

Contesting Legitimacy

PROTEST AND THE POLITICS OF SIGNIFICATION
IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY EGYPT

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Für Hugo

Summary

This dissertation examines the issue of mobilisation in the context of authoritarian contraction through the lenses of hegemony theory. It explores the shifting coalitions of contenders in Egypt since the 2013 military coup and their contending conceptions of political legitimacy. Its conceptual perspective is defined by the realisation that processes of social mobilisation are contingent on the dynamics of interaction between political contenders. This interaction takes place on the streets between demonstrators and police forces, and it takes place on a discursive level where contenders articulate competing narratives about contentious events in an attempt to establish hegemony for their reading of social reality. I argue that the trajectory of mobilisation and opportunities for cross-movement alliance building, as well as the scale of repression wielded by authorities against their contenders heavily depend on the outcome of this latter, discursive struggle. Accordingly, in this dissertation project I investigate the unfolding waves of mobilisation in post-coup Egypt in a nested research design that combines quantitative protest event analysis with in-depth qualitative analysis of the contested discourses about events on the ground. By tracking the contentious dynamics in Egypt with the proposed analytical focus from the 2013 *Tamarod*-uprising, over the *Anti-Coup* campaign against the deposition of President Mursi, to the restoration of an authoritarian order under the aegis of General Al-Sisi and, finally, to the 2016 Tiran and Sanafir island protests, I highlight the impact of shifts in the discursive architecture of contentious politics on the conditions of possibility and the opportunity structures for both, resistance and repression. The aim of investigating processes of political contestation both in the discursive and the performative arena is to illustrate how the narratives established around contentious events crucially account for variances in the reaction of movements to regime action, of regimes to mobilisation, and of the broader public to the means by which these principal contenders interact with each other to achieve their goals—for instance, by escalating collective action and radicalising repertoires, or by restricting civil liberties and deploying state violence against protesters. Ultimately, this thesis thus attempts to map Egypt's contentious politics in the first years of Al-Sisi's reign. By systematically linking the performative and the discursive in an analytical framework informed by discourse theory and relational approaches of social movement studies, I propose an integrated approach to the study of contentious politics—one that 30 years after the cultural turn in the study of contention is still lacking.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Dissertation befasst sich aus hegemonie-theoretischer Perspektive mit politischen Mobilisierungsprozessen im Kontext der autoritären Regression in Ägypten. Ihr Schwerpunkt liegt auf den seit dem Militärputsch 2013 mehrfach wechselnden politischen Allianzen und ihren umkämpften Auffassungen von politischer Legitimität. Die Arbeit fußt auf der Prämisse, dass Prozesse politischer Mobilisierung, sowohl seitens sozialer Bewegungen als auch staatlicher Akteure, nicht durch unidirektionale Kausalzusammenhänge erklärbar sind, sondern von den Mikrodynamiken sozialer Interaktion zwischen politischen Wettstreitern abhängen. Diese Interaktion findet einerseits auf einer performativen Ebene statt, etwa zwischen Polizisten und Demonstrierenden bei Straßenprotesten. Parallel dazu zeichnen sich politische Konflikte aber auch auf einer diskursiven Ebene ab, wo politische Rivalen um die Deutungshoheit über eben jene Protestereignisse ringen. Ausgehend von einer hegemonietheoretischen Betrachtung dieses diskursiven Wettstreits zeigt die vorliegende Arbeit, wie sich beide Ebenen gegenseitig bedingen. Im Kern wird dabei argumentiert, dass Entwicklungsverlauf und Erfolgsaussichten sozialer Mobilisierung in Ägypten seit der militärischen Machtübernahme sowie die Gelegenheiten für die Allianzbildung verschiedener widerständigen Akteure gleichermaßen von der faktischen Beschaffenheit und der diskursiven Darstellung von Protest- und Repressionsereignissen abhängen. Die Analyse mehrerer Protest- und Repressionswellen in Ägypten zwischen 2013 und 2016 stützt sich auf ein integriertes Forschungsdesign, welches quantitative Messverfahren zur Erfassung von Protestereignissen mithilfe von Eventdatenbanken mit einer qualitativen Diskursanalyse zu jenen Ereignissen kombiniert. Die resultierende Mehrebenen-Analyse der Protest-Repressionsdynamiken in Ägypten – von den *Tamarod*-Protesten 2013, über die *Anti-Coup*-Kampagne gegen den Militärputsch, bis zu den Demonstrationen gegen die Aufgabe der zwei Inseln Tiran und Sanafir im Roten Meer im Jahr 2016 – belegt den Einfluss von Veränderungen in der diskursiven Architektur auf die Gelegenheitsstrukturen sozialer Bewegungen und politischer Regime und auf deren Bereitschaft, sich auf Protest- und Repressionskampagnen einzulassen. Nicht zuletzt verfolgt diese Analyse somit das Ziel, zu zeigen, dass die Art und Weise, wie über politischen Protest, Repression oder Gewalt gesprochen wird, letztlich ausschlaggebend dafür ist, mit welchen Mitteln soziale Bewegungen Regime herausfordern, wie selbige darauf reagieren und inwiefern beide Seiten hierfür potenzielle Unterstützer mobilisieren können.

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Transliteration and Referencing

For better accessibility, I have refrained from making use of various complex scholarly systems of rendering written and spoken Arabic in the Latin script, such as **the International Convention of Orientalist Scholars’ DMG standard**. Instead, throughout this thesis, Arabic has been transliterated according to a simplified version of the system employed by the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES).¹ In this transliteration system, a few letters with diacritical marks are added to the Latin alphabet to represent Arabic letters without equivalent in the Roman alphabet. For the benefit of those not familiar with Arabic transliteration and in favour of accessibility, **most diacritics have been omitted, with the exception of the Arabic letters ‘Ayn’ (ع transcribed as ʿ), an ‘a’ sound that comes from very deep in the throat and ‘Hamza’ (ء transcribed as ʾ), a guttural stop**. For transliterating colloquial language—protest chants, agitation speeches or discrete text passages in Egyptian dialect—I have used a transliteration system described by Mona Baker in her **edited volume ‘Translating Dissent’**.² It reflects how words are **pronounced in Egyptian dialect, thus ‘g’ instead of ‘j’, and ‘z’ instead of ‘th’**. Individual names, as well as terms, locations, organisations or incidents with a common lay spelling, are not transliterated. Hence it is Tahrir, not Taḥrīr. All translations are my own.

This thesis has several different types of sources with separate bibliographies: academic works and newspaper articles are cited in the author-date format through the text, according to APA standard, and listed in the bibliography. By contrast, primary sources, including interviews, press releases, official statements and recordings of demonstrations, are cited in footnotes with translated titles; they are furthermore listed in Appendix D with their original title, their publication dates and, where available, their URL. Several sources are no longer accessible online but exist only on file with the author. They were made available in a dedicated online repository. This should make it possible to revisit these sources in subsequent research projects, notwithstanding that ever more web content and testimonies from Egypt are disappearing, inaccessible, or systematically deleted by authorities in their efforts to rewrite history to their advantage (Raghavan 2016).

¹ Available at <https://ijmes.chass.ncsu.edu/docs/TransChart.pdf>.

² The apparatus attained popularity with the rise of instant messaging services, Twitter and Facebook. It has the advantage of first, making the text more accessible to a broader range of readers due to its omission of diacritic marks, while it also positions the text in its ‘cultural habitat’ (Baker 2016, 13). According to the Ahdaf Soueif (2012) it was first used by Arab bloggers catering to both ‘MENA’ (Middle Eastern and North African) and ‘WENA’ (Western Europe and North American) readers.

Abbreviations

CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CSF	Central Security Forces
DNE	Daily News Egypt
DOC	Dynamics of Contention
EIPR	Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
ERC	Egyptian Revolutionary Council
FJP	Freedom and Justice Party
FMA	Forensic Medical Authority
IDSC	Information and Decision Support Centre
JAN 25	25 January Revolution
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MP	Member of Parliament
NASL	National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy and Rejection of the Coup
NCHR	National Council of Human Rights
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PCPL	Popular Campaign to Protect the Land
PDA	Political Discourse Analysis
PEA	Protest Event Analysis
POS	Political Opportunity Structures
Rabaa	Rabaa al-Adawiya Massacre
RG	Republican Guard
RNN	Rassd News Network
RSF	Reporters without Borders (Reporters sans frontières)
SAC	Students Against the Coup
SIS	State Information Service
WT	Wiki Thawra

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1. Introduction

History, by nature, emerges only in retrospect. What makes historical events meaningful—and what they signify for the course of history—is mostly visible only when attention is turned to it with hindsight. At times, it is not until decades later that observers or participants of historical events recognise the meaning of what they were part of, and experienced. This is true particularly for the protagonists of *long-durée* social movements, like the struggle for women's rights or the pacifist anti-war movement, who have sometimes not even lived to reap the fruits of their mobilisation efforts. At times, however, it is already as events unfold that spectators realise that they are witnessing history. The question of what makes such events historic; what compels people to grasp the liminal character of what they are witnessing, has been answered philosophically by Wilhelm Hegel (1910). He generally affiliated historical breaks with violent eruptions of social and political contestation—as crucial elements in a sequential chain of successions of wars and victors. Building on this thought, Robin Wagner-Pacifici (2010, 1358; see also 2017) has affirmed the conditioning nature of violence for the individuals populating history. But he also contends that violence inheres not only in the material sequence of events:

It inheres as well in the naming, appropriating, and displacing of this violence as cultural artefacts do the work of constituting history. This work of constituting history takes enormous effort. Events must force their way into historical subjects' fields of attention and action, and while violence is not an essential ingredient of all historic transformations, it is a condition of many of them. Great things are at stake, including the remaking of social and political identities and the redistribution of power and resources.

In Egypt, the well-studied 25 January uprising against Husni Mubarak has been described as such a crucial moment of experiencing history live unfolding—and as one conditioned and accompanied by levels of political violence in the streets **which were unprecedented in the country's republican history**. Significantly less studied, the massacres of *Rabaa al-Adawiya* and *Al-Nahda* indeed represented another such critical juncture, two and a half years later: Across all political camps, hardly anyone witnessing the events unfolding on 14 August 2013, either live, on television or on social media, failed to notice the liminality inherent in what they saw. Horrific images emerged of the Egyptian army and police troops brutally cracking down on protesters in the streets and squares that had witnessed an iconic uprising against authoritarian modes of governance only two years earlier. These were broadcasted in infinite loops over the following weeks and supplemented by **gruesome images from Cairo's morgues** and left a deep imprint on

those who saw them: Egypt, after *Rabaa*, would never be the same. Dina Wahba (2017) writes in her powerful recapitulation of the events in the fourth year after:

Rabaa cannot be seen as a singular event but should be viewed as a key moment within almost two-and-a-half years of state-sponsored violence up until that moment, in which Egyptians had to a great extent normalized images and videos of violence and death, from Tahrir to Maspero, to Mohamed Mahmoud, to Port Said.

At the time of the crackdown, I had been working on social mobilisation by the National Alliance Supporting Legitimacy (NASL), commonly referred to as the Anti-Coup Alliance, for several weeks. The mostly Islamist protest alliance had been defying authorities with country-wide peaceful marches since the removal of President Mursi from office in a military coup. They had occupied several public squares in the capital and initiated the largest wave of Islamist mobilisation in Egyptian history. I had talked with participants of the protest camps in Nasr City in the weeks before the massacres. And I attempted to follow up on these conversations in their aftermath, trying to make sense of the counter-intuitive effects of **the massacre on Egypt's political public**: unlike after the experience of disproportionate state violence on Tahrir, a backlash against in terms of dissident mobilisation across ideological and social cleavages had not materialised (Grimm and Harders 2018). Other than in 2011, violence did not backfire this time. When police repression peaked in mid-August 2013 in several massacres, it was condemned by international human rights defenders as crimes against humanity. However, it barely drew any criticism at the national level, let alone popular outrage that could have materialised in protests (Grimm 2013b). Quite the contrary: The overwhelming majority, including public intellectuals of all political persuasions, welcomed **the security forces' and their new strongman's resolve against the Islamists**; those protesting the violence were shamed, expelled from parties and chastised on social and public media.

It was disturbing to witness many of those who had been driven to the streets and victimised by repression only two years earlier now relativise or even cheer for this very same kind of state violence. Amongst those supporting the repression were respected journalists, activists and the leaders of several ostensibly pro-democratic and liberal parties and social movements.³ Moreover, the witnessed sequence of events also ran counter to much of what sociological theory suggested about the impact of brutal police violence on protesters: driven by the question of why repressions worked in some instances, but not in others, social movement

³ In this sense, *Rabaa* was also a watershed for reassessing the integrity of human rights defenders and revolutionary activists as well as many personal and professional contacts and colleagues and their professed political principles.

scholars had explored the mobilisation-repression nexus (e.g., Davenport 2005; Johnston 2012; Tilly 2005) for over four decades. While this body of research found the empirical link between mobilisation and coercive response to be so stable that it has assumed a law-like character (Davenport 2007b, 7), a heated debate had been fought over the effect of repression on mobilisation, with a variety of conflicting correlations being statistically established over time. In an attempt to refine the models, scholars turned to the material features of repressions in order to explain the diverging reactions on the protester's side: repressions were found to be effective when applied pre-emptively and selectively (M. Hafez 2003; T. D. Mason and Krane 1989), when violence was not employed indiscriminately against opponents and regardless of their rank (Khawaja 1993), and when the level of repression did not surpass a certain threshold (Alimi 2009; Hess and Martin 2006). Otherwise, regime forces risked a “moral shock” (Jasper and Poulsen 1995, 498) to society that raised such a sense of public outrage that individuals became inclined to act, even in the absence of prior networks of recruitment and mobilisation (see Rogers 2011).

Such a moral shock failed to materialise in Egyptian after *Rabaa*—in spite of the fact that repression was applied reactively and indiscriminately against opponents. The mainstream reaction to *Rabaa* was quite the contrary from what social movement theorists would have expected: Since the military overthrow of President Mohammed Mursi in mid-2013, rather than protest, Egypt has witnessed a rapid counter-revolution. Five years after the popular uprising Egyptians are living to see an authoritarian comeback under the auspices of a military-backed government, a politicised judiciary, and a weak shadow-parliament. National security and the ‘war on terror’ have become the dominant frameworks for the implementation of ever more restrictive domestic policies. They have effectively replaced the coalition-enabling revolutionary slogan of ‘bread, freedom, and social justice’ of 2011 in the mobilisation of the political public. Gradually, the security discourse constructed by state officials has been extended from including only the Islamist segment of society to all those actors voicing criticism of the regime or the security forces’ handling of street protests. As a consequence of unseen physical repression and restriction of the public space, mobilisation efforts have all but ceased. Starting from this puzzle of absent backlash despite ideal-typical conditions, this dissertation examines patterns of the contention in Egypt in the summer of 2013 in an attempt to explain, on a basic level, the question asked by Donatella della Porta (2016) in a recent intervention: “where did the revolution go?” This research project seeks to answer this question through an approach attuned to interaction processes between incumbents and contenders. In other words, this thesis closely

traces the unfolding waves of social mobilisation and repression in Egypt *after* the extensively investigated transition period of the Arab Spring and its aftermath (2011-2012), both in their performative and discursive dimensions. Broadly speaking, the topic of this book is thus the issue of mobilisation in an authoritarian setting. More specifically, it is the interrelation of social mobilisation and the policing of protest that takes centre stage.

The ten chapters of this thesis narrate Egypt's post-revolutionary history through the lenses of contentious politics: this narration begins in late 2012, with the wave of dissent that emerged in Egyptian streets against the policies of Egypt's first freely elected president Mohammed Mursi which were widely perceived as erratic and despotic. Popular discontent with the administration's performance manifested in country-wide street protests and culminated in the iconic *Tamarod* [rebel] uprising on 30 June 2013 that paved the way for Mursi's ouster. It then moves to the popular protests against the military coup on 3 July 2013 which represent the most significant wave of mobilisation since the iconic mass protests on Tahrir Square in January 2011. As one of the first academic works, this book takes a closer examination of this episode. It seeks to investigate how it established path dependencies for a powerful counter-revolution that reversed most of the achievements of the 2011 uprising in Egypt, that is commonly referred to as the Arab Spring. The manner in which this authoritarian restoration unfolded in the months after *Rabaa* is the topic of another episode of contention discussed in this thesis. It covers the post-coup period in Egypt and reconstructs the emergence of a new hegemonic consensus which legitimised the restoration of the most repressive regime in Egypt's republican history—embodied in the leadership of General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. Alive to the ongoing debate about the general's prospects as Egypt's new potential "president-for-life" (R. Owen 2012), however, the narration ends on a positive note. The final episode of contention covered in this thesis shifts attention back to Egypt's streets to show that the new hegemonic order is far from consolidated: The popular protests against the transfer of a small Red Sea archipelago to Saudi Arabia illustrates how the seeds of resistance have been planted in Egypt: When certain historic events make it apparent that authorities do not walk their talk, mobilising actors are provided with an opportunity to subvert the hegemonic discourses that sustain the status quo. This may open windows for mobilisation in seemingly closed contexts, and for the emergence of new political alliances against authoritarian rule.

1.1 Lessons of Tahrir for the Study of Contention

Zooming in on these different episodes of contentious struggle in post-

revolutionary Egypt, this thesis emphasises the performative and discursive interaction of diverse coalitions of contenders and their authoritarian counterparts. This contentious relationship has been investigated extensively by social movement studies with the help of case studies from across the globe. From this work, as Christian Davenport (2005: vii) has noted, we have a sense of what tactics will be used on both sides and of what provokes violent behaviour; we have some insights into what consequences are likely when movements take to the street, or when protests are crushed by repression; and we have some idea of where to look for information. Above all, three different lines of inquiry in social movement studies of the ‘Arab Spring’ can be made fruitful for this project:

1.1.1 Contentious Dynamics and the Egyptian Uprising

For the most part, investigations of what is varyingly called the protest-repression nexus (Carey 2006), the mobilisation-repression nexus (e.g., Davenport 2005; Johnston 2012; Tilly 2005), the repression-dissent nexus (e.g., Koopmans 2005; Lichbach 1987; Moss 2014b; Tilly 2005), or the dissent/coercion nexus (e.g., Francisco 2005; Karklins 1987) rarely transcended the study of aggregate accounts. Mark Lichbach (1987, 288) was early in critiquing how attempts to establish causality and derive action-reaction models black-boxed the interaction process itself, effectively reducing the study of the protest-repression-nexus to an endless correlation of the total aggregate level of one output (repression) with another (protest). As a result, and with few recent exceptions (della Porta and Tarrow 2012; Moss 2014a; Soudias 2015), the current state of research on broadly consists of two separate strands, with each investigating either of the two sides of the interaction (Earl 2003, 44).

However, the ‘18 days of Tahrir’ illustrated the need to move beyond the uni-directional analysis of contentious dynamics to closely study the patterns of interaction between states and contentious actors on a day-to-day basis. In early 2011, country-wide mass protests led to the fall of Hosni Mubarak. The sudden appearance of mass protests against his authoritarian rule that had been inspired by the unrest in neighbouring Tunisia caught scientists by surprise as it posed a major puzzle for both, movement scholars and area specialist. The grievances of Arab societies caused by the “lingering political, social, and economic crises, which are highlighted in many accounts of the Arab uprisings,” had been known for more than a decade and were widely discussed by scholars (Harders and König 2013, 7). They had fuelled the notion of a supposed Arab exceptionalism. Frederic Volpi (2014, 154) laments that “one would be hard-pressed today to find an account of the Arab uprisings that does not include a lengthy account of the social, economic

and political structures that underpinned the uprisings.”⁴ These old crises of the Arab regimes held little explanatory power for the wave of new protest across the region. In addition, in the run-up to the popular uprisings, neither the cohesion among regime elites, nor the composition and permeability of their polities, nor the capacities of their coercive apparatuses had undergone significant changes. In the light of quite stable political opportunity structures (Tarrow 2011, 76; Meyer 2004), actors and their choices seemed to hold answers to the puzzle of how regime threatening popular protest could erupt in a context of authoritarian contraction.⁵

During the so-called ‘Arab Spring’, it was both, regime agents and mobilising groups that created new windows of opportunity for social transformation in their highly dynamic interaction (Davenport and Moore 2012; Shokr 2015; Harders and König 2013; Ketchley 2014; Volpi and Clark 2019). Particularly in the Egyptian 25 January Revolution, increased mobilisation efforts and the radicalisation of protesters’ demands can be attributed to short-dated interaction effects. When the authorities awakened to the fact that the turnout during the first days of protests was unprecedented in that “for the first time in most protesters’ memory, they outnumbered police” (El-Amrani 2011, 3; see also El Chazli 2018, 150), they hastily shut down cell phone and internet networks across the country in an effort to undermine online mobilising structures. Contrary to its intention, however, this move sparked even more demonstrations—largely by people who had until then abstained from participation, but were now disrupted by the shutdown and dragged into the confrontation (Hassanpour 2011, 28). Anti-regime protests culminated on 28 January 2011, dubbed by activists the *Friday of Rage*. Unable to control the masses police forces eventually withdrew from the streets, ceding the first victory to the protesters on Tahrir square. The ‘18 days of Tahrir’ thus illustrated the need to closely study the patterns of interaction between states and contentious actors on a day-to-day basis. As Jillian Schwedler (2018, 72) has argued, “recognizing routines in protests and policing enables one to better identify a rupture in those practices.”

They also exemplify how repression can, at times, backfire on its agents, and have even a catalysing effect on mobilisation (see Holmes 2012; Ketchley 2014; Shokr 2015). The Egyptian uprising holds proof that particularly the perceived

⁴ For a comprehensive overview over the field see Charles Kurzman (2012). For a review of the debate on the supposed ‘Arab exceptionalism’ see Morten Valbjørn and Frederic Volpi (2014).

⁵ This is in line with recent reflections on the applicability of social movement theories to non-western authoritarian contexts have come to the conclusion that in highly repressive contexts even opening opportunity structures do not necessarily facilitate mobilisation (Alimi 2009; Beinin and Vairel 2011).

violation of moral codices (e.g., of a people's dignity) is bound to inspire antagonism (see Khosrokhavar 2018, 169 ff). Many works support this line of argument, ultimately suggesting that any state conduct could possibly mobilise opposition if it is only considered largely illegitimate or disproportionate with regard to their expectation of how authorities should behave (e.g., Almeida 2003; Hess and Martin 2006; Opp and Roehl 1990). Yet, how is it that something comes to be perceived as unjust, illegitimate, disproportionate, or abusive by a critical mass? How does this perception translate into action? This link between what happens, how the people make meaning of it, and how this meaning is acted upon is largely understudied.⁶ The bulk of literature on contentious dynamics has focused on the material features of repression and collective action. Much less has been said about the interpretation of events on the ground or the discursive subjectivation processes by which, as Farhad Khosrokhavar (2018, 160) has put it, "what was accepted as a sad fact of life becomes unbearable due to heightened indignation, shared and amplified."⁷

1.1.2 *The Tahrir Revolution as the Result of a Hegemonic Crisis*

Few studies have acknowledged that the popular protest of the so-called 'Arab Spring' was situated in an "imaginative terrain" (Chalcraft 2014, 179) and hence, if it was to be adequately understood, attention had to be given to the role of symbolic contestation for the trajectory of mobilisation. Significantly, those that do, build largely upon a Gramscian reading of the revolutionary events of 2011. This is evident in their attempts to account for the observation that, during the '18 days of Tahrir', social subjects interpreted the world around them in a political way and subsequently acted on these interpretations "in a disruptive, transgressive, and collective fashion" (Chalcraft 2014, 159; see also Chalcraft, John and Noorani 2007, 1–19; Pratt 2015). In this sense, 25 January 2011 represented a rupture that expanded the horizon for the thinkable and utterable enabled counter-hegemonic forces to come to the fore and challenge to the dominant superstructure. Gramsci has referred to this superstructure as "hegemony" (Gramsci 1971, 161).⁸

⁶ In line with Richter (2017), meaning is defined here as a discursively constructed cultural value, causal narrative or shared sense of 'knowing why'.

⁷ Learning on post-structuralist notions of collective identity, subjectivation in the context of collective mobilisation is defined in this thesis as the discursive articulation of togetherness, a sense of belonging, or a political collectivity to identify with within an antagonist political struggle. As Khosrokhavar (2018, 163) has argued, subjectivation processes open up the possibility of individuals asserting themselves as "a person who participates in politics through street protests."

⁸ The concept denotes a consensus on the naturalness of existing relations of power, backed by the coercion of the state apparatus.

The 25 January uprising took place in a context of static authoritarianism. What was commonly referred to as the Mubarak-regime effectively represented an authoritarian hegemonic block with remarkable stability. Aside from the presidency, it included the armed forces, domestic intelligence, as well as members of the country's **business elite**. **For several decades, this block was sustained and its dominance over the country's political affairs naturalised by a hegemonic national 'modernisation' discourse** (see Pratt 2012). After the demise of the grand ideologies (Anti-Colonialism, Pan-Arabism, Socialism) that had supplied legitimacy regimes in the region this discourse relied largely on a social contract of informality (Harders 2009, 300). This promised Egyptian citizens a certain degree of social welfare and a fair share of the economic development in exchange for a waiver of political representation and social demands and their political acquiescence of the status quo.⁹ The legitimacy of this informal social contract, however, had eroded in the years prior to the uprising as a consequence of a **massive social "transformation without transition"** (Harders 2015, 148). These social dynamics manifested in the shape of demographic change, increasing digitalisation (and thus enhanced popular access to information), unequal economic development, and the proliferation of civic mobilising structures (see also Chalcraft 2014; 2016; Joya 2011). Since the late 1980s, this erosion was additionally catalysed by the implementation of economic liberalisation policies and the *tawrih* [succession] crisis. Roberto Roccu (2013a; see also Achcar 2013, chaps 1, 2; Hanieh 2013) argues that neoliberal economic reforms promoted the emergence of a capitalist oligarchy at the expense of social cohesion and the integrity of the ruling hegemonic bloc. Neoliberal reform may have been a necessary structural condition to deliver on the promises of economic prosperity. However, the implementation of reforms effectively impoverished and alienated vast strata of the Egyptian population, eroding **the political hegemony that hitherto sustained Egypt's ruling class**. As Brecht de Smet has argued, **one of the reasons why Mubarak's regime fell was because his neoliberal business cronies failed to gather enough consent for their project** (De Smet 2016; 2015). Andrea Teti and Gennaro Gervasio (2011, 323) come to a similar conclusion:

In short, having sacrificed remnants of its populist revolutionary legitimacy on the altar of its narrower self-interest, and alienating increasingly large swathes of the popu-

⁹ If anything, after the fall of the bipolar world order, of the grand old ideologies only political Islam and its notion of Islamic unity were still able to inspire popular support and establish legitimacy for its champions. It is thus no coincidence that, precisely for this reason, Islamist movements have been among the most suppressed political actors in the region (even if to varying degrees and at times in conjunction with their co-optation) as they represented the greatest cultural challenge to the incumbent autocratic regimes' legitimacies.

lation in the process, the ruling elite found it impossible to compensate politically for its economic choices.

At the same time, alternative visions that could have been incorporated by the regime to reform the incumbent governance culture thus reinvigorating the hegemonic order could not be expressed publicly given the tightly controlled political space and the severe limitations in freedom of speech. As a consequence, a counter-hegemonic culture developed only in the shape of several alternative political grassroots-projects. Their claims remained primarily confined to the private sphere or the few pockets of political activism that were tolerated by the ‘Mubarakist’ security state. Until the 2011 uprising, with the notable but short-lived (2005-2007) exception of *Kefaya* (Chalcraft 2014, 162), most of these discourses were unable to travel beyond the boundaries of these secluded counter-publics. Thus, such discourses failed to resonate among Egyptians in a way that could have challenged the hegemonic social order. Recourse to the repressive apparatus effectively prevented the widening gap between Egyptian society and its ossified regime from being addressed in the public sphere. In the long-term, however, the dissonance between the hegemonic superstructure that meant to legitimise and naturalise the exclusionary rule of an elitist clique (see Roll 2010), aggravated the latent crisis of legitimisation (Harders 2013; Herrera and Mirshak 2018) laying the ground for the urban middle-class revolt of 2011. As Chalcraft (2014, 165) argues, **in 2010, the governing regime was factually a case of “dominance without hegemony—a situation in which coercion outweighed consent in the political order at large.”** The performative disruption of the tacit hegemonic consensus of the Mubarak era through the first protest marches on 25 January 2011, in this view, became the tipping point that brought the latent crisis to the fore. According to Nicola Pratt (2015, 46), it demonstrated that **“Egyptians rejected the domination and coercion of Mubarak’s regime and that the latter had lost its hegemony over a large part of society.”** Similarly, Chalcraft (2014, 175) contends that the sight of demonstrators overpowering riot police across the country and exhausted policemen deserting their posts effectively signalled that **“even the regime’s instruments of domination—as opposed to its long-defunct forms of hegemony –were now vulnerable.”**

As the symbolic ‘barrier of fear’ crumbled, empowering disenfranchised Egyptians to speak their minds about long-held grievances and voice their demands, the Tahrir uprising effectively triggered a proliferation of countless new **competing political projects with contending visions for the country’s political future** (see Wessel 2017, chap. 3). By debunking the hollow protectionist rhetoric of the Mubarak regime, it effectively became not only a precedent for new forms

of social mobilisation that would dominate the following ‘18 days of Tahrir’, and the months to come. It was also a box-opener for contesting hegemony through a “new political language” of revolt (Filali-Ansary 2012) that emphasised personal and collective freedom, human dignity, social justice and political self-determination over statist conceptions of centralised and authoritarian ruling for the common good. During these expressions of resistance, according to Tristan Smaldone (2015), “a particular social imaginary was generated, a symbolic identity, forming around the unified position of alterity.” Bridging political divides by drawing the ultimate antagonist frontier in Egypt’s political struggle not between different social or ideological factions, but between ‘the people’ and ‘the regime’, this discourse allowed political groups and their respective mobilising goals to re-emerge which had been largely repressed or discredited in the public sphere thus far. Moreover, it triggered political subjectivation processes that “transformed passive moods into active emotions that promote action, in particular, social protest” (Khosrokhavar 2018, 160).

1.1.3 Political Subjectivation and New Contentious Alliances

These political subjectivation processes enabled what Roberto Roccu (2013b) has referred to as “embryonic forms of alliance between the dispossessed and the discontented.” Significantly, the Egyptian 25 January Revolution has been attributed by many authors to this successful alliance formation—not only between the mobilised streets and the elites within state institution, such as the military (Barany 2011; Nepstad 2011; Roll 2016), but also between various oppositional groups in a process of cross-movement mobilisation that blurred former social and ideological divides (Beissinger, Jamal, and Mazur 2015; Durac 2015; Goldstone 2011; Harders and König 2013). This diagnosis ties in with the experience of social movement studies in other regions of the world, where scholars also identified the emergence of cross-class and cross-movement coalitions as a precondition for successful mass mobilisations against authoritarianism and an active precursor for almost all popular-driven revolutions in the 20th century (Goldstone 2009; Foran and Goodwin 1993; Goldstone 2011; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010). This process of coalition-forming was not ad-hoc but built on prior groundwork (Carnau and Vairel 2015; Beinlin and Vairel 2011; Clarke 2011; El-Ghobashy 2011). Mark Beissinger, Amaney Jamal and Kevin Mazur (2015, 2) have shown how, across the Arab world, different regime strategies vis-à-vis domestic socio-demographic and political pressures had laid the foundation for contentious coalitions in the run-up to the 2011 Arab uprisings by creating “sites of heightened grievance and configurations of opposition mobilising structures.” In Egypt, these sites gave rise to for-

mal organisation and mobilising structures which were tested, for instance, in the *Kefaya* campaign of 2005 (see El-Mahdi 2009), but they also promoted the spread of informal ties and networks which Asef Bayat (2010) has referred to as the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary.” These long-term developments provided the parameters for coalition building in the Egyptian case. Yet, as Gilbert Achcar (2013, 151) has stressed, until 2011 the desolate state of organised civil society gave little hope for cross-class collective action.

In effect, the emergence of objective structural grievances, social movement studies inform us, is rarely enough to precipitate eventful sequences of collective action that actuate a revolution. Only the emergence of new actors which offensively articulated the unfavourable status quo in their resistance discourses as a legitimacy crisis of their rulers (Harders 2013, 21) provided the subjective factor that triggered mobilisation potentials and the emergence of a new coalition of contenders. The shared experience of victimisation by state repression then galvanised oppositional identity during the 25 January uprising, while joint participation in demonstrations created personal bonds and enabled sustained mobilisation by a coalition of diverse movements (Harders and König 2013). Many of these coalitions materialised only in the encounter with the repressive force of the state. Atef Said (2014) has argued that particularly the case of Egypt seems to illustrate that “**how coalitions are weakened or strengthened, or the very choice of making coalitions, are shaped by and occur in response to state actions or control in the political sphere.**” These coalition building processes were tantamount to the success of 2011 as the diversity of protesters provided political legitimacy to the uprisings and offered some protection by increasing the repression costs for security forces. Through their collective actions, the mobilised people then produced their own windows of opportunity for social transformation (Kurzman 2012).

1.2 Situating this Project

It is at the juncture of these three strands of literature—contingency, hegemonic contestation, and political subjectivation—that this dissertation project is situated: As key for understanding the highly volatile mobilisation dynamics in an era of authoritarian contraction, I propose to investigate the competing and often partly overlapping discourses and meaning ascriptions that emerged and became sedimented as a product of Egypt’s early post-revolutionary struggles after the fall of Husni Mubarak and that have become re-signified, incorporated and re-appropriated by several contentious actors in their struggle for normative discursive hegemony since the military coup of 2013. Subscribing to the critical paradigm and building on the works of Cilja Harders, Nicola Pratt and others (see

Harders 2015; De Smet 2014a; 2016; 2015) and others, the contentious struggle in Egypt is conceived of as a struggle over hegemony. Accordingly, the investigation thus focuses on what Stuart Hall has referred to as the “politics of signification” (Hall 1982, 64), that is, the competing meaning that the contenders in this struggle construct about specific events. This study aims to illustrate how they reinforce or challenge prevailing relations of power with the end to influence the conditions of possibility for mobilisation: depending on which of many competing narratives about contentious events prevails, thus potentially achieving a hegemonic character, police forces will, for example, adopt different postures when facing disorders, and protesters will evaluate their available choices of repertoire differently. Depending on which rival interpretation about contentious events prevails in public and is thus able to affect people’s “hearts and minds” (Pratt 2015, 46), actions may inspire backlash or create new discursive opportunities for further repression.

Accordingly, I suggest studying the outcome of the constantly fought discursive battles over interpretation in Egypt after the 2013 military coup and systematically trace their effects on the action choices of contending groups (e.g., their repertoires, their mobilising strategies, their proneness to violence, or their composition). I argue that contested perceptions and interpretations of the dynamics of contention ‘on the ground’, captured in the post-structuralist notion of *articulation*, are crucial in order to account for variances in the reaction of social movements to regime action, and of potentially mobilisable publics to both protest and repression.

The Egyptian case is a prodigious one to study in this regard. Over several episodes of contention related to the construction of legitimacy for political power, it very much illustrates the role of the symbolic and the intervention of the discursive sphere into processes of both, political mobilisation and state repression. At the same time, the Egyptian case provides an opportunity to analyse these processes in a highly contested political realm with a number of collective actors frantically interacting with each other in shifting alliances and political constellations. The challenge of this case study, accordingly, lies in the volatility of the competing and often partly overlapping discourses that have emerged as a product of Egypt’s early post-revolutionary struggles. These meaning ascriptions, rather than becoming sedimented, have been re-signified, incorporated and re-appropriated by several actors in their struggle for normative discursive hegemony since the 2013 coup.

Considering the case of Egypt, I thus investigate first, how collective actions and state responses to mobilisation have been represented in competing discursive projects by political contenders after the military coup on 3 July 2013. How have

central themes of Egyptian politics—revolution, nation, dignity, legitimacy—been discursively renegotiated to inform both contentious claim-making or and repression. At the heart of these questions is an outline of the constitutive myth that surrounded the post-coup regime and its effect on the structuration of the field of discursivity. After all, it was a certain symbolism and discourse that empowered the new regime to articulate and implement specific policies that aimed to suppress competing hegemonic projects.

The second complex of questions that guide this inquiry relates to the impact of what William Sewell (1996b) has referred to as “transformative events” on this discursive struggle. The question is here whether certain events can be discerned from the historical sequence of contentious events in Egypt, which managed to dislocate established meaning structures. Did the disruption of hegemonic discourses allow for oppositional subject formation and the articulation of alternative discursive projects? And finally, but most importantly, what did this mean for contentious politics: What is the impact of shifts in the discursive architecture of contentious politics on opportunities for political repression and/or social mobilisation? Can the subversion of hegemonic discourses produce new relations that favour coalition building and cross-movement mobilisation, change the perception of political opportunities, and effectively created the conditions for social transformation?

In its attempt to answer these questions, this project is inspired by and seeks to integrate both, works on the dynamics of contention as well as the rather post-structuralist ‘Essex School’ of discourse analysis. The realisation that the relationship between protest and repression is a dynamic one that works both ways (i.e., in which causal effects can be identified on both sides), which defines the conceptual perspective of this research project, is much indebted to the works of Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007): instead of ascribing the success or failure of protest cycles to structural conditions, unilinear ascriptions, or the idiosyncratic features of a given protest movement, I follow these authors and their ‘contentious politics’ research programme in their conceptualisation of protest cycles as the results of complex interactive processes on the micro-level. On the other hand, I depart from the tradition of social movement studies in my conception of the discursive architecture of contentious politics to adopt a post-foundational perspective on discourse (Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Laclau 2005; Howarth and Torfing 2005; Howarth, Norval, and Stavrakakis 2000). By emphasising language’s constitutive aspect, such a perspective helps to recall that the meaning attached to material events have immediate and tangible real-world effects, as they constitute the boundaries

of responses by contending actor. My mixed qualitative analysis of textual communication, semiotic representation, and physical interaction, in short: of the competing hegemonic projects of political articulation by the Egyptian regime and its contenders, is guided by the premise that contentious claim making is not only influenced by or influential on public discourse. Public discourse, instead, constitutes the conditions of possibility for social claims. Changing discourses about physical events accordingly provide the context for interpreting the diverging findings on the interactional effects of states and contenders on each other.

1.3 Outline

This thesis consists of ten chapters. Of these, two chapters are concerned with developing a theoretical framework and outlining the methodological choices of this dissertation. This entails a meso-level approach to the study of contention, a post-structuralist framework of analysis, and a subscription to the critical paradigm; one chapter deals with epistemological concerns and issues of positionality; and five chapters are of an empirical and analytical nature.

Structurally, the first chapter after this introduction (Chapter 2) introduces the conceptual framework and theoretical underpins, embedding this paper in the broader research tradition of social movement studies. First, it introduces the idea of social mobilisation as a population of contentious events. By taking such a social interactionist and contextualist perspective, this case study compliments Charles Tilly's call for more refined evidence on contentious performances that, "look inside individual episodes to analyse the interplay of actors, interactions, and contentious claims" (Tilly 2008, 35). Decomposing the unity of social movements beyond the categories of means and ends relocates the locus back to the individual level. As Dieter Rucht (2013; 2017) has correctly stated, 'the social movement' cannot act.¹⁰ This thesis, therefore, conceives of social movements in terms of populations of collective action events (Della Porta 2011) and systems of relations between movement components (Diani 2013) whose political subjectivities, contentious performances and discourses are deeply embedded in their his-

¹⁰ Instead, agency is situated at the level of movement components, between individual, SMOs, and networks of activism. Strictly speaking, the analyst can thus never claim to grasp the actions of a movement, but only observe visible traits of how its components coact during discrete collective action events. Rucht has suggested the notion of concentric circles as an image for the structuration of the ecology of contentious politics which movements are situated in. Like in a dynamic meteorological chart of high- and low-pressure systems these circles are affected by constant changes, contingent overlaps, and continuous processes of convergence or differentiation (Rucht in keynote at Xmovements conference, 5.4.2017, Bochum). And like these pressure systems, movements may produce quite different outcomes – good or bad weather, social change, disruption or stagnation.

torical context. Building on this thought, the second section deals with what could be termed a ‘constructivist’ approach to social movements. Drawing on the works of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (above all, Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Laclau 2005; Howarth, Norval, and Stavrakakis 2000; Howarth and Torfing 2005), it illustrates how discourse theory, by accounting for both linguistic meaning and the material event, can contribute to an encompassing theorisation of the mobilisation-repression-nexus.

The next chapter (Chapter 3) deals with methodological concerns, covers the sources used in this investigation and presents the embedded research design of this thesis. Conceiving of **discourses as a struggle at the level of signifiers** allows for a methodology that combines protest event analysis, a tested method from the toolkit of social movement studies, and discourse analysis in a nested research design. Particularly, it is suggested that the construction of antagonisms in social movement discourses can be investigated by resorting to the dimensions that framing theory has identified as the relevant traits in a **movement’s political communication**. These traits provide hints to its collective identity and its perception of the political struggle. The chapter demonstrates how discourse theoretical considerations (still eking out a niche existence in social movement studies) and the framing approaches (in turn, chastised as reductionist by critical theorists) interrelate. It, therefore, presents an integrated approach to the study of contentious politics which—30 years after the introduction of the framing perspective into the study of social movement—is still lacking. For the sake of reproducibility, the chapter furthermore details the methods-mix employed for empirical analysis, namely a combination of protest event data, discourse analysis and interviews; it discusses source selection and coding procedures, and it describes the procedure by which discourses are visualised as semantic networks in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

Before engaging with the empirical analysis, a final chapter in the first part of this book (Chapter 4) deals with questions of positionality, the conditioned nature of writing about protest in Egypt, and the situatedness of this particular PhD-project within an effective personal history. Accounts of revolution are necessarily situated and partial: **“What defines a revolution—where it can be located on a calendar and a map, what it includes, who speaks for it, the things it seeks to change—is never a neutral question”** (Shenker 2016, 11). This is also true for research about revolutions. Taking the situatedness of academic knowledge production seriously, this chapter contextualises the origins of my research questions and applies critical scrutiny to the interpretations of social reality deduced from them.

The empirical part of this book begins by retracing the chain of events that led

to the mass uprising on 30 June 2013 and the ouster of President Mursi. These events which, I argue, can be interpreted as disruptive, transformative events that **caused an irrevocable rift in the hegemonic social order**. This period of Egypt's post-revolutionary history has been the subject of much discussion by scholars of political Islam investigating the trajectory of one of the largest Islamic movements in the modern world, from its sudden rise to power to its quick demise and near extinction (El-Amrani 2013), as well as by others assessing the **impact of Mursi's short rule on the country's political transition** (N. J. Brown 2013; Stein 2012). More recently it has attracted the attention of social movement scholars, with several authors reconstructing the dynamics of contention leading up to the 2013 military coup and those following it (Biagini 2017; Grimm and Harders 2018; Ketchley 2017a). While methodologically diverse, these accounts agree that **Mursi's presidency had been riddled with conflict from the outset**.¹¹ This chapter explores how this conflict unfolded, polarised society and catalysed a clash between **two competing hegemonic projects which culminated in Mursi's deposition by the military on 3 July 2013**.

The next two empirical chapters (Chapter 6 and 7) then explore the dynamics of contention in Egypt directly after the 2013 military coup, above all, the wave of Islamist mobilisation by the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters which **came to be known as the 'Anti-Coup'-campaign**. Unlike the 25 January Revolution that has been discussed in extenso, the protests staged by the National Coalition for the Support of Legitimacy (NASL)—commonly known as Anti-Coup Alliance—have been scarcely investigated. This is partly due to the rapid authoritarian regression and the restoration of autocratic modes of governance in Egypt that followed on the contentious dynamics in mid-2013 and drew considerable scholarly attention. Partly it is because the brutal repression that accompanied the protests affected first and foremost demonstrators that could be counted to the Islamist spectrum of Egyptian society. Brutal massacres by state security forces against civilians, such as that of *Rabaa al-Adawiya*, could thus be signified as a reasonable, **albeit failed attempt of Egypt's authorities to confront radical Islamic groups**.

At the same time, the contentious dynamics in the summer of 2013 can be considered as one of the most formative episodes for Egyptian politics of the last decades, equalling only that of 25 January in recent years. After all, it enabled the emergence of what has today become one of the most brutal authoritarian regimes not only in the region but across the globe. An interlude chapter (Chapter 8) thematises this autocratic restoration in Egypt in the aftermath of the 2013 military

¹¹ For a summary of Mursi's first year in office see <http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/29146>.

coup. It describes, above all, how a new hegemonic discourse emerged in Egypt in which national defence and the fight against terrorism have replaced self-determination and civilian rule as the central nodal signifiers. This discourse effectively allowed for a rehabilitation of the armed forces as representatives of the **people's will and their inclusion into a new hegemonic bloc, an alliance of political forces with the ability to exert power through consensus, not only coercion** (Gramsci 1971, 365 f).

The contentious episode discussed in the next chapter (Chapter 9) shows, however, that the post-coup **regime's** very reliance on a nationalist discourse for legitimising their actions, at the same time, sowed the seeds for new resistance. It investigates how the transfer of the Egyptian archipelago of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia in early 2016 became a catalyst for oppositional subject formation and the emergence of a strange bedfellow coalition under conditions of extreme repression. Drawing on another protest event catalogue and an analysis of the competing discourses on the protests, the chapter illustrates how the 'Egypt is not for sale'-campaign [*Hamlat-masr mish li-l-bi'a*] **undermined the regime's nationalist lingo, thus changing the perception of opportunities for mobilisation and creating the conditions for innovative coalitions. Placing its campaign in the trajectory of the Egyptian revolution, the coalition established solidarity between liberals, leftists, and the nationalist youth who had so far toed the regime's line.** The final chapter (Chapter 10) discusses the overall empirical findings critically in light of ongoing theoretical debates on the power of nationalism, and it reflects on their limitations.

Ultimately, this dissertation can thus be considered an attempt to map both **the performative and the discursive arena of Egypt's post-revolutionary contentious politics.** It includes tracing the unfolding protest dynamics during the above-mentioned contentious episodes in an event database that documents scope and repertoire for the unfolding events. But at the same time, it also includes tracing the effect of contested discourses on protest performance. Thereby, I propose a **new historical narrative of Egypt's post-revolutionary history.** I contend that it has **not been a journey back to square one and a result of the wit of Egypt's elites, the machinations of a deep state, or the structural resilience of authoritarianism.** Instead, I view it as the rise and fall of competing hegemonic projects in a post-revolutionary Egypt which have all risen and then struggled over the question of legitimacy. I thus concur with Nicola Pratt in her assessment that since the 2011 **uprising, "the most significant contest revolves not around institutions or political party programmes, but around conceptions of Egyptian identity"** (Pratt 2015, 44).

2. Theoretical Framework

With its focus on symbolic interaction and contested interpretations of contentious politics, this thesis deals primarily with the discursive architecture that sustains both, state repression and social protest. A discourse is here defined as “a particular way of representing certain aspects of the world, whether physical, social or psychological” (Rear and Jones 2013b, 375). Around physical interactions, such as distinct protest gatherings or the repressive measures taken by security forces on a specific date against the people in the streets, there are always different representations in discourse that compete with each other for meaning. This has been true for Egypt ever since the outbreak of the political struggle in 2011, as Khaled Abdalla (2016, 37) illustrates in his discussion of the shifting fault lines of the revolution: “Is 25 January the anniversary of the revolution, or a day commemorating the police? Did we have two revolutions? Where the events of 30 June 2013 a revolution or a coup? Can the Muslim Brotherhood’s programme be considered ‘secular’? Who killed who on what day? Who is conspiring to destabilise the country? Is it our duty to obey or to challenge?” How these questions are answered by individuals is, and always was, more than a question of representation. According to Pratt (2015, 48), the struggles over the meaning and objectives of the 25 January Revolution represent “struggles over ‘the hearts and minds’ of the Egyptian people and the definition of the future polity.” Due to language’s constitutive aspects, the meanings attached to material events have immediate and tangible real-world consequences. Discourses and the physical events they signify are thus a two-way street, or as Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips (2002, 61, emphasis i.o.) stress, “discourse is a form of social practice which both *constitutes* the social world and is *constituted* by other social practices.” By constituting the boundaries of responses by contending actors, it is significant for the course of events during phases of contention.

The theoretical framework presented in this chapter, due to these considerations, builds a bridge between the discourse theoretical research tradition and the contentious politics research programme. The idea of social mobilisation is understood as a population of contentious events, and thus a ‘constructivist’ approach to social movements. Building on this, it is claimed that movements are not static actors, endowed with certain features and traits that can be inferred based on their ideology, culture, or religious affiliation. They are a product of a contingent and, above all, discursive context. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s theory of discourse attempts to make sense of this relation, investigating the political subjectivation processes that give rise to projects of resistance and, ultimately, social

movements. The particulars of the authors' complex genealogical deconstruction of a Marxist history of ideas are detailed in several chapters of their seminal 'Hegemony and Socialist Strategy' (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 1–78). Rather than retrace these ideas, this chapter elaborates on Laclau and Mouffe's theory in a way that is tailored to the analytical needs of this project, and that interoperates with the basic tenets of social movement theory. Above all, weight is placed on introducing those elements of discourse theory that can be operationalised for the analysis of contentious politics.¹² The theoretical framework resulting from this discussion represents a bridge-building attempt between discourse theoretical and framing approaches.

2.1 Eventful History and Political Opportunities

It is widely recognised in social movement studies, including recent empirical work in the Middle East, that political mobilisations in the context of authoritarianism are highly contingent on political opportunities. Proponents of the political opportunity framework posit that people are most likely to engage in protest when they believe it is ultimately necessary and anticipate the benefits of acting to outweigh those of remaining demobilised. According to a pertinent definition, political opportunities structures (POS) are those “dimensions of the political environment or of change in that environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting expectations for success or failure” (Tarrow 2011, 163). Earlier approaches were notably tilted in their focus on the static components of political opportunities for mobilisation. Among these were the relative openness or closure of institutionalised political system, the stability of elite alignments, the existence of potential **insider elite allies, or the state's capacity and propensity for repression** (Alimi 2009; McAdam 1996; Meyer 2004). However, recent contributions take the volatile and dynamic aspects of opportunity more seriously (for a pertinent discussion of competing approaches see Giugni 2009). The role of symbolic contestation for the formation of collective action has been acknowledged (Giugni et al. 2005; Koopmans and Olzak 2004) and—partly influenced by the Arab uprisings, authors ascribing to the POS paradigm are exploring the role of emotions, identities and, above all, of interpretation (Alimi and Meyer 2011, 476; see also Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Jasper 2011; Pearlman 2013; Volpi and Jasper 2018).

¹² For example, the notion of ubiquitous antagonisms, the theoretical concepts of 'nodal' and 'floating signifiers', the dialectic of a 'logics of difference' and a 'logics of equivalence', and the idea of 'moments' of articulation operating discourse.

Prior works that relativised the structural determinism of POS by stressing their volatile, relational and constructed nature served as vantage points for these studies. Foregrounding the short-term interactional effects between regimes and contenders, above all scholars of political violence and repression (a.o., Della Porta 2014c; Earl and Soule 2010; Francisco 2004; Hess and Martin 2006; Jasper and Poulsen 1995; McCarthy and McPhail 2005) illustrated how windows for mobilisation are often situational and emerge spontaneously and unexpectedly from contentious interaction. Hanspeter Kriesi (2004, 79) notes that “episodes of contentious interaction are likely to modify the relevant configuration of actors and, thus, to change the specific opportunities for future options for collective action.” Likewise, Della Porta (2011) has argued that in “eventful times” movements can also create opportunities for themselves or other movements that follow. In the work of both authors reverberates Sewell’s conception of an eventful temporality of protest, which also constitutes the conceptual backbone of this thesis (McAdam and Sewell 2001; Sewell 1996b; 1996a).¹³ It highlights how social structures, thought durable and resilient, can effectively be transformed by contingent acts of resistance and thus as the result of exercises of collective agency. Collective action events are thus to be seen as moments of structuring, which are “punctual and discontinuous rather than cyclical, linear, or continuous” (McAdam and Sewell 2001, 102).¹⁴

The advantage in conceiving of movements as populations of events lies in its ability to symptomatically also capture processes of mobilisation that do not conform to the classical image of a social movement organisation engaging in a campaign. Furthermore, adopting such a perspective avoids homogenising contentious actors by investigating them through essentialist analytical categories (e.g., *the youth*, *the workers*, *the Islamists*, etc.). These categories often invoke a certain historical agency (e.g., of the working class in revolutions) that may not be empirically warranted for the investigated case. Moreover, in empirical reality, these

¹³ In their essay ‘It’s About Time: Temporality in the Study of Social Movements and Revolutions’ McAdam and Sewell (2001) identify four different temporal rhythms that each grasp different aspects of social movement and revolution: 1) cultural epochs/master templates; 2) long-term change processes that destabilise existing power relations and afford groups new organisational bases for mobilisation; 3) protest cycles, which denote the temporally narrow and most active phase of social movements; and 4) transformative events, that is, and unique moments of structuring and collective creativity. McAdam and Sewell ultimately argue for a more event-centred approach as the most viable platform for engaging with temporalities in social movements.

¹⁴ Sewell recognised a necessity to relocate the focus of historical sociology to the analysis of events, making a head start with his own study of the publication of Abbé Sieyès’ ‘Qu’est que c’est le tiers état?’ and the storming of the Bastille in Paris on 14 July 1789 – two events that marked the outset of a most decisive contentious episode in European history, the French Revolution (see Sewell 1996a).

camps are never static, nor strictly demarcated. As moments of structuring, events bring together in a movement very disparate groups of people. Even in the absence of pre-existing organisation and mobilising structures, in fact, events create a specific temporal structure for prefigurative movements. Especially broader mobilisations during mass events are better understood as “assemblages of diverse people and groups that in an exceptional moment come to apprehend a common goal” (Schwedler and Harris 2016, 4). Thus, we can also conceive of events as harmonisation of individualised struggles, a synchronisation of attention, and a synchronisation of different temporal rhythms of historical development (on the idea of temporal agency in this synchronisation see Kavada 2017; 2016).

The Arab Spring became a prime example for this process, demonstrating the necessity to move beyond structuralist and taxonomic accounts of mass protest in what Lawson (2016) has referred to as the “fourth generation” of revolutionary theory. Dovetailing with Beissinger’s discussion of the critical junctures leading to the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1989, the Arab Spring that is often portrayed as a “structurally overdetermined drama” (Beissinger 2009, 335), in fact, depended on countless acts of contention whose outcomes were hardly predetermined, in that each event altered the “constellation of possibilities in the future” (Alimi and Meyer 2011, 477). Della Porta (2014b, 29–32) has drawn parallels between this eventful character of the upheaval in the Arab World and the popular uprisings in the GDR and former Czechoslovakia. It was in their dynamic interaction that innovative coalitions of contenders produced relations that favoured mobilisation and transformation. In both protest waves, she notes, social mobilisation “fuelled itself: it did not so much respond to emerging political opportunities as it created and broadened them in the struggle” (Della Porta 2014b, 191).

Her comparative historical approach to the analysis of the Arab Uprisings as a process of “democratisation from below” (Della Porta 2014b, 14) is one of the few attempts to establish bridges between the disciplinary perspectives of transition and democratisation studies on the one hand, and those of social movement scholars on the other. Evidently, the prognosis of democratisation in Egypt has been disproven by the bleak political reality of a successful counter-revolution and a protest driven ‘autocratisation from below’. The merit of Della Porta’s analysis, however, lies in her dynamic conception of social mobilisation as more than a context variable for elite decision making (for a critique of this essentialising conception of the mobilised people see Grimm 2013a, 9). She and others have stressed how it was effectively a sequence of responsive events that had a transformative impact on mobilisation in Egypt. These dynamics provided the trigger for translating long-existing structural conditions for cross-class and cross-ideological mo-

bilisation into effective collective action coalitions. In a similar vein, Harders (2012) and others (Asseburg and Wimmen 2017; Della Porta 2014b; Harders and König 2013; Ketchley 2014; 2017a; Moss 2014a) have underscored that the puzzle of successful mass mobilisation amid stable authoritarianism can be solved only by adopting a procedural and relational perspective and by focusing on micro-level dynamics, rather than macro level structural shifts. After all, what is conventionally understood as POS underwent little change in the forefront of the 2011 uprisings: neither the cohesion among regime elites, nor the permeability of their polities, nor the capacities of their coercive apparatuses had experienced significant changes. But during the ‘18 days of Tahrir’, authorities and contenders effectively changed the perception about these structures, thus creating new openings themselves.

The analytical thrust of this thesis resonates with this relational paradigm, that is, a conceptualisation of protest cycles as the results of complex interactive processes (e.g., Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou 2012; Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner 2014; Carey 2006; 2009; Della Porta 2014c; Ellefsen 2018; Goodwin and Jasper 2012; Grimm and Harders 2018; Harders and König 2013; Jasper and Duyvendak 2015; McCarthy and McPhail 2005; Volpi and Jasper 2018). From this analytical position, the trajectory of a protest cycle is not ascribed to structural conditions or to the idiosyncratic features of a given protest movement—e.g., the individual motivation and ideological predisposition of a mobilised social group. Instead, protest cycles are viewed as products of complex processes of interaction between authorities, coalition partners, competitors, and the public. Charles Tilly (2005) has argued that ultimately protest episodes are not activists’ solo-performances. On the contrary, they involve a high degree of social interaction: spectators can become sympathisers or opponents that support or reject protesters’ demands; they can become activists themselves or join forces with the agents of repression. “Looked at more closely, those phenomena resemble complex dances” (Tilly 2005, 222) and as such, they ought to be investigated in a dynamic, multidimensional and multidirectional research design.

Put more simply: “to explain the impact of state coercion on protest, we ought to take into account the effect protest has on state coercion; and in order to analyse the impact of protest on state repression, we ought to take into account the effect repression has on protest” (Carey 2009, 58). Della Porta seconds this thought in her poignant appeal for a relational approach to the study of clandestine political violence and repression referring, in Luis Fernandez’ words, to it as a “dance” between challengers of authority, power and privilege, and those who seek to retain and extend it (Della Porta 2014c, 165; see also Fernandez 2008, 171). The

dance metaphor reverberates crucial insights from McAdam's early works on the civil rights movement in the United States. In his study McAdam (1999, xiv) writes:

If it takes two to tango, it takes at least two to 'contend'. That is, contentious politics always involve the mobilisation of at least two groups of actors. We should be equally concerned with the processes and settings within which both sets of actors mobilise and especially interested in the unfolding patterns of interaction between the various parties to contention.

His seminal collaboration with Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (McAdam and Tarrow 2011; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 1996; 2001; see also Tilly and Tarrow 2007; della Porta and Tarrow 2012; Tarrow 2006; 2012) have been particularly influential in introducing the idea of social protests as dynamic and relational phenomena. As a result, social protest, as well as grievances, ideological programs and the framing of movements, evolved. Gradually they came to be regarded as the products of dynamic interactions between contenders, authorities and the political public—interactions that could be studied by investing the iterative sequences of discrete events that constitute the pulse of a protest cycle.

2.1.1 Transformative Events

But not all events in these sequences are equal: As originally conceived by McAdam and Sewell, events may be thought of as “unique happenings, full of accident, contingency, and sudden, unexpected transformations” (Tarrow 2001, 10; see McAdam and Sewell 2001, 100–102). They find both, commonalities between events during revolutionary times and during the conventional temporal registers of social movements. But they are careful to underscore the importance of few particular historic events, lamenting that sociological analysts of social movements and revolutions had so far left the analysis of these events to historians. According to McAdam and Sewell, it is during these events that we can observe “concentrated moments of political and cultural creativity when the logic of historical development is reconfigured by human action” (McAdam and Sewell 2001, 112). Stretching the concept of eventful history further, in her study of civil strife in Italy during the late 1960s, Donatella della Porta has also stressed that some specific forms of action or campaigns have a particularly high degree of ‘eventfulness’. This means that they cannot be undone and unthought, propelling an impression of liminality. At these critical junctures, the exceptional moment “is seen as requiring exceptional commitment” (Della Porta 2014c, 178), which leads to the rise of new forms of action. For instance, in Italy in the late 1960s, extra-parliamentary left-wing activists remembered feeling as if they were living in a historic moment. Certain events then became turning points for how this historic moment was to be

read: after the neo-fascist massacre at Piazza Fontana in 1969 and with the proof that the Italian intelligence service had helped protect the assassins, the state became the “state of the massacre” (Della Porta 2014c, 169). In a more recent article, della Porta has discussed the Gezi protests on the night of 27 May 2013 in Istanbul, the 25 January 2011 Tahrir occupation, the sit-in at Puerta del Sol in Madrid on 1 May 2011, as well as the 31 March 2016 *Nuit debout* camp at the Parisian Place de La République as similar critical momentum for subsequent mobilisation (Della Porta 2018, 2; 2016, 205, 305).

McAdam and Sewell have captured these crucial turning points in the history of social movements that dramatically increase or decrease mobilisation in their notion of “transformative events” (McAdam and Sewell 2001, 101; see also Della Porta 2008, 30; Hess and Martin 2006, 249; Sewell 1996a). Transformative events, they argue, are usually public and mediatised and thus widely visible. Becoming part of the cultural stock of a movement, they provide reference points for tactical evaluation, and they create new possibilities for framing. These highly symbolic events can thus become resources for identity formation, recruitment, meaning-making, and—ultimately—backlash mobilisation (Jasper and Poulsen 1995, 497f; Olesen 2009, 26). McAdam has described the processes of mobilisation which are set in motion by insurgents recognising, manipulating and instrumentalising discrete transformative events as “critical dynamics” (McAdam 1999, 174), due to their decisive impact on the trajectory of contention.

The idea of a transformative event is that of a short-term temporality that opens a new temporal register wherein “a new future becomes possible, a new founding” (Schwedler 2016). Time becomes fateful because it comes to be seen as “irreversible, in the sense that an action, once taken, or an event, once experienced, cannot be obliterated” (Sewell 2009, 6). Usually heralding a cascade of temporally compressed contentious events, these key events are both unique in their underlying dynamics and their transformative potential. This is precisely what also Mark Beissinger (2009; 2002) highlights when he refers to the unfolding of a “thickened” history: **In his discussion of the waves of nationalist mobilisation that catalysed the collapse of the USSR he acknowledges the importance of structural and institutional windows and constraints for contention, especially in providing the fertile grounds for collective expressions of dissent. However, events consequently often assume a life of their own, altering these windows and constraints and encouraging people to mobilise in unexpected ways.**

Transformative events such as the taking of the Bastille explored by McAdam and Sewell exert a transformative effect on people as they created “hitherto unimagined categories of political action” (Tarrow 2001, 106). They also played a key

role in the uprisings across the MENA region. Jillian Schwedler has argued that the initial acts of the uprisings—in spite of the idiosyncratic differences between the various cases of mass protest across the region—were akin in their symbolism and effect to such transformative protest events as the taking of the Bastille or the **Montgomery Bus Boycott**: “**Just as taking the Bastille helped transform the self-understandings of French subjects into citizen, the early days of the Arab uprisings were necessary to make imaginable actually thinkable**” (Schwedler 2016). When 26-year old Mohamed Bouazizi set himself aflame on 17 December 2010 in the town of Sidi Bouzid, his self-immolation became a transformative event that “**sparked the fire in millions like him**” (Chatterji 2013, 96). In the Egyptian case, in turn, the torture and the killing of the Alexandrian teenager Khaled Said in late 2010 by police officers (Della Porta 2014b, 101), became a transformative event. Not only was Khaled Said a recurrent image referred to during all kinds of protests against state violence in 2011, but it also served as triggers for a massive backlash driving the number of protesters in new heights. As a reporter who covered the 2011 Tahrir protests in Cairo, Jack Shenker has vividly described this transformative moment in a piece for the New York Times. Revisiting and comparing his personal Tahrir experience with **John Reed’s legendary chronic of Russia’s 1917 October Revolution** he resumes:

Across time, place and context, revolutions occur when a whiff of possibility appears, a broadening of horizons, tangible evidence that the status quo is not immutable. Wherever we are, we are all capable of picking up that scent (Shenker 2017).

What is more, the Arab Spring demonstrates the ability of such transformative events to impact even geographically distant sites. In our globalised world, the transformative event that precipitates a chain of contentious events does not necessarily take place at the time and place where protest manifests. In fact, it can take place in any part of the world. Accordingly, Khaled Said and Mohamed Bouazizi became icons not only in Egypt and Tunisia, but their images and corresponding narratives travelled across borders to enter the cultural stock of local movements in the region and beyond: Miniya Chatterji (2013, 101), for instance, has stressed that the news of an uprising with the objective of achieving freedom and dignity of the Arab people message resonated well with Indian media. Providing strength and legitimacy to local struggles, the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt served as transformative events **for India’s anti-corruption movement**. In a similar vein, Dina El-Sharnouby (2018b) has hinted at the emergence of a new culture of resistance in the Egyptian uprising which connected to and fuelled through its success story a globally shared desire for direct participation in politics. The spatial contagion of transformative events in Egypt became visible in Europe as well: Sarah Kerton (2012) has argued that the Egyptian uprising, especially the successful

defence of the protest camps on Tahrir Square, played a crucial role in initiating and shaping the Occupy movement. Even long after protesters had emptied the square to embark on a shaky institutional transition, the impact and perceived success—the ‘aura’ of Tahrir Square—lasted on for European activists, transforming the forms of what was thinkable and possible in their own spatial present (Kerton 2012, 304).

When it comes to the aftermath of the ‘Arab Spring’, Jannis Grimm and Cilja Harders (2018), Christoph König (2013) and Neil Ketchley (2017a) have explored the decisive impact of transformative events on the trajectory of contention in Egypt, pointing out how they were recurrently followed by “moral shocks” (Jasper and Poulsen 1995, 498; see also Jasper 1997; 1998) which compelled formerly contention averse people to take to the street in large numbers. Often generated by blatant acts of state violence, these moral shocks raised such a sense of public outrage that individuals were mobilised, even in the absence of prior networks of recruitment and although structural conditions were ‘not ripe’ for protest.

For this recurrent unintended consequence of state repression, Ronald Francisco (1995, 263) has coined the term “backlash.” The risk of backlash mobilisation following repression is generally found to increase when repression was applied in a reactive and indiscriminate way against all opponents regardless of their rank (Della Porta 2014c, 169; Khawaja 1993), instead of selectively targeting leading cadres of a movement or agents provocateurs, thus causing the individual costs of participating in a protest to approximate those of non-participation (Carney 2006; M. Hafez 2003; T. D. Mason and Krane 1989). Moreover, backlash becomes likely when the ‘level of repression’, that is, police brutality or the severity of restrictions, surpasses a certain threshold (Alimi 2009; Francisco 2004; Hess and Martin 2006). Prominent examples referred to in the literature as transformative and highly mobilising events are the ‘Bloody Sunday Massacre’ in Northern Ireland, or the ‘Sharpeville Massacre’ in South Africa (Hess and Martin 2006, 251).¹⁵ In turn, during the 25 January Revolution, the vicious attempt by the Mubarak regime to disperse the crowds on Tahrir Square with the help of hired thugs on camelback was such a transformative event. The violent attack on 2 February 2011, recalled as the ‘Battle of the Camel’ during the occupation of Tahrir, strengthened the determination of those defending the square and triggered massive backlash mobilisation (Holmes 2012, 399). These encounters gave rise to “in-

¹⁵ Ronald Francisco, in his seminal article ‘After the massacre’, has compiled a catalogue over some of the largest massacres against protest movements in the 20th century that effected a backlash of protest activities (see Francisco 2004, 109, 121–24).

tense emotions, such as excitement, and strengthened commitment to radical politics” (Della Porta 2008, 172).

Violent events such as massacres have a particularly intense emotional impact on society. However, moral shocks may be triggered by all kinds of structural contradictions and implosions that affect potentially mobilisable actors in that they disrupt the perception of their life world and thus elicit an intense emotional response. As demonstrated over several decades in the literature, for example, environmental catastrophes work as formidable shocks that propel people into action: **by creating an emotionally charged environment that “disrupts routine” they provide an opening for collective action** (see Bergstrand 2018). Moral shocks thus may well transcend the realm of repression (Pearlman 2013; Benski and Langman 2013; see also Benski et al. 2013, 545). **In fact, disruptions of “the quotidian,”** that is, of the taken-for-granted routines and attitudes of everyday life, can be a highly productive force as regards mobilisation (see D. Snow et al. 1998). Large ruptures in the life cycle of social movements are easily recognizable as they are highly visible, **but small ruptures can be equally meaningful and indicate “a pushing of boundaries by defiance of a previously honoured red line, whether done by the security services or by protesters”** (Schwedler 2018, 72).

A recent volume by James Jasper and Frederic Volpi (2018) explores the dynamics of meaning-making on a micro-level. Therein Jillian Schwedler (2018) convincingly argues for a closer study of protest events, not only as a component of a larger protest cycle which helps to piece together a larger study but especially in terms of the meaning that people attribute to them. Methodological nationalism and a macro focus on the larger protest waves or cycles, she contends, have led scholars to overlook the vital question of how meaning is generated by the actors **involved in the protests themselves over the course of even a single event: “What political work is done in the course of a protest or set of protests, and for and by whom?”** (Schwedler 2018, 71). Centring in her analysis on the regularities and ruptures in the micro-practices of the ‘Kaluti protests’ against the Israeli embassy in Jordan she shows how, at times, even small ruptures can become very meaningful events for collective actors. It is when events on the ground are able to affect **people’s hearts and minds that they develop affective power and inspire backlash.**¹⁶

As I demonstrate in this dissertation, the June 2013 “coup-volution” (Hamada

¹⁶ Underscoring the affective nature of eventful protest, recent studies increasingly also stress the emotional intensity of participation in protest events on a personal level. Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper and others have notably described the mobilising mechanism behind this emotional intensity of transformative events in their investigations of ‘passionate politics’ (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; see also Ron Aminzade and McAdam 2001; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2000; Jasper 2011).

2014, 37), the massacres of *Rabaa al-Adawiya* and *Al-Nahda* in mid-August 2013, and the cession of sovereignty over a small Red Sea archipelago constituted transformative events. Each of these events disrupted the assumptions about social life that had been taken for granted in post-revolutionary Egypt. Moreover, each event provided a constitutive myth for social mobilisation and introduced new episodes of contentious interaction between Egypt's regime and its contenders.

2.1.2 *The Symbolic Life of Events*

The creation of “myths and martyrs,” as Donatella della Porta (2006, 161) has described the mobilising mechanism of state violence, however, is not an automatism. Gamson (1992b, 6) reminds us that “there are many political movements that try in vain to activate people who, in terms of some allegedly objective interest, ought to be up in arms.” No matter how passionate and how significant the collective claims and individual commitments of protesters, public manifestations of opposition do not automatically inspire people to join a cause. Equally, even the most brutal and indiscriminate repression does not automatically produce protests. Sometimes, shocking violence may become a “summary symbol” that intensifies meaning in a mobilising effect (Cremer-Schäfer 1992, 24). By contrast, at other times, brutal violence may actually deter dissent and prevent the emergence of an operational coalition of contenders. Either outcome is highly dependent on the discursive embedding of contentious politics. Concrete physical experiences—the tear gas and batons of the police—must be embedded in certain narrative or symbolic structures in order to attribute a certain meaning to them.

For instance, Youssef El Chazli (2018, 140ff) has argued that the abuse and killing of Khaled Said in itself was not an extraordinary event. Torture and police brutality were commonplace in Mubarak's Egypt. Hence there was nothing inherently significant about Said's murder. What made it transformative was that several political players seized the event as a public case to define a political enemy. The murder of the Alexandrian teenager cleft a political chasm between Egypt's people and its police. Beyond the immediately suffered experience, the (re)construction of the event was thus imperative for subsequent mobilisation (Della Porta 2014c, 177). In line with this reasoning, Colin Hay (1996, 424) has argued on a more general level that the effects of political crisis events are always dependent on their discursive mediation: “Crises are accessed in and through perceptions, in and through narratives.” The production and the interpretation (e.g. of both protest and repression) are closely interlinked.

As part of the political power struggle, social movements and regime elites constantly frame protest and repression events with competing meanings in order

to claim moral authority. Several contending versions of ‘what happened’ during contentious events usually co-exist in public discourse. Depending on which of these rival interpretations ‘wins’ over the public sphere (Wisler and Giugni 1999, 171) police forces will, for instance, adopt different postures when facing disorders, and protesters will evaluate their available choices of repertoire differently (Dobratz and Waldner 2012, 50; Grimm and Harders 2018; F. H. Lawson 2004, 95ff). To subvert dominant codes, movements must construct compelling sets of **representations that are able to affect people’s “hearts and minds”** (Koopmans 2005, 161). Only then can events take a life of their own and inspire backlash. The interaction between the state and contenders thus takes place in a discursive ‘arena’ (see Jasper and Duyvendak 2015), and in the material ‘arena’ of the street where police forces shoot their tear gas canisters, and where demonstrators answer with stones and roadblocks.

Social movement scholars have attempted to capture the interpretive processes that operate concurrently to the physical interactions of states and contenders during contentious episodes in the concept of framing. According to this influential strand of social movement research, diverging readings of demonstrators physical interaction with the state emerge from contested frames.¹⁷ Framing works on discourse in a similar fashion as a frame around a picture does (Noakes and Johnston 2005, 2), concurrently highlighting and excluding certain items and features, establishing clearly what is to be taken as relevant in the artistic composition and what as redundant.¹⁸ In essence, framing implies two dimensions: First, it captures the cognitive process through which actors in conflict make sense of the events they witness.

In this sense, the frame is an interpretative schema that “condenses the out-

¹⁷ The framing terminology has profoundly altered the direction of social movement research, complementing and modifying the earlier ‘resource mobilisation’ and ‘political opportunity structure’ approaches by restoring the idea of agency (for a comprehensive review see Benford and Snow 2000; David A. Snow et al. 2014). Thitherto, movement scholars had attempted to explain recruitment and participation in contentious collective action primarily by examining structural and contextual factors to social mobilisation and the micro-sociological push-factors for movement participation – among others the relative deprivation, alienation, or ideological predisposition of individuals acting collectively (David A. Snow et al. 2014, 26). In contrast, from the perspective of framing, social movements were no longer reduced to being merely carriers of extant ideas that grew out of their structural position or ideologies, but recognised as active signifying agents (Benford and Snow 2000, 613).

¹⁸ This understanding of frames derives largely from the work of Erving Goffman who aimed at explaining how people navigate their daily interactions. For Goffman (1974, 21) frames essentially denote **schemata of interpretation that enable individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label”** occurrences within their life space and the world at large. In a similar vein, Gaye Tuchman (1978, 1) has described competing frames as different windows to reality: “The view through a window depends upon whether the window is large or small, has many panes or few, whether the glass is opaque or clear, whether the window faces a street or a backyard.”

side world by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action, thus organising experience and guiding action by rendering events or occurrences meaningful” (Noakes and Johnston 2005, 5). Second, adding to this encoding of reality and “meaning work” (Desrosiers 2012, 2; Benford and Snow 2000, 613), framing embodies the “discursive work” (G. Brown 2014, 143) by which actors communicate the meanings they attach to events. Thereby, the perceived causes of, reasons for, or solutions to certain events are translated into specific symbolic structures and positioned within carefully manufactured narratives. This proactive component of the framing process embodies a critical activity in the everyday construction of social reality because it contributes to shaping the perspectives through which people experience the social world. Yet how does this process influence the conditions for mobilisation or repression?

One promising line of inquiry has attempted to address this question by linking the process of meaning work to the debate on political opportunities in social movement studies (e.g., Bröer and Duyvendak 2009; Cinalli and Giugni 2013; Giugni et al. 2005; McCammon et al. 2007; Koopmans and Olzak 2004; Shriver and Adams 2013; Vasi et al. 2015). Most notably, Ruud Koopmans and his collaborators have conceptualised this link in their notion of “discursive opportunities” (Giugni et al. 2005; Koopmans 1996; 2004; 2005; Koopmans and Olzak 2004). Taking a middle ground between constructionist and structuralist approaches, this concept resonates with both, the POS and the framing approach (see Giugni 2009). It acknowledges that opportunities for protest—aside from being shaped by the institutionalised political system or the configuration of power—are also strongly intertwined with culture. **Alive to Gamson and Meyer’s** (1996) reasoning that political opportunities can only influence activist decisions when they are recognised as such, the discursive opportunities approach underlines the role of public opinion in shaping the conditions of social mobilisation.¹⁹ Albeit acknowl-

¹⁹ The notion of discursive opportunities largely derives from Koopmans’ and Olzak’s joint exploration of violent right-wing mobilisation in Germany. The authors’ earlier works, albeit already touching on the idea of a discursive dimension to political opportunity (Koopmans 1996, 201), had still carried the subtitle ‘Grievances or Opportunities?’, thus paying tribute to classical mechanistic frustration-mobilisation models (Davies 1971; Gurr 1970) as well as the rather materialist ‘political opportunity structures’ approaches prominent at the time (Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi et al. 1995; McAdam 1999; Tarrow 1989). The 2004 sequel to this research resolved this dichotomy by emphasising the subjective side of grievances. Departing from both, purely structural and cultural explanations of violence, it suggested a decisive role of public discourse in the stimulation or abatement of violent mobilisation (Koopmans and Olzak 2004, 199). As the authors examined the prevailing political and cultural context of radical right mobilisation, they found that high visibility and a high degree of consonance proved to be important predictors for subsequent mobilisation and affected also the target choice of violence.

edging the inherent mobilising effect of perceptions of deprivation and injustice, it assumes that the latter can only be understood in relation to their discursive contexts. This context ultimately constitutes the conditions of possibility for these grievances.²⁰ To account for the trajectory of protest campaigns, good research thus **needs “combined attention to structures and perceptions (e.g., political opportunities and the framing thereof) as intimately linked”** (Della Porta 2014a, 2).

While pointing toward the constructed nature of opportunities for mobilisation or repression, the discursive opportunities approach nevertheless fell short in conceptualising this link in a compelling way. Public discourse is black-boxed as a resonance chamber wherein the prominence of some narratives over others is explained in purely structuralist terms; depending on the structuration of the media mechanism, movement claims may end up stuck in dead-end streets or assume favourable symbolic positions, thus facilitating mobilisation.²¹ Of course, it is true that the diffusion of movement messages and thus the mobilisation of support is intimately connected and somehow dependent on exogenous factors, such as the degree of media attention (see also the source discussion in chapter 3.3). In empirical reality, this discursive playing field is often heavily skewed (see J. C. Alexander 2006; Fraser 1990). However, media structuration is only part of this story. Equally as important are the rules by which discourses themselves operate. These rules and regularities of discourse condition what can be said, what problems can be named, who can be held accountable, and what solutions appear as viable, in the first place. They define the horizon of possibilities for mobilising actors—even before their rallying calls, slogans or press releases are inserted into public discourse where they then have to compete with countervailing narratives. It is these inner workings of discourses that explain why certain events are experienced as opportunities, thus becoming transformative events that spark street protests in seemingly closed contexts or facilitate repression in spite of ripe conditions for social mobilisation.²²

²⁰ Proponents of the approach hold that it is particularly the convergence between a movement’s messages and broader public discourses that opens up windows of opportunity for collective claim making. Analogue to the notion of discursive opportunities, the concept of ‘discursive opportunity structures’ thus seeks to define those parameters of public discourse that determine the chances that the narratives proposed by social movements actually resonate in the public sphere (Koopmans and Olzak 2004, 202).

²¹ E.g., the political positioning of news outlets, the geographic proximity of contentious events, or the features of events on the ground – are protests violent and large scale or small and peaceful, disruptive or conceding, innovative and surprising or routine, do they involve known celebrities or prestigious speakers, is there a potential for dramatisation and personalisation, etc.

²² Like framing, the concept of discursive opportunities is blind to these power relations into which every political action is embedded, and how they change over time. Interactive perspectives on the approach are fairly absent from the literature (Vasi et al. 2015, 938).

2.2 A Discourse Theoretical Perspective on Contentious Politics

The idea that political opportunities are nested in concealed hegemonies is at the basis of a discourse-theoretical understanding of social mobilisation: What is doable and thinkable in a society undergoes changes over time, depending on the interaction of its members and the ways that this interaction plays out. Discourse theory recognises that the truth about the material world at our disposition, on which we base our decision-making (such as whether to join a protest) does not merely exist out there. Instead, the manner in which people act, what they do, say, write or think is contingent on a pool of generally accepted knowledge. At the same time, through their actions, they feed back and reshape this pool, at times extending its boundaries, and at times reinforcing them. Discourse theoretical approaches give this struggle over meaning as the constitutive element of the social centre stage, both in their theorisation of the conditions of possibility of the social and in their analytical aim.²³ At their foundation lies the assumption that society cannot be understood as a structured totality and cannot be described through any unifying principle. This does not mean that there is not some form of social order which structures daily life. There is just no necessary one. All social orders—just like social identities—are necessarily contingent. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who are commonly viewed as the founders of the so-called *Essex School* of discourse theory,²⁴ call this the “constitutive openness” of the social (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 96).

In their founding text, they contest the “**lingering class essentialism**” (Keucheyan and Elliott 2013, 240) of Marxist theory and defend an anti-essentialist view of social struggle. The classical Marxist position had assumed that **a subject’s social position, despite its empirical variations and tendencies on the surface, could always be traced back to its position as a partial element in an essential social order. The social had been presented as “a structural totality with its own identifiable and intelligible positivity, as society”** (Hall 1988, 43) enabling all those able to *read* the code according to which ‘the social’ is structured—the laws of capitalist production—to **identify the position of all of society’s elements. Ulti-**

²³ This theory was first laid out in Laclau and Mouffe’s joint ‘Hegemony and Socialist Strategy’ and then developed further in several works written by the authors individually (Laclau 1990; 1996; 2000; 2005; Laclau and Zac 1994; Mouffe 1993; 2005; 2008). Several excellent reviews illustrate how these works have contributed to a comprehensive social theory (e.g., Contu 2002; Gee 1999; Howarth 2005; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002; Rear and Jones 2013b; Sjölander and Payne 2011; A. M. Smith 2003).

²⁴ Named after the graduate programme in ‘Ideology and Discourse Analysis’ at the University of Essex, the Essex School has become the breeding ground for a generation of discourse scholars who contributed to establishing their mentors’ approach as a research tradition (e.g., Glynos et al. 2009; Howarth 1998; 2013; Howarth and Torfing 2005; Howarth, Norval, and Stavrakakis 2000; Torfing 1999).

mately, their role in politics was always defined by their structural position in the capitalist relations of productions. The working class was therefore ascribed the natural role of the revolutionary subject and consequently the greatest hegemonic potential.

Departing from this historical determination of the subject by economic superstructure as a class subject, Laclau and Mouffe argue that the coherence of social actor is actually contingent on and constructed by the dynamics of the struggle (Shantz 2000, 92f). In a social world that is radically heterogeneous, fragmented in its components, and volatile in its multiplicity, they argue, social identity is anything but defined a priori.²⁵ Instead, social life must be interpreted as a continually shifting surface of inscription for a variety of meanings. The mechanism by which these meanings are inscribed is discourse. This emphasis on the discursive constitution of social reality does not deny the independent existence of objects, nor the presence of fact. According to Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 108), it merely means that this reality is not intelligible outside and thus mediated entirely by discourse:

An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God', depends upon the structuring of a discursive field.

Many discourses compete with each other constantly, in an attempt to dominate this field, over the fixation of truth about social reality. It is, however, only through some discourses that the specificity of objects come to seem natural and in line with common sense. This is where hegemony comes to play for Laclau and Mouffe, as the political logic which creates consensus by persuasion, and grounds power asymmetries in reality, thus enforcing them without resorting to force.

2.2.1 The Social as a Hegemonic Terrain

For Laclau and Mouffe, Gramsci's lifework constitutes at a turning-point in Marxist orthodoxy. His conception of hegemony replaced the static and often essentialising concept of ideology in Marxist thought and enabled Gramsci to grasp the

²⁵ Their deconstruction of historical materialism builds on the empirical observation that the social world has become more complex than forecast by Marxism. Far from consolidating, class cleavages have become ambiguous and supplemented by other layers of identity, thus casting doubts on workers "objectively antagonist relationship to capital" (cf., S. Smith 1994, 45) and on the link between structural positions and the constitution of interests. Rather than the workers assuming their revolutionary role, researchers were witnessing the emergence of new social movements who no longer focused exclusively on economic demands and whose mobilising structures and resources were not organised along class divides. The failure to grasp these trends, for Laclau and Mouffe, related to the class reductionism of Marxist theory.

increasing significance of culture in social relations (see Anderson 1976): “For Gramsci, political subjects are not—strictly speaking classes, but complex ‘collective wills’; similarly the ideological elements articulated by a hegemonic class do not have a necessary class belonging” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 67). Furthermore, Gramsci also viewed the superstructure instrumentalised by a hegemonic block for ruling society as more than a mere mirror image of material realities bound by inextricable economic laws. Instead, he asserted that the discursive processes of articulation that aimed to manufacture social consent and acquiescence to dominant power relations produced social reality itself (see Gramsci 1971, pt. 2). Building on this though, Laclau and Mouffe suggest conceiving of the social as a hegemonic terrain, that is, a sort of ‘discursive arena’ where different agents attempt to establish hegemony for their reading of social reality in order to widen their room for manoeuvre. Society and its ordering are thus understood as a non-determined discursive terrain that is not structured by any general laws or principles, but rather the result of hegemonic power relations arising from struggles over articulation.²⁶

With a view to contentious events, the competitive nature of this terrain is evident. As part of the political power struggle, social movements and regime elites constantly assign protest and repression events with competing meanings in order to claim moral authority for their actions and garner support: regimes vilify demonstrators to undercut their social base and legitimise repressive action (Ferree 2002; 2005); demonstrators, by contrast, aim at establishing their own particular framing to create support for their goals and mobilise potential sympathisers (Koopmans 2005, 164). **People’s understanding of what actually occurred in the street depends on this discursive struggle: social phenomena, such as mass protests or a massacre by security forces, are meaningful only through the valve of discourse. Each discourse structures social reality in a different way, competing over the exclusive production of meaning. This exclusion presupposes the exercise of power which, for Laclau and Mouffe is the authority to define.**

The most significant consequence of this ontological position for this thesis is the realisation that, given the mediated character of all objects (including especially heavily debated social phenomena such as contentious events), their meaning cannot be objectively determined by an external reference. Facts about the material world which inform decision-making (e.g., the decision to engage in or join

²⁶ While Gramsci’s social theory maintains an essentialist core that ties hegemony to the naturalisation of class divisions (Keucheyan and Elliott 2013, 240), the discourse theoretical project abandons the centrality of class. For Laclau and Mouffe hegemony denotes the naturalisation of all kinds of power relations, of which class is but one possible option.

collective action) simply do not exist. Instead, they are produced continuously under a controlled environment by dominant social, political and economic forces and depend on the power of actors and institution which seeks to produce and promote it (Foucault 2001, 132). Discourse analysis thus cannot aim to discover the ‘truth’ about reality. Instead, it can only “describe how discursive struggle constructs this reality [...] so that it appears natural and neutral” (Rear 2013, 5).

2.2.2 *The Structuration of Hegemonic Discourse*

This construction occurs through deliberate acts of articulation by different contenders in the political struggle. It is through their political articulation only that different discursive elements are linked, that a relationship between them is defined. Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 105) define the essential dimensions of this process of meaning-making they define as follows:

We will call articulation any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call discourse. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call moments. By contrast, we will call element any difference that is not discursively articulated.

Underlying this conception of discourse is the notion of a discursive field consisting of a multitude of signifiers. No signifier itself owns a unique identity, but its identity stems from the discourse in which it is located. For a better sense of Laclau and Mouffe’s specific terminology,²⁷ the Glossary in Table 1 provides a short overview.

Table 1: Glossary for the domain discourse theory

Key terms	Definition
Discourse	An attempt to fix a web of meanings within a particular domain by structuring signifiers into specific meanings to the exclusion of others.
Hegemony	The fixation of meaning in a discursive terrain naturalising a particular social antagonism.
Discursive field	The population of all signifiers that are articulated in discourse as well as all elements that have not been articulated in this discourse, in addition to all other possible relations that could potentially be articulated among these elements.
Floating signifier	All elements in the discursive field whose meaning has not yet been fixed in discourse and which are thus open to multiple possible meaning ascriptions.
Articulation	The discursive practice of partially fixating the meaning of elements in discourse.
Moment	The temporal fixation of the relational meaning of an element in antagonism to a complex net of differentiation of what the element does not mean.
Nodal signifiers	A privileged signifier that bestows a specific relational meaning on all signifiers ordered around it.

We can imagine discourses as a network of multiple elements which are interconnected through articulation. Until this political act lays claims to their meaning, all

²⁷ Their work has drawn justified criticism for its high level of abstraction, sophisticated language, and specific terminology which is barely comprehensible for those not familiar with the language and argumentative structure of postmodernist theory (cf., S. Smith 1994).

elements are ‘floating signifiers’. That is to say; they are either contested in their signification or not yet fixed to a particular signified, making them particularly open to meaning ascription (Torfing 1999, 98–99). Through the act of articulation only, these floating signifiers are placed in a relationship with other elements of the discursive field whose meaning within a discourse is already established. Thereby they are awarded a new meaning and, to a certain degree, fixed in their signification.

The relation by which elements are linked through articulation can be one of difference or equivalence (Laclau 2005, 78). For instance, mobilisation scholars usually place demonstration marches and sit-ins into a relation of equivalence through their common definition as ‘protest’. However, within the debate about the divergent contentious repertoires of social movements, these two signifiers assume a differential position to each other, each designating a particular protest tactic. The articulation of a relation of difference or equivalence results in the creation of what Laclau and Mouffe call a ‘moment’, that is, a temporary fixation of relational meaning between two signifiers.²⁸ It is at the level of these moments that the crucial contests over meaning with consequences for entire discourses take place, that is, those struggles that may open or close up discursive opportunities for mobilisation.

By linking several elements together in a variety of moments larger units are created—a discourse materialises. In this discourse, moments are arranged around nodal points, eminent signs that structure the discursive field (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 112). According to Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, 26), a **nodal point** is “a privileged sign around which the other signs are ordered; the other signs acquire their meaning from their relationship to the nodal point.” A popular example of such a nodal point is the signifier ‘body’ within medical discourses. From this nodal signifier, technical terms such as ‘symptoms’ or ‘vital functions’ but also terms with multi-layered meanings such as ‘tissue’ or ‘patient’ derive their specific meaning. In turn, the ‘people’ evidently represents the key nodal signifier in populist discourses (Laclau 2005, 153).

Translated into network notation, the nodal point is thus the element in a discourse with the largest centrality value. That is to say; it is at the centre of individ-

²⁸ As in Saussure’s original conception of sign, there is no intrinsic connection between a sign and its meaning. The link between a certain sign and a specific meaning in common language is the result of an implicit contract between interlocutors. Each sign could be understood quite differently when placed within the context of different discourses. The discourse awards it a specific meaning thereby granting the relation between sign and meaning a certain degree of stability. However, this stability is only temporary, because discourses are subject to constant change in response to unfolding events.

ual clusters of mutually referential elements that give meaning to each other (Andrade 2015; Glasze 2007). This means that all other signs are connected through the node, thus awarding the discourse with the character of a fully determining totality.²⁹ This unifying character excludes other webs of differential relations by antagonist frontiers. The practice of articulation ultimately consists in the construction of moments around such nodal points.

As understood in this thesis, the articulatory moments through which the discourse of contenders materialise are to be seen simultaneously as a location, a time and an event—the critical nexus of contingent social forces and resistance (see also Rear and Jones 2013b, 376): Several elements are woven into a social fabric that—for a particular time and place—assumes some degree of unity and stability, and in its consequences also a specific materiality, thus giving ‘the social’ a specific form. A discourse is thus an attempt to fix a web of meanings within a particular domain by structuring signifiers into certain meanings to the exclusion of others (cf., Rear 2013, 6). At any point in time, a variety of discourses attempt to fix the meaning of certain chains of signifiers and thus establish hegemony over a certain reading of social reality. Most of these discourses never touch upon each other. In these cases, they become the reference for what is true or right in a specific domain—they achieve a certain sense of hegemony. However, some are mutually exclusive and oppose each other. It is during these clashes that, according to Laclau and Mouffe, the antagonisms that characterise all discursive projects are most salient and become observable. Along these antagonisms processes of political subjectivation crystallise, collective identities are constructed, and political actors can rally support.³⁰

2.2.3 *Disruptive Events and the Articulation of Resistance*

Such conflicts are usually triggered by certain disruptive events that propel new cascades of articulation. Unforeseen events or crises challenge established knowledge which then opens up opportunities for new political rationalities to evolve (see Nabers 2017). As Schwedler (2016) has underscored, a single event

²⁹ Yet this fixation is always temporal and partial and open for contestation: “The partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity,” Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 113) write. Each element of discourse is thus oversaturated with potential meanings as a signifier, the entire discursive field thus characterised by an effective ‘surplus’ of meaning.

³⁰ Laclau and Mouffe draw on Georges Sorel’s conception of a world based on the primacy of conflict. However, unlike Sorel they do not see this conflict as one that follows any essential qualities or pre-discursive features of the social. For instance, class struggles are but one of many articulations of social antagonism. This rigorous abandonment of a class perspective finds its correlate in the notion of ubiquitous antagonisms as constitutive features of subject formation (see Shantz 2000).

“can fundamentally transform the horizon of what people believe is possible,” thus enabling new articulatory projects (or reinforcing older ones). This holds true especially for the transformative events described above. For those participating in or witnessing them, these events unfold their transformative character by significantly disrupting, altering, or violating the taken-for-granted assumptions governing routine political and social relations (Schwedler 2016). In particular, they have the potential to shatter those sedimented meaning orders that those building on Gramsci have described with the term ‘hegemony’.

Laclau and Mouffe refer to these rupture as “dislocations” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 49 f; Laclau 1990, 41 ff).³¹ Dislocation, according to the authors, describes the need for re-arrangement of discourses to incorporate new events. It is caused by all of those events that cannot immediately be incorporated into the current horizon of expectations. That is, those events that cannot be symbolised or ‘made sense of’ within the **prevailing hegemonic discourse**; “**it is something we did not expect and which therefore threatens the sedimented routines and processes of social institutions**” (Marchart 2014, 277). By uprooting the sedimented meaning of nodal signifier and destabilising the order of meaning, these events thereby reveal the contingency and the constitutive openness of the prevailing social order (previously assumed as rigid). To give an example, all three monotheistic religions are based on a strict dogma, thus representing a unified discourse with a sense of hegemony over those who believe in it. In this dogma, only God has the ability to give life. Accordingly, the development of new biotechnological means for human reproduction effected a dislocation: The unity of a hegemonic order maintained by the three book religions over centuries collapsed as the event of technology usurping ‘**God’s place**’ could not be signified.

With a view to contentious politics, such ruptures can be a highly productive force because they create space for articulation. By shattering hegemonic interpretations of social reality that had gone unquestioned, so far, they create possibilities for activists to renegotiate the limits of what is thinkable, in terms of political alternatives, and doable, in terms of contentious actions on the ground. Colin Hay, who has produced some of the most influential insights into the productive effects of political crises, has therefore defined the crises that lay bare the precarious nature of the hegemonic order as moments of decisive intervention and not merely

³¹ According to Laclau, moments of dislocation reveal the inability of any collective entity to achieve closure in several ways: First, moments of dislocation reveal how any identity construction is only temporary until its precarity is evidenced by dissonances with the lifeworld of those it seeks to represent. Second, dislocation discloses the contingency of any new construction as it reveals also alternative articulations that had been excluded before (Laclau 1990, 39; see also Marchart 2014, 276f).

of fragmentation, dislocation or destruction; they involve:

The active display of agency by actors or bodies that have some autonomy at the level at which the crisis is identified—actors capable of imposing a new trajectory upon the system in and through crisis (Hay 1996, 425, see also Hay 1999, 323 ff).

The moment of dislocation created by transformative events can thus be seen both as a rupture and a new beginning. According to Hay, they are, in effect, “what we make of them; and what we make of them determines how we respond” indicating the mediating role of discourse in determining their effects and laying path dependencies for responsive action (Hay 2013, 23; see also Rear and Jones 2013b, 375). Accordingly, the articulation of events in a discourse can take different directions. It can either reify previous hegemonic discourses, that is, the “dominant viewpoint(s) throughout society, kept stable by political power dynamics” (Macdonald 2003, 32). For instance, Christopher Bail (2012) has highlighted in his study of post-9/11 media discourses about Islam how the widespread impression that the United States was experiencing a liminal historical moment caused a streamlining of mainstream discourse with the fringes. Rather than a proliferation of new discursive projects, this collective realignment with the fringes effectively closed the space for alternative interpretations. For the example above, such a realignment could find its expression in a discourse that explains the artificial creation of life as a divine wonder or incorporates the event by denouncing it as the devil’s work.

But discursive responses can also challenge the status quo: It is usually in moments of dislocation when processes of disidentification with the hegemonic order and its sustaining actors or regimes begin, and new discourses emerge to make sense of what is happening. This creates a potential for resistance and the emergence of new contentious alliances that challenge the status quo through a “politics of signification” (Hall 1982, 64).³² From the perspective of discourse theory, such political projects of resistance that react to dislocation and attempt to “hegemonise the gap” (Nabers 2017, 422) created by the crisis of hegemony, operate according to relational rules of subject formation—the ‘we’ is defined vis-à-vis

³² For their emphasis on the counter-hegemonic politics of signification as the principal mode of resistance, Laclau and Mouffe’s work has been rebuked by anarchist and autonomist thinkers who understood it as an appeal to give up on the revolutionary goal of radical and systemic change (Keucheyan and Elliott 2013, 242). Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey (2008, 133) have argued that a reversion of the existing hegemonic powers would merely result in a continuity of the same structuration of power, thus reifying the totalising logic of the dominant system. In a similar vein, Richard Day (2005, 8) has stressed that the radical left needed a movement that mobilised “non hegemonically rather than counter-hegemonically,” as all attempts to establish a different kind of global hegemony that worked from ‘below’ necessarily remained trapped in the logic of neoliberalism.

the other. This is because, if “no ‘essence’ underlies the social, the entities that develop in it are necessarily relational—that is to say, they are constructed with respect to one another or against one another” (Keucheyan and Elliott 2013, 241). It is only the differential relation to a constitutive outside (who I am not) that confirms and fixates social identity (who I am). According to Laclau (2006, 655), to constitute a popular political subjectivity one thus “has to discursively construct the enemy—the oligarchy, the establishment, big money, capitalism, globalisation.”

The emergence of a collective subject, such as a social movement or a contentious alliance, in this sense, is achieved by the articulation of a link between its elements that is not shared by this enemy. This chain of equivalence dissolves the differential relations among the individual movement components through common reference to an external other. The logic of difference that previously defined their interrelation is thereby functionally replaced by a logic of equivalence; sectoral particularisms are transformed into a collective resistance to or rejection of an antagonist other. Tristan Smaldone (2015) has illustrated this process for the Arab Spring:

To recapitulate, the uprisings that engulfed Tunisia and Egypt in late 2010 and into early 2011, cannot be attributed to a particular social demand or counter-hegemonic struggle. Rather, they encompassed a diversity of grievances and actors, who coalesced into a singular and unified struggle.

Part of the recipe for the success of the 2011 mass protests was, in fact, their rejection of a firm leadership or unitary ideology and their dissolution of social differences in an equivalential chain of demands, with “neither a unitary subject to act as a signifier nor any metanarrative to contain its message”(Hale 2014). The revolutionaries were “people from different class backgrounds and conflicting ideologies, who found solidarity in their demands for justice, freedom, and dignity” (Smaldone 2015, 1). The emergence of such a collective actor resisting the status quo effectively represented a subjectivation process by which discursive articulations related different individuals to what Farhad Khosrokhavar (2018) has referred to as a *would-be social movement*. This discursive process was paralleled and reinforced by an affective process of emotional affiliation and subjectivation—referred to by Ayata and Haders (2018) as the “Midān Moment”—that temporarily forged the multiple elements on Tahrir square into a unified struggle:

Contrary to the working-class movements in which the economic condition of the workers was the dominant characteristic of their association and protest movements, [...] in the Egyptian Revolution, the loose association of individuals with disparate social conditions gave birth to collective action against the Mubarak regime. This was made possible through ‘subjectivation’: the latter compensated for the heterogeneous

conditions of the people, creating a unity of emotions [paralleling the discursive unity] autonomous from their 'objective' social conditions (Khosrokhavar 2018, 163).

Such a political subjectivation of a variegated popular mass in a revolutionary alliance was made possible by a dichotomisation of the political spectrum into two antagonist camps, with the stooges of the Mubarak regime on the one side, and the Tahrir revolutionaries on the other. The iconic slogan '*al-shaʿab yurid isqat al-nizam*' [the people want the fall of the regime], one of the most prominent **articulatory gestures of the 'Arab Spring'** imaginary, clearly evidences this antagonist discursive formation (El-Ghobashy 2011; see also Svendsen 2014, 46). The use of this slogan signified a commonality between all those who were taking **to the streets in Egypt and beyond while establishing 'the regime' [or the system]** as the main obstacle for a new national identity. Laclau (2005, 74) describes this process as the emergence of "internal frontier, a dichotomisation of the local political spectrum through the emergence of an equivalential chain of unsatisfied demands." **This antagonist frontier separates 'the people' from 'power', enabling a plurality of demands to constitute a broader social subjectivity.**

2.3 Synthesis

Building on the notion of dislocation, a discourse-theoretical perspective on contentious politics makes it possible to conceive of contenders' competing discourses in post-coup Egypt as contingent reactions to a crisis of hegemony, and thus as constitutive social practices that gave rise to antagonist struggles over meaning. These struggles are not only an integral part of the dynamics of contention, but they also make social change possible in the first place (specifically on this point see Biesecker-Mast 1996). Laclau and Mouffe's concept of dislocation aptly captures the discursive character of those events that social movement scholars have referred to as transformative, precipitating or turning point events (e.g., Hess and Martin 2006; Owens 2013; Pearlman 2018; Vicari 2015). As Nabers (2017, 425) recapitulates:

These 'events' are never situated outside of a discourse. They neither have a temporal nor a spatial location outside of the discursive frame that translates it from a 'pure event'—with all its ambiguities, displacements and disruptions—into a 'historical event'.

It is the way in which activists articulate their meaning and how they weave them into counter-hegemonic narratives that provide these events with a transformative character. In the context of social mobilisation, we can think of these acts of articulation along the lines of collective claim making. However, rather than only reflecting the structural dispositions of movement, tapping into audiences' disposi-

tions, or mechanically instrumentalising the opportunities provided by the structuration of a media system, these counter-hegemonic projects imply agency on the part of social movements as they represent a dynamic reaction to the dislocation of some sort of sedimented meaning structures by contentious events. As the discussion of the eventful character of protest has shown, social movements can thereby create opportunities for themselves and for other movements at later points in time, but also influence the trajectory imposed upon the state by unfolding events. Resonant movement discourses can thus be conceived of as an active injection into the public discourse which allows for its permutation. According to Hay (2013, 425), the collective mobilisation of popular perceptions at moments of crisis are crucial in influencing the trajectory of contentious dynamics: they open or foreclose windows for mobilisation; they provide fertile ground for, or impede the emergence of new political alliances; they bridge or reify social and ideological cleavages.

As will be shown, thinking of the framing competition that follows certain key events in an episode of contention events as a contentious struggle at the level of critical **signifiers that** structure public discourse, allows for an analysis of contentious dynamics that transcends the rigid structural determinism of the discursive **opportunities framework and reconstructs contenders' identities in more nuanced ways** and in relation to the dynamics of their struggle. At the same time, the dimensions identified by framing theorists as central to successful social mobilisation processes can guide such a microanalysis and help overcome the limits imposed by the high abstraction level of post-structuralist theory.

3. Methodology

The realisation that the relationship between protest and repression is a dynamic one that works both ways (i.e., in which causal effects can be identified on both sides) defines the conceptual perspective of this research project. As discussed above, mobilising actors and regime agents interact both directly via their material actions on the ground (e.g., police forces repress demonstrators, dissidents block roads, etc.) and indirectly in the discursive sphere, where repression and protest events are interpreted. Interaction effects must, therefore, be observed both on a material and an immaterial, a symbolic, level.³³ Accordingly, this dissertation follows a two-step analytical process. It combines a thorough mapping of contentious interactions as an event history with an in-depth examination of the discourses of those actors involved in, concerned with and provoked by the witnessed events. This includes tracing the unfolding protest dynamics during the above-mentioned contentious episodes in an event database that documents scope and repertoire for the unfolding events. But it also includes tracing the effect of contested discourses on protest performance. The aim of this two-level investigating is to illustrate how the narrative established around certain contentious key events—transformative or turning point events—crucially account for variances in the reaction of social movements to regime action, of potentially mobilisable publics to both protest and repression, and of regime actors to social mobilisation. This chapter attempts to lay bare the bones of the methods and the framework employed for empirical analysis in this thesis. In line with Teun van Dijk's (1990, 14) note that theoretical sophistication need not lead to obscurantism, I try to be as transparent as possible with the hope that readers can trace the logic behind my (subjective) analysis—if only to possibly dispute its results.

In order to reconcile the two analytical layers—a condensed retracing of contentious interaction on a day-to-day basis with an in-depth analysis of contested discourses—this thesis relies on process tracing as a research strategy. Ontologically, this method derives from the constructivist toolkit. It can be distinguished from other historical accounts by the focus it places on the interactive and config-

³³ Charles Tilly (2003) has suggested distinguishing three camps of observers of violence: ideas people, behaviour people, and relation people. Whereas ideas people focus on ideology as central explanatory factor, behaviour people understand collective phenomena as the sum of individual behaviours. Relation people, finally, give the transactions among persons and groups centre stage, conceiving of collective violence as the visible symptoms of social relations and personal interchange (Tilly 2003, 5–6; see also Della Porta 2014c, 165). The methodology of this thesis is primarily embedded in the relational paradigm, but also caters to the ideas and the behaviour camp through its focus on discourses that are constitutive for political action and its conception of movements as populations of contentious events.

urative processes, that lead to a particular outcome (e.g., the abatement of collective action or modification of protest or policing tactics). The essential idea of process tracing as a research approach is that every phenomenon—mobilisation and repression, for instance, but also articulation by contenders to a struggle—leaves traces that analysts can observe and reconstruct in terms of attributes, elements, causes and effects (Checkel 2005). Hence what proponents of process tracing approaches do is look at **“the observable implications of putative causal mechanisms in operation in a case, much as a detective looks for suspects and for clues linking them to a crime”** (A. Bennett 2004, 24). However, the aim is not to establish a complete causal explanation for the trajectory of a protest cycle, but rather to identify the mechanisms that drive it (see Mahoney and Goertz 2006). The concept of mechanism, in this context, refers to a recurrent sequence of events that links specified initial conditions to a specified outcome (Tilly 2005, 212, for a pertinent discussion, see 2001). These abstract patterns may travel across both, episodes of contention and cases. Hence process tracing can be thought of as a causal reconstruction of **the “concatenation of generative events”** (Della Porta 2014c, 163) by which an investigated social phenomenon comes into being. The effects of the mechanisms that drive social processes are not only visible in the physical behaviour of contenders, e.g., in their protest performances, their repertoires or their changing attitude to violence. They also mark the discourse of those engaging in contentious politics. This means that they can be traced through a close examination of articulations.

