

In absence of a Hero Figure and an Ideology: Understanding new political Imaginaries and Practices among revolutionary Youth in Egypt

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One of the challenges in analyzing youth who participated in the recent Arab uprisings relates to explaining and understanding their revolutionary practices. Adopting a leaderless and cross-ideological form of mobilization, youth during the eighteen days of the Egyptian uprising managed to practice inclusion by uniting a diverse group of Egyptians. After toppling Mubarak, the revolutionary youth, however, did not present themselves as aiming to seize power, a defining feature of revolutions at least until the 1970s. To understand the meaning of these new cross-ideological and leaderless forms of mobilization, I suggest understanding youth within their time and space. Drawing on Alain Badiou and

his conception of the intervallic period and the rebirth of history through the Arab revolts, this article highlights important differences among this generation in their conception of doing politics. More specifically, this paper focuses on the changed meaning of the hero figure, highlighting the importance of inclusionary politics. It will suggest that since the 2011 revolutionary event, a shift away from traditional politics based on a leader and an ideology is being contested for a more inclusionary politics as desired by the younger generation in Egypt.

Keywords: Revolution; Youth; Subjectivity; Alain Badiou; Revolutionary politics; Egypt

Through the 2011 revolutionary event in Egypt, a new political generation of youth surfaced. Over just eighteen days, young men and women, foremost among other participants, took to the streets and toppled Egypt's longtime President Hosni Mubarak, whose regime had been in power for nearly thirty years. Over the course of the uprising, these young Egyptians aired a collective frustration with deteriorating living conditions and advanced a hope for a different type of politics and social order capable of achieving 'Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice'. This generation of young Egyptians - the 1980s generation - was born in a decidedly different historical moment than their parents. Arising in the midst of a neoliberal world order (Bayat) and during a moment marked by an end to classical war situations that depended on the soldier figure to protect the nation in the name of an ideology (Badiou), this generation of Egyptian youth grew up in altered times, affecting both their transition into adulthood and, accordingly, their understanding of what it means to 'do politics'. A number of scholars have highlighted the extraordinary nature of Egyptian youth's new political practices, exemplified by the Tahrir experience and the loose organizational structures adopted at the square, namely its leaderless and cross-

ideological forms of mobilization (Harders, Bamyeh, Hanafi, Herrera et al.). Yet several scholars have also emphasized the inability of revolutionary youth, through these practices, to formulate a new politics capable of contesting the state (Abdelrahman, Rennick). In his analysis, French philosopher Alain Badiou describes the new time in which Egypt's revolutionary youth are operating in as an 'intervallic period', defined by an end to the traditional way of doing politics conditioned on a leader and an ideology. According to Badiou's reading of the Arab uprisings, "we find ourselves in a *time of riots*¹ wherein a rebirth of History, as opposed to the pure and simple repetition of the worst, is signaled and takes shape" (Badiou 5). Following Badiou's understanding of the intervallic period and the rebirth of history through the Arab revolts, this paper aims to highlight some of the nuances in the new political understandings and practices among Egypt's revolutionary youth. Specifically, it aims to show that, since the 2011 revolutionary event, Egyptian youth have been contesting and shifting away from traditional politics based on a leader and ideology, towards a decisively different, more inclusionary imagination of the politics to come. After a review of relevant literature and a discussion of the intervallic period high-

lighting the different lived experiences among youth today, the paper will examine the cases of Mohamed El-Baradei, one of the founders of the Constitution Party, and Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, one of the founders of the Strong Egypt Party, through the perspective of youths, to highlight how the meaning and role of leaders in politics has changed for revolutionary youth. It will highlight the experiences of the 1980s generation by situating them within their historical location (Mannheim), and instead of defining youth by age, it will examine youth as a social process based on a historical location. It will suggest that while older political activists played an important role in mobilizing for the 2011 events and afterwards, their role is now foremost one of symbolic representation, rather than as leaders advancing a particular ideology. Moreover, it will argue that revolutionary youth no longer want or accept leaders and ideologies in their conception of politics, posing both a challenge and an opening for a different, more emancipatory politics to come.

