

**The Material Politics of Revolution and Counter-Revolution:  
Labor Organization, Autonomy and Democratization in Egypt (2011-2016)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This is a study of democratization in Egypt through the lens of labor organization in the period following the fall of Hosni Mubarak. As a vehicle for collective action that is perpendicular to the Islamist-secular divide, labor organization produced cross-cutting cleavages that transcended intractable identity-based divisions. The suspension of prior constraints on political mobilization opened up spaces for the construction of autonomous working class organizations. An important subset of democratization theory has emphasized the role of working class organizations and political conflict over resource allocation in the institutionalization of democratic orders. The double-negative of the non-emergence of an autonomous organization of the working class and the failure of democratic transition in Egypt steers this study away from a macro-level assessment of the impact of labor autonomy on democratization towards an expository account of the forms of political action undertaken in the pursuit of political autonomy. Taking the assembly of political actors as projects, I examine how various groups sought to mobilize available resources in those projects. In consecutive chapters I consider the impact of available tools, and gravitational constraints of economic legacies, institutional vestiges, the media environment and the legal apparatus on the failures and success of these efforts. What remains of these projects should impact future efforts to construct autonomous political actors, which in this study are defined as political subjects capable of a destructive withdrawal from alliances, the credible threat of which institutionalizes the vulnerability of a governing regime.

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## **Acronyms**

AMCHAM	American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt
COSPE	Cooperation for the Development of Emerging Countries
EBA	Egyptian Businessman Association
ECESR	Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights
EDLC	Egyptian Democratic Labor Federation
EFITU	Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions
EGP	Egyptian pound
EIPR	Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
ERSAP	Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program
ESDP	Egyptian Social Democratic Party
ETUF	Egyptian Trade Union Federation
FEI	Federation of Egyptian Industries
ILO	International Labor Organization
KAPO	Al-Nasr Company for Clothing and Textiles
NDP	National Democratic Party
PCAW	Permanent Conference of Alexandria Workers
SCAF	Supreme Council of the Armed Forces



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The late Professor Stepan was particularly helpful not only in logistical and academic matters, but just as importantly, as a friend and an inspiration. I recall vividly my first interaction with him at my incoming cohorts' orientation at the department of Political Science in April of 2008: he asked a question to which I gave an argumentative answer. Jokingly, but with mock fury, he asked if there were any other PhD programs to which I had been accepted. When I replied that I had not, he bellowed: "Good, so you will be here next year and we can argue some more." Over the next nine years, he made good on the promise to argue, always speaking to me as if I were on an equal footing. As disorienting as this was, it was also inspiring, because more than anyone else I have met in academia, Professor Stepan managed to maintain a passion for politics, and passion for justice, that was never tempered by a much-heralded fifty-year academic career. He inspired me to write the dissertation through the power of example; by demonstrating that academic precision and passion need not be at odds in our work as political scientists.

My many years as a graduate student will be marked by the friendships I have formed there. The friends, most of whom were fellow students, will be lifelong companions within academia and outside of it. Amongst them are Claire Provost, Hiroaki Abe, Kuei-min Chang, Elham Sayedsiamdost, Jonathan Cleveland, Yasser el-Shimy, Michael Golan, Timothy Kaldas, Kristian Boyson, Adam Coogle, Kamal Soliemani, Dina Bishara, Olivia Mosely, Greg Halabi and Matthew Baker.

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FOR HAZEL

## Overture to Chapter 1

On July 3, 2013, there was a military coup d'état in Egypt. As a proactively instituted reduction of politics to an existential core, a conflict between those who were for, and those who were against, it was a time for political actors to stand up and be counted. One possible recounting of the event, and the actions leading up to and following it, is heavily tilted towards the deontological (ethical), where principles, philosophies and histories are contrasted to positions; an understandable inclination given the intensity of the oppression and the callousness of prominent figures expected to articulate and represent positions resistant to these reversals of democratization. Another approach is adopted in this chapter. I seek to examine these events in order to investigate the ontological status of actors to which positions (and actions) are attributed. The preliminary conclusion is that the attribution of positions to actors is an actively produced category error, part of a repertoire of autonomous political actors in the Egyptian revolution. The autonomous political actor is defined as that actor capable of destructive withdrawal from an alliance. Given that this is an identification that can only be made post-facto, an outline of the characteristics of an autonomous political actor is put forth, one that maybe developed into a grouping that endogenizes the preferences of its constituency over time. It is the political autonomy of actors organized around human labor, rather than their articulated position, that should be the key component of theories of democratization in comparative politics that are attentive to the role of the 'working class.' The political autonomy of labor is a potentially powerful democratizing force in Egyptian politics and an important, but poorly understood, component of democratization more generally.