3.1 Text and Context

Significantly, the structuring effect of both macro-constraints and micro-level interaction dynamics on the discursive situation is often either ignored or left unanalysed for convenient treatment of text and talk in isolation. Van Dijk has cautioned against such a superficial understanding of discourse stressing that many analysts who investigated the structures or strategies of text and talk failed to **consider their conditioned social contexts: “Fundamental notions of the social sciences, such as those of power and dominance, group relations, ideologies, cultural reproduction, institutional decision making, among many others, were and are hard to find in most studies of discourse”** (van Dijk 1990, 7). Similarly, Angermüller (2001, 8) has stressed that **“texts are not containers of self-referential meaning, but the recorded traces of discourse activity which can never be completely reduced to text.”** In order to understand discourse, it is not enough to merely analyse its internal structures. Even if we were able to ascertain the meaning of individual elements that produce a discourse (e.g., a specific statement)

from a close reading of the element itself, this would still leave us without any grasp of its intended thrust, that is, of its performative function in the discourse. As Skinner argues, a real understanding of the meanings of texts necessitates acknowledging “what they were intended to mean, and how this meaning was intended to be taken” (Skinner 1969, 48).

Accordingly, analyses must account for the ways in which discourses are being produced, received and engaged within a framework of understanding that, in turn, is being shaped and modified through broader processes of social interaction: meanings are not produced in a vacuum but through sharing and exchange of argument. And they are both realised through and respond to the ways how these interactions play out. As Van Dijk (2002, 203) contends, “the study of political discourse is theoretically and empirically relevant only when discourse structures can be related to properties of political structures and processes.” Discourses thus need to be contextualised with respect to the changing structures of the social situation where they are inserted. This also implies that discourses must be traced over time as they are constantly subjected to change. If we accept the relationship between regimes and their contenders as dynamic and contingent on the eventful character of contestation processes, then we must acknowledge that also the impact of contested discourses and contentious dynamics on each other will probably vary throughout a protest cycle. One cannot assume the existence of *the one* movement discourse, framing, ideology or collective identity. Especially if we ascribe to the terminology of transformative events, and thus to a conception of cycles of contention as eventful protest (see Della Porta 2011; Tarrow 1998), we **must account for unfolding events leaving traces in contenders’ communication** and contributing to the emergence, permutation and demise of political subjectivities. Vice-versa, discourses come to constitute and redefine social reality in the sense that they alter conditions of possibilities for action on the ground. These interactional effects are often short-dated and skirt models that rely on aggregate indicators (Earl and Soule 2010, 107).³⁴

In line with Tilly’s (2002, 252) argument that it is insufficient to state that a given instant of time or place more protest happened than at a different instant or place, movement scholars thus need to break up their aggregate accounts of pro-

³⁴ On a physical level, such interaction effects include, for instance, demonstrators shifting protest timing (W. H. Moore 1998) in response to policing strategies, or the construction of spaces of resistance that defy territorial control techniques (McCurdy, Feigenbaum, and Frenzel 2016; Soudias 2015). On a discursive level, by contrast, they manifest when the lived experience of protest or repression events set in motion political subjectivation process or altering the collective identity of movements and their counterparts.

test waves into bounded sequences of continuous interaction in order to reconstruct a coherent narrative of a protest cycle (Tilly 2008, 10). In analogy to the study of contentious events, discourse should be viewed as an iterative process, constituted by countless acts of articulation. This process generates texts, speeches, and other products of discursive practices which can be collected as ‘snapshots’ of certain actors’ discourses at this specific point of time and analysed in relation to their social situation they are inserted, that is the respective event.

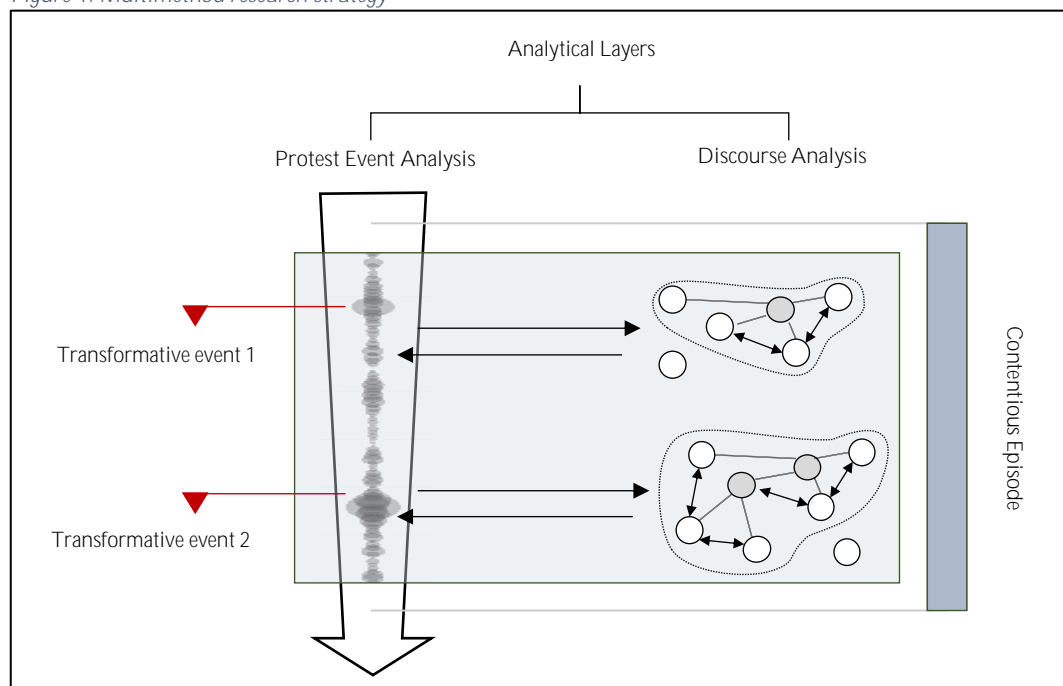
3.2 Combining Event and Discourse Analysis in a Nested Design

From a methodological perspective, thinking historical hence implies tracing the relations between products of articulation (that is, the analysed sources) and their eventful social context. The nested research design of this thesis gives due to this premise by interlinking, on the one hand, the statistical tracking of contentious episodes and the detailed study of transformative events within these episodes with an in-depth analysis of competing discourses surrounding these events, on the other (see Figure 1). The research strategy integrates protest event analysis (PEA), the ‘weapon of choice’ from the methodological toolkit of social movement studies, and Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) in a single design. This innovative combination complements calls for methodological pluralism (e.g., Della Porta 2014d; Della Porta and Keating 2010; Fearon and Laitin 2008; Harrits 2011; Tarrow 2010; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2003), but also two different datasets with the necessary detail for micro-level analysis. This allows for rigorously testing hypotheses regarding the effects of competing articulation projects on the trajectory of contention and on the discursive effect of transformative events. Moreover, it allows for generating new theoretical arguments that cannot be studied with static conflict-zone data and aggregated data on movement framing (Raleigh et al. 2010, 653ff).

Recognising this synergistic value, Evan Lieberman (2005, 435) has pointed out the **benefits of triangulating different methodologies in a “nested analysis.”** Albeit not entirely new (Harrits 2011, 152), his sequential approach is unique in that it maps out different pathways for the systematic combination of small-N and large-N analysis (for a chart see Lieberman 2005, 437). Combining small and large-n-analysis in a single framework, the nested analysis allows for examining a phenomenon, in this case, the shifting dynamics of contention in post-revolutionary Egypt, on different levels and to zoom in on the causal mechanisms that drive it (see Fearon and Laitin 2008, 756). In addition to providing orientation, the triangulation of methods also facilitates the verification of results, increasing the overall analytic payoff: each level of analysis informs the other thus

contributing to an integrated understanding of the process under investigation and the reduction of potential sources of error. The sequential research design of this study builds on these thoughts and can be read as a variation of Lieberman’s original nested analysis.

Figure 1. Multimethod research strategy



Source 1. Own representation.

In essence, the integration of PEA and PDA in an integrated process tracing design (see Figure 1) comprises two analytical stages: The first step consists of a quantitative mapping of contention in Egypt within the investigation period based on transparent and verifiable coding procedures (outlined in Chapter 3.3). This catalogue serves as a guide for the identification of intriguing events and historical turning points for in-depth study (see Lieberman 2005, 438–40). In a second step, this subset of events is explored in depth, both in its effects on the character of protests and in its discursive effects. In this second step of the analysis, I examine how different narratives about the witnessed events are wielded by contenders as **discursive “weapons” against each other** (Hoffmann and König 2013, 18). The analysed discursive sample is necessarily limited to the communication of the prime contenders in each contentious episode identified via PEA (see Chapter 3.5.3). The results of these analyses can be conceived of like a cross-section of **contenders’ discourses at these specific instants of the protest cycle. These snapshots** can be compared over time, making it possible to identify how certain events dislocated and altered discourse with varying effects.

This two-step multimethod research strategy caters to calls for an integrated approach to the study of historical data (A. Bennett 2002; Goertz 2017; Lieberman

2005; 2010) and echoes a growing trend in social research, especially in the sub-discipline of comparative politics (e.g., Goertz and Mahoney 2012; Harrits 2011; Mahoney and Goertz 2006; Munck and Snyder 2007; Rohlfing 2012). The essential idea behind an integrated approach is to combine the complementary strengths of large-N designs for identifying empirical trends with those of in-depth case studies for revealing the driving forces behind such distinctive patterns (Fearon and Laitin 2008, 758). In an attempt of methodological bridge-building, Tarrow has highlighted the complementary strengths of quantitative and qualitative analyses. Time series may serve as a point of departure by drawing attention to moments of visibility and of latency of social movements and to turning points in political mobilisation processes. In turn, close qualitative analysis of a limited set of cases may provide more nuanced insights and explain transitions and nonlinearities that have been discovered through quantitative analysis (Tarrow 2010, 104). The gain of reliability that results from such a second qualitative layer of analysis is convincingly expressed by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2000, 3): “Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.”

3.3 Step One: Event Catalogues as Theories

At the core of the process tracing through protest event data is the continuous description of a historical sequence (Checkel 2005, 6). In practice, however, one cannot capture every interactive step due to limited time, resources, and information. The presentation of empirical facts is thus usually pragmatically minimised to that the “bare bones” of the interaction process (Richards 2011, 212), that is, to key events that are relevant for the construction of a coherent narrative. What is required, is “purposeful” case selection (Rihoux and Lobe 2009). Yet, how far can we go in construing protest cycles as a series of events “without losing the sense of which are the important and which the incremental ones?” (Tarrow 1998, 34). In fact, in-depth qualitative studies have often been charged with ‘cherry-picking’, that is, the biased selection of those historical records that are most aligned with a favoured hypothesis (see Lieberman 2010, 39). Event catalogues offer a tool to avoid this methodological pitfall uncovering situational dynamics that escape even the “naked eye or even the trained historical mind” (Tarrow 1998, 554). Visualised in time series diagrams, they allow for confidently identifying the hot phases of contentious episodes. Sharp drops fluctuation or a sudden peak in an event sequence effectively point us to the critical and transformative phases of a protest cycle that merit a closer look (Tarrow 1998, 56).

Over the past decades, protest event analysis has become a routine methodo-

logical practice for the study of social movements (for pertinent discussions see Hutter 2014). Ruud Koopmans and Dieter Rucht (2002, 233) identify three generations in the methodological literature on event data: in the early 1970s the historical-sociological research on political violence and the labour movement first discovered the newspaper articles and media reports as valuable empirical sources for the identification of contention and manifest social conflict (e.g., Danzger 1975; Lieberson and Silvermann 1966; Snyder and Kelly 1977). With the growing possibilities of computer-assisted coding, event data then received a notable boost. Particularly quantitative sociologists discovered the field in the 1990s as a fertile terrain for repression research (see Maney and Oliver 2001; P. E. Oliver and Maney 2000; Woolley 2000). In a third wave, scholars began to apply the method also to cases beyond the Anglo-European context (see Herkenrath and Knoll 2011). It is thus hardly surprising that scholars also employed event catalogues to study the Arab uprisings in 2011 (e.g., Grimm and Harders 2018; Ketchley 2017a; Rogers 2011; Vatthauer and Weipert-Fenner 2017). This thesis follows in their footsteps.

Within the method of PEA, the analytical focus shifts from the individual attitudes of activists and the ideological or organisational specificities of certain movements to a **meso-level observation of discrete episodes in movement's lifecycle** (see Tilly 2005, 212). **Social movements are thereby conceived of as "populations of collective actions"** (P. Oliver and Myers 2002, 3). Such a working definition implies a **quantification of collective action**: "This basic distinction between less and more is required even for explanations that are pursued with qualitative evidence rather than statistical analysis; a historical narrative typically graphs the **time series of protest**" (Biggs 2018, 23). The approach thus ties in well with the 'contentious politics' research programme developed by Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007) who assert that social movements can be empirically measured and operationalised through "**clusters, sequences and cascades of events**" (Tarrow 2011, 57). Such patterns are identified in this thesis with the help of time series generated from several protest event catalogues for contentious episodes under investigation.

Contentious episodes are thus the unit of analysis, while discrete contentious events (temporally and spatially circumscribable actions that are carried out by specific actors and captured within the event database) function as the unit of observation within the examined episodes. Making this distinction is important: While contentious events are immediately observable by eyewitnesses or via media coverage, contentious episodes interactively combine various events. Linking the physical interaction between state and contenders to the discursive level is central to this project and crucial to my theoretical argument. Therefore, the event analy-

sis in this thesis focuses on those transformative events that exerted a crucial effect on the dynamics of contention in Egypt.³⁵

Analyses based on event data rely on doubly reconstructed reality, first by the press and then by the coder. Hence, some scepticism is warranted. Above all, representativeness and reliability, that is, the issue of whether certain events are reported on in the media at all, are problematic in **media-based studies**. “Whatever the method and source of data collection, it is impossible to produce a perfect data set which includes virtually all protest events that have taken place in a given period and area,” Dieter Rucht and Thomas Ohlemacher (1992, 80) observe. This is because the production of media is influenced by economic, socio-psychological, and political logics of selection (King and Lowe 2003, 617). Different issues compete for space and attention, and thus, social protest often merely is overshadowed by more sensational topics. The dilemma is evident: Just because there is less coverage on collective action, this does not necessarily indicate that demobilisation is taking place. Within the empirical literature, there is a controversial discussion on **the properties that determine an event’s newsworthiness**.³⁶ What seems to be uncontroversial is that newspapers tend to focus on large events, those where significant societal actors are taking part, and those where outbreaks of violence happen (Myers and Caniglia 2004, 538; Ortiz et al. 2005, 398f). By contrast, peaceful and decentralised repertoires of protest can be expected to receive less coverage. Aside from these factors, whether a protest event is reported on also depends on the interplay between the characteristics of an event and the sensitivity of mechanisms of reporting (Snyder and Kelly 1977, 113f).³⁷ In the present study, for instance, events in the social or geographical periphery attracted significantly less attention by Egyptian media than those taking place in the Cairo agglomeration, which is characterised by higher press density. In addition, local media outlets often had political affinities that impacted on the reliability and validity of their reporting (see Ball 2005, 189). Since the onset of the Tamarod-campaign, **Egypt’s state and private media effectively underwent a forcible alignment that was reminiscent of the media’s ‘Gleichschaltung’ in fascist Germany** (see Richter 2015a). After **Mursi’s ouster, the pro-army camp benefitted from almost unanimous press support**.

³⁵ Rare “**moments of concentrated transformation**” (Della Porta 2011, 258) such as these events derive their power from their unpredictability, hence their identification is usually possible only after the fact. As a heuristic device, event catalogues can facilitate this process while increasing comparability and reproducibility of results and reducing hindsight bias in the identification of transformative events.

³⁶ Earl et al. (2004) as well as Ortiz et al. (2005) provide good overviews of the field.

³⁷ Apart from a few efforts to statistically correct selection effects (Vgl. Ball 2005, 198ff; Hug and Wisler 1998; Woolley 2000, 167f), the literature provides hardly any practical advice for dealing with the problems of reliability, validity, and representativeness that are associated with journalistic sources.

On top of that, censorship was at work: In authoritarian contexts, the disproportionate use of force by the security apparatus is oftentimes concealed or qualified by using legitimising narratives (Ball 2005, 192; Rogers 2011, 25). If oppositional mobilisation ever becomes the subject of coverage, it is mostly reported on in a starkly limited fashion (Ortiz 2008, 51). In contexts where the bulk of the available information is generated by one of the conflict parties themselves, single-sourcing is particularly problematic. This was also the case in this research project, as arbitrary arrests of reporters and the censoring of articles became an everyday phenomenon in Egypt during the investigation period (Jäger and Resch 2015).³⁸

Despite these limitations, the collected event data is suited to illustrate, at least, the most pertinent trends how protest and repression interacted during the period of investigation, as well as the transformative turning points in the studied protest cycles under.³⁹ If we are interested in analysing those events that were relevant for the course of events, e.g., by influencing authorities' cost-benefit calculations or by inspiring popular support, it is even sensible to restrict the analysis to those events that received media coverage: only these protest events were potentially noticed by the broader public and mobilise potential additional supporters. Activities that did not even make it into the—rather protest adverse—reporting can, by contrast, be considered to have played a more marginal role for the evolution of the dynamics of interaction due to their limited public visibility.⁴⁰ From this angle, an analysis of event data based on media reports is “not only a pragmatic choice but a theoretically grounded imperative” (Rucht and Neidhardt 1998, 76).

3.4 Step Two: Political Discourse Analysis

More than a method, discourse theory is above all a methodology that integrates a growing variety of operationalisations for empirical study under a common roof

³⁸ The Committee to Protect Journalists currently ranks Egypt as the third worst jailor of journalists, with at least 38 media professionals behind bars. In a similar vein, the organisation Reporters without Borders in its yearly assessment of press freedoms ranks Egypt 161st of all countries examined. Since 2014, it uninterruptedly lists the country's leader, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as 'Predator of Press Freedom'. Given these dire straits for free reporting in Egypt, the account of the course of protests presented here is not claimed to be exhaustive. See https://rsf.org/en/barometer?year=2018&type_id=235.

³⁹ This is also suggested by a comparison with the higher, but not easily verifiable count of the International Development Centre Egypt's (IDCEG) 'Democracy Meter Survey'. Visualised in a time series, the peaks in its protest charts are almost parallel for a large part of the period of investigation.

⁴⁰ Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993, 116) have gone as far as labelling “non-events” all those protest events that fail to receive any media coverage. Complementing this argument, Koopmans and Olzak (2004, 201) consider regime weaknesses, affective moments, and transformative openings, which are not visualised by media coverage, as “non-opportunities” for movement mobilisation.

(see Angermüller 2001; Glynos et al. 2009). This common roof is sustained by the somewhat coherent set of assumptions that Laclau and Mouffe have articulated on the constitutive effect of language and social practice. However, as Laclau and Mouffe themselves never engaged with the question of how to operationalise their project, a lack of systematisation pervades discourse theory as a field of study. The number of research projects claiming to be some kind of discourse analysis grows constantly (van Dijk 1990, 7). But only a few of these projects are clear and transparent about the methods that underpin their analysis. The resulting approaches are highly heterogeneous, focussing each on different aspects such as the hegemony component (Glasze 2007; Nonhoff 2007; 2015; Rear 2016; Vey 2015), the proliferation of empty signifiers (Glasze 2007; 2008; Mattissek 2008; Rear and Jones 2013a), the operationalisation of variants in relational meaning (Marttila 2015a; 2015b), or the constitution of political subjects (Howarth and Torfing 2005; Howarth, Torfing, and Stavrakakis 2005). Making a virtue of necessity, Torfing (1999, 292) argues:

A universal recipe for the utilisation of discourse analysis does not exist and should not be developed. For, whereas there is a great need to develop our critical reflections on how to apply discourse theory in concrete studies, we should not aim to solve the methodological question once and for all.⁴¹

Like several other proponents of the approach (e.g., Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002; Müller 2011), he strongly affirms that discourse theory as a conceptual perspective draws its power precisely from its methodological flexibility. Critics, however, have taken the absence of a coherent methodology as **proof for the approach's impracticability; it is partly responsible for the perception of discourse theoretical studies as policy irrelevant and lofty theorising exercises at the expense of systematic empirical engagement** (Müller 2011, para. 5); and it has earned discourse theory the reputation of non-operationalizability.

Particularly in the field of social movement studies, the post-foundational paradigm has seen little empirical application, given the competing and established scholarship on framing. At the same time, it is this very research tradition that offers points of connection. As I argue in this chapter, framing theory provides the broad categories wherein movement discourses can sensibly be analysed, thereby paving the way for a sensible operationalisation of discourse theory. The centrality of antagonisms for the construction of collective action frames dovetails with central assumptions of discourse theory about the constitution of political

⁴¹ Similarly, Howarth et al. have called upon discourse researchers to stay true to the post-foundational paradigm and “to *articulate* their concepts in each particular enactment of concrete research” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 7, italics i.O.).

subjectivities. And the conceptual tripod of diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation denotes those layers of movement discourses where antagonisms materialise.

3.4.1 Operationalising Discourse Theory through Framing

Discourse analysis refers to “**the practice of analysing empirical raw materials and information as discursive forms**” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 6). This means that discourse analysts treat a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic data—speeches, reports, manifests, historical events, interviews, policies, ideas even organisations and institutions—as texts. Setting out from these texts the analyst thus aims at locating the historical antagonisms of the larger discursive formation within which the texts operate. In framing approaches to social movement studies this differential process has **been captured in the concepts of “boundary framing” and “adversarial framing”** (Benford and Snow 2000, 616; see also Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994; Hunt and Benford 2004; Silver 1997), attributional processes that construct and delineate between movement protagonists and antagonists. The **discourse analyst’s job is to describe how social movement discourse establishes and naturalises this antagonism by using the available means of persuasion** (Biesecker-Mast 1996).

The framing perspective offers a way to describe these means of persuasion, and thus to assess the mobilising power of a communicated text, message or slogan: “**The frame suggests what the controversy is about and hence the political essence of the issue**” (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, 143). What makes a framing powerful and resonant is that it condenses either abstract or concrete experiences with an affective character that are able to generate both rational and emotional responses. Accordingly framing processes are integral to social movement recruitment and sustained mobilisation. Alongside government agents, the state and the wider media system, social movements are among the principal contenders in a **constant struggle about the “production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders”**—a process that Stuart Hall (1982, 64), in his seminal essay on the media’s ideological work, has described as “**the politics of signification.**”

The process by which social movements define what is going on, why it is going on, who is responsible for it, and what can or should be done, and how, is usually referred to as the forging of collective action frames.⁴² Their core functions

⁴² According to Robert Benford and David Snow (2000, 614), collective action frames are “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organisation.”

can be dichotomised along the audiences that social movements must simultaneously cater to—often making their political communication a tightrope walk. Extending beyond an analysis of the world for the movement members, collective action frames must also convince new potential followers who are not yet associated with the movement. Movement frames thus have to incorporate at least two actor-oriented functions: building and maintaining cohesion, as well as motivating and integrating outsiders into the movement (Snow & Benford 1988:198). This double task is undertaken by activists almost instinctively when they define the boundaries of their collective subject in protest calls, demonstration chants and press releases.⁴³

These two functions of movement communication, cohesion and inclusion, are served by the coaction of specific components which constitute the framing process, and which are usually analytically divided into the triad of diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation. Diagnosis refers to the process of defining a problem and appointing responsibility, virtually an act of naming and shaming. In this regard, empirical studies of movement find ‘injustice’ and ‘victimisation’ to be the most recurrent diagnostic frames (see Jasper and Poulsen 1995). Following from this diagnosis, the prognosis then proposes the solution to this problem, identifying who should counter injustice and how. Yet, establishing consensus about specific problems and problem causes, as well as probable solutions and demands is usually not enough to inspire collective action.⁴⁴ Hence collective action frames comprise an additional motivational component, which provides a reason for acting politically. The motivational frame often adds a moral dimension to the hitherto rational line of argument (Noakes and Johnston 2005, 2).⁴⁵ In sum, movement discourses:

⁴³ Egypt, Tahrir, in January 2011 again offers a great example here: The fraternisation of protesters with army forces, which Neil Ketchley (2014) has described in depth as performative act of micro-conflict avoidance, constitutes in essence a situational attempt of a frame extension to cooptate a possible antagonist. By default, civilians and soldiers stand on opposing sides of the political struggle. However, in resorting to the – by now famous – chant “el-geysh we-l-shaab iyd wahda” (the army and the people are one hand), protesters extended their collective subject and redrew the frontiers of the political struggle in a way that “include[d] newly deployed soldiers, with the Mubarak regime present as the silent Other” (Ketchley 2014, 172).

⁴⁴ Each society harbours a whole barrage of inherent tensions, social grievances and discontent with the political status quo, which could all lend themselves to potential collective expressions of dissent. For example, the grievances of Arab societies, caused by the lingering political, social, and economic crises which are highlighted in many accounts of the uprisings (e.g., Kurzman 2012), had been well known for more than a decade and had been widely discussed by scholars (Valbjørn and Bank 2010, 185). However, knowing about such crises and making them visible is not enough to inspire collective action.

⁴⁵ Motives for action can be variegated and extend from symbolic shows of appreciation and recognition, to solidarity, or moral appeals to tradition, moral values and belief systems. Emotionality and affect also play an important role at this stage of the mobilisation process.

define problems—determine what a causal agent is doing and costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of cultural values; diagnose causes—identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments—evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies—offer and justify treatments for the problem (Entman 1993, 52).

More often than not—heterogeneous movements neither diagnose a unitary common problem nor a common solution (Benford and Snow 2000, 616; Benford 1993). Instead, consensus often materialised in the course of mobilisation through the construction of political camps. It is part and parcel of the framing process to supply both the *we* who should act collectively as an agent of change and the antagonist *other* who should be acted against. Thereby, the discursive space is dichotomised, and an antagonistic frontier is established between those who are part or allies of the movement and those who are not. According to Gamson (1992a, 7f, 85), without such an antagonist element, the targets of any indignation remained abstract and diffuse, and hence might even be able to demotivate collective action.

The construction of such antagonisms in movement discourses cuts across the three framing dimensions. In their binary construction of the political struggle, contenders' narrative about their antagonist other usually follows the structure of *who did what to whom*, thus mirroring the diagnostic frame. By contrast, their self-portrayal usually replicates the prognostic frame by designating *who should to what*. An additional antagonism on the motivational level justifies taking action by juxtaposing the moral superiority of the collective *we* against the moral corruption of the external *other*. That is to say; there is effectively three antagonisms that lend themselves to an investigation as part of a discourse analysis:

- 1) one that pits the agents of injustice (who is the problem) against the agents of change (who solves the problem);
- 2) one that contrasts the deeds of the former (what did they do) with the goals and strategies of the latter as a plan to solve an impasse or crisis;
- 3) and one that evaluates the moral qualities that set the collective subject apart from its antagonist other (what makes them disputable and what makes us the driver of change). This last antagonism typically stresses urgency and a duty to act, targeting the motivational and emotional drivers of a movement's audience.

Discourse theory provides an analytical vocabulary for describing the process of how these antagonisms are constructed; how on both sides of this antagonist frontier chains of equivalence are established that delineate between those who are part of the movement and those who are not; and how—again on both sides—differences are moderated by common relation to central signifier. In a nutshell, framing theory thus provides the broad categories wherein social movements'

political subjectivation processes can sensibly be analysed in this thesis. It provides those layers of movement discourses that suggest what the movement and the controversy are all about. Each of these levels is equally important for the cohesion and recruitment of a social movement and thus for its processes of collective identity formation. Discourse theory then provides the tools for illustrating the micro-structuration of discursive layers. And it provides the framework for explaining how this discursive architecture affects the conditions of social protest and/or state repression.

3.4.2 *Semantic Networks*

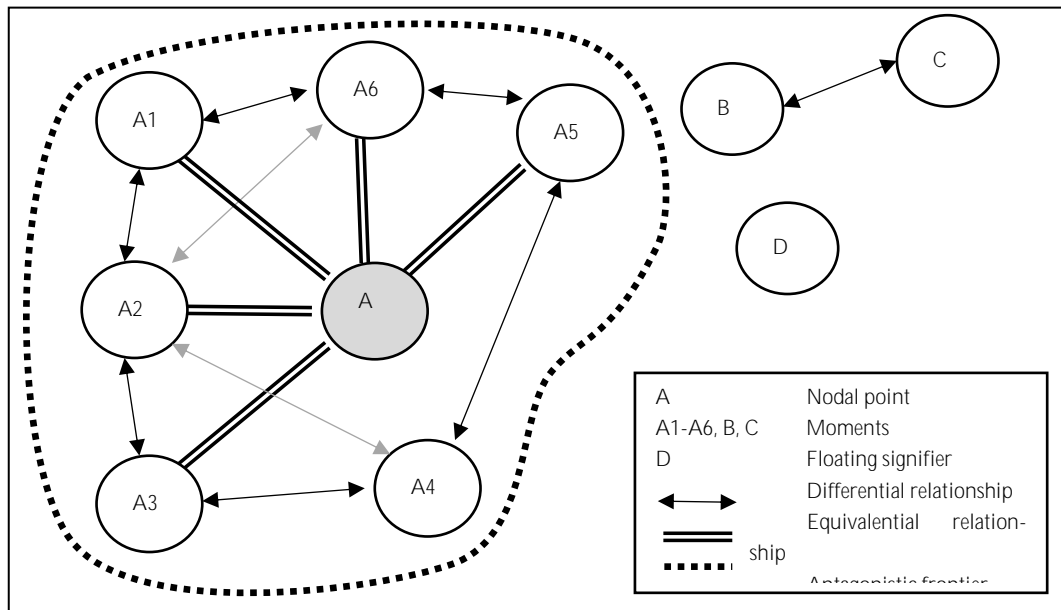
While competing discourses are hence the unit of analysis, the divergent structuration of discrete signifiers within the examined discourses functions as the unit of **observation**. **This thesis views discourses as composed of articulatory ‘moments’**, each of which subtly **challenges, modifies, renegotiates or reproduces the structured totality** of that discourse. Their structure can be made visible with semantic networks. Network analysis, at its core, refers to the study of relational patterns between different elements (Hawe, Webster, and Shiell 2004, 971; see also Wellman and Berkowitz 1988). In social movement studies, it has above all served as a method by which to grasp the interpersonal relations among activists, mobilised groups and social movement organisations, to identify broker positions, and overlaps in mobilising structures and resources (Diani 1992).

However, aside from this classic domain, the method can also be applied to the investigation of discourses. The aim of such an analysis is to identify the key signifiers that sustain a certain discourse, thereby enabling and constraining the actions of its respective authors. If these signifiers are uprooted by political realities on the ground (i.e., dislocated by transformative events), new windows of opportunity (e.g., for protest or repression) may appear. In this sense, a semantic network can be thought of as an organising mechanism. It summarises the structure of a discourse which conditions social interaction. Its elements correspond to the elements of a text or a body of texts and can represent words and expressions or certain meanings assigned by a coder.

The network terminology dovetails with crucial tenets of discourse theory which is often described through the fishing net metaphor: Figure 2 exemplifies this point by illustrating the concepts introduced in the theory chapter in a two-dimensional network graph. Showing how discourse is constituted by the articulation of differential relations (moments) among its elements into a chain of equivalence, above all, the notion of closure and of a discursive frontier is illustrated. The figure displays Laclau and Mouffe’s idea of discourse as a set of interconnected

discursive elements.

Figure 2. Temporal fixation of signifiers and discursive boundaries



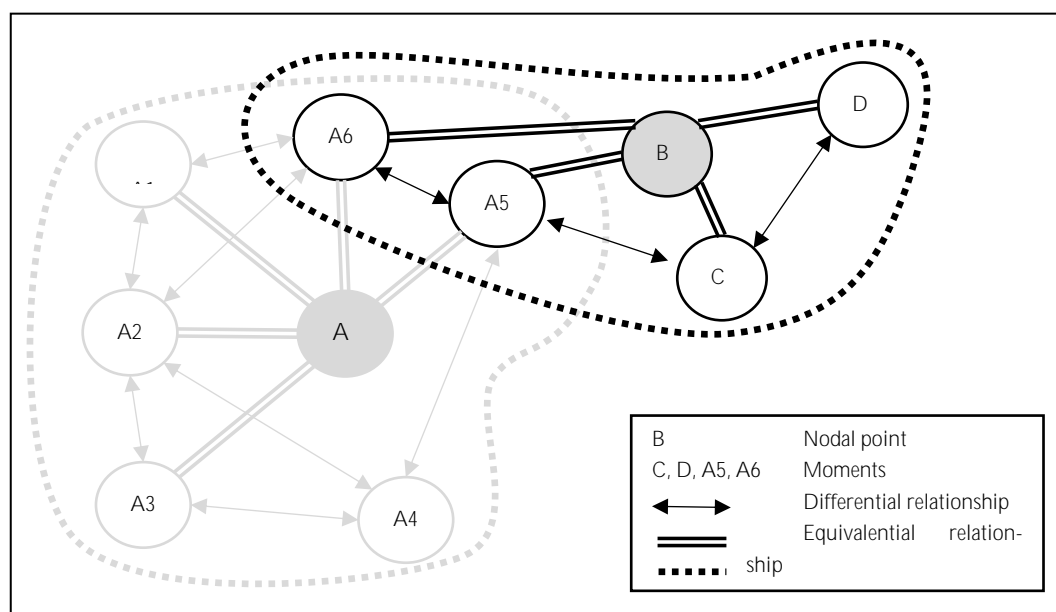
Source 2. Own representation, based on Andrade (2015) and Glasze (2007, sec. 23).

The graph illustrates how all elements A (A, A1-A6) can be considered moments because they have been articulated in relation to other elements in the discursive field. B and D are moments, too. By contrast, D is an element that has yet to be articulated. It had no meaning yet. As a floating signifier, it plays no role in the depicted discourse thus far. In this specific discourse, the signifier A assumes a unique role, because it occupies a nodal point. All differential elements A1-A6 are bound together by their common relation to this nodal signifier. A thus represents the entirety of the discourse by temporarily fixing the position of all its constituting elements. This discourse, however, is more than a web of elements. In fact, from the perspective of discourse theory, discourses always emerge against a constitutive outside (e.g. elements B, C, D). As Andrade (2015) notes “discourses present themselves as fully determining totalities. In doing so, they exclude other possible differentiations.” By excluding what they are not, not only are boundaries created (which are represented in the figure by the dotted black line), but also the articulation of other meanings, that is, of other possible configurations of the discursive field is prevented.

Figure 3 shows how an alternative discourse, articulated with some of the same elements, might have looked like. The competing discourse now articulates nodes B, C, D, and F. In turn, A, A1, A6, A5, A4 now have lost their meaning and become floating signifiers, elements of the discursive field whose relation to other elements is not defined. These two visualisations are hardly exhaustive of all pos-

sible relations that could be articulated among these elements. As the discursive field is endless, there is an infinite number of other possible configurations of meaning which could include less, or additional elements.

Figure 3. Competing discourses



Source 3. Own representation, based on Andrade (2015) and Glasze (2007, sec. 23).

The advantages of operationalising discourse through semantic networks is two-fold: On a content level, it helps to discern the topics a document (or a body of documents) touches upon, from the micro-topics to the general themes discussed, as well as their interrelation. At times, it is hard to summarise a single text, let alone to grasp the inner workings of an entire body of texts. Intertextual analysis often gets lost in the description, or otherwise remains superficial. Studies of discourse should go beyond highlighting the broad red lines that structure communication and instead elaborate on the underlying regularities and silences that structure political projects of articulation and processes of meaning-making.⁴⁶

At a structural level, semantic networks additionally reveal how the architecture of discourses changes over time, for instance, in relation to transformative events or other ruptures in the lifeworld of social movements. From a post-foundational perspective, terms are signifiers that draw their distinct meaning from their differential relation to each other. Hence, it is often distinct clusters of equivalence that characterise a specific key tenet of a discourse. They are delimited from others through relations of difference. Converting a text into a semantic

⁴⁶ When analysts in their mapping of a large body of communication focus only on the most visible signifiers and symbols, they risk making their own work redundant. One need not be a discourse analyst to read the traits of nationalism and securitisation in the patriotic lingo of the Egyptian administration.

network helps to detect these clusters and how they change over periods of contention.⁴⁷

3.5 Data Sources and Coding Procedures

This dissertation is based on several phases of data collection, archival work, and field research conducted in mainly Egypt and Turkey. Throughout these phases, three types of primary data were collected: protest event data, statements and press releases by social movement activists, and interviews. I conducted the first stage of this research in the spring and summer of 2013. During this period, I investigated Anti-Coup marches and counter-mobilisation by groups affiliated with the NSF and Tamarod in the Caireen suburbs of Maadi, Nasr City, Zayeda Zeinab, Shoubra al-Kheema, Gizah and Helwan as an outside observer. The second stage of my data collection took place between December 2013 and May 2014 and centred on the systematic coding of protest events by the Anti-Coup campaign in the aftermath of the 2013 coup—mainly from Berlin but with intermittent field trips to Cairo. The data for the study of the Tiran and Sanafir island protests was recorded as the protests unfolded in April and May 2016.

Additional interview and documentary data were collected during field trips to Cairo (June and July 2015) and Istanbul (June 2016, August-December 2016).⁴⁸ Whenever possible, I arranged follow-up discussions throughout 2016 and 2017; however, this last stage of data collection happened primarily from abroad. Since early 2016, I conducted most background talks with activists in Egypt only via the encrypted online communication tool *Jitsi Meet*. I draw on these discussions eclectically to illustrate my arguments based on the protest event and discourse analyses. Furthermore, where quotes are included in the empirical description, their sources have been obfuscated: I have anonymised the names of all my interlocutors including those of my prior interviewees, as well as the time and place of their interviews. Wherever I suspected that readers might be able to piece together the information provided about interlocutors, their testimonies were split up and

⁴⁷ If too many elements are crammed in a visualisation, viewers need time and effort to explore the visualisation. The latter thus loses its use as a simplifying tool, as Clément Levallois states “the viewer transforms into an analyst, instead of a regular reader” (Levallois 2017, 4). Test visualisations showed that around 30 elements are the upper limit as regards the number of elements that can be reasonably visualised in a semantic network. This ball park figure provides enough information to allow for micro-topics of a text to be distinguished, without getting lost in detail or exceeding the space of a single page.

⁴⁸ A full list of all activists, lawyers, journalists and local researchers who were interviewed in the frame of this dissertation project is on file with the author. It includes 37 mostly Egyptian informants some of whom were deceased or were still in jail when this thesis was submitted.

attributed to different personas.⁴⁹

During data collection, I often chose not to use a recording device or protocol **my interlocutors' answers. Instead, I took field notes** or dictated what I recalled as relevant from these meetings into my phone on the ride home. This choice will likely open this study to many of the criticisms levied at qualitative analyses—in particular, that of subjectivity. However, from my perspective, prioritising risk avoidance over scientific reproducibility was not only a practical choice but an ethical imperative, given the unprecedented personal risk for researchers and their research participants in contemporary Egypt (see Grimm 2018b; 2018a; Grimm, Koehler, Lust, et al. 2020).⁵⁰ The forced disappearance, torture and killing of Giulio Regeni, a colleague from Cambridge University working on similar issues as myself (Pyper 2016), in January 2016 gruesomely demonstrated the shifting red lines in Al-Sisi's Egypt.⁵¹ **After details of Giulio's kidnapping**—such as the fact that he was monitored during most of his research after having been reported to authorities by a trusted informant—were disclosed, even seasoned Egypt researchers began to judge the personal risk to themselves and their interlocutors too high to continue with interview-based research on sensitive topics concerning civil society or social movement inside the country. Sheila Carapico (2014, 28) has correctly **noted the after Giulio's murder** “even some long-term expats came home, fewer ventured to fewer countries, and there are no revolutionary tourists anymore.”

As intimidation attempts and threats to local and foreign researchers intensified (both in Cairo and abroad), I chose to abandon my methodological focus on face-to-face interviews in Egypt. Instead, I proceeded with a series of face-to-face talks with exiled activists in Athens, Berlin, Frankfurt, Istanbul, Rome and Washington DC. I conducted two separate research stays in Turkey, in spring and autumn of 2016, to interview MB and NASL activists in exile. During these trips, I was able to conduct over a dozen interviews. They provided invaluable feedback on the findings of my discourse analysis and supplied my interpretations with background knowledge. These talks also inform the narrative of this thesis but are not systematically analysed in this dissertation. For the stated reasons—access limits and ethical concern—the described combination of protest event and dis-

⁴⁹ In cases where giving up the date or location of the interview might provide clues to the interviewee (e.g., because authorities knew about the author's schedule on this specific day, or because security cameras might have caught the conversation on tape), this data was obfuscated as well.

⁵⁰ Moreover, in my opinion, it is not only valid to, but also perfectly acceptable for this study to be seen as subjective. There is no such thing as objective knowledge. All we can do is lay bare how we arrive to our conclusions through our research process.

⁵¹ For detailed accounts of Giulio's disappearance and murder see Walsh (2017).

course analyses form the principal data basis for all argumentations in this thesis.

3.5.1 *Cataloguing Protest Events from Media Reports*

On the contenders' side of the protest-repression nexus my analysis centres on public performances by collective actors that embody dissent with the Egyptian regime. By the time of writing, no protest event dataset on the 2013 Anti-Coup protests in Egypt was readily available that offered the necessary depth of detail for investigating the protest campaign's trajectory in response to and affection by repression. I have therefore manually coded protest events from social media posts and press articles for each day of the investigation period between 3 July and 11 October 2013, factoring in the time lag of reports and with special attention to tactical repertoires. To reduce reporting bias (e.g., newspapers over-reporting large and violent events) and the effects of authoritarian censorship (Earl et al. 2004; Ortiz et al. 2005), the coded sample included local print and online media of different political affiliations as well as social media posts and crowdsourcing data.

In principle, local newspapers are qualitatively superior to foreign or online press, because of their geographical proximity to the events in question and the immutability of their content (Khamis 2011, 1167; Herkenrath and Knoll 2011; Ortiz 2008, 52). However, unlike the 25 January Revolution or the 2013 Tamarod campaign, the NASL protests received little to no coverage by Egyptian news.⁵² Due to either their anti-Islamist stance or state interference in editorial lines, the big Egyptian national dailies, such as the 'semi-official'⁵³ *Al-Ahram* (including its English online platforms *Ahram Online* and *Al-Ahram Weekly*) and *Al-Shorouq* heavily underreported the Anti-Coup campaign. I thus incorporated the independent news platforms *Daily News Egypt* and *Mada Masr* into my data pool to balance for this reporting bias. Publishing online in Arabic and English, they cater to an informed readership and are less affected by censorship mechanisms. To compensate further for political selection mechanisms (Ball 2005, 189), I have added oppositional outlets to the sample. Regrettably, the online archives of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) were disabled by a cyber-attack in January 2014. The archives of *Ikhwanonline*, the Muslim Brotherhood's Arabic website, were

⁵² I evaluated a sample of *Al-Ahram* and the independent dailies *Al-Shorouq* and *Al-Dostor* for a test period (the week following the so-called Mandate Friday on 26 July 2013) to probe the coverage of protests in the leading media outlets. I expected a special focus on mobilisation in the selected test week and hoped that these outlets would cover, at least, the trends of the Anti-Coup protest campaign, despite their political biases. The reality was sobering: all three newspapers reported only a few mass events; protests outside of provincial capitals were not reported; and state violence was hardly ever mentioned.

⁵³ The specification describes the direct exercise of influence by the Egyptian government on the respective newspapers (Hamdy and Gomaa 2012, 196).

marred by server problems during the whole period of investigation. The protest organisers' social network presence (e.g., the Muslim Brotherhood's, the FJP's and the NASL's Facebook pages) was hence an important primary source. As "social newspapers" (Elsayed 2013, 16), these sites have gained importance in Egypt over the last years (Hamdy and Gomaa 2012, 196).⁵⁴

The websites and social media pages of the Anti-Coup Alliance, of the Muslim Brotherhood, its Freedom and Justice Party, and of the dissident *Rassd News Network* (RNN)⁵⁵ were indispensable for the reconstruction of Anti-Coup mobilisation, because they took notice of small and peaceful demonstrations, too, and were less affected by censorship. In addition, articles were often linked to videos on citizen reporter platforms, such as *Bambuser*, *Ustream*, or *Livestream* where demonstrators uploaded live feeds and cell phone videos of protests they attended in real time. This turned them into a valuable resource. Adopting a method suggested by Ketchley (2013), I compared samples of each source to uploaded video material to check for description bias concerning protester turnout, violence or repertoires. Thanks to the geotagging of these platforms, recording dates and location of visual material could be verified, thus bolstering the data's reliability.⁵⁶

In sum, these sources document 2,433 discrete protest events during the investigation period that can be attributed to the Anti-Coup Alliance. I extracted and coded this sample from a basic population of around 11,000 reports published by the selected outlets within the investigated timeframe. The indicators used to qualify it further include meta-variables like location, time and source. Other characteristics measure the influence of repression on size, composition, and repertoire. Due to partially conflicting reports, protest size was coded on an imputed interval scale (events attended by up to 10,000, up to 50,000, up to 100,000, and over 100,000 participants). No additional threshold value was set since it was assumed that in any case, the media would only cover protests that have a significant number of participants. Whenever sources did not explicitly specify numbers, I

⁵⁴ Since there were no indexed databases for the selected media for the period of investigation, the analysed population included all articles released by Al-Ahram, Ahram Online, Al-Ahram Weekly, Daily News Egypt, Mada Masr and RNN, as well as Facebook posts published by the FJP, the MB and the NASL during the investigation period of investigation – which amounted to a total of over 11,000 articles. No sampling techniques were employed for the investigation conducted here (e.g. reducing the analyses to editions of only one day of the week, random selection of editions, see Earl et al. 2004, 69).

⁵⁵ Originally established to cover the protests against the Mubarak regime (Richter 2015b, 194; A. F. Hassan 2015, 42), *Rassd* has in the meantime become one of the most widely read news outlets in the Arab world: About seven million users follow its status updates on Facebook and Twitter.

⁵⁶ In the appendix to his analysis of post-revolutionary contention in Egypt, Ketchley (2017a, 164–65) provides an example of how streaming platforms work as aggregators for Anti-Coup protest footage. This turned them into a valuable resource for assessing the reliability of reporting in different sources.

estimated the turnout according to available information, as suggested by Walker, Martin and McCarthy (2008, 52).⁵⁷ I extrapolated the daily country-wide turnout based on the **sum of the categories' mean values**.⁵⁸

As regards protest repertoire, all tactics were coded as a new value when they first appeared. Where sources indicated a mixed repertoire for a certain event, it was coded as using the kind of repertoire that dominated the journalistic accounts. Furthermore, there is a dichotomous distinction between violent and nonviolent events. A protest was coded as violent whenever there were reports on physical confrontations. Political violence is not an integral part of social movements. But it usually emerges from peaceful collective action (Della Porta and LaFree 2012, 6; Tilly 2003, 26). It was therefore coded as part of the contentious repertoire. Attacks on state facilities, churches, or security personnel were coded separately.⁵⁹

By contrast, the analysis of the 'Egypt is not for sale' protest campaign draws on the real-time Africa-dataset that is released and updated regularly by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) at the University of Sussex (cf., Raleigh et al. 2010).⁶⁰ Developed as a tool for disaggregated conflict analysis and crisis mapping, the ACLED-dataset codes dates and locations of conflict events, specific types of events (including battles, civilian killings, riots, protests and recruitment activities), the range of actors involved (including rebels, governments, militias, armed groups, protesters and civilians) and changes in territorial control in over 60 developing countries in Africa and Asia, and disposes of a fairly accurate account of event data for Egypt in the timeframe examined in this paper, between 8 April 2016 (the first announcement of the island transfer) and 25 May 2016 (the day that a third 'islands-protest' was scheduled for which, however, **never materialised**). **ACLED's event data is hand coded and derived from a variety of sources including reports from developing countries and local media, humani-**

⁵⁷ Walker et al. found that well-informed coders who were acquainted with the subject of research were able to very reliably estimate participants turnouts on an imputed interval scale and within broad size categories, such as those employed in this thesis.

⁵⁸ Arguably this coding decision carries the risk of inflating participant counts as the smallest protest is coded with the category mean of 5,000. However, the fact that usually few large protests contribute most participants over a protest cycle (Biggs 2018) has positive implications for our catalogue: the inclusion of all reported events without a quantitative threshold enriches our projection of protest rates, while affecting the projection of total protest turnouts only to a minor degree. We concentrated on eliminating duplicates of large events which would have severely distorted our empirical results.

⁵⁹ For reasons of analytical clarity, no further disaggregation of the concept of violence (e.g. into violence against persons and against objects) was employed.

⁶⁰ Real-time monthly ACLED data for South and Southeast Asian and African countries is available for download on the ACLED Project website at <http://www.acleddata.com/data/>.

tarian agencies, and research publications.⁶¹ Whereas the analyses published by the ACLED project on the Egyptian transformation (e.g., Moody 2014a; 2015; 2014b) vary in their degree of factual accuracy and argumentative persuasiveness, the actual data behind the papers is surprisingly solid: A comparison between the hand-coded event database for the Islamist protests by the Anti-Coup-Alliance in **the aftermath of President Mursi's deposition** (Grimm and Harders 2018), and the ACLED project for the same timeframe reveals that the latter recorded substantially smaller rates of protest events—as regards the influential transformative events and turning points in the course of the protest cycle, however, the ACLED data was fairly reliable.

To further refine data quality, reported protests were manually checked for false positives, and the dataset was scrutinised to eliminate protests and clashes between civilians and police forces that were not related to the 'Egypt is not for sale' protest campaign and instead motivated by, e.g., local land disputes, sectarian conflict, and administrative misconduct.⁶² Consequently, a total of 65 protests remain in the set, of which two—the riots after an Egyptian police officer shot a street vendor over a cup of tea (Middle East Eye 2016) and another injured a microbus driver following an altercation over traffic (Al Ahram 2016c)—are not directly related to the land transfer issue. However, video footage of both events testifies that local rioters and outraged residents framed their grievances explicitly in reference to the 15 April protests, thus qualifying the events for inclusion in the analysis.⁶³

⁶¹ In order to manage the huge mass of press reports and social media posts, movement researchers rely increasingly on automatised data capture. Doing so they accept a loss of precision in exchange for increased efficiency (King and Lowe 2003, 633). With the Global Database of Events (GDELT), in fact, there is a dataset for the period of investigation that offers the detail necessary for a day-to-day conflict analysis, and which has even been applied already to the study of contentious dynamics in Egypt (cf., Beielser 2013). However, as with other machine-coded predecessors, it suffers strongly from the biases inherent in reporting of protest, selection bias, uneven distribution of sources and description bias (for an overview over the pitfalls of newspaper data see Earl et al. 2004; Ortiz et al. 2005). In addition, the GDELT data's reliability fares quite poorly, especially when it comes to the inclusion of false positives (for a pertinent critique cf., Hammond and Weidmann 2014; Hanna 2014b; 2014a). Due to the sheer amount of data collected by the GDELT search protocol, refining the dataset manually ultimately amounts to a tedious Sisyphian task.

⁶² Due to time constraints, it was not possible to analyse further sources. However, the selection of sources used here seems to be sufficient when considering that most social movement researchers rely on the New York Times Index or the archives of the Washington Post despite the known problems of validity and selectivity (cf., Earl et al. 2004, 75; A. W. Martin, McCarthy, and McPhail 2009, 828; Olzak 1989, 126; Davenport 2010; Ortiz et al. 2005).

⁶³ Even though the employed dataset was manually refined and validated, coding errors are inevitable, as coding decisions reflect the level of detail of the sources. However, rather than worrying about the underreporting (of probably a large number) of small events, I have focused on recording those few large events correctly, which "provide a remarkably accurate measure of total participation" (Biggs 2018, 5).

3.5.2 Mapping Repression by Proxy

In order to better grasp interaction processes, the ways how the authorities responded to contentious performances are measured in a disaggregated way as well. Hence repression is not treated as an abstract condition that quantifies the degree of liberty for collective action at a particular instance in time, but as a sequence of discrete and responsive events. In principle, these events comprise policing (Earl and Soule 2006) and all formal or informal actions that aim at raising mobilisation costs.⁶⁴ However, due to the inability to quantify the latter in a disaggregated way this study is unable to encompass protest and repression events in equal measure.

Repression was measured by proxy and with the help of crowdsourcing data. Christoph Williams (2013, 30) defines crowdsourcing as a “participative online activity in which an individual, an institution, a non-profit organisation, or company proposes to a group of individuals of varying knowledge, heterogeneity, and number, via a flexible open call, the voluntary undertaking of a task.” Especially in authoritarian settings, such as the studied case, where conventional means of collecting data are restricted and where those institutions in charge of documenting human rights violations are either partisan or hindered in their work, crowdsourcing platforms provide a means to keeping track of state violence (Heinzelman and Meier 2013, 124).⁶⁵ By providing an anonymous reporting mechanism for violations, crowdsourcing technologies facilitate overcoming institutional and psychological barriers while enabling victims of violence and repression to avoid social stigmatisation or potential repercussion for their testimonies (Young 2014, 8). It is precisely for these reasons that Egyptians employed crowdsourcing in the past to track sexual violence and police torture (Williams 2013, 33), for election monitoring (Meier 2011, 164ff), and to document the 2011 Tahrir protests (Urgola 2014).

Currently, the online platform *Wiki Thawra* represents the most extensive effort in the country to systematically catalogue the victims of rights violations in the timeframe covered in this thesis (Dunne and Williamson 2014). Launched by the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR), its raw data is compiled mainly from the reports of different Egyptian human rights organisa-

⁶⁴ Including legal restrictions (Barkan 2006; Ellefsen 2016) and ‘soft repression’ (Ferree 2005) (e.g., stigmatisation or shaming) which are often neglected in studies of the protest-repression nexus.

⁶⁵ Students of repression continue to meet crowdsourcing methods with scepticism. Above all, NGOs who monitor human rights violations traditionally place utmost importance on close reasoning and meticulous evidencing of each individual case to insulate their reports against methodological criticism. By contrast, in piece and conflict studies, crowdsourcing methods have been established as a reliable tool for decentralised conflict mapping (e.g., Meier and Ziemke 2009).

tions (HRO) and validated with the help of private individuals. The database meticulously documents who did what to whom during the investigation period, thus making it possible to distinguish victims of state violence from those of confrontations among civilians. For the investigated timeframe, the database lists a total of 2,305 fatal casualties, 11,517 injured, and 14,442 arrests (see Wiki Thawra 2014). Up to date, there is hardly any comparable official data available. Systematic accounts of casualties at protest events, or reliable data about wounded protesters either do not exist or are kept from the public. Only for some mass events that were meticulously documented by HRO have the authorities released official figures—mostly to counter accusations of negligence regarding the investigation of political violence. The discrepancy between these official figures and those reported by Wiki Thawra, however, is staggering, as the comparison of reported casualties for some of the most violent events during the investigation period illustrates (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Comparison of casualty figures

	Republican Guard 8 July 2013		Nasr Street 27 July 2013		Rabaa & Al-Nahda 14 August 2013		Ramses Street 16 August 2013		6 th October October 6, 2013	
	WT	MoH	WT	MoH	WT	MoH	WT	MoH	WT	MoH
killed	93	61	109	95	1516	719	356	95	83	53
wounded	1237	1404	763	748	6986	3994	1798	1330	392	271

Source 4. Wiki Thawra; Ministry of Health Egypt.

For the operationalisation of repression during the Tiran and Sanafir islands campaign, the *Wiki Thawra* database was unfortunately of no use, as the crowdsourcing project was already terminated by the time of the campaign's inception. By contrast, ACLED dataset chronicled only fatalities. It was thus also of little use for researching this particular protest episode which—thankfully—saw no lethal protest policing. In spring 2016, the preferred repertoire repression were handcuffs and batons, not birdshot and live ammunition (although on 15 April and 25, birdshot and rubber bullets were deployed against the protesters in parts of the country alongside tear gas canisters). Accordingly, the statistics released by the highly respectable **Front to Defend Egypt's Protesters (FDEP)**, a collective of activist-lawyers, proved invaluable to track state repression on a day to day basis. The grassroots movement, which was founded to raise awareness on the targeting of political activists in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, issues a disaggregated dataset which is updated regularly and documents arrests, detailing on the demo-

graphic and geographic characteristic of the detainees.⁶⁶ The FDEP's account thus represents a reliable take on the physical side of repression exerted by the Egyptian security state in the second contentious episode under study.

Admittedly, all operationalisation of repression via statistical data are limited in their explanatory potential. Event databases only capture things that actually happened. In empirical reality, a shadow of repression, that is, the recollection of prior experiences of victimisation or mere knowledge about the repressive capacity of a regime can be sufficient to discourage potential demonstrators and thus prevent mobilisation from happening (Ortiz 2008, 79–84). Event catalogues, no matter how comprehensively sourced, offer no way to render such a climate of fear measurable. In addition, they also captured repression that does not originate as a response to protests. Phases of transformation are phases of heightened uncertainty and thus generally prone to seeing increased use of force. In order to control for this latter factor, all entries were excluded from the *Wiki Thawra* and FDEP datasets that were not immediately related to the attendance of a protest event. What is more, in the empirical section of this thesis the statistical evidence of repression is complemented by a qualitative analysis that covers several modes of repression that could not be represented by victim figures (e.g., spatial control techniques, legal restrictions, vilifying discourses). The discourse analysis additionally illustrates how, at times, authorities' framing of protesters and their collective actions also fulfilled a repressive task. This account remains fragmentary, however, as this thesis primarily concentrates on the protesters' side of the protest-repression-nexus.

3.5.3 *Analysing Contenders' Discourses*

Laclau and Mouffe's concept of discourse extends beyond the linguistic meaning to a broad set of articulations, with textual documents ranging equally with policy, paintings, notes, as well as audio and visual recordings. Accordingly, this thesis triangulates different types of primary data (textual statements, transcripts of speeches, etc.) from different data outlets (traditional mass media and social media) to see whether they support each other. However, whereas the challenges of protest event analysis stem from the scarcity of reliable sources and an abundance of reporting bias (Ball 2005, 192f; Myers and Caniglia 2004, 520ff; Woolley 2000, 158), discourse analyses face the opposite problem. Methodological difficulties arise from the sheer quantity of commentary produced about protests. For in-

⁶⁶ All figures in this paper refer to the FDEP's last update on 24 May 2016. A spreadsheet with all the documented cases can be accessed via GoogleDocs at <https://goo.gl/DUp6Yn>.

stance, as regards the island crisis, a brief inquiry on the use of the two hashtags associated with the protests #تيران_وصنافير [Tiran and Sanafir] and #جمعة_الارض [Friday of the Land] delivered more than 155,000 mentions on Facebook only in the first month. This figure evidences the difficulty of reducing the pool of potential sources for analysis to a manageable sample, while, at the same time, avoiding both random selections and cherry-picking.

Selection Criteria

In order to avoid the imprinting of some empirical presuppositions onto my results, my selection of items for the discourse analysis remained intimately linked to the protest event data (and thus the boundaries of the investigated discourses). That is to say; I confined my discourse analysis to the political communication released at the critical junctures identified with the help of protest event data, that is, before during and after transformative events. The two-stage research design made it possible to confidently assess which events during phases of contention constituted such critical junctures. Approaching discourse this way, that is, setting out from the event itself (see also Schwedler 2018, 70), avoided the easy mistake of imposing coherence on the investigated authors in the act of interpretation.

Moreover, I concentrated on those sources that could be attributed to the significant factions in the political struggle. Interviews and background talks, conducted between 2013-16 in Cairo, Berlin and Istanbul, were crucial to determine which of those groups calling for protests really took part in the respective street protests. The focus on the political communication of contenders is a deliberate attempt to contribute to the theorisation of mechanisms of mobilisation and the transformation of hegemonic formations by focusing on the ‘agents of change’ themselves. Rather than discounting or discarding their partiality as an unreliable source for reconstructing the dynamics of contention, the viewpoints expressed in **their communications are taken as a window into their contenders’ divergent** readings of contentious events. As Sarah Wessel has argued, when we approach the cultural context of contentious politics as a discursive arena composed by contenders practice of meaning-making, then explicit explanations and implicit assumptions in statements from individuals are partial reflections of the changing political culture (Wessel 2016, n. 2). In other words, material which is distorted or biased is analysed precisely because of its inaccuracies, omissions and hyperbolic representations, which all constitute valuable points of condensation (Howarth 2005, 39). Studying the effects of this meaning-production then entails analysing **the relation of the explications in statements to “agents’ practices (e.g., their work habits, gendered norms, self-policing strategies, and leisure patterns) and systems of signification (language and other symbolic systems)”** (Wedeen 2002, 714).

Admittedly, this procedure departs from conventional practice in social movement studies, which is characterised by an overwhelming focus on mass media as the forum for public debate. The literature acknowledges that political communication transcends the realm of media, taking place also in meetings or on podiums (e.g., Della Porta and Rucht 2013; Haug 2013). But mobilisation **scholars have classically argued that activists' ability to recruit** supporters hinges on their ability to access the mass media (see Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Koopmans and Olzak 2004). This privileging of news coverage over other spheres of communication has been vocally criticised, marshalled by research on the use, workings and dissemination of new social media (Vasi et al. 2015, 941). William Lance Bennett (2003, 144) has highlighted how these communication practices, beyond merely reducing the costs or **increasing the efficiency of mobilising processes, effectively "change the political game itself" in favour of resource-poor** players. Most of the time, ordinary citizens find it difficult to reach traditional media. Social media become alternative outlets for their hopes, fears, and aspirations (Woo-Young 2005). They provide, as Nancy Fraser (1990, 67) puts it in her conception of subaltern counter-**publics**, "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinate social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs."⁶⁷

For movements, they thus constitute venues in which to circumvent exclusion from the official public sphere. Alexandra Segerberg and Lance Bennett (2011; William Lance Bennett and Segerberg 2013) argue that social media have effectively become part and parcel of collective action in that they have adopted the function of primary tools for socio-political activism. Moreover, the new hyper-linked platforms create multiple points of entry for individuals into political action, thus facilitating cross-cleavage mobilisation and the recruitment of support beyond prior personal networks. Taking into account social media as distinct discursive arenas that are nevertheless an inherent part of the contemporary public sphere is thus key for any meaningful attempt to map out the structuration and dynamics of public discourse (Vasi et al. 2015, 953).

Selection Process

Due to the lack of systematic access and meta-data on these communication channels, however, my analysis is based on a carefully selected pool of pertinent sources, which are mostly of textual nature (as in the case of transcribed press

⁶⁷ This argument is even more crucial for authoritarian contexts such as the Egyptian one where traditional media is closely monitored, regulated and censored. In such contexts, social media is often much more aligned with, or at least open to, social movement claims than newspapers or reporting on TV.

statements and public speeches), or consist of a mix of textual, graphics, and video elements (as in the case of the Ministry of Interior's special announcements on social media).⁶⁸ As regards the analysis of movement discourse, I conducted documentary and historical research during all phases of the research. This included examining primary sources, such as the leaflets, press releases and statements issued on social media and different online platforms by the various contentious groups who participated in the protests coded in the event catalogue. I additionally consulted the foundational statements and the social media channels of the protest coalitions studied in this thesis, including the blogs and social media profiles of several leading activists. Furthermore, documentary research also meant collecting and revising secondary sources about the Tamarod, Anti-Coup, and Tiran and Sanafir protests. These sources included newspaper and other coverage of the protests, with a focus on the outlets used to code protest events. On the other side of the contentious dynamics, primary sources were easier to identify. Stricter hierarchies and the functional differentiation between ministerial resorts allowed for identifying and collecting close to all official public statements that referenced protest events or other critical events (such as the diplomatic accord between Egypt and Saudi Arabia over Tiran and Sanafir) directly or alluded to the popular outrage about these events indirectly. The collected primary sources comprise official statements by authorities charged with the policing or regulation protests during the investigated episodes, as well as public speeches or press statements by the leading government figures on the respective protest campaigns.⁶⁹

Despite the absence of press articles in the examined sets, the distribution of sources interestingly mirrors what Myers and Caniglia (2004, 538), as well as Ortiz et al. (2005, 398f), have determined for newspaper reporting: commentary on contentious action tends to focus on large events, those where significant societal actors are taking part, and those where outbreaks of violence happen. In addition, events occurring in the social or geographical periphery attracted significantly less attention than those taking place in central Cairo which, due to their attendance

⁶⁸ A comprehensive list of evaluated websites, gazettes and social media is included in the appendix.

⁶⁹ Unlike formal speeches and TV addresses by members of the cabinet and the presidency, their appearances in television programs and talk shows were deliberately excluded from the analysis. The reason for this procedure is twofold: For once, it served to reduce the fuzz caused by the diversity and fragmentation of opinions expressed in the name of the state, and **allowed for excavating the "official narrative"** (Brand 2014a). Adding to this analytical imperative, there is simply neither an openly accessible Egyptian media archive which would have allowed for extracting a representative sample of televised appearances by members of the state bureaucracy, the military, or other official institutions. Nor did I have access to reliable information on audience ratings of individual TV broadcasts hosting state officials. The latter would have allowed to preselect only those shows which, in all probability, reached a significant audience and are thus likely to have left an interpretative mark on it.

by renowned public intellectuals and oppositional politicians or due to their symbolic location at the steps of the Journalist Syndicate or in the vicinity of Nasr Street, assumed a leading role in the protests investigated in this thesis.

Selected Source Pool

As regards the first major contentious episode discussed in this thesis, the Anti-Coup protest campaign by members of the so-called National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy (NASL) following the military's ouster of President Mursi on 3 July 2013, the analysed selection included a total of 154 statements. Of these, 59 Arabic (both, colloquial Egyptian dialect and Modern Standard Arabic) statements were released by representatives or members of the Anti-Coup protest alliance or its affiliates and covering the phase before the critical juncture of the *Rabaa Al-Adawiya* massacre on 14 August 2013. An additional nine documents were published in English and needed no translation. Another 66 sources cover the timeframe after *Rabaa* and are compared to the first group in order to assess the discursive impact of this transformative event. The manner in which these statements were created reflected in many ways the consensus establishing procedures within the NASL. Typically, the process of drafting a statement in response to recent events would proceed as follows: a skilled editor came up with a draft document that picked up the cues from the last agreed-on and uncontested statement by the Anti-Coup coalition; in the new statement, the ongoing events were incorporated and articulated in relation to these cues. Then the statement would usually be circulated among selected individuals from the NASL leadership prior to publication. As the protest cycle went on and the incarceration of leaders impeded this feedback loop, the small group of statement editors assumed almost full authority over the process, deciding on the NASL's editorial line almost exclusively. Disagreements over the alliance's common denominator expressed in the statements were not resolved by a lengthy drafting process, but through follow-up statements that sometimes corrected certain formulations or restated certain aspects of the presented narrative.⁷⁰

By contrast, the reconstruction of the discourses that accompanied the Tiran and Sanafir islands campaign, the second major episode of contention analysed in this thesis, is based on a sample of 93 speech transcripts and statements. These sources are mostly of a textual nature but include graphic and video elements (e.g., TV records, Twitter posts, banners). The set consists of 68 items released by members or supporters of the Popular Campaign to Protect the Land (PCPL),

⁷⁰ Interview with former editor of Ikhwanweb.com, Istanbul, August 2016.

influential public intellectuals, or by affiliates of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in addition to 25 documents and records of public speeches that exemplify the regime's strategy of dealing with the island issue discursively. As regards, the protesters' side of the discursive interaction, the source pool was compiled on the basis of a broad content scan of several dozen webpages and social media sites covering the popular protests against the island deal. Informal talks and interviews with PCPL activists as well as two lawyers with ties to the campaign facilitated the selection of these sources. To check for the overstatement or negligence of individual actors and webpages, I conducted additional searches for top influencers in the island incident on social media and included the sources that were most re-tweeted and reposted into the analysed pool.⁷¹ For government sources, the analysed sample includes statements that referenced the island agreement and were released during the investigation period by either official state outlets such as the Egyptian government's Information and Decision Support Centre (IDSC), by several state ministries or by the Egyptian presidency. Furthermore, this chapter draws on a range of video footage (around 22 clips) from the street protests on 15 April and 25 April, which were evaluated as visual evidence of the framing of collective action by those who actually took to the street, as compared to the readings established in the protest calls and statements released by the organising movements.⁷² All the information collected of these sources also informs the contextual description of prelude and aftermath of the protests that take centre stage in this chapter.

Coding Process

A fundamental dilemma in the use of interpretative methods with respect to coding primary and secondary data centres on what David Howarth (2005, 339) has called "the problem of pre-existing paradigms." It refers to the temptation to project preconceived ideas about the symbolic lifeworld of, and the causal mechanisms at work in situations of contention onto the processed data during coding and analysis. As a result, data analysis may not only be tendentious. It might produce obvious misinterpretations.⁷³ In order to guard against such a temptation to

⁷¹ E.g., #جمعة_الارض [Land Group], #عواد_باع_أرضه [Awad sold his land], #تيران_وصنافير_مصرية [Tiran and Sanafir are Egyptian], #تيران_وصنافير [Tiran and Sanafir], #مصر_مش_للبيع [Egypt is not for sale].

⁷² To ensure the availability of the sources used in the analysis, all video footage is available as a playlist on the author's YouTube-channel at

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLKitE6IKPzUehcRy6j9POvDrrShtwxOKC>.

⁷³ This problem is not specific to evaluation, but also concerns the interpretation of empirical results. As Skinner (1969, 7) contends, a "mythology of doctrines" compels us to arrange individual texts into an anticipated intellectual system. The evaluation, citation, reception, and the historical weight attributed to sources usually depends on the extent to which they contribute in the advance of this system.

“reduce the other’s discourse to familiar and self-serving purposes” (Howarth 2005, 39), the qualitative coding of the collected data was done in four steps: First, sources were coded with a range of rudimentary qualifying meta-variables, which include document title and type, author and release date, the political affiliation and camp of the respective author, and the outlet or medium where the text or video recording was published. This process was facilitated by the data mining software *DiscoverText*. It enabled crawling, preselecting and quick-coding social media sites that were no longer accessible.

In the second round, I then engaged more deeply with the content of these sources with the help of the more comprehensive data organisation and coding software MAXQDA (cf., Kuckartz 2010). Sources were coded deductively according to the three discursive layers identified by framing scholars as central to movement communication (see Chapter 3.4).⁷⁴ At the diagnostic level, I coded whom the respective mobilising actors identified as their antagonist other. In addition, I coded which of their respective actions were identified as unjust and contributing to the diagnosed problem. On the prognostic level, codes denote who was included in the self-description of the respective actors as well as the suggested strategies and solutions. On the motivational level, I coded how these subjects defined themselves in terms of their moral qualities vis-à-vis an antagonist other. This was followed by a third step of inductive fine-coding. The starting point for the creation of thematic subcategories was a quantification of frequencies for terms as single words. Discursive elements composed of two or three terms, so-called ‘bi-grams’ or ‘tri-grams’ were acknowledged as well.⁷⁵ This preliminary quantification was then used as a map for the creation of subcategories that were refined throughout the coding of further sources. Signifiers referring to the same element in different terms were merged: for instance, I grouped ‘Ikhwan’ and ‘Brotherhood’ as they were used interchangeably.

A fourth coding step consisted of meta-coding the relation between the created subcategories as relations of equivalence or of difference. In the semantic networks, which illustrate all chapters of this dissertation, connections between the discursive elements represented as nodes are drawn based on the co-occurrence of codes. Cooccurrence is defined as the joint appearance of two terms or codes over several documents. Two elements are connected if they appear together frequently and if intertextual analysis revealed that this co-appearance was not an idiosyn-

⁷⁴ For all collected documents, codes were assigned in their original publishing language.

⁷⁵ To filter out superfluous terms, an Arabic stop list was created for this project based on a 750 word stop words list available at: <https://github.com/mohataher/arabic-stop-words/blob/master/list.txt>. Single word textual elements were lemmatised to avoid creating several nodes with the same meaning.

cratic feature of one unit of text. The type of edge (straight line vs dotted line with arrowheads) denotes the type of relation, in accordance with the two types of relationships between discourse elements specified by Laclau and Mouffe: a relation of difference or one of equivalence. Taken together, the result of these coding rounds served as a **blueprint for redrawing the structuration of contenders' discourses** at different instants of a protest cycle, and for comparing these cross-sections with each other.

4. Reflections on Positionality

Scholars are not outside of discourse but crucially involved in the creation and recreation of social reality. This privileged position has implications that transcend questions of research quality. The researcher has an impact on the object of her research and on what is perceived as true about them. But the very object of research only comes into being through the researcher's construction. From the post-structuralist premises adopted in this project follows that this construction must be considered an act of articulation in itself—in fact, it often is an attempt at hegemonisation. Authors embedded in different paradigms have engaged with the process of objectification of research issues. Such work has solicited researchers to reflect on their own positioning and situated, embodied bias, that is, their inclination to present or hold a partial perspective due to a specific socio-demographic or historical location (Abu-Lughod 2014; Dallmayr 1996) or social advantage (Haraway 1988; S. Harding 1992). This critical project has perhaps been most explicitly championed by feminist and post-colonial researchers who have contested the notion of neutral knowledge (ao., Abu-Lughod 2014; Dallmayr 1996; Haraway 1988; S. Harding 1992; Rolin 2006). The very belief in scientific objectivity through methodical rigour, they argue, is enabled only by the hegemonic structuration of the academic field as a patriarchal, white, and western playing field which allows those who populate it to lose sight of the partiality of their perspectives.⁷⁶

According to Donna Haraway, true knowledge of social phenomena can be advanced only through the interpretation and reinterpretation of such variegated partial perspectives. Her core argument materialises in the claim that “objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn **how to see**” (Haraway 1988, 583). Situated knowledge, in this sense, is always embodied, local, limited, and can never claim universality. That is to say that nobody can claim to be simultaneously in all, or wholly in any, of the privileged positions structured by gender, race, nation, and class, either—objectivity cannot be attained by a “god trick” (Haraway 1988, 582). Truths can thus only be “positioned truths,” as Leila Abu-Lughod (2014, 468) has argued in a similar vein.

⁷⁶ I consider myself lucky to have been mentored by advisors who asked me to reflect on my position within the mechanics of knowledge production and how this positionality related to my research ethics. The engagement with feminist theory was one of the most formative experiences of my academic career.

4.1 Locating my Position

Admittedly, as scholars, we have limited ability to influence and subvert the established power relations that pervade the structures of knowledge production. For instance, we cannot escape the fact that the study of culture, regimes, social groups and political mobilisation in the Global South has its origins in colonial projects and that particularly the disciplines of area studies are firmly rooted in imperial projects of conquest and control (see Brand 2005; Sidaway 1992).⁷⁷ However, we do have the ability and, as Laurie Brand has argued more recently, also an ethical responsibility, to be aware of historically grown power relations and of the ways how our research is part of these larger relations. They exert influence on various aspects of our research, “from how we conceive of a project, to how we carry it out (how much time in the region, what sorts of regional sources/input), to how we draw conclusions, and how and to whom we present them” (Brand 2014b, 10).

Jillian Schwedler (2014) rightly states neither knowledge production nor scientific modes of inquiry are normatively neutral—they are guided by interest, which, in turn, is tied to our becoming as researchers (Wylie 2004, 345 f). Accordingly, the interest of this thesis in protest, repression and the contested discourses about politics of contention is strongly interwoven with my personal experiencing of Egyptian politics, the ‘Arab Spring’ and its aftermath: Before engaging with the topic of contentious dynamics in Egypt in the framework of my doctoral studies, I had spent my senior high school years in Cairo. Whilst there, I became interested in the intricacies of a young society under iron cast dictatorship. Egypt became the country focus of my university studies. Nevertheless, I felt out of touch with the realities on the ground when Egyptians from different walks of life took to the streets on 25 January and outnumbered the riot police that confronted them.⁷⁸ Thus far, the idea of “people power” (Chalcraft 2016, 9) beyond the realm of political elites had been nothing but a distant thought for me: I was in Cairo when first protests erupted in Tunisia. But my upbringing in a stagnant authoritarian Egypt and my university education in Middle East Studies had shaped my gaze on the region in a way that made the diffusion of protest to Egypt seem outside the realm of the realistically possible. My engagement with democratisation theories had only reified these preconceptions (see Heydemann 2007; Cavatorta 2010). As Flo-

⁷⁷ A recent study shows how the bulk of peer reviewed articles about the region still originates outside of it (AlMaghlouth et al. 2015).

⁷⁸ Coincidentally I even wrote a short blog on 24 January where I critically reflected (and ultimately disavowed) the chances of a contagion effect and of mobilisation spreading from Tunisia to Egypt. This blog is now deleted, and rightfully so, but it still serves me as a humbling reminder for social scientists’ notoriously poor record at prediction.

rian Kohstall (2016, 7; see also Gause 2011; M. M. Howard and Walters 2014) underscores, the “dominant analytical current on authoritarian resilience made it difficult to imagine anything else, in particular, a large scale uprising.”

Against this backdrop, experiencing the outbreak of a revolution created a sort of cognitive dissonance: The historic protest camps on Tahrir Square, which I was fortunate to attend in 2011, and their affective environment of optimism and joy in the face of repression were simply incongruous with how I had previously viewed Egypt and the Arab World at large. While I shared much of the **protesters’** enthusiasm, it nevertheless took time until this dissonance also affected my research perspective. The realisation sunk in slowly that to explain what was happening, one would have to go further than asserting that elite actors under certain conditions adapted their decisions and strategies in response to popular pressure. Such a structural understanding of masses as one variable among various other factors that conditioned the course of a transformative process seemed increasingly unsatisfactory to me. This was because it glossed over the diverse effects of mobilisation which I **was witnessing in Cairo’s streets, e.g. the emergence of unseen solidarities**, the rise of new political visions, and the disparate political subjectivation processes that were inspired by Tahrir.

Furthermore, a conception of ‘the people’ as a unitary actor failed to account for the variegated nature of the motives for protesting, of the employed repertoires and of the protesting actors themselves (Grimm 2013a, 9f). When Mubarak was toppled shortly after, the way how I had viewed the Arab world thus far was **decisively shaken**. In an attempt to “switch the gears” (A. Said 2014), my perspective on politics shifted gradually to one “from below” (Harders 2015) that was more attentive to the collective practices of the people, rather than the elites whose machinations have been overrepresented in accounts of Middle East politics (see Asseburg and Wimmen 2017; Grimm 2013a). Many of the conceptual premises adopted in this thesis, ultimately, were a consequence of this shift.

4.2 Access and Constraints

Questions of positionality, however, do not end with a reflection of one’s affectedness by historical events or one’s embodiment of certain research traditions. A feminist epistemology implies going further in recognising that “every view is a view from somewhere and every act of speaking a speaking from somewhere” (Abu-Lughod 2005: 468). This ‘somewhere’ is defined by more than a researcher’s personal embedding in an “effective history” (Gadamer 2004). Recognising and reflecting upon all the facets which influence ‘from where one speaks’ is elusive—the reproduction of power asymmetries often happens unconsciously. However, it

is fair to say that, to a substantial degree, **one's perspective is conditioned** on race, class, and gender. This PhD project made me aware of this conditioned nature of knowing and experiencing. Doing research in and on the Middle East as a white Western man with access to funding came with certain privileges and entailed certain restrictions. Gender, race, nationality and class were at times advantages, for instance, when they facilitated contacts with elites or Western socialised liberal activists or when they opened doors for research exchanges, academic conferences, stipends or policy assignments. At others, they made interlocutors feel uneasy and hindered access. They allowed me to ask certain questions and pursue certain types of topics and barred me from touching upon others. The parameters of these **"barriers of privilege"** (Brand 2014b, 10; see also Hesse-Biber 2012) were not static, but shifted with the research context as the political playing field in Egypt was drastically reconfigured throughout the investigation period.

In the third year of Egypt's **transition**, shortly after Mursi assumed office, I became a research assistant in the German think tank Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) and was provided with **the opportunity to participate in SWP's interdisciplinary project on 'Elite Change and New Social Mobilisation in the Arab World'**. This position provided me with access to many interview partners in the civil society sector as well as to many Cairo-based gatekeepers to local academic community and political parties. Today, institutional affiliation and a foreign background is not necessarily a pro in Egypt, given the hostile political climate towards researchers who often are accused to be foreign agents. At the time of my fieldwork, however, it still provided privileged access.

Contrary to the experience of American colleagues (see Carapico 2014), my German nationality was usually a minor obstacle during everyday interactions. More often than not, it was even a door opener for conversations (for an account of similar experiences see Wackenhut 2018). **Especially after Germany's 2014 World Cup victory, and Al-Sisi's controversial first visit to Berlin the following year**, conversations quickly shifted from suspicions of espionage to enthusiastic expressions of support for German soccer or to the topic of German-Egyptian friendship and cooperation, symbolically manifested in the televised handshake **between both country's leaders**. Moreover, for many of my interlocutors within the public administration, my affiliation with a publicly funded think tank was reason enough to consider me a part of the **German governments'** push for normalisation—and thus a worthy interlocutor. The formal parameters of my research were decisive here. The topic thereby faded into the background.

By contrast, with interviewees from the ranks of social movement organisations, civil society organisations and grassroots movements, I could point to this

very topic as evidence for my critical stance vis-à-vis the German administration and its Egypt policies. Here, the very publications which I constantly downplayed and reframed when in touch with authorities (e.g., on the violation of human rights by Egyptian law enforcement agencies, and the repression of civil society) provided me with some degree of ‘street credibility’ and facilitated establishing trust among field contacts.⁷⁹ This allowed me, for a while, to meet activists and authorities ‘on both sides’ of the contentious dynamics, including such diverse actors as the Muslim Brotherhood, the April 6 Youth Movement, and members of the Tamarod initiative. For the initial phase of my field research, I was virtually the outsider “who had the financial means and privileged access to outlets of power” (Brand 2014b, 10), contacts to the lower ranks of the Islamist sector of civil societies, as well as closer amities with the liberal and/or socialist segment of the civic initiatives that are commonly subsumed as “revolutionary youth” (El-Sharnouby 2017).

Arguably this privileged position changed after publishing first research results and following the autocratic restoration in Egypt. Over the years, intimidation attempts, restrictions of field access, pressure from authorities due to a specific research topic, as well as confrontations with agents provocateurs and smear campaigns became recurrent phenomena for most researchers who continued to work critically on Egypt. I first realised that not only ‘the locals’ but also outsiders were vulnerable to this trend during field research in summer 2015. I had travelled to Cairo to conduct interviews about the then-new phenomenon of forced disappearances (Grimm 2015). There I witnessed how the re-emergence of the pre-revolutionary security state drastically reshaped the red lines of what was doable, writable, thinkable (Kohstall et al. 2018).

The contraction of the political space in Egypt impacted on my research methodologies and field practices of this research in three respects: First, it limited and effectively re-shifted my prior modes of data collection, processing and presentation for fear of jeopardising the safety of my interlocutors. The massacre of *Rabaa al-Adawiya* was a pivotal event in this regard. Prior to this outburst of repressive violence, I had collected much of my primary data via semi-structured face-to-face interviews with protest organisers and activists. These same people were criminalised overnight and subsequently hunted down by the Egyptian security apparatus. This raised several dilemmas for my methodology: How could I

⁷⁹ Paradoxically, I was never confronted with the reproach of contributing to the normalisation or legitimisation of an undemocratic system in Egypt through policy work from the side of this group. Significantly, several of my interlocutors rather assumed this to work in their advantage and projected a certain broker function on to my role as a researcher.

continue conducting interviews with these trusted contacts, when either this very communication could put them in danger; when I could be questioned for their names by Egyptian (and potentially also European or American authorities⁸⁰); or when the reported content might provide further pretext to Egyptian law enforcement authorities to justify their crackdown on the Islamist segment of society? It is a delicate balance that researchers must strike between vibrant, detailed accounts of research and protecting our interlocutors and research communities involved (see Grimm, Koehler, Lust, et al. 2020; Wood 2006). As ‘Data Access—Research Transparency (DA-RT)’⁸¹ frameworks are becoming the norm in major political science publications, this balancing act is becoming increasingly difficult—and even more so when working on sensitive topics or with vulnerable populations (Parkinson and Wood 2015).

After all, qualitative works are usually valued because of their degree of detail. However, often it is these very details that make our interlocutors and their communities vulnerable to physical, reputational, or legal repercussions. This is particularly true when it comes to interviews with a delimited group of actors or organisations which can easily be identified. Accordingly, the methodological weight of this thesis shifted towards a stronger focus on discourse analysis. Interviews fragments are still included throughout the text to supplement the presentation of empirical data. However, much more has been omitted for fear of jeopardising the safety of my research participants. In line with principles of informed consent, anonymisation and ‘do no harm’ as the basic standards for ethical research practice (see Wackenhut 2018, 247–52), the content and the metadata of what is presented was **edited to protect interlocutors’ identities during** the write-up, publication, and dissemination.

Related to this, but on a personal level, my relation to those ‘in the field’, to my research participants and colleagues, was profoundly affected by the ripple effects of the “weeks of killing” (EIPR 2014) in the summer of 2013. Particularly the liminal event of *Rabaa* had a transformative effect as it fundamentally split the Egyptian public, which had already fragmented before 30 June, into two antago-

⁸⁰ The danger that US authorities will solicit researchers to give up their information about members and activities of the group has become more real since the current Trump administration has revived its efforts to designate the Brotherhood a terrorist group (McCants and Wittes 2017).

⁸¹ A joint statement by political science journal editors on data access and research transparency that established the foundation for most actual DA-RT frameworks. In this joint statement, published in October 2013, the editors commit their respective journals to the principles of data access and research transparency, and to implementing policies requiring authors to make as accessible as possible the empirical foundation and logic of inquiry of their submitted research. The statement is available at http://media.wix.com/ugd/fa8393_da017d3fed824cf587932534c860ea25.pdf.

nist camps—each fervently defending its version of the unfolding events. This dichotomisation of the public sphere according to an irreconcilable with-us-or-against-us logic conclusively determined field access beyond adjustments to travel and study plans. It was, above all, decisive for the general disposition of informants to continue working with outside researchers. Polarisation reached a fever pitch when former interlocutors broke contact after learning about my condemnation of the *Rabaa* massacre (e.g., Grimm 2013b).⁸² I became an antagonist outsider for some who just could not grasp how someone could not share their view that the ongoing crackdown was regrettable but dearly needed. Others ceased or reduced communication to a bare minimum, perhaps in an attempt to return to normal daily routines while battling with the desensitising and traumatising effects of ubiquitous brutality and state violence (see Wahba 2017).

Paradoxically, however, *Rabaa* also brought me closer to some other research participants: In a context where first Islamists and then virtually anyone who opposed the official narrative was viciously attacked and framed as public enemy, the mere fact that I investigated the massacre (and labelled it as such) was credited with trust by those whose voices were marginalised in public discourse. This does not mean that I chose ‘their side’ in this book. It simply means that access to some interlocutors became easier than to others. Accordingly, I make no claims to provide an exhaustive account of Egypt’s bloody summer of 2013. The story that I tell in this thesis is one informed mainly by the testimonies and discourses of supporters and sympathisers of the Anti-Coup Coalition, most of them young Islamists. Different stories could be told from the interviews with other groups that were active during the same time, but found themselves on the opposite side of the political rift: Samuli Schielke (2017), for instance, has told the story how a group of leftist or liberals who described themselves as ‘revolutionaries’ because of their double opposition against both the Mubarak regime and the Islamist movements **experienced Egypt’s ‘stormy season’** in 2013; another perspective is provided by Neil Ketchley (2017a) who has examined both Brotherhood and Tamarod protests through the lenses of Protest Event Data, or Dina Wahba (2017) who has grappled with the individual and collective memories of bloodshed by looking back at the responses of her own social field. Many more stories of 2013 could be told without providing a complete picture. However, it is my firm belief that putting these different viewpoints into dialogue with one another is what gives the individual sub-

⁸² The dehumanisation of repression victims and the relativism of state violence against supporters of deposed President Mursi also led me to part with some former friends and colleagues, many of whom abandoned their former liberal views on freedom of speech and the abuse of state power after 30 June.

jective accounts value and worth.⁸³

My selective proximity to the field, in turn, forced me to adopt a tighter methodological framework for this thesis (see Chapter IV) to ensure valid and reliable results despite partial access. This is to say; methodological rigour serves not only the purpose of enabling reproducibility and transparency. It also intends to mitigate the potential interference of several affective ecologies on my work (see Schwedler 2014, 22), for instance, the fear of personalised attacks, threats and hate mail, or other repercussions by those in Egypt and in Europe for whom writing about the Muslim Brotherhood outside the frame of terrorism is unpardonable. Moreover, it intends to balance the interference of emotional ties on the interpretation process: As friends and colleagues were arrested or have disappeared (into hiding or cells), it has become difficult to disentangle advocacy, personal political views and academic argument and to avoid ‘writing for retribution’, when conducting research on Egypt. If not neutrality, my stepwise methodological approach has hopefully ensured that the way by which I arrive at my conclusions is transparent and verifiable.

4.3 Ethical Dilemmas

Throughout this PhD project, I became aware of the privileges I enjoyed vis-à-vis these research participants as a male researcher with access to funding and resources. This process was painful, not primarily because of my personal experiences, but because I witnessed the disenfranchisement of interlocutors who had become dear friends; because I was powerless and unable to help when colleagues in Turkey and Egypt lost their jobs for work similar to what I continued to do relatively unfazed by repercussions and when they were stripped of their right to travel when I could still enter and leave ‘the field’ whenever things became too heated; and because I felt (and continue to feel) for research participants and their families who lost their freedom, their rights, and at times even their lives. Experiencing this anger, grief, and often powerlessness in the face of manifest violence by the security state, coupled with the comprehension that it was never me who was most vulnerable in situations of strain has given me some kind of understanding of the power relations in field research. Luisa Enria strikes the right chord when she sets out how experiencing fragility during fieldwork has made her at once feel closer to her research participants whilst simultaneously forcing her to

⁸³ The late Jay Gould offers a fitting metaphor in his posthumously published ‘The Hedgehog, the Fox and the Magister’s Pox’. The pursuit of knowledge is described there as “a diverse collection of separate patches into a beautiful and integrated garment called wisdom” (Gould 2003, 19).

confront the injustice made evident by the kind of fragility that she had experienced:

Difficult, at times traumatic experiences during fieldwork have forced me to flip the lens on myself and think about the ways in which I, as a researcher, can be vulnerable whilst doing research in contexts that are often defined by their fragility (Enria 2018).

As a way of addressing this asymmetry, the least we can do in our work is remain especially attentive to the truths published and testified by our colleagues and interlocutors in the region (see Carapico 2014, 29). **In this regard, Mona Abaza's** critique of the 'academic tourism' of countless Western researchers to the region (Abaza 2011), which was published in the early days of the "Arab Spring Break" (Carapico 2014, 28), serves as a timely warning of the uneven playing field between researchers working on the ground, that is, 'local' academics, and outsiders.⁸⁴ While 'the field' is all but a construct for me, it is a lived everyday reality for so many of those I routinely interacted with—as informants, interviewees, facilitators, or team colleagues. This realisation was formative for my understanding of my own position in the hierarchy of knowledge production about the Arab world. But it also complicated matters.

Scientific practice, from data collection to communicating findings, usually implicate a reproduction of power relations between the researching 'subjects' and the researched 'objects' of knowledge production.⁸⁵ Taking seriously the call for situated knowledge requires that they are pictured as an actor and agent, not as a "screen or a ground or a resource" (Haraway 1988, 592). At the same time, the authoritarian regression in Egypt set clear limits to this. The deteriorating political conditions in Egypt, which have been extensively addressed in the frame of the 'shrinking spaces' debate (Breckenmacher and Carothers 2014; Grimm 2015; 2018a; Wackenhut 2018) not only had implications for my own fieldwork safety (Saliba and Grimm 2016; Völkel 2018). They also bore practical consequences for how interlocutors can be personally acknowledged and accredited in this thesis without incurring the risk of jeopardising their safety (see Schierenbeck, Kohstall, Revkin, et al. 2020, 70ff).

Throughout this thesis, the names of interviewees, the location where the in-

⁸⁴ Conversely, there is also danger in romanticising 'local' knowledge or appropriating the vision of the subjugated. The standpoints of the subjugated are not "innocent positions" and thus not exempt from critical re-examination, deconstruction and interpretation (Haraway 1988, 584). Especially research on social movements in an authoritarian setting easily effectuates an implicit sympathy for the oppressed. For a pertinent discussion of this dilemma in the Egyptian context see Kohstall (2016, 10–13).

⁸⁵ In extreme circumstances of cross-cultural encounters, this process of objectivation transforms cultural differences into radical otherness. Such practices of "spiritual colonialism" (Dallmayr 1996, 13) have been abundantly reproduced (and criticised) in studies of the Arab spring (see El-Mahdi 2011).

interviews took place and the dates of the interviews have been modified or obfuscated to ensure a maximum degree of confidentiality and anonymity. This overly cautious approach and emphasis on information security (Parkinson 2017) was often at the cost of losing detail and making it difficult to reproduce or validate results. But behind this trepidation was the realisation that, at the time of writing, many of the records that once would not have been deemed sensitive to law enforcement agencies (both in Germany and in Egypt or Turkey) had effectively become highly sensitive. Who was to say that what was still relatively innocuous at the time of writing would remain so in the foreseeable future? Informed consent principles are indeed not enough to protect researchers and their interlocutors against the political contingencies of either post-coup Egypt and Turkey where different social groups have become a pawn in the hand of authorities, or of Europe and the United States where groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood who seemed an undesired but viable political interlocutor in 2012, might well be declared terrorist actors in the mid-term future. As Elisabeth Wood and Sarah Parkinson (2015) have underscored, neither researchers nor their research participants are in a position to anticipate whether seemingly innocuous comments made to a scholar at one point in time may be used as evidence of criminality, sedition, or disloyalty later.

Not knowing for sure entails the obligation to be even more cautious. Following the example of Wackenhut (2018), I have thus opted for anonymising even those interlocutors who explicitly agreed to be cited by name at the time of interviewing. The ethical dilemma that arises out of this choice is, of course, that agency is stripped from my research participants as they are deprived of their personal voice in my reports. However, honouring the commitment made earlier under less precarious circumstances for research in Egypt would have meant potentially placing those in danger on whose accounts this research primarily depends. **The tension between honouring interlocutors' wishes vs avoiding any kind of harm to them due to their participation in my research** represents an insoluble dilemma. In the end, I decided to rather err on the side of caution and judge the physical integrity as more important in this research project than reproducibility or my principled commitment to rightful attribution of quotes.

4.4 Foregrounding Expectations

Today, only a few scholars of social mobilisation continue to believe “either in the neutrality of science or in its subjection to political aims” (Della Porta 2014a, 2). As Della Porta notes, social movement scholars have adopted nuanced views in their research practice with the degree of political commitment promoted in their

work varying. With a view to writing about revolutions, Jack Shenker has perhaps most explicitly acknowledged the illusory nature of a distanced and objective scholarly gaze. He quotes the historian Howard Zinn on the impossibility of being neutral on a moving train and adds that, ultimately, **“no train moves faster or tilts more fiercely than a nation consumed by popular rebellion”** (Shenker 2017). Accordingly, it is almost by default that this book is a political one: it must be considered political for its choice of topic—an investigation of struggle and contention in Egypt where the regime professes unity and concordance (see Schwedler 2014, 22); **for its choice of perspective, which honours the premise that “the vision is better from below”** (Haraway 1988, 584; see also Desai 2013) and for its chosen archive, which gives voice to social movements as the potential agents of change (see Stanbridge 2006). Many of the fundamental problems described and investigated in this book are rooted in group-based forms of inequality. These inequalities should not just be testing grounds for refining and elaborating theory. On the contrary, they are real areas of struggle that affect the livelihoods of real people. Critical research recognises these struggles as such by taking them, for once, as the point of departure and by aiming towards their solution.

Discourse analytical projects have a particular responsibility in this regard because hegemonic power relations cementing inequalities and legitimising oppressive modes of domination have a vital discursive basis of reproduction. As Lisa Wedeen has stated in her seminal ‘Ambiguities of Domination’: **“Regimes attempt to control and manipulate the symbolic world, just as they attempt to control material resources or to construct institutions for enforcement and punishment”** (Wedeen 1999, 30). Representing the world in a particular way and finding these representations accepted and reproduced by those not in power reveals another, rather compliance-oriented face of power. The revelation and critique of such power differentials, which are sustained through manufactured consent, through discourse analysis may thus be an effective way to identify avenues for resistance, the formation of counter-hegemonic projects, and consequently for social mobilisation under conditions of autocracy. Accordingly, I hope that this book remains not just an academic treatise, evaluated only by methodological quality criteria, but one that relocates the focus of agency to the people.

5. The Road to 3 July 2013

Five years after the popular uprising of 2011, Egyptians are witnessing an authoritarian comeback under the auspices of a military-backed government, a politicised judiciary, and a weak shadow-parliament (Abdel Kouddous 2014). This restoration of autocracy is all the more astounding as it was first initialised by a military coup that was backed by millions of Egyptians marching in the streets (N. J. Brown 2013) and then enforced by a fierce crackdown on the supporters of the deposed president Mohammed Mursi. Spearheaded by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), several groups had organised themselves in a broad coalition that rejected **the coup as an illegitimate intervention into the country's democratic transition**. The so-called *National Alliance Supporting Legitimacy (NASL)*, commonly referred to as the Anti-Coup Alliance, defied authorities with country-wide peaceful protest marches (see Ketchley 2017a). Occupying several public squares in the capital with large camps, similar to the 2011 sit-ins on Midan Tahrir, the alliance organised the largest wave of Islamist mobilisation in Egyptian history. This protest campaign was met with fierce repression by the Egyptian security forces which cracked down on protesters indiscriminately and with utmost brutality.

However, other than in 2011, state repression did not backfire. Even as police violence peaked in mid-August 2013 with several massacres that human rights defenders condemned as crimes against humanity, it drew scant criticism on a national level, let alone popular outrage that might have developed into protests. On the contrary, it came with vigorous attempts by media and public figures to justify the killings (Grimm 2013b). Collective action thus remained limited to the **Islamist segment of society that was committed to the Muslim Brotherhood's cause**.⁸⁶ In contrast to the experience of excessive state violence on Midan Tahrir, a backlash against the state in terms of dissident mobilisation across ideological and social cleavages did not materialise (Grimm and Harders 2018).

On the contrary, in an overwhelming show of political determination, large masses of Egyptians, including many of those groups that had been key in the mobilisation against the Mubarak regime, welcomed the removal of a president. In their eyes, Mursi had continued to derive his legitimacy from a narrow victory at in a contentious election, where the choice, for most of the Tahrir activists, had been between two evils. Not realising this predicament, he had done little to placate his opponents' **fears of the advent of an Islamic state in Egypt, pursuing an**

⁸⁶ The terms 'protest' and 'collective action' are used interchangeably in this study. The National Alliance Supporting Legitimacy is varyingly referred to as NASL or Anti-Coup Alliance.

exclusivist ‘winner takes all’ policy and alienating the revolutionary opposition along the way. The various national forces were not provided with platforms for dialogue or inclusion. Instead, the government and its supporting Freedom Justice Party took Mursi’s marginal electoral victory in the presidential runoffs with 51.73 per cent of the cast votes as grounds for uncompromising policymaking. They also took to discrediting all dissent as illegitimate disruption of the democratic process. By the time the Tamarod campaign filled Tahrir square with hundreds of thousands of angry Egyptian protesters, his uncompromising stance had undermined Mursi’s position to such a degree that any insistence of his democratic legitimisation held little credibility outside of his core constituency.

5.1 The Polarisation of Egypt’s Public Sphere

The stage for the conflict had been set with Mursi’s presidential oath. On the day before his official installation on 30 June 2012, the Freedom and Justice Party had organised an informal inauguration ceremony on Tahrir Square. There, Mursi stood defiantly before his followers and unbuttoned his jacket to prove that he was speaking without a protective vest. Addressing all “free people of Egypt, brothers and sisters [...] Muslims and Christians of Egypt,” Mursi declared the conclusion of the tumultuous revolutionary period and the beginning of a new, democratic era which would remain faithful to the goals and values of 25 January.⁸⁷ Only the next day, he swore his formal oath to 17 Mubarak-appointed judges of the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC). This was in accordance with regulations in the constitutional addendum that the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) had added to its 2011 constitutional declaration immediately before the presidential elections in June 2012. Originally, the Egyptian constitutional declaration had stipulated that the president of the republic be sworn in at the Egyptian parliament. The logical site for the presidential inauguration would have been the *Majlis al-Sha‘ab*, the People’s Council. This institution had been reinstated after its dissolution by the SCAF in 2011, with new parliamentary elections that took place in two rounds in November 2011 and January 2012. In these elections, the Muslim Brotherhood had won a sweeping majority as part of the Democratic Alliance for Egypt.⁸⁸ Its party, the FJP became the most influential faction in the new parlia-

⁸⁷ For a record of the full speech see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGoXgvkcLY0>.

⁸⁸ Aside from the Brotherhood’s FJP, the Democratic Alliance for Egypt comprised a number of smaller parties which, to a large part, hailed from the Islamist and Salafist camp and had been newly founded after the demise of the NDP and liberalisation of party competition. Prominent members included the new political arm of the Islamic Jihad group - the Salvation and Development Party [*Hizb as-Salama wa-t-Tanmiya*], the Egyptian Islamic Labour Party [*Hizb al-‘Amal al-Islamiy al-Masri*], the Islamist

ment securing 235 of 508 seats in the Assembly. However, the then-ruling SCAF were faced with the prospect of the Muslim Brotherhood holding a strong position **within Egypt's institutional architecture**. This entailed a legislative majority and potentially a president in office. Consequently, the SCAF moved to disband the lower house by mid-June 2012 (AJE 2012). The Brotherhood was thus deprived of its parliamentary representation. This move was legitimised by alleged faults in Egyptian electoral procedures, and the dissolution of the *Shura* Council was formally backed by an SCC ruling that declared the Egyptian Legislative Elections Law (38/1972) unconstitutional. **The SCAF's subsequent unilateral move to amend its own constitutional declaration pushed this verdict zealously**, as it meant to enshrine a significant degree of military autonomy from whoever was to become Egypt's next president.

Accordingly, Mursi's informal oath in Midan Tahrir marked, if not a legal challenge, then at least a symbolic public show of defiance to the army's guardianship over the constitutional and electoral due process. It was widely perceived as a test of the army's resolve and sparked fears among the opposition. For their part, the opposition had seen the dissolution of the *Shura* chamber as a necessary move by the military and the judiciary to provide checks and balances to the Brotherhood's sweeping takeover—an alleged '*akhwana*' [Brotherhoodisation] of Egypt's governing institutions (Haenni 2016, 28–30; see also El-Amrani 2012; Shahine 2012). This fear was further reconfirmed by the newly elected president's first moves: On 9 July 2012, after a week in office, Mursi declared that the dissolution of the *Shura* Council was not legal and moved to reinstate the council temporarily in its former composition. He entrusted the council with a caretaker function until the drafting of a new constitution would pave the way for a new round of elections.

While short-lived in its immediate effect—three days later the new president was forced to renege and accept a second SCC ruling overturning and repealing his measure. Consequently, the *Shura*-council delegates never resumed their seats in parliament. Its broader impact on the popular perception of Mursi's legitimacy was longer lasting. The unilateral move was widely perceived as a bold first at-

Reform and Renaissance Party [*Hizb al-Islah wa-l-Nahda*] and the Salafi Reform Party [*Hizb al-Islah*]. However, not only Islamist or Salafist parties joined the alliance, but also a range of liberal and left-leaning parties, such as Hamdeen Sabahi's leftist-nationalist Dignity Party [*Al-Karama*] Ayman Nour's Tomorrow of the Revolution Party [*Ghad al-Thawra*], the secular Civilisation Party [*Al-Hadara*], the Egyptian Arab Socialist Egypt Party [*Hizb Misr al-'Arabi al-Ishtiraki*], the Democratic Generation Party [*Hizb al-Gil al-Demuqrati*], and the centrist Egyptian Socialist Liberals [*Hizb al-Ahrar al-Ishtirakiyin al-Misri*]. For a detailed analysis of the electoral result see (Grimm and Roll 2017).

tempt of the Islamist president to place himself above the judiciary. For many of Mursi's opponents, it also exemplified the new president's priorities: his reform measures targeted not primarily those who had driven the country to the brink of civil strife, the *feloul* [remnants] of the old regime, but aimed to disempower those who could curb the Brotherhood's influence on the country's institutional and legal transition.

A range of symbolic steps may be read as attempts by the new president to quickly counter and eradicate this narrative and position himself as the legitimate representative of the revolutionary and democratic forces. Shortly after taking office, Mursi established two committees in charge of overseeing transitional justice measures. One committee was chaired by a retired judge and former member of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Mohamed Amin al-Mahdi. This committee was tasked with examining all cases of civilians tried in military courts after the revolution, whose number was estimated to have surpassed 12,000 by the end of 2011. A second fact-finding committee was tasked with investigating the killing of unarmed protesters during the '18 days of Tahrir' and the ensuing rule of the SCAF (Presidential Decree No. 10/2012). The latter's role was to investigate the "measures taken by executive branches of government and the extent to which they cooperated with the judicial authorities and any shortcomings that may exist" (Al Ahram 2012). Mursi also moved quickly to answer the calls of the popular campaign 'No to Military Trials', a coalition of revolutionary youth groups, human rights advocates and leftist and liberal political parties, for releasing those who had been detained in the course of the 25 January Revolution and in the months after under the rule of the SCAF. On 19 July 2012, as a consequence, 572 political detainees were released and cleared of their indictments by the military judiciary as part of a Ramadan amnesty.⁸⁹ Moreover, a

⁸⁹ The presidential pardon is a final avenue of appeal for convicted citizens. The Constitution grants Egypt's president the authority to issue pardons at his discretion after consulting with the Cabinet. Like in other countries with a Muslim majority population (e.g., Nigeria, Turkmenistan, UAE) yearly pardons at the end of Ramadan, the month of forgiveness (see Goitein 2017), have become a tradition in Egypt since the mass arrests following the 2011 uprising. Usually, the process entails the revision of a selected list of convicted felons, including political prisoners, and the issuance of presidential amnesties for a small number of defendants in ongoing cases ahead of the *Eid al-Fitr* holiday. In 2018, the tradition was institutionalised by presidential decree (No. 18/2018) in the form of a Presidential Pardon Committee tasked with reviewing the release demands of young Egyptians detained in the events following the 25 January Revolution by the end of each Ramadan. During the last years, authorities have used the Ramadan pardon to placate the pressure for wider amnesties and channel activists' demands for a cutback on political repression. Prisoner releases were furthermore accompanied by an uptick in new political arrests. In this sense, presidential pardons became a mechanism for shifting law enforcement resources towards those deemed a more imminent threat by authorities. The acting Al-Sisi administration has used pardons to turn political prisoners into bargaining chips. Bypassing and undermining

range of old-guard figureheads was sent into forced retirement and replaced by the new president. Amongst those forced into retirement on 5 August were intelligence chief Mourad Mouwafi, who had been appointed and served in his position under Mubarak. He was joined by Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi and then chief of staff General Sami Anan on 12 August 2012. Later in Autumn, Mursi additionally ordered retrials for former President Mubarak and his Minister of Interior Habib al-Adly with new evidence and new defendants. Stripping them of their double jeopardy protection, their protection from being tried twice for the same crime, Mursi circumvented the previous court rulings against both defendants. Expanded retrials were to include more defendants and overseen by a newly formed transitional justice mechanism (Kirkpatrick and El-Sheikh 2012).

The entire process of transitional justice, however, was plagued by allegations of **politicisation and victors' justice**. Many of Mursi's measures were only implemented selectively and effectively limited in their reach. Sparing members of armed forces from prosecution they were easily dismissed as revolutionary window-dressing (Van Leuven 2014). First, the fact-finding committee comprised not only of various judges, lawyers and a variety prominent public figures, but also the **assistant minister of interior, a military general and the head of Egypt's intelligence apparatus' national security committee**.⁹⁰ The doubts cast by its composition on the committee's political independence were reinforced by the fact that the committee's 700-page report was never released to the public. The document, which according to leaked excerpts implicated the military in incidents of torture, death in detention and forced disappearances (Hill and Mansour 2013), was classified by Mursi after its completion in December 2012 and referred to public prosecution where it remains until today (Rageh 2013).

