline and fragmentation of much of the middle class I have described above.

*Education*

Lower middle class parents strive to give their children private educations because private schools usually teach a foreign language that provides better opportunities for work and greater prestige. But the difficulty is that many private language schools in the price range of the lower middle class carry out the task of teaching English or other foreign languages poorly. Many private schools available to the lower middle class are supplied with only substandard
computers and teachers teach a foreign language that may barely speak that language at all or may simply teach in Arabic despite the school regulations.

Lower middle class parents, when they can, pay for private tutoring, but this usually does not substantially improve students’ performance even though parents believe it does (Chapman and Miric, 2009; p. 330). Teacher supervision is lax or nonexistent (Chapman and Miric, 2009; p. 330) in public schools and supervision is nearly as lacking in Egyptian private schools. Nor does attaining a degree not necessarily lead to favorable job prospects. The Arab world has a high unemployment to education ratio: getting a degree through higher education does not result in significantly increased employment prospects (Campante and Chor, 2012; p. 174). Moreover, the fertility rate in a number of youth in most Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt results in a youth bulge in the population that is difficult to absorb into the workforce. To actually integrate them into the workforce money must be spent to create jobs for them instead of improving other jobs (Richards, 2014). Thus when schools are not waiting rooms for the unemployment line (Romani, 2003; p. 9), those jobs that are created or already exist are likely to have low or stagnant wages (Richards, 2014).

Since the explosion of private schools in the 1990s (Dixon, 2010; p. 43) lower middle class parents can sometimes afford to send their children to private schools, but these schools are of less quality and thoroughness than the upper middle class experiences with their private schools. In general, unless one has 40,000 pounds a year to spend on a private international school, the result of a private school education will be poor (Dixon, 2010; p. 43). While lower middle class children that emerge from private schools are more educated than working class children they are still significantly less well educated than those of the upper middle class. They also do not emerge with nearly as many connections that can be usefully leveraged.
In contrast to the lower middle class an upper middle class child typically attends a better private school, preferably one of the better foreign language schools such as Cairo American College or the Pakistani School in Zamalek. These schools have more advanced curriculum, more opportunities, and due to their proximity to the corridors of power, allow students to emerge with more powerful connections with which to leverage their educations. Moreover, upper middle class comportment is learned in schools as well as at home. Lack of access to more expensive schooling disadvantages those members of the lower middle class who wish to rise in status. More importantly, it prevents them from easily making their voices heard and getting their concerns met. In an Egypt increasingly ruled by neoliberalism, the inability of the lower middle class to be heard in government is a profound disadvantage.

Conclusions

By 2016, reflecting middle class trends elsewhere in the Middle East and even the Western world, the Egyptian lower middle class was struggling to maintain their lifestyles. The lower middle class had been squeezed by the 2011 uprising. Tourists fled, and there was little work to be found anywhere. In 2013 the mantra on the streets was “There is no money, no work, and no education.” In 2016 my lower middle class informants made the same complaint in almost the exact same words.

Egyptians hit the streets in 2011 and again in 2013 hoping that a new regime would better their circumstances. The lower middle class in Mubarak’s era had been squeezed by a series of market reforms. As I will argue in this dissertation, they have found little relief through new leadership. Instead Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi leads a counter-revolution that carries out neoliberal change at a pace at which his predecessors could only dream of. In the next chapter I will discuss the January 25, 2011 revolution and the 2013 coup. I will argue that these events have
caused many sorts of stresses on the Egyptian middle class and my informants in the lower middle class in particular. In Chapter 3, Middle Class Decline, I will discuss the economic consequences of the counter-revolution and the neoliberal changes that Egypt is undergoing. I will closely examine the material decline that is a consequence of these changes. In Chapter 4, Fear and Paranoia, I will discuss the renewed and intensified repression meant to quell the revolutionary urge displayed in Egypt and discuss how this repression has allowed the regime to carry out neoliberal change at an astonishing pace. In Chapter 5: Respectability I will examine how material decline threatens ihtiram, or respectability, a key moral and material discourse of the Egyptian lower middle class and what this means to my informants. In Chapter 6: Conclusions, I will revisit these topics and what lower middle class decline means for the future of Egypt and my informants.

Egypt’s lower middle class decline is a part of a larger phenomenon: the global precarity of the middle classes. Egyptian members of the lower middle class, like others in the world, have been struggling on the cusp of middle class-ness for years. By closely examining what they do in the midst of rapid neoliberal reform and counter-revolution we can gain some hint of the direction the global middle class is going.
Revolution and Counter-Revolution

A great wave of euphoria swept Egypt after the 2011 uprising. Observers in 2011 said Egyptians were reclaiming their country. Many Egyptians believed it too. Yet a counter-revolution began almost the moment Hosni Mubarak was ordered to step down by the military. By 2013 revolutionary euphoria had ended and by 2016 fear had settled in: a great section of the lower middle class had begun to struggle to hold onto their way of life. The purpose of this chapter will be to discuss the way Egyptians have been steadily and violently ground down from their moment of revolutionary joy in 2011 until 2016 and in doing so, provide the groundwork for the rest of this dissertation. I will begin with the road to the January 2011 uprising.

Heading to the January 2011 Uprising

I was in Egypt during the 2011 uprising and for two years prior. There are many accounts of the January 2011 uprising. Here I will add a perspective to those accounts that has been shaped by the distance of time and a year and a half of ethnographic fieldwork starting in 2016. I will seek to convey the sense of chaos that many people felt in 2011 and 2013, and how nothing felt certain for long periods of time.

By 2011 Hosni Mubarak had been in power for 29 years, making him one of the longest reigning dictators in the Middle East. There was a massive gap between the wealthy and everyone else. The elites “hobnobbed with foreign tourists in the gated playgrounds of Egypt's Red Sea Riviera” while the masses “struggled [sic] to get by on meager incomes and liv[ed] a precarious existence in ‘Dickensian’ urban tenements” (Hashim, 2011; p. 113). People were forced into informal labor with increasing frequency (Bayat, 2012; p. 113). An increase in elite power had left the poor and middle classes vulnerable to elite depredations backed by the state. By 2011 nearly half the population existed below the poverty line (Shahine, 2011; p. 2) and 40%
“lived on less than $2.00 a day” (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 8). Twenty percent lived on less than $1.25 a day. In perspective, beef was $5.00 a pound (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 8). At the time, however, many outside observers and academics believed Hosni Mubarak’s regime was stable (El-Ghobashy, 2011; Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 7).

Nonetheless, things were not quiet in Egypt. Egypt has a decades long history of labor protest. In fact, the first act of the Free Officers in 1952 was to quash a labor protest at Kafr al-Dawwar and hang two of its leaders (Beinin, 1999; p. 19). By the 1990s the Egyptian working class had been undergoing reorganization due to Egypt’s increased participation in the world economy, the move towards private enterprise, and “an upward redistribution of the national income” (Beinin, 1999; p. 18). In the 1980s and 1990s many workers in state-owned industries struck over pay, working conditions, and bonuses, but 2004 was the beginning of a wave of labor protest that eventually grew to encompass both the public and private sectors (Beinin and El-Hamalawy, 2007).

After 2004 the government tried (not for the first time) to privatize the nationally owned textile industry. New owners and investors choices to offer short-term contracts, inadequate pay, and few benefits (Aziz, 2016; p. 44) lead to “an unprecedented wave of wildcat strikes” (Beinin and El-Hamalawy, 2007). These strikes then spread to other industries as well (Beinin and El-Hamalawy, 2007). In 2006 alone there were 222 labor strikes (Beinin and El-Hamalawy, 2007). The wave peaked in 2007 and 2008 with 614 and 609 labor protests respectively (Beinin, 2011; p. 191). Yet even though the wave had peaked the number of worker protests per year remained at nearly triple or quadruple its level in the late 90s until the 2011 uprising (Beinin, 2011; p. 191). Overall in the twelve years preceding the uprising there were 3500 to 4500 strikes (Aziz, 2016; p. 44). Nonetheless, up until the 2011 uprising, these protests were organized and took
place on the local level; there was no national-level coordination (Beinin, 2011; p. 193). Yet the
fact that so many disparate protests took place without any national-level coordination in Egypt
is a measure of the discontent of the working class at the time. In any case, the picture of
working class protest punctures façade of quiet under Mubarak.

The decline of the middle class was another powerful impetus towards the initial revolt
(Aziz, 2016; p. 44). In summer 2006 alone gasoline prices increased 30%. Between 2005 and
2008 the cost of “milk, cheese, eggs, and beans increased by 100 to 150 percent” (Aziz, 2016; p.
44) and the cost of cooking gas cylinders and vegetables rose, hurting the lower middle class
(Aziz, 2016; p. 44). In mid-2010 the price of rice went up 50%, meat went up 40%, and poultry
25% (Aziz, 2016; p. 44).

The increasing concentration of police power under Mubarak by 2010 lead to their
demanding bribes from middle class shop owners, street vendors, and restaurants. The
punishment for those unable to pay was arrest and detention. Lower middle class and working
class Egyptians were “frequently beaten, tortured to give false confessions, and pressured to
become police informants” (Aziz, 2016; p. 45).

Privatization such as I have discussed in the last chapter as well as allowing public sector
entities to skirt the guarantee of a job to graduates meant that public sector employment, the first
choice of many members of the lower middle class, was halved from 1.08 million to less than
500,000 between 1998 and 2004 (Aziz, 2016; p. 45). The average wait for new entrants into the
job market was at least five years and the informal sector constituted 61% of actual employment
(Aziz, 2016; p. 45).

The stage was set for the 2011 uprising, but the spark that began the uprising is more
elusive. One point is apt here, and three historical events. James C. Scott says that a peasant is a
man standing up to his neck in water so that any passing wave will drown him (Scott, 1976; p. 1). Scott further argues that peasants will remain quiescent under adverse conditions as long as those conditions are stable. When their lives become unstable and they do not know where their next meal is coming from they revolt (Scott, 1976). The same logics extend to the middle class as well. Instability increases the chances of revolt and neoliberal change offloads risk from governments and corporations onto individuals. As neoliberal reforms took place and prices rose they increased the risks borne by the middle and working classes and revolt became ever more likely.

The first event I will recount is the death of Khaled Said. In the summer of 2010 a young middle class man named Khaled Said was sitting in an Internet cafe in Alexandria, Egypt. A group of police officers entered and demanded identification. Khaled Said asked “Why?” Plainclothes police dragged Khaled Said into a nearby apartment building, beat him, smashed his head into a marble staircase, and along with witnesses watched him bleed to death (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 14). An onlooker took a picture with a mobile phone (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 14). The Egyptian Medical Forensics Authority claimed that Khaled Said had beaten himself while running from police and choked to death on a clump of marijuana (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 15) while trying hide it from the police (Fahmy, 2015; p. 559). Such bizarre and outlandish excuses were not uncommon prior to 2011 (Fahmy, 2015; p. 559) because army officers, doctors, police, and judges do not see themselves as servants of the people but rather defenders of the state (Fahmy, 2015; p. 562). Whether these statements are believed or not seems to depend more on the mood of the public than the outlandishness of the explanation. In this case the public did not believe the doctor's explanations about Khaled Said. An Egyptian Google executive named Wael Ghonim formed a Facebook group called “Kulna Khaled Said”, or “We Are All Khaled Said.”
Over one hundred thousand joined the group. This slogan was to become one of the rallying cries of the 2011 uprising.

The second event is the Al-Qidiseen Church bombing. On January 1st 2011, 24 days before the January 25 uprising, a bomb went off at the Al-Qidiseen Coptic Orthodox Church in Alexandria during a new year service, killing twenty-three people and injuring nearly one hundred more (Fayed et al, 2011) in the worst attack on Coptic Christians in the last 10 years. In an attempt to deny any possibility of localized sectarian violence, the Egyptian government blamed outsiders for the attack (Batty, 2011). In particular, Mubarak’s regime claimed it matched the profile an al-Qaeda attack. Indeed, an Iraqi linked group to al-Qaeda had threatened to attack Egyptian Christians in November (Batty, 2011). However, Egypt had its own sectarian tensions quite apart from al-Qaeda.

Early in 2010 a drive-by shooting had killed six Christians and one Muslim policeman (Batty, 2010). Protests over church building were common, and concern over conversion had risen in the past year (Batty, 2010) when a Christian pastor’s wife had supposedly been abducted and held by her family because she had converted to Islam. In truth, she wished to divorce her husband and her family sequestered her in response.

Many Egyptians were sickened and outraged by the church bombing and Coptic protesters and police fought throughout the month of January over the bombing (el-Ghobashy, 2011; p. 2). Copts believed the regime failed to protect Christians (Fayed et. al, 2011). Indeed, the government seemed to do little in the case of the Coptic pastor or in the numerous disputes over church building, even when valid permits had been obtained and Copts had a legal right to build. In the case of Al-Qidiseen, the government swore loudly, made threats, and did nothing.
The third event is the Tunisian Revolt. On December 17, 2010 in Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire in Tunisia. Bouazizi was a 26-year-old university graduate who owned a vegetable cart because he could find no other work. Police claimed he had no permit to operate his vegetable cart and confiscated his produce. A despairing Bouazizi immolated himself. Enraged people headed for the streets in protest. The Tunisian government's crackdown killed at least 200 people but ultimately the Tunisian people managed to unseat president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 15, 2011 (Marzouki, 2011). Ben Ali’s fall was ten days before the Egyptian uprising began. People began to believe that the uprisings could spread.

*The First Egyptian Uprising*

In Egypt there were several attempted self-immolations (modeled after Mohamed Bouazizi) in front of government buildings prior to January 25, 2011 (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 24). Details are sparse and largely overshadowed by the uprising that followed. Suicide is forbidden in Islam: these were people that were believed to have no redemption coming. The desperation and rage required in carrying out an act that is believed to leave one bereft of any chance of final redemption was not lost on Egyptians.

By mid-January I heard talk on the streets of Cairo of a planned anti-government protest on January 25, National Police Day. No one knew how big the January 25 protests would be beforehand. In Cairo it is difficult to predict how big protests will be before they happen, largely because up until January 25th the Mubarak regime engaged in extremely high levels of repression (Abul-Magd, 2017; p. 185). Public resentment of the police was high, so much so that in the early days of the January 25, 2011 uprising people burned down police stations in Suez (Abul-Magd, 2017; p. 163) and elsewhere in the country (Genidy and Salam, 2016; p. 158). Thus, Egypt had seen rising worker strikes and protests under Mubarak and January 25 had two
advantages over other days: it was National Police Day in a country where people hated the
police and it was a holiday where most people were off work and available to protest. However,
January 25, 2011 began quietly.

I had a meeting the morning of January 25 at a cafe in Zamalek with a professor. The sun
was out and it was a pleasant day. My meeting ended around 12:00PM and I decided to stay and
enjoy some shīsha, or hookah, a common pastime in Egypt. I remembered the protests and
checked Twitter and Facebook. Both would be major sources of on the ground information in
both 2011 and 2013. At around 1:00 I learned that there was fighting on Batal Ahmed Abdel
Aziz Street near the Mohandessin section of the city. Since this street was on my way home in
Mohandessin at the time I left Zamalek and headed back to Mohandessin. I found no protest on
the way. For the last few months I had been planning a move to Rehab City. The protests pushed
me to speed up my plans.

Rehab City is an upper middle class suburb of Cairo and one of the gated communities
that were built in the 2000s. Many of the housing divisions there were still new in 2011. It was a
haven for members of the upper middle class as well as a small assortment of foreign (usually
American) converts to Islam who came to Egypt to participate in what they believed to be an
authentic Islamic lifestyle. Rehab City is located in the Fifth Settlement within a mile and a half
of the AUC campus. I was an AUC student at the time and needed to be closer to the American
University in Cairo than Mohandessin while I was writing my master’s thesis. I moved to Rehab
City the night of January 25 as the protests began to heat up.

Around January 27th there was a rumor that the government was going to shut down the
phones. Indeed, I was discussing this rumor over the Internet with a friend back in the United
States when the Internet was cut off, ending our conversation. It is generally accepted that the
phones and Internet were out for five days. Nonetheless outages differed throughout Egypt: I experienced four days of outage. Some landlines were operational during this time, but not all. The youth organizing some of the protests managed to use some of these operational landlines to coordinate in the absence of cellular access (El-Ghobashy, 2011) and people went door to door to organize in any case.

In the end, the regime’s plan to cut off the phones backfired. The security services’ walkie-talkies malfunctioned the following day (January 28) and they were unable to use their cell phones to coordinate a response, eventually leading to their defeat that day. Likewise unable to use their phones to check on relatives, many more people flooded the square to check on their loved ones (Shahin, 2012; p. 65).

The effect of the mobile and Internet shutoff on Egyptian sociality outside Tahrir Square was profound. By 2011 even some beggars on the streets sported mobile phones. People never seemed to cease talking on them. People in 2011 at cafes would talk loudly on the phone to their friends or family members. When the mobile network was cut, a silence seemed to fall over Cairo. People would go to cafes, take out their phones, look at them forlornly, and place their phones on the table as if they expected them to ring. After a few moments of silence (and sometimes staring at their phones hopefully) they would turn to the neighboring table and begin to talk. They spoke of the protests.

The Military

I was in a cafe on January 28, 2011, the Friday of Rage, when the military rolled into the streets of Cairo. They were greeted with adulation. A man in tears on Al-Jazeera explained “meya meya gish!” an expression meaning “the military is 100%, or the best.” The people thought the military was more supportive of them than the police (Fadel, 2016; p. 29). People on
the street chanted, “The people and the army are one hand!” (Aziz, 2016; p. 84). People in the
cafe cheered, but they were also debated this new development. They did not know yet what the
military's plans were. In any case, the military’s apparent siding with the revolutionaries on
January 28 increased their public regard, at least in the short term. This deception was reflective
of the military’s ability to feel which way the wind was blowing and would contribute to the
effectiveness of the mutiny and coup that would ultimately unseat Mubarak.

*The Police*

After protesters forced the security services to retreat on January 28, (Shahin, 2012; p. 65) the police receded from the streets. Shortly thereafter plainclothes thugs replaced the police
in Tahrir: the police had after January 28 had simply gone home, doffed their uniforms, and
come back to fight again. The government declared a national curfew: first 7:00PM, then
5:00PM, and then 3:00PM. The curfew proved to be ceremonial: people continued to go about
their daily lives in many parts of town after a few days.

The effect of police absence was obvious. In the first few days of the uprising 99 police
stations were burned to the ground (Genidy and Salam, 2016; p. 158). At first people were elated
that the oppressive police on the streets of Cairo were missing. Then rumors of looting began to
spread. People in Rehab City feared looters were coming from Cairo to threaten Rehab. Some
places, such as the Grand Mall in Maadi, were in fact looted during the 18 days of the uprising.
An alleged “gang of Bedouins” (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 42) looted Carrefour, an upper class
supermarket located near the al-Maadi section of the city after the police stationed there invited
the men in and then abandoned their (the police’s) posts. In Rehab City and many other places in
and around Cairo people were out in the streets with wooden boards, chains, and other
implements to protect their homes. They stopped and searched cars they did not recognize. These
ad-hoc neighborhood militias sprung up throughout Cairo and its surrounding environs to protect the home front as fighting raged in Tahrir.

On January 29 there were rumors that the government was emptying prisons in an attempt to create chaos on the streets. This included the infamous Tora Prison on the outskirts of Digla, Maadi. People near Tora Prison heard gunfire and explosions and saw tanks. The story of what happened at Tora and other Egyptian prison only emerged later and the information is incomplete. A few informants told me that that the government allegedly told the inmates to leave and that those who refused to go and were shot. Other people at the time believed there had been a prison break.

What is known about the situation at the prisons is that on January 29 and for 10 to 15 days after the government began to shoot prisoners with live ammunition in Tora Prison and Appeals Prison in Cairo (Maadi), Al-Qatta Prison in Giza, Shebin al-Qom Prison in Monofiya, Al-Abaadya Prison in Damanhour (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2011). Inmates interviewed by the Egyptian Initiative for Human Rights claim that the guards began to shoot people in their cells and those who ran from their cells were faced with live fire in the courtyards (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2011). Over 100 inmates were killed and hundreds more were injured (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2011). There may have been (and likely were) prison breaks (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2011) along with mass releases. Indeed, Mohammed Morsi, the future president of Egypt, was sprung from prison during this time by a gang of armed men (BBC News, 2016). Morsi had been arrested earlier in the uprising (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 42). Regardless, people I spoke to who had been near Tora Prison at the time claimed to have seen prisoners running down the streets and many I spoke to believed at the time that the regime had simply released a number of prisoners.
Between the 25th and the 31st of January I watched many upper middle class residents in Rehab City pack up and leave. Those who fled Rehab City left the country out of the fear that if the revolution succeeded everything would be taken from them. As politics was practiced in Egypt then and now, to the victor went the spoils. So why wouldn't the poor take from the rich as the rich had taken from them first? The members of the upper middle class that stayed held a march inside Rehab, calling for the downfall of the regime. As Rehab was a private exclave they faced no real opposition. There were no military and no police within the gates prior to the uprising, let alone now with the police absent from the streets and the military concentrated in Cairo and on the roads to the airport.

By January 31st the reaction to the unrest seemed to have temporarily normalized in Rehab City and elsewhere. For the first few days of the uprising none of the restaurants in the center of Rehab City had been open and many of the cafes in the market area had been shut. Throughout this period there was a run on the bank and a run on the grocery stores each day. By 3:00PM all the ATMs were out of money and grocery stores and kiosks had little besides rice and soda. Everyone feared that the next day the shipment of goods would not come, so they stockpiled food and cash. Long lines at ATMs were the norm. Egyptians got around withdrawal limits by forcing others to wait while they made multiple withdrawals. While the runs on the bank and grocery store did not cease, businesses slowly began to re-open. People had ignored the curfew almost from the beginning, so re-opening businesses was a logical step. This re-opening coincided with a brief lull in Tahrir Square, where the uprising seemed to stay in stasis or dwindle. In Rehab City panic and normalcy coincided.

On the night of January 31st Hosni Mubarak gave a speech. Egyptians expected him to resign on air. Instead Mubarak was angry and paternalistic. Mubarak said he would reshuffle his
cabinet and step down after the elections in September and that he would die on Egypt’s soil (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 44). Mubarak’s speech lead many to believe he never intended to leave at all. Tahrir was furious. Many others were in shock. The phones returned the next day, and the uprising continued.

On February 2nd I took a US State Department Evacuation flight out of Egypt. The way to the airport was lined with tanks. We were stopped multiple times by the military. I found the evacuation flight full of Egyptian American dual citizens laughing at their good fortune to be able to leave. I returned in mid-February after Mubarak had fallen.

As I was flying out of Egypt on February 2 the Battle of the Camel took place. It was so named because camel-drivers and men on horseback entered Tahrir in the thousands wielding machetes, clubs, and swords (Shahin, 2012; p. 67). High-level National Democratic Party (Mubarak’s party) officials and related businessmen had paid thugs, both police and otherwise, to drive the protesters out of Tahrir (Shahin, 2012; p. 65). The battle raged on for 18 hours and eventually Mubarak supporters made use of Molotov cocktails and sniper rifles (Shahin, 2012; p. 67). Nonetheless, the thugs failed to drive protesters out of Tahrir, and the uprising continued.

The Battle of the Camel was part of a trend: over the course of the 2011 uprising the police grew more and more violent, which increasingly turned people against the regime. Security services tried again and again to drive the protesters out and shut down the uprising. The military continued to occupy the streets but did nothing to either defend the people or help the police (Shahin, 2012; p. 67). In Tahrir conscripts had not been given bullets out of fear they would mutiny. Later people would learn that the military had been given the order to shoot protesters and did not comply (Nepstad, 2013; p. 342). Senior officers refused to give the order because they feared recruits would not obey (Nassif, 2012).
The final straw for Mubarak's regime turned out to be when the workers joined the uprising in mass strikes (Mahdi, 2012). On February 9th, tens of thousands of workers broke with the Egyptian Trade Union Federation, the only legal trade union in Egypt, and struck (Beinin, 2011). With the police defeated, the workers against him, the military in mutiny, and only the secret police on his side, Mubarak's last structures of power failed him. On February 11th the military forced Mubarak to resign in the first of what would eventually become two coup d’états in two years (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 53). Mubarak turned the presidency over to Omar Suleiman, then head of the hated secret police. Shortly thereafter Suleiman abdicated as well. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces headed by Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi was now in control of Egypt.

The Protesters

Several organizations ultimately contributed to the success of the uprising. In particular, Kifaya and April 6 had been active since 2005, sponsoring persistent protests (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012; p. 364). Kifaya, or Enough, is a pro-democracy movement that arose out of protests in 2000 over the Israeli occupation, but that truly rose to prominence in 2003 over the second Iraq War when they “broke a taboo” (International Crisis Group, 2011; p. 1) by calling for Mubarak’s resignation (International Crisis Group, 2011; p. 1). The April 6 Youth movement was founded to support the Egyptian labor movement in 2007 and was the first youth movement to use Facebook (Lim, 2012; p. 239). April 6 was grounded in its predecessor movement, Kifaya, and many of its members were former or current members of Kifaya as well (Lim, 2012; p. 240).

Educated middle and upper middle class youth, many of them connected in the previous decade by Kifaya and April 6th activism, launched calls for the January 2011 protests through Facebook and other social media platforms and lead during the early days (Shahin, 2012; p. 48;
Marfleet, 2016; p. 24). In particular, the first calls for protest came from the *Kulna Khaled Said*, or “We are All Khaled Said” Facebook group (Shahin, 2012; p. 61). Many of the Facebook groups used to organize the uprising had large memberships, but with the exception of *Kulna Khaled Said*, most came from protest movements active in the 2000s: the Khaled Said Facebook group had 400,000 members in January 2011 (Shahin, 2012; p. 55), the April 6 Youth Movement had 70,000 members (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 4) and the El-Baradei group, part of the organization run by the popular reformist political figure Mohammed al-Baradei, had 300,000 (Shahin, 2012; p. 55). While social media is not a perfect measure of participation it does hint at the amount of middle class and upper middle class youth who might have participated. In addition, while the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization kept their distance (they only formally told their members to go down after January 28, the Friday of Rage), some of their younger members participated in planning the uprising as well (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 31, 35).

It is also important to note that while the first calls to protest were on social media organizers also used text messages and distributed 20,000 pamphlets in the days leading up to the uprising (Lim, 2012; p. 243). The crowd on the first day of the uprising was roughly 80,000 (Lim, 2012; p. 243).

I discuss the participation of middle class youth here because this is a dissertation about the middle class, and particularly the lower middle class. However, it is important to realize that while these youth led some of the protests of the early days, they were not alone on the streets, their leadership was not the only leadership, and Mubarak did not fall solely because of them. As time went on and regime violence increased, the uprising grew. Overall, the protesters were composed of a wide range of groups and individuals that changed from day to day, but included workers, members of the middle class, and the urban poor (Marfleet, 2016; p. 29).
Decline and the Road to the 2013 Uprising

I returned to Cairo a few days after Mubarak’s resignation. People I encountered were relaxed and elated. Open political conversation took place on the streets, on the metro, and in cafes. The military was in control of the country and enjoyed public support until late 2011 when the people finally realized that the Supreme Council of Armed Forces had little intention of leaving power (Aziz, 2016; p. 53). Regardless, February 2011’s revolutionary excitement soon met harsh reality. After the fall of Mubarak military and police power in the country had been set back, but far from defeated.

In March 2011 a document began to circulate on Facebook purported to come from state security. This document contained a plan to carry out the bombing of the previously mentioned Alexandrian Coptic Church in December 2010 (McGregor, 2011). The origin of the paper is not known, but the document purported to be plans for a “false flag operation” (McGregor, 2011) to bomb the Coptic Church in order to scare the people and cause them to cling to the government and in doing so shore up its power. Many Egyptians were again enraged. On the evening of March 5, 2011 Egyptian protestors raided their local state security offices, and in particular the main office of the Amn Al-Dawla, the state security services, the place known in the Nasr City section of Cairo known as the “Capital of Hell” (Doyle, 2011).

At state security offices Egyptians found hidden torture chambers with devices for applying electric shocks (Doyle, 2011). Despite the secret police going through an orgy of shredding, Egyptians found a range of documents showing that security services had been monitoring nearly everything in the country. Among the un-shredded and half-burnt files were compromising audiotapes of prominent Egyptian citizens (Doyle, 2011), files on the private lives of media figures and political activists (MacFarquar, 2011), documents detailing meetings with
mobile phone operators prior to the internet and phone shutdown of 2011, the monitoring of trade unions, the Muslim Brotherhood, and even the movements of Hosni Mubarak and his wife in the few days before Mubarak fell (Black, 2011). There were also “accounts of opposition meetings, transcripts of private phone calls, lists of SSIS agents planted in opposition groups, and even logs specifying how many votes candidates would receive in parliamentary elections” (McGregor, 2011). In what should have been a warning of the days to come, the military took control of at least one security building in Alexandria back from protesters and the officers began to shred documents themselves (BBC News, 2011) and officers confiscated retrieved documents from citizens (el-Deeb and Associated Press, 2011).

After the March raids State Security appeared to have gone silent. On March 11, Interior Minister Major General Mansour el-Essawy claimed that he had disbanded state security and a new force was being formed, the “National Security Force” (Al-Jazeera and Agencies, 2011).