# Chapter 1

## The Constitution of the Political Actor

Once upon a time there lived in Berlin, Germany, a man called Albinus. He was rich, respectable, happy: one day he abandoned his wife for the sake of a youthful mistress; he loved; was not loved; and his life ended in disaster. This is the whole of the story and we might have left it at that had there not been profit and pleasure in the telling; and though there is plenty of space on the gravestone to contain, bound in moss, the abridged version of a man's life, detail is always welcome.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Laughter in the Dark*

For a mass of people to be led to think coherently and in the same coherent fashion about the real present world, is a 'philosophical' event far more important and 'original' than the discovery by some philosophical 'genius' of a truth which remains the property of small groups of intellectuals.

Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

As the two of them were led to the gallows, the first turned to the second and said: 'You deserve this.'

Belal Alaa, Facebook post<sup>1</sup>

The end looked very much like the beginning. The images of masses assembled in the streets of Cairo on June 30, 2013, very much echoed the visible apogee of the revolution 28 months earlier, when a cascade of protests, violent suppression, and more protests resulted in the fall of the octogenarian president Hosni Mubarak. Though its designation has been subsequently

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<sup>1</sup> Belal Alaa's Facebook page, post dated 31 December 2013. <https://www.facebook.com/belal3>.

questioned,<sup>2</sup> the Egyptian revolution was at the center of the narrative order to which *all* of the formal entities participating in the protests against his successor, Mohamed Morsi, subscribed. That much was perhaps inevitable given all but a handful of the participating organizations existed prior to the fall of Mubarak.<sup>3</sup> The overwhelming majority of the tens of formal political parties, hundreds of associations and thousands of labor unions endorsed, mobilized for, and participated in the demonstrations on which the authorial justification for the removal of the executive was premised.<sup>4</sup> The numbers were enormous, and enormously impressive, such that the claims by television presenters that people on the street were more than those who came together in the overthrow of Mubarak were credible.<sup>5</sup> Photographed from up on high by military

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<sup>2</sup> Alternative designations include ‘uprising,’ ‘upheaval,’ and ‘refolution.’ Designators are ostensibly hedging their bets analytically, or otherwise fashioning a political stance out of their refusal to grant the moniker of Revolution to the collective action and its consequences begun on the 25 January, 2011. The politics of naming became prominent in the summer of 2013 when a large majority of Egyptian intellectuals, editorials in media outlets furnishing their platforms, and ministers in the new government insisted on characterizing the military’s removal, literally then figuratively, of then-President Mohamed Morsi, as a revolution rather than a coup. Whilst engaging those arguments seems fruitful, especially given the new regime’s unmistakable attempt to link its capture of the state and reordering of the public sphere with the reference to the foundational event of 2011 as by turns, a ‘second revolution,’ ‘a second wave’ or a ‘corrective revolution’, similar debates about the designation whether 2011 was indeed a revolution seem odd in comparison. The designation was little contested in Egypt itself; its existence had reached the status of common sense and a reference point for all political self-fashioning. Arguments based on ostensibly more objective measures regarding type and extent of change following the fall of Mubarak rest entirely on qualitative proximities of the new order to the old, or failure of the new order measure up to the most radiant of protest slogans, but seldom denying the emergence. With the possible exception of Bayat (2013), author of the aforementioned ‘refolution,’ none of these debates rested on an empirical account of political action during this period. Other commentaries, indexing some measures of change to shifting definitions of revolution in the social sciences reflect the relative poverty of that literature and the methodological folly of using a measure that is itself the most acute focal point of political action in a polity.

<sup>3</sup> Of the thousands of unions represented under the by the two large federations supportive of the demonstrations, only four had existed prior to that fall of Mubarak.

<sup>4</sup> This is inclusive of organizations which would soon after clash with the military-led government, namely the Strong Egypt Party (*Hizb Masr al-Qawiya*), the Revolutionary Socialists and the 6 April Youth Movement. The last of these has since been declared illegal by the judicial branch of the new regime and its leadership imprisoned.

<sup>5</sup> Other claims, namely that there were 33 million people on the streets on June 30, were not. The strains on credulity are imposed less by political analysis, logical or empirical, than by familiarity with limitations of physical spaces in which the demonstrations were staged. The number, however, became a repeated mantra that would echo announcements of the many measures taken by the post-coup leadership. The numbers were part of an extraordinarily intense and persistent campaign to boost the new order and malign the old, hence their effect as a stand-alone speech act cannot be parsed. However, at critical junctures, on points on which the new order may have been vulnerable, numbers were invoked to protect it. This was the case when Jen Psaki, spokesperson of the US Department of State, cited the 22 million signatures collected from Egyptian citizens withdrawing confidence in President Morsi as the reason why the United States would not halt military aid to Egypt. The 22 million figure has never been independently verified. In early 2015, both figures are still invoked. See Blumenthal, Max. “Egypt’s

helicopters that dropped Egyptian flags on the crowd below,<sup>6</sup> the many had become one, amongst whom were compliant constituents of the tens of parties, hundreds of associations and thousands of unions.

