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The Egyptian Revolution against the Police

THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION BEGAN ON JANUARY 25, 2011—“POLICE Day”—a public holiday that commemorates the role of the police in the resistance against the British occupation in Egypt. It started as a day of protest called for by a number of youth groups and activists, among them “April Sixth” and the Facebook group “*Kulina Khaled Said*” (“We are all Khaled Said”). The organizers of the protests on that day wanted to subvert the celebration of the police and turn the day into an occasion to indict the institution in charge of policing—in a sense, putting it on public trial. Primary among the objectives of the organizers was the removal of General Habib al-Adli, the then-minister of the interior, who had been in that position for 14 years and under whose leadership the ministry came to represent the most feared and despised apparatus of government. The ministry has been associated with routinized violent practices against civilians held in police stations, including torture and sexual violation, the internment of political dissidents by its state security organs, the surveillance of activists, the rigging of elections, and the protection of core ruling regime interests.

The case of Khaled Said concerned an incident of police brutality in Alexandria in June 2010. Said, a young man, was dragged out of an Internet café by two undercover police officers and was violently beaten to death while in police custody. The incident was emblematic of a mode of operation on the part of police that threatened the integrity of life for ordinary citizens. To understand the strength of the feelings surrounding this case and its powerful role in mobilizing youth against the police, we should take a broader look at the background of anti-police sentiment to see that for large segments of the population, engagement in the upris-

ing was an expression of opposition against the police as an institution of everyday government, which operated throughout the social body and infiltrated the nooks and crannies of society.

To grasp the character of the police in Egypt, we need to consider the police not only as an organization in charge of public security, but as an agency of government in the broad sense. In terms of areas of remit and rationalities of government, the Egyptian police approximate the police project of state envisioned by social thinkers of eighteenth-century Europe and discussed by Michel Foucault in his genealogy of modern governmentalities (2007a, 311–332; 2007b, 333–361). As in this project, the Egyptian police's governmental reach covers, among other things, markets, transport, roads, food supply, public utilities, public morality, and taxation, in addition to public security and national security. The organizational chart of the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior reveals the extensive remit of police monitoring and surveillance activities and the degree of specialization and complexity of its departments. It is not only the maintenance of public order that made the police so present in people's everyday lives; rather, it was their interventions in the government of the social that brought ordinary citizens face to face with the police on a daily basis.¹

By its very design, the police apparatus in Egypt is intrusive and represents a semimilitary body. The use of overt violence in police practices of government both heightened and complicated this intrusiveness. It should be noted that there are political factors that consolidated the police presence in society, notably the role it was assigned in stifling the Islamist opposition in the 1980s and 1990s. The security police and the criminal and investigative police operate out of police stations located at the neighborhood level and in central offices in cities throughout the national territory. This local presence and associated activities of surveillance intensified during that period and directed much of the resources and energies of the police to the monitoring of youth suspected of belonging to Islamist groups.

The public security and political objectives relating to the Islamist opposition are not the only factors to note. The expansion

of security politics has also occurred in conjunction with the withdrawal of the state from welfare provisions and the promotion of neoliberal economic policies beginning in the 1980s and continuing more fully into the 1990s. An important development in this regard was the growth of the informal labor market and informal housing alongside the increased privatization of social services. This development also meant that spaces of social life were increasingly gaining relative autonomy from the state. For example, informal employment removed citizens from the clientelist networks of public sector jobs. In other words, larger segments of the population ceased to be clients of the state and were no longer bound by the social contract of earlier days whereby political quietism was exchanged for social goods. The social and economic autonomy represented grounds of challenge to the regime, which, in turn, it sought to contain through the expansion of security politics. In particular, police presence and interventions have expanded in the popular quarters of large cities.

Ordinary citizens' encounters with the police take place in outdoor markets, on roads and highways, in public transport, in alleyways, and in their private dwellings. Very often, these encounters involve violence and humiliation. At the heart of police government of the social lie practices of surveillance and discipline of the body and the affect.

I contend that the people's rising during the revolution was directed at the terms of police government through the affect. In putting forward this proposition, I highlight the role that physical punishment and verbal violence play in the disciplining of bodies and minds. In making this argument, I want to draw attention to practices of discipline falling outside the genealogical account provided in Foucault's history of modern forms of discipline (1995). Indeed, in his account, emphasis is put on the rationalization of disciplinary practices as manifested, notably, in the shift away from physical violence acted on the body to practices of normalization acted through the body.

In her engagement with Foucault's account, Begoña Aretxaga (2005, 58) notes that Foucault does not address the question of what

happens when rationalization falters and technologies of normalization are disrupted because the subject either rejects normalization or because power succumbs to the excess of its theatrical staging. I want to take up Aretxaga's question in my inquiry into police practices of government and the subject's resistance. The orientation of the account I give below is that rather than a breakdown of rationalization, the use of physical punishment and verbal violence are elements of police government that operate through the manipulation of socially embodied emotions, in particular by modulating feelings of humiliation and citizens' anxieties about becoming the subject of public spectacles of humiliation. In this respect, I draw attention to the affective associations of ordinary citizens' encounters and relations with the police as constitutive elements of their subjectivities and as informing their modes of action. My analysis of the people's rising up against the police looks into the structure of feelings that develops in interaction with the police and that has come to guide the acts of protest and resistance during the "Tahrir days" and in their aftermath. My approach to the structure of feelings emerging in encounters with the police and guiding individuals' interaction with them draws on theorizations of emotions as socialized embodied feelings that are marked by sociocultural norms and called forth in recurrent social experiences.²

Drawing on my fieldwork in Cairo's new popular quarters—conventionally referred to as "informal quarters"—and in informal markets, I will sketch out the patterns of interaction with the police and the structure of feelings toward the government of the police that developed in the processes of interaction.³ In this structure of feelings (or affective register), a sense of humiliation and of being humiliated is deeply felt by ordinary Egyptians. The experience of being humiliated in encounters with the police underpins affective dispositions such as anger, disdain, and revulsion toward the police.

