The Street, the Sponge and the Ultra in Egypt

Queer Logics of Twenty-first Century Children's Rebellion at the Intersections of Violent Securitization and Political Infantilization

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Between 2010-2014 Egyptian security apparatuses and social control discourses have confronted increasingly powerful forms of childrens' agency and have responded with ferocity. The state has acted to hypervisibilize children as objects of repressive security campaigns: representing street children as perverse traffickers, targeting pre-adolescent soccer fan organizations as terrorists and detaining and torturing them by the hundreds, and policing young SpongeBob fans and child laborers in the urban economy as anti-family abominations. All this has made it difficult, and queerly threatening, for Egyptian specialists as well as international scholars and activists to recognize or analyze a series of devastatingly effective child-centered political movements in which groups of young people acting beyond adult guidance or supervision challenged local and global barriers of exclusion and produced new logics of unruly politics.

In this context, this article works against the grain of moral panic regimes and beyond "Arab Spring"-era idealizations of "revolutionary youth" (that hinge upon the figure of the slightly older, supposedly liberal, tech-savvy 20-30 year-old proto-adult). I ask a new set of questions about the younger protagonists of new kinds of popular and collective political

expressions. Is there a queer logic to this new generation of children's expressions and mass politics? Do children engaging in street activism in Egypt represent the queer Other of the youth activists of the "Facebook Generation" so valorized in the global press during the Arab Spring?

I use the term queer here to signal the illegibility of children's mobilizing logics within the hegemonic languages of public morality. I also use the framework of queerness to discuss how children's collective expressions are seen by the security state <u>not</u> as collective claims and social practices, embedded in collective histories, child workers' economic grievances, and longstanding religio-cultural sociabilities, but as engines of mass perversion and cataclysmic indecency. These moral-sexual politics and transregionally-circulating security regimes consistently position children as always-already the essential socially troubling and sexually at-risk or risk-generating population.

To challenge these regimes of moralistic discourse and security-state practice, this study works to uncover the power relations, political cultures, and state prerogatives behind these framings that "infantilize" politics and render queer and illegible an emerging model of revolutionary agency. To do this, this essay embarks on a four-part analysis. First, in order to situate these contentions in local Arabic scholarship, I map contentious schools of Egyptian academia and activism around childrens' agency and children's sovereignty, exploring the construction and deployment of categories of "street children" and around the Arabic term *mu'arid lil-inhiraf* ["liable to perversion" and "tending toward delinquency"], and I present and explain the reasons behind the wild divergence in data about numbers of "street children" and "loose children" and "rebel children" in Egypt. Second, I detach from social-psychology and state "protection" this fetishized figure of the empowered child, which scholarship and activists contest so strongly. I reintegrate this subject within the cultural and socio-geographic history of

unruly dissidence and mass politics particularly as "childrens' sovereignty" manifests in and around popular religious festival practices in which children assert "unruly rule" over streets and public morality. Third, I map out the political-economy of childrens' labor in Egypt, identify some of their real grievances as workers, and highlight economic component of their agency in the "street" economies of urban Egypt that underlie the material interests and mobilization spaces that drive childrens' protests. Finally, I map the explosion of new figures of revolutionary childrens' agency and mass self-organization in Egypt since 2010, as articulated through and around the symbolic politics of SpongeBob Squarepants, an anarchic, gender troubling, joyful cartoon character that was appropriated and resignified within Egypt's local childrens' queer logics of rebellion. And I examine the critically important set of social movement-formations called Ultras. The Ultras are young hardcore soccer fans who generated mass movements with hundreds of thousands of organized supporters who honed fiercely effective children's expressions that challenged the security state, embodied a new logic of anti-morality politics, and offered a "perversely" fun form of child body politic specifically in opposition to the thug hypermasculity of the repressive, militarized adult-male "rescuer" and "moral purifier" figures of human-security state, and as a direct challenge to the global human-security norm that locates a particular kind of rigidly hierarchical family as epicenter of politics and as the ideological anchor of a violently dispossessive form of human-security state.

Egypt's "Brazilian Solution" and Global Children's Movements

On June 19 2014 the once-progressive Egyptian newspaper *Al-Masry Al-Youm* published a distressing editorial. The author, Nassar Abdullah, a poet and professor of Moral Philosophy at

Sohag University in Egypt, argued that his government should adopt what he called "the Brazilian Solution":

> In the 1990s, street children in Brazil's major towns turned from a source of annoyance to a source of terror, increasingly committing crimes including rape, prostitution, and murder, while the economic situation of Brazil was similar to Egypt's present condition . . . Thus the Brazilian security forces unleashed a campaign to hunt down and kill the street children like stray dogs, to avoid the dangers. . . . That harsh solution managed to cleanse the streets of major cities in Brazil from street children. It happened because the political leadership had the will to reform and to fight corruption as well as provide jobs. This is the lesson everyone should learn from the Brazilian experience.[1]

Though Abdullah's mercilessly moral-authoritarian approach to street children represents a drastic change from recent Egyptian policy, the fact that he was inspired by Brazil is no surprise, as security state institutions in Egypt and Brazil have had a long history of exchanging ideas and practices. In the 1990s, both countries engaged in similar practices to secure UN summit megaevents: the Rio Conference on the Environment in 1992 and the Cairo conference on Population in 1994. However, Egyptian intellectuals widely rejected the Candelaria Massacre in 1993 of 50 street children by Brazilian militarized police as an atrocity of ungoverned policing. Starting in the 1990s, Egypt pioneered in a radically demilitarized, and non-moralistic approach to "street children," that diverged from that of Brazil[2]. This policy redefined the subject of the child in relation to humanitarian interventions, and reframed the notion of the "street" versus "the home." Egyptian sociologist Kamal Fahmy, drawing upon more than eight years of urban fieldwork in Cairo in the 1990s and early 2000s, wrote of Egypt's street children: "far from being mere victims or deviants, these children, in running away from alienating home lives and

finding relative freedom in the street, are capable of actively defining their situations in their own terms. They are able to challenge the roles assigned to children, make judgments, and develop a network of niches and resources in a teeming metropolis such as Cairo. …Social workers and others need to respect the agency the children display in changing their own lives."[3] Fahmy's alternative framing of children's agency, and the Egyptian pro-empowerment movement, in solidarity with children rather than securitizing and "protecting' them, demonstrated the possibility for challenging the relationship between humanitarian intervention the discourse of the home/family as disciplinary agency of the state. Fahmy's resistance demonstrated a brief moment of possibility before the state crackdown on street children described below.

Starting in the early 2000s the street child increasingly became an obsession of intensifying operations of state security and control in Egypt. Securing child sexuality became crucial to a state effort to relegitimize the police, framing them as moral agents whose efforts to control the street would restore discipline to society as a whole. The sexuality of street children thus became symbolic in state efforts to solve larger social and economic problems. Popular discourses like that of the "marriage crisis," which linked countrywide economic issues to local concerns about whether working and middle class men would be able to afford to marry[4], argued that the Egyptian state rescuing the family structure would be equivalent to producing jobs and economic growth. In this context of the rise of securitization, moral stability, and of the human-security doctrine of "family rescue," any politics of child recognition manifested as a queer menace, and became framed as a sex crime in itself.

By 2014, as evidenced by Nassar Abdullah's editorial cited above, the type of repressive reactionaries that had been shut down in the early 1990s following debates around child empowerment and critiques of Brazil's Candelaria Massacre were back with a vengeance. These

reactionaries supported the mass extermination of "street children" and, by implication, the arrest, torture and detention of children protesting in or occupying streets and public thoroughfares. This, they dared to argue, would not just "cleanse" the city, but would somehow unleash job growth, purge Egyptian society of AIDS, prostitution and sexual predation, launch what they saw as a Brazil-style economic boom, and even build a democratic state purged of corruption. It is important to note that these were not only the recommendations of military or police leaders. As cited above, radical policy recommendations against children even appeared in the writing of a professor of moral philosophy, deeply self-identified with a humane project for the state! While scholars like Fahmy once wrote of street children's freedom and agency, recent scholarship that recognizes the agency of children in the contentious street, or raises questions about subjectivity, play, sexuality, and autonomy has been targeted as this critical move challenges the nodal intersection of securitization of the public and the infantilization of political subjectivity in an age of revolution and fierce counterrevolution.[5]

Egypt's recent conflicts over the status of street children are emblematic of a set of worldwide political movements in which groups of children acting without adult guidance or supervision challenge global barriers of exclusion. In 2014, "surges"[6] of pre-adolescents from El Salvador and Honduras—many between six to nine years old—confronted immigration enforcement officers at the US southern border. In the Middle East, children continued to take to the streets on their own terms: pre-teen protesters flooded the streets of Palestine and Yemen by the thousands, hurling their bodies against police barriers and security perimeters. In Brazil, pre-pubescent black *favelado* residents launched the "rolezinho" movement, challenging the forces of militarization, exclusivism, and eviction around World Cup and Olympic developments by strolling and dancing *en masse* through elite shopping malls and gated communities,

demonstrations that were countered by explosive levels of police brutality, even lynching and mutilation. This confluence of global political maelstroms around very young people demands that we grapple with the "childness" of these moments, asking how state and parastatal agencies of humanitarian rescue and morality policing operationalize subjects at this turbulent intersection of securitization and infantilization.