After January 2011 and until 2013 the police and secret police were notably absent from the streets, a sharp change from the Mubarak era when the police were on every street corner. During the Mubarak years Cairo was imagined to be quite safe compared to cities of a similar size. The police forces were (and still are) vast. It was estimated that security services in the country (police and secret police, not the military) numbered as many as 130,000 people. In the months following 2011 the police were ineffective. In the absence of public tolerance for their abuses, the police were afraid and “demoralized” (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Prior to 2011 police would enter shops and demand to be given whatever they wished. Now they paid full price (Kirkpatrick, 2011). In the absence of their once-great repressive ability, the police did not know how to behave (Kirkpatrick, 2011). One of the consequences of the repression under Mubarak’s rule had been the relatively low amount of street crime. Yet in the absence of real police action
crime rose 200% between January and May 2011 (Hendawi, 2011). Egyptians began to speak to me about their fear of being kidnapped or mugged. Five attempted jailbreaks took place in May 2011 alone, the grandniece of Anwar Sadat was kidnapped, and a mob in Maadi hospitalized a traffic officer (Kirkpatrick, 2011). People reported armed gunmen robbing restaurants, coffee shops, and other commercial establishments. Carjacking and kidnapping became issues (OSAC, 2012). Incidents of purse snatching and pickpocketing also rose (OSAC, 2012).

In October 2011 a group of Coptic Christians organized a march from the working class neighborhood of Shubra toward downtown to (Ibrahim, 2012) protest the burning of a Coptic Church in Al-Merinab, Aswan on September 30 (Mosad, 2016; p. 115). Within an hour of the start of the march, at Maspero, the state television building, unknown attackers assaulted the protesters with rocks and bottles (Ibrahim, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 91). Then the military itself attacked as the Copts reached Maspero (Ibrahim, 2012). In video footage, the military ran over protesting Copts with ATVs and dumped their bodies in the Nile, while eyewitness accounts claimed they fired at Copts while shouting “Allahu Akbar!” (Ibrahim, 2012). Witnesses claimed live ammunition was fired (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 90), and wounds prove that this was indeed the case (Ibrahim, 2012). As the military was attacking the protesters state television told Egyptians to “come and protect the armed forces” (Ibrahim, 2012). State-run TV host Rasha Magdy claimed the military was under attack (Ibrahim, 2012). All told, the military killed 28 Coptic Egyptians (Clarke, 2013; p. 211).

The military’s actions at Maspero were a stark contrast to the mood in Egypt just a few months before: during the uprising Christians had protected Muslims during prayer and Muslims had protected Christians. People chanted that Muslims and Christians were one hand even as they made the same chant about the people and the military. Yet this unity had been fragile from
the beginning. Five days after the fall of Mubarak, on February 22, a local military unit attacked the Monastery of St. Bishoy in Wadi Natrun, ostensibly for building a fence without a permit. The military gunned down an unknown number of people, razed the fences and brick walls, and left (Christiansen, 2015; p. 17). Two weeks after the fall of Mubarak, unknown individuals torched the Two Martyrs Church in Helwan. Protests over the attack resulted in the deaths of 13 Muslims and Christians (Brownlee, 2013). In May 2011 fifteen people were killed, including at least four Copts, and two hundred were injured when Churches were set on fire in Imbaba (Brownlee 2013).

Coptic Christians were not the only ones facing difficulties. On February 1, 2012 at Port Said Stadium, 72 members of Ultras Ahlawy, a football club, died during a riot at football match (Rommel, 2016; p. 39). The Ultras Ahlawy had stood on the front lines of the 2011 uprising. Demonstrators sought them out for their help because they had experience dealing with security forces (Shahin, 2012; p. 63). They were the youth who threw the tear gas canisters back at security services and fought back with rocks and stones. On February 1, 2012 Security services shut the gates to the stadium and watched as a riot that the security services may have sparked themselves resulted in the deaths of 72 Ultras (Gawad, 2017). The Ultras and many others came to believe that this was an act of revenge by the security services for the Ultras participation in the 2011 uprising (Rommel, 2016; p. 39). The government of Egypt subsequently banned spectators at football stadium matches for several years after.

All of these incidents troubled Egyptians and made them feel less safe. The revolution for all its successes could not protect them. Many people believed they were taking control of their country again, but in the wake of the government’s toppling things seemed, for many, to get
worse instead of better. In the midst of these events Egyptians turned their attentions to elections, which began to take place in late 2011.

**Heading to Elections**

Following Mubarak’s resignation, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) and its head, the Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, were in control of Egypt. While the military’s move to depose Mubarak was met with wide support, people began to push for elections and a new constitution by fall 2011.

The length of the transitional period and how long the military would stay in power proved to be a source of controversy. The youth revolutionaries never really built meaningful political organizations, and following the fall of Mubarak’s NDP, the Muslim Brotherhood was the most organized political party in the country. A faster transition strongly favored the Brotherhood: everyone else needed time to organize. When the military proposed a series of constitutional amendments in March 2011 to limit presidential terms to eight years, establish new electoral rules, and ban religious parties, (Marfleet, 2016; p. 65) despite the ban on religious parties, Islamists embraced the referendum (Brown, 2013; p. 47; Fahmy, 2016; p. 86). The new electoral rules favored them by setting an earlier date for elections. The revolutionaries, including Mohammed el-Baradei, the voice of middle class reformism, (Marfleet, 2016; p. 65) opposed the referendum because they did not want to amend the old constitution: they wanted a new one (El-Gabaly and Farid, 2012; p. 228). The referendum passed with 77% of the vote (Hellyer, 2016; p. 30). The revolutionaries lost. Then the military decided the amendments were instead a new constitutional declaration. Again the revolutionary coalitions and the Islamists were split: the Islamists supported the military declaration and the revolutionaries did not
Parliamentary elections then took place in November 2011 and Presidential elections in June 2012.

With regard to elections, the Muslim Brotherhood repeatedly changed its position on its course of action. The Brotherhood initially claimed they would run for no more than 30% of the seats in Parliament (Hellyer, 2016; p. 43). Later the Brotherhood backtracked and said they would contest 50% of Parliamentary seats (Hellyer, 2016; p. 46). By October 2011 the Muslim Brotherhood said they would go after as many seats as they were able to contest (Fahmy, 2016; p. 87). The Brotherhood also claimed they would not field a candidate for the presidency. By 2012 they also backtracked on this as well (Fahmy, 2016; p. 88). The Muslim Brotherhood eventually took 54% of seats in the parliament (Fahmy, 2016; p. 87). When combined with the Salafi Nour party Islamists held 70% of parliament and the post-revolutionary parties took only 10% (Fadel, 2016; p. 30). The Supreme Court then dissolved parliament two weeks prior to the Presidential elections (Fahmy, 2016; p. 88; Hellyer, 2016; p. 96), an incident I will return to shortly.

The Presidential Elections

The 2012 presidential elections were chaotic. I will recount here only some of the candidates and events. Abu Hazem Abu Ismail was a wildly charismatic Salafi preacher running for president. His devoted and sometimes fanatic (in the television sense) followers were called the Hazemoon (Ahram Online, 2013). Ahmed Shafiq was the military's man on the ballot. Shafiq was a former Air Marshall and he had been one of Mubarak's right hands, the ex-minister of Civil Aviation. He was considered felūl, or a remnant of the old regime. Mohammed al-Baradei said he would run, hired an anthropologist to tell him about the poor and then proceeded to waffle about whether or not he should run. Ultimately he was never on the ballot. Hamdeen
Sabbahi, the leftist candidate, was on the ballot. The Muslim Brotherhood wanted to put up their moneyman, Khairat al-Shater for the presidential bid. The government deemed him a convicted felon and ineligible to run. Al-Shater had been in prison for years before the 2011 uprising (Hellyer, 2016; p. 57). The Brotherhood then put forward the much less articulate Mohammed Morsi. Egyptians called him the Brotherhood's "spare tyre" (Hellyer, 2016; p. 101). These were just a few of the candidates.

The first round of elections resulted in the emergence of Mohammed Morsi and Ahmed Shafiq as the two leaders, and led to a runoff. Morsi took 25% of the vote, Shafiq 24% (Hellyer, 2016; p. 60). The government delayed announcing the results of the runoff. Rumors in Egypt held that the state was attempting to head off violence between Islamists and itself if Morsi lost (Sailer, 2012). The eventual state declaration of the results said Morsi had garnered 51.7% of the vote and Shafiq 48.3% (Hellyer, 2016; p. 61). The state declared Morsi the winner. In a final note, just as Morsi’s success was declared, the military announced a new constitutional amendment that stripped the presidency of much of its power and left the SCAF with the only say “over all military matters, including the appointment of commanders.” (Sailer, 2012). If Morsi wanted to declare war, he also had to seek permission from SCAF (Sailer, 2012).

Moreover, upon the dissolution of parliament SCAF controlled all legislative and budgetary authority in the country (Sailer, 2012). It was a “quiet coup d’État” (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 99).

Islamist success in parliament and at the presidency came as a shock to some Egyptian elites and outside observers. Yet after the Mubarak years the Brotherhood was the largest political organization in Egypt. Their leadership consisted of upper middle class businessmen who were at the time seen as political moderates. Their conservatism had a strong appeal to the lower middle class and working class (al-Anani, 2015; p. 533) and much of the core of the
Muslim Brotherhood was middle class (Marfleet, 2016; p. 145) built up by “activism in the syndicates and professional unions and the provision of high quality fee-based education” (Tadros, 2014; p. 7). Moreover, 20 million people live in the greater Cairo metro area, but the rest of the population, totaling 60 million, does not. Alexandria in particular was a known Islamist stronghold. The Salafis had survived the Mubarak years by being politically quietist. Instead they, like the Brotherhood (Vannetzel, 2017; p. 231-232), had taken up charitable causes. In the end the Brotherhood and the Salafis held a good deal of support from the lower middle class, working class, and the poor all over Egypt while the revolutionary coalitions drew much of their support from Cairo itself (Marfleet, 2016; p. 159).

Other candidates had their own problems. Hamdeen Sabbahi had started with a large base of support, but it dwindled as he allied himself with the National Salvation Front (NSF), which was associated with former members of Mubarak’s cadre such as Amr Moussa (Marfleet, 2016; p. 159), the former Secretary General of the Arab League and Mubarak’s former minister of foreign affairs. The NSF disowned protests that were attacked by police, further alienating Sabbahi’s supporters (Marfleet, 2016; p. 159). In the end, Sabbahi did well in the elections, but his newfound felūl associations ultimately put him behind Morsi. Morsi himself gathered a number of votes simply because Shafiq was felūl. In perspective however, Morsi garnered only a quarter of the vote in the first round, and just over half the vote in the second round (Hellyer, 2016; p. 103) in an election in which more than half the electorate did not show up to vote in either round (Hellyer, 2016; p. 103). Morsi and the Brotherhood did not represent a majority by any understanding of the word.
The Muslim Brotherhood in Power

In the 2011 and 2012 elections Egyptians had put their hope in the democratic process to ensure a peaceful outcome (Fadel, 2016; pp. 30-31) and the electoral process itself was remarkably peaceable. Egyptians also hoped that an elected leader would be more sympathetic and willing to meet their needs than a dictator. The fact that they were disappointed bears discussion. The elected parliament in 2012 turned out to be 70% Islamist and Morsi represented the Brotherhood at the Presidency. By any legal standard, Morsi should have been able to carry out reforms. That Morsi and the Islamists did not carry out meaningful reform was a result of a number of barriers, one of the earliest of which was the Field Marshal and head of SCAF, Mohammed Tantawi, that had formerly been in control of the country.

When Morsi became president Mohammed Tantawi did not step down from his military post. Tantawi had intimated he wanted the presidency for himself. During the period before the elections, Tantawi had gone down to Tahrir Square in a business suit to meet and greet the people, a tactic many believed to be meant to rouse popular support for his future presidency (Kirkpatrick, 2018 p. 57). It seemed obvious that the head of SCAF and the current president could not remain in power at the same time. Indeed, Tantawi’s taking power after Mubarak in many ways was simply a return to the status quo (Aziz, 2016; p. 42) and Tantawi’s presidential ambitions merely confirmed the fact. For any real change to take place, Tantawi had to go.

On August 5th, 2012 sixteen Egyptian soldiers were killed in a militant attack on the eastern Border. Pressure mounted within the military to take a step back from politics and focus instead on national security (Hellyer, 2016; p. 98). In an ironic twist, Morsi appeared to use this pressure to retire Tantawi with the public aide of his then defense minister Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, the man who would later depose him. Facts are unclear on what really happened. SCAF may
have reshuffled their officers and allowed the Brotherhood to believe it was their victory (Hellyer, 2016; p. 98). In any case, Tantawi was shuffled: he became a presidential advisor instead (Hellyer, 2016; p 98). Morsi was no longer dealing with a “co-president” (Hellyer, 2016; p. 98), but little real change had taken place.

The next barrier Morsi faced was the dissolution of the newly elected parliament. Two days before the presidential election the newly elected Islamist-majority parliament was dissolved by the Supreme Constitutional Court, which claimed that the constitutional amendment used to speed the elections was itself unconstitutional (Fahmy, 2016; p. 88). Two weeks after taking office Morsi attempted to reinstitute parliament by decree. The Supreme Constitutional Court reversed his decree and handed legislative power back to SCAF (Fahmy, 2016; p. 90). Without an elected parliament and legislative power in the hands of SCAF, any legal reform process stalled.

There was also the issue of the constitution. Prior to the presidential elections, parliament had chosen a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. Liberal and revolutionary elements hoped a new constitution would do more to preserve democracy and individual liberty than the previous constitution had (Fadel, 2016; p. 32). An Islamist dominated parliament had elected the constitutional assembly, so it was unsurprisingly largely Islamist (Fadel, 2016; p. 32). The constitution the assembly produced was controversial. Liberals and revolutionaries felt that the new constitution did not do enough to protect individual or human rights. Instead it over-emphasized traditional religious values. They also argued that a constitution, due to its universal nature, should be consented to by all or it was not legitimate (Fadel, 2016; p. 32).

By 2012 a case to dissolve the constituent assembly was pending (Fadel, 2016; p. 33). In an attempt to head off a judicial dissolution of the constituent assembly rewriting the
constitution, Morsi attempted to pass a declaration that put his decrees beyond the courts (The New Yorker, 2017; Fadel, 2016; p. 32). A case against the decree went to court, and Morsi lost. Viewed sympathetically, Morsi was attempting to insulate the constitutional process from judicial interference in order to preserve the transitional roadmap that had been laid out by the military (Fadel, 2016; p. 32). The revolutionary and liberal coalitions, who suspected the Brotherhood of trying to institute a new totalitarian state in any case, viewed Morsi’s decree as an attempt to put himself above the law. They accused him of acting like a “new pharaoh” (Hellyer, 2016; p. 110). Protests erupted all over the country, and often ended with burning down the local offices of the Brotherhood’s political party, Freedom and Justice Party (Hellyer, 2016; p. 111). Morsi lost any cooperation he may have had from liberal or revolutionary coalitions within Egypt, isolating the Brotherhood (Fadel, 2016; p. 32). The new constitution eventually did pass with 2/3 of the vote (Hellyer, 2016; p. 121). However, the referendum had a low public turnout and the damage to the Brotherhood and Morsi’s administration had already been done.

Alongside the legislative and constitutional stall, Egypt’s Coptic minority was facing its own problems under Morsi. Egypt’s Coptic Christians had fought in the streets alongside Muslims during the uprising. Egypt’s Copts are an “unranked ethnic group” (Sedra, 1999; p. 220) in that they have membership across all classes and sectors of Egyptian life. Under Mubarak the Coptic Pope had existed in a “millet partnership” (Sedra, 1999; p. 227) with Mubarak. Mubarak provided resources for the church establishment, which then provided resources for Copts. Thus the pope was dependent on Mubarak, the Church was dependent on the Pope, and lay Copts dependent upon the church (Sedra, 1999; p. 228). The uprising upended that political order: Mubarak was no longer a patron who could or would protect them. In Mubarak’s place Morsi did nothing for Coptic Christians. Kidnappings of Copts in Upper Egypt,
already a problem under the transitional government, continued, and violence against Copts rose (Brownlee, 2013). On April 5, 2013 five Copts were killed in al-Khusus in Greater Cairo. The attacks spread to St. Mark’s Cathedral on April 7 where police joined a mob of thugs assaulting the Cathedral full of those mourning the lost at al-Khusus (Brownlee, 2013). Morsi offered an immediate investigation. It bore little fruit. In any case, two months later Morsi was out of office and many Copts had hit the streets along with others to see him gone (Brownlee, 2013).

Gas and Power Crises

Starting in March 2013 there was a gas shortage in Egypt. The long waits at gas stations turned many roads in Cairo into parking lots with cars lined up three deep and over a mile back. I experienced this myself one day in early June I decided to take a taxi back from downtown in order to get home. I found myself stuck in traffic several miles from my apartment. There are several gas stations located on the Autostrad and my driver, while remarkably patient, could do nothing about the jam we were in. We found ourselves stranded in grueling heat and barely moving at all. I paid the taxi. The driver merely shrugged and smiled. He was not going anywhere. I walked back to my apartment. I was fortunate. Most people in the traffic jam could not leave their cars and people continued to remain in the heat for hours each day. Traffic would build up over the course of the day and by 2:00 or 3:00PM each day roads with gas stations along them were brought to a standstill by the gas crisis. Gas was in fact coming into the country. The people thought at the time much of it was being sold on the black market. Morsi’s government seemed to be able to do nothing to end the shortage and lines could extend up to seven or eight hours. Later it emerged that the secret police and the Central Security Forces were responsible for the gas crisis (Marfleet, 2016; p. 164). Morsi in fact had little to no control over security services (Fadel, 2016; p. 35), so whether or not he was aware of the source of the crisis,
there was little he could do about it aside from use his bully pulpit to denounce the security services. Morsi chose to say nothing, and administratively he was able to do nothing. Morsi’s inaction, or the appearance of it, angered Egyptians and made Morsi appear weak.

If the gas crisis was a source of irritation and anger, then the electrical crisis proved to be a source of outright fury for many Egyptians of almost all social classes. Between May and June 2013 Cairo underwent multiple heat waves, with temperatures hitting above 110F. Rolling brownouts lasting three to four hours at a time plagued all parts of the city. Some sections of the city were hit harder than others, with wealthier areas supposedly seeing fewer outages. The brownouts were centrally controlled to conserve the supposedly weak power grid and some places were supposed to be immune, but hospitals were as vulnerable to power loss as residences. It was widely believed that areas of the city where the ministers and government officials lived saw no outages. Areas outside of Cairo saw power outages extending for days. Central Security was also responsible for the power crisis (Marfleet, 2016; p. 164) and like the gas crisis, Morsi could do little about it due to his lack of control over the security apparatus. Again, Morsi chose to publicly say nothing about the cause of the crisis.

Hot weather brings fights on the metro lines and in the streets. The constant power outages exacerbated the problem. In the streets traffic jams seemed interminable. The heat was grueling: Cairenes and many outside the city had nowhere to go for relief. Their anger was palpable. Again, the Egyptian government had little to say about the cause of the crisis. Instead the government told Egyptians to tough it out: they should be like their leaders who were supposedly stoic in the heat. The government held up the Prime Minister, Hisham Qandil who, they said, would not allow air conditioning at the ministerial meetings no matter how hot it
became. This self-righteous behavior only made many already hot, sweaty, and frustrated Egyptians angrier.

At the height of the gas and power crises in June 2013 Morsi appointed 17 governors, eight of them members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Morsi filled the Luxor post with a former member of Gamaat Islamiyya, the Islamic Group. Gamaat Islamiya had engaged in low-level insurgency, much of it in Upper Egypt, between 1993 and 1997. Gamaat Islamiya had been quiet since the early 2000s when it declared an end to hostilities and put down its weapons. However, none of my informants at the time had forgotten that an offshoot of Gamaat Islamiya had committed the infamous Luxor Massacre of 1997 in which 62 tourists had been killed or that it was a member of another offshoot of this group that assassinated Anwar Sadat in 1981. To put a former member of the Gamaat in charge of Luxor appeared tone-deaf to Egyptians hoping that the tourist trade could be revived.

Morsi’s ability to act was not helped by the fact that Egyptian government was badly affected by poor growth connected to the global financial crisis in 2008/2009 (Nabil, 2013). Between 2010 and 2012 growth had slowed from 5.5% to 0.3% (Nabil, 2013). Tourism, which had made up 13% of the economy in the aughts, had decreased sharply following the 2011 uprising (Nabil, 2013). The Egyptian budget deficit was over 13% (Kingsley, 2013C). Egypt’s foreign exchange reserves had dropped 60% and the pound devalued rapidly (Kingsley, 2013C) from 5.5 to 1 in 2011 to 6.5 to 1 in 2012. Egypt’s exports were affected by lower demand. The devaluation of the pound and the resulting dollar deficit lead to rising food prices, rising unemployment, and contributed to the shortage of fuel and cooking gas (Kingsley, 2013). Morsi’s government made efforts to close a deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), yet constant instability and popular opposition to the IMF in the country made it difficult to close
a deal (Plumer, 2013). The government in Egypt was at the time understandably reluctant to agree to the IMF's terms of cutting spending and subsidies.

Morsi had issues with State Security as well. State security services “refused to protect the offices of the Muslim Brotherhood and its political party, the Freedom and Justice Party….even businesses affiliated, or thought to be affiliated, with the Muslim Brotherhood could not rely on police or military protection.” (Fadel, 2016; p. 35). State security services did not even protect the presidential palace when demonstrators attacked it in December after Morsi’s constitutional decree (Fadel, 2016; p. 35).

Administratively the Brotherhood was hamstrung and with their public behavior they only made things worse. Morsi had narrowly defeated Shafiq in the elections. A substantial number of people did not want the Brothers in power to start with. Yet because they believed that the majority of people preferred them to the old regime, the Brothers did not bother to win people over once they were in power. The Brotherhood never sought “consensus” (Hellyer, 2016; p. 96) from the populace for their choices. Instead the Brotherhood, even though arriving in the wake of a revolution, played politics as usual (Hellyer, 2016; p. 105). Morsi’s constitutional decree was particularly divisive and resulted in the country becoming increasingly polarized and violent (Hellyer, 2016; p. 116). By January 2013, revolutionary activists were documenting Brotherhood and military actions calling them kazibūn, liars (Hellyer, 2016; p. 129). SCAF and the intelligence services fomented the protests that resulted in Morsi’s ouster, but Morsi and the Brotherhood set the stage for it.

By June 2013 Morsi was internally paralyzed. The courts had dissolved the parliament before Morsi had even assumed office (Fahmy, 2016; p. 88), and SCAF had snatched most of the power of the presidency before Morsi was declared the winner of the elections (Hellyer, 2016; p.
Those institutions that had responded to Morsi in the beginning had begun to rebel (Hellyer, 2016). From the outside it appeared that while heat waves roiled a country without sufficient power and gas lines stretched for miles, Morsi was doing nothing about it. Ultimately the Brotherhood’s declining popularity lead to an opening for Tamarod, the Rebels.

*Tamarod: the Rebels*

In Arabic, Tamarod means “Rebel”. In May 2013 when I arrived in Egypt, Tamarod youth were all over the streets spreading fliers and calling for an early election. The protests were to take place on June 30, the anniversary of Morsi’s election. In 2013 Tamarod was seen as a plucky youth movement trying to overturn what they saw as an increasingly tyrannical Islamist presidency. I heard conversations about Tamarod and June 30th on the metro, the streets, and in cafes.

*June 30th*

The Egyptian state media said that on June 30th thirty one million people hit the streets and protested against Mohammed Morsi. They called it the largest protest in the history of mankind. It was an untruthful statement. The protests were indeed large, and perceived to be larger than January 2011. Yet, a larger reported protest lends greater legitimacy to claims of opposition to Morsi (Read, 2013; pp. 73-74). Later estimates informed by the use of Google Maps and other services argue that the numbers were closer to 700,000 in Cairo proper. Protesters filled the streets in cities elsewhere in Egypt as well, but it was unlikely that there were more than a few million all over the country.

In 2013 workers, front-line fighters from 2011, and large numbers of the middle class went out to protest (Marfleet, 2016; p. 164). The streets of Maadi where I lived were deserted on the 30th, and most shops were shut with their gates down and locked. Everyone was either at the
protests or hiding at home waiting for the crisis to pass. For a cramped metropolitan city of 20 million this was an eerie time.

On July 1, the day after the protest, the military gave all parties 48 hours to resolve their differences. Morsi continued to insist on his legitimacy, as did his supporters. Privately Morsi was reaching out to his opposition, trying to make compromises (Kirkpatrick, 2018; pp. 234-235). Some Islamists called for violence, though significantly many of the hard line parties began to split with Morsi. Gamaat Islamiya called for peaceful protests to support Morsi and the Salafi Nour party, previously staunch allies of the Muslim Brotherhood, called for Morsi to step down.

On July 3, a few hours after the deadline passed Minister of Defense Abdel Fattah al-Sisi issued a joint statement with Adly Mansour, head of the Supreme Constitutional Court, Mohammed al-Baradei, Ahmed al-Tayyeb, the Grand Mufti of Al-Azhar, and Baba Tawadros, the Coptic Pope. Al-Sisi spoke, saying that Morsi had been removed as president. His speech was followed by speeches from Tawadros, al-Tayyeb, and el-Baradei. They did not announce that Morsi was to be jailed. Celebration erupted all over in the country. Tahrir was consumed with elation. People cheered the military and set off fireworks. In Maadi people were cheering, waving flags, and driving up and down the streets honking their horns in jubilation.

It is difficult to say what happened the night of July 3rd leading into July 4th outside of the main anti-Morsi protest spots in Tahrir and in the Delta. All of the Islamist-run stations in Egypt went black that night, shut down by the military. Their hosts were rumored to be arrested, though revelations in the days that followed made their arrests difficult to verify. Rabaa’ al-Adaweya, which had become the main gathering point for Islamist pro-Morsi protests over the course of July 3rd (Read, 2013; p. 85), went dark: there were no feeds or news coming from the Internet or
television. Some Brotherhood members began spreading rumors that a massacre was occurring. In retrospect this rumor was a chilling foreshadowing.

The Islamists planned a major counter-protest on Friday, July 5th. After prayers they planned to march on the headquarters of the Republican Guard in Mohandessin and Tahrir Square to demand the release of Morsi. Mohammed al-Badei, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Saad al-Katatny, the Secretary-General of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, appeared at the protests and spoke, giving shock to many who had believed they were in custody. Badei claimed they would “give their souls” for the nation. After nightfall on July 5 fighting broke out. Brotherhood supporters marched up the 6th of October Bridge at Abdel Moneim Abdel Riad Square near the Egyptian Museum. They attempted to reach the state television building at Maspero and the Tamarod protests at Tahrir. I watched the live footage as fighting raged for hours at Abdel Moneim Abdel Riad Square, with both sides losing and regaining ground in a seemingly endless back and forth. Eventually residents of Boulaq, the neighborhood where Maspero is located, ejected Morsi’s supporters from Maspero and the military moved in at Abdel Moneim Abdel Riad Square and broke the lines of the pro-Morsi protesters there.

*The Republic Guard Headquarters Massacre*

On the night of July 7th leading into the 8th pro-Morsi protesters had gone down to the Republican Guard Headquarters in Mohandessin. The Republican Guard was the unit tasked with protecting the president and reminiscent of the Roman Praetorians rumors said that Morsi was being held at their headquarters. At 3AM at the start of prayers the military opened fire and began shooting protesters in the back. Fifty-one people died (Kingsley and Green, 2013). The
military claimed that the Morsi protesters had planned to raid the Republican Guard
Headquarters. The protesters had bullets in their backs.

Afterwards the Brotherhood’s main sites of protest were Rabaa al-Adaweya Square in
Nasr City and al-Nahda Square near Cairo University in Giza. On the 29\textsuperscript{th} of July, state security
forces attacked a sit-in at a mosque close to Rabaa al-Adaweya (Kingsley and Beaumont, 2013).
82 Islamists died (Kingsley, 2013). An official announcement followed days later: state security
services, though disbanded after 2011, were being reactivated (Kingsley, 2013).

\textit{The Rabaa’ al-Adaweya Massacre}

The beginning of the end for pro-Brotherhood protests was at Rabaa al-Adaweya Square
in Nasr City and al-Nahda Square near Cairo University in Giza on August 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2013. There had
been rumors that the Brotherhood was holding weapons at Rabaa’ al-Adaweya under the stage
they had constructed. Rumors also held that the Brotherhood was torturing people under the
stage. Plots and conspiracies were all over the Egyptian state news. The Muslim Brotherhood’s
resolve was weakening: they were beginning to talk about a negotiated exit for Morsi.

At dawn prayers on August 14, 2013 more than 85,000 protesters holed up at Rabaa al-
Adaweya Square emerged to hear loudspeakers from the police and military urging them to leave
the square peacefully. Protesters found themselves surrounded by military and police. The police
moved in with guns and armored personnel carriers while the military secured the perimeter.
When the fighting started those in Nahda square retreated to the Giza Zoo and the Orman
Gardens nearby. Protesters at the Giza Zoo and Orman Gardens fought with rocks and sticks
against soldiers and police with machine guns. Once Rabaa’ al-Adaweya and Nahda squares had
been cleared at least 1,000 people lay dead from Rabaa square alone (Human Rights Watch,
2014; p. 13) with over 3,994 injured (Read, 2013; p.67). The death toll was more than the
Chinese government killed in Tianamen Square in 1989. The three days after Rabaa’ al-Adaweya brought violence to Cairo, Alexandria, and the Egyptian Delta. Angry Brotherhood supporters torched churches, government buildings, and attacked police and at least 173 more people died (Read, 2013; p. 68). The government claimed that they were fired upon by protesters at Rabaa’ Al-Adaweya and al-Nahda squares. However, a Human Rights Watch investigation determined that the use of firearms by protesters was extremely limited and that the force the government used was entirely disproportional to any weapons the population in these areas may have held (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

The Rabaa al-Adaweya and al-Nahda Square massacres sharply divided the population of Egypt. There were large numbers of Egyptians who cheered the bloodbath, while others believed it a grievous wrong. Yet in a society as closely knit as Cairo, the Rabaa' massacre meant that many lost kin, friends, and acquaintances there and in the days that followed.

Later it was discovered that Tamarod had been infiltrated from the beginning by the mukhabarat, or secret police, and the military (Marfleet, 2016; 162-163). In retrospect, the military's support of Tamarod should have been obvious to everyone. The democratic option for Egyptians who disapproved of Morsi was to call new parliamentary elections, not overthrow the president and there were no legal grounds for a new earlier presidential election (Fadel, 2016; p. 36). Demonstrators left no option in their uprising but for the military to intervene. In doing so they discarded political parties and elected officials as true representatives of the country (Fadel, 2016; p. 36). They believed the military would topple Morsi in the interests of democracy (Fadel, 2016; p. 36). As everyone would discover in a few months time, the military would simply take the opportunity to rule for themselves.

_Sisi's Election_
Since Morsi was deposed in July 2013 Adly Mansour was prime minister. In truth, Defense Minister Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was running the country from that point forward. Al-Sisi’s assumption to the presidency was the next logical step and in 2014, his presidential election took place. At the time, al-Sisi’s cult of personality was in full swing following Morsi’s ouster. His name and face were on billboards all over Cairo. Al-Sisi wore dark sunglasses in public and seemed to style himself after Gamal Abdel Nasser. Pictures of Nasser and al-Sisi together were on banners (Marfleet, 2016; p. 179). There were al-Sisi candies and bobble head dolls. Many people depicted al-Sisi as a superhero and organized military themed weddings (el-Nawawy and elMasry, 2016; p. 2). If one were to look merely at shops and stores it would seem that Sisi's popularity was soaring. Al-Sisi was supposed to be popular in 2013 with the state, the army, and felūl (or remnants) of Mubarak’s regime, and a good part of the middle class (Marfleet, 2016; p. 176). The election told a different story.

Al-Sisi's only opponent in the election was Hamdeen Sabbahi, a leftist member of the Nasserist party. Sisi called for record turnouts to give his coup legitimacy. However, voter turnouts were very low and some polling stations were empty. The regime declared a second day of voting, extended it until 10:00, and declared that day a public holiday. When voter turnouts were again low and some polling places empty, the regime declared a 3rd day of voting, threatened fines against those who did not vote, and made train and metro fares free to encourage citizens to vote. State media supported the push, and state sponsored talk show hosts called those who did not vote traitors (Kirkpatrick, 2018; pp. 305-306). Voting closed on the 3rd day and Sisi claimed 97% of the vote. Participation was likely around 46% (BBC News, 2014).
**Insurgency**

The military’s toppling of Morsi was justified in part as a means to prevent Egypt from descending into civil war. Yet Egypt has faced a sharp upsurge in armed violence against the state since 2013. In the days following Rabaa’ Al-Adaweya, armed gunmen stormed the police station in Kerdasa, a town north of Cairo and killed 14 police officers and “left their bodies on the floor” (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 281). For months after the coup, explosions rocked Cairo on a seemingly nightly basis as people tried to take their revenge for Rabaa’ Al-Adaweya (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 294). Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis, a terrorist group revived in the wake of the Rabaa’ massacre, and a number of other disconnected militant groups (Hellyer, 2016; p. 179) carried out “bombings and assassinations inside Cairo” (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 284). North Sinai was between 2015 and 2017 was largely under the control of an Islamist insurgency that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. In 2015 one particularly infamous attack on the North Sinai town of Shaykh Zuwaïd killed hundreds of Egyptian soldiers and police (Fadel, 2016; p. 38). Armed Islamists also struck targets in Cairo with increasing frequency. Insurgents bombed the motorcade of Hisham Barakat, the Prosecutor General, and killed him (Fadel, 2016; p. 38). These insurgents have been responsible for numerous bombings and attacks in the Nile Valley. The state has seemed unable to stop them.

**Failed Consolidation and Crackdown**

Following al-Sisi’s rise to power the regime’s top priority has been survival (Bahgat, 2015; p. 4). Within a few months of toppling Mohammed Morsi al-Sisi appointed 25 new provincial governors (out of 27 provinces), eighteen of whom were retired military generals (Rutherford, 2018; p. 187). Al-Sisi altered the constitution so that the defense minister must now be an active duty member of the armed forces who is approved by the Supreme Council of
Armed Forces (Rutherford, 2018; p. 188) and the military’s budget is no longer subject to civilian review, including by parliament (Rutherford, 2018; p. 188). Parliament merely sees a single number when it deals with the national budget each year (Rutherford, 2018; p. 188). Article 200 of the constitution now reads “the armed forces belong to the people, and their duty is to protect the country, and preserve its security and the integrity of its territories” (Rutherford, 2018; p. 189). This article makes no reference to the constitution or the state: the military essentially has carte blanche to act how it chooses (Rutherford, 2018; p. 189).

Parliamentary elections were held in October and November 2015. The new parliament is widely believed to simply rubber-stamp new authoritarian laws into place at al-Sisi and the security services’ behest (Rutherford, 2018; p. 194; Stacher, 2016).

Protests were banned without a permit in 2014 and the police can now monitor citizens’ communications indefinitely without a warrant (Rutherford, 2018; p. 196). The regime now routinely engages in torture of detainees (Rutherford, 2018; p. 197). I will return to these issues in Chapter 4: Fear.

The Muslim Brotherhood was declared a terrorist organization in December 2013 (Al-Malky, 2014). The state seized all its assets (Rutherford, 2018; p. 196). The Freedom and Justice Party was disbanded, along with over 1,000 related organizations. One hundred and six thousand people were in jail for either political or criminal offenses in 2016 (Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 2016) Rights Information, and 60,000 of those are political prisoners (Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 2016). The senior Brotherhood leaders are now in jail (Rutherford, 2018; p. 196) along with tens of thousands of their alleged membership. The government built 25 new prisons to accommodate the crackdown (Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 2016). Hundreds now await execution.
In 2014-2016 a vast crackdown was underway, but “the unconsolidated regime itself is so fuzzily defined that Egyptians doubt[ed] it [was] one coherent entity” (Stacher, 2016) and “the security forces seem[ed] to have slipped the leash of the executive branch” (Stacher, 2016). The number of stories recountable here is staggering. I will confine myself to a few incidents and pick up this discussion again in the chapter on Fear.

In 2014 the Egyptian government began going after Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Under Mubarak as state services declined NGOs had risen to fill the gap. Included in these were a number of Human Rights NGOs that served as watchdogs against potential abuses. Al-Sisi’s regime began trying to shut them down. In July 2014 the government ordered all NGOs to register under the Mubarak era law 84/2002 (POMED, 2016; p. 1). In June and July 2015 the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and the Hisham Mubarak Law Center were informed they were under investigation. They were never informed why (POMED, 2016; p. 1). Hossam Bahgat, a leading human rights lawyer in Egypt was detained for two days in 2015 for allegedly publishing fake news (POMED, 2016; p. 1). The list goes on. In 2015 and 2016 employees of the Nasra Center for Feminist Studies were repeatedly summoned for interrogation (POMED, 2016; p. 2). The al-Nadeem Center provides counseling for victims of torture. In February 2016 it too was hit with a closure order (Stacher, 2016). It is now closed and its director has been threatened with prosecution. Egyptian government cases against NGOs are an ongoing process with almost constant new developments.

In January 2016 two officers went to Matariyya General Hospital to have a doctor sign a report about a few minor cuts (Stacher, 2016). When the doctor refused to sign a report that claimed the officer’s injuries were worse than they were, the officer punched the doctor. When another doctor intervened the police called for backup. Eight police officers appeared and beat
the doctors (Stacher, 2016). A few weeks later 10,000 doctors showed up at the Doctor’s
Syndicate to protest (Stacher, 2016). In February 2016 a cabbie was shot by a police officer in
Darb al-Ahmar over a fare dispute. Locals beat the police officer bloody (Stacher, 2016).

The crackdown has changed the face of Tahrir as well. Sadat station sits under Tahrir
Square. Sadat is a sprawling metro station with entrances and exits that span all over the vast and
busy Tahrir Square. For several years after 2013 it had been shut down. In 2016 it reopened.
Only two entrances/exits were open. To pass in and out of Sadat it was necessary to go through
police and metal detectors. Sadat station remained locked down in this way for the duration of
my fieldwork. Tahrir has become hard to navigate in the wake of the Sadat lockdown: previously
the underground tunnels had allowed people to avoid the considerable traffic that goes through
the square on an average day. Now people must brave the traffic instead.

The area near the stock exchange, the Borsa, is located not far from Tahrir square. A
number of government ministries are also nearby. The Borsa area had emerged when the three
streets surrounding the old stock exchange had been pedestrianized in the early 2000s (Ryzova,
2015; p. 22) creating an open-air promenade. Prior to 2013 the Borsa had been host to a lively
and very popular middle and working class cafe scene with many places to sit, chat, and watch
the world go by. In 2014 it was closed. Gates barred traffic on both ends of the streets and all the
coffeeshops had been shut down permanently.

Conclusions

The barrage of events since the fall of Mubarak in 2011 have been grinding for
Egyptians. After 2011 Mubarak had fallen and many Egyptians thought themselves victorious.
Yet, the counter-revolution was launched, in various forms, nearly as quickly as Mubarak walked
out of office. Egyptians put their faith in the ballot box and a parliament and Mohammed Morsi
were elected. Egyptians protested again in 2013, in part because they were manipulated, but also because the fundamental concerns of the middle class, working class, and the poor had not been addressed. The outcome of 2013 was the rise of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. As I will show, al-Sisi has systematically and ruthlessly crushed their hopes.

No one has been brought to account for the military massacres of Maspero, Rabaa’ Al-Adaweya, or Nahda Squares. Mubarak is free, Morsi is in jail, and Morsi’s relatives fear he will die there of maltreatment (Akkad, 2018). The secret police, once thought fallen, re-emerged with new force in 2013. Morsi never made a real attempt to reform the security apparatus (Hall, 2012) and it is unlikely he could have succeeded had he tried. When Sisi became the President of Egypt, he found the security services intact for his use: they are again the terror of Egypt.

In 2016 protests over the Egyptian handover of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia were met with live fire (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Other protests, such as the “Revolution of the Poor” mostly failed to materialize (Khalifa, 2016). I will return to both of these subjects in the chapter titled “Fear.” Those who spoke too loudly were known to disappear. The graffiti that decorated Tahrir Square in 2011 and 2013 has been erased. Graffiti was thought to be a new form of political statement for Egypt (Schielke and Winegar, 2012). Now it is gone.

In 2016 few spoke of 2011 and 2013. In a year and a half of fieldwork no one broached these topics with me at all. Bringing them up in any context merely brought silent stares. People voiced negative opinions about the government after looking about the room to see that no one was listening, and then, only in whispers. Only once in that time did anyone, and that person my closest informant, voice an opinion against the military or Sisi. We were alone in the cafe that he owned at the time. When members of the Brotherhood occasionally emerged to protest these
protests were crushed violently. Thousands of them were in jail in any case. Anyone who hit the streets in protest for any risked torture and death.

By 2016 many Egyptians, and my lower middle class informants in particular, were too tired overwhelmed to put up a fight. The victories of Tahrir seemed far in the past to my informants. They feared going out to protest again. After all, it had availed them little in the past. In the following chapter I discuss how this counter-revolution and its tactic of grinding down Egyptians has continued in an economic fashion in 2016 and 2017 and I will show how al-Sisi set about enacting a program of neoliberal reform is quickly impoverishing the lower middle class.
Decline

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the uprisings of 2011 and 2013. In 2011 many Egyptians, including members of the middle class, favored the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, whose authoritarian policies were causing a decline in their quality of life. In 2013 those who participated in the 2011 insurrection now wanted to overthrow a president, Mohammed Morsi, who they saw as incompetent, overreaching, and largely ineffective in the face of crisis. The middle classes hoped the military and the next person in line, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, would improve their situation. Instead al-Sisi leads a powerful counter-revolution whose policies are impoverishing the lower middle class very quickly. In this chapter I will discuss the material conditions of the lower middle class in 2016 and 2017 and show how their decline has only accelerated since the first uprising.

The International Monetary Fund Deal

The decline I describe in this chapter is a result of neoliberal policies. In particular, after the uprising in 2011 and the coup in 2013, Egypt was beset with a financial crisis. There were multiple shortages, such as those of rice, sugar, and medicine, related to an acute foreign currency shortage (Momani, 2016). I discuss these shortages later on in this chapter. Since the uprisings investor and foreign government confidence in Egypt had declined, thereby causing a significant discrepancy between the exchange rate in Egypt and the real rate of exchange. The government made up this difference, an act that depleted its foreign reserves and hampered its ability to pay its bills (IMF Media Relations, 2016). Dollars were hard to come by, and the black market traded pounds for dollars at rates as high as 20:1. I will return to this particular crisis in more detail later. In any case, the Sisi government sought out the International Monetary Fund
for help, specifically in the form of loans (Hadid, 2016). The IMF position is that austerity, or subsidy cuts coupled with tax increases, is the solution for governmental debt. Therefore, in exchange for a 12 billion dollar loan, the first tranche of 2.75 billion to be disbursed in November 2016, the Egyptian government agreed to cut the electrical subsidy, create a value added tax, reduce the fuel subsidy, and float the pound (International Monetary Fund Communications Department, 2016). The shortages and the economic changes the government agreed to are the reason for much of the economic decline I discuss here. However, I will begin with a general discussion of the middle class in Egypt.

Members of the Struggling Middle Class

The middle class can be defined both by their market position and their particular tastes and lifestyles (Bourdieu, 2010). In this chapter I discuss the material decline of the lower middle class and how this material decline threatens the loss of access to taste and lifestyle markers which Egyptians use to define themselves as middle class. Here I show how middle class life can be frustrating and often painful for many by describing the ways in which the middle class is struggling and then discussing some members of the middle class, their places of work, and how this relates to them.

Most researchers divide the Egyptian middle class into upper and lower echelons. A secure middle is difficult to find by any reliable metric because while the middle class was estimated to total 44% of the population in 2011 (Abu Ismail and Sarangi, 2015; p. 14), the middle of the middle class that had existed under Nasser in large part as government workers (Muller and Ndoye, 2017; p. 18) had largely disappeared by 2011 (Muller and Ndoye, 2017; p. 17). As Schielke points out, the middle middle is an “aspiration” (Schielke, 2015; p. 112), not a reality. The government bureaucracy had grown large enough to encompass one-third of the
population by 2003 (Abdallah, 2003; p. 13), but wages had not kept pace with inflation since Nasser’s years. Government workers had slid downward into the lower middle class.

**Historic Decline**

For clarity’s sake, I will briefly revisit the history of the middle class here. The modern middle class arose during the time of Abdel Nasser. By the end of the 1960s newly secure tenants, smallholders, and members of the working class had sent their children to college and these children had acquired government jobs, thus enlarging the middle class. The decline of this middle class arguably began with Anwar Sadat and his *infītah* in the 1970s. Sadat’s market reforms allowed foreign investment in the country and expanded the number of exit visas and (Weyland, 1993; p. 6). Those members of the middle class as well as members of the *ahl al-balād*, the popular classes, who had gone abroad to work sent remittances back home, were able to build new houses, buy appliances, and send their children to better schools, thus allowing some of them to rise in status, or at least to improve their living conditions. Those members of the Nasserite middle class who stayed home, clung to government jobs or otherwise did not find success in the private sector saw their fortunes decline relative to émigrés. As the government began allowing public companies to skirt the grantee scheme, government jobs became harder to acquire, and the waiting list expanded (Binzel, 2011; p. 8). As a result of these public and private sector reforms, the middle class became more divided under Sadat and the private sector expanded (Mellor, 2016; p. 69).

Under Mubarak the middle class continued to become more fragmented as everyone slowly shifted to upper or lower middle class and the secure middle disappeared (Muller and Ndoye, 2017; p. 17). The number of government workers, despite the low pay and status of such jobs, continued to expand. By 2001, one third, or roughly 7 million, of Egypt’s population were
government workers (Abdallah, 2003; p. 13). Meanwhile, privatizations shifted some previously stable government jobs into a continuously expanding private sector. However, this expansion favored the more socially “connected” upper middle class and elites more than the lower middle class. Public and private business is more often carried out successfully because of a “wāsta” or connection in the government, private sector, or both who smoothes the way and removes or allows one to ignore bureaucratic hurdles. More powerful public and private connections can be leveraged to help individuals open new businesses, get a job, construct buildings, or do nearly anything else more easily and quickly than going straight through a bureaucracy. The core of Egypt’s economy has always been based on these personal connections (Shenker, 2016; p. 64). Members of the lower middle class did not go to elite schools and have not developed powerful connections. Thus they were disadvantaged by the expansion of the private sector: they had fewer connections to leverage.

Public transportation, education, and medical care, which had begun to decay under Sadat, continued their decline under Mubarak, albeit for different reasons. Public education expanded significantly, undergoing a “massification” (Buckner, 2013; p. 528) that resulted in more widely available, but lower quality, public schools. Healthcare expanded, but became increasingly privatized in line with neoliberal ideas about the sale of public goods. Public transport, and trains in particular, became notorious for accidents (BBC News, 2006). Before 2014, government wages saw their last rise in salaries during in the 1980s. Thus the minimum wage in 2010 for government workers was 400LE, the same as it had been in the 1980s and 1990s (Hafez, 2017). Thus lower middle class salaries for government workers remained the same while prices increased, and so quality of life for government workers declined. Many government workers tried to make ends meet by taking second jobs or developing other alternate
streams of income (Rommel, 2018; p. 11). The value of the pound declined under Mubarak. In the 1970s, a minimum wage of 16LE per month could purchase 320kg of rice. In 2010, a minimum wage of 1,500LE per month would be necessary to buy the same amount of rice. The purchasing power of the pound on the local market was just 5% of what it had been in the 1970s (Hafez, 2017).

Those in the upper middle class in the private sector, however, did well. Under Mubarak they were able to leverage new and more lucrative opportunities as a result of private sector expansion. Upper middle class quality of life generally improved. Their income provided them with access to greater levels of consumption as foreign investment and access to imports expanded. Overall, the upper middle class of business executives and professionals in the private sector saw improvement in their lives under Mubarak, while the lower middle class of bureaucrats, shopkeepers, low ranking officers in the military, public and some private sector teachers, public sector professors, and some lower level private sector managers and workers, was increasingly squeezed.

Post-2011 Middle Class Decline

In November 2016, the Egyptian government implemented the abovementioned plan of IMF-backed austerity measures and lowered the fuel subsidy. The price of fuel went up 60-79% in less than 12 hours. The government raised microbus and regular bus fares to compensate for the fuel price hikes, and raised the base rate for metered taxis from 3LE to 4LE (Al-Tawy, 2016). Nonetheless, many taxis in Cairo are not metered and not all drivers were aware of the changes. Others taxis found the fare changes unsatisfactory. Fights over taxi fares, always a source conflict in Cairo, intensified greatly (Al-Masry Al-Youm, 2016).
In early 2016 the Egyptian government doubled the price of a metro ticket to 2LE (Farid, 2016), and then doubled it again to 4LE in March 2017 (Middle East Monitor, 2017). The IMF had long criticized the Egyptian metro line as a place where costs far exceeded revenues. It was estimated the difference between expenses to run the metro and the price of tickets led to a loss of 20.5 million EGP ($1.1 million) per day (Farid, 2016). The new, higher fares were intended to somehow both to fund existing lines and to pay for improvements and new planned lines. The Egyptian government and the IMF wished to treat what had been a subsidized government service as a for-profit one. Many middle class Egyptians, however, live far from work in inexpensive parts of town and take long metro rides each day. The cost increase was a painful one.

The quality of food also began to decline by February 2017. Vegetables at formerly reliable vendors were suddenly rotting on the shelves. Vegetables were spoiling because the pound float meant that imported fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides were much more difficult to acquire. Unable to prevent pests or even fertilize their crops, farmers were producing rotting or much less nutritious produce. Meat that appeared safe at the store went bad within 24 hours of its purchase, likely because the antibiotics and feed required to ensure its quality were no longer available or had become much harder to purchase. Meat became fattier while mince at one popular supermarket market chain where I shopped became whole cuts of beef, bones and all, run through the grinder. The bits of bone hurt my teeth when I ate it. It would seem that supermarket employees who were struggling to survive in the face of the pound float no longer exercised great care either.

To understand the reason for a decline in material conditions, it is necessary to discuss the precarity of the Egyptian pound since 2011. The strength or weakness of the pound has a direct
effect on lower middle class and middle class life. Many companies rely on some manner of imported goods to conduct business. Egypt is the second largest global importer of wheat, the price of wheat had more than tripled in the last ten years (Bush, 2010; p. 124), and the bill is usually paid for in dollars. Egypt’s companies also import fruits, vegetables, clothes, cars, cell phones, some pharmaceuticals: much of what are considered the necessities of middle class life. All of this is evident at the store where the origin of these products is often marked on the packaging. Companies pay for imports in dollars or euros, but their income from sales is in Egyptian pounds. The relative strength of the pound therefore translates almost immediately to how much a product costs for my lower middle class informants.

The value of the Egyptian pound on the open market is based on the faith of foreign governments and investors on Egypt’s economy and whether or not they believe the Egyptian government is capable of paying its bills. During the presidency of Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian pound was set to a managed float pegged to the dollar (Abdel-Khalek, 2002). The government set the exchange rate against the dollar, and either paid or collected the difference between the official exchange rate and the market rate. After the 2011 and 2013 uprisings, tourism, the major source of US dollars in Egypt, declined sharply and since then has never recovered. The pound’s real value declined sharply as Egypt’s instability rose and the Egyptian government was forced to pay an increasing difference. In the five years prior to 2016 such devaluations had been significant but overall much less than what took place in November 2016. In 2008 the exchange rate was 5.5 to 1. After 2011 it was moved to 6.5 and later to 7.5. By January 2016 the Egyptian pound was set at 8.93 to 1. In 2016 the black market was buying dollars at 19 to 1 and at its peak, 20 to 1. In 2016 at official exchanges the Egyptian government was paying the cost difference, roughly half the real exchange rate, an unsustainable action that rapidly drained foreign reserves.
In early November, the Egyptian government shifted the pound from a managed float of 8.93 pounds to one dollar to market rates. The pound settled at 18.1 pounds to the dollar, where it sat when I left Egypt in June 2017.

The pound float was accompanied by a concomitant rise in the price of groceries and several shortages in basic commodities. Even the price of lentils and fava beans rose as the inflation rate in 2016 averaged 18.5% (Kholoif and Nikhil, 2016). The availability of imports in turn declined significantly (Michaelson, 2016). The Egyptian government has subsidized rice, sugar, and cooking oil on an increasing scale since World War II (Dethier and Funk, 1987) and buys large amounts of each off the international market to support local consumption of each. In 2016, the weakness of the pound and the accompanying dollar shortage severely compromised the international purchasing and subsidy system. Cooking oil temporarily vanished from the shelves, and rice was in low supply (Hadid and Youssef, 2016), both very basic, essential food items. Prices of nearly every item in the supermarket rose, regardless of their place of manufacture. The price of potatoes quintupled from 5 cents to 25 cents per pound (Hadid and Youssef, 2016). There was even a shortage of imported infant formula (Reuters staff, 2016). The military eventually intervened by importing the formula themselves and selling it at market value (Hendawi, 2016), an act that profited them greatly.

Egypt was also hit by a sugar shortage in October 2016, something that was particularly frustrating for citizens of a country with a notorious sweet tooth. The government was unable to restock its own sugar supply for subsidized direct sale as well as use in subsidized products due to insufficient funds in the face of the pound’s low value. Sisi’s government therefore began seizing the supplies of private manufacturers and importers (Knecht and Dahan, 2016) including the supplies of PepsiCo and Edita, a large confectionary manufacturer (Michaelson, 2016). The
low value of the pound combined with a 20% import tariff on sugar strongly discouraged private importers from buying more (Knecht and Dahan, 2016). Soft drink companies worsened the shortage by purchasing supplies on the local market (Ali, 2016). The shortage along with the government seizures and frozen government stockpile led to accusations that the military was stockpiling sugar in order to dump it back on the market at a higher price (Ali, 2016). The military faced the same accusations over its treatment of powdered infant formula (Ali, 2016). Indeed, when sugar did re-emerge on the market in January 2017 it had almost doubled in price.

The country was hit as well by a critical pharmaceutical shortage between May 2016 and June 2017 as well. The state has set price controls for pharmaceuticals since Abdel Nasser nationalized Egypt’s pharmaceutical industry in the 1960s (Reich and El-Saharty, 1998). In May 2016 the government had raised the price ceiling by 20% for a number of drugs (Greatsinger, 2016). In reality, however, the prices of drugs at the till had risen much more than this percentage by May 2016, which can only be attributed to illegal pricing. The discrepancy between the prices of drugs set by the state and the actual cost of drugs procured from abroad meant that companies ceased to import critical diabetes, cancer, and heart disease medication in order to avoid selling at a loss between June and July 2016 (Kholaf and Nikhil, 2016). Public hospitals struggled, sending patients in need of dialysis to private hospitals they could ill afford because public hospitals did not have the drugs and materials for the treatment (Kholaf and Nikhil, 2016). Vitamins, antibiotics, eye drops (Kholaf and Nikhil, 2016), insulin, tetanus shots, and contraceptive pills were now all in scarce supply (Gaballa and Knecht, 2016). A total of two hundred thirty-two drugs were in short supply in early 2016 (Greatsinger, 2016). By May 2016, the pharmaceutical chamber of the Egyptian Federation of Industries estimated that as many as 1,471 name brand drugs were out of stock on the local market, 300 of which had no local
alternative (Hafez, 2016). Distributors were accused of hoarding drugs to keep profits high (Kholaif and Nikhil, 2016). But whether they were hoarding or simply not buying, the outcome was the same: drug companies were not putting drugs on the market in to protect their profit margins. As with sugar, the drugs did eventually reappear on the market, at a higher price.

One of my informants was badly affected by the pharmaceutical shortage. She went looking for items such as insulin needles and Topamax, a common seizure medication, which were some of the missing items. She had a rare form of anemia: she was unable to absorb vitamin B12 through dietary means and was dependent on B12 shots for her survival. This informant visited 15 separate pharmacies in her search for insulin needles of the right size for her B12 injections, and finally had to settle for an intramuscular (in the muscle) needle instead of the subcutaneous (underneath the skin) syringe usually required. She subsequently began to suspect that the B12 was adulterated, because it caused large and painful welts on her body and was not absorbed correctly, a problem my informant had never experienced before.

Between November 2016 and February 2017, the cost of living rose dramatically and at the same time, members of the middle class received no wage increase to compensate. All forms of transport became more expensive, the quality of food deteriorated, and the price of food and other necessities rose dramatically. Moreover, longstanding problems, such as education, were worsened by the changes.

*Educational Decline*

Middle class education in Egypt offers the illusion of possible advancement but not the reality of it. Those in the lower middle class find that they can have as much education as they can buy, but they cannot afford very much education. The belief in the value of education for advancement dates back to the age of Abdel Nasser when each person was promised a free
public education and a government job (Bush, 2002) and they often received both just as promised. The belief has survived the privatization of middle class education in Egypt, but the struggle to get a good education for one’s children has only become more difficult with time.

Middle class education in the ideal sense means private school. Yet tight finances mean public school is sometimes a necessity for members of the lower middle class. There are two kinds of Egyptian public schools: regular public schools and public language schools. Public language schools teach students in English and require a small fee, whereas regular public schools do not, though parents must purchase school supplies for either. Both public schools and public language schools provide very poor education. The United Nations estimated a literacy rate in Egypt of 76% in 2015 (UNESCO, 2015). Yet literacy status is mostly determined by asking the head of household who is literate and who is not (UNESCO, 1995; p. 93). When regressive illiteracy (those who have lost the ability to read and write through disuse) and functional illiteracy (those unable to read and write well enough to process minimal information) are taken into account the real rates are likely much higher (Akkari, 2004; p. 147). Literacy rates in Egypt are subject, moreover, to high amounts of error, so much so that some estimates put 51% of the population as illiterate to the point of being incapable of engaging in and completing higher education (Fergany, 1995). Poor literacy rates are in part a function of the school system. Yet they are also part of the failure of the economic system, and the loss of people’s hopes and dreams as well.

Public and often private schools do not ensure students stay in class. Likewise, many students do not feel the need to attend class. Regular public schools are the worst of the lot. Their students are frustrated by the difficulty of learning in an Egyptian public school and by the fact that their education does not hold much promise of a better life. I lived next to several public
schools in Dokki. They started around 8:30 each morning and let out at about 2:00 in the afternoon. Observation alone made it difficult to tell when these schools let out because groups of students were outside and milling around at all hours of the day. Skipping class is very common. Students see little value in their lessons. Materials are memorized rote, teachers are overworked, and classroom control is poor. Schools often run on double or triple shifts (Akkari, 2004; p. 146). If parents want to improve the quality of their child's education they pay teachers for private lessons. Egyptians know all of this very well, and it is part of the complaint when they say there is no education in Egypt. Moreover, public school students know they have very poor chances of getting a decent paying job after graduation (Cook, 2001; p. 382), and that education does not often result in significant increases in future earnings (Akkari, 2004; p. 148). Some therefore see that they have very little reason to work hard in class. Likewise, economic needs sometimes push parents to pull their children out of school in order to go to work, to help at a parent’s business or, in the countryside, to work on the farm. This is not to say that some students do not work hard and succeed, but the odds are stacked against them.

Students in public school are sorted into either vocational or general education tracks after primary school (Buckner, 2013) and the result is a highly class stratified one. If one is sorted into the vocational track, university is no longer an option. Whereas general education students can shift to technical or commercial school if and when they flunk out, those already in the technical track have nowhere else to go if they fail. For public university, admissions standards vary from school to school and program to program (Buckner, 2013; p. 533). The Supreme Council of Universities determines how many spaces are available in each program (Buckner, 2013; p. 531). In practical terms however scores of 90% or more are necessary on the Thanawiyya Amma in order to get into the most desired college degree programs. For example,
in 2018 roughly 25% of test takers amounting to 28,000 out of 656,000 students achieved a 96% or higher, the score necessary to enter a public university science program (Ahram Online, 2018). This does not, however, translate to actual entrance numbers. The Supreme Council of Universities makes the ultimate choice of who goes where (Buckner, 2013; p 531).

Regular public school and public language school always ends in the Thanawiyya Amma. The Thanawiyya Amma is a combination final high school and college entrance exam in Egypt. The Thanawiyya Amma itself consists of eight sections, including geography, French, English, science, and math. Two to three hours are allotted for each subject, making the Thanaweyya Amma a grueling endurance test (Shann, 1992; p. 233). A rotating and secret committee of scholars and teachers writes the test each year. The Ministry of Education then sorts students by test score. The higher the student scores the more prestigious the program the student will be able enter and the better the University they will be admitted to. Students do not have a choice in the matter: their test score determines their fate and what college and program they will enter, whether they are interested in it or not (Shann, 1992; p. 229). The highest score gets a student an opportunity to enter the college of dentistry, the best college in Cairo University. Second prize can get a student into the college of medicine. At the bottom of the list is law school. Failing the Thanaweyya Amma leads to taking the “door a-thani” the second floor or circle. The maximum score available on the door al-thani is 50%. It grants a diploma and nothing more.

Because stakes are high cheating is rife and not limited to students. Teachers are on occasion caught and jailed for assisting their students in chicanery. In Spring 2016, the Thanaweyya Amma test answers were leaked on a Facebook page called “Shaoming.” The name is not Arabic and may be an attempt to use the word “Shaming.” When the Ministry of Education shut down this page, the same operators opened two more pages, “Cheat Meet” and “Helpers of
Thanawiyya Amma Cheaters.” The operators of these pages wrote scornfully of the Ministry of Education and gave some of the answers away for free. The remainder of the test answers could be purchased at 60LE per test. One informant told me that students would study for the test and then an hour or so before it pay for the answers and study those also. My informants greeted the scandal with frustration: it is a no-win situation. The test is widely believed to be unfair but failure dims future prospects. Passing the Thanawiyya Amma often amounts to a struggle to keep a door open that rarely leads anywhere for the victor. Adding to my informant’s frustration, the Thanawiyya Amma took place in 2016 during the fasting hours of Ramadan.

Private schools offer the opportunity for a child to learn a foreign curriculum and a second language, skills that are highly valued in the Egyptian private and tourism sectors. Private schools have undergone an expansion since private universities were authorized in 1995 (Dixon, 2010; p. 42). These schools have flourished as they have taken advantage of low taxes and other financial incentives meant to help the development of new cities such as New Cairo and Sixth of October City (Dixon, 2010; p. 42). The growth of these new cities was in turn driven by the private schools that opened their doors: in 2004 some of the first businesses to open in New Cairo were private schools touting French, British, and American diplomas (Marsh, 2014; p. 384). In private schools the curriculum is supposed to be taught in the language of that respective country. British and American schools are the most popular but not necessarily the best in educational quality: the great desire for American and British education has lead to a glut of schools claiming to provide such an education, all of varying academic standing.

The chief advantage of a private school is that it grants a more prestigious education and, in theory, a more thorough education than public school. Additionally, private school graduates do not have to take the dreaded Thanawiyya Amma in order to gain entry to college. Yet my own
experience working in the Egyptian private school system taught me that private schools sometimes produce students who are barely literate in any language and have only the shakiest grasp of the subjects they were supposedly taught: the diploma sometimes seems to matter to students and parents more than the education provided. Private school sometimes threatens to become transactional. Private schools are often accused of “selling degrees” (Buckner, 2013; p. 533). Realistically sometimes parents and students believe they are buying them. When private school is not transactional parents often pour their hearts and souls into their children’s educations and are left with little to show for it. Moreover, many of these schools make highly fictional promises to parents that they are incapable of keeping.

Children with private school diplomas will find their university options in large part determined by what private school they attended. Some schools cost more and are accorded more prestige than others. University opportunities arise out of choice of high school, and the ability to make desired choices are determined by social class (Koning, 2009). In general, most private universities are out of the price range of the lower middle class. Moreover, Egyptian public and private universities do not enjoy the prestige that they once did. They are now in many cases merely “waiting rooms” (Romani, 2009; p. 3), places to postpone unemployment in the middle classes for later. With dwindling cash resources, many lower middle class families now do not even know how to access the waiting room.

Lower middle class youth who graduate high school often go to public university or not at all. As of 2005 there were 17 public universities in the country (Cupito and Langsten, 2011; p. 184), including, in the Cairo area, Cairo University, Helwan University, and Ain Shams University. Many of the best Egyptian teachers leave seeking better wages abroad, and have done so since the 1980s (Weyland, 1993). They now populate the faculties of other universities
in the Middle East (Romani, 2009; p. 6). Egyptian teachers and professors who stay in the
country all share the same problems: they are underfunded, teacher pay is on the bottom end of
the scale, and classrooms are overcrowded. Teachers and university instructors who wish to
make ends meet give private lessons (Dixon, 2010; p. 41), and students who wish to do well pay
for that tutoring (Elgeziri, 2012). USAID backed “cost-recovery measures” (Armbrust, 2011)
have resulted in some departments such as foreign language studies in public universities
charging tuition (Elgeziri, 2012), meaning that those are increasingly difficult to access to the
lower middle class as well. After the recent subsidy cuts and the floating pound, paying for either
is now in doubt for many of my informants, and some are switching to less expensive schools
(Tawil, 2016) due to the costs.

Decline Café-side: Amr and Adel’s Stories

Refuge[^3] is a middle-class café located in Dokki where I did fieldwork. Refuge is a lower
middle class café with upper middle class and elite aspirations. A soda at Refuge costs 10LE (55
cents), a meal costs 72LE ($4), and *shīsha*, or hookah, is 30LE ($1.65). This is compared to the
usual outdoor lower middle class café where a soda costs 7LE and *shīsha* is 12LE. Refuge is
priced slightly higher than a normal lower middle class café, but is still much cheaper than an
elite café which might charge 140LE for a main course, 40LE to 60LE for a *shīsha*, and 15LE for
a soda. Based on its prices, one would guess that Refuge should serve a secure middle class
clientele. However, as discussed earlier, in Cairo the secure middle is gone (Muller and Ndoye,
2017; p. 17). I have visited the café scene in almost every part of Cairo and cafés like Refuge are
quite uncommon. In extensive daily observation at Refuge, I only observed lower middle class
clientele. Refuge thus struggles to remain in the black because it is priced too high to be a regular

[^3]: A pseudonym.
night spot for the lower middle class but lacks the finer accouterments needed to attract the upper middle class. This is no doubt why Refuge was constantly short on customers, and this problem was only exacerbated by the economic crisis in 2016 and 2017.

Refuge has orange walls made of faux-stone. Paintings on the wall depict folkloric Egyptian scenes: Bedouins sitting together, Bedouins riding camels, and old time Egyptian cafes under thatched roofs. These kinds of paintings and pictures are popular in lower middle class, middle class, and working class cafes all over Cairo. The lighting is soft and it always feels like twilight away from the windows. There are two seating areas to the left and right of the saloon style doors through which you enter. The seating area on the right is larger. Bench seating lines a large window and a table short enough to be uncomfortable to use. It is occupied tonight, and Refuge is busy. The other seating area is a small nook next to a window. It is my favorite perch. In the far left-hand corner, behind a booth is another large area with a couch and bench seating that backs into the wall on three sides. The cushions are comfortable, and they, like much of the rest of the décor here, are orange. One of the Refuge’s owners sits there now. He is a heavy man with a white beard and a prayer bruise on his forehead. Like always, he is wearing a pressed but slightly dirty looking suit and tie and sits slumped and watching the crowd and the television set. Across from the owner seated in the back is a small hallway. It contains bathrooms that are always meticulously clean and an office on the right where they handle receipts, take money, and control the music. The shisha preparation room is directly to the left in the hallway. The room at the far end of the hallway contains a bed where Amr, one of the owners and my friend, sometimes sleeps. There are dark blue, purple, and orange patterned throw pillows on the padded benches about the café. TVs on the walls are always playing MBC and American movies. Patrons wear neat and clean clothing. Young men wear t-shirts and jeans, while older men wear
slacks and button up shirts. Veiled women come in alone and smoke shēsha on occasion, and the rare munaqaba, or woman with a full face-covering, comes in as well. Refuge serves food and the shēsha pipes are washed daily. Unlike elite cafes such as those found in Zamalek or more upscale parts of town, patrons do not come in baring skin or dressed in designer brands. Refuge is a more conservative place than the cafes of Zamalek or Maadi, and Amr, one of the owners, compares it to your home: “You enter and say ‘salām, izayak’ (Peace, how are you?) and they get you anything you want.” he tells me. “People here have standards. But in the other cafes they don’t.” Amr compares his friendly personable service with cafes of less reputable quality than his: “’ayīz shay?’ (Do you want tea?) ‘Ok.’ They give you tea and done.”

Refuge serves a quieter and more reserved clientele than the more boisterous outdoor lower middle class cafes. Lower middle class cafes tend to be part indoors and part outdoors. They are loud smoky affairs in which men of all ages sit, smoke shēsha, play dominoes and cards, study, and socialize. Lower middle class cafes are sometimes nothing more than a garage or storage space with a sink, a burner, and maybe a toilet. Tables and chairs are made of cheap plastic and wicker. Some of these cafes now have Wi-Fi, but it rarely seems to work.

Lower middle class cafes like Refuge are rare (though its owner might disagree with me about the middle class label: he insists that anyone can come there and are welcome). They are indoor affairs with booths, tables, and cushions. Upper middle class cafes such as Costa Coffee, Beanos, and Pete's Coffee and Tea Leaf are cosmopolitan affairs that locals imagine are more connected to global spaces than local places (Koning, 2006; p. 227-228). Indeed, there are even Starbucks in Egypt. In the upper middle class cafes, customers can sit in a clean space and order an Americano, Latte, or other Western style coffee drink. They can also order American or European style food such as hamburgers, escalope, Pasta Alfredo, and so on. Patrons tend to be
highly educated and often conversant in English. The service and items on offer are tailored to local desires and availabilities. The language is still Arabic, and the culture is subtly different than a European or American coffee shop: they do not bring a bill unless you ask for it and do not rush patrons out of the cafes.

Cafes such as Refuge are positioned in between lower middle class cafes that spill out onto the streets and upper middle class cafes with their higher prices and more westernized offerings. The clientele is dressed cleanly, but not expensively. Refuge’s patrons’ clothes are well cut but not skin-tight, as they might be in upper middle class cafes. Their incomes are modest: better than the working class in Egypt but not as extravagant as those of the upper middle class.

Adel is a 17-year-old lower middle class youth. As always, he greets me with a warm smile and a handshake. He is around 5’6, thin, clean cut, and he bustles about the café, quietly charming patrons and staff alike. He is a rare young man in that he always seems happy. His job requires him to puff on a great deal of shīsha. I do not know how he breathes. He works part time at Refuge as a shīsha preparer and fire bringer, although he seems to be here almost as often as I am. He also goes to school, and as of 2016, studied hard and took the Thanaweyya Amma. In his off hours he wears fashionably distressed but clean blue jeans and t-shirts featuring his favorite bands. He loves Batman and Superman but mostly just reads the comics, in which he is well versed. He spends at least a little of his money each month to buy comic books so that he can keep up. Adel likes to create new shīsha blends. I think I am one of the few who try them. He never tells me much about his family but I do know that he is loved and they are proud of him. He has a difficult life: he works eight-hour shifts at Refuge and goes to high school. Management treats him with fondness. It is hard not to. He is a charming and kind young man.
He lives in Bulaq al-Dakrur, a popular neighborhood in Giza with a mixed lower middle class and working class population located next to the more upper-class Dokki. Adel commutes to and from work each day, sometimes by walking and sometimes by a combination of walking and using the metro lines. At minimum, his commute takes 30 minutes each way, longer if he only walks.

Amr is part owner of the cafe I am sitting in. He sits across from me, quietly smoking cigarettes and drinking tea. He speaks softly and his movements are slow and gentle. Amr is easygoing and rarely seems to get upset with anyone. Amr is 33 and has four children aged 9, 7, 5, and 1. Amr lives in Shubra el-Kheima. Shubra is located in the far northern section of Cairo and is home to a very large contingent of the lower middle class population. Amr works 16-20 hours a day. He is about 6 foot, dark skin, and has black hair curly hair that he keeps short. He has the beginnings of a beard, but he has groomed it so that it is short as well. He never allows it to grow into a full beard and comes in once every few weeks clean-shaven. I think he does not like to shave. He is wearing dark jeans, nice shoes, and while he sits with me he smokes. After a minute of talking, he orders a coffee. I order a tea with mint. I am smoking Red Bull shīsha, a favorite of mine. We talk about our families. I tell him about my family, and my brother who also has four kids. Amr has a room in the back of the cafe. He sometimes sleeps at Refuge when he stays too late to catch the metro or is simply too tired for the long commute. Amr has been part owner of this cafe for a year and a half. He had previously owned a cafe in Maadi for four years, and before that he worked for 15 years in a different cafe to save money.

Amr says Egypt has fallen on hard times. The place he owned previously in Maadi was shut down for almost a year after the 2013 uprising for lack of income and customers. He says his income at Refuge is better and the rent is less. Amr wants to save money and he dreams of
opening a restaurant in another country. He owns the cafe with four other men, one of whom is kibar, or senior, to him because he has been part owner longer. Amr says this is not fair, but he also learns the trade from the older man. In addition to being a part owner, Amr is also the chef. Amr loves to cook and at some point, he taught himself Moroccan cooking. Although Amr has never been to Morocco, his Moroccan cooking is remarkably authentic and tastes delicious.

When I tell him I like the food and that at home I usually cook rice and eggs, he says “Why go anywhere else?” I agree with him. He cooked the Moroccan food dishes for his patrons himself until mid-2016 when he hired a chef for the cafe. Amr tells me there are a great many problems in Egypt today, but there are problems everywhere. I hear this refrain often. Amr says some of the problems came from Obama and the American economy.

Amr's favorite perch is in the back corner of the cafe. Though he owns a shīsha place, he does not enjoy smoking shīsha himself. Instead Amr smokes a steady chain of cigarettes throughout the day while drinking tea and coffee. Surprisingly Amr has a talent for making sheesha blends. Like Adel, Amr enjoys comic books and comic book movies, but he enjoys professional wrestling more. We sometimes sit and chat about old wrestling stars like Hulk Hogan, Jake the Snake Roberts, and the Undertaker. He knows them all. Amr watches professional wrestling with his children, and sometimes they play-wrestle at home. He smiles when he talks of his children. He misses them. His hours are long and he does not see them as much as he would like. Amr has a middle school education, or mutawaṣit. He did not go to high school or college, yet as a café owner with what his patrons adjudge to be a modicum of the proper taste, he is undoubtedly middle class.

Amr and Adel both take the metro to work. Amr lives in Shubra al-Kheima and rides the metro 45 minutes to work each day. Adel rides the metro from the much closer Bulaq al-Dakrur.
Amr and Adel have seen the cost of his metro ticket rise from 1LE to 4LE each way. In June 2017, they paid 48LE ($2.60) per week for metro rides that used to cost 12LE (66 cents). For Amr, a family man with four children, this cost is painful, but likely more bearable than it will be for Mohammed or Adel in the end. Amr is a shopkeeper and has a place to sleep if he cannot always afford to go home. Amr will miss his family, but the cost to him will not have the devastating effect that it will have on Adel, his employee. Adel makes 60LE per day as a *shīsha* preparer (plus tips), the metro prices represent a profound loss in income. Adel can choose to get to work on foot every day but this would take almost two hours in addition to doing his job. Adel might have to seek employment elsewhere, if that is at all possible. Amr has been supportive of Adel’s schooling. Another boss might not be so accommodating.

Food costs hit families the hardest. Amr, with his four children, faces stark choices about what he and his children will eat. Increased spoilage and declining quality means food must be bought more frequently, creating more work for him and his wife. Further, the rising cost of food means that Amr’s family will eat meat less often and in less quantity, a particularly painful blow to the middle-class aspirations of putting regular meat on the table. Adel’s income, low as it is, is hit much harder by rising costs. A young man such as Adel is striving to go to college and get married. He may have to contribute more of his income to his family and less to savings, which means a longer wait to marriage and a questionable college future. Adel will have to sacrifice purchases of new clothes and buy used as many others are doing (Mahmoud, 2017), something the lower middle class regards as a loss in status. Amr has a business to support him, but he and his wife will likely have to go without a number of things so that their children will have clothes and school supplies. Both Amr the café owner and Adel the employee tell me they do not know how they will survive.
Small cafes and shops such as Amr’s area often experience financial instability because shopkeepers such as Amr do not have a large reserve of savings to fall back on. What capital they have is invested in their businesses. Amr does not even own his space and does not own it by himself. He rents and is part owner with several other men. Small-business owners therefore tend to be cash-poor and in many cases, asset poor. Small businesses such as Refuge are quite vulnerable to economic shock. Costs in Egypt have been rising for 30 years. Inflation over such periods is something that can be managed and survived, as evidenced by a number of long-standing small businesses in Cairo. But economic change of the sort that Egypt has experienced in the last five years is harder to manage. Inflation was 18.5% in 2016, yet wage increases for the middle class were at most 5-10% and most businesses were only considering wage increases, not implementing them (Hafez, 2017). For a small business, inflation rates like these translate into purchasing goods at higher prices, but having great difficulty in generating sufficient income from their resale. Overall, in this period, price hikes have not been offset by wage increases for most members of the middle class (Asem, 2018). It has always been cheaper to smoke shīsha, eat rice, drink tea, and watch TV at home. Now people have difficulty just buying the rice.

Amr has already seen his other café (he used to own two) close because of lack of clientele. The other café was in an upper middle class section of al-Maadi and catered primarily to foreigners and Cairo American College (CAC) students and teachers. After 2011 the population of foreigners decreased and CAC is now at 1/3 of 2011 size. His Maadi café did not survive the transition. Amr sometimes complained to me that things were too quiet at Refuge because he had too few customers. If Amr loses Refuge, he will also lose his livelihood. In addition, Adel and at least four others will lose their jobs.
Refuge’s possible crash is part of a much wider problem. In the wake of 2011 dozens of cafes sprung up in the near environs of downtown: near Tahrir, in Dokki, Garden City, and elsewhere. For a brief period following Mubarak’s ouster the government was not regulating the opening of new cafes or other businesses and entrepreneurial Egyptians took advantage of the gap by opening many new businesses. I witnessed the burgeoning of these businesses in Cairo in 2011 and again in 2013. Yet by 2016 almost all of them were gone. The Egyptian government had shut some of these cafes down in a surge of renewed regulation and repression, others had run out of money, and many had fallen victim to rapid inflation and economic crisis. The closures reflect the fact that increasing numbers of the lower middle class have seen poor turns of fortune since 2011.

A Lower Middle Class American School

Hind is the principal of the private school I worked at. She is in her 60s and wants to retire at the end of the academic year (July 2017). She lives in the 1st Settlement, an exclusive part of town. Her husband works for a telecom company and travels often. It is likely Hind got an apartment in the 1st Settlement because she got into the building early: it was still under construction when she and her husband moved in. They also own a flat in the coastal city of Hurghada. Hind’s husband works for a telecom company in Egypt. Hind spends her weekends there when her husband has work nearby. Hind is a devout woman who wears the hijab and clears out her office so that she can pray at midday. Her arms are always covered and she always wears a long dress. Hind favors darker greens and flowers in her clothing.

Hind should not be mistaken for well to do or even financially stable. Hind’s Hurghada property was inherited. For her part Hind appeared to live at the absolute limit of her means and sometimes beyond them. Hind wore the same outfits repeatedly. Her outfits were cared for, but
well worn. Hind did not own a private car, an important marker of upper-middle class status. Instead, she rode the uncomfortable school buses to and from work every day. Hind was better off than her teachers, but she still pinched pennies and fretted constantly over the cost of groceries.

I think of Hind as my Egyptian grandmother and she often seems to behave that way. On summer mornings, she likes to sit in the sunlit courtyard of the school and chat amiably with staff and students. Hind is a wise woman but also quick to anger and not above yelling. She has a wicked sense of humor. I have often been the one to calm her down and also the target of her wrath. Hind makes 8,000LE ($442) a month, but also is only paid 10 months out of the year. At such a salary, Hind is in the upper margins of the lower middle class.

Hind works at a private American school. In this case “American” means that the curriculum is in English. Hind’s school was certified by a major accreditation agency, so the diplomas it gave were considered valid in the United States and elsewhere. The school claims to follow the Common Core Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards that are used in US public schools, but in reality, it does not. Only the supervisors truly know what these standards are, and their implementation is haphazard.

Hind’s teachers, lower middle class themselves, believed they were paid less than their private school colleagues in other educational institutions in Cairo. However, this was not necessarily the case. The English and Math department heads teach 11th and 12th grade and make roughly 4000LE ($447 before the 2016 pound float, $220 after the 2016 float). Regular teachers make 3000LE per month ($335 before float, $166 after). This amount is more than the salary of low-level government workers and bureaucrats and hence public school teachers, which is set around 1400LE per month. It is, however, roughly comparable to what other school private
teachers make, between 1000 and 3000LE per month (Glassdoor.com, 2018). Hind’s teachers’ salaries are also roughly comparable to other private sector jobs pursued by members of the lower middle class. A technical support engineer for Orange (formerly Mobinil) makes 4,235LE per month (Glassdoor.com, 2018), Vodafone International Account Advisors make 2,725LE per month, Nile University Research Assistants 2,333LE, and General Motors IT Engineers between 3,000 and 4,000LE per month (Glassdoor.com, 2018). All of these jobs require college degrees and a command of English, but not necessarily an expensive private college education.

Electrical bills for a two or three bedroom flat can run 100-800LE ($5.50-$44) per month, depending on the time of year (the electrical subsidy seems to fluctuate in its application as well), water costs around 20-30LE ($1-1.65), sugar costs 18 LE ($1) per bag, a Pepsi costs 5LE (25 cents), and rent can be anywhere from 800LE ($44) per month to 5000LE ($276) or more. Chicken cost 173LE ($9.55) for a kilo and beef over 200LE ($11) depending on the cut. These items are all considered important for lower middle class aspirations. For Hind’s teachers, these costs translate to the necessity of increasingly frugal and modest living. The teachers at Hind’s school are lower middle class and some of them live in ‘ashawiyat to cut costs.

Tuition at Hind’s school is roughly 4000LE ($447) per semester. As such, it is rather low-cost compared to many of the private schools in Cairo, some of which cost at least that much per month (Hafez, 2017). The parents are members of the middle class and many of them seem to be lower middle class themselves. Parents are police officers, private school teachers, members of government bureaucracy, and other similarly paid individuals. They are well dressed and may or may not speak English. They are trying to give their children an advantage they did not have by seeing them into a school in which they would learn English. A few of the parents at
the school are fellahīn, or peasants, who have made good, but most have college educations of some kind.

On occasion, parents send their older children who have already been educated in a national (public) school to Hind's school for high school. This move gives these students a chance to avoid the dreaded Thanaweyya Amma, the standardized test that all Egyptian public schools students must pass, and to obtain a recognized and accredited diploma. Many of the students who enter the school at high school from a public school or private national school, however, are brought in by their parents in fact because they are troublemakers and/or academic underachievers at their former schools who would not pass the Thanaweyya Amma on their own. In addition, because these students spent their earlier years at national schools, they speak little, if any English, thus rendering the curriculum at Hind’s school all but impossible for them to comprehend. Hind's school, like many in Egypt, has a difficult to manage student body.

Middle class decline for Hind means that she has to make concessions on her grocery choices, a fact which she acknowledges, but which she does not know how to do. Hind does most of her shopping at the grocery store. Where Hind lives in the 1st settlement, there are no cheap souqs in which to shop. Traveling to the city to shop at a souq is cost and time prohibitive and would negate any gains made by lower prices. Previously Hind sometimes bore the cost of certain school supplies when her bosses refused to pay for them, a practice she can no longer afford.

The price of sugar has become so high Hind began rationing it in the tea she constantly drinks, and sugar was notably absent from her office for a few weeks at the height of the shortage. Hind takes regular shots for a medical condition. The cost of these shots has gone up. Hind can no longer go to the grocery store and buy whatever suits her, as she did prior to the
drastic price rises. She must now choose more carefully what she purchases. While it is unlikely the cost of her rent will rise quickly (rents are secured by contracts of a year or more and she had just moved into the place when I met her), Hind still must pay rent to live in a rather exclusive part of town. The rising cost of living also throws into question Hind’s ability to retire as she has planned, in July 2017. She was reconsidering her retirement date when I left the school.

For the other lower middle class, but lower income, teachers at Hind’s school, the outlook after the recent cutbacks is even less sanguine. A few of Hind’s teachers commute by carpool or live in the area and walk. Most, however, ride the free buses the school provides. I did this too while I worked at the school. These buses are not air conditioned, do not always stop where they are supposed to, the drivers are often late, and sometimes do not leave the school on time, causing teachers to get home late. The staff buses are old, poorly maintained, and break down often.

This experience was not unique for commuters in Cairo, lower middle class or otherwise. The options for those who cannot afford taxis and private cars on a regular basis are buses, microbuses, and the metro lines. Cairene public transport carries almost 1.4 billion commuters per year (Shalabi, 2018). Microbuses and buses travel to and from nearly all parts of Cairo. There are several metro lines, but they do not go everywhere in the city. Commuting for teachers therefore, even when they took staff buses, usually meant some combination of bus, microbus, and metro line. Microbuses were often crowded, and never air conditioned. People squeezed as closely as they could together, and sometimes people could be seen hanging out of the doors, as also happened with buses. Women tried to avoid microbuses when they could because men had a tendency to rest their hands in inappropriate places. The metro lines at least had women’s cars, which tended to be less crowded. But metro cars had the same problems as buses and
microbuses: they were hot and crowded, especially around rush hours. Egyptians would pack as many people as they could into a metro car until even breathing was difficult and bodies touched in uncomfortable ways. At times, the only way to get into and out of a metro car was to shove, and Egyptians did this when they needed to.

The metro lines, bus systems, and staff buses should also not be assumed to be the province of those too poor to afford any other kind of accommodation. Parking in Cairo was expensive and scarce, and in parts of town, run by mafias. Some of those 10% of the greater Cairo population (Shalabi, 2018) who did have cars often thought it easier to take other modes of transport due to traffic and parking issues. Also, the metro line, for all its faults, was highly efficient. For example, it took 20 minutes to reach Tahrir Square (downtown) from al-Maadi (a middle class suburb) by metro. It took 45 minutes and sometimes much more to make the same trip by car during most times of day. After such a trip a private car had to be parked, which took more time. Parking spots were often far from where one actually wished to go, meaning long walks in addition to the time spent hunting for parking, and paying for parking. The metro line was often simply a more efficient mode of transport, and some of my middle class informants resorted to it and other means of public transport for that reason.

With regard to school transport, Hind and her teachers (Hind rode the buses as well) believed the school did not upgrade and fix staff transport, which workers also took, because the school was too cheap to pay for repairs. Many other areas of the school needed repair and upkeep as well. Indeed, the school seemed to be able to afford repair when it wished: the owner was notoriously frugal. The drivers themselves could be difficult and cranky. Hind sometimes intervened on behalf of her teachers over disputes on the staff buses. Inflation, the cut to the fuel
subsidy, and the pound float meant that the small minority who owned private cars after November 2016 were starting to consider taking the buses themselves.

Most teachers at Hind’s school were contracted at 25 teaching hours per week, but they had to be on campus from 8:00AM to 3:15PM each day. Teachers are actually assigned 16 teaching hours per week on average. Casual conversations with a number of private school teachers over the course of fieldwork suggests Hind’s teachers worked about the average number of hours for a private school teacher in Egypt. The school frequently tried to increase this number of hours to above 25 without increasing pay in order to avoid hiring new teachers. While I was at the school teachers frequently threatened to quit if teaching hours were upped.