This opaque process gave rise to suspicions of collusion and compromise between the army and the Brotherhood and cemented the image of a president intent on collaboration with the old guard, following double standards, and accepting compromises to guarantee privilege his own supporters (Shenker 2016, 259). **Tellingly, Mursi's new expanded list of defendants** in the retrial of the killings during the 25 January Revolution did not include any military officers.

the independent judiciary, since 2014, political pardons have repeatedly been issued when politically expedient, or with the aim of deflecting international criticism of Egypt's appalling human rights record (see Amnesty International 2015; Guernica Group and Cordoba Foundation 2018).

⁹⁰ The committee reportedly included judges Mohamed El-Bastawisi, Mohamed Shirbash and Adel Said; doctors Mohamed Badran and Mahmoud Qbeish; General Emad Hussein; Egypt's assistant public prosecutor; the head of the Egyptian intelligence apparatus' national security committee; and the assistant minister of interior. Six relatives of slain or injured protesters were appointed as observers.

Some of the pardons for political prisoners moreover were used as evidence by those who portrayed the president as an Islamist wolf in sheep's clothing. The first of a total of nine presidential pardons, granted by Mursi on 26 July 2012, went exclusively to Islamist convicts. Most of these were key figures in either Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya or the Muslim Brotherhood. The list included nine Brotherhood leaders residing abroad who had been tried in absentia as well as 18 presumed veterans of the armed Islamist insurgency of the 1980s and 1990s. Some amongst the latter had received death sentences from state security courts for their involvement in an assassination attempt against Husni Mubarak in Addis Ababa. Only much later, on 9 October 2012, the 100th day of his presidency, did the president issue a general pardon for all Egyptian citizens arrested between 25 January 2011 and his inauguration for their mobilisation in support of the revolution (R. Ali 2012). Investigative reports demonstrate that the number of Islamists who were released during Mursi's rule was actually limited and amounted to just 27 of the over 2,000 released detainees. This was compared to the more than 800 released members of Islamist or jihadist organisations during the rule of the SCAF in 2012 (Bahgat 2014).⁹¹ However, misinformation and leaked statements by the security services in the media created the image of a president favouring, above all, his ideological kin and irresponsibly pardoning hundreds of convicted jihadists. These accusations escalated throughout Mursi's first year and effectively thwarted the President's attempts to portray himself as receptive to the goals of the 25 January Revolution.

Even Mursi's far-reaching purge of security sector officials in August 2012 over the death of 16 paramilitary policemen in a cross-border attack on Sinai was not able to rehabilitate this public image. This was despite some shows of support from revolutionary activists, such as the April 6 Movement, which organised minor demonstrations in solidarity with the dismissals. Ultimately, the retirement of Tantawi and Anan represented an "entrenchment of the status quo" (Shenker 2016, 259, fn. *), or of a governance constellation that has been discussed as a quiet entente between the Brotherhood and the army (e.g., al-Anani 2015a), having secured Mursi's ascension to power, in the first place. Having the most to lose, as the experience of violent oppression of Islamists during the past decades had proven (see El-Shimy 2015, 77–81; see also Pargeter 2010; Wickham 2013; Rubin 2010; Krämer 1999), the MB had joined the 2011 Tahrir protests only at a later stage (for details see Ketchley 2017a, 82–84), after first warning of the disruptive and desta-

⁹¹ As a note of caution, this limited number may have been the consequence of the strong critique of Mursi's first presidential pardon. The allegations that they had been politically motivated may have Mursi to refrain from additional pardons to Islamists (see Bahgat 2014; Van Leuven 2014).

bilising potential of a popular revolt (Al-Awadi 2013, 540–41).

To be sure, many young Brotherhood members had been at the forefront of the Midan Tahrir protests since the first public show of dissent on 25 January. During two visits to Midan Tahrir on 25 and 26 January, for instance, I spoke with several young Brothers who had taken to Midan Tahrir jointly with fellow members of the Ahli and Zamalek soccer fan clubs. The ‘Ultras’ would soon gain notoriety for their proactive role in physically defending the Tahrir sit-ins against police incursions and attacks by state-hired *baltagiya* (Harders and König 2013, 26; see also Dorsey 2012; 2015). Some Brotherhood youth activists had also been active in the planning phase of the protests (Ketchley 2017a, 83). **The Brotherhood’s guidance bureau tolerated this level of individual participation, provided that those joining the protest would refrain from openly identifying with the organisation and from carrying its insignia.**⁹² Nevertheless, the bureau remained hesitant to endorse the uprising against Mubarak (Trager 2016, 19–22). Ignoring the mounting pressure, both from its lower ranks and from Brotherhood-affiliated former members of parliaments, to not isolate itself from the street movement, **it released ambiguous statements instead, which echoed support for “reform, freedom, stability and democracy” and stressed that the Muslim Brotherhood lived through and participated in the unfolding events, this “peaceful, positive and blessed moment” jointly with the Egyptian people.**⁹³ However, the organisation was careful to avoid going too far with its statement of solidarity. Whilst the **Brotherhood were content with urging their “sons and brothers” to be patient in order to achieve the legitimate demands of the people, they remained taciturn regarding the upcoming ‘Friday of Anger’ protests.**⁹⁴

Only after witnessing how thousands of demonstrators successfully claimed and defended Midan Tahrir as their site of representation, the Muslim Brotherhood re-evaluated its stakes in the ongoing conflict. Mohamed el-Beltagy, a senior leader of the Muslim Brotherhood guidance bureau and later the general secretary of the Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party, was sent to Tahrir Square as the **group’s representative on the ground** (Bassiouni 2017, 37). On 27 January, the group decided to join the rallying calls for ‘Friday of Anger’ (Tadros 2012, 33).

⁹² Interview with former member of the Muslim Brotherhood who participated in demonstrations on 25 and 26 January 2011. Istanbul, 12 November 2017.

⁹³ Muslim Brotherhood (MB). 26 January 2011. ‘Statement from the Muslim Brotherhood regarding the Events of 25 January and Their Aftermath[Arabic]’. *IkhwanWiki*. <https://bit.ly/1110DUj>.

⁹⁴ In fact, fearing the potential repressive outcome of a revolt, the MB even made efforts to avoid a popular uprising, as evidenced by its famous ‘ten demands’ to prevent a popular revolution, published shortly before 25 January 2011. See: <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/109759>.

Attempts by the security apparatus to prevent the dissemination of the protest call through the arrest of Brotherhood cadres, parliamentarians, and several guidance bureau members (CNN Wire 2011; see also Trager 2016, 26) remained unsuccessful. The following day would become a turning point in the trajectory of the uprising (Harders and König 2013, 27). According to estimates, up to 100,000 Muslim Brotherhood members participated in the countrywide protests (Wickham 2013, 162).

The Muslim Brotherhood's initial hesitance cast a long shadow on its revolutionary credentials. This was despite the subsequent contribution of the Islamist demonstrators in making the '18 days of Tahrir' successful with the help of the organisation's logistical infrastructure and by providing dedicated protection units to the occupiers. This badge of shame was reinvigorated by the organisation's pragmatic decision to demobilise its constituents rapidly. Shortly after the ousting of Husni Mubarak on 11 February 2011, it instead embraced dialogue with the remnants of the former dictator's "securocratic state" (see Abdelrahman 2017) to ensure its place in the political aftermath of the uprising (Wickham 2013, 160–70).⁹⁵ In the SCAF-appointed committee that drafted the constitutional amendment, which would serve as the framework for Egypt's institutional transition during the following near two years, the only representative of the opposition was former MP Sobhi Saleh—a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Brotherhood's nonconfrontational and accommodative stance during the rule of the SCAF in the post-uprising period has been attributed to the organisation's gradualist and conservative approach to political reform (al-Anani 2015a; El-Shimy 2015). It came to characterise the Brotherhood's political strategy throughout the entire transition period:

It preferred to deal and bargain with the deep state; that is, it worked through traditional channels such as the military and the Ministry of Interior, rather than accommodating and allying with the young revolutionaries and activists who sparked the uprising (al-Anani 2015a, 535).

In fact, after the downfall of Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP), which had been dominating Egyptian politics since its foundation by Anwar Sadat in 1978, the Brotherhood had become the strongest organised force in the political arena—and the only one with legislative experience. Only five days after the

⁹⁵ Since its early use in relationship to the apartheid state in South Africa and the British state in Northern Ireland, the idea of 'securocracy' has evolved to describe a regime of ordering and managing society through a collective sense of vigilance against different forms of threats. Translated by Maha Abdelrahman (2017, 3, Fn. 9) to the Egyptian context, the term implies not only the increasing power of the security bureaucracy but also the rise of a regime of governance and surveillance for managing society.

NDP's formal dissolution in mid-April 2011 (Reuters 2011b), on 21 February 2011, its new political arm, the nominally independent but factually subordinated Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), was officially founded. In the subsequent months, it took a conciliatory stance vis-à-vis the ruling SCAF and, with the newly founded Salafist *Nour-Party*, first supported the SCAF's constitutional referendum. It thus affirmed its commitment to the task of fundamentally reforming the political system at some point in the distant future (BBC News 2011). The Muslim Brotherhood neglected calls from most smaller opposition factions for a postponement of parliamentary elections in light of the prospects of easy electoral victories instead.⁹⁶ Moreover, it set aside issues of accountability for the crimes committed during the Tahrir Revolution. Instead, the Brotherhood took a minimalist approach to transitional justice that focused solely on a handful of representatives of the old regime and the police force and, above all, left the privileges of the army untouched. Only when the Brotherhood and SCAF failed "to identify a 'consensus' candidate" (al-Anani 2015a, 533) for the presidential elections who could secure both of their interests, the first rifts between the unwilling partners became visible.

The Muslim Brotherhood's prior history of accommodation and concerns that it was returning to its past proclivity to seek full control of Egypt raised doubts regarding the narrative that the SCAF reshuffle represented an attempt to break with the old regime. The replacement of General Intelligence Service Chief Mouwafi, the head of the military police General Hamdy Badeen, several Interior Ministry officials, and the head of the presidential guard and the governor of North Sinai Sayyid Abdul Wahab Mabrouk, were indeed bold moves, in and of themselves. Officially, the reshuffle targeted those responsible for security lapses that had enabled the assault near Rafah on 5 August 2012. However, as some of the dismissed officers had hardly any say in troop movements in Sinai, it was widely interpreted as an attempt by the President to both purge the security sector from officials who were closely tied to the old Mubarak regime and reclaim executive authority from the SCAF generals (Cook, Steven A. 2012; Fahim 2012).

The military leadership's 17 June 2012 constitutional decree had stripped authority over military personnel decisions from the presidency. In defiance of this, Mursi redoubled his efforts to purge those who had been the public faces of the army throughout the entire post-revolutionary period after the fall of Mubarak. On 12 August 2012, both Defence Minister and SCAF head Tantawi and the Army

⁹⁶ On the turf wars over the institutional roadmap after the 2011 uprisings see Stilt (2012); for an analysis of the Constitutional Referendum see Dunne and Revkin (2011).

Chief of Staff Sami Anan were asked to resign (Londoño 2012).⁹⁷ The same decree also repealed the SCAF's constitutional addendum, thereby restoring the president's full executive authority.

Praised by spontaneous crowds on Midan Tahrir as a de facto end to military rule in Egypt, the sacking of the two SCAF leaders, in addition to the leadership of several army branches, was not unambiguous. After all, it left the generals' privileges intact, including an institutionalised right to prosecute civilians in military courts. Furthermore, the leadership changes, in fact, provided those responsible for crimes and massacres during the SCAF rule with a safe exit and amnesty from legal prosecution (Achcar 2013, 272 ff), thus amounting to a 'soft coup' against the military rule. When leaving office, Tantawi and Anan were fittingly honoured by Mursi with Egypt's highest state medal, the Grand Nile Medal. Both were also awarded posts as presidential advisors. Moreover, as became visible in hindsight, both positions were filled with officers who enjoyed even deeper support from within military ranks. Tantawi and Anan were intimately connected to the former Mubarak regime⁹⁸ and, thus, resented by the leading army officers as magnets of public criticism against their institution. In contrast, both the new Defence Minister Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Chief of Staff Sedki Sobhi hailed from a new generation of army leaders. Untainted by the hands of the former regime, they provided the military with the opportunity for a fresh start and a chance to whitewash the image of the army as the lesser evil in direct comparison to the ruling Brotherhood. The new appointments also allowed the military to restore its 'prestige' as an impartial protector of the nation, above factional politics.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ In addition to Tantawi and Anan, Mursi also ordered the retirement of Egyptian Navy Chief of Staff Vice Admiral Mohab Mamish, Air Defense Force Commander Abd El Aziz Seif-Eldeen and Air Force chief Air Marshal Reda Mahmoud Hafez. Mamish was subsequently appointed as President of the Suez Canal Authority, Seif-Eldeen as chairman of the Arab Organisation for Industrialisation and Hafez as Minister of State for Military Production (Aboulenein 2012).

⁹⁸ Several cables released by Wiki Leaks describe Anan and Tantawi as corner stones of the Mubarak regime. In a March 2008 cable, Francis Ricciardone, the US ambassador to Cairo, for instance described Tantawi and Mubarak were both described as "focused on regime stability and maintaining the status quo through the end of their time. Other diplomatic cables portrayed Tantawi, alongside former EGIS Director Omar Soliman and MOI Habib Al-Adly as Mubarak's main advisers – each operating their strictly circumscribed spheres of power at the will of the President. Tantawi and the SCAF would not support any efforts to arrest and try Mubarak for corruption or misuse of his office. See, for instance, <https://anarchitext.wordpress.com/2011/04/12/tantawi-resistant-change/>; https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09CAIRO874_a.html.

⁹⁹ Under the 30-year rule of Husni Mubarak, above all, Al-Sisi had mainly stuck to a traditional military career path. From his first commission as an officer in 1977, he advanced through the ranks of the Egypt's mechanised infantry to command a mechanised infantry division and then served as the Chief of Staff of Egypt's Northern Military Zone after February 2008. Only in 2010, Al-Sisi assumed a more political role through his appointment to the post of Director of Military Intelligence, after serving a stint

Accordingly, the SCAF reshuffle did little to demonstrate that Mursi was finally having his ‘coming out’ as a president, indebted to transitional justice and the spirit of the revolution. Instead, it signalled that the generals had realised that the time was ripe for a change of leadership and decided to come back to the fore **with a new face. Mursi’s image as a reformer was further** undermined by the appointment of Mohamed Ibrahim, then a Major General of the Egyptian Police, a former assistant minister in the prisons department and an old hand of the Mubarak regime, as Minister of Interior. Ibrahim replaced Ahmed Gamal El-Din in the Qandil cabinet, who had come under criticism for his role as deputy minister for general security during the deadly Mohamed Mahmoud clashes in November 2011 (Mihaila 2012). The cabinet reshuffle was intended to signal a fresh start in the Ministry of Interior (MoI). With Ibrahim taking office, however, it appeared very much to be a return to the old days of the Mubarak regime.

These ambivalent actions severely **damaged Mursi’s legitimacy from his early** days. The breaking point, however, came with a fierce battle between the presidency and the Egyptian judiciary. This culminated on 22 November when Mursi issued a controversial constitutional declaration that shielded him from judicial interference and effectively put the executive beyond the supervision and control of the judiciary. This unilateral move resulted from a legal battle over the appointment of a new prosecutor general¹⁰⁰ as well as an ongoing struggle between the Mursi-administration and the opposition, led by Hamdeen Sabbahi, Abdel Moneim Aboul-Futuh and Amr Moussa, over the composition of the assembly in charge of drafting a new constitution for Egypt. Appointed by the Brotherhood-dominated parliament, the assembly had—in the eyes of many—failed to represent Egyptian society at large, thus giving rise to fears that the Islamist body was drafting the constitutional foundation for a theocratic regime.

As the dialogue between Mursi and opposition leaders seeking to rebalance the Constitutional Assembly’s **composition** became stalled, the risk increased that **the way the assembly had been elected could be ruled illegal in court. Mursi’s con-**

as its deputy director. He thereby also joined the ranks of the SCAF, headed then by Field Marshal Tantawi, becoming the council’s youngest member. In this capacity, for two years, he was the liaison officer between armed forces and Egypt’s political parties, including after the fall of President Mubarak in 2011 (see Neriah 2014). In February 2014, Al-Sisi was promoted to the top rank of Field Marshall, only hours before SCAF authorised his presidential candidacy. Despite his absence from the public stage, Al-Sisi’s image was nevertheless tainted, particularly among revolutionary groups. In early 2011, the general had publicly defended the subjection of female anti-Mubarak demonstrators to forced ‘virginity tests’ by soldiers as necessary to protect the army from rape allegations (see Long 2014).

¹⁰⁰ On October 11, 2012, Mursi had made a move to replace Abdel Meguid Mahmoud by appointing him Egypt’s ambassador to the Vatican. This order, however, was successfully challenged in court by Mahmoud and other judges on the basis of the executive’s lack of authority in this field.

stitutional declaration effectively prevented this by shielding not only the presidency but also the Constitutional Assembly and the lower house of parliament from potential judicial interference and dissolution (N. J. Brown 2013, 49). A week later, the Constitutional Assembly approved a document that cemented the status quo and enshrined in law broad privileges for the armed forces and protected its officers from civilian prosecution. The amendments concerned the appointment of the defence minister, sovereignty over budget and armament decisions and the restoration of military trials for civilians. Mursi attempted to hedge his bets by introducing a transitional justice passage into the declaration, which was intended to pave the way for retrials of all defendants accused of harming protesters during 2011 should new evidence be presented. Moreover, he made first use of his new legislative powers by dismissing the Mubarak-appointed Prosecutor General Abdel Meguid Mahmoud. With Talaat Ibrahim Mohamed Abdullah, a prosecutor who was less disinclined to serve the presidency was put in Abdel Meguid's place. The former deputy head of Egypt's Cassation Court was charged with overseeing the retrials.

Rather than placating the revolutionary youth, the declaration struck a nerve among the public antagonising not only the political opposition but also members of the young ruling coalition and the usually supine elite. The opposition joined ranks in their unanimous criticism of the move, several public figures who had been appointed by Mursi as presidential advisors resigned, and large sections of the Egyptian public took to the street in what quickly turned into nationwide protests and several massive demonstrations in Tahrir Square.¹⁰¹ Regardless of potentially valid pragmatic rationales for the overruling and disempowerment of the judiciary by the executive (N. J. Brown 2013, 49f),¹⁰² the controversial constitu-

¹⁰¹ Moreover, the declaration was challenged at the Court of Cassation which on 2 July 2013, the day before Mursi's deposition, declared it a violation of the law on judicial independence. Enforced only after Mursi's deposition on 4 July, by interim president Adly Mansour, the verdict reinstated Abdel Meguid Mahmoud as prosecutor-general who, however, would resign from his post shortly after on 9 July to make way for former Cairo Court of Appeals prosecutor Hisham Barakat. Barakat remained in office until his assassination on 29 June 2015 in an unclaimed car bomb attack on his motorcade outside his residence in Heliopolis (Bassiouni 2017, 277).

¹⁰² Several analysts, including law professors Noah Feldman (2012) and Mohammad Fadel (2014) have defended Mursi's decree as well-intentioned, albeit miscommunicated. They argue that a failure to issue the decree, would have led to the collapse of the entire transition process by jeopardising the near-completion of the draft constitution and thus preventing parliamentary elections. Without the decree, accordingly, Egypt would have returned to de facto indirect military rule (see also Elmasry 2015). Their reasoning is not without basis – several Mubarak-appointed judges, in fact, threatened to disband the constitutional assembly and rescind Mursi's earlier exclusion of the army from politics. It can therefore contribute to an understanding of the political rational behind Mursi's decree. However, it also follows an overly rationalist understanding of transitional processes, subscribing to the false assumption that the limits of "democratic" governance can be determined objectively. In the context of a polarising

tional declaration soon came to symbolise the frontier in a struggle for interpretive **predominance over the country's democratic transition**. Consequently, it became the reference point for tumultuous disputes over the meaning of constitutionality, the separation of powers, sovereignty, and democratic legitimacy.

5.2 Ittihadiya as a Watershed Moment

Popular anger at the first freely elected president overstepping his institutional competencies manifested most visibly in early December 2012 at the Ittihadiya presidential palace in Cairo. There, several protest marches against the constitutional declaration took place. These had been organised by the 'National Salvation Front' (NSF), a loose alliance of the main opposition parties from and several revolutionary youth movements. Protesters converged at the palace on 5 December 2012 to **demand Mursi's resignation** in the form of a sit-in (Beinin 2013).¹⁰³ With over 30 members of every political stripe, according to Eyadat (2015, 169), the structure of the NSF mirrored the decentralised resistance against authoritarian encroachment witnessed during the 25 January Revolution. Describing itself as "a peaceful, comprehensive alternative outside of institutionalised politics," it also **stayed faithful to the revolution's modes of resistance through street politics**. Bound together merely by their shared opposition to President Mursi, the coalition did not forward any positive vision for better governance (Dworkin 2013, 6, 20). However, it impressively illustrated the **growing dissent with Mursi's divisive policies** which effectively was turning foes into allies: blurring the divisions between the '*feloul*' and the 'revolutionaries', which had dichotomised the political spectrum since the 2011 uprising, the NSF comprised not only liberals and social movements, but also several centrist and reactionary parties that were populated by old regime elites.¹⁰⁴ **The NSF's support from within the regime establishment**

public sphere since the 2012 elections, whether Mursi's policies were "legitimate" or not, highly depended on their collective but subjective popular perception.

¹⁰³ The National Salvation Front (NSF) was formed on 24 November 2012, marking the first time that Egypt's secularist political forces united in a common alliance against their Islamist competitors (Abdul Moneim Aboul-Futouh and his Strong Egypt Party refused to join the alliance due to reservations about cooperating with former regime figures). Aside from popular calls for Mursi's resignation, the front's three core demands included the rescindment of the constitutional declaration, the annulation of the announced constitutional referendum and the formation of a new constituent assembly. The NSF's prominent member Mohamed El-Baradei, the co-founder of the liberal Constitution Party, became the NSF's first general coordinator in December 2012. For a detailed analysis of the NSF see Al-Amrani (2013). For an analysis of the oppositional rifts that lead to the emergence of the NSF as a pressure mechanism see Gerbaudo (2013) and Abdalla (2016). An archive version of the NSF online platform can be accessed at <https://web.archive.org/web/20160401205518/http://www.nsfeg.org/>.

¹⁰⁴ Initially it comprised 35 political parties and revolutionary groups, with the April 6 Youth Movement, the National Progressive Unionist Party [*Tagammu*], the Dignity Party, the Socialist Popular

also became apparent when police forces collectively disobeyed Mursi's orders to step in and confront the growing crowds. This act of disobedience has, in hindsight, often been portrayed as a case of police officers acting individually and **“according to their conscience”** (Alsharif and Saleh 2013). The Muslim Brotherhood, therefore, dispatched its own troops, armed with sticks and chains, to disperse the protesters and protect the presidential palace.

Ten people were killed in the ensuing fights, most of them Brotherhood supporters. As protestors fervently clashed with pro-Mursi demonstrators, resulting in a dozen casualties and hundreds of injured, the Ittihadiya confrontation unfolded a transformative effect on Egypt's post-revolutionary contentious dynamics. This was evidenced by the polarising effect it had on the already fragmented Egyptian public in two camps, with each defending its own notion of legitimacy and democratic due process. This dichotomisation of the public sphere effectively laid path dependencies for how different political camps would support, defend, **fight, or come to terms with the “coup-volution”** (Hamada 2014, 37). It also forecast the authoritarian regression of mid-2013, including unseen crackdowns and political violence against members and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and their deposed president. It set the stage for the re-emergence of political violence on Egypt's streets—not only between civilians and members of the Egyptian security forces but also between Egyptians and their fellow citizens—and for divergent stances among different camps on the legitimacy of violence as a tool of resistance against authoritarian practices. At Ittihadiya, demonstrators broke through the barricades placed by members of the Muslim Brotherhood to protect their president reaching the palace walls; across the Egyptian provinces, FJP party offices and Muslim Brotherhood headquarters were set ablaze.

Furthermore, these events can also be regarded as the catalyst for the emergence of two competing protest coalitions in Egypt's post-revolutionary scene. On the one hand, as Ketchley (2017a, 135) shows in his systematic study of the protest cycle leading up to the deposition of Mohamed Mursi, the Muslim Brotherhood's decision to systematically engage in street politics through a mobilising mechanism can be traced back to the experience of Ittihadiya. After the clashes that left eight Muslim Brothers dead, the Brotherhood decided that, hereafter, it would

Alliance Party, the Social Peace Party, the Egyptian Communist Party, the Egyptian Popular Current and the Maspero Youth Coalition occupying the left wing; the *Kefaya* Movement, the National Association for Change, the Reform and Development Misruna Party, the Egyptian Social Democratic Party and the Constitution Party [*Doustour*] taking the liberal wing; the New Wafd Party, the Free Egyptians Party, the Free Egypt Party representing the centrist currents; and the Freedom Party and the Amr Moussa's Conference Party occupying the right wing of the coalition.

confront all collective actions directed against their president with counter-demonstrations. The security forces had stood by and watched Muslim Brothers being chased through Cairo's streets without intervening and fulfilling their protective function. This was taken as a pretext for the creation of dedicated protection units within the lower Brotherhood ranks. These units were charged with the protection of street protests against opponents' attacks and, potentially, against the police should it side with the former.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, the violence also galvanised support for the coalition against Mursi's presidency, which by now was widely perceived as an illegitimate and exclusionary rule of an Islamist clique. As a participant of the Ittihadiya protests in December recalls: "The massacre of Ittihadiya revealed the Brotherhood's true face. They could no longer hide their bloody hands. [...] The Central Security [Forces] did nothing to defend us, so we had to defend ourselves, and we will not stop it again."¹⁰⁶

President Mursi did little to counteract the impression of a grand conspiracy between the Muslim Brotherhood and the security state against the revolutionary forces. On the contrary, his rush to complete and pass the new constitution through a popular constitutional referendum on 15 December further alienated his critics who were dismayed by the fact that the Egyptian public was expected to decide on a document that had largely been drafted by an Islamist majority in the Constitutional Assembly.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, boycotts from liberal groups who felt underrepresented and a number of resignations due to claims that the Islamists were monopolising the drafting process, had left the hasty finalisation of the constitutive document exclusively to an Islamist body.¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, Mursi's emphasis that a new 'revolutionary charter' had been drafted by a balanced Constituent Assembly in a participatory process was hardly taken seriously among the opposition. The NSF thus boycotted invitations from the presidential office to take part in a national dialogue—an attempt to forestall further collective action and potential sabotage or blockade of the upcoming popular poll.

¹⁰⁵ On the creation of these units see Ketchley (2017a, 135).

¹⁰⁶ Interview with member of the National Salvation Front, Cairo, June 9, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ See Bassiouni (2017, 122) on the reasons for this rush.

¹⁰⁸ It was expected that the Supreme Constitutional Court was going to rule on the dissolution of the Assembly on 2 December 2012. To avoid this scenario that would have entailed commencing the drafting process anew, and to meet the deadline set by the March 2011 constitutional declaration, the assembly thus stayed in session for over 16 hours effectively finalising the last traits of the constitutional document in a graveyard shift, pushing through a number of contested articles that had provoked the boycotts and resignations in the first place. In the end, however, the verdict on the assembly was never delivered, because Brotherhood supporters prevented the judges from convening at the SCC by barring access to the courthouse with a sit-in on its front steps.

5.3 A Rebellion against Mursi

The aftermath of Ittihadiya witnessed a loss of appetite for further violent agitation. The brutal clashes had left a mark on the public mood, and further instances of **major political violence remained absent during the remainder of Mursi's tenure** until the protests of 30 June 2013. Dissent within the security apparatus grew, nonetheless. Additionally, the socio-economic crisis propelled discord to new heights, fuelled by violent repression by state security forces that were deployed against protesters on the anniversary of 25 January 2011. This violence served to catalyse street politics. By April 2013, youth groups launched a grassroots campaign to collect signatures for the resignation of Mohamed Mursi, a revocation of the 2012 constitution, and a temporary return to the 1971 constitution pending the drafting of a new and more inclusive constitutional document. The idea of the campaign to gather and submit 15 million signatures to the constitutional court **on the anniversary of Mursi's assumption to the presidency was to assemble a critical quorum that quantitatively surpassed the 13 million votes by which Mursi had won the election.** At the same time, the organisers of the campaign called for a sit-in at the presidential palace to pressure Mursi into early presidential elections.

At first, the group that gave itself the name *Tamarod* was hardly taken seriously. Most of its members knew one another from *Kefaya* [enough], a grassroots campaign that had once mobilised popular support against the re-election of former “**president-for-life**” (R. Owen 2012) Husni Mubarak. However, the key members of the campaign, the activists Mohammed Abdel Aziz, Mahmoud Badr, Moheb Doss, Walid el-Masry and Hassan Shahin were hardly known to the Egyptian public. Only once the signature campaign gathered pace in the countryside and amongst the wider public did it garner the attention of institutions such as the state security services and the Ministry of Interior.

Over the ensuing weeks, the Tamarod initiative was provided with logistical and financial support from within the ranks of state security (Springborg 2018a, 48; see also Kirkpatrick 2015) and rhetorical backing by prominent opposition leaders: “**Ministry officials and police officers helped collect signatures for the petition, helped distribute the petitions, signed the petition themselves, and joined the protests**” (Alsharif and Saleh 2013). One of my interviewees, who had been part of the initial Tamarod mobilisation in the coastal city of Alexandria and whom I interviewed years later about the Tiran and Sanafir islands protests, recounts how the logistical support of the local police force to Tamarod ranged from assistance in printing flyers and petition forms to physical protection of demonstration marches against counter-demonstrations of Mursi supporters:

We had this curious situation back then when the *shurta* [policeman] took the microphone, and we were afraid he would take it. But instead, he spoke into and said, ‘everyone can see that I am an Egyptian like you and everyone can see that they [the Muslim Brotherhood] are ruining the country’.¹⁰⁹

In several interviews, former Tamarod campaign members, including Moheb Doss, one of its five founders, that they had been in close contact with several military officers and security agencies throughout the signature campaign. In addition, audio recordings that were released by *Mekameleen*, an Islamist satellite television channel based in Istanbul as part of the so-called ‘Sisi-leaks’ reveal the extent of institutionalised support for the campaign (Alsharif and Saleh 2013; Kingsley 2015; Kirkpatrick 2015; see also Ketchley 2017b; Atef and Frenkel 2014).¹¹⁰ Above all, Badr, Aziz and Shahin reportedly attended several meetings with the Ministry of Interior and with the then-head of the armed forces Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (Atef and Frenkel 2014). Former military and security officers, in turn, served as the intermediaries between the protest organisers within the Tamarod campaign and the armed forces during the preparations for 30 June. As a consequence of the intimate connection between Tamarod and elements of the security state, several authors have analysed Tamarod as a creation of the ‘deep state’ to undermine the rule of President Mursi (e.g., Springborg 2018a). Others have pointed to the scarcity of reliable non-partisan information about real systematic support by the military as an institution for the Tamarod campaign, beyond individual shows of solidarity by some of its members. Both narratives, ultimately, cannot be verified independently (Roll 2016, 33).

At any rate, Tamarod’s success was certainly not solely due to the state support that it received. Elyachar (2014) has shown how the campaign placed their project in a trajectory of resistance via popular petition, which traces back to the 1919 campaign in support of Saad Zaghloul. Moreover, she argues, Tamarod adopted its modus operandi from the previous petition drives led by Mohamed El-Baradei, who had championed a popular petition for constitutional reforms when he returned to Egypt in February 2010. His seven-point list of demands was mirrored by Tamarod’s **sevenfold justification for rejecting Mursi**. In colloquial Egyptian dialect, the petition complained:

¹⁰⁹ Interview with former leading Tamarod member, London, March 2018.

¹¹⁰ The leaked records of a phone conversation between Major-General Abbas Kamel – now the director of General Intelligence Service (GIS) and then Sisi’s presidential office manager and right hand – and General Sedki Sobhy who was then the military chief and is now Egypt’s Minister of Defence appear to date from near the end of Mursi’s presidency. They include a lengthy discussion about a payment of 200,000 Egyptian Pounds from the United Arab Emirates to an off-book bank account that was controlled by senior defence officials but used by the Tamarod movement.

Because security hasn't been restored since the 2011 revolution...we don't want you
 Because the poor still has no place....we don't want you
 Because we are still begging loans from abroad....we don't want you
 Because there is no justice for the martyrs....we don't want you
 Because there is no dignity for me and my country....we don't want you
 Because the economy has collapsed and depends only on begging....we don't want you
 Because Egypt is still following the footsteps of the USA....we don't want you

The petition also assigned responsibility to the acting president for the country's misery and its failure to achieve the goals of the revolution, as well as the failure to establish physical and social security (see Figure 5). This failure was held up as proof of his lack of suitability for office. The petition was soon translated into the German, French and English, and spread online via the (now shut-down) Tamarod website. Signatories to the petition declared that they were of sound mind and with their full will as Egyptians demanded the destitution of President Mursi and early presidential elections in order to uphold the "goals of the revolution [...] so that together we can achieve a society of dignity, justice and freedom."

Figure 5. Tamarod petition form

لسحب الثقة من نظام الاخوان
REBEL... تمرد

لذلك:

حملة تمرد
سحب الثقة من محمد مرسى العياط

أعلن أنا الموقع أدناه بكامل إرادتي، وبصفتي عضوا في الجمعية العمومية للشعب المصري، سحب الثقة من رئيس الجمهورية الدكتور محمد مرسى عيسى العياط، وأدعو إلى انتخابات رئاسية مبكرة وأتعهد بالتمسك بأهداف الثورة والعمل على تحقيقها ونشر حملة تمرد بين صفوف الجماهير حتى نستطيع معا تحقيق مجتمع الكرامة والعدل والحرية.

الإسم:
 الرقم القومي:
 المحافظة:
 التوقيع:

عشان الأمن لسة مرجعش للشارع مش عايزينك
 عشان لسة الفقير ملوش مكان مش عايزينك
 عشان لسة بنسحت من بره مش عايزينك
 عشان حق الشهداء مجاش مش عايزينك
 عشان مفيش كرامة ليا وليلدى مش عايزينك
 عشان الاقتصاء اتنهار وبقي قايم ع الشحاتة ... مش عايزينك
 عشان تابع للأمركان مش عايزينك

منذ وصل محمد مرسى العياط إلى السلطة، يشعر المواطن البسيط بأنه لم يتحقق أي هدف من أهداف الثورة، التي كانت العيش والحرية والعدالة الاجتماعية والاستقلال الوطني، وفشل مرسى في تحقيقها جميعا، فلم يحقق لا الأمن، ولا العدالة الاجتماعية، وأثبت أنه فاشل بمعنى الكلمة، ولا يصلح لإدارة بلد بحجم مصر.

Source 5. Leaflet collected in late June 2013 in Mohandessin, Gizah.

However, in contrast to ElBaradei who had been criticised for spending "more time outside of Egypt in 2009-10 than he did within the country" (Kamrava 2014, 268), the Tamarod campaign drew from the experience of community advocacy groups such as *Askar Kazeboon* [The military are liars] and maintained a firm grassroots infrastructure throughout the country (A. Alexander and Aouragh

2014, 902ff; Eskandar 2013). This way, it carefully avoided repeating the mistakes of the 2011 revolutionary youth groups whose mobilisation had been heavily focused on social media and blogs.

Growing hardship and a bottleneck in the supply of cooking gas, car fuel, and even stocks of basic food staples further catalysed the movement's growth. In June 2013 queues of cars waiting for diesel were stretching for several blocks at gas stations creating traffic jams and effectively bringing city life in downtown Cairo to a near standstill. The fuel shortage also manifested in frequent power outages several times a day and often during peak business hours. Likewise, fuel and foodstuffs were experiencing massive price hikes. Moreover, the prices for cooking oil, sugar and wheat had increased by half compared to the previous year (Kingsley 2013a; Ottaway 2013; Westall and Perry 2013). Indeed, as of 1 July 2013, shortly before the military coup, annual inflation stood at 27.1 per cent. As the crisis culminated, the official reaction ranged from a deflection of responsibility to outright denial. Even after the head of the Egyptian Gas and Petroleum Company, Tarek El-Barkatawy had publicly acknowledged that public consumption was critically exceeding the available petroleum stocks on the Egyptian market (by 10-20 per cent), thus marking an absolute scarcity, Mursi's Petroleum Minister Sherif Hadar downplayed the situation. As late as 25 June 2013, he continued to deny the existence of a crisis and stated in a press conference: "What has been said about the shortage of oil, diesel and other mineral materials is not true." Instead, he attributed the supply gap to ineffective distribution procedures and misappropriation (El-Behary 2013). Such statements were applauded by the supporters of the acting government who were blaming the hidden hands of the 'deep state' for deliberately manufacturing the crisis by holding back stocked fuel to undermine Mursi's legitimacy. Proponents of the 'deep state' theory argued that a covert alliance of Mubarak's cronies co-ordinated their capital exodus while ministerial bureaucracies create artificial energy and stock shortages.

Regardless of the veracity of these allegations (for a discussion see N. Brown 2013), Mursi's deflective attitude pitted the administration and its supporters against those opposing the President including the Tamarod campaign. Fuelled by growing feelings of insecurity and hardship among the Egyptian population, above all, in the countryside, Tamarod had grown in strength by June. The campaign claimed to have gathered a total of 22 million signatures with national ID numbers in support of their cause.¹¹¹ While this figure remains disputed, it is clear

¹¹¹ The counter-campaign *Tagarod* [Impartiality] claimed to have secured 11 million signatures for Mursi to stay in office by the end of June 2013 (see El-Dabh 2013a). Despite the fact that this figure is as

that the pace of collective action throughout the spring of 2013 accelerated.¹¹² Active critics of the government and demonstrating street activists felt legitimised by the consent of the **silent majority of Egyptians and backed in their actions**: “Even before Tamarod, we knew in our hearts that we express the will of the youth of Egypt like we expressed [it] in 2011 [...] but now it is clear to all. The facts lay open for everyone to witness. Therefore, we now call on everyone to join us.”¹¹³ Tellingly, this motivating effect of the signature campaign figures in most interviews conducted with participants of the Tamarod protests throughout this research. Regardless of the actual support, members of the campaign felt strengthened by the signature list. It provided them with proof of popular backing in black and white. Significantly, the number of signatures was also comparable to (and probably surpassed) the number of votes that Mursi had received in the presidential elections.¹¹⁴ Ultimately, the protests culminated in a sequence of mass demonstrations under the umbrella of Tamarod and the National Salvation Front. This brought Egyptians back to Tahrir Square in numbers comparable to those of the 25 January uprising (J. Brown 2013a).

In the run-up to the demonstrations announced for 30 June, the anniversary of the **president’s first term in office**, clashes erupted across the country between supporters of the signature campaign and pro-Mursi demonstrators. Spearheaded by the Muslim Brotherhood and its FJP, the latter had mobilised an “open-ended” sit-in in the capital and called for a nationwide *miliuniya* [million man march] in defence of legitimacy on 24 June 2013, the Friday before the planned Tamarod-demonstrations on Tahrir Square.¹¹⁵ However, the Brotherhood avoided Tahrir

unverifiable as that of Tamarod, the Tagarod online petition was largely ignored by the media and up to date delivers only a few thousand results in online searches.

¹¹² Above all, several polls cast doubt on the signature count provided by Tamarod. A Baseera poll from late May 2013, for instance, indicates that, even when Mursi’s approval hit rock bottom at 32 per cent, roughly 40 per cent of Egyptians had never heard of the Tamarod signature campaign, and only half of those who were aware of the campaign were amenable to signing it (see Osman 2013a). Moreover, polls by Pew (2013) and Zogby (2013) showed Mursi’s approval rating at 53 per cent in the months preceding and 42 per cent after the coup, respectively, among the Egyptian adult population. If correct, these results contradict the alleged participation of a quarter of the entire population in the Tamarod petition.

¹¹³ Interview with member of the NSF organising committee, Berlin/Cairo, June 2014, via Skype.

¹¹⁴ Mursi had won the runoff elections in December 2012 by a tight margin of 882,000 votes with 51.73 per cent of the 26.4 million cast votes against his opponent, former Prime Minister and Air Force Lieutenant General Ahmed Shafiq. As the turnout had been remarkably low with only 51.85 per cent of registered Egyptians participating, this meant that Mursi de facto had secured little more than 13.6 million votes in a country of close to 90 million people.

¹¹⁵ The term *miliuniya* refers to a countrywide mass protest involving a turnout of at least one million people. It also recalls the transformative power of the the first million-man march in 21st century Egypt on 27 January 2011 which, as Aoudé (2013, 249) has put it, managed to derail “much of the machinations of the reactionary forces.” As a protest tactic, the *miliuniya* was part of the contentious

Square as a protest site due to the fear of further bloodshed and potentially ensuing repression by the MOI security forces, as it had been claimed by the Tamarod campaign as their main theatre.¹¹⁶ Instead, the Muslim Brotherhood marches were to concentrate on the surroundings of the Rabaa al-Adawiya Mosque in the suburb of Nasr City, and on Al-Nahda Square in the periphery of the Cairo University in the district of Giza.

These protest sites were first announced in a meeting held by a diverse coalition of Islamist political parties and movements which was spearheaded by the FJP. This loose coalition established itself on 27 June 2013, officially as the National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy (NASL)—more commonly referred to as Anti-Coup Alliance. Over the coming weeks, the shared experiences of confronting police forces and opponents in Cairo's street would forge this loose coalition into an efficient protest alliance. Besides the Freedom and Justice Party, it comprised more than 40 organisations, ranging from moderate religious movements to ultraconservative Salafi groups. Prominently placed in this alliance were *Hizb al-Bina' wa-t-Tanmiya* [Building and Development Party], the political arm of the *Gama'a al-Islamiya*; *Hizb as-Salama wa-t-Tanmiya* [Salvation and Development Party], the political arm of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the moderate Islamic *Wasat* [Center], and *Al-Raya* [the Flag], the Party of Salafist preacher Hazem Salah Abu Ismail.¹¹⁷

As the guiding frame for its first joint mass demonstrations, the alliance chose the slogan 'Legitimacy is a red line', underscoring the centrality of this concept for its political position. How legitimacy was to be understood, as one derived from the Egyptian constitution only, Mursi made clear in a speech on 26 June, marking the end of his first year in office. In his speech, he claimed that all constitutional and legal powers had been vested in him as the head of the state and that this legitimacy exceeded that of any mass mobilisation in the Egyptian streets:

repertoire of nearly all protest alliances in Egypt since the 2011 uprising, including the Revolutionary Youth Coalition, Tamarod and the Anti-Coup Alliance.

¹¹⁶ RNN. July 7, 2013. 'National Alliance to Support the Legitimacy issues a statement about the bearded pretenders [Arabic]'. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/66500.htm>.

¹¹⁷ According to its founding statement (on file with the author), the NASL initially comprised the Construction and Development Party, the Freedom and Justice Party, the New Labor Party, the Virtue Party, the Reform Party, the Arab Tawhid Party, the Islamic Party, the Homeland Party, the Wasat Party, the *Asala* [Originality] Party, the People's Party, the Coalition of Arab Tribal Union in Egypt, the Revolutionary Trustees Council, the Union of Professional Syndicates (comprising 24 trade unions), the Union of Preachers, the General Union of Farmers of Egypt, the Al-Azhar University Students Union, The center of the Labor, the General Association of Street Vendors, as well as a group of retired officers and veterans. The NASL's founding statement, on file with the author, can be accessed at <https://www.scribd.com/document/394191292/NASL-Founding-Statement>.

Revolutionary legitimacy has a range, limits and a time, after which nations then move to constitutional legitimacy. We are under this constitutional legitimacy now. Wake up people, we have constitutional legitimacy. We have a constitution, a constitution according to which we can be held accountable. This is a very great achievement.¹¹⁸

Mursi added that the revolution would survive and achieve its goals through elections. However, Mursi also stated that the movement could no longer provide a mandate to anyone, not even the president, other than through the means defined in the constitution. Addressing a crowd of his supporters from a podium in front of the Cairo stadium, this speech came as a clear response to the military's warning that it would consider intervening should the political crisis and turmoil in Cairo's streets persist. After the Anti-Coup-coalition announced its own counter-demonstrations to the Tamarod protests on 30 June, several prominent activists, opposition leaders and public intellectuals met General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the Minister of Defence and acting head of the SCAF. They voiced their concerns over potentially violent confrontations on 30 June between the Islamist protesters and the Tamarod supporters and the risk of destabilising the country.

Consequently, Al-Sisi had addressed his fellow military officers in a televised speech a week before the 30 June protests and called on all political parties to engage in dialogue and reach a settlement. However, al-Sisi also committed the army to its constitutional role as the guarantor of national security and the protector of the Egyptian people.¹¹⁹ Speaking in a large auditorium directly to close to a thousand officers, his insistence that the armed forces would not “stand by if Egypt descends into violence” was ambiguous enough to be welcomed by both sides. Nevertheless, it was widely understood as an ultimatum to the acting government to compromise and give in to the opposition's demands for change, lest the military stepped in and installed a new roadmap to enable a stabilisation of the country's domestic political arena and a reconciliation of its players. Concurrently, armoured vehicles were deployed in Cairo's streets without the president's consent, which were soon adorned by protesters with stickers and iconic spray paint slogans expressing the army's solidarity with the opposition and reviving the fraternisation myth of the 25 January Revolution about the people and the army being “one hand” (Malfait 2014, 6; see also Ketchley 2014).

Precisely one year after President Mursi was sworn in as Egypt's first fairly elected civilian president, Egypt witnessed a massive turnout of millions of protesters in the central squares of major cities across the country, with at least three

¹¹⁸ A transcript of the speech, on file with the author, can be accessed at <https://de.scribd.com/document/378807384/Mursi-Speech-26-June-2013>.

¹¹⁹ A partial recording of the speech is available at <https://youtu.be/rBBmQry7nc8>.

protest sites in the capital and a clear focus on Tahrir Square. Estimates of how many people actually participated in the 30 June demonstrations, the 22nd *milliuniya* within eight months (Ketchley 2013, 2), vary. Tamarod was quick to claim that an estimated 33 million Egyptians—over one-third of the entire population—had taken to the street. **This count, albeit hardly credible, was adopted by the country’s major media outlets and also made it into international reporting** (see R. Alexander 2013; Blumenthal 2013).¹²⁰ A military source soon corrected this number in a statement for *Reuters* (Fayed and Saleh 2013). **However, even the army’s more modest figures of 14 million were an exaggeration.**

Regardless of the actual turnout, the demonstrations caused a shift in the balance of power also due to their social and geographical spread to all corners and classes of the republic and their demographic diversity. According to Mogahed, **those who marched on 30 June came “from all walks of life; secular and devout, liberal and leftist, revolutionary and reactionary”** (Mogahed 2013; see also Schielke 2017, 209). Accordingly, the National Salvation Front declared in a statement styled as ‘Revolutionary Communique No. 1’ the victory of the revolutionary movement and underscored that the Egyptian masses **had affirmed “the downfall of the regime of Mohamed Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood.”**¹²¹ Additionally, several state institutions openly threw their support behind the demonstrations. The police forces had declared that they would not stand with the Muslim Brotherhood’s government and the MOI had pledged that its policemen would protect the demonstrators against potential assaults (see El-Rashidi 2013). The armed forces had similarly confirmed that they would remain uninvolved. At the same time, however, it had lent its symbolic support to the Tamarod protests by cancelling the festivities for the 44th anniversary of the air force on the same day, after

¹²⁰ The turnout for 30 June has been a subject of heated debate. While several recent publications have parroted participant numbers between 12 and 33 million, which were claimed by the leadership of Tamarod or army officials (Elyachar 2014, 453; Gunning and Baron 2013, 303; Trager 2016, 222). While there is no means to independently verify the turnout, authors have resorted to different methods in an attempt to provide more accurate estimates: Neil Ketchley’s protest event analysis of the Tamarod campaign, for instance, suggests an upper threshold of around 1 million anti-Mursi protesters across the entire country on 30 June 2013 (see Ketchley 2017a, 104–6; 2017b); Jack Brown also suggests commensurately lower crowd figures, based on an evaluation of helicopter shots broadcasted by Egyptian state television. Assuming a maximum of 4.7 people per square metre, he calculates that the two biggest gatherings in Cairo may have encompassed less than half a million people (J. Brown 2013a; 2013b). Likewise, according to social movement analyst Clark McPhail, no more than 250,000 people can have joined the protests in Downtown, assuming no traffic and including all roads that encompass Tahrir (Shachtman 2011). More generous calculations yield the results that between 500,000 and 700,000 protestors could have been on the streets of Cairo and, by extension, a maximum of 3 million could have been protesting throughout the whole of Egypt (Shereef Ismail 2013b; Tahar 2013).

¹²¹ For a transcript of the communiqué see <http://www.dp-news.com/dpmasri/detail.aspx?id=2593>.

Mursi had announced his participation. On the day of the demonstrations, in turn, different units of the armed forces demonstrated their support by parading their armoured vehicles, projecting elaborate laser-graphics onto the *Mogamma* administration building and by flying cordons of battle helicopters carrying the Egyptian flag, ultimately converting Tahrir into the site a carnivalesque celebration of patriotism. As Maged Atef and Sheera Frenkel (2014) recollect:

In the skies above Tahrir Square, military planes began to conduct elaborate flying stunts, painting the colours of the Egyptian flag or drawing hearts in the blue summer sky. The stunts were neither easy to perform nor cheap, but they sent the clear message that both the army and police were behind Tamarod.

According to Adel Abdel Ghafar (2013), the military also provided the necessary logistics to mediatise the scenes on Tahrir, that is, harness Egyptian media to exploit the event for mass consumption: carried by an army helicopter, an anti-Mursi director was permitted to record aerial shots of the square which were soon televised as **“the largest protest in human history” by Egyptian media. In light of this massive show of resistance, 30 June witnessed the resignation of ten ministers from Mursi’s cabinet.**¹²² As it became clear that the demonstrators would not leave Midan Tahrir before their demands were met, Al-Sisi additionally issued a second and more explicit ultimatum on the following day, 1 July 2013. This time he spoke in the name of the entire central command of the armed forces, a top brass body of roughly 50 decorated officers including the SCAF. The statement was read out by a spokesman on state television on Monday evening. In the statement, he called for the government to meet the demands of the people and to demonstrate its ability and willingness to settle its differences with the opposition within the next 48 hours. If it failed to do so, the army would consider itself forced to intervene in order to enact a **roadmap for the country’s future.**¹²³

5.4 Recap: A Crisis of Legitimacy

With hindsight, it seems obvious that the Tamarod campaign successfully **subverted the discourse sustaining Mohamed Mursi’s rule. As Seppe Malfait (2014, 16) contends, the popular campaign managed to temporarily dominate the discursive field and create a new hegemonic project, grouped around the contested sig-**

¹²² Resignations included Tourism Minister Hisham Zaazou, Minister of State for Environmental Affairs Khaled Abdel-Aal, Communication and Information Technology Minister Atef Helmi, Minister of State for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Hatem Bagato and Water Minister Abdel-Qawy Khalifa.

¹²³ For a transcript of the ultimatum statement see <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-protests-army-text-idUSBRE96014420130701>. A second statement posted on the military’s Facebook page on the same day emphasised that the army was not aspiring to rule and would not overstep its prescribed role.

nifiers of the ‘revolution’, of ‘democracy’ and of ‘legitimacy’. By fixing the meaning of these floating signifiers in a discourse that drew a sharp antagonist line between the Muslim Brotherhood, on the one hand, and all other elements of Egyptian civil society, on the other. Tamarod’s **discourse effectively drew political frontiers**. To one side were those representing the popular will—including the anti-Mursi demonstrators in the street, oppositional parties and initiatives such as the NSF and Tamarod, and key state institutions such as the armed forces, the Ministry of Interior, Al-Azhar and the Coptic church. This discourse aimed to evoke nostalgia as it aimed to recreate the revolutionary momentum of 2011 where, according to popular wisdom, a variegated coalition of state and non-state actors had stood side by side against the authoritarian incumbent regime. On the other side of the political divide was the antagonist ‘other’ of the incumbent Islamist government and its supporting organisations who, supposedly, were defying this will. The campaign thereby created not only the conditions for broad alliances across the divisions of class, ideology and movements. It also enabled the **formation of an implicit coalition between Mursi’s contenders on the street and the armed forces**. As a state institution, the military saw its constitutionally guaranteed economic and political privileges endangered by the prospect of civil strife. Moreover, it was keen on restoring its role as protector of social peace and image as a **defender of the nation**. The powerful “flank effect” (Haines 2013) created through this integration of variegated actors in a hegemonic bloc first benefitted **mobilisation by some of the bloc’s members against the precarious status quo** and then paved the way for a military coup by others against the first freely elected president Egypt’s republican history.

The solidarity of its key allies, but also of most Salafi parties and movements (with the notable exception of the *Nour* Party) as well as other non-religious organisations may **have contributed to the Mursi administration’s overestimation of its political leeway** in the face of credible threats of military intervention and growing momentum for the 30 June demonstrations.¹²⁴ Furthermore, the victories at the ballot box since the 2011 uprising—first in the March 2011 referendum on constitutional amendments to the 1971 constitution, then in the December 2011 parliamentary elections, and finally in the presidential elections and constitutional referendum of 2012—had made the Brotherhood and its president over-confident of their popular backing. In truth, these elections had done little to satisfy popular

¹²⁴ Some authors have insinuated that negotiators had been seeking a graceful exit for Mursi behind the scenes, including new elections and the installation of the head of the SCC as interim president, in exchange for guarantees of political amnesty and for assurances to the Muslim Brotherhood that it would not again be banned and excluded from the political process (Bassiouni 2013, 3).

aspirations for political participation. As Shenker (2016, 265) remarks:

In the past half-decade, there have been nearly a dozen national elections; Egyptians have ‘done’ procedural democracy more than virtually any other people on earth, so much so that they have invented a new term to describe the system of government inflicted upon them since Mubarak fell. Deemuqratelya is the Arabic word for democracy; many now talk instead of living under the rule of sundooqratelya, a (ballot) ‘boxocracy’.

This discovery evidently remained concealed to the administration who insisted on the electoral ballot as the people’s legitimate mechanism to express their political preferences and give voice to their grievances. As Nicola Pratt (2015, 46) has argued:

Indeed, one of the fundamental errors of the Muslim Brotherhood was to assume that their plurality in the first parliamentary elections and their victory in the first presidential elections indicated their hegemony over the vast majority of the population.

Mursi reified this position during his address to the nation on 26 June: “We want a loyal opposition that represents the vision and perspectives of the people who elected them, so there can be an alternation of power between whoever holds it and those elected by the people [...] the political experience based on elections and the legitimacy of the ballot box are sufficient to take in everyone,” he confirmed in the speech to his supporters gathered in front of Ittihadiya palace, only to discredit the opposition’s grievances in the same breath as reactionary and counter-democratic forces.¹²⁵

At the first sign of disagreement, some factions have chosen to give up the rules of the democratic process such as commitment to the ballot box and legitimacy, ignoring the extended hand offering a dialogue. Instead, they rushed to question the legitimacy of the entire regime. It is now an absurd scene that they are standing with the revolutionary youth saying that they are revolutionaries, while what they want is to attack the democratic experiment.

While media reports indicated growing support for the Tamarod campaign predicting a massive turnout for the 30 June protests, both President Mohamed Mursi and cadres of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood declined not only to bow to the opposition’s demands but also rebuffed several offers of mediation. In an attempt to mitigate the risk of open conflict and civil strife, among others, the Salafi *Nour*-Party—the FJP’s former coalition partner in parliament—had attempted to broker a deal between the Brotherhood and the opposition.¹²⁶ However, when the armed

¹²⁵ Mursi, Mohammed. 26 June 2013. ‘Address to the nation on the occasion of the one year anniversary of his inauguration [Arabic]’. On file with the author.

¹²⁶ The deal offered by the *Nour*-Party entailed the government meeting some of Tamarod’s key demands, such as an immediate government reshuffle, the appointment of a new prosecutor-general, and

forces' symbolic deadline passed on 3 July without an agreement and Mursi giving in to the opposition's demands, the army took sides in the conflict against the acting government in the early afternoon and took leadership of the country.

Drawing on Gramsci (1971, 219), Brecht de Smet and others (2014b; 2014a; 2015; Malfait 2014) have interpreted the subsequent arrest of the acting president and 250 mid- and upper ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood and its FJP (Bassiouni 2017, 125; El-Amrani 2013, 4f) as a re-enactment of the "Caesarist" scenario of 2011: A reactionary third force intervened to break a stalemate between two camps which, in a mutually reinforcing spiral, was gradually leading towards both camps' demise. The army was, however, careful to avoid its mistakes from 2011 and installed a civilian transition government under the direction of interim President Adly Mansour to lead the country until new elections. Mansour, the former head of the SCC, received far-reaching legislative and executive powers to implement the military's 'transitional roadmap' that General Sisi had announced during his statement to relieve Mursi of his duties. Aside from new elections and the formation of a national reconciliation commission, the roadmap included the elaboration of a new constitution, a reformation of the electoral law, and the implementation of a new ethical codex for the country's media outlets (see Pioppi 2013, 65). In the absence of a legislative an interim cabinet headed by Hazem al-Beblawi, an economist and former Finance Minister in the cabinet of Essam Sharaf, was retained to rule by decree.¹²⁷

a revision of the contentious constitution by a non-partisan committee. Moreover, a roadmap for gradual reconciliation would have paved the way for early presidential elections.

¹²⁷ The lower house *Maglis ash-Sha'ab* had been vacant for a year, since its suspension by the SCC; the MB-dominated *Maglis ash-Shura* was dissolved by Mansour on 5 July 2013.

6. Competing Hegemonic Projects

General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced Mursi's deposition and the coming changes in government on 3 July 2013 at 7 p.m. local Egyptian time. For his televised address, he was joined by representatives of Egypt's religious institutions, opposition party leaders and high-ranking officers in a carefully stage-managed visual framing process (see Abdel Ghaffar 2013). The sheikh of Al-Azhar Ahmed Al-Tayyeb and Coptic Pope Tawadros followed Sisi at the podium with speeches of their own, confirming their support for the steps taken by the army and calling upon Egyptians to resolve their differences. National Salvation Front leader Mohamed El-Baradei and Tamarod spokesman Mahmoud Badr spoke last. Significantly, a leading member of the Salafist *Nour* Party visibly attended the announcement as well, letting the military intervention appear as a broad consensus of all segments of Egyptian society, rather than an anti-Islamist coup. Aside from creating tangible facts on the ground,¹²⁸ the coup d'état had thus another immaterial side. As a discursive event, on the one hand, it caused a structural dislocation in contenders' discourses. On the other, it became a productive force by providing a constitutive myth for two opposing political projects whose competition would dominate the years to come.

The coup dichotomised Egypt's political public by delimiting the frontier between the opposing forces in the contentious struggle. In this struggle, both sides derived their legitimacy from competing conceptions of democracy, legality and the country's revolutionary heritage; both sides claimed to represent the popular will and to speak for 'the people'; and both sides engaged in a vicious vilification of their respective other, depicting it "as an existential threat, yet paradoxically also as a minuscule fringe side-lined by their own clear majority" (Mogahed 2013).

6.1 From Government to Opposition

Mursi's deposition was the catalyst for the protest cycle that is at the centre of this investigation: Spearheaded by the Freedom and Justice Party, the National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy had been demonstrating in support of President Mursi since mid-June. After 3 July 2013, however, it added the suffix 'in Rejection of the Coup' to its name and called for country-wide peaceful protest marches in defiance of the new interim authorities' orders. The Islamist protest coalition

¹²⁸ Symptoms of the military intervention could be witnessed by Egyptians live or on state television, such as, President Mursi being arrested and escorted out of office, tanks rolling in position throughout Cairo, as well as fireworks and shouts of joy emanating from Midan Tahrir.

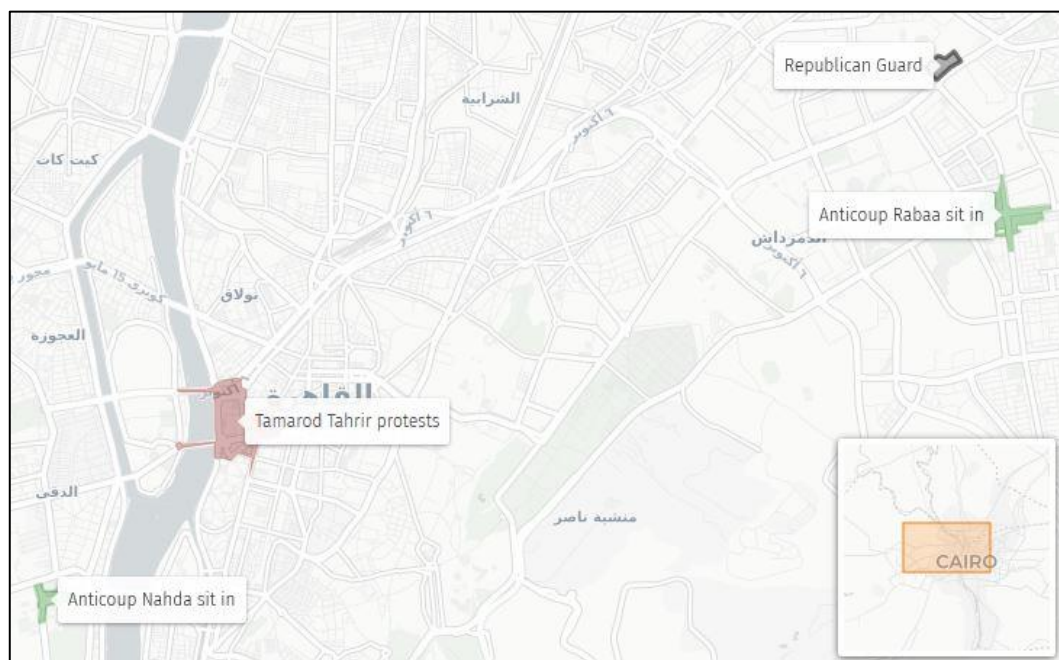
honoured the president's last speech and made opposition to the coup the epicentre of its campaign. *Shar'aiya* [legitimacy] moved to become the master signifier that would structure the protest campaigns discourse and define the boundaries of protesters' collective identity. The myth of a national initiative for the restoration of constitutional, democratic, and revolutionary legitimacy became the surface for the inscription of a variety of demands and meaning constructions under the umbrella of the Anti-Coup Alliance. This alliance transformed rapidly from an advocacy coalition in support of the incumbent Mursi government into a street movement. It also became the primary pressuring mechanism for a broad coalition of mostly Islamist political forces who rejected the military intervention as an illegitimate 'coup' against the country's democratic transition. Rabaa Al-Adawiya Square (henceforth referred to varyingly as Rabaa al-Adawiya or Rabaa Square) in the Cairene neighbourhood of Nasr City became the epicentre of this movement's activities.

Mona Abaza (2014, 165) has argued that the squatting of Rabaa Square represented a "last resort" of the defeated Muslim Brothers. However, it seems only natural that the Brotherhood and its allies adopted a contentious repertoire, namely the occupation of a square, which—according to Carola Richter (2017) has become "a global signifier for staging anti-establishment protest." Across borders, public spaces and especially major urban roundabouts (both their spatiality and their occupation and appropriation by protesters) are viewed today as eminent sites of confrontation between revolutionary and reactionary groups (e.g., Kerton 2012; McCurdy, Feigenbaum, and Frenzel 2016; Soudias 2015; Weizman, Fisher, and Moafi 2015). As Jonathan Liu (cited in Weizman, Fisher, and Moafi 2015, 11) has remarked in his essay on the "roundabout revolutions" of the Arab Spring, the symbolism in the location of a growing number of popular uprisings around the world is almost jokingly obvious: "what better place to stage a revolution, after all, then one built for turning around?"

Accordingly, the choice of Rabaa al-Adawiya was less born out of necessity than a conscious one. It contrasted well with Tamarod-occupied Midan Tahrir as a site that is not only heavily loaded with revolutionary symbolism, but that had also served for decades as the site of annual parades to celebrate the 1952 military coup (Weizman, Fisher, and Moafi 2015, 37). If Tahrir Square provided some sort of public voice to that segment of the Egyptian nation which called for an end to Mursi's government and supported military intervention into civilian politics, Midan Rabaa provided something of a counter-public (for an overview over the camps' locations see Figure 6, p. 115). Tying their fate to that of the Anti-Mursi protesters, its occupiers refused to leave the square until the demonstrations on

Midan Tahrir disbanded as well. After the coup attempt, the Rabaa al-Adawiya camp became the primary pressuring mechanism of the Anti-Coup Alliance.

Figure 6. Protest locations in summer 2013



Source 6. Map created with umap, based on OpenStreetMap data, map tiles by Carto DB, under CC BY 3.0.¹²⁹

The square, located on a major intersection of Nasr City, offered several advantages as a location for the Brotherhood's protest camp. First, Nasr City is charged as a symbol of the military's crucial embedding into Egyptian society. The urban conglomerate was planned and built in the late 1950s and early 1960s under the auspices of Gamal Abdel Nasser and houses Egypt's Al-Azhar University. Next to Rabaa al-Adawiya Square lies the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on Al-Nasr Road, as well as the *Minassa* [podium] memorial of the assassination of former President Sadat. Moreover, several military clubs and the principal military parade street are close by (cf. Abdelbaseer 2016).¹³⁰ Recalling memories of the military coup in 1952 that brought Abdel Nasser to power, the sit-ins in Nasr City thus challenged the coup leaders' interpretive authority over the role and function of the armed forces in Egyptian politics, and appropriated the nationalist prestige of

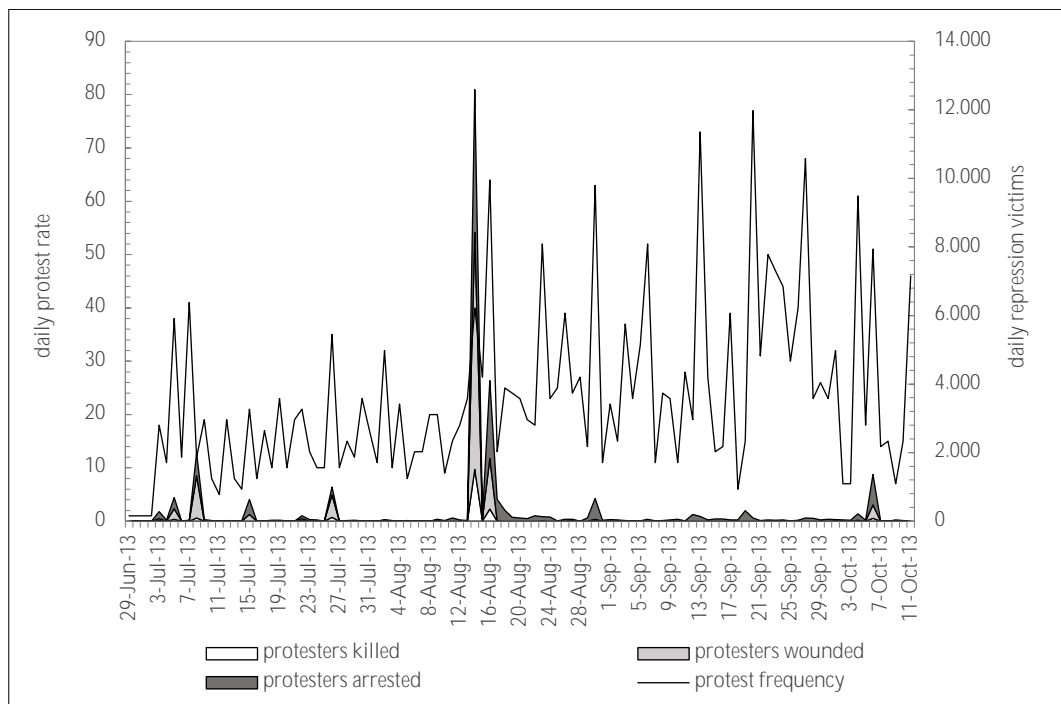
¹²⁹ For an interactive map see http://umap.openstreetmap.fr/en/map/rabaa_224774#16/30.0667/31.3241.

¹³⁰ The pyramid-shaped Tomb of the Unknown Soldier monument was commissioned by President Anwar Al-Sadat in 1974 to honour the fallen soldiers of the united Arab armies of the 1973 October War. After President Sadat's assassination on October 6, 1981 during the annual parade in commemoration of the Egyptian crossing of the Suez Canal and overcoming of the Israeli Bar Lev Line, which marked the beginning of the 1973 October War, the site was chosen for the President's tomb. Across the street, facing the tomb, the tribune podium [*Minassa* in Arabic] where Sadat had been shot during the parade, was also kept as an additional memorial for the former President.

the protest site.

In addition to Midan Rabaa, a second large camp was created on Midan Al-Nahda [Renaissance Square] in the district of Giza and vicinity of the Cairo University, on the other bank of the Nile. Until their dissolution by police in mid-August, these two major sites of occupation in the Egyptian Capital geographically concentrated the unseated President's supporters. Moreover, the two squares served as hubs for a large portion of the demonstrations in Cairo and Giza, where different marches originated and converged (Grimm and Harders 2018; Ketchley 2017a). However, contention did not remain limited to the capital: During the period investigated in this thesis, the decisive first 100 days after the coup, I have documented 2,433 discrete protest events that can be attributed to the Anti-Coup Alliance (see Figure 7). These events took place in all provinces, albeit with a clear focus on the governorates' capitals.

Figure 7. Anti-Coup protest cycle and state repression



Source 7. Time series based on author's event database, repression data by Wiki Thawra.

The protest cycle did not follow a linear trajectory though. Protest events were not normally distributed across the investigation period. Several instances of condensed event data point to the existence of contentious episodes marked by accelerated mobilisation and an escalation of collective actions. These findings correlate with the available data on victims of state repression during protests for the same timeframe: For the investigation period, *Wiki Thawra* has documented the violent deaths of 2,305 people and the physical injury of 11,517 through violence

from state security forces including police, CSF and army units. At the same time, 14,442 people were arrested. Significantly, most peaks in the dataset correspond with phases of the protest cycle that were marked by an intensification of collective action.

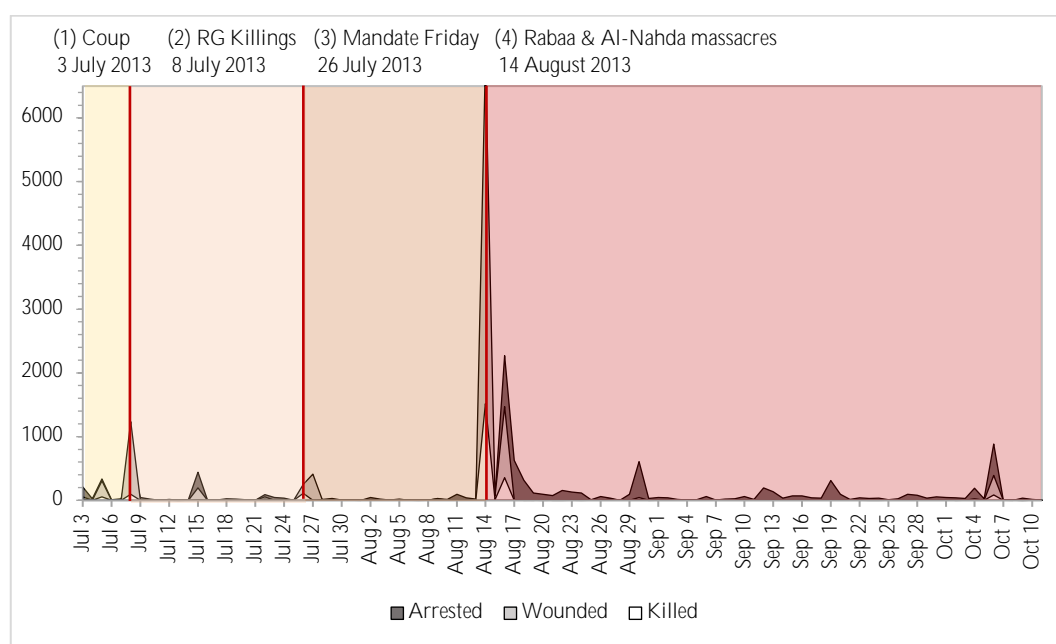
As the diagram shows, the Anti-Coup protest cycle was characterised by four different episodes that each displayed a distinctive pattern of interaction between protesters and state security forces. Furthermore, each episode included a precipitating event that was (in general) accompanied by a massive deployment of indiscriminate and lethal state violence against protesters:

- 1) first, the deposition of Mohamed Mursi on 3 July 2013 triggered an initial phase of collective action that concentrated on the surroundings of Midan Rabaa al-Adawiya in the suburb of Nasr City, on Al-Nahda Square in Giza, and on Salah Salem Street in downtown Cairo;
- 2) second, the mass killing of demonstrators at the latter protest location, in front of the Republican Guard (RG) headquarters on 8 July 2013 precipitated a cascade of regular daily marches that contributed to the institutionalisation of the Anti-Coup Alliance as a protest movement;
- 3) third, a public call by then-defense minister Al-Sisi for a popular mandate to confront terrorism, followed by a mass protest on 26 July 2013, marked a **turning point for the regime's dealing with the protest and resulted in the deadly clashes outside the *Minassa* memorial in the Cairene neighbourhood of Nasr City on 27 July 2013;**
- 4) and finally, fourth, a short phase of condensed and intensified interaction between protesters and security forces. These dynamics culminated in the simultaneous raids of the NASL's protest camps in Midan Rabaa al-Adawiya and Midan Al-Nahda on 14 August 2013 which became the constitutive event for both, an authoritarian regression in the coat of nationalism that brought the military back to power (see Chapter 7) and also cemented a coalition of contenders that continues to demonstrate today, albeit in smaller frequency and numbers.

These episodes (tinted in different colours in Figure 8, p. 118) were all defined by the copresence of massive repression and contentious collective action. In line with McAdam and Sewell's (2001) definition of transformative events, these instances became "turning point events" (Pearlman 2018) for the trajectory of the Anti-Coup movement leading to an immediate and dramatic escalation of protest

activities.¹³¹ Significantly, aside from altering conditions on the ground, these events were also important as discursive events that became resources for identity formation. Surpassing the provision of reference points for collective action frames, they entered the cultural stock of the Anti-Coup movement as a nodal signifier. In this sense, they ushered a new understanding of political reality and its possibilities (Schwedler 2016), thereby exerting a precipitating effect on the Anti-Coup campaign.

Figure 8. Phases of Anti-Coup subject formation



Source 8. Time series based on author's event database, repression data by Wiki Thawra.

This chapter and the next explore how during the different phases depicted in Figure 8 different transformative events came to structure contentious politics in post-coup Egypt, both on a discursive and material level. On the one hand, they were formative as they disrupted the life worlds of contending actors and informed their political subjectivities, thereby delineating the boundaries of collective identities. On the other hand, the competing narratives about the witnessed contentious events also constituted the conditions of possibility for subsequent protest performances and its repressive responses.

It is argued that the battle over the definition of legitimacy in the context of a democratic transition early on laid path dependencies for the failure of the Islam-

¹³¹ Confirming prior findings on the conditions of backlash (Rogers 2011), these observed escalation of mobilisation efforts during these episodes can by and large be attributed to the brutal, indiscriminate, and reactive nature of repression deployed by the Egyptian police and Central Security Forces against the largely peaceful protesters (see Grimm and Harders 2018).

ist protest campaign by the so-called Anti-Coup Alliance. The nodal signifier of ‘legitimacy’ in the former president’s discourse had been challenged and subverted throughout the year before 30 June so that it finally remained a hollow shell, an empty signifier, that was filled with contingent meanings by different mobilising camps (see Chapter 5). Its dislocation and unfixing made it a delicate topic around **which to mobilise**. In the context of a polarised public, the Islamists’ nonviolent protest campaign under the banner of ‘legitimacy’ was hence unable to generate resonance and support. Ultimately, this chapter thus highlights how a particular choice of symbolic repertoires may restrict the building of broader coalitions of contenders, thereby **limiting mobilisation’s chances of success**.

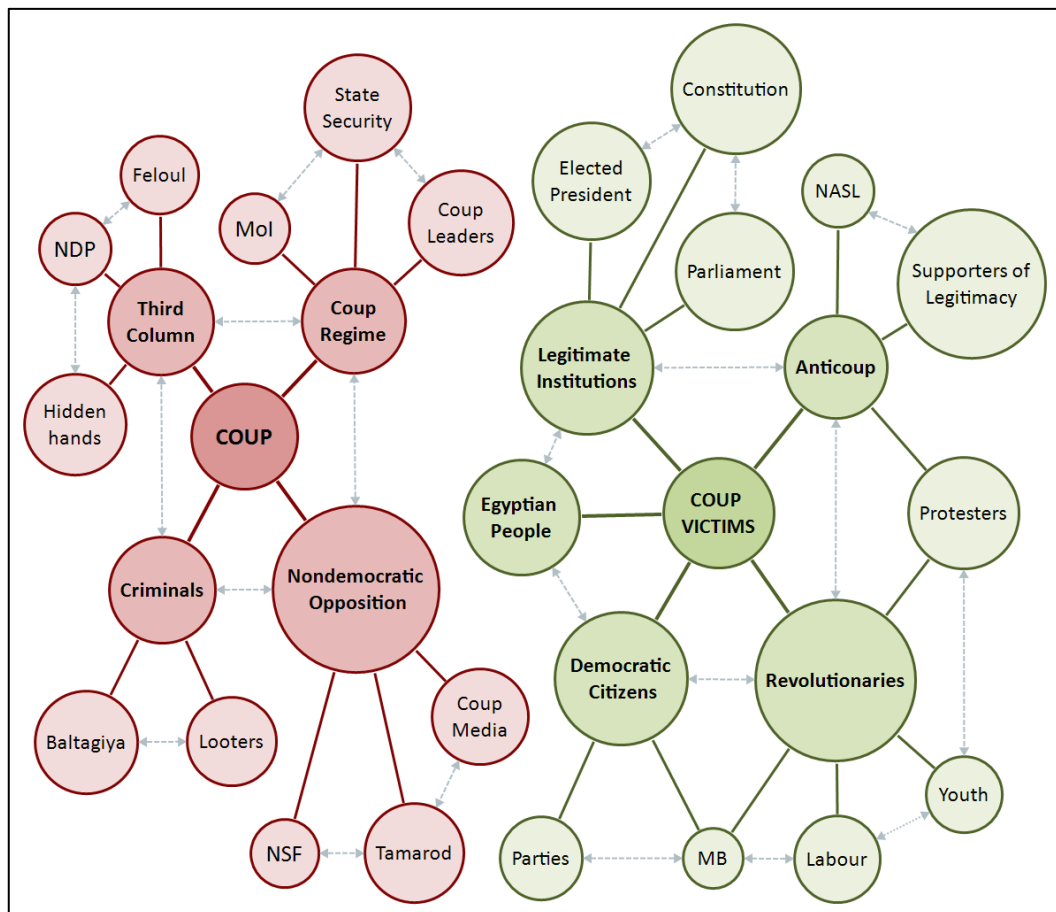
6.2 Coup and Anti-Coup

The protest-backed military ousting of Mursi became the first constitutive node for a range of new political subjectivation processes in the Islamist spectrum (phase 1). It set the boundaries for possible alliance building, defined the pool of available alternatives for political action, and shaped the modes of political resistance by those **opposing this ‘coup’**. For the Anti-Coup Alliance, it provided a founding myth, enabling alternative possibilities of identification for those whose collective identity had been shattered by the dislocations that the Tamarod campaign had caused in the hegemonic discourse regarding Egypt’s post-revolutionary democratic transition. The dislocation of the government’s discourse by a series of contentious events during Mursi’s rule had revealed the **contingency of the Brotherhood’s conception of democratic legitimacy**. It also paved the way for a hegemonic struggle, in which both the Tamarod campaign and the Brotherhood attempted to fix the meaning of the disarticulated floating signifiers of legitimacy, democracy, revolution, and popular sovereignty. Their struggle can ultimately be read as an attempt to suture the rift of the social order created by the **inability of the ruler’s discourse to incorporate new events** (see Torfing 2005, 16). By mid-2013, it had resulted in a stalemate with no faction able to expand its reading of the world into a broader social imaginary. The coup broke this stalemate and reshuffled the cards. It gave the Islamist coalition an opportunity to redefine its collective identity and redraw the image of its antagonist other.

The body of statements issued by the NASL between the 3 July military intervention and the 8 July Republican Guard killings dichotomised the political spectrum into opposing camps (see Figure 9, p. 120). They created the foundational stock for *who was to be considered an insider* and *who an outsider* of its campaign for legitimacy, *who a potential ally*, and *who a coupist and thus an irrevocable en-*

emy. The semantic network in Figure 9 reveals the relatively symmetric structuration of the Anti-Coup Alliance’s discourse. The shared otherness of those elements on the one side created a chain of equivalence among all elements on the respective other side of the discourse’s internal frontier—and vice versa. The coup and its victims became the two nodal elements for opposing chains of equivalence that connected different clusters of discourse elements and delimited those who were to be considered part of the Anti-Coup coalition and their actions on the one side, from their opponents on the other. Individual demands without necessary prior relations with each other, such as the demand for real democracy, the compensation of victims, social justice, and the reinstatement of President Mursi were thereby grouped and transformed into a popular demand for the abolition of the coup.

Figure 9. Articulation of antagonist frontier



Source 9. Semantic network created with the help of XMind 8 based on coding in MAXQDA 13. Colours demark the two sides of the antagonist frontier, dotted lines with arrowheads illustrate differential relations.

The main fault-line in this discourse was, unsurprisingly, along the support of the coup. As with their primary opponents in the Tamarod camp, the Anti-Coup Alliance was keen to consolidate a dichotomic frontier between the supporters of their

cause and those who had betrayed them. As Helen Underhill has stressed, “framing the events that lead to Sisi’s ascension as a coup is an essential element of their narrative because a coup represents a rupture in the revolution, the antithesis of democracy, and is central to their narrative of the continuing events as revolving around the issue of legitimacy” (Underhill 2016, 53). Through the framing of the events of 3 July as a coup, not only against the legitimate president but against popular will in general, a line was drawn between ‘the coupists’ and ‘the people’, who had been victimised by a military intervention that disregarded their electoral choice and had disposed of their representative.

This dividing line served as a reference for juxtaposing a range of actors in a differential relation. The ‘coup leaders’ were constructed as the antagonist other to the elected President Mursi, the country’s ‘democratic leader’. For their part, the ‘democratic citizens’ who were equalised with those citizens who supported the NASL’s principles were juxtaposed to the Tamarod campaign that was portrayed as a bunch of criminals, no other than the *baltagiya* [thugs] paid by the remnants of the Mubarak regime. Finally, in the Anti-Coup discourse, the workers, youth movements and Islamist groups who had made possible the 25 January uprising, the ‘true revolutionaries’, found their differential counterpart in the reactionary forces of the ‘coup regime’. This included the representatives of the security state, the ‘coup media’ and the so-called ‘third column’—an ostensive conspiracy of the ‘deep state’, the remnants of the old regime, and foreign powers aiming to destabilise Egypt and roll back the achievements of the Revolution (see Gribbon and Hawas 2012, 122).

6.2.1 *Articulating a Collective Identity*

Realising that President Mursi’s earlier attempt to fraternise with the Egyptian public and present himself as a people’s man had failed, the Anti-Coup coalition refrained from establishing a direct link between the people and the deposed president but instead constructed a relation of equivalence between both only via their common victimisation by the coup. Significantly, the protest coalition also worked hard to alter the image of the Anti-Coup movement as basically a grassroots mobilising arm of the Muslim Brotherhood. Albeit strongly present on the Rabaa al-Adawiya podium and at street rallies, the NASL’s official communication thus largely evaded any religious symbolisms. Samuli Schielke has argued that supporters and allies of the Brotherhood produced a different narrative of polarisation. He claims that those who opposed Mursi were either “Christians, godless liberals, or corrupt old regime elites—thus, once again, not the true Muslim Egyptian people” (Schielke 2017, 209). In contrast, the analysis of Anti-Coup discourses surround-

ing the events on the ground tells a more differentiated story. Accordingly, neither the Brotherhood nor its FJP assumed a nodal position. And while the coup forces were likened to and associated with the *feloul* [remnants] of the old regime,¹³² neither their confession nor their piety played a central role within the discourse structure that delimited the boundaries of the Anti-Coup movement.

This finding is surprising given the Brotherhood’s legacy of sectarian agitation. But it can also be understood as a strategic choice. There was a conspicuous absence of typical Brotherhood tropes, such as the traditional slogan “Islam is the solution” (Imad 2014, 239). The marginalisation of sectarian frames in the Anti Coup discourses may have been intended to dissolve pre-existing antagonisms and leave the movement permeable to outside support by non-Islamist political groups. During Mursi’s presidency, opposition parties had regularly accused the Brotherhood of abusing religion for political gains. Well aware of their image as *tujjar ad-din* [religion brokers] (Monier and Ranko 2013, 116) and given the fact that Islamic protest frames did not resonate with the non-Islamist segments of Egyptian society, the Brotherhood thus adopted a broader reference to democratic legitimacy, in an effort to bridge social polarisation.

The notions of democratic citizenship and faithfulness to the goals of the revolution became key in the Anti-Coup campaign’s attempts of coalition building and of linking the struggle of the Freedom and Justice Party and its allies to a broader political struggle against authoritarianism. Accordingly, the Anti-Coup organisers defined the equivalence between the Muslim Brotherhood members and sympathisers and other social groups such as the Egyptian youth, its workers and its other national political forces, including parties and revolutionary movements, as a principled one: both groups, so their argument went, were bound together through their joint victimisation by the coup. The military coup, an NASL statement on 4 July 2013 stressed, had been one against “the legitimacy derived from the will of the people and revolution of 25 January.”¹³³

This legitimacy had been granted via democratic elections and constitutional referenda—a procedure that had been fought for and enabled only via the joint revolutionary protests of youth, workers, Islamists and other patriotic forces. In this logic, all those groups who either supported democratic due process (regardless of its outcome) or those citizens who had participated in and shared the goals of the glorious revolution of 25 January were necessarily bound together in oppo-

¹³² The term *feloul* represents a revolutionary neologisms. It came into common parlance in 2011 to describe the remnants of the Husni Mubarak regime (see Kingsley 2014b).

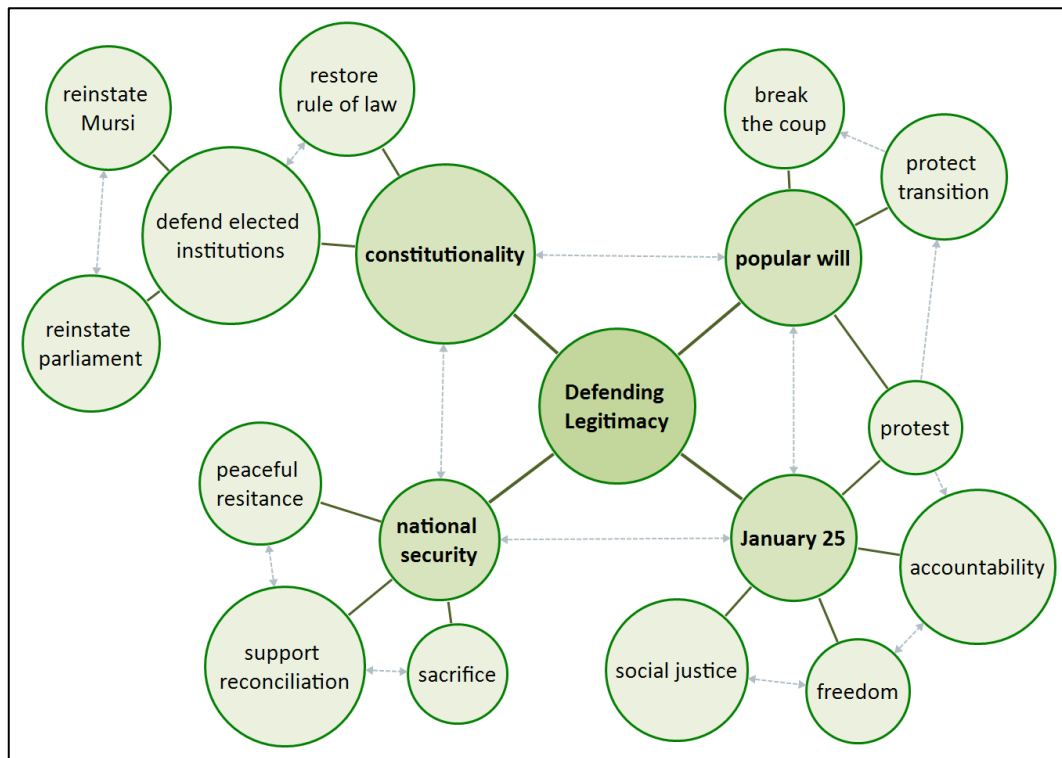
¹³³ NASL. 4 July 2013. ‘Statement 6 [Arabic]’. On file with the author.

sition against the coup. In this perspective, solidarity with Mohamed Mursi, as the prime victim of the coup also became a matter of principle for the Anti-Coup coalition, as their communiqués illustrate:

We assure that all supporters of the legitimate President Mohamed Mursi, out of principle, are inherently peaceful in their approach as they stand by the side of the elected president's legitimacy and the people whose vote and free will was wasted by the coup carried out by Al-Sisi.¹³⁴

The Anti-Coup alliance framed legitimacy as based on the four pillars of national security, revolutionary glory, democratic electoral victory and constitutional legality (see Figure 10), also came to define the prognostic dimension of its discourse and hence both its prefigurative component and the more concrete instructions to the movement's followers regarding repertoires and the modes of street politics.

Figure 10. Prognostic frame, articulation of collective subject 30 June-8 July 2013



Source 10. Semantic network created with the help of XMind 8 based on coding in MAXQDA 13.

From the interplay of these dimensions of legitimacy, the NASL inferred the instructions to its followers: from the primacy of restoring constitutionality derived the demand for restitution of the elected president, the reinstatement of the disbanded parliament and the restoration of the rule of law; from the claim to defending the popular will derived the appeal to break the coup and protect Egypt's

¹³⁴ NASL. 7 July 2013. "To the Egyptian people [Arabic]". <http://bit.ly/2RjUmZ7>.

post-revolutionary democratic transition from its effects; from the nationalist-inspired reference to the defence of legitimacy as a service to national security, in turn, derived the strong insistence on peacefulness and the (at least formal) support for reconciliation and a consensual solution to the constitutional crisis; and from the definition of legitimacy as one rooted in more than formalism and strongly engrained in the spirit of the 25 January Revolution derived demands for freedom, social justice and accountability, as well as the Anti-Coup Alliance's repertoire and insistence on street protest as mechanism for leveraging popular support.

The alliance's prognosis 'what was to be done' and how it was to be done, hence of the strategy and means of resistance to the coup and for solving the political crisis effectively reflected its convictions regarding legitimacy. According to **the alliance, in Egypt's post-revolutionary context**, legitimacy derived on the one hand from the normative order enshrined in the constitution of 2012 and affirmed by popular vote in several elections. This stance was explicit in its fourth statement, which was released on 3 July, shortly before the army announced the Mursi's deposition:

The Alliance sees adherence to the constitution, which the people accepted by ballot a few months ago with a majority of nearly two-thirds of the Egyptian people, as the **reference and source of legitimacy for Egypt's system of governance**. And there is no way to go back to zero. Any proposal or decision against the constitution is void as it contravenes the will of this people which no faction may claim to represent without another faction. Instead, its expression is by elections that will be done in accordance with the constitution. The alliance also believes that constitutional legitimacy ensures that there will be no fighting or violence or any kind of bloodshed between us.¹³⁵

On the other hand, the NASL appealed to the affective ties to the 2011 revolution when it stressed that legitimacy also originated in the legacy of the 25 January Revolution. The NASL thus actually realised that it had been the narrow conception of popular will as the periodic formal expression of voting preference at the ballot, **which had undermined the Mubarak regime's claim of representing the people**. It therefore additionally drew on conceptions of popular legitimacy which emerged and were developed further via street politics during the 2011-2012 uprising.

What transpired on 25 January constitutes a concrete transformative event that recalls, above all, a range of historical descriptions of who acted how towards whom during the 18 days of the Tahrir Square occupation in 2011 (e.g., Holmes 2012; Ketchley 2014; Shokr 2015). However, 25 January can also be conceived of

¹³⁵ NASL. 3 July 2013. 'Statement 4 [Arabic]'. On file with the author.

as the signifier for a more abstract belief system and a repertoire of interpretive frames loaded with cultural and affective meaning. Tarek Ghanem (2016) has captivantly deployed the metaphor of religion to describe this second symbolic face of 25 January. Ghanem points to the ideals of agency, autonomy and moral consistency, the emotions and affective memories, and the rituals and iconography (embodied in the martyrs and their stories and legacies), which the term evokes. Though the metaphor is debatable, the Tahrir revolution as a symbolic marker has come to embody the essential elements of a belief system with enormous mobilising power.

In an illustrative case of creative frame extension, the NASL drew on this belief system to reinforce its claim of defending legitimacy against the military coup and its supporters. The NASL claimed that “the great revolution continues all the fields of Egypt and its quarters until it achieves its goals and declares that it will never allow the return of the defunct former regime that the masses of the great people have removed.”¹³⁶ In doing so, the NASL placed its resistance to the coup on the trajectory of the Egyptian revolution against authoritarianism. As a committed coalition of Egyptian citizens, the second statement read, the NASL would neither allow legitimacy to be overturned nor a return to “the age of dictatorship, corruption and tyranny.” If necessary, the Anti-Coup protesters would protect the democratic system, which came from “the womb of the people” with their lives.¹³⁷ Its principled peacefulness, the NASL claimed, had been established by the 2011 Revolution.

Betting on the symbolic power of collective memories about the 2011 uprising, the alliance moreover drew parallels between its own victimisation by security forces and the 2011 violent crackdown on Midan Tahrir with its canonised martyrs. The NASL emphasized that “thousands of Egyptians” had fallen victim to the same kind of violence that its members were now experiencing.¹³⁸ It thereby effectively likened the Anti-Coup martyrs to those who had died throughout the revolutionary struggle in the previous years. At times, these references became more explicit, for instance, after first blood had been shed on 3 July between both antagonist camps. During the night of 2 July, Muslim Brotherhood protesters had clashed with local residents and supporters of the Tamarod campaign at a pro-Mursi rally on Midan Al-Nahda near Cairo University. The next morning, the

¹³⁶ NASL. 2 July 2013. ‘The text of the statement of the National Alliance in response to the statement of the army [Arabic]’. <https://alaam250.blogspot.de/2013/07/blog-post.html>.

¹³⁷ NASL. 3 July 2013. ‘Statement 4 [Arabic]’. On file with the author.

¹³⁸ NASL. July 4, 2013. ‘Statement 6 [Arabic]’. On file with the author.

coalition in its statement extended its condolences to the families of the 18 people that had been killed in the clashes, both local residents and demonstrators (see Human Rights Watch 2013a).

Amid conflicting reports about the prime responsibility for the killings, however, the NASL, went on to portray the fatalities as “martyrs.” Selectively drawn witness testimonies suggested that *Baltagiya* thugs had attacked the crowds jointly with police officers while the army had refrained from intervening. The NASL also highlighted the manner in which they had been “shot by professional snipers under the eyes and ears of the security apparatus.”¹³⁹ According to the Alliance, this deadly force was reminiscent of the police brutality during the 2011 uprising. Above all, it pointed to the similarities with the vicious attempt by the Mubarak regime to disperse the crowds on Tahrir Square with the help of hired thugs on camelback on 2 February 2011. Recalled as ‘Battle of the Camel’, this event created some of the most iconic images of the Tahrir occupation and came to signify the determination of protesters to stay until their demands were met (Fathi 2012; Holmes 2012, 399).

In spring 2014, I conducted a background discussion with two young Muslim Brothers and the son of an Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya member who all supported the Anti-Coup demonstrations. This discussion confirmed that parallels between the early days of the 2011 uprising and the beginning of the crackdown on the Anti-Coup campaign were not only drawn by the public relations professionals within the NASL but also at the grassroots level. All three interview partners acknowledged that—in hindsight—the brutal massacres of 2013 had been premeditated and were foreseeable given the climate of anxiety, dehumanisation of opposing sides and the shared expectation of bloodshed on all sides (see also Schielke 2017). However, they also stressed that initially their perceptions were shaped by the same categories of their revolutionary experience in 2011:

On Abdel Moneim Riyad [one of the entrances to Tahrir Square and the main site of the 2011 Camel Battle] the men stood as one against the *baltagiya*, and now we are standing against them again in Gizah [the site of the Al-Nahda camp].¹⁴⁰

Lastly, the defence and protection of ‘national security’ also became a nodal signifier in the Anti-Coup Alliance’s **discourse on legitimate resistance**. This was undertaken as a means to counter the coupists attempts to monopolise the prerogative of interpretation over what was to be considered sensitive to national security and which elements were a threat to it. Furthermore, such rhetoric around the

¹³⁹ NASL. July 4, 2013. ‘Statement 6 [Arabic]’. On file with the author.

¹⁴⁰ Group discussion, July 2014.

defence of national security also served as a means to discredit alternative resistance strategies against the coup which were not primed on nonviolence. This adoption of a nonviolent repertoire of contention and a prognostic frame that stressed peacefulness and nonviolence as a legitimate means of resistance had a strong prefigurative component and reflected the NASL's **broader conception of legitimacy**. The notion of 'prefigurative politics', which has become established in debates about the political logic of social movement refers to the phenomenon that **movements, at times, express the political 'ends' of their actions through their 'means'** (see Maeckelbergh 2011; Van de Sande 2015; Yates 2015). From the outset of their campaign, the alliance thus affirmed its "full commitment to the principle of peacefulness established by the glorious January Revolution" in order to preserve the "sanctity of precious Egyptian blood." Bloodshed, it stressed from even its earliest communiqué, was to be considered a "red line" not to be crossed.¹⁴¹

6.2.2 *Constructing the Antagonist Other*

Those who had crossed this line, the NASL made clear, were their antagonist adversaries and part of the collective other that was constructed around the nodal signifier of the coup. As Keucheyan and Elliott (2013, 242) recapitulate, "the people are always constituted as such in opposition to an adversary." If manifold sectors of society join a protest movement in rejection of government policy, this is made possible not by their mutual solidarity based on their common adherence to the same class, gender, etc., but by their common rejection of the other—in this case the government: The specificity of their individual demands dissolves once they meet with rejection from a common enemy, paving the way for alliance-building and collective identity formation. In the absence of any pre-discursive features uniting them, the mobilised populace has at least one thing in common: **the antagonism between their subject position and that of their adversary**. Mursi's last presidential address had set the parameters for who was to be considered to be this adversary: Only moments after General Al-Sisi had finished addressing the masses on Tahrir Square, the President released a short and hastily recorded video clip over an official Web site, in which he denounced the coup attempt. Moments later, the website was shut down, and the record disappeared, to be disseminated further via social media only, as official media channels at this stage refused to televise presidential statements without permission from the armed forces.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ See NASL. 2 July 2013. 'The text of the statement of the National Alliance in response to the statement of the army [Arabic]'. <https://alaam250.blogspot.de/2013/07/blog-post.html>.

¹⁴² Today, there is neither an official record, nor a full original transcript of the speech available. This is the primary reason why this 'last stand' of President Mursi is often overlooked. Most analysts mistaken-

However, a shorter written version of the statement was e-mailed to selected reporters and researchers (Kirkpatrick 2013). It asserted that the actions of the leadership of the armed forces represented an “outright military coup.” In his capacity as the high commander of the army, the President insisted that all citizens, “whether civilian or military, both commanders and soldiers” should adhere to the constitution and reject the coup that only led Egypt backwards.¹⁴³

In Mursi’s view, an unholy alliance between the remnants of the old regime, Egypt’s foreign enemies and a “fifth column” of criminals, corrupt instigators and secret groups had been collaborating to sabotage Egypt’s democratic experiment. This nefarious and counter-revolutionary triad, in Mursi’s interpretation, had spared no effort in attempting to lead Egypt towards “a state of violence, defamation, incitement, and corruption” in order to instigate opposition against the government and fragment the Egyptian public.¹⁴⁴ In an earlier speech on 26 June 2013, Mursi alleged that the group of plotters was supported from abroad:

It is no secret to any rational being that there are some abroad who are overtly hostile to this revolution. There are those who realise what a free, strong, growing, developed Egypt could provide to its community, both at home and abroad. There are those who crave the ability to turn back the clock and revert to the state of corruption, oppression, monopolisation and injustice. It seems, unfortunately, that there are those among us who cannot imagine being able to eat or live without it.¹⁴⁵

After Mursi’s deposition, the NASL adopted this definition of the national enemy. Figure 11 (p. 129) shows how the alliance articulated its conception of its antagonist other, the coup forces, around four actor blocks:

- 1) the coup regime, which denoted the leaders of the coup on the institutional side and the public figureheads of the military intervention Defence Minister Abdelfattah Al-Sisi and Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim, the state security institutions, as well as the Ministry of Interior and its subordinate law enforcement and policing bodies;
- 2) criminals and paid thugs;
- 3) a clandestine ‘fifth column’ consistent of old regime remnants, the remaining fractions of Mubarak’s National Democratic Party, and its domestic and for-

ly refer to Mursi’s June 2 address as his last speech. For a transcript of the quoted speech see <https://austingmackell.wordpress.com/2013/07/04/morsis-post-coup-speech-translated/>. For excerpts see <https://youtu.be/FFyBpk9eHRw>; <https://youtu.be/4x0bo5IJK0Y>.

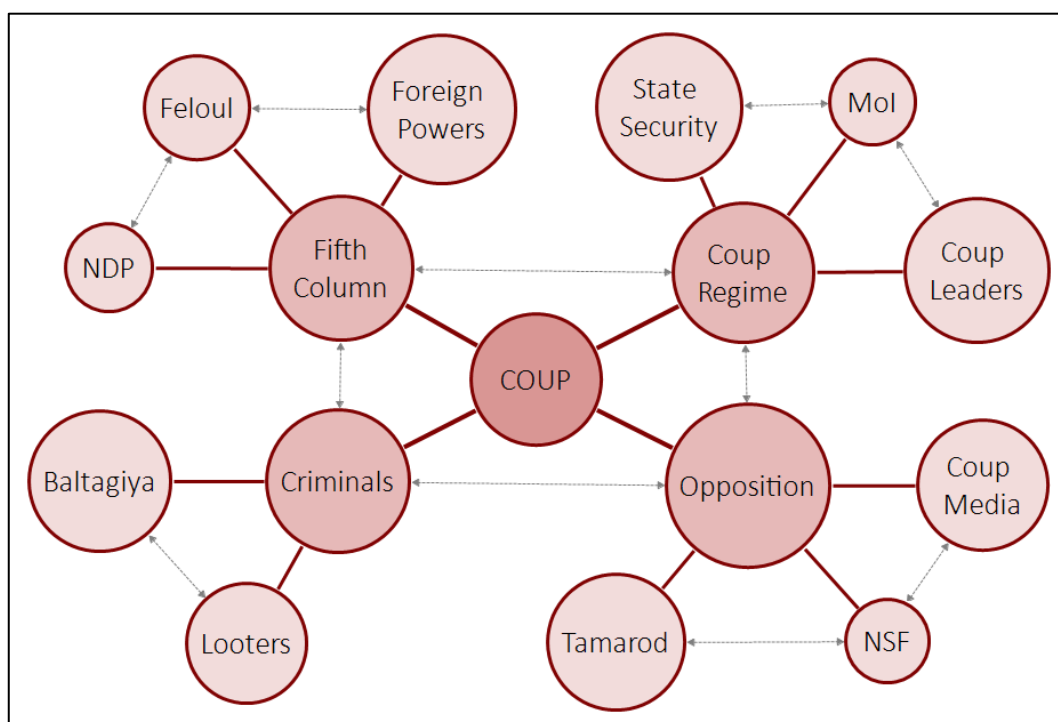
¹⁴³ Statement on file with the author, received via e-mail on 3 July 2013, approximately 10 p.m. Cairo Time, after Mursi’s deposition.

¹⁴⁴ The speech by President Mohammed Mursi to Egyptian people in Cairo was broadcast live by Doha-based Al Jazeera TV on 2 July 2013, see <https://www.ghlasa.com/vb/showthread.php?t=7036>.

¹⁴⁵ Mursi, Mohammed. 26 June 2013. ‘Address to the nation on the occasion of the one year anniversary of his inauguration [Arabic]’. On file with the author.

- eign financiers, which were trying to cause chaos and sectarian strife in order to destabilise the country and enable a return to the pre-revolutionary order.
- 4) the opposition forces, including the Tamarod movement and the parties and initiatives bundled in the National Salvation Front, who were defying the constitutional framework by voicing their position outside of the legitimate channels of democratic political expression, as well as the larger part of private and state media who—in the NASL’s view—were abrogating their professional ethics for a role as public address system for the coup forces.

Figure 11. Diagnostic frame, construction of antagonist other, 1 June-8 July 2013



Source 11. Semantic network created with the help of XMind 8 based on coding in MAXQDA 13.

Significantly, the Egyptian armed forces were not included in this discourse. Quite the contrary, at first, the NASL explicitly welcomed the presence of the armed forces in the street calling upon its troops to stand in the way of all attacks on the Anti-Coup protesters just as they had done during the 18 days of Tahrir: “We are confident that you are standing on our side,” the alliance’s statement read while at the same time downplaying prior confrontations between Islamist protesters and army officers as mere “misunderstandings” that the NASL was keen to avoid from now on.¹⁴⁶ Written in the first person plural, the note furthermore addressed the soldiers as “fellow officers” and part of “our forces” thus deliberately constructing

¹⁴⁶ NASL. 4 July 2013. ‘From the field command of the sit-ins to our brothers in the armed forces [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2RiyGwr>.

a relation of equivalence between them and the members of the Anti-Coup campaign. This conciliatory tone was surprising, as the alliance concurrently framed the cascade of events between 30 June and 3 July early on as an *inqilab* ‘askariy, a “military coup d’état against the president, the constitution, and [...] the legitimacy derived from the will of the people and the 25 January Revolution,” thus making use of a terminology that implied the armed forces’ involvement.¹⁴⁷ Explicitly, however, it carefully avoided calling out the generals as the chief perpetrators of the coup. Instead, the alliance stressed the image of the armed forces as a people’s army:

In the eyes of the Alliance, the great Egyptian army belongs to the entire people. It rejects firmly all attempts to instrumentalise it in order to attack legitimacy or to give preference to one faction over another, including to overthrow legitimacy.¹⁴⁸

The Anti-Coup Alliance’s reluctance to alienate the armed forces can be explained by the apparent hostility of the police forces towards its members, and its lack of alternative allies within the security sector of the Egyptian state. Numerous media sources had documented the resentment and general spirit of defiance that had permeated the officers’ corps of the Ministry of Interior during Mursi’s first year in office (e.g., Alsharif and Saleh 2013). If not explicitly ordered, many police and security officials individually adopted a wait-and-see approach vis-à-vis the Mursi administration, only selectively acting upon its orders in moments of direct confrontation and disobeying any orders to protect Muslim Brotherhood political mobilisation against political opponents. At times, the police had even openly opposed the Mursi administration. For instance, during the *Ittihadiya* clashes in December 2012 police refused to protect the president. Likewise, police officers in uniform assisted in the collection of signatures for the Tamarod petition. In June 2013 it refused to confront the riots near the presidential palace and chose not to protect the Brotherhood’s headquarters in Cairo’s Moqattam district as well as other MB and FJP affiliated premises across the country from looting and arson.¹⁴⁹

The MOI’s partisan stance against the acting government also became obvious during the coup against Mursi when it unilaterally deployed against the pro-Mursi demonstrators effectively undertaking the army’s ‘dirty work’: Surely, it was the armed forces that deployed in the street in a symbolic show of solidarity with the anti-Mursi demonstrators, and it was the Republican Guard Division, a command within the Egyptian armed forces that took Mursi into custody. However,

¹⁴⁷ NASL. 4 July 2013. ‘Statement 6 [Arabic]’. On file with the author.

¹⁴⁸ NASL. 3 July 2013. ‘Statement 3 [Arabic]’. On file with the author.

¹⁴⁹ A record of the press conference is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EArlLae99Jw>.

the police backed these moves by cracking down on the Brotherhood's counter-demonstrations and thus relieving the armed forces of the need to go beyond their show of force and actually make use of their arms.

The NASL's congenial stance towards the armed forces thus also resulted from its sheer lack of alternatives. Hoping for army units to act as a buffer between the CSF and its demonstrators, the 'square leadership' of the Rabaa and Al-Nahda sit-ins directly addressed the armed forces with a dedicated statement on their role as fellow citizens. Bayan 5, the coalition's first statement after Mursi's ousting released on 4 July 2013 in response to the Cairo University clashes, invited the soldiers to join the sit-ins as "brothers" and to "stand in the way of any attack on the constitution and the law" - a constitution that according to the Anti-Coup statement had preserved a role for the armed forces, worthy of its officers.¹⁵⁰

The Alliance was keenly aware of its lack of potential partners in the upper leadership of the state security institutions. This had been laid bare by recurrent informal meetings between army officers and Ministry of Interior officials at their social clubs throughout spring and the repeated personal threats by the military leadership to the then acting-President (Alsharif and Saleh 2013). The Alliance, therefore, turned, above all, to the army's mid and lower ranks:

We assure you that all the supporters of the National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy harbour all the love and appreciation for the officers, the non-commissioned officers and the soldiers of the armed forces... you are always an object of honour and pride. We don't forget your role in the recuperation of Sinai in the 73 war, and we don't forget your support for the glorious Egyptian Revolution on 25 January.¹⁵¹

The glory of the armed forces was then juxtaposed in opposition to the savagery of the coupists and, above all, the internal security and its troops as the main pillar of the coup regime. Making use of the term '*dawla bulisiya*' [police state] the alliance directly addressed the Ministry of Interior as the prime responsible.¹⁵² In addition to the coup regime, consisting of the coup leadership around Al-Sisi and domestic security, the NASL blamed paid thugs and criminals for the violence that followed the coup. As the looting and arson of Brotherhood premises increased and after clashes in the vicinity of the Cairo University sit had already left 18 dead, the NASL began to refer to the police forces as "professional criminals" [*mugrimin muhtarifin*]. Moreover, in an aggressive demarcation of bodies, the NASL resorted

¹⁵⁰ NASL. 4 July 2013. 'Statement 5: From the field command of sit-ins to our brothers in the armed forces [Arabic]'. On file with the author.

¹⁵¹ NASL. 4 July 2013. 'Statement 5: From the field command of sit-ins to our brothers in the armed forces [Arabic]'. On file with the author.

¹⁵² NASL. 4 July 2013. 'Statement 6 [Arabic]'. On file with the author.

to the vilifying and political designation *baltagiya* to label civilians engaged in clashes with its own supporters.

The term *baltagiya* had previously been employed during the reign of Mubarak. It designates the stooges of the NDP who swarmed Egypt's neighbourhoods during elections to mobilise support for a candidate and intimidate potential opposition. But the term also refers to the informal Mafia-like militia structures in many of Cairo's settlements that exist largely outside the supervision of the state. In the past, these structures reliably produced muscles-for-hire, whose services could be contracted by state institutions, local public servants as well as private businessmen (Amar 2011, 308). During the 25 January Revolution, these groups transformed into an instrument of state repression in a dual sense: on the one hand, the *baltagiya* were a tool used "by those in power in certain moments to stop a particular popular movement. It became part of the political process as a trend: to take on the role of a militia—for one side to use a group of thugs as a militia" (Hanafi 2015). Emblematic of this phenomenon was the liminal event of the Camel Battle where paid thugs led by NDP MPs viciously attacked the protesters on Tahrir Square after police forces had retreated to their barracks. This repression by-proxy enabled the regime to confront protesters without generating images of a state crackdown, which would potentially be adopted by the protesters as a corroboration of the righteous nature of their claims or by the international community as proof for the regime's injustice (see also Schwedler 2018, 81). Other than uniformed riot police or security forces, using plain-cloth Egyptians as agents of repression allowed the regime to deny any responsibility for the violence happening on the ground. Instead, the presence of such para-state producers of violence in public spaces could be taken as a pretext to extend the security apparatus' use of force.

On the other hand, the *baltagiya*-label became an expedient derogatory term with which to discredit social movements, vilify political currents and undermine subaltern politics. As Amar argues, "protesters were re-signified as crazed mobs of brutal men, vaguely 'Islamist' and fiercely irrational" (Amar 2011, 308). In her forthcoming work, Dina Wahba convincingly argues that the revolutionary moment of 2011 blurred the lines between who is a thug and who is a revolutionary: "Since all protestors were outlaws, everyone became a thug." However, the delegitimising essence of the *baltagiya* label remained intact throughout the revolution's turbulent aftermath and was reproduced by many factions to the political struggle, including by authorities to discredit those voicing their dissent via street politics. In a similar vein, after 2013 both political camps attempted to monopolise usage of the derogatory term in order to discredit their adversaries. One of my interlocu-

tors fled Egypt to Turkey in early August 2013, after clashes between opposing protesters turned increasingly violent and caused casualties on both sides. In one of our discussions, he reflected the constructed nature of the *baltagiya*-label:

When we protested and didn't defend ourselves, the police called us thugs to justify that they attacked us. Then, when they attacked us, and we defended us against their batons, they also called us thugs and said that we were proving them right. Even though they were the thugs who assaulted us and shot at us and they were proving our words right.¹⁵³

Furthermore, the political responsibility for this “relapse into barbarism,” the NASL assigned furthermore vaguely to a clandestine “fifth column,” a clandestine subversive faction aiming to undermine the nation’s unity by any means at their disposal.¹⁵⁴ In line with Pratt’s findings (2015, 49), this domestic “fifth column” that threatens the fabric of the nation through its particularistic interests found its complementary counterpart in the hidden hands of dangerous foreign forces. Unspecific hints to external actors, such as the ‘third hand’, ‘foreign fingers’, ‘external forces’—which are common in the nationalist and xenophobic discourses that have taken hold of Egypt today (Trew 2012)—were a characteristic feature of the NASL statements. According to the NASL, the coup forces hence consisted of both, remnants of the old regime, such as Mubarak’s National Democratic Party, as well as foreign powers, including ‘Zionist agents’, who collaborated in creating chaos and sectarian strife to destabilise the country and prepare the return to the pre-revolutionary order.

In a press release on the eve of the 30 June, the “planned mass protests by the opposition and members of the defunct National Democratic Party” the NASL leadership alleged that the Tamarod movement was effectively colluding with these forces.¹⁵⁵ The statement not only voiced grievances about the political violence and killings, and the looting of the FJP’s offices during the past weeks. It also bemoaned that the attacks with blades, live bullets, birdshot and Molotov cocktails clearly showed that the opposition consisting of “NDP thugs and their NSF and Rebel allies [...] had no respect for the sanctity of homes and private property”. It claimed that the Tamarod coalition had attacked NASL leaders’ houses and shops across Egypt and even laid siege to mosques and attacked worshipers and preachers. Other political forces were ultimately complicit in these attacks, the statement stressed, by remaining quiet and thus implicitly condoning the violence against

¹⁵³ Interview with participant of the NASL protest in the run up to 30 June 2013, Istanbul, October 2017.

¹⁵⁴ NASL. 4 July 2013. ‘Statement 6 [Arabic]’. On file with the author.

¹⁵⁵ MB. 29 June 2013. ‘National Alliance in Support of Electoral Legitimacy Speech to Egypt People on Eve of 30 June’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31062>.

the Brotherhood and its supporters. This included the media which, according to the NASL, failed to adhere to professional standards when it did not cover the attacks.

Here the NASL picked up Mursi's cue from the last speech before his deposition. There he had alleged that different forces were cooperating to end the revolutionary a process and that the media was playing a well-known role in these efforts. The alliance elaborated on this link in its last statement before the devastating Republican Guard massacre that was to shift the attribution of responsibility for the NASL. The statement condemned "the acts of violence and murder in all its forms, which are carried out by the coup's security forces and its Baltagiya." The Alliance also used the statement to denounce the "coupist media broadcasting" for distorting the peaceful nature of the Anti-Coup campaign and for spreading lies and rumours about the protesters. It furthermore called on the remaining "free media" and to other neutral observers to attend their demonstrations and monitor events on the ground in order to falsify the image that the coup forces were presenting.¹⁵⁶

The depiction of the coup forces effectively was a mirror image of the NASL's self-portrayal as protector of constitutional, revolutionary and democratic legitimacy (see Figure 10, p.123). This was particularly so on the diagnostic level of actions where the Anti-Coup Alliance articulated what actions by the coup forces, taken together, composed the alleged coup 'against legitimacy'. Here the signifiers of the 'popular will', 'constitutionality', 'national security', and the 25 January Revolution' again assumed the role of nodal signifiers sustaining the discursive architecture that delineated the boundaries of the movement and its antagonist other: the NASL, according to its self-depiction, was acting on behalf of and defending these pillars of legitimacy; the coup forces, by contrast, were supposedly undermining by disregarding and acting against the popular will, and by setting themselves above the constitution to champion a counter-revolution (see Figure 12, p. 135).

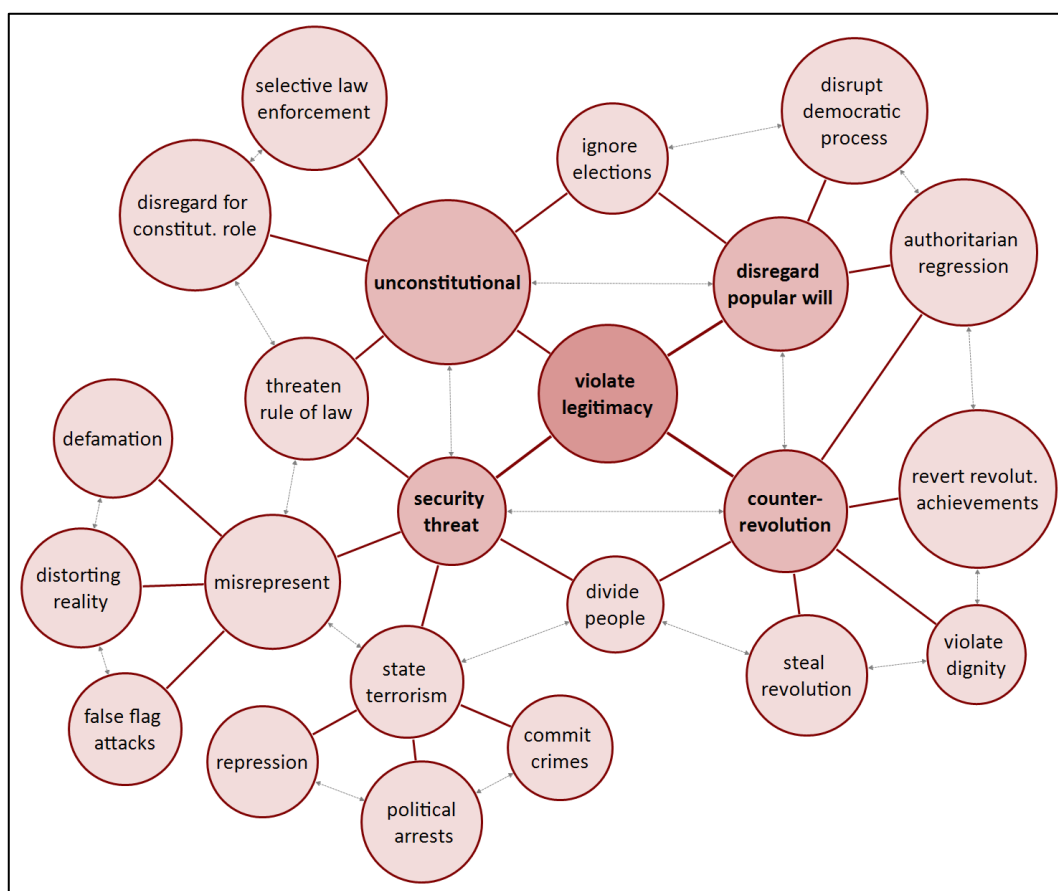
Juxtaposing the coup forces' conduct with its own defence of constitutionality and the popular will, manifest in the electoral vote that had swept the Brotherhood's president into office, the Alliance first and foremost claimed that the institutions were illegitimately acting against the role provisioned for them in the Egyptian constitution—an achievement of the 25 January Revolution. On the one hand, the Alliance claimed, the coup forces were neglecting their constitutional

¹⁵⁶ NASL. 7 July 2013. 'Statement 9 [Arabic]'. On file with the author.

purpose: security forces were violating the legal order by only selectively enforcing the law and failing to protect both, the Anti-Coup protesters as well as Brotherhood and FJP offices from attacks; the media were acting against their mandate to abide by the “norms of professionalism and decency,” as stipulated in 215 of the constitution,¹⁵⁷ by spreading misinformation, misrepresenting the NASL protests on the ground and partaking in the vicious defamation campaign; and the armed forces were overstepping their legal boundaries with its intervention:

The army belongs to the entire people, and its mission is to protect the homeland and territorial integrity as stipulated in successive constitutions. So, it is not permissible for some of its leaders to align with a faction against faction or to interfere in politics.¹⁵⁸

Figure 12. Diagnostic frame, construction of antagonist other, 1 June-8 July 2013



Source 12. Semantic network created with the help of XMind 8 based on coding in MAXQDA 13.

On the other hand, the Alliance claimed that the coup forces were, in effect, threatening the rule of law. By allowing the armed forces to depose President Mursi, they ignored the constitutional process to replace the head of state, that is,

¹⁵⁷ For a translation of the 2012 constitution see <http://www.sis.gov.eg/newwr/theconstitution.pdf>; <http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/eg/eg047en.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ See NASL. 16 July 2013. “To our armed forces [Arabic]”. <http://bit.ly/2Rkn5wS>.

either via democratic elections or via impeachment. Article 152 specified that this procedure was conditional on a motion signed by at least one-third of the members of the Council of Representatives and a two-thirds majority vote. Accordingly, the Alliance **denounced the army's efforts to place itself above the constitution** and manage the political scene as illegitimate and unconstitutional—an experience, it stressed, the Egyptian people had lived through once before during the year and a half long rule of the SCAF: **“We do not want to repeat this bitter experience, especially as we are at the doors of parliamentary elections in which the opposition can achieve the majority and form the government.”**¹⁵⁹ In its eleventh announcement, the Alliance added that the great Egyptian people would not be fooled by the attempt of the coupists **“to create a new reality seeking to legitimise the coup with an authoritarian constitutional declaration or with the formation of a coup government based on the ruins of the glorious 25 January Revolution.”**¹⁶⁰

Aside from posing a threat to the rule of law, the NASL soon reverted to referring to the coup also as a broader threat for Egypt. National security effectively became another nodal signifier in the alliance's discourse about its antagonist other: **“The National Alliance for the support of legitimacy is sensing the magnitude of popular anger and the imminent threat to the homeland as a result of the unprecedented military coup d'état”** one of its earlier statements read.¹⁶¹ Warning those **“playing with fire”** that the polarisation of Egypt's society and the artificial creation of a sectarian strife during this critical juncture would only benefit Egypt's domestic and foreign enemies,¹⁶² the NASL based this diagnostic framing crucially on three arguments: **First, it asserted, the coup was pitting “people against the army on the one hand, and against each other, on the other hand,”**¹⁶³ thus eroding both social cohesion and the popular unity achieved through the joint revolutionary struggle as well as the social contract between the Egyptian people and its armed forces.

Within this national security frame, the security service's (in)actions were interpreted as symptoms of reemergent *'irhab al-dawla al-bulisiya'* [police state terrorism]. The NASL thus adopted the securitising label of terrorism for its opponents early on, even before the first major instances of physical violence against protesters. As symptoms of the terror meted out by the police state, it initially

¹⁵⁹ NASL. 3 July 2013. 'Statement 4 [Arabic]'. On file with the author.

¹⁶⁰ NASL. 10 July 2013. 'Statement 11 [Arabic]'. <http://bit.ly/2Rk0kt1>.

¹⁶¹ NASL. 4 July 2013. 'Statement 6 [Arabic]'. On file with the author.

¹⁶² NASL. 7 July 2013. 'To the Egyptian people [Arabic]'. <http://bit.ly/2RjUmZ7>.

¹⁶³ See MB. 15 July 2013. 'National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy Statement Condemns Coup; Calls Peaceful Protests'. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31144>.

identified the restriction of freedoms, the closure of Islamist media channels, the illegal arrest of opposition politicians and a campaign of lawsuits against Brotherhood members of government, which had all immediately followed the deposition of Mohammed Mursi. However, as police forces began confronting the growing Anti-Coup demonstrations in the following days, the rhetoric hardened and the NASL began to openly accuse the security state of murder:

The peaceful protestors were subjected to violence and murder by the police and the Baltagiya in front of the Republican Guard and the top of the October Bridge, on Midan An-Nahda, and in Alexandria, Assiut and Fayoum, causing many casualties and wounding hundreds of peaceful protesters—men and women. The National Alliance for the Defence of Legitimacy, therefore, condemns all forms of violence against peaceful demonstrators and emphasises the sanctity of Egyptian blood.¹⁶⁴

This statement came in direct response to the first bloodshed at the outset of the Anti-Coup demonstrations on Friday, 5 July 2013 (Human Rights Watch 2014, 108ff). For this day, the NASL had called for a nation-wide ‘Day of Rejection’ in support of deposed President Mursi. For these protests, it avoided Tahrir Square for fear of repression and to “protect the precious blood of Egyptians.”¹⁶⁵ Further street battles, Gehad al-Haddad, the speaker of the Muslim Brotherhood argued, would only provide the armed forces with a pretext to impose a ban on public demonstrations and to reinstate martial law.¹⁶⁶ Instead, the NASL concentrated its public announcements on the surroundings of the protest camps that the Brotherhood had pitched adjacent to the Rabaa al-Adawiya Mosque in the suburb of Nasr City, on Al-Nahda Square in the periphery of the Cairo University, and on Salah Salem street, in front of the Republican Guard headquarters. Ostensibly, the Republican Guard is directly subordinate to the President of the Republic, but it had been members of this military division that had taken President Mursi into custody. Consequently, Anti-Coup demonstrators believed the deposed President Mursi was held in their headquarters and began to erect tents in front of the barracks directly after Mursi’s deposition had been announced.

After the Friday sermon on 5 July 2013, thousands of additional demonstrators marched to the barracks. They answered the protest calls by the Muslim Brotherhood’s *murshid* [supreme leader] Mohammed Badie who—after false reports of his arrest on the previous day—had unexpectedly appeared at a rally in

¹⁶⁴ See NASL. 5 July 2013. ‘On the events of the Friday miliuniya [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2Rkdh66>; see also NASL. 7 July 2013. ‘Statement 9 [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2RjSmVz>.

¹⁶⁵ RNN. 7 July 2013. ‘The National Coalition for the Support of Legitimacy issues a statement on the fabrications’ [Arabic]. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/66500.htm>.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

eastern Cairo and had insisted street mobilisation would continue until Mursi's reinstatement. Confronting the marches, security forces used live ammunition against the demonstrators for the first time killing at least three and injuring several more. In addition, violence also intensified at other demonstrations as thousands of supporters of Mursi clashed with their opponents in central Cairo, Alexandria, Beni Suef, Damanhur and Luxor, and left dozens of protesters killed and over a thousand injured (Kingsley and Chulov 2013b). In most of these clashes, **the police forces sided with Mursi's opponents. At times, they merely provided cover and shielded anti-Mursi demonstrators with their vehicles.** In other instances, they engaged in physical violence themselves. By contrast, in several other clashes, the police stood by and merely observed the violence without intervening. On the October 6 Bridge, the two clashing groups used fireworks, Molotov cocktails and birdshot against each other. Police remained absent from the scene for hours. The violence only subsided when armoured vehicles arrived late at night (Escobales, Holpuch, and Weaver 2013).

It is important to note that deadly violence on 5 July 2013 was reported to be emanating from all sides: In fact, the very graphic videos of Mursi supporters stabbing and throwing their opponents raising the Egyptian flag off the roof of a building in Alexandria were most widely spread. Outside of the Anti-Coup support base, these iconic images of martyrdom effectively undermined much of the NASL's rhetoric about 'peaceful resistance'. On Rabaa and Al-Nahda Square, however, it was widely relativized as self-defence or denounced as a staged false flag attack. The day after the clashes, the NASL released a related statement to the Egyptian people. The statement alleged that reliable information exists that the security services were paying bearded *baltagiya* to march to Tahrir, in order to make it appear as if the Islamist movement was launching an assault against peaceful demonstrators on the square.¹⁶⁷ On the other hand, the statement also lamented that most of the martyrs of the previous days were from among the **alliance's ranks**—killed at Anti-Coup demonstrations and arson attacks on the FJP party bureaus across the country. While the NASL hence implicitly acknowledged the victims in the other camp, it concurrently refuted the responsibility for their deaths. Rather it assured that the **alliance's approach was genuinely a peaceful one** and argued that the Anti-Coup marches were deliberately avoiding Tahrir Square **in order to spare the shedding of "precious Egyptian blood."**

In this and several subsequent statements, the Anti-Coup Alliance made a

¹⁶⁷ NASL. 7 July 2013. "To the Egyptian people [Arabic]". <http://bit.ly/2RjUmZ7>.

desperate attempt to maintain a link to the Egyptian public and convince larger parts of society that the official Egyptian media was distorting the image of its peaceful protest campaign and spreading lies and rumours.¹⁶⁸ Ultimately, however, the events on 5 July contributed to the development of siege mentality within the Islamist camp. It confirmed the worst fears of the Anti-Coup organisers who had repeatedly cautioned against the renewed violence and oppression under the new military-backed regime. Moreover, it substantiated the NASL's perception of its antagonist other as an alliance of security forces and professional media in the cover of a popular uprising: their collusion was evidenced by the violence against Mursi's supporters and by the fact that neither the army nor police intervened for hours to prevent factional violence. This was despite the NASL having reminded all state institutions of their responsibility for securing peaceful demonstrations in its earlier statements.¹⁶⁹

In addition, the impression of a 'grand collusion' was reified by the statements released by Tamarod and the National Salvation Front in response to the 5 July clashes which warned of a counter-revolution: "There are clear attempts to smear our glorious revolution, attempts that seek to portray the people's will as a military coup, which may lead to intervention by foreign forces in Egypt's internal matters and which we won't accept," read the statement (Al Ahram 2013b) calling on Egyptians to take to the squares and main streets to support the armed forces in guarding the achievements of 30 June. For the NASL, this appropriation of the 'revolution'-metaphor effectively whitewashed the coup on 3 July 2013. In an attempt to counter the Tamarod-narrative, it asserted that it would not "allow it to be overturned and to return to the age of dictatorship, corruption and tyranny" and insisted that the political order it was seeking to protect and reinstate was one that came "from the womb of the people and free popular will."¹⁷⁰ Tamarod and the coup forces, by contrast, had violated the people's dignity by disregarding its popular will and inviting the army's return to the political playing field. The NASL thereby picked up the cue from Mursi's last speeches where he warned Egyptians that their revolution was being stolen from them and that the coup was leading the country backwards. As the NASL adopted this diagnosis of 3 July as a regression to autocracy, the depiction of Mursi's opponents as counter-revolutionaries soon became a key element of the Anti-Coup resistance discourse.

¹⁶⁸ NASL. 7 July 2013. 'Statement 9 [Arabic]'. On file with the author.

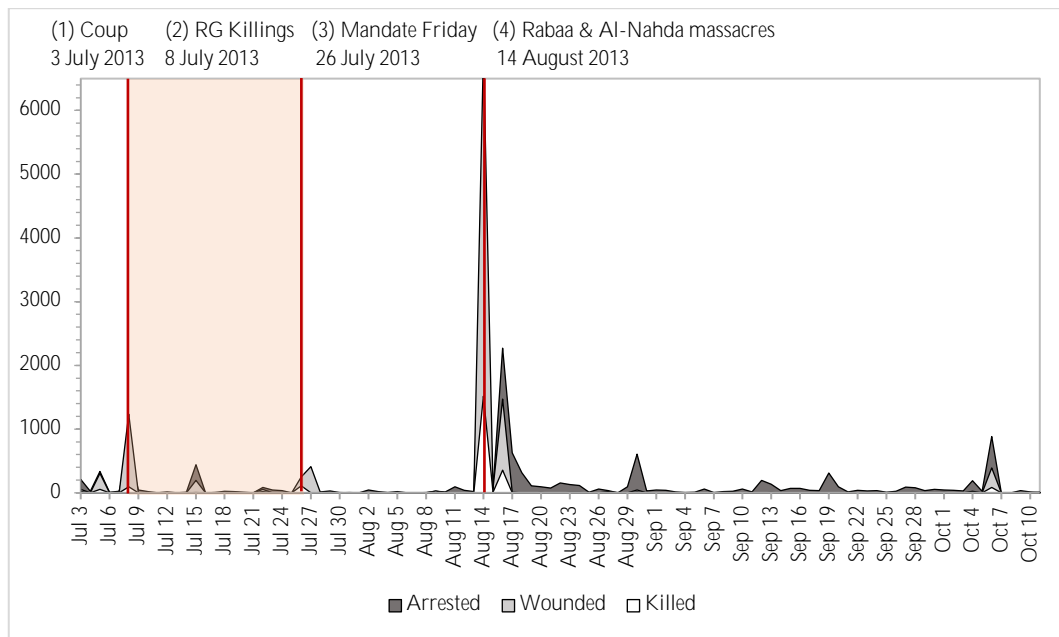
¹⁶⁹ NASL. 4 July 2013. 'Statement 5: From the field command of sit-ins to our brothers in the armed forces [Arabic]'. On file with the author.

¹⁷⁰ NASL. 3 July 2013. 'Statement 4 [Arabic]'. On file with the author.

6.3 Hardening Fronts

The internal frontier constructed by the NASL between the two camps—the supporters of legitimate democratic rule and of the aims of the revolution, on the one hand, and the counterrevolutionary and autocratic coup forces on the other (see also Underhill 2016, 53f)—began to crumble as it became evident that the armed forces could not be relied upon as a neutral the mediator of Egyptian domestic politics. On 30 June, it had not merely played the role of a responsive actor to the pressure of the mobilised public, but in fact, was to be considered the chief orchestrator of the regime change in the summer of 2013 and the puppeteer behind the Tamarod protest alliance. The army’s partiality had been apparent on 5 July 2013, when several of the tanks deployed on the 6th of October Bridge near Midan Tahrir had carried anti-Mursi demonstrators on its roof. But, notably, it was the first major incident of large-scale lethal violence by army units against the protesters that heralded a new phase in the Anti-Coup Alliance’s political subjectivation process in the early hours of 8 July 2013 (see Figure 13, p.140). In the event that is commonly referred to as the “Republican Guard massacre” (P. Owen and McCarthy 2013), army units, for the first time, engaged themselves in repressive action against the NASL protesters. Dozens of Anti-Coup supporters, who had camped outside the elite army unit’s headquarters in Cairo, were massacred (Kingsley and Green 2013).

Figure 13. 2nd phase of Anti-Coup subject formation



Source 13. Time series based on author’s event database, repression data by Wiki Thawra.

After the ‘Friday of Rejection’ on 5 July 2013, the FJP had called for countrywide

demonstrations on 7 July. This led to a surge of participants staying in the Republican Guard (RG) camp. At the time the police began to clear the sit-in in the early hours of July 8, it is estimated that some 2,000 protesters were camping there peacefully (Kingsley and Green 2013). The raid left dozens dead and hundreds injured, with several protesters dying from live ammunition fired from the rifles of armed forces elite units.¹⁷¹ After the raid, the military claimed that the demonstrators had attempted to break into the building with the aid of armed motorcyclists and security forces had merely acted in self-defence (Amnesty International 2013a). However, video evidence and interviews with eyewitnesses and medics tell a different story, namely that of a coordinated assault by paramilitary Central Security Forces (CSF) backed by the Republican Guard on mostly peaceful civilians.

Due to their brutal conduct, the raid marked a setback for the new regime. Within the popular coalition that had enabled the 3 July intervention, the Republican Guard operation sparked harsh criticism and caused rifts. The next day, the Salafi *Nour* Party—a former ally of the Muslim Brotherhood during the previous election which had sided with the coup forces on 3 July—announced its retreat from the negotiations regarding the formation of an interim government (AJE 2013). Shortly thereafter, Hazem Qandil stepped down from his post as interim Prime Minister, explicitly citing the disproportionate state violence in his letter of resignation.¹⁷² Furthermore, even political figures closely aligned with the armed forces’ intervention, such as the representatives of *Misr Qawiyya* [Strong Egypt], Tamarod and the National Salvation Front including the designated Vice Prime Minister Mohamed El-Baradei, demanded an impartial investigation into the shootings. Ahmed Al-Tayyeb, the Sheikh of the Al-Azhar Mosque, warned that he would retreat into religious seclusion should the bloodshed continue (Dakroury 2013a).

6.3.1 *Honourable Soldiers vs Coup Generals*

Notably, the RG massacre created a dislocation in the Anti-Coup coalition discourse. Talking about its political adversary, the alliance had thus far deliberately excluded the armed forces. The mediated sight of army units shooting unarmed

¹⁷¹ While the official Egyptian Forensic Medical Authority (FMA) has until now not updated its initial count of 61 casualties, the Wiki Thawra database has documented 93 victims, over 1200 injured, and more than 650 arrests for the night of 7-8 July 2013.

¹⁷² Tellingly, Qandil’s resignation letter was addressed to Mursi and included an apology to the detained President for continuing to run the government after his deposition until the formation of an interim National Coalition government. See RNN. 18 July 2013. “Qandil’ presents his resignation to President Mursi in protest against the ‘massacre’ [Arabic]”. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/66565.htm>.

protesters, however, was an event that could not immediately be incorporated into the horizon of expectations evoked by the Anti-Coup discourse about the coup forces and their relation to the armed forces. It seriously challenged the NASL's narrative of resistance. In order to suture this rift, the Anti-Coup discourse needed to shift. On 8 July, the NASL named and shamed the army for the first time as one of the perpetrators of the mass killings on Salah Salem:

The hideous massacre was committed by the Egyptian Army and police against peaceful protesters from among the sons of the great Egyptian people, praying the Fajr, in a crime that is unprecedented in Egyptian History. It resulted in dozens of martyrs, including children and infants who died at the breasts of their mothers, and hundreds of injured.¹⁷³

This was the first time that the army was explicitly called out by the alliance, thus marking a shift within the Anti-Coup discourse (see Figure 14, p. 143). The statement was also unprecedented in its moral condemnation of the army's conduct: "the alliance finds no description for this massacre other than that this despicable and infamous act goes against all religions, values, norms, manhood and honour," the statement continued, irrevocably placing the army on the opposite side of the frontier drawn between the honourable resistance by the Anti-Coup protesters and the shameful deeds of their opponents.

Over the course of the coming weeks, the armed forces moved from the least questioned state actor in the Anti-Coup narrative to the most prominent one: in a repugnant crime, live bullets had been fired "into crowds of Egyptian worshipers by the of soldiers and officers of the armed forces" and *not* by thugs or gangsters, as the Anti-Coup movement stressed.¹⁷⁴ This made the army an accomplice of the coup, and preventing its return to power part of the Anti-Coup *raison d'être*.

We have seen enough evil of that repressive military state during the past week alone. We do not accept that the military should govern this country again, not after the long bitter experience over the past 60 years.¹⁷⁵

It is important to note that the Anti-Coup organisers made an effort attempt to differentiate their image of the armed forces and keep a window open for reconciliation and an inclusion of the army into their friendly narrative: "We have no quarrel with our brothers, our people, officers and soldiers of the armed forces, nor any dispute or conflict. They are the protector and strong shield of the home-

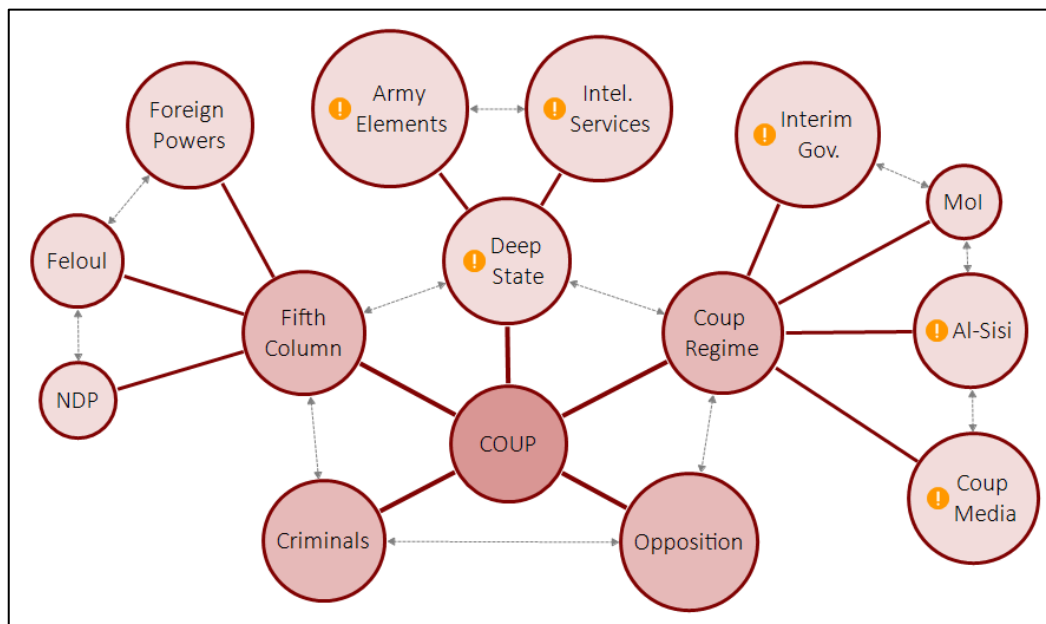
¹⁷³ NASL. 8 July 2013. 'Statement 10 [Arabic]'. <http://bit.ly/2Rio1BL>.

¹⁷⁴ NASL. 8 July 2013. 'To our family, brothers and partners at home [Arabic]'. <http://bit.ly/2RkmNpA>.

¹⁷⁵ NASL. 15 July 2013. 'National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy Statement Condemns Coup; Calls Peaceful Protests'. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31144>.

land,” the NASL underscored on 15 July, “our problem is with those who involved the armed forces in these political conflicts and the spilling of Egyptian blood.”¹⁷⁶

Figure 14. Diagnostic frame, construction of antagonist other, 8 July-26 July 2013



Source 14: Semantic network created with the help of XMind 8 based on coding in MAXQDA 13.

The following day, the NASL doubled down on this rhetoric and released a second statement that was exclusively dedicated to the armed forces. “Our brothers, officers and soldiers of the armed forces,” the letter opened:

We are all Egyptian citizens, military and civilian, so we are all brothers in the homeland. Among you are some brothers of kin. We were also part of the military during our recruitment period. And we were proud of the military uniform and proud to belong to this ancient national institution. And you will return to civilians after the end of your service. Hence you are part of us, and we are part of you.¹⁷⁷

The statement went on to flatter the army and express the NASL’s respect and love for it. In spite of the incomparable magnitude of the crimes committed by the coup leaders, the alliance reiterated its categorical distinction between those who were responsible for these crimes and those who were merely acting upon their orders. It also underscored that the movement’s attitude towards “our heroic army” would not change with the actions of this small and despicable group: “We know that the army is innocent of these acts and does not accept the oppression of its people.”

¹⁷⁶ NASL. 15 July 2013. ‘National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy Statement Condemns Coup; Calls Peaceful Protests’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31144>.

¹⁷⁷ NASL. 16 July 2013. ‘To the armed forces [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2Rkn5wS>.

As the army operations against the protest camps became a regularity, even though the fasting month of Ramadan was starting, and security forces backed by army units engaged more frequently with the demonstrators on the street, it became hard to maintain this distinction. In a demonstrably disbelieving tone, the NASL also addressed the army after its helicopter units had dropped intimidating flyers onto the locations of the remaining sit-ins on Rabaa and Al-Nahda Squares:

The blood of the martyrs and wounded from the massacre of the Republican Guard barracks has not even dried up, and peaceful protestors [...] are surprised again by statements full of threats and intimidation and stamped with the words ‘shut up!’. This reflects the culture of tyranny by which the coupists rule. It makes us wonder—is it the role of the Egyptian army to protect or to threaten the people.¹⁷⁸

For the alliance, the strategic choice not to confront the armed forces as a unitary entity created the need to delineate more concretely who, in its view, was no longer a part of the “heroic army.” In the subsequent communication following the massacre, it thus more deliberately referred to Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and his aides as the “coup leadership” and the masterminds behind Egypt’s democratic rollback. Significantly, the NASL had openly called out the General already the day before the massacre.¹⁷⁹ During the 3 July coup, the Republican Guard had acted under the direct orders of the then-defence minister when it took Mursi into custody. That the elite army unit was now also involved in the brutal repression of the Anti-Coup protests facilitated framing the General as the string-puller for the coup forces. Moreover, it hinted at the hidden hands of a ‘deep state’ acting as Al-Sisi’s support base. Implicitly exculpating the army as the perpetrator of the RG massacre, the NASL claimed that this informal alliance had “involved Egypt’s armed forces in the massacre of innocent citizens as they peacefully prayed at dawn on Monday 8 July 2013.” As Wessel has suggested, ‘third hand’-claims, such as that of a deep state plotting against the people, are particularly powerful claims: “Since the ‘enemy’ or the ‘other’ is so elusive and depends on the interpretation of the individual, it enables the incorporation of a wide range of competing and even opposing collective imaginaries” (Wessel 2018, 353). In the Egyptian context, in particular, the term ‘deep state’ [*ad-dawla al-‘amiqa*] carries multiple connotations.

On the one hand, the deep state signifies an actual phenomenon. It refers to the empirical reality of how rule has been exerted within the “officer republic” (Sayigh 2012) from its birth until the recent loss of all “civilian accretions on top

¹⁷⁸ NASL. 15 July 2013. ‘Statement 16 [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2RiWpg0>.

¹⁷⁹ NASL. 7 July 2013. ‘To the Egyptian people [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2RjUmZ7>.

of the military regime” (Springborg 2018a, 4f). Based on its origin in Turkey, the term has traditionally denoted a secretive, authoritarian substructure of republican politics behind the country’s institutional façade. Since the 1950s, a quiet entente between the presidency, the security services and the army have functioned as a gatekeeper of political power in Egypt. As Springborg (2018a, 71) has argued in his work on this historically grown substructure of republican decision making: **“Power has shifted marginally between the three legs of the tripod over the last sixty-plus years, but the tripod itself has remained remarkably stable.”** This has allowed the periodically shifting regimes that stand on the pillars of the deep state to protect the interests of a narrow elite to the exclusion of the Egyptian majority population. The institutions of the deep state became the principal beneficiary of economic benefits at the expense of the majority population. As they penetrated all branches of government, they were also responsible for the subordination of social and economic policy to concerns over security and self-preservation. Structurally, the consequences of this undermining of the separation of power, were disastrous, as it prevented accountability and stalled the much-needed economic modernisation.

On the other hand, the deep state also represents a discursive figure, an empty signifier that belies the scarcity of reliable information about who is actually pulling strings in Egypt. As such, it has become a scapegoat for political forces—both, power-holders and civil society. For the former, the deep state reliably functions as a bogeyman who is invoked to deflect from their own shortcomings and mistakes. The different republican regimes from Sadat to Mubarak routinely blamed the **deep state for Egypt’s social fragmentation, economic underperformance, administrative incompetence—and even for the popular uprising in 2011: on 2 February, Omar Suleiman claimed in his televised interview that the Tahrir protesters had been manipulated by “external forces” and that the revolution was a conspiracy** (Trew 2012; see also Shukrallah 2011). In her investigation of the emergence of the normative ideal of a civil state in Egypt, Sarah Wessel (2016, 18ff) discusses a particularly striking example of how the narrative of the deep state was instrumentalised by the post-revolutionary SCAF regime: in 2012, the government produced two segments for state and private television cautioning Egyptians against interacting with foreigners (Mackey 2012; see also Zeinobia 2012).¹⁸⁰ Spreading fear of conspiracies and infiltration these spots aimed at tarnishing the revolutionary

¹⁸⁰ Commissioned by the Supreme Electoral Commission, the spots reminded Egyptians of their duty to report suspected spies and nourished speculations about of foreign elements implementing their hidden agendas in Egypt. Both spots closed with the slogan “Every word comes with a price. A word can save a nation.” The clips can be accessed at <https://youtu.be/GuclYK94RwI> and <https://youtu.be/poaHa7Jkxa4>.

youth by alleging that it was dealing with foreign spies and thus putting the country's security in jeopardy.

For these very movements, in turn, referrals to the deep state functioned as a vehicle for pointing out the shortcomings of authorities, as well as the poor governance and accountability gap prior to the 2011 uprising. After the Arab Spring, by contrast, the deep state turned into a prominent explanation for the failure of the reforms they championed and for the resilience of authoritarianism in Egypt (cf., Hanafi 2015). Fuelled by the repressive experiences under the rule of the SCAF, its primary signification for many revolutionary activists turned into that of a **de facto guardianship of the military over the country's constitutional politics**. References to the deep state, alongside other expressions, such as the “third hands” or the “hidden hands” of an alleged secretive “fifth column,” furthermore became an efficient rhetorical tool to discredit specific groups and actions, indicating **financial support from abroad** (Wessel 2016, 18). Referred to frequently in conversations, as well as on television and in newspapers, the term consciously or subconsciously securitised politics by creating the perception of a country under threat of exploitation by conspiring domestic and foreign forces (Shukrallah 2011; Egypt Independent 2012).

Fears of the deep state became such common currency that, during Mursi's time in office, his supporters, for their part, claimed that their President was constrained in his abilities to reform the political system in Egypt due to the deep state's resistance. Only, in their view, the real power-brokers included not only the remnants of the NDP and the Mubarak-era business elite but also the security and intelligence services, the judiciary, the bureaucracy and the liberal media who were colluding against the President in a process of labour division. Mursi himself also adopted this trope in his final speeches on 2 and 3 July 2013. During these addresses, he attempted to excuse his failure to implement all of the demands of the 25 January Revolution, pointing to the great challenges posed by corruption, the deep state, and the remnants of the former regime.¹⁸¹ The NASL hence drew on a well-established nationalist archive by invoking the deep state.

Admitting that the Mursi administration and its supporters had underestimated their reach, the NASL claimed that the deep state had been plotting against democratic rule all along, thus never giving the Mursi administration a chance to real institutional reform. Its notorious ‘hidden hands’ had first conjured up and orchestrated the diesel and gasoline crises, as well as the electricity shortages that

¹⁸¹ Mursi, Mohammed. 2 July 2013. ‘Urgent statement by the presidency of the republic [Arabic]’; Ibid. 3 July 2013. ‘Address to the nation’ [Arabic]. Both transcripts on file with the author.

plagued the country throughout Mursi's year in power; after successfully blaming the government for the dire straits, it had then forced people onto the streets on 30 June, thus providing the army with a pretext to intervene.¹⁸² There is some truth to this claim: in fact, there is a widespread belief among analysts that a "secret cabal of military officers, intelligence operatives, and senior bureaucrats" partially engineered the crisis that led to Mursi's ouster (S. A. Cook 2017; Momani 2013; Springborg 2018b; N. Brown 2013). As Bessma Momani (2013) has noted that, "the day after Mr Morsi was removed from power, Egypt's fuel shortages were no more, its electricity supply went uninterrupted, and traffic police suddenly went back to work." However, it is also fair to assume that the Brotherhood gravely overestimated its capability to keep the deep state in check. Favouring short-term relative gains against their opponents, the Mursi administration lost sight of how its policies, in the long-term, had handed "a propaganda gift" (Shenker 2016, 262) to the deep state and paved the way for its reinstallation.

In spite of these ambiguities, a strong emphasis on the involvement of deep state was necessary for the NASL to discredit and delegitimise the post-coup order, which was solidifying rapidly: with former SCC head Adly Mansour, a respected judge had been sworn in as the new interim president on 4 July 2013. And on 8 July, the day of the RG clashes, Mansour had already issued an institutional timetable for the transition period, announcing that a new constitution would be put to the vote by November 2013. In the tense aftermath of the killing, he had furthermore appointed the respected former finance minister Hazem El-Beblawi as Prime Minister of the interim government as well as NSF leader Mohamed El-Baradei as vice-president (Black and Kingsley 2013). Thus, swift moves were made to constitute a technocratic civilian transition government, including mostly liberal figures or technocrats but with no Islamist representatives, This can be understood as, on the one hand, an attempt to curry favour with the social movements that had enabled Mursi's ouster,¹⁸³ and on the other hand, to stymie those who

¹⁸² NASL. 15 July 2013. 'National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy Statement Condemns Coup; Calls Peaceful Protests'. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31144>.

¹⁸³ Aside from Prime Minister Hazem Al-Beblawi and Vice-Prime Minister Mohamed El-Baradei, it comprised of 34 members : Kamal Abou Eita (Minister of Manpower), Saber Arab (Culture), Ayman Abu Hadid (Agriculture), Mahmoud Abul Nasr (Education), Khaled Abdel Aziz (Youth), Mohamed Abdul Mutalib (Irrigation), Mounir Fakhry Abdel Nour (Production and International Commerce), Amin Al-Mahdi (Transitional Justice and National Reconciliation), Ashraf al-Sayed al-Arabi (Planning and International Cooperation), Ziad Bahaa El Din (Minister International Cooperation and deputy Prime Minister), Ahmed Borai (Social Solidarity), Hossam Eissa (Higher Education), Abdul Aziz Fadel (Civil Aviation), Nabil Fahmi (Foreign Affairs), Ahmed Galal (Finance), Ramzi George (Minister Scientific Research and the only Copt in the Beblawi cabinet), Mokhtar Gomaa (Religious Affairs), Atef Helmy (Communication), Ahmed Imam (Electricity), Sherif Ismail (Petroleum), Laila Rasheed Iskandar

were cautioning against a return to direct military rule: the announcement of an interim constitutional charter that gave full executive and legislative plans to the military-backed presidency had drawn fervent criticism by both, Tamarod and the National Salvation Front on the day before.

Responding to this perceived ‘window-dressing’, the NASL claimed that “the great Egyptian people” would not be fooled by the coup regime’s attempts to artificially create new institutional realities that legitimised the coup ex-post. The new constitution, it argued, was an autocratic dictatorship in disguise, and the new government effectively one built on the ruins of the glorious 25 January Revolution.¹⁸⁴ As the interim cabinet was sworn in on 16 July 2013, the Anti-Coup alliance saw an opportunity to delegitimise the coup forces among the broader public, which had no say in the government’s composition, and among those political factions who had been marginalised within the new cabinet. Emphasising the people’s right to choose its officials directly, or to delegate this choice via election, it issued a barrage of statements that portrayed the cabinet as the puppet of the deep state.¹⁸⁵

In a dedicated statement on the formation of the government, the alliance made its disregard and disrespect for the new government most explicit. Therein, it specifically defined the new president and cabinet as parts of the coup forces, thereby also foreclosing any possibility of compromise.¹⁸⁶ Since “everything built on the coup,” from the appointment and delegation of legislative and executive authority to Adly Mansour, to the formation of a government, was declared merely a front for the “dictatorship of the coupists” through which they control all authorities. As a result, options for negotiating reconciliation or a partial inclusion of the NASL members into any future government disappeared from the horizon of possibilities. Instead, the inclusion of the government into the diagnosis of the movement’s enemies effectively narrowed the NASL’s pool of potential dialogue

(Environment), Ibrahim Mahlab (Housing), Adel Labib (Local Development), Osama Saleh (Minister for the newly created Ministry of Investment), Duryea Sharaf al-Din (Information), Maha Sayed Zain al-Abedin (Health), Ahmed Sultan (Transportation), Hisham Zaazou (Tourism), Taher Abu Zaid (Sports). General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi remained Defence Minister in addition to his post as deputy Prime minister. In addition, the cabinet included another military representative with Air Marshall Reda Mahmoud Hafez (Military Production). The police representatives in the new cabinet were Major General Mohammed Ibrahim (Interior) and General Mohamed Abu Shady (Supply and Domestic Trade). For a background of the key figures in the Beblawi cabinet see Mikael (2013).

¹⁸⁴ NASL. 10 July 2013. ‘Statement 11 [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2Rk0kt1>.

¹⁸⁵ NASL. 15 July 2013. ‘National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy Statement Condemns Coup; Calls Peaceful Protests’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31144>; NASL. 8 July 2013. ‘To our family and brothers and partners at home [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2RkmNpA>.

¹⁸⁶ NASL. 16 July 2013. ‘On the formation of the fake government [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2RknOOq>.

partners in favour of further consolidation of political camps.

6.3.2 *Closing Ranks*

Aside from cementing the NASL's image of its antagonist other, the shared experience of confronting the state also cemented the protesting coalition's collective identity. It made it, above all, much harder for individual groups to act as fringe members of the alliance and attempt to position itself as a mediator between the state and the Muslim Brotherhood. During the first days of the Anti-Coup resistance, particularly Egypt's *Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya*, a staunch political ally of the Muslim Brotherhood had announced several proposals for reconciliation. These were an attempt to offer a solution to the polarising political stalemate that was already destabilising the country and sparking clashes between different political camps. **Shortly before Mursi's arrest**, it had succumbed to pressure from the streets and called on the President via its prominent spokesman Tarek Al-Zomar to hold a referendum on early presidential elections (World Bulletin 2013). In a similar vein, on 5 July it had **released a controversial statement dubbed "protection for all sons of the nation,"** which suggested holding a popular referendum on **Mursi's return to power or the adoption of the army-sponsored transitional roadmap.** The initiative also called for reconciliation and an amnesty for all **contending faction, "regardless of their affiliations"** (Al Ahram 2013b).

After the Republican Guard massacre, legitimising a remission of punitive measures became much harder within the Anti-Coup Alliance. As several interlocutors reported who had taken part in the demonstrations of July and August 2013, the joint experiences of protesting and facing police brutality thus contributed to streamlining the narrative **within the diverse protest coalition:** "We were no longer Muslim Brothers or *Gama'a* or *Tayyar*, but all those who participated in the protest were fellow citizens, and all of us shared the same peaceful struggle with the sit-ins and all of us suffered the same violence from the hands of the **coup.**"¹⁸⁷ Conversely, the antagonist divisions between the contending camps become more precise, as subsequent NASL statements exemplify:

The current conflict is not political between parties with different visions, but a struggle between the dream of achieving a civil democratic state and brutal military rule that never in the entire global history has kept even once a white image.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Interview with former member of the Muslim Brotherhood who participated in the NASL demonstrations until late August 2013, Istanbul, October 2017.

¹⁸⁸ NASL. 11 July 2013. *Statement 12: Principles of the Revolution of 25 January* [Arabic]. <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/288328581309512>.

In addition to cementing the Anti-Coup exclusive collective identity, the Republican Guard massacre contributed to their decision to expand and fortify the Rabaa al-Adawiya sit-in during the coming fasting month of Ramadan.¹⁸⁹ After a short setback that coincides with the celebration of the start of Ramadan on 10 July, above all, the official inauguration of the interim government had a catalysing effect. On the eve of the ceremony, contention escalated as protesters clashed with security forces across the country. The casualties soon rose to a total of 170 dead in the first two weeks following the 3 July coup. In the meanwhile, the frequency of collective actions increased, above all, on Fridays. After the Friday prayers, Anti-Coup protesters were able to use the mosques across the country as gathering points for their marches and central stages for their rallies (on a comparable function of mosques in other contexts see Olesen 2009, 19; M. Hafez 2003, 36). Until the violent encounters on Nasr Street on the night of 27 July 2013, which mark the climax of the next discursive phase discussed in this chapter, protest rates increased steadily until settling at the level of the first *miliuniya* of 5 July 2013, with around one hundred larger collective actions every week.

As argued more extensively elsewhere (see Grimm 2014a; Grimm and Harders 2018), it was above all the lack of selectivity and the extreme brutality of the security forces that triggered this protest backlash, evoking memories of police conduct during the 2011 uprising. CSF units had poorly timed their operation so that it coincided with the morning prayers, and used heavy weaponry against the demonstrators, leaving several women and children dead (EIPR 2014, 40–49).¹⁹⁰ This enabled the Anti-Coup organisers to frame the assault as a slaughter of devoted Muslims and to draw comparisons to the Syrian civil war whose founding stone had been the army attack on the Umari mosque in Deraa.¹⁹¹ Accordingly, on the Rabaa main stage, FJP vice chairman Essam El-Erian declared the police operation a “massacre of believers.” The security forces, he claimed, had without warning opened fire on true Muslims who were in the act of prostration for the second *Rak‘a* of the prayer. The Imam had warned the security forces via loudspeaker of the potential for bloodshed should they intervene, and these warnings had been answered by live ammunition (Kingsley and Green 2013). Consequently, a new Anti-Coup slogan placed ultimate culpability for this bloodshed on Al-Sisi, branding him a butcher and comparable to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (Rahin

¹⁸⁹ RNN. 10 July 2013. “Ramadan Celebration for Morsi supporters in Al Nahda Square” [Arabic]. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/66611.htm>.

¹⁹⁰ See also RNN. 9 July 2013. “The field hospital: 8 women and 5 children massacred at dawn [Arabic]”. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/66559.htm>.

¹⁹¹ For a micro analysis of this “turning point event” in the Syrian civil war see Pearlman (2018).

2013).

The indiscriminate nature of state violence fit well within the Anti-Coup framing of its antagonist other. However, this is not simply *Ikhwan*-propaganda: interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights as well as the former *Guardian* correspondent in Cairo Patrick Kingsley with residents of the Republican Guard neighbourhood as well as with the staff of the surrounding hospitals that treated the bulk of the injured demonstrators corroborate the story of a sudden and brutal assault on the protesters (EIPR 2014; Human Rights Watch 2014; Kingsley and Green 2013). Mohammad Zanaty, the head of the Rabaa field hospital, for instance, recounts treating not only countless birdshot wounds but also notes that many of the more than 270 treated patients were hospitalised with bullet wounds in their thorax, neck and head regions. Investigations suggest that these wounds were caused by both, targeted sniper fire and indiscriminate machine gun use (EIPR 2014, 44f; Human Rights Watch 2014, 113f). Other doctors reported that the bulk of the victims had been barefoot upon their arrival at the hospital—an indication that the attack had in fact coincided with the prayer (El-Dabh 2013b). Moreover, human rights organisations have documented several cases where the security forces resorted to physical and psychological humiliation and torture against arrested participants of the Republican Guard sit-in, as well as the indiscriminate and combined use of several tear and irritant gases against protesters (EIPR 2014, 46–48).

Notably among the affected were not only members of the Anti-Coup Alliance, let alone armed protesters, as the security forces affirmed, but also residents of the surrounding neighbourhoods. These residents had partly joined the protesters for the *Fajr* prayer on Salah Salam street or had gone to pray in either the Mustafa Mosque or the *Sayyida Safiya*-Mosque which are both close to the RG barracks. The Arab Network for Human Rights, for instance, denounced the waves of random arrests against alleged Islamists in the night of 7-8 July 2013, and during the following days (Sailer 2013). By contrast, the narrative promoted by the state media and the various representatives of the armed forces and the MOI could scarcely be corroborated (Amnesty International 2013a). According to a police report by the Cairo General Investigative Bureau covering the nightly events,

Security services learned that protesters at the sit-in in front of the Republican Guard on Salah Salem Street attacked the premises, shooting live ammunition and birdshot, throwing stones from neighbouring buildings toward the Republican Guard base [...]

In response to this, the armed forces units protecting the base shot sound bullets and the Central Security Forces shot teargas to disperse the groups responsible.¹⁹²

According to this version of events, “armed terrorists” had attacked the RG headquarters with motorcycles in a coordinated and armed attempt to storm the barracks with arms (see Mada 2013b).¹⁹³ The elite unit had thus merely responded in “self-defence.” In contrast, the video material uploaded by neighbours of the sit-in or press outlets to social media contained only images of protesters hurling stones and Molotov cocktails towards the security forces after they had opened fire on the protesters (see also Human Rights Watch 2014, 113).¹⁹⁴ It clearly documents the use of automatic weapons by both, uniformed and plain cloth police officers (and after sunset also army units) against Anti-Coup members taking cover behind makeshift barricades.

These images, however, never reached the broader Egyptian public. They were thus scarcely able to evoke solidarity or to convince thus far non-aligned political forces of the peaceful nature of the Anti-Coup protests. Against the background of a media blackout against the NASL and their protests, the ‘massacre’-narrative generated little resonance outside of the Islamist camp (CPJ 2013a; RSF 2013). Independent journalists investigating the clashes and contradicting the state narrative were explicitly targeted in the days after the massacres. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (2013b), censorship efforts had begun already during the police operation itself, which was accompanied by obstruction attempts, a blockade of satellite connections, the arrest of several journalists and the shooting of a photographer by a sniper. An ongoing crackdown on media with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood or other Islamist groups sympathising with President Mursi furthermore prevented dissemination of news and images generated by the NASL or by reporters embedded with the Rabaa-protesters (see Richter 2015a; 2017). **Immediately after the coup, Egypt’s administrative courts had ordered the closure of a range of satellite channels operated by members of the NASL including the Brotherhood-owned *Misr 25*, the Islamist *Al-Hafez*, *Amgad* and *al-Nas* (Al Ahram 2013a).** In addition, over 200 station staff and journalists as well as two prominent Al-Jazeera hosts, were arrested and isolated at undisclosed locations (Malsin 2013). *Nilesat*, the Egyptian satellite television provider also then blocked the pan-Arabic channels *Al-Quds* and *Al-Aqsa* of the Palestinian *HAMAS*,

¹⁹² The official police report for the operation (No. 9134/2013) is available at <https://nchr1.org/sites/default/files/Police%20preparator.pdf>.

¹⁹³ See the official transcript reported by the State Information Service at: <http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Templates/Articles/tmpArticles.aspx?ArtID=68897>.

¹⁹⁴ E.g., https://youtu.be/A31X17_wl-s; <https://youtu.be/-iND9GsCGhU>; <https://youtu.be/kKrqq2P4Bvo>.

as well as the Jordanian *Al-Yarmouk* (RSF 2013). Given their ties to the Brotherhood's sister organisations in Palestine and Jordan, these channels had briefly served as alternative outlets for the Anti-Coup organisers after the closure of their channels.¹⁹⁵

Additionally, by the time of the RG massacre, the state-owned *Ahram* publishing house, which had been in charge of printing the Muslim Brotherhood's *Huriyya & Adala* (Freedom and Justice, named after the group's own Freedom and Justice Party FJP) during Mursi's presidency had reduced the newspaper's edition, because of financing problems following the freezing of the group's funds (Al Ahram 2013c). After the RG massacre, it ceased to distribute the paper.¹⁹⁶ This forced many of the 50 journalists who produced the daily newspaper to work in secret (Aswat Masriya 2013a). In addition, the English and the Arabi websites of the Brotherhood, *ikhwanweb.com* and *ikhwanonline.com* remained blocked by Egypt's internet providers since the day of the military intervention, albeit accessible via VPN-proxy. Since early 2002, both sites had served as primary mouthpieces of the Brotherhood and its subordinated groups. Even after the foundation of the FJP, the *Ikhwan* websites remained the primary mirrors of political debates within the Brotherhood.¹⁹⁷ As Richter (2017; see also 2013) notes "both websites served as a mixture of a news portal, a forum for journalistic analyses and a public relations tool at the same time."

In sum, the clashes on Salah Salem Street received only little coverage from the country's news outlets. However, the fact that the NASL narrative was unable to transcend ideological cleavages was not solely the result of direct state intervention into media autonomy. Instead, the wave of nationalist sentiments in the wake of Mursi's deposition found its journalistic expression in all but every major Egyptian news outlet, state or private, enthusiastically praising the armed forces and its allies and defending them against critique. As Fatima El-Issawi (2014, 302) has argued, "Journalists' self-identification as advocates for the 'national interest', translated into the defence of the regime's survival, and prevailed over the timorous movement among journalists after the uprising who lobbied for independent

¹⁹⁵ In December 2013 the *Rabaa* network was launched from Istanbul as the first major foreign-based MB opposition channel. By summer 2014, the Muslim Brotherhood operated nearly half a dozen satellite networks from Turkey (Awad 2017).

¹⁹⁶ On 25 September 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood released a statement on its Facebook page claiming that Egyptian security forces had stormed the headquarters of the Freedom and Justice newspaper early Wednesday morning and removed the contents (Aswat Masriya 2013b). The newspaper was officially closed on 25 December 2013, according to Ketchley (2013).

¹⁹⁷ Interview with former *Ikhwanweb* editor, Istanbul, August 2016 (see also Hamza 2009; Richter 2017).

and professional journalism.” The deep political chasm that preceded the 2013 coup also affected media houses. According to Richter (2017), by the time of the Rabaa clearing:

The entirety of Egyptian media had clearly been taking sides both reflecting and stimulating popular sentiment either in favour or against Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood. Observers could simply detect a frontline approach by the media with no consensus-orientation visible.

As a consequence of these hardening positions, many in the anti-Mursi camp underreported or relativised the state violence against the Anti-Coup protesters for political motifs. Yet others chose a similar loyalist approach to covering contention in Egypt out of fear and as part of their survival strategy to appease the military (Bolliger, Elmenshawy, and Weilandt 2016).¹⁹⁸ The few independent newspapers that chose to publish evidence that supported the protesters' side of the story—even against their own political stances—found their articles censored, blocked from access online or even manipulated content-wise (see A. A. Mohsen 2013).

6.4 Burned Bridges

Meanwhile, state television published a series of video clips and pictures that rivalled the martyr images circulated by the NASL and the Muslim Brotherhood via social media.¹⁹⁹ In a public statement, police general Hany Abdellatif had stated early on that rock-throwing against the army had rapidly descended into gunfire, resulting in the death of an army officer and conscript. Several video snippets of the clashes were edited and released by the military and the Ministry of Interior during a joint press conference on the afternoon of 8 July 2013. These showed protesters hurling stones from rooftops near the RG barracks, as well as three bearded men with a shotgun and make-shift firearms among the demonstrators. The videos were heavily edited and appeared to have been filmed long after the skirmishes began, thus undermining the official claim that armed violence by the **protesters had triggered the Republican Guard's response. However**, they fed into the state narrative that depicted the sit-in as a threat that had been neutralised by the security forces.

¹⁹⁸ Several journalists interviewed during a 2015 field trip to Cairo describe how they were asked by their board or editor-in-chief to delete content or tune down the tone of their articles relating to the RG incident in order to avoid repercussion for their outlet. Two recounted that their online articles were taken offline shortly after the release of the army's press statement which contradicted parts of their stories.

¹⁹⁹ *Wiki Thawra* has collected these videos as well as pictures and clips released by third parties on *Youtube* and different social media at <http://bit.ly/2RqRhpW>.

What is more, the armed forces categorically denied the indiscriminate use of state violence and the deployment of snipers against civilians and denounced the video evidence as meticulous falsifications as part of a strategy of “psychological warfare.”²⁰⁰ According to the army spokesman, Ahmed Adly, the clips were actually showing civilians associated with the Muslim Brotherhood posing as soldiers in stolen army uniforms. The deaths of women and children were likewise discounted as rumours: “The army is a target of psychological warfare and campaign of lies. The Egyptian army only kills its enemies, never its children. This is part of the psychological war they are waging... Every country would allow soldiers to protect a military installation” (Nagi 2013a).

The colonel added that the army’s release of video footage was part of their own “psychological operations” and that the armed forces were unable to confirm the body count published by Brotherhood outlets. This was attributed to protesters having transported mortal remains to mosques to orchestrate “some kind of propaganda” (Abd al-Aziz 2013). He moreover claimed that the type of ammunition found with demonstrators near the Republican Guard was used by units of the armed forces. He proposed to ask the “peaceful protesters” from where they had procured the bullets. These statements fed into the mechanisms of securitisation that the interim regime had worked since Mursi’s ouster.

In its essence, securitisation represents a process of discursive framing that causes a fundamental change in the public perception of a subject, or an actor. In the process, internalised norms and values, as well as the institutionalised rules of peaceful coexistence, may be altered or replaced by new modes of action following a strict security-logic. Coined by a group of researchers of the University of Copenhagen (Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde 1998; Wæver 1995; 2010), the term aptly describes how security is never an objective variable but a relational phenomenon. Above all, it is the result of a process of social construction: for an issue or actors’ group to become relevant in a security context, it must be staged as a threat by a securitising actor. Since the 1990s, researchers building on the path-breaking work of the Copenhagen School have illustrated how regimes instrumentalise an expanded concept of security as a pretext for extending their powers. In the name of security, extraordinary measures are legitimised that would otherwise be unacceptable—an example being the domestic deployment of military forces against protestors. This is because an issue complex, once successfully securitised, comes to be regarded as an isolated subsystem, where norms and rules that govern socie-

²⁰⁰ A full video of the press conference is available at <https://youtu.be/xu9yag81s0M>.

ty do not apply. The security complex becomes an anarchy in its own right.²⁰¹

Processes of securitisation are supported by certain linguistic structures. From the beginning, Egyptian security forces sought to establish legitimacy for their actions by means of controlling the rhetoric surrounding events. To accomplish this task, the SCAF and the Ministry of Interior unleashed a fierce propaganda campaign. Claims regarding the armed attack on the Republican Guard quarters were soon followed by allegations that weapons were stored at the NASL protest sites and that the Islamists were harbouring foreign elements and radical Jihadist fighters among their ranks. State-owned television effectively became the interim regime's mouthpiece, increasingly portraying the Anti-Coup Alliance and its protesters as an extremist alien body requiring a 'security solution'.

Such discourses were fuelled by the rising protest rates in the weeks following the RG killings which came with a notable increase of violent confrontations between protesters and security forces in Egypt's streets. Clashes between Anti-Coup demonstrators and counter-demonstrators as well as organised *baltagiya* escalated too, culminating in the bloody street battle of Mansoura on 19 July 2013.²⁰² Several women were killed during these clashes (EIPR 2014, 50ff)—a fact that tarnished the image of the NASL in the eyes of the public, just as the dead women and children had inspired some public critique against the security forces' operations on 8 July 2013. What is more, a rise of sectarian attacks on Coptic Christians in Southern Egypt, the 'Somalisation' of the Sinai Peninsula and the significant increase of terrorist attacks within the Nile Valley since Mursi's deposition contributed to the growing perception of general insecurity and national instability. These developments also nourished suspicions among the Egyptian population about a secret alliance between the Muslim Brotherhood and armed groups. Despite the Brotherhood consequently having distanced itself from these attacks in several vocal statements,²⁰³ this narrative sedimented further after an unclaimed bomb attack

²⁰¹ Paul Amar (2011; 2013) has famously discussed such processes of securitisation in the Egyptian context from a feminist angle with a view to racialised and gendered struggles over rights and citizenship. In turn, Maha Abdelrahman (2017) has investigated how the securitised logics of governance in Egypt have sedimented and become institutionalised and bureaucratized in the form of a "securocratic state." Several ongoing projects are engaging with the processes of securitisation since Al-Sisi assumed power (e.g., Edel 2016; Wessel 2016; 2018; Ayata and Harders 2019; Harders 2017; Hamzawy 2017; Van de Bildt 2015). This topic is also touched upon in the interlude Chapter 8, however, it cannot be covered at lengths in this PhD.

²⁰² RNN. 20 July 2013. 'The massacre of shame. The blood of women flows in the state of half-men [Arabic]'. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/67300.htm>.

²⁰³ E.g., NASL. 29 July 2013. 'Statement 49: The National Alliance responded to the statement of the alleged National Defence Council [Arabic]'. <http://bit.ly/2PZqKn3>

on the police directory of the Daqahliyya governorate on 24 July 2013.²⁰⁴

Taken together, these events significantly lowered repression costs for the interim government by gradually turning the general atmosphere against the protests. In fact, almost three-quarters of all respondents in a Baseera poll reported a heightened need for security during the investigation period (Osman 2013b). As a consequence of collective actions frequently disrupting urban transport, blocking major thoroughfares, and forcing business activity to a near halt, authorities could argue that the police only fulfilled its mandate to restore law and order when it took action against protesters (see Davenport 2007a, 39; Rivera Celestino 2012, 6). Moreover, rumours that the NASL was storing weapons and operating “torture rooms” at its sit-ins were used as a pretext to search the FJP party offices and other premises of the Muslim Brotherhood across the country (Mada 2013a). Sanctions against press outlets critical of this intensified crackdown were justified as preventive measures against disinformation and incitement to violence (M. Mohsen 2013).

The judiciary moreover imposed travel bans and asset freezes on the NASL leadership who was declared the official prime suspect in the investigation of the RG killings (M. Mohsen 2013).²⁰⁵ The Islamist party leaders and preacher were accused of inciting violence against demonstrators outside the Muslim Brotherhood’s headquarters. Furthermore, according to General prosecutor Hisham Barakat, they had “ordered armed groups to cut off highways and threaten violence in the city of Qalyub, spreading violence and damaging public interest”(Abedine and Abdelaziz 2013). These judicial measures clearly aimed at isolating the Anti-Coup leadership from its base. This was underscored by the regime’s increased efforts to differentiate in its vilifying rhetoric between the NASL leadership and the coalition’s grassroots. During the RG press conference, Colonel Ali, for instance, stressed that those in Rabaa and Al-Nahda Square were all, ultimately, brothers.²⁰⁶ “We’re all believers, and we’re all Egyptian, and we’ll build Egypt together,” Ali continued, stating that no single group or ideology would rule Egypt in the future. However, the placatory remarks also signalled the regime’s limited willingness to engage in reconciliatory measures with the Islamists. While thus

²⁰⁴ RNN. 24 July 2013. ‘Interior: 12 individuals and a recruiter wounded in an explosion in front of the first district Mansoura’. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/67556.htm>

²⁰⁵ Arrest warrants were issued for Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide Mohammed Badie, his deputy Mahmud Ezzat Ibrahim, FJP secretary general Mohammed Al-Beltagy and FJP Vice Chairman Essam Al-Erian, Safwat Hegazi, a Salafist television preacher, Assam Abdel Magued, a leader in the Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya, Abdullah Barakat, the former Minister of Supply, Osama Yassin, the former Minister of Youth, as well as Abdel Rahman Al-Barr, Mohamed Abdel Maksoud and Gamal Abd al-Hadin.

²⁰⁶ A full video of the press conference is available at <https://youtu.be/xu9yag81s0M>.

clearly demarking the Brotherhood protesters as responsible for the bloodshed, his statement thus kept a window open for a potential reconciliation process.

This strategic differentiation was unquestionably due to the fact that interim president Mansour had taken the beginning of Ramadan as an occasion to invite all political parties to meet for dialogue. In a public address on the anniversary of the 23 July 1952 revolution, he reiterated this appeal to “to turn a new page in the country’s book with no hatred, no malice, no division.”²⁰⁷ His ‘one nation’ reconciliation initiative (Al Ahram 2013d; El-Behairy 2013), however, was met with a brisk refusal from the side of the Anti-Coup camp: precondition for any kind of dialogue, it stated, was the rehabilitation of President Mursi, the only elected and thus the only legitimate president to host such conference. The Brotherhood and FJP speakers furthermore publicly denied the existence of any backdoor channels between the NASL and the regime (Nagi 2013c; Rahin 2013). According to both organisations, the movement would not contribute to a consolidation of the status quo by addressing the interim institutions as legitimate dialogue partners.

6.4.1 *Mandated Violence*

The limited openness to a national dialogue and reconciliation by the interim cabinet therefore soon gave way to more confrontative and militant rhetoric that vilified the protesters as terrorists and enemies of the state. A rallying call by Defence Minister Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi on 24 July 2013, after another bomb explosion outside a police building in Mansoura killed a police conscript and injured 27 officers and civilians, marked a turning point and the beginning of a new phase in the regime’s dealing with the Anti-Coup movement (see Figure 15, p. 159).²⁰⁸

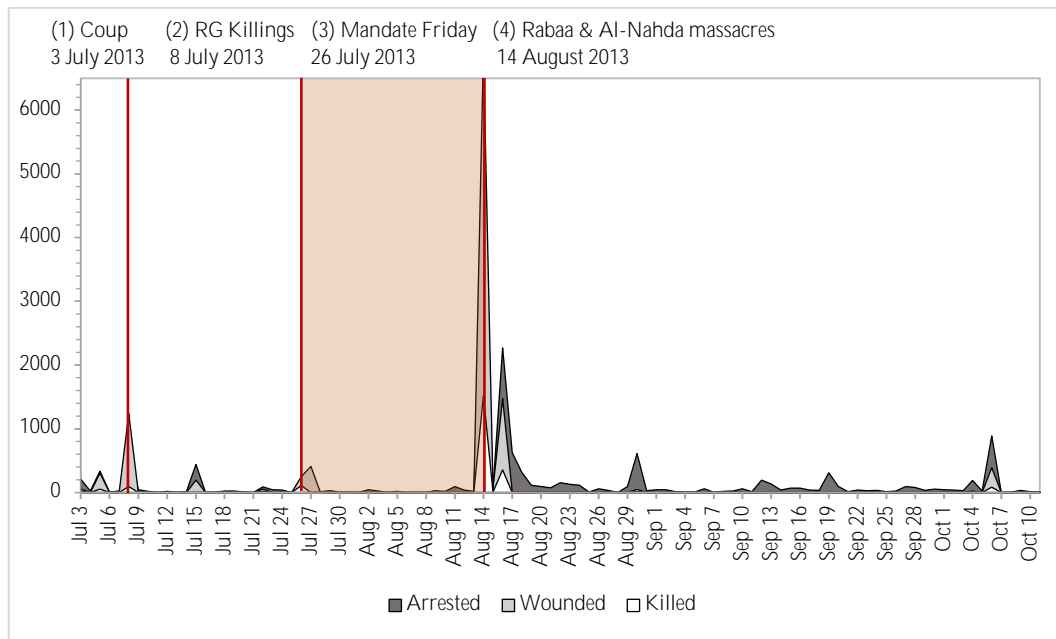
The general’s speech at a military graduation ceremony in Alexandria can be interpreted as the first comprehensive attempt to present a counter-narrative to the NASL’s discursive framing of legitimacy.²⁰⁹ His appeal exemplified the two different conceptions of legitimacy that were clashing in Egypt’s divided public sphere (Al-Awadi 2013, 549).

Figure 15. 3rd phase of Anti-Coup subject formation

²⁰⁷ See full speech at https://youtu.be/GxI31_ICOmA.

²⁰⁸ This was notwithstanding the fact that the NASL condemned the bombing and demanded an official investigation, cf. NASL, 24 July 2013. *About the Mansoura bombing* [Arabic]. <http://bit.ly/2PWzkmy>.

²⁰⁹ For a full recording of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s speech at the graduation ceremony of the 64th cohort of the Marine College and the 41 cohort of the College of the Air Defence Forces see <https://youtu.be/RXYOq47fvAs>. A transcript of the speech is available at <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=24072013&id=b94ce861-eefe-4d34-aa02-66dde3ee63c1>. A translated transcript of the speech is on file with the author.



Source 15. Time series based on author's event database, repression data by Wiki Thawra.

Whereas the Muslim Brotherhood and its alias invoked an *input* legitimacy, granted to its Freedom and Justice Party and its President through electoral ballot, Al-Sisi reasoned the military's intervention into Egyptian politics with the Mursi administration's *missing throughput* and *output* legitimacy:²¹⁰ On the one hand, he pointed out that Mursi, from his first day in office, had failed to rule as a "president of all Egyptians," refusing the army's initiatives to contain the political crisis, which had been building since November, through inclusive consultations with all political forces. On the other hand, he had angered the people with his policies "even more than they were angered by the corruption that the previous regime practised over the past thirty years" thus jeopardising the stability of the country (see Monier and Ranko 2013, 120). Finally, he had ignored the massive turnout on 30 June 2013 which, according to Al-Sisi, equalled denying the will of the people:

He said to me merely thousands had come out and I responded I will never be a guardian of legitimacy when it comes only from the ballot box. The people grant it through the ballot box and can reject it, and when they reject it is necessary to respect their opinion.

In his discursive construct of a competing concept of legitimacy, the signifier of *al-irada al-sha'abiya* [popular will] played a key role (see also Abdel Ghaffar

²¹⁰ The triad of input, output and throughput legitimacy draws on the works of Fritz Scharpf (1970) and Vivien Schmidt (2013). Scharpf introduced the first two normative criteria for democratic governance: **Input legitimacy** focuses on the responsiveness of a polity to citizens' concerns as a result of participation; **output legitimacy**, by contrast, assesses the effectiveness of policy outcomes. Schmidt has added throughput legitimacy as a third normative criterion, referring to the accountability, transparency, inclusiveness and openness of governance processes themselves.

2013). The message was clear: the right to govern, derived from a win at the ballot box, can be revoked at any time through a stronger show of popular will. Millions of Egyptians rising up against Mursi had left the neutral military as the guardian of popular sovereignty with no choice but to intervene on behalf of the people. In an attempt to restage this empowering mechanism, the general urged the people to show their support for the security forces once more, by taking to the streets and providing the army with a popular *tawfid* [mandate] to confront violence and terrorism:

I ask all trusted and honourable Egyptians to come out next Friday to give me the authority to face violence and terrorism. I have not asked anything of you before, but now I ask you to come out and remind the world that you have demands. [...] Please Egyptians shoulder your responsibility with me, the army and the police. Show your steadfastness in the face of what is going on.

While General Al-Sisi's remarks, which were broadcast live by state media, did not explicitly name any one political faction, they clearly portrayed the political turmoil in Egypt as a struggle between the Egyptian people and a group of religious fanatics. Albeit not directly referred to, the NASL was indirectly addressed in the speech as the movement that believed it was fighting in the name of religion:

We advised them over and over, and we warned them not to turn Egypt into a confrontation battlefield between a movement that claims to be fighting and working in the name of God against others who, according to them, are standing against God's religion. And that is wrong because other movements have the right to have their own political visions of how the country should be governed.

With his statements, the general effectively reproduced the divisive discursive logics fostered by both political camps in the entire summer of 2013. As with the NASL's discourses, Al-Sisi's words pitted 'the people' against 'the people' (Mogahed 2013). Portraying the political crisis as a fight between two irreconcilable camps, Al-Sisi thus clearly demarcated a frontier between the legitimate body of the nation and its external antagonist other: On the one side of this divide were the 'honourable Egyptians' who were to meet on Friday, 26 July 2013. On the other, were those who, according to Al-Sisi, sought to take the country down a dangerous path including the former president and the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood. In this antagonist constellation, the general clearly sided with the former camp.

The general directly addressed the Anti-Coup organiser's repeated appeals to the lower ranks of the armed forces to fulfil their protective function and defend the Anti-Coup protesters against the coup forces (see Chapter 6.2.1). He also categorically rejected all rumours hinting at divisions within the army ranks: "I swear by God that the Egyptian army is united," he affirmed denouncing all rumours

that indicated the contrary as conspiracies and religious propaganda. Festooned in full military regalia, he furthermore summoned the revolutionary myth of the unity between the army and the people as *yad wahid* [one hand]. That is, the perception that the military had intervened in the 25 January Revolution to protect the protestors against the assaults of the Mubarak regime (Wessel 2016, 9; see also Ketchley 2014):

I say time and time again this army is commanded only by the will and commands of the Egyptian people. Do you think that 'the greatest force on the earth' is an expression that came out of nowhere? On the contrary, it is an inseparable relationship. [...] Friday is the day that we, the army, the people and the police, will unite.

Retrospectively, Walter Armbrust (2015, 105) has interpreted the protests on 26 July 2013 as the decisive moment of Al-Sisi's ascension to power, "ratified later by a patently fixed election." After *Mandate Friday*, as the protests responding to Al-Sisi's speech are commonly known, he asserts, the general separated from his prior role as a mere arbiter of social unrest and assumed a privileged role in the post-coup order. Bassem Sabry (cit. in Daragahi 2013) has similarly argued that the change of semantics in Al-Sisi's speech reflected a personal recognition of his potential role in the post-coup order: "It appeared that Sisi was personally speaking as an individual and as a leader, compared to before, when he predominantly carried a more institutional tone."

While it is arguable, if Al-Sisi's fate as future president was sealed as early as July 2013, Mandate Friday indeed became an indicator of the popular support for the general. Popular polls had been indicating growing resentment with the demonstrations, particularly among the urban population (Baseera 2013). Nonetheless, likening the NASL protesters to terrorists had been a bold move for Al-Sisi, given the obvious parallels to the framing strategy pursued by the Mubarak regime vis-a-vis Tahrir square in January 2011. But it was undoubtedly effective. On the evening of the defence minister's speech, presidential spokesman Ahmed al-Muslimani voiced the interim president's support. Al-Muslimani stated that Egypt had now "started the war on terrorism,"²¹¹ and that Al-Sisi's call aimed to protect the revolution and the state (Fahim and Sheikh 2018a). State television channels immediately added the tagline *didda al-irhab* [against the Terrorism] as a banner to their news broadcasts (El-Amrani 2013, n. 61). Soon all six of the major private satellite channels adopted different variations of the banner, reading Egypt against terrorism," "together against terrorism" or "the people's word

²¹¹ Within hours after Al-Sisi's speech, the armed forces declared a nationwide state of alert and deployed additional troops in all provinces, with a focus on greater Cairo.

against extremism” (Bradley 2014).²¹² Moreover, the Tamarod movement echoed Al-Sisi’s call to the streets: “We call on the people to take to the streets on Friday to support their armed forces, which we support and whose role in confronting the violence and terrorism practised by the Muslim Brotherhood we happily support,” Tamarod leader Mahmoud Badr announced (Saleh 2013a). The movement’s official Facebook page called on its supporters to heed the general’s call for protests. Alongside Tamarod, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians answered the call on the following Friday, 26 July, and demanded action against the Anti-Coup protest camps.²¹³ The National Salvation Front toed the line and, to not be outdone, emphatically urged the Interior Minister to listen to the people’s will and disband the Anti-Coup sit-ins, “to reinforce the principle of a state of laws and to preserve state prestige” (Fares 2013).

The Mandate Friday protest effectively was a barometer for Egyptians’ willingness to support a broader crackdown on the Islamist demonstrations (cf., Koopmans 2005, 161). Aside from the NASL, only the *Nour* Party and the revolutionary April 6 Youth Movement had openly criticised Al-Sisi’s speech and boycotted the protests.²¹⁴ Within the governing camp, by contrast, there were hardly any critical voices. Encouraged by this unique public show of support, the prosecution brought charges of murder and conspiracy with the Palestinian *Hamas* against Mohammed Mursi that same day (Pioppi 2013, n. 60) And in the following night, the police moved against the Rabaa al-Adawiya sit-in for the first time—probably to pre-empt a further extension of the sit-in to the neighbouring Nasr Street and the adjacent 6th of October Bridge (Chayes 2013). The offensive followed immediately after the MOI announced that the occupied squares would soon be cleared in an orderly and legal way. Its pattern, however, mirrored that of the Republican Guard assault: After barraging the surroundings of Nasr street, the slip road to the Rabaa camp, and the *Minassa*, the memorial in honour of former President Sadat, with teargas, the CSF advanced together with army units as back-up (EIPR 2014, 57; Human Rights Watch 2014, 121–29). The ensuing clashes in

²¹² After the clearing of the Rabaa and Al-Nahda sit-ins these slogans were homogenised and turned into a permanent logo in red, black and white, the colours of the Egyptian flag, in the upper left corner of the screen reading “Egypt fighting terrorism” in English and Arabic (for a screenshot see Bell 2013).

²¹³ Like on 30 June 2013, the turnout of Mandate Friday has been the subject of fierce debate. From the aerial shots of the pro-regime protests, however, it is clear that the number of protesters in Cairo and Alexandria came close to the turnout of the 30 June Tamarod demonstrations.

²¹⁴ RNN. 24 July 2013. ‘In response to Sisi: *Nour* refuses to authorise the army and warned of civil war [Arabic]’. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/67619.htm>; RNN. 24 July 2013. ‘April 6: We will not participate in a blank mandate and will not participate next Friday [Arabic]’. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/67616.htm>.

front of the memorial lasted until the early next morning and left over 100 people dead and its multiple injured.²¹⁵

The clashes in front of the *Minassa* and the memorial for former President Sadat marked the hitherto worst single instance of state mass killings in the republic's history. Many of the corpses, examined by journalists and Human Rights advocates in several surrounding morgues on the following days, exhibited either head wounds from sniper fire, or multiple bullet holes in their torsos which pointed to heavy machine gun use (EIPR 2014, 57; Human Rights Watch 2014, 124ff; Kingsley 2013b). The figures released by Wiki Thawra additionally seem to confirm that security forces had deliberately resorted to lethal violence: While the killed-injured ratio stood at an average of 1 killed versus 13 injured after the Republican Guard massacre at the beginning of the protest cycle, during the clashes in Nasr city, this ratio moved to 1:7. Uploaded videos of the clashes confirm the uncontrolled use of live ammunition which Egyptian authorities deny up to the present day.²¹⁶ By contrast, there is little evidence for the use of firearms by NASL demonstrators (see Human Rights Watch 2014, 128f). The observation that CSF and army units captured on film neither wore ballistic vests nor had to take cover from enemy fire suggests that protesters, aside from stones and slingshots, were mostly unarmed (see Wiki Thawra 2013a).

6.4.2 *Competing Conceptions of Terror*

From the perspective of the Egyptian authorities, the nightly operation on Nasr street had the opposite of its intended effect. Given the indiscriminate and extensive use of live ammunition and automatic weapons, Anti-Coup officials compared the police operation with the historic massacre of Egyptian Copts by army units in front of the *Maspero* television building in October 2011—a symbolic event that is firmly engrained in Egyptians' collective memory about the military rule after 2011. In commemoration of the victims of the *Minassa* massacre, the FJP announced new protests for the coming days.²¹⁷

The excessive and disproportionate police violence nourished protesters' grievances. It consolidated their oppositional identity, and it granted legitimacy to demands for legal recognition of all mass killings. According to the Anti-Coup

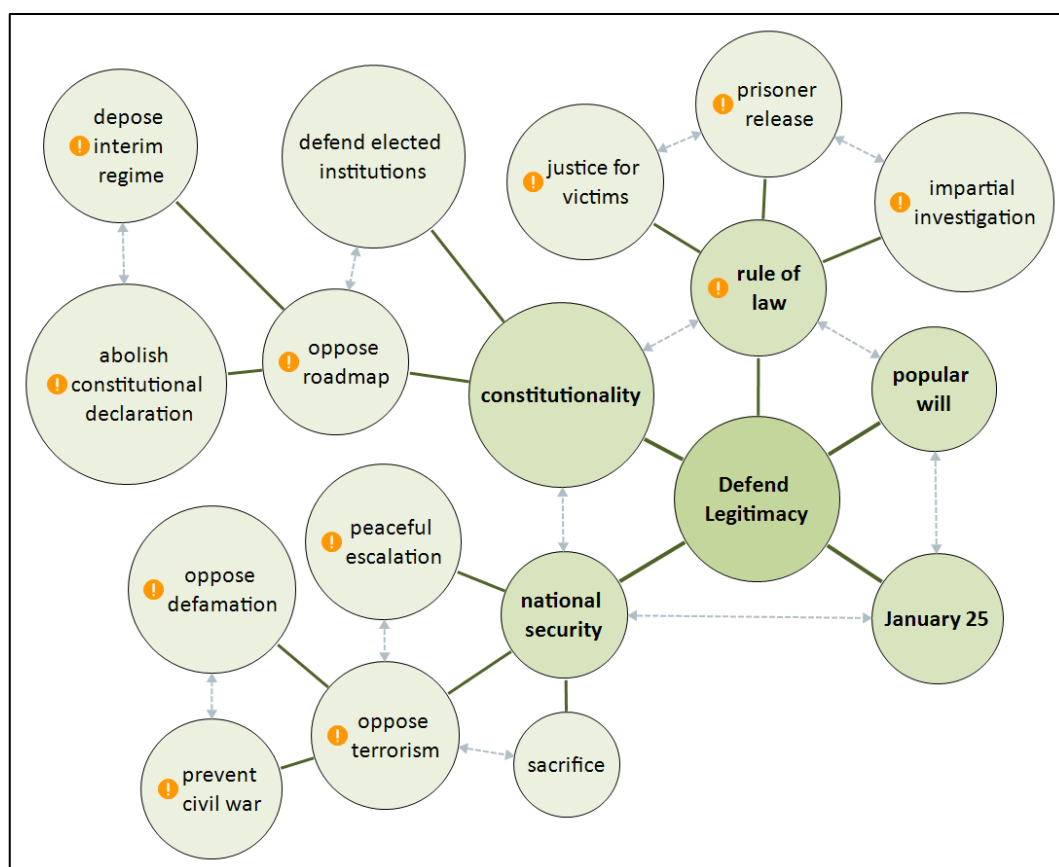
²¹⁵ By way of exception, there is relative consistency regarding these casualty figures in the records of both, WT and Egypt's state Forensic Medical Authority. The latter declared that 95 civilians and one police officer had been killed during the clashes.

²¹⁶ See, for example, <http://youtu.be/2K3GB0EocoE>; <http://youtu.be/GF0NxTsm5C8>.

²¹⁷ See RNN. 27 July 2013. 'El-Beltagy: We are being subjected to genocide [Arabic]'. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/67865.htm>.

Alliance, the massacres pointed to an evident collapse of the rule of law. The total isolation of Mohamed Mursi from any legal counsel and the simultaneous announcement of new charges of espionage against him and arrested leaders of the Brotherhood further strengthened this impression. In the eyes of the NASL, the rule of law had been replaced by a “law of the jungle,” which was now selectively applied by the “henchmen” of the military coup.²¹⁸ By early August, seeking justice for the victims of the RG and the *Minassa* massacres, the release of protesters detained during these clashes as well as arrested NASL leaders, and an impartial investigation of army and police crimes had become part of the campaign’s core demand as an essential stepping stones for restoring the rule of law (see Figure 16). In fact, after the *Minassa* clashes, these demands permeated the statements released by the NASL equivalent to or even exceeding the reinstatement of the constitution and President Mursi.

Figure 16. Evolving prognostic frame, 30 June-8 July 2013



Source 16. Semantic network created with the help of XMind 8 based on coding in MAXQDA 13.

According to the NASL, a neutral international investigation of the human rights

²¹⁸ NASL. 26 July 2013. ‘Statement 27 [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2Ri0Uav>.

violations in the aftermath of the military coup would include an inquiry into the killing of protesters, research about the fabrication of criminal charges, as well as the criminal prosecution of those responsible for curtailing the freedom of expression by closing the **Muslim Brotherhood's satellite television channels**.²¹⁹ On 7 August 2013, Mohamed El-Beltagy announced on the Rabaa-podium that the sit-ins would no longer end with the return of the elected president to his office and the reinstatement of the Egyptian constitution. Anti-Coup protesters would not leave the field until the killers, **and those responsible for shedding the martyrs' blood** were tried in court, the army had retreated from the political scene and the **structure of the state's security sector, media system and judiciary** had undergone a reform to safeguard against another counter-revolution.²²⁰

In a statement released shortly after the 'mandate speech', the alliance additionally called on the international community, including the international criminal court to prosecute Al-Sisi for his "crimes against humanity."²²¹ Furthermore, it invited international human rights organisations to participate in the Anti-Coup sit-ins as monitors of human rights violations, vowing to welcome their presence and facilitate their work at all Anti-Coup demonstrations from now onwards.²²² This turn towards the international community marked a shift from prior communications that had mostly framed foreign governments and IOs as accomplices of the coup. It partly responded to the growing international criticism towards the repressive conduct of the security forces in Cairo. The NASL saw, above all, the worried statements by the UN General Secretary and High Commissioner for Human Rights and their calls for a release of President Mursi as an opportunity to lobby their agenda on an international level (UN News 2013), simultaneously to the domestic level where political polarisation was rigidifying, and the dialogue processes with other political forces had come to a standstill.²²³

Given the high casualties, the leaders of different parties represented in the NASL seized on the general's speech as evidence that had returned to "fascist mili-

²¹⁹ NASL. 3 August 2013. 'Anti-Coup Alliance Statement on US Delegation Meet Saturday, August 3.' *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31215>; NASL. 3 August 2013. *Statement 49: On the meeting with the US delegation* [Arabic]. <http://bit.ly/2RiEJRF>.

²²⁰ RNN. 7 August 2013. 'Al-Beltagy states three demands after the return of Morsi [Arabic]'. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/68772.htm>.

²²¹ NASL. 25 July 2013. 'Statement by the Anti-Coup Alliance in Response to Sisi's Speech'. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31179>.

²²² NASL. 5 August 2013. 'Statement on the call to international human rights organisations to monitor the activities of 'a miliuniya to overthrow the coup [Arabic]'. <http://bit.ly/2RiNqL8>.

²²³ Interview with the Anti-Coup coordinator for cooperation with Human Rights Organisations, via Skype, September 2013; cf., NASL. 26 July 2013. 'Statement 37 [Arabic]'. <http://bit.ly/2Ri0Uav>.

tary rule that confiscates the people’s freedom, sovereignty and dignity.” Statements released by the Muslim Brotherhood, *Al-Wasat* and by FJP spokesman Amr Darrag interpreted Al-Sisi’s comments as an announcement of civil war and “a prelude to a country-wide massacre” (UPI 2013).²²⁴ “The threat made by Sisi is a call for civil war. Widespread massacres will be carried out in the name of popular support,” said a statement read out on behalf of the groups at a press conference (Daragahi 2013). The NASL echoed these interpretations in a statement released on behalf of all factions allied in the Anti-Coup campaign (Abou Bakr 2013),²²⁵ likening General Sisi’s speech to that of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad who, in a much anticipated speech to the Syrian People’s Assembly on 30 March 2011,²²⁶ had labelled pro-democracy demonstrations as a plot to destroy the nation, thus giving security forces the green light for the ensuing brutal repression:

This speech is incitement and clear evidence of the state of confusion and loss of mind experienced by the bloody Putschists. It resembles Bashar Al-Assad’s speech that preceded his war against the Syrian people where he requested a similar mandate.²²⁷

Aside from the routine chants *silmiya, silmiya* [peaceful, peaceful] and *al-sha‘ab yurid isqat al-nizam* [the people want the fall of the regime], new chants featured prominently in these marches which directly referenced Al-Sisi’s ‘mandate speech’: “To whoever is standing at the window, we are your brothers, not terrorists,” protesters chanted (Nagi 2013d). Others carried posters in English and Arabic reading “I am not a terrorist. I’m defending my vote that has been stolen” (for a photograph of the banner see Daily News Egypt 2013b). The dissemination of such a counter-narrative to the vilification by authorities turned into a central motivation for the protests. As Ketchley (2013) has remarked, this new message was captured by the popular chant “*dihku ‘alayku wa qulu irhab, w-ehna giran al-bab fi al-bab*” [they fooled you by calling us terrorists, we are your next-door neighbours].

On Rabaa Square, the NASL additionally tried to reshape the public image of their camps as incubators for terrorism. An official ‘Rabaa Tour’—a PR initiative launched by Mohamed Zain and around a dozen other young NASL supporters

²²⁴ See RNN. 24 July 2013. ‘Al-Beltagy: Sisi ignites a civil war to protect the coup d’état of the people [Arabic]’. *Rassd News Network*. <http://bit.ly/2Q3Lw51>; RNN. 24 July 2013. ‘Abu al-Ela Madi: Sisi’s call is one for killing and civil war [Arabic]’. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/67615.htm>.

²²⁵ RNN. 24 July 2013. ‘National Alliance: Sisi speech call for civil war [Arabic]’. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/67603.htm>.

²²⁶ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8P2kx-TvbU>; For a transcript of the speech see: <http://www.voltairenet.org/article169245.html>.

²²⁷ MB. 25 July 2013. ‘Statement by the Anti-Coup Alliance in Response to Sisi’s Speech’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31179>.

on 2 August 2013—aimed to counter their securitisation and vilification by state media (Johanson 2013). “Media is saying a lot about us in a fierce campaign to distort the protesters and the sit-in. They say unpeaceful and armed sit-in. They say ‘terrorists and extremists’. They say we are paid. They say we torture and detain protesters and children in our sit-in,” the founding statement of the initiative claimed.²²⁸ Published and widely shared on social media—and followed shortly by a professionally shot and edited video message²²⁹—it announced that the initiative intended to dispel these lies by inviting Egyptians and international observers to take a tour of the sit-in and “make sure of its peacefulness.” The daily tours under the motto ‘Heard enough, time to see!’ failed to effectively attract a significant audience beyond those who had already been visiting the encampment before. Amy Austin Holmes writes in a recapitulation of her own tour the day before the deadly clearing that the several hours long guided tours of the tent city, including visits to the Rabaa field hospital and the main stage, attracted only an average of one visitor per day (Holmes 2013). A Rabaa sit-in bus tour hardly fared better.²³⁰

Furthermore, the NASL appropriated the terrorism label as a nodal signifier for its own **resistance discourse, attempting to counter the regime’s vilification**. To subvert the portrayal of the Anti-Coup campaign as a terrorist alliance, it re-framed its patriotic duty to safeguard national security as a duty to oppose also any type of terrorism. Only in the view of the NASL, the source of terror was primarily the coupist state: In several statements, the NASL emphasised that Al-Sisi’s talk about a coming war on terrorism represented merely a cover for the coup forces’ **own criminal conduct and meant** to provide a pretext for imposing a terror regime on the Egyptian people.²³¹ A visit by international and human rights organisations to the sit-in sites and protest activities would reveal that the coup forces were the ones practising “terrorism, extermination, murder, threats and intimidation of the oppressed who maintain their peace despite the brutal massacres.”²³²

The regime’s fabrications of evidence against the protesters, according to the alliance, included the recent bombings and *baltagiya* violence against civilians and army bases which, actually, were covert false flag operations by intelligence agencies to smears the Egyptian people’s “peaceful revolt” and to create “a cover and

²²⁸ The full statement is available at <http://bit.ly/2BEeXID>.

²²⁹ The promotion video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2j6G0psL3s>.

²³⁰ See NASL. 6 August 2013. ‘Come Join the Rabaa Sit-In Tour Bus [Arabic]’. *Facebook*. <https://bit.ly/2VYwUSX>.

²³¹ NASL. 29 July 2013. ‘Statement 42: The National Alliance responded to the alleged statement of the National Defence Council [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2PZqKn3>.

²³² NASL. August 1, 2013. ‘Statement 47 [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2Q1Lv1o>.

justification for flagrant violations, repression.”²³³ This state terrorism in disguise was effectively replicating the “Mubarak state,” but it would not prevent the alliance’s revolution throughout Egypt—just as smear campaigns and police repression had not stopped the 25 January Revolution.²³⁴

FJP Secretary General Mohamed Al-Beltagy advanced this narrative more zealously, providing it with a religious subtext. This is evident in his declarations that Al-Sisi’s framing of state terrorism as an anti-terror campaign merely intended to provide legitimization for the killing of innocent and devout Muslims. Accordingly, the protesting crowds should remain peaceful in their rallies but also “prepare for a second jihad” (ABC/AFP 2013).²³⁵ The NASL, by contrast, was wary of framing its protest campaign as a jihad-like struggle and, in fact, mostly avoided religious references in their statements. The exception to this was a recurrent appeal to police men’s and soldiers’ conscience by quoting a *hadith* by the Prophet Mohammed,²³⁶ according to which there was no duty to obey any leader if this meant disobeying Allah and by citing from *surah 5, surat-l-maida*, that “Whoever kills a human being, except as punishment for murder or for causing turmoil in the land, so it shall be as if he had killed all mankind” (Verse No. 32).²³⁷ Fear of new bloodshed, however, did not hinder the NASL from escalating their calls for demonstrations across the country. To prevent the descent of the country into civil war, the NASL announced a “peaceful escalation” of its ongoing protest campaign in the coming weeks:

Our ongoing, persistent and steadily escalating protest activities and events will remain peaceful, and that no-one will provoke us into violence, because we realise that our strength lies in our peacefulness, our unity, our persistence and our insistence on our rejection of the coup and on our demands for legitimacy and the completion of the democratic process to build a unified Egyptian constitutional democracy.²³⁸

In light of this peaceful resistance, the armed forces, as the guardian of national

²³³ MB. 25 July 2013. ‘Anti-Coup Response to Al-Sisi’s Speech’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31179>.

²³⁴ NASL. 26 July 2013. ‘Statement 36 [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2PXz7Q6>; see also NASL. 2013. ‘Statement 37 [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2Ri0Uav>; MB. 26 July 2013. ‘Anti-Coup Statement on Imprisonment of President Morsi’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31187>.

²³⁵ See also RNN. 24 July 2013. ‘National Alliance: Sisi speech call for civil war [Arabic]’. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/67603.htm>.

²³⁶ It is worth mentioning that there are similar wordings of the same *hadith* that convey the same meaning. The wording quoted repeatedly by the NASL was related by Al-Bukhari (6820) and Muslim (1840).

²³⁷ See, for instance, MB. 6 August 2013. ‘Anti-Coup Alliance Statement Affirms No Invitation to Dialogue Received’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31233>.

²³⁸ MB. 26 July 2013. ‘Pro-Legitimacy, Anti-Coup Alliance Statement on Imprisonment of President Morsi’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31187>.

security, would be held liable for any new bloodshed. In the view of the NASL, Al-Sisi had confirmed in his own words that he was ‘the mastermind of the coup’. Demanding that he be put on trial for crimes against humanity, the alliance gave the armed forces a final choice:

The question to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces remains: is it looking for political solutions to the crisis of the homeland [...] or has it accepted the language of genocide, murder, kidnapping, fabrication of charges and muffling of mouths practiced by some of the leaders of the armed forces as a solution for any crisis.²³⁹

This ultimatum exemplified how the NASL was visibly curbing its efforts to exclude parts of the military from their criticism of the coup forces. In its statement on the Minassa clashes, it claimed that army units were partaking in a “policy of eradication” against the NASL. Purported evidence of this was the army’s provision of support for security forces on Nasr street, surrounding the peaceful demonstrators with gas bombs, and providing cover for the use of live ammunition and snipers.²⁴⁰ In addition, the alliance’s patience with its unsuccessful attempts to mobilise additional political support was exhausted, while avoiding the alienation of the army. This was evident in the ways in which it dealt with other third-party players in the aftermath of the Minassa clashes. After the ‘mandate speech’, the NASL made attempts to reach out to different political parties and movements including Pope Tawadros II and *Al-Azhar* Sheikh Ahmad al-Tayyeb, in order to convince them to distance themselves from the general’s call.²⁴¹ During the Minassa clashes, however, snipers had used the roofs of buildings on the premises of the Al-Azhar University to shoot at the protesters. The alliance consequently held the Sheikh of Al-Azhar Mosque and the President of Al-Azhar University co-responsible for the bloodshed.²⁴² According to the NASL, the owners of television stations, broadcasters, journalists were sharing this criminal responsibility, as well as all “so-called media professionals” who had fervently and vindictively incited murder.

Furthermore, the NASL also apportioned blame on other actors whom it held had incited, financed, aided and abetted the killing of unarmed civilians, including the U.S. administration and the European Union. These external forces were cul-

²³⁹ NASL. 27 July 2013. ‘Regarding the efforts and initiatives put forward within the framework of constitutional legitimacy [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2Q1RaVi>.

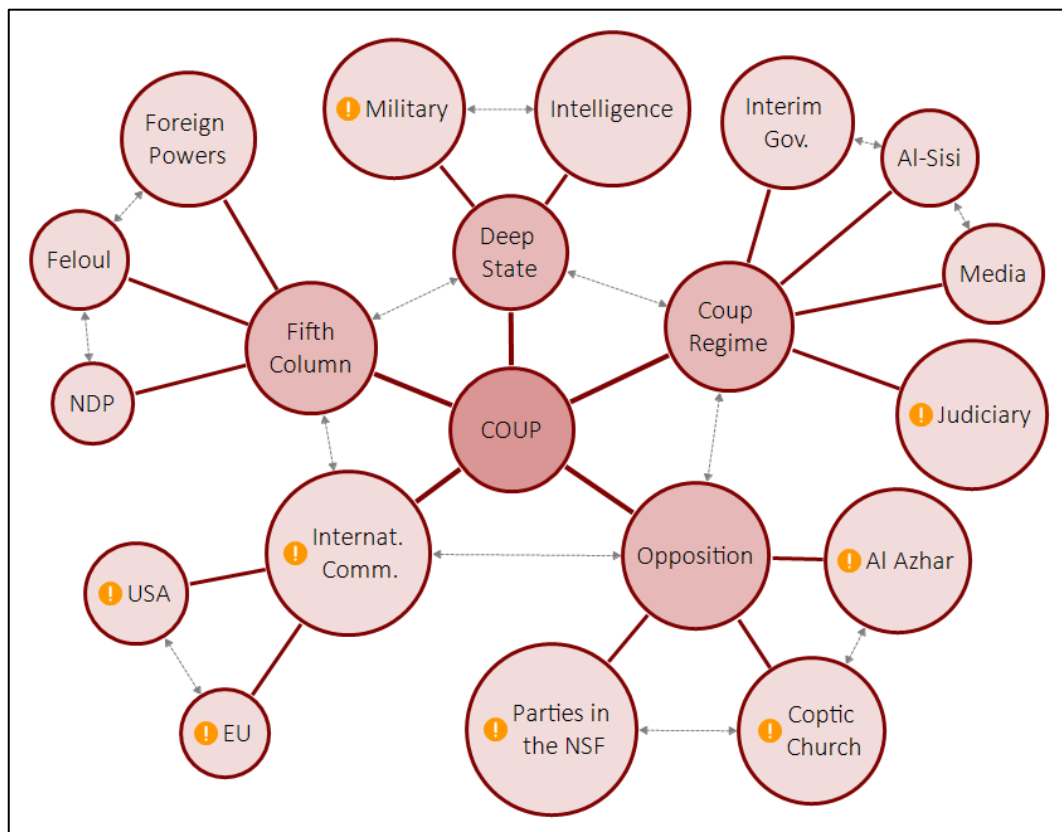
²⁴⁰ NASL. 26 July 2013. ‘Statement 39: On the massacre of Rabaa al-Adawiya [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2PZfxD6>.

²⁴¹ MB. 25 July 2013. ‘Statement by the Anti-Coup Alliance in Response to Sisi’s Speech’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31179>.

²⁴² MB. 3 August 2013. ‘Anti-Coup Alliance Statement Condemns Security Forces Attack on Friday 2 August.’ *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31211>.

pable due to their support of the “the coup masterminds, commanders, security forces and intelligence service.”²⁴³ With the list of enemies growing (see Figure 17, p.170), the odds of turning the NASL into a broader alliance thus dwindled, as did the chances for a peaceful mediation of the conflict. In fact, following Al-Sisi’s ‘mandate speech’ and the ensuing killings on Nasr Street, the NASL distanced itself further from prior thoughts about reconciliation,²⁴⁴ and turned gradually toward a portrayal of the Anti-Coup campaign as a righteous fight of ‘one against all’.

Figure 17. Evolving diagnostic frame, antagonist other, 24 July-14 August 2013



Source 17. Semantic network created with the help of XMind 8 based on coding in MAXQDA 13.

Before the massacre, the Brotherhood had declared it was studying several initiatives by respectable political figures who were “determined to restore constitutional legitimacy,” adding the caveat that it could not decide on them without extensive discussion with the alliance (Assran 2013). In light of many of these players’ partaking in Al-Sisi’s ‘mandate speech’ and their blessing of the ensuing *Mi-*

²⁴³ NASL. 1 August 2013. ‘Statement 47 [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2Q0KfLZ>.

²⁴⁴ For instance, NASL. 6 August 2013. ‘Statement on National and International Initiatives to End Egypt Crisis [Arabic]’. <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/288782681264102>.

nassa clashes as ugly but necessary police efforts at curbing the growing instability, these discussions became increasingly obsolete. After the killings, the NASL asserted, it would not engage in talks with any of the parties who were lending their support to the interim government, given their shared responsibility for the bloodshed:

The Alliance reminds that parties which mounted or blessed the bloody military coup—and hence caused the horrific Republican Guard Officers’ Club and dawn prayer massacres as well as other killings of peaceful protesters in all public squares across Egypt—those parties are unwelcome, because they are not unbiased mediators but partners in the putschists’ crime.²⁴⁵

This framing remained the dominant tenor of the NASL discourse until the massacre of Rabaa al-Adawiya on 14 August 2013 (henceforth referred to as *Rabaa* in italics to distinguish the event from the location). In a massive backlash, it provided fresh impetus to the protest campaign. Protest rates increased continuously. By the middle of the month, the two principal camps in Rabaa and Al-Nahda Square had developed into entire tent cities. These were replete with functioning internal infrastructure, constantly harbouring an average of 85,000 protesters.²⁴⁶

A second backlash can be identified on the regime side, where the clashes at the *Minassa* monument were again framed as an orchestrated assault on defenceless police officers. The clashes were still ongoing when Interior Minister Mohammed Ibrahim declared that the units tasked with dispersing the Nasr Street protests were unarmed and had “never ever directed a weapon towards the chest of a protester.” Instead, he claimed, clashes were occurring between demonstrators and residents in the Nasr City neighbourhood.²⁴⁷ In order to prevent such clashes in the future, President Mansour released a decree the following day which

²⁴⁵ For instance, MB. 6 August 2013. ‘Anti-Coup Alliance Statement Affirms No Invitation to Dialogue Received’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31233>.

²⁴⁶ According to official figures, only 20,000 protesters resided in Midan Rabaa prior to its clearing. However, participant counts by Human Rights Watch (2014, n. 32) based on satellite photographs of an average night at the sit-in suggest that between 71,000 and 100,000 protesters camped on the square. These estimates are based on a measurement of the total protest area of approximately 110,000 m². Other independent calculations suggest an even higher turnout. Accordingly, the total area occupied by protesters on Tayaran Street and Nasr Road on Fridays amounted to 136,000m². Divided by a modest average per person of 0.45m² this area would have housed around 300,000 protesters in Rabaa area alone, with an additional 245,000 protesters on Al-Nahda Square (~110,000m²) (see Shereef Ismail 2013a). The combined count of an average of 500,000 Anti-Coup protesters in Cairo on Fridays comes close to the protest event data recorded for this thesis. This estimated turnout lies substantially below the figures of 3 million protesters released by MB spokesman Gehad Al-Haddad for the Rabaa sit-in by mid-July 2013. However, it also lies substantially above the estimates release by Human Rights Watch. The variance can be explained by the fact that turnouts were between weekdays and Friday holidays (see Chapter 7.3.1).

²⁴⁷ For a video of the press conference see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yblonfpcH1U>.

transferred emergency power to interim Prime Minister Hazem al-Beblawi (Mada 2013c). The decree authorised the interim government to deploy the infantry troops against the Anti-Coup protest camps, and to legalise the arrest of civilians by the army. Mansour also restored the infamous anti-Islamist units of *Mabahith* ‘*Amn ad-Dawla* [State Security Information Service] with immediate effect—a symbol of Mubarak’s police oppression that had supposedly been dissolved and replaced by the new National Security Service in March 2011 (Kingsley 2013c). In addition, the military established a complaints office to collect the demands and document the grievances of the residents in the neighbourhood of the Rabaa and Al-Nahda sit-ins.²⁴⁸ These complaints—in addition to anonymous leads that the NASL protesters were holding and torturing several Egyptians suspected of spying on the sit-ins—ultimately provided the popular legitimisation that the regime needed to authorise the clearing of Midan Rabaa (see NCHR 2014a, 6).²⁴⁹

On 29 July, furthermore, the National Defence Council (NDC) announced that evidence was growing that the Anti-Coup sit-ins posed a threat to national security (Dakroury 2013b).²⁵⁰ Notably, its diction marked a shift: it no longer differentiated between peaceful demonstrators and individual violent protesters, nor did it specify only the Muslim Brotherhood as a violent group within the NASL. Instead, it collectivised the blame for the escalating street violence and placed it on the entire contentious alliance (see Mogahed 2013). Referencing the sit-ins’ adverse effects on public peace and the popular mandate to confront terrorism, the interim cabinet followed suit on 31 July 2013 and empowered the MOI to confront the imminent danger. A preliminary deployment plan was signed off by the

²⁴⁸ In a letter to the neighbours of the Rabaa camp, the NASL had tried to address these grievances on 18 July 2013 and apologised for any damages, harassments or other negative side-effects of the sit-ins. To reduce the residents’ distress, the alliance had vowed to evacuate the occupied areas between the residential buildings and to start an extensive clean-up of the park next to the buildings. It had promised to ban the use of fireworks and lasers after midnight and reduce the volume of the sound systems on the sit-in. See NASL. July 18, 2013. ‘Letter from the National Alliance to Support Legitimacy to the Population of the Rabaa al-Adawiya region [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2Qd7CCb>.

²⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch (2014, 11, 96) states that the NASL’s specialised security committees, in charge of guarding the sit-ins, were involved in the abduction and detention of several alleged spies. However, the organisation underscores that, according to their researches, these crimes had not been sanctioned by the protest organisers and that most protesters were unaware of the kidnappings.

²⁵⁰ The NDC, Egypt’s highest body on matters of domestic security, was dissolved in 2011. It was revived by the SCAF in mid-2012 and has remained intact to date. Although it is technically in existence year-round, the NDC only convenes when the country is under threat. According to the 2014 constitution (see https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2014.pdf), it is headed by the acting President and comprises a total of 14 members, including the Prime Minister, the Speaker of Parliament, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Interior, the Chief of the General Intelligence Service, the army Chief of Staff, the Commanders of the Navy, Air Forces and Air Defence, the Chief of Operations for the army and the Head of Military Intelligence.

NDC a few days later.

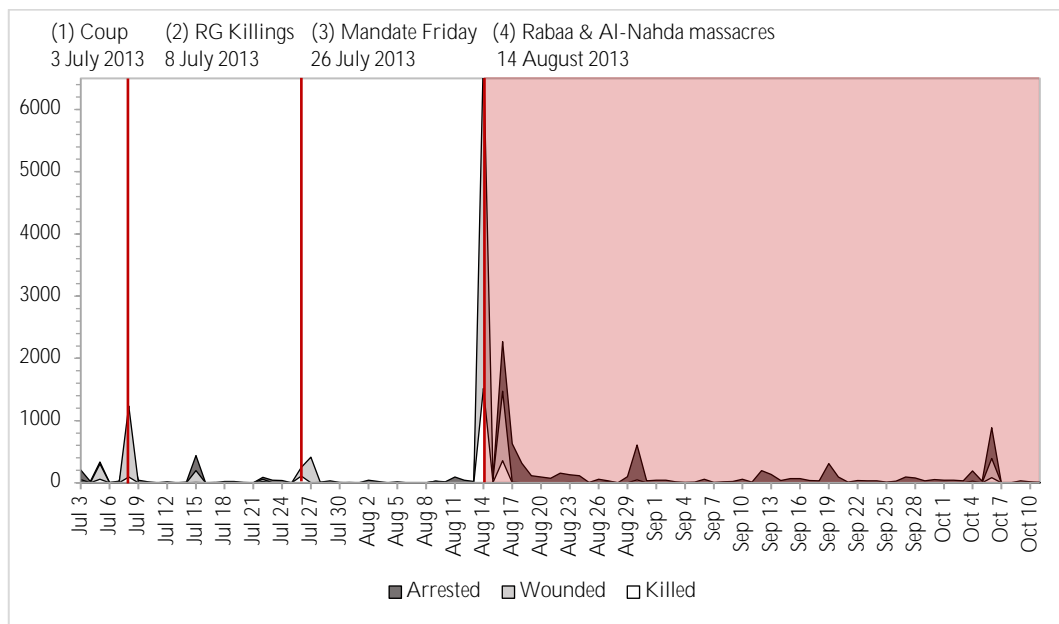
Several international organisations and a range of prominent Egyptians from the liberal as well as the Islamist spectrum tried to avert the looming confrontation.²⁵¹ However, after a week of escalating militant rhetoric, on 7 August 2013, President Mansour declared that all mediation efforts had failed and the decision had been made to clear the sit-ins, immediately after the end of Ramadan (Kamel 2013). As the following chapter shows this decision sealed a spiral of violence **which culminated in the “worst mass unlawful killings in the country’s modern history”** (Human Rights Watch 2013b). **However, the security forces’ indiscriminate and disproportionate application of force also provided the Anti-Coup Alliance with a new motif for continued resistance. It created myths and martyrs which began to figure strongly in the Anti-Coup resistance discourse as embodiments of the movement’s righteousness, victimisation and moral superiority.** As I argue in the next chapter, in the context of unseen repression, it was only the **strong intertwining of the NASL’s collective identity and its propagated ‘legitimacy’-discourse with notions of peaceful resistance that prevented the Islamist protest coalition from escalating their campaign against the ‘coup regime’ and turning to a more violent repertoire of contention.**

²⁵¹ Amongst other, the EU, the African Union, the US State Department, the former Brotherhood member and presidential candidate Abdel Moneim Aboul-Futuh and acting vice president and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mohammed El-Baradei (see Assran 2013; Daily News Egypt 2013a; Ramadan 2013).

7. After the Massacre²⁵²

The *Rabaa* massacre (hereafter referred to simply as *Rabaa*) was the pivotal event of Egypt's contentious politics after the coup and heralded a new phase of subjectivation processes within the Anti-Coup Alliance (see Figure 18). As regards police brutality and arbitrary conduct, the raids set a new record. Alongside the massacres of Tiananmen in 1989 and of Andijan in 2005, they are among the biggest mass killings of demonstrators in a single event. The civilian death toll was also **unprecedented in the country's modern history**. However, unlike in precedent cases of Islamist coup-ousting and large scale state violence against Islamist forces (M. Hafez 2003) and in contrast to prior studies on the increase of disruptive tactics throughout a protest cycle in response to repression (Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou 2012; Morris 1993), *Rabaa* did not cause a gradual radicalisation of the Anti-Coup contentious repertoire. Instead, policing and state violence triggered mechanisms of adaptation inside the National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy (NASL) that ensured the campaigns resilience and even produced backlash effects as regards its internal mobilisation levels.

Figure 18. 4th phase of Anti-Coup subject formation



Source 18. Time series based on author's event database, repression data by Wiki Thawra.

This chapter illustrates how the alliance successfully turned the massacres at the Republican Guard Headquarters, on Nasr Street and on Midan Rabaa al-Adawiya

²⁵² Subsections of this chapter extend on contents that were first published in the journal 'Social Movement Studies' in a free-standing article with Prof. Cilja Harders (see Grimm and Harders 2018).

and Midan al-Nahda into ideational commodities that invigorated the Anti-Coup uprising in the face of repression and compensated for the defeating blows dealt by Egypt's interim authorities to the street movement.

Confirming previous findings (see Rogers 2011), especially the arbitrariness exhibited by those policing the Anti-Coup protests had a vigorously mobilising effect. This backlash was more complex than unidimensional backlash-models suggest, transcending binary notions of escalation vs de-escalation (a.o., Muller and Weede 1990; Opp and Roehl 1990; Francisco 1995; 1996; 2004; Regan and Norton 2005; Khawaja 1993). Moreover, it remained mostly peaceful as the NASL had made nonviolence a core component of its discourse on legitimacy. In this sense, the 'legitimacy' discourse that had been propagated by the coalition in the weeks before the massacre, effectively constrained radicalisation and a shift towards more violent repertoires of contention. At the same time, it also constrained potential alliance-building and forestalled public shows of solidarity by other political players when the Anti-Coup protesters were brutally on Rabaa and Al-Nahda Square.

7.1 The Making of a Massacre

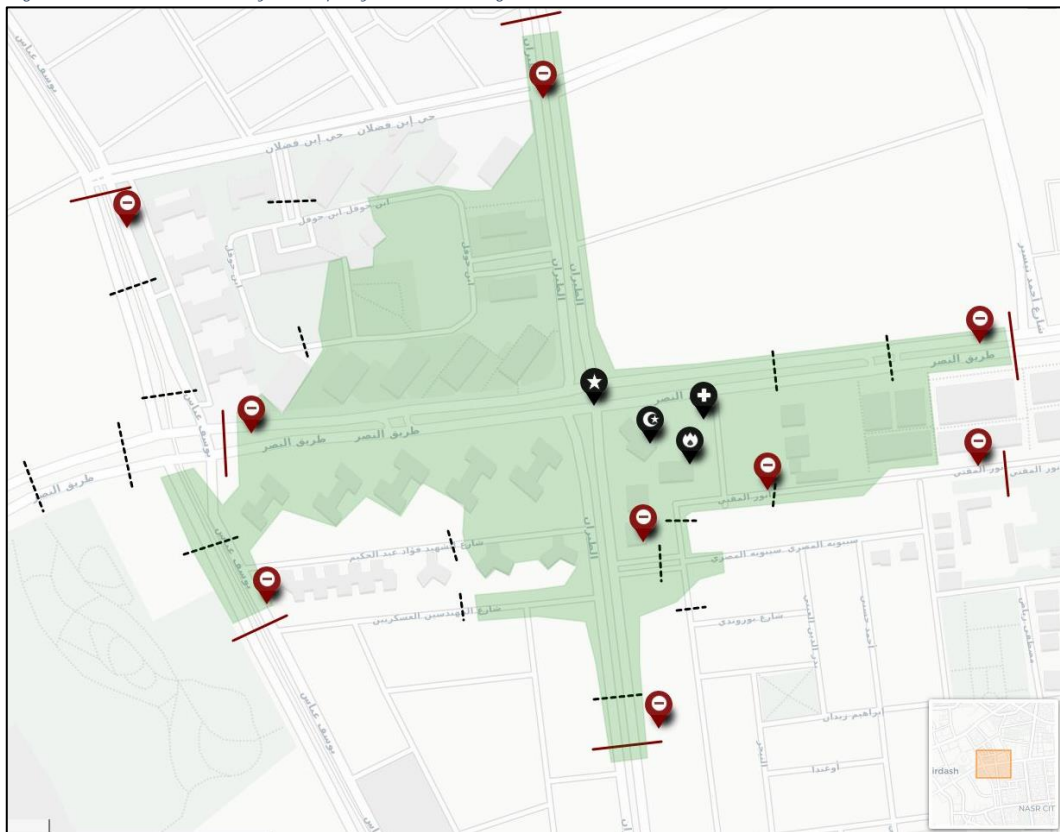
The mass killings of summer 2013 were the subject of three independent investigations by Human Rights Watch (2014), the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (2014) and the Egyptian rights-based organisation Nazra for Feminist Studies (2013). All three attribute the responsibility for the unprecedented death toll to the excessive violence deployed by the Central Security Forces (CSF) and armed forces against mostly unarmed demonstrators in a premeditated attack. The total body count of the raids and the ensuing street battles in Cairo, Alexandria and other provincial capitals stands at over 1,500 dead, and almost 7,000 injured, with an even higher estimated number of unreported cases (EIPR 2014, 65; Nazra for Feminist Studies 2013). In the area of the Rabaa-camp alone, at least 969 people were killed.²⁵³ In addition, tens of thousands were arrested. At the conclusion of the raids, so many people had been detained by police and army forces in the vicinity of Midan Rabaa that prisoners were temporarily rounded up at Cairo Stadium until space became available at the surrounding police stations (see

²⁵³ The Egyptian National Council of Human Rights and the official Egyptian Forensic Medical Authority indicate only 632 casualties (NCHR 2014a, 13). However, observers from independent human rights organisations note that this count excludes the figures from several morgues and hospitals which also registered victims in the aftermath of the massacre. Human Rights Watch (2014, 13) assumes a death toll far above 1,000 people for the clearing of Midan Rabaa alone. The NASL, by contrast, stated a death toll of 5,000, with 20,000 wounded. See <https://bit.ly/2LXcnui>.

Kingsley 2014a).

The catastrophic course of the raids was partly due to their timing and, relatedly, to the spatial makeup of the Rabaa and Al-Nahda protest camps by the time of the police incursion. It is apparent that security forces had reacted to the sit-ins far too late. By the time the squares were raided, they had been occupied for a total of 47 days. During this period, they had been constantly enlarged and fortified with makeshift barricades. Expanding its radius from the intersection of Al-Nasr Street and Al-Tayaran Street particularly the Rabaa-camp had come to include a large part of the neighbourhood. On the major commuter arteries and busy traffic junctions, six major entrances, each equipped with checkpoints, lead into the camp (Abdelbaseer 2016; Abdelbaseer, van Nes, and Salheen 2014).

Figure 19. Rabaa al-Adawiya camp layout on 13 August 2013



Source 19. Representation based on field notes. Map created with the help of uMap and OpenStreetMap data, map tiles by Carto DB, under CC BY 3.0. map data.²⁵⁴

The urban structure of the area made Midan Rabaa an ideal space of contention, easily accessible from all sides and significantly interrupting everyday work life

²⁵⁴ An interactive scalable version of the map is available at http://umap.openstreetmap.fr/en/map/rabaa_224774#16/30.0667/31.3241.

and traffic in Egypt's capital (see Figure 19).²⁵⁵ Unlike the Tahrir roundabout, Rabaa Square lies at an intersection which enabled seven major entrances (later on fortified checkpoints) to the protest camp: two on the opposing sides of Al-Nasr Street (the central Eastern and Western gates to the encampment), two on Al-Tayaran Street (the main Northern and Southern gates to the camp), as well as two additional peripheral gates on Yousef Abbas Street to the north and south of the sit and one on Anwar al-Mufti Street in the immediate vicinity of the Rabaa al-Adawiya Mosque.²⁵⁶ Over the weeks a considerable influx of protesters led to the expansion of the sit-in and adjacent tent encampments along these principal axes: to the East it expanded until the Tiba Mall at the intersection of Nasr and Ahmed Taysir Street; to the West barricades stretched on Nasr Street until the military parade grounds next to the Sadat memorial; to the North protesters established rows of tents on the platforms of Al-Tayaran Street until close to the Ministry of Defence building on the intersection with Hay Ibn Fadlan road; and to the South, the encampment came to encompass parts of Youssef Abbas Street (Figure 19, p.176).

CSF and army special forces began their simultaneous raids of the two camps, which lasted a total of 12 hours, in the morning hours of 14 August advancing from the eastern entrance to the square. As security forces closed in on protesters from several directions, the demonstrators found themselves unable to leave the area of the assault (NCHR 2014a, 5). **In his discussion of the camp's spatial architecture, Mohamed Abdelbaseer contends that the geospatial makeup of Rabaa Square effectively allowed authorities to isolate the protesters from the surrounding quarters with the help of army snipers deployed on top of neighbouring buildings, tanks blocking the thoroughways leading to the camp's main entrances and helicopters targeting entries to and exits from the square, creating a "no-go buffer zone around the sit-in"** (Abdelbaseer 2016). Only after establishing this perimeter, security forces moved against the camp with bulldozers to destroy the makeshift

²⁵⁵ For a contrasting view based primarily on the analysis of the spatial layout and urban permeability of the Rabaa neighbourhood see (Abdelbaseer, van Nes, and Salheen 2014)

²⁵⁶ The maps depicted in this study are based on my own notes from July and August 2013 as well as drawings by several interlocutors in the weeks after the massacres. This map was complemented with information from the diverse mapping projects. Several attempts have been made to comprehensively map the Rabaa sit-in, first by the Al Jazeera network (available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2013/08/201381462016326343.html>, last accessed 4 June 2018) and Human Rights Watch (available at http://features.hrw.org/features/Egypt_map_report_aug_12_2014/map.html), later also by the New York Times and several researcher teams (Abdelbaseer 2016; Abdelbaseer, van Nes, and Salheen 2014; Starn 2013). These maps partly contradict each other when it comes to the location of checkpoints and of individual buildings of interest (e.g., field hospitals, playgrounds, offices, etc.), but they agree on the major fortified entrances and the overall extension of the camp site.

barricades surrounding the Square.²⁵⁷

The authorities had issued a clearance order via public media, giving notice of the upcoming raids.²⁵⁸ In addition, helicopters had dropped flyers over the camp asking the protesters to leave the camps peacefully lest the army disperses them. However, they had not specified their schedule in order to prevent the Anti-Coup protesters from organising their defence. This lack of transparency precluded even unarmed participants from leaving the campsite before the assault. Met with strenuous resistance—mostly by stone-throwing demonstrators, but also by a number of hooded protesters armed with Molotov cocktails and guns—the CSF randomly opened fire on the protesters, condoning civilian casualties. The square, an open stage with little cover, offered no place to hide, and the urban layout in Rabaa al-Adawiya prohibited demonstrators from escaping safely. Hence unarmed protesters found themselves in the crossfire between militant protesters and advancing troops.²⁵⁹

Eyewitness testimonies compiled by human rights defenders and observers echo the statements released by the Muslim Brotherhood, according to which the security forces had operated an indiscriminate shoot-to-kill policy during their assault, had deployed snipers against civilians, and abstained from firing warning shots (EIPR 2014, 72; NCHR 2014a, 7; Nazra for Feminist Studies 2013, 2–4). **Many of the victims' bodies showed severe head, neck and thorax injuries and bullet holes from large calibre weapons** (EIPR 2014, 57; Human Rights Watch 2014, 124ff).

7.2 Myths and Martyrs

Prior research on violent events and massacres shows how their emotional impact can translate into symbolic moments that give meaning to social struggles. Della Porta has for instance shown through life cycle interviews how the 1969 fascist massacre in Piazza Fontana in Milan left a lasting mark on the collective memory of Italian leftists, sparked interest in and solidarity with ongoing militant mobili-

²⁵⁷ For a chronology of the operation see <https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2014/08/11/rabaa-mapping-massacre>.

²⁵⁸ See, for instance, RNN. August 1, 2013. 'Ministry of Interior calls for protesters to evacuate Rabaa and Al-Nahda Square [Arabic]'. <http://rassd.com/68305.htm>; RNN. August 3, 2013. 'The Mol renews its call for the Rabaa and Nahda campers to leave the sit-in [Arabic]'. <http://www.alqalahnews.net/post.php?id=48141>.

²⁵⁹ Compared to the total number of participants in the sit-ins, the number of weapons that were confiscated by police forces was relatively small. According to official statements by the Ministry of Interior, 55 Molotov cocktails, nine rifles and pistols, and around two dozen make-shift guns were found in Al-Nahda Square. In the much bigger Rabaa tent city only 15 hand guns were found (EIPR 2014, 64).

sation activities in the left and moved to the centre of leftist discourses: “The mobilisation after the massacre and the death of an anarchist, Pinelli, while being interrogated by police during the investigation represented very intense experiences for many activists. In death, comrades became heroes. Extreme emotions were aroused by the memory of the “April days’ of 1975,” (Della Porta 2014c, 173).

In a similar vein, *Rabaa* and its victims moved to the centre of the Anti-Coup discourse of resistance. Sharply contrasting their prior experiences of everyday life in the sit-ins, the massacres became a “collective biographical landmark” for the protest movement, as Thomas Demmelhuber (2014, 42) has called it. For many of those protesting on Rabaa and al-Nahda Square, the weeks of occupation had not only been a strategic tool but had effectively enabled the organisation of alternative and ideal-typical miniature societies. Particularly the Rabaa sit-in with its sophisticated internal logistics, functional differentiation, work-sharing, community activities and social support structures had a strong prefigurative character.²⁶⁰ According to Maria Maeckelbergh (2011, 4) prefigurative politics removes “the temporal distinction between the struggle in the present and a goal in the future; instead, the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present.”

In this sense, Midan Rabaa al-Adawiya and Al-Nahda had housed a utopian society “under construction” where people with different socio-economic, ideological, and demographic backgrounds met in collective resistance against the installation of a new “historical block” (Gramsci 1971, 161, 365–67) in the shape of the military-backed coup forces. Ahmad Shokr’s (2015) vivid descriptions of the identity-establishing communitarian dynamics on Tahrir, if complemented by a strong religious component, to a large part capture what the tent cities represented for most of the Anti-Coup supporters; over the course of 47 days, “the plaza had turned into a veritable polis, where people were bound together by more than a common political demand.” Certainly, the Anti-Coup camps neither harboured an equally pluralist cross-ideological coalition as Tahrir Square had during the Arab Spring. Nor did they give voice to the aspirations of as many different segments of Egyptian society. Instead, they were experienced by their participants as utopic spaces in their own right, where an idealised vision of society could be construed and lived that drew on Islamist discourses as much as the cultural stock of

²⁶⁰ The glorifying accounts of the Rabaa sit-in provided by several of my research participants effectively echo those of many liberal activists recalling the ‘18 days of Tahrir’ (see Telmissany 2014, 40ff). Accordingly, Rabaa had represented an egalitarian utopia, cutting across classes, age groups and organisational boundaries. Moreover, several interlocutors describe their time at the sit-ins as a unique personal experience that effectively changed their understanding of solidarity and a meaningful life. Other analysts have reported similar conversations with participants of the NASL sit-ins (e.g., Holmes 2013).

the 2011 camps.

Against conventional wisdom, the sit-ins were not only populated by rank and file Muslim Brothers and their families. Albeit shunned by liberal and secular activists—some of whom were, in principle, sympathetic the rights of the Mursi supporters to freely voice their political opinion but did not join the sit-ins, **because they disagreed with the protesters' goals**—the tent cities were nonetheless run by a variegated alliances of Egyptians from all walks of life (Ketchley and Biggs 2015; Holmes 2013). In a sense, the camp was not so much pro-Brotherhood as it was Anti-Coup. Several conversations with participants of the Anti-Coup campaign revealed the presence of two major camps within each camp on Rabaa and Al-Nahda Square. The first encompassed actual supporters of deposed President Mursi and therefore by definition Anti-Coup. By contrast, the second comprised citizens who were, above all, opposed to the way Mursi was removed from office, but not necessarily pro-Mursi – including some who even shared the conviction that the former President should have stepped down or be removed from office through impeachment as described in the constitution. This bifurcation of motivations for being Anti-Coup represents a major difference to the 30 June protest coalition, whose major factions Tamarod and the NSF both welcomed military intervention as a way to not only depose the president but also repeal a disliked constitution.

The Muslim Brotherhood members and Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) functionaries played a leading role in most of the committees on the square and were crucially involved in the logistical efforts necessary for the smooth functioning of this utopian social order including the provision of basic necessities and the organisations of security. But among the NASL grassroots, the MB activists only made up between a quarter to a third, as several interviewees estimate.²⁶¹ Most participants of the sit-in were not formal members of either organisation. Moreover, an investigating the socioeconomic profiles of those who were killed during the Rabaa dispersal, Neil Ketchley and Michael Biggs (2015) showed that the Rabaa-protesters came from more than **half of the country's districts, with many** protesters coming particularly from the more prosperous and urbanised parts of the country.

²⁶¹ It certainly fit the Muslim Brotherhood's propaganda to portray the Rabaa sit-in as a horizontally organised, democratic and diverse community, as this narrative blurred the de facto hierarchies between Ikhwan and non-Ikhwan among the camp's members. However, several of my interlocutors who took part in the camp have also stressed the variegated nature of the Rabaa protests. Some of them highlighting that they personally knew hardly any Brotherhood members on Midan Rabaa. Several eye witnesses who toured the camp site in the days before the clearing have come to similar conclusions (Holmes 2013; Bedier 2014).

For weeks, Midan Rabaa and Al-Nahda thus became “social laboratories” (Van de Sande 2015, 190; 2013) where the variegated forces allied in the NASL negotiated, tested and shaped their new ideal political community. From the political debates on the Rabaa-podium to the mundane acts, such as cleaning the streets, re-painting the surrounding walls, distributing food, or organising the night shifts, the everyday practices of collectively sustaining an alternative order to that of the post-coup state provided moments of inspiration for the formation of a strong collective identity that overran the categorical political distinctions between the movements aligned in the NASL.

On 14 August, however, this “effervescent community” (Khosrokhavar 2018, 166) was abruptly shattered. The Anti-Coup movement’s coherence, however, endured. In fact, the collective experience of brutal state violence endowed further sense and identity to the protesters’ subsequent struggle: Framed by the coalition as a “crime against humanity in the holy month of Ramadan,”²⁶² the massacres became the central theme for the Anti-Coup campaign, dominating the alliance’s imagery and collective action frames in the second half of the examined timeframe.²⁶³ The dispersals provided a moral shock to protesters that transcended the geographical boundaries of the raided squares (cf. Jasper and Poulsen 1995). Similar to Guantanamo or Abu Ghraib becoming symbols for the ubiquitous violations of human rights in the name of the global war on terror, the *Rabaa al-Adawiya* and *Al-Nahda* massacres became symbols for the Egyptian authorities’ disdain for civil opposition, civic rights and a peaceful solution of the political conflict. Resonating strongly with universalised norms of human dignity and civil rights, the massacre quickly turned into a transnational symbol for state abuse of repressive powers.

7.2.1 A Symbol of Outrage

The moral outrage generated by the mass killings became encapsulated in a four-fingered hand gesture, made by raising four fingers with the thumb resting on the palm, the *Rabaa*-salute (Figure 20, p. 182). The *Rabaa al-Adawiya* square is named after the 8th-century Muslim saint Rabia Al-Adawiya, whose forename Rabia (رابعة) in Arabic means fourth, hence the four-fingered hand gesture. Before the massacre, the gesture was used by Cairo’s microbus drivers to let commuters

²⁶² NASL. 14 August 2013. ‘Regarding the great massacre which was committed in the dissolution of the two peaceful sit-ins of Rabaa al-Adawiya and Nahda Square [Arabic]’. <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/292355837573453>.

²⁶³ As Perlmutter (2013) notes, the critical juncture of *Rabaa* and all of its corresponding actors, figures, imagery and symbols were virtually “endowed with supernatural qualities.”

know where they were heading. After 14 August, its meaning expanded to include not only a location but also a collective that was being victimised. The corresponding graphic sign comprised a black right hand with four fingers raised and thumb folded on a yellow background over the capital letters *R4BIA*, *Rabaa*, or less common *Rabi3a* (see Figure 20).

Figure 20. The Rabaa-salute



Source 20. Wikimedia Commons, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabia_sign

A dedicated website, set up by sympathisers of the Anti-Coup campaign shortly after the massacre (Anadolu Agency 2013), described the sign's meaning as follows:

R4BIA is a symbol of freedom; R4BIA is the birth of a new movement for freedom and justice; R4BIA is the birth of a new world; R4BIA is the return of Muslims to world stage; R4BIA means justice, freedom and conscience; R4BIA is the place where the so-called values of the West collapsed; R4BIA means the Egyptian heroes who became free by dying; R4BIA is Egypt, Syria, Palestine and the whole geography of Islam; R4BIA is the name of those who wake all the Islamic world with their death; R4BIA is the place of people who show the death is a revival; R4BIA is our daughter Asma;²⁶⁴ R4BIA is the grandchildren of Hasan Al Banna;²⁶⁵ R4BIA is the new name of our children who will change the world; R4BIA is a new breath to humanity; R4BIA is justice for everyone against rotten Western values; R4BIA is the soul of a free man and a free woman; R4BIA is the tear, the sadness, the sobbing; R4BIA is the joy, the happiness, the good news; R4BIA is the child, the woman, the young, the old; R4BIA is a man like a man; R4BIA is straight as an Aleef, humble as Waw;²⁶⁶ R4BIA is a pure martyrdom; R4BIA is a new world; R4BIA is Ummah; R4BIA is solidarity, togetherness, brother-

²⁶⁴ Reference to Brotherhood leader Mohammed al-Beltagy's daughter Asma who was killed on Midan Rabaa

²⁶⁵ Reference to Hasan Al-Banna, the founder and spiritual father of the Muslim Brotherhood, born in 1906 and assassinated by the Egyptian secret police in 1949.

²⁶⁶ The first and 27th letters of the Arabic alphabet, respectively.

hood; R4BIA is unification of Islamic World; R4BIA is the shame of the accomplice of the massacres; R4BIA is the end of munafiqeen [hypocrites] who support the massacres; R4BIA is the end of oil sheikhs; R4BIA is the end of capitalists; R4BIA is the end of Zionists; R4BIA is the end of immoral press; RABIA is the arena of martyrdom; R4BIA is the mother of martyrs; R4BIA is a smiling martyrdom.²⁶⁷

The NASL protesters did not necessarily share all of these meanings. In fact, the website administrators remained anonymous until years after and admitted on their site that their answers to the question ‘what is R4BIA?’ was a compilation of interpretations by Muslims across the world.²⁶⁸ However, in many ways, their statement exemplifies the affective power that the R4BIA salute carried, as an empty signifier that could be filled with different meanings by the diverse sympathisers of the NASL, in Egypt and abroad.

Accordingly, the R4BIA sign quickly turned into a powerful mobilising symbol, as it could be associated with both, a religious imaginary and the now globalised symbolism of civil rights movements: on the one hand, its colours black and yellow referenced the colours of the holy sites of Islam, the golden dome of the *Qubbat as-Sakhrah* [Dome of Rock] shrine in Jerusalem and the black cloth covering the *Kaaba* in Mecca (Eren 2017; Hamama 2016a), making it possible to perceive the sign as a marker of the Anti-Coup Alliance’s Islamic identity. On the other hand, they also resonated well with the visual language of international humanitarian or civil rights campaigns. For instance, Amnesty International, Black Lives Matter or the Human Rights Campaign all employ a contrasting black stencil on yellow canvas as campaign logos to convey a sense of urgency and alarm for their goals. This similarity helped the Anti-Coup campaign surpass linguistic and cultural barriers. As a powerful visual image in the age of social media (Richter 2017), the stylised R4BIA salute thus went viral quickly.²⁶⁹

Beyond Egypt’s borders, the sign was adopted by solidarity groups across the region and Europe, and by a range of prominent critics of the Al-Sisi regime. This

²⁶⁷ The website www.r4abia.com is offline by now, however, the author’s archive contains a record of the R4BIA statement. The statement is furthermore available on different blogs and webpages, albeit sometimes in a slightly different form (see Martijn de Koning 2013; see also Expat Cairo 2013; Perlmutter 2013). For screenshots of the main site see: https://www.scribd.com/document/391661280/R4bia-com-Screenshots?secret_password=WzBd0mYChQp1qX6hbOqZ.

²⁶⁸ Several reports place the Rabaa sign’s origin in Turkey, portraying the graphic designers Saliha Eren and Cihat Döleş as the creators of the sign (Eren 2017; Hamama 2016b). For a video reportage on the creation story see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ex_kztHc8S4. In the immediate aftermath of the massacre, the two designers and several exiled Brotherhood activists furthermore created another website from abroad to report about the violent events in the absence of independent news channels to report from the site in Egypt.

²⁶⁹ RNN. August 18, 2013. ‘The ‘Rabaa’ victory sign spreads on “Face” pages after Erdogan’s speech [Arabic]’. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/69752.htm>.

includes prominent Western politicians (e.g., Hamad 2018), as well as self-declared spokesperson of political Islam: In the Turkish context, the sign gained particular popularity in the months after the *Rabaa* massacre, as it was adopted by then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan during his speeches and public rallies (Tharoor 2016). After vocally condemning the coupist massacres in Cairo and offering asylum to persecuted members of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) gradually assumed ownership over the *Rabaa*-symbol in the following years. Especially since the failed military coup attempt in Turkey on 15 July 2016, the *Rabaa*-salute was uncoupled from its Egyptian origin. As a now established symbol of civic resistance against military rule, the four-fingered salute could be quickly adapted to the Turkish context. Given its origins, the salute furthermore represented a powerful Islamic alternative to the ‘grey wolf’-salute of the ultra-nationalist Turkish ‘Bozkurtlar’ which, in its original meaning, is devoid of any religious references (Hürriyet Daily News 2017). Turkey’s ruling party AKP thus developed the *Rabaa* sign into its own trademark: In Article 4 of its bylaws, the four fingers now signify AKP’s newly adopted 4 principles of “one homeland; one state; one flag; one nation” (Birgün Daily 2017).

In Egypt too, the R4BIA symbol did not remain confined to its representative function. Instead, the symbol enabled different communities to generate and attach it with its own meaning. It thereby developed into both, an object of contestation and into a unifying symbol. The salute’s “codes of connotation,” as Barthes (1993) has referred to the rhetoric’s of images, were understood radically different, by different communities. On the one hand, Anti-Coup demonstrators all over the country soon replaced Mohammed Mursi’s picture with placards showing the R4BIA emblem (Werbner, Webb, and Spellman-Poots 2014, 22). As a powerful “condensing symbol” (Jasper and Poulsen 1995, 498) this symbol encapsulated the essence of what *Rabaa* meant to the Anti-Coup Alliance. First, one of my interlocutors in Istanbul told me, the *Rabaa*-sign directly referred to deposed President Mursi who had been the fourth Republican President of Egypt, following Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat and Husni Mubarak in the presidential office.²⁷⁰

What is more, the R4bia salute’s similarity with the victory sign connoted the movement’s determination to continue demonstrating until reaching its goal, while also visibly setting the Anti-Coup protesters apart from those mobilised by Tamarod on Tahrir Square who had welcomed the deposition of President Mursi

²⁷⁰ Interview with member of the NASL, Berlin/Cairo, June 2014, via Skype.

on 30 June 2013 with the V-sign. Conveniently, the Sufi saint Rabaa al-Adawiya is in Egypt often associated with steadfastness and the ongoing struggle for freedom through faith. Announced to her father in a vision, Rabaa was born in 715 in Basra. After a youth in poverty and the death of her father, she endured a life of suffering, hardship and slavery only due to her strong faith. As the legend goes, this very piety ultimately prompted her master to set her free (Salbi 2013). The parable of the Sufi saint was embodied by the Anti-Coup protesters who saw it as the perfect allegory for their own struggle against the coup. Particularly Brotherhood members, having experienced years of repression and persecution prior to the **movement's legalisation in the wake of the Arab Spring**, could relate to Rabaa's story and found consolation in the notion of success through endurance and piety.

Most importantly, the R4bia salute conveyed emotional solidarity with those massacred on Rabaa Square. As several research participants in mid-2013 noted, the Anti-Coup protesters wore the sign on their T-Shirts and posters in order to **pay their respects to the massacre's martyrs collectively and without singling out** or heroising individual protesters for their role on the square.²⁷¹ Given the multifaceted meaning of the R4BIA emblem, these banners themselves turned into an *articulation* of the demands and desires of the Anti-Coup movement **reconstructing the movement's collective identity** vis-à-vis their external other. Protest signs usually articulate the individual demands of their carriers. The mass resort to the R4BIA sign by protesters, by contrast, reflected their **"conscious participation in a specific culture of resistance"** (Gribbon and Hawas 2012, 104). Just as the Tahrir protesters had unremittingly reproduced the iconic *'aish, hurriya, karama insaniya'* [**bread, freedom, human dignity**] in 2011 making a **"distinct and categorical connection between the police state and their decades-long economic dispossession"** (Gribbon and Hawas 2012, 112), NASL protesters now resorted to the *Rabaa*-salute as a powerful means of relating to one another while also challenging the dominant narratives about what had happened on the square. As such, the signs encapsulated and conveyed different emotional layers that resonated **with the movement's narrative of Rabaa** and included grief and sorrow, pride about the steadfastness and resilience of protesters against brutal state oppression, **anger and outrage about the regime's boldness and brutality, and a desire for retribution.**

Unsurprisingly, for those who supported the securitising narrative that portrayed the NASL as a terrorist entity, the self-referential nature of the *Rabaa*-salute

²⁷¹ Interview with Anti-Coup protest organiser in the Mohandessin district, November 2013, via Skype.

was taken as evidence for the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies were disassociating from the Egyptian public sphere. The veneration of the *Rabaa* martyrs by the Islamist movement and corresponding slogans such as “RABIA is the arena of martyrdom, R4BIA is the mother of martyrs, R4BIA is a smiling martyrdom” on the *r4abia.com* website aggravated their fears of radicalisation and adoption of jihadist positions among the protesters. Others, by contrast, claimed that the movement was capitalising on the bloodshed of Egyptians which they ultimately were themselves responsible for. Notably, both groups took to social media to respond to the four-fingered salute, creating counter-symbols that played with the R4BIA theme and either showed support with General Sisi or turned the symbol of solidarity into a joke (see El-Shenawi 2013; Shata 2013; G. Ibrahim 2013).

Figure 21. R4BIA Counter-symbols



Source 21. Facebook, Twitter.

Among the most prominent symbols shared on Facebook and Twitter was an edited four-fingered hand whose fingertips ended in Kalashnikov rifles (see Figure 21, p. 186). Stamped ironically with the Arabic term *silmiya* (peacefulness), it meant to highlight the hypocrisy of the Anti-Coup protesters who claimed to engage in a peaceful struggle but, during the clearance of their camps, had resorted to automatic firearms to defend Rabaa Square. In a similar sarcastic image, a black standard bearing the *shahada* [testimony of Islamic faith]—as used by various Jihadi organisations since the late 1990s—was attached to the brandished fingers, indicating the alleged support of the Anti-Coup Alliance for radical Salafi ideolo-

gies and the continuity between members of the Alliance and terrorist groups. Other popular images in support of the security forces' operation showed the crest of Egypt's armed forces, stencils of its military commander Al-Sisi, or two hands curved in the form of two "C" shapes, referencing a popular abbreviation for the General's name given the letters' similar English pronunciation (Cee-cee). For yet other Anti-Coup opponents, the R4BIA sign became merely a source of ridicule as they played with its theme creating yellow signs with all sorts of black stencils—including obscene hand gestures and cut-outs mocking the protesters or Islamists' piety more generally.²⁷²

Aside from this symbolic support for the armed forces' conduct on Rabaa Square, also Salafi groups distinguished themselves from the Anti-Coup Alliance by re-appropriating its salute. Their edited version, however, brandished only the index-finger in a *tawhid* (the indivisible oneness of God). As Martijn De Koning (2013) has argued, for some of these groups the original R4BIA sign represented idolatry and *bid'ah* (innovation), because it did not originate in Islamic tradition and divided the Islamic ummah. The Rabaa sign thus became a symbolic marker "of the boundary between insiders and outsiders creating both difference and similarity on different sides of the boundary but also across the boundary" (Martijn de Koning 2013). Through this process of symbolic differentiation and collective self-assertion, *Rabaa* provided a mythical closure to the hitherto still relatively open subjectivation processes that had been set in motion with the 3 July coup within the Anti-Coup Alliance. As all attempts by the regime to hold the movement in check by criminalising the *R4BIA* sign failed (Shamni 2013),²⁷³ *Rabaa* developed into the central signifier in the Anti-Coup discourses about resistance, providing unity and irrevocably demarcating the frontier between coup and Anti-Coup.

7.2.2 *The Rabaa Martyrs*

Redemption for the souls of the 'Rabaa martyrs' as a central motive for the Anti Coup protests that dislodged even the restitution of President Mursi from the list of primary objectives. Not only did the presence of posters and banners com-

²⁷² Some of the most prominent parodies of the Rabaa-salute are collected at: https://www.facebook.com/pg/Contemporaryarts1/photos/?tab=album&album_id=399166366833464.

²⁷³ From December onwards, those flashing the Rabaa-salute were charged under Article 86 of the Penal Code. The article regulated the designation of political groups as terrorist entities. After the designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation in December 2013, displaying the R4BIA sign was taken as evidence for belonging to the criminalised group and charged with up to 5 years imprisonment. See Hamid, Walaa. 2013. '5 years imprisonment for the authors of the Rabaa sign on 'Facebook'. Rights Groups: a political decision [Arabic]. *Al-Shorouq*. December 27, 2013. <https://bit.ly/2LWw6Kv>.

memorating the victims of state repression become a prominent phenomenon at Anti-Coup marches, but the slain supporters of President Mursi were bestowed with almost sacred status. Perlmutter (2013) has aptly described the mythical qualities of the *Rabaa* massacre: “A new Islamist legend was born out of the blood of Egyptian protesters. It would not be surprising if pilgrimages to Rabia al-Adawiya Mosque to commemorate the new martyrs occur each year on the anniversary of the violence.” **This sacralisation of protest was difficult for the regime to oppose.**

Even before the *Rabaa* events, the commemoration of martyrs was a central part of the NASL’s resistance myth. A so-called ‘Panorama Tent’ at the *Rabaa al-Adawiya* sit-in had displayed the portraits of fallen members of the movement. Centrally located at the intersection of Youssef Abbas and Al-Nasser Road in front of a *Mobil* gas station, its walls were covered with photographs of killed protesters. Tables within the tent showcased some of their possessions for visitors, and LCD televisions were screening documentaries and video snippets of prior massacres. This prominent representation of killed protesters served the strategic aim of the NASL to extend the Anti-Coup coalition across ideological divides. After all, it showed how ordinary Egyptian citizens including women and youth were selflessly sacrificing their lives vis-à-vis security forces and thus evoked collective memories of popular resilience against state violence during the 25 January uprising. Before *Rabaa*, however, the rendering of killed protesters as martyrs served, above all, tactical purpose: For instance, after the Republican Guard killings, the NASL had unsuccessfully tried to liken the killing of Anti-Coup protesters to the suffering and death of Khaled Said at the hands of police officers in late 2010;²⁷⁴ as this revolutionary frame failed to inspire sympathies, it had then resorted to a more religious framing of the Republican Guard victims by stressing how they had been killed insidiously during the act of prayer. These framings, albeit unsuccessful in mobilising popular support, had been primarily strategic attempts to evoke **solidarity with the movement’s cause among the Egyptian masses.** After *Rabaa*, by contrast, martyrdom turned into a central theme of Anti-Coup collective identity, representing “a rhetorical call” (Peterson 2015b) to the living members of the movement to change the context in which the martyrs’ death had occurred through ongoing resistance.

The notion of martyrdom plays a crucial role in most social movements, as do their visual depictions (see Askanius 2013). The articulation of victims as martyrs

²⁷⁴ RNN. 11 July 2013. “We are all Khaled Said’ ... a page damaged by the love for the ‘military’ [Arabic]”. *Rassd News Network*. <http://rassd.com/66681.htm>.

invests their slain bodies with meaning, their depiction as martyrs, in turn, indexes the circumstances of their death and, thereby, symptomatically points to the greater injustice that their respective movement seeks to encounter. On the one hand, martyrs give movement audiences with a powerful interpretive frame by **providing clear points of condensation to identify friends and foes**: “By defining martyrdom as any death delivered at the hand of the oppressor, the nation’s collectivity is reaffirmed *vis-à-vis* [*Italics i.o.*] **the oppressor**” (Khalili 2009, 141). Martyrs can thereby serve as the foundation or reinforce the boundaries of what Asef Bayat, with a view to Islamist social movements, **has referred to as “imagined solidarities”** (Bayat 2005, 891). On the other hand, the martyrs of a movement become symbols of their experienced injustice and thus multipliers of the movement’s *raison d’être*. Both the original Greek term *martyrios* and the Arabic term *shahid*, in their literal signification, mean ‘witness’. In an abstract sense, the martyr who suffers testifies to the truth of the cause by virtue of her suffering. As Kristin Luker (2009, 157) writes:

Social movements get an enormous boost from martyrs who give their lives for the cause. They testify to the importance of the issue, as important to them as life itself. Plus, they demonstrate how viciously repressive and brutal the other side, or the police, are. Death raises deep emotions and forces people to ask what their deepest values are, what they might consider dying for.

In this sense, Khaled Said, the young Alexandrian who was brutally beaten to death in police custody and then framed as a drug dealer in June 2010, was not only one of the sparks of the 2011 uprising in Egypt, but also one of its first martyrs (Halverson, Ruston, and Trethewey 2013, 318 ff; see also A. Ali and El-Sharnouby 2014; Mittermaier 2015; Olesen 2013).²⁷⁵ In juxtaposition to the security state’s moral corruption, **Said’s innocence elevated him to the status of a martyr**. Likewise, Muhammad Bouazizi, a street vendor whose self-immolation triggered the 2010 uprising in Tunisia, has been discussed as the first martyr of the ‘Arab Spring’, despite the unpolitical nature of his suicide (Di Donato 2012; Halverson, Ruston, and Trethewey 2013).

In the Egyptian context, the theme of martyrdom constitutes today one of the few “**fil rouge**” (Di Donato 2012, 2) that continues to connect the Arab uprisings to religion.²⁷⁶ On the one hand, the idea of martyrdom has deep historical roots within Islamic dogma (see D. Cook 2007). Notably, the three radicals that make

²⁷⁵ Hence it is no coincidence that URL ‘<https://www.facebook.com/elshaheed.co.uk/>’ of the renowned “We Are All Khaled Saeed” page on Facebook page contains the Arabic word *Shaheed* [martyr].

²⁷⁶ For a discussion of the historical emergence of martyr narratives in North Africa see Halverson et al. (2013, 322ff).

up the Arabic term *shahid* (martyr) are also at the base of the word *shahada*, the Islamic testimony of faith. Albeit appearing only once in the Qur'an in its political meaning, the term *shahid* frequently appears in the Hadith literature, often in relation to the discussion of *jihad* (see Afsaruddin 2016; D. Cook 2012). An ample research tradition has thus developed around the exploration of the martyr theme in jihadist ideology and the political practices of radical Islamic movements, both Shia and Sunni and including HAMAS, Hizbullah or the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (a.o., D. Cook 2002; Euben 2002; Litvak 2010; Moghadam 2014).²⁷⁷ Beyond their role as summary symbols for injustices, martyrs assume an additional purifying role for many of these movements. Here the term not only designates the death for a political cause, but it furthermore refers to pious individuals who, in dying for a religious cause, transfer their moral qualities to the entire group of believers.

On the other hand, in Egypt especially, the martyr narrative has diffused from a traditionally religious context with its associated identities into the nationalist terrain, extending what Walter Armbrust (2015, 89) has referred to as the “martyr-scape” in Egypt. The anti-colonial struggle for national independence as well as decades of armed struggle with Israel over Sinai, including several devastating defeats at the hands of the “Zionist enemy,” effectively catalysed a nationalist appropriation of the longstanding religiously embedded martyrdom narrative. In the propaganda of Egypt’s republican regimes, the martyrdom image, above all, assumed the distinctive image of the *shahid al-harb* [martyr of the war]. The theme of martyrdom perfectly embodied the military’s ideal of heroism in the face of the enemy, as well as the perception of death in the service of the nation as the ultimate patriotic duty.²⁷⁸ Moreover, the veneration of national martyrs made the abstract national struggle for territorial sovereignty graspable and tangible for civilian citizens. As Dalia Mostafa has stressed (2016, 56), “it is through the martyr’s image that the people and the army are united in grief for the wounded nation.” Informed by the nationalist identity formation processes that informed political projects throughout the MENA region in the mid-1950s, the divine promise of a

²⁷⁷ In fact, with a view to the Muslim Brotherhood, the slogan “Allah is our goal; the Prophet is our leader; the Quran is our constitution; Jihad is our way; dying in the way of Allah is our highest aspiration” – repeatedly cited by President Mursi during his election campaign and reportedly also at his election speech before Cairo University students (Lutz 2012) – is often credited to be the founding motto of the group.

²⁷⁸ It is noteworthy that until today, Egyptians celebrate a national ‘Day of the Martyr’ on 9 March to commemorate the death of military commander in chief Abdel Moneim Riyad during the 1969s war. Also 25 January, the national Police Day turned into an official holiday by Mubarak in 2009, originally marked not a revolution but the massacre of an Ismailiyah police unit in Ismaili by British colonial troops in 1952 (see Thornhill 2006, 56).

better tomorrow, that is, individual recompense and elevation of the martyrs in the afterlife, thereby turned into the promise of a better today for Egyptians. This image worked successfully in the service of the incumbent forces and their aspirational identities because it prepared citizens for sacrifice and self-abandonment for the greater weal.

The trope of sacrifice for the nation met its limits in early 2011, when Egyptian youth visibly refused to accept any more indignation in the name of patriotism and when Mubarak's claims to "military honour, allegiance and sacrifice," in his last speech, were met with dismay and crowds waving the bottoms of their shoes in a gesture of disgust (Shadid and Kirkpatrick 2011).²⁷⁹ By contrast, the martyrdom theme survived and even invigorated the uprising, illustrating how the image of the martyr has turned into an ideational commodity that different groups instrumentalise to garner support and legitimacy for their causes (Gribbon 2013).²⁸⁰ Social movements resorted to the martyrdom theme in order to link their grievances to those of other oppositional groups and assert the steadfastness of their mobilisation in the face of violence and repression. As could be observed during the 18 days of Tahrir, the notion of death for a political cause continuously found its expression in the theme of martyrdom (see Armbrust 2015; 2013; Gribbon 2013; Halverson, Ruston, and Trethewey 2013; Mittermaier 2015; Zakarevičiūtė 2015). Some of these enactments of the martyr theme notably drew on a religious archive: As Ramzy (2015, 649) notes, for instance, in January 2011, Coptic protestors arrived at Tahrir Square with stickers reading "a martyr is available here" to indicate their readiness to die for the revolution. Other religiously inspired performances of martyrdom on Tahrir Square included protestors wearing the *kafan*, a white Islamic burial shroud (Gribbon and Hawas 2012, 110, 112), as well as graffiti and commemorative "living martyr" (Halverson, Ruston, and Trethewey 2013, 326) photographs of fallen protestors which, in their visual arrangement, resembled the well-known iconography of armed Islamic resistance movements in Palestine.

Mostly, however, the revolutionaries adopting the martyr theme keenly avoided any frame that could contribute to sectarian divides and built on a nationalist archive instead. For instance, the systematic commemorations of the vic-

²⁷⁹ For a translated transcript of the speech see <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12427091>.

²⁸⁰ Walter Armbrust (2015) has noted the irony of this historical twist. After all, 25 January 2011, the day of the first mass protests against Husni Mubarak, marks the remembrance of another group of martyrs as well. Egypt's National Police Day, declared by Husni Mubarak in 2009 and intentionally chosen for the first Tahrir protests, commemorates 50 police officers of the Ismailia police station killed over their insubordination by British troops during the anti-colonial struggle on 25 January 1952.

tims from the ‘Battle of the Camel’ or from the deadly clashes on Mohamed Mahmoud Street in photographs and graffiti were devoid of all religious references, enabling identification and commemoration across ideological cleavages. Also the altered portraits of protesters killed during the ‘18 days of Tahrir’ on the Mohamed Mahmoud wall (Abaza 2016, 116; Telmissany 2014, 44), which achieved global fame alongside spectacular revolutionary wall art long after the first appearance of martyr graffiti in downtown Cairo (Armbrust 2015, 88), mainly drew on pharaonic imagery, emphasising a unifying nationalist frame beyond confessional divides. Building on a common foundation, they are among the most powerful tributes to the 25 January Revolution and influenced the discourses, imagery and protest performances of subsequent protest campaigns (e.g., ‘No to Military Trials’, or the mass protests against the rule of the SCAF) facilitating cross-ideological alliance building. Even the Coptic movements in 2012 resorted to commemorating the martyrs of the ‘Maspero Massacre’—a deadly crackdown of army units on Coptic demonstrators in Cairo on 9 October 2011—by reviving ancient Egyptian themes (El Gendi 2017, 47f). In the aftermath of the massacre, commemorative protest marches employed Christian symbols, such as makeshift crosses and pictures of Christ, but also extended their martyr frame in an attempt to collectivise the outrage over repression to other segments of society. Through nationalist performances, the Coptic community aimed, on the one hand, at reasserting its national identity as Egyptians and thus countering the state media’s vilification of the demonstrators. On the other, they aimed at linking their grievances to those of other oppositional groups and building a foundation for cross-ideological alliance building.

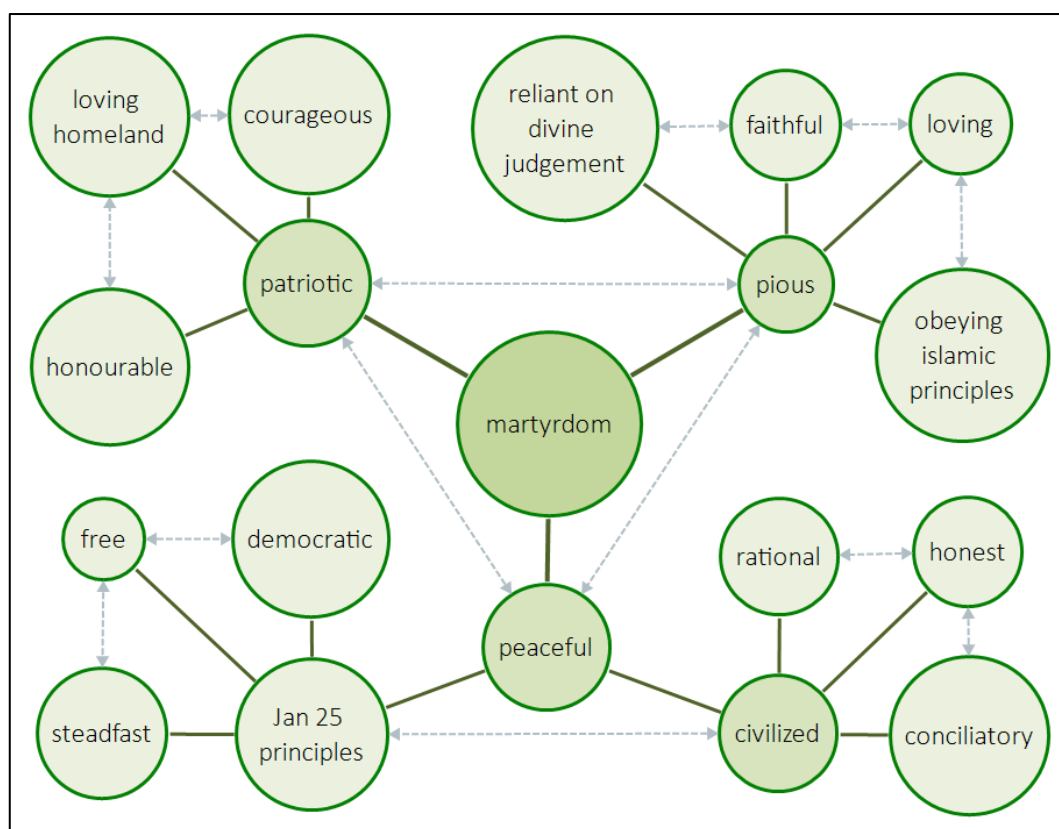
The common denominator of these different adoptions of the martyrdom signifier across the ideological spectrum is the theme of death at the hand of the enemy—a theme that catalyses political subjectivation processes by reinforcing the antagonist boundaries of the community. What Laleh Khalili has noted for the context of Palestine can furthermore be transferred to the Egyptian context as well: “Islamists and secularists emphasise the act of injustice which results in martyrdom, such that any activity of the oppressor or enemy which results in the death [...] transforms that potential senseless death into a redemptive self-sacrifice for the nation” (Khalili 2009, 140).

7.2.3 *Evidence of Moral Superiority*

Given the strong roots of the martyrdom theme in Egyptian collective memory, the NASL drew on Islamic, nationalist and revolutionary discourses in its framing of the martyr signifier. In the alliance’s self-perception, the rendering of killed

protestors as martyrs added a transcendental element to its protest, which elevated it to a morally and spiritually superior struggle above mere factional politics. The systematic integration of the *Rabaa* martyrs into the imagery of the Anti-Coup movement, with the online R4BIA platform, several social media sites and a dedicated magazine *Sawt al-Shahid* [Voice of the Martyr]²⁸¹ collecting pictures and stories about the massacre as a sort of “virtual reliquary” (Halverson, Ruston, and Trethewey 2013, 320), had a galvanising effect on the protest alliance. This was recently confirmed by Bigg’s and Ketchley’s online survey, according to which the solidarity with victims of earlier protests was one of the most significant sources of inspiration and motivation for Anti-Coup-demonstrators (see Ketchley and Biggs 2014). More than 90 per cent of respondents indicated that a close friend or acquaintance had been arrested since the military coup and almost 75 per cent personally knew one of the fatalities of the protests.

Figure 22. Motivational frame, articulation of the collective subject



Source 22. Semantic network created with the help of XMind 8 based on coding in MAXQDA 13.

With each fallen protester that could be elevated from its individualised mortal

²⁸¹ The magazine was distributed in print at rallies and online as a PDF-file via the now closed website www.shahidmasr.com. A copy of the magazine’s first edition is available at <https://de.scribd.com/document/158718621/Shahid-Mag-Issue1>.

existence into an embodiment of the movement's values and aims, the discursive structure defining the external frontier between the Anti-Coup Alliance and its foes was fortified. In this sense, *Rabaa* represented a physical, but not an ideational defeat. Albeit brutal in their effect on the logistic capacities of the movement, for the Anti-Coup Alliance, the gruesome massacres also revealed the protesters' moral superiority to the coup forces. This perceived moral superiority, which set the movement apart from the coupists, manifested in the Anti-Coup discourses as a triad of patriotism, religious piety and principled peacefulness (see Figure 22, p. 193). This tripod effectively was a mirror image of how the alliance portrayed the coup forces (see Figure 23, p. 198) whose moral decay, according to the NASL, was evidenced by the gruesome events of Rabaa. During the clearing, the coup forces' brutality had reached "inhuman" proportions:

They burnt peaceful protesters' tents as women and children sought shelter inside from the effect of teargas, thus causing them horrific burns and excruciatingly painful injuries. Meanwhile, security apparatus sniper-fire targeted journalists, photographers and reporters, as well as unarmed civilian [...]. Even worse, the putschists' forces prevented ambulances from taking badly injured citizens to nearby hospitals, after the field hospital was unable to cope with this enormous number of casualties.²⁸²

While the massacre of *Rabaa* was still unfolding, the NASL already declared that, in contrast to the coup forces' conduct, its own approach was and would remain a non-violent one; and that the alliance would not be drawn into the spiral of violence, in spite of the brutal and heinous attacks. Drawing on the debatable historical myth of the 25 January Revolution as a mainly peaceful uprising—famously captured by the iconic chant 'silmiya, silmiya' (peaceful, peaceful) (see Abaza 2016, 120; Ketchley 2014, 171)—the NASL released a statement asserting that its revolution would continue to build on the power of the street without violence or subversion. In a symbolic reference to the 25 January Revolution, the alliance announced a 'Friday of Anger' in response to the violence on Midan Rabaa, aiming to reproduce the backlash moment of the 2011 revolution (see Harders and König 2013, 27). The Friday protests, like the Tahrir protests, were meant to be strictly peaceful:

Violence is not our approach, and vandalism aims to harm the reputation of our peaceful revolution and find justification for the coup leaders to continue ruling.²⁸³

Principled peacefulness was not only invoked in an attempt to place the Anti-

²⁸² See MB. 14 August 2013. 'Anti-Coup Alliance Statement: Major Massacre During Crackdown Against Rabaa and Al-Nahda Sit-Ins [unofficial translation]'. *IkhwanWeb*. www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31236.

²⁸³ NASL. 16 August 2013. 'On "The Friday of Anger" [Arabic]'. <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/292957700846600>.

Coup protests in the trajectory of the Egyptian 2011 revolution. It also served to showcase the civilised nature and conciliatory character of the Anti-Coup protesters in contrast to the savageness of the coup forces. In contrast to the “scorched-earth” crackdown on the Rabaa al-Adawiya and Al-Nahda vigils, the Anti-Coup demonstrations would continue to uphold their civilian nature and refrain from taking revenge against the coupists in equal measure.²⁸⁴ According to the NASL, peacefulness would “prevail over their bullets” on the long term.²⁸⁵ Martyrdom on the path of peaceful protest, accordingly only symbolised the steadfastness and moral superiority of the Egyptian people and bolstered the legitimacy of their aims:

The precious blood of peaceful protesters that flowed and is still being spilled is watering the tree of liberty in Egypt and is arousing the spirit of the 25 January Revolution—resistance to injustice, corruption and rejection of the coup, repression and tyranny.²⁸⁶

Rather than fighting fire with fire, the Anti-Coup movement’s steadfastness would thus find its expression in a popular revolution, in which the NASL was no more than a coordinating mechanism and the Egyptian people the “real sovereign” and leaders of the revolution to restore legitimacy and reject the coup.²⁸⁷ At the same time, the Alliance affirmed it would accept any national initiatives for reconciliation, including a temporary ceasefire, to prevent further bloodshed, while strategically denouncing the security forces’ unwillingness to engage in any further negotiations as a sign for the coup forces’ savageness and bloodthirst. In light of this bloodthirst—and recognising that after *Rabaa*, Egypt’s streets had turned into an unlevel playing field for the Anti-Coup protesters, the alliance furthermore increasingly turned to patriotic nationalist as well as religious lingo to motivate its sympathisers to continue protesting despite their defeat on Rabaa Square. On the one hand, the protest calls and releases by the NASL glorified the demonstrators who continued to resist the security forces after *Rabaa* and their “heroic bravery”²⁸⁸ as true Egyptian patriots who displayed their courage and love for the Egyptian homeland by facing the regime’s bullets unarmed. On the other hand, the alliance also increasingly emphasised their pious character thus complementing the protesters’ nationalist credentials by their moral elevation as true believers.

²⁸⁴ NASL. 17 August 2013. ‘On the crimes of coup leaders 3 July on Friday of Anger [Arabic]’. <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/293449520797418>.

²⁸⁵ NASL. Statement 66. ‘On ‘Friday of Anger’ Murderous Crimes by Coup Commanders [Arabic]’. <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/293449520797418>.

²⁸⁶ NASL. 16 August 2013. ‘Statement 65 [Arabic]’. <https://bit.ly/2sgQOfr>.

²⁸⁷ NASL. 20 August 2013. ‘Assessment of position and vision for the future [Arabic]’. <https://bit.ly/2s9ZfZS>.

²⁸⁸ NASL. 16 August 2013. ‘Statement 65 [Arabic]’. <https://bit.ly/2sgQOfr>.

The Anti-Coup protesters had given their blood “without compensation to please Allah” and in sacrifice for the freedom of their homeland²⁸⁹—their blood had nourished “the pure land of Egypt” in Rabaa, Al-Nahda and at the Republican Guard “with dignity and nobility.”

The amalgamation of nationalist and religious discourses is exemplified in the NASL’s statement about the regime’s crackdown on the ‘Friday of Anger’ protests. Therein the coalition stressed that “in spite of all the pain and wounds of the loss of the martyrs and the suffering of the wounded and injured,” the crimes of the coup forces were only strengthening the movement’s determination to pursue its quest for an “Islamic, national, moral and human duty.”²⁹⁰ What is more, the alliance resorted to framing the results of its protest campaign not only in worldly terms but increasingly pointed to the rewards that awaited protesters in the hereafter. Many statements released after *Rabaa* ended with inflexions that God would save Egypt and its people and “reward the honourable martyrs in the afterlife;”²⁹¹ or with a quote from the last verse (No. 227) of surah 226 from the Qur’an. The verse roughly translates: “Those who do wrong will come to know by what a (great) reverse they will be overturned!”²⁹²

Placed within the Anti-Coup discourse, these phrases reinforced the political subjectivation of the Anti-Coup protesters as the morally superior and righteous political alliance in Egypt’s streets and served as a reminder, or perhaps a threat, that those on the other side of the antagonist struggle would eventually pay for their deeds.²⁹³ The alliance moreover appealed to consciences of policemen and soldiers by quoting a *hadith* by the Prophet Mohammed.²⁹⁴ According to the quote, there was no duty to obey any leader if this meant disobeying Allah. Similarly, the alliance cited surah 5, *surat-l-maida*, that “whoever kills a human being, except as a punishment for murder or for causing turmoil in the land, so it shall be

²⁸⁹ NASL. 5 September 2013. ‘Statement 93 [Arabic]’. <https://bit.ly/2s86zF9>.

²⁹⁰ NASL. 16 August 2013. ‘On “The Friday of Anger [Arabic]’.

<https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/292957700846600>.

²⁹¹ See, for instance, NASL. 14 August 2013. ‘Regarding the great massacre which was committed in the dissolution of the two peaceful sit-ins of Rabaa al-Adawiya and Nahda Square [Arabic]’.

<https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/292355837573453>; NASL. 16 August 2013. Statement 65. ‘On ‘Friday of Anger’ Violent Attacks on Peaceful Protesters [Arabic]’.

<https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/293245094151194>;

²⁹² See NASL. 17 August 2013. ‘What after the slaughter of Egyptians and destruction of houses of worship? [Arabic]’. <https://bit.ly/2tY991n>; NASL. 26 July 2013. ‘Statement 37 [Arabic]’.

<http://bit.ly/2Ri0Uav>.

²⁹³ See, for instance, NASL. 26 July 2013. ‘Statement 37 [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2Ri0Uav>.

²⁹⁴ It is worth mentioning that there are similar wordings of the same hadith that convey the same meaning. The wording quoted repeatedly by the NASL was related by Al-Bukhari (6820) and Muslim (1840).

as if he had killed all mankind” (Verse No. 32).²⁹⁵

The growing importance of such Islamic references for the motivational dimension of the Anti-Coup movement’s mobilisation was also reflected in contentious performances on the ground: With the **beginning of the “Putschists’ Departure Week”**—an escalation of protest activity in the week after the *Rabaa* and *Al-Nahda* killings, the NASL announced that demonstrators would perform their *Maghrib* [sunset] and *Isha*’ [nightfall] prayers on Ramses Square as an act of protest during the entire week, in order to commemorate those killed in during the clashes on the square and the siege of the neighbouring Al-Fateh Mosque on 16 August and 17, 2013. During the gatherings, they would pray for the souls of these innocent and defenceless martyrs.²⁹⁶ In neighbourhoods with strong support for the **Islamists’** cause, the movement organised public screenings of video footage from the squares; symbolic processions to the graves and former residences of killed demonstrators became increasingly frequent; the funerals of martyrs—often attended by thousands of sympathisers—provided occasions for new protest marches.²⁹⁷

In effect, the moral qualities of those affiliated with the military coup, who in the eyes of the NASL unmistakably included all those who had failed to condemn the brutal clearing of Midan Rabaa and Al-Nahda were articulated as the very antithesis to this pious, patriotic and civilised self-image of the Anti-Coup movement (see Figure 23, p. 198). A week after the massacres, the coalition announced the creation of a **“blacklist”** of all those who had aided the establishment of the **“coup regime”** and thus contributed to the atrocities it committed.²⁹⁸ This narrowed down further the NASL’s list of potential political allies—and, in truth, foreclosing any chances for the creation of a larger **“coalition of contenders”** (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 7). The list included **“respected national figures in political, media, revolutionary, labour and professional associations”** who partnered with the army and thus carried the blood of honourable Egyptians on their hands. As the statement made clear, the alliance hoped that transitional jus-

²⁹⁵ See, for instance, MB. 6 August 2013. ‘Anti-Coup Alliance Statement Affirms No Invitation to Dialogue Received’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31233>.

²⁹⁶ NASL. 16 August 2013. ‘Statement 65. Anti-Coup Alliance Statement on ‘Friday of Anger’ Violent Attacks on Peaceful Protesters [Arabic]’.

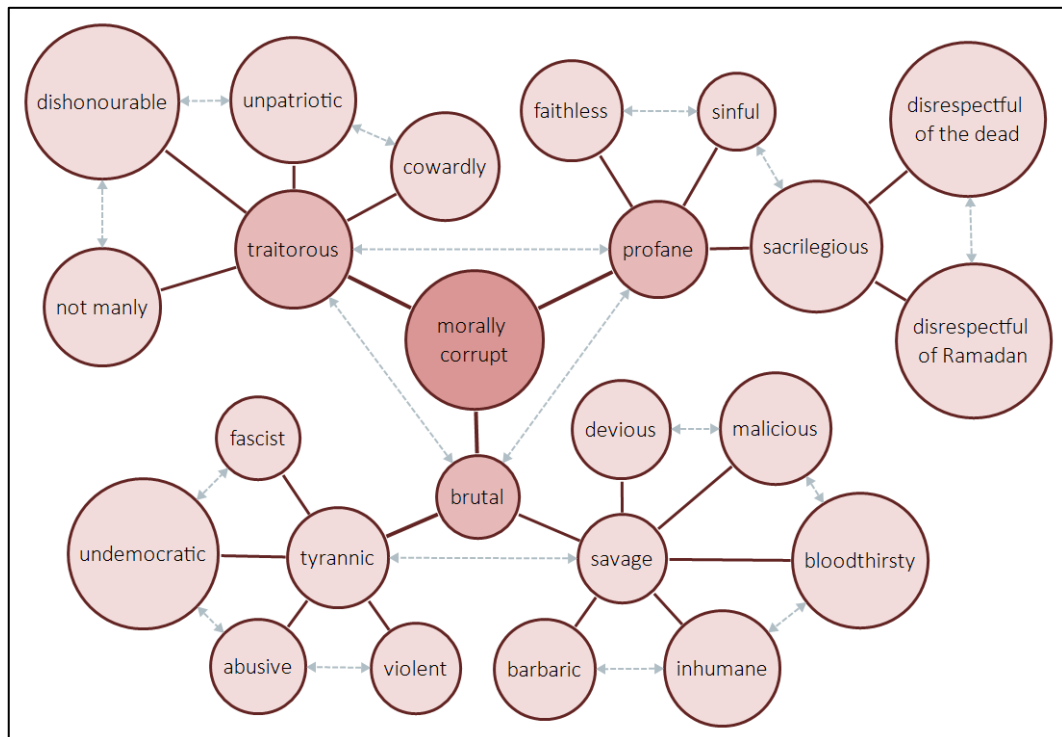
<https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/293245094151194>.

²⁹⁷ RNN. 22 August 2013. ‘A Data Show in Saft El-Laban Exposes the Military [Arabic]’. *Rassd News Network*. <https://rassd.com/70110.htm>; RNN. 2 September 2013. ‘Opponents of the coup organise the “Soldiers are Killers” show in Helwan [Arabic]’. *Rassd News Network*. <https://rassd.com/71096.htm>.

²⁹⁸ NASL. 25 August 2013. ‘Statement 78 [Arabic]’.
<http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Section/160805/Default.aspx>.

tice would be carried out in the near future based on this “shameful record in the history of the country.” The charges levelled against the coup forces, however, no longer related mainly to the reversion of the revolutionary achievements and the sabotage of the democratic process. After *Rabaa*, they first and foremost encompassed what the alliance referred to as “massacres and crimes against humanity”²⁹⁹ and a “genocide”³⁰⁰ that resulted from the “war of annihilation” at the hands of the police and the army.”³⁰¹

Figure 23. Motivational frame, articulation of antagonist other



Source 23. Semantic network created with the help of XMind 8 based on coding in MAXQDA 13.

A barrage of fervent statements was released in the second half of August by the alliance, summarising the violent events between 14-17 August and laying out a strategic path forward for the protest movement, *Rabaa* epitomised the coup forces’ profanity and loss of humanity. According to the statements: “not content with

²⁹⁹ See NASL. August 17, 2013. ‘What after the slaughter of the Egyptians and the destruction of houses of worship? [Arabic]’.

<https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/294271977381839>; see also NASL. 26 July 2013. ‘Bayān 37 [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2Ri0Uav>.

³⁰⁰ NASL. 20 August 2013. ‘Assessment of position and vision for the future [Arabic]’.

<https://bit.ly/2s9ZfZS>.

³⁰¹ See, for instance, MB. 14 August 2013. ‘Major Massacre During Crackdown Against Rabaa and Nahda Sit-Ins [unofficial translation]’. *IkhwanWeb*. www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31236; NASL. ‘Statement 66. On ‘Friday of Anger’ Murderous Crimes by Coup Commanders [Arabic]’.

<https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/293449520797418>;

the massacres and crimes against humanity they committed during the month of Ramadan and the killing of women, children and worshippers going down in prayer,”³⁰² the coupists had operated an “unholy practice of violating the sanctity of the dead by mutilating the bodies of the martyrs”³⁰³ and they had repeatedly disrespected and desecrated several houses of worship, including the Rabaa al Adawiya Mosque, which burned down while wounded protesters were sheltering inside.

On 16 August 2013, they had furthermore attacked a provisional field hospital established by Anti-Coup demonstrators inside the Al-Fateh mosque in the centre of downtown Cairo, close to Ramses Square. Protesters had turned the mosque into a field hospital and a morgue during clashes with the security services at the nearby Al-Azbakeya police station shortly before. Police forces had opened fire with live ammunition making use—for the first time during the investigation period—of large-calibre stationary weapons (see Human Rights Watch 2014, 130–39; Carr 2013) and several armed demonstrators had responded fire. Others took shelter within the nearby spacious mosque, built in the early 1990s. The ensuing standoff between scores of riot police as well as Midan Ramses inhabitants, storekeepers and plainclothes vigilantes who set up checkpoints outside the gates of the mosque on the one hand, and dozens of protesters holed up inside the building on the other, lasted until the evening of the following day. When the protesters surrendered to the security forces (see Fahim and Sheikh 2013), the siege had left dozens dead.

Significantly, the NASL announced that among those killed by live ammunition were **also the son of the Muslim Brotherhood’s spiritual leader, Mohamed Badie**, as well as the grandson of its founder, Hassan al-Banna. Their deaths symbolically added to the list of prominent NASL family members killed during the government crackdown on the Anti-Coup protests the days before. Most importantly, Asmaa al-Beltagy, the teenage daughter of FJP General Secretary Mohamed al-Beltagy had been shot as the CSF dispersed the Rabaa encampment, turning the **17-year-old into one of the movement’s most venerated martyrs** (Sherlock and Samaan 2013). The Fateh mosque becoming a flashpoint in the 16 August clashes between Anti-Coup members, security forces and counter-demonstrators, which cost at least 137 lives, fit well within the motivational frame of the NASL discourse. This discourse characterised the coup forces as sinners

³⁰² NASL. 14 August 2013. ‘Regarding the great massacre which was committed in the dissolution of the two peaceful sit-ins of Rabaa al-Adawiya and Nahda Square [Arabic]’. <https://bit.ly/2LNQrBT>.

³⁰³ NASL. 17 August 2013. ‘Statement 66. On ‘Friday of Anger’ Murderous Crimes by Coup Commanders [Arabic]’. <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/293449520797418>.

without faith:

Today, they and their soldiers, army, police and thugs completed their infringement of the sanctities and houses of God today in a shocking violation of one of the most famous mosques in Egypt, burning its doors and destroying its contents and beating live bullets at the peaceful detainees of children, women and the elderly.³⁰⁴

Together with the massacres on the previous days, for the Anti-Coup Alliance, it perfectly exemplified **the coupists' utter disregard for any human or moral standards** as well as their sacrilegious disrespect for the pillars of the Islamic religion. The NASL even went further when it alleged that the coup coalition had instrumentalised religious unjustly through manufactured religious legal opinions in order to mobilise support for their conduct. In its 78th statement since the coup, released on 25 August 2013 in response to the revelation that several dozen prisoners from the Rabaa and Al-Nahda clearings had died of suffocation from tear gas in the back of an overcrowded police van during their transport to the Abu Zabaal prison complex,³⁰⁵ the NASL effectively branded the coupists as heretics claiming:

They started to follow again the ways of the removed [Mubarak] and his disciples and elicit people to be drawn to the legitimisation of bloodshed and rivalry under false pretences and through falsified fatwas that have no relation to true religion, its ethics or values, and that have nothing to do with the conduct and approach of democracy.³⁰⁶

In a more explicit statement, it called upon the military to renounce the government's **killing order as well as the orders to storm any houses of God**, stressing that such actions they were considered 'haram' according to Islamic law and quoting the Quranic Verse 4:39, according to which "whoever kills a believer inten-

³⁰⁴ NASL. 17 August 2013. 'What after the slaughter of the Egyptians and the destruction of houses of worship? [Arabic]'; see also NASL. 26 July 2013. 'Statement 37 [Arabic]'. <http://bit.ly/2Ri0Uav>.

³⁰⁵ According to the official narrative, the 37 prisoners had died during an escape attempt in the course of which they had kidnapped a police officers, prompting his colleagues to fire tear gas into the truck. However, already at its release, this version of events contradicted state media reports that claimed the prisoners had dies as a collateral of Muslim Brotherhood gunmen attacking the police van (Michael 2013). Subsequent investigations by *Guardian* journalist Patrick Kingsley based on the leaked proceedings of an official inquiry as well as collected testimonies by survivors of the incident and some prison guards, in turn, contradicts both stories. Instead, it suggest that 37 of 45 prisoners suffocated from extreme exposure to CS gas after hours of suffering from a lack of oxygen in an overcrowded vehicle with broken ventilation (see Kingsley 2014a). See also NASL. 18 August 2013. 'Statement 68: On the Cold-Blooded Murder of 52 Coup Opponents in Detention [Arabic]'.

<https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/294253744050329>.; NASL. 19 August 2013. 'Statement 71: About the Sinai events [Arabic]'.

<https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/294606784015025>.

³⁰⁶ NASL. 25 August 2013. 'Statement 78 [Arabic]'.

<http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Section/160805/Default.aspx>.

tionally, his punishment is hell.”³⁰⁷ For their heresy, including their lies, deception and incitement, the coup forces would encounter the revenge of “God Almighty,” both in this world and the Hereafter. Beyond demonstrating in gruesome obviousness their antagonist’s inferiority in terms of adherence to the teachings of Islam, stressing and accentuating the utmost brutality of the security forces in their raid of *Rabaa* also served another purpose for the Anti-Coup Alliance. It evidenced the savageness of the coup forces and their doublespeak regarding the claim of protecting the unity and integrity of the Egyptian people:

The unspeakable massacres that these cold-blooded forces committed will be a mark of shame on the forehead of humanity that shows how the coup commanders lost their human senses together with all feelings and values, principles and ethics.³⁰⁸

Several passages additionally intended to contrast the Anti-Coup protesters’ patriotism and courage with the unpatriotic and dishonourable politics of those supporting the military coup. Unlike the courageous demonstrators—the “pure Egyptians” whose blood had “flown like rivers” as they faced bullets with their bare chests—the coupists had engaged in a cowardly “war of annihilation” that had caused to that represented a “disgrace to the Egyptian military.”³⁰⁹

The reproach that the army had, on the command of the coup leaders, turned against the Egyptian people was particularly powerful. It directly opposed the competing discourse about ‘legitimacy’ that the alliance of political forces opposing President Mursi reproduced to justify first the military intervention and then the crackdown on the Anti-Coup protests. Al-Sisi had portrayed its mandate and the mission of the interim regime that it backed after the dissolution of Mursi’s cabinet, as a project for the protection of the Egyptian nation and its free will, above formal electoral politics, as well as factional and party struggles. The Anti-Coup Alliance’s discourses opposed this claim. Accordingly, the barbaric atrocities proved the coup forces’ partisan stance as well as their counter-revolutionary intentions and thus evidenced that the coup’s claim to legitimacy was null and void. Significantly the term *batil* [null, void, invalid, delusive], which the NASL employed in its statements to denigrate the state narrative, in its Arabic meaning has

³⁰⁷ NASL. 17 August 2013. ‘What after the slaughter of the Egyptians and the destruction of houses of worship? [Arabic]’. <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/294271977381839>.

³⁰⁸ NASL. 17 August 2013. ‘Statement 66. On ‘Friday of Anger’ Murderous Crimes by Coup Commanders [Arabic]’. <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/293449520797418>.

³⁰⁹ See, for instance, MB. 14 August 2013. ‘Anti-Coup Alliance Statement: Major Massacre During Crackdown Against Rabaa and Nahda Sit-Ins [unofficial translation]’. *IkhwanWeb*. www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31236; NASL. 17 August 2013. ‘What after the slaughter of the Egyptians and the destruction of houses of worship? [Arabic]’. <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/294271977381839>.

a double connotation: On the one hand, it can describe a nullified or invalid act or contract according to the sharia—thus symbolising aptly how the NASL viewed the interim regime and its proposed transitional roadmap. However, beyond its literal meaning, the term also transports an additional affective dimension as it directly connected to the revolutionary archive of 25 January. During the 18 days of Tahrir, the term had been adopted from Yousef Chahine’s famous ‘The Land’—an iconic movie from 1968 chronicling a small peasant village’s struggles against the oppression of the local landowners (see Mostafa 2016, 67; see also Hanafi 2015). As a pop-cultural reference, it turned into the key component of a regular slogan of the street protests that declared the political system and all of its representatives null and void: The respective call and response chant had involved a protest leader shouting successively the name of prominent regime figures (such as, Husni Mubarak, his son Gamal Mubarak, Interior Minister Habib al-Adly, or steel tycoon and regime crony Ahmed Ezz) and the chorus responding in one voice with a loud ‘*batil!*’

By adopting this symbolic signifier, the NASL thus implicitly parallels between authorities framing of the *Rabaa* massacre and the Mubarak regime’s maladroitness attempt to defuse the Tahrir protests in 2011: many people would probably have accepted Mubarak’s offer to step down by the end of his term. But a vicious attempt to disperse the Tahrir camps with the help of hired thugs on camelback (*baltagiya*) on 2 February 2011, had made his offer meaningless. In the Anti-Coup version of events, like Mubarak’s assault on Tahrir, the massacres evidenced the lacking hegemonic consensus of the regime—to clear Rabaa Square, the putschists had seen no alternative but to turn to deadly violence, hence admitting their ideational defeat.³¹⁰ This violence, albeit significantly more severe and less targeted, thus ultimately paralleled the helpless response of the Mubarak regime to the 2011 uprisings. The government reinforced the comparison on its part by imposing a month-long state of emergency and thus a favoured tactic of the Mubarak regime. After *Rabaa*, analogies between the authoritarian nature of the Mubarak and the post-coup regime became a prominent method by the NASL to discredit and demonise the new transitional authorities as harbingers of a counter-revolution and a return of the country to tyranny. In the days after the massacres in Cairo, multiple protest calls by the alliance concluded with the emphatic accusation of the

³¹⁰ NASL. 17 August 2013. ‘Statement 66. On ‘Friday of Anger’ Murderous Crimes by Coup Commanders [Arabic]’. <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/293449520797418>.

coupists as “fascist terrorist.”³¹¹ In a comprehensive assessment of the alliance’s political position after the *Rabaa* massacre, released on 20 August 2013, the movement then declared that its opponents had coalesced domestically with the *feloul*, and with the Zionist enemy abroad to “wreak terror on our revolution and seek revenge for the old regime.”³¹²

This discursive shift, in effect, provided a rationale for the ongoing violence in the country and for continued resistance: In this sense, what was at stake after *Rabaa* was no longer only the democratic transformation and the constitutional rule of President Mursi. Instead, the NASL managed to signify the brutal repression deployed against the Anti-Coup demonstrators as an attempt by the remnants of the Mubarak regime to seek retribution against and play havoc among all those who had participated in the Tahrir uprising, and to prepare the ground for a restitution of the old order with “all its symbols and institutions and its disgraceful behaviour.”³¹³ This gave the Anti-Coup protests a new purpose and partly compensated for the subversion of protesters’ *raison d’être* after their defeat on Rabaa Square; it also gave new impetus to the alliance’s street protests by boosting the collective morale. And it complemented the systematic integration of the martyr theme into the Anti-Coup discourse and imagery. Like those who had died at the hands of the state on Tahrir, the *Rabaa* martyrs turned into powerful symbols of the need for change:

Their deaths put new steel into the will of many protesters who argued that going home -no matter how deeply entrenched and willing to ignore them the regime appeared to be- had become morally impossible. It was unthinkable that these men and women should have shed their blood for an uprising that failed (Peterson 2015a, 168).

The resulting backlash effectively sustained the campaign’s mobilisation levels that had plummeted after the loss of the two major protest sites in the capital. However, the backlash did not unfold as planned: first, it failed to bind new supporters. Outside of the alliance, the insistence on *legitimacy* as a central signifier prevented the alliance from creating a broader coalition of actors critical towards the regime. Moreover, its decision to frame all those who had initially supported the coup as accomplices of the massacres and their moral devaluation effectively forestalled a massive wave of solidarity against police repression. Finally, weakening organisa-

³¹¹ See NASL. 17 August 2013. ‘What after the slaughter of the Egyptians and the destruction of houses of worship?’ [Arabic].

<https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/294271977381839>; see also NASL. 26 July 2013. ‘Statement 37 [Arabic]’. <http://bit.ly/2Ri0Uav>.

³¹² NASL. 20 August 2013. ‘Assessment of position and future vision [Arabic]’. <https://bit.ly/2s9ZfZS>.

³¹³ NASL. 25 August 2013. ‘Statement 78 [Arabic]’. <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Section/160805/Default.aspx>.

tional unity, brought about by the targeted arrests of leading cadres and the closure of public space, gave rise to violent eruptions from within the movement which the persecuted and debilitated leadership was unable to contain.

7.2.4 *The Challenge of Sectarianism*

The extent to which the brutal clearing of the sit-ins backfired, not only on the regime but also on the Anti-Coup Alliance's **hitherto largely peaceful campaign**, was most visible on the second day after the raids: in a massive backlash, demonstrators took to the streets in unseen numbers since 3 July 2013. Beyond an unseen frequency of collective actions, however, backlash also manifested in the form of more radical expressions of dissent and a surge of incidents involving collective violence or terror tactics against security forces and minorities.

Until mid-August, the Rabaa and Al-Nahda camps, with their coherent protest repertoire, strict hierarchies and unified message, had provided a central model that Anti-Coup sympathisers had emulated across the country. The brutal clearing, however, proved this model to be ineffective. Isolated attempts to occupy new squares, including Midan Mustafa Mahmoud and Midan Soares in the quarters of Mohandessin and Maadi, were thwarted by security forces (see Miller and Gulhane 2013). Consequently, the Anti-Coup organisers' **call for a new Friday of Anger** primarily concentrated on demonstration marches and street protests as the preferred tactic to carry on the Anti-Coup campaign. As regards participation rates, the subsequent Friday exceeded its precursor in 2011 by far: the protest event data for 16 August 2013 reveals the largest amount of collective actions on a single day during the whole investigation period. In Cairo alone, 28 protest **marches converged in Downtown's Ramsis square**, where they were met with teargas. The ensuing clashes between militant protesters, police forces, counter-demonstrators, and local residents lasted until the next day, expanding to provincial capitals, the canal cities of Ismailiya and Damietta, and several villages in the Nile Delta (Al Ahram 2013f).

In addition, dozens of assaults on police stations and army checkpoints in all Egyptian governorates were reported, with 15 officers killed in the village of Kerdasa alone (EIPR 2014, 92, 105; Human Rights Watch 2014, 104–7). Particularly the provinces of Assiut, Minya, Fayoum and Sohag were rocked by confessional violence for several days following the massacres (EIPR 2014, 94–98; NCHR 2014a, 1). The *Eshhad* Project to document sectarianism against religious, cultural, and ethnic minorities in the Middle East has recorded at least 143 attacks on churches, Coptic priests and Christian property for the timeframe investigated in this thesis. Tellingly, more than 120 of these attacks occurred in the immediate

aftermath of the *Rabaa* massacre (Eshhad 2018; see also EIPR 2014; Wiki Thawra 2013b). In the vast majority of the documented cases, neither the police nor the military intervened to prevent or end the respective attacks (Human Rights Watch 2013c). In several provinces, among others in Minya and Sohag, residents additionally reported after the Rabaa clearing that their houses or shop fronts had been marked overnight with graffiti of a cross. In the following weeks, these properties subsequently came under attack.³¹⁴

These attacks were not unpremeditated. They followed weeks of sectarian agitation by more extremist elements within the Anti-Coup Alliance at the Al-Nahda and Rabaa sit-ins. The discourse analysis reveals that sectarian narratives never made it into the NASL mainstream, as religious references or justifications of contentious collective actions assumed no nodal position in the Anti-Coup discourse: as mentioned before, the antagonism against the coup-regime was articulated primarily around the central signifier of popular, democratic, constitutional and revolutionary legitimacy, rather than in terms of a struggle of believers against infidels. However, on the grassroots levels, the NASL nevertheless tolerated sectarian agitation at their rallies and invited speakers who openly insinuated links **between the machinations of the Coptic Church and President Mursi's ouster** (Human Rights Watch 2013c). It is reasonable to presume that this hate speech contributed to the spike of sectarian and anti-governmental violence.

In order to maintain the support of more radical Islamist and Salafi elements within Egyptian society, the NASL furthermore practised a certain degree of doublespeak by sharing the Rabaa-podium and the stages of several sit-ins across the country with militant speakers. Some of these directly held the Egyptian Copts responsible for the bloodshed that followed 3 July 2013 thus probably contributing to the violent outbursts after the Rabaa clearing. On the Rabaa and Al-Nahda stages, some prominent Salafist speakers had blamed the Egyptian Christians for the marginalisation of the Islamist political segment, pointing to the Coptic Patriarch Tawadros II. who had closed ranks with the military leadership after its coup d'état. **Assam Abdel Magid, a leading member of the Gama'a al-Islamiya even spoke of an alleged new Christian "crusade" against the Islamic state-building project** (Human Rights Watch 2014, 105; EIPR 2014, 90 f).³¹⁵ These and other statements in a similar tone were gratefully covered by the Egyptian state press that interpreted them as an admission of guilt and assumption of ownership over the

³¹⁴ Interview with leading member of the Maspero Youth Coalition, Cairo, June 2015.

³¹⁵ See also RNN. 24 July 2013. "Copts for Egypt' calls to meet the call of Sisi to rally [Arabic]". *Rassd News Network*. <https://rassd.com/67599.htm>.

terror campaign. Moreover, several NASL cadres had made vague insinuations, e.g. the Freedom and Justice Party's vice chairman Essam El-Erian, who warned that there were thousands ready to sacrifice themselves for the reinstatement of their legitimate President.³¹⁶ Speaking from the central podium on Rabaa Square, also the party's general secretary Mohammed al-Beltagy had claimed that the terrorist attacks in Sinai would not stop until President Mursi was reinstalled (see Nagi 2013b).

Albeit not adopted as an official position of the protest alliance in any of the NASL press releases,³¹⁷ such ambiguous statements about the escalating sectarian and anti-police violence were nevertheless adopted by several sub-groups of the alliance. Several local chapters of the Muslim Brotherhood, on their part, released statement that rivalled the Anti-Coup communiqués. For example, according to an infamous statement in response to the 14-17 August 2013 church attacks, posted on the FJP Helwan's Facebook page, the Coptic church and its Pope had sided with the coupists against "the first elected Islamist president" by mobilising its religious community on 30 June. Moreover, the site alleged that the Pope had also called the Islamic Sharia "backwards, stubborn, and reactionary" and sponsored "Black Bloc groups" in the aftermath of the 3 July coup to "create chaos, pursue banditry, and siege and storm mosques."

Given this political involvement of the Coptic Church, the FJP Helwan voiced surprise that people were still asking why churches were being burned across the country. The statement ended in a nominal condemnation of the arson and lootings. But it also relativised them as a comprehensible response to the Church declaring war against Islam: "Burning houses of worship is a crime. And for the Church to declare war against Islam and Muslims is the worst offence. For every action, there is a reaction."³¹⁸ Another prominent example for the tendentious nature of the MB's media coverage of the post-14 August violent outbursts were several stories about the cooperation of security forces and members of the Coptic church in the repression of new Anti-Coup protest marches, which were republished by the Brotherhood's online news platforms. On 16 August 2013, for

³¹⁶ See also RNN. 6 August 2013. 'Erian: Thousands are ready to sacrifice for legitimacy [Arabic]'. *Rassd News Network*. <https://rassd.com/68722.htm>.

³¹⁷ The first official statement by the NASL after Rabaa, instead, framed the attacks on churches and police stations as a spontaneous affective response by ordinary Egyptians across the country to the violent attack on the Rabaa and Al-Nahda protests. See MB. 14 August 2013. 'Anti-Coup Alliance Statement: Major Massacre During Crackdown Against Rabaa and Nahda Sit-Ins [unofficial translation]'. *IkhwanWeb*. www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31236.

³¹⁸ FJP Helwan. 16 August 2013. 'FJP Helwan on the church attacks [Arabic]'. <https://www.facebook.com/FJ.Helwan/posts/516124478472316>.

instance, the Muslim Brotherhood's official *Ikhwanonline* website published a story about police and the church opening fire on a march in Gizah.³¹⁹

In spite of these statements strengthening the popular impression that the Anti-Coup movement was responsible for and effectively a coordinating mechanism for the terrorist attacks, my analysis of the Anti-Coup discourses shows that sectarian agitation against Christians was, however, not systematic within the NASL. On the contrary, after the collective experience of *Rabaa* and *Al-Nahda*, almost all significant Anti-Coup leaders who had not been arrested before or during the raids distanced themselves from any form of political violence. Rather than framing their struggle as a jihad-like zero-sum game between believers and infidels game (see Alimi 2009, 226; Olesen 2009, 9), the NASL routinely emphasised that all Egyptians would benefit from its envisioned restoration of a legitimate democratic order. In a review of the rapid sequence of violent events that had shattered Egypt after the critical juncture of *Rabaa*, the NASL connected their announcement of a new political vision with a renunciation of all political violence as a means of expressing dissent. Its Statement 72 condemned “the acts of violence, arson and looting against certain churches, some public and provincial buildings, as well as police stations.”³²⁰

As popular support for state repression depends strongly on whether the threat posed by protesters exceeds the parameters of what is deemed legal and accepted by social practice (Davenport 2007a, 69),³²¹ the campaign organisers disassociated themselves from any form of political violence, arguing that it would only slander the image of their peaceful revolution and provide new pretexts for repression. The Freedom and Justice Party released a statement on 15 August wherein it strongly condemned “any attack, even verbal, against Copts, their churches or their property.” Potentially realising how the Brotherhood's own framing of the Coptic church as part of the Coup forces may have contributed to the spike of sectarian violence, the statement went on to highlight that there was no justification for such attacks, even though Coptic leaders may have supported or even participated in the 3 July coup, “for one reason or another.”³²² The party's

³¹⁹ MB. 16 August 2013. “The police and the church shoot at the Haram march in Giza Tunnel and on Murad Street” [Arabic]. *Ikhwanonline*. Offline, on file with the author.

³²⁰ NASL. 20 August 2013. *Assessment of position and vision for the future* [Arabic]. <https://bit.ly/2s9ZfZS>.

³²¹ Several scholars of repression argued accordingly that violent protest is significantly more often affected by repression, independent of regime type or ideology (see, for instance, Davenport 1995, 687; Earl 2003, 57; M. Hafez 2003, 24; Ortiz 2008, 116f; McCarthy and McPhail 2005, 19).

³²² FJP. 15 August 2013. ‘FJP Condemns Attacks on Copts; Reaffirms Revolution Non-Violence’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31239>

spokesperson Dr Mourad Ali went even further and claimed in a subsequent statement on behalf of his party that a range of fake Twitter and Facebook accounts had been created in the *Rabaa* aftermath in order to spread incisive statements justifications for the burning of churches in the name of the Freedom and Justice Party:

These are attempts to ignite sectarian divisions to distract everyone from the real issue. Our stance is clear, we have announced it, and we reiterate: Based on the true nature of **our religion, and pursuant to our party's indivisible principles, we strongly condemn** any attack, even verbal, against Copts, their churches or their property.³²³

Aware of the polarisation of Egyptian society along ideological fault lines, also other Brotherhood cadres condemned the arson attacks on churches as the acts of criminals that instrumentalised the peaceful protests as a stalking horse for vandalism and terror. Some accused the police of planting the bombs and staging the assaults on Coptic property to discredit the Islamist movement. The NASL adopted these allegations, likening the alleged false flag attacks on churches across Egypt to **the 2011 New Year's bombings in front of the Coptic Orthodox church of Saint Mark and Pope Peter in the Sidi Bishr neighbourhood in Alexandria**—the deadliest act of violence against Coptic Christians in the previous decade:

The security services have a bitter and bad history of committing such foolishness in order to sow discord in Egypt, like in the Church of the Saints. Because the climate of sedition is guaranteed to continue.³²⁴

As a consequence of such statements and a declared rejection of violence as a legitimate means of expressing dissent, the **repression deployed by Egypt's security forces** against the NASL did not lead to the adoption of political violence. In truth, aside from the horrific mob attacks and arsons of 14-17 August, nonstate political violence remained relatively limited as a side-effect of the contentious struggle in the summer of 2013. The Anti-Coup alliance had tied its conception of legitimacy closely to the notion of peaceful resistance.

7.2.5 *Peaceful Escalation*

The Anti-Coup Alliance's **principled stance towards violence may simply have** reflected the factual balance of power on the ground—Brotherhood cadres must have been keenly aware of the inferior manpower and firepower of its organisation vis-à-vis both Tamarod street protesters and the security forces. However,

³²³ FJP. 16 August 2013. 'FJP Reiterates Denunciation of Attacks on Copts, Churches and Property'. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31246>.

³²⁴ NASL. 20 August 2013. 'Assessment of position and vision for the future [Arabic]'. <https://bit.ly/2s9ZfZS>.

this stance effectively came to dominate the NASL's entire discourse of resistance, both as a means to counter the coup forces' attempts to monopolise the definition of national security and its enemies, and as a means to discredit alternative political strategies which were not primed on nonviolence. This discourse set the conditions of possibility for contentious performances on the ground, precluding violent resistance as a viable strategy. This finding is surprising because oppositional violence and repression are closely related, as research on escalating policing (De-la Porta 2014c) and predecessor cases of Islamist coup-ousting in Algeria or Tunisia show (M. Hafez 2003). With a view to *Hamas*, the Brotherhood's Palestinian affiliate, Alimi (2009, 232) has argued that "extreme repression, systematic victimisation, and exclusion from the political system can lead certain groups to adopt extreme political agendas and, consequentially, an action strategy for creating political making opportunities that allow an external struggle against the system." When the individual costs of staying nonviolent the face of harsh repression begin to equal the costs of taking up arms—why should one stay peaceful and not defend himself? This question seems particularly relevant for Anti-Coup members, as affiliation with the Brotherhood put even those at risk that ceased protesting.

Moreover, from the outset of the Tamarod campaign, activists in both camps had believed that violence was unavoidable. Asked what would happen on 30 June several days before the protests, Ahmed Adel, one of the founding members of Tamarod, answered: "let's be realistic. The Muslim Brotherhood is a bloody group. We're sure there will be violence" (Chang 2013). In a similar vein, Samuli Schielke recounts constantly hearing people speak about the upcoming bloodshed during a field trip to Egypt in May and June 2013: "The expectation was that the Brotherhood would not go voluntarily. They would fight back fiercely. They would need to be forced" (Schielke 2017, 210). Describing the anticipation of impending violent confrontations, some analysts have even claimed that the ousted Brotherhood was welcoming the bloodbath in preparation, "specifically expecting to produce martyrs who would win them international support" (Abaza 2016, 116). Albeit hardly grounded in solid evidence (aside from dubious allegations that the NASL was displaying children as human shields) these allegations testify to both, the polarised nature of discussions about the events of summer 2013, as well as the ubiquitous expectations of bloodshed. Interestingly members of both antagonist camps, whom I interviewed for this thesis, confirm this. On both sides of the political divide, those engaged in mobilisation were expecting a burst of violence should either the army or counter-demonstrators confront the Anti-Coup sit-ins.

These expectations were nourished by signs that the protesters were making

use of weeks-long occupation to fortify their sit-ins and prepare for a likely attack and an upcoming battle with security forces: on 9 August 2013, for instance, images circulated on social media showing the deployment of a catapult surrounded by walls of sandbags at Al-Nahda Square (Al Arabiya 2013); moreover, the perimeters of both sit-ins had been visibly fortified with makeshift barricades of paving stones, metal bars and car wrecks to slow down potential incursions by the security forces; finally, dozens of videos uploaded to *Youtube*,³²⁵ and the reports of visitors to the Rabaa encampment furnished evidence for the organisation of self-defence units within the NASL (see also Ketchley 2017a, 135). Far from a professionalised militia, these units were mostly armed with sticks, wooden planks and makeshift shields, carried a hotchpotch of crash helmets and hardhats. Kingsley and Chulov (2013a) aptly refer to them as “an Islamist version of Dad’s Army.” Mostly in charge of patrolling the surroundings of the Anti-Coup demonstration marches and occupation sites, their presence at the sit-ins nevertheless seemed to point out the emergence of militant structures under the roof of the Anti-Coup Alliance.³²⁶

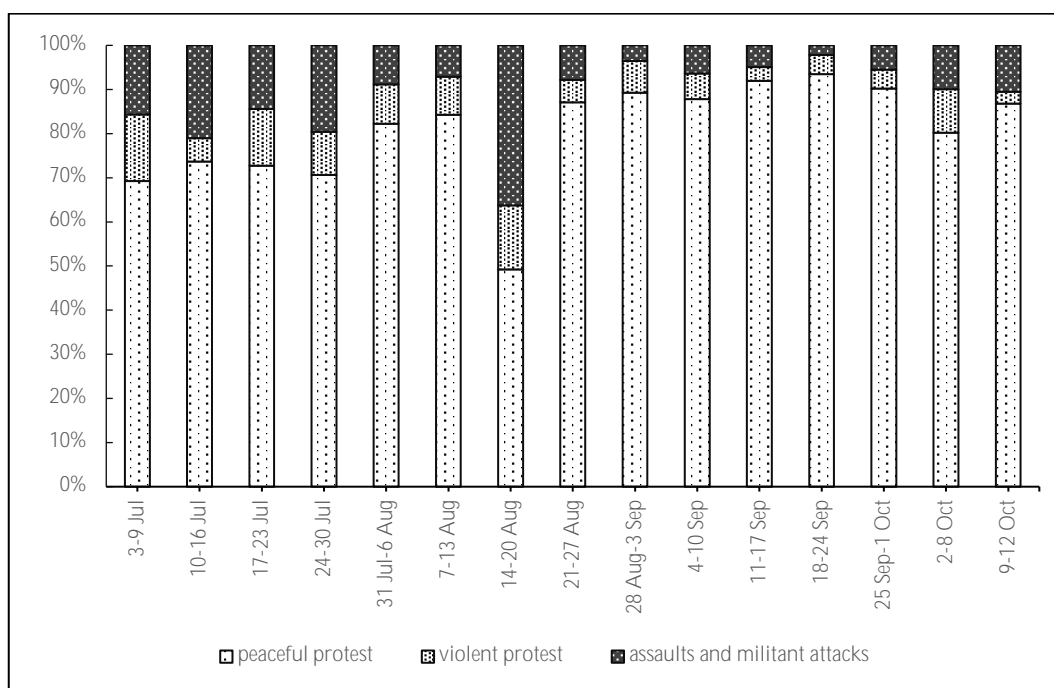
Even so, the charges that Anti-Coup protests turned violent after *Rabaa* or were radicalised progressively are not supported by facts. In contrast, the protest event catalogue illustrates how the alliance succeeded in mobilising its supporters in an almost exclusively non-violent campaign throughout the entire summer of 2013.³²⁷ The analysis reveals no direct link between repression and the rise of political violence. Against expectations, the constant need of adapting to deteriorating conditions for voicing dissent in peaceful ways through protest and sit-ins did not entail a gradual radicalisation of the contentious repertoire (see Figure 24, p. 211).

³²⁵ See, for instance, https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=nzdcBk03q88; https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ko3ovWp37ws. After the circulation of these and other similar videos, the NASL leadership officially distanced itself from these groups, claiming that they were not card-carrying members of the alliance.

³²⁶ Some commentators, furthermore, alleged that Al-Qa’ida flags were present at several Anti-Coup protests, alleging an alliance between the Muslim Brotherhood and more radical jihadi elements under the roof of the NASL (e.g., M. T. Dawoud 2013; Guirguis 2013). While the toleration of such symbols by the NASL is not hard to imagine, as the alliance keenly avoided alienating the more radical spectrum of political Islam, there is, however, little solid evidence for a widespread and/or organised presence of such groups at the sit-ins. Also, the photographs of black banners at pro-Mursi demonstrations are scarce and ultimately hard to verify given their low resolution, see for example: <https://bit.ly/2sl3lss>.