EVERYDAY GOVERNMENT OF THE POLICE

In my fieldwork on everyday-life politics in Cairo, I collected numerous narratives of ordinary people's encounters with the agents of vari-

ous police departments. The narratives revealed patterns of interaction and elucidated mechanisms of discipline and control deployed by the police. In this paper, I will draw on these narratives to sketch out key elements of people's everyday encounters with the police. To begin, it is important to note that different police departments carry out specialized monitoring and surveillance campaigns known as *hamalat*. These pertain to the management and control of various activities and spaces of the urban setting. In this regard, there is an important spatial dimension to policing practices, with popular quarters being subject to the most intrusive and continuous campaigns.

Outdoor markets are subject to Supply Police and municipality police campaigns. Supply Police were originally tasked with monitoring prices of food provisions at the time when prices were set by the Supply Ministry within the frame of "socialist" government in the 1960s. With economic liberalization, food prices became market-driven, but a legal requirement to advertise the price remained. This requirement was used as a pretext for Supply Police raids on markets. However, Supply Police oversight extends to such matters as the conformity of subsidized bread to certain standards. Market campaigns are occasions of conflict and confrontation as well as spectacles and rituals of state power as embodied in the agencies of the police. In these campaigns, or "raids" as they are called by vendors, police control of livelihood in the form of seizing vending scales is one of the most contentious acts. Incidents of seizing poor vendors' scales were narrated by my interviewees as evidence of the injustice of government that undermines poor people's efforts to earn a living. As scales are the main equipment of earning a livelihood, vendors resist their seizure and, in the process, enter into confrontation with police officers that may result in verbal or physical intimidation or abuse (being shoved around or beaten up). These accounts follow the same narrative lines that could be gleaned from the events surrounding Muhammad Bouazizi's self-immolation in Tunisia in 2010. Bouazizi rejected the seizure of his goods, and being slapped by the municipality officer and was thus being humiliated in public. This kind of encounter has long been part of people's daily expe-

rience in public space and has entered into the structuring of feelings toward government.

A tale related to me by a young university student and vendor in Bulaq al-Dakrur, a new, informal quarter in the greater Cairo region, exemplifies this daily experience (see Ismail 2006, 132–133 for a discussion of this type of encounter). Briefly, the incident involved the seizure, by the police, of the vending scales of a young female vendor (perhaps 17 years of age) and her subsequent beating when she resisted. When recounting the incident, my narrator noted that as he witnessed the assault on the young woman, his immediate thoughts were to intervene. But he restrained himself, fearing a physical fight with a police officer in uniform, a fight that would land him in jail and possibly cost him his career. He also commented that the police action was likely to lead the young woman to become deviant (*tanharif*), meaning to become morally loose. I recall this narrative here to underscore two observations from the account: first, feelings of solidarity between citizens and constraints on expressing that solidarity and, second, people's assessment of the effects of police power on the citizen.

The first observation highlights the anger felt as well as the desire to take action on behalf of a fellow citizen in the face of what is seen as police brutality. It also puts a focus on constraints on action in such circumstances. In my discussion of this case, I caution that we should not interpret the reticence of my narrator to intervene as indication of a submissive subjectivity. Indeed, when we read this narrative alongside other accounts of encounters with the police, it becomes clear that there are no a priori subjects of submission or rebellion. Rather, contingent factors enter into the subject's formation and performance. For instance, it is reasonable to imagine that Bouazizi had had goods seized from him before or that his fruit cart had been overturned on earlier occasions. I suggest that such experiences, and the structure of feelings that develop in and from them, enter into the making of an oppositional subject who may act alone or in concert with others at a given moment. I will come back to the question of the subject's action and performance in my discus-

sion below of the youth's accounts of the police practice of *ishtibah wa tahari* (suspicion and investigation), which entails being stopped, questioned, and possibly detained for investigation.

The other observation to draw from my narrator's account is that of the assessment of the police as corrupting the citizen. By conducting themselves violently and unjustly, the police are seen as accomplices if not instigators in the corruption of society and the breakdown of morality. Further, government is seen as undermining people's efforts to make a living. Indeed, this was poignantly underscored by another of my informants in Bulaq who said that "life was better before government came" in reference to the efforts by state agents to bring the area under their control.

If, in the market episode of confrontation with police recounted above, the narrator appears as a submissive subject concerned with the consequences of intervening and fearful for his career and family, albeit angry and disdainful, in other episodes rebellious subjects can be seen forming and performing. One of the most telling of these was related to me by Ayman, a 27-year-old tile layer (this narrative of encounter is discussed in Ismail 2006). I will dwell on Ayman's story briefly. Like many young men in popular quarters, Ayman was the subject of the police practice of *ishtibah wa tahari*. The incident of his arrest began when a police patrol car passed in front of his house in one of the quarter's alleyways. He happened to be standing in front of his house at the time and momentarily exchanged looks with a police officer in the car. The next day the same officer patrolled the alleyway and again looks where exchanged. Following that, the officer approached Ayman, asked for his identity card, and then he took him to the police station. At the station, he was charged with possession of drugs. When brought before the prosecutor two days later, Ayman denied the charge and countered that he was arrested because he dared look a police officer in the eye. Police falsification of drug charges has been a common procedure and is understood as a mechanism of control of young men (a former high-ranking officer asserted that in the 1990s in Cairo alone, police fabricated about 57,000 drug-possession cases on an annual basis; see Ismail

2006). Ayman's reflex betrayed defiance, which positioned him as a subject suited for practices of discipline and punishment that aim to turn "rebellious" subjects into docile ones. Ayman ended the account of his arrest with a commentary on the inevitability of the people rising up against such practices, though he added the qualification that such an uprising needs a leader of Salah al-Din's or 'Urabi's stature (see Ismail 2006).

In the accounts given by my informants, it is possible to get a sense of the structure of feelings toward the police that develops in the experience of *ishtibah wa tahari*. Young men spoke often of their feeling humiliated—*ihana* and *mahana* were the two emotion terms most often used. The feeling of being humiliated—sensing an injurious attack on one's self-esteem and self-respect—is incited by being beaten, pushed around, or insulted in public or in police stations and detention cells. The young men I worked with recounted their experiences with the police in terms that convey their feeling of a rupture or tear in their sense of self as a result of being subjected to demeaning and degrading treatment. One young man, reflecting on the experience, asserted "*ana ibn balad wa dami hur wa ma'balsh al ihana*" ("I am a son of the country, my blood is free and I do not accept humiliation"). This statement points to tensions between the sense of self articulated in the idiom of popular classes and the humiliated subject of police discipline.

What crystallize from the narratives of young men are strong feelings of contempt, disdain, and disrespect toward the police. These feelings develop out of the familiarity with police modes of operation and out of a reflective engagement about their propriety in terms of social norms of interaction. As corruption became a feature of the activities of the police, their claims to be protecting citizens and maintaining public order became hollow. In an ad hoc group discussion I had with young men from Bulaq, many noted that the police used their campaigns to raise funds—that is, to create a bribe situation. The youth questioned and ridiculed the transport and traffic police campaigns, saying that they were primarily designed to extort money on behalf of the government and for personal use, particularly to purchase mobile telephone credit.

In the narratives of interaction between the police and the people, respect, as a social norm, arises as an important motif. The narratives underscore how the police undermined particular social norms of interaction and by doing so transformed everyday civilities. Police used forms of address considered demeaning and belittling when stopping citizens, in particular those from popular quarters and socially disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, taxi drivers recount that when stopped by police for verification of driving papers, the police officer usually addresses the driver as “boy” as in “where are your papers, boy” (“*fayn awra’ak ya wala*”). The violation of civilities relating to age in cases when the driver is older is particularly distressing. One driver told me that on one occasion, he objected to this derisive form of address and that speaking up led to a verbal altercation with the police officer that ended with him being taken to the police station and presented to the public prosecutor on charges of attacking a police officer. This type of exchange is typical and is recounted by drivers throughout Cairo. A citizen experiences these encounters with police on the street, in the municipality, and various other spaces, and gains a cumulative understanding of their workings, coming to see the police as a vast network of aggressive overseers. The disrespect shown by police officers when interpellating subjects is intended to elicit obsequiousness in them. It is one of the modes of simulating *haybat al-dawla* (the awe of state) that has been projected as a defining feature of the Egyptian state.

Police monitoring extends to both intimate expressions of self and outward appearance as they classify subjects of innocence and suspicion. In interviews, youth noted that their clothes, posture, and personal grooming were all factors that projected them as subjects of suspicion (and possibly innocence). In discussions about their experience, they explained that being well dressed, having a scar on the face or hand, the type of haircut, or the length of the beard were all factors in their subjectivation by the police. The test of docile subjectivity could take place at road checks for drivers’ licenses or during night patrols. A gold jewelry manufacturer and merchant in Cairo’s al-Moski market recounted how he felt compelled to shave his beard after he

was arrested one evening by the police. Devout and Salafi-leaning in religious practice (that is, a self-fashioned follower of the tradition of the prophet and his companions), hajj Ahmad grew a beard as an expression of his commitment to the Salafi way. He narrated how his experience of *ishtibah wa tahari* led him to alter his appearance so as to avoid being subject to the practice. He recalled that one evening on the way home following a delivery to a customer, he was stopped by the police and detained for a few days. During questioning and to fend off the charge of being an Islamist, he denied his religious commitment and feigned being a transgressor of religious injunctions to secure his release. When he was transferred from State Security Intelligence to the Investigative Police, he considered that he was reborn and shaved his beard. He reasoned that the outward signs of his religiosity were too costly as he had to worry about his work and his family.

Hajj Ahmad assessed his reaction and that of others as manifesting weakness in the upholding of devotion and commitment. He said “our Islam is that of pretenders (*zalantahiyya*).” Hajj Ahmad’s experience and his assessment of the impact of police practices on his sense of self and his ability to be faithful to his religious convictions resonate with the account given by the young merchant in the market. The key issue for both, as it is for many citizens, is that police practices were undermining their personal dignity and self-respect and hence their senses of self. It could be argued that they did not like how they were being governed. Foucault noted that the critique of the police project of government raised the issue of individual self-government capacities as a necessary ingredient of government. This critique pressed for limitations on government by harnessing individual capacities of self-government to state government. In the accounts of encounter, the subject’s reclaiming her capacity to govern herself in certain domains is clearly present.

THE BACKSTREETS OF TAHRIR: “THE PEOPLE WANT TO BRING DOWN THE POLICE”

An important feature of the Egyptian Revolution was the mobilization of large crowds and their congregation peacefully in public squares

throughout the country. Marching in large numbers and forming the million-man/woman processions were spectacular acts of the revolution as experienced and seen in Tahrir. Yet other activities that were crucial to the success of the first phase of the revolution were given less visibility and prominence in reporting and writing about the revolution. These activities took place in popular quarters and targeted the police directly. While large numbers of protestors poured into Tahrir and other public squares, many residents of popular quarters took their grievances and defiance to police stations and detention centers. In the first few days of the revolution, 99 police stations were burned down and many detention cells were opened and detainees let out. The bulk of the police stations attacked were located in Cairo popular quarters such as Helwan, Imbaba, Bab al-Shi'riyya, Bulaq al-Dakrur, al-Mattariyya, and al-Gammaliyya. The same pattern can also be noted for Alexandria and other cities where large mobilization took place. It is also important to underscore that in these clashes with the police, there were many fatalities among the protestors. According to local activists, a small number of the protestors killed during the days of Tahrir were in Tahrir. The majority were in popular quarters.