Youth and the 2011 revolutionary Event

It came as a surprise to many people in Egypt and around the world when young Egyptians took to the streets to topple President Hosni Mubarak. The possibility that this generation, which has been per-

ceived as apathetic and uninterested in politics (El-Sharnouby, Murphey, Herrera et al.), would take to the streets in such great numbers against the thirty-year rule of Mubarak was inconceivable before 2011. Yet, the day after, revolutionary youth in Egypt did not manage to entrench themselves or their social justice ideals in the political system of the state or its formal political institutions. As opposed to previous revolutionary movements, Egyptian revolutionary youth never sought to seize political power to change the system from one form to another (Bayat). Yet, the 2011 revolutionary event did impact youth's political imaginaries and practices. With the revolutionary event and the toppling of Mubarak, the question of social justice embodied in the slogan 'Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice' surfaced as an important component in the revolutionary imaginary in Egypt. During the eighteen days of the uprising, men and women united in their diversity at the square, allowing for new possibilities of social interactions (Bamyeh, Hanafi, Badiou). Superseding social divisions during the eighteen days, such as between Muslims and Christians, men and women, and among different classes, new possibilities of collective action and interactions were practiced.

Revolutionary youth, those young men and women who took to the streets and still maintain fidelity to the principles of the 2011 revolutionary event, have since been ruthlessly sidelined, particularly after 2013 with the return of the military to power following the toppling of President Mohamed Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood (Hamzawy). Finding themselves again in the old dynamic of polarized politics between the military and its strongest political opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood, revolutionary youth are currently locked in a struggle to impose their presence and go beyond the prevailing political divisions. While the 2011 event brought important questions of social justice and emancipatory politics to the fore, the new political generation forged in the event has yet to find a form of organization to enact their different political ideals and imaginaries.

In this respect, many scholars have grappled with the meaning of the 2011 revolutionary uprisings in the Arab world and in Egypt specifically in its revolutionarity and ability to drive change, suggesting that revolutionary youth did not have a drastically different vision to change the socio-political system nor did they aim at seizing power (Bayat, Abdelrahman). It is particularly the form of organization and mobilization characteristic of the 2011

event—that is, the fact that it was leaderless and cross-ideological—that gives the Egyptian revolution a different appeal similar to other revolutionary movements in this century. Other examples are the Eastern European uprisings at the beginning of the millennium, as well as the other uprisings in the Arab world such as in Syria and Tunisia. The question thus remains: why did this generation of youth act differently than previous revolutionary movements, and what are the political practices and imaginaries that drive their political participation?

To explain the forms of organization adopted in Egypt's 2011 event, some scholars have argued for understanding them within the larger historical context (Zemni et al.). They accordingly suggest that similar mobilization strategies were adopted from previous political struggles in Egypt, most prominently the *Kefaya* (Enough) movement (2004-05) and the Baradei campaign for the presidency (2010) (Abdelrahman, Rennick, Abdalla). Others have argued that these revolts suggest the beginning of a new era that splits from old historical legacies, such as by proposing an end to post-colonialism (Dabashi). Meanwhile, others urge an understanding of the Arab revolts not as revolutions in the old sense of the word, of seizing power, but rather as a combination

between revolutionary action and calling for reforms. In this context, Asef Bayat refers to the 2011 uprising as a 'Refolution' (Bayat).

Bayat claims that revolutions mean simply "the rapid and radical transformation of a state driven by popular movements from below" (Bayat 154). This definition has been expanded since the Arab uprisings in a way that not only focuses on the results of the uprisings in terms of state transformations, but also pays attention to the unfolding changes among revolutionaries. According to Brecht de Smet, "an outcome-centered or consequent centralist approach turns a particular outcome of the revolutionary process into a primary determinant of its success - i.e. the conquest, break-up, and transformation of states" (De Smet). Similarly, Mohammed Bamyeh emphasizes that

successful revolutions are those that usher in a legacy of cultural transformation, and not those that topple systems of grievance. In this sense, enlightenment and revolution go hand in hand, but only insofar as the revolution does away not simply with a political regime as much as with vestiges of authoritarian culture in society at large (Bamyeh 32).

Many of these scholars have thus understood the 2011 revolution as a con-

tinuous or even permanent revolution (Abdelrahman, De Smet), based on a long process of contentious struggle. In that sense, “the revolutionary process is stretched in time, and its movements are dictated by the ebb and flow of its constituting and profound political and economic protests” (Zemni et al.). In a similar understanding, the Egyptian revolutionary uprising is understood in this paper as a long process, yet conditioned by the surfacing of something new through the appearance of, drawing from Badiou's terminology, the event and the subject. In Badiou's theoretical framework, an event is understood as a break in time through which a new collective political subject emerges. For Badiou, the experience of the event carries in itself clues in which new possibilities for change are embedded. Meaning comes when the newly forged political subject attempts to organize itself in fidelity to the event:

A political organization is the Subject of a discipline of the event, an order in the service of disorder, the constant guardianship of an exception (Badiou 66).

Thus, understanding the new political practices that are characteristic of the 2011 event in Egypt should not seek to simply

explain from where these modes of organization may have been adopted historically, but should also explore them in relation to what type of new political subject surfaced in the event.

Understanding and analyzing the meaning of the loose organizational structures thus requires juxtaposing the political subject(s) that surfaced from the event, including their political practices and imaginaries, with the historical moment in which the Egyptian uprising appeared, which Badiou has coined an “intervallic period”. In his book *The Rebirth of History*, Badiou defines an intervallic period as what comes *after*² a period in which the revolutionary conception of political action has been sufficiently clarified that, notwithstanding the ferocious internal struggles punctuating its development, it is explicitly presented as an alternative to the dominant world, and on this basis has secured massive, disciplined support. (Badiou 38-9)

The disciplined support for the revolutionary ideals of social justice imagined through a diverse collective gave the revolutionary masses in Egypt clues in terms of what they reject, namely discrimination, exclusion of women and minorities (such as Christians and Nubians), unequal power-sharing, and an unfair distribution of

resources. Yet these ideals have not yet been embedded into structural possibilities in an organized politics. These negative ideals, which Egypt's revolutionary youth reject, are still in search of an ‘affirmative element of the idea’:

During these intervallic periods, however, discontent, rebellion and the conviction that the world should not be as it is (...) all this exists. At the same time, it cannot find its political form, in the first instance because it cannot *draw strength* from the *sharing of an Idea*. The force of rebellions, even when they assume an historical significance, remains essentially negative (‘let them go’, ‘Ben Ali out’, ‘Mubarak clear off’). It does not deploy a slogan in the affirmative element of the Idea. (Badiou 40)

As Badiou explains, the formulation of an affirmative idea is essential for inaugurating a new form of politics beyond the intervallic period.

In short, guardians of the history of emancipation in an intervallic period, historical riots point to the urgency of a reformulated ideological proposal, a powerful Idea, a pivotal hypothesis, so that the energy they release and the individuals they engage can give rise, in

and beyond the mass movement and the reawakening of History it signals, to a new figure of organization and hence of politics. (Badiou 42)

Analyzing revolutionary youth's ongoing political struggles in the context of an intervallic period highlights the political subjects' search for a new affirmative idea for the politics to come. As of now, the new politics of Egyptian revolutionary youth is defined on greater social justice and organized around the importance of inclusion of the different segments of society which unfolds in practice by the rejection of a leadership figure in the sense of a hero that strives for change in the name of an ideology.

In absence of an ideology and leader, the challenge for Egypt's revolutionary youth is to find an adequate, alternative form of organization for enacting their political imaginary in fidelity to the 2011 event. Juxtaposing the political figures of Baradei and Aboul Fotouh demonstrates some of the contradictions in the political party as a form of organization and the difficulty of searching for meaningful forms of organization in the absence of a hero figure and an idea. As becomes clear from these contradictions, the party system, as it currently exists, does not offer revolutionary youth

the organizational structure upon which a new form of politics can be born.

The challenge of the cross-ideological and leaderless forms of mobilization is then precisely to find a new form of politics, an idea, and a new type of leadership to organize the revolutionary masses in meaningful ways; that is, in light of the clues that surfaced with the event, the importance of social justice imagined through a diverse collective, that of men and women, Christians and Muslims, people of different classes, and so on. In his book, *Philosophy for Militants*, Badiou argues and asks

'The last man' is the exhausted figure of a man devoid of any figure. It is the nihilistic image of the fixed nature of the human animal, devoid of all creative possibility of overcoming. Our task is to find a new heroic figure, which is neither the return of the old figure of religious or national sacrifice nor the nihilistic figure of the last man. Is there a place, in a disoriented world, for a new style of heroism? (Badiou 34)

The search for a new 'style of heroism' to fuel the energies of revolutionaries to continue their struggle for emancipatory politics is far from easy, precisely because the old hero figures are not representative of

the historical moment in which the uprising unfolded. According to Badiou "the period of the aristocratic warrior is behind us, as is the period of the democratic soldier. So much is certain, but we do not find ourselves for this reason at the peaceful end of History" (Badiou 44). He further states that

the great problem is to create a paradigm of heroism beyond war, a figure that would be neither that of the warrior nor that of the soldier, without for this reason returning to Christian pacifism, which is only the passive form of sacrifice (Badiou 35).

This soldier figure to Badiou was connected to the war situation. The transition from the warrior to the soldier figure came with the French Revolution, in which the soldier figure represents a collective while the warrior before that was foremost important in his individual achievements. The warrior figure "does not formalize a disciplined relationship to an idea. It is a figure of self-affirmation, the promotion of a visible superiority" (ibid 35). Thus, to Badiou, "the French Revolution replaced the individual and aristocratic figure of the warrior with the democratic and collective figure of the soldier" (Badiou 35).

Being 79 years old himself, Badiou's focus on the experience of today's youth in his most recent book, *The True Life*, suggests that youth find themselves in disoriented times in search of new ways of socialization and identification. In the past, for example, "a young man was considered an adult when he had done his military service, and a young woman was considered an adult when she got married. Today, these two vestiges of initiation are no more than memories for grandparents" (Badiou 18). Another decisive difference for Badiou is that "in traditional society, the elders were always the ones in charge; they were valued as such, naturally to the detriment of the young people. Wisdom was on the side of long experience, advanced age, old age" (ibid 19). Although Badiou reflects here foremost on French society, there is some truth to these shifts in Egypt too. Young people's socialization process is shifting away from a traditional society with clearly defined roles for men and women, leadership, and ideology. Though still a patriarchal society, the 2011 revolutionary event in Egypt inaugurated a new process of shifting in the role of women as well as the importance of elders, particularly imagined as heroes. Badiou's understanding of the confusion in the world today in terms of revolutionary politics is convincing. According to

Badiou, "classical revolutionary politics whose goal is justice" reached an end at the close of the 1970s, yet there is no beginning to something new, a new name, idea, or figure to hold on to. Accordingly, he suggests understanding this time, both globally and in the context of Egypt, as intervallic, that is, a moment in which it is clear that something has to change, but no idea is yet strong enough to unify the revolutionary youth towards something other than the vague dream of social justice. According to Badiou:

In an intervallic period, [...] the revolutionary idea of the preceding period, which naturally encountered formidable obstacles, relentless enemies without and a provisional inability to resolve important problems within is dormant. It has not yet been taken up by a new sequence in its development. An open, shared and universally practicable figure of emancipation is wanting. The historical time is defined, at least for all those unamenable to selling out to domination, by a sort of uncertain interval of the Idea. (Badiou 38-39)

Youth of today are born in drastically different times from previous generations, with different experiences affecting their political imaginaries. Asef Bayat, in that sense, identifies the year 1979-80 as the point in which neoliberalism was advanced

and "played a central role in [the] change of the discourse. In place of 'state' and 'revolution' there was an exponential growth of talk about NGOs, 'civil society', public spheres' and so forth - in a word, reform" (Bayat 56). The effect of the neoliberal order on the transition of youth from childhood to adolescence has been highlighted by some scholars in that neoliberal ideas and ideologies are increasingly fused with the image of youth, with an aim to "inculcate neoliberal subjectivities among the young through education, training and youth development programs that promote such concepts as youth entrepreneurship and financial literacy" (Sukarieh et al. 24). As a result, young people spend more time in their lives on education and training. According to Wyn and White,

young people are often forced to seek refuge in education and training institutions because they cannot find work (Wyn et al. 2).

Vera King suggests that youth also experience time differently. Acceleration of time has a decisive impact on youth in as far as new burdens and pressures are imposed on them (King). According to Linda Herrera, another trend among youth due to neoliberal economic restructuring is

widespread precarity. Critiquing the UN's 2016 Arab Human Development Report, she states

The message to young people is that they should pull themselves together, become more self-reliant and take charge of their lives. This distorted framing of empowerment advances a development model in which young people are encouraged to break their collective bonds as “youth” in exchange for facing the future as competing individuals (Herrera).

Youth in general, and Egyptian youth in specific, thus find themselves in a decisively different moment in time marked by the revolutionary event. Due to the event, important questions and reflections in relation to social justice are unfolding until this day. What will follow is an examination of the changed meaning of the hero figure to revolutionary youth through fieldwork done in Egypt in 2014 and 2015.

Superseding one coherent Unity through a Desire for Inclusion in Diversity

Based on interviews with young former party members of the Muslim Brotherhood and members of the Constitution Party,³ the following examination of two political party figures, Baradei and Aboul Fotouh, highlights the changed meaning of the

hero figure in the context of the Egyptian uprising in 2011.

The Absence of a Hero Figure

The mobilization for the Egyptian revolution, though in absence of a hero figure, had certain political figures that made it possible for the movement to unfold into a historical riot⁴ in 2011. For example, Mohamed El Baradei, former director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency and Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2005, undoubtedly played an important role in uniting the opposition when he proposed running against President Hosni Mubarak in what should have been the 2011 presidential elections. Yet, looking closely at what Baradei stood for in terms of leadership, he did not embody a heroic figure as such, with a new agenda for bringing about change.

According to Amina,⁵ a member of the Constitution Party that was formed by Baradei and others, “Baradei is like Ghandi. He is important as an iconic figure” (Personal Interview). Amina, who joined the Baradei campaign for the presidency in 2010, explained that young people were shocked when Baradei eventually decided not to run for the presidency, but noted that

he taught them that this movement is not and shall not depend on him (Personal Interview).

Amina believes “we are the children of Baradei. He taught us that he is not a godfather and that we have to work ourselves” (Personal Interview).

For Amina, Baradei’s Constitution Party is important foremost in protecting youth from detention. Other than that, the party does not seem to offer much, in her opinion. She believes that

revolutionary consciousness (*w’y thawry*) is about doing something for the country without waiting for a result, while ‘political consciousness’ (*w’y syasy*) is about aiming to gain power. The process of political thinking aims at quick solutions, while revolutionary thought is patient in the long run (Personal Interview).

Though affected by Baradei, Amina is more interested in political practices, in which she imagines revolutionary politics to be about a long process that aims eventually towards a politics of greater social justice. For her, political participation is clearly not about gaining power, as she learned from Baradei. Baradei, in that sense, did not resemble the traditional hero figure in terms of following his ideas, but rather following his lead in an aim to

reform the state in accordance with democratic forms of governance.

Amr, a member in the 6th of April youth movement who joined the Constitution Party, but who was not very active, had a similar understanding of Baradei as Ghandi. For him, "Baradei, like Ghandi, is the father figure that inspired and made me join the Constitution Party". Besides being an inspiration, however, the party did not represent much more for Amr in terms of a form of organization that could bring about meaningful change. The image that Baradei represents fits well in the current historical situation in which there is a general absence of the traditional hero figure. Baradei primarily represents a leading figure who encourages the young to participate in politics through democratic forms of governance, such as elections. He does not represent a hero figure in the old sense of the word.

What Baradei resembled is thus the possibility for democracy in the absence of anything revolutionary about him in terms of representing an ideology. He represented the possibility of democratic governance by proposing to compete in the elections; in a broader sense, Baradei embodied the possibility of meaningful reforms of the state and its institutions by breaking the domination of the presidency by one dictator after the next.

Baradei also symbolized the will to go against acting as a hero figure. Instead, he explicitly sought to serve as a focal point, using the wide network that his advanced age and prestige afforded him to mobilize youth. He did not consider himself a hero, as Amina suggests, nor did he aim to bring about drastic change. Rather, he sought to motivate the youth to join forces and push for the changes they hoped for, leading some members in the Constitution Party to perceive him as a 'Ghandi' figure in the sense of standing for peaceful resistance combined with an image of pushing for reforms.