³²⁷ In the event catalogue protests were arguably coded as non-violent when reports mentioned low-level forms of violent resistance by protesters, such as stone-throwing or scuffles. Such low-level violence is a frequent side-effect at the fringes of almost all protests with a certain size. Given this ubiquity of confrontations and short-term melees (in particular, in the Egyptian case where mass protest has been continuously accompanied by street clashes ever since the 2011 uprising), in this thesis, its occurrence is not viewed as sufficient condition for diagnosing a radicalisation of contentious repertoires.

Figure 24. Political violence throughout the protest cycle



Source 24. Time series based on author's event database.

This weak convergence of repression and protester violence might be attributable to the relatively short timeframe under scrutiny, as the historical precedents of Islamist coup-ousting have demonstrated.³²⁸ During the examined timeframe, however, the Anti-Coup movement consciously tried to avoid further alienation by the Egyptian public by choosing a nonviolent approach. These findings are all the more surprising, as Egyptian authorities legitimised their repressive conduct, the reinstatement of martial law in parts of the country, and the curtailing of civic freedoms with the alleged threat posed by the Muslim Brotherhood's militias (Dunne and Williamson 2014; Dworkin and Michou 2014, 6). In particular, the 'Somalisation' of Sinai, that is, the state's loss of his monopoly of power in large parts of the peninsula—evidenced by a sharp increase of bomb attacks, assaults on police stations and army checkpoints and the assassinations of recruits in the North Sinai province—was falsely quoted as evidence for the Brotherhood's growing militancy.

It is true that several events involving police violence in the summer of 2013 all provoked a short-dated flash of violence. However, in the case of two instances of deadly police repression against protesters prior to Rabaa—the Republican Guard massacre on 7 July and the clashes of Nasr street on 27 July—political vio-

³²⁸ In Algeria, for instance, the radicalisation of Islamist groups was preceded by a phase of peaceful mobilisation that lasted for multiple years (Hafez 2003: 200; Lawson 2004: 106).

lence stayed spatially and temporally limited to the local level and the immediate site of confrontation. It subsided already in the early morning of the following day (Kingsley and Green 2013). Only in mid-August did repression effect an escalation of political violence that transcended the immediate surroundings of the raids in Cairo and Giza. Except for this short period in the *Rabaa* aftermath, violent behaviour by protesters rather decreased over the investigation period. The same holds true for assaults on police and army personnel. If anything, their rate rather declined. Given that no direct link could be established between the outbursts of violence and the Anti-Coup campaign on a logistical level, it seems probable that the militant groups responsible for these attacks acted on their own initiative and against the strategic interest of the protest campaign.³²⁹

In many cases where protester violence was recorded, it can additionally be attributed to targeted provocation by *baltagiya*. In other cases, it was bilateral and the product of escalating confrontations between rival protesters (EIPR 2014, 50). For example, did Anti-Coup protesters clash with pro-regime demonstrators on the *Friday of the Mandate* in ample street battles that left dozens dead on both sides (EIPR 2014, 53–56). The overall picture of the protest cycle, however, shows that political violence was neither a strategic component nor a dominant concomitant feature of the Anti-Coup campaign. Instead, this adoption of a nonviolent repertoire of contention and a prognostic frame that stressed peacefulness and nonviolence as legitimate means of resistance had a strong prefigurative component and reflected the NASL's broader conception of legitimacy. Particularly after the clashes in Nasr street on 26 July, in the second part of the period under review, the protest organisers seem to have exerted a strong moderating influence on its followers.

It seems probable that the campaign organisers consciously chose a nonviolent approach in order to disassociate themselves from the street battles that had broken out all over the country between supporters of the coup and angry Islamist mobs right after Mursi's deposition. This is not to say that Anti-Coup protesters did not resort to violence at all. In fact, video evidence, as well as interviews conducted with several Anti-Coup protesters, point out many situations where members of groups allied in the NASL took part in violent clashes (including stone throwing, tossing Molotov cocktails, and selectively even the use of guns or makeshift firearms). In addition, human rights organisations have documented evi-

³²⁹ In turn, the jihadist militias *Majlis Shura al-Mujahid* and *Ansar Bayt al Maqdis*, which are ideologically and logistically linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, have claimed responsibility for some of the assaults on police stations and army checkpoints (Gold 2014).

dence, including testimonies, that supporters of President Mursi repeatedly captured and held suspected informants and rivals at Anti-Coup campsites in Cairo, including under one of the podiums of the Rabaa al-Adawiya sit-in. The victims were subjected to electric shocks and heavy beatings, with several people dying as a result of physical torture (Amnesty International 2013b). In another dramatic instance of mediated violence on 21 July, two Mursi opponents watching an Anti-Coup demonstration in the Sidi Gaber area of Alexandria were pushed off the roof of a water tower by supporters of the ousted president carrying a black Salafist banner (Hawksley 2013).³³⁰

However, these instances largely point to transgressions committed by protesters individually which were usually not condoned by the broader protest collective, and not to a systematic or strategic feature of the Anti-Coup campaign. With a view to the entire Anti-Coup campaign, violent protester behaviour remained the exception rather than the rule, including by members of the **Muslim Brotherhood, the NASL's largest contributor. Against expectations, the constant need of adapting mobilising structures and contentious repertoire to worsening protest policing, the restriction of public spaces for the public articulation of political dissent and the suppression of peaceful means of resistance thus did not entail a gradual radicalisation of the Anti-Coup movement. Violence at protests remained highly situational.**

7.3 Tactical Adaptation

Generally, it is important to note that, instead of general behavioural laws (Gurr 1970; B. Martin 2005; 2007), situational mechanisms of adaptation dominated the **Anti-Coup alliance's reaction to state repression.**³³¹ Similar to McAdam's (1983) observation that southern elites and civil rights activists adapted their behaviour to each other after a confrontation, violent encounters became learning occasions **for both police and protesters. Challenging Tilly's (2008, 5) controversial claim that "contentious performances change incrementally as a result of accumulating experience" and not because of "great events,"** this study demonstrates that it was precisely the events of the coup, at the Republican Guard Headquarters, and on Rabaa al-Adawiya and Al-Nahda Square which acted as triggers for short-term

³³⁰ The two perpetrators, Mahmoud Ramadan and Abdullah el-Ahmedi, identified as supporters of deposed President Mursi, were sentenced to death a year later in a mass trial (see BBC News 2014).

³³¹ These findings are in line with Ketchley's (2017a) analysis of the Anti-Coup campaign, thus testifying to the merit of a disaggregated approach to the study of contentious politics in Egypt. Notably our databases differ, as this study focuses on both street level interaction and discursive representations and thus details only the immediate post-coup weeks. Nevertheless, both datasets reveal the same adaptive trends.

tactical innovation. Rather than binary notions of escalation vs de-escalation, what could be witnessed were processes of *decentralisation* and *diversification* within the Anti-Coup movement's contentious repertoire. Especially after the pivotal massacres in mid-August 2013, these adaptation mechanisms enabled the protesters to cope with the loss of their operational bases in the capital.

7.3.1 *Decentralisation and Temporal Concentration*

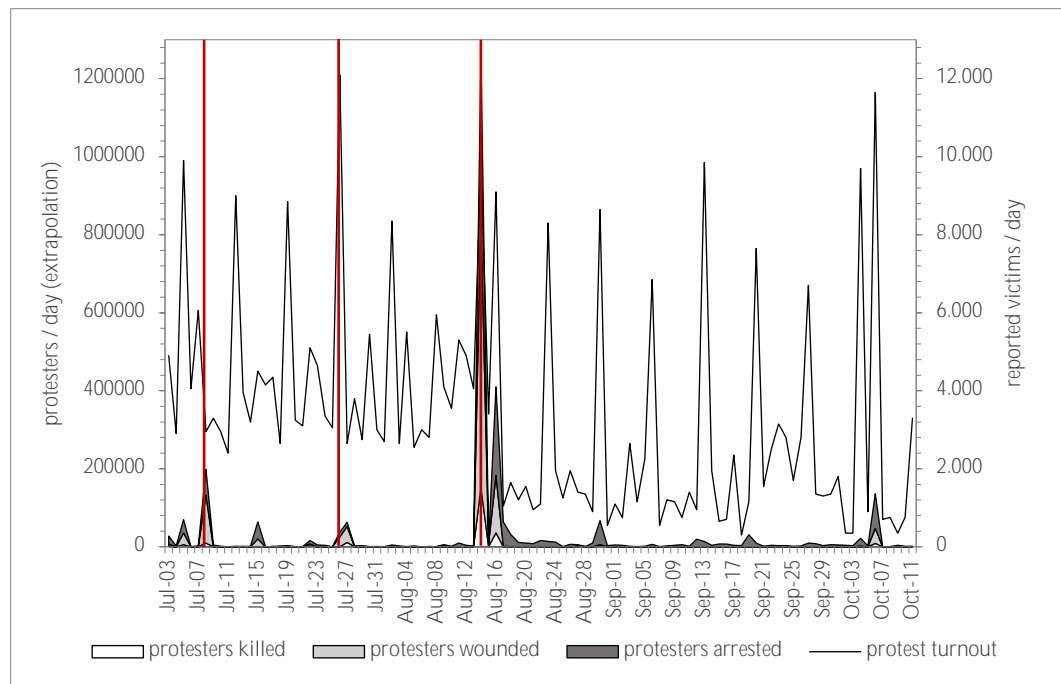
After the brutal skirmishes in late July, participation levels had managed to recover gradually, but following the massacres of *Rabaa* and *Al-Nahda*, the turnout rates abruptly dropped to the lowest level since early July (see Figure 25, p. 215). This setback can be attributed, above all, to spatial decentralisation processes as protesters quickly adapted to the destruction of their operational bases. In its "Call to all the Free [people] in Egypt," the NASL deliberately called for this decentralisation to cope with the increasing challenges of maintaining organisational coherence, as one of its six principles for the ongoing campaign to restore legitimacy.³³² Until mid-August 2013, the protest camps of *Rabaa* and *Al-Nahda* had geographically concentrated the majority of the unseated president's supporters and served as major hubs for protest marches. They had also formed spaces where innovative tactics could be developed, tested, and diffused (McCurdy, Feigenbaum, and Frenzel 2016, 98). By asserting territorial control of this urban space, the security forces re-adopted a familiar strategy: the former Mubarak regime had fenced off symbolic public spaces into small plots, successfully impeding street mobilisation (Shokr 2015). These restrictions had crumbled when protesters claimed Tahrir in 2011, transforming the plaza into a 'space of resistance' (Soudias 2015, 173).

Determined not to allow history to repeat itself, the authorities moved swiftly after clearing *Rabaa* and *Al-Nahda*. To prevent new occupations, police forces took control of urban landmarks, barred access to infrastructural hubs, and increased their presence in the provincial capitals. From mid-August, the most symbolic squares, streets, and bridges including the surroundings of *Midan Rabaa* and *Tahrir* were sealed off. On weekends, even metro stations in the vicinity of the

³³² These principles included 1) the rejection of the righteousness of all acts carried out by the coup government in the frame of its fight against terrorism; 2) the duty of continuing mobilisation without interruption; 3) the decentralisation of the campaign on the spatial level to different villages, districts and neighbourhoods, as well as on the organisational level to women, youth and girls; 4) the escalation of tactics of civil disobedience in factories, public institutions and companies and the boycott of all products benefitting the coup; 5) full commitment to peaceful resistance and rejection of violence in all its form; 6) communication media outlets to disseminate the true facts about contentious dynamics on the ground to the public. NASL. 20 August 2013. 'Statement 73. A Call to all the Free in Egypt [Arabic]'. <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/posts/295035333972170>.

squares were put out of service. The country's mosques faced restrictions, too, as the government aimed to re-establish territorial control over potential gathering points. All public Friday prayers were declared illegal unless held in licensed mosques of at least 80 square meters. Gatherings in the surroundings of mosques were banned, too. This complicated the task of organising the mass demonstrations that were so characteristic of the Anti-Coup campaign's inaugural phase. To a large part, they had started from countless privately funded mosques and prayer rooms (Ketchley 2013).

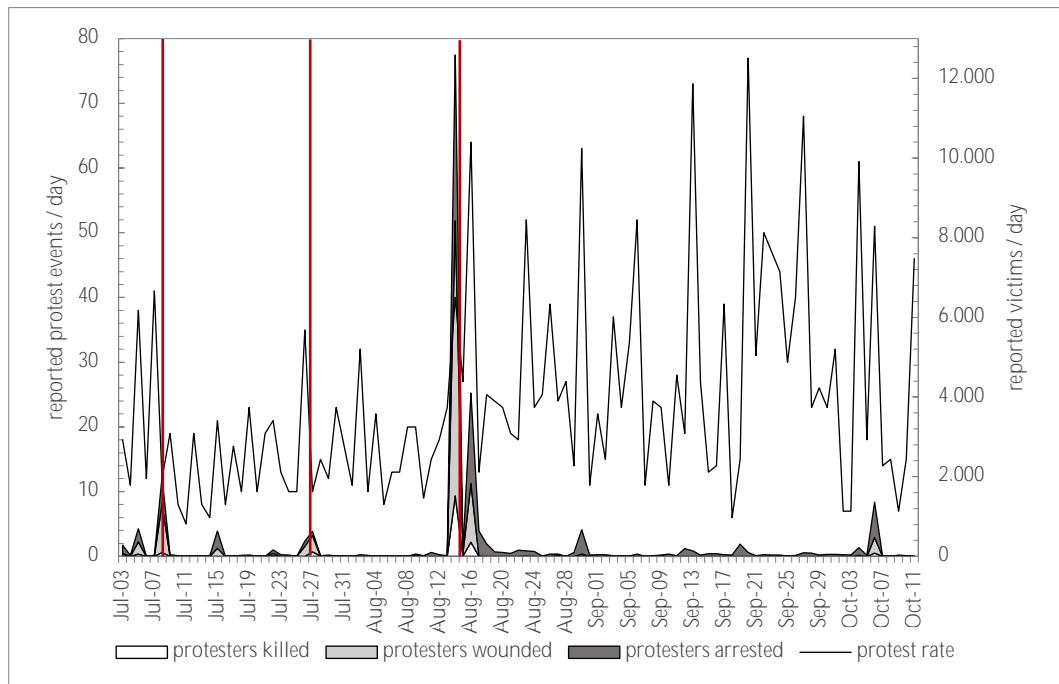
Figure 25. Impact of transformative events on protest turnout



Source 25. Time series based on author's event database, repression data by Wiki Thawra.

The progressive closure of public space promoted a spatial decentralisation of the Anti-Coup campaign, as events with hundreds of thousands of participants were simply deprived of their spatial basis. This evidence is substantiated by the trajectory of the average protest size, which swiftly dropped in mid-August and settled substantially below 10,000 participants, with around 220,000 average reported protest participants per week. However, this considerable drop in daily turnouts and the size of Anti-Coup events did not denote a reduction of mobilising power: realising that its centralised way of operating predisposed it to fail, the movement replaced mass events by smaller and more dispersed protests in byroads. Most of the locations where violent encounters had taken place were now avoided, **constraining the regime's ability to target and weaken the movement in a single blow.** Consequently, the event data documents a surge of smaller protests following the mass killings (see Figure 26, p.216).

Figure 26. Impact of transformative events on protest rates



Source 26. Time series based on author's event database, repression data by Wiki Thawra.

Events involving tens of thousands of participants became less frequent and concentrated on important key dates, such as the regular *miliuniya* after the Friday prayer.³³³ As the regular weekly peaks on Friday in Figure 27 (p. 217) show, these weekly demonstrations were not affected by the declining turnout on weekdays. They attracted up to a million protesters even after the *Rabaa* and *Al-Nahda* massacres. In fact, Fridays in their immediate aftermath even witnessed a surge of participants and some of the vigils for its victims, including the 'Friday of Rage' two days later and the 'Friday of Martyrs' one month later were among the largest Anti-Coup protest events.³³⁴

Lower turnouts on weekdays partly are explained by protesters' need to return to their jobs and provide for their families (Ketchley 2017a, 134). For similar reasons, the Anti-Coup protesters gradually moved their activities on workdays to the time after working hours (see Figure 28, p. 217). Additionally, the temporal concentration of contentious collective action can be attributed to the size of the Friday events, which offered better protection than the smaller protests throughout

³³³ For an overview over the 24 *miliuniya* protests in the investigated timeframe see Figure 29, p.218.

³³⁴ The twin peaks in Figure 27 at the beginning of October can be attributed to 'Armed Forces Day' which exerted a strong mobilising effect on the Anti-Coup protesters due to its symbolic character. The national holyday on 6 October honours the Egyptian army for its crossing of the Suez Canal and capture of the Israeli 'Bar Lev' defence line on Sinai in 1973. In an attempt to raise awareness for the army's involvement in recent massacres, the Anti-Coup coalition thus organised numerous counter-events to the traditional 6 October celebrations and on the Friday prior to the anniversary.

the week. Over the summer of 2013, deadly force became a routine policing practice as the police took previous violent encounters with Anti-Coup protesters as a pretext to operate a shoot-to-kill policy. During the dispersion of the Rabaa and Nahda camps, for every five injured demonstrators, there was one who died of his wounds (Wiki Thawra 2014). The large crowds on Friday, at least, raised the expected repression costs for the CSF units charged with dispersing the protests.

Figure 27. Daily protest turnouts, sorted by Fridays

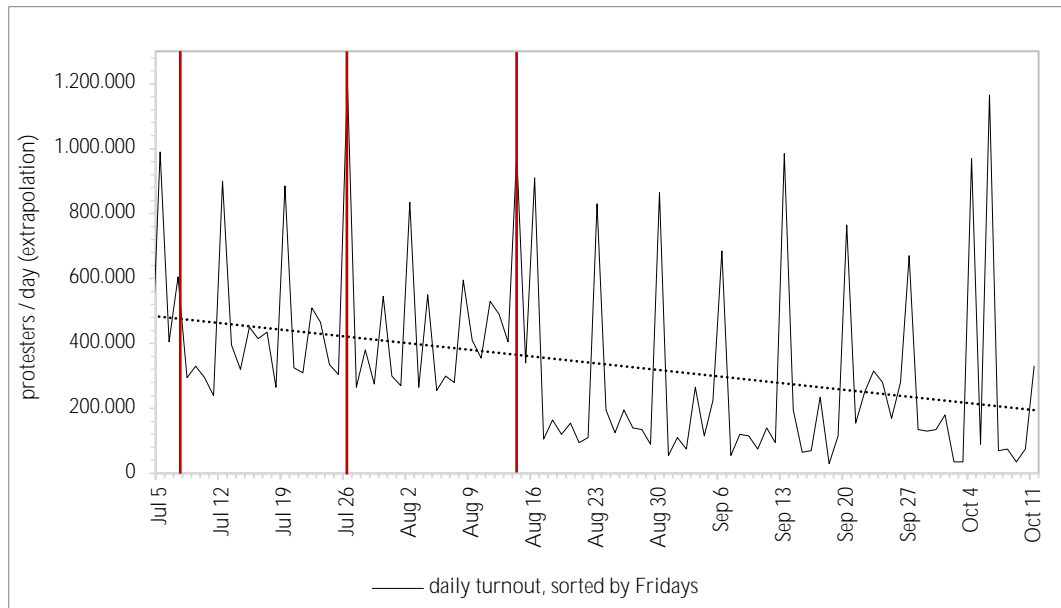
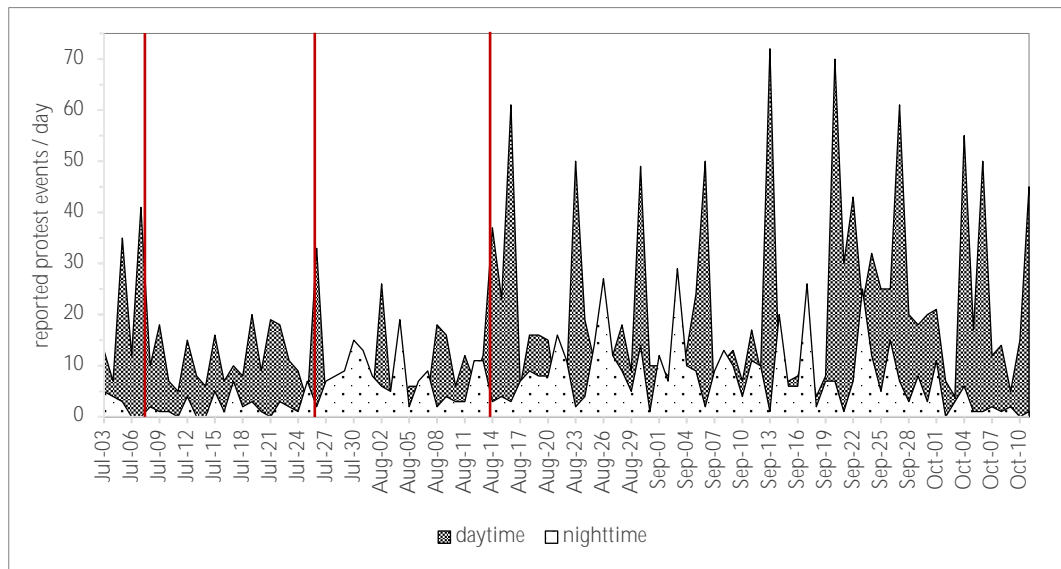


Figure 28. Daytime of the Anti-Coup protests



Source 27 & 28. Time series based on author's event database.

The interim government aimed to lower these costs not only by legalising the use of live ammunition against protesters but also by imposing a nationwide state of emergency in the month after the Rabaa clearing. The decree endowed the securi-

ty forces with far-reaching competencies and remained in effect until the end of our investigation period, including curfews in 14 provinces. The Friday protests eventually (see Figure 29, p. 218) became a way to circumvent these curfews as attending the Friday sermon at the mosque provided a pretext for political gatherings. To counter this recurrent mobilisation, Egypt's Ministry of Religious Endowments, in early September 2013, declared all Friday prayers a prerogative of imams trained by Al-Azhar whose sermons were to be approved by the state-controlled institution's council of elders.³³⁵ De jure, this implied that more than 55,000 freelance imams were barred from preaching on Fridays or carrying out collections on behalf of the Anti-Coup coalition. De facto, however, it impacted little on participation rates. While individual marches grew smaller in size, their frequency somewhat increased throughout the investigated timeframe.

Figure 29. Anti-Coup *miliuniya* protests, Fridays highlighted

date	The motto of the <i>miliuniya</i>	reported protests	extrapolated turnout
5 July	Day of rejection	38	990,000
9 July	The first night of Ramadan	19	330,000
12 July	Together against the bloody coup	19	900,000
15 July	Remember the martyrs	21	450,000
19 July	Resistance in order to break the coup / 10th of Ramadan	23	885,000
22 July	Right of martyrs	21	510,000
26 July	Breaking the coup	35	1,210,000
30 July	Martyrs of the coup	23	545,000
2 August	Overcoming the coup	32	835,000
4 August	Laylat al Qadr	22	550,000
8 August	Aid el Fitr	20	595,000
9 August	Steadfastness against the coup	20	410,000
14 August	Rabaa Massacre	40	985,000
16 August	Friday of rage	64	910,000
23 August	Friday of martyrs	52	830,000
25 August	Start of the "people leading the revolution" week	25	125,000
30 August	The people reconquer the revolution	63	865,000
3 September	The coup is terrorism	37	265,000
6 September	The people protect their revolution	52	685,000
13 September	Loyalty to the blood of the martyrs	73	985,000
20 September	The youth continue the revolution	77	765,000
27 September	The youth is the pillar of the revolution	68	670,000
5 October	The people restore the spirit of 6 October	61	970,000
11 October	Tahrir for all Egyptians	46	330,000

Source 29. Time series based on author's event database.

³³⁵ For a copy of the decree see RNN. 11 September 2013. 'Endowments prohibit any gatherings in mosques after prayer ends [Arabic]'. <https://rassd.com/71718.htm>

7.3.2 *The Coalition Diversifies*

Besides increased repression, the decreasing rate during weekdays can also be attributed to the needs of regular campaign members to provide for their families. For many protesters, engaging in daily street demonstrations came with severe neglect of their businesses and working routines. This explains why the starting time of protest marches on workdays gradually moved into the night, after shop closing time. After several weeks of protest, however, many Anti-Coup coalition members had to return to a regular working schedule, thus causing a shift of protest to non-business days (cf. Ketchley 2013). It was only due to functional shifts in the composition of the Anti-Coup coalition that the still relatively high frequency of collective actions could be sustained on weekdays throughout the investigation period. Above all, women protesters increasingly took responsibility for organising marches and human chains, whose employment rate in Egypt lies significantly below that of their male counterparts (see UNDP 2014).

As Erika Biagini (2017) illustrates in her noteworthy study of the Muslim Sisterhood, the post-coup period saw the establishment of several women-only movements both, within and independent of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Anti-Coup coalition. Of these movements, *Women against the Coup* (WAC) became the most active in coordinating women's activities across Egypt, moving to the forefront of the Anti-Coup as more male Anti-Coup members were jailed or killed (Biagini 2017, 44). The Muslim Sisters progressively replaced men in their positions, thus gradually emerging themselves as leading links in the organisation of protest marches and the dissemination of new slogans and tactics.³³⁶ Their increased participation in the NASL protests came with the significant advantage of greater tolerance from the side of the security forces. As Lin Noueihed reported, police appeared “more hesitant to act against them than male Muslim Brotherhood members, giving them the freedom to join demonstrations and preserve group cohesion through regular meetings” (Noueihed 2014).

In a similar vein, new student and youth organisations joined or were established by sympathisers of the Anti-Coup coalition (see Figure 30). Their collective actions compensated for the declining protest activity by the core members of the alliance (Abdel Salam 2013; Ketchley 2013). Most notably, a range of youth organ-

³³⁶ However, these changes within the mobilising structures of the alliance did not effect a systemic change within the NASL's tributary movements. While the forced exile of NASL leaders and the jailing of Muslim Brothers thrust women within the coalition into the vanguard of its battle for survival, its leading ranks abroad remained foreclosed. By contrast, within the Brotherhood, the need to rely on womenpower to sustain the movement in Egypt has created leverage for the Muslim Sisters, slowly creating niches in the local hierarchies of the group (see Noueihed 2014).

isations emerged across Egypt, organising resistance at educative institutions and universities. With the start of the academic winter semester in September, Egypt's governorates thus witnessed a rise of protests in educational institutions where the state's monopoly of power had been curtailed by a series of administrative court decisions since 2009. These protests were mostly organised by *Tullab didda al-Inqilab* [Students against the Coup] and *Shabab didda al-Inqilab* [Youth against the Coup] (Abdel Salam 2013). The emergence and success of these two Anti-Coup youth chapter effected another shift in the composition of the Anti-Coup protest coalition as they recruited the bulk of their members from the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood that is made up in no small part (around 210,000-245,000) of young men below the age of 35 (Tammam 2012, 35).

Figure 30. Logos of new Anti-Coup sub-chapters



Source 30: Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/Y.Anti-Coup.Official/>, <https://www.facebook.com/SACMov/>, <https://www.facebook.com/3farit.Anti-Coup/>, <https://www.facebook.com/WomenAnti-Coup/>, <https://www.facebook.com/MhamwnDdAlanqlab/>, <https://www.facebook.com/EngineersAnti-Coup/>.

Since the *Kefaya* Campaign of 2005 against a constitutional referendum and presidential election campaign of Husni Mubarak, Brotherhood youth groups had regularly participated in demonstrations against the regime, albeit not under the official banner of the Brotherhood (Martini, Kaye, and York 2012, 11f). During the 2011 uprisings, too, young Islamists had joined the Change Youth Coalition and the Revolutionary Youth Coalition, playing a crucial role in defending the Tahrir camp against attacks by counterrevolutionaries and police forces (Al-Awadi 2013, 541f). These prior experiences had provided the Brotherhood youth movement with expertise in contentious politics which they could draw on despite

the weakening organisational structure of the Anti-Coup coalition following state repression. Moreover, Ketchley (2013, 13) observes a surge of Anti-Coup activities by even younger pupils at public schools. Many of these new recruits had been politically inactive before and were compelled to partake in protest only by the victimisation of their friends and relatives. Accordingly, many of the protests on schoolyards rather than classical Anti-Coup-protests took the shape of advocacy protests for political prisoners, organised by their own sons and daughters.

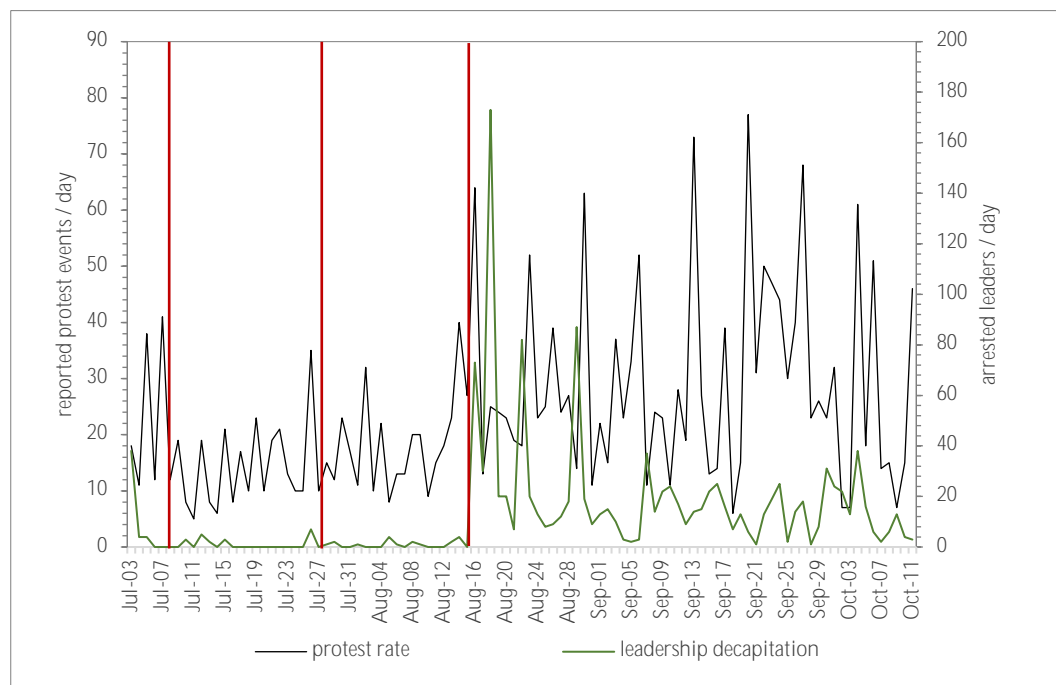
Within the youth movement, through further functional differentiation, several specialised subgroups (see Figure 30, p. 220) realised an active division of labour in the implementation of the Anti-Coup protests under the roof of *Youth against the Coup*: *Nisaa' did al-Inqilab* (Women against the Coup), for example, became the central organising body for young women and schoolgirls, in addition to the newly founded *7 Al-Sobh* movement (7:00 in the morning Movement), named after its first early morning demonstration in the Roshdy neighbourhood of Alexandria on 31 October 2013 (see Antoun and Parietti 2013; Ketchley 2017a, 153 f).³³⁷ *Afarit did al-Inqilab* [Demons against the Coup], in turn, took over the organisation of nightly protest marches. Mobilising each specific sectors of Egyptian society, they effectively complemented the various specialised protest chapters that the Anti-Coup coalition had established from its outset in various segments of the labour market, such as *Doctors against the Coup*, *Lawyers against the Coup*, *Professors against the Coup* or *Engineers against the Coup*.

With this diffusion of protest into different social segments, the Brotherhood had attempted to imitate the formula for success of the 2011 uprisings which had consisted in the successful coalition-building across socio-economic cleavages of youth, workers, and labour syndicates—the three sectors with the strongest mobilising power in Egyptian society (Harders 2013, 28). Hence, the interaction with repression agents not only led to a spatial, but also to a functional decentralisation and differentiation of the Anti-Coup protests, markedly impacting on the compo-

³³⁷ The 7 a.m. movement became widely known for a series of mass trials against 21 young female Anti-Coup protesters, including several minors, who had been arrested in the group's first protest event. Their trial, which prompted outcry by many human rights organisations, moved unusually quickly and thus gave the impression that Egyptian authorities aimed at stating a public example. According to the account of public prosecution the protesters had disrupted traffic and blocked roads based on instructions from the Brotherhood Guidance Council to cause chaos in the days before Mursi's trial. The hastily conducted lawsuit ended on 26 November 2013 in a series of harsh verdicts against the defendants, with adults receiving prison sentences of 11 years, and those below 18 receiving long juvenile detention. The Sidi Gaber Minor Offenses Court later commuted the sentences on charges of vandalism, thuggery, rioting, illegal public gathering, and the use of weapons to probation sentences of three to twelve months (Human Rights Watch 2013d).

sition of the protesting coalition of contenders. What Rune Ellefsen (2016, 449) has described as “leadership decapitation” contributed to this trend.

Figure 31. Impact of leadership decapitation on protest frequency

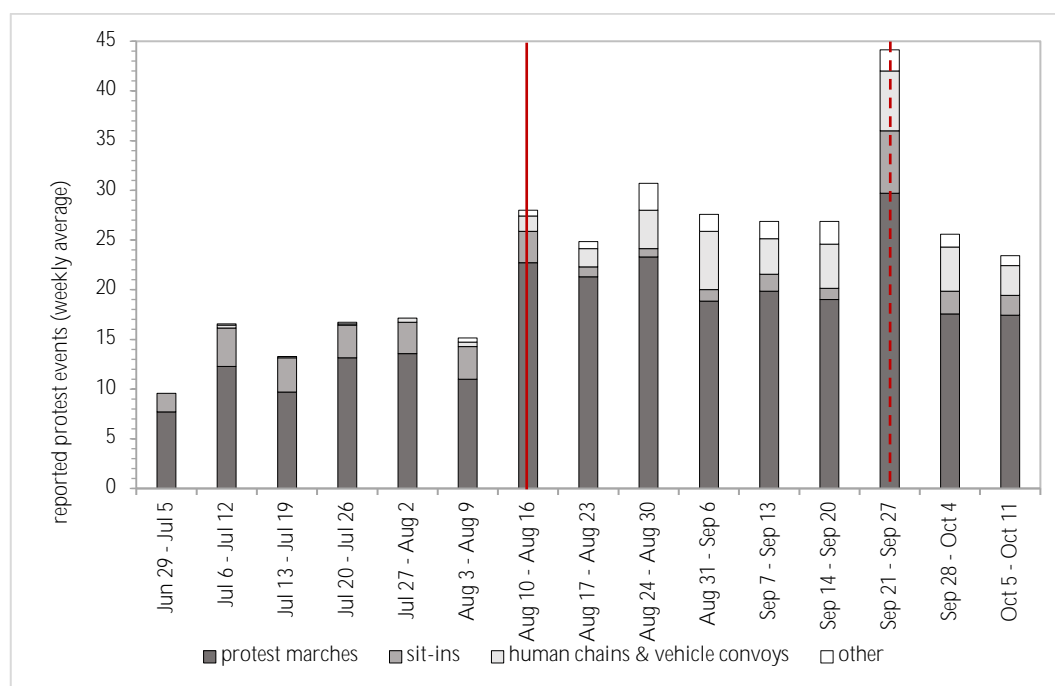


Source 31. Time series based on author’s event database, 30 June-11 October 2013.

Due to the Muslim Brotherhood’s secretive and protectionist information policy and the non-transparent internal hierarchies of its party, it is hard to accurately identify the leading figures inside the group and its coalition partners. The data released by *Wiki Thawra*, however, offer at least a rough overview over arrested Islamists believed to be part of the organisation’s cadres (see Figure 31, p. 222). The targeted arrests documented therein broadly match the counts by senior officials from the Ministry of Interior and the Egyptian army, according to which around three thousand Islamist cadres had been detained by March 2014, most in early July and after the protest camp raids in August 2013 (Dunne and Williamson 2014). Initially, the tent cities in the capital had offered the Anti-Coup leaders a relatively safe harbour from prosecution. Until mid-August, arrest rates stayed low, because the police refrained from incursions into the inner circles of the camps. This changed with the crackdown on the squares. The rapid neutralisation of their highest echelons after the Rabaa and Al-Nahda raids effectively required the constituent parts of the Anti-Coup movement to adopt decentralised and leaderless forms of organising resistance (El-Sherif 2014, 7; see Dobratz and

Waldner 2012).³³⁸ Along with the trend towards decentralisation and temporal concentration, the movement's contentious repertoire diversified in the interaction with the security state. Particularly after *Rabaa* (marked as a red line in Figure 32), new protest tactics emerged as demonstrators pragmatically adapted to the destruction of their operational bases: Figure 32 illustrates that although marches remained the most common protest form, above all, large-scale sit-ins were partly substituted by human chains, smaller hit-and-run protests, and creative tactics (see Ketchley 2017a, 138–41).

Figure 32. Evolution of the Anti-Coup repertoire



Source 32. Time series based on author's event database.

These flexible performances allowed for a more spontaneous organisation and were better suited to evade state policing. With the emergence of the Anti-Coup youth chapters 'Students against the Coup' and 'Youth against the Coup' particularly schools and universities developed into hotbeds of resistance and gave rise to a range of innovative and often creative protest performances. The Anti-Coup students made use of their dorms, faculties and schoolyards as gathering points and stages for collective action, thus combining their local context with a globalised repertoire of creative tactics (Spiegel 2016, 535). The start of the winter se-

³³⁸ Towards the end of the investigation period, only former FJP-cabinet members Amr Darrag and Mohammed Ali Bishr, the chairman of the *Shura* Council Ahmed Fahmi, and the FJP vice chairman Essam al-Erian were on the loose. In late October, al-Erian was arrested. Mahmoud Ezzat, who since Badie's arrest acts as the group's supreme leader, had already been underground since the summer of 2013.

mester (marked as a dotted line in Figure 32) was therefore marked by a mobilisation peak in mid-September. For example, in Mansoura students organised a series of public theatre performances that re-enacted the massacres; in Port Said they released balloons with the R4BIA imprint into the Suez Canal, and in Assiut, they commemorated the *Rabaa* martyrs with a series of soccer matches.

Inspired by the success of its youth chapters in generating resonance with their localised creative actions, the Anti-Coup movement engaged in a country-wide civil disobedience campaign against the public sector and private enterprises that had supported Mursi's ouster. In its August 20, 2013 statement, the NASL called for a country-wide boycott, providing explicit instructions for the provincial Anti-Coup chapters to respond to the destruction of the movement's central base of operations on Rabaa Square. Provincial Anti-Coup chapters were entreated to rejoiner with an escalating civil disobedience campaign and a new repertoire of contention that targeted newspapers, satellite channels and websites that supported the coup, incited hatred, had promoted lies and had misled the public in their opinion on the Anti-Coup campaign; businessmen and wealthy entrepreneurs who had supported the coup through their funding; the products of companies run by the military and its associated enterprises.³³⁹ This proxy-targeting of the state was less risky but, nevertheless, caused significant disruption to public life.

Furthermore, train and metro traffic were affected by a rising number of blockades. In the countryside and alongside wide connecting roads, car convoys, motorcycle rallies and human chains emerged as innovative tactics that were less hazardous than sit-ins and better able to circumvent structural repression. Because of this tactical diversification, the movement could make its presence felt in residential neighbourhoods. As mainstream news coverage boycotted the protests and the Anti-Coup social media campaigns failed to reach most households, human chains and car convoys offered a comparative advantage to sit-ins: taking place on the major commuter arteries and traffic nodes during rush hours, these decentralised performances were more salient in the urban public space and reached a broad audience as passers-by were inevitably confronted with the protesters' messages. Moreover, human chains and motorcades on thoroughfares were easy to organise, while orchestrating large urban sit-ins and running entire tent cities posed significant logistical challenges (McCurdy, Feigenbaum, and Frenzel 2016, 101). Following the same logic, so-called *farasha* [butterfly] protests spread in residential areas where security forces enacted a particularly restrictive

³³⁹ See NASL. 20 August 2013. 'Assessment of position and vision for the future [Arabic]'. <https://bit.ly/2s9ZfZS>.

curfew policy. The expression captures a variety of hit-and-run tactics that involved protesters changing their location in short intervals, or scattering after only a few minutes (Ketchley 2017a, 144). The model of the butterfly protests was soon emulated across the entire country, with the newly formed Anti-Coup chapter ‘**Demons against the Coup**’ working as a diffusion network.

Just as the earlier protest camps in Nasr City and Gizah themselves had earlier been a model emulated by sit-ins in other parts of the country, the *farasha* tactics and other alternative protest performances diffused quickly. The diffusion of effective tactics, including the “protest camping” (McCurdy, Feigenbaum, and Frenzel 2016, 100), constitutes a recurrent phenomenon during the entire investigation period. Demonstrators in the epicentres of protest throughout the country did not newly invent their tactics, but mostly adapted them from known model cases in which the envisioned tactics had been successfully applied by others.³⁴⁰ In Port Said, for instance, demonstrators occupied the Tawhid Mosque for several weeks mimicking the camps in the capital. In Alexandria, the Qaid Ibrahim Mosque became the site of sit-ins. The butterfly protests, in turn, seem to originate from the city of Assiut, where demonstrations were often attacked by hired thugs during curfew hours.³⁴¹ In contrast, car convoys and motorcycle rallies made their way into the Anti-Coup repertoire from the Sinai and Fayoum governorates, where local Bedouin tribes traditionally resort to motorcades to reinforce their political claims. Most official attempts to prevent such diffusion processes, for example through a general ban on motorcycles in Sinai, remained unsuccessful.³⁴²

A decisive advantage of the new forms of protest compared to marches or sit-ins was that they were immune to the geostrategic options for imposing preventative blockades that were available to the security forces. Since protest had already been anticipated, following the military coup, ministries, as well as military and administrative buildings, were cordoned off with razor wire and anti-vehicle barriers. Over time, these blockades were extended to strategic junctions and access. **The country’s mosques, which after the nationwide close-down of almost all FJP-offices** functioned as the primary meeting point for protest marches, faced in-

³⁴⁰ This confirms McAdam’s (1983, 736) observation that for innovations to have an impact they needed to be adopted by a broader population of activists, the urban epicentres of protest throughout the country adapted their repertoires to successful model cases.

³⁴¹ RNN. 28 August 2013. ‘Innovations of those who reject the coup against the oppression of the interior [Arabic]’. *Rassd News Network*. <https://rassd.com/70616.htm>; RNN. September 29, 2013. ‘Butterfly demonstrations by Women Against the Coup in Assiut [Arabic]’. *Rassd News Network*. <https://rassd.com/72996.htm>.

³⁴² RNN. 10 August 2013. ‘Erian: Thousands are ready to sacrifice for legitimacy [Arabic]’. *Rassd News Network*. <https://rassd.com/68722.htm>.

creasingly restrictive regulation, too, as the protest cycle went on: Closing ranks with the Grand Imam Ahmed Tayyeb, who in the name of the *Azhar* Mosque had welcomed the military coup against the Mursi administration, the *Awqaf* Ministry of Religious Endowments led by Muhammad Mukhtar Gomaa compiled a set of regulations and legislative provisions that were intended to curtail the Brotherhood's control over the country's mosques and Quran schools (see Morsy and Brown 2013).

In the context of decades of repressions against Islamists in the Arab world, these restrictions were not a first: just as within the campaign of repression orchestrated against Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya during the 1980s and 1990s, they aimed at regaining the state's control over the content of Friday prayers and the distribution of *Ṣadaqat* [voluntary donations], which for the Brotherhood had developed into an instrument of mass mobilisation (Salwa Ismail 2006, 31, 71–77). In early September, Gomaa declared illegal prayers of more than 80 square metres outside of officially licensed mosques (see Rose 2013; Saleh 2013b). This decree restricted the availability of public spaces for the articulation of dissent. The countless smaller and privately funded mosques and local *Zawiyat* [rooms of religious retreat], which were among the Brotherhood's traditional centres of recruitment and influence (see Gaffney 1991), were progressively closed down. Nearly 40 per cent of all Anti-Coup protests had started from these locations; the comparatively high density of protest in specific quarters of Cairo and Alexandria according to Ketchley (2013, 16) was correlated with the higher concentration of mosques in these areas. The envisioned close-down of the majority of houses of worship aside, Gomaa's decree also implied a general ban on any kinds of gatherings inside or in the surroundings of mosques.³⁴³ This acute kind of regulation of the public space complicated the task of organising the *musira khashida* [mass demonstration] that was the most characteristic protest performance of the Anti-Coup repertoire in the movement's inaugural phase. Thereby, however, it ultimately promoted the tactical diversification of the NCSL's protest repertoire.

7.4 Conclusion: Discursive Path Dependencies

The body of statements issued by the NASL after the 3 July 2013 military intervention effectively laid out the architecture for a protest campaign in the name of legitimacy which was to dominate Egypt's contentious dynamics in the summer of

³⁴³ See RNN. 11 September 2013. 'Endowments prohibit any gatherings in mosques after prayer ends [Arabic]'. <https://rassd.com/71718.htm>

2013. It also strongly conditioned the trajectory of this very campaign—by restricting its potential alliances with other political players, and by delimiting the horizon of thinkable repertoires of contention that the protesters resorted to. As the Anti-Coup campaign suffered from unseen repression at the hands of the state in the massacre of Rabaa, the NASL found itself in a quandary: At the Islamist base, the shared experience of victimisation contributed to the stabilisation of its oppositional counter-hegemonic identity. This political subjectivation process was supported by discursive structures that portrayed the Brotherhood and its coalition partners as martyrs for both, democratic and religious values, as well as for constitutional legitimacy and the rule of law. Given the months of hegemonic struggle over the definition of popular legitimacy, however, the NASL failed to appeal to a broader audience with this discourse.

In contrast to the *Kefaya*-campaign or the protests against the Mubarak regime in 2011, its call to reinstate legitimacy was no lowest common denominator that could be used for multi-partisan mobilisation (cf. Clarke 2011: 406). Instead, it was an expression of the Muslim Brotherhood and its sympathisers' **vested interests** which, due to the erratic performance of the Mursi administration, did not meet with a lot of enthusiasm outside of the Islamist inner circle of supporters. As described in chapter 5, large masses of Egyptians including many of those groups who had been key in the mobilisation against the Mubarak regime had welcomed the removal of Mursi who, in their eyes, continued to derive its only legitimacy from a narrow victory in a contentious election where the choice for most of the Tahrir activists had been one between two evils. Not realising that **"consent must be secured not just at the ballot box, but at every critical juncture,"** as the Blogger Baheyya (2012) succinctly put it, Mursi had done little to placate his opponents **fears of the advent of an Islamic state in Egypt, pursuing an exclusivist "winner takes all" policy and alienating the revolutionary opposition** along the way. By the time that the Tamarod campaign filled Tahrir square, his uncompromising stance had undermined Mursi to such a degree that any claims to his democratic legitimacy held little credibility outside of his own constituency. As illustrated in chapter 6 of this thesis, competing interpretations of police operations against the Anti-Coup demonstrators further added to the increasing polarisation of Egyptian society. By excluding the army from its list of foes, the NASL sought to reproduce the solidarising effect of 2011, where, according to John Chalcraft (2014, 176), the demonstration of a united popular will had made it that much harder for the military to resort to lethal violence for the risk that such a move would have sparked **"disunity in the ranks and the rebellion of junior officers."**

The fact that the movement failed to inspire even marginal support for its

policies from within the military's ranks, however, was indicative of the Brothers' political isolation by the time of Mursi's deposition (see also Ketchley 2013). Faced with a strongly segmented public and within the context of growing perceptions of insecurity, the Anti-Coup movement did not succeed in defending its own version of events against the securitised frames of the administration. Moreover, it failed to develop with innovative frames appealing to audiences beyond the Islamist oppositional spectrum or to build upon or modify its legitimacy frame in a creative and inspiring way (Snow et al. 1986: 477). In the context of an extremely polarised public (K. Hafez 2015), the Islamists' nonviolent protest campaign under the banner of 'legitimacy' rather contributed to the stabilisation of the discursive frontier between the 'forces of the coup' and those 'legitimately resisting' them—and thus of both political camps. Accordingly, the Anti-Coup discourses, over the course of the investigation, turned from a competitive hegemonic project into an insurmountable obstacle for cross-ideological alliance building. As I have shown in this chapter, it even precluded popular solidarity when civilian protesters were butchered in the massacres of *Rabaa* and *Al-Nahda*.

However, while failing to extend the movement's support base, the principled nature of the Anti-Coup discourse on peaceful protest as the only legitimate way of resistance, also ensured the movement's survival and prevented it from following the path of Jihad that would inevitably have entailed a fragmentation of the fragile contentious coalition and a discrediting of its political aims. The coalition was held together by a discourse that defined the Anti-Coup campaign as a popular movement that was peacefully resisting a violent, unconstitutional and undemocratic counter-revolution. This discourse also set the parameters for the NASL's contentious repertoire: abandoning the nonviolent approach would have critically endangered the alliance's collective identity. Accordingly, instead of a gradual radicalisation, the NASL adapted to the brutal crackdown against its members with processes of decentralisation and diversification. The surge of contentious performances that did not depend on specific geographical points of assembly; the concentration of mass protest on Fridays; the postponement of protest marches to dusk; and the proxy-targeting of institutions seen as extended arm of the regime all represented strategic substitutions of established performances by more effective tactics (cf. Davenport and Loyle 2012: 80). They came along with personnel changes regarding the composition and organisation of collective actions (see also Biagini 2017; Ketchley 2013). Without these adaptations, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood would today hardly exist anymore beyond the very atomised *usra* [family, an organisational unit within the MB] level. In this sense, the peaceful Anti-Coup campaign—which persists up to date, albeit in smaller

scale and frequency—became a self-serving survival mechanism, for the Brotherhood and many of the groups organised in the NASL. While unsuccessful regarding their goal of reinstating Mursi, their resilience after the defeating blow of Rabaa, kept the disapproval of the military return to politics present in the public sphere (see Schwedler 2018, 83).

Ultimately, however, the episodes of Egyptian state violence in July and August can be considered as the trigger for a two-sided backlash. As I discuss in the next chapter, particularly the *Rabaa* and *Al-Nahda* massacres marked not only a turning point for the NASL, but also for its antagonist other: neither the authorities nor the protesters could take a step back afterwards and offer concessions to the opponent. In an attempt to legitimise its violent crackdown, the regime resorted to a counter-discourse to the NASL's legitimacy discourse after the coup which labelled the MB and its allies as terrorists. *Rabaa* reinforced this antagonising narrative, cementing political polarisation and paving the way for a restoration of authoritarian rule.

8. Interlude: A New Hegemonic Block

Rabaa marked a turning point (see Pearlman 2018) not only for the Brotherhood and its allies but also for the interim regime. In order to protect ‘national security’, it temporarily reinstated martial law, imposing curfews in 14 provinces and authorising the CSF to apply deadly force in case of transgression (Sly and Al-Hourani 2013). It also stepped up the wave of mass arrests against leading members of the Anti-Coup movement, often in cooperation with a politicised judiciary (Dunne and Brown 2014; Dworkin and Michou 2014). Most importantly, the cabinet vowed to dissolve the Muslim Brotherhood within a legal framework. A September 2013 court case established the legal basis to move against the Muslim Brotherhood’s social service network. **On 23 September 2013, the Cairo Court for Urgent Matters declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organisation, ordered the seizure of its funds and banned it from carrying out any activities in the country (Brooke 2015, 1–2).**³⁴⁴ A legal committee was charged with investigating **the Brotherhood’s assets and compiling a list of its affiliated social service organisations** that were to be closed for their ties with the group. In December 2013, the new Minister of Social Solidarity, Ahmed El-Borai, announced that the committee was auditing 1,055 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for alleged links with the MB and had frozen their assets pending the results (El-Dabh 2013c). By mid-2015, the Egyptian government had closed more than 430 of them.³⁴⁵ In October 2014, finally, also the political arm of the group, the FJP, was banned (El-Sherif 2014, 14).³⁴⁶

The prohibition of the MB and FJP, the largest contributing organisation to the NASL,³⁴⁷ raised the stakes for the whole protest alliance. When the Muslim

³⁴⁴ The interim-government postponed the implementation of the original verdict and the dissolution of the group until all litigation measures against members of the group were finalised and announced the ban of the group only on 24 December 2013 (Cunningham 2013). This announcement followed another car bombing outside a government security directorate in Mansoura that killed at least 15 people.

³⁴⁵ Social Solidarity Minister Ghada Waly, who followed Ahmed El-Borai in office, claimed that the frozen assets would be distributed to other NGOs. See: <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/social-solidarity-minister-dissolves-169-ngos-9-governorates> and <https://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2015/07/08/434-muslim-brotherhood-ngos-shutdown/>.

³⁴⁶ In a second wave, the Egyptian government’s Inventory, Seizure, and Management Committee of Muslim Brotherhood Funds froze the assets of another 1,589 alleged Brotherhood members (including those of former President Mursi, of MB leader Mahmoud Ezzat and of FJP Secretary General Mohamed al-Beltagy) and 118 companies in September 2018 based on alleged evidence that organisation’s leadership had been working to replace its lost funds since the first crackdown in 2013. The committee additionally imposed asset freezes on 1,133 NGOs, 104 schools, 69 hospitals and 33 media outlets, claiming that they were “damaging the national economy” by smuggling foreign currency.

³⁴⁷ While certainly a MB offshoot, from its foundation, the FJP encompassed countless Egyptians who did not belong to the group. Formal membership in the Brotherhood requires an intensive training

Brotherhood was designated a terrorist organisation, this explicitly placed it within the jurisdiction of State Security. This then allowed State Security agents to raid and seize Islamist charities and civic associations at will, under the pretext that they maintained ties to the group or its members. Moreover, it removed the need for authorities to find a pretext for putting Anti-Coup members on trial. After the designation as a terrorist group, any affiliation with the Brotherhood put even those at risk that were not protesting or engaging with any type of political activism. The Brotherhood thus faced losing its traditional social basis consisting of a network of schools, medical facilities and charities spread across the country (Brooke 2013; 2015; Davis and Robinson 2012; Byman and Wittes 2014).³⁴⁸

Barred from retreating to the social service sector, the success of the Anti-Coup campaign became even more essential for the Brotherhood. With the verdict, its political struggle became basically one of political survival. Towards the end of the investigation period, the rate of peaceful Anti-Coup protests continued to increase, until it escalated again in deadly street battles on 6 October 2013, the highly **symbolic national day for Egypt's armed forces**. **At the time of manuscript submission**, in 2018, Anti-Coup protesters were still demonstrating in Egypt, albeit intermittently and in considerably smaller frequency and scale. The Brotherhood's **designation as a terrorist organisation**, the prosecution of key activists, and the criminalisation of protest in the months after the period investigated in the last **two chapters have curtailed the movement's room of manoeuvre** (Van de Bildt 2015). These developments crippled other attempts to mobilise cross-movement coalitions for street protests.

8.1 Anti-Coup Resistance from Abroad

By the time the Brotherhood was dissolved in December 2013, several thousand formerly active members of the Brotherhood and other tributaries of the NASL had already fled the country, particularly to Turkey, Qatar and the UK. The sum-

process, known as *tarbiyya*, including a five-to-eight yearlong gradual ascendancy from an initial status as prospective member (for a description of this incubation process see Al-Anani 2016, 82–98; Trager 2016, 48–51). Becoming an FJP member was substantially easier. The party thus became a mechanism for extending the boundaries of the populace under the clout of the Brotherhood, while maintaining the **rigid internal structures that had ensured the MB's coherence and resilience over decades of repression**.

³⁴⁸ It is estimated that the MB income reached about one billion Egyptian pounds annually after the 25 January Revolution. This substantial income was due to the increase in donations from individuals and members of the international organisation, in addition to the MB's membership donations which amount up to 10 per cent of members' income. Additional funds sprung from a complex network of private schools in 19 provinces, a range of mid-sized construction companies, furniture stores, and textile companies. Further companies were under indirect ownership of the group, and often run under the roof of larger business conglomerates, such as the 'Malik' group (see Al-Morshedy 2013).

mer of 2013 marked a **turning point in the Muslim Brotherhood movement's 90-year long history**. For the first time in its history, the Brotherhood lost its main operating base in Egypt. Consequently, it was forced to follow the path that related organisations and offshoots of the movements, such as, Hamas, had taken in the past when repression became too severe to continue operating in their home countries. The Anti-Coup refugees fled to various destinations, exiting Egypt first predominantly via the Sudanese Border, later through Jordan. Turkey received the **bulk of the Brothers' rank and file, including several leaders of the Egyptian Gamma'a Islamiya and key members of the Anti-Coup organisation** who were not part of either organisation. Given the ideological sympathies between the FJP and members of Turkey's governing *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* [Justice and Development Party, AKP], Turkish authorities provided the exiled Egyptians with different forms of support.³⁴⁹ This included the provision of a special *Ikamat İnsaniye*, a sort of humanitarian VISA created specifically for the purpose of granting asylum to wanted Anti-Coup members. According to my interlocutors, a small group of FJP and Brotherhood functionaries arriving in Turkey in the immediate aftermath of 3 July 2013 were the first to receive this legal title. These few hundred people then compiled lists of names for other Anti-Coup fugitives in need of asylum. Subsequent waves of refugees were awarded visas when they found themselves on these lists. Through this snowball system, it is estimated that, to date, between four and eight thousand Muslim Brothers, including their families, found asylum in Turkey, **predominantly in the Yenibosna area, near Istanbul's Ataturk airport, which houses much of today's logistical infrastructure of the FJP and the NASL's remains**. Despite the pending charges in Egyptian courts, Brotherhood members

³⁴⁹ This political support, however, may have been based less on ideological affinities than on the leverage that the guardianship over the Brotherhood's fate gives the Turkish authorities. In fact, several exiled Anti-Coup activists I spoke to in Istanbul throughout 2016 highlighted their own suspicions vis-à-vis Turkish authorities and stressed that they felt like "Erdogan's bargaining chips." This impression was reinforced by the events of the failed coup attempt in Turkey which made it plain to the Egyptian fugitives how much their toleration depended on the favourable climate in Turkey (see also Aydın-Düzgüt 2014). Several interview partners stressed how the night of the coup attempt, had been a night of packing and planning, as they anticipated that their asylum status would be revoked in the case of a government change. As it became clear that the coup attempt had failed, however, the Muslim Brothers were able to capitalise the parallels between the coup scenarios in Egypt and Turkey and on its organisation's victimisation by the army – an experience they now shared with the AKP (see Grimm 2017). A leading member of the group in Istanbul highlights how the bombing of parliament and the deployment of troops against civilians in the night of July 15, 2016 dramatically widened the room for manoeuvre for the MB and its allies in Turkey (see also Magued 2018, 9). However, surprisingly several younger interlocutors described having closer ties with members of the Turkish *Saadet Partisi* [Felicity Party], an offshoot of the Necmettin Erbakan National Outlook movement, than with the AKP, which is often mistakenly portrayed as the "Turkish version" of the Egyptian MB (e.g., Abdel Kader 2013; Tremblay 2018; for a discussion of the historic interrelation of both groups see Yilmaz, Barton, and Barry 2017).

were furthermore allowed to congregate in Istanbul and Ankara, including after their expulsion from increasingly pressured Qatar in mid-September 2014 (see Sailer 2016).³⁵⁰

By August 2014, several of these actors had realised the failure of their grass-roots protest campaign in Egypt and were exploring new avenues for translocal political activism for their goals from exile. They founded the Egyptian Revolutionary Council (ERC) in Istanbul as an anti-regime platform that embraced the 25 January Revolution **principles and affirmed most of the NASL's founding principles** (Magued 2018, 487).³⁵¹ Acting as political opposition from abroad (see Magued 2018), these expatriates helped to keep the discourse of legitimate Anti-Coup resistance as well as the memory of *Rabaa* alive (Richter 2017). From London, this was conducted mainly through a range of exile news portals, with Ikhwanweb.com, Ikhwanpress.org and Ikhwanonline.info as the most important examples (Booth 2014). In contrast, from Istanbul, the Anti-Coup discourse was kept alive through several online multimedia platforms specialised on providing propaganda material for social media as well as offline protest campaigns (e.g., banners, logos, propaganda videos, picture portfolios etc.), such as Rabaastory.net or Rabiaplatform.com.³⁵² In addition to these Brotherhood-owned outlets, several new Brotherhood-friendly think tanks (e.g., Al-Sharq Forum) and news agencies (World Bulletin, Huffington Post Arabic) provided platforms for Anti-Coup

³⁵⁰ Qatar pledged to expel the leaders of Egypt's MB including its foreign affairs spokesman Amr Darrag, its acting secretary-general Mahmoud Hussein, as well as several clerics and preachers with sympathies to the group as part of an agreement forced upon the state by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other neighbours. The bilateral ties between Qatar and Egypt were badly damaged since the military intervention 2013 as Doha welcomed a number of senior Brotherhood figures. In turn, Saudi Arabia perceived the MB as a threat to its monarchic model of governance due to the group's opposition to the House of Saud's hereditary power structures and its Islamic self-legitimation as the protector of the holy cities. Qatar's expulsion of the group thus aimed at easing the growing tensions within the GCC due to the emirate's pronounced support for the group, including through its Al-Jazeera TV network (see Black 2014; Neubauer 2014; Sailer 2016).

³⁵¹ The ERC does not operate on behalf of the Brotherhood, but many of its exiled members and sympathisers have joined the organisation. However, it also includes several liberal and Christian Egyptians abroad. See ERC official website at <http://ercegypt.org/>. The ERC's founding statement is available at: <http://normanfinkelstein.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/statement-1.pdf>

³⁵² Created in the run up to the two-year anniversary of the *Rabaa* massacre to coordinate global *#RememberRabaa* rallying efforts and set up as a professional PR platform, Rabaastory.net went offline through the course of this research. An archived copy of the website is available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20140816042224/http://rabaastory.net:80/#!slide-2>. The so called 'Rabiaplatform', established on 14 September 2013, has grown into a major forum for news about groups affiliated with or sympathetic to the Brotherhood. Since mid-2016, it was turned by its webmasters into a propaganda platform for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's 'one nation, one flag, one motherland' discourse and for the defamation campaign against the Fethullah Gülen movement (referred to on the platform as "FETO") - the organisation made responsible by Turkish authorities for the failed coup attempt. See <http://www.rabiaplatform.com/>.

members to comment on the ongoing events in Egypt and lobby for international support. Many of these platforms operated from Istanbul and often even from the same buildings where the expat Anti-Coup leaders opened their exile offices. Others, such as RNN, continued to work from Egypt, with their servers hosted abroad.

Moreover, Turkey provided financial and legal backing to the Muslim Brotherhood by allowing the establishment of several oppositional satellite TV channels from abroad, which compensated for the organisation's closed networks in Egypt. While the first and most prominent of these channels, *Rabaa al-Thawra* [Rabaa the Revolution] was taken off air by its host, the Jordan-based *Noorsat* service, in May 2015 (World Bulletin 2015), the channels *Mekammelyn*, *Al-Sharq*, and *Al-Watan* (formerly *Misr Al'aan*) continue to broadcast from Istanbul.³⁵³ Run by exiled Brotherhood members, such as former Secretary General Mahmoud Hussein and Brotherhood politician Basim al-Khafagy, these media channels enabled those organisers of the Anti-Coup Alliance who were not arrested in the weeks after Rabaa, to maintain a certain degree of communication with their supporters in Egypt through the broadcast of news feeds, protest calls and political talk shows. In this sense, media advocacy from abroad became compensated for lacking infrastructure in Egypt and introduced a new means of political participation that bypassed state repression (see also Magued 2018, 486, 490). However, it also contributed to the detachment of the NASL leadership from the coalition's grassroots level. This includes both Anti-Coup members who continued to stage protests in Egypt, albeit in much smaller frequency and scale,³⁵⁴ and who were facing increasingly dire conditions. However, the metamorphosis of transnational activism also reinforced a split between the movement elites—a few dozen activists with privileged access to funding, travel opportunities, media outlets and Turkish officials—and its affiliates in Turkey. As many interview partners highlight, supporting their families including potentially jailed family members in Egypt from exile, over time, turned into a significant challenge for those residing in Istanbul and Qatar and a daily task that overshadowed all political activism. Coupled with the difficulties of finding employment, childcare or arranging other daily necessities in a for-

³⁵³ Rabaa TV was shut down by Jordanian authorities, because of the hate speech by a Salafist cleric broadcasted on the channel. That same year, Turkish authorities also closed the *Al-Watan* precursor *Misr Al'aan* after a talk show host had called for the assassination of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

³⁵⁴ Up until today, several Anti-Coup chapters continue to organise small protests on a regular basis. However, these groups as well as their protests are scattered across the country and operate mostly on a local, with little interdependence and coordination between different local groups. Often the coordinating bodies for the *farasha* demonstrations boil down to the small *usra* units within the MB, which continue to exist autonomously from the MB leadership as independent cells across Egypt (for an excellent discussion of the MB's internal organisational structure see Al-Anani 2016, 87f, 104–10).

eign, non-Arabic-speaking country, the burden of meeting days end dampened the propensity of most exiled Anti-Coup members to continue their political engagement beyond Egypt's borders.³⁵⁵

What is more, the trans-nationalisation of the Anti-Coup activism also contributed to a radicalisation of the coalitions discourse of resistance. Above all, the mediatisation of prominent religious scholars as guest speakers in the Turkey-based TV studios contributed to an expansion of Islam as a frame of reference for the Anti-Coup struggle. As Shaima Magued has discussed in her analysis of the shows broadcasted on the four TV channels, “many Islamic scholars advocated the end of the Egyptian regime, stigmatised its leadership, and accused it of apostasy (kufr) while labelling the army “an occupier” that killed “Muslim’ citizens” (Magued 2018, 411f). This reinterpretation of the political struggle as a test of faith, and the increasing presence of *takfir*-language within Anti-Coup circles abroad, effectively fed into the vilifying discourses of the consolidating post-coup regime.

8.2 Historical Revisionism at Home

In Egypt, the consolidating post-coup regime worked hard to erase the memories of the week-long peaceful resilience of the Anti-Coup campaign, as well as any evidence of the massacres committed by security forces. Police violence against civilians was either categorically denied or reinterpreted as self-defence against terrorist attacks and the legitimate restoration of law and order (see Hess and Martin 2006, 251). On 22 December 2013, interim President Adly Mansour tasked a fact-finding committee, which included law professors and former government executives, with the collection of evidence and information on “the events that accompanied the 30 June 2013 protests” (al-Dakhakhly 2014). The committee lacked any judicial power and released an executive summary of its report on 26 November 2014.³⁵⁶ The report blamed mainly the protest leaders for the casualties in Rabaa. A parallel investigation by the state-affiliated National Council for Human Rights (2014a; 2014b), released on 6 March 2014, confirmed that there was a “disproportionate response” and “excessive use of force by security forces.” It also

³⁵⁵ Additionally, several interviewees report a certain unease about engaging in any type of street activism in Turkey. They claimed that their toleration by Turkish authorities depended on an unspoken agreement that activism confine itself to the sanctioned online and media activities by the movement's upper ties as well as covert logistical support, such as the delivery of scarce or rationed for the criminalised Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt from abroad.

³⁵⁶ The full text is available at <https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=26112014&id=2b3-e50b252aa47d4a9298dba01128e6f>.

mentioned that security forces failed to maintain a safe exit for protesters willing to leave or to provide medical aid for the wounded. However, as with the fact-finding committee, the NCHR exonerated the interim government. They concluded that security forces had been compelled to use lethal force by the armed resistance of Anti-Coup demonstrators. Consequently, those responsible for the bloody dispersals of *Rabaa* and *Al-Nahda* remained unfazed by legal repercussions until the end of Mansour's tenure and effectively up to date. On the contrary, in February 2014, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi was even promoted to the top rank of Field Marshall, only hours before SCAF authorised his presidential candidacy.

In contrast, those arrested during the *Rabaa* and *Al-Nahda* dispersals were viciously prosecuted in what became known as the 'Rabaa Sit-in Dispersal Trial' and the 'Rabaa Operation Room Trial' (see Shams El-Din 2016; Zeinobia 2018; for a list of further related trials see Egypt Today 2018). Initiated by the East Cairo public prosecution on the day after the *Rabaa* dispersal, the first of these two historical mass show trials included 739 defendants, of which roughly half were held in pre-trial custody for years. As a consequence of delay tactics by some of those on trial combined with countless bureaucratic hurdles, the case concluded five years after the events of 14 August 2013 (Abu Emaira 2018). On 8 September 2018 judge Hassan Farid of the Cairo Criminal Court confirmed the preliminary death sentences handed down in July 2018 by the terrorism chamber in the South Cairo Criminal Court in against 75 NASL leaders.³⁵⁷ All defendants were charged with participating in an unauthorised protest. Further alleged charges included premeditated murder of security personnel, vandalising private and public property, **forcibly occupying buildings, obstructing traffic and restricting citizens' right to freedom of movement and personal safety, membership in a banned organisation, "incitement to breaking the law,"** and taking part in an illegal gathering.³⁵⁸ The

³⁵⁷ Those sentenced to death included the MB guidance office member and FJP Vice Chairman Essam al-Erian, FJP Secretary General Mohamed Al-Beltagy, the former Minister of Youth Osama Yassin as well as the clerics Abdel-Rahman el-Barr and Safwat Hegazi. Another 47 defendants (including MB supreme guide Mohammed Badie, former Minister of Supply Bassem Ouda and leading Al-Wasat Party member Essam Sultan) received life sentences and the remaining 612 defendants were sentenced from five to 15 years imprisonment (including the former President's son Osama Mursi).

³⁵⁸ Among those sentenced was also renown photojournalist and prisoner of conscience Mahmoud Abou Zeid, better known as Shawkan. He received a five-year prison sentence. Some of the defendants, including Wagdy Ghoni and Tarek El-Zomor were sentenced in absentia, thus automatically receiving the maximum penalty according to Egyptian penal code. By the time, the verdict was delivered, five defendants had already died during the legal process. The defendants furthermore included 22 minors who were all sentenced to 10 years in prison. The trial and its resulting verdicts were harshly criticised both by local and international human rights organisations (e.g., Amnesty International 2018), as well as the Human Rights Commissioners of the UN and EU (AJE 2018), see also

prosecution had therefore unsuccessfully demanded death sentences for all defendants.

A second lawsuit against more than 50 leading Muslim Brotherhood members, which had also dragged on for several years, had concluded earlier the same year when Egypt's Court of Cassation handed down its final ruling on the retrial of several Muslim Brotherhood leaders over charges of setting up a 'control room' on Midan Rabaa to orchestrate a campaign of violence across Egypt following the dispersal of the sit-ins.³⁵⁹ In their statements on both cases, the prosecution explained that the solicited charges built on the collected testimonies of local residents of the Rabaa and Al-Nahda neighbourhood as well as the official reports by police and a National Security Agency official (see Shams El-Din 2016). According to the prosecution, this evidence demonstrated how the sit-ins had served as a cover for unlawfully detaining and torturing Egyptian citizens, for storing arms and for organising armed marches to terrorise the public.

The treatment of the Anti-Coup demonstrators stood in stark contrast to that of the security forces, who were not investigated, let alone prosecuted for their conduct. Egyptian law added another layer of impunity by shielding current or former officers from prosecution in a civil court. According to article 204 of the new constitution of 2014,³⁶⁰ military officials and officers of the general intelligence services can be tried only before military courts and by military prosecutors who are part of the Ministry of Defence Ministry.³⁶¹ As President Al-Sisi succeeded Adly Mansour in the presidential office in May 2014, he ensured that they would also remain untouched by the outcome of any potential independent investigation in the future. On 26 July 2018, he ratified **Law 161/2018 on the "treatment of senior military commanders."** The law empowers the president to award special privileges for designated senior members of the armed forces. Amongst the special privileges are legal immunity from prosecution or questioning for any events during the periods when the constitution was suspended and the parliament dissolved unless approved by the SCAF (see Rabia 2018).³⁶² The law furthermore grants the

https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/50293/statement-spokesperson-sentencing-egypt_en.

³⁵⁹ As their initial death sentences were repealed, MB supreme guide Badie and two other defendants in the case were sentenced to life imprisonment, whereas 15 other defendants received five years sentenced and 21 others were acquitted.

³⁶⁰ The official Arabic text of the Egyptian constitution is available on the website of the State Information Service at: <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Newvr/consttt%202014.pdf>. A commented English translation can be accessed via: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2014.pdf.

³⁶¹ On the expanding jurisdiction of these courts see (Aziz 2016; see also N. Brown and El-Sadany 2017).

³⁶² The law thus effectively ensured that military leadership would not be held accountable for any of its crimes committed between 19 February 2011 (suspension of the 1971 constitution) and 23 January 2012

designated commanders ministerial status and “diplomatic immunity” from prosecution while travelling abroad throughout the duration of their service.

In parallel to insulating itself against potential prosecution, the post-coup regime made additional efforts to disappear any alternate interpretations of *Rabaa* from the public sphere. With these actions, the regime sought to whitewash its human rights record. This including all visual indicators of the massacre. Not only was the R4BIA salute criminalised (Shamni 2013),³⁶³ but also the location of the Anti-Coup sit-ins was rebuilt in line with the official version of what had happened on the squares. As Kareem Fahim and Mayy El-Sheikh (2018b) write:

The bloodied roads have been covered with fresh asphalt, and the charred Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque that gives the square its name has been repainted in eggshell white. Paving stones that were hurled in protest have been replaced.

Midan Rabaa itself was remodelled in the spirit of Al-Sisi’s ‘mandate speech’: The centre of Rabaa Square, facing the Rabaa Mosque, a sculpture now commemorates the unity of armed forces and police in confronting violence in terrorism in the summer of 2013. The sculpture, built in October 2013 shortly before a similar nationalist restoration of Tahrir Square, depicts two angular arms, representing both institutions, which protect a silver orb that supposedly represents the people. This army-built monument is today the only visible landmark reminiscent of the Rabaa sit-in. In a final effort to efface the massacre from public memory, the name of Rabaa al-Adawiya Square was changed by executive decree in July 2015. The square’s new designation ‘Midan Hisham Barakat’ references Egypt’s former Public Prosecutor who had authorised the armed forces to disperse the sit-ins on 14 August 2013 and who had been killed by a car bomb the week before.

Despite such efforts to advance a revisionist material history and the authorities’ manifest attempts to re-appropriate the space claimed by the Anti-Coup Alliance, the legacy of *Rabaa* anything but disappeared. In fact, the massacre marked a point of no return for the interim regime as well (Shokr 2014). To legitimise the

(new parliament) and between 3 July 2013 (suspension of the 2012 constitution) and 1 January 2016 (new parliament). This timeframe comprises, among others, the Maspero massacre, the 2011 Mohamed Mahmoud clashes and 2013 *Rabaa* massacre. For a comprehensive discussion and FAQ of Law 161/2018 see <https://cihrs.org/faq-law-on-the-treatment-of-senior-military-commanders/?lang=en>.

³⁶³ Most known are the cases of several Egyptian athletes, amongst others, Egypt’s Kung Fu Champion Mohamed Youssef and Al-Ahly soccer player Ahmed Abd el-Zaher, who were suspended and prosecuted for wearing Rabaa T-Shirts or flashing the four-finger salute at sporting events (see Abd El Rasoul 2013; Ashraf 2013). In January 2016, the Egyptian cabinet additionally approved a draft law that criminalised the promotion and the distribution of stickers, posters or photographs that allegedly promoted “terrorist” groups. According to the law, posting, possessing, producing or promoting such symbols would be jailed and fined a minimum of 10,000 Egyptian pounds and a maximum of 30,000 Egyptian pounds (see Anadolu Agency 2016).

police operation, it had unleashed a wave of patriotic fervour. This was accompanied by a nationalist discourse revolving around the citizens ‘national duty’ [*al-wagib al-watani*] to support the state and oppose those elements attempting to harm it—namely the MB and its allies.

8.3 Back on Horseback

The new hegemonic discourse has seen the national defence and the fight against terrorism replace self-determination and civilian rule as the central nodal signifiers. This effectively allowed for rehabilitation of the armed forces as **representatives of the people’s will and their inclusion into the new ruling coalition**. Directly after their intervention on 3 July 2013 the generals continued to attempt to present the newly appointed transitional government as a civilian authority: new parliamentary elections were scheduled, the world-valued Nobel peace laureate Mohamed El-Baradei became interim vice-president. In contrast, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces, formally assumed the position of Minister of Defence. However, with El-Baradei stepping down after less than a month in office, the façade of civilian governance crumbled.³⁶⁴ In reaction to country-wide unrests, the state of emergency was reinstated, extending the **state’s authority and legitimising the domestic deployment of military units**. This return to martial law was not met with much resistance. On the contrary, while the disproportional level of state violence created an international stir, inside the country, it was strongly endorsed. Some voiced scepticism as to whether reports about massacres were accurate, others blamed the Brotherhood for the violence. Representatives of the Tamarod movement aligned themselves with mainstream media and complimented Al-Sisi for his determination. The National Salvation Front staunchly toed the line.

It was particularly striking to witness revolutionary groups relativise and legitimise police brutality, who had been targeted by the security apparatus and resisted the rule of the SCAF the previous year. Arguably their lacking criticism and outrage resulted from an entrenched conflict of interest: many preferred a second chance for a democratic turnover to the perceived risk of a ‘**Brotherhoodisation**’ of the emergent post-revolutionary republic. As Nathan Brown (2013, 51) has observed, “**virtually every sin with which the opposition charged the Brotherhood—**

³⁶⁴ El-Baradei justified his decision with the violence witnessed during the Rabaa dispersal, saying it had become difficult for him to continue bearing responsibility for decisions that were forestalling any national consensus. The full text of his resignation letter is available at <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/259365>.

using force against demonstrators, trying to purge judges, denying and even applauding security-force abuses, harassing media—was a sign that the opposition embraced with unseemly enthusiasm in July 2013.”³⁶⁵

Key to the emergence of this odd alliance between revolutionary movements and the army against the Brotherhood was also that its political subjectivity was primarily articulated in nationalist terms. As Samuli Schielke (2017, 207) contends:

The conflict line that divided Islamists from supporters of a civil and/or secular state never would have been sufficient to create the 30 June coalition. The most powerful and successful accusation against Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood was not that they were fundamentalists or that they were incompetent, but that they were traitors to the nation.

As Yannis Stavrakakis has underscored the discursive production of “the people” as a potent political subject presupposes a “crisis of hegemony, the inability of an established system to respond effectively to social grievances and political demands” (see Economidou 2018). This inability became obvious during Mursi’s short-term in office: The government not only failed to respond to the allegations of partisanship with convincing policies but also aggressively side-lined the concerns of the opposition about the exclusive drafting and implementation process of the new institutional order. As a consequence, the groups representing those unmet demands were suddenly linked to each other through their shared dissatisfaction with the status quo. Their shared opposition to a common enemy thus created the basis for coalition building and a common discourse that centred on **the unmet demands and grievances of the Egyptian people**. In Laclau’s terms, a populist “chain of equivalence” emerged and materialised in a populist discourse. This challenged the current order and the attempts of Mursi and the FJP to establish a hegemonic reading of legitimacy as electoral legitimacy and formal-procedural democratic rule exerted via the official institutions of the state.

In antagonism to this conception of legitimate rule, the new regime put forward an alternative political orientation based on Egyptian nationalism. This nationalist discourse initially functioned as a counterweight to the Muslim Brotherhood’s **claim to democratic legitimacy**—derived from their victory at the ballot boxes. After 3 July 2013, it was repurposed to sanction the crackdown on the Brotherhood and its allies as a necessary evil in order to restore national security.

³⁶⁵ To understand how drastically the hegemonic opinion of the Brotherhood and its allies had changed over the course of the summer 2013, as Jonathan Guyer has argued, one need only explore their representation by political cartoonists which changed from a depiction of obedient sheep to caricatures of the MB as wolves or terrorists (see Guyer 2016, 218).

The post-coup regime made its ability to defend the Egyptian homeland from internal and external foes an essential component of its *haybat ad-dawla* [state prestige] (Baheyya 2013; see also Khosrokhavar 2018, 165; Shenker 2016, 316). Whereas the reinvigoration of the revolutionary discourses of 25 January 2011 had catalysed the coalition building between Tamarod, the NSF, the Salafist *Nour* Party and the Armed Forces, the post-coup regime amended the revolutionary discourse by a nationalist subtext. A discourse emerged describing the military's responses, first to the 30 June uprising and then to the Anti-Coup protests as a realisation of the people's will.³⁶⁶ Over time, this subtext became the dominant layer. The army thereby managed to portray itself as “guardian of the revolution” (Monier and Ranko 2013: 112) and protector of the Egyptian nation. Especially after Rabaa, the post-coup regime coalition relied almost exclusively on a securitising nationalist discourse to challenge the “legitimacy” discourse of the Anti-Coup Alliance.

8.4 A New Sheriff in Town

Nationalism as a political project is deeply ingrained in Egyptian history (cf., Naeem 2016). Egypt's modern conception of its national identity is to a large part based on the construction of a glorious legacy which spans back thousands of years until ancient pharaonic times—a heritage that is captured tellingly in a famous local metaphor that describes the country as *umm al-dunya* [the Mother of the World]. How the Egyptian nation defines itself is nowhere more clearly articulated than in its constitution. The preamble of the document, which was adopted through a popular referendum in 2014, depicts Egypt as a gift to humanity at the heart of the world:

It is the meeting point of its civilisations and cultures and the crossroads of its maritime transportation and communications. It is the tip of Africa, [...] the dawn of human conscience, [...] the cradle of religions and the banner of glory of the revealed religions and the first centralised state. [Egypt] is the home of the best soldiers of the earth struggling in the path of God.

Against this backdrop, the nationalist archive became a welcome resource for a military man such as General Al-Sisi. He harnessed it to counter the Islamists' legitimising strategies which rooted either in their deeper knowledge and understanding of religious matters or in their repeated wins in democratic elections. The constitution traces the role of the national “people's army” as “the pillar of the

³⁶⁶ As the narrative goes, the nation rose up on 30 June 2013 to topple an extremist faction that represented only a tiny minority, embodying through their collective action the “epitome of democracy,” rendering the same “will-of-the people” result a popular ballot on the same day would have (Elmasry 2014).

modern Egyptian state” back to Mohammed Ali.³⁶⁷ In this spirit, Al-Sisi portrayed its mandate and the mission of the interim regime that it backed after the dissolution of Mursi’s cabinet, as a project for the protection of the Egyptian nation and its free will, above formal electoral politics and factional struggles: “In summer 2013, love for the nation became heavily personalised in the figure of a venerated leader: Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, glorified as the saviour of the nation in songs and posters that covered homes, public spaces and businesses across the country” (Schielke 2017, 208). It was this aura, coupled with the repression of all meaningful opposition, that carried the general into the presidential office.³⁶⁸

The 2014 presidential election in Egypt took place between 26 and 28 May 2014. It marked the seventh ballot for Egyptians since the fall of Husni Mubarak. Al-Sisi was elected with 96.9 per cent of the popular vote (Al Ahram 2014). Significantly this tally was substantially higher than the narrow margin of 1.24 per cent by which Mohammed Mursi had secured his majority in a runoff election and even surpassed the rigged 88.6 per cent of Husni Mubarak’s last electoral victory in 2005. What is more, officials announced that also the overall voter turnout exceeded that of the 2012 elections. Officially, it stood at 47.5 per cent at the end of the election, despite widespread photographs of empty voting stations across the country and press reports of the lowest turnout in an Egyptian election thus far (see Kirkpatrick 2017). This was compared to 46 per cent in the first round of the 2012 elections (and 52 per cent in the second).³⁶⁹

The ballot reinforced Al-Sisi’s counter-discourse to the Anti-Coup discourse on electoral legitimacy by challenging it from within. As Andrea Teti and his collaborators have argued, “Sisi’s main objective was to outpoll Mursi so as to lend an air of legitimacy and popular approval to the ouster of the Muslim Brother some

³⁶⁷ See Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt 2014: Preamble.

³⁶⁸ The 2014 presidential elections notably contrasted with Egypt’s first free elections in 2012. For once, the 2012 elections, had been largely free and fair and marked by an absence of political repression against the supporters of specific candidates. By contrast, in 2014, several political parties were systematically excluded from the ballot. First and foremost, the Muslim Brotherhood and its Freedom and Justice Party were barred from fielding a candidate and boycotted the election, arguing that the position of the President was not currently vacant but, instead, was still being filled by detained President Mursi. As Abdel Moneim Aboul-Futuh and his Strong Egypt Party as well as several other political blocs, including Ayman Nour’s Ghad al-Thawra Party and all forces united in the NASL also boycotted the vote or refrained from fielding a candidate, Hamdeen Sabahi was Al-Sisi’s only competitor (Malsin 2014). However, his election campaign hardly attacked the general and Sabahi had supported most of Al-Sisi’s policies throughout the post-coup transition period. Hence the latter’s victory was a foregone conclusion. In fact, according to officials, the number of spoilt votes even exceeded the votes for Sabahi.

³⁶⁹ Already before the elections, the second day of balloting had been declared a state holiday and a nominal fee of 500 Egyptian pounds had been imposed for non-voters. As the turnout nevertheless remained low, thus damaging the projected image of widespread popular support for Al-Sisi, the electoral committee decided to intervene on behalf of the aspiring president and extend the elections to a third day.

11 months earlier” (see Teti, Matthies-Boon, and Gervasio 2014). Having thus beaten the NASL at its own game, and additionally endowed with a high degree of popular trust as a provider of internal and external security, the new President was thus empowered to flag successively all enemies of the state and the Egyptian nation.³⁷⁰ Through the construction of a dualistic friend-foe mindset, over time, the propagated nationalist discourse established an exclusive notion of citizenship (see also Pratt 2015, 49). It conveyed an understanding of Egyptian identity with no room for those criticising or dissenting with the national project that was to be orchestrated and judged by the executive authorities and the Egyptian armed forces alone. President Sisi had made this explicit in his first and most extensive television interview in May 2014 when he stressed he would not leave a chance for people to act on their own: “my program will be mandatory” (Kirkpatrick 2014).

It is not surprising that the affective registers that the post-coup regime instrumentalised to mobilise support and manufacture consent for its authoritarian policies worked so well. They followed a well-established ‘rule and divide’ playbook in Egypt where the mechanisms that securitised Islamists have a long tradition since the rise of nationalist rule under Gamal Abdel Nasser (McManus 2018, 3–6). As a discourse intended to bolster state-centric models of governance, above all, Egyptian nationalism has served to portray of the Egyptian nation as progressive and modern, while constructing the colonised (often the Islamist fundamentalist) as a degenerate *other* (Khatib 2006; Yohannes 2001; Pratt 2015). This othering process justified Egypt’s conquest of this figure. Egyptian nationalism has therefore lent itself to support authoritarian power structures, since dichotomous representations of Egyptian society as an unbridgeable ‘us’ against ‘them’, by nature, seemed to suggest *the limits of*, and undermine the *struggles for* pluralism within the nation (Khatib 2006, 76). As Adeed Dawisha (2003) writes:

Arab nationalism operated throughout its glory days in a sea of authoritarianism, and this happened not because of some unfortunate circumstance. Indeed, the very way Arab nationalism was defined and developed accounted for the absence of democracy.

It is thus hardly surprising that the pre-2011 regime of Husni Mubarak also portrayed itself as the guardian of a nationalist and secular state against Islamist extremism. However, the new administration was more successful in mobilising nationalist sentiment and building resonances “for the idea of the ‘nation under

³⁷⁰ While insulating Al-Sisi against the claim that he lacked actual popular legitimacy exerted through a popular vote, Ellis Goldberg has argued that the actually low turnout effectively prevented Al-Sisi from freeing himself from the clout of the SCAF and the armed forces leadership but instead ensured an ongoing symbiosis between both and thus a perpetuation of the deep state model of governance with its mutual institutional interdependencies (see Goldberg 2014).

threat” (Sobhy 2015, 806, 821). It was effectively the sedimentation of nationalist discourse that elevated Al-Sisi from his initial role as “protector of the masses” (Hamzawy 2016) to the level of a moral paragon with the right to adjudge, speak and act in the name of national interest and national security.

From the beginning, Egyptian security forces had sought to establish legitimacy for their actions by means of controlling the rhetoric surrounding key events, such as Mursi’s ouster or the dispersal of demonstrations by the Brotherhood and its supporters. The repression of NASL protesters was supported continuously by specific rhetoric structures that securitised the alliance as sources of disorder and chaos, outlaws and thugs, and ultimately as terrorists that had to be held in check. To accomplish this task, the military unleashed a fierce propaganda campaign. The state-owned TV stations virtually became the mouthpiece of the SCAF. However, it was Al-Sisi’s televised speech on 24 July 2013 that marked the turning point (see also McManus 2018, 7 ff). The ‘mandate speech’ effectively created an “emergency mentality” among the general population (Abdelrahman 2017, 9; cf., Grimm 2013b; 2014b). In the following weeks, a new security paradigm took hold of the country and was fostered by state media, the interim government and social movements alike. As Elmasry (see also 2014) has argued, the resonance of this new hegemonic consensus narrative was exemplified by CBC anchorwoman Dina Abdelrahman who commented in real-time on the raids of Rabaa and Al-Nahda in her show *Akher al-Nahar*. As the clashes were still unfolding, she asserted that there were no longer two political camps contending in Egypt: “There is only the Egyptian nation on the one hand, and there is a group of Muslim Brothers on the other.”³⁷¹

Moreover, the new security paradigm was extended continuously to include other actors voicing criticism of the regime and its security forces in handling political struggles. Grievances ranged from the labour dispute to the state of public health care and education, the demise of the currency reserves, and the rise of crime and lawlessness in large parts of the country. These have all come to be defined as national crises. At the same time, the military-backed new interim regime made efforts to strengthen its alliance with those forces that the NASL had clearly marked as their antagonist others (Roll 2016, 34). In domestic politics, Tamarod particularly was soon instrumentalised as a co-optation mechanism for Egyptian youth and a potential reservoir for a new party basis of political power. Tamarod representatives became involved in drafting the new constitution, and loyal youth groups were offered state support. What is more, a new nationalist platform, *Mus-*

³⁷¹ For a recording of the 14 August 2013 episode visit <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x134rjj>.

taqbal Watan [the Future of the Nation] was established to empower loyalists within Egypt's revolutionary youth (see N. Abdalla 2016, 55 f). Like Tamarod before, the Future of the Nation campaign joined General Al-Sisi's presidential election effort.

8.5 Authoritarian Regression

The successful articulation of a nationalist conception of legitimacy as a counterweight to the Brotherhood's narratives ultimately catalysed the emergence of this alliance as a new hegemonic block in Egypt. In this nascent constellation, the army was present as the principal revolutionary subject. However, these nationalist underpinnings also created the discursive opportunities for massive and popular-backed repression by drawing an antagonist frontier between the people and its enemies. Mechanisms of securitisation deepened **the military's agenda by including non-military threats** such as mass demonstrations and political opposition. It **extended the security forces' room for manoeuvre on the domestic level and renewed their legitimacy in the eyes of the people**. In order to justify the redefinition of a policy field as a security relevant matter, the subject is usually dramatised by certain rhetorical structures dominated by threat perceptions and militarised, securitised, and often gendered (cf., Amar 2011; 2013) language.

In Egypt, the terrorism label proved useful for extending the state's freedom of action: Dealing with a designated terrorist group, and thus a matter of national security, authorities no longer have to limit their response to police deployment. In order to justify a swift move against the Islamists, the armed forces had sought to create a sense of urgency. Claims that militant extremists and foreign agents had been identified among the protestors at Rabaa al-Adawiya were followed by allegations that weapons were stored at the square. Taking it one step further, Foreign Minister Nabil Fahmy had declared the country was no longer in a state of confrontation between two political camps, but in a fight against terrorism (Kenner 2013). In consequence, the cabinet authorised the security forces, led by the Ministry of Interior, to take all necessary measures in order to defend social peace and security. After the violent break-up of the sit-ins, the anti-Ikhwan rhetoric was further intensified. Egyptian presidential adviser Mostafa Hegazi declared the fight to be a full-blown war against terrorism. The war-metaphor has since been uncritically cited by most political camps in Egypt—among others by the Coptic Patriarch and representatives of Tamarod.

The resort to such a polarising discourse **was akin to opening Pandora's Box**. The nationalist narrative of a heroic fight by the Egyptian people and its army against Islamist terrorism achieved a certain sense of hegemony. It succeeded in

supplanting and repressing all competing depictions of the bloody weeks in the summer of 2013. Discussions of potential wrongdoing by the state were therefore obscured. Instead, a new narrative emerged in which *Rabaa*, as Shokr (2014) had noted, crowned the state's "crusade to quell a terrorist campaign that began as early as 2011 when Muslim Brother operatives and allies allegedly stormed Egypt's prisons." Consequently, all solutions based on cooperation were discredited.³⁷²

The new constitution of January 2014 contained an article that declared the fight against "all types and manifestations of terrorism" to be a national goal and endowed the security services with far-reaching powers. Since then, the regime has repeatedly modified its definition of terrorism by decree, expanding it each time to include a new set of criminal offences. As a result, not only the Brotherhood but all actors critical of the regime or contradicting its narratives of contentious events in Egypt could now be persecuted by State Security. The pretext for this was that they threaten the public order or national unity. They could, therefore, be prosecuted by special courts for terrorism-related felonies and misdemeanours (Wessel 2016, 26):

Everyone who did not explicitly support the ousting of Muhammad Mursi in 2014 is discursively turned into a 'terrorist' by the government's forces, while supporters of the military are framed as 'good Egyptian citizens'.

'Orwellian' legislation from mid-August 2015 expanded the list of offences to be tried as terrorist crimes to include even private expressions of support for groups blacklisted by the judiciary as terrorist entities. According to Article 86 of a new terrorism law (law 94/2015)—symbolically ratified by President Al-Sisi on the second anniversary of *Rabaa* (Al Ahram 2015)—the membership of a designated terrorist group may incur penalties of up to five years' imprisonment. Article 86 also criminalises the distribution of materials, in writing or in speech, pertaining to a proscribed organisation or in service of its objectives.³⁷³

A new protest law had already effectively barred all public shows of solidarity with such groups (see Grimm 2015; TIMEP 2018). This piece of legislation from November 2013 was a response to the ongoing daily protests under the umbrella of the Anti-Coup Alliance across the country in the weeks after *Rabaa*. The law limited the right to strike and the freedom of assembly on pain of severe penalties. It subjected all collective action to prior police authorisation. This specified that

³⁷² Daniel Byman and Tamara Wittes (2014, 50) in the yearly Brookings memorandum confirm that the terrorism label that has been attached to Egyptian Islamists may be "less an empirical description than a self-fulfilling prophecy."

³⁷³ For a discussion see <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2015/09/falqs-egypts-new-antiterrorism-law/>.

the organisers of any demonstration must themselves be present at the responsible police station with their itinerary, the number of participants and the names of those in charge, seven days in advance. Violating this procedure or the vague **requirement not to impair the country's "productivity" through protests is prosecuted** as a crime. This protest law has led to a de facto ban on all demonstrations since the authorities issue hardly any authorisations and since fines of 100,000 Egyptian pounds and a **two-year prison sentence have become the "new standard"** for punishing those who defy authorities (Teti, Matthies-Boon, and Gervasio 2014).³⁷⁴ The law is also increasingly being used retroactively. The protest law was complemented by a presidential decree of 27 October 2014 that categorised nearly all public institutions as military installations. Consequently, all crimes committed there can be prosecuted before military courts (including retroactively). This includes not only electricity plants, pipelines, railway stations and bridges but also the Egyptian universities that have become the hotbeds of resistance against the autocratic rollback after the severe crackdown on the Anti-Coup street protests.³⁷⁵

Moreover, the room for manoeuvre of civil society actors was systematically restricted through a series of presidential decrees in the absence of a parliament in the months after Rabaa.³⁷⁶ The work of local and foreign NGOs, but also of parties, trade unions and youth groups, has been made more difficult. This has been achieved particularly through the vaguely worded new law on assembly; the tightened rules on foreign funding; the introduction of an obligation to register; and such groups being placed under the control of the Ministry of Social Solidarity. In July 2014, in a memorandum addressed to Prime Minister Ibrahim Mahlab, a coalition of the most important national HROs already referred to a **"declaration of war by the government on freedom of association and the work of civil society**

³⁷⁴ According to Hawthorne (2017) and Ansary (2017), the Egyptian judiciary has handed down prison sentences for demonstrators also under the colonial-era Assembly Law (Law No. 10/1914) in addition to the new demonstration law.

³⁷⁵ Since the military coup of 2013, the protest law has been one of the main legal pretexts to put arrested regime critics on trial. While under Mubarak the number of political detainees peaked at around 14,000, estimates by *Wiki Thawra* indicate that security forces detained more than 41,000 people in the months after the coup. Current estimates put this figure at over 60,000 (e.g., ANHRI 2016; Hamalawy 2018).

³⁷⁶ As a new parliament was convened in January 2016, the chamber's first task was to ratify 341 presidential decrees issued by both Adly Mansour and Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi in the absence of a legislature since July 2013 (see Hendawi 2016). Under article 156 of the new constitution, these decrees had to be ratified within two weeks of the new parliament's inaugural session, otherwise they would have been repealed automatically. After an initial proposal by the speaker to create six temporary committees to review the decrees was rejected because it would not have allowed all MPs to participate equally in the ratification process, 19 committees were established to review the laws pertaining to their mandates. All laws were then put to a wider vote in a controversial and untransparent process that was riddled with allegations of committee heads silencing individual critics and bugs with the electronic voting system (El-Sadany 2016).

organisations in Egypt” (CIHRS 2014). This war on civil society first targeted the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies and then expanded to revolutionary youth movements, such as April 6 or the Revolutionary Socialists. It particularly affected those who had been engaged in documenting the repression and human rights violations committed by the security apparatus in the weeks after the July 3 coup. In the absence of independent media or any independent investigation of the massacres in mid-2013, human rights organisations had taken on the critical function of monitoring the executive. However, witnessing and documenting the repression of protesters turned these groups themselves into targets of repression.

In June 2014, social minister Ghada Waly announced a new draft law to regulate the work of NGOs, which was intended to replace the Mubarak-era association law 84/2002.³⁷⁷ NGOs were to be prohibited from participating in political activities as well as from carrying out unauthorised field research, data collection, or publishing. A supervisory authority with the power of veto was to control the registration, funding and personnel decisions of NGOs working in Egypt. A particular source of concern was the indication that representatives of State Security and the Ministry of Interior would also be sitting on the committee. As a result of massive public criticism, the law was initially held back, but NGOs were nevertheless made to register at the Social Solidarity Ministry formally.³⁷⁸ At first glance a mere formality, this procedure placed their work content and structure under the auspices of the Ministry and drastically curtailed the associational freedoms guaranteed by the constitution. The large amount of discretion that the vaguely worded law affords the authorities effectively enables state institutions to control any registered organisation’s funds at will, to prohibit their political activities and to hold potential asset freezes as a Damocles Sword over activists’ heads.³⁷⁹ The heavily criticised law was finally repealed in June 2017—only to be replaced by new and even more restrictive legislation to regulate civil society (Law 70/2017).

³⁷⁷ For a comparison and discussion of the effects of both laws see ‘Arafa (2017).

³⁷⁸ According to the Ministry, about 45,000 HROs were registered nationwide by the deadline, but among Egypt’s large human rights groups so far only the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) has done so, in early 2015, avowedly to set a precedent for Egyptian HROs – though it also announced that it intended to continue working towards democratic reform of the law. By contrast, other groups, such as Al-Mawred al-Thaqafy, discontinued their work just before the deadline expired; yet others, including the CIHRS, moved a part of their staff abroad. Some groups simply ignored the deadline. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), for example, pointed out that the NGO law was undemocratic and that the ANHRI was a law firm. This tactic was adopted by other NGOs as well, which registered as media production companies, limited liability companies or law firms – sectors where regulation is notably less restrictive – so as to circumvent the mandatory registration.

³⁷⁹ For instance, article 11 states that an association may be refused approval if its activities risk endangering the public order and morals, or if it represents the vested interests of individual parties or trade unions.

This new law extended the **authorities' room for manoeuvre in the regulation and repression of civil society organisations as well as their budget oversight** (see Mamdouh 2017; Mirshak 2018). A joint statement from eight nongovernmental organisations warned that this legislation was effectively restricting civil society to the degree that eliminated all paths for Egyptian citizens to peacefully express **their dissent with the country's governance at times of severe repression and economic hardship** (TIMEP et al. 2017).

In addition to such 'legalized repression' that effectively foreclosed the opportunity structures for contentious politics (Hamzawy 2017; see also Dunne and Brown 2014; Hawthorne 2017), the mobilising structures and resources of collective actors in the country were additionally targeted by extrajudicial and extra-legal violence. Since 2014, and increasingly since mid-2015, security forces resorted to forced disappearances to target the lower and mid-levels of activist collectives, NGOs and social movements particularly (Grimm 2015, 4f). According to **the group Freedom of the Brave, which campaigns for prisoners' rights, over 160 people were kidnapped between early April and early June**. The Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF), a coalition of lawyers that investigate the whereabouts of disappeared Muslim Brothers, identified almost 1,000 people that have gone missing since the start of 2015. What is more, both organisations point to the rapid increase in kidnappings, which are carried out mainly by security forces in plainclothes on the street, but also in private flats or the campuses of state universities. Until recently, the abduction of unwelcome citizens—such as the photojournalist Omar Abdel Maqsood, who in autumn 2014 had reported on the abuse of his wife in police custody—remained exceptions that attracted a great deal of attention. This makes the current wave of abductions even more alarming—it marks a new dimension in the abuse of state power. The Ministry of Interior, which formally administers Egyptian prisons, either does not comment on kidnappings or else denies that they have taken place, making references to their illegality. However, even individual representatives of the NCHR attribute primary responsibility for the abductions to State Security, which is directly assigned to the Ministry of Interior. This interpretation is supported, among others, by the fact that the forced disappearances are not limited to a few districts, which come under the jurisdiction of certain governors or local police stations but are a nationwide phenomenon.

The location of the abductions and witness statements of the way they unfold show that the perpetrators are highly professional and well-informed. In this context, it is surprising, at least at first sight, that the kidnappings are not more targeted. The victims include some members of the banned April 6 Youth Movement

and leaders of the protest coalition ‘Students against the Coup’, which is sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood. However, other victims cannot be assigned to any banned group, and have in some cases not been politically active for some time.³⁸⁰ While dozens remain missing, some of those kidnapped have now been released. Others were eventually found in the Egyptian jails of Tora, al-Qanater and al-Aqrab. In several cases, activists whose location had been discovered were brought before a magistrate on a litany of trumped-up charges so as to legitimise their detention retroactively. The charges brought ranged from membership in a banned organisation (such as April 6) to violating strike bans, to spreading false news and murdering policemen. In other cases, pre-trial detention was renewed without any formal charges by the prosecution. Yet other civil society entities were crippled through public defamation campaigns and administrative burdens. Increasingly, the Egyptian regime has included religious and moralising themes into its nationalistic, populist rhetoric that contribute to depict Al-Sisi as a protector of dignified morals and values. As I have argued elsewhere (Grimm 2014b), raids against bathing houses and coffee shops, the proclamation of a national strategy to combat atheism, and the prosecution of gay men for ‘debauchery’ are just the **most visible symptoms of a concerted effort to restore the state’s moral authority** in the eyes of the public. This frame enabled the president to address divergent moral conceptions as inappropriate for Egyptian society. As Amr Hamzawy (2017, 6) illustrates, this discursive strategy was intensively used as a mechanism to denounce and repress human rights activists and pro-democracy civil society organisations.

As a consequence of these shrinking spaces due to legalised, extra-legal and **discursive repression, social movements all but disappeared from Egypt’s streets**. It is true that the new repertoires of contention that became established during and in the aftermath of the 2011 Revolution as a standard way of expressing dissent did never completely vanish. For instance, students adopted protest marches and occupations as contentious repertoire to mobilise at their universities against the encroachment of the security state on campus, in what became known as the “**Midan Movement**” (Sika 2017, 160). Furthermore, in what has been discussed as a new “**supply intifada**” (Ketchley and El-Rayyes 2017), rural Egyptians took to the

³⁸⁰ The case of Esraa el-Taweel is emblematic in this regard. An amateur photographer, she retired from activism after receiving a gunshot wound as she photographed the protests on the 2014 anniversary of the 25 January Revolution. She disappeared in early June 2015 along with two friends. Only after intensive searches carried out by relatives and a broad solidarity campaign in social media, was she identified in al-Qanater women’s prison and subsequently brought before a prosecutor. She remains in custody to date with her provisional detention being renewed on a monthly basis pending further investigation into the charges of belonging to a terrorist organisation.

streets in several cities of Upper Egypt and the Nile Delta in March 2017 in angry demonstrations against the government's decision to cut bread subsidies in the face of a deep economic crisis and food rationing (Michaelson 2017). However, neither of these cycles, in the end, was more than a scattered population of protest events. Nor were the discourses of those taking to the street marked by any visible challenge to the ruling hegemonic consensus that carried Al-Sisi into office.

8.6 Nationalism—A Recipe for Success?

Accordingly, since the deposition of Mohammed Mursi in summer 2013, the new Egyptian nationalism has mostly been understood as a discourse that has successfully supported the new status quo (e.g., Adly 2014; Grimm 2013b; Sobhy 2015; Stack 1382746747; Strasser 2014). The nationalist discourse has not only enabled and supported sweeping securitisation of Egyptian politics and enabled repression on an unseen scale. It has also trickled down into society and left traces on people's hearts and minds. As the Egyptian nation is increasingly viewed and accepted as "a project rather than a people" (Kurzman 2018, 186), a new Egyptian social contract has emerged that Foucault (1977, 201) has aptly described as a "disciplinary" and others have decried as a "fascist" society (a.o., al-Anani 2015b; Naeem 2016; Shahin 2015). In an assessment of Al-Sisi's grip on power, Maha Abdelrahman (2017, 14) concluded that the regime "struck a winning formula for guaranteeing popular support" by deriving its legitimacy from a discourse of populist nationalism and promises of restoring Egypt's lost leadership in the Arab world. However, at the same time, she has also noted the downside of this policy. Citing Tilly's seminal article on the parallels between the racketeering policies of modern nation-states and organised crime (cf., Tilly 1985), she cautions against the substantial costs of keeping up with the illusions of national grandeur. On the one hand, the eminent focus of security policies may imply that other, not security relevant policy fields remain neglected which, in turn, may inspire popular grievances. On the other hand, national authorities may be unable to deliver on their promises. The power of nationalist discourse ultimately lies in its projection of a glorious imaginary of the nation. But what if it becomes evident that these projections are castles in the air? As Mohamed Naeem (2016) writes in his essay on the state of the 'Mother of the World':

Believers in the nationalist ideal daily bear the weight of its greatness and swim in seas of arrogant pride, impervious to the daily reality that defies such a belief. How can the result be anything but perilous?

As the contentious episode discussed in the next chapter illustrates, there is nothing determining or inevitable about particular nationalisms: they can become ve-

hicles for the exertion of power or means of resistance. In an effort to transcend the dichotomous view of nationalism as either a strategic instrument or a primordial phenomenon, Beissinger (2002, 38) has argued that one needs to look at how nationalism is constructed and is shaped by events and a **“politics of emboldening in the face of institutional constraints” during tumultuous periods.** In Beissinger’s view, once a wave of nationalism emerges, ex-ante structural or institutional factors lose much of their relevance, allowing for—more or less—extraordinary events: in his case, the collapse of the Soviet state. Of course, structural variables and institutional constraints remain essential. Above all, they are significant in setting the initial stage for protests. But once contention emerges, events can take on a life of their own, altering conceptions of the nation and encouraging others to mobilise.