Official reports depicted the attack on police stations as the work of thugs (*baltagiyya*) and criminals. However, it is difficult to sustain this view if we take a closer look at the scale of the clashes and the level of popular participation. I will offer here an interpretative account of the action and put forward the proposition that the assault on the police, while motivated by popular anger against police practices in these areas, arises out of an existing repertoire of contentious action that had developed over the previous decade. This extends further back to incidents of extraordinary confrontations, such as the 1986 rebellion of the soldiers of central security, when the young conscripts rose up in protest over low pay and indenture- or slave-like employment conditions. This event marked the emergence of police stations as targets of rebellious action. In response, the government of the day turned key police stations in Cairo into virtual fortresses with blocked access roads and heavily armed security stationed all around (good examples are

police stations in Ma'adi, Helwan, and Giza). Before the revolution, and aside from the 1986 events, the most notable attacks on police stations took place in small towns outside big cities. Beginning in the late 1990s and continuing throughout the 2000s, a number of towns saw mini-uprisings in which local police stations were targets. These mini-uprisings were reactions to specific incidents of police violence where a detainee died because of torture, or when the police shot at demonstrations organized to protest living conditions (for example, the famous events of Hamoul, Mit Nima, and Belqas; see Ismail 2006). During these earlier events, people surrounded police stations and set them on fire. They also set fire to armored police cars and destroyed equipment.

If we review the documentation of human rights organizations, we find that many of the police stations that were burned down during the revolution were known to have been places where violence and torture had been perpetrated against citizens. While the targeting of police stations had an element of a settling of accounts, its purpose was also to disarm the police so that the protests could continue.⁴ In some parts of Cairo, the confrontation with the police took the form of street wars or urban guerrilla warfare. Drawing on press coverage, uploaded videos, and interviews with protesters in Tahrir Square and Bulaq al-Dakrur in March 2011, I will retrace a few of these battles to illustrate how they were integral and necessary to the revolution. The account of the battles serves to draw attention to the place of popular quarters in the geography of resistance, and to the spatial inscription of popular modes of activism.

One of the battles took place in Old Cairo, in the area known as Fatimid Cairo (and hence was dubbed in some press reports as “the battle of Fatimid Cairo”; see *al-Masry al-Youm*, January 30, 2011). Fatimid Cairo comprises historical sites such as al-Azhar mosque and old popular quarters such as Gammaliyya. It is also the home of Egypt’s largest popular market, namely al-Moski. The earliest reported battle began on January 29, 2011, and lasted until morning of the next day. It unfolded in the main thoroughfares of Al-Azhar Street and Port Said Street and ran into the alleyways of al-Moski. At one end were the security forces

and, on the other, stood the protestors. The stand-off ensued when the security forces tried to block demonstrators who had reached Bab al-Shi'riyya quarter from al-Nur mosque in Abassiyya quarter and were proceeding on Port Said Street. There the demonstrations stopped at al-Banat Mosque Square in the heart of Gammaliyya when the police fired on demonstrators with rubber bullets and threw tear gas canisters. The youth ran into al-Moski alleyways, and the merchants closed their shops as chases ensued. There is much in this account that recalls the repertoires of contentious action in previous historical periods—for example, the space of the battle and the maneuvers of the protestors (see Raymond 1968, 104–116; Burke III 1989, 42–56; Ismail 2000). However, there are novel elements as well. As the protestors on al-Banat Mosque Square were being chased, other demonstrations came out of the historic mosques of al-Azhar and al-Hussein in the direction of the adjacent district of Ataba, on the way to Tahrir. At this point, the battle with the security forces broadened. The people surrounded the security forces between al-Banat Mosque Square and Bab al-Khalq Square and in front of the Cairo Security Headquarters and some set the back of the Security Headquarters building on fire.

Taking into account the space of the battle and the places from which the crowds came, I suggest that the topography of Fatamid Cairo was one already marked by quotidian encounters with the police and by antagonistic relations between the residents and merchants, on the one hand, and the police, on the other. These conflictual relations with the police—having to do, for instance, with conduct and the use of space in market areas—are compounded by the fact that the area attracts many tourists and, hence, is subject to added security surveillance. Throughout 2010, when I was conducting fieldwork in al-Moski market and in the neighborhood of Gammaliyya, there were police vans, roadblocks, and security checkpoints positioned throughout the area. Young workers in shops and workshops were regularly stopped by the police and asked to show their identity cards. On occasion they were taken to the police station. Merchants and workshop owners spent a part of their day trying to secure the release of a worker or relative.⁵

Commenting on constant police monitoring, one merchant told me: “Egypt is beating its children with shoes.” To explain this figurative expression, he added “You only understand this when you feel the hand coming down on the back of your neck.” The hand being referred to here is that of the police officer. In vernacular idiom, *al darb ‘ala al-afa* (beating on the back of the neck) symbolizes degradation and humiliation. Physical beating by police officers is not limited to this type of demeaning assault, but it stands for the experience of humiliation.⁶

Set against the background of relations between Gammaliyya residents and Moski merchants and vendors on one side, and the police on the other, the battle of Fatimid Cairo represents an extension of ongoing conflicts with the police relating to the area’s livelihood. This is not to argue that in each neighborhood the grievances were simply local. Rather, my argument is that police government was experienced locally and was inflected with each quarter’s specificities. At the same time, there are shared experiences and common understandings at work in the popular quarters’ battles against the police.

As noted earlier, the clashes with the police in popular quarters facilitated the movement of protestors and their ability to proceed to Tahrir and other central city squares. This was particularly true in the case of Bulaq Abu al-Ila. Processions from Ramsis’s Al-Fath mosque situated north of Tahrir went through Bulaq Abu al-Ila to avoid the heavy security presence on Ramsis Street, the main connecting road. The protestors marched on Shar’i Bulaq al-Jadid, where they were joined by local residents. During the chases while entering Tahrir or when engaging in clashes to force a retreat of the security forces from Tahrir, Bulaq Abu al-Ila offered refuge and shelter and its residents blocked their streets in the face of advancing security officers. In later accounts, when Bulaq Abu al-Ila inhabitants found themselves accused of sectarian assaults on the sit-in in front of the Radio and Television Building at Maspero, they would remind everyone of their role in the Tahrir battle and of their historical record of patriotism dating back to the period of French colonial conquest of Egypt.

As in Gammaliyya, on January 27, Abu al-Ila residents engaged in street warfare with central security soldiers. In the early days of the

revolution, they raised banners demanding social and economic rights and they also removed the photos of New Democratic Party figures from the area. Then, the demands were harmonized with the slogans of Tahrir and became focused on the fall of the regime. When the central security forces attempted to enter the area with armored vehicles, the protestors, who included many local residents, repelled them, throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at them. Streets of Bulaq Abu al-Ila, such as Shari' Abu al-Ila al-Jadid, Na'im and Sabtiyya, became veritable war zones according to press reports.

Bulaq Abu al-Ila has a long history of antagonism and conflict with the police. Residents have been subject to much pressure to give up title to their homes to make way for multinational construction investment projects in the area. To speed up their dispossession, residents were denied permits to rebuild their homes or to repair them so as to prevent their collapse. The municipality ordered the demolition of some homes and the municipality police was in charge of the implementation of the orders that occasioned stand-offs over the few preceding years.

The translation of locally grounded antagonism into an engagement with national protest and revolutionary action, witnessed in Gammaliyya and Bulaq Abu al-Ila, could also be observed in new popular quarters such as Bulaq al-Dakrur. At the quarter level, the police station was stormed and set on fire. At the same time, quarter residents' participation in the protests on January 25 was crucial to the mobilization on that day. Tellingly, the youth organizers of the Police Day protest sought support from the quarter and worked with its residents to organize a march from Bulaq to Tahrir. They identified a known meeting point on Nahya Street (the quarter's main street) for the march and some of the youth leaders went there to help with the local organization and bring people out on that day. By all accounts, the march was successful, with some 1,500 people marching out of the quarter to Tahrir and, in the process, encouraging residents of other quarters to join (interview with one of the youth leaders, Cairo, February 2011). Bulaq residents' presence on the first day, when the crowds were still relatively small, contributed needed experience in confrontations between protestors and police.

Undoubtedly, it is this experience and the strength of opposition to the government of the police among the quarter's residents that presented it as an ideal space of recruitment of protesters on National Police Day (January 25)—what was to become the first day of the revolution. It is relevant here to recall that the residents' everyday encounters with the police have occasioned varied practices ranging from evasion to outright defiance (see Ismail 2006). The youth, in particular, have occupied positions of opposition in their interaction with the police. This, in part, motivated some to join Islamist groups and others to form neighborhood fraternities and fashion a strongly territorialized identity. The argument that I want to underscore here is that the infrastructures of mobilization and protest lay in the microprocesses of everyday life at the quarter level, in their forms of governance and in the structure of feelings that developed in relation to state government.

THE PEOPLE VERSUS THE POLICE: ENTER THE *BALTAGIYYA*

Police practices of government have rested on the classification of the population into categories of subjects identified for various types of specialized policing. For example, certain police campaigns and practices of street control focus on “juvenile delinquents,” while others aim at “street children.” The policing of young men from popular quarters as a category of dangerous population finds its rationale in the construction and reinvention of the *baltagi* (plural *baltagiyya*) as a socially disruptive and potentially criminal subject. During the revolution and its aftermath, the question of *baltaga* (thuggery) and *baltagiyya* gained greater public prominence. It is relevant here to recall how *baltaga* was reinvented and became a vector of power and resistance involving the people and the police.

Baltagiyya has long been used as a category to name a particular subject of police government (see el-Messiri 1977; Ismail 2006). Indeed, the epithet *baltagi* was attached to some Islamist activists in popular quarters—perhaps most famously, Sheikh Gaber, the “emir” of Imbaba, who was arrested during a large police campaign in Imbaba in 1992. However, the construction of *baltaga* as a national security issue took

shape as the Mubarak regime appeared to have contained the challenge of militant Islamist groups in the mid-1990s. At that time, a public discourse on the social problem of thuggery gained prominence in the media and in official pronouncements. The articulation of the problem was associated with the expansion of informality in housing and in outdoor markets. The management of the populations of the seemingly unruly districts of the city was now being diagnosed as a social problem relating to a type of social deviance which required normalization interventions (Ismail 2006).

Sociological and criminological experts supplied a profile of the typical *baltagi*: “A thug, usually a young, unemployed, poor illiterate man. He lives in a shanty or slum area, but he usually works in the middle- and upper-middle-class districts where people need his services to replace the rule of law” (cited in Tadros 1999). Statistics were quoted to substantiate the extent of the problem. Thus in 1998, Zakariyya Azmi, the then-general secretary of the ruling NDP, claimed that there were 130,000 *baltagiyya* in the Greater Cairo area. Meanwhile, the Center for Sociological and Criminological Studies reported a total of 5,000 thuggery cases registered for Cairo and pointed out that 70 percent took place in popular areas of the city. In 1998, following the media campaign, the People’s Assembly passed Law 6, known as the *Baltaga* law. Articles of Law 6 furnish the police with powers of arrest and detention of citizens suspected of undermining public order through displays of aggression or physical strength or through intimation of the intention of causing harm (Ismail 2006). At the core of the legislation’s objectives is the body of the young man, which is identified as the object of discipline and punishment.

The official account of *baltaga* is highly contested, however. The questions of what *baltaga* is and who is a *baltagi* were given different responses by ordinary citizens and particularly those residing in popular quarters. As the named category of population from which thugs were said to issue, not only did they reject the stigmatization, but also they told a different tale. In Bulaq al-Dakrur, *baltagiyya* was the name that the residents gave to police informants and to minivan drivers who ran neighborhood minivan services, known as the *carta* system.