Dominant representations tend to present children in contentious street politics as engines of extreme affect rather than as social subjects with histories, interests, and agendas. Children stand in for the broadest of abstract categories—as the essence of the human, the people, the nation, the victim, or the dispossessed. Children also serve as visual shorthands for ideologically overburdened metaphors like "risk" and "futurity," that haunt us with what is lacking or fragile in the political present or social structure. When children are seen in these cases they are hypervisible while being socio-politically inapprehensible. They are seen everywhere in images of emergency journalism without being perceived, recognized, or engaged on their own terms.

Because of their simultaneous hypervisibility and inapprehensibility, children are constantly politically appropriated but not acknowledged or empowered. By examining children's movements in their particular social histories and cultural geographies and by researching children's movements—both as adversaries of state security operations and when appropriated by authoritarian populism—we can help generate alternatives to established social science agendas that frame children primarily as subjects of care, development, education, and protection. We must grapple critically with the moralizing, sexualizing, and racial/embodiment histories that circulate around children in the streets and children at key political borders, containment frontiers, and circulation corridors.

Is there a queer logic to this new generation of children's expressions and mass politics? I use the term queer here to signal the illegibility of children's mobilizing logics to the hegemonic languages of public morality. I also use the framework of queerness to discuss how children's collective expressions are seen by the security state not as collective claims and social practices, embedded in collective histories and longstanding religio-cultural sociabilities, but as engines of mass perversion and cataclysmic indecency. These moral-sexual politics and transregionally-circulating security regimes consistently position children as always-already the essential socially troubling and sexually at-risk population. This "at-risk" status highlights children's queerness through discourses of their gender dissidence, that they are always disrupting or arresting the process of naturalizing family structures and moral strictures, and through their status as deserving of constant discipline, detention and regulation.

Security discourses and insecurity industries that will be mapped below drive paradoxical sets of significations. They imply that unsupervised children are naturally the most radically outside of family or state, even as children represent the most intensive state/family intersections, thus meriting exceptional humanitarian oversight. This contradiction is most spectacular when the figure of the street is associated with the figure of the child on the loose. Thus the hypervisible term *street child* operates as the primary token around which orbit all other associations of queer children as they animate spaces of circulation, sociability and commerce, beyond spaces of the family or the institutions governed by human-security apparatuses of the patriarchal state. Street children, even or especially when at play, are seen as both incapable of political subjectivity or social autonomy, and meriting unlimited state violence. Within this discourse, state violence seems justified because it recues street children from themselves, even as they are detailed, brutalized, or killed.

Children are constantly being rendered invisible because they are buried in the category of "youth." However, the body politic of the child is radically distinct from embodiments of youth. Youth, in the discourse of modernity, in both colonial and its anticolonial forms, stands proudly as the cusp of more fresh, more modern, more idealistic adulthood. In Western representations of the Arab Spring, youth stand as iconic figurations of the liberalized, modernized, moderate adult-in-waiting, a class of tech-savvy, middle class, secular cosmopolitan aspirants emblematic of the 2011 uprising. However, the Egyptian category of youth emerged in the 1940s, as Omnia El Shakry has eloquently argued.[7] At this time, youth was abstracted from particular geographies of social life and particularities of regional practice and rendered a distinct "stage of development." El Shakry writes that in the 1940s, "adolescence— perceived as both a collective temporality and a depoliticized individual interiority—became a volatile stage linked to a psychoanalytic notion of sexuality as libidinal raw energy."[8]

Building on El Shakry's crucial insights and the recent importance of children to global political movements, this article explores how the category "child" has become a distinct epistemological category rivaling "youth" in political importance, in Egypt and across the Arab region. Since the 1990s, children in general, but particularly those seen as "loose children" or street children have become identified as a heavily securitized collective reservoir of dangerously concentrated libidinal energy. It would seem that, in the optic of securitization proceses, chidren have been designated as a category that is less interior, less phychologically contained than that of "youth." By contrast, children are seen as embedded in certain street spaces, socially contentious geographies, and dissident practices that challenge the depoliticizing containment fields of the psychoanalytic or therapeutic, and trigger full mobilization of the violence of the human-security state rather than the redistributive apparatus of a welfare state. Through a

discussion of children's movements in Egypt leading up to the 2011 uprising, I hope to demonstrate that children's activism operates as the Other of liberal youth that operated as the dominant celebratory framing of the original phase of the Arab Spring.

In global resistance movements, children are acting as self-organized subjects of unruly politics as well as manipulated objects of authoritarian populism. Representations of seemingly new forms of child-centric mass politics and collective actions invoke scampering embodiment, carnivals of play and cruelty, swarming interruptions and derailing circulations. "Children" are less likely than "youth" to be protesting or engaging in sit-ins or occupations, less interested in marching, but more engaged in bursting out of detention and the institutions that warehouse them, or in swarming through the pristine spaces of safety and containment—including soccer stadiums and shopping zones—in which elite adults have shuttered themselves. I am not arguing that children in all contexts and historical epochs naturally display the same characteristics or are driven by the same drives or interests when they mobilize collectively. Mine is not a psychological or developmentalist argument about the nature of the child or about the political tendencies of a particular stage of development. I argue that certain children's mass expressions deploy practices of movement and expressions of collective embodiment that resonate with each other in key ways for specific contemporary global structural and conjunctural reasons.

In analyzing the specific practices and expressions of Egyptian children in the streets, this article asks three interrelated questions. First, which queer logics are operationalized by children's collective political assertions (voluntarily self-organized, or coercively corralled)? Second, which forms of cultural, spatial, and political-geographic mapping can recognize these logics of children's politics in the real spaces of infrastructural transformation, and in spheres of security politics and authoritarian populism? Third, why is the infantilization of the object of

security politics so useful to this unstable power bloc in Egypt that in 2013–14 strained to unite a post-American, post-neoliberal coalition of crony contractors, Saudi/Kuwait capital, and certain military and police officials while excluding all other elites as well as the vast range of popular demands and economic, social and civil mobilizations?

The "Street Child": Sexualized Criminal Status, or Empowered Revolutionary Worker?

Since the 1990s, global movements advocating the empowerment of street children have focused on decriminalization, and on challenging policing strategies that designate children as an inherently perverse and criminal category. Emerging in the 1990s and early 2000s in Egypt, India and Colombia, these child-empowerment movements offered a strongly agency-centric approach to the problem of street children. Many academic works have contributed to children's empowerment movements, including L. Aptekar's 1989 book on Colombian street children in Santiago de Cali, I. Bibar's 1998 discussion of street children in Egypt that demands an end to punitive and incarcerative responses, N.H. Hussein's 2003 book on the resilient cultural and social formations self-generated by children normally considered the most vulnerable, and S. Patel's 1990 book on street children's resilience in Bombay.[9]

Unique to Egyptian scholarship on street children is an insistence on refusing paternalizing victimization discourse, and a critique of the romanticism that characterizes some of the Andean and South Asian literature of the 1990s and 2000s, which may verge into a neoliberal celebration of children's bootstrapping self-help practices and entrepreneurial autonomy from the state. Nelly Ali, a brilliant Egyptian children's rights activist who emerged from this movement, focuses on the particular social coping strategies and child-generated

cultural and spatial practices that allow for maximum resilience. Her work on street children recommends "recognizing [their] exceptional fortitude" and mobilizing resources to enable their agency, while also asking for particular state interventions and changes to public provisions of health, housing, and educational aid to street children.[10]

This dual approach of demanding aid and valorizing child autonomy responds to Egyptian law, which categorizes autonomous children as *Mu'arid lil-Inhiraf*, ("liable to perversion"), defining street children through a discourse of vulnerability. Police record-keeping creates registries of vulnerable children, ostensibly to map populations requiring care, yet "children in police custody face beatings [and] sexual abuse."[11] On July 25 2002, Human Rights Watch released a report entitled "Charged with Being Children," detailing "abuses during arrest, transport, and in lockups recommends immediately ending practice of arresting children considered 'vulnerable to delinquency,' or 'vulnerable to danger' and amend Child Law 12 of 1996 to ensure that no child is penalized for 'status offenses,' that is, conduct that would not be penalized if committed by an adult."[12] Thus, the Egyptian practice of marking autonomous children as vulnerable "protects" children by policing them[13].