Teachers were regularly shorted on pay. The school does not have a standard absence policy. Teachers who take time off may or may not be paid. Such decisions are made at the whims of the owner, and Hind had no say in such matters. The standard method of punishment for disciplinary infractions is to dock pay. At the end of the month, time lost, random shortages, and pay cuts for infractions sometimes lead to harsh choices about food and clothing purchases for Hind’s teachers.

The setbacks of the past few years have only increased the difficulty of these choices. The school has no plans to increase teacher pay to offset for inflation. The school’s owner was notorious for paying as little as she could get away with. To increase teacher pay significantly would mean increasing tuition, something not likely to happen given the schools’ concern for finances. Though the depth of the school’s financial problems was hard to know for certain, in November and December 2016 finances had gotten tight enough that the school would shut off power at the breaker boxes at 2:45PM (when school let out) each day to save money. Teachers and staff were required to stay until 3:15 in the dark.
The common method for teachers at our school to make extra money is to give private lessons. Officially, offering private lessons to students at the school is forbidden, and teachers had been fired for the offense. Parents are already paying for a private education. Why should they also pay teachers for private lessons? So teachers deal with the ban by seeking out students from other schools. But sometimes private lessons are given covertly for school students as well. Teachers judge that taking the risk is better than losing the income private lessons provide. The elementary school principal in fact was in the business of giving lessons to students in our high school. Hind accused her of leveraging her favor with the owner to get these students better grades, but it turns out in fact that Hind may have had her own private students as well. Taking on more tutoring hours, however, was not really a good option for many of Hind’s teachers who sought to make more money in order to offset price increases. Many who engaged in private tutoring after classes ended did not finish the workday until after 10PM.

Because Hind’s teachers get paid far less than she does, the grocery crisis hits them much harder and their need to reduce their expenses is no doubt much deeper. Before the pound float teachers already complained of being unable to afford new clothes, a very important standard for the middle classes. Their current situation means that even more teachers will have to forgo buying new clothes in the near future or to buy used clothes instead (Mahmoud, 2017). Teachers also complained after the pound float that they could not afford to buy groceries, specifically meat and sugar, important for maintaining aspirational middle class standards. Like many members of the lower middle class, teachers at the school already worked two jobs: one as teachers and the other as private tutors. Some left the school to tutor and worked until late. Others went home to take care of their children. Teachers had few ways to earn more money: their responsibilities filled their days to begin with. They also had few places to save money and
maintain their lifestyle; they had difficulty paying for middle class basics such as sugar, meat, and new clothes to begin with.

Members of the Middle Class: The Gym

Mohammed is a personal trainer at my gym. He is by any standard the most physically fit man at the gym. He has six-pack abs and muscles that seem to enter the room ahead of him. Mohammed is 23 and has a degree in Arts and Literature from Cairo University. He speaks fluent English. Mohammed is friendly, intelligent, and an excellent trainer. He is 6'3”. I only see him at the gym, where he wears loose sweat pants and t-shirts. He has puffy curly hair, a slightly bushy, but always well-groomed black beard, and an easy smile. Mohammed dreams of starting his own tourism company but works at the gym because after the 2011 uprising and 2013 coup tourists no longer come to Egypt in their former numbers. Mohammed works from 9AM to 10PM, six days a week. He lives near the Cairo University stop on the metro, and his commute to work is 20-30 minutes each way. He does not make much money, and as with all young men before they are married in Egypt, he lives at home. Mohammed became engaged to a woman in 2016 but his marriage is probably years away.

Personal training with Mohammed costs 1500LE ($83) for 14 one-hour sessions of personal training and 2300LE ($127) for 30 hours. His clients were higher-ranking police officers and government bureaucrats who were some of the few members of the middle class approaching middle income. Mohammed makes a commission amounting to a few hundred pounds per client at most. He seemed to have one or two clients a month. Mohammed also makes around 1200LE ($66) per month just for working at the gym. Mohammed’s gym primarily serves the lower middle class. Not many can afford both the gym and his services. He looks at clothes on his phone and watches TV during most of his work hours. In his off hours
Mohammed likes to go to cafes. He enjoys American movies and Egyptian comedies from the 90s. He thinks more recent Egyptian films lack class and sophistication.

Pictures of the Incredible Hulk, Captain America, and Iron man adorn the walls of the gym Mohammed works at. Machines line three out of four of the walls, with the cardio equipment in the far-right corner facing the windows. The windows overlook a small but busy side street below which has two kiosks and a cafeteria serving cheap ful and tammîya (mashed bean and fried bean sandwiches). There are two benches in the center of the gym and a dumbbell rack and mats on the floor underneath them. Men seem to come here as much to socialize as to work out, and Mohammed is always chatting with someone. If I arrive early enough in the morning Mohammed is asleep in the staff room. It is a 24-hour gym, but it is often empty early enough in the morning. The gym is not far from a major government building and occasionally men in suits trying to look important come in to tour the place to see if it was a suitable gym. Mohammed’s gym is inexpensive and not usually to the taste of such upper middle class and elite men.

Gyms were an activity for roughly 6% of women and men in the middle class in 2015 (Migally, 2015) and at the time, seemed fairly resistant to cutback (Migally, 2015) likely due to the fact that most memberships are paid for on a six-month or annual basis. Nonetheless Mohammed’s gym has cut the cost of membership by 20% in the last year because the pound has been floated and people can no longer afford to pay the original (higher) cost. The clientele is mostly Egyptian, but includes two or three Russians. These Egyptians are men in their 30s working out, in their 40s rehabbing injuries, and many youths. One young man skips class each day to be at the gym at 1:30. I know his school is not out when he arrives because I live near four of them. They let out between 2:30 and 3:00. Some young men are always their doing arms, but
many times it appears that they are to socialize as much as work out. The Egyptian clientele still appears to be lower middle class, and steep discounts for a yearly membership taking place around Ramadan mean that even the occasional taxi driver could, prior to some of the cutbacks that took place in 2016, afford to work out there. In any case, gym membership will not go down immediately. The occasional steep discounts (as much as 50%) make renewal more possible than it would otherwise be. Those occasional heavy discounts may also encourage impulse payments that may not be affordable for people even though they pay them.

Mohammed became engaged prior to the 2016 pound float. Mohammed does live with his family, an arrangement typical of Egyptian women and men before they are married. This allows him to save some money. However, Mohammed, like Adel, will have to buy less new clothing, something which represents a loss in status for him. Mohammed also rides the metro at least three stops each day. Like Adel and Amr, he has been hit by this cost as well. Mohammed’s daily expenses have gone up, his commissions have become less, and his paycheck has stayed the same. Saving for his marriage is much more difficult now.

Conclusions: Downhill Fast

Middle class aspiration has been an increasing struggle since the 1970s. What has changed is the rapidity of the decline: inflation in December 2016 was 22% (Momani, 2016). The pound was devalued over 100%. Al-Sisi says ‘Can you stand it if I take away subsidies in one go?’ (Shenker, 2016; p. 318). The government cut the fuel subsidy and the price of fuel rose 60-70% overnight. Al-Sisi says ‘If I make you walk on foot, can you stand it?’ (Shenker, 2016; p. 318). The government more than doubled the price of public transport in 2016. Al-Sisi said ‘If we become short of food, can you stand it?’ (Shenker, 2016; p. 318) The middle classes face
mounting grocery bills as food prices almost tripled in 2016 (Markey and Awadalla, 2017). My informants are making ever-harder choices about the foods they buy and eat.

The outward markers of the middle class: clothing, healthy bodies, foodstuffs, household goods, and their ability to move through spaces demarcated as middle class are being severely compromised in ways that make compensating for them seem out of their control. So they throw their hands in the air and say “What can we do?”, and then recognizing that life goes on, keep on trying to manage in an increasingly, as I will show in the next chapter, fearful situation.
Fear and Paranoia

Al-Sisi’s rise to power Egypt ushered in a period of fear and paranoia that peaked between 2016 and 2017. This period of government manufactured fear and panic facilitated the continuation of the counter-revolution that had been in progress since 2011. Repression and misinformation aided the ability of the government to enact subsidy cuts and other measures that the lower middle class and poor might have otherwise met with protest. The fear and paranoia that many Egyptians experienced was unique in its intensity and effectiveness in enabling the carrying out of an agenda that rapidly removed many of the protections the middle class had heretofore enjoyed. In this chapter I describe how this fright was created, why it was successful, and how living in dread affected the lives of my middle class informants.

Uncertainty

Despite covertly backing Tamarod from the beginning (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 218) and using the vast wave of Mohammed Morsi’s unpopularity to oust him, al-Sisi found that Morsi’s unpopularity did not translate to his own electoral success. Al-Sisi was popular with a section of the population in 2013 and into 2014. How much it was difficult to tell. The government mostly manufactured the wave of Sisi mania that swept Egypt in 2013. Government papers wrote long and florid accounts praising al-Sisi. There were al-Sisi cupcakes, Sisi bobble-heads, al-Sisi panties (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 261) and al-Sisi themed weddings (el-Nawawy and elMasry, 2016; p. 2). The public remained energized and ready to protest. Al-Sisi was expected to deliver results. Yet whereas Mubarak was heavy-handed in crushing protest, I will show that al-Sisi is ruthless and paranoid in dealing with anything he deems opposition. Further, al-Sisi’s definition of opposition is broad.
Moreover, by 2016 the Egyptian lower middle class and many others had experienced five years of increasing collective uncertainty: the counter-revolution had been highly effective in upsetting revolutionary plans. Egyptians had witnessed and experienced the 2011 uprising and coup and the 2013 coup d’état. Two successive governments had been toppled. Egyptians had also experienced the Maspero Massacre, the Mohandessin Republican Guard Headquarters massacre, the Rabia’ al-Adaweya Massacre, and the gas crisis and power crises of 2013, among other things. After Sisi’s rise to power Egyptians were in an understandably heightened state of anxiety. By 2016 many Egyptians, including members of the lower middle class I came in contact with, were afraid of their government, but also, afraid of chaos (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 309). Al-Sisi and his counter-revolution tried to consolidate his power through the use of these fears.

Paranoia

Al-Sisi and his regime have often been accused of paranoia (Zunes, 2014; Agence-France Presse, 2016; Farid, 2018; Afify, 2018; Hijazi and Soltan, 2018; Khalifa, 2016) and al-Sisi’s regime has been called a “black hole for human rights, democratic governance, and rule of law” (Hijazi and Soltan, 2018). The State Information Service (SIS) believes it is at war with the international media (Afify, 2018). It has condemned foreign news organizations for their coverage of the 2018 elections, a BBC report on forced disappearances, and a *New York Times* story on Egypt’s unofficial position on moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem. The SIS even managed to push Reuters to withdraw a critical report on vote buying in the 2018 presidential elections (Afify, 2018). Egyptians are aware of the conflict: Diaa Rashwan, head of SIS, accompanies attacks against foreign media with personal appearances on Egyptian television to condemn them (Afify, 2018).
Egyptian state paranoia takes discernible form in its ideology. The ruling military in the form of Al-Sisi and his generals have modified a military theory from John Boyd, a former Air Force Colonel, about asymmetric warfare against rogue states (Vest, 2001) for their own purposes. The Egyptian military, like Boyd, call the battle they are fighting “fourth-generation warfare.” The Abdel Nasser Military Academy briefed the Egyptian parliament on the supposed threat in 2016 (Diehl, 2016). First-generation warfare relies on swords and spears as weapons. Second-generation warfare involves gunpowder and conventional weapons. Third-generation warfare involves pre-emptive strikes. Fourth-generation warfare is a battle over the use of information. It takes place on social media sites and through the use of terrorist cells (El-Masry, 2016) and it is a war that will only grow because according to Egypt’s generals and talk show pundits “a fort can only be torn down from the inside” (El-Masry, 2016). In 2015 Al-Sisi told a group of military cadets that fourth generation warfare is “used to destroy countries.” (Rabie, 2015). Al-Sisi encouraged the cadets to go home and tell their friends and family about this warfare. He claims that “terrorism, modern communication, rumors, and psychological warfare” are all part of fourth-generation warfare.” In an ominous note about Egypt’s own use of such tactics, he also says “I can take words and do with them as I please.” (Rabie, 2015). Media commentators tell Egyptians that the chaos they fear is the result of such fourth-generation warfare, meant to bring on a state of political paralysis (Akl, 2018).

State television engages in its own fourth generation warfare: state media constantly tells Egyptians about conspiracies and fifth columns against all of Egypt. Such claims go back at least to the 1980s (Swedenburg, 1997; p. 83), and belief in conspiracy theories is quite common in Egypt. A study of 1,007 respondents in Egypt carried out in 2016 showed that 52% of respondents believed that Jews had planned the 9/11 attacks and 67% of respondents believed the
United States was supporting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (Nihan and Zeitzoff, 2018; p. 1401). Such conspiratorial claims had seen a small break after 2011 (leaving aside the accusation that 2011 protesters were being paid in Kentucky Fried Chicken), however, under al-Sisi they have been renewed in force. Attributing many Egyptian’s misfortunes to a conspiracy constitutes a form of “scapegoating” (Zuhur and Tadros, 2015) and in some ways an antidote to powerlessness among the populace. Used by the regime, it is scapegoating as well. It misdirects viewers from the truth of what the regime is doing and sows confusion and fear.

Examples of conspiracies put forward between 2013 and 2016 are numerous. Some of them I have recounted in brief previously and will go into more detail here. Examples include the arrest of a stork with an ornithologist’s tracking device (Zunes, 2014). The stork was detained by a fisherman and held at a police station. The police claimed it was a “swan” being used by French intelligence to spy on Egyptians (Saner, 2013). The bird was eventually released, only to be killed and eaten before it flew out of the country (Urquhart, 2013). Abla Fatiha the hand puppet was accused of being a “terrorist mouthpiece” in 2014 (Mackey and Stack, 2014) because she appeared on a Vodafone television ad babbling nonsense. Vodafone officials were summoned to the prosecutors office to answer questions because Ahmed Spider, a blogger and television personality, filed a complaint with prosecutors that she was spouting code words to terrorists in the ad (Mackey and Stack, 2014). Amr Simbel, a political researcher and member of the Egyptian Historical Society, wrote an op-ed in the popular al-Dostour newspaper accusing the International Crisis Foundation and Mohammed el-Baradei, who currently lives in Austria, of orchestrating a vast conspiracy involving, the April 6\textsuperscript{th} Youth Movement, former advisors of Jimmy Carter, and the American government to try to return the Muslim Brotherhood to power (Salmy, 2014). After all, the Brotherhood had collected signatures to put el-Baradei forward as a
presidential candidate at one point during Mubarak’s rule (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 5). Armed Forces Center for Strategic Studies General Hossam Sweilam, also previously mentioned, believed that “The Supreme Council of the World” (Naeem, 2016) was responsible for hurricanes, sandstorms, and earthquakes. He specifically named the Alaska based HAARP system as a means of weather control, a favorite topic of American conspiracy theorists as well (El-Din, 2016). Sweilam further claimed that a Mecca crane accident in Saudia Arabia that killed 107 in 2016 was instead the result of a geophysical weapon (El-Din, 2016). In 2016 Adel Azab testified at Mohammed Morsi’s trial that the Muslim Brotherhood was a Masonic group that intended to bring a new religion to Egypt (El-Din, 2016). The Interior Ministry released an official statement accusing the Muslim Brotherhood of orchestrating the Alexandria floods in 2016 and several members of the Brotherhood were arrested and accused of trying to destabilize the pound (El-Din, 2016). When the Province of Sinai claimed responsibility for downing a plane in 2016 killing 224 Russian nationals and Russian and American intelligence officials also concluded that they were responsible Egyptian media personalities called the statements a conspiracy against Egypt (El-Din, 2016).

A battle over information such as al-Sisi’s regime believes it is engaged in has few limits. The Egyptian government in this case becomes, like other Arab regimes, thought police (Khoury, 2018). Al-Sisi told a group of 15 Egyptian parties this internal battle is critical because “if Egypt collapsed, millions of ISIS members will storm the world” (Middle East Monitor, 2015). Yet the enemies in a battle over thought and information are Janus-faced ghosts: they are everywhere one turns and nowhere. One moment in this war mothers, brothers, and sisters are allies. The moment they express a contrary opinion on social media or in an otherwise public fashion, however, they become part of the enemy. They change their minds and the enemy vanishes
again. Trying to root out such supposed dissidents results in an internal purge. Given that there are 60,000 political prisoners currently in Egypt, it is difficult to argue that the al-Sisi regime and its counter-revolution are engaging in anything else. The battle has many fronts. State media spouts lies and conspiracy theories. The government monitors social media, newspapers, and as I have experienced directly, lines in and out of the country. To fight the war in the streets the government had informants.

My interlocutors and many others I spoke to thought that government informers were everywhere, and they were probably correct. The regime is known to employ a network of former convicts to serve as baltagiya, or thugs, and to feed it information (Rommel, 2016; p. 36). Informants may be citizens trying to do the right thing, those under duress, and some are simply being paid. Everyone lives in fear of informants and no one knows who these informants are. For my informants to live in such an environment is to exist in a constant state of dread. People lived “in their own heads” as another of my informants put it.

If my informants said or posted the wrong thing it could have lead to their arrest. They took care with every thought and word. They went home and turned on their televisions only to hear authority figures spouting paranoid conspiracy theories. As I will discuss shortly, they also heard stories of torture and imprisonment. My informants looked over their shoulders, both physically and metaphorically. They and many others stopped engaging strangers in conversation. The usual way out of paranoia and anxiety is to rationalize it: we tell ourselves “it is only me!” but in a place and time where the details of arrest and torture are everyday reality and authority figures speak of conspiracies, such rationalizations are in vain. In addition to government informers, as I will show, when my interlocutors went out on the street they faced police harassment and possible imprisonment.
**Repression**

Political repression and mass imprisonment in Egypt have a long history. President Nasser imprisoned thousands of members of the Muslim Brotherhood between 1954 and 1971 after Mahmud Abd al-Latif, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Secret Unit carried out an assassination attempt against him in Manshiyya Square, Alexandria in October 1954 (Özdemir, 2013; p. 16; Zollner, 2007; p. 413). Imprisoned members of the Brotherhood joined the Communists and leftists, who began to be imprisoned after helping in Nasser’s coup in 1952 (Abo-Issa, 2018; p. 28). Sayyid Qutb, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose works are still cited by jihadists today in defense of their actions, wrote the seminal Jihadist texts, *In the Shade of the Quran* and *Milestones* while being tortured in Nasser’s prisons (Zollner, 2007; p. 416). Later, President Anwar Sadat struck a deal with the Muslim Brotherhood in order to free the Islamists in order to counterbalance the leftists and the Nasserists (Zuhur and Tadros, 2015; p. 110). Nonetheless Sadat also imprisoned leftists and Nasserists (Zuhur and Tadros, 2015; p. 111). After Sadat’s assassination by an Islamist lieutenant in his own army, Mubarak’s response was heavy-handed. Mubarak imprisoned thousands of Islamists and various other dissidents, sometimes going so far as “destroying entire villages and taking families hostage” (Zuhur and Tadros, 2015; p. 112) to combat the Islamist insurgency in the country. In contemporary times the security services are vast: one estimate is that 300,000 people are part of the Central Security Forces (CSF) that augment the police alone (Smith, 2006; p. 12).

After 2011 the powers of the police were temporarily curtailed. They receded from the streets and were a visible but much diminished presence. The police returned in force and the secret police were reactivated after the coup in August 2013 (Kingsley, 2013). The military also began persecuting citizens when in 2014 Al-Sisi issued a presidential decree that ordered the
military to assist the police in “securing and protecting public institutions, offices and facilities” (Hamzawy, 2017; p. 400). This definition included public universities and government buildings. Military courts tried more than 7,000 cases between 2014 and 2015 (Hamzawy, 2017; p. 400), including more than 3,000 cases between April and December 2014 alone (Hellyer, 2016; p. 183). Convictions were a near certainty, and arrestees had even fewer rights than those arrested by regular police. Like during the latter years of Mubarak’s reign, in 2016 police were on every street corner. The difference between now and the years of Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak is the intensity of repression.

As I have mentioned previously and will go into more detail here, Al-Sisi’s government has been shutting down on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Egypt, particularly those who monitor and report human rights abuses. While NGO involvement with political parties has always been banned, in late 2016 the government of Egypt passed a new NGO law that bans NGO involvement with labor unions or professional syndicates such as the Journalists’ or Doctors’ Syndicates (Hamzawy, 2017; p. 395). The government has also tightened controls over transfers of foreign funds into NGOs, seeking to cut off many NGOs’ prime source of funding (Hamzawy, 2017; p. 396). Members of NGOs under government scrutiny face fines of up to $55,000 and imprisonment up to five years (Najjar, 2017).

The new law could be used to target any NGO. However, the government is specifically focusing on NGOs that advocate for human rights and report incidents of abuse. The list of specific instances of shutdown and harassment is long, but the Nadeem Center, which counsels women who have been tortured, has been shut down (Najjar, 2017; Stacher, 2016). Human Rights Watch has been banned in Egypt. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights and the Hisham Mubarak Law Center were under investigation in
2015 (POMED, 2016; p. 1). Hossam Bahgat, a human rights lawyer in Egypt, has had his assets frozen since 2016 and currently faces up to 25 years in jail for allegedly receiving foreign funding for his NGO, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (Front Line Defenders, 2016). The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and the Hisham Mubarak Law Center are under investigation. As of 2016, they did not know why (POMED, 2016; p. 1).

In 2013 following the fall of Mohammed Morsi, interim President Adly Mansour issued the “Protest Law.” The “Protest Law” requires organizations wishing to protest to register their intent to protest with the government at least 3 days and no more than 15 days in advance. Security services have absolute control over which petitions are approved and which are denied. Security services may cancel, postpone, or change the location of any protest they desire for any reason (Hamzawy, 2017; p. 393). The government routinely denies such requests. According to the law the government may also create secure zones where protest is prohibited. Those who defy the Protest Law face between two and five years of jail time and fines between 50,000-100,000LE. ($5,600-$11,200 before the float, $2,760-$5,500 after) (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Security forces may disperse unauthorized protests or those seen as breaching the public peace with batons and bullets (Hamzawy, 2017; p. 394).

Egypt was ruled between 1981 until 2012 under Emergency Law No. 62 of 1958. The Emergency Law finally lapsed in June 2012 (Abdelall, 2015; p. 450). Al-Sisi invoked it again in April 2017 after a series of church bombings in Alexandria and Tanta killed 44 people and wounded 128 more (Hosny, 2018). The Emergency law suspends the protections provided in the constitution allowing press freedom and allows for harsher penalties. The Egyptian constitution of 2011 modified the emergency law, limiting its powers. The Emergency Law can now only be invoked for 6 months, requires a parliamentary vote, and any renewals require a popular
referendum (Abdelall, 2015; p. 451). Despite constitutional changes, these modifications to the emergency law survived to the 2014 constitution (Hosny, 2018). However, al-Sisi has kept the Emergency law almost continually in effect since 2017, most recently renewing it on October 3 2018 without a referendum or parliamentary approval, in direct contravention to the constitution (Egyptian Streets, 2018).

After January 25, 2011 cases of torture and imprisonment were frequently publicized. Police and intelligence agencies have arrested children as young as 14. Pre-trial detention is used as a form of “punitive punishment” (Shukrallah, 2014). Victims in pre-trial detention are held for weeks, months, or sometimes years, without the benefit of a trial. However, one of the most terrifying tools at the state’s disposal is the enforced disappearance of political dissidents. Local Non-Governmental Organizations estimate the rate of enforced disappearance in 2016 at 3-4 a day (Amnesty International, 2016). Indeed, “[e]nforced disappearance has become a key instrument of state policy in Egypt” (Amnesty International, 2016). The disappeared are shuttled from police station to police station, prison to prison, and tortured at every turn. The disappeared are only occasionally charged with a crime. People are being imprisoned at historic rates. In the 1990s when the Islamist insurgency was at its peak there were 20,000 political prisoners. Today the number is 60,000 (Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 2016). Al-Sisi denies there are any political prisoners in Egypt (Middle East Monitor, 2017).

Torture in Egypt has a long history: the US government farmed out torture to Egypt in its extraordinary rendition program (Guardian, 2011) in the 1990s and 2000s and possibly into 2013 (Elmenshawy, 2013). In 2017 a Human Rights Watch investigation concluded that Egypt’s National Security Agency regularly uses torture to force people to confess, give up information, or just to punish them (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The details of torture are well known in
Egypt. Egyptians arrested were splashed with water daily, left blindfolded for hours at a time, beaten daily, electrocuted with shocks to their genitals, and put in cells too small for “20 people but held 60 with no place to sit or sleep” (Shukrallah, 2014). Sometimes torturers beat victims with their fists. Sometimes they beat the soles of their victims’ feet with a rubber hose. Victims are made to strip and pay obeisance before their torturers. Women face rampant sexual abuse (Aman, 2014). After a protest in 2011 the military lined women up at the Egyptian museum for “virginity” tests in which a man in a lab coat fingered their genitals to see if their hymen was intact. (Xan, 2011; Amnesty International, 2011). Men suspected of being gay are subjected to “anal exams”, supposedly to ascertain whether they are “chronic homosexuals” (Feder and Atef, 2015; Aboulenein, 2017). Giulio Regeni, the vanished and murdered Italian researcher, had both of his ears cut off and his genitals electrocuted (Philipson, 2016). He was beaten all over his body and he died when his skull was crushed like an egg by a blunt object (Walsh, 2017). Other accounts of torture indicate Regeni’s treatment was no different than that of Egyptians. The thing that sticks with those arrested often seems to be the sound of their compatriots screaming (Wright, 2006; p. 52; Shukrallah, 2014).

The specific cases of torture are many and involve both famous and ordinary people. In 2014 Alaa Abdel Fattah, a noted Egyptian activist was being held in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day while his case was being adjudicated. His case is still ongoing. Forty-seven year-old Talaat Shaheeb was tortured to death in a police station in Luxor over a personal dispute with a police officer in November 2015. The only punishment for the officers responsible was to be transferred out of Luxor (Ahramonline, 2015). In November 2016 a 50-year-old Coptic fish vendor, Magdi Makeen, was tortured to death inside Al-Amiriya Police Station (Morsy, 2018).
In 2016 the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms received 830 complaints of torture and reported that 14 people died from torture in custody (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

The new constitution forbids torture in any form and the Interior Ministry as early as 2014, swore that torture was absolutely forbidden, did not happen, and extended a chilling invitation: "[t]he ministry assures again that it welcomes any request made by rights organisations, whether official or non-governmental, to visit Egyptian prisons and examine detainees" (Shukrallah, 2014). By contrast, detainees describe an “assembly line of abuse” (Human Rights Watch, 2017) in which even prosecutors were complicit and sometimes participated (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

When complaints of torture are made, officers are referred to prosecution, and higher courts do (on occasion) uphold guilty verdicts. At least one police officer in 2017 had his sentence of seven years in prison for torture upheld and nine others were referred to prosecution in 2017 (Hassan, 2018). As of 2018 there are thousands of complaints against the Interior Minister over the torture of detainees (Hassan, 2018). However, the prosecutors in charge of these investigations are complicit in the torture and so many Egyptians believe that the rare prosecutions are largely for show (Hassan, 2018). Moreover, these highly publicized cases have done nothing to stem the tide of torture in Egypt (Hassan, 2018). Cases against police officers often serve to emphasize what can happen to Egyptians when they are arrested or go to prison, rather than showing that the state is protecting Egyptians.

Speaking against Egypt was also a punishable crime in 2016 and 2017. An Egyptian pop singer, Sherine Abdel Wahab, was sentenced to six months in prison for joking that the Nile was contaminated, and she would rather drink Evian than Nile water (Associated Press, 2018). Sherine has also been banned from performing in Egypt (DeSantis, 2018). Mona el-Mazbouh, a
Lebanese tourist, was sentenced to 11 years in prison for a Facebook video in which she complains about her tourist experience and being sexually harassed (Specia, 2018; Reuters Staff, 2018). She called Egypt “a son of a bitch country” (Reuters Staff, 2018). She was found guilty of “deliberately spreading false rumors that would harm society, attacking religion, and public indecency” (Reuters Staff, 2018).

Being judged indecent or morally questionable in the eyes of the state could result in jail time. Shaimaa Ahmed, a pop singer known as Shyma, has been sentenced to prison for “inciting debauchery” over a video of her bellydancing and complaining about her husband (Associated Press, 2018; BBC News, 2017). Three other female singers were sentenced to prison in 2017 for the same crime (BBC News, 2017). In October 2017 at a Mashrou Leila concert a group of concertgoers rolled out a rainbow colored flag. The government has since hunted down those who rolled out the flag, is searching for anyone suspected of supporting LGBTQ rights, and is now engaging in a massive crackdown against anyone suspected of being gay, lesbian, or have leanings otherwise.

My informants, though not political dissidents, celebrities, or engaged in acts that the state would deem “debauchery” were always nervous that they might be the next to be arrested, tortured, or disappeared. The evidence indicates my informants had reason to fear. Security services act with impunity. Al-Sisi publicly applauded when a police officer machine-gunned three people to death in a dispute over the price of a cup of tea (Khalifa, 2016; The New Arab, 2016). Police officers demand bribes from café owners. They stop cars and force drivers to pay to get out of the jam. Taxis do not charge police officers for rides and street vendors and shop owners must stand by and watch while the police take what they like. As noted in the cases
above, even personal disputes with police officers can lead to torture and death. As I will now show, everyday life had its own forms of dread as well.