In my interviews, stories about *baltagiyya* activities and transgressions against local communities cast the *baltagiyya* as police agents. It was common for my informants to speak of the drug dealers as being under police protection. One of my interviewees, a young man who belonged to an Islamist group (al-Tabligh wa al Da'wa), recounted how he, along with other group members, chased away the drug dealers in his neighborhood, only for them to make a comeback under police protection. In another case, when members of the community complained to the police about the threatening conduct of a resident who was a habitual drunkard and who harassed women on the street, they were told to take care of the problem themselves (Ismail 2006).

Police failure to respond when called upon by citizens was not interpreted as neglect of duty. Rather, it was understood as an element of their policy of deploying a vast network of watchers and informants who are given leeway with regard to their conduct and activities. Police would position informants in the local communities by providing them with vending kiosk licenses and by appointing them to the *carta* system. The management of the *carta* system has to do with the allocation of turns among drivers at a given service line. The *carta* appointee is in charge of settling disputes among drivers relating to turns and to waiting spaces. Police farm out the position to one of their informants and it is understood that he would, in discharging the job, have recourse to physical violence to settle disputes—that is, act as a *baltagi*. The incorporation of thugs as an arm of the police went beyond the control of popular quarters to include the rigging of elections and the suppression of demonstrations.

It is against this background that the entry of *baltagiyya*—as a contentious descriptor and label for opposing actors in Tahrir Square and in subsequent episodes of violent conflicts with the police—mobilizes an existing register of police-citizen interaction. In the early days of the revolution, the police withdrew from the streets. While this may have been the result of being pushed out by the force of the demonstrations, it was also a strategic retreat to create a security vacuum and hence dampen support for the protests. At the same time that the police withdrew, it was charged that they let loose their informants—

baltagiyya—on the demonstrators, most notably in what became known as the Battle of the Camel. In the 18 days of Tahrir, the protesters were represented as ordinary citizens led by the revolutionaries (*al-thuwwar*). Tahrir radiated images of middle-class youth bravely and peacefully defying tear gas, water cannons, and live bullets. Following Mubarak's resignation and the ascendance of the State Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), these images gave way to the pitched battles of largely less well-off youth on Mohammad Mahmoud Street and on Mansour Street in the vicinity of the Ministry of the Interior.

The SCAF, the official media, and some independent media have been quick to cast these protestors as *baltagiyya*. Newspapers and TV programs have replenished the supply of *baltagiyya* stories. The narrative orientation of much of these stories is that the protestors are not revolutionaries, but are *baltagiyya*. It is precisely in these terms that one satellite television show concluded its reportage on an attack on the police head of the Bulaq al-Dakrur station. In the reportage, a group of young men were paraded and then interviewed as the suspects held in connection with the attack.⁷ The parade was intended to reinforce the stereotype of poor, popular-class residents as thugs and to convey to the viewers that these young men were typical of the youth now active on the streets. Another widely viewed talk show hosted police officers and army generals to discuss the violence on the street and to endorse tougher policing.

Faced with this renewed stigmatization, activists from popular quarters have been at pains to counter the charges of thuggery. In Bulaq Abu al-Ila, the members of the local popular committee met to discuss issues of land ownership and threats of eviction relating to state expropriation of vacant lots in the area and to a plan of further expropriation. As was the case prior to January 25, the speakers at the meeting asserted that they were not *baltagiyya*. One speaker said: "We are not *baltagiyya*, we are respected people, we are civilized people" (*ihna mish baltagiyya, ihna nas muhtarama, ihna nas mutahadira*). He then added: "Tomorrow when we march to the Egyptian television building in nearby Maspero, we should show them that we are the example of civilization, we will teach them civilization."⁸ The subject is formed and

performed in a dialogic field. In this instance, the subject is publicly enacting a civilized subjectivity—meeting, discussing, and marching peacefully, and hoping to demonstrate exemplary civilization. This is one of the facets of the enactment of public selves reclaiming citizenship rights. In one of the chants, they shout, “They say we are *baltagiyya*, but we are the history of patriotism” (in allusion to Bulaq Abu al-Ila’s history of engagement in popular resistance against French occupation forces). The residents also recalled their role in supporting the revolution when their area gave aid and succor to the revolutionaries. This assertion was made in response to charges that some of the attackers on the sit-in and demonstrations by Coptic Egyptian protesters in front of the Radio and Television Building in the Maspero area came from the Bulaq Abu al-Ila neighborhood.⁹ In response, the Bulaq inhabitants went out to demonstrate and to assert that they were the foundation of the revolution and the protectors of its dignity.¹⁰

The articulation of claims of popular quarter identity with a role in protecting the revolution is undertaken in opposition to the stigmatization of popular neighborhoods in public discourse and government pronouncements. According to one local commentator, the attempt to delegitimize the protesters in the aftermath of the fall of Mubarak and his cronies is a strategy of turning the people against themselves. In other words, it is a continuation of the subterranean narrative about criminals and hidden hands deployed to create a moral panic situation and to rationalize the extension of the state of emergency.¹¹

AFFECT IN THE REVOLUTION AGAINST THE POLICE

I want to conclude by looking more closely at how the structure of feelings that develops in interaction with the police enters into the constitution of the oppositional subject of the revolution. I do so by focusing on how particular affective dispositions have been clearly manifested in the confrontation between the youth of the sports-fan clubs known as “Ultras” and the police and the Ministry of the Interior. The Ultras, originally organized by the fans of football clubs to express their loyalty and support for their chosen teams, joined the protests in Tahrir in the early days of the revolution. Experienced in skirmishes with the

police, the youth occupied the front-lines of defense against the security forces and provided organizational and technical skills to repel security advances. In the aftermath of Tahrir, the Ultras took to challenging the police in charge of security at the football stadiums. They also initiated protests nearby the Ministry of the Interior in connection with the arrests of some of their leaders. Throughout the first year of the revolution, they have been in the forefront of the street battles of central Cairo, particularly around the Ministry of the Interior.