Similar trends can be found among youth who were formerly members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Founded in the 1920s, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) espouses an Islamic ideology and has an extensive history of mobilization and organization that has long established it as the strongest opposition in Egypt. Having acted as the opposition for an extended period of time, the MB developed into a centralized leadership and rigid hierarchy, which was less appealing to some of its young members. According to Akram, who is 30 years old and was a MB member from 2003 to 2008

When the MB started their first year of rule [in 2012], they had some important challenges in their organization, like

the problem of recruitment. They really did not manage to recruit. And this was something fascinating for anyone who knows them because in the past they recruited members in huge numbers. Their appeal [once they were in power] was not there anymore - they used to present themselves as a moderate movement that fights. But now that they are in power, the appeal of what you had as an opposition was gone". (Personal Interview).

Akram, whose family has been in the higher ranks of the MB in previous years, decided to resign from the organization in frustration with the Islamic interpretations the movement adopted and its inability to open up to new ideas in its rigid organizational structure. According to him

The organization of the MB, what keeps it together during times of repression is based on central democracy. The decision-making always happens on a very small scale and very centralized, and then the implementation of these decisions happens also in a very centralized way. (...) The organization does not want people who think. It is not only that they do not want them [those who aim to introduce new ideas], but they become a burden - people they [the MB] do not want. And this explains why many people have left. (Personal

Interview)
Ahmed, who was a MB member from 1995 to 2009, confirmed this sentiment. Ahmed resigned in 2009 because

I personally felt that the solution [to political change] had to be a revolutionary one, which I realized in 2009 when the constitution of 2007 was adjusted and the heritage [Hosni Mubarak began grooming his son Gamal Mubarak to become the next president of Egypt] started happening and so on. The MB did not go into this direction, while in the meantime, there appeared more youth movements and there were alternatives to the MB who fight the political order in a more revolutionary direction. (Personal Interview)

After the 2011 revolutionary uprising, Ahmed reconsidered joining the MB, but the centralized decision-making process and control over youth's choices was unappealing. Shortly after Mubarak was toppled in 2011, some youth of the MB

got permission [from the MB leadership] to make a conference. Yet shortly before the conference they were told to cancel it. So they [the youth] wondered why, we have already reserved a place and made other arrangements. No, cancel it [they were told]. The idea that youth make their own conference and talk openly about their issues was

considered not feasible, instead they [the MB leadership] wanted them [the youth] to talk to the leaders as their friends. Eventually the MB said we have nothing to do with this conference. But they [the youth] insisted to hold the conference, which of course marked them. When the decision was taken [to do the conference] they [those organizing the conference] were expelled. (Personal Interview)

Ahmed, along with several other former MB members who had all joined the Baradei campaign for presidency in 2010, eventually decided to form their own group/party. For this, they decided they needed a 'famous person':

Some of us thought, let's make a party, and then the idea was, despite whether it was right or wrong, how do we form the party?! We need a famous person to attract people. Then, what about Aboul Fotouh? He was the suggestion as a famous person among the doctors. And we were close to him, so we thought, why not make him the president of the party? And then others would say, why not do a presidential campaign? The idea being to do a presidential campaign to attract people and mobilize them and then, out of it, make a party, because you need 10,000 official sup-

porters in a number of governorates and so on [to form a political party]. So then we started talking to him and decided to do a presidential campaign and not a party. (Personal Interview)

Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, presidential hopeful in the 2012 elections and ex-MB member, though still influential among the MB and famous among its youth members, also did not resemble a traditional hero figure. Instead, he served as an important iconic figure that helped to mobilize youth groups. The Strong Egypt Party, formed by Aboul Fotouh, is an interesting case study for deeper probing, particularly in its ideological component, in as far as Aboul Fotouh appeared as a moderate Islamist, thus attracting attention on this ideological level. Yet, in terms of leadership in the sense of a classic hero figure that finds relevance and strength through ideology, he also did not fit the bill. That is, Aboul Fotouh foremost resembled a possibility for moderate Islamism; in a sense, he offered a way out of the centralized and rigid interpretations of Islam by the MB. Although the case of MB splinter groups needs deeper probing in terms of their political imaginaries due to the complex relationship between Islam and politics in the Egyptian context, the political imaginaries among revolutionary youth, includ-

ing those who left the MB, is not based on a search for a hero figure and a rigid ideology to follow. While this revolutionary movement in Egypt, similar to previous revolutionary movements, aimed to achieve greater social justice, a decisive difference is the absence of a political drive based on a hero figure mobilizing people in the name of an ideology. The political figures of Baradei and Aboul Fotouh resemble important iconic figures used to form groups, yet they do not resemble the hero figure in the Badiouan sense.