*Everyday Harassment*

My informants’ and others’ real fear of arrest, torture, and disappearance is exacerbated by everyday harassment. Pedestrians in large *midans* or squares, are sometimes stopped and questioned by the police, particularly if the officer does not recognize them. I know of several people who were arrested this way. If the pedestrian's answers are not to the officer's liking it can mean anything from fines to jail, torture, and death.

During Ramadan 2016 the vice president of the Agouza section of Giza, a lower middle and working class section of Cairo went around with plainclothes police officers raiding lower middle class and working class cafes that were open during fasting hours, making arrests, and in general shaming people who were breaking the fast (MEE Staff, 2016). The videos were posted on YouTube for all to see.

In July 2016 the government shut down a series of cafes on the popular Road 9 in Maadi, ostensibly because the neighbors complained about noise (Cairoscope Team, 2016). The government claimed this was over “licensing issues.” In truth the proper bribes had not been paid. Lower middle class and working class cafes serve most of their patrons on sidewalks and in the streets. Another common means of harassment is for police officers to appear and demand that such sidewalks and streets to be cleared. This was common enough under Mubarak. In al-Sisi’s Egypt no one is immune. I have been in upper middle class cafes where police have appeared and demand the sidewalk be cleared as well.

Amr, my café owner informant, had faced more than one period of police persecution over his cafés. The café where I met Amr in Maadi was shut down in 2010 for weeks and
afterwards only open after 5:00 due to supposed “licensing issues”. Refuge had its own troubles. Amr occasionally had to shut off the lights and close the doors as if it was closed. Refuge’s troubles were something that Amr would only discuss with me in vague terms, and out of respect I did not press the issue. However, based on what I witnessed, certain conclusions can be drawn. Police officers likely approached him for bribes. I know that he occasionally paid such men off because despite some interruptions, Amr’s café remained open fairly regularly. In other cases he responded to approaching police by turning out all the lights and giving the appearance that Refuge had been shut down.

I was in a well-known elite cafe in 2016 that overlooked the Nile River that had always had tables on the sidewalks only to see a mid-ranking police officer arrive and demand that all the tables be removed from the sidewalk. In mid-2016 as I sat in a café in Maadi the staff quietly closed and locked all the doors, turned out the lights, shut off the music, and muted the televisions. The police were coming around and they did not want trouble. The staff would not or could not tell me more specifics. This was by no means a unique event. I was present in more than one middle class café that year that closed its doors and turned out all the lights because the police were coming. I have seen staff go so far as to unscrew bulbs in order to prevent the lights from accidentally being turned on. Patrons, including myself, remained inside during café blackouts like this until such time as we wished to leave, when the staff would unlock the doors and allow us out. Those still in the café went about their business, albeit quietly. Others who wished to go to the café passed on by. Everyone knew they were avoiding the police.

Yet cafes are not the only ones affected by the police clearing the streets. Patrons find themselves being ordered to move by police. Lower middle class and working class cafes where the sidewalks are cleared are close to shut down: they have nowhere to serve most of their
patrons. The cafes on Road 9 did not pay their bribes, so yet again people are faced with their favorite places being shut down. People could go elsewhere, but often the police close down an entire area. There are many places in Egypt to go, but people would often rather go home than be seen too much under such circumstances. People cannot speak out and the government shuts down their favorite places to go out. They cannot even relax.

Checkpoints are common on the Ring Road that offers access to the outskirts of Cairo and the new cities. Police stop vehicles at random and ask for driver's licenses. If the police officer decides for any reason to “make for someone a problem”, they confiscate their driver's license and possibly tow their car. An immediate bribe to the traffic marshal (Shenker, 2016; p. 203) or barring that, a complex slog through government bureaucracy, is then required to retrieve the confiscated license. Worse things can happen too. Looking the “wrong way or say[ing] the wrong thing” (Shenker, 2016; p. 242) can result in arrest and jail. In 2014 18-year-old student Mahmoud Hussein was stopped at a traffic checkpoint in Northern Cairo. He was wearing a celebratory January 25, 2011 scarf and a “Nation Without Torture” t-shirt. For his clothing, Hussein was transported to a nearby police station “beaten, and thrown in jail” (Shenker, 2016; p. 242). In January 2016, the government renewed Hussein’s for another 45 days. At that point he had spent 757 days in pre-trial detention. It is not uncommon to pass by such checkpoints and see multiple people stopped and standing outside their cars making frantic phone calls to friends and family for help getting out of the jams brought on by arbitrary police stops. While the Egyptian government has claimed it will end the practice of confiscating driver's licenses as of this writing it is still common practice.

In 2016 my informants and many others believed that the government assigns plainclothes officers and informants to cafes in order to monitor the populace. If they were not in
cafes, plainclothes definitely frequented other places in Cairo. I was approached in Tahrir Square by at least one plainclothes police officer and have seen many more across Cairo. Plainclothes police were often more obvious than one would expect. They looked like upper-middle class youth: clean jeans, nice t-shirts, and they drove expensive and largely clean (from dust) cars. What made them obvious is that they carried large firearms tucked into the waistbands of their jeans (I saw at least one .50 caliber Desert Eagle) and that the people around them often seemed afraid.

To fill arrest quotas at the end of the year the police often arrest random people in middle and lower class cafes. Those arrested are guilty until proven innocent. If the police wish they will concoct charges. None of these actions on the part of the security forces are new, but under al-Sisi they were employed far more frequently and with far more intensity.

The cumulative effect of the regime’s tactics is insidious. It is hard to go out. People go by their favorite café, only to find it closed. A group of police officers is on the street corner, taking names and making arrests. A paddy wagon is nearby. People who witness such things put their heads down and walk hurriedly by, hoping they are not noticed (Shenker, 2016; p. 203). They go home, shut their doors, and hope they have not been followed. What if someone mentions their name? The dread can last for days. People go for a drive, and the police stop them at a checkpoint. They breathe a sigh of relief as they are allowed to pass. The person behind them is not so fortunate. They bear witness as an unlucky soul is pulled out of their car.

Such forms of everyday repression and provocation have obvious consequences for my informants Amr and Adel. Aside from the constant need to pass through a heavily controlled midan (square) to get to work every day, Amr must pay bribes to the newly empowered police or he must hide that his business is open, and concealing the fact that his business is open on a
regular basis, however, means lost customers. The better option would be to pay the bribes. But to pay bribes puts Amr’s already borderline business even further in the red. I had previously seen the consequences of such problems, as he had to disguise the fact that his Maadi café was open more than once. Amr once told me in an empty café in a low voice, and only after looking around the room “the government is shit.” But Amr does not go to protests. He is a respectable middle class man. He will not risk the livelihood of his family.

Adel lives in Bulaq al-Dakrur, an informal settlement, or ‘ashawiyyat. I have discussed informal settlements elsewhere. Reaching Bulaq in particular is a challenge. It requires crossing a series of bridges and cross the railroad track to reach “the other side” (Kupplinger, 2006; p. 2). Entering or leaving constantly exposes Adel to the streets. He must keep his head down. As Bulaq is an informal settlement, practically every place Adel goes at home is technically illegal, constantly exposing him to low-grade risk. As a youth who frequents cafes in Bulaq, Adel must also be careful to avoid being rounded up and arrested at random with other youth.

Mohammed the personal trainer lives close to Cairo University, once a hotbed of student protest. In 2013 when the police massacred the Rabeya al-Adaweya protestors, they used the same tactics at Cairo University and at Nahda Square. The Egyptian Ministry of Health estimates 87 died in these dispersals (Human Rights Watch, 2014). When protests are planned he stays home and does not go to work. Mohammed works near a major government building that is an important site of protest. Mohammed wants to get married and dreams of working in the tourism industry and starting his own company. None of these things will happen if he is arrested and thrown in jail. So Mohammed plays it safe. He is after all, or tries to be, a respectable middle class youth. He does not go to protests because he does not wish to risk his life and those of the people he cares about. Mohammed never spoke to me about the government. This is in part
because given the gym’s proximity to a major government building we were likely all under surveillance.

Hind worked at a private foreign school. The government of Egypt regulates these schools, but inspectors for the Ministry of Education cannot under normal circumstances legally enter a private school such as Hind’s. Nonetheless Hind lived in constant fear that parents would call the Ministry of Education. This did on occasion happen and at least once an inspector appeared to investigate an alleged assault by one student on another. On at least one occasion the school was forced to file a report with the local police station. Brushes with authority such as these are never treated lightly and Hind lived in constant state of anxiety that one of them would go badly for her. She was determined that her last year be a “good year” and to go out on a high note. Hind’s student’s parents were government officials and while she had friends, Hind also had enemies. Parents who were unhappy with the school often treated it as a fault of Hind personally and on occasions sought to file suit or to even assault Hind. In short, a wrong move could upend her retirement and embroil her in legal battles that she might not win. In Egypt private citizens with the aid of lawyers can file lawsuits against one another that result in jail time, particularly with regards to concerns over public decency (Fathi, 2018). Moreover, citizens can file complaints with the prosecutor general’s office which the prosecutor may choose to take up or not. Hind feared these kinds of complaints in particular: they could upend her life.

Insurgency

Efforts to strike fear into the populace through torture and repression have other consequences in addition to the fear itself. An Islamist insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula broke out in July 2013 and a series of bombings, attacks, and assassination attempts against government officials in Cairo and Alexandria were launched in the wake of August 2013. These
operations are arguably the result of al-Sisi’s attempt to wipe out his opposition in one fell swoop at Rabaa’ al-Adaweya and al-Nahda squares. Moreover, Egypt has a long history of producing middle class jihadists through torture and political repression.

Anwar Sadat styled himself Rayyis Mo’men, or the “Believer President” and let some of Nasser’s Islamist prisoners go free. Egypt’s prisons, unfortunately, had radicalized many of these men. After an Islamist lieutenant in the Egyptian military assassinated Anwar Sadat on October 6, 1981 (Wright, 2006; p. 39) Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian doctor who belonged an Islamist cell plotting the overthrow of the Egyptian government, was arrested, tortured, sexually abused, and forced to give up Islamist contacts. Before al-Zawahri entered an Egyptian prison he merely wanted to overthrow the Egyptian regime. After he emerged from prison Al-Zawahri became the terrorist mastermind later responsible for planning the 9/11 attacks (Wright, 2006; p. 52) and subsequently took over leadership of al-Qaeda after the death of Osama bin Laden.

The Council on Foreign Relations describes al-Sisi’s means of suppressing these terrorist operations as turning Egypt into a “jihadi factory” (Abrams, 2017; p 7). As mentioned before, Egypt currently has 60,000 political prisoners. These individuals are not guilty violent crime, yet they are imprisoned alongside those who are. They are not guilty of terrorism, yet they are beaten, tortured, and humiliated alongside those who are. This process does not defeat terrorism. It produces terrorists as inmates experience the injustice of torture while simultaneously learning from actual jihadists (Abrams, 2017; p. 7). Egypt has a vast number of people in prison from which to produce terrorists.

Al-Sisi’s government uses this threat of terrorism to justify greater arrests (Han, 2016; p. 80). Members of the lower middle class among whom the Muslim Brotherhood had once been popular now must be doubly careful. The Brotherhood was declared a terrorist organization by
the Egyptian government in December 2013 (Al-Malky, 2014). Guilt by association can be devastating and any hint of the wrong association can be damning in the eyes of the Egyptian government. There are tens of thousands of political dissidents in prison in Egypt already. The prisons are infamous. People are tortured and forced to turn in friends and colleagues. People are tried and convicted based on confessions given under torture. Friends and colleagues are rounded up and the process continues.

_Tiran and Sanafir_

The Egyptian government’s repressive power and the fear it produced was on full display in early April 2016 when Egypt announced the transfer of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir to the Saudi government. Many Egyptians were infuriated, thinking that the government of Egypt gave these islands to the Saudis in exchange for billions of dollars of Saudi aide. Al-Sisi was dismissive, saying “Egypt did not relinquish even a grain of sand.” (BBC News, 2016) and “please do not let us talk about this matter again” (Fahim, 2016) because parliament would take up this matter and “form a committee or two or do whatever it wants” (Fahim, 2016). Protests were planned for Friday April 15 2016. I read about them in the news, but could find nothing on Facebook and Twitter. None of my informants spoke to me about the protests and I did not overhear anyone talking about them in the cafes I frequented. One of my informants became nervous when I asked about the protests and refused to answer. Later his boss, Amr, approached me. I told him I was asking because I had not heard anything about it before today. Amr had not either. He took my number, and told me to stay in Dokki that day. There would be police everywhere. He advised me to stay home the next day as well. Amr believed that staying home was best, and like many of the middle class, he intended to do just that if he could. Amr said people stay home because of fear of _fūwda_, or chaos.
In the days immediately following the 2011 uprising my informants and many others felt as if anything could happen. In the short term this translated to new possibilities for life and these were seen as good. In the long term, my informants came to learn that these possibilities also included terrifying new realities. Amr feared nearing a protest and being swept up in a police net, or worse, being spotted, his name noted, and being picked up later at his home in the dead of night. It had happened to others. Amr dreaded being mugged or beaten, any number of things that he never would have considered possibilities in his life eight years ago, before Mubarak fell. At least under Mubarak, he imagined, he could stay safe by keeping his head down and his mouth shut. Even this was not enough in al-Sisi’s Egypt. Sisi is terrible Amr said but he would not go to the protests because he could not afford the risk. As it turned out, Amr opened Refuge for only a few hours the day of the protests. He had no customers so he closed the café and everyone went home.

On April 15 the protests started after prayers. There was a protest at the Parliament not far from my apartment. I could hear it but it was not close enough to see. I heard the police dispersing it sometime in the early afternoon. Sadat metro station in Tahrir Square was closed. After the Parliament protest was dispersed the streets in Dokki went eerily quiet. More people gathered to protest at Sayyeda Zeinab, the Journalist's Syndicate, and Mohammed Mahmoud Street in Mohandessin. The Mohandessin protest was dispersed by early afternoon along with others scattered throughout the city leaving only Sayyeda Zeinab and the Journalist's syndicate. The protesters dubbed the day “Land Friday” and called for the downfall of the regime. The Sayyeda Zeinab protest moved to join the Journalist's Syndicate at Talaat Harb. There were 1500-2000 people once the protests were combined. Police dispersed the protest late in the evening using tear gas and water cannons.
The week of April 25 the government prepared itself for much larger protests. Starting Thursday, April 21, the police began arresting people from their homes and downtown Cairo cafes (Human Rights Watch, 2016). On Friday, April 22 the police arrested between 12 and 50 people downtown and downtown area cafes alone. Overall the police arrested at least 382 people, 33 of whom were journalists (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The police raided a number of lower middle class and middle class cafes close to the middle class cafe I frequented in Sayyeda Zeinab, making seemingly random arrests as a means to intimidate the populace. This had been normal procedure under Mubarak (Ghannam, 2013). However, it had seen a break between 2011 and 2013. Here it returned in force.

I passed by Tahrir Square on the morning of April 25. Tanks ringed the square. No traffic could get in or out. As I passed the Qasr al-Aini Bridge that leads into Tahrir there were more tanks rolling in. The government had also closed off Abdel Khalek Tharwat Street, the location of the Journalist’s Syndicate (Saaman and Sanchez, 2016). Security forces were out in force and dressed in riot gear, the traditional white, or even street clothes where they “lurked in alleyways, at metro stations and in armored cars, looking for signs of trouble” (Fahim, 2016).

The government authorized live ammunition against the protests on April 25th (Saaman and Sanchez, 2016). Protesters were chased from Parliament and moved to Midan Mesaha, the nearest square and where my home was located. At 3:30 people at Midan Mesaha were calling for medics. The police were dispersing the protest with tear gas and birdshot. There were mass arrests in Midan Mesaha as well. Videos of the Mesaha protest showed people shouting at the police and military “Baltagiyya Baltagiyya!” or “Thugs! Thugs!” while they were fired upon by police. The government arrested at least 286 people on April 25 (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Those arrested were not allowed defense lawyers while they were questioned and the
government at one point fired tear gas at lawyers waiting outside the station after the station chief had yelled at them to leave (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

*The Revolution of the Poor*

By November 2016 the peak of fear had hit Cairo and sustained repressive tactics were proving quite effective. After the gas subsidy was cut and the price of gas rose 60-79% overnight Egyptian oppositionists planned a protest for Friday, November 11. There was a Facebook page calling for a mass suicide on the same day. It had thousands of likes. It seemed as if the country might erupt again. Inflation was at 15% (Aboulenein and Ismail, 2016), prices of basic goods were rising quickly, and wages were flat. The price of bread in some places had gone up 33% and some medicine was unavailable due to the cost of importing it (Khalifa, 2016). The government raised electricity prices 35 to 40% and introduced a 13% Value Added Tax in August (Aboulenein and Ismail, 2016). People appeared to be at their breaking point: financially they had few options to cut. The papers called the impending protests “The Revolution of the Poor.” On November 11, 2016 Cairo security services covered downtown with riot police and armored cars (Aboulenein and Ismail, 2016). There were also heavy security presences in Alexandria, Suez, and Minya (Aboulenein and Ismail, 2016). Only a few small protests materialized throughout the day, and these were quickly crushed (Aboulenein and Ismail, 2016). For the most part the streets outside of downtown were eerily silent and protests failed to materialize (Khalifa, 2016). The Muslim Brotherhood backed the protests, but there are 60,000 political prisoners in Egyptian jails and those prisoners include the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and tens of thousands of their membership (Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 2016). The Brotherhood’s numbers on the ground were few. One of the Facebook groups calling for the protests was Turkey-based, and likely Brotherhood as well (Amin, 2016),
winning it no friends in suspicious Cairo. Many were weary of protest (Amin, 2016) and too scared to go out. As I will show, the state’s habit of spreading paranoia did not help matters either.

Conclusions

In 2016 and 2017 my informants faced harassment on the streets and lies and misinformation on television. Wrong moves and wrong looks could land them in jail or worse. Subjects such as the Tiran and Sanafir Islands, subsidy cuts, random arrests, and sexual assault were common knowledge in 2016 and 2017. My informants were afraid to talk about any of these things. They complained that the rising cost of food was bankrupting them. Drivers complained that the price of fuel had gone up. The closest anyone came to governmental criticism was one of Hind's colleagues noting that she had been a fan of al-Sisi, but now she was not so happy with him. Amr, at one point, in an empty cafe looked around the room and quietly whispered to me that the government was “shit”. No one openly criticized the president to me or even spoke of the military or its role at all. I once mentioned in passing the 2011 uprising in a room of Egyptians: I was met with flat stares and silence. People talking on the phone always seemed to be promising payments to someone else.

Al-Sisi meets opposition harshly and his definition of it is broad. He sows fear and paranoia in the populace and this fear and paranoia in turn makes subsidy cuts easier to carry out. Because residents do not know who is watching or when, they are inclined to remain silent. Anyone could betray them. Lower middle class men are angry because they can no longer meet the needs of their families. They say, as Amr did, “Everything is shit.” and “What can we do?” Their silence about the causes of their problems results in their impoverishment, which deepens their despair and does nothing to alleviate their fear. It is a vicious cycle.
For much of 2016 and 2017 my informants, and many Egyptians like them, existed in state of dread. They feared the government, the police, and what felt to them like chaos. Chaos represents a lack of order, predictability, and rhythm. Yet middle class-ness itself is an ideal predicated on a very particular kind of rhythm and financial predictability: one goes to work at their white-collar job and goes home to spend time with one’s family. Not feeling safe from the police, not knowing if you will be allowed to pass unmolested, is a powerful contributor to feelings of chaos. Fear derives from a perceived lack of control over your fate and from the knowledge and possibility of so many bad things that can happen. Dread is how you live in that world. People desire an end to, as Amr put it, fūwda, or chaos.

Yet fear, dread, and paranoia at such extremes are finite emotional states. Under such sustained duress people may explode or perhaps worse, implode on themselves. For many, however, eventually the fear breaks down. Despite the harsh consequences, the power of such repression to quell resistance fades with overuse and then threatens to begin to solidify the very opposition it is meant to sunder. My informants cannot look over their shoulders forever, especially when the financial pressure they are under is so high that it threatens their ability to remain muhtaram, respectable, middle class citizens.
Struggling to Maintain Respectability

The Egyptian lower middle class is living under a decline that has been accelerated by the counter-revolution that began in 2011 and continued throughout 2016 and 2017. This decline and acceleration endangers their ability to retain ihtiram, or respectability, a discourse and normative ideal for the Egyptian middle classes. Here I discuss what respectability means to the lower middle class and argue that their declining financial situation threatens this aspiration to ihtiram and with it, the idea of maintaining a normative middle class lifestyle in Egypt.

The Basics of Respectability in Middle Class Life

Ihtiram, or respectability, is a key term in a broad discourse about the appropriate ways of living for the Egyptian middle class. Ihtiram is a set of moral and material judgments that the middle class (and those who wish to be middle class) makes about themselves and others. Ihtiram is as much aspirational for the lower middle class as it is a reality of everyday life: it is something they struggle to achieve and maintain. Respectability is an “assessment of the more diffuse qualities of persons” (Wuthnow, 2017; p. 20) and its aspiration is not exclusive to the middle class (Wuthnow, 2017; pp. 21-22) in Egypt, for it is based on meritocratic hope (Petit, 2017; p. 65). Ihtiram is a processual and relational negotiated outcome between parties (Wuthnow, 2017; p. 22; Schielke, 2015; p. 55) that is constantly being evaluated and re-evaluated.

When my lower middle class informants spoke about ihtiram, they often did so in moral terms. A common rebuke when someone behaved wrongly was to say “ihtiram nefsak!”, respect yourself! Thus the moral qualities of ihtiram bear some elaboration in order to understand how economics affects moral discourse. One element of ihtiram means being trustworthy. Trust is given based on past actions and expectations of future activities. Respectability differs from
“karāma”, or dignity, which refers to the sanctity of one’s body and was one of the chief demands of the 2011 revolution (Winegar, 2016; p. 611). Parents condition their children to behave in a respectable fashion, believing it to be an attribute that carries from place to place throughout life (Wuthnow, 2017; p. 21).

The rules of respectability also serve as a guide for how to deal with others based on their standing, for how to have or project/develop a standing before others, and how to deal with situations where conflicts arise with regard to standing and reputation (Schielke, 2015; p. 58). Middle class ideas about respectability are a means of boundary making both inside and outside Egypt. In Britain the middle classes, particularly upper middle class and public school educated whites, define themselves against working class “chavs” who they regard as disgusting, unmannered, and sexually profligate (Tyler, 2008; Lawler, 2005). In the United States the middle classes separate themselves from working class and poor “white trash” (Lawler, 2005; p. 430) and in India, the middle classes distinguish themselves from the “vulgar” (Gilbertson, 2014; p. 121) poor and the elites, who they see as prone to excess and foreign in aspect (Gilbertson, 2014; p. 121). In China the educated white-collar middle class of schoolteachers, doctors, lawyers, and public servants imagine themselves as more respectable than low-level officials and uneducated businessmen “parvenus” (Unger, 2006; p. 27).

In Egypt middle class ihtiram is set against and in relation to the idea of sha’bi, or popular, status (Pettit, 2017; p. 103). The popular classes wear less expensive clothes than the middle class (Ghannam, 2013; p. 24). Older men wear “out of fashion” suits and galabeyas, the traditional Egyptian robe, usually beige, are common (Peterson, 2011; p. 149), but young men or single men, buy the nicest clothes they can afford (Ghannam, 2013; p. 75). Women tended towards robes and abayas (Winegar, 2016; p. 614). Though the working classes are quite
concerned with morals and manners themselves, like the British middle class (Lawler, 2005; Tyler, 2008) the Egyptian middle classes (and upper classes), or those who aspire to it, imagine they have better manners and morals, *adab and akhlaq*, than the working class (Peterson, 2011; p. 107).

My informant’s decisions about who is and who is not sophisticated and respectable were often based on language and comportment, and could be made quite quickly. Hind mocked a parent at her school who said “bit” (daughter) instead of “bint” (also daughter) as an unsophisticated *fellah*, or more accurately in her meaning, a peasant hick. This man was uneducated in speech, and thus in Hind’s estimation, he was less decorous than her. Another of my lower middle class informants made fun of a group of dark-skinned men who wore dirty *gallabeyas* and rode in the back of trucks. Again, he thought of them as rubes from the countryside. Skin color is also an important determinant of status, though not as it is in the United States. Skin color often mark out regional and some status differences in Egypt, with darker skin colors being associated with upper Egypt (Ghannam, 2013; p. 8), an area associated with hard working, but also uneducated and less decorous people. The line for the lower middle class in these cases was quite clearly drawn against people they thought obviously from the countryside: members of the lower middle class imagined country folk were easier to spot and separate out on the streets than the working class, with whom at least the lower middle class shared much of the experience of the city.

On the other end, middle class respectability can be defined through a shared discourse of morality and an understanding of distinction from upper class “fat cats” (Donner, 2017) those uncultured nouveau riches, or *ahl al-zawat* (Donner, 2017; Shechter, 2009; p. 26). These
individuals arose during the *infitaḥ* and felt less indebted to the state for their well-being, and hence, felt less loyalty to it and to other social classes (Shechter, 2009; p. 27).

This lower middle class and middle class dislike of the *infitaḥis* is juxtaposed with youthful admiration of pop singers and football stars (Donner, 2017). This is not, however, a middle class endorsement of their excesses, which are spoken about in terms of whether or not such money is seen as earned, its spending is tasteful, or whether or not their morals are considered sound (Donner, 2017). For example, my informants and others often spoke of the Lebanese pop singer Nancy Ajram in more positive tones than Haifa Wehbe, another Lebanese pop singer. Haifa was considered debauched based on her racy videos, Nancy less so.

The middle class imagines that they have earned their place in society through their education and hard work. Unlike “fat cats” (Donner, 2017), they believe they contribute to Egypt’s culture. They are not vulgar in language or speech. By way of example, the most stereotypical of the sort of nouveau riche that a member of the lower middle class might set herself or himself against would be Fadda al-Madawi, from the Ramadan *musalsil* (serial) *White Flag*. Her catchphrase “Hamoooo! Al-Timsaha!! Yalla!!” (Mohammed! The Crocodile! Let’s go!) was the archetype for upper class nouveau riche vulgarity (Armbrust, 1996; pp. 13). “Hamoo” was a lower class diminutive for Mohammed. Al-Timsaha (the crocodile) was a vulgar way of referring to her massive Mercedes Benz. Fadda spent the series trying to take the protagonist, Dr. Mufid’s villa from him. Fadda took from society, but she did not give back to it.

Such understandings of middle class sophistication set against vulgarity can also be used to make sense of current events. Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi (2012-2013) was the son of a peasant farmer (Reuters, 2012). My informants mocked Morsi for his speech, saying that he spoke like a *fellah*, a peasant. Morsi did not speak *fusha* (formal Arabic) well. In and of itself,
this is not a mark against Morsi: many politicians in modern Egypt do not speak formal Arabic with any degree of fluency. The issue with Morsi was that he almost always spoke colloquial, used phrases that were regarded as “country” in my informant’s eyes, and fumbled formal Arabic when he attempted it. In one particular instance Morsi spoke before a women’s conference and said “If anyone sticks his finger inside Egypt, I will cut it off.” The obvious sexual connotations of this phrase when translated to English are just as strong in Arabic. It was regarded as an unsophisticated thing for a President to say, and it led to a wave of jokes at his expense (Egypt Independent, 2013).

Middle class notions of respectability include consumptive habits. Looking like a member of the middle class is essential to being esteemed. Consumption is a form of information exchange (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996) that conveys middle class ideas of respectability. The middle class “uses consumption to enforce its separate status from the lower classes, but lives in constant anxiety of losing the control necessary to maintain the customary standard of living” (Cahn, 2008; p. 440) in a culturally conditioned fashion (Wuthnow, 2017; p. 20). The middle class ideal includes having the proper clothes, a suitable mode of transport, the proper mobile phone (internet enabled), and the correct form of home. I will discuss these in more detail later, but for now it is important to realize that only the upper middle class in fact meets all of these material ideals and even then, not all the time. Much of the middle class ideal and its respectability is aspirational for the lower middle class.

In general terms, the more money someone has and the higher their social class, the less they are concerned with respectability because they are inherently made more respectable by their social class and money. However, for falling members of the middle class such as those in Egypt and Latin America (Cahn, 2008; p. 431), consumption remains an important but inherently
unstable means by which one can construct middle class respectability (Pettit, 2017; p. 53). For example, Brazilian members of the middle class faced trading in their salaried positions for commissioned based sale positions in the 1990s. They sought to hold on to markers of middle class status by publicly displaying foreign imports such as items obtained from visits to Disneyland (O’Daugherty in Cahn, 2002; p. 11). Respectability is indexed by consumptive practices and middle class consumption can be endangered by economic crisis (Pettit, 2017; p. 40).