As noted earlier, humiliation and anger were structuring relations and interaction with the police. These feelings were experienced when the police called drivers “*ya wala*” (“you boy”) or when they insulted youth using sexually charged language in which their mothers’ honor was verbally and symbolically violated, or when the officer’s hand came down on the back of the neck, and when sexual violence was threatened or actually inflicted. The visibility and publicness of the humiliation put a brake on challenging the police as citizens sought to avoid and evade confrontations as much as possible. Also, as I have noted, it undermined their senses of self and, for popular-class youth, it undermined their constructs of masculinity. For these youths, the encounter with the police was experienced as a duel between opposing men and failure to respond incited feelings of rancor and anger towards the police (Ismail 2006).

How do we see these affective dispositions expressed today? The Ultras’ conflict and clashes with the police are a visible and explicit expression of emotions cultivated in a history of violent encounters. They enact scenarios of leveling that have been imagined and written following other conflictual encounters. The songs chanted by the Ultras at the stadium and on the street in front of the Ministry of the Interior capture the enactments of their vindicated selfhood and dignity. Through these performances, the youth also enact their scorn and contempt of the police. The lyrics of the Ahly Club Ultras’ song, *Ya Ghurab Ya M’ashish guwwa baytna* (“O Crow that Is Nested in Our Homes”) are an anthem of leveling and rebellion.¹² In these lyrics, the officers are depicted as failed high school pupils who join the police academy by paying bribes, then become pashas (an Ottoman title conferred on

high-level servants of the ruler and officially abolished in the post-1952 revolution period) who deprive people of their simple pleasures. It is worth noting that the defunct title of pasha was used by ordinary citizens to address police officers in order to convey their deference and docility. Serving notice to the officers that they reject this mode of subjectivation, the youth chant: “We will no longer conduct ourselves in line with your whim; spare us your sight.” The taunt is taken up in the song *mish nasyyin al-Tahrir* (“We have not forgotten Tahrir”) by the White Knights Ultras fan group of the Zamalek Club.¹³ The lyrics of *mish nasyyin* affirm the presence of Tahrir in the youth’s imaginary, ridiculing the police by reminding them that they were given a beating that they have not had for years.

In highly publicized standoffs, the Ultras have transformed the stadiums, and then the streets of central Cairo, into stages for the spectacles of ridicule and mockery of police officers. The insults and obscene words hurled at the officers acquire their potency from the social conventions and the situational dynamics of publicity and collective participation in front of large audiences. Ultras’ performances bring down the signs and symbols of superiority and dominance, humiliating and shaming the officers. The comments on the uploaded videos of the events convey the validation of the youth’s performances in masculinist terms. The Ultras are greeted as *rigala*, *gid’an*, *gamdin* (men, chivalrous, solid). The negative comments are also expressed in masculinist terms—the Ultras as *baltagiyya*.

The battles of Mohammed Mahmoud Street and of Mansour Street (notably those which took place in September and November 2011 and in early February 2012) saw the Ministry of the Interior and its officers engage in what can best be described as street wars. The youth protestors’ charge on the ministry has been depicted in official statements as an attack by *baltagiyya* on “the awe of state” (*haybat al-Dawla*). In response, the youth protesting in front of the ministry chant “*al-Dakhliyya! Baltagiyya!*” (“The Interior Ministry is *Baltagiyya!*”). These repeated skirmishes have culminated in a stalemate whereby the Interior Ministry wants to dismantle the Ultras and the Ultras want to bring down the Interior Ministry.

In this standoff, the police's failure to intervene in incidents of violence between the different football fan clubs during matches has been interpreted as an attempt to discipline the Ultras by withholding from them any right to protection from violence. Charges of negligence and complicity were leveled at the police following the assault, allegedly, by fans of al-Masry team on al-Ahly supporters at the end of a football match in the city of Port Said on February 1, 2012. The massacre of 74 Ahly fans during this attack introduced new dimensions to the Ultras' conflict with the police. The conflict has gone beyond skirmishes in the stadiums and on the streets. The Ahly Ultras and their supporters are now seeking retribution for the police's conduct during the Port Said events.¹⁴ The fallen Ahly Ultras are viewed as victims of a police conspiracy as well as martyrs who were targeted and punished for the Ultras' activism and support of the revolution. In addition to the sadness and sorrow felt for the lost lives of young fans whom the Ultras group members consider as close kin, there was also shock and anger arising from the sense that these lives were treated as expendable or as "cheap souls" in the words of one activist (interview with an Ultras activist, Cairo, May 1, 2012). Further, the conviction that the police were implicated in the massacre has crystallized the Ultras' feelings of hatred toward them in a vendetta-type relationship (*tha'r*—meaning "feud" or "vendetta"—is the term used by some of the activists to describe their relationship with the police following the massacre). In their pursuit of retribution, Ultras activists have organized street processions and held sit-ins demanding "the rights of the martyrs" (*haq al-shuhada'*), calling for the removal of the minister of the interior, a purge of the ministry's leadership, and the dissolution of the SCAF, and the transfer of political rule to civilian authorities. In this respect, the terms for "just retribution" (*al-qasas al-'adil*) put forward by Ultras protestors point to the coalescence of their objectives around the continuation of the revolution and the achievement of its goals.

The Ultras' political subjectivity is formed in opposition to the police. In their oppositional subjectivity, they have much in common with fellow citizens who occupy antagonistic positions vis-à-vis the police. The Ultras, the residents of popular quarters, and the middle-

class youth coalesced as *al-sha'b* (“the people”) on January 25, 2011. *Al sha'b*, the collective subject of the revolution, was constituted in the coming together of social forces and individuals formed as oppositional subjects in interaction with the police. In the rap song of the revolution, entitled *Ana didd al-hukuma* (“I Am against the Government”), we can hear this subject explaining his oppositional subjectivity.¹⁵ It is this subjectivity that we should bring to light when we ask: Who are the Ultras? Who are the Islamists? They are not only collectivities organized with particular goals, they are also constituted of individuals who are the subjects of police practices of humiliation: the subjects stopped at checkpoints, addressed disrespectfully when asked to show an identity card or a driver’s license; those who resist at times and those who evade or simulate obedience at other times. They are all against the police government, and during the events of the revolution they enacted their oppositional subjectivity as expressed in the overarching slogan of Tahrir: “The people want to bring down the regime.”