Contrasting the political figure of Baradei to that of Gamal Abdel Nasser, for example, illustrates the different character of the 2011 revolution versus the 1952 revolutionary coup in Egypt. Nasser represented a hero figure in the Badiouan sense. Nasser, as spearheading nationalism, was embodied in the figure of the soldier. In this case, Nasser was literally a soldier before the 1952 events. In its symbolic importance, Nasser represented the hero that would free Egyptians from colonialism and lead them to independence. The political project was clearly that of national independence accompanied by the hero figure: Nasser in the role of the *zaiim*, the leader, with nationalism as an ideology. Though Baradei never became President of Egypt, and despite the fact that many

have been critical of the leadership model he proposed, the point of comparison is rather the symbolic representation of Baradei, along with Aboul Fotouh, to highlight the different character of the 2011 revolution. In comparison to Nasser, Baradei was more of a leading figure represented in the democratic practice of competing in elections, similar to that of Aboul Fotouh, than a hero figure that represented something new as such.

Conclusion

In absence of the hero figure and an ideology, revolutionary politics today in Egypt has diverged from its old historical drive, which was conditioned with wars and independence movements to bring about change through a leader and an ideology. Nasser's popularity in Egypt, for example, is directly connected with his national project of forming the independent nation state and the historical situation of colonialism. The desire for independence at that time was thus the historical condition that made the ideology of nationalism in the hero figure of Nasser a possibility.

However, in the absence of wars - the last one in Egypt was in 1973 - this condition is lacking from revolutionary youth's experiences. In turn, they do not see the relevance of a hero figure. Since Nasser, Egypt has been governed by the military through

authoritarian rule and never translated the country's independence movement into greater social justice and more emancipatory politics. It resulted instead in successive dictatorial rule. Thus, the challenge for youth today is, as Badiou emphatically writes, "in disoriented times, we cannot accept the return of the old, deadly figures of religious sacrifice,⁶ but neither can we accept the complete lack of any figure, and the complete disappearance of any idea of heroism" (Badiou 33).

Placing youth within the intervallic period—that is, a time in which neither traditional politics based on leadership and ideology are appealing, nor is politics yet driven by a new idea or ideology that could supersede previous pitfalls of revolutionary movements, such as the dictatorship of one leader—leaderless and cross-ideological mobilization strategies suggest a meaningful form of representing revolutionary youth in Egypt. These mobilization strategies are not simply a choice or a tactic used to mobilize others, but are a reflection of youth's experiences during this particular historical juncture. These mobilization strategies promise new possibilities of practicing politics superseding the possibility of dictatorship of one leader and one ideology for all, in as far as they allow for a collective body to unite in their diversity aiming for greater social jus-

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tice and a fairer representation of the different segments of society (religious affiliation, gender, class, and so on). Yet as these mobilization strategies are not yet substantiated within an idea or a representative form of organization allowing for new possibilities of collective action and interaction, they remain a site and means of continued struggle.

Notes

¹ Emphasis in original text

² Emphasis in original text

³ For a detailed Case Study of my research go to: El Sharnouby, Dina "Conducting Participant Action Research in the Context of Drastic Change: Understanding Youth's Political Project in Revolutionary Egypt" SAGE Research Methods Cases (2018)

⁴ Alain Badiou understands the Egyptian revolution as a historical riot; that is, as a break in time that allowed for new possibilities

⁵ All names of my interlocutors are replaced by pseudonyms to protect their identities

⁶ Badiou does not mean religious sacrifice literally in terms of religion but rather hints at the idea of militantly abiding by a particular doctrine.

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ISSN: 2196-629X
<http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.9.6835>