*Living out Iḥtiram*

*I am a respectable woman! You can’t talk to me that way! - Hind*

Respectability is a discourse and currency amongst the middle class about how one lives. A “ragil muhtaram,” or respectable man, is someone who is able to provide for his family, who lives in a proper home, and who has equally respectable sons and daughters. Men who are middle class or aspire to it are judged by how well they provides for their families (Ghannam, 2014; p. 22). They are tough, *shidīd*, but gentle (Ghannam, 2014; p. 31-32), jealous, yet benevolently protective (Schielke, 2015; p. 55). Respectable men treat others with respect, and are treated with respect in turn. A woman or man with a private education can make an additional claim to being “respectable, professional, critical, ethical, and educated” (Pettit, 2017; p 130). The most creditable sort of woman is married and lives with her husband. She too, treats others with respect and in the case of the lower middle class, behaves with modesty. A respectable woman engages in domestic production. In the middle class ideal she is educated and thus contributes to the education of her children. She cooks, cleans (Abu-Lughod, 2001; p. 142), engages in informal labor, and irons her husband’s clothes (Ghannam, 2013; pp. 188-189).
Unmarried women and men derive much of their respectability from their parents. Young women’s respectability is tied inextricably to their sexuality. Young women exist under an adverse standard: it is very easy for them to diminish the respectability of a home and themselves by dating, being out too late or too much, dressing without sufficient modesty, holding hands with a boy, kissing, or any number of activities. Ideally, young middle class women stay home and serve their brothers and fathers (and sometimes their brother’s friends). Young women can add to the respectability of a home aspiring to the middle class or that is already middle class by becoming educated (Agu Lughod, 2001; p. 60), by marrying well, by defending the standing of their brothers and families (Ghannam, 2013; p. 88), by using money from their work to contribute to the success of their family (Ghannam, 2013; p. 91), and by being dutiful daughters who meet family obligations (Ghannam, 2013; p. 87). Young men add to the ihtiram of their parents and can accumulate their own by taking responsibility for certain household tasks such as going to the store and by behaving well in public, thus building a creditable “masculine trajectory” (Ghannam, 2014; p. 8).

A proper middle class family lives in a bayt muhtaram, a respectable home. The Arabic word “bayt” most directly translates to “home.” However, it also denotes a place where a father, mother, and children and dependents live (Fathy, 2003; p. 183). In Cairo almost no one lives in a physical house and everyone lives in an apartment. Yet a respectable middle class home is always called a “bayt”, or house, never a “sha’a” (which usually refers to a sha’a mafrusha, a furnished apartment) or apartment because respectable men are married and live in their own home. Everyone who is not married should, according to the rules of respectability, live in her or his parents’ home.
The material form of a respectable home is harder to define, but it is a house that is large enough to accommodate the family (of whatever size it may be) comfortably, but not necessarily one in which everyone has their own room. Middle class houses should have modern appliances, which at minimum consist of a television set (usually as big as one can afford) and a refrigerator (Pettit, 2017; p. 137). Having one’s own room is less important for middle class Egyptians than it is for middle class Americans and young men are more likely than young women to have one if such rooms are available. Respectable houses are furnished and have raised beds as opposed to mattresses on the floor. This is not to say that no one shares a bed. Rather it is a statement about the nature of the beds themselves: adults and children do not sleep on a mattress on the floor as the lower classes or those in the countryside may do.

In a bayt muḥtaram, the man is ideally the only one who works and the wife cooks, cleans, and takes care of the household. In reality roughly 9% of Egyptian women work (Barsoum, 2010), and this includes many lower middle class wives. This labor can be in middle class government jobs in the public or private sector or it can be informal labor. This does not necessarily detract from the respectable nature of the home in question as long as the woman also carries out her household duties such as cooking, cleaning, and childrearing (Ghannam, 2013; pp. 13-14). The ideal is that young middle class women quit work when they get married. They desire to save only for marriage and being able to labor only in the home after marriage is a sign of a good husband (Ghannam, 2013; p. 13). However, this does not always occur. Several of the female teachers at Hind’s school were married, as was Hind herself. Husbands, wives, and youth are taking second jobs and in some cases starting businesses in addition to the second jobs in order to accumulate savings (Tawil, 2016). These second jobs are in addition to the second jobs
that lower middle class men have already taken such as government workers who drive taxis in their off hours and so on.

Maintaining a respectable home has been difficult for members of the lower middle class at least since the 1980s and 1990s. Yet after 2011 the difficulty of maintaining a reputable home has rapidly increased. Housing in Cairo is a complex issue. There are numerous expensive villas and pricey apartments for those who have money. New divisions arise every day: I have seen the expansion of New Cairo from a series of nearly empty roads to a metropolis unto itself since 2008. Yet these new divisions are beyond the price range of most of the lower middle class. Empty and half abandoned buildings litter the city but most members of the lower middle class cannot afford to live near their places of work. Members of the lower middle class deal with this problem by living in cheaper areas and putting up with long commutes to their places of work. Yet the buying power of many in the lower middle classes has been severely compromised by the economic strains of the past five years. Inflation in 2016 alone was 30%. My informants concerned themselves with how they could buy food in the way in which they were accustomed: meat consumption was decreasing, they were being forced to purchase lower quality food, and most painfully, less sugar. My informants did not speak at all of replacing broken televisions, repairing refrigerators, or purchasing important household goods. Indeed, many other members of the lower middle class are forgoing such purchases as well (Tawil, 2016). Yet a middle class family can still appear middle class without a respectable or dignified private life if they can appear respectable to others in public (Winegar, 2016; p. 612).

Imagine then the frustration of my informants in public life: it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the aesthetic (Winegar, 2016; p. 1) of middle class-ness in public as well. How does a man provide properly for his family when his wages are no longer sufficient and he
has so few ways of earning more? How does one buy decent clothes if she or he cannot even afford meat? These are all questions my informants posed, frustrated, in conversation with me.

In practical terms, while men, brothers, and fathers are expected to be generous and attentive in public (Pettit, 2017; p. 210), they found themselves unable to be so when their own concerns were so pressing and their financial reserves were diminishing. Men cannot take their wives out to dinner, nor can pensioner parents as easily give money to their married sons. Parents are switching their children to cheaper schools (Tawil, 2016). Men regard such a diminishment of lifestyle and public consumption as a “social disgrace” (Sherbini, 2016). Some members of the lower middle class are now taking government supplied food aid. Unlike other food aid, their food boxes and cans have no labels to avoid embarrassing them (Shembab, 2016). Men continue to work for wages that have increased little, but in the face of rapid inflation, a currency float, and disappearing subsidies, all in the course of one year, it is difficult to effectively provide for one’s family, even with two jobs.

Women must range further to shop as kiosks in different parts of town can offer goods at radically different prices. This is because in Cairo, shopping is tiered. The cheapest goods can be found in il-aswaq, or markets, where goods are sold in covered stands, located in popular quarters. One can also shop at corner kiosks for items such as sodas, chips, and newspapers. Larger kiosks or markets carry groceries, but these often carry only local brands and the selection is limited. Last and most expensive are the supermarkets such as Metro Market, the European store Carrefour, Spinny’s and others. In addition, prices in one part of town may be very different from another.

While supermarket prices such as those in Spinny’s can remain relatively the same across town, prices of vegetables and other items can vary considerably. For example, when I lived in
Dokki I could buy several kilos of vegetables from the small shop behind my house for less than 20LE (roughly $1) at the time. At a kiosk on Road 233 in the more posh Digla district of Maadi, it could cost 50LE for the same amount of vegetables. Thus as members of the lower middle class became relatively poorer, shopping necessitated traveling further to less expensive parts of town to afford similar groceries. Members of the lower middle class were being forced to enter il-aswaq in poorer and less reputable parts of town. Yet the souq, or open market, in a poorer neighborhood is less respectable than a supermarket (Coillie, 2018).

My informants and other members of the lower middle class were under a great deal of pressure because of their economic situation, and this made it difficult to uphold appropriate middle class standards of public reserve and morality. The struggle to maintain a respectable home or to shop in a respectable fashion means that members of the lower middle class must place more emphasis on appearing praiseworthy in public. Turning up at locations appropriate to the middle class such as cafes and gyms and looking middle class and respected at work become more important as the economic means to maintain a lower middle class lifestyle diminish. I now discuss in further detail what middle class respectability entails and how it is challenged, through a focus on specific sites, including cafes, gyms, and work.

Public Repute

The aesthetic of public ihtiram is first and most obviously displayed by dress. One can observe appropriate generational and public and private sector dress through the prism of cafes. There is a café on virtually every street corner in Cairo, and different cafes cater to different class fractions. Each cafe has a particular aesthetic that appeals (or is meant to appeal to) to the class or class fraction that frequents it. Each person tends to have their own café that they frequent more than others. The staff at Egyptian cafes typically know regulars by name and often bring
them their standard order when they arrive, without being asked. Members of the middle classes usually go to cafes to see and be seen but also to be catered to in particular ways depending on their position in the class stratum. Here, drawing on my fieldnotes, I examine some of the ways in which members of the middle classes display middle class respectability to the public and the ways in which they are recognized and recognize others as members of their particular class.

I am at Refuge, in Dokki. Refuge’s location straddles the upper middle class neighborhood of the square nearby and the lower middle class neighborhood at the end of the street. It is April and after 8:00PM on a weeknight. Two businessmen in black slacks and striped dress shirts sit across the table from each other. One talks on the phone. These, however, are businessmen closing a deal. Both are smoking cigarettes. The ashtray in front of them seems to indicate they have been here for some time.

A woman in her 40s in a hijab and a loose fitting brightly flowered dress sits in a booth alone. At Refuge about 40% of women wear the veil. The percentage of veils on the streets is much higher. At an upper middle class or elite café less than 10% of women don the veil. The veil is more common in the lower classes. Middle class women in cafes dress along a generational divide. Young women, including some women in their 30s, wear jeans and blouses, but dresses are also very common. Skirts are knee length but shorts, reflecting the wider cultural norms, are almost never seen on women. Make-up, again, reflecting wider cultural norms and ideas about feminine beauty, is often heavy.

The veiled woman in the flowered dress is smoking a shīsha. She looks at her phone. It is unusual for a woman alone to smoke shīsha. Publicly, it is regarded as somewhat provocative and not very creditable for women. Amr’s café does not turn away paying customers, but the
disapproval in the room of this woman’s actions are displayed by the distance the staff keep from her and the coolness of their approach.

    In the far corner a young woman and young man are cuddling. The young man is wearing jeans and a polo shirt. Public dress is jeans and polo shirts for young men. Skinny jeans and gelled hair are common accouterments for middle class youths, though this young man’s hair has less emphasis on hair gel. This couple is obviously on a date. Amr, the owner, has told me on occasion that he does not approve of such things, but his staff is discrete and polite and will not interfere. In any case the couple are keeping to themselves. Occasionally parents appear and want to talk to Amr about what their children are doing in his cafe. Amr does not discourage young couples as long as the public displays of affection do not go beyond a little cuddling. Amr is a practical man.

    There is a group of youth in the large corner. They wear jeans and polo shirts of varying styles and colors. They are obviously out for the evening and enjoying themselves. This group, who seem to make constant special requests, takes up much of the staff’s time. Nonetheless, the staff is ever polite and helpful, because it is good for business.

    In order to be served at a café such as Refuge, one must be dressed appropriately. The young men in polo shirts and jeans described above were in acceptable dress. Women can wear jeans and blouses. T-shirts are uncommon for men and women, but acceptable if they are clean and not too obviously worn. Failure to adhere to this dress code will result in patrons not being allowed into cafes in some cases. Staff know on sight who belongs and who does not. In more upper class cafes if a person cannot be forbidden admission they will be stuck in a quiet corner and thoroughly ignored by the staff until they leave.
In general, lower middle class clothing is reflective first of work and school uniforms. School uniforms at private schools can be highly standardized, but almost always involves some variation of jeans or slacks and polo shirts. It is also worth noting that Egyptians distinguish between “classic cut” jeans and regular jeans. “Classic cut” jeans are jeans in colors other than blue, usually black, brown, and in other cases white. Classic cut jeans (though usually not white ones) were acceptable work uniform in the school I worked at. Regular blue jeans were not. Businessmen usually wear suits to work, and women may wear the hijab, dresses, and sometimes classic cut jeans to work. Therefore street clothes tended to be a variation on work and school uniform.

This clothing can be further contrasted with that of the working class, who often wear khakis, button up shirts, and loafers to work out in public and wear these outfits to work whenever possible. The upper middle class and elites can be contrasted to the middle class by their lack of conservatism in dress. The upper middle class tends to wear finer cuts of clothing in less washed out colors that stand out on the dusty streets of Cairo. However, they are not in public often. These clothes might include expensive foreign imported brands such as Gucci and Armani. Upper middle class and elite women show their arms and their upper back, which the more conservative middle class often looks down upon. Upper middle class and elite men are also more likely to wear full and expensive business suits in public than the more cash-strapped lower middle class.

Keeping up the appearance of middle class-ness has become increasingly difficult however. Outings to cafes such as Refuge have decreased because many cannot afford the trip. Moreover, the clothing that identifies people as muḥtaram has become more difficult to purchase. The lower middle class buys a combination of imports and local brands. Nike, Adidas,
Converse, and European brands such as Massimo Mutti and Valentino, are desirable, if not always affordable. High-quality knockoffs are also common. After the pound float many imports disappeared off the shelves. When they returned prices were much higher and even prices of local made goods rose. To maintain their standard of dress many in the lower middle class are now shopping in souqs for used clothes instead of shops for new clothes (Tawil, 2016).

Yet clothing is only one middle class status marker. Comportment and behavior are also important aspects of ihtiram. While youth to some extent are always loud, such loudness is not often tolerated in lower middle class cafes. Staff often hush overly rambunctious youth. Such behavior does not befit the comportment of a member of the middle class. Members of the lower middle class are expected to be respectful yet not obsequious. Members of the lower middle class do have nights out, but as Amr, my informant once told me, they usually go home to their families. Staying out all night is not creditable.

By contrast lower class cafes are, stereotypically, notorious sites of coarse language and disreputable behavior in Egyptian popular culture (Kriel, 2016; p. 173), literature, and film. Middle class conceptions of working class culture see them as raucous, joyful, disreputable, and somehow still inherently honorable. They working and popular classes make up the ibn al-balad, the sons of the country. Indeed, upper middle class youth sometimes go to lower class ‘ahawī to “slum” (Peterson, 2011; p. 146). While being quieter and more respectful in comportment is expected of the upper middle class, other social classes and the media often see upper middle class youth as too quiet and respectful: they are sometimes deride them as weak, or sīs. Thus upper middle class youth travel to working class cafes to engage in behaviors that reinforce their own conception of masculinity. Lower middle class youth are less economically and socially
distant from the working class, and therefore less likely to engage in such behavior on a regular basis.

*Love, Dating, and Marriage*

Some of the key markers of *iḥtiram* are derived and related to marriage. Indeed, to be a respectable adult of any social class one must be married. Companionate marriage and love began to be emphasized over arranged marriages in elite circles at the end of the 19th century (Kriel, 2016; p. 169). In Egypt and other places such as Jordan (Kaya, 2009; p. 262) romantic love is associated with modernity, progress, romance, passion, and tenderness (Kreil, 2016). Among the lower middle class love matches are more common than they were 30 years ago. Dating without engagement is taboo, but quietly practiced by some.

Standards of *iḥtiram* as they relate to dating are different for men and for women. A man can more easily balance serially dating many women and remaining respectable than a woman. Young women’s respectability is based on ideas of “virginity and seclusion” (Schielke, 2015; p. 97). All the same, young men expect young women to meet them or they will be labeled *mutakhalifa*, backward (Schielke, 2015; p. 97). It is quite common for romantic partners to receive parental approval for their marriages (Kreil, 2017). One of Hind’s male compatriots became “unofficially engaged” as Hind put it. More properly it was an informal engagement, a *qirayet fatiha*, (Salem, 2015; p. 2). He and the woman he had been dating had decided they wanted to marry one another and their parents had in principle, consented. However, a marriage contract had not yet been signed. Months later the contract was signed and it became official. Dating and marriage exist on a continuum in which romantic love is balanced against arranged marriage (Schielke, 2015; Kreil, 2017).
Dating and romantic love, however, costs money. Footing the bill for dinner, cafes, and gifts is an expensive practice that grows more expensive the more frequent the dating is. For example, Valentine’s Day is celebrated in Egypt as both an institutionalized “sweet talk” (Kreil, 2017) and an opportunity for gift giving. Flower shops make most of their money on February 14 each year (Kreil, 2017) and gifts are expected between those who are dating (Kreil, 2017). Yet prices rose and real income dropped significantly in 2016. Young men struggled to find money to date, especially if the source of money was already cash-strapped parents.

The most respectable sort of man or woman is the married kind. Married people with children are also seen as the most fully adult. Apartment, *mahār*, and other expenses have gone up significantly in the last 30 years. The average age for marriage in 2010 was 24 for women and 29 for men, while most people believed the optimum ages for marriage were between 20 and 21 for women and men (Abdoun, 2010). Marriage ages are higher than people would prefer because marriage is costly and has grown more so in the past decade. Though her data does not split by social class, Rania Salem estimates that the overall cost of marriage between 2007-2012 had risen over 10,600LE from its cost during 2001-2006 (Salem, 2018; p. 7). As Schielke points out, marriage costs should be “slightly more than one can afford” (Schielke, 2015; p. 112). For example, one lower middle class accountant estimated he needed to save $15,000 and it would take him seven years to save for it (Bohn, 2015). Marriage requires a long wait, on average between five and seven years from engagement to wedding.

In particular, marriage requires a significant financial outlay towards a future home. Moving into a new home is a great expense. Only the finest bed linens, and a “fully-equipped kitchen” (Eldin, 2015) will show visitors that the marriage will “stand the test of time” (Eldin, 2015). Couples are reluctant to reduce spending on marriage because more conspicuous and
elaborate consumption reproduces the conditions of their social class and provides them a better place in the hierarchy of couples (Salem, 2018; p. 1). There are a number of things that couples must purchase or provide that are simply markers of middle class status: china, certain place settings, and so on. Most items are used daily, but some are bought merely for display (Schielke, 2015; p. 62). Couples purchase these items and others such as furniture, appliances, and so on to bedeck their home in the appropriate style. The exact details of what is to be bought and what brands are often detailed in marriage contracts. The bride’s family bargains hard for them. Such purchases are important to ensure that the newly married couple embarks upon a suitably middle class lifestyle from the beginning. Moreover, people compare their weddings and new households with their friends. No one wants to be in last place: it is ignominious. The groom must also make a substantial purchase of gold jewelry, the shabka, to be displayed at the wedding, the farah. Yet the price of gold doubled in 2016 from 300LE ($16.50) to 600LE ($33.10) per gram (MEE Staff, 2016). It is worth noting that a young man’s family pitches in for wedding costs as well. The burden is not his alone. However, this also makes young men dependent on their parents will when it comes to whom they will marry and when. Practicality often wins out over romance (Kreil, 2017).

Marriage purchases include a “lavish” (Schielke, 2015; p. 112) ceremony as elaborate as the participants can afford. Lower middle class ceremonies take place in the streets or in cheaper hotels. The groom’s family must provide food for all attendees, which can number over one hundred. A DJ is customary if one cannot afford a singer. Such parties can last all night. The expense of a ceremony is considerable, though difficult to estimate. Families frequently exaggerate the cost because of the jockeying for position that takes place among young couples.
over who has the best wedding (Schielve, 2015; p. 114). Given current climates, some members of the lower middle class are settling for a wedding on a felucca (Eldin, 2015).

In some cases, young women are married first in a family, but a young man must demonstrate his ability to sustain a household before he can even hope to become engaged (Salem, 2018; pp. 2-3). Prolonged singleness and extended liminality (Donner, 2017) create a great deal of familial strain and ennui that in the past had found outlets at cinemas (Armbrust, 2006; p. 438), cafes, and the streets. In the last few years the pressure on youth has increased. When the material basics of middle class ihtiram become objects of compromise: buying old clothes instead of new ones, putting off household maintenance, cutting back on outings, then saving for marriage is a very difficult. Some brides are going for “Chinese gold” (Eldin, 2015) instead of real gold, couples are moving into rentals while they save for the purchase of a home, and some are entering into informal, urfi, and controversial marriages. As one prospective bride put it, “The middle class has these aspirations of respectability and decency, but they don’t have the financial means,” (Eldin, 2015).

Healthy Bodies and An Esteemed Person

Gyms are an avenue for cosmopolitan consumption, much like westernized malls such as City Stars and restaurants like McDonald’s (Birkholtz, 2014; p. 46). Gyms, like Westernized coffee shops, restaurants, and fast food places, are “indexical of ‘the West’ or ‘the Global’ and serve as a valuable means of displaying cosmopolitan identity” (Peterson, 2011; p. 3). Where members of the lower middle class can afford them, gym memberships allow them to aspire to greater ihtiram by building “cosmopolitan capital, familiarity with First World repertoires and standards” (Koning, 2009; p. xxi). This cosmopolitan capital can then be displayed publicly in the form of a fit body.
For example, Gold’s Gym looks much the same in Cairo, Egypt as it does in Texas. Likewise the upper class gym I went to in Maadi had many of the same accouterments as Gold’s, but the clientele simply did not have the level of income of Gold’s. The weight machines, ellipticals, exercise bikes, and treadmills that modern gyms are littered with are all similar. The cost of the machines may be less at a lower middle class gym, but the machines will still be there. The presence of such expensive machines is significant precisely because they are unnecessary for physical fitness: the same objectives could be achieved far more cheaply with benches, a few squat racks, and a selection of barbells and weights. These gyms treat the machines, along with a steam room or sauna (and hopefully both), as a requirement. Machines are cosmopolitan symbols of modernity and a gym is incomplete without them.

Yet cosmopolitanism is not merely displayed in technological symbols: it is present in imagery as well. Egyptian gyms always have televisions. These televisions showed soccer matches or commentary most of the time. When they did not they tended towards American action movies. Mohammed’s gym was wallpapered with pictures of Captain America, the Incredible Hulk, Iron Man, and a series of pictures of white physically fit male and female bodies that usually adorn supplement ads in American fitness magazines. These symbols, like ads containing “fit, light-skinned, straight-haired young women and men in business suits” (Koning, 2009; p. 16) are cosmopolitan and neoliberal imagery (Koning, 2009; p. 16) that connect Egyptian gym goers with an idealized global cosmopolitan gym culture.

In and of itself, gym going is part of expanding consumptive practices that allow greater cosmopolitanism and a more creditable personage. Gyms have been a growing trend for the Egyptian middle classes and upper class and men in particular since at least 1997 and the opening of the first Egyptian Gold’s Gym in al-Maadi. Gold’s Gym at the time aimed and still
aims to provide services for the “upper class” (Goldsgymegypt.com, 2015). Like many cosmopolitan trends, the gym trend arguably started with Gold’s Gym and has filtered down to the lower middle classes from the upper classes over time. The popularity of sports also contributed to the trend, as well as the popularity of American film and television shows that glorify in the case of men, ultra masculine and muscular physiques and in women, thin and sometimes, though not always, strong physical bodies.

The choice of gym reflects one’s place in the middle class and level of disposable income. Mohammed’s baladi, or local gym, I frequented in Dokki cost 2,000LE ($223 before the pound float, $110 after) for a year. The more upper middle class gym I went to later in Maadi cost 3,300LE ($369 before the pound float, $182 after) per year and Gold’s Gym, the most expensive of these choices, cost upwards of 5,000LE ($559 before the pound float, $276 after) per year. Such upper class gyms are well out of the reach of lower middle class men who make, at most, 3000LE per month. Nonetheless, lower middle class gyms allowed men who aspired to be more fully part of the cosmopolitan middle class to take part in something of the cosmopolitanism that their upper class peers enjoyed. Lower middle class gyms such as Mohammed’s were also sociable places where keeping to oneself was seen as unusual and unfriendly. Trim bodies at Mohammed’s gym were frequently works in progress, whereas those in upper middle class gyms were more often, though not always, honing the razor edge of fitness.

It has been disreputable to appear obese or slovenly since at least the 1870s (Jacob, 2011). The need for physical fitness has long been ingrained in Egyptian popular culture. Middle class ideas about bodily discipline have changed over time. In the 1940s Egyptian ideal of effendi masculinity revolved around physical culture and scouting (Jacob, 2011). The 1949 Naguib
Maḥfouz novel *The Beginning and the End* depicts a teacher with a slight paunch as prosperous, but perhaps slightly selfish.

In 2016 *Batman vs. Superman* was immensely popular even though many, my informants included, could not afford to go see it. Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* was popular in 2008. Superhero movies in general all get extensive showings in Cairo. I had many conversations with informants about these movies, and Adel in particular was a fan of superheroes. He idolized Batman. American professional wrestling in the form of the World Wrestling Federation, World Championship Wrestling, and World Wrestling Entertainment were also very popular among many of my informants. Such television shows and films glorify intense muscularity and physicality. Moreover, I have never been in a gym in Cairo in which football (soccer) was not at some point on television. Men desire to emulate their favorite wrestlers, superheroes, and football players, whether that person is Egyptian football star Mohammed Salah, Batman, the Rock, or David Beckham. Media images influence the middle class cosmopolitan ideal and also reflect public conceptions of what the middle class aspires to.

I separate the idea of building cosmopolitan capital (Koning, 2009) and displaying it with a cosmopolitan body from Egyptian concerns about being overweight or fat. Gyms are a new trend. Ideals of a thin or fit cosmopolitan body vying against the traditional ideal of having a *kersh*, or belly, associated with male prosperity or comfort (Abdeltawab, 2016). Women’s gym membership is at least in part a response to fat-shaming, a common practice in Egypt. Men catcall overweight women and tell them to eat less (Cairoscene, 2016). A television station in Cairo told its female anchors in 2016 to go on a diet and tried to dictate what size they could be (Egyptian Streets, 2016) and Egyptian mothers and mother in laws are notorious for being fat police. Older men at the gym or elsewhere have told me they want to go to the gym to lose some
weight so that they have fewer heart problems and are more attractive to their wives. Indeed, fifty percent of Egyptian men and 60-85% women are overweight or obese (Hegazi et. al, 2016; p. 815), and Egypt has the highest obesity rate in the world (Smith, 2017). Fast food, from the low end to the high end, is a common and popular food choice for all social classes (Bower, 2017). Yet increased poverty leads to more high-carbohydrates and a fattier diet (Hegazi et. al, 2016) as people try to stave off hunger with cheap fats, sugars, and other carbohydrates. While some individuals do turn to the gym to try to control their weight, gyms are new trend and they is only really an option for the middle classes. Moreover, it is much easier for the upper middle class than the lower middle class. Instead, the practices I have seen have leaned towards trying to build or construct certain kinds of bodies that reflect cosmopolitan ideals.

Men claim to go to the gym for a number of reasons. Mohammed tells me he diets and works out to look good. He idolizes Ronnie Coleman, a famous African American bodybuilder from the 1980s. Going to the gym is not always about weight control and body fat. Many of Mohammed’s male clientele want bigger arms, as evidenced by the fact that they work biceps and triceps and little else. Others want to look like their favorite football (soccer) players such as David Beckham. Many want to be better at playing football or to emulate their favorite superhero. Like Mealey (1997) found in American gyms, most men spent more time on their upper bodies, in contrast to women who worked on their lower bodies and aerobic activities.

Egyptian men are more likely to use bodybuilding supplements and seek advice on them from gym personnel, while women favor weight loss supplements and take their advice from TV advertisements and health professionals (Ali et. al, 2016). Gym workouts and supplements accentuated sexual bodily difference and whatever their other goals being more attractive to the opposite sex, an activity which would hopefully lead to a better marriage, were among them.
Lower middle class women go to the gym too, though in fewer numbers than men or upper middle class women (Koning, 2009; p. 124). Moreover, gender segregation through women-only hours helps maintain the respectability of many of these establishments in Egyptian eyes. Mohammed’s gym had women-only hours every day. The gym I frequented in Maadi added women only hours and then later on, an expensive women’s section of the gym. However, the lower middle class desire to display a cosmopolitan body and build cosmopolitan capital is being undermined by the current economic climate. Cosmopolitanism is crossing boundaries and borders, not erasing them (Schielke, 2012). When such boundaries cannot be bridged or crossed, then cosmopolitanism emphasizes inequality (Schielke, 2012). The opportunity a gym provides for cosmopolitanism and for displaying it with a fit body is being narrowed for the lower middle class, reinforcing in a new place the inequality between them and the upper middle class in the bargain. For example, lower incomes mean that food choices are now more limited and the available foods are less nutritious. Meat prices have nearly kept pace with the pound float and gone up to around 173LE from a price of 90LE for a kilogram of chicken alone while wages have remained flat. By contrast, foul, ṭa’miya, chips, and soda pop, all high carbohydrate, high sugar, and/or fried diet options, are quite cheap. ṭa’miya costs roughly 2LE (10 cents) for a sandwich at a local cafeteria in Dokki, while even getting several kilograms of often oily foul delivered only costs around 15LE. Chips and soda can be bought at any kiosk on any corner for 5LE or less. A 12oz can of Pepsi costs 2LE and has 140 calories. A 1.5oz bag of chips costs between 1 and 2 LE and has around 150 calories (these numbers from the back of the bag or can). Compare this to around 5.4LE for an ounce of chicken, which typically has around 68 calories. Chicken and beef are more enjoyable and desirable by middle class standards, but good sources are much more expensive. It is cheaper (and more convenient)
to obtain one’s calories at the kiosk. However, because such options are less filling those who go this route are likely to consume far more calories than they would have otherwise. Moreover, because the fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides that are used to grow food are now out of some farmer’s price range, vegetables arrive at vendors already rotting and more expensive than they were a year ago.