9. Rifts in the Hegemonic Order

The power of movements in our times is based first and foremost on their ability, as Alberto Melucci (1996, 358) has argued, to produce meanings and representations that are able to challenge dominant cultural codes within society. Such acts of symbolic **resistance bring to light social movements' intimate familiarity with** the ways in which power is exerted through official discourses. Exploring this thought with a view to mechanisms of popular resistance during the Arab uprisings, Charles Tripp (2013, 306ff) has stressed—albeit in a reference to visual art—that there is significant power in the subversion of the very images that rulers attempt to project as evidence and instrument of their dominion into a channel of symbolic resistance:

Regardless of the forms and representations—and these may be various, discordant and by no means tied to a single political project—the very fact of their expression can both outline the contours of resistance and unsettle the arrogant complacency of established power.

The emancipatory potential of 'speaking in the language of power' was recently illustrated in Turkey, where President Erdogan unintendedly gave rise to an oppositional campaign by declaring that he would step aside if the nation said: '*tamam*' [enough]. This statement inspired a viral hashtag on social media, which was able to **unite Turkey's fragmented opposition before the presidential elections. Protesters effectively used Erdogan's words against him, as Lisel Hintz (2018a) writes:**

While his intention may have been to signal that he was following the rules to his own wavering party base, the result has worked against him. #Tamam generated a swell of enthusiasm among Turkey's frustrated opposition unseen since Gezi, empowering voters with a platform for venting their vexation.

In the case of Egypt, it was the sell-off of a small Red Sea archipelago comprising the two islands of Tiran and Sanafir, perceived as corrupt and dishonourable, that highlighted the disparities between what the Egyptian nationalist Sisi-regime claimed to pursue (in terms of goals) and act upon (in terms of values and norms), and what it really did. In April 2016, the Egyptian and Saudi governments signed a controversial agreement that gave Saudi Arabia sovereignty over the two Red Sea islands at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba (Walsh 2016). Secretly negotiated, the deal was officially signed into effect by Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail and his Saudi counterpart on 8 April 2016. This signature created rifts in the emerging hegemonic consensus about what constituted legitimate rule in Egypt after the 2013 coup, and it sparked new openings for countervailing political projects to suture these rifts. Above all, it was met with protest, both by members of different government branches and by a variety of social movements and demonstrators in

Egypt's public spaces. Tiran and Sanafir effectively turned into transformative events. By debunking the hollow nationalist rhetoric of the Al-Sisi regime, the island crisis provided the ignition spark for contesting the state's security discourse, which had been repressing and delegitimising protest since Mursi's deposition, with a new language of revolt that combined the traits of the ruler's patriotic nationalism with the spirit of Tahrir. This chapter illustrates the process by which the disruptions created by the island crisis enabled the so-called Popular Campaign to Protect the Land to subvert the regime's nationalist lingo, thus changing the political opportunity structures for social mobilisation and paving the way for a new contentious coalition.

9.1 A Tale of Two Islands

Situated at the south entrance of the Gulf of Aqaba and not far from the coast of the Sinai Peninsula, the archipelago of Tiran and Sanafir is mostly uninhabited. The few inhabitants consist of Bedouin fishermen, a garrison of Egyptian police forces and a small division of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), stationed on the islands as part of international peacekeeping efforts in the aftermath of Camp David. Aside from these, it is mostly tourists from the resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh that visit the archipelago on their diving and snorkelling trips, drawn to the islands' rare colourful coral reefs and vivid marine life. Despite their lack of demographic significance and the fact that most Egyptian nationals have never set foot on either of the islands, Tiran and Sanafir are deeply embedded in Egypt's nationalist archive. As Laurie Brand and Joshua Stacher (2016, 38) have stated:

The history of the control and sovereignty over the islands is complex, evidenced by the flurry of justifications and stinging critiques that followed. But for the vast majority of average Egyptians, these islands are part of the national territory.

Due to their strategic location at the gate of the Gulf of Aqaba, they have played a central role in all three wars fought by the Egyptian army with Israel: The Saudi kingdom had transferred sovereignty over the islands to Egypt in 1949 to prevent Israeli from seizing them; nevertheless, they came under Israeli occupation in the 1967 war along with the rest of Sinai. Egypt resumed control over the islands only in 1980, after a lengthy diplomatic and military struggle and as part of Israeli withdrawal from Sinai in the framework of the Camp David Agreement. Hence the surprise and outrage when on 8 April 2016, after decades of war and the diplomatic struggle over the islands, the Egyptian government came forward with its

announcement of a finalised maritime border agreement with Saudi Arabia that would put Tiran and Sanafir under Saudi sovereignty.³⁸¹

Answering activist calls to oppose the land swap, thousands of protesters gathered in Alexandria, Cairo, Port Said and a range of other provincial capitals on 15 April to demonstrate against the transfer. What made these protests significant was not only that they were the most massive non-Islamist demonstrations since the 2013 military coup, but also the diversity of their participants: An unlikely domestic alliance of “strange bedfellows” (Whittier 2014, 175) took to the street which was neither associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and its goal of reinstating President Mursi, nor the military regime and its campaign against internal opposition. Among the forces that joined the so-called ‘Popular Campaign to Protect the Land—Egypt is not for sale!’ [*al-Hamla al-Shaʿabiya li-Himayat al-Ard—Masr mish li-I-Biyʿa*, hereafter referred to as PCPL] were the April 6 Youth Movement, the Youth Movement for Justice and Freedom and the Revolutionary Socialists—leftist youth and labour rights groups who had been vital in the making of the 2011 revolution. Additionally, many of the political parties founded in the aftermath of the uprising joined the coalition, including Mohamed El-Baradei’s *Dostour Party* as well as the *Popular Current*, *Strong Egypt*, and the *Bread and Freedom Party*—the three parties created in the wake of the 2012 elections by the former presidential candidates Hamdeen Sabahi, Abdel Moneim Aboul-Futouh and Khaled Ali. The outlawed Muslim Brotherhood also supported the protests, and even the Tamarod movement, which had paved the way for Al-Sisi’s ascension to power in 2013, joined the rallying calls.

Most of these factions had hitherto fervently opposed each other. Aside from partisan grievances and ideological cleavages between Islamists and some liberal opposition parties, their fragmentation had resulted primarily from the political crackdown and the securitisation of Egyptian politics in the aftermath of the 2013 military coup (Schielke 2017). The particular socio-political context that emerged made it difficult for civil society to articulate a shared political message. Amongst the mechanisms preventing the opposition to coalesce were the aggressively proclaimed nationalist and securitising discourse of new regime described in the previous chapters which delegitimised any dialogue with those designated as ‘national enemies’, in addition to long-standing identity issues and the fundamental con-

³⁸¹ While the text of the agreement has not been disclosed yet, the Egyptian Cabinet’s Information and Decision Support Centre (IDSC) has made available documents a range of documents supporting the Saudi claims over the two islands, available at <http://www.idsc.gov.eg/idsc/News/View.aspx?ID=4269>. For a timeline of the bilateral talks on Sanafir and Tiran visit: <http://www.dailynewsegyp.com/2016/04/10/timeline-talks-sanafir-tiran-islands/>.

trovsky about whether or not to support the army-backed interim government after the deposition of President Mursi. Sporadically, some factions overcame their rifts, e.g., to form electoral alliances in the 2014 presidential elections. However, massive disagreements about Al-Sisi's war on terrorism, the recognition of army massacres against pro-Mursi demonstrators (Grimm and Harders 2018) and the inclusion of the Islamist segment of society into the post-coup political order would have suggested equally polarised reactions to the announcement of the island deal. All the more surprising was the ability of Tiran and Sanafir to unite the opposition in a new "coalition of contenders" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 7).

For the Sisi-administration, this type of resistance was a primer. Although the final turnout for the countrywide demonstrations remained rather low, the protests became a transformative event in Egypt's post-30 June 2013 contentious politics—for reasons that have less to do with participation rate and protest size and more with their symbolic character. Video footage of the demonstrations that rocked downtown Cairo's streets provided evidence that the real motivation for the protests was less the relinquishing of Egyptian soil to a foreign country, but rather the regime's modus of governing the country. It was not long before the chants and choruses shifted from slogans about land and country to the iconic slogans which had echoed in Egypt's streets since the outset of the revolution.

9.2 The Agreement as a Dislocating Event

The controversial agreement that ceded to Saudi Arabia sovereignty over the two Red Sea islands at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba was officially signed into effect by Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail and his Saudi counterpart on 8 April 2016. (Walsh 2016). Negotiated in secret, the deal was signed publicly during a televised ceremony on the occasion of Saudi King Salman's visit to Egypt. This ceremony coincided with the disclosure of bilateral plans to implement a development proposal from 2007 and build a bridge connecting Egypt and Saudi Arabia over the Gulf of Aqaba. Plans for the King Abdullah Bridge, a 32-kilometre causeway that would link Egypt and Saudi Arabia between Sharm al-Sheikh and Ras Hamid near Tabuk and pass through the Straits of Tiran and Sanafir, had been in discussion since 1988. During Mubarak's tenure, the plan had been aborted due to concerns over both security and potential environmental impacts.³⁸² Under the presidency of Mohamed Mursi already, the Binladin Group had then

³⁸² The construction of the bridge is expected to impact on water quality in the fragile Red Sea habitat and would risk a negative cascading effects on its protected marine life and fisheries

announced its intentions to fund the project with its estimated financing volume of 3 billion USD in cooperation with Egypt's state-owned Arab Contractors construction and contracting company. However, cautions by environmentalists and growing diplomatic tensions between Egypt and the Saudi kingdom had led to the postponement of the project (see K. Walker 2013).

The fact that now, after Mursi's deposition, prior concerns about the project had suddenly vanished contributed to the widespread impression that the land swap, effectively, represented a corrupted exchange of Egyptian land and soil for Saudi petrodollars and economic support. Tiran and Sanafir became condensing symbols for the canting two-faced nationalist rhetoric of the Egyptian administration and its dependence on the credit chequebook of the Gulf States: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had provided at least 25 billion USD in aid and investment to the post-coup governments since 2014. Hence Egyptians accused Sisi of repaying this debt with the Egyptian homeland. Exiled popular satiric Bassem Yousef aptly summarised the prevailing public sentiment that Al-Sisi had sold an invaluable piece of the homeland in an Arabic tweet that imitated the bargaining habits of street hawkers in Cairo's old town tourist souk of Khan al-Khalili: "Closer Pasha, a billion for an island, two for a pyramid, and on top some statues as gift."³⁸³

Regardless of possibly respectable legal grounds³⁸⁴—and the Egyptian Council of Ministers' announcement that the islands were unmistakably Saudi territory as the surveys by the National Committee for Egyptian Maritime Border Demarcation and a total of eleven rounds of negotiations during the last six years had determined—the ceding of the islands "struck a nerve among the public and even among the elite that revived the fearlessness of the revolutionary period [...] Even members of the usually supine elite were horrified" (Cole 2016). This was compounded by the fact that the resounding governmental rhetoric since Al-Sisi's assumption of the presidency had been one of reclaiming *aradi ad-dawla* [the state's lands], as Sherif Gaber (2016, 98–101) illustrates. In October 2014, the former Prime Minister Ibrahim Mahlab had even announced that anyone who laid a hand on the state's land would "have it cut off" (EL-Behansawy and Said 2014 cit. in Gaber 2016: 99).

³⁸³ Tweet by @DrBassemYoussef on 9 April 2016, 23:32. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/DrBassemYoussef/status/718914530823311361>.

³⁸⁴ There are good legal grounds to consider the islands Egyptian, but also respectable claims on the Saudi side. An overview over the legal positions of both stakeholders is provided by the London Centre of International Law Practice's own Centre for International Land & Maritime Boundaries in its April 2016 policy brief (cf., Dupont and McGarry 2016, 3–5) and by the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy in a dedicated report on the island debate (TIMEP 2017, 9).

His words evidently contradicted the announced land swap. However, the nationalist rhetoric and the securitisation of contentious issues had been so successful for the past three years in quelling opposition, generating public support for **restrictive policies, and the extension of the security state's room for manoeuvre**. Consequently, it was seemingly out of a routine that authorities framed all concerns regarding the agreement in security terms, as soon as they were first voiced.

9.2.1 *The Limits of Securitisation*

On the morning of 13 April 2016, Al-Sisi assembled the editors-in-chief of several newspapers, some members of parliament and around one hundred selected movement representatives for a special meeting on the island crisis.³⁸⁵ Announced as a conversation with the “Egyptian family” the meeting boiled down to a presidential monologue that revealed Al-Sisi’s deep mistrust in, and contempt for the Egyptian opposition, the public, and the country’s media system (see Elmeshad 2016).³⁸⁶ The president’s remarks set the tone for how authorities would deal with popular dissent. Among the opposition, they were seen as an expression of the regime’s arrogance and as symptomatic of the president’s disdain for the opinion of its constituency. Warnings of a “hellish scheme” that Egyptians were not paying enough attention to and that aimed at widening the “cracks” in Egyptian society dominated the larger part of his speech (see Al Ahram 2016a; Abdel Alim 2016; S. Ibrahim 2016). During his televised 90-minute long speech, Al-Sisi claimed that Egypt was subject to a foreign conspiracy and embargo which aimed at isolating it internationally:

Egyptians should stand as one hand against these evil powers. [...] Egyptians are currently suffering from a state of collective suicide due to fourth generation warfare, which targets the loss of Egyptians’ confidence in their state institutions.³⁸⁷

Against this backdrop, the calls for public protest in Cairo and other cities were not only undermining the will of the Egyptian people by contributing to its “national suicide.” They also threatened national security and stability more than all outside attempts to destabilise the country. By denouncing the agreement as an illegal land sale, the president added, the Egyptian people would only hurt themselves and drive a wedge into society. Furthermore, he referred to the opposition’s

³⁸⁵ In addition to discussing the demarcation agreement, the meeting also focussed on new developments in the case of the forced disappearance and murder of Giulio Regeni.

³⁸⁶ In her a detailed description of the event, Amira el-Fekki (2016a) quotes one of the attendees MP Anwar Sadat on the impression that the meeting had effectively been a nationalist photo-op.

³⁸⁷ For a transcript of the speech on 13 April 2016 see <https://almanassa.com/ar/story/1505>. Records of the televised speech are available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRGXxVGb_yw and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBvj0XWk6y8&feature=youtu.be>.

mobilising efforts in online media and via social networks indirectly as elements of the “fourth generation warfare” that was being waged by cyber-brigades on the Egyptian nation (see Naeem 2016).³⁸⁸ This rhetoric, which securitised all opposition to the border demarcation agreement, tied in well with the threat scenarios that the incumbent regime had tied its fate to in the aftermath of the 2013 coup against Mohammed Mursi (see Chapter 8). It included the coalition of forces voicing dissent against the deal in the group of Egypt’s enemies, effectively extending the frontier that the post-coup regime had drawn between the national body and its antagonist other. It moreover aimed at bolstering the former general’s claim to power and legitimacy, which based on the military’s professional ability to deal most effectively with threats to national security. Al-Sisi began also drew lines to a greater plot “to hit Egypt, blur the truth, falsify reality and discredit the confidence in everything good.” In doing so, he stressed—once more—the role of the state’s ‘prestigious institutions’ as the sole saviours from evil, thus reaffirming the ‘protector of the nation’-framing that had been so successful since the reconfiguration of the regime in mid-2013.

This securitised tenor of Al-Sisi’s first public reactions to the island controversy remained vaguely the same throughout all presidential addresses during the investigation period. This was the case for addresses in Istanbul at the 13th session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Summit on 14 April,³⁸⁹ in Cairo on the occasion of marking the Judges Day on 23 April,³⁹⁰ as well as the 34th anniversary of Sinai Liberation. At each of these events, Al-Sisi doubled down on his ‘enemy from within’ and conspiracy framings, warning of evil forces and lauding Egypt’s state institutions, above all the army, judiciary and police, for their commitment:

All of these institutions never did and will never give in one inch of the Egyptian soil. They all take all measures and exert all efforts for defending and developing the Egyptian soil. This homeland which is cherished in the minds of all Egyptians is protected through the providence of Allah the Almighty and the efforts of its loyal sons who are

³⁸⁸ Since taking over the presidential office, Al-Sisi had repeatedly warned Egyptians of this fourth-generation warfare, which he has described as the use of technology, modern communication tools and psychology to destabilise the country. More than mere propaganda, the idea of a plan by Western, Zionist, or Islamist forces to divide the Middle East, seems to be strongly rooted in the administrations program. Recently, the Defence Ministry-affiliated Nasser Military Academy has started to offer courses for parliamentarians to train the legislation on how to defend against this warfare (see Mada 2016a).

³⁸⁹ SIS. 14 April 2016. ‘Statement by President Abdel Fattah El Sisi to 13th session of OIC in Istanbul’. *State Information Service Official Website*. <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/99975/Statement-by-President-Abdel-Fattah-El-Sisi-to-13th-session-of-OIC?lang=en-us>.

³⁹⁰ SIS. 23 April 2016. ‘Statement by H.E. President of the Arab Republic of Egypt Abdel Fattah El Sisi on the Occasion Marking the Judges Day’. *State Information Service Official Website*. <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/101093/Statement-by-President2-El-Sisi-on-the-occasion-marking-Judges-Day?lang=en-us>.

sacrificing their lives for its dignity and progress.³⁹¹

A few days after Al-Sisi's meeting with the 'Egyptian family', the Ministry of Interior (MOI) also subscribed to this rhetoric. Adopting a familiar strategy that had been developed for the crackdown on the Anti-Coup protests and subsequently reproduced vis-a-vis the labour strikes as well as several protests by public sector employees and non-commissioned police officers in 2014 and 2015,³⁹² the MOI dismissed all critics of the demarcation agreement as *agents provocateurs*. On the one hand, the ministry underscored its "full appreciation and respect for the rights of citizens to freely express themselves on various national issues regarding the border line drawn by the law." On the other hand, however, this affirmation came with a hostile undertone and abstract warnings to Egyptians not to break the law. Furthermore, the MOI's official statement dismissed the current protest marches as the work of the illegal Muslim Brotherhood which aimed to destabilise the country. In a paternalist manner, it appealed to citizens not to fall prey to this Islamist incitement and cautioned them against heeding any "biased" protest calls. In other words, the ministry deliberately framed the ongoing controversy over Tiran and Sanafir in polarising terms, as a standoff between the state and those spreading chaos and disturbing the public order.³⁹³ Its dichotomous 'enemy from within'-framing effectively mirrored Al-Sisi's warnings of a hellish scheme to destabilise the country. Referring to its constitutional responsibility to safeguard national security, consequently, the ministry also reserved the right to take all necessary legal steps "to restore order in the street" and confront all measures that could impair public safety.

9.2.2 *Relativising the Agreement*

By contrast, attempts to legitimise the redrawing of Egypt's sea borders were less fervent and agitated. Seeking refuge in technicalities, Al-Sisi had argued vis-à-vis his assembled supporters, mostly nationalist in orientation, that the agreement did not imply a sale but a return of sovereignty to its rightful owner: "We did not sell

³⁹¹ SIS. 24 April 2016. 'Statement by H.E. President of the Arab Republic of Egypt Abdel Fattah El Sisi on the 34th Anniversary of Sinai Liberation'. *State Information Service Official Website*.

http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Templates/Articles/tmpArticles.aspx?ArtID=103660#.V3EaxzVY_k0.

³⁹² CSF forces were deployed in August 2015 to put down a mass protest by hundreds of low-ranking officers in the Sharqiyah governorate. The protestors demanded improved access to health care, risk compensation and, in general, treatment equal to that of higher-ranking officers (Abdelrahman 2017, 8).

³⁹³ See MOI. 14 April 2016. 'Statement Issued by the Ministry of the Interior [Arabic]'. *Egypt Ministry of Interior Official Website*.

<http://www.moiegypt.gov.eg/Arabic/Departments+Sites/Media+and+public+Relation/Ministry+Releases/by14042016.htm>.

our land. What happened is we gave the Saudi people their land back.” Moralising the issue, Al-Sisi went on to say that his mother had taught him not to take other **people’s things**, hence, giving the islands back to Saudi was the right thing to do. He added that the agreement had been prepared by and resulted from a professional demarcation process, initiated by presidential decree in 1990. This narrative exemplified the authorities’ **double strategy in dealing with the crisis and followed** the lead of an earlier statement released by the Council of Ministers: After secrecy had failed to prevent the disclosure of the land deal with Saudi Arabia, the government was eager to frame the border demarcation agreement as the result of a simple and unambiguous technical process following established scientific and legal standards.

In her widely cited article on science and securitisation Trine Villumsen Berling demonstrates how the securitisation of a policy issue is often supported by narrative structures that relativise the political element within decision making and portray it as a purely technical procedure. In this process, surveys, academic reports and expert opinions can become instrumental to authorities, because they invoke scientific authority, objectify the facts of a case and hence contribute to establishing interpretive authority (Berling 2011, 389, 393f; see also Waever 1995, 474). Al-Sisi’s **statement on the 34th** commemoration of the liberation of the Sinai Peninsula best exemplifies how the Egyptian government attempted to tap into this mechanism of knowledge construction. Melding scientism with his securitising rhetoric, the president intended to appease his critics on 25 April by saying:

Egypt will not accept jeopardising its national security and will not allow any power that is seeking to impose its control or implement its plots in the Arab world to achieve its goals. [...] **One of the most important lessons is hard work while adopting a scientific approach along with overcoming all calls that are aimed to spread despair and scepticism and are seeking to shake the confidence in the State and its nationalist institutions.**

The Egyptian government recognised the pitfalls of a discursive strategy primed on nationalism. It, therefore, aimed to persuade the public of the proper course of the negotiations that had preceded the demarcation agreement with Al-Saud and to downplay its political significance. To underscore the risks posed by the opposition to the due process of political decision-making, it furthermore contrasted the disruptive nature of the protests with the hard work that had gone into finalising the agreement. On 9 April, the cabinet disclosed details on the process to discard the impression of a backroom deal (see Kamel 2016) and reassure the population **of the government’s diligence during the negotiations:**

This accomplishment comes after hard work that lasted six long years, during which time 11 rounds of meetings were held by the maritime delimitation committee be-

tween Saudi Arabia and Egypt.³⁹⁴

The press release went on to state that the technicians among the committee members had resorted “with the utmost precision” to the latest scientific methods to calculate the geographic location and course of the new border line between both countries in the Red Sea. The exact coordinates relied on presidential decree 27/1990 about the demarcation of Egypt’s territorial waters which had been issued by Husni Mubarak (and placed the two islands outside of Egypt’s national borders and economic zone in the Southern Sinai. The United Nations had been notified of this decree as early as May 1990. With the aim of further defusing tensions and deflect criticism from the presidency, the cabinet also assured that the bilateral agreement would be presented to Egypt’s House of Representatives, which would then discuss its contents and, ultimately, have the final say on whether it should be ratified. All public outrage was hence premature (see Alabbasi 2016).

To up the ante, a few days later the Council of Minister’s Information and Decision Support Centre (IDSC) published a potpourri of documents purportedly proving Saudi ownership over the islands on its website including, among others, several diplomatic letters and correspondences, classified cables, an essay by Mohamed El-Baradei on “The Egyptian Israelis Peace Treaty and Access to the Gulf of Aqaba,” as well as a shot from a New York Times article dated to January 1982 on the delineation of the border between Israel and Egypt.³⁹⁵ The accompanying statement by the IDSC indicated that “claims that a hurried decision has been made during King Salman’s visit to Egypt” were untrue.³⁹⁶ As regards the peculiar timing, the IDSC instead explained the conclusion of the demarcation agreement and the disclosure of the deal as a matter of necessity and a consequence of the bilateral plans to build a bridge over the Gulf of Aqaba:

The demarcation agreement between Egypt and Saudi Arabia was concluded because

³⁹⁴ A repost of the full statement is available at https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=939485159497593&id=100003083533414.

³⁹⁵ In total, the release includes nine documents: King Abdulaziz’s cable to the Saudi plenipotentiary in Cairo from February 1950; two correspondences between the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Saudi counterpart from in 1988 and 1989; a letter sent by former Minister of Foreign Affairs Essmat Abdumeguid to Prime Minister Atef Sedqy; a confidential cable was sent from the American ambassador to Egypt to US secretary of state in 1950, in which the ambassador stated that Tiran and Sanafir are Saudi territories; a letter by Egypt’s permanent representative to the United Nations from 27 May 1967 confirming that Egypt has never claimed sovereignty over the islands; a range of maps ratified by the United Nations on 16 February 1973 locating the islands in Saudi waters; the above mentioned 1982 New York Times article and the July 1982 piece by El-Baradei; and the presidential decree 27/1990 which the Council of Ministers had referred to in its initial statement. The documents can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/2MNSuX0>.

³⁹⁶ See IDSC. 12 April 2016. ‘Tiran and Sanafir Islands belong to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia [Arabic]’. *Information & Decision Support Centre*. <http://www.idsc.gov.eg/idsc/News/View.aspx?ID=4269>

establishing a bridge between the parties requires a precise determination of borders in order to maintain the principle of territorial sovereignty. Instances of countries sealing agreements to establish bridges on land or at sea are many.

According to the historical diplomatic correspondence quoted in the published file, the occupation of Tiran and Sanafir in 1949 had also never amounted to a **full-fledged annexation of the territory**: “Egypt did not seek at any time to claim that the sovereignty of the two islands has been transferred to it. Rather, Egypt only sought to take over defending the two islands,” the letter by the Egyptian chief delegate to the United Nations, released by the IDSC and dated to 27 May 1967, reads. Instead, the centre asserted, the occupation had been acquiesced by the Saudi kingdom only temporarily by virtue of an agreement in 1950, and only to shore up its military capacities for confronting Israel in the Gulf of Aqaba.

In his ‘meeting with the Egyptian family’ on 13 April 2016, Al-Sisi affirmed **the IDSC’s position. In his view, the government had not relinquished “a single grain of sand” from Egypt’s land.** The border agreement had been finalised in co-operation and accordance with several sovereign institutions that had, over the years, produced **numerous studies on the islands’ correct affiliation.** The President thus pointed to the experts involved in the process to defend the opacity of the demarcation procedure. Additionally, he invoked the authority of two institutions whose mandate is most strongly connected to notions of national security and border integrity to shore up the legitimacy of the negotiations: The Foreign Intelligence and the Ministry of Defence. Based on their advice, details of the bilateral negotiations had ostensibly been kept confidential and concealed from both the Egyptian and the Saudi public to prevent sensationalisation by the media, subsequent conflict and a potential division of the Arab world: “**You don’t know the harm that comes from disclosing everything without limits,**” **Al-Sisi stressed,** “**You harm yourselves, I swear.**”³⁹⁷

In his one-hour long speech made in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, the President framed any criticism in moralising terms as an insulting public show of mistrust and a personal offence: “**The army has no patriots, and they are all willing to sell their country?,**” he asked ironically, chastising the public for its lack of faith in **the country’s leadership. However,** rather than raising a convincing argument for his plead for public self-discipline and trust in the institutional process, the President opted for expressing forgiveness and demanding **the people’s loyalty in re-**

³⁹⁷ Al-Sisi, Abdel Fattah. 13 April 2016. ‘Explanation of the issue of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir [Arabic]’. *Al-Manassa*. <https://almanassa.com/ar/story/1505>.

turn:³⁹⁸

I brought you here to reassure you about the man you entrusted with your land and honour. I did not take the issue personally [...] I didn't let you down or desert you and never doubted your sincerity for one second, please treat me and the state the same way.

People should differentiate between the state's better assessment of a crisis and the less accurate assessment of individuals, Al-Sisi added. In a side note on human rights conditions, he remarked that societies were built through work, not unchecked freedom of opinion. This served as a warning to the national media against questioning or criticising the state. Referring to the earlier announcements by the cabinet, the president highlighted that, as with other issues of national importance, the island deal would undergo a due process of legal revision under the auspices of the parliament. Contrasting the "legitimate representative of the people's will" with the illegitimate claims that had been voiced via street politics, he argued that it was ultimately in the hands of the parliament to "form a committee, or two, and do whatever it wants" in order to process and ratify the border demarcation.

As a backdrop to the opaque policy-making process in the lead-up to the agreement, this rhetoric was perceived by those critical of the island deal as an implicit gag order. However, it was not only the government's derogatory tone, nor its questioning of Egyptians' sanity that backfired.³⁹⁹ Rather, the manner in which Al-Sisi aimed to close the discussion about the islands became the straw that broke the camel's back. At the end of his speech, he thanked his audience and went on to close the meeting:

I said a lot of words on this issue, let me resolve it, or finish with it, which means that, please – I hope that we do not talk about this issue again.

When one of the attendees attempted to pose a question, he was interrupted by the president who snapped that he had not granted anyone permission to speak, followed by an abrupt suspension of public broadcast.

9.3 The Popular Campaign to Protect the Land

Al-Sisi's address was aimed at putting an end to the contentious discourse around the topic, but it effected precisely the opposite. Though embedded in a long speech, his remarks on Tiran and Sanafir were reminiscent of the Mubarak re-

³⁹⁸ Al-Sisi, Abdel Fattah. 13 April 2016. 'Explanation of the issue of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir [Arabic]'. *Al-Manassa*. <https://almanassa.com/ar/story/1505>.

³⁹⁹ Throughout his speech, Al-Sisi had repeatedly asked his audience what was wrong with it.

gime's attempt to defuse popular anger towards the end of the '18 days of Tahrir' in 2011 via a normalisation strategy. These attempts reached a climax during Omar Suleiman's brief address on 10 February 2011, which strongly backfired as it revealed the regime's ignorance of popular feelings (Holmes 2012, 406f): Protesters in Cairo's Tahrir Square had already reacted with fury when Mubarak had failed to announce his immediate resignation. But when Omar Suleiman, in his televised statement, asked the "Youth of Egypt, heroes of Egypt, go home and go back to work so that we can build and create" (Reuters 2011a), demonstrators, instead of leaving the square, vowed to make Friday's protests the biggest so far. Like Suleiman's historic address, Al-Sisi's call for silence seemed, as Marina Ottaway (2011) has put it well, "out of touch with the mood in the country." A protest call released on 14 April by several revolutionary youth groups and widely shared online portrayed the president's gag order as a lack of respect and insult, not only to the heritage of the Egyptian martyrs in Sinai but also to the Egyptian constitution and its legal provisions:

The people's sons have paid with their blood to defend the islands of Tiran and Sanafir in our battles with the Zionist enemy. Today we find Al-Sisi daring to sell them with the stroke of a pen, against the Constitution and all norms and laws. Then he addresses us after the sale is complete, saying 'I do not want any more talk on this subject'.⁴⁰⁰

References to Al-Sisi's explosive words became a ubiquitous feature of the PCPL's communication throughout the investigation period. Al-Sisi's speech effectively became engrained in the campaign's motivational framing as a symbol of disrespect for the protesters' legitimate concerns. This was exemplified, among others, by the April 6 Movement's morning salute to the Egyptian youth on 25 April. The statement referred not only to the gag order but also borrowed from the President's narrative that nor a "grain of sand" of the Egyptian homeland had been sold:

Good Morning! A morning of a complete Sinai which is not missing a grain of sand! A morning of Tiran and Sanafir [being] both Egyptian. A morning of taking to the street, a morning on which we will say no to the regime... we will say no to giving up our land... we will say no shutting up our mouth.⁴⁰¹

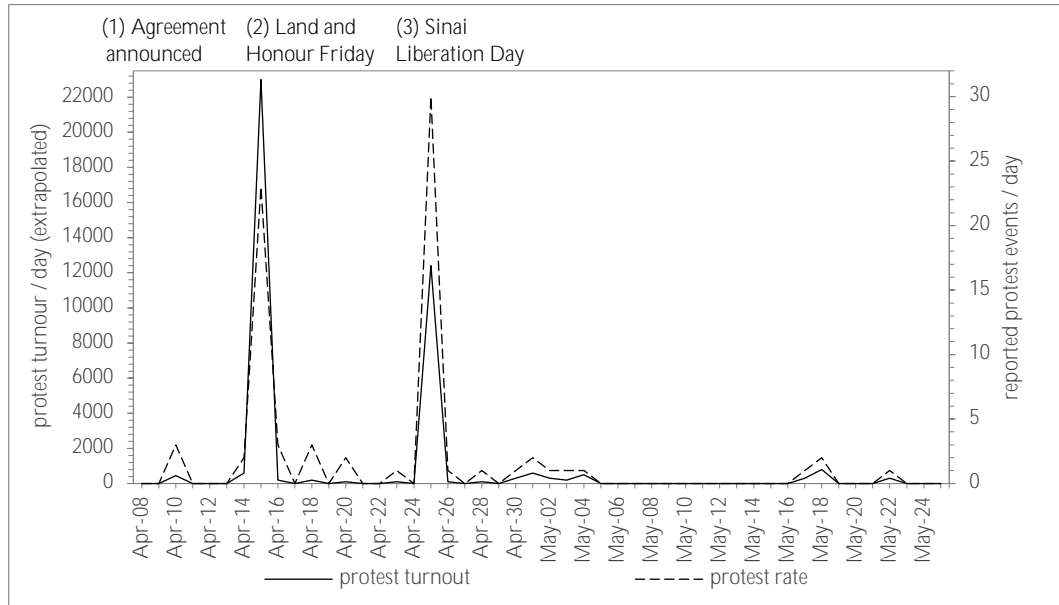
Furthermore, different versions of the hashtag 'speech does not need permission' began to trend on Twitter and Facebook. This hashtag mocked the fact that the President had invited the nation to an open debate in which, in the end, only he had voiced his opinion. Paired with the hashtag #جمعة_الارض [Goma'a al-Ard, Fri-

⁴⁰⁰ April 6 Youth Movement. 14 April 2016. "These things are not for sale [Arabic]". *Official Facebook Page (@6thApril)*. <https://bit.ly/2Hn2lwP>.

⁴⁰¹ The post was removed from the April 6 Movement's Facebook page. A copy is on file with the author.

day of the Land], it resonated not only in Egypt but became the second-highest trending hashtag globally on 15 April.

Figure 33. PCPL protest rate and turnout, 8 April-25 May 2016

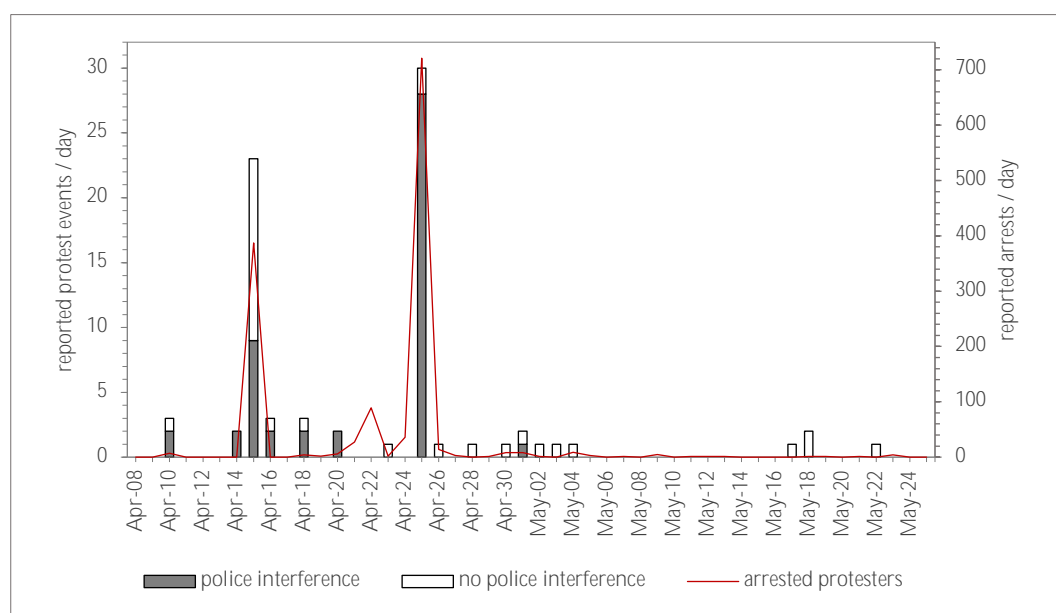


Source 33. Time series based on ACLED and hand-coded sources.

In the weeks that followed, Egypt witnessed protest events across almost all governorates. The integrated event catalogue for the island protest campaign was compiled from the ACLED event database for the investigation period from 8 April 2016 until 24 May 2016 and supplemented by additional hand-coded data. Tellingly, the catalogue contains a total of 79 discrete protest events with thematic reference to the Tiran and Sanafir issue. As shown by the diagram in Figure 33 (p. 266), protest events were not equally distributed across the protest cycle. Instead, the cycle is structured into several episodes of contentious interaction between authorities and protesters. Each of these episodes was precipitated by a crucial turning point event: First, the signature of the bilateral border demarcation agreement on 8 April 2016 by Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail and Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman in the presence of Al-Sisi and King Salman Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud during the latter’s first visit to Cairo set in motion the wave of protests at the centre of this chapter; then, the so-called *Goma’a al-Ard wa-l-ʿArd* [Friday of Land and Honour], on 15 April, showed the magnitude of the discontent with the government’s ceding of territory to Saudi Arabia—for the first time since the imposition of a restrictive protest law in November 2013, Egypt’s provincial capitals saw mass protests of several thousand, which did not originate from associations affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Finally, Sinai Liberation Day on 25 April 2016, the second big ‘island protest’ called for by the opposition in rejection of the demarcation agreement, constitutes a third notable event

within the investigation period.

Figure 34. Repression of PCPL protests, 8 April-25 May 2016



Source 34. Time series based on ACLED and hand-coded sources, repression data provided by FDEP.

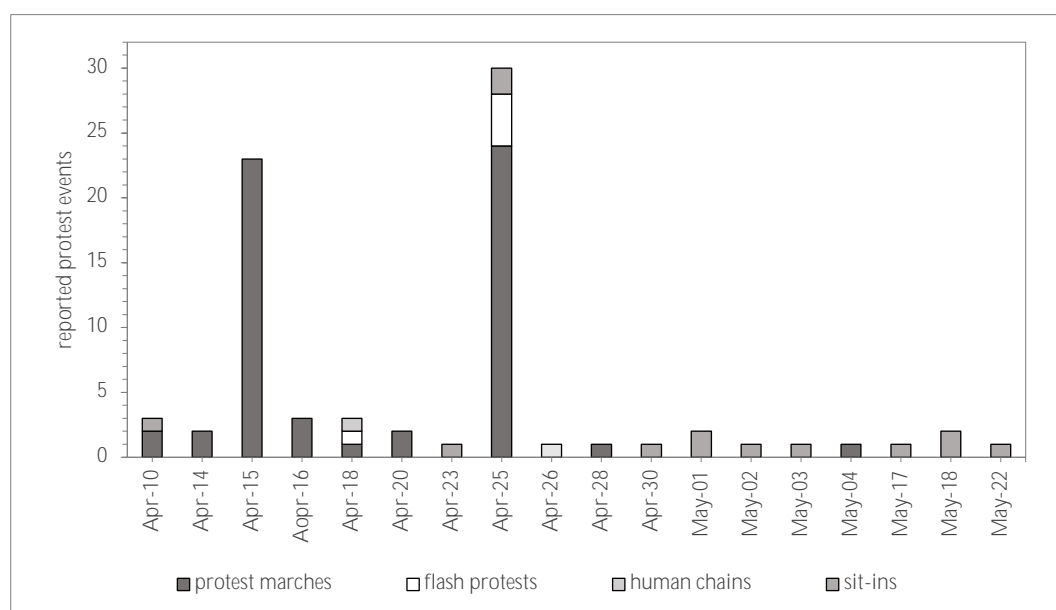
As shown in Figure 34, these turning point events coincided with a spike of political arrests. According to the Front to Defend Egypt’s Protesters (FDEP), no less than 1,344 people were arrested over the course of the entire ‘Egypt is not for sale!’-campaign.⁴⁰² Of these, 741 were detained by Egypt’s infamous state security service *Amn Watany* [Homeland Security].⁴⁰³ The list issued by the NGO includes cases spanning 22 cities and the entire timeframe of the campaign. However, most arrests are documented on 25 April with 721 arrests, of which 296 had been charged by the time of writing, followed by 15 April with 387 arrested and 268 charged protesters. In addition, the diagram draws attention to the phase in the lead-up to Sinai Liberation day, which saw a spike of arrests on 21 and 22 April despite the absence of protest events. This peak stems from a failed attempt by the security forces to prevent popular mobilisation on the national holiday by arresting at least 116 people—often directly off the street or from their homes. Some were released at random shortly after the arrest. Others were only released weeks after and pending trial. Charges against the last 22 defendants were dropped only on 21 June 2016, after the Egyptian State Council declared the border demarcation

⁴⁰² The FDEP database can be accessed at <https://goo.gl/DUp6Yn>.

⁴⁰³ A symbol of Mubarak’s police oppression, the State Security Information Service (*Mabahith Amn ad-Dawla*) was nominally dissolved in March 2011. Factually, however, changes were rather cosmetic: the units were reactivated and restructured in the newly founded National Security Service that continues to operate building on the networks of informants and resources acquired during the Mubarak era, with a high degree of personnel continuity (cf., Abdelrahman 2017, 7).

with Saudi Arabia invalid (see Mada 2016h).⁴⁰⁴

Figure 35. PCPL protest repertoire



Source 35. Time series based on ACLED and hand-coded sources.

Yet, while political arrests accompanied the entire protest cycle, how the PCPL protests were policed on the ground varied more strongly when comparing the major protest events: On 15 April, more than half of the documented protests were virtually unfazed by police interference; by contrast, on 25 April over 90 per cent of collective actions were confronted by police forces. As a consequence of this change of stance by state security vis-à-vis the demonstrators, the protest repertoire also differed during both events, as the PCPL adapted to the closing space for public shows of dissent with a decentralisation of the campaign: 25 April saw a substantial decline of centralised mass protests. Instead, it witnessed an increase in numerous smaller protests as evidenced by Figure 33 (p. 266).

Demonstrations and urban protest marches with a designated start and end point remained the most popular means of expressing dissent with the cession of the Red Sea islands. But as repression increased, especially in the countryside, demonstrators also adopted the more short-term ‘flash protest’ tactics—similar to the *farasha* [butterfly] protests described for the Anti-Coup campaign in Chapter 7.3—and resorted to human chains alongside busy thoroughfares and traffic junctions (see Figure 35, p. 268).

⁴⁰⁴ On the juridical limbo that arrested protesters had to face, with the courts first dealing a heavy blow to the opposition by handing out prison sentences of up to five years under the new terrorism paragraph, and later dropping charges altogether, see Khaled Dawoud’s (2016a) recapitulation for the Atlantic Council’s MENA Source.

These events provided resources for identity formation within the opposition and laid the foundation for a cross-ideological and cross-movement coalition. However, they were also significant as discursive events that dislocated the hegemonic discourse upon which the Sisi-administration had carefully built its autocratic mode of governance. For the first time since its reconfiguration in the aftermath of the 30 June coup d'état its political legitimacy was seriously challenged by others than the demonised Islamists. For both authorities and contenders, the controversial border demarcation agreement came to symbolise the frontier in a struggle for interpretive predominance over political legitimacy, and thus the reference point for heady battles over the meaning of *land* and *nation*, *security* and *stability*, *transparency* and *legality*, as well as *sovereignty* and *rights*. These battles were fought with words on a discursive level, and with deeds in Egypt's streets.

9.3.1 *Land and Honour Friday*

Al-Sisi missed out on the sight of the revolutionary youth taking to the street for the first time during his presidency. Ironically, when the first protests against the deal with Saudi Arabia materialised across Egypt, the President was hosting a dialogue with selected members of the **government's newly launched** 'Youth Leadership Program' at the Red Sea view Galala development high plateau.⁴⁰⁵ There he acknowledged the public outrage and protests in his address to the gathered loyalist youth representatives, describing the protest campaign as offensive and "a stab in the heart" of the nation (Aman 2016). These remarks echoed his prior choice of words in Cairo, where he had first addressed the land swap publicly at the presidential palace. In a similar vein, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) had issued a warning to all opponents of the island deal on the vigil of the marches: Its urgent announcement on social media claimed that the security services possessed reliable information that the "terrorist Muslim Brotherhood" was behind the "inflammatory calls" to organise rallies with the aim of creating chaos and instigating a confrontation between Egyptian citizens and the security services.⁴⁰⁶

On 15 April, however, protesters defied these warnings and took to the street in Cairo, Alexandria, Mansoura, Port Said, Qena and a range of smaller provincial cities and villages (e.g., Ashour 2016; CPJ 2016a; S. Ibrahim 2016; Mada 2016c). For the first time in three years and since the imposition of a restrictive protest law

⁴⁰⁵ See more info at <http://www.sitesint.com/sites-international-president-abdulfatah-el-sisi-galala-city/>.

⁴⁰⁶ MOI. 14 April 2016. 'Statement Issued by the Ministry of the Interior [Arabic]'. *Egypt Ministry of Interior Official Website: General Department of Information & Relations*. <http://www.moegypt.gov.eg/Arabic/Departments+Sites/Media+and+public+Relation/Ministry+Releases/by14042016.htm>.

in November 2013 (Grimm 2015, 3),⁴⁰⁷ a protest of several thousand people formed in Downtown Cairo, which did not originate from Islamist youth groups and student associations. Different political groups and parties supported and joined the protests. Among others, the Revolutionary Socialists, Strong Egypt, the Youth Movement for Justice and Freedom, the April 6 Youth Movement and the Democratic Current declared their intention to oppose the land transfer in a newly founded coalition.⁴⁰⁸ This alliance became known as the ‘Egypt is not for sale!’-coalition. It released an official founding statement as ‘Popular Campaign to Protect the Land: Egypt is not for sale’ the following week, on 22 April.⁴⁰⁹

On ‘Land and Honour Friday’, the groups associated with this coalition gathered on the steps of the Press Syndicate in downtown Cairo where most of the protest marches converged. The steps of the syndicate represented an iconic location for a **demonstration**. **Under Mubarak’s rule**, they had become a sanctuary of sorts for the articulation of political demands that did not cross certain red lines (Fahmi 2009, 101; see K. Ali 2012).⁴¹⁰ Still, it came as a surprise that the protests were not met with the lethal violence that had become the routine response from **Egypt’s security forces** to such public shows of dissent. According to the statistics released by the **Front to Defend Egypt’s Protesters (FDEP)**, **no lethal violence** was reported during the entire investigation period. Any fatalities that may have resulted from police violence, were not registered by human rights organisations in the country. When at least 1,500 people gathered in front of the Journalists Syndicate, **they remained relatively unfazed by the massive deployment of Egypt’s noto-**

⁴⁰⁷ The full text of Egypt’s protest law, including an English translation, was made available by EgyptJustice.com and can be accessed at <https://de.scribd.com/document/398648895/Protest-Law-Arabic> and <https://de.scribd.com/document/398648976/Protest-Law-English>.

⁴⁰⁸ April 6 Youth Movement. 14 April 2016. ‘Protest Call for 15 April: On my body [Arabic]’. *Facebook Event*. <https://www.facebook.com/events/1586440928333688/>; Strong Egypt Party. 14 April 2016. ‘Tiran and Sanafir are a cause for all Egyptians [Arabic]’. *Strong Egypt Party Official Facebook Page (@MisrAlQawia)*.

<https://www.facebook.com/MisrAlQawia/photos/a.492672350759920/1362555427104937>.

⁴⁰⁹ The statement ends with a list of all PCPL founding members, including several political parties, such as the Socialist Popular Alliance, the Popular Current, the Constitution Party, the Justice Party, the Bread and Freedom Party, Karama, the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, Strong Egypt, the Egypt of Freedom Party, as well as a range of popular movements that had been crucially involved in the 2011 mobilisation against the reign of Husni Mubarak or established in its immediate aftermath, such as the Revolutionary Socialists, the Free Front for Peaceful Change, the Freedom and Justice Youth and the Democratic Front – a chapter of the April 6 Youth Movement. Moreover, some nationalist movements, such as the National Partnership Current, the Land Campaign and the “Students will not sell”-Campaign were among the signatories alongside dozens of more or less prominent individual activists. The full list of PCPL founding members can be accessed at <https://goo.gl/YD8evH>.

⁴¹⁰ For an overview over Cairo’s few ‘spaces of freedom’ under the rule of Husni Mubarak see Samir Rifaat’s (2004) modified map of downtown Cairo, modified and reprinted in Fahmi (2009, 100).

rious riot police, in Downtown Cairo.⁴¹¹ At the outset of the protests, the Central Security Force (CSF) were deployed at the access routes to Tahrir Square and had closed down Mohammed Mahmoud Street, Talaat Harb Street Qasr El Nil Street. Moreover, they had blocked the entrances to Ramses Street in an attempt to contain the marches to a controllable area in downtown (M. Said and Al-Sadany 2016). However, the police then refrained, for the most part, from taking any further action beyond creating a perimeter around the sit-ins.

Some teargassing and buckshot were reported from the marches from Al-Sayeda Zainab Square to the city centre, and from Mustafa Mahmoud Squares in Mohandessin where approximately 2,000 protestors had gathered following the Friday prayer. Nevertheless, the clashes between revolutionary youth and police forces remained few and scattered.⁴¹² In Giza, a range of video footage seems to indicate that CSF units chased protestors attempting to move the demonstration from the square in Mohandessin to Tahrir. However, the time series show that more than half of all demonstrations recorded on 15 April remained completely unhindered (see Figure 33, p. 266). Arrests occurred only during the late evening hours. The PCPL organisers announced an ordered pull-back at around 19:00 hours, after having negotiated a truce with the police forces present at the journalist syndicate in Cairo. Shortly before, police forces had attempted to clear the sit in there and issued an ultimatum for its termination.⁴¹³ Those who refused to leave the streets after this point were targeted for arrest.

However, when protesters left the steps of the syndicate, where most marches in the capital had converged, it was only on a temporary basis. That very night, the Revolutionary Socialists, April 6 and a range of independent public figures announced new rallies and stressed the achievements of the protesters:

[It is time] to complete the battle to overthrow the decision to forfeit the two islands, and to build on this fight to break this regime and overthrow the rule of the military. For we have created a mass protests which thousands have joined today in a new breakthrough for the mass movement. With the issue of the islands closed doors have been opened on issues of economic exploitation and austerity, of political despotism,

⁴¹¹ The count is a personal estimate based on the visual evaluation of dozens of videos from the rally at the Journalist Syndicate.

⁴¹² Masr Al-Arabiya. 15 May 2016. 'Injuries in the dismantling of a demonstration by "Mustafa Mahmoud [Arabic]'. <https://bit.ly/2MKsmfL>; RNN. 15 April 2016. 'Security forces fire Molotov cocktails and tear gas at protesters at Mustafa Mahmoud [Arabic]'. *Rassd News Network*. <https://www.facebook.com/RassdNewsN/videos/1283885688355204/>.

⁴¹³ For a detailed micro-level account of protesters' interaction with security forces at the journalist syndicate see the tweets by Heba Farooq Mahfouz (<https://twitter.com/HebaFarooq>), Mahmoud Adel (<https://twitter.com/maadmahmoud>), Muhammed Atef (<https://twitter.com/i3atef>) and Rania Abdallah (<https://twitter.com/RaniaAbdallah>) who all live-tweeted from the sit-in until its dissolution.

torture, arrests, and on the issue of the dirty alliance with the reactionary and counter-revolutionary kingdoms in the Gulf.⁴¹⁴

The protesters' retreat thus represented merely a temporary and strategic withdrawal. After a range of small-scale rallies organised by the April 6 Youth Movement over the following ten days, Sinai Liberation Day on 25 April 2016 brought a new surge of protest.

9.3.2 *Sinai Liberation Day*

A new protest call released by members of the PCPL on 16 April 2016 on social media showed that the coalition aimed to mobilise an even larger crowd on 25 April, the iconic national festive Sinai Liberation Day, which was approaching ten days later. The following week, a printed version was distributed in Egypt's streets:

To those who came down yesterday, we tell them: you have done your duty, and you must come down again next time. And to those who did not come down, we say: come down and don't be afraid!⁴¹⁵

The date marked a highly symbolic national holiday. It references the departure of Israeli forces from the Sinai Peninsula in 1982 and is firmly rooted in Egypt's nationalist archive: The day, for many Egyptians, represents the memory of the restoral of Egyptian national pride which supposedly had been lost in the defeat of the 1976 war. For this historic commemoration, the 'Egypt is not for sale'-campaign announced protests at Egyptian Journalists Syndicate in downtown Cairo, at the Doctors Syndicate in Downtown and next to El-Bohoos station in Dokki, Giza. The location of protests, which were scheduled for 3 p.m. Cairo local time was chosen wisely: The Future of the Homeland Party, one of the dominating nationalist blocs in the last parliamentary elections, had announced simultaneously to celebrate Liberation Day on 25 April, by marching "in honour of the homeland" to downtown Cairo's Abdeen Square and Mohandessin's Mustafa Mahmoud Square, only a few blocks from the planned sites of the PCPL protests (Al Ahram 2016b; Mada 2016e).⁴¹⁶ While this geographical proximity raised the risk of clashes between the two camps, it also increased the chances of the anti-demarcation coalition receiving substantial media coverage, as the Sinai Liberation Day celebrations would be widely televised by Egyptian press.

⁴¹⁴ Revolutionary Socialists. 15 April 2016. 'Return to the street .. Down with the military rule [Arabic]'. *The Revolutionary Socialists Official Website*. <http://revsoc.me/statements/36161/>.

⁴¹⁵ April 6 Youth Movement. 16 April 2016. 'The people, the army and the demonstrations yesterday [Arabic]'. *Facebook (@6thApril)*. <https://www.facebook.com/6thApril/posts/10153348746216568>.

⁴¹⁶ See also RNN. 15 April 2016. 'Video. The Future Party of the homeland: We will celebrate tomorrow in Abdeen. The demonstrations are embarrassing Sisi [Arabic]'. *Rassd News Network*. <https://rassd.com/184520.htm>.

Nevertheless, contention remained more fragmented. While the frequency of protest was higher than on 15 April, as the graph confirms (see Figure 33, p. 266), the size of individual collective actions remained considerably smaller, compared to the Friday of the Land.⁴¹⁷ For 25 April 2016, the event database documents a total of 29 protest events with an extrapolated overall turnout of 12,400 people across the country. Individual marches failed to converge and assemble a critical mass. This was partly a consequence of the massive campaign of arrests against activists which had preceded Sinai Liberation Day (see Figure 33, p. 266). Additionally, with the noteworthy exception of Al-Masry al-Youm and Al-Shorouk (Mada 2016b), most newspapers had opted to downplay or smear the 15 April protests and their organisers' calls.⁴¹⁸ In doing so, they reproduced a pattern established during their coverage of the Anti-Coup protests since mid-2013. In spite of this, the Ministry of Interior was not willing to leave the outcome of oppositional mobilisation efforts to chance.

The 25 April was preceded by a massive campaign of arrests against activists all over the country, with more than 100 people being picked up from their homes, offices and from a range of downtown cafés by plain-clothed *Amn Watany* e officers (El-Fekki 2016b).⁴¹⁹ This crackdown came as a surprise: April 6 and others had taken the lenient approach of the regime's security apparatus towards the 'Friday of the Land'-protesters and the complete absence of the military from Egypt's streets as a sign of encouragement that the army might be tempted to support their cause. April 6 recapitulated the day in its press release:

The usual show of army presence on squares and highways, like the Cairo-Ismaïlia Desert Route, was entirely absent. This means the army is stuck between the anger of the people pressuring it and its support for Sisi. It is holding the stick from the middle⁴²⁰ and [...] does not oppose exchanging the head of state with another.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁷ Competing figures released by Demometer, a local human rights observatory that regularly publishes report about protest events in the country, put the number of events at 23 protests across ten governorates. Its full report about contentious action on Sinai Liberation Day can be accessed at <https://demometer.blogspot.com/2016/04/23-10-25.html>.

⁴¹⁸ Al-Ahram, for instance, highlighted a smaller, pro-government protest and lauded the security forces' successful disruption of a conspiracy to instigate riots in the country (see Mada 2016b).

⁴¹⁹ The arrested included a range of leading members of the protest coalition, among others Revolutionary Socialist member and labour rights lawyer Haitham Mohamedein and renowned lawyer Malek Adly who had been the spearheads of the legal complaint against the Islands transfer to Saudi Arabia (Front Line Defenders 2016). Consequently, protester on 25 April no longer demanded only the restoration of Egypt's maritime borders to its status ante. Their calls and street chants additionally prominently featured demands for the release of the 'prisoners of the land'.

⁴²⁰ The Egyptian proverb 'to hold the stick from the middle' refers to someone who takes the position of a middle man or refuses to choose sides between two camps.

⁴²¹ April 6 Youth Movement. 16 April 2016. 'The people, the army and the demonstrations yesterday [Arabic]'. Facebook (@6thApril). <https://www.facebook.com/6thApril/posts/10153348746216568>.

On 16 April, Egypt's General Prosecutor ordered the majority of those arrested on the night after the Friday of Land demonstrations to be released from the Qasr al-Nil and Abdeen police stations by the end of the week (Mada 2016h). This raised hopes of a positive precedent for future protest. However, in a swift change of course, the prosecution reversed its decision in the forefront of 25 April and charged those still in custody with violating the protest law, disrupting public transportation, blocking roads and threatening security and public order (Mada 2016c). It also issued new detention orders against lawyers and journalists who continued to call for further protests. In addition, a heavy-handed arrest campaign aimed to suppress the new protests before they even began (Mughrabi 2016). This crackdown marked as a major shift in the tactics of the security apparatus which had exercised unprecedented caution vis-à-vis the rallies on 15 April 2016.⁴²²

In the aftermath of the 'Friday of the Land' protests, the MOI announced a campaigns to "bring back discipline in the street and straighten out what might affect public security."⁴²³ In justification of its pre-emptive strike, the ministry announced on the eve of the national holiday that it would stand firm "against any attempts to destabilise national security and any vital public or police facilities" (Al-Bedaiah 2016; Egypt Independent 2016a). Abdul Ghaffar furthermore invoked the Egyptian constitution to fortify his 'law and order'-framing and delegitimise collective action as an illicit practice beyond any legal framework. He assured that the security services, "in the light of the law and the constitution," would deal with any attempt to infringe on vital and important institutions of the state and that there would be no leniency on the rights of all citizens to a "safe and secure life." The law would be applied firmly and decisively. Public collective action of any kind would not be tolerated. Then he appealed to the 'honourable citizens' [al-

⁴²² In a possible explanation for this change of strategy, the independent daily Al-Shorouk reported how the police's "soft approach" to the 15 April protests had been harshly criticised by President Al-Sisi. Quoting internal government sources, Al-Shorouk claimed, a different code of conduct had been ordered top-down for the upcoming 25 April call. Yet, denying the statement in a historic precedent, the Egyptian Presidency took to social media and issued a statement on its personal Facebook page in which President Sisi denounced the "misinformation" of the newspaper (for the full statement from 21 April 2016 see <https://www.facebook.com/AISisiofficial/posts/1405692086123793>). Until then Al-Sisi had refrained from issuing official statements via social media, can be attributed to the popularity of the 'Egypt is not for sale!'-campaign: It seems that by departing from protocol the presidency aimed at reaching a large share of the campaign's virtual followers who were, due to their nationalist background, also following the presidency on Facebook. In response, Al-Shorouk issued an official apology and took its article offline in an act of self-censorship mechanism. A copy of the original article is on file with the author and can be accessed at https://de.scribd.com/document/399024037/Shorouk-Report?secret_password=lrRJ7VrnBop1bUautB4H.

⁴²³ Ministry of Interior. 15 April 2016. 'Security Cairo is directing a large security campaign involving a number of streets and squares of the capital'. *Official Website*. Offline, on file with the autor.

muwatinin al-shurafa],⁴²⁴ not to respond to attempts to instigate discord between the security services and the Egyptian people. Reproducing the usual protector-frame, at the end of the meeting, the minister highlighted that the police was responsible for maintaining security and stability and would thus “**undertake all efforts and sacrifices**” to keep citizens safe.

It was in the same vein that Defence Minister Sedki Sobhi argued during his speech in commemoration of the 34th anniversary of the ‘liberation’ of Sinai.⁴²⁵ Going beyond the usual laudation and honorific speech, the general openly turned to domestic politics and the recent controversy, when he called on the people to unite their voices in the nation’s interests and stressed that the armed forces would no longer tolerate those spreading chaos in the streets. In a clear reference to 25 January 2011 and 30 June 2013, he stated that the army would not be blackmailed or pressured, thus crushing all hopes of military intervention on the side of the protesters against the regime. Even the Minister of Religious Endowments, Dr Gomaa Mohamed Mokhtar, towed the line and commented on the calls for the 25 April 2016 demonstrations by describing them as “subversive” and an “invitation to sabotage, murder and bloodshed” which contradicted the teachings of Islam (Hawy 2016), thus complementing the security frames constructed around the protesters with an additional religious framing. This securitising narrative was further streamlined as Sinai Liberation Day drew closer, and following 20 April 2016, when President Sisi had conferred with Interior Minister Magdy Abdel-Ghaffar and his deputies about the attempts to mobilise for new marches on the national holiday. After meeting the heads of all security directorates (Al-Bedaiah 2016), Ghaffar asserted that there would be no leniency for those breaking the assembly law, stressing that the safety of citizens and the stability of the state were of top priority:

I trust in the awareness of the honourable citizens, that they will not respond to calls to create chaos and harm security, or even respond to attempts to create division between security forces and the people, whom we have vowed to protect and secure, whatever the sacrifices or challenges may be.

Anyone involved in such activities would be crossing a red line and be dealt with accordingly. Meanwhile, Egypt’s military announced that it was deploying forces

⁴²⁴ Given its routine use in the communiqués of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in 2012, the term has become a derogatory signifier, in certain political circles, for all those who agree with everything the state does and turn a blind eye to the crimes for which it is responsible. For a discussion of the term’s contentious nature see Al-Aswani (2012) and Andeel’s (2014) ‘Lexicon of a revolution’s insults’.

⁴²⁵ Sobhi, Sedki. 21 April 2016. ‘Speech of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Minister of Defense and Military Production on the proceedings of the 22nd educational symposium [Arabic]’. *Egypt Ministry of Defense Official Website*. <http://www.mod.gov.eg/mod/NewsDetails.aspx?id=29131>.

to secure major public buildings;⁴²⁶ riot police cordoned off the doctors' and journalist syndicates as well as other declared protest sites; the entrances and exits of Tahrir Square saw the deployment of military vehicles and CSG units; and Sadat Metro station was closed to impede an influx of protesters to the downtown protest sites (Cairo Post 2016; Raghhab 2016). Moreover, the security forces arrested hundreds of citizens on suspicion of being in the streets or places leading to the assembly areas to demonstrate. Many rallies were forced to relocate due to heavy police presence at the announced meeting points.⁴²⁷ An attempt to organise a convoy from the capital with the aim of planting an Egyptian flag on the islands was equally aborted given the government's announcement to block the tunnel that connects Sinai to the mainland.⁴²⁸

Nevertheless, on the morning of the national holiday, the April 6 Movement posted a confident statement on social media that called Egyptians to the streets to **join the protests without fear of the police forces, asserting that "they are the ones who are fearful of you!"**⁴²⁹ As the first marches set out from Giza's Nahya neighbourhood, CSF moved in preventing the individual protest marches from gaining pace and from converging and gathering larger masses. What followed in the afternoon were repeated attempts by groups of around 100 people to regroup and converge on several different assembly points. Such gatherings were attempted at Midan Al-Mesaha and Dokki Street in Giza, as well as in Giza's Ard al-Liwa neighbourhood, and were all thwarted by security forces dispersing demonstrators with teargas. The physical violence deployed against the protest campaign culminated in a siege by CSF on the Karama Party headquarters which overlooks Al-Mesaha Square and where many protesters sought refuge after police forces began their crackdown. The standoff ended late in the evening with a truce, negotiated by prominent leftist figures (Hidji 2016).

While justifying their crackdown with the PCPL's violation of the assembly law, according to which any marches on 25 April would have been subject to prior

⁴²⁶ The army spokesperson's statement is available at <https://rassd.com/184493.htm>.

⁴²⁷ See PCPL. 25 April 2016. 'Facebook Post Announcing New Locations [Arabic]'. *Facebook (@Egyptisnotforsale)*. <https://www.facebook.com/Egyptisnotforsale/posts/1003535756351075>; PCPL. 25 April 2016. 'Facebook Post Announcing Relocation of Protests [Arabic]'. *Facebook (@Egyptisnotforsale)*. <https://www.facebook.com/Egyptisnotforsale/posts/1003524006352250>.

⁴²⁸ Among the main proponents of the convoy were the Revolutionary Socialists, the April 6 Youth Movement, the April 6 Democratic Front, and the Masr Party. To coordinate the convoy and the upcoming demonstrations, April 6 launched a Facebook social networking site entitled 'Re-Liberation of Sinai'. The statement announcing the convoy is available at RNN. 17 April 2016. 'Revolutionary movements mobilise for 25 April and the "Tiran" convoy provokes reactions [Arabic]'. *Rassd News Network*. <https://rassd.com/183799.htm>.

⁴²⁹ The post was removed from the April 6 Movement's Facebook page. A copy is on file with the author.

authorisation, security services nevertheless tolerated even spontaneous pro-government demonstrations. The very streets that remained barred to the PCPL on 25 April 2016 saw major celebrations of the 34th Sinai Liberation Day, particularly at Abdeen Palace, the presidential residence, where thousands convened to celebrate the Egyptian Army and in support of President AL-Sisi (see Al-Masry Al-Youm 2016). Convoys led by pick-up trucks with giant speakers additionally drove around downtown Cairo blasting out the pro-military song *'teslam al-ayadi'* [Blessed are the hands, a reference to the fraternisation slogan “the army and the people are one hand” during the 2011 uprising, see Ketchley 2014]. In addition, there were some minor counter-demonstrations in favour of the islands deal. At these events in Mohandessin and Downtown, protesters carried not only banners honouring Al-Sisi and the army, and the military’s role in the liberation of Sinai. They had also carried Saudi flags. In Cairo, dozens even gathered outside the Maadi military hospital to salute Egypt’s ousted president Hosni Mubarak for his role in the bilateral consultations that led to the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. Albeit much smaller in size, these demonstrations were much more extensively covered by the Egyptian media than the original PCPL protests.⁴³⁰

In summary, it can be said, therefore, that the odds were stacked against the PCPL on 25 April. The ecology for protests was one characterised by mass arrests, roadblocks and huge deployments of security forces. In response to the hard hand of the police and continued repression after Sinai Liberation Day, the island-protest campaign abated further. Realising the limits of street politics under conditions of tightening repression, leading figures within the coalition thus began to refocus their mobilisation efforts on the legal battle for Tiran and Sanafir (Kassab 2016). The momentum of the first island-protests had visibly lost steam and the authorities gradually shifted back to a zero-tolerance policy in dealing with demonstrations. Consequently, collective efforts within the coalition of contenders began to centre on the solicitation of supporting legal evidence for several lawsuits against the island agreement.

9.3.3 *From the Streets to the Courts*

While successful in containing demonstrations on 25 April, the repression deployed by the internal security apparatus against all potential sources of dissent was unable to put an end to the Tiran and Sanafir crisis. Instead, a backlash manifested on a new front: In Egypt’s courts. Given the abatement of street demonstra-

⁴³⁰ Several videos of these protests were published by Al-Masry Al-Youm in a recapitulation of the strangest scenes on Sinai Liberation Day at <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/936951>.

tions, the legal battle that the PCPL had been waging against the agreement in parallel to its street protest became the primary playing field for the opposition. After Sinai Liberation Day, these efforts experienced an additional boost and triggered an organic campaign by engaged citizens, both within the country and abroad. This campaign saw activists taking to various international archives, colonial map repositories and official documentation centres in search of documents **supporting Egypt's historical ownership over Tiran and Sanafir**. In the absence of a street movement to exert pressure on the political process, especially for the diaspora, assisting the PCPL its judicial struggle through historical and archival research became all the more significant. Early on, PCPL frontrunner and former presidential candidate Khaled Ali realised the potential of this international effort **for perpetuating the PCPL's resistance** and maintaining the political momentum of the protests, despite foreclosing opportunities for street mobilisation. Even before the first major demonstrations, he had made use of his social media popularity **to appeal to a broader audience beyond Egypt's border**, seeking its assistance in his lawsuit against the demarcation agreement. In a widely shared Facebook post, he stressed:

This is not a personal case. [...] The case requires major research and legal effort at the historical, geographical, international, strategic and constitutional level. We thus call on everyone who has the ability to provide research assistance in this case not to withhold any knowledge or documents in his hands from us.⁴³¹

For Egyptians abroad as well as those hesitant to join the island protest for fear of **repercussions**, **Ali's personal call provided an alternative vehicle for taking part in the campaign against the land swap and voice their dissent**.⁴³² Not only committed activists answered the call, but also dozens of Egyptian citizens without prior organisational ties to the parties organised within the PCPL. Reportedly even civil servants within the Sisi-administration and state employees were thereby enabled to support the campaign without jeopardising their personal safety (Kassab 2016).

The team of lawyers presided over by Khaled Ali presented the collected historical documents—extracts from the official gazette, old maps, military atlases, several encyclopaedias of Sinai, and historical diplomatic correspondences, amongst others—at a press conference led by the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR). Based on these documents, against all odds, the State Council Commissioner Authority (SCCA) issued a surprising report on 7 June

⁴³¹ Ali, Khaled. 21 April 2016. 'Today I filed a lawsuit against the waiver of the islands [Arabic]'. *Facebook (@khaled.ali.72)*. <https://www.facebook.com/khaled.ali.72/posts/822837647861595>.

⁴³² Interviews with exiled opposition activists in Berlin, May 2016, June 2016; Istanbul, September 2017; London, June 2018; Washington, May 2018.

2016 which responded to the lawsuits filed against the transfer in April by a group of lawyers and questioned the legality of the border demarcation procedure, citing **Article 32 of the Egyptian Constitution**: “The state’s natural resources belong to the people. The state shall commit to protecting these resources, using them well, not depleting them and respecting the right of future generations to their use” (Mada 2016g).⁴³³ **Though not legally binding, the SCCA’s recommendation to form a committee of historians, geographers and engineers to determine the sovereignty status of Tiran and Sanafir represented a victory for the PCPL: it proved, for once, that the filed complaints against the land transfer were significant enough for the court to consider accepting it; adding to that, it symbolically delegitimised the imprisonment of the renowned lawyers Malek Adly and Sayed al-Banna, members of the legal team that filed the complaint against the demarcation agreement, who were arrested on 6 May 2016 on charges of plotting to overthrow the government, promoting publications that disrupt national unity, disseminating false news and inciting the anti-government protests that took place on 25 April (Mada 2016f).**⁴³⁴

As the case had been postponed several times before the First Circuit Court for Administrative Justice, many observers were surprised when the State Council’s Administrative Court (SCAC), in reaction to the SCCA report, nullified the maritime border agreement. Basing its ruling on a total of 23 documents submitted by claimants of the legal team as prove of Egyptian ownership of the islands, on 21 June (Egypt Independent 2016b) it described the islands Tiran and Sanafir as sovereign Egyptian homeland, owned only by the people alone: “they protect it and are the only **source of authority**” (Elgohari 2016).⁴³⁵ This verdict effectively invalidated the Prime Minister’s **signature on the agreement**.

However, the legal contest continued. A complex web of rulings issued by three different courts—the State Council (made up of **Egypt’s Administrative courts**), the Supreme Constitutional Court and the Court of Urgent Matters—came to characterise the island case in the coming months. Several courts became embroiled, denigrating each other and competing for jurisdiction over the Tiran

⁴³³ The full 13-page report is accessible via Khaled Ali’s public Facebook profile at: <https://www.facebook.com/khaled.ali.72/posts/855173074628052>, and on my Scribd account at <https://bit.ly/2Hn3Lgf>.

⁴³⁴ Malek Adly and Sayed al-Banna are defendants in the same case as the Journalists Amr Badr and Mahmoud al-Sakka who were taken into custody on 1 May 2016 when police forces stormed the Journalists Syndicate. Their arrest sparked a wave of protests by affiliates of the Journalist Professional Association which dominated Egypt’s contentious dynamics over the whole of May and June 2016.

⁴³⁵ The full 21-page report is on file with the author and was uploaded to <https://goo.gl/F22Smx>. Mohamed ElGohari’s (2016) provides a thorough analysis of the court’s reasoning for the Atlantic Council.

and Sanafir agreement (for a timeline see Mada Masr 2017; TIMEP 2017, 7). Only hours after the verdict, the government filed an appeal at Egypt's Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) (Al Ahram 2016d). However, the SAC only confirmed **the SCAC's original verdict in an appeals hearing on 16 January 2017** (Nabulioon 2017), ruling against the agreement—and thus the Sisi-administration's appeal—and declaring the islands Egyptian. As the SAC constituted the highest authority in this branch of the judiciary, the government thus switched strategy and focussed on challenging the legality of the lawsuit against the deal and thus the administrative court's competency.⁴³⁶ A subsequent lawsuit thus centred on the lawsuit itself, not on the content of the island deal. This strategy proved fruitful: On 2 April 2017, the Cairo Court of Urgent Matters annulled the SAC's ruling arguing that the court had “acted as if the administrative judiciary combined all branches of government, be they executive, judicial or legislative” (Mada 2017b).

The team of PCPL lawyers, including renown rights lawyers Khaled Ali, Yusuf Awad, Mohamed Adel Soliman, Ziad al-'Aleimy, Malek Adly, Tarek Negeida, and Tariq al-Awadi, immediately filed an injunction against what they saw as the Court of Urgent Matters overstepping its constitutional competencies. Despite this, the verdict was ostensibly taken as a signal by the Al-Sisi administration to go forward with legal proceedings: On 10 April 2016, first the parliament took the decisive step to refer the case to its constitutional affairs committee for a preliminary vote (Soliman and Said 2017); furthermore, the ruling paved the way for a **new government appeal at Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court** on the basis that now two contradictory rulings on the same case existed.

Both tracks emerged favourably for the Egyptian government: Despite 10 ongoing cases against its authority on the matter—filed by a variety of individuals in addition to the original lawsuits by Khaled Ali, Malek Adly and their legal team—the parliament took a vote on the island agreement on 14 June 2017. A majority by the **show of hands voted in favour of the islands' cession**. This vote was backed by a comprehensive report by the IDSC addressing the “most prominent questions and reservations regarding the maritime border demarcation agreement” and decisively negating the possibility that the vote could be challenged in an international court (see Assam Al-Din 2017).⁴³⁷ A mere week later, Egypt's Supreme Con-

⁴³⁶ On behalf of the government, the State Lawsuits Authority, an executive body representing the government in lawsuits, contested the State Council's jurisdiction over the case on the basis that bilateral border agreements fell in the category of 'sovereign actions', a prerogative of the executive with backing of the legislative chambers.

⁴³⁷ The full report can be accessed at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/390670290/IDSC-report-on-Tiran-and-Sanafir-June-2017>.

stitutional Court suspended all previous rulings in the judicial conflict until its final decision.

Despite the sobering experience of several unanswered protest calls in the aftermath of Sinai Liberation Day,⁴³⁸ the parliamentary vote on the island agreement prompted many of the members of the original protest coalition to call for mass protests for the last time. A joint statement on 16 June 2017 called upon the Egyptian citizens to express their rejection of the agreement by all constitutional and peaceful means while demanding the immediate release of all those arrested for their opposition to the island agreement. At the same time, the PCPL took the parliamentary vote as a sign of failing institutional checks and balances and the **chamber's biased nature and thus advocated new elections:**

On this matter, we declare that it is our position not to recognise the legitimacy of the current House of Representatives, which has downplayed any political or constitutional legitimacy. Furthermore, we support all political and legal efforts on the dissolution of the current parliament.⁴³⁹

However, unlike after the initial disclosure of the deal the year before, the PCPL was not given a pass for this harsh critique. Authorities initiated a widespread arrest campaign to pre-empt demonstrations accompanying the parliament's proceedings (see Abdel Hafez et al. 2017). Many of the coalition's torchbearers were arrested or cowed into obedience by policing measures. Those arrested for disturbing the peace and calling for illegal protests included the leaders of the Social Democratic Party, of the Bread and Freedom Party, and of the Dostour Party. In addition, many local PCPL leaders were detained for 15 days pending investigations into the accusation of incitement against the state apparatus. According to figures released by the activist campaign 'Freedom for the Brave', raids by Central Security at the offices and private residences of the main protest organisers and renown opposition figures led to the arrest of over 112 people,⁴⁴⁰ effectively forestalling a major public show of dissent. Consequently, the protests on 16 June

⁴³⁸ Most notably, Hamdeen Sabahi and representatives of the ^cAdl, Karama, Dostour and Popular Alliance parties and the Democratic Current had tried to turn the headquarters of his Karama party, which had served as a refuge for persecuted protesters on 25 April, into a symbolic new centre of resistance by making it the location of an (unsuccessful) open ended sit-in for the release of the prisoners of the land. See RNN. 25 May 2016. 'Sabahi announce his sit-in inside the Karama Party because of 'Tiran and Sanafir' [Arabic]'. *Rassd News Network*. <https://rassd.com/186609.htm>.

⁴³⁹ PCPL. 16 June 2016. 'Political parties, national forces, youth movements and public figures announce their participation in a campaign to defend the land "Egypt is not for sale [Arabic]'. *Facebook (@Egyptisnotforsale)*. <https://www.facebook.com/Egyptisnotforsale/posts/1356013204436660>.

⁴⁴⁰ For detailed figures on the arrests see: <https://www.facebook.com/AI7orialgd3an/photos/a.110216819090186.15443.110174469094421/1195384073906783/?type=3&theater>

2017 at the Journalist Syndicate remained insignificantly small.

Strengthened by these developments, President Sisi went on to ratify the agreement with Saudi Arabia on 24 June 2017. His signature sparked even less resistance—partly because many websites that had previously published critical commentary on the island deal had been shut down or blocked in Egypt by the time of his signature, and partly because it coincided with the start of the Eid al-Fitr holidays.⁴⁴¹ A final verdict by the SCC on 3 March 2018—tellingly delivered during Saudi crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman’s visit to Cairo⁴⁴²—closed the lid on the case and confirmed the parliament’s decision ex-post.⁴⁴³ In principle, it only ended the struggle over jurisdiction, not the debate over the legality of the border demarcation per se: Once the treaty passed into law, judicial oversight would have fallen under the purview of the SCC; the agreement going into effect and being published in the Official Gazette⁴⁴⁴ thus, theoretically, paved the way for contesting its constitutionality ex-post in court.

However, in practice, by the time the agreement was signed into effect, the PCPL was already too weak to continue facing an uphill battle: The crucial street support of 2016 had lost momentum, and the coalition against the agreement had crumbled. Moreover, when the SCC issued its verdict, Khaled Ali, the opposition’s frontrunner for the 2018 presidential elections, had become embroiled in a sexual harassment scandal and refrained from any further public appearances. Ali resigned from his Bread and Freedom Party and from his position as a lawyer at the ECESR (Mada 2018). As a result, the opposition never took the next step to appeal the agreement at the SCC.

⁴⁴¹ By the time Al-Sisi ratified the island deal, AFTE reported over 100 blocked websites in Egypt, see https://afteegypt.org/right_to_know-2/publicationsright_to_know-right_to_know-2/2017/06/04/13069-afteegypt.html?lang=en. An official report detailing on and defending the blockade of several of these websites by the government is on file with the author and can be accessed at https://de.scribd.com/document/399381154/Report-on-Website-Block-in-Egypt-May-24-2017?secret_password=PI1DUbxGpBWPwCBLpnwA.

⁴⁴² The ruling was credited by Saudi Arabia shortly after with the announcement of a joint Egyptian-Saudi investment fund. The fund with a total volume of 10 billion USD intends to develop a 1000 square-kilometre area in Southern Sinai as part of MBS’ plan to build the futuristic Mega-City ‘Neom’ in the Red Sea area in the frame of his ‘Vision 2030’ government plan, see <http://vision2030.gov.sa/>.

⁴⁴³ The SCC’s verdict rejected the two lawsuits filed by the Egyptian State Lawsuits Authority against the State Council’s jurisdiction over the case. But it also established that, according to article 151 of the Egyptian constitution, oversight over the executive’s decision making pertaining all matters related to foreign relations, international agreements and political acts lay unmistakably with the legislature. This dual ruling implicitly validated the parliament’s vote on the agreement the year before (For details of the ruling see Mamdouh 2018).

⁴⁴⁴ The full agreement, as included in the Official Gazette No. 33 from August 17, 2017 can be accessed at <https://www.scribd.com/document/390296134/Official-Gazette-including-Tiran-Sanafir-Agreement-No-33-17-August-2017-No-607-2016>.

9.3.4 Diffusion of Protest

While successful in keeping a lid on the PCPL demonstrations, the repression deployed by the internal security apparatus was, however, unable to stop the spread of protest. Already during the ‘Egypt is not for sale’-campaign contentious collective actions had extended to different social sectors where the aim of abolishing the controversial island agreement was coupled with more particularistic and sector-specific demands. The PCPL hence effectively opened the doors way to a series of subsequent protest cycles in the months after which each contested the authoritarian state on a different terrain: **Emboldened by the PCPL’s show of defiance**, for instance, the so-called *Tadamon* [Solidarity] Coalition, a civil society alliance of 36 syndicates and independent unions, announced on 30 May its intention to stage public protests against a controversial new civil service law in front Doctors Syndicate (El-Sheikh 2016). Despite facing severe policing, their series of protest events continued for several weeks in parallel to the PCPL, including in front of the Ministry of Social Solidarity, and combined the demand for revisions to the civil service law and the dismissal of the authorities in charge with a general call for more transparency in the drafting process of regulations and legislation.

In a similar vein, hundreds of high school students gathered on 27 June 2016 in front of Egypt’s Education Ministry to voice their opposition to exam cancellations and postponements after a series of exam leaks. In the following days, students staged protests in Assiut, Alexandria, Cairo and Suez. These protesters called for the Education Minister’s immediate dismissal and the abolition of the non-transparent and infamously corrupted university admissions system, but, at the same time, carried banners and posters that likened the education system’s corruption to the corrupted sell-out of the Red Sea islands. As tear gas and heavy policing by the CSF riot police failed to disperse the students in downtown Cairo, at the end of the day, their protest marches were the first ones to reach Tahrir Square against the will of authorities for years.

The most significant example of the process of diffusion triggered by the PCPL, however, resulted in what became known as the Egyptian Journalist Syndicate’s standoff with the Ministry of Interior (see K. Dawoud 2016b; O. Said 2016). On 1 May 2016, the PCPL had effectively seemed beaten when security forces took their crackdown one step too far and—in a historical precedent—raided the headquarters of Egypt’s Press Syndicate. There, police and plain-clothed officers arrested the journalists Mahmoud al-Sakka and Amr Badr who had been crucially involved in the PCPL mobilisation efforts in front of the Egyptian Press Syndicate and whose private residences had been raided (for the second time in a month) a few days earlier during the MOI’s preventive crackdown on the PCPL (see Suter

2016). Reacting to these raids, Badr and Al-Sakka had already organised a small sit-in by journalists on 29 April 2016 (Badr 2016; Daily News Egypt 2016). But their arrest sparked a new episode of contention in Egypt that moved to become the gravest confrontation between the organised members of the national press **and the Egyptian government in the country's modern history.**

Tensions had been building up gradually over the course of the island protests, as members of the press had been targeted by policing and faced arrest for covering the protests.⁴⁴⁵ On 15 April, at least eight journalists that were harassed or briefly arrested by police forces (CPJ 2016a), on 25 April, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ 2016b) reported over 33 local and foreign journalists detained. Furthermore, these arrests came in the wake of a report released by the monitoring group Journalists Against Torture Observatory, which documented a total of 222 violations including assaults, arrests, kidnapping, torture and censoring committed by the government against media personnel in the first quarter of 2016, and thus a 77 per cent annual increase of repression against members of the press.⁴⁴⁶ In a first step, the Press Syndicate had filed a complaint against the interior minister to protest police practices. As the complaint was ignored, dozens of **journalists, on 28 April, marched from the Syndicate's headquarters to the general prosecutor's office to file a report.**

Against this backdrop, the police incursion onto the grounds of the Press Syndicate brought the mounting tensions between journalists and the government in the wake of the island controversy to a climax. Less than 24 hours after both journalists were arrested and joined the ranks of those detained on 25 April on charges of joining an illegal organisation that aimed at toppling the regime, a sit-in began at the Journalists Syndicate which lasted for several weeks. Following the **raid, the Syndicate's chairman Yehia Qallash furthermore convened an emergency general assembly.** In this meeting on 4 May, thousands of journalists gathered at the building and called for the deposition of the Minister of Interior and an official apology from President Al-Sisi.⁴⁴⁷ The aftermath of the general assembly saw unprecedented measures by the authorities, as Prosecutor-General Nabil Sadek, in **another first in the Syndicate's history, pressed charges against its head and several**

⁴⁴⁵ For a corresponding statement by the Press Syndicate complained on this unprecedented crackdown see <http://www.ejs.org.eg/page.php?id=2385950>.

⁴⁴⁶ The report can be accessed at <https://journalstort.wordpress.com/2016/04/23/quarterly-report2016/>.

⁴⁴⁷ Ahram Online released a minute-by-minute protocol of the press syndicate's general assembly meeting at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/207047.aspx>. For a full list of the protesters' demands see PCPL, 8 May 2016. 'Resolution [Arabic]'. *Facebook (@Egyptisnotforsale)*. <https://www.facebook.com/Egyptisnotforsale/photos/a.1001835726521078/1008447889193195/?type=3&permPage=1>.

leading members (see K. Dawoud 2016b), suppressing contention on this new front as well.

However, opposition to the island transfer also transcended the group of journalists, lawyers and activists who had partaken, in some capacity, in the 15 April and 25 April demonstrations. In fact, after both the PCPL's and the Journalist Syndicate's defeat at the hand of state security, the cause of Tiran and Sanafir gained momentum in parliament, supported by the contentious lawsuits filed by Khaled Ali and his collaborators. Like in Egypt's streets, also in the parliament a peculiar oppositional coalition formed against the agreement with Saudi Arabi, which was headed by MP Mohamed Abdelghani and the small parliamentary opposition of the 25-30 block,⁴⁴⁸ but significantly also included members of the 'Support Egypt'-coalition—a majoritarian parliamentary block that usually uncritically adopted and backed government decisions. Several of these parliamentarians made their critique of the island agreement visible by wearing a T-Shirt with the imprint "Tiran and Sanafir are Egyptian to the parliamentary sessions; others reportedly expressed their concern about the deal only in closed session, out of fear for repercussions (see Kassab and Charbel 2017). While this contentious coalition was ultimately unable to halt the ratification of the agreement, failing to generate enough support for its "list of honour" in opposition of the island deal (Al-Sayed and Salah 2017), its protest nevertheless showed the serious challenges that the announcement of the Tiran and Sanafir deal and the ensuing PCPL had posed to the regime's legitimacy.

9.4 Turning the Nationalist Discourse Inside Out

The diffusion of protest effectively illustrated the symbolic nature of the PCPL protests campaign. In this sense, the demonstrations that materialised around the islands controversy were highly successful in that they literally, as the April 6 Movement proudly announced,⁴⁴⁹ managed to 'break through the barrier of fear' [*kassara hagaz al-khauf*] which had successfully prevented any major public shows of dissent and enabled the restoration of securocratic governance since the forced change of government in 2013. The mobilisation campaign by the PCPL

⁴⁴⁸ Not a formal parliamentary block, the 25-30 consists of the members of an informal electoral alliance of mostly unaligned or independent deputies who first ran together in the 2015 elections. Its name references the two recent popular uprisings in Egypt on 25 January 2011 against Mubarak, and on 30 June 2013 against Muhamad Mursi. In accordance with its title, coalition members have tried to position themselves as a third way between the two main antagonist camps in the aftermath of the 2013 coup.

⁴⁴⁹ See Tweet by @shabab6april on 16 April 2016, 11:11. *Twitter*. <https://twitter.com/shabab6april/status/721264645789487105>.

can ultimately be read as an attempt to suture the rift in the social order that had been created by the disjuncture between the ruler's discourse and events on the ground: For the promise of protecting the homeland and providing physical as well as moral guidance for the nation, the security state and its executing forces had been able to demand a high price from the Egyptian citizens since the deposition of Mursi. This mechanism ultimately amounted to a protection racket scheme, which figured in the extension of security budgets and legal cover, increased arms buys, and the allocation of rents to senior officers (Abdelrahman 2017, 9). In spite of an economy in dire straits and a visible decline of public social and physical security, the bulk of Al-Sisi's constituency had grudgingly accepted this informal securocratic social contract, above all due to the fear of a *bellum omnium contra omnes* and a lack of alternatives. But ceding Egyptian islands proved a price too high to pay. Tiran and Sanafir became empty signifiers that could be crafted into a new counter-hegemonic web of meaning which challenged the modes of governing established after the military coup.

Even the Egyptian Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, apparently concerned about upsetting public opinion, had warned the administration that conceding Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia, given the agreement's timing and its coinciding with the announcement of Saudi investments made the sovereignty transfer look like a sale and would incur the risk of seriously wounding the national pride of Egyptians (Stratfor 2016).⁴⁵⁰ Therefore, the Egyptian regime was particularly eager to portray the demarcation agreement as a matter of honour, consisting in Egypt generously returning long occupied lands to their rightful owners. However, Al-Sisi's emphatic declaration, "we do not sell our land to anyone, and we do not infringe on the right of anyone!" during his meeting with the 'Egyptian Family' exemplifies how maintaining nationalist credentials became a real tightrope walk.

In an ingenious way the PCPL was, however, able to appropriate the nationalist architecture of the regime's securocratic discourse in a way that subverted the established modes of governance and empowered anti-regime protests: The border demarcation agreement was a contingent event which could not be convincingly symbolised in the hegemonic nationalist discourse, thereby destabilising it and creating opportunities for resistance. Tiran and Sanafir became empty signifiers that could be crafted into new counter-hegemonic webs of meaning which

⁴⁵⁰ Reportedly the island agreement had been signed by the Prime Minister only after the ministers of foreign affairs and defence had refused to directly engage in the matter and warned against the dangers of the deal to national stability (see Mada 2017a).

challenged the established nationalist discourse that had been legitimising the post-coup government since the deposition of Mohammed Mursi. As protesters reclaimed ownership over the meaning of patriotism, the subversion of hegemonic discourse became a vehicle for successful alliance building under conditions of **severe repression**. By taking something away that “had upheld the sanctity of the state” (Morayef 2016, 200), the campaign managed to rewrite established codes of **domination and, for the first time, seriously challenge the regime’s sole claim to representing the nation and protecting its lands**.

This was achieved via different discursive strategies and rhetorical devices—from the invocation of Egypt’s historical archive and the nationalist legacy of Abdel Nasser, to the use of familiar cultural narratives, patriotic metaphors, and borrowings from pop-culture—which were creatively combined in a discourse of resistance that the opposition constructed around the nodal signifiers of Tiran and Sanafir. This discourse effectively drew the frontiers of the political struggle. Its main fault line was along the support for the island agreement, with those opposing the agreement on one side of the political struggle and those supporting it on the other.

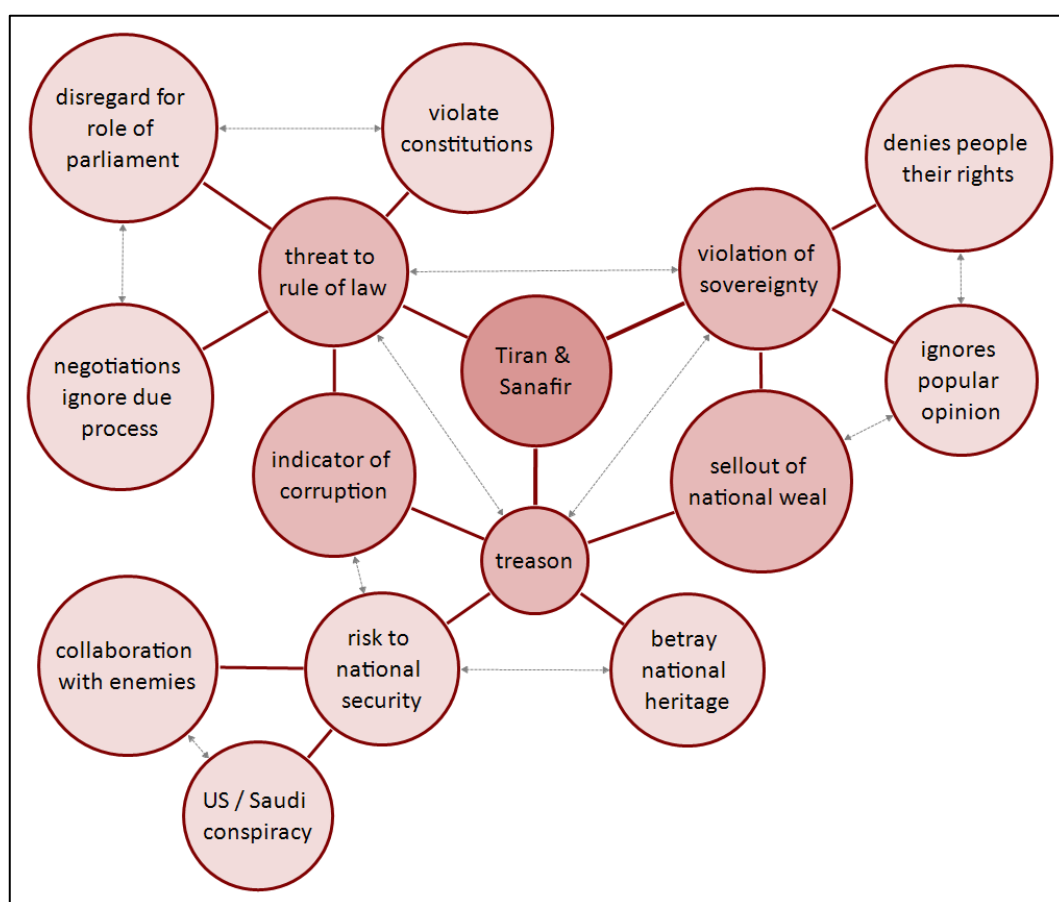
How the PCPL, in this process, subverted the incumbent regime’s securitising logics thus turning nationalism against its architect, manifested particularly on the diagnostic level of its resistance discourse. There the island coalition articulated the actions by which the government had betrayed its own principles and thereby put its own legitimacy in jeopardy. In the discursive web drawn by the members of the PCPL to sketch out the precise process by which the authorities had undermined their own source of political legitimisation (see Figure 36, p. 288), the signifiers of the *rule of law*, *sovereignty* and *national security* (abbreviated in the graph as “**treason**”) assumed the role of nodal signifiers. According to the PCPL, by ceding Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi, the government had:

- 1) violated the will of the people by denying Egyptians popular sovereignty over their own homeland;
- 2) violated the Egyptian constitution and committed a crime by negotiating and signing the border demarcation agreement without parliamentary oversight. The opaque and secretive way by which the deal had been prepared, in this sense, represented a threat to the rule of law.
- 3) Moreover, the government had betrayed the memories and historical legacy of Egypt’s **struggle for independence**. This had ultimately put the nation in danger and thus amounted to treason against the Egyptian nation and its weal.

Cementing an antagonist frontier in the political struggle, the PCPL’s self-

portrayal effectively mirrored this image of the Egyptian authorities: According to its self-perception, the protesting coalition was acting on behalf of the people and **defending the country's borders and national heritage** when it took to the streets and called for the abolition of the Tiran and Sanafir island agreement. This diagnostic framing effectively challenged the legitimacy of the acting government by attacking the foundations of its nationalist credentials. It furthermore set the conditions for who could join the oppositional movement in a new coalition of contenders and who would be opposed by it as an accomplice of the unpatriotic forces who had agreed to give away parts of the Egyptian homeland.

Figure 36. Diagnostic frame, articulation of antagonist other



Source 36. Semantic network created with the help of XMind 8 based on coding in MAXQDA 13.

9.4.1 A Violation of Popular Sovereignty

In what became the most prominent way of challenging the legitimacy of the post-coup regime's way of **handling the crisis**, the agreement was framed as a waste of the peoples' fortunes and **sell-out** of the Egyptian homeland, in return for investment commitments and credit loans for **Egypt's ailing economy**. The 'Egypt is not for sale'-campaign derived its name from a catchy slogan that the April 6 Movement had coined in several press statements, tweets, and social media posts at the

outset of the island crisis. Speaking for the entire coalition and defying its judicial ban by the Cairo Court for Urgent Affairs on 28 April 2014 (Farid 2014), the youth movement had released a widely shared rallying call titled “These things are not for sale!” and called for collective action across “all of Egypt’s squares” on 15 April. 2016.⁴⁵¹ This sarcastic statement set the tone for how the maritime border demarcation agreement would be framed by most of the forces opposing it. With a view to the Al-Sisi administration it claimed:

For the first time, we find a political system that seeks to prove that it lacked the right to the land it already controls and that seeks to provide for those who pay the highest price.

Denouncing the government’s claims of ruling for the wealth of the nation and picking up the cue from the April 6 statement, the PCPL campaign made the critique of such a policy a matter of principle: In their founding statement, the undersigning “national forces” agreed that they would refuse “the logic of selling public assets and wasting resources, to be extended to the sale of homeland.”⁴⁵² Yet, the framing was omnipresent throughout the entire campaign, even before the official foundation of the protest coalition, as mirrored by the viral hashtags in colloquial Egyptian Arabic *#مصر_مش_للبيع* [*Masr mish li-l-biy’a*/Egypt is not for sale] and *#باع_البلد_وحبس_الولد* [*ba‘a al-balad wa habis al-walad*/he sold the country and imprisoned the boy] which accompanied most statements and online posts in critique of the island agreement and referenced the perceived sale and the mass arrest of those opposing it. Most vocal in this regard was the Muslim Brotherhood who, immediately after the disclosure of the agreement issued a sharp condemnation of Al-Sisi’s policy titled “What is left to waste, Al-Sisi?,” declaring that Al-Sisi was not entitled to compromise on the fortune and wealth of the Egyptian people in return for “a handful of funds or support for the killing and arrests, violations and enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings policies.”⁴⁵³ Shortly after the Brotherhood, also the National Coalition in Support of Legitimacy, discussed in chapter 6 and 7 of this dissertation, released a statement in rejection of “the traitor Sisi and his gang of thieves” who had sold off national territories in exchange for “promises and cash.” In a separate press release, the NASL furthermore announced that it would join the Friday of Land protests:

⁴⁵¹ April 6 Youth Movement. 14 April 2016. “These things are not for sale [Arabic]”. *Official Facebook Page* (@6thApril).

<https://www.facebook.com/shabab6april/photos/a.379736183293/10154752637193294>.

⁴⁵² PCPL. 22 April 2016. ‘Founding Statement of the Popular Campaign to Protect the Land – Egypt is not for Sale [Arabic]’. <https://goo.gl/YD8evH>.

⁴⁵³ MB. 8 April 2016. ‘Statement on the signing of the Convention on the demarcation of the water border with Saudi Arabia [Arabic]’. *Ikhwanonline*. <https://bit.ly/2GKrYwG>.

The treasonous Sisi sold off a part of the dear homeland and trampled Egyptian sovereignty. He would sell anything and everything in order to hold onto power.⁴⁵⁴

Warning to the Egyptian people of a grim future, if such deed went unpunished, **also the Brotherhood's 'Students against the Coup' movement** jumped in:

Today, the traitor gives Saudi Arabia the Egyptian islands of Tiran and Sanafir. Yesterday, he gave Ethiopia the rights of Egyptians in the Nile water. Tomorrow, he will sell off more of this homeland's resources to other countries.⁴⁵⁵

To increase the resonance of their framing of the deal as a sell-out, and to inspire nationalist sentiments of solidarity, many of these statements implicitly or explicitly touched upon other sensitive foreign policy issues that concerned Egypt's national sovereignty over its waters and borders. In this sense, for instance, the reference to Ethiopia in the above-quoted statement was a direct reference to the Nile Water Crisis that had been testing Al-Sisi's resolve.

The conflict among the different riparian states of the Nile Basin over their fair share of the river's waters had been going on for decades (see, for instance, Cascão 2011; S. J. A. Mason 2004; Nicol and Cascão 2011; Swain 2011). During the majority of this conflict period, Egypt sought cooperation rather than conflict when it came to Nile water policy, in order to maintain the lion's share of the river's waters which it had been awarded through several colonial-era agreements. In 2011, Ethiopia commenced construction on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam to harness the river's hydroelectrical potential. This development dynamised the conflict, as it sparked fears in Cairo that the mega-dam would reduce the Nile's annual flow downstream (see Cascão and Nicol 2016; Lossow and Roll 2015). Today, Egypt is almost entirely dependent on the river, which supplies more than 90 per cent of the country's water needs. Hence any reduction of this renewable water source is predicted to come with severe consequences downstream, above all, with a view to Egypt's agricultural production. However, it wasn't until under Al-Sisi's tenure that Ethiopia was likely to complete the construction of its hydroelectric dam in the headwaters of the Blue Nile, making the risk of a change in Egypt's water supply imminent (F. H. Lawson 2017). Though Al-Sisi had warned the upper riparian that any cutback of Egypt's water supplies would be treated as a direct threat to its national security, he had made little headway in deterring the project.

Other, less explicit, references by signed members of the PCPL, who were less

⁴⁵⁴ NASL. 13 April 2016. 'National Alliance Urges Mass Protests Friday Against Junta Selling Out Egypt'. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=32503>.

⁴⁵⁵ Students against the Coup. 13 April 2016. 'Students Against the Coup to Take Part in Friday Mass Demonstrations Across Egypt'. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=32506>

drastic in their critique than the already illegalised Brotherhood and its political arms, include the perceived sell-out of national gas to Israel; Egypt's weak bargaining hand in the diplomatic dispute with Cyprus about several newly found and substantial Mediterranean gas fields; as well as the government's passivity in the Egyptian-Sudanese border dispute about the so-called Hala'ib Triangle.⁴⁵⁶ By placing their demand for an annulation of the island agreement in the historical trajectory of these previous disputes about Egypt's national resources, the opposition ultimately aimed at strengthening their claim that the Red Sea maritime border demarcation agreement with Saudi Arabia represented only the latest in a series of dismal political decisions by the government which had not only caused harm to the Egyptian nation but also demonstrated how the regime's legitimacy was effectively based on a hollow nationalist rhetoric.

To increase their appeal within the nationalist segment of society and boost the resonance of this sell-out framing, PCPL activists additionally embedded their messages in famous patriotic metaphors and imagery and resorted a range of familiar pop-culture narratives. For instance, the tale of taxi-driver Awad who sold his share of the country's soil to raise money for his wedding with a belly-dancer became part and parcel of the PCPL's discourse and imagery. In the nationalist-inspired film '*Ayez haqqi!*' [I want my right], released in 2002 and based on a popular novel by Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi, the struggling taxi-driver Awad played by popular comedian Hani Ramzy discovers by chance that his country's constitution grants him a share in the nation's public property. He thus collects power-of-attorney documents from the population in order to literally sell out the country to raise money for his wedding with a belly dancer. In a powerful scene towards the film's finale, an elderly man appears as the father of a fallen soldier who died in one of Egypt's war for territorial independence. He admonishes the protagonist for attempting to sell the Egyptian homeland to the highest bidder: "Awad sold his land, people" the old man says, creating an iconic line for Egyptian pop-culture. This line was first adopted by Egyptian political satirist Bassem Youssef as a

⁴⁵⁶ In fact, shortly after the announcement of the island deal, Sudanese authorities had called on their Egyptian counterparts to reopen direct negotiations to settle the unresolved border dispute over the Hala'ib Triangle, a disputed area of around 20,000 km² at the Red Sea coast in the borderlands between Egypt and Sudan, or to resort to international arbitration. Since the deployment of military units in the mid-1990s, Egypt has administered the area as part of its Red Sea province and categorically rejected any negotiations over its sovereignty. Accordingly, Egyptian authorities quickly rebuffed the Sudanese advance (see also K. Hassan 2017). Nevertheless, the move sparked public concerns over an ostensible trend that Egypt was gradually ceding bits of its territories to the country's neighbours. For a transcript of the statement by the Sudanese Foreign Ministry see RNN. 1 April 2016. 'Experts exclude the repetition of the agreement to give up Tiran and Sanafir with Sudan [Arabic]'. *Rassd News Network*. <https://rassd.com/183838.htm>.

hashtag in a Twitter comment on the Tiran and Sanafir island deal. From there, references to the popular Egyptian folktale made their way into the PCPL repertoire.

In another interesting twist, the Awad movie plot is based on an old nationalist radio soap that had been widely broadcasted starting in the era of Gamal Abdel Nasser, through the Sadat tenure, up to the Mubarak era, and is thus widely known in Egyptian society. The story of Awad and his land was part of Nasser's remodelling project and aimed to embed a new nationalist identity in the minds of Egyptians. The storyline of 'I want my right' was aimed at asserting the "bond between the land and the Egyptian people" (Mahmoud 2016)—an aim that, judging from the island controversy, was achieved. Hence the tale of Awad was almost predestined to become part and parcel of the contentious discourse around the island deal. Imagery relating to the film was a constant feature of all mobilising groups framing efforts: first adopted by opponents to the island deal on 9 April 2016, different variations of the Twitter hashtags "#عواد_باع_ارضه" and "#عواد_باع_ارضك" [Awad sold his land / Awad sold your land] went viral and soon accompanied the press releases of all members of the protesting coalition, alongside the respective hashtag for the upcoming protest event.

Important for the island protesters, the inclusion of easily recognizable popular folk tale, such as that of Awad, awarded a certain "coolness factor" to their campaign, as Lisel Hintz (2018b) has argued in her analysis of pop-culture's mobilising functions. In lack of wider mobilising structures beyond the inner-city neighbourhoods of Cairo, the PCPL was thereby enabled to reach and appeal to publics outside their established networks of recruitment. Likewise, humorous social media posts ridiculing Al-Sisi for his attempts to deflect public attention from the island agreement and, instead, project criticism on the unlawful island protests became instrumental as a mobilising tactic and were encouraged and shared by member groups of the PCPL in order to reach new audiences on social media (see Hintz 2018b; Romanos 2018). For instance, a sarcastic instruction to protesting youth—"If he asks you for your license to protest, tell him 'do you have a license for the sale of Egyptian soil?'"—was widely shared by different non-Islamist parties and movement.⁴⁵⁷ In a process that Hintz describes as "one-upping others," sympathisers of the campaign shared and created countless memes with this joke, trying to outdo one another by always adding cleverer, more subversive

⁴⁵⁷ PCPL. 24 April 2016. 'And if they ask you about the license to demonstrate, ask them for their license to sell the land of Egypt [Arabic]'. *Facebook*. <https://www.facebook.com/Egyptisnotforsale/posts/1002848916419759>.

content.⁴⁵⁸ These social media users thereby unwittingly contributed to the incremental expansion of the protest campaign's outreach. At the same time, they enabled new audiences to reconstruct their own webs of meaning around the empty signifiers of Tiran and Sanafir.

For similar reasons, a process of *tamsir al-lugha* [Egyptianisation of the language] could be observed in many of the oppositional statements. While the official PCPL protest calls and many of the joint memoranda and press releases that were co-signed by the diverse factions of the protest campaign were released in modern standard Arabic, most of the shorter and more emotional statements—released above all by April 6 and Tamarod, but at times also in the name of the entire PCPL—were published in Egyptian dialect. Going back to the historical underpinnings of nationalist rhetoric in Egypt, Ahmed Lotfi Al-Sayyed, who is acknowledged to have been the father of modern Egyptian nationalism, already had argued that for Arabic to become a vehicle for national identity construction in the everyday life of Egyptians, it would need to be based on a rapprochement between the classical *fusha* and the colloquial Egyptian dialect: “One way of achieving this would be to use the colloquial as a reservoir stock from which the lexical stock of the *fusha* would be constantly replenished,” among others by incorporating words and idioms of native origin (Suleiman 1996, 29f). Hence, the resort to colloquial Egyptian Arabic aimed to create a bond between the core activists of the protest campaign and the wider Egyptian public.

9.4.2 *A Betrayal of the National Heritage*

To increase the resonance of its ‘sell-out’-framing, the PCPL furthermore aimed to establish the idea of an inalienable right of the Egyptian people, both past and future generations, to their homeland. Against this backdrop, the campaign could claim that the president had committed treason against the nation by illegitimately signing a deal over property that did not belong to it in the first place. In the campaign's founding statement, the coalition asserted that forfeiting the Egyptian islands to Saudi Arabia equalled compromising the country's sovereignty and the security of its borders. Such a move, in the view of the undersigning forces, represented a betrayal of the Egyptian people's historical sovereignty rights:

It is a violation of a red line which cannot be crossed: the rights of the entire people

⁴⁵⁸ For an impression of the satirical posts on the agreement see <http://www.cairogossip.com/gossip/lifestyle/14-hilarious-internet-reactions-to-the-tiran-sanafir-controversy/>.

and all future generations to this land.⁴⁵⁹

Until this date, this narrative of treason had been primarily championed by members of the Muslim Brotherhood whose Anti-Coup Alliance had been pointing out **crimes committed by the ‘coup regime’ since the deposition** of its president in mid-2013. For the forces of the island coalition, however, the reproach of treason was new. As with other nationalist movements, the PCPL thereby furthermore **sought to “historicise a territory and territorialise a history”** (Suleiman 1996, 36), aiming to create in this process a historical unity between land and people. Soraya Morayef (2016) has demonstrated how this mechanism works to cement collective identity in her exploration of street art and street performances in the Egyptian revolution which were inspired by pharaonic iconography. During and after the 2011 uprising, she stresses, this street art, on the one hand, subverted established and state-sanctioned art forms and asserted ownership over public spaces. On the other hand, the *longue durée* historical references embedded in graffiti, banners and stencils symbolically empowered anti-regime protesters by invoking a **foundational era of Egypt’s national history whose legacy predated and would outlive** the few Mubarak-dominated years in the republican history of Egypt.

In a similar vein, the PCPL explored elements of the nationalist archive that **were firmly established in Egypt’s collective imaginary as a nation but predated** the era Al-Sisi, in order to establish legitimacy for its protest campaign. In a related development to the diffusion of the ‘Awad’-metaphor, the movements of the ‘Egypt is not for sale’-campaign began to adopt the grainy footage of former Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser and historical pictures of the Egyptian army into their releases.⁴⁶⁰ Especially a video of Nasser warning of any violations of the Tiran waters was widely shared by social media users.⁴⁶¹ Among others, the Tamarod movement was active in sharing the record under the hashtags ‘السيسي خاين’ [Al-Sisi is a traitor] and ‘عبدالناصر مات’ [Abd al-Nasir mat, transl: Nasser died].⁴⁶² “The word of Gamal Abdel Nasser belies al-Sisi and the government,” Tamarod’s

⁴⁵⁹ PCPL. 22 April 2016. ‘Founding Statement of the Popular Campaign to Protect the Land – Egypt is not for Sale [Arabic]’. <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScqrP8A9J-7t84Dt42H-GMnauzciv4wiANHGkpMbJQGF-vdnA/viewform>.

⁴⁶⁰ Some of these videos can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwEPu9shPJ0>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAaxhLGwgLo>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdj2lgi3OBs>.

⁴⁶¹ See PCPL. 10 10 April 2016. ‘Opponents to Egypt giving up Tiran and Sanafir: Sign to save the islands of Tiran and Sanafir [Arabic]’. *Avaaz*. https://secure.avaaz.org/ar/community_petitions/lrfDyn_ltnzl_mSr_n_jzyrty_tyrn_wSnfr_blbHr_IHmr_wqw_Inqdh_jzyrty_tyrn_wSnfr/.

⁴⁶² The hashtag alludes to the famous Egyptian proverb ‘the men died in 1973’, a metaphor for the lack of braveness among more recent generations, compared to the valour of those who had died for Egypt in its wars with Israel over Sinai.

corresponding statement read:

Abdel Nasser refused to forfeit one inch to maintain pressure against the enemy, Israel. Sisi, at this moment, sells her [the homeland] to Al-Saud, an ally of America and Israel, gives him [King Salman] the Necklace of the Nile, the highest medal of the Republic and a PhD from the University of Cairo ... etc.⁴⁶³

I **Invocations of Egypt's decades of anti-Zionist struggle** became another avenue via which to challenge the nationalist prestige of the Sisi-administration. Effectively, the land transfer of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi-Arabia had required the approval of Israel, as any new demarcation of maritime borders in the Gulf of Aqaba necessitated a modification of the military annexe to the Camp David peace treaty. Documents contained in a case file on the agreement, which the government had **passed to parliament, had furthermore laid the basis for Egypt's continued responsibility** for the security of the multinational forces and observers stationed on Tiran and Sanafir. These documents established that even after the transfer of sovereignty over the islands to Saudi Arabia, as Saudi Arabia is not a party to the arrangements included in the Camp David Accords (see Mada 2017a). In the diplomatic correspondence, the Egyptian government assured to its counterparts in Tel Aviv and Riyadh that it would take military action in the case that Saudi Arabia was unable or unwilling to confront a security violation efficiently.

Although the Israeli newspaper Haaretz announced only on 11 April 2016 that Tel Aviv had been informed of, and had consented to the Egypt-Saudi agreement prior to its public announcement (Ravid, Khoury, and Cohen 2016), the **alleged "hidden hand of Israel" and the role that Tiran and Sanafir had come to play in the wars with Egypt's neighbour played a significant role in the opponents' framing** from the start of their campaign. The islands are, after all, are deeply embedded in **Egypt's nationalist archive. Not only do they harbour abundant deposits of natural resources such as oil and gas. The archipelago which gained strategic significance with the opening of the Suez Canal also lies only three nautical miles ashore of the country's most contested territory, the Sinai Peninsula, over which the Egyptian army has fought a total of three wars during the last century.**

Due to their strategic location at the gate of the Gulf of Aqaba, Tiran and Sanafir have played a central role in these conflicts too, weaving themselves deeply into the nationalist cloth of the Egyptian historical archive. Twice have the islands **been seized by the Israeli armed forces, twice have they been "reconquered" by the Egyptian military.** As a result of the war that followed the establishment of the

⁴⁶³ Tamarod. 11 April 2016. 'The word of Abdel Nasser belies Al-Sisi [Arabic]'. *Facebook*. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1156772357696247>.

state of Israel in 1948, Egyptian troops first occupied Tiran and Sanafir in 1949, as Israeli forces were advancing on the northern end of the Red Sea (Hakim 1979, 136). And in 1955, when Israel first put into operation the port of Eilat at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba and insisted on free passage for its commerce ships to the Indian Ocean, the Egyptian Nasserite government had insisted on its sovereignty over the Straits of Tiran as a bay inside of Egyptian territorial waters and its sole authority for issuing permission to passing vessels (Hakim 1979, 138).

Threatened in its aspiration to ensure Israeli use of the gulf, the Ben Gurion government in Tel Aviv consequently conquered the islands in its 1956 Sinai campaign during the joint British-French-Israeli assault on Egypt, and only withdrew under the severe pressure of both, the US and USSR governments (General Assembly Resolution 1124 [XI]), which condemned the premeditated incursion into Egyptian territory as a violation of the young-lived United Nation Charter. After a period of relative quiet under the aegis of a United Nations Emergency Force overseeing the Egyptian-Israel armistice, the islands saw Israeli boots again in 1967. Gamal Abdel Nasser had addressed air force officers in Sinai on 22 May of this year with the words **“The Israeli flag shall not go through the Gulf of Aqaba. Our sovereignty over the entrance to the Gulf cannot be disputed”** (cit. in Co-may 2005, 28; Bowen 2012) in an attempt to reinstall the sea blockade, providing Israel’s Minister Levi Eshkol with a *casus belli*. Launching a series of pre-emptive strikes on Egyptian air force landing strips on 5 June 1967, however, the Israeli army left the country’s military in shatters, and during the following Six Day War it captured the entirety of the Sinai Peninsula including the contested archipelago. Only as a result of the Camp David Peace Treaty was the archipelago returned in March 1979 when Israel signed a peace treaty with Egypt which guaranteed its ships freedom of passage through the Straits of Tiran (Mada 2016c). A UN peace-keeping force was stationed on the islands to ensure compliance and the Menachem Begin government finally evacuated and handed over control over the island in 1982.

This legacy, of Gamal Abdel Nasser and of the enmity with the ‘Zionist entity’, and of the long record of armed conflicts and diplomatic disputes over the islands, is thus strongly present in collective memories about Tiran and Sanafir: Hence the idea that Tiran and Sanafir are not Egyptian was difficult to sell to those **“who lived all their lives with the story of the Straits of Tiran and the 1967 war as an integral part of their memory”** (Mahmoud 2016). As a result, the idea of an international plot, orchestrated by the hidden hand of Israel and the US began to surface in the communication by the opponents to the demarcation deal. It was the head of the *Misr Qawiya* [Strong Egypt] party Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh

who first made the narrative of the hidden ‘Zionist hands’ behind the agreement respectable among the proponents of the PCPL. On 10 April 2016, the former presidential candidate tweeted:

The only ones who will benefit from tampering with Egypt's eastern borders will be the Zionists, Tiran and Sanafir are Egyptian the Strait of Tiran is Egyptian 100% and will be neither an international strait nor occupied Egyptian land as Al-Rishrash [Eilat].⁴⁶⁴

On the following day, he doubled down on this by claiming that the Zionists and their Arab allies wanted to erase the history of the Arab league.⁴⁶⁵ A quote from the Popular Campaign’s founding declaration further illustrates the roles that Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia were to take in this narrative:

The agreement was even communicated to the Zionist entity and America before the Egyptians knew. This made clear that it is linked to regional arrangements which, in our view, aim to secure the Zionist enemy, favour the invasion of major powers in the region in the framework of Camp David and serve the American project in the Arab world.⁴⁶⁶

The parallel that was drawn between Egypt’s historic struggle for territorial independence and the current episode of contention, became most visible in the run-up to Sinai liberation day on 25 April: the national holidays title was the perfect fit for the campaign, as it enabled them to reinterpret its historical meaning by giving it a somehow prophetic new connotation. “Come down and attend on 25 April, and say no to the sale of Egypt,” the description of the corresponding public Facebook event read, created by April 6 right after the Friday of the Land:

The soil of Egypt is not yours Sisi because you gave it to your sponsors. 25 April is the anniversary of Sinai’s liberation from Israel. And the same date will be the Liberation of the islands from Al Saud.⁴⁶⁷

The Muslim Brotherhood’s statement echoed this rhetoric, yet the movement dramatised the situation even more, situating it in their broader apocalyptic narrative of a total loss of freedom since the military coup against Mohammed Mursi:

On the anniversary of the liberation of Sinai, Egypt lost its freedom at the hands of these traitors, they saluted themselves to the Zionist enemy, they did everything forbidden in in the law of the homeland to seize power and stay on her head, and took

⁴⁶⁴ See Tweet by @DrAbolfotoh on 10 April 2016, 05:26. *Twitter*. <https://twitter.com/DrAbolfotoh/status/719003541722046466>.

⁴⁶⁵ See Tweet by @DrAbolfotoh on 11 April 2016, 11:51. *Twitter*. <https://twitter.com/DrAbolfotoh/status/719462762926227456>.

⁴⁶⁶ PCPL. 22 April 2016. ‘Founding Statement of the Popular Campaign to Protect the Land – Egypt is not for Sale [Arabic]’. <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScqrP8A9J-7t84Dt42H-GMnauzciv4wiANHGkpMbJQGF-vdnA/viewform>.

⁴⁶⁷ April 6 Youth Movement. 16 April 2016. ‘The Land of Earth is not for Sale [Arabic]’. *Facebook*. https://www.facebook.com/events/584421871719292/?active_tab=highlights

advantage of the stakeholders in order to control the destiny of the country.⁴⁶⁸

Juxtaposing Al-Sisi's corruption and dependence on the "masters in the Gulf" with former President Abdel Nasser's emblematic stance for Egypt's independence and the integrity of its borders (Brand and Stacher 2016, 38), and narrating the island controversy as another episode in a decade long story of warfare and struggle over Egyptian land with the neighbouring enemy Israel—the same country that had allegedly been informed of the deal with Al-Saud even before the Egyptian people—effectively enabled the movement to undermine Al-Sisi's nationalist credentials.

9.4.3 *A Threat to the Rule of Law*

By resorting to the confrontational framing that criminalised Al-Sisi and his administration as traitors to the homeland, several groups additionally attempted to counter the state's securitisation of the 'Egypt is not for sale'-campaign opposing, while at the same time admitting to the crime of patriotism. At the forefront of this framing were the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies who, as a routine, had been pointing in their statements to the litany of crimes and abuses committed by the "military coup regime" over the last years. In the context of their established framing of the Sisi-administration as criminals and thugs, the reproach of corruption and selling off the nation's wealth was just another tile to add to the larger mosaic of delegitimising the deposition of President Mursi: "We are in front of [!] a group of criminals who commit the largest sale of Egyptian land and honour to date," the group's statement on 14 April 2016 read.⁴⁶⁹ It called for solidarity between all national forces against the military junta regime.

With an ironic undertone, the Anti-Coup Alliance added that today, President Sisi was, in fact, committing "the exact crime he falsely accused President Mohamed Mursi of." This latter juxtaposition with the former president added an interesting twist to the Brotherhood's statements, as it referred to the rumours, which had emerged during the rule of Mursi and had been instrumentalised by the post-coup regime, that the former President had plotted with Palestinian Hamas to hand over parts of the Sinai Peninsula to the Islamist group (Ezzat 2013). It had been the fears of such disposal of Egyptian homeland in the first place that had led

⁴⁶⁸ MB. 24 April 2016. 'Muslim Brotherhood Statement on Sinai Liberation Day Calling for Protests on 25 April'. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=32517>.

⁴⁶⁹ MB. 14 April 2016. 'The Muslim Brotherhood announces their participation in the protests against the sale of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir [Arabic]'. *Ikhwanonline*. <https://bit.ly/2MIZOTS>.

to the inclusion of clause (Article 151) into the new constitution,⁴⁷⁰ which significantly raised the legal prerequisites for any redraw of Egypt's borders (see Nathan Brown, cit. in Walsh 2016). Ironically, it was under the current administration that this constitution was put in place.⁴⁷¹ But even beyond the Brotherhood, the 'treason'-framing was widely adopted. For example, a coalition of respectable public intellectuals and prominent public figures released a statement 14 April:

We also call on every citizen to raise high the Egyptian flag to announce their commitment to the unity of Egyptian territory—from Tiran and Sanafir to Salloum and Farafra, from Alexandria and Matrouh to Rafah and the Sinai, and from this homeland's western borders to its eastern borders; not forgetting its rivers and seas. No-one represents Egypt but its own people. No-one sells off Egypt's territory but a traitor.⁴⁷²

In this context, the official announcement that the agreement would still require parliamentary sanction, rather than alleviating the reproaches, only sparked further mistrust. As the island deal had been kept secret for months and had sidelined all legislative institutions that were now to judge on it, the government's assurance that its implementation would go its due process held little credibility.

First, contenders to the deal argued, it would have been reasonable to assume that a public consultation with the parliament over the issue would have taken place prior to the finalisation of the agreement with Saudi. Instead, the delegates would now be confronted only post factum with a finalised deal, which the President had already signalled he would not tolerate further discussions on. The PCPL, for example, pointed to the governmental institutions treating the demarcation as a *fait accompli* already, which added to their scepticism about a monitoring role that parliament could possibly fulfil:

Despite the declaration of the authorities' intention to submit the matter to the House of Representatives, however, some ministries and agencies have already changed the maps which indicated Egyptian ownership of Egypt over the islands.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷⁰ NASL. 13 April 2016. 'National Alliance Urges Mass Protests Friday Against Junta Selling Out Egypt'. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=32503>.

⁴⁷¹ According to article 151 of the 2014 Egyptian Constitution "the President of the Republic represents the state in foreign relations and concludes treaties and ratifies them after the approval of the House of Representatives. They shall acquire the force of law upon promulgation in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. With regards to any treaty of peace and alliance, and treaties related to the rights of sovereignty, voters must be called for a referendum, and they are not to be ratified before the announcement of their approval in the referendum. In all cases, no treaty may be concluded which is contrary to the provisions of the Constitution or which leads to concession of state territories."

⁴⁷² Nafie, Tharwat, Seif Abdel-Fattah, Abdel-Rahman Youssef, Hatem Azzam, Amr Darrag, Ihab Shiha, Tariq Al-Zomar, et al. 14 April 2016. 'Egypt National Figures Statement Urging Protests Against Hand-over of Two Islands [Arabic]'. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=32505>.

⁴⁷³ PCPL. 22 April 2016. 'Founding Statement of the Popular Campaign to Protect the Land – Egypt is not for Sale [Arabic]'. <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScqrP8A9J-7t84Dt42H-GMnauzciv4wiANHGkpMbjQGF-vdnA/viewform>.

Al-Sisi's assertion that the Egyptian public should simply trust in the fact that the presidency and his government were good patriots and in their official function better fit to judge on the well of the nation, in this context, seemed to amount to a gag order not only for the street opposition but also for the parliamentarians. This impression was compounded by reports that the case file on the island deal, which had been passed by the government to the parliament, had remained locked away in the office of parliamentary speaker and regime loyalist Ali Abdel Aal. Ordinary parliamentarians had been granted access to select documents only to placate their outrage over the lack of information (see Mada 2017a).

Second, and more importantly, activists questioned both the capacities and the loyalties of their MPs. Recent broadcasts from the house of representatives had cast doubts on the parliament's allegiance: When King Salman addressed the Egyptian legislature on 10 April 2016, he had been received with standing ovations. Applause had interrupted his only six-minute long address repeatedly. And some members of the 596-seat chamber had even recited poetry praising the Saudi monarchy.⁴⁷⁴ Given this overwhelming show of allegiance by the elected representatives of the Egyptian people to the foreign leader, and against the backdrop of the restrictive and non-pluralistic nature of the elections that brought the parliament into existence, many activists saw their concerns warranted that the new parliament would uncritically approve the agreement without voicing the widespread concerns.

This stance reflected the fears of many protesters that took to the streets on 15 April, who had alluded that waiting for the parliament to decide negatively on the matter would equal waiting for Godot: "It is obvious that the members of parliament have blessed this deal ever since they hailed King Salman and gave him the opportunity to address parliament as a sign that they are upholding Saudi Arabia's position disregarding Egypt's historical right to the islands," Al-Monitor quotes one of the participants of one of the more massive marches in downtown Cairo which later joined the rally at the Journalist Syndicate (Aman 2016).

Building upon the notion of a historical right that had been inherited by the Egyptian people to their land, the protest campaign consequently advanced its own conception of "due process to counter the President's claims of rightfully restoring lost ownership to Saudi Arabia. Calls for a popular referendum, as stated in Article 151 of the 2014 constitution, were thus widespread in the PCPL's analysed political communication: "The Islands of Tiran and Sanafir are 100% Eryp-

⁴⁷⁴ See the footage released on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=am8VQyKfirY>.

tian [...] Egypt waived them without the work of a referendum or referral to the Egyptian parliament, even though this is a formality (duty) according to the constitution after the signing of [such] an agreement,” read an exemplary online petition launched already in the first days after the disclosure of the deal,⁴⁷⁵ and also the first public statement of the coalition of opponents to the deal pointed to the need of involving the people in the making of such a significant decision:

Those undersigning below affirm fully and unconditionally the right of the Egyptian people to express their opinion, and that the issue of land demarcation shall not pass into law without notice of the real holder of sovereignty and the real proprietor, which is the people. The matter of the Tiran and Sanafir islands is a matter for all Egyptians.⁴⁷⁶

Adding to that suspicion was the fact that the regime imposed a gag order on media coverage of issues related to the island deal. Moreover, as the arrest campaigns expanded, even those who had only brought legal charges against the deal were suddenly targets of persecution. Thus, there was adherence to the procedure that the regime had acknowledged as the right way to go forward instead of protesting on the streets. The fact of famous lawyers who had contested the deal in court finding themselves in detention cells not only demonstrated the hypocrisy of the administration and its ‘due process’ and ‘law and order’ framing of the controversy. Most importantly, it also gave the forces allied in the PCPL the opportunity to redefine their discursive strategy and extend their patriotic and nationalist frames.

9.5 The Limits of Coalition Building

The diagnostic framing of the island deal, by drawing an antagonist frontier, defined those that the PCPL opposed, that is, those responsible for the violation of popular sovereignty and the betrayal of the Egyptian nation, its law and order, and its security. At the same time, it laid the foundations for who would join the street protests and who would support the PCPL. A key factor in this process and for the resonance of nationalist discourse was the bridging of nationalist and revolutionary discourses within the frame of the PCPL. This was the case among movements such as Tamarod, which had articulated their collective identity along nationalist

⁴⁷⁵ PCPL. 10 April 2016. ‘Opponents to Egypt giving up Tiran and Sanafir: Sign to save the islands of Tiran and Sanafir [Arabic]’. *Avaaz*.
https://secure.avaaz.org/ar/community_petitions/lrfDyn_ltnzl_mSr_n_jzrty_tyrn_wSnfr_blbHr_IHmr_wqw_lnqdh_jzrty_tyrn_wSnfr/.

⁴⁷⁶ Strong Egypt Party. 14 April 2016. ‘Tiran and Sanafir belong to all Egyptians [Arabic]’. *Strong Egypt Party Official Facebook Page (@MisrAlQawia)*.
<https://www.facebook.com/MisrAlQawia/photos/a.492672350759920.128763.478976282129527/1362555427104937/?type=3&theater>.

and patriotic lines previously. But it was also the case among the various political audiences that had previously been victimised by the Sisi-administration's 'weaponised' nationalism.

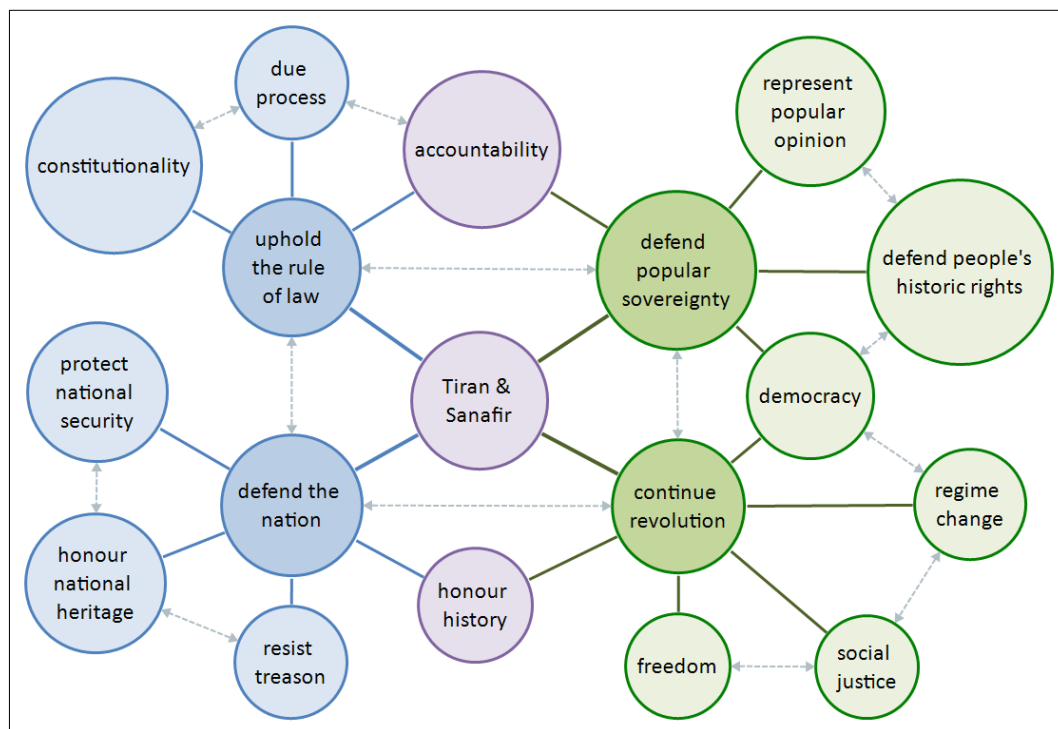
In line with Benford and Snow's (2000, 624) assertion that the mobilising force of collective action frames among potential supporters of a campaign is strongly dependent on "the extent to which the frame taps into existing cultural values, beliefs, narratives," the prognostic frame of the PCPL discourse drew heavily from the well-known and established vocabulary of the 25 January belief system. In fact, analyses of the PCPL protest calls and explorations of footage from the major protest events on 15 and 25 April revealed a comeback of the slogans, symbolism and nodal signifiers of the 25 January Revolution. As Samer Al-Atrush (2016) remarks, the chants that could be heard in the videos of the 15 and 25 April protest that were uploaded to Youtube and Facebook were "retro 2011" and often inspired by favourite themes from Tahrir Square or by football chants.

Some of these chants were reproduced by the PCPL protesters without modification. For instance, the signature slogans of the 25 January Revolution *ash-sha'ab yurid isqat an-nizam* [the people want the fall of the regime], *irhal!* [leave!], and *yasqut, yasqut hukm al-askar* [down, down with military rule] remained unchanged as they still fitted to the contemporary political realities while, at the same time, evoking powerful affective memories of the revolutionary experience of 2011. Also the famous 'bleep'-sound was adapted from the discursive repertoire of the 25 January Revolution (see El Zein and Ortiz 2011, 13; Gribbon and Hawas 2012, 116) and employed widely on both 15 and 25 April. An imitation of the sound used on television to black out profanity and explicit language, the 'bleep' originates in the chants of Egyptian Ultras soccer fans whom it enabled to swear in the soccer stadium without risking collective legal repercussions against their fan block. By contrast, for the island protesters, the 'bleep' was a welcome way to publicly curse President Sisi without providing a pretext for legal prosecution under charges of 'contempt for the President'. By contrast, other chants were modified in ingenious ways and combined the references to the '18 days of Tahrir' with references to more recent events, such as the rhyming '*Aish, hurriya, al-gaziraten masriya*' [bread, freedom—the two islands are Egyptian] (Aman 2016).

By adopting these slogans, ultimately, the PCPL aimed to reproduce or at least strategically harness their demands and the "affective arrangements" (Slaby, Mühlhoff, and Wüschner 2019) that they embedded. Some of these arrangements have recently been described by Bilgin Ayata and Cilja Harders (2019; 2018) in their conceptualisation of the "Midan Moments" on Taksim, Tahrir and many other squares in the Middle East that witnessed large scale occupations as key

components of a larger oppositional protest cycle. Emerging from the bodily co-presence, joint practices and collective contentious performances during these prolonged occupations, these affective dynamics included aspects of joy, fear, and liberation.

Figure 37. Prognostic frame, articulation of the collective subject



Source 37. Semantic network created with the help of XMind 8 based on coding in MAXQDA 13.

All of these affective dynamics served to catalyse processes of solidarisation and effectively jointly “created an affective arrangement that enabled outright antagonistic actors to protest together” (Ayata and Harders 2018, 116). Accordingly, the supporters of the ‘Egypt is not for sale’-campaign narrated the struggle over Tiran and Sanafir as the most recent episode in an ongoing revolutionary struggle against injustice. This was embodied in their adoption of known markers and symbolic slogans of the revolutionary moment of 2011. However, they also aimed to discursively recreate the conditions for coalition building across the organisational boundaries and ideological cleavages of Egypt’s opposition—especially across the divide between the *shabab ath-thawra* [revolutionary youth]⁴⁷⁷ and pat-

⁴⁷⁷ Less than a strict age category, the term ‘youth’ in the context of the Arab uprisings has been used widely to designate a “lived and shared generational narrative of the exclusion and marginalisation” (Murphy 2012, 5). After the fall of Mubarak in Egypt, the narrative of the ‘Revolutionary Youth’ emerged as a frame that excluded competing readings of the uprising as an Islamic awakening or a popular coup. For different political camps, it became a signifier for a disembodied group that could be rewarded and blamed for the course of the political transition (see Andeel 2014).

riotic youth movements that had resulted from the dichotomisation of the public after the ouster of President Mursi.

To this end, the PCPL discourse paired and merged the revolutionary discourse (marked in green in Figure 37, p. 303), a marker of collective identity for the activist and movements that had been at the forefront of the 2011 uprising, with the patriotic and legalist-constitutionalist discourses (marked in blue in Figure 37) that movement's in the entourage of Tamarod could subscribe to. Through common reference to the central signifier of Tiran and Sanafir, the differential relationship between both identity-establishing discourses was dissolved, and the political divides between both groups effectively bridged.

9.5.1 *Harnessing the Memory of 25 January*

Among the most active groups of the protesting coalition in this regard, was the Tamarod movement which first among all PCPL allies adopted the iconic repetition “*yasqut, yasqut...*” [down, down...] with respect to President Al-Sisi. Since 2011, this slogan had reverberated throughout Egypt's streets whenever the political situation had become so unbearable that the people began to demand the government's resignation: first during the 2011 protests against Egypt's “president for life” (R. Owen 2014) Husni Mubarak; then during the interim rule of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces and its Field Marshall Mohammed Hussein Tantawi; and finally during the popular campaign against Egypt's first freely elected President Mohammed Mursi who had fallen out of the people's favour due to his partisan politics and polarising political rhetoric. Hence it was highly symbolic that the movement whose campaign had enabled Al-Sisi to sweep Mursi from office now used the same chant against the general. In an Arabic post on 13 April, Tamarod called for Al-Sisi's fall:

Down, down your ego; down, down your failure; down, down your speeches; down, down your deals; down, down your terror; down, down your suppression; down, down your regime; down, down Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.⁴⁷⁸

However, the statements released by other activist groups including the Revolutionary Socialists or the April 6 Youth Movement were also full of Tahrir references and echoed its iconic vocabulary of resistance which, until the islands controversy, was thought to have disappeared from the public sphere. Several of these movements explicitly stressed that in their view, the island protests had opened a new chapter in the history of the popular revolution that had been started in Janu-

⁴⁷⁸ Tamarod. 13 April 2016. ‘Facebook Post Calling for the Fall of the Regime [Arabic]’. Tamarod Official Facebook Page. <https://www.facebook.com/TAMROUD/posts/1158642677509215>.

ary 2011.⁴⁷⁹ In this sense, a statement by April 6 urged the ‘Land and Honour’ protesters:

Let today be a new beginning. More important than slogans, parties, political shouting, is that we go down today and say I am here. I am still here, and I have an opinion, a voice and worth. The January revolution still lives, and its legacy is still within us, despite everything that has happened!⁴⁸⁰

Also, the clashes between protesters and police on the evening of 15 April were also framed in analogy to the events of January 2011, including the photographs of the events that circulated on social media. Above all, two photographs taken at the standoff between CSF units and PCPL protesters in the vicinity of the Journalist Syndicate on 15 April, went viral on Twitter and Facebook (see Figures 38, 39). They capture scenes of popular defiance of oppressive power structures—epitomised in the presence of security forces—and were reminiscent of the imagery that travelled around the world during the mediatisation of the Arab Spring: a standoff between a wall of CSF troops and a single protester whose raised arms formed a ‘V’ for ‘victory’, and a young student ridiculing the security state by performing a longboard stunt in front of its cordons.

Figures 38, 39. Standoff at the Journalist Syndicate, 15 April 2016



Source 38. @_amroali, 16 April 2016.



Source 39. @shabab6april, 16 April 2016.

In a similar vein, a picture of protesters kneeling down for Friday prayer shielded by human chains from riot police on the street in front of Egypt’s Judges Club on 15 April 2016 referenced the iconography of the Arab Spring (see Figure 40, p.

⁴⁷⁹ See also RNN. 21 April 2016. ‘Politicians reveal to the “Monitor” the reasons for the success of the 25 April demonstrations [Arabic]’. *Rassd News Network*. <https://rassd.com/184255.htm>

⁴⁸⁰ See statement posted on 16 April 2016 by the April 6 Movement in the *Facebook Event* for the Land and Honour Friday protests at <https://www.facebook.com/events/158644092833688/>.

306).⁴⁸¹ During the ‘18 days of Tahrir’, Coptic protesters had repeatedly protected their praying Muslim comrades on Tahrir Square against *baltagiya* and police incursions by forming cordons around them. This highly mediatised ritual became a symbol of national unity and the anti-sectarian nature of the uprising. Its adoption by the PCPL thus meant to evoke similar connotations and signal that the alliance was taking to the street on behalf of the entire nation.

Figure 40. Protests in front of the Judges Club, 15 April 2016



Source 40. April 6 Official Facebook Page (@6thApril).

Furthermore, the PCPL protests also saw the return of the martyr theme: On 15 April, banners bore, for instance, the images of Coptic activist blogger Mina Daniel and of Italian researcher Giulio Regeni (Mada 2016c; 2016d). Daniel, an icon of the revolutionary youth, was killed by army forces in 2011 during the Massacre of Maspero. His death became a symbol for the excesses of the post-revolutionary state and the army’s betrayal of the Tahrir Revolution. In turn, Regeni, a PhD student who was kidnapped, tortured and murdered in January 2016 became a harbinger of the rise of an unaccountable and brutal security state under Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi.⁴⁸²

In addition, those protesters who had been arrested during the island protests were soon framed by the PCPL as martyrs of the Egyptian revolution and placed

⁴⁸¹ See April 6 Youth Movement. 15 April 2016. ‘Now, in front of the Judges Club [Arabic]’. *Facebook* (@6thApril). <https://www.facebook.com/m6april/photos/a.119279621491044.29804.119276198158053/1014648468620817/?type=3&theater>

⁴⁸² As Amro Ali (2016) has noted, Regeni is possibly the first non-Egyptian to be induced into the revolution’s narrative of martyrdom.

in the context of the authoritarian contraction in the country and the growing number of political detainees since 2011. Alongside the annulment of the demarcation agreement, the release of the “Prisoners of the Land” soon became one of the central demands of the campaign, and their portraits featured strongly in the campaign’s visual communication, as Figure 41—a banner that accompanied several press releases—illustrates. In a direct response to the arrest, the PCPL furthermore modified its guiding slogans to shame the illegitimate detention of Egypt’s patriotic youth: The hashtag *#باع_البلد_وحبس_الولد* [*bāʿa al-balad wa habis al-walad*, he sold the country and imprisoned the boy] blamed Al-Sisi personally for the arrest of many young demonstrators and was adopted alongside graphic depictions of the president as a jailor and prison warden.

Figure 41. Image commemorating the “Prisoners of the Land”



Source 41. PCPL Official Facebook Page (@Egyptisnorforsale), 4 May 2016, caption “15 April 2016... if solidarity and the defence of the homeland is a crime... then I am guilty—Freedom for the Friday of the Land prisoners.”

The bridging of nationalist and revolutionary discourses furthermore allowed for the articulation of more far-ranging demands in the frame of the island campaign such as the release of political prisoners, the reformation of freedom of assembly and information provision laws, as well as the dismissal of vital figures of the ruling coalition including even the resignation of the president and the fall of the regime. Regarding this frame extension, there was notable disparage among the PCPL member. The Strong Egypt Party, for instance, was more explicit than other members of the PCPL in this regard. On 23 April, it coupled the announcement that it would participate in the demonstrations on Sinai Liberation Day with a list of 15 reasons why the Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and his government should step down.⁴⁸³ In a separate statement, the party furthermore openly admitted its de-

⁴⁸³ Aside from the waiver of Tiran and Sanafir, in its statement the party also rejected the Al-Sisi administration for: its endless crimes; its contempt for the blood of Egyptians; its corruption and failure; the economic demise it was responsible for; its undermining of the country’s wealth; its victimisation of the honourable Egyptians; its campaign against the victims of the coup; its open doors to hypocrites and

mands were no longer limited to the return of Tiran and Sanafir:

We emphasise that our demands are greater and not only limited to the two islands—despite the significance of their issue—as our demands are still: state justice, freedom, democracy, rule of the people, neutrality of the institutions of both military and security forces, and the dignity of all citizens without distinction or discrimination.⁴⁸⁴

As the protest cycle continued, demands for greater informational freedom, accountability, and even regime change also became a dominant feature of the framing of most other PCPL members. Although the rallies continued to focus on the abolition of the island transfer to Saudi Arabia, many began to air other grievances over the course of the protest cycle. Amongst these grievances were the issues of political prisoners, physical repression and the restriction of freedoms, the military coup of 2013, or other instances that were perceived as a sell-out of Egyptian homeland, such as the demarcation of the maritime border with Cyprus, or the **Egyptian government’s policy in the Nile Water Dispute with Egypt’s southern neighbours**. Eventually, the release of political prisoners became a particularly dominant motive of the PCPL. At the end of the protest cycle investigated, calls for a presidential amnesty, the release of all prisoners of conscience and an investigation into their unlawful arrest had replaced the abolition of the agreement as **the protesters’ central demand**.

The effect of this scale shift remained ambiguous: On the one hand, it enabled the alliance to transcend the constraints of the strong nationalist frame on the issues it could address. On the other, abandoning this unifying signifier also eroded the PCPL’s internal cohesion. **The group’s statements, but also video footage** from the protest events themselves reflect how its members realised the tensions that resulted from parts of its constituency embracing more particularistic demands. A clip from 25 April, for instance, shows how some protest leaders attempted to prevent the protests from deviating from their primary objective by **chanting**: “Unite your ranks, shoulder to shoulder, our objective is one.” Mirroring this effort on the grassroots-level, the joint protest calls released by the PCPL after 25 April carefully highlighted that the entire campaign was still essentially about the return of Tiran and Sanafir to Egypt. Ultimately, however, these calls were insufficient in preventing fragmentation. Protest faded in response to the

cronies; its alignment with Israeli interest; its increase of poverty; its detention of tens of thousands of political prisoners; its torture; for the suffering it was causing; and for the absence of justice. See Arabi21. 23 April 2016. “Strong Egypt’ Party announces 15 reasons for the departure of Sisi [Arabic]’.

<https://arabi21.com/story/903974/حزب-مصر-القوية-يعن-عن-15-سببا-لرحيل-السياسي>.

⁴⁸⁴ Strong Egypt Party. 23 April 2016. ‘Press release [Arabic]’.

<https://www.facebook.com/MisrAlQawia/photos/a.492672350759920/1369370706423409/?type=3&permPage=1>.

hard hand of the police and continued repression in the days following Sinai Liberation Day. Finally, the coalition dissolved as the debate over the border demarcation agreement was relocated to the judiciary and opposition channelled into several lawsuits, championed by the former presidential candidate and opposition leader Khaled Ali who questioned the constitutionality of the border demarcation procedure.

9.5.2 *My Enemy's Enemy is Not my Friend*

In principle, the new antagonist frontier drawn by the PCPL, between those who had betrayed the nation and the true patriots who opposed the Tiran and Sanafir deal, could have functionally replaced the hegemonic divide between 'coup' and 'anti-coup' that had shaped contentious politics in Egypt since Mursi's deposition. In fact, initial attempts to mobilise against the agreement and the growing thematic salience of the repression of civil liberties and the question of political prisoners within the PCPL discourses seemed to point in this direction. They seemingly foreshadowed the emergence of a new broad anti-government coalition that could have also included members of the Islamist Anti-Coup protest coalition. For instance, in its initial call for 15 April 2016, the April 6 Movement had asked protesters not to carry any signs displaying ideological or political affiliations or to raise any partisan slogans. This meant pre-empt attempts to discredit the campaign as factional instigation: "Today we are all Egyptians, and that is enough!", read the movement's statement.⁴⁸⁵ This enabled various political groups and parties to join the marches on the Land and Honour Friday. Furthermore, the revolutionary slogans, pictures and chants were not only reproduced by the groups aligned in the PCPL but travelled across ideological boundaries.

Most notably, the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and their political arms at the grassroots level, the National Alliance for the Support of Legitimacy (NASL) and the Students Against the Coup movement, as well as the nationalist Tamarod movement joined the calls for mass protests. The two movements that heretofore never rallied around a common goal and been exclusively antagonist in the formulation of their political aims.⁴⁸⁶ It is true that the political adversaries had lost

⁴⁸⁵ April 6 Youth Movement. 14 April 2016. 'Protest Call for 15 April: On our bodies [Arabic]'. *Facebook Event*. <https://www.facebook.com/events/1586440928333688/>

⁴⁸⁶ See MB. 14 April 2016. 'The Muslim Brotherhood announces their participation in the protests against the sale of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir [Arabic]'. *Ikhwanonline*. <https://bit.ly/2MIZOTS>; NASL. 13 April 2016. 'National Alliance Urges Mass Protests Friday Against Junta Selling Out Egypt'. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=32503>; Tamarod. 13 April 2016. 'Facebook Post Calling for Demonstrations on 15 April 2016 [Arabic]'; Students against the Coup. 13 April 2016. 'Students Against the Coup to Take Part in Friday Mass Demonstrations Across Egypt'. *Ikhwanweb*.

much of their influence during the last three years after suffering from repression and infighting. By the time of the island crisis, their grassroots basis had grown small and fragmented. However, the mere fact that they called for street protests together was noteworthy. On 15 April, members of both groups participated in the street protests, albeit individually and without carrying any of their banners.⁴⁸⁷ At some demonstrations in the country-side, scattered *Rabaa*-salutes were an indicator of the Islamist's presence. However, at the majority of the PCPL demonstrations joined by members of the Anti-Coup Alliance, the Islamists abstained from displaying their known insignia (e.g., the yellow R4BIA-signs, Mursi banners, and Anti-Coup-martyr portraits).⁴⁸⁸

Ultimately, this can be interpreted as a first attempt by the Anti-Coup Alliance to transcend political polarisation and modify the rigid discourse of resistance that had ensured its organisational coherence in the aftermath of the 2013 military coup. Especially its public appeal to the “great, patriotic Egyptian people” on the occasion of Sinai Liberation Day shows how the movement had attempted to bridge the sell-out-frame, which it shared with the members of the PCPL, with its own legitimacy-discourse that had hitherto failed to inspire popular support:

The military coup leaders who profaned Egyptian land, Egyptian honor, trampled the Egyptian citizen' dignity, and smeared the history, culture and tradition of this dear homeland [...] The only solution now is to defeat and end this illegitimate coup, to reinstate democratic legitimacy, and put right all the ruinous coup's injustices and crimes. [...] Say it loud and clear: No compromise on an inch of Egyptian land. As President Mohamed Morsi said: 'The land of Egypt is forbidden to non-Egyptians'. It is not for sale, especially after it has been watered with the blood of the martyrs.⁴⁸⁹

Moreover, the Islamists' protest calls were composed in a style that reproduced the PCPL's revolutionary-nationalist lingo and diagnostic framing, rather than the established Anti-Coup-discourse. Particularly the NASL's student chapter paired its declaration of support for Egypt's revolutionaries against the island deal with a reconciliatory language that referenced to the core motifs of Tahrir. In a statement to the patriotic Egyptian youth the Students Against the Coup movement invoked the unique cross-ideological resistance of the Tahrir uprising and affirmed with a

<http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=32506>; Tamarod. 13 April 2016. 'Facebook Post Calling for Demonstrations on 15 April 2016 [Arabic]'. *Facebook (@Tamroud)*.

<https://www.facebook.com/TAMROUD/posts/1158333357540147>.

⁴⁸⁷ See also RNN. 15 April 2016. 'Overview over the Tiran and Sanafir demonstrations. 4 Slogans. / Aspects. A main Square [Arabic]'. *Rassd News Network*. <https://rassd.com/183577.htm>.

⁴⁸⁸ This visual abstinence of the Muslim Brotherhood might have contributed to the relatively moderate and tolerant stance of the policing authorities towards the protesters on 15 April 2016.

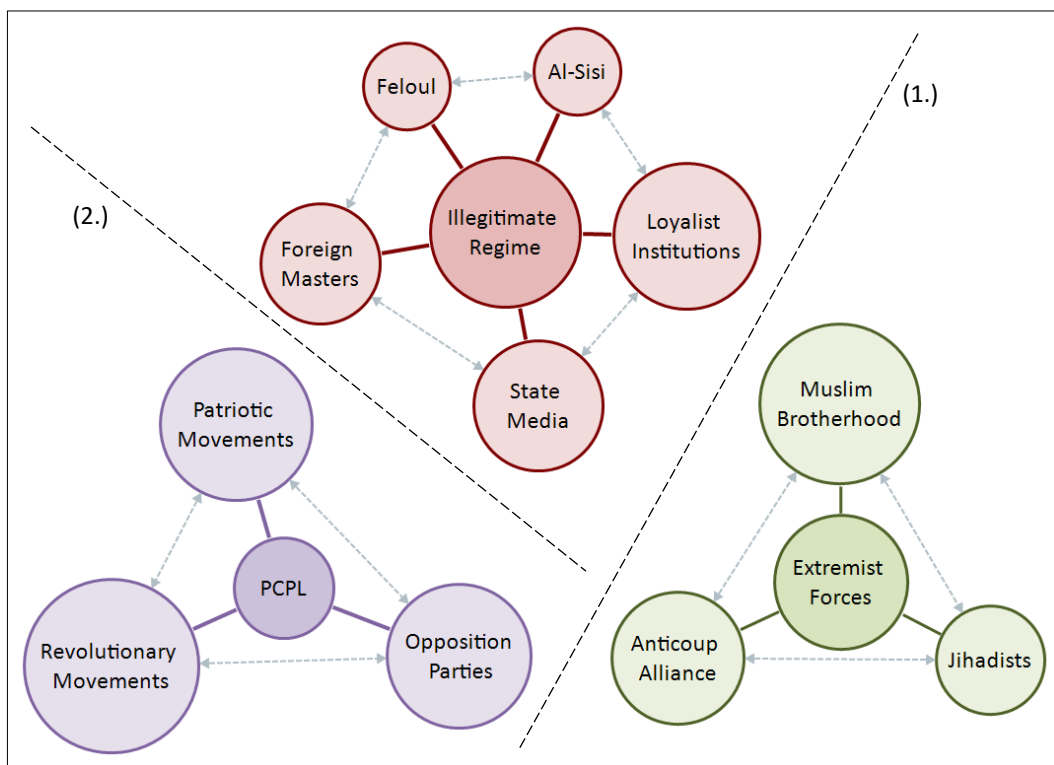
⁴⁸⁹ MB. 24 April 2016. 'Muslim Brotherhood Statement on Sinai Liberation Day Calling for Protests on 25 April'. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=32517>.

view to the upcoming ‘Land and Honour’ protests:

We will close ranks, once again, and rally around the 25 January 2011 principles: freedom, social justice, human dignity, and the homelands’ independence.⁴⁹⁰

These bridge-building attempts, however, were met with scepticism and rejection, above all, by liberal and leftist activists within the PCPL who feared that their participation would tarnish the image of the Friday protests. Most groups that coalesced in the campaign declared their outright rejection of any formal affiliation with the Brotherhood and their way of reading Al-Sisi’s policy in contrast to Mursi. Instead, they pointed to semblances between both president’s misdemeanour.

Figure 42. Articulation of antagonist frontier



Source 42. Semantic network created with the help of XMind 8 based on coding in MAXQDA 13.

The bridging of nationalist and revolutionary discourses hence enabled nationalists and a broad spectrum of oppositional parties and movements from different sways to march jointly in protest and rally around the same goal. However, it fell short of reconstructing the revolutionary unity coalition of 2011. While their individual participation in the island protest was tolerated, Egypt’s most important Islamist players were marginalised in the PCPL discourse which, effectively, reproduced the hegemonic structuration of the political playing field since mid-2013

⁴⁹⁰ Students against the Coup. 13 April 2016. ‘Students Against the Coup to Take Part in Friday Mass Demonstrations Across Egypt’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=32506>.

(see Figure 42).

The dominant antagonism of Egyptian politics between supporters and opponents of Mursi's ouster had dichotomised the political public in the aftermath of the 2013 coup in two opposing camps—supposedly an Islamist one, and a nationalist and supposedly pro-democratic one (dashed line 1 in Figure 42, p. 311). Rather than dissolving this rivalry, the PCPL instead attempted differentiated on its own 'side' of the political frontier by articulating a second political frontier (dashed line 2 in Figure 42, p. 311) that split the pro-ouster camp into two camps. It thereby aimed to contrast its own patriotism from the hollow ruling discourse, while concurrently distinguishing its opposition to the island agreement from that of the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies. In doing so, PCPL asserted that subscribing to the conception of the Islamist movements as anti-democratic and illegitimate did not equal uncritical support for the regime.

The self-image of the PCPL as a third force is most clearly exemplified by a passage in the coalition's long and explicit protest call for Sinai Liberation Day. Therein, the coalition categorically rejected any coordination with the Muslim Brotherhood and its political arms. Instead, the PCPL portrayed the Brotherhood and its affiliates as reactionary forces that promoted sectarianism and factionalism, and that were engaged in acts of sabotage against the Egyptian government with the aim of toppling the regime:

There is no place for those who committed a crime against the nation and the people. We are confident that the Egyptian people—as they strive to overturn the forfeit of the two islands, refuse subordinate to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and confront a campaign of repression and threats of escalation from the side of authorities—won't allow the Brotherhood to exploit the issue, nor the coalition's name, nor its activities.⁴⁹¹

The authorities were warned of attempts to blend between the civil forces opposing the island deal and the Islamists via a statement aimed at tarnishing the PCPL's public image. The statement also stressed that all factions united in the PCPL had been at the forefront of the 30 June 2013 confrontation with the autocratic rule of former President Mursi. The PCPL resorted to a framing device that Todd Gitlin (1980) has referred to as the use of culture-bound narratives, that is, formulating a new episode in a long and well-known story. The PCPL hence carefully placed its protest in a narrative of the Egyptian uprising that excluded the possibility of a positive association with the Brotherhood. At the forefront of this effort was the Tamarod movement which cemented this political frontier already

⁴⁹¹ PCPL. 24 April 2016. 'The Popular Campaign to Protect the Land Calls for Demonstrations Peaceful in Rejection of Ceding the Islands and to Stop the Security Repression [Arabic]'. *Facebook @Egyptisnotforsale*. <https://www.facebook.com/Egyptisnotforsale/posts/1003019766402674#>.

in its first protest call on 13 April 2016:

The day we went down on 25 January to a revolutionary day, we went down for this country. When we stood against the military council, it was for this country. When we stood against the Brotherhood on 30 June, it was for this country. We wanted clear demands and their realisation, we have sacrificed and among us, some died, some are in prison, for our freedom and our dignity and the future of our children in this country. Therefore, we will go down again on “Friday 15 April,” for the sake of this country!⁴⁹²

By placing the new islands episode in the tradition of 30 June 2013, Tamarod excluded and alienated the Muslim Brotherhood from the ranks of those legitimately representing the national interests of the Egyptian people.⁴⁹³ Most other movements within the PCPL soon followed suit. Ultimately, their aversion to the Brotherhood and its Anti-Coup resistance movement not only reinforced the dominant discourse by which the acting regime justified its exclusionary politics since the deposition of Mursi.

It also forestalled a sustained positive identification of the Islamist opposition with the ‘Egypt is not for sale’-campaign. In reaction to the expressed hostility of the statements by Tamarod and other PCPL members, the Islamist forces united under the NASL also abandoned the idea of further rapprochement between both camps and a linkage of their campaigns against the Al-Sisi-regime: mirroring the statements by Tamarod, the Muslim Brotherhood (and subsequently also the NASL) hence deliberately placed the island demonstrations in a direct continuity with its prior campaign against the military coup.⁴⁹⁴ Until the end of the investigation period, the Islamists effectively prioritised internal cohesion over potential new alliances and placed the controversial framing of 30 June as a coup against democracy at the centre of its discourse about Tiran and Sanafir.⁴⁹⁵ By resorting to such an antagonising frame, they accepted the rejection of most PCPL members.

⁴⁹² Tamarod. 13 April 2016. ‘Facebook Post Calling for Demonstrations on 15 April 2016 [Arabic]’. *Facebook (@Tamroud)*. <https://www.facebook.com/TAMROUD/posts/1158333357540147>.

⁴⁹³ However, Tamarod implicitly also challenged the authority of President Al-Sisi by claiming interpretive authority over the events of mid-2013. The president had also referred to 30 June to shore up his legitimacy in the wake of the protests. In his meeting with the “Egyptian Family” he even asked for a minute of silence for the Tahrir martyrs. See Al-Sisi, Abdel Fattah. 13 April 2016. ‘Explanation of the issue of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir [Arabic]’. *Al-Manassa*. <https://almanassa.com/ar/story/1505>.

⁴⁹⁴ NASL. 13 April 2016. ‘National Alliance Urges Mass Protests Friday Against Junta Selling Out Egypt’. *Ikhwanweb*. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=32503>.

⁴⁹⁵ The MB was also unsuccessful in its attempt to persuade the PCPL that the demarcation agreement proved the regime’s moral corruption, to which the Anti-Coup Alliance had been pointing since 2013. See MB. 14 April 2016. ‘The Muslim Brotherhood announces their participation in the protests against the sale of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir [Arabic]’. *Ikhwanonline*. <https://bit.ly/2MIZOTS>.

9.6 Conclusion: Breaking through the Wall of Fear

Through the articulation of a hybrid discourse that carried the marks of the “new political language” (Filali-Ansary 2012, 10) of the Arab uprisings *and* the patriotic lingo of the Sisi-era, the PCPL successfully linked the signifiers of nationalism and of revolution through their common relation to Tiran and Sanafir. Transcending prevalent differences and social divides, this enabled coalition-building between nationalist movements like Tamarod, moderate-Islamic groups like the Strong Egypt Party, and revolutionary youth movements like April 6 and the Youth Movement for Justice and Freedom. The Tiran and Sanafir issues had enabled the re-emergence of revolutionary claims that had been virtually absent from Egyptian politics since the 2013 coup. But it nevertheless reinforced old antagonisms that had irrevocably split the Egyptian public into two camps since 2013. All of the movements aligned with the PCPL—from the Revolutionary Socialists to Tamarod—out of fear or aversion explicitly set themselves apart from ‘extremist’ Islamist forces, such as the Brotherhood and the NASL. This particular dynamic prevented the emergence of a more powerful coalition of contenders that could have posed an existential threat to the authoritarian order.

However, when investigating the transformative impacts of collective action, we should resist the temptation to discard all protests that fail to mobilise critical masses of tens of thousands of people or produce outright regime change. In this sense, it was of a highly symbolic nature that on 15 April, hundreds of protesters gathered in the same squares and marched on the same thoroughfares that had witnessed the 25 January uprising in 2011, relatively unfazed by the massive deployment of Egypt’s notorious riot police. Moreover, the islands controversy enabled oppositional groups whose cadres and mobilising goals had been largely discredited in the public sphere to come out of the closet and hold up a mirror to the nationalist elite. The Egyptian-Saudi land transfer, in this sense, was a transformative event for Egypt’s post-revolutionary contentious dynamic.

The authorities grossly underestimated the prominent role of the homeland in their nationalist project. Therefore, attempts to integrate the controversial border demarcation agreement into the hegemonic discourse that legitimised the authoritarian rule of the post-coup regime effectively backfired. Although most Egyptians had no particular material relation to the country’s territory, with many having never travelled outside of their hometown, the land remained deeply embedded in collective Egyptian memory and identity. The link between land and nation grew strong over the fight against colonialism and the ensuing military and diplomatic battles with the Jewish neighbour state—often driven by the question

of sovereignty over Sinai (which recently also dominated the regime's narrative on the fight against jihadism in the peninsula). Consequently, the regime's framing of the demarcation agreement as an honourable restoration of historical rights became an easy target for the opposition.

As Brand and Stacher (2016, 38) have argued, in such moments of crisis, regimes usually attempt “a kind of re-scripting — a reinterpretation of national symbols or key events” to allow for policy innovation while maintaining control. But they suggest there are limits to which historical events can be sensibly incorporated into the hegemonic narrative and which elements of the dominant discourse may be modified short of a change in regime. In this sense, the voluntary cession of Tiran and Sanafir was an event that could not reasonably be signified within the hegemonic discourse. Reinterpreting the transfer as a matter of national pride proved too great a challenge thus creating opportunities for resistance in an otherwise closed context. The island deal thus became an empty signifier that could be filled with different meanings and provided a powerful tool for the construction of a strange bedfellow coalition. As protesters reclaimed ownership over the meaning of patriotism, the subversion of hegemonic discourse became a vehicle for successful alliance-building under conditions of severe repression: The forces that joined the PCPL claimed to represent the true patriots who would defend every single grain of their fathers' soil with their blood. They adopted the very same nationalist rhetoric by which the military-backed transitional government and its successors had legitimised their authoritarian modes of governing. This discourse, for the first time since the 2013 coup d'état, seriously challenged the regime's legitimisation.

Ultimately, the Tiran and Sanafir crisis exemplified the opportunities that arise from the disparities between what authorities claim to stand for and how they act. In an earlier exploration of such disparities, Laurie Brand (2014a, 196) noted that authoritarian leaders in the Middle East, at times, miscalculated by building on nationalist narratives, thereby inducing apathy or resistance in their target audience. The case study of Tiran and Sanafir complements her account by highlighting how such dissonance can also become a catalyst for innovative political alliances that cut across movement boundaries and ideological cleavages. By “harnessing hegemony” (Maney, Woehrle, and Coy 2005), that is, subverting nationalist discourse for mobilisation by drawing upon its imagery, tropes and established webs of meaning, activists could not only bridge political divides but also undermine the official legitimisation of repression against protesters. In doing so, activists were able to create their own windows of opportunity for social mobilisation.

10. Conclusion

As Lisa Wedeen (1999, 30) maintains in her political ethnography of Syrian authoritarianism, politics is “not merely about material interest but also about contests over the symbolic world, over the management and appropriation of meaning.” The 2011 popular uprising effectively illustrated this process, demonstrating how the proliferation of a new vision of the Egyptian people was triggered by a dislocation of the hegemonic discourse. Mubarak’s claim to rule in the name, for the sake, and on behalf of the people had been undermined by years of negligence, unequal economic development, and barred access of Egyptian civil society to meaningful socio-economic and political participation (Harders 2015, 148). The performative disruption of the hegemonic order on 25 January 2011 brought this latent crisis to the fore (Chalcraft 2014, 175). The participants in this first mass protest were instrumental in physically breaking through the barrier of fear in that they overpowered the deployed riot police and claimed ownership over public space by taking Tahrir Square. Moreover, through their protest performances, they also expanded the horizon of possibilities in terms of what was arguable with a view to the country’s political future. This opening discursive space—through the disruption and appropriation of meaning—impacted on the opportunity structures for subsequent mobilisation and coalition building and culminated in the breakdown of the hegemonic block that had ruled Egypt for several decades.

Countless new political projects originated from the dislocation of the hegemonic order: with the demise of the Mubarak-regime, particularly the notion of ‘popular legitimacy’ became a floating signifier that different factions wove into different discourses in their attempt to garner support for their political projects and shape the political transformation in the aftermath of the uprising. Their contending strategies, political competition and ideological fragmentation have been described in several recapitulations of Egypt’s democratic transition and the reasons of its failure (e.g., Abdelrahman 2015; El-Sharnouby 2018a; Marfleet 2016; Rennick 2015; Sika 2017). Albeit rooted in different epistemological and theoretical paradigms, what these works have in common is that they underscore how the disruptions created by the Tahrir uprising left a vacuum that different (revolutionary and reactionary) forces attempted to fill with their partisan projects. But rather than creating a shared vision for the revolutionary movement—a unifying “affirmative idea” (see Herrera and El-Sharnouby 2018) for a new participatory order—these projects fell short of achieving a sense of hegemony. Instead, as Pratt (2015) argues, the 25 January Revolution marked only the beginning of “the next phase” in the ongoing efforts of civil society to resist authoritarianism.

This dissertation picked up where prior works left off and focused on the contentious struggle in Egypt *after* the heavily studied and mediatised ‘Arab Spring’. However, this project avoids a reproduction of the structuralist (and misleading) diagnoses of Egypt’s ‘failed transition’ or return ‘to square one’, which follow from normative assumptions of change as a gradual process towards democracy and evoke false connotations of stagnation and a halted political process. Instead, the **ten chapters of this thesis have portrayed the country’s trajectory as the highly contingent outcome of dynamic interactions.** By subscribing to the critical paradigm, contentious interaction was conceived of as an ongoing struggle over hegemony between regimes and their contenders. This struggle manifested through visible protest-repression-dynamics. But it took place on a discursive level, too, where different readings of social reality competed with each other.

It was the stated goal of this thesis to show how these two “arenas” (Jasper and Volpi 2018, 15 ff), that is, street politics and the discursive politics of signification, interrelated and informed **the trajectory of Egypt’s post-revolutionary order.** Its results confirm Alberto Melucci (1996) who famously maintained that the ability of today’s social movements across the world to generate a serious challenge to prevailing structures of domination hinges on their symbolic capacity to subvert, reverse and redefine social meaning to demonstrate the arbitrariness of the power and its justification. In a similar vein, I have argued throughout this thesis that in the case of post-revolutionary Egypt, discursive struggles determined the conditions of possibility for contentious interactions on the ground and thus the political opportunities for resistance or repression. In fact, this dissertation has shown how the discourses articulated to make sense of and in relation to contentious events crucially accounted for the observed variances in the reactions of the main contenders to each other. That is to say, they conditioned which social movements formed coalitions to challenge the status quo; how authorities encountered mobilisation; and how the broader public took in and evaluated the means by which the primary contenders engaged each other in their struggle for hegemony. Depending on which rival interpretation about contentious events prevailed and affected **people’s “hearts and minds”** (Pratt 2015, 46), contentious interactions triggered a backlash, created new discursive opportunities for protest, or facilitated further repression.

Particularly, the challenges posed by Tamarod and the PCPL to the hegemonic orders sustaining the rule of President Mursi and President Al-Sisi, respectively, have testified to the power of discursive contestation ‘from below’. They served as evidence that, at times, “it is enough to structure reality using different words for the power monopoly over reality to crumble” (Melucci 1996, 358). Over the

course of the investigation period, above all, the mismatch between how incumbents acted and what they claimed to stand for—and the articulation of this disjuncture by social movement coalitions—effected the fall of one regime, triggered the emergence of another, and planted the seeds of resistance in the current order.

10.1 An Autocratic Restoration through the Lenses of Contentious Politics

Considering these findings, this dissertation makes several contributions to the body of research. First and foremost, it produces a new historical narrative about **the exceptional and “eventful times”** (Della Porta 2017, 12) of the run-up, unfolding and aftermath of the military coup. Egypt’s post-revolutionary history is narrated through the lenses of contentious politics as a sequence of several contentious episodes that were each structured by a series of transformative events. Their **impact on the dynamics of contention and consequently on the country’s overall political trajectory**—rather than clear-cut—was manifold, often ambiguous and volatile, but always highly dependent on the outcome of the discursive battles fought over their interpretation.

This thesis starts by showing that the popular-backed military intervention against President Mursi, similarly to the 2011 uprising (see Khosrokhavar 2018), represented a constitutive event that triggered a range of new political subjectivation processes, both in the Islamist spectrum and within the coalition of contenders who had joined forces to depose Mursi through their protest campaign. As a transformative event, the coup on 3 July 2013 broke the political stalemate that had crippled Egyptian politics throughout the first half of the year. It reshuffled the cards and provided the leading political contenders with an opportunity to redefine both, the boundaries of their collective identities and their stated goals for the **country’s political future. The coup effectively dislocated the precarious legitimacy-discourse of the Mursi administration that had sustained the status quo and threw it into open competition with the alternative political project that had been articulated in the frame of the 30 June 2013 protest.**

As I have described in Chapter 5, **the President’s standing had eroded throughout his first year in office. Above all, Mursi’s discourse about constitutional legitimacy proved to be a double-edged sword: first, the ‘quiet entente’ between the SCAF and the Brotherhood which had enabled Mursi’s ascension to power had tarnished his revolutionary credentials; an exclusive constitutional drafting process cemented the image that the President and his Islamist base attempted to monopolise their grip on power; finally, a constitutional declaration that placed the executive beyond judiciary supervision also undermined his claim to constitu-**

tionality. The performative disruption of the hegemonic order on 30 June, I have argued, brought this latent crisis to the fore, demonstrating how the Mursi-administration had never really managed to establish hegemony for its political **project in Egypt's post-revolutionary public**. In this context, I contend, the Tamarod campaign became the roof for a counter-hegemonic block that successfully bundled and mobilised the widespread grievances against Mursi.

As an event that could not be signified in the ruling discourse—primed on **legitimising Mursi's rule**—the second popular uprising in Egypt within two years represented a transformative event that not only dislocated the incumbent regime's claim to legitimacy but also **set in motion another military intervention** that culminated in the deposition of Mursi on 3 July 2013. This “coup-volution” (Hamada 2014, 37), however, did not result in the replacement of one precarious hegemony—that of the Mursi administration and its supporting Islamist base—by another: instead, as my discussion of the post-coup dynamics in Chapter 6 shows, the coup dichotomised the political public by delimiting the frontier between two opposing political projects. Their battle for hegemony dominated and polarised Egyptian society during the rest of the investigation period. As I have argued, this new societal conflict cut across the formerly salient division **between ‘the people’ and ‘the regime’** by **pitching an alliance of civic and state forces that supported Mursi's ouster, including representatives of the army, political parties, social movements and state ministries, against another equally variegated coalition of anti-coup forces.**

In this contest, both sides derived their legitimacy from competing conceptions of democracy, legality and the country's revolutionary heritage; both sides claimed to speak for ‘the people’; and both sides engaged in a vicious vilification of their respective other, depicting it “as an existential threat, yet paradoxically also as a minuscule fringe side-lined by their own clear majority” (Mogahed 2013). After the massacre of Rabaa al-Adawiya, which is covered in detail in Chapter 7, the social polarisation between these projects reached a fever pitch. As Dalia Mogahed (2013) **underscores, “people didn't just hold different opinions about the same reality—they held different realities.”** **These different realities found their articulation in different discourses about the contentious dynamics that unfolded in the streets and, as my argument goes, set the conditions for the ensuing modes of conflict:** On the one hand, a coalition of mostly Islamist forces under the roof of the National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy kept the **deposed president's discourse** alive. The myth of a ‘National Alliance’ for the restoration of legitimacy effectively became the surface for the inscription of a variety of political demands that found their expression in the most significant cycle of collective actions since

the 2011 uprising, in what was to become known as the ‘Anti-Coup’-campaign. Within the frame of this campaign, the central signifier of resistance in the name of legitimacy not only provided the principal reference for protesters’ collective identity. It also limited their radicalisation in response to state repression. **Illustrating the conditioning impact of contenders’ discourses on their action repertoires**, the strong intertwining of Anti-Coup conceptions of legitimacy with notions of peacefulness and nonviolent resistance prevented the Islamist protest coalition from turning to political violence. Instead, adaptive mechanisms of decentralisation and diversification ensured the movement’s survival despite severe repression.

A question yet to be answered is how sustainable this survival mechanism is in the long run. As Jillian Schwedler (2018, 72) has argued, often the significance of innovations is only recognizable with time, when routine practices come into sharp relief. In this sense, it remains to be seen whether the sequence of short-run processes of substitution establishes long-term path dependencies, for instance, for the Muslim Brotherhood as a group. Of equal concern remains the question of violence, as the weak convergence of repression and protester violence identified in this chapter might be attributable only to the relatively short period under scrutiny. In the immediate post-coup context studied in this thesis, however, the interim authority’s deadly violence rather confirmed the protesters’ moral superiority and strengthened their internal cohesion. At the same time, the Anti-Coup Alliance’s failure to modify or extend its legitimacy discourse in an inspiring way also forestalled the creation of coalitions beyond the ideologically aligned opposition spectrum—it also precluded popular solidarity when civilian protesters were targeted in the massacres of Rabaa al-Adawiya and Al-Nahda. Not realising that its discourse—by association with the former president’s rhetoric—was perceived by most Egyptians as a hollow shell and a smokescreen for the Muslim Brotherhood’s will to power, the NASL’s insistence on constitutional, democratic, and revolutionary legitimacy only deepened the divide between the *pro-* and the *anti-coup* camps.

On the other side of this divide, as I have argued, the events of 3 July 2013 also marked a point of no return. After all, the interim regime that assumed control over the country after Mursi’s arrest needed to counter the Muslim Brotherhood’s claim to power and the Anti-Coup Alliance’s attempt to establish hegemony for its understanding of legitimacy. The interim regime, therefore, refuted these forces by promoting an alternative discourse primed on nationalism and the state’s ability to protect the Egyptian people from external and internal threats. Within the frame of this discourse, the army’s intervention against the acting president and its

repression of the Anti-Coup protests was articulated as a realisation of the popular will—and thus the origin of all political legitimacy. The army was thereby portrayed as the ultimate guardian of Egyptian democracy and thus rehabilitated as a political actor. On this side of the political divide, as within the NASL, the propagated discourse set the conditions of possibility for how authorities acted vis-à-vis their opponents: as a consequence of its securitising logic, all bottom-up challengers to the post-coup order were framed as potential threats to the nation. Brutal state repression, including several massacres, were signified as necessary evils in order to restore national security. Especially after the liminal event of Rabaa, the crackdown against the supporters of the deposed president was articulated as a **reasonable, albeit terrible attempt of Egypt’s authorities to confront the threats posed by the Islamist extremists.**

As I conclude in this thesis, this discursive struggle for interpretive authority over social reality in the violent summer of 2013 not only polarised public opinion so strongly that all other political projects were excluded from the horizon of possibilities **for the country’s future.** It also created **path dependencies that catalysed** the emergence of a new hegemonic order. As a consequence of the polarising discourses of the leading contenders in the post-coup arena, it became nearly impossible for these or any other political forces in the country to approach their antagonist other without losing face (see also El Houdaiby 2014). Within the context of growing perceptions of insecurity in the population—owing to the everyday violence on the streets—alternative interpretations of the contentious dynamics in Egypt were simply unable to gain traction. As discussed in the interlude chapter (which cursorily explores the further trajectory of Anti-Coup mobilisation), the emergence of a new autocratic order in Egypt can be considered a by-product of this polarising conflict for political hegemony.

To sum up, I interpret the authoritarian restoration under the auspices of General Al-Sisi not only as **the fruits of the deep state’s machinations but as the** outcome of an iterative process of discursive labour, first in response to the legitimacy crisis of the Mursi administration, and to several transformative events in the summer of 2013. In other words, I contend that the emergence of a new hegemonic consensus in Egypt wherein national defence and the fight against terrorism have replaced self-determination and civilian rule as central signifiers, was **highly contingent on the ‘eventful’ dynamics of contention** that I have mapped out in this thesis—dynamics whose outcome was hardly predetermined, in that each event altered the “constellation of possibilities in the future” (Alimi and Meyer 2011, 477).

In hindsight, it could be argued that the hegemonic struggle between coup

and Anti-Coup was conclusively decided in favour of the former. However, contrary to Egypt's delusive self-portrayal as an "anchor of stability in the region,"⁴⁹⁶ the new hegemonic order may not be as stable as it seems, as Chapter 9 illustrates. Thus far, in the case of Egypt, the potential of nationalism as a magnet for contentious coalitions has been investigated only scarcely. Nationalist and securitising discourses have mostly been understood as tools to co-opt popular pressure for reform into a state-centric model of governance (e.g., Amar 2013; Brand 2014a). But this study highlights that there is nothing deterministic about such discourse. It may support exclusive projects of domination, but it may also support a "politics of emboldening in the face of institutional constraints" (Beissinger 2002, 38).

The study of the Tiran and Sanafir Island protests exemplifies this process, showing how activists harnessed the emotional dimensions of established nationalist political discourse for mobilisation and contentious alliance building: a controversial border demarcation agreement became the tipping point event that could not be symbolised in the hegemonic nationalist discourse, thereby destabilising it and creating opportunities for resistance in what became known as the 'Egypt is not for sale'-campaign. While failing to effect systemic change, this contentious coalition challenged the post-coup regime's interpretational sovereignty over the meaning of political legitimacy and the appropriate modes of governance in Egypt. By undermining and subverting the hegemonic discourse, the campaign effectively forced the Al-Sisi administration into a discursive struggle which can be interpreted in Gramscian terms as a "war of position" that is ongoing to date (Boggs 1976, 53, 115).⁴⁹⁷ This war of position no longer attacks the hegemonic apparatus, that is the "historically specific system of institutions and practices" (Egan 2016, 437) of authoritarian rule in Al-Sisi's Egypt, its ruling apparatus and institutions, through frontal assaults against the state, such as mass demonstrations, blockades or strikes. Instead, it is waged against and within the ideological complex that underpins and sustains authoritarian rule.

Notably, the character of the counter-hegemonic struggle in Egypt has thereby resumed a form and shape that parallels that of the decade-long opposition against authoritarianism before the events of the Arab Spring. Furthermore, it effectively reproduces the political constellation in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, described by Pratt (2015, 47) as a war of position by civil society representatives against military rule, and "encapsulated in the phrase, al-thawra

⁴⁹⁶ See remarks Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi at the 71th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on 20 September 2016 at <https://gadebate.un.org/en/71/egypt>.

⁴⁹⁷ On the origins of this prescriptive metaphor in Gramsci's thought, and his differentiation of the political war of position from the militant war of manoeuvre see Egan (2014; 2016) and Boggs (1976).

mustamirra—the revolution continues.”

10.2 A Relational Multi-Method Approach

In addition to its historiographic value, at a conceptual level, this dissertation testifies to the strengths of investigating contentious dynamics in a disaggregated and relational analytical framework. Such a relational framework not only provides detailed insights into the mutual adaptation processes between protesters and their counterparts. It also helps to detect and retrace the usually understudied mobilisation processes in authoritarian contexts (see Della Porta 2017, 11), below the threshold of the apparent mass uprisings that monopolise scholarly attention. Charles Kurzman (2018, 190) has rightly argued that:

[s]ocial scientists who privilege the mass scale may dismiss small-scale disruptions as statistical noise in the signal, but for the people living through these periods of unrest, they may be the signal itself. These small-scale perturbations can come to define the historic moment. They may be the iconic feature that people latch on to as they work out which institutions are finished and which ones remain intact.

Particularly in contexts of extreme repression and authoritarian closure with unfavourable opportunity structures for social mobilisation, such mobilisations can signal rifts in the status quo and foreshadow broader and more sweeping changes. Within this dissertation, particularly the case of the PCPL **exemplifies** how “challenges [posed by protests to elites] are not intense objectively, but in their relationship to capacities possessed by states” (Boudreau 2005, 53). Not only was it highly symbolic that the protesters gathered in the same squares and streets that they had occupied during the Tahrir Revolution to defend two Red Sea islands. The island protests also exposed the precarity of the nationalist discourses that were sustaining the incumbent regime. This supports Atef Said’s (2014) contention that “one of the main advantages of studying regimes in relations to movements is to give attention to any movements, even if they are not sturdy or durable.”

Event catalogues provide a reliable heuristic device to detect even small-scale disruptions by disaggregating social movements and protest cycles into sequences and cascades of individual events. Even within the relatively short timeframe covered in this dissertation, the analysis of contentious interactions through disaggregated event data and the closely linked examination of discourse via the communication of political contenders in relation to these events reveal a number of situational linkages that would have remained obscure to analysts relying on aggregate data. For instance, the analysis of the Anti-Coup campaign suggests that given the success of repression in overpowering specific contentious tactics, such as mass demonstrations, still does not automatically make it a useful tool for control-

ling social protest. Common misjudgements of the interim regime's repressive success in the summer of 2013 stem from a misinterpretation of strategic substitution as behavioural reduction: in the Egyptian case, rather than successfully suppressing contenders, state violence triggered mechanisms of adaptation in the Anti-Coup movement that ensured its resilience, and they even produced backlash effects as regards mobilisation rates. As I show in this dissertation, the perceived 'defeat' of the Anti-Coup Alliance was much more a consequence of its failure to detach itself from a problematic and partisan conception of legitimacy which reinforced the antagonism between the protest movement and the Egyptian public, rather than enabling a broader coalition of contenders.

Since the presented data allows for some ambiguity, as discussed above, the results of this thesis need to be interpreted with caution. On the one hand, they do not lend themselves to a general empirical argument. Overall, I find that over the lifespan of a movement the interactional effects of protest performances and repression on contenders, rather than clear-cut, tend to be inconsistent and punctual. In addition, in empirical reality, there is usually neither a clear-cut dichotomy between dissenters and incumbents, such as the one investigated in this thesis. With a view to 25 January, for instance, Shenker (2016, 12) has dismissed the binary between state and street as an elusive construct that served simplification but did not account for the variety of motives of the Tahrir protesters:

Not all Egyptians who have participated in the revolution would describe themselves as adversaries of the paternalistic state [...] Among those who joined the uprising against Husni Mubarak were citizens angry that the state was no longer carrying out its paternal duties effectively enough.

In a similar vein, during the contentious episodes discussed in this thesis a plethora of other actors were involved in the shaping and contestation of public discourse about the unfolding events. Their voices have not been explored with the same level of detail as those of the leading contenders—partly for lack of time and resources, partly because they did not figure in the protest event catalogues that provided the empirical backbone for the process tracing in this thesis. In addition, it seems fair to say that the methodological dualism of this thesis reflects the central antagonism in post-coup Egypt, and the two main conflicting players: the 30 June uprising effectively boosted political polarisation in Egypt. In this context, as I have argued elsewhere (Grimm 2013b), most political forces uncritically welcomed the crackdown on the NASL and the return of the generals to the political stage. Other players, such as the Constitution Party and the Social Democratic

Party,⁴⁹⁸ felt compelled to side with the interim authorities despite their criticism of the state violence, lest they risked victimisation themselves (Hamzawy and Dunne 2017). Few non-aligned forces, such as the Bread and Freedom Party or the moderate Islamic Strong Egypt Party of former Brotherhood Guidance Bureau member Abdel Moneim Aboul Futuh, attempted to resist the political binary and establish themselves as a ‘third way’ between the army and the Brotherhood. But they were too weak to articulate and effectively promote their alternative visions of popular legitimacy and a post-coup democratic order in Egypt. While outside the scope of this dissertation project, it would be worthwhile to explore these ‘silences’ in a follow-up project. Such an investigation would not only contribute to a more nuanced picture of the dynamics that effected Mursi’s fall and Al-Sisi’s rise to power. In light of the autocratic restoration in Egypt and the bleak prospects for national reconciliation, returning to these early attempts to resist securitisation and offer an alternative to the two hegemonic projects portrayed in this thesis might also produce a new positive vision for the country and harbour the potential for resistance to the authoritarian status quo.

Related to this unexplored external multiplicity of voices is the understudied internal variety of the protest movements that are covered in this thesis. Their designation as ‘Tamarod’, ‘Anti-Coup Alliance’, ‘NASL’, or ‘Popular Campaign to Protect the Land’ admittedly create an impression of these groups as unitary actors which is often not empirically warranted for. In social reality, coalitions of contenders constantly shift, expand and contract, dissolve and reassemble. For instance, as a consequence of imprisonment and persecution, the NASL’s initial command structure has been shattered. Due to the isolation of senior Brotherhood, *Wasat* and *Gama’a* cadres within Egypt’s penitentiary system and the decentralisation of the movement, the NASL’s initial leadership has almost completely lost its moderating influence over the movement’s grassroots. Analysts have pointed out that the Islamist youth in Egypt is increasingly questioning the directives of their detained leaders, with calls for a more radical approach to resistance gaining resonance (Awad and Hashem 2015; Trager and Shalabi 2015). This radicalisation of the discourse at the grassroots jeopardises the chances for reconciliation as much as the regime’s uncompromising crackdown which continues to date. The same holds true for regimes, states, authorities etc. These placeholder terms blend over internal disagreements and power struggles and obscure the fact that also the internal composition of those ‘on the other side’ of the

⁴⁹⁸ The Constitutions Party’s founder and most prominent advocate Mohamed El-Baradei abruptly resigned and left the country after the *Rabaa* massacre, leaving his party leaderless.

contentious struggle constantly alternates. This is sometimes the case even in reaction to the unfolding contentious dynamics, for instance, when ministers resign in response to brutal violence or are replaced for their failure to contain collective actions adequately. In theory, all of the main contenders of this thesis could also be analysed themselves as hegemonic arenas, where individual movement or regime components—down to the level of individual actors—interoperate and compete for interpretive authority over the **aims, motifs and identity of ‘the’ movement or ‘the’ state.**

I have endeavoured to account for this fluid nature of contenders by making the contingent character of cross-movement alliances the centre of several sections of this dissertation. More importantly, I have deliberately approached their contentious politics through the discrete protest event. The advantage of conceiving of movements as populations of events lies in the ability to symptomatically also capture processes of mobilisation that do not conform to the classical image of a social movement organisation engaging in a campaign. However, even the act of reconstruction involved in the coding of the event itself necessarily implies a range of simplifications that, on their part, reduce complexity and limit the ability to capture the multiplicity of protesting actors. Robin Wagner-Pacifici (2010, 1352) rightly states that, as we face the task of determining whether and how actions colligate into a historical event, we also face the task of demarcating it by limiting it to acts performed, for instance, on one day, by one group of people, in one space, or against one common target. Against this backdrop, I concur with James Jasper and Frederic Volpi (2018, 16) who have argued that the temporary unity attributed to players in the reconstruction of event history is but a necessary analytical device to cope with the otherwise impalpable “multiplicity in rapidly evolving political situations.”

The deficits as regards accounting for this multiplicity are engrained in the research aims and the methodology of this thesis. They should, however, not prevent further engagement with and refinement of the proposed research design. On the contrary, future projects could attempt to develop the proposed integrated approach to contentious politics further. This could be undertaken, for instance, by extending discourse analyses from official statements and joint movement positions to the examination of internal discussions—on social media or in group meetings—among the members of specific alliances; or by mapping the broader discursive context constituted by reporting and the mediated articulations of public figures and other political players, and how it supports or undermines the discourses of the principal contenders during a protest cycle. Alternatively, subsequent studies could explore a comparative angle. Other cases in the region, in fact,

lend themselves to comparison: for instance, the authoritarian contraction in Turkey prompted many observers to caution against the risks of the country following the ‘Egyptian model’. Notably, the convergence of authoritarian policies in both countries was initiated by two military coups.⁴⁹⁹ Comparativists have tended to view these coups as a factor that sets both countries apart—it successfully toppled a government in Egypt, while it failed to do so in Turkey. However, their argument hinges on its focus on short-term outcomes. By contrast, thinking of the coups as disruptive and transformative events that caused a reconfiguration of decision-making in both countries, the similarities between Egypt and Turkey are apparent. The Turkish case is just one of many examples that could be explored in a comparative design. Given the constraints of this dissertation, I am unable to follow this thread further: this dissertation engages with a single case in-depth and, while allowing for longitudinal comparison across the discussed protest cycles, it lacks the horizontal comparability that would enable me to generalise from the Egyptian case.

In spite of this limitation, the results of this thesis seem to indicate that a relational and multimethod approach can reconcile at least some of the conflicting findings that pervade the study of the protest-repression-nexus and provide a more nuanced picture of the highly situational causal dynamics during cycles of contention which accounts for contenders’ agency: “Although we may focus on one player, the approach discourages us from reducing the other players to the status of structures or a static environment” (Jasper and Volpi 2018, 16). Rather than seeking an overarching causal argument or refining the long-standing threshold models for backlash, scholars investigating the mobilisation-repression-nexus ought to direct their attention to processual frameworks that account equally for the material arena of contention—including protest spaces, tactics, timing and composition as well as the material features of state repression and policing—and contentious discourse, that is, the interpretive arena where players attribute meaning to the unfolding events. As this dissertation has demonstrated, Donatella della Porta (2017, 13) is correct when she contends that:

In order to understand movements in times of crisis, one must indeed move decisively from causal to processual approaches. As movements, as producers of their own [...] resources and sources of empowerment, enter into complex interactions within multiple arenas, the relations among players evolve in response to their strategic choices.

Building on this thought, I have shown in this thesis that it is furthermore the em-

⁴⁹⁹ I have argued elsewhere that one can think of the parallels between the authoritarian policies in both countries as the symptoms of a ‘convergence of governance’ which has gradually blurred the boundaries between formal democracies and authoritarian regimes in the region (see Grimm 2017).

bedding of this event-history within dynamic discursive arrangements that explains the emergence of new political opportunities for mobilisation and repression. This, in turn, determines the trajectory of protest campaigns and crack-downs, the rise and fall of social movements and regimes, and their failure and success in establishing hegemony for their causes.

10.3 Conceptualising the Discursive Arena

In this sense, this dissertation contributes to theory development by showing how procedural frameworks for studying social mobilisation can benefit from integration with discourse theory. This thesis has furnished evidence that exploring not **only the question ‘who acted how towards whom’, but also how these interactions** are interpreted and articulated in contending discourses can prove fruitful in reconciling the ambiguous findings that have pervaded the study of repression effects for several decades. By systematically linking the discursive to the material in an analytical framework informed by both post-foundationalist theories of discourse and hegemony, and the more dynamic and agent-centric perspectives of movement studies I have proposed a novel approach that provides a more complete picture of the dynamics of contention under conditions of authoritarianism.

This approach not only resonates with and complements interactionalist perspectives, which have recently gained new prominence in the study of contentious politics (e.g., Jasper and Duyvendak 2015; Volpi and Jasper 2018). It also contributes to conceptualising what Stefania Vicari (2015) has termed the ‘interpretative dimension of transformative events’: In this thesis, I have argued that discourse represents the missing link between transformative events and their impact on the trajectory of contentious dynamics. In a recent intervention, Della Porta (2018, 1) has argued that eventful protests can trigger critical junctures and thereby produce abrupt changes which develop contingently and become path dependent:

While routinised protests proliferate in normal times, under some political opportunities, some protests—or moments of protest—act as exogenous shocks, catalysing intense and massive waves of contention.

As I have shown, such critical junctures constitute moments of politicking, where assumptions about the social, previously taken for granted, come into question and the horizon of possibilities for the emergence and promotion of new meanings by social movements is expanded: “**Old lines of thought are disrupted, older constellations displaced, and elements, old and new, are regrouped around a different set of premises and themes**” (Hall 1980, 33 cit. in Della Porta 2018, 3). That is to say, the political power of moments of rupture, crisis, and transformation lies not in their concreteness and the clarity of their meaning, but in their

interpretive malleability. As such, they represent windows of opportunity for social movements to develop and promote alternatives to the status quo.

As I have claimed in the theoretical section of this thesis, this productive dimension of critical junctures is aptly captured in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's concept of 'dislocation': Engendered by a mismatch of unfolding events on the ground and the manner in which these events are articulated in hegemonic discourse, dislocation creates ambiguity. This ambiguity opens up the possibility of multiple meaning inscriptions and thus for processes of contestation—new counter-hegemonic projects are thereby enabled which may successfully or unsuccessfully challenge the current order. Pulling the two theoretical threads together, I have thus argued that movements can profit from the dislocations created by transformative events as symbolic resources for resistance: both the 30 June 2013 uprising and the tale of two insignificant Red Sea islands demonstrate that blatant gaps between discourses and government policies can backfire on their agents in the same ways as severe repression and outrageous police violence sometimes do (cf., Hess and Martin 2006; B. Martin 2005). When certain critical junctures **render it apparent that authorities do not 'walk their talk', mobilising actors are provided with an opportunity to subvert the hegemonic discourse that sustains the status quo.**

This dissertation furthermore connects the scholarly debates on transformative events and contentious coalitions by describing the processes of social movement alliance-formation as contingent reactions to critical junctures. The prelude to the 30 June 2013 uprising in chapter 5 and the discussion of the PCPL in chapter 9 exemplify how powerful actor coalitions usually emerge in response to a crisis of hegemony. Such a crisis results from the inability of the established system to effectively respond to social grievances and political demands and incorporate unfolding events into the discursive order. A link is thereby created between different groups who champion these grievances and demands (see Economidou 2018). They now share what Mouffe (2008) has termed a "**relation of equivalence**" based on their shared dissent with the status quo. This opposition can be formalised in protest coalitions. Sustained by a joint (often populist) discourse, a newly forged common political subject can thus emerge.

A closer examination of the 'discursive arena' of contentious politics can thus yield insights into such diverse social phenomena as protest backlash, the emergence of unlikely 'strange bedfellow' coalitions and the public toleration or even approval of mass killings and brutal repression regardless of their violation and transgression of formerly shared social norms. Discourses allow for either the acceptance of oppressive power relations or the emergence of counter-hegemonic

projects that enable new social movements to challenge the status quo and, if successful, inscribe a new social order. It is thus imperative to develop new methods to capture and analyse these discourses if we want to move beyond multi-pay correlations and achieve a **better understanding of the volatility and ‘eventfulness’** (Della Porta 2011) of contentious cycles.

In this thesis, I have suggested one potential way forward, by tracing discursive shifts in relation to transformative events through an integrated approach that combines the toolkits of protest event analysis and discourse analysis. In other words, event catalogues function as heuristic tools to capture **the ‘rhythm’ of social movements** and identify crucial turning points of their protest cycles, whereas semantic networks then provide the means to capture shifts in their discourses. This integrated research design combined the advantages of qualitative discourse analysis for detecting concealed and broadly internalised power structures and the micro-topics of social movement discourses with the methodical rigour of quantitative event analysis. And it enabled me to capture the dynamics of contention in post-revolutionary Egypt more completely than either individual approach alone because it accounted for both, the interpretive aspects as well as the physical arena of contentious politics. This integration of discourse-theoretical considerations and event history approaches admittedly cannot explain why certain perceptions and interpretations of political reality spread and created political legitimacies (whereas others fail to do so). Like the framing approaches, it ultimately lacks the empirical means to account for causality in social resonance processes. What it can do, however, is shed some light on the pertinent question regarding how contentious actors construct their own discursive windows of opportunity for mobilisation and **alliance-building through a responsive “politics of signification”** (Hall 1982, 64).

10.4 Opportunities for Continued Resistance

Consequently, I hope too that the narrative provided in this thesis holds some (if limited) value, for the countless activists, social movements and civil society associations in Egypt who are currently fighting an uphill battle against the tightening of authoritarian grip. This research does not provide concrete recommendations for how to challenge the hegemonic bloc in its attempt to revert the achievements of the 2011 uprising. This study does, however, demonstrate how even when the physical space is limited for protest mobilisation, there remains discursive space in which to challenge the status quo. One promising path for sustaining resistance in the context of near-total authoritarian closure seems to lie in the continued symbolic erosion of the legitimacy of those in power through the exposure of rifts and

disjuncture in their professed discourses. **In line with James Scott's** (2000 [1987]) seminal notion of 'weapons of the weak', I have illustrated in this thesis how, at **several instants of Egypt's post-revolutionary history**, groups without any material tools of power at their disposal successfully challenged their counterparts through diligent symbolic labour.

In this sense, showing how authorities perform actions inconsistent with their claims represent minor, yet often powerful rebellious acts that can dislocate hegemonic perceptions of social reality and thus undermine incumbents' basis of legitimation. One might expect that, in retaliation, authorities would adapt to these discursive attacks by modifying their narrative in the same ways they modify their action repertoire in response to the challenges posed by protests in order to incorporate and co-opt pressure (see Della Porta and Tarrow 2012). However, as the cases discussed in this thesis show, this is easier said than done and such adaptation attempts often prove to be a real test for the regime: the discursive strategies and symbolic structures that 'work well' in generating popular support, and hence most autocrats rely on are often hard to change. They have strong affective power and rely on clear-cut differences between what is right and wrong, what ought to be done and who ought to be fought against. These categorisations cannot be abandoned easily without causing the entire hegemonic order to sway. In other words, there is a certain path dependency to them; hence while dominant discourses, such as nationalist or securitising rhetoric may often be abstract, in the Egyptian case, the consequences of making them the imperative for political action are substantial:

Scale the conceptual frameworks embedded in those narratives into buildings, institutions, laws, cultural norms, and suddenly the burden of a simple story can become overwhelming (K. Abdalla 2016, 36f).

In this sense, the cases discussed in this thesis say something about the long-term prospects of Al-Sisi's autocratic rule in Egypt. They caution, above all, against overestimating his ability to govern the country by force and draw its legitimacy exclusively from a discourse primed on nationalism and **his government's** provision of security against all domestic and foreign threats. While exclusionary and securitising, nationalist discourses may work in the short-term to shore up regimes, in the long term they must be sustained by real policies and political action choices that positively affect the lifeworld of their audience. This audience—in this case, the Egyptian public—continually evaluates their congruency, punishes the betrayal of proclaimed goals with defection or dissent, and rewards congruence with loyalty. In the end, this balances the strong affective power of nationalism. The emotional component which makes it effective, at the same time, can become

its weak spot. When it becomes apparent during certain critical events that authorities do not stay true to their professed goals, this gap can represent an opportunity for mobilising actors to demand accountability and thus open up space for contestation and the articulation of political alternatives.

In a nutshell, it is far from certain that Egyptians will see Al-Sisi stay in power until 2030: The recent constitutional referendum may have extended the **president's maximum term-length**. However, several sensitive issues loom on the horizon that could test his nationalist credentials well before then: At **Egypt's southern border**, the popular uprising against President Omar Bashir has placed Al-Sisi in a quandary between fears of a contagion effect and the need accept the new realities in order to prevent Sudan from descending into conflict. **Bashir's** ouster demonstrated how civic aspirations for socio-economic participation and better living conditions have taken root in the region and might resurface in Egypt as well, should its government fail to be more responsive to its citizens.

Further down South, Ethiopia will soon complete the construction of its '**Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam**' in the headwaters of the Nile. The filling of this giant hydroelectric dam is **expected to deplete the river's** water supply on which Egypt so heavily depends for its fresh water. Though Al-Sisi has warned that any cutback of **the river's supplies** would be treated as a direct threat to Egypt's national security, he has made little headway in deterring the project. At the same time, **Egypt's Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation** has yet to present any viable alternatives to confront **Egypt's looming water crisis** through effective resource management or innovative irrigation methods.

To the East, Al-Sisi faces an additional quandary between the need to stay on good diplomatic terms and deepen security cooperation with Israel in Sinai and the strong anti-Israeli sentiments of the Egyptian public. This predicament has **been exacerbated in recent months** by **President Trump's** relocation of the US-embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and his push for a '**Deal of the Century**' to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict which is expected to reduce the size of the Palestinian territory further. Finally, even the islands controversy is likely to resurface, should the Saudi crown prince move forward with his plans to build a new metropolis and a 500 billion USD economic zone on the coast of the Red Sea—spanning across Jordanian and Egyptian territories, and including the recently ceded Tiran and Sanafir.

It is uncertain whether the Al-Sisi administration will be able to keep a lid on all these highly symbolic issues through repression and restrictions. Should it fail to **deliver on its promise to protect the nation's interest**, this might once again unite the opposition and drive Egyptians to the streets in protests.

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Appendix

A. Sources for Protest Event Analysis⁵⁰⁰

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⁵⁰⁰ All protest reports were retrieved from these sources between April 2014-September 2017. Sources marked with a star were no longer accessible at the time of manuscript submission or, in the case of the Rassd News Network, have been moved to new URL.

B. Codebook (Protest Event Analysis)

Variable	Description	Potential values / format	Note to coders
<i>no.</i>	The overall number of events coded on this day as an identifier	Numeric value	Adapt no. with of later additions.
<i>date</i>	Events are aggregated per day	mmm, dd, yyyy	In case of prolonged events, code event for each day
<i>daytime</i>	Time of the day when the protest event took place	1 = during daylight; 0 = during night-time	If not specified in source code with daylight
<i>friday</i>	Denotes events on Fridays	1 = yes; 0 = no	
<i>location 1</i>	Denotes in which governorate the event took place	Alexandria; Aswan; Asyut; Beheira; Beni Suef; Cairo; Dakahlia; Damietta; Fayum; Gharbia; Giza; Ismailia; Kafr el-Sheikh; Luxor; Matruh; Minya; Monufia; New Valley; North Sinai; Port Said; Qalyubia; Qena; Red Sea; Sharqia; Sohag; South Sinai; North Sinai; Suez	
<i>location 2</i>	Denotes in which city the event took place	Name of the city	Use Arabic name, IJMES transliteration
<i>location 3</i>	Describes landmarks or buildings, if protest took place in their immediate vicinity	Name of the landmark	Describe location as precisely as possible, with direct quotes from the source, if needed. Code with a proper noun, e.g., Midan al-Tahrir
<i>smo</i>	The group organising the protest event	Name of the organisers, e.g. April 6, Egyptian Trade Union Federation, <i>Nour</i> Party.	IF the organiser is not mentioned, are the protests attributable to one faction?
<i>motto</i>	Denotes if the event had a particular motto	Name of the protest event	Code with a proper title, e.g., "Friday of Martyrs".
<i>turnout</i>	Denotes how many people participated in the event	Imputed interval scale with values from 1-4: 1 (0-10.000 participants), 2 (10.000-50.000 participants), 3 (50.000-100.000 participants), 4 (more than 100.000 participants) OR exact number	IF not reported, use either imputed values according to repertoire OR according to your intuition.
<i>repertoire</i>	Denotes what repertoires participants resorted	d = marches with start and ending; s = sit-ins, blockades and rallies with fixed location; hc = human chain; moc = motorcade, mob = motorcade with bikes; c = creative action (theater plays, video screenings, street art); f = flash protest; x = other	Code most dominant repertoire. Code as a sit-in, if several marches converge in one place. IF no protest repertoire is reported, code as a demonstration.
<i>violence</i>	Indicates if violence was reported	1 = yes; 0 = no	Code low-scale violence (scuffles, stone-throwing, paint bombs etc.) as non-violent protest
<i>confront</i>	Were protests confronted?	1 = yes; 0 = no	Code interventions, dispersals, clashes, assaults on protests
<i>confront w/</i>	Who confronted the protesters	Name group involved in the confrontation	E.g., riot police, republican guard, army units, Tamarod
<i>source</i>	Reporting medium	Name, URL	Code as many sources as found

C. Summary of Anti-Coup Protest Event Data (aggregated per day/countrywide, Fridays marked in green)

date	mobilisation (event catalogue)		repression (Wiki Thawra)		
	rate (n)	turnout (N)	wounded	killed	arrested
Jul 3, 2013	18	490.000	53	17	208
Jul 4, 2013	11	290.000			23
Jul 5, 2013	38	990.000	305	55	334
Jul 6, 2013	12	405.000			8
Jul 7, 2013	41	605.000			24
Jul 8, 2013	12	295.000	1237	93	657
Jul 9, 2013	19	330.000			42
Jul 10, 2013	8	295.000			17
Jul 11, 2013	5	240.000			
Jul 12, 2013	19	900.000			16
Jul 13, 2013	8	395.000		1	
Jul 14, 2013	6	320.000			11
Jul 15, 2013	21	450.000	195	3	440
Jul 16, 2013	8	415.000			
Jul 17, 2013	17	435.000		3	2
Jul 18, 2013	10	265.000			23
Jul 19, 2013	23	885.000	8		21
Jul 20, 2013	10	325.000			8
Jul 21, 2013	19	310.000			
Jul 22, 2013	21	510.000	55	19	87
Jul 23, 2013	13	465.000			43
Jul 24, 2013	10	335.000			36
Jul 25, 2013	10	305.000			
Jul 26, 2013	35	1.210.000	659	109	233
Jul 27, 2013	10	265.000			0
Jul 28, 2013	15	380.000		6	13
Jul 29, 2013	12	275.000			30
Jul 30, 2013	23	545.000			6
Jul 31, 2013	17	300.000	5		
Aug 1, 2013	11	270.000			1
Aug 2, 2013	32	835.000			44
Aug 3, 2013	10	265.000			21
Aug 4, 2013	22	550.000			2
Aug 5, 2013	8	255.000			18
Aug 6, 2013	13	300.000			
Aug 7, 2013	13	280.000	1		
Aug 8, 2013	20	595.000			2
Aug 9, 2013	20	410.000	28		25
Aug 10, 2013	9	355.000			16
Aug 11, 2013	15	530.000			94
Aug 12, 2013	18	490.000			40
Aug 13, 2013	23	405.000		0	19
Aug 14, 2013	40	985.000	6906	1516	4168
Aug 15, 2013	27	340.000	67	8	60
Aug 16, 2013	64	910.000	1473	356	2269
Aug 17, 2013	13	105.000	11		626
Aug 18, 2013	25	165.000	1		314
Aug 19, 2013	24	120.000		1	112
Aug 20, 2013	23	155.000	1	2	93
Aug 21, 2013	19	95.000		1	74

Aug 22, 2013	18	110.000		1	156
Aug 23, 2013	52	830.000	5		129
Aug 24, 2013	23	195.000	2	1	116
Aug 25, 2013	25	125.000			8
Aug 26, 2013	39	195.000			59
Aug 27, 2013	24	140.000	18	6	32
Aug 28, 2013	27	135.000		2	
Aug 29, 2013	14	90.000			96
Aug 30, 2013	63	865.000	46	12	609
Aug 31, 2013	11	55.000		1	30
Sep 1, 2013	22	110.000			42
Sep 2, 2013	15	75.000			41
Sep 3, 2013	37	265.000			14
Sep 4, 2013	23	115.000			6
Sep 5, 2013	33	225.000			10
Sep 6, 2013	52	685.000			59
Sep 7, 2013	11	55.000			4
Sep 8, 2013	24	120.000		2	18
Sep 9, 2013	23	115.000	10	2	23
Sep 10, 2013	11	75.000			57
Sep 11, 2013	28	140.000			13
Sep 12, 2013	19	95.000			196
Sep 13, 2013	73	985.000		2	134
Sep 14, 2013	27	195.000			36
Sep 15, 2013	13	65.000			67
Sep 16, 2013	14	70.000			68
Sep 17, 2013	39	235.000			38
Sep 18, 2013	6	30.000			32
Sep 19, 2013	15	115.000			309
Sep 20, 2013	77	765.000			94
Sep 21, 2013	31	155.000	2		12
Sep 22, 2013	50	250.000			37
Sep 23, 2013	47	315.000		1	30
Sep 24, 2013	44	280.000		1	32
Sep 25, 2013	30	170.000			11
Sep 26, 2013	40	280.000			24
Sep 27, 2013	68	670.000			92
Sep 28, 2013	23	135.000			79
Sep 29, 2013	26	130.000			32
Sep 30, 2013	23	135.000			52
Oct 1, 2013	32	180.000	4		42
Oct 2, 2013	7	35.000	1		40
Oct 3, 2013	7	35.000			30
Oct 4, 2013	61	970.000	25		190
Oct 5, 2013	18	90.000			24
Oct 6, 2013	51	1.165.000	391	83	885
Oct 7, 2013	14	70.000			
Oct 8, 2013	15	75.000			1
Oct 9, 2013	7	35.000	1	1	33
Oct 10, 2013	15	75.000			15
Oct 11, 2013	46	330.000	7		5

D. Summary of PCPL Protest Event Data

date	mobilisation (event catalogue)		repression (FDEP)		
	rate (n)	turnout (N)	wounded	killed	arrested
Apr 8, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
Apr 9, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
Apr 10, 2016	3	450	-	-	7
Apr 11, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
Apr 12, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
Apr 13, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
Apr 14, 2016	2	600	-	-	0
Apr 15, 2016	23	23000	-	-	387
Apr 16, 2016	3	200	-	-	0
Apr 17, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
Apr 18, 2016	3	200	-	-	4
Apr 19, 2016	0	0	-	-	2
Apr 20, 2016	2	100	-	-	6
Apr 21, 2016	0	0	-	-	27
Apr 22, 2016	0	0	-	-	89
Apr 23, 2016	1	100	-	-	2
Apr 24, 2016	0	0	-	-	36
Apr 25, 2016	29	12400	-	-	721
Apr 26, 2016	1	100	-	-	14
Apr 27, 2016	0	0	-	-	3
Apr 28, 2016	1	100	-	-	0
Apr 29, 2016	0	0	-	-	1
Apr 30, 2016	1	300	-	-	8
May 1, 2016	2	600	-	-	8
May 2, 2016	1	300	-	-	1
May 3, 2016	1	200	-	-	0
May 4, 2016	1	500	-	-	9
May 5, 2016	0	0	-	-	3
May 6, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
May 7, 2016	0	0	-	-	1
May 8, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
May 9, 2016	0	0	-	-	5
May 10, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
May 11, 2016	0	0	-	-	1
May 12, 2016	0	0	-	-	1
May 13, 2016	0	0	-	-	1
May 14, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
May 15, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
May 16, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
May 17, 2016	1	300	-	-	0
May 18, 2016	2	800	-	-	1
May 19, 2016	0	0	-	-	1
May 20, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
May 21, 2016	0	0	-	-	1
May 22, 2016	1	300	-	-	0
May 23, 2016	0	0	-	-	4
May 24, 2016	0	0	-	-	0
May 25, 2016	0	0	-	-	0

E. Source Pool for Discourse Analysis⁵⁰¹

- April 6 Youth Movement. *Official Facebook Page @shabab6april*. <https://www.facebook.com/shabab6april/>.
- Egypt's Ministry of Defense. *Speeches and statements issued on its official website*. <http://www.mod.gov.eg/ModWebSite/>.
- Egypt's Ministry of the Interior. *Speeches and statements issued on its official Facebook page @moiegy*. <https://www.facebook.com/MoiEgy/>.
- Egypt's Ministry of the Interior. *Speeches and statements issued on its official website*. <https://www.moi.gov.eg/home/index>.
- Egypt Presidency. *Speeches and statements issued on its official Facebook page @alsisiofficial*. <https://www.facebook.com/AlSisiofficial/>. Records and transcripts were also partly available on Youtube, the official SIS website; other transcripts were released by Al-Shourouk and BBC Arabic.
- Freedom and Justice Party. *Freedom and Justice Gate*. <http://fj-p.net/category/news/>.
- Freedom and Justice Party. *Official Arabic website*. <http://www.fjponline.com/>. *
- Freedom and Justice Party. *Official Facebook page*. <https://www.facebook.com/FJParty>.
- Information Decision Support Center (IDSC). *Official website*. <http://www.idsc.gov.eg/idsc/News/View.aspx>
- Muslim Brotherhood. *Ikhwanonline. Official Arabic website*. <https://www.ikhwanonline.com/>.
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- Mursi, Mohammed. *Speeches and public statements*. Records and transcripts were released on Al-Jazeera, Youtube, Scribd, the official SIS website and several private blogs.
- National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy. *Official Arabic Facebook page @alliancesupportinglegitimacy*. <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy/>.
- National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy. *Official English Facebook page*. <https://www.facebook.com/Egypt-Anti-Coup-Pro-Democracy-Alliance-222974781194704/>
- Popular Coalition to Protect the Land. *Official Facebook page @Egyptisnotforsale*. <https://www.facebook.com/Egyptisnotforsale/>.
- Rassd News Agency. *New Website*. <https://rassd.com/>.
- Revolutionary Socialists. *Official Website*. <http://revsoc.me/statements/>.
- State Information Service. *Speeches and Statements by H.E. President of the Arab Republic of Egypt Abdel Fattah El Sisi*. <http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Templates/Articles/>.
- Strong Egypt Party. *Official Facebook page @misralqawia*. <https://www.facebook.com/MisrAlQawia/>.
- Students against the Coup. *Official Facebook page @sacmov*. <https://www.facebook.com/SACMov/>.
- Tamarod. *Official Facebook page*. <https://www.facebook.com/TAMROUD/>.
- Wasat Party. *Official Facebook page @alwasatparty*. https://www.facebook.com/alwasatparty/?ref=br_rs.
- Youth against the coup. *Official Facebook page @y.anticoup.official*. <https://www.facebook.com/Y.AntiCoup.Official/>

⁵⁰¹ Sources that were no longer online at the time of submission of this dissertation were made available in a dedicated online repository at <https://de.scribd.com/user/127738080/Jannis-Julien>.