Laws seeming to protect street children can be especially pernicious in this regard. Egypt's controversial "Child Law" of 2001, which demanded access to food, bedding and medical care for street children, empowered police to provide these resources by detaining and charging children, since the law considered more than 25% of Egypt's children to be "vulnerable to perversion/delinquency." A 2001 study by the Egyptian government's National Center for Social and Criminological Research (which informs the state's social intervention agendas as well as policing priorities) reported that "at least 20% of street children [are] victims of trafficking, mostly for sexual exploitation; and are also involved in theft, and in the sale of

narcotics."[14] The concept of child vulnerability, as expressed in Egyptian law and government discourse, implies that the children of the urban popular classes are, in general, a criminal class. Like colonial humanitarian agencies of the early 20th century, contemporary human-security state formations in Egypt identify notions of vulnerability with liability, perversity, deviance and delinquency. Under the label *Mu'arid lil-Inhiraf,* children's vulnerability makes them personally and collectively liable, both in the sense that they are seen as likely to be perverted, deviant or delinquent in their behavior, and that they are made criminally responsible. Because street children are seen as both legally responsible for their behavior and likely to commit criminal acts, these children can be policed *en masse.* Because children who are removed from the family are seen as liable to perversion, police may deploy forms of brutal detention, punishment, sexual abuse and forced labor against street children in order to protecting an imagined notion of childhood innocence, spatially and ideologically removed from the children they are disciplining. The humanitarian discourse of international aid agencies, even as it insistently stands against police abuse in its campaigns to raise awareness (and raise money) dovetails with the human-security state's discourse of the child as a self-prostituting deviant requiring supervision. UNICEF's 2000 report on Egypt stated: "These children lead an unhealthy and often dangerous life that leaves them deprived of their basic needs for protection, guidance, and supervision and exposes them to different forms of exploitation and abuse. For many, survival on the street means begging and sexual exploitation by adults."[15]

The process of counting the number of "street children"—loose children that are not just autonomous from families, but who have no viable or acceptable relatives from which to draw support—reveals the invention of this status category of mass vulnerability at work. During the 1990s, when Egyptian activists were challenging the production of these criminalized status

categories, counting of individuals was performed carefully and so the official total of street children was a more modest sum. In 1999, the Egyptian government counted 17,228 street children in Egypt. "The June 2009 NCCM [Nat'l Council for Childhood and Motherhood] snapshot survey counted 12,000 street living children and street-working children in Greater Cairo."[16] But by 2011, when the discourse of child criminality had gained more power, the Egyptian government counted 3 million. These number counts vary wildly in relation to Egypt's total population, which approached 100 million by 2014. Are street children a subsector of the homeless population numbering in the thousands, or are "street children" to be equated with an entire generation of unruly children of the poor, 25% of the young population, who are officially "liable" for criminality, perversity and repression?

Egyptian journalist and children's rights activist Amira ElFeky wrote, in 2013 "It is easy for us to categorise and label street children. To us, they are ruthless criminals, beggars, the puppets of unknown forces, drug addicts or miserable victims. They all come from the same background, probably a slum. They were either kicked out of their homes or they chose the street as a space of unlimited fun and freedom. But all our categories, all our labels, are highly deficient. . . . Ironically, NGOs and individuals who work with street children or advocate for their rights largely stick to those same labels. Instead of condemning what the street children do, however, they find excuses and explanations and address our compassion with heart-breaking stories. These stories are true and heart-breaking but it is questionable whether telling them serves the goal of advocating street children's rights or if they merely serve to "raise awareness"."[17]

One reason why children are forced into the status category of the vulnerable, liable and perverse—requiring humanitarian security intervention rather than empowerment—is because of

the taboo around the recognition of the reality of child labor. UNICEF presented data that revealed that "Boys and girls between the ages of six and eleven make up about one quarter of children who work in Egypt."[18] In July 2011, a report jointly produced by the ILO and the Egyptian Center for Statistics and Planning (CAPMAS) found 1.6 million children laborers in Egypt (about 10% of the total workforce)." This report acknowledged that the real total may be far greater since children tend to work in informal businesses or off-the-record apprenticeships or agricultural labor. Furthermore, this total only counted those under the age of 13, since Egyptian law permits children aged 14–18 to work legally. Taking these other groups into account, "children" may make up 50% of the workforce of Egypt's most difficult jobs.

As the ILO/CAMPAS report makes clear, "children are often exposed to adverse working conditions and long working hours, in which they are deprived of their basic rights stipulated by the law. They are mostly hired by informal sector enterprises, which are highly unregulated and generally disregard labour laws. Egyptian law permits children older than 14 years old to participate in the work force on the condition they do not perform hazardous or arduous tasks. . . . Results show that a whopping 82 per cent (1.32 million) of total underage workers work in adverse conditions, which includes exhausting jobs, exposition to dust, smoke, high or low temperatures, chemicals, insecticides, and so forth…Long working hours was the second criteria used in determining the number of child laborers in Egypt, where 29 per cent work more than 43 hours a week, more than 8 hours daily in a 5-day work week."[19]

Since 2011, child labor has been on the rise.[20] State violence against children also rose dramatically during this period, even as the state-security discourse generated constant moral panic around the need to save the nation's children from the threat of violence and instability. In

January 2013, Ultras soccer fan clubs (discussed in more detail below) and other childrens' and young peoples' movements were visible leading their own protests, and in clashes with police. As Alaistar Beach reported, "In the wake of the [January 2013 clashes] which left scores of people dead, hundreds of children have been illegally detained by the Egyptian police. Many of them have been beaten, tortured, and sexually humiliated by their captors."[21] According to Karim Ennarah, a researcher for the Cairo-based Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, the rate of child detention over the past month is unprecedented:

> Numerous testimonies have reached rights workers and lawyers about children under 15 being held in both security camps and police cells prior to trial—a clear contravention of the Child Law, which states that minors cannot be held in police detention. In a further breach of legislation, Mohamed el-Maligi says he was held in the same cellblock as one 9-year-old boy. There have been numerous other reports of elementary-school-age youngsters being detained in police facilities. In Egypt, it is illegal to hold children younger than 12 alongside adult detainees. . . . At a press conference held by one NGO last week, a 12-year-old boy described how, after being arrested in downtown Cairo, he was stripped naked by a police lieutenant and forced to commit an "indecent act" in front of officers. Motaparthy from Human Rights Watch said the organization had documented several other instances in which children were stripped by officers and then left naked in their cells.[22]

With such a large portion of Egypt's detainees and those abused by the security state, and with such a significant population of the workforce consisting of children—including a significant proportion of children under the age of 12—working long hours, often in informal-sector occupations and circulating between shops, vendors, villages, and streets, why should it be

surprising that these individuals should have grievances, participate in protests against the current order?

During the revolutionary uprisings in Egypt in 2011–2012, children "placed themselves on the front line. . . . Activists say several have been killed or wounded in recent months by gunfire and tear gas. Plus, 1 out of every 4 protesters thrown in jail following clashes in December was a child. Their advocates say most, if not all, of these kids live on Cairo's streets, and that they see the revolution as a way to escape their isolation from society."[23] Amira, a rally organizer in Cairo in 2012, said "the children are valuable partners in the Egyptian revolution given their speed, agility and small size, which make it harder for security forces to stop them." She added, "it is important to recognize their contribution, which is why she and a teen acquaintance organized the rally." In a subsequent news conference, "General Adel Emara accused activists he did not name of paying children and teens to throw rocks and Molotov cocktails at security forces. The general also showed a poor-quality video of a boy named Sami confessing to his interrogator that he received the equivalent of $33 to attack buildings. Many children's rights activists in Egypt suspect the confession was coerced. They accuse the generals of using the kids to try to discredit the pro-democracy movement and justify soldiers' use of deadly force."[24]

As demonstrated above, human-security discourse, whether deployed by military agents of the state, or among liberals and progressives, tends to assume that children are being "used," forced, or "lured" into demonstrations. An article by Jacob Lippincott of *The Week* typifies journalism that casts child activists as disempowered victims: "At the bottom end of Egypt's underclass are the countless homeless children who were cast out by impoverished parents. Packs of barefoot, filthy preadolescents are ubiquitous in central parts of Cairo, and are often

drawn to street violence like moths to a flame, serving as stone-throwing cannon fodder for both the police and demonstrators."[25] The discourse of child vulnerability also permeates political discourse. During the July-August 2013 sit-in by the Muslim Brotherhood, in Rabe'a Al-Adaweya Square which demanded the reinstatement of deposed president Mohammad Morsi, the Brotherhood were accused of "using" children as human shields or propaganda, or trucking them in from orphanages[26]. UNICEF warned of the illegality deliberately putting children in danger.[27] However, Egyptian children have their own social histories of taking over streets and asserting sovereignty, on their own terms, not just as lured or exploited by others in times of political uprising.

Street Space and 'Eid Time: Queer Orderings and Child Sovereignty

When they converge around the figure of the child, moral panics tend to compound each other and intersect, and the notion of the family and of humanity itself is re-securitized in new ways through these formations of infantilizing panic and control. In this context, the figure of the street child recurs throughout the history of repression. But there is also an alternative subaltern social history of autonomous children's practices, celebrated by popular religiosity and urban festival culture in Egypt. The figure of the street child is also specific to the late-twentieth century emergence of new species of political humanity through the resilient reassertion of these subaltern unruly publics. In recent years, children asserted control over and redefined the play and practice of popular religious traditions, trans-urban political economies, the informal commerce of toys, games, and challenged the security-state regimes of policing, destabilizing the discourse politics of public sexuality. The securitization of child sexuality is a tactic of sovereignty: the binary street/home has particular racialized sex panic dynamics. It reveals the

spatialization of a city, and compacts the spatial dynamics of the slum versus gated city, the factory, the plantation, and the school-as-warehouse.

The notion of spatial areas and temporal periods in which children rule by performing spectacular forms of playful sovereignty is not a novelty in Egypt, not a reflection of some new collapse of discipline or crisis in family regulation, or emergency of urban public modernity.[28] Regular episodes of "children's rule" or an "Empire of Children" are strongly identified with popular Egyptian religious festivities that take on joyful, unruly, carnival-like character.[29] The biggest of these festivities is Eid al-Fitr, the festival of the breaking of the fast that marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. This 'Eid begins with a uniquely inclusive prayer gathering which does not segregate men from women. The ceremony brings everyone together— particularly to include young children in the prayer—loosening the norms of prayer, propriety, and gender in the process. If the family can afford it, children are often given new clothes, toys, balls and gifts at this time. Most importantly, children are often ceded control over street spaces. During Eid al-Fitr, children from age seven through seventeen take over the streets to play games, taunt adults, play tricks on each other and their neighbors, and assert a vibrant, and sometimes rather menacing form of rule. In the early evening hours, groups of girls or mixed-gender clusters rule the street together, but at night boys tend to take over, lording over these spaces until dawn and beyond. Over centuries, as popular practices have proliferated and children's sovereignties have developed their own traditions, accelerated by the transformation of 'Eid by consumer capitalism and street vending economies, this moment of children's rule has stretched to last for four or five days. During these days, young children are loaned or given (or borrow or steal) bicycles, mopeds, even occasionally cars and mini-pickup trucks (!), and buzz around city streets, at night, unleashed. Delivery boys, shop girls, mechanic's apprentices, little

vegetable merchants from the country, and street vendor kids rule the urban economy during this time. Usually these children constitute over 50% of the labor in these urban merchant, vendor, small shop and home-factory economies. However, during the days of Eid they act as the bosses, honchos, and thugs of these businesses—cartoon versions of the coercive adults that rule over their labor during the rest of the year. Cliques of boys aged 8–12 can be seen strutting about, chain smoking their cheap Cleopatra cigarettes, and evicting parents and shoppers from the sidewalk, establishing hegemony over streetside cafes. The carousels, beebee gun booths, and 'Arous (Punch and Judy) puppet shows pop and screech with childhood cruelty and glee throughout the nights[30]. Much play around sexuality is infused in these times and spaces of children's rule.[31] Groups of young girls flirt boldly with young men, even grabbing them, and boys will cat-call and grab at girls and young women. This environment of childhood flirtation has led to the depiction of 'Eid festivities by some media and by organs of the security state as a landscape of sexual assault, with children sexually preying on other children.[32]

'Eid al-Fitr is not the only time and space in which these forms of children's sovereignty are partially sacralized in the context of popular religious practices and social history and asserted by kids themselves. During Sufi Moulids, festivals surrounding revered members of the Prophet's family, or Sufi "saints," there is often a large degree of children's sovereignty in certain corners of the festivities. Of course, adults are in charge of operating sweet carts, dhikr tents, travelling circuses, magic shows, loop-the-loop iron rides, whirling carrousels, and kazoo-screeching puppet shows. Sufi sheikhs also host more serious gatherings for devotional prayers and chanting of the dhikr[33]. Street spaces, however, are flooded with children, groups of girls and boys, linked arm in arm, carousing and cruising and enjoying the space. Perhaps contrary to expectation, the proportion of children in the streets increases as night falls, and after midnight

the streets are flooded with the noise and motion of thousands of children in these moulids.

Whereas children in 'Eid festivities may appear particularly proper, even wearing new clothes, at moulids children and adolescents often cross-dress—though this has been policed and reduced in just the past years, as a new "tradition" of strict gender binarism has been invented and enforced by Salafist moral-panic campaigns. Nevertheless, 6 year old girls can still be seen wearing bushy fake black moustaches and tarboush ("fez") hats, while boys, like in the Moulid Carnival parade of Saeeda Aisha, will dress as belly dancers or women movie stars and dance frenetically on the parade floats, the donkey-led vegetable carts, or the shoebox delivery trucks.

These periods of "world upside down" in which children rule over an empire of play, reigning over street spaces and street economies, in which children are aggressive, explicitly sexual and gender-bending, mockingly authoritarian and anarchic at the same time, mark the intersection of popular non-orthodox religious tradition, and carnivalesque Mediterranean festival culture. These street festivities also represent an explosion of trapped energies, after children and families have been contained every night by long, late Ramadan dinners where the domestic, family sphere is concentrated and celebrated to the point of exhaustion. Festivals like 'Eid and Sufi Moulids are traditionally viewed as moments of celebration of the child as special beneficiary of family piety, generosity and love. However, from a child's perspective, they are also times of joyful revelry in the non-domestic, non-family forms of sociability, commerce, modes of circulation and encounter. These are utopian moments, often threatening and violent ones as children unleash cruelty and even sexual aggression on adults and each other, as the child labor that constitutes sometimes the majority of lower-middle class and working-class urban and peri-urban economies gets to enact its assumption of particular kinds of sovereignty. Festivals of child sovereignty may also be seen as a form of protest through occupation, as the streets

represent a more a "real" public space to child workers than the vast squares identified as symbolic public spaces by protesters.

The politics of these festivals has shifted since the 1990s, with the rise of Salafist public morality vigilantism, and with the infiltration of street publics by plain-clothes "security agents" who are formed and contracted by rich merchants as well as by the Interior Ministry, and who deploy explicitly sexually-assaultive forms of social control.[34] In 1995 a moral panic coalesced around children's transvestism during Moulid parades. Salafists, in league with Mubarak's culture ministry, raged against the vulgarity and moral abomination of Moulids, leaving Sufi leaders at Al-Azhar stuck in between. In the discourse of this moral panic, children came to embody the most vulgar and morally abominable figures. In 2005–2009, the Egyptian press began to argue for a "state security threat" around "childrens rule" during Eid al-Fitr, as a problem of working-class unruliness, and as a cathexis of the "marriage crisis" and the "crisis of the Egyptian family."[35]

As social control over Eids and Moulids began to descend, mobilizations for "children's sovereignty" exploded beyond the designated times and spaces of popular religiosity and carnivalesque Sufi and Ramadan festivities, and asserted themselves in new times and places. Children's militancy began in the late 1990s, but increased in frequency and intensity in the years leading up to the 2011 uprisings. Drawing from and often invoking the carnivalesque logics of Moulids and 'Eid festivities, but breaking out of the "exceptionalist" box of the Ramadan/Moulid religious calendar, children began to take over other spaces and interrupt specific modes of circulation. In 2009 and 2010, in several cases children in Egypt took over their primary schools, evicting teachers and the state[36]. These incidents responded to shifts in Egyptian education since the 1990s, when President Mubarak signed a stringent accord with the

IMF that utterly dismantled the public school system, having massive effects on gender, class, generation, and space in schools.

Egyptian children have economic interests of their own. As laborers, they have familiarity with and mastery over particular spaces and modes of circulation. Egypt also has a rich religious and social history of children's sovereignty during festivals and 'Eids, while Egyptian children have more recent histories of channeling these Eid and Moulid modes of unruly sovereignty into the occupation of schools and street-commerce zones. From the perspective of the state, these extensions of children's sovereignty have been seen as a threat of sexual harassment[37] or rape or a breakdown in family structures that can be fixed by Salafist morality brigades or police violence. However, child militants can also be seen as savvy activists, with claims of sovereignty and rights to the city, who assert demands for a greater share of economic revenue, and a broader form of social and political power.

Spongy Presentism vs. Arrested Futurism

Just as the mustachioed white Guy Fawkes mask of "V for Vendetta" became the iconic face of revolutionary Arab youth since 2011, Spongebob SquarePants stands unchallenged as the superstar of children's rebellion and children's playful sovereignty in Egypt and across the Arab world. Emblazoned on schoolboys' T-shirts and shopgirls' headscarves, inserted into online memes, featured in graffiti murals, and invading political cartoons, "Sponge" has been deployed by Arab children to embody the spirit of political rebellion as well as the fun of unruliness with increasing frequency since 2012. [38]If V is the avenging angel of justice representing youth against the repressive police state, then Sponge is the tricky demon of infantile disorder,

ideological implosion, familyless sociability, sexual and bodily amorphousness, and most importantly, of boldly fearless playfulness.

The name of this cartoon anti-hero is rich in how it resonates in Egyptian colloquial dialect and in Cairene street slang. In Egypt, Mr. Squarepants is usually referred to just as Sponge (pronounced *sbinch*). SpongeBob is sometimes called "Pop" since Pop or Bob—interchangeable due to the play between the letter "b" and "p" in Arabic—is also an Egyptian children's street slang for "buddy." Sometimes, in a fun way, the colloquial pronunciation of "sponge/sbinch" morphs into "sbinkis," or Sphinx, a kitsch figure of Pharoanic nationalism in Egypt which formal Arabic refers to as *Abu al-Huul*. Sponge can also be pronounced "sfing" which is the literal term for sponge itself—the thing with which you wash dishes or polish shoes, or the foam pad upon which you sleep when you are out on the street[39].

But Spongebob is also occasionally referred to as "Al-'Efreet"—the little demon. 'Efreet, in the popular idiom of non-Orthodox Islam and in Sufi spiritualism, are the trickster jinn ("genie") figures and little devils that bring bad luck, tempt fate, plant deviant desires, and inspire love, lust, and rebellion. They resemble to some extent the darker, archaic notion of the fairy or fae people that animate Celtic lore. When children in Egypt throw obviously faked tantrums, or display gender-deviant or socially embarassing behavior, Egyptian parents affectionately chide their children: "What a horrible little 'efreet!"[40] In a time of moral conservativism in which representations of popular non-orthodox religiosity are attacked by Salafist preachers and *Amr Maarouf* morality vigilante brigades—and where the women who channeled the presence of jinn and 'efreet in spiritual ceremonies and during Zaar ecstatic gatherings have been charged with witchcraft and repressed—Sponge has snuck back to reanimate this spirit of the popular trickster. SpongeBob's winking, dancing form hangs from

taxi drivers' rearview mirrors and is painted on the neighborhood walls where the blue Hand of Fatima might have been seen in the recent past.

Of course Spongebob is not a native icon of childhood that emerges directly from any tradition in Egypt, although it does resonate with popular jinn culture and Sufi Islamic spiritualism. His origins are American and his routes of transmission are those of consumer capitalism. SpongeBob was originally created by Anaheim, California-born artist Stephen Hillenburg, a trained marine biologist who specializes in the life forms that dwell in intertidal pools. SpongeBob is, moreover, the intellectual property of Viacom Inc., a US-based transnational corporation. Viacom's diverse and often offbeat properties include *Dora the Explorer*, MTV's buff *Jersey Shore* cast, Logo's *RuPaul's Drag Race* characters, and Stephen Colbert's satirical conservative talk-show-host persona. Yet it would be incredibly simplistic to reduce the meaning of SpongeBob's ubiquity to the generic power of American consumer neoliberal capitalism—even to Viacom's weirdo, queer-friendly, youth-slanted branch of consumer capitalism. More aggressively marketed figures of neoliberal consumer capitalism— Spider-Man, the Transformers, Batman, *My Little Pony*, Disney's Princesses franchise, MineCraft, and the inescapable empire of LEGO—have absolutely no place in the street cultures of Egypt's children's movements. Those mainstream cartoon heroes and toy brandings do not channel anything like Sponge's mass identification and connotation of rebellious joy. SpongeBob's resonance to Arab Spring countries has been compared to American popular trickster figures like Bre'er Rabbit or Bugs Bunny, and queer European diabolical figures like the Mad Hatter or Rumpelstiltskin.

If we do want to read Spongebob as Western, then he lives in an explicitly post-American landscape, where the US becomes a lost Atlantis sunk deep underwater (deep in debt? flooded by

climate change?). Gender and race biopolitics have not been washed away but have been mushed and dissolved into an invertebrates-only habitat where Sponge constantly, accidentally, playfully, cruelly, stupidly undermines the ambition of the one form of capital—the Krabby Patty burger sold at a sunken 1950s-era diner, the Krusty Krab—and constantly inadvertently, playfully, fearlessly decimates the plans of the one would-be property owner, Squidward.[41] Jack Halberstam discusses SpongeBob's anticapitalist leanings in *The Queer Art of Failure*, asking, "What if, like SpongeBob SquarePants, we don't believe that a trip to the land of milk and honey inevitably ends at the gift shop? What is the alternative, in other words, to cynical resignation on the hand and naïve optimism on the other? What is the alternative, SpongeBob wants to know, to working all day for Mr. Krabs, or being captured in the net of commodity capitalism while trying to escape? This book, a kind of 'SpongeBob SquarePants Guide to Life,' loses the idealism of hope in order to gain wisdom and a new spongy relation to life, culture, knowledge and pleasure."[42]

Another way[43] to examine SpongeBob as a figure of post-American logics of rebellion in the Middle East is through the framework of "pirate" Chinese consumer capitalism, and its links to new manufacturing industries in the region. Ignoring US copyrights, Chinese factories [?] produce SpongeBob products *en masse*—children's backpacks, Ramadan lanterns, Ramadan toys, snack food packaging, etc. Profit from these goods does not circulate through US market mechanisms or production chains, yet somehow this form of post-American pirate consumer capitalism embraces the American franchise product SpongeBob like no other figure.

In 2011, SpongeBob was explicitly targeted as a queer object of childhood subversion as well as cultural perversion. Salafist preachers in Kuwait, looking toward children's fan cultures in Egypt, demanded a fatwa against SpongeBob, arguing that he was a "perversion" that "acted

like a girl" and threatened the Islamic family structure. This mirrored a 2005 controversy in which US evangelical group Focus on the Family accused SpongeBob of "advocating homosexuality."[44] In Egypt, opposition to SpongeBob came not just from the right wing: in 2013, liberal satirist and popular TV host Bassem Youseff—who is all-too-often referred to as the "John Stewart of Egypt"—decried SpongeBob as reflecting the lack of locally produced, Egyptian-authentic children's literature, representing the corruption and consumerization of the once proud Egyptian Revolutionary spirit. Yet SpongeBob's queer and, well, spongy, embodiment of the spirit of children's rebellion is difficult to capture through any one category of power or to identify with any ideology or project of domination—certainly not the local/authentic versus the imperial/consumerized. Moreover, even groups who decry SpongeBob may be subject to his allure. On August 8th, 2013, Sponge held a live pep rally, along with his purple buddy Barney and XXX the sheep, to cheer up children among the Muslim Brotherhood protesters sequestered in Rabe'a al-'Adaweya square. Although the Salafists had declared Sponge queer and haram, Brotherhood-affiliated entertainers took on the characters of Barney and SpongeBob, dressing up in colorful furry suits to sing.[45]

While the figure of the street is always already laden with repressive and stigmatizing queer meaning when married to the figure of the child, "the Sponge" has picked up on popular non-Orthodox religiosity, childrens' 'efreet culture, the 'kids sovereignty" of 'Eid celebrations. Images of SpongeBob symbolically mark the street as a landscape of little devils and tricksters, and a playful, post-American transcendence of the religious/secular divide, all while displacing questions of gender. A sponge is an undeveloped body, invertebrate, satirically cruel but not hard or orthodox, not muscular or gendery or curvy. SpongeBob is a subject that is best suited to winking and sticking out his tongue, flirty not lusty. Bob, or Pop is a figure of the spongy present

that will not submit to adult embodiment or orthodox norms; "he" is not a body that represents the arrested development of a future. The embrace of SpongeBob embraces a pleasure in the present, not complacent presentism wallowing in "stability" but a playful moment-focus that likes the unruly, the overturned, the interrupted as a form of play. This is the kind of childhood that infantilization discourse describes as "arrested development."

Ultra Children Confront the Infantilization of Politics

Egyptian soccer (football) fan clubs have emerged since the late 1990s as a unique form of collective organization and coordination among children and teenagers. These well-organized cheering clubs and youth collectivities—called "Ultras" in colloquial Arabic, English, and in many other languages including Italian, German, and Brazilian Portuguese—are not unique to Egypt. However these soccer clubs have a distinct identities within each country in terms of their social-class profile, political leanings, relationship to other populist or popular mobilizations, and whether they include girls and young women as participants and leaders. In some countries, Ultras lean to the political right, and dovetail with skinhead groups or hooligans. In most countries, however, Ultras are made up of younger members whose adolescent or pre-pubescent bodies do not threaten the violence stereotypically associated with the coursing testosterone of a "hooligan's" body. When they are children's fan groups, Ultras reject physical violence and intimidation and instead employ mass coordination, vulgar chanting, and rhythmic collective expressions. These Ultra mass movements take place in stadiums during games or in street protests; they may even interrupt highways, metro lines or government motorcades.

Ultras may even be seen as early instigators of the Egyptian Revolution. In important ways, the Ultras—movements largely among children, adolescents and teenagers—generated key resistance tactics and created public momentum against the corporate oligarchization of sports and public space in general, against both the media's star system and its moral panics, and against the repressive apparatus of the police state. These movements were crucial in the years leading up to the uprisings of 2011, though they remain invisible in accounts that focus on their big sisters and brothers in the "Facebook generation," or on labor, youth and student movements. Ultras were also some of the first civilians to be arrested and tried in military tribunals during this time, since they were arrested for being unruly in arenas owned by military officers. This set a precedent for the current logic of repression whereby any action taken near "military-owned" property—including stadiums, shopping malls, highways, public buildings, and dozens of other forms of property and infrastructure—can justify military detention and eviction from the civil justice system.

Movements of children's and adolescent rebellion like those of the Ultras have been crucial since 2007 to the development of a revolutionary way of life, as well as to the geography of resistance to policed, militarized, and media-corporate domination. Although not taken seriously or credited with developing an alternative ideology or political project for the revolution, Ultras present a bold, and resilient form of unruly popular sovereignty. After the Port Said massacre, while the world focused on viewing Egypt through the imposed binary of the Brotherhood versus "liberals," the Ultras and other children's rebellions occupied streets and structures, and dominated the daily life of resistance in Cairo, Alexandria, and in the strategically critical Suez Canal cities for much of 2012 and 2013.

The Egyptian Ultras have gradually emerged as narrative subjects of political and generational change, as well as objects of social and scholarly fascination. In 1993, queer Egyptian filmmaker Yousri Nasrallah featured pro-Ultras soccer fan clubs in his popular film *Mercedes*.[46] The Ultras served as a kind of *deus ex machina* at the film's denouement, rescuing an artist from security-state thugs and redeeming the artist's gay brother who had been victimized by hypermasculine informants. In *Mercedes*, the Ultras smoothed generational and political divides and offered a playful, boisterous form of public pleasure that implied a possible embrace of tolerant humanist or populist celebration of sexuality in public. *Mercedes* gendered these Ultras as boyish but not as manly. They were represented, and continue to represent themselves in contemporary street actions, in specific contrast to the steroidal hypermasculinty of the state-linked thugs and brutal police. This childish dimension of Ultra politics reflects not just transnational "soccer globalization" but also the particular Egyptian sociabilities of the children's sovereignties discussed above.

Egyptian anthropologist Dalia AbdelHamid discusses the structural transformation and oligarchical corporate takeover in Egyptian sports that drove Ultras to come together as an activist community:

> Egypt in 2007, the year when those communities had been formed, was truly a neoliberal state. Everything was being privatized, education, health, transportation and public sectors companies. Egypt was a perfect model for Harvey's story on neoliberalism, where IMF and World Bank kept interfering in Egyptian economic decision[s], pushing for free trade and giving blind eye to the rising unemployment. [International Financial Institutions] prais[ed] the increase in national product and d[id]n't discuss its distribution. Football was not a different story in this respect. A small number of [the] bourgeois elite

owned the clubs and profiteered from players' deals. On the other hand, the working class

and students, the real spectators of the game, were banned from getting into these fancy

clubs, ha[d] no say in clubs' decisions and only permitted to be in the third grade section

in the stadium.[47]

In 2008, the Ultras began to turn against the state media, as well as against the police and

corporate oligarchy, while TV anchor Shober stirred up queer panic and police violence against

the Ultras. AbdelHamid writes:

> the famous sport TV anchor called Shober aired a very infamous video in 2008 in which
>
> members of Ultras Ahlawy AU07 are smoking hash and drinking alcohol and this
>
> incident coincided with mass arrest of Ultras members from their homes. Ever since,
>
> media outlets used to portray Ultras as deviants, drug addicts and homosexuals. . . .
>
> Escalated violence with police forces erupted in 2008 with the growing numbers of Ultras
>
> to be several thousands; police officers were terrorized by the organized fans. Ultras
>
> members started to defend themselves and respond to the police attack with counter
>
> attacks by throwing missiles into them and beat[ing] them up. There were several
>
> important incidents where Ultras managed to defeat security forces and make them run
>
> away. The most important one was just before the revolution by 10 days on the 15th of
>
> January 2011. It was a friendly match for Al-Ahly in Kafr El-Sheikh and police attacked
>
> the Ultras heavily when they celebrated the first goal. Ultras attacked them back and they
>
> managed to injure many police officers.[48]

These confrontations came to a head during the period after the ousting of President Hosni

Mubarak when the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) ruled as Egypt's transitional

executive. On February 1, 2012, a brutal massacre took place in the main soccer stadium of Port Said. Armed forces vehicles surrounded the stadium, sealed off the exits, and Central Security (paramilitary police) forces blocked any fans from leaving. In the darkness and confusion, thugs among (or masquerading as) Ultras of the local Al-Masry club attacked the Ultras of the Cairo-based Ahlawy Club. In the horrifying melee that ensued, seventy young people were killed, chopped up by machetes or suffocated as they were blocked by the military at the exits. It was obvious to Ultras of both teams that this massacre had been planned and deployed by officials of the military and or police as "punishment for their participation in the revolution. . . . The massacre was a turning point in the Ultras participation in the revolution."[cite?] As one of AbdelHamid's respondents reported, "The massacre crystallized the enmity between us and the SCAF. Now we organize marches and we had a sit-in and many protests. Now we are present in all revolutionary activities and not only in confrontations and clashes."[49]

Since the early 2000s, Ultras have developed a unique fan culture and set of collective practices that set them at loggerheads with the apparatuses of the police state, as well as with country's corporate elites. Egyptian scholar, Mohamed AlGohari writes of Egypt's Ultras:

The contention between the Ultras and the state/police is focused on a few key issues: First, the limits placed upon the Ultras freedom within the stadium created much tension between the state and the Ultras groups. Using the flames, fireworks, and pyrotechnics by the Ultras members in the stadiums was not allowed. In breaking that rule, the Ultras incited clashes between its members and the security forces, which generally resulted with the arrest of members of the Ultras. The Ultras sought to express themselves in support of their team within the stadium without any restriction or intervention from security officials. The Ultras always asserted the belief that the rules that govern the

curva[50] should be set by the fans themselves, not by oppressive police officers or by corrupted officials in the EFA. A second point of contention between the Ultras and the police revolved around freedom in creating graffiti. Liberating the public spaces and, more specifically, the public walls, from the political regime and state control was an important tool used by the Ultras.[51]

As AlGohari notes, street graffiti and murals that captured the dissident moral and parapolitical agenda of the Ultras became ubiquitous in urban Egypt and in the Canal Cities during this period. Ultras graffiti and murals took on three types. One style depicted boy martyrs, focusing particularly on those killed in the Port Said massacre, but also depicting those killed in the battle between youth groups and the military—called the Battle of Mohammad Mahoud Street—and those who died or were tortured to death in military detention or police custody. A second set of Ultras graffiti repeated the text "Cops Are Whores" "Cops Are Fags" or "A.C.A.B" (All Cops Are Bastards), the latter being by far the most common. A third set of graffiti depicted either Brotherhood leaders or military leaders as tricksters, liars or snakes, embodying diabolical agendas. Often this style depicted leaders revealing their true identities as Satan, or as The Joker from the *Batman* franchise.

Each of these three representational styles resonates with queer dissidence, in a broad sense. Graffiti murals of boy martyrs add angel wings to the boys, who are depicted as smiling images of innocence and playfulness. These murals thus render boy martyrs definitely as children or cherubs, not as martyred soldiers or as valiant young-men. Because of their beauty, murals or cherubic boy martyrs seem designed to stir the Ultras much vaunted ethic of "love of fellow-fan," and "love of team," as much as to rally outrage. The third style of "trickster" graffiti also has some queer resonance: one mural depicts President Mohammad Morsi as a rosy-cheeked

queen of hearts, a false lady-luck played by the joker of the "deep state." The graffiti style that calls cops as "fags" or "whores," combined with images of police partially dressed in women's clothing, or of police officers making out with each other, has been identified by some as homophobic. However, this style of graffiti could alternatively be read within the language of Ultras' intentionally vulgar chants, that mobilize intense attacks at the intersection of police repression, corporate sports and corporate media "star culture," and elitist oligarchical exclusion of "the people" from public space and sports. In the terminology of the Ultras, a "whore" or a "fag" or a "bastard" is someone, whether an athlete or fan, who sells out to the police to work as a provocateur or informant, or who sells out to work for corporate sports or the celebrity media[52].

In a climate when the police, military and media apparatus of the state were describing Ultras' "love of club and love of each other" as a culture of homosexuality, debauchery, vandalism, and (eventually) of "Black Bloc" terrorism, this style of seemingly homophobic graffiti can be read as an aggressive inversion of these queering terms. While police, media and the military used these terms to smear the Ultras, Ultras used them as a critique of the oligarchical security state. Even certain young gay-identified Ultras and female former-ultras admitted to me that they relished the rowdy chants that labeled cops fags and whores, perhaps for this reason[53]. The use of homophobic terms by Ultras against police can be seen as similar to other projects that reclaim terms used to target queer people, like the use of the derogatory term "queer" itself that has been reclaimed, since Ultras were being targeted and designated perverse by these terms.

These forms of junior queer dissidence and children's rebellion, which predate and persist beyond the logics of protest that occupied Tahrir Square in 2011, never came together as a specific "third way" or alternative political ideology or platform. However, these forms of

expression and organization did and do embody what Egyptian political scientist Ashraf AlSharif calls a very serious "politics of fun."[cite] In a context in which the security state, liberal civil society, and the moralistic leaders of the Islamist parties all agree that "stability" is top priority, the Ultras reject "the paradigm of the depression, control, and normalization of apathy versus the paradigm of joyful liberation from the shakles of social and institutional norms to create gratifying chaos. . . . This conflict between two rhythms of life—one so dim it fails to realize its own fragility, stagnation and gradual extinction and the other so young and full of life that it fails to realize the revolutionary consequences of its actions—is a useful one. It should be allowed to grow. In fact, the chaos of the Ultras, Egypt's hardcore football fans, may play the role of waking up Egypt's middle class, which continues to adhere to the myth of stability."[54]

Militarization of the Child: Securitization meets Infantilization

On January 25 2014, during the three-year anniversary of the popular uprisings that centered on Tahrir Square—called in Egypt "the 25 January Revolution"—children appeared in Tahrir Square and in front of the court building where deposed president Mohammad Morsi was standing trial. Several children, ages 6–9, were holding large black military boots on their head, or wore them as hats, tied to their head with string around their chins. These children stood alongside parents who were holding posters supporting General Abdel Fattah al-Sissi and asking him to run for president.[55] By strapping boots to their head these children, and/or their parents, were expressing support for military rule, for repression, for the stomping out of political and civil liberties[56].

Three months later, at the end of April 2014, another kind of militarized child grabbed headlines in Egypt. Fleeing physical abuse by a brutal father, Khaled Gouda, at home, a thirteen-year old boy fled his home and began living with a group of friends that orbited around child-empowerment NGOs in downtown Cairo. Gouda eventually tracked down his son at "Al-Balady," a social-educational organization in downtown Cairo that shelters "street children" from abuse, offers them counseling, and mobilizes civil groups around issues of stopping sexual harassment and advocating children's rights.[57] When the father found his son participating in the children's rights organization, he called in his friends from the State Security directorate and plainclothes thugs linked to the police. They invaded the NGO and brutally assaulted and detained several children, as well as the co-founder of the organization Aya Hegazy, a university professor and children's rights specialist. As reported by Hegazy's mother Hosny:

> Hegazy was interrogated by National Security and was hit on the neck in the process. 'It made her fall to her knees. The officer called her names and said he would urinate in her vagina and that she should be sentenced to death, or at least to a life sentence' . . . She added that another officer asked her to confess that she has been receiving foreign funds and that she has been deceived, in order to prompt her release. The Interior Ministry released a statement regarding the arrests, claiming the children taken by police from the organization testified that they had been paid by the defendants to participate in protests and instructed to sexually assault each other, in order to make it hard for them to return to their families. . . . [O]nly four out of the 21 children arrested in the raid [and certainly tortured to force confessions] testified against the four defendants.[58]

Ten years before, an organization in Cairo run by Kamal Fahmy—the sociologist studying street children cited above—was raided and disbanded. As in that case, "Al-Balady" was absurdly accused of turning children into queer sex predators, and into soldiers against the state aiming to overthrow Sisi's rule by giving them space to express themselves and to develop more equitable sociabilities.

Conclusion

On June 30, 2014, prominent Middle East analyst Juan Cole published an *LA Times* opinion piece entitled "Why it is way too late to give up on the Arab Spring." Cole argues:

> The young Arabs who made the recent revolutions are . . . distinctive: substantially more urban, literate, media-savvy and wired than their parents and grandparents. . . . Analysts have tended to focus on the politics of the Arab youth revolutions and so have missed the more important, longer-term story of a generational shift in values, attitudes and mobilizing tactics. The youth movements were, in part, intended to provoke the holding of genuine, transparent elections, and yet the millennials were too young to stand for office when they happened."[59]

Cole is known for taking a strong stand, insisting during dark times on reviving the hope identified with the "Facebook generation" slogans of 2011, and continuing to advocate a liberal futurism linked to the promise of youth as force of modernity, democracy, and innovation. However, by June 2014, when he published this piece, this vision of the youth/protester as tech-savvy futurist had been securitized—transformed or retransformed through figures of hypermasculinized "black bloc" anarchists or the ubiquitous discourse of "terrorism." Youth

activists were facing severe repression by a revanchist security state in Egypt, near extermination in Syria as they were squeezed between Islamic militias on the one hand and Bashar alAsad's state on the other, and marginalization not just across the Middle East, but also in Europe and the Americas, where a "revolutionary generation" had swept the global public sphere in 2010–2012 in a way often compared the "Generation of 1968."

What this discourse of youth as vehicles of liberal futurism missed, during its moment of triumph in 2011, as well as during attempts to revive it during the darker times of 2013–14, is the figure not of youth—university and graduate-students in their 20s and 30s, young adult labor leaders, website managers and networkers—but of masses of children. These children—especially in the case of Egypt, but also across many of the Arab Spring countries—mobilized by the thousands, pushing state and political discourse in radically different directions from those of their "big brothers and sisters" in the youth movements. Children are particularly important political actors and subjects of security and morality politics because they reveal queer aspects of logics of Arab revolution and global counterrevolution in a way that the ubiquitous focus on youth ignores. At the intersection of securitization and infantilization of politics is the figure of the loose child, the child on the loose, overwhelming borders and security perimeters. Critical, situated, contextualized forms of research and sociopolitical bridge-building need to wholly rethink, and recognize in new ways, the spongy and disruptive subject of the child, and of the categories that have been erected to infantilize politics and violently operate upon them, and the queer logics of unruly dissent that play out when those security apparatuses are interrupted.

Notes

[1] World Cup Brasil, "Updated: Article proposing idea of killing Egyptian street children stirs fury," *Ahram Online,* June 29, 2014, http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/104271/Egypt/Politics-/Article-proposing-idea-of-killing-Egyptian-street-.aspx, which was citing the original op-ed article: Dr. Nassar Abdullah, "Atfal al-shawari'a: Al-Hall al-brazili." *Al-Masry Al-Youm Newspaper* (Cairo), 19 June 2014.

[2] Add more citations of Egyptian "pro-child-empowerment" scholarship of that era, and Egypt reactions to Candelaria at that time.

[3] Kamil Fahmi, *Beyond the Victim*: *The Politics and Ethics of Empowering Cairo's Street Children* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007).

[4] Insert refs, quote on "marriage crisis"

[5] Add note and quote about Fahmy's center being shut down

[6] Use of the term "surge" to describe this collective agency of migrant children traveling without parents sounded the loudest of alarms, as it resonated with military-humanitarian connotations of counter-insurgency surges in wartime and evoked disaster and emergency coverage of looming superstorms or hurricanes. See Neil Munro, "Surge of Migrant Children Urged on by US-Based Parents," *The Daily Caller,* July 14, 2014, http://dailycaller.com/2014/07/14/surge-of-migrant-children-urged-on-by-us-based-parents/; and Human Rights Watch, "US: Surge in Detention of Child Migrants," June 25, 2014, http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/25/us-surge-detention-child-migrants.

[7] Omnia El Shakry, "Youth as Peril and Promise: The Emergency of Adolescent Psychology in Postwar Egypt," *International Journal of Middle Studies* 43/4 (2011):591-610.

[8] Ibid. p. 591

[9] Lewis Aptekar, *Street Children of Cali* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988); "Characteristics of the Street Children of Columbia," *Child Abuse and Neglect, The International Journal* 13/3 (1989): 427-439; Iman Bibars, "Street children in Egypt: from the home to the street to inappropriate corrective institutions," *Environment and Urbanization* 10/1 (1998): 201-216, http://eau.sagepub.com/content/10/1/201.full.pdf; Sheela Patel, "Street children, hotel boys and children of pavement dwellers and construction workers in Bombay: How they meet their daily needs," *Environment and Urbanization* 2/2 (1990): 9-26, http://eau.sagepub.com/content/2/2/9.abstract.

[10] Nelly Ali, "The Vulnerability and Resilience of Street Children," *Global Studies of Childhood* 1/3 (2011): 260-264, http://www.wwwords.co.uk/rss/abstract.asp?j=gsch&aid=4722.

[11] Human Rights Watch, "Mass Arrests of Street Children in Egypt," February 20, 2003, http://www.hrw.org/ar/node/75785

[12] Human Rights Watch, "Charged with Being Children," February 19, 2003, http://www.hrw.org/node/12360/section/1.

[13] Add some examples of status offenses with quotes, refs

[14] International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Cairo, "Street Children In Egypt: Key findings of a study conducted by the National Center for Social and Criminal Change, http://egypt.iom.int/Doc/Street%20children%20profile.pdf (accessed July 29, 2014).

[15] UNICEF, Egypt, "Street Children: issues and impact, http://www.unicef.org/egypt/protection_4397.html (accessed July 29, 2014).

[16] Ola Farrag, "FACE for Children in Need: Building a sustainable Street children Youth Project in Cairo, Egypt," FACE Annual 2013 Report, http://www.facechildren.org/upload/files/FACE%20for%20Children%20in%20Need%20-%20Salam%20Street%20Children%20Program%20Annual%20Report%202013.pdf (accessed July 29, 2014).

[17] Amira El Feky, "Street Children: What they are not," *Daily News Egypt,* April 14, 2013, http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/04/14/street-children-what-they-are-not/.

[18] UNICEF, Egypt, "Primary School Years," http://www.unicef.org/egypt/children_152.html (accessed July 29, 2014).

[19] Ahmed Feteha, "1.6 million underage workers in Egypt: Official figures," *Ahram Online*, July 14, 2011, http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/16406/Business/Economy/-million-underage-workers-in-Egypt-Official-figure.aspx.

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[23] Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, "Egypt's Street Kids Are Revolution's Smallest Soldiers," NPR *All Things Considered,* January 4, 2012, http://www.npr.org/2012/01/04/144692425/egypts-street-kids-are-revolutions-smallest-soldiers.
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[25] Jacob Lippincott, "Dispatch from Cairo: The pyramid scheme of violence-ravaged Egypt," *The Week,* March 12, 2013, http://theweek.com/article/index/241162/dispatch-from-cairo-the-pyramid-scheme-of-violence-ravaged-egypt.
[26] Add ref, quote
[27] *Al Arabiya News*, "Women group accuses Egypt's Brotherhood of using children at sit-ins," August 3, 2013, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/08/03/Women-group-accuses-Egypt-s-Brotherhood-of-using-children-at-sit-ins.html.
[28] CITE Alex Reza Shams' notion of the heteronormalization of urban modernism, and the dual function of the street as "avenue to modernity" as well as "queer field" that is projected as the other of the project of urban normalization.
[29] cite these quoted terms
[30] Insert notes and a couple of quotes and refs, fieldwork interviews
[31] Walter Ambrust, "The Riddle of Ramadan: Media, Consumer Culture, and the "Christianization" of a Muslim Holiday," in *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East, Second Edition - the Riddle of Ramadan,* ed. Donna Lee Bowen and Evelyn A. Early (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2002): 335-348.
and CITE SAMULI SHIELKE and JENNIFER WINEGAR's new books; and collaboration of Shielke & Winegar: Samuli Schielke and Jessica Winegar, "The writing on the walls of Egypt," MER 265, 2012 (Middle East Research and Information Project), http://www.merip.org/mer/mer265/writing-walls-egypt.
[32] http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=KzRX9E_-yp0C&oi=fnd&pg=PA335&dq=Ramadan+children+Egypt&ots=GOe7fnJFzJ&sig=PIfRX_CZYprGE_KcX0guGzT

HreY#v=onepage&q=Ramadan%20children%20Egypt&f=false [this is Bowen & Early's *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East…* - check which chapter deals with children and Eid/Ramadan]

33 Seek sources, through Samuli

34 I analyzed these new security agents in "The Security Archipelago" in terms of what I called the "baltagi effect" and the security state's confrontation with subjects of radical gendered resistance. See *The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics, and the End of Neoliberalism* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

35 Recover refs and quotes on Moulid moral panic incidents

36 Insert Arabic newspaper refs and quotes from a couple of school takeover incidents

37 Ref/quote from Egyptian newspaper about these initial incidents, when they began to be framed as "children as sexual harassers during Eid celebrations"

38 Miriam Berger, "SpongeBob SquarePants Takes Over Egypt," *BuzzFeed World,* October 23, 2013, http://www.buzzfeed.com/miriamberger/spongebob-sqaurepants-takes-over-egypt.

39 Insert refs from interviews

40 Ref / quote

41 *Connected in Cairo,* "In SpongeBob We Trust?" November 2, 2013, http://connectedincairo.com/2013/11/02/in-spongebob-we-trust/; *The Guardian,* "How SpongeBob became massive in Egypt, http://www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2013/may/27/spongebob-squarepants-egypt-cartoon-fame (accessed July 30, 2014).

42 J. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011) 1-2.

43 what logic of rebellion do I interpret Halberstam as assigning to SpongeBob in this passage and how is it different from how I am using SpongeBob or how Egyptian children's movements mobilize SpongeBob? Or is it different?

44 BBC News, "US right attacks SpongeBob video, January 20, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/americas/4190699.stm; USA Today, "Spongebob, Muppets, Sister Sledge writer suffer criticism," The Associated Press, January 22, 2005, http://archive.today/GAhAs.

45 [Youtube Reference]

46 Stephen Holden, "Mercedes (1993) Film Review," *The New York Times,* May 5, 1995, http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=990CE7D71438F936A35756C0A963958260.

47 Dalia AbdelHamid, "Ultras, State and Revolution in Egypt," Thesis for Master of Arts (in progress), Department of Sociology and Anthropology, American University in Cairo (2014) 4-5.

48 Dalia AbdelHamid, op cit. 6-7 [or Ibid. 6-7]

49 AbdelHamid, 7.

50 Originally from Italian, but now part of global Ultras terminology, *curva* means the curved seats behind the goal where the most fanatic supporters cluster.

51 Mohamed Elgohari, "The Ultras Political Role and the State in Egypt," Department of Politics, New York University, thesis for Master of Arts (2013), http://www.fordifp.org/Portals/0/Thesis/0b5156c0-783e-4fbe-a3e7-032f1872e9daThe%20Ultras%20Political%20Role%20and%20the%20State%20in%20Egypt.pdf.

5252 insert interview data on this delicate topic of vulgar/"homophobic" graffiti as queer logic, rather than as anti-queer normalization

[53] Add quotes, refs here

[54] Ashraf El-Sherif, "The Ultras' Politics of Fun Confront Tyranny, *Jadaliyya,* February 5, 2012,

http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4243/the-ultras-politics-of-fun-confront-tyranny-.

[55] Maha Abdel Azim, "AFP photo depicts 'child endangerment': Human rights lawyer," *Daily News Egypt,* January

28, 2014, http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/01/28/afp-photo-depicts-child-endangerment-human-rights-lawyer/.

[56] Add George Orwell quote about state "with boots on your head"

[57] Amr Mazidi, "Bi-l-ṣuwar: shabaka tajnīd al-aṭfāl li-l-mushāraka bi-l-mudhāhirāt tataza''amuhā amrīkīya"

(Photos: Arrest of network recruiting children for participation in US-led demonstrations) *al-Dastur,* May 4, 2014,

http://www.dostor.org/411903. [the double ' ' is double ع]

[58] Mada Masr, "Mother defends daughter accused of exploiting street children," *The Morning Digest,* May 6, 2014,

http://www.madamasr.com/content/mother-defends-daughter-accused-exploiting-street-children.

[59] Juan Cole, "Why it's way too soon to give up on the Arab Spring," Los Angeles Times, June 28, 2014,

http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-cole-arab-spring-millenials-20140629-story.html.