The rising cost of living means that gym memberships are expendable. Some Egyptian gyms have juice bars and supplement stores, but these are sidelines. They exist to attract customers but do not make a great deal of money. For the most part, gyms only make money when membership dues come in. Yet membership dues, whether paid monthly or in lump sum for a year, are hard to come by when the economic climate is poor. Mohammed’s gym lowered prices in January 2017 from 2000LE ($110) to 1200LE ($66) per year so that clients could afford to continue to frequent the gym. Yet, they must lower prices a sufficient amount that an expendable cost such, as a gym membership, seems reasonable and even desirable over the alternative of gaining or keeping a little weight. Thin and toned bodies provide a possible path to a creditable and more cosmopolitan persona but they are less important than base nutritional needs, clothing, or cell phones. Moreover, work and home stress can be exhausting, leaving little energy to go to the gym. What this means is that members of the middle class will go to the gym less and eat less nutritious foods, putting the growing aspect of middle class respectability that relies on bodily control on the back burner. While gyms are a new trend, they are yet another window into a more cosmopolitan lifestyle that is being quickly closed.

Respectability at Work

A respectable job is a key aspect of maintaining a creditable persona as is being respected at work. Workplace respectability is a process of boundary making (Donner, 2017) that defines
relationships with those above and those below and as in public spaces, provides a guide for interaction. Therefore an examination of lower middle class working conditions can tell us much about the problems the middle class is currently facing.

The working classes have unions that allow them to bargain collectively and doctors, journalists, lawyers, and teachers have their own syndicates to advocate for their issues. These syndicates are active, but they do not function as well for individual problems as they do for larger group issues. Moreover, teachers in private schools do not have a syndicate like public school teachers do, nor are they part of unions. Thus in places such as Hind’s school negotiations over workplace issues often took place within the framework of a family discourse. I was present at many staff meetings where when disputes threatened harmony, management would refrain that “We are all one family.” But although management could give orders, they had little faith that the commands would be carried out, or implemented in a timely manner. Thus management relied on a family discourse in which mutual consent, or the appearance of it, was prized over hierarchy. Likewise when employees had difficulties they could approach management within the same familial discourse.

Yet the family metaphor does not provide clear boundaries: it is abused as often as it is used successfully. Superiors can be supremely disrespectful and patronizing to workers. In turn, workers often agree to everything the boss says they should do, only to execute none of it. Management is often treated with obsequiousness in public and ignored in private (Palmer et al, 1988; p. 34). Open rebellion is rare, but passive refusals are extremely common. Management gives orders that teachers agree to follow and then teachers do nothing. Management can respond by letting it pass if it is not important or by paying increasingly close attention to the employees and engaging in frequent confrontation. I have seen more than a few confrontations over orders
that were not followed, and they usually result in drawn out arguments, multiple refusals, and threats to quit. Sometimes the employee does quit. The first option of letting a passive refusal go is thus usually preferable because the second option of confrontation is often destructive and certainly violates workplace harmony. As a result of this problem trust between management and employees is in short supply.

At Hind’s workplace the family discourse was muddied in other ways. The hierarchy seemed to place Hind in a grandmother role. At best, this permitted Hind to take on a maternal role with her employees when she directed them to do the right thing. At worst this meant there were some tasks such as official disciplinary action, pay cuts, and firings that she could not or would not carry out because she believed it violated her role as grandmotherly mediator. In addition, Hind simply did not like confronting her own employees, though she was not averse to it with regards to parents and on occasion, her superiors. The Elementary principal, her subordinate, often had to carry out such punishments on her behalf. When an employee’s mistake was not deemed a personal insult, Hind spoke gently and could often convince her employees of the rightness of her position. When she felt slighted, however, Hind was quite harsh. Personal slights violated Hind’s role as a respected figure.

Workplace politics and slights always had to be resolved with delicacy, for the maintenance of relationships was paramount. Yet such everyday problems took on a new harshness when money did not go as far as it once did. As economic and political tensions increased I witnessed the strain on the family metaphor at Hind’s workplace as things became increasingly difficult outside the workplace. People carried into work the stress of their problems at home just as they took their work stress home with them. As home problems became harder to bear workplace issues became that much more frustrating. Reining in emotions became an issue,
and failure to behave in the proper way damages respectability and the family metaphor. It is a
no-win situation. Economic strain increases workplace strain and vice versa. Economic and
workplace strain place inhibit one’s ability to maintain decorum. People feel less respectable
under such circumstances and hence they are much more likely to lash out and behave less
respectably.

It is hard for members of the lower middle class to maintain a veneer of ḳiṭṭiraṃ when
management regularly imposes greater expectations without increasing compensation or
decreases compensation without cause. Hind’s administration often shorted workers’ pay,
changed their hours, and made unreasonable demands on them. When lower middle class
teachers spoke of these cuts and unreasonable demands they typically did so in terms of ḳiṭṭiraṃ
and morality. Recent economic shifts mean that teachers’ paychecks no longer go as far as they
once did, and so being shorted pay became a much more serious matter. Thus disputes inside the
school became much more vocal.

Private sector contracts in education were often little more than vague statements of
responsibility and arguments over contracts often had as much to do with the employers’ and
employees’ ideas of right and wrong as they did with what the contract specified. For example,
most of the teachers Hind’s school had been contracted at 25 teaching hours per week. During
the last few years most of them actually taught between 16 and 18 hours. The discrepancy is
likely due to the fact that the work scheduler worked for the National School and was not
familiar with their contracts. He simply made a schedule that seemed to work, and no teachers
had any interest in contradicting him. When the school tried to increase teaching hours to the
contracted number of 25, more than one teacher threatened to quit. In public Hind tried her best
to convince them to take on more hours, but privately Hind sided with the teachers. Hind
believed her teachers were paid little and worked very hard. The inflation rate was 18.5% in 2016 (Kholaf and Nikhil, 2016) and even the prices of staples such as lentils and fava beans had risen. The cost of potatoes had quintupled (Hadid and Youssef, 2016). Real wages had dropped dramatically and the owner paid teachers little.

Another dispute arose when management attempted to enforce the dress code in order to look more respectable for parents and prospective clients. The owner wanted to bring the school from one that served members of the lower middle class into an upper middle class school, and the dress code was part of that plan. Employees pushed back. The dress code called for slacks and dress shirts for men, and dresses or slacks for women. The teachers said flatly that they had only one set of dress clothes (and some in fact did not even own that) and that if they wore them to school every day they would ruin them. They argued they could not afford to buy more. Indeed, it has become common, as noted above, for lower middle class families to sacrifice new clothing purchases in order to stay afloat in the economic climate of 2016 (Hilal, 2016). Hind sided with the teachers and upper management was forced to back down. Hind was, in this case, correct. Teachers did in fact follow a certain standard of dress that matched their conception of ihtiram. Male teachers wore clean “classic cut” jeans and polo shirts, and women teachers usually were dressed in clean (classic cut) jeans and nice blouses. Acceptable colors for classic cut jeans were red, brown, or black. Women wore the hijab or not, based on their religious persuasion. Men mostly wore clean sneakers, and women wore heels or flats. One male teacher wore t-shirts and crocs (rubber shoes) to work every day. He was looked down upon because he was a large man and could not afford to buy clothes fitting his size. In the case of Hind’s school, about 50% of women wore the hijab, including Hind herself. Hind and her teachers wore what
they could manage, and no more, given their financial constraints. Maintaining *ihram* in unreasonable situations was a constant challenge.

Even the hours of the workday were not certain. At Hind’s school, teachers were required to be at school each day at 7:45 and were mostly allowed to leave at 3:15. Yet on many days early in the year the gate guards would receive a phone call at 3:15 from upper management stating that the workday would be longer and teachers had to stay. The reasons for these odd extensions were never stated and extensions such as these were resented in the extreme.

The normal method of disciplining employees was to cut their pay, a harsh and painful punishment for disciplinary infractions that could sometimes amount to little more than displeasing superiors by committing some minor error. In addition contracts never specified sick or vacation days either. Sometimes the owner would pay for these days and sometimes she would not. If someone was absent, they never knew whether or not they would be paid. There were frequent disputes on payday. Sometimes workers were simply shorted.

Being shorted means tough decisions have to be made about what one can purchased in the month and what one cannot. In the current climate, pay cuts as well as the unreliability of pay threatens to shift radically an already unbalanced power structure between employers and employees.

A white-collar job helps create a sense of respectability through offering steady hours and a regular paycheck. The elimination of either at what is presented as middle class workplaces is damaging to people’s ideas of themselves as respected individuals. It made my informants furious. There are immense working pressures on middle class people. One lower middle class informant working in marketing had to meet a high quota of sales to keep his job: it did not matter how many hours it took for him to do this. I knew one member of the lower middle class
who was promised a job at a private school only to be told when he arrived that his pay would be less than promised and his job would not be as originally promised. Most of my middle-class informants worked long hours. None could to take afford time off. Their employers had limited sympathy for their personal lives in any case. People were getting poorer very quickly and workplace conditions continued as if nothing outside were changing, which gave workplace problems a particular piquancy and humiliation. Yet if work and public were problems for men and women, there were also problems that faced by women alone.

**Female Respectability**

Women contribute greatly to a family’s ability to maintain respectable levels of consumption in the home. The patriarchal ideal in Egypt, however, is that women should be in the home. As such a truly respectable middle class woman would not be found on the streets at all. Such a woman would ideally be shuttled from place to place in a private car and would never be subject to harassment. Yet Egyptian women have been working outside the home for several decades (Macleod, 1991). This was a reflection of their increasing levels of education, rising consumer expectations, and increased independence brought on by migration in the 1980s (Amin and Al-Bassusi, 2004; p. 1290). There are women doctors, lawyers, syndicate leaders (Amar, 2011; p. 309), police officers (Egyptian Streets, 2015) and government workers. Moreover, the economic pressures of 2016 are forcing more women out onto the streets with increasing frequency. In order to maintain levels of consumption and hence, ihtiram, women are now taking second and third jobs themselves (Ghad, 2018) and in turn, are subjected to increasing amounts of harassment.

Sexual harassment, ataḥarush al-ginsi, has been an issue in Egypt at least since the 1990s. However, the 2011 uprising witnessed an increase in the violence, if not the actual
numbers, of sexual harassment (Abdelmonem, 2015). Both state-sponsored thugs and opportunists attacked women protesters in Tahrir in 2011 (Abdelmonem, 2015) and a mob assaulted Lara Logan, a CBS correspondent, in Tahrir square the night of Mubarak’s ouster (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 64). By supporting such thug harassment of women, the state enhanced the sense of impunity for everyday harassers, already emboldened in an environment of insufficient laws and lax enforcement (Abdelmonem, 2015). Mobs assaulted female protesters on International Women’s Day on March 8, 2011, shouting, “Go back to the kitchen!” and “The people want to bring down women!” (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 64). The military used force to clear women demonstrators the following day, March 9 (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 65). At another protest in 2011 a woman in an abaya was caught by a group of soldiers. They beat her and pulled her clothes off so that her blue bra was showing. Activists recorded soldier stomping on her chest and blue bra. Soldiers carried away her unconscious body (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 78). She became known as the “Blue Bra Woman” and television commentators accused her of being a prostitute (Kirkpatrick, 2018; p. 79). That sense of latitude for street tormenters and police and military abusers of women carried on through 2016 and 2017. Sexual harassment in Egypt is a “large-scale daily occurrence” (Abdelmonem, 2015) that can also tell us about the structures of gendered power in Egypt and how respectability is parsed in a declining economic situation and counter-revolution.

The separation of work and home is a cornerstone of patriarchal power which limits the mobility of women (Massey, 1994; p. 179), and the fact that women need to work outside the home represents a constant challenge to the male dominance of space outside the home. Like in India, where middle class women must also contend with unwelcome touching, comments, and stares in public spaces (Gilbertson, 2014; p. 133), women’s presence on the street is likely to be
construed as a violation of gender ideals and women who violate gendered ideals are more likely to be harassed than those who do not (Berdahl, 2007; p. 435). In addition, economic crisis often leads to an increase in violence against women (International Alliance of Women, 2013; Cruz and Klinger, 2011; Addabbo et. al, 2018; p. 4). The worse the economic crisis is, the worse street harassment becomes. Sixty percent of Egyptian men report having sexually harassed a woman, and 98% women report being harassed. This can be compared to Morocco, where 60% of women have been harassed and 53% of men admit to having harassed a woman (Promundo and UN Women, 2017; p. 139), Lebanon, where 57% of women report harassment (Promundo and UN Women, 2017; p. 186), and Palestine, where 40% of women report ever having been harassed⁴ (Promundo and UN Women, 2017; p. 249). At least half of Egyptian men recently surveyed reported the use of violence against women in the home (Promundo and UN Women, 2017; p. 42).

Workplace harassment is also an issue in Egypt, but there are almost no studies on it, so it is difficult to estimate its extent and consequences (Amin and Darrag, 2011). What is known is that women fear harassment in the workplace, and that it is a common problem (Barsoum, 2010; p. 71). Women fear being alone with a man in the office, and frequently have to deal with requests that they deem inappropriate, such invitations to go out to eat with a boss, or demands to clean his home, wash his car, or to clean bathrooms. Inappropriate joking and touching by male colleagues are also the focus of serious workplace complaints by women (Barsoum, 2010; p. 71).

Lower middle class men say that harassment is an issue of education. They claim that harassers have less education and hence, cultural refinement, than those who do harass.

⁴ The discrepancy in sexual harassment rates between Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries can in part, be attributed to the regime’s refusal to deal with street-level harassment, their own assault of women, and the rising economic crisis in Egypt.
However, lower middle class men also say that “a beautiful woman couldn’t enter a street without ten men following her” (Kriel, 2016; p. 175). It is always other men than the person being talked to doing the pestering. Several of my informants told me that a woman’s dress determines whether or not she is respectable and hence, whether or not she will be troubled on the street. This is a common sentiment that whatever treatment a woman receives she likely deserves based on her clothes, something that has even expressed even by members of parliament (Sun, 2017). Women retort that it does not matter what they wear because they are still hassled. Men see themselves and each other as more manly and women are blamed for the violence inflicted on them (Ghannam, 2014; p. 116) because they are seen as immodest (Barsoum, 2010; p. 71).

Some women wear the veil in order to be seen as respectable, a move that Darlene Macleod calls “accommodating protest” (Macleod, 1991; pp. xiii-xiv). Veiling allows women to reclaim ideas of a settled identity, honor, integrity, and dignity and it connects them to a rich and vibrant cultural tradition. However, veiling is at the same time a concession to gender inequality, because it allows women to be seen as pious, while at the same time reinforces their own inequality to men (Macleod, 1991; p. xii). Yet even the veil is no ironclad guarantee against being bothered by men, because in reality, like in Jordan, men harass women whom they do not know and to whom they have no obligations to (Kaya, 2009; p. 260). In response to recent debates on whether or not the hijab was compulsory for Muslim women, as of December 7, 2017, Al-Azhar, the Sunni institution of learning, issued a fatwa saying the veil is compulsory for Muslim women (Egyptian Streets, 2017), complicating ideas about the veil’s relationship to the identity of women and arguments about who is respectable and who is not.
Single earner and now double earner households are impossible to maintain for most lower middle class Egyptians. Inflation has been harsh for the past five years and subsidy cuts and the pound float have put severe stresses on the budgets of many Egyptian families. Women are competitors with men in the workforce, and no longer working in specific female only jobs, a situation that breeds gendered violence (Greig, 2011; p. 1) when women emerge onto the streets. Some women I knew would only go out with a male escort in 2016 and 2017, although escorts sometimes found that their presence was not a guarantee against being bothered by men in the streets, and they had to resort to intimidation and threats. Men considered women’s’ presence on the streets less respectable in 2016 and 2017 and hence they felt freer to hassle and provoke them.

Conclusions

*Ihtiram* is not limited to the forms of materiality, morality, and comportment I have described here. Creating and maintaining an honorable and respectable persona is a complex, negotiated, and continuing process. The struggling lower middle class focuses intensely on *ihtiram* because they are in a precarious position living in an economic crisis while trying to distinguish themselves from the working class even while aspiring to match middle class standards set by the upper middle class who have far more resources to meet those standards than they do. The current economic circumstances brought on by the counter-revolution pose severe challenges to the ability of many in this class stratum to attain and live according to the prevailing ideals of respectability. Before the most recent economic crisis the middle class had to save in order to frequent and enjoy dignified spaces such as cafes and gyms. Now that their ability to save is diminished, so too is their capacity to patronize such locales and to enjoy the status gained from such patronage.
Inflation combined with the pound float makes even basics such as food far more expensive than they were even 2-3 years previous. The loss of the fuel subsidy has driven up transport costs significantly, and the cost of a metro ticket has more than quadrupled for some trips. Getting to work itself is now a serious expense for many. The lower middle class has had to downgrade their diet, their modes of transport, and their clothes while their homes become in a state of disrepair. In addition, such pressures make the maintenance of respectability at work increasingly difficult.

As of this writing the financial situation in Egypt continues to collapse and the counter-revolution led by al-Sisi continues to make cutbacks to state spending on social welfare and at the same time to raise taxes. Costs are escalating and wages are flat. Being respectable in the counter-revolution is difficult and problems are increasing.
Conclusions

This dissertation has described how the Egyptian lower middle class experienced a sharp and painful reduction in means and lifestyle from the January 2011 uprising until 2017. The uprising and coup d’état of 2011 resulted in the fall of Hosni Mubarak and a sense of elation in Egypt. The counter-revolution began immediately. The years between 2011 and 2013 brought with them little improvement for the lower middle class. The coup d’état of 2013 brought into power a counter-revolutionary government whose policies have markedly worsened the circumstances of the lower middle class and many others. Al-Sisi’s government has used immense amounts of repression and fear to carry out this agenda, which is sold to the people as a means to improve the circumstances of all of Egypt. Instead al-Sisi’s economic agenda has worsened the lot of the lower middle class and many others. In this environment lower middle class Egyptians have found it difficult to hold onto even ihtiram, a key set of moral and material set of judgments about their social status.

The View So Far

The original middle class, the efendiya, arose under Mohammed Ali in the 1800s as “citizen soldiers” (Ryzova, 2017; pp. 88-106) and eventually became leaders in the nationalist movement against the British (Ryzova, 2017; pp 105-106). In the 1950s through the 1970s these older middle classes made up of small shopkeepers, the self-employed, and those with family firms in agriculture (Davis, 2010; pp. 250-251) were joined by a new educated middle class of government workers.

Yet Nasser’s successors did not share his socialist tendencies. Under Anwar Sadat’s infitah and later Mubarak’s structural adjustment, Egypt underwent market liberalization and the private sector grew. Under Sadat and later Mubarak, the middle class became increasingly
bifurcated as those who took part in the burgeoning private sector rising to the upper middle class, while government workers and those who found less success in the private sector slid downward into the lower middle class (Mellor, 2016; p. 69; Hashim, 2011).

In 2011 Hosni Mubarak had been in power for 29 years, making him the longest ruling dictator in the Middle East. The upper classes vacationed in posh local destinations such as the Sahel and Sharm el-Sheikh while the lower middle class and working classes struggled to get by with congested traffic, lived in under-maintained buildings, and lived on insufficient wages (Hashim, 2011; p. 113).

The uprising against Hosni Mubarak and his government that began on January 25, 2011 ultimately grew to include all segments of the population. In the process of the uprising the police were defeated and the military rolled out onto the streets, yet did nothing in what turned out to be a silent mutiny (Nepstad, 2013; p. 342).

It was the military that ultimately pushed Mubarak from power and it was the Supreme Council of Armed Forces and Mohammed Hussein Tantawi that had to be forced to make way for new elections. The public elected a primarily Islamist parliament and Mohammed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood’s second choice and “Spare Tyre” to the presidency. The courts dissolved the parliament before Morsi assumed office. Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood faced a counter-revolution made up of the police, the military, and the intelligence services. The Brotherhood worsened matters because they never attempted to build popular consensus (Hellyer, 2016; p. 96).

After another mass protest in June 2013 a military coup led by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi deposed Mohammed Morsi. Two months later the military massacred over 1,000 people at Rabaa al-Adaweya. In 2014 al-Sisi was elected president in a sham election. Egyptians have still
not seen change or democracy. The lower middle class, who hit the streets along with everyone else in 2011 and 2013, is now declining faster than it was before the uprisings.

In November 2016 al-Sisi floated the pound and lowered the fuel subsidy. The value of the pound was halved overnight and fuel prices went up 60% or more. Then the government raised microbus fares and eventually taxi fares (Al-Tawy, 2016). Members of the lower middle class struggling pay the rent or buy food are dipping into savings and asking relatives for help (Reuters, 2017). Some members of the middle class already spent 50% of their income on food. Now it can be as much as 4/5 (Kingsley, 2013).

Lower middle class food choices are beginning to change and will likely continue to do so (Attalah et al., 2016). In 2013 Elmenus, a food menu aggregator in Egypt, estimated that 100LE could buy 27 kibda, or chicken liver sandwiches. In 2013 this number was 7 (Cairoscene Team, 2017). Some members of the lower middle class have gone down to eating meat once a month already (Hilal, 2017). The government took to giving out food aid such as pasta, rice, lentils, sugar and canned meat to the lower middle class (Shembab, 2016). People with middle class salaries of 4500LE per month could no longer afford to make family outings for dinner (Sherbini, 2016). My informants and other members of the lower middle class were being squeezed on all sides.

To carry out this agenda and secure his power in 2016 and 2017, the state under al-Sisi engaged in extreme repression. At the height of the Islamist insurgency in the Mubarak years there were 20,000 political prisoners in Egypt. There were 60,000 political prisoners in Egypt in 2016 (Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 2016), and Amnesty International estimates that 3-4 people were forcibly disappeared each day (Amnesty International, 2016). The regime engaged in systematic torture (Human Rights Watch, 2017). My informants and many
other members of the lower middle class were afraid to go out, and were frequently looking over their shoulders. When I left in June 2017 my informants and other members of the lower middle class were living in dread and in increasingly difficult economic circumstances.

Beyond 2016 and 2017

With regards to work, lower middle class men are pushed to the limit: they already have second jobs and can work 10 or more hours a day. Women are taking second jobs and youth taking second and third jobs (Tawil, 2018). Shops and cafes and opening and closing at a rapid pace as owners run out of money (Economist, 2018) and adding further instability to the economy by doing so.

Maintaining middle class status in Egypt is hinged on private schools and college educations. Some members of the middle class can no longer manage the money for private schools (Kamel, 2018) after tuition increased over 68% at some private international institutions (Tawil, 2018). Lower middle class children that do make it to college in the next few years will have little money with which to fund their educations. Their parents’ means are severely reduced. Lower middle class children who do not go to college will not be middle class as adults.

Inflation in the month of September 2017, after I had left, was 32.9%. On average the prices of food and drink rose 4.8% each month in 2018. In September 2018 alone vegetable prices rose 17.2% and fruit rose 7.4%. Overall inflation in September 2018 inflation was 15.4% as economic reforms caused prices to spike (Reuters, 2018). Some members of the lower middle class are now spending the majority of their incomes on subsistence in 2018 (Ghad, 2018). People cannot always afford beef, and the chicken they can afford is inedible. One family recounted how they boiled their chicken and it turned blue (Gaballa and Abdelatty, 2018). I have experienced inedible chicken myself in the wake of the cutbacks. It is a common problem.
The cutbacks have continued: in May 2018, the government hiked metro fares again. Metro ticket prices are now set at 3LE for up to 9 stops, 5LE for 10-15 stops, and 7LE for more than 16 stops (Lotfi, 2018). My informant Amr lived more than 10 stops from his work and it is not uncommon for people, members of the lower middle class included, to live in the suburbs or even far south and outside of the city proper in Helwan and ride the metro 10 stops or more into the city for work (Lotfi, 2018). Discounted rates are now available for those with electronic passes (Egypt Independent, 2018), but the amount of bulk cash required is beyond the price range of my lower middle class informants. Some people saw their monthly transport costs increase by more than eight times (Ghoneim and El-Mahdawy, 2018). Al-Sisi asked if anyone really thought that the price hikes were a surprise, and said more price increases would come (Reuters, 2018).

They did. In 2018 the government raised the fuel subsidy another 60-79% and subsequently upped the prices of buses, microbuses, and taxis yet again. It also doubled the price of cooking gas (Middle East Eye, 2018) and as of January 2018, the government is raising the price of pharmaceuticals up to 50% (Egypt Independent, 2018). In August 2018 paper newspapers, a critical source of news for many Egyptians lower middle class and others underwent a 100% price hike (Cairoscene Team, 2018). Prior to these newer cutbacks members of the lower middle class were having difficulty even buying winter clothes (Hilal, 2017) and some are being forced to purchase cheaper, less effective medications (Hilal, 2017). The government raised electricity bills again in summer 2018 and prices went up 43% (Economist, 2018). Angry tenants chased bill collectors out of buildings (Economist, 2018). It is difficult to see how these new price hikes and subsidy cuts will not make their lives even more difficult.
In what seemed a positive move, the Egyptian government raised the minimum wage and the wages of government workers in an attempt to offset the subsidy cuts (EgyptToday, 2018) only to hint that they may deny civil servants their yearly pay increases this year (Reuters, 2018). In any case, the wage increases al-Sisi has put into law for government workers amount to only about 15%. However, the cost of basic foodstuffs rose 28% in 2016 (Middle East Eye, 2016): the raises are wholly insufficient to keep the lower middle class afloat. Moreover, non-government members of the lower middle class such as Amr, Adel, Hind, and Mohammed will see no help at all. The government is applying for a program from the World Bank to protect the middle class and create jobs (Kamel, 2017). The World Bank program would be a positive development, but as of this writing in August 2018, specific measures have not yet been disclosed.

Future possibilities look bleak unless members of the lower middle class see wage increases that are equally as drastic as the price increases they now face. Businesses have discussed measures to raise salaries, but few have been implemented and those businesses that have granted salary increases have only gone as far as 5-10% (Hafez, 2017). Again, these raises are not even close to keeping pace with inflation.

Experts who are not suffering themselves argue “As expected with any austerity package, things are expected to get worse before they get better.” (Gaballa and Abdelaty, 2018). Egypt’s economic numbers are going up. Foreign reserves have doubled since 2016 and investment is returning (Reuters Staff, 2018). Moody’s, an international credit rating agency, actually raised Egypt’s credit rating (Reuters, 2018). These benefits demonstrably do not extend to the lower middle class. The effects of economic growth, as I have demonstrated in this dissertation, are unevenly distributed. The upper class typically benefits from foreign investment while the lower middle class just loses ground. The IMF praises al-Sisi’s actions as they did Mubarak before
him. Al-Sisi cuts subsidies that the poor and the lower middle class, including my informants rely on. The IMF calls this progress. In reality the IMF’s progress is devastation for most of the country.

_Fear and Silence on the Nile_

As of late 2017 some of the fear began to lift. Yet the repression has not changed. Sisi’s Egypt is if anything more violent and repressive than when I left in June 2017. Al-Sisi was recently quoted saying “What happened seven or eight years ago, will never happen again in Egypt” (Egyptian Streets, 2018). Al-Sisi speaks of the January 2011 uprising where Hosni Mubarak was pushed from power by the military. If the public revolts again, Sisi promises, it will be bloody: they will face the full might of the Armed Forces united behind him.

The lack of real protest continues in 2018. There were scattered protests in January 2018, numbering no more than few dozen people, over the metro price hikes (Lotfi, 2018). Twenty-one people were arrested, and 10 were released a few days later (Lotfi, 2018). The following day the Egyptian government upped security at the metro stations. There were no more protests (Reuters, 2018). In September 2018 the courts upheld the death sentences of 75 Islamists in a mass trial of over 700 and a rumor went around the country that 28 military officers had been arrested (Economist, 2018).

_Final Words_

This dissertation is in many ways a cautionary tale. Egyptians threw out an aging dictator, Hosni Mubarak, in 2011 only to eventually find him replaced by a far more powerful strongman, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, brought to power by a counter-revolution led the military, secret police, and police just three years later. The sharp diminishment of the lower middle class is a direct result of the counter-revolution’s IMF backed neoliberal policies.
Yet counter-revolution and authoritarian muscle are not the only ways that these policies are carried out, nor is the IMF the only engine of neoliberal policy in the world. Neoliberalism itself is a means of restoring, enhancing, and creating elite power (Harvey, 2009). As I have described here, the counter-revolution has reclaimed the power that the Egyptian people threatened to take from them in 2011. This counter-revolution is stripping the middle class of their wealth and their protections. Yet Egypt’s economic numbers are improving, meaning that someone, that is, elites, are benefiting from these policy changes. What I have described here is what it looks like when a section of the middle class is squeezed to their limits in the center of a counter-revolution. When it ceased to be sufficiently profitable for Egypt’s elites to create wealth for themselves by protecting the middle class, elites have rapidly extracted wealth from the middle class.
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Appendix A: IRB

February 5, 2018

MEMORANDUM

TO: Keith Whitmire  
    Ted Swedenburg

FROM: Ro Windwalker  
    IRB Coordinator

RE: EXEMPT PROJECT CONTINUATION

IRB Protocol #: 15-12-394

Protocol Title: Masculinity, Consumption, and Neoliberalism in Egyptian Coffeehouses

Review Type: ☑ EXEMPT

New Approval Date: 02/05/2018

Your request to extend the referenced protocol has been approved by the IRB. We will no longer be requiring continuing reviews for exempt protocols.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.