Concerns for representativeness were evident in the principal proximate outcome derived from this event. In a televised address on July 3, the minister of defense, Colonel General Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi,<sup>7</sup> was set to speak. On a shiny marble floor stood a large wooden podium that was itself placed in front of the four large flags of the Armed Forces. Behind the flags was a long darkened stairwell from which the speaker may well have emerged, had it not been for the flags. At the podium el-Sisi stood in full military regalia flanked by four rows of chairs – two on each side, radiating outwards from the podium. To el-Sisi’s right were seven individuals; four senior men from different branches of the Armed Forces were scattered between Mohamed el-Baradei, one of the founders of the National Salvation Front and head of the Constitution Party, Hamed Abdullah, the head of the Supreme Judicial Council, and Mahmud Badr, one of the young founders of the *Tamarod* (Rebellion) movement that had collected signatures from citizens “withdrawing confidence” from President Morsi and had called for the June 30 protests. He sat at the back left of the stage. To el-Sisi’s left, there were only two generals and five others; the Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadrus II, the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar, Mohamed el-Tayeb, the

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Number Game: How Crazy Claims of 33 Million Protestors Were Used to Boost a Coup.” *Alternet*, 19 July 2003: <http://www.alternet.org/world/egypts-numbers-game>.

<sup>6</sup> “Egypt Crisis: Mass Protests over Mursi Grip Cities.” *BBC News*. 1 July 2013: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23115821>.

<sup>7</sup> At the time of the intervention, as the minister of defense and military production, Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi, held the rank of *fariq awal* [translated as Colonel General], the second highest rank in the Egyptian Armed Forces on July 3. The intervention resulted in the installation of the recently promoted head of the Constitutional Court, Adly Mansour, as interim president of the republic. Mansour, in his capacity as interim president, then appointed el-Sisi to the post of *mushir* [Field Marshall], the highest possible military rank at the midpoint of his year long tenure as president. It was under this title that el-Sisi presented himself as candidate for president in the spring of 2014. See “Mansur yuraqi al-Sisi ila rutbat al-mushir.” *Al-Jazeera*. 27 January 2014: <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2014/1/27>.



Secretary General of the Salafist Nour Party, Galal el-Murra, the liberal columnist Sekina Fuad (the only woman) and, at the corner, the back right of the stage, sat Mohammed Abdel-Aziz, another of Tamarod's founders, sitting at a symmetrical point to his colleague.

Reuters reported that el-Baradei was there to represent the “the opposition National Salvation Front coalition and youth groups” and to “negotiate on their behalf.”<sup>8</sup> The two Tamarod founders' presence was a nod to the singular mobilization for which their organization was created, and a salutation of ‘youth’. Fuad filled the category of women. Sat next to each other, in the robes of their institutions, the grand sheikh and the pope were familiar figures, accompanying as they had Egyptian presidents since the foundation of the republic.<sup>9</sup> Abdullah, on his eighth day at the head of self-constituting body at the head of the judiciary, signaled the disposal of the state's legal infrastructure for the measures about to be taken, as well as representing the institution to which responsibility for the office of president of the republic would pass.<sup>10</sup> Only el-Murra's presence invited excavation;<sup>11</sup> as a representative of second

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<sup>8</sup> Saleh, Yasmin and Asmaa Alsharif. “Egypt Opposition Leader El-Baradei meets Army Chief: Source.” Reuters. July 3, 2013: <<http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCABRE9620HP20130703>>.

<sup>9</sup> The cultivated symmetry of the heads of these religious institutions as they sat next to Egyptian presidents never reflected the varying levels of autonomy of their institutions. For an overview, especially with regards to al-Azhar, see Moustafa, Tamir. “Conflict and cooperation between the state and religious institutions in contemporary Egypt.” *International Journal Middle East Studies* 32.01 (2000): 3-22.

<sup>10</sup> To the head of the Supreme Constitutional Court, Adly Mansour, on his third day on the job. See Sabri, Tariq. “Al Watan Tanshur Tashqil Majlis al-Qadaa al-A'laa al-Jadid: Hamid Abdullah Ra'isan.” 24 June 2013: <<http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/208862>>.

<sup>11</sup> His party had been widely considered to more wedded to an uncompromising implementation of *Shari'a* (Islamic law) than the Muslim Brotherhood, and in that sense, more ‘Islamist.’ Nour had captured 27.8% of the vote in a parliament dissolved by the judiciary six months into its existence. In their time in parliament, they had closely allied with the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, and the alliance remained well into Morsi's year as president. In January of that year however, Nour's leadership consciously charted an independent course when they began holding meetings with the leadership of National Salvation Front, but remained effectively neutral amidst the polarization. Although it is widely speculated that the party has lost much of its popularity and support after the coup, the speculation contains within it an assumption that such popularity remained the key to power and influence. The party calculated otherwise, and their actions, regardless of its strategic efficacy in achieving their stated goals, or normative judgments thereof, demonstrate a degree of autonomy absent in most, if not all, post-revolutionary political organizations.

largest party of ‘political Islam,’ his presence signaled an additional layer of the isolation of the Muslim Brotherhood, and their presentation as sole target of the action about to commence.

In his carefully worded eight-minute speech, Colonel General el-Sisi laid out a ten point plan outlining the ‘roadmap’ for the country’s political future, including the suspension of the constitution and the installation of the head of the Supreme Constitutional Court as interim president with powers to issue his own constitutional declaration.<sup>12</sup> The roadmap had come about as result of negotiations between the parties represented on stage, but in his speech, the Colonel General left no doubt who was the author of the political decision, beginning with the statement that “the Armed Forces could not turn a deaf ear nor a blind eye to the movement and the call of the masses of the people.”<sup>13</sup> All of those present on stage spoke after el-Sisi, though their words would have to await the explosive scenes of celebration for analysis. *Bayan el-Sisi* (el-Sisi’s declaration) sparked an orgiastic cacophony of fireworks, nationalist songs and joyfully weeping anchors on all the available television channels, interspersed with shots of the people assembled in Tahrir Square. An unscientific but nonetheless defensible claim can be made that the most repeated phrase by public figures and private citizens calling in to express their views to the celebrating anchors was ‘*Masr rig’it lina*’ (Egypt has returned to us).

The days that followed were ones of suspended animation; seething, quiet, ineffectual arguments, self-fashioning without pretense of consequence -- a condition that if any way representative of a larger group of people, must remain unverifiable. Whereas revolution is

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<sup>12</sup> It has never become clear what the substantive differences were between suspension and abrogation, though Nour Party representatives would later claim, to their supporters, that it was only their participation that secured the first outcome rather than the latter.

<sup>13</sup> The full text of speech can be found here: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/07/201373203740167797.html>. The state’s own information portal links to a video of the address under the title “The Declaration of the Armed Forces: Lieutenant General and the Deposition of Morsi.”

exceptional, its breakdown seemed modular. A science of politics that takes actors for granted is extraordinarily ill-equipped for modelling the interactions of those arising in a revolutionary situation, but seems uniquely equipped to derive a calculus of actors who remain fully formed and capable. Rather than seeking succor in the sentimental, I found Anthony Downs' then-novel observation about the irrationality of individual voting comforting (Downs 1957), for embedded therein is an argument for the rationality of silence. In a noisy space of entombment, I met with a friend on the night of July 5, who like myself had found himself outside of the evident majority, and together we met with a third who had left the square that night with a disquiet that he seemed eager to share. At café a few hundred meters from Tahrir, I indulged the novel disposition to listen rather than participate. In the space afforded by the lack of argument, I made note of theirs, and committed a brief exchange to my fieldnotes later that night:<sup>14</sup>

Person 1: The Brotherhood leadership gestured towards and initiated violence before June 30. And with stupidity and opportunism and incomparable shortsightedness they are playing their role with precision in the army's plot....What is enhancing fascist capabilities and populism are their confrontations and clashes with residents. Today there is news that three were killed in Manial and there is wailing in the street around us....In my opinion, mobilization and the defense of the squares is the possible alternative to civil violence, and refusal to leave the sit-in is the only guarantor against the scenario of the coup.

Person 2: Refusal to leave a sit-in that is supportive of the coup is the only guarantor against the coup? How?



Ever since Clifford Geertz's mesmeric description of Negara in nineteenth-century Bali as a "theater state" (Geertz 1980), the political role of spectacle has been given at least some

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<sup>14</sup> Translated, names redacted. That, it should be added, was the end of the discussion.

consideration in mainstream social science.<sup>15</sup> In the state described, political authority and its symbols are reciprocally defined in a hermeneutic circle in which meaning cannot be decontextualized, and for which neither a causal ordering nor exegesis can be sufficient. In Geertz's Bali, there exists “a state cult,” not “a cult of the state.”<sup>16</sup> The limitations of determined holism for any consideration of change, be it of the immediacy of a revolution, or the intricacy of democratization, are obvious. What is less so are its virtues; in a Geertzian spectacle, power is embodied in a spectacle rather merely expressed.<sup>17</sup> When the circle of expressive determinism is broken, a sort of spiral of symbolic deployments emerges in which a relationship of domination, of actors and acted upon, maybe derived. In her semiotic analysis of Syrian authoritarianism, Lisa Wedeen illustrates how ritualistic spectacle makes ‘accomplices’ out of a citizenry who could not possibly believe the incredible claims about their leader, but are isolated from each other when they act ‘as if’ they do (Wedeen 1999). Their performance, rather than their beliefs, is what embodies their compliance. The public sphere, filled with ‘monotonous slogans and empty gestures’ is then shorn of discursive tools for meaningful collective action – with participation in a pro-coup demonstration in order to oppose the coup an illustrative, but imperfect, example.

The imperfection is significant. A symbolic system, even one in which the deployment of signs effectively asserts the victory of one and the defeat of another, is in any event a system, a set of procedures, principles or signs in accordance with which something is done. As a result, the role of its constituent parts in the functioning of the whole, even if it is ambiguous, monotonous and empty, is implied. The micro-foundations of political semiotic analysis are

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<sup>15</sup> If not, necessarily, political science.

<sup>16</sup> Geertz, Clifford. 1980. *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 102.

<sup>17</sup> The ritual, Geertz argues, ‘actuates’ political power.

essentially Foucauldian; the individuated self, through the exercise of his or her freedom, disciplines his/herself in such a way that is congruent with the exercise of power (Foucault 1982).<sup>18</sup> Linguistic delicacy is always a requirement in the rendering of a political situation in these terms, for even if the symbolic deployments are instrumental, they are inscribed upon foundations that are entirely pre-given; by ‘western modernity’ in the lectures of Michel Foucault, or decades of centralized authoritarianism in Wedeen’s Syria. The foundational political act has no author.

The absence of an author did not matter nearly as much in 2011. Mainline social science had never produced a consensus position on the causes of revolution; the central text in that literature remains a structural account in its fourth decade of publication (Skocpol 1979),<sup>19</sup> which despite several generations of engagement could only counsel that revolutions may well be ‘emergent phenomena’ (Goldstone 2001) whose surprising occurrence should not necessarily remain a surprise *after* they have occurred (Kuran 1989, 1991).<sup>20</sup> The rarity of revolution meant that early academic and semi-academic writings emphasizing the meaning-making spectacle of the filling of public squares (Alexander 2011), the impact on world history (Dabashi 2011), or, in the Egyptian case, a uniquely miraculous manifestation of a universal yearning for freedom

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<sup>18</sup> Foucault, Michel. "The subject and power." *Critical inquiry* (1982): 777-795.

<sup>19</sup> The fact that the patterns of class dominance under the ancien régimes did not seem to dictate outcomes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen (the countries which experienced the fall of the head of state) is not itself problematic for Skocpol’s theory. The author goes to some length to emphasize that her account is an explanation of *social* revolution as one that is clearly distinct from *political* revolution, which, by definition requires much more than the fall of the head of state, but must await the reconfiguration of social classes in society. The point here is not critique or support Skocpol, but to demonstrate that the paradigmatic theory of revolution was of little utility for political scientists considering the Arab Spring.

<sup>20</sup> Kuran’s elegant model of revolution, which is in fact a model of protest, is based on the prior existence of private preference that expressed only the presence of similar preference by others during a protest; hence allowing for a cascade effect in a situation heretofore generally characterized by passivity. Interestingly, Wedeen finds traction in this model in her semiotic analysis on Syria, where private discontent with the regime could quickly turn into a revolutionary situation whence the mechanism of ‘preference falsification’ is no longer operative. What is perhaps most noteworthy here is that shared unit of analysis, the individual. But whereas the economist Kuran simply assumes the atomized rational actor at the beginning of his analysis, in Wedeen’s conception, the cognitivist political subjectivity of the atomized individual maybe historically produced by authoritarian domination.

abandoned in the West (Zizek 2011) did not engender much contestation amongst social scientists. Thin as they were, the early drafts of history were not without foundation in recent political thought. Non-replicable events, or their concatenations,<sup>21</sup> were precisely the sort of arenas in which politics as the highest form of human action was to take part; the sort of non-instrumental collective action described by Hannah Arendt that is, by definition, irreducible to component parts, and therefore immune to causal ordering (Arendt 1958).<sup>22</sup> Ephemeral but unforgettable, the scenes of tens, if not hundreds of thousands of people together chanting words that seemed to be underlined in the air were enough to humble political scientists who had spent two decades cataloging absences in Middle Eastern politics; or, as two critics acerbically put it ‘waiting for Godot’ (Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004). The unfamiliar presence of the masses pushed more reflexive comparativists to advocate for the study of local practices independent of the role they were to ostensibly grow to play, and categories they would eventually fill in models derived from Western capitalist democracies (Howard and Walters 2014).

The military coup, by contrast, was not an unfamiliar presence. Political scientists have recorded some 450 attempted coups between 1950 and 2010 (Powell and Thyne 2011). Taking the unusual origins as pre-given, the central paradigm for the analysis of politics after the fall of Mubarak was that of a democratic transition, including by prominent Egyptian politicians, one of whom, Ali el-Silmi, even held a government position as ‘deputy prime minister for issues of democratic transition.’ Steeped as it is the political history of Latin America, scholars of the comparative politics of democratization had counted the most prominent ways in which this

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<sup>21</sup> Famously, Skocpol, who wrote a fine history of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions, justified the presence of that history as a strategy that ought to adopt when “there are too few cases, and too many variables” (Skocpol 1979). For an important critique see Sewell, William H. "Three Temporalities: Towards an Eventful Sociology." *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (1996): 245-80.

<sup>22</sup> Although this account of politics is derived from *The Human Condition*, the theme of new beginnings, that is ‘natality,’ is evoked in Arendt’s other works, including *On Revolution* (1963).

process was halted and reversed, and hence had internalized that “the central problem of democratic consolidation is to avoid a military coup” (O’Donnell 1985: 1). Whereas the interlocutor seeks elaboration, justification and rationalization, the political scientist seeks parsimony. Faced with the central claim of the spectacle’s enthusiasts that the military was called upon by civilians to intervene, the political scientist would readily cite the leading volume on military coups, wherein the author found that in the six-month period leading up to most Latin American military coups there had been a civilian constituency *publicly* calling for military intervention (Stepan 1971). That interlocutor would be, regardless of how he or she chooses to define themselves, part of a ‘coup coalition,’ and the only relevant point they would be making is about the size of that coalition, not its ends. Indeed, when a political scientist subjected the events in Egypt to 15 different definitions used in the discipline to characterize military coups, the answer came back ‘coup’ every time (Powell 2013). It is impossible to deride a group of people for their fealty to abstract categories and roles that are so fully occupied and performed by actors in the drama; waiting for Godot ceases to be folly when Godot does indeed arrive.

Expectations congruent on the behavior of a military in government after the overthrow of democratically elected executive were met. The pictures of the celebrating masses would likely not have been shown on television channels supportive of the deposed president, but the relative unity of representation of spectacle was shored up when armed military personnel escorted the staff of three Islamist channels to confinement. Immediately after el-Sisi’s speech, these channels went black.<sup>23</sup> The deposed president was held incommunicado by the military at a location believed by his supporters to be the headquarters of the Republican Guard in the north-

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<sup>23</sup> Mustafa, Hind. “Media Watchdogs Slam Closure of TV Stations in Egypt.” *Al-Arabiya*. 5 July 2013: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/2013/07/05/Media-watchdogs-slam-closure-of-Islamist-TV-stations-in-Egypt-.html>

east of Cairo. As they congregated outside the heavily guarded compound, a conflagration of contested origin resulted in the shooting dead of 51 people, then the ‘bloodiest state-led massacre since the Egyptian uprising of 2011’ (Loveluck 2013).<sup>24</sup> The Armed Forces issued a statement entitled “Their Past is Their Present,” exonerating itself of the killings, claiming that the protestors shot each other in order to foment division, and editorializing, somewhat crudely given that the claim was limited to the title of the statement, that such actions were in keeping with Muslim Brotherhood’s tradition.<sup>25</sup> Though gruesome, the details of the massacre were soon eclipsed by another, when on July 27, on the wide street leading to Rab’aa al-‘Adawiya Square where a very large sit-in was growing, 72 people were killed in what came to be known as the ‘Memorial Massacre’ (*mathbahat al-nasab al-tithkari*) owing to its proximity to the memorial of Anwar el-Sadat, who had been assassinated at same site 32 years prior.<sup>26</sup>

In the interim a government was put in place. The men in charge of state violence kept their posts; Mohamed Ibrahim, the minister of interior, and Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi, the minister of defense and military production were part of the new government, with the latter adding another title; “first deputy prime minister for national security.” Significantly, six prominent figures were appointed. From the July 3 stage, the head of the Constitution Party, Mohamed el-Baradei, was

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<sup>24</sup> The designation is controversial given that some accounts put the death toll of the November 2011 massacre by combined police and military personnel in Mohamed Mahmoud Street connecting Tahrir Square and the Ministry of Interior at higher than 50. At a soccer game in the coastal city of Port Said, 74 members of the “Ultras” fan group of Al-Ahly football club were trampled to death when the gates of the stadium were sealed shut and the electricity in the stadium was cut. The Ministry of Interior was strongly suspected and the Port Said chief of police was charged. The numbers reported by Loveluck regarding the first of the post-coup massacres were largely uncontested, perhaps because they were quickly dwarfed by the violence that followed. See Loveluck, Louisa. “A Massacre in Cairo.” *Global Post*. 16 July 2013: <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/middle-east/egypt/130716/egypt-cairo-muslim-brotherhood-republican-guard-massacre-july-8>

<sup>25</sup> What is worthy of consideration about this extraordinarily clumsy statement was strange vow by the Armed Forces to bring a lawsuit against the Brotherhood. The statement released on the military command’s Facebook page, their chosen venue for comment on the subject. The full text is available here:

<https://www.facebook.com/bilqas.egypt/posts/10151468335466104>

<sup>26</sup> Jones, Sophia. “‘What Happened Today Was a War Crime.’” *Foreign Policy*. 28 July 2013: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/07/28/what-happened-today-was-a-war-crime/>



appointed vice president of the republic for international affairs. Hazem el-Beblawi, the liberal economist and one of the founders of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party (ESDP) was asked to form a government. He appointed another co-founder of ESDP, the mild mannered and thoughtful economist and writer Ziad Bahaa el-Din as deputy prime minister and minister for international cooperation. Hossam Eissa, a Nasserist professor of international law, a former member of the steering committee of the Constitution Party, was appointed deputy prime minister and minister for higher learning.<sup>27</sup> The caustic Ahmed Hasan el-Bora'i, also of the Constitution Party, was back in government as minister for social solidarity. As minister of manpower and immigration in 2011, el-Bora'i had with the stroke of a pen destroyed the formal monopoly of workers' representation by decreeing that any 50 people may deposit papers at the ministry and hence be granted recognition by the state as an independent labor union.<sup>28</sup> Kamal Abu 'Aita, the charismatic labor leader who had extracted from the Mubarak regime the first recognition of independent union for real estate tax workers in 2009 through relentless organizing, strike action and protest was also part of the government, as minister of manpower and immigration. Abu 'Aita who had helped build upon el-Bora'i's executive decision at the Egyptian Federation of Independent Unions (EFITU) resigned from the presidency of a federation that claimed 600 member unions in order to embark on what he described as a 'mission' to achieve a new trade union law and to restore jobs to workers who had been subject to arbitrary dismissal.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The sensitivity of this position the context of deeply polarized politics may not be immediately clear to the reader. The universities, however would quickly prove a consistently robust arena for mobilization against the incipient order.

<sup>28</sup> For details see Benin (2011).

<sup>29</sup> El-Bayh, Heba. "Al-Arabi: Al-'huriyat al-naqabiyah wa 'awdat al-mafsulin aham awlawiyat Abu 'Aita" [Al-Arabi: Union Freedoms and the return of the dismissed are Abu 'Aita's most important priorities]. 14 July 2013: <http://elbadil.com/egypt-followups/2013/07/14/173602>

The six new members' opposition credentials were impeccable, having all directly participated in the uprising against Hosni Mubarak, or had expressed unambiguous support for it prior to its resolution. In an interview in exile, el-Baradei revealed that what he called the key portfolios were picked by him.<sup>30</sup> Having reportedly vetoed el-Baradei forming the new government himself, military leaders evidently allowed him free hand in choosing all but the security ministries – the lack of inclusion of these as 'key' in el-Baradei's formulation reflects their absolute centrality as *wizarat siyadiya* (sovereign ministries) rather than their marginality in the shaping of state action. The taken-for-granted autonomy of the institutions of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior meant that actors in command of the state's capacity for violence were in coalition with, rather than components of, a government whose task would formally come to be the management of a 'second transition' after a 'second revolution.'

On July 17, I returned from a trip to Alexandria where I had been attending the weekly seminar by the Permanent Conference of Alexandrian Workers (PCAW). At the seminar, where workers in ongoing disputes are provided a forum to seek solidarity and legal assistance, the administrators had expressed disappointment that the man most readily identified with independent labor organization had called for a one-year moratorium on strikes and protests, but were still cautiously optimistic that it was him rather than someone else, who was at the helm of a ministry generally hostile to their demands. "We have Mr. Kamal's number," Khaled Toson, the vice-president of PCAW, told those in attendance, "and he has been responsive" (*'mutagawib'*). Outside Ramses Railway Station, Cairo's central transportation hub, the relevance of ministerial responsiveness to his sector to immediate government action did not

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<sup>30</sup> For el-Baradei, that meant the prime minister and ministers responsible for matters related to the economy and foreign affairs were directly chosen by him. Interestingly, matters economic did not seem to include the labor portfolio. Abu 'Aita was the prime minister's choice: "Hazem and Ziad knew him. I didn't, but I knew that he was a revolutionary and that he lived in Tahrir." Interview, October, 2014.

seem to be of paramount. In the expanse surrounding the station's eastern gate the usual gaggle of street vendors populated the available space on the pavements either side of the road, in front a row of shops selling fresh juice, food, electronics and apparel. In between the vendors' carts stood a row of minibuses – the most affordable mode of transportation within the city, servicing travelers on the most affordable mode of transportation to the city. A large majority of the carts and shops bore glossy posters of Colonel-General el-Sisi, freshly pinned and plastered. Some depicted his silhouetted image alongside a lion looking at the same distant object, while others placed his image under that of Gamal Abdel-Nasser, the Egyptian colonel who became a president – suggesting a direct lineage. Standing outside their minibuses, most of the drivers were advertising their destination by shouting ‘Rab’aa, Rab’aa,’ the name of square where supporters of the deposed president were gathering in large numbers to participate in a sit-in and protest. The political polarities represented invited discord, but there was a relative harmoniousness of functioning of all the components of the scene – as much as there can be harmony outside of Ramses Station in any case – suggesting that whatever tensions may have arisen between the sellers, drivers and passengers had been resolved. This had been going on for some time.

By mid-July, the sit-in at Rab’aa al-‘Adawiya Square was well into its third week. The considerable mobilizing power was evident as tens of thousands of people descended on the capital to join one of two sit-ins, at Rab’aa al-‘Adawiya in the northern end of the large urban sprawl of Nasr City in Eastern Cairo, a sit-in which was organized by the Muslim Brotherhood, and al-Nahda Square, at the gates of Cairo University across the Nile in the Giza part of the capital, organized by the Brotherhood’s ally, al-Gama’al-Islamiya (the Islamic Group). It was in Rab’aa however that scale of a spectacle began to take shape redolent of the Tahrir masses. To

combat the absence of aerial photography for example, protest organizers began to equip toy drones with cameras, which, from a position high enough above ground level started to capture another ‘mass of the people,’<sup>31</sup> that amorphous actor to whom, on July 3, the Armed Forces could neither ‘turn a deaf ear nor turn a blind eye.’” In a resounding echo chamber, the counter-public of Rab’aa subjected to the fiercest of propaganda assaults; with accounts circulating and re-circulating about dead bodies under the Rab’aa and culminating in a headline in large circulation state-owned newspaper proclaiming the presence of “Chemical Weapons in Rab’aa and Nahda.”<sup>32</sup> It was against this backdrop that the cabinet, and within it the men of impeccable credentials, sat down to make a decision.

Foreshadowing the Kremlinology to which analysis of post-Rab’aa Egyptian politics would descend, some secondary reports hinted at a discomfiture expressed by members of the cabinet about the state’s plan of action. The coalition in power claimed its authority from the spectacle of the masses on June 30. The spectacle of Rab’aa, which had not only persisted but grown in the extreme summer heat, and was approaching its fiftieth day, had become a direct assault on those foundations. This is probably what inspired members of the government to cast the question of the ongoing sit-ins as a threat to ‘national sovereignty.’ Given that association with the Egyptian state’s proposed course of action would likely to be costly, especially for those who fashion themselves as democratic or liberal, then we would have expected that these individuals, hidden away from the enforcing public gaze, to shirk responsibility for the violence

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<sup>31</sup> Ferguson, Jane. “Toy Drones used to record pro-Morsi Sit-ins.” Al-Jazeera. 13 August 2013: <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2013/08/20138133950103343.html>.

<sup>32</sup> “Asli’ah Kimawiya fi I’tisamy ‘Rab’aa wa al-Nahda.” (Chemical Weapons in the Rab’aa and Nahda Sit-ins). Al-Akhbar. 6 August 2013.

(Olson 1965).<sup>33</sup> In any event, on the morning of the dispersal, 14 August, it was only Mohamed el-Baradei who submitted his resignation in protest. None of his appointees followed suit.

The massacre in Rab'aa al-'Adawiya was in the anodyne language of a rights organization “the worst unlawful mass killings in the country’s modern history.”<sup>34</sup> The massacre became the still center of a whirlpool moving towards military dictatorship. In the absence of familiar sound during the enforced night-time curfew that followed, the firings of different kind of guns were indistinguishable from the perverse frequency of firecrackers, perhaps celebrating the authorities’ achievement, which had come to be known as ‘the clearing’ (*al-fad*). If a coup had within it a propensity towards an existential calculus by rational actors, the event negated competing logics; a coup of the moderate variety was precluded and centripetal tendencies galvanized, not least by placing the country under a months-long military curfew and the suspension of the entire railway system. The subsequent move from ‘ruling but not governing’ (Cook 2007) to direct military rule, had by the end of 2014 resulted in at least 3248 deaths at the hands of security personnel, compared to 1075 in the uprising against Mubarak, 438 under the rule of Supreme Council of Armed Force (SCAF) and 470 under Morsi, alongside the addition of an 41,163 prisoners to the penal system (Wikithawra).<sup>35</sup>

The literature on coalitions suggests that existence proof of a coalition maybe derived from instances when actors vote in ways that are contrary to their own preferences but consistent

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<sup>33</sup> Absent, of course, an external enforcement mechanism.

<sup>34</sup> Which raises the question of the category of ‘lawful mass killings,’ which, were it to exist, must have been borne of a moment of unprecedented hegemony of the most cold blooded of legal positivisms. Since Human Rights Watch does not excuse the authorities, both legislative and executive, embodied in the interim President Adly Mansour, nor the judiciary, represented by Mansur’s nominal appointee the Public Prosecutor Hisham Barakat, then it is safe to say that the organization does not subscribe to legal positivism. The philosophical poverty of a legalistic account aside, Human Rights Watch has done the most complete job of documenting the details of the massacre. See also *All According to Plan: The Rab'a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protesters in Egypt*. Human Rights Watch, 2014: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/08/12/all-according-plan/raba-massacre-and-mass-killings-protesters-egypt>

<sup>35</sup> See the robust documentation at <https://wikithawra.wordpress.com/>.

with those of the group (Krehbiel 1993). It may make more sense however to withhold the deployment of this literature until further investigation: the descriptor “June 30 Coalition” deployed to enumerate the forces aligned against Mohