Why did the revolutions of 2011 turn out to be so different from their earlier 1970s counterparts? The rentier states were able to provide social services to many of their citizens, while the populist states dispensed significant benefits in education, health, employment, housing, and the like. For these postcolonial regimes, this "social contract" served to build support among the peasants, workers, and middle strata at a time when the states were struggling against both the colonial powers and old internal ruling classes. The state acted as the moving force of economic and social development on behalf of the populace. The social contract, however, dwindled as the Arab states went along with the World Bank and the IMF from the 1980s to implement liberalization and structural adjustment policies. Even though Arab governments, weary of popular unrest, slowed down aspects of liberalization and facilitated safety nets such as social funds, welfare nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or even Social Islam (Islamic charity), the strategy continued ceaselessly.

The Arab Human Development Reports of 2002–2009 invariably highlighted the Arab developmental deficits, underemployment, and mounting disparity gripping the region. By 2008, food prices rose, increasing inflation to more than double the global rate; unemployment (11 percent average), especially among youth, reached the highest in the world (30 percent in Tunisia); exports declined because of the drop in global demand (7.7 percent in Tunisia; up to 22 percent in Yemen); workers’ remittances plunged sharply (17 percent in Egypt) while income inequality grew. By the early 2000s, 0.3 percent of citizens in Lebanon controlled 50 percent of the national wealth; of these just six men from two families (Hariri and Miqati) held most of the wealth. In Tunisia in 2012, only 70 people held 20 percent of the national wealth, and in Egypt 490 individuals controlled 25 percent of national wealth. Most of the new money went to powerful businessmen who, enjoying favoritism and monopoly, increasingly influenced governmental policies. As the old social contract collapsed, the new disparity found vivid expression in, on the one hand, a minority of globalized super rich with visible wealth, conspicuous consumption, and snobbery enclosed in the gated communities and, on the other, a majority of marginalized constituencies spreading across the urbanizing villages and ruralizing cities. Despite pushing for liberalization, the Arab states continued to remain at the center of economic activity, managing the neoliberal policies by facilitating, sharing its benefits, and attempting to handle its social costs. It is no wonder that these autocratic states would become the prime target of any discontent triggered by developmental deficits, social problems, political repression, or corruption. An early popular reaction to austerity policies, notably cuts in consumer subsidies as the states tried to reduce their deficits, included a series of mass urban riots that extended from Morocco (1983), Tunisia (1984), and Sudan (1982, 1985), to Lebanon (1987), Algeria (1988), and Jordan (1989). Following a decade in the 1990s of safety nets, welfare NGOs, and Islamist involvement in social provisions for the needy, dissent assumed different dynamics and diverse forms during the years preceding the uprisings; the cost of living and social services protests merged with those of labor, democracy advocacy, and regional politics to form a single episode of mass street politics. In the meantime, the neoliberal restructuring turned the Arab large cities into what I term "cities inside out," where a large number of urban subalterns were compelled, by necessity, to resort to the outdoor subsistence economy to survive and to public spaces to perform social and cultural rituals such as funerals or weddings. Here I focus on the Iranian revolution of 1979, in which revolutionary ideas were
articulated by the Marxist and Islamic leftist guerrilla movements, as well as the "ideologue of the revolution," Ali Shariati. The revolution saw radical strategies and repertoires to which revolutionary ideas lent support. Chapter 3 elaborates on these repertoires by examining the widespread (shura, or council) movements for grassroots democracy and self–rule in the neighborhoods, colleges, farms, and workplaces, focusing on the occupation of factories. With the fragmentation of labor and the end of actually existing socialism, radical ideas began to lose their clout. Chapter 4 examines the deradicalization of political Islam, showing how the Islamist opposition evolved from its strong anti–imperialist and social justice propensity to embrace reformist politics and neoliberal economy. By the time the Arab uprisings occurred, most Islamists and secular counterparts alike had been conditioned by the neoliberal climate. Despite the decline in revolutionary projects, popular dissent grew, as neoliberalism transformed the Arab economies and shaped an increasingly contentious urbanity.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss how the Arab large cities became the spaces of popular discontent and how dissent found expression in the Arab squares, exploring what the urban setting of the uprisings tells us about their origin and dynamics. While the urban setting was by no means unexpected, the sudden and fierce eruption of the uprisings surprised observers and protagonists alike. Chapter 7 explores the way in which under the shadow of the authoritarian polity and neoliberal economy, the Arab subaltern were involved in discrete forms of everyday struggles to enhance their life chances; and in doing so, they had created their own opaque and illegible realities outside the radar of the state and scholars. Their struggles, often in the form of "nonmovements," assumed collective voice once the protests began and merged into what came to be known as the Arab uprisings. Not everyone attributes anything distinct to the Arab revolutions, except perhaps their civil character, which avoided war and destruction as seen in the "classical" revolutions. Commenting on the Egyptian experience, the sociologist Saad Eddin Ibrahim argues that the remarkable revolt that overthrew the Mubarak regime opened the way for far–reaching social and political changes, including three free elections, a new government and parliament, and under General Abdel Fattah el–Sisi new economic projects, notably the new Suez Canal. Yet most revolutionaries saw the post–Mubarak Muslim Brotherhood government as a barrier to rather than facilitator of deep democratic change. And only a few considered General Sisi, who forcefully seized power from the government on July 3, 2013, as the incarnation of the revolution; if anything, General Sisi’s regime embodied a drive toward restoration. From a broader perspective, the political scientist Jack Goldstone likewise suggests that the Arab Spring followed the same pattern as any other revolution, beginning with socioeconomic strain and elite opposition, followed by popular anger, shared views, and benefit of favorable international relations. He predicted that they "will unfold as all revolutions do" with "ongoing struggles for power between radicals and moderates." It is true that the Arab uprisings had similar preconditions, which tell us about revolution as movement or the way a revolutionary mobilization develops. Indeed, as I demonstrate in Chapter 10, these subaltern struggles, in part, rendered the postrevolutionary transition acutely contentious, reinforcing the painful and paradoxical postrevolutionary moments. Those were the "revolution 1.0 model." But the revolution in Egypt, according to Ghoneim, belonged to a new model, "revolution 2.0," a "truly spontaneous movement led by nothing other than the wisdom of the crowd." In an attempt to give meaning to such
particularities, the political scientist Ivan Krastev finds in the recent global protests, from Tunisia and Egypt to the Occupy movements, a clear departure from the twentieth-century experiences. But the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Yemen, and Egypt had serious limitations in transforming into full-fledged revolutions. This has had an undeniable deradicalizing effect.