The course and outcome of the popular rising against the police will represent a key variable in determining the future of the revolution. Radical transformation in the forms and modalities of government is required. People do not like how they are being governed—namely, according to the Egyptian version of the police project of government. This does not mean that they want a liberal government or that they see institutions such as parliament as the appropriate frame of representation. So far, popular committees appear to be the chosen form for mobilizing and articulating demands and finding solutions to local problems. Further, the continued popular activism shows that protests, sit-ins, and civil disobedience have become favored forms of action. How all of this will fare with the middle-class, political-party-oriented liberals and Islamists is another question to consider.

CONCLUSION

The revolution continues to unfold. One of its important facets is the people’s rising up against the police. This rising is inscribed in popular quarters’ spaces and repertoires of activism, which are territorially grounded and have evolved in the history of conflict and clashes with

government. The popular support for the revolution was to a large extent motivated by antagonism toward the police, guided by the structure of feelings of humiliation, anger, disdain, and revulsion. Police practices of government, which had affect as their object, undermined the ordinary citizen's sense of self and her moral personhood.

It is in relation to the structure of feelings developed in interaction with the police and to the terms in which humiliation was inflicted on youth and felt by them that we can understand the ongoing contestations involving youth of popular-class background. The activism of the Ultras, manifested in their cultural work, their performances in stadiums, and on the streets of central Cairo, offers us a glimpse into how youth resistance is directed against police practices of government through the affect. The language and enacted resistance appear inspired by some of the same practices that they are intended to oppose as with the use of obscene insults and sexually charged language to humiliate the police officers standing guard at the stadiums or deployed in front of the Ministry of the Interior. Undoubtedly, these performances—akin to carnival—effect symbolic leveling, which has the potential of rendering police practices of humiliation obsolete. The centrality of socially embodied emotions in this contest points to the need for our inquiry to consider how the collective enactments of emotions could serve to challenge institutions of government, and in the process, transform them.

NOTES

1. Some of the domains of police intervention in Egypt predate the establishment of the police department (*dhabtiyya*) in the nineteenth century under Mohammed Ali and its subsequent reorganization in line with two models of policing, namely the French and British. For example, the inspection of markets evolved as an element of *wilayya* (guardianship-rule) in the early Islamic period. Inspectors of markets and of public morality in Cairo were appointed by Fatimid and Mamluk rulers. For a discussion of police domains of intervention and relations with the people in nineteenth century Egypt, see Fahmy (1999). Features of the police project of government could be discerned in the description of responsibilities falling under the

Ministry of Interior established by Said Pasha in 1857. These included public health, public engineering, civil schools, the public printing house, and the works of the Suez Canal. For the reorganization of the police under British administration, see writings by British colonial administrators such as Coles Pasha. Police government of the social is grounded in the “reform” and “civilizational” projects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the postcolonial period, police activities were harmonized with the “socialist” principles of the Nasserist regime. A genealogical study of the police as an apparatus of government in Egypt is yet to be undertaken.

2. I draw here on Leavitt’s (1996) analytical exposé of the terms in which we can reconcile theorizations of emotions as body-anchored feelings and conceptions of emotions as meanings that are socially and culturally constructed.
3. I conducted fieldwork in a number of popular quarters in Cairo in a period that extends from 1999 to 2011. In the early part of this period, I worked primarily in Bulaq al-Dakrur and less so in Imbaba and Manshiyyat Nasser. The most recent extended field research I undertook was between October 2009 and November 2010 and was carried out in the quarter of Gammaliyya and the al-Moski market. This later research was funded by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) of the UK (RES-062-23-2283).
4. At the same time, the people replaced the police by setting up the popular committees for security and protection of homes and public buildings.
5. During one of my visits to the area, while walking with a resident and a workshop worker, we were stopped three times by police. My male companions were asked for identity cards and questioned, while I was asked to open my handbag for inspection. The worker remarked that being stopped by the police for identification had become a routine experience.
6. It is in this connection that a “renegade” police officer who broke with the police service wrote a book entitled *So that You Would Not Be Beaten on the Back of Your Neck* (*‘alashan ma tidiribsh ‘al qafak*) (Afifi, n.d).
7. See the segment from the program *Muntaha al-Sarah*, al-Hayat TV at

- <<http://youtu.be/pZSLaHeikb0>>. Accessed February 2, 2012.
8. See Maspero seminar, “Yes to Development, No to Displacement,” held by the Popular Committee in Bulaq Abu al-Ila at <<http://youtu.be/Xv00AyO4ln0>>. Accessed February 3, 2012.
 9. The incident known as *ahdath Maspero* (the events of Maspero) took place in early October 2011, when the military violently dispersed the protesters, killing 26 and injuring many more.
 10. See interviews with Bulaq Abu al-Ila residents on Mahatat Misr TV at <<http://youtu.be/FgpVzaQgoQE>>. Accessed February 3, 2012.
 11. The president of the SCAF, Field Marshall Mohamed Tantawi, declared the end of the state of emergency as of January 25, 2012. However, Tantawi also maintained that matters of *baltaga* are to be dealt with under emergency regulations. This amounts to keeping the emergency provisions in effect.
 12. See the Ahly Ultras’ performance of this chant during a football match at <<http://youtu.be/HKChZraC1zw>>. Accessed February 3, 2012.
 13. See the Zamalek Ultras’ performance of the song during a football match in June 2011 at <<http://youtu.be/hWMVD7FIZD8>>. Accessed February 3, 2012.
 14. It is charged in eyewitness and news reports of the massacre that the police failed to secure the stadium, that they were lax in their inspections for weapons that fans may have brought in with them, and finally, that they stood by while fans of al-Masry descended on the field and then charged on the trapped al-Ahly fans.
 15. See <<http://youtu.be/S7n44IHSB3w>>. Accessed February 15, 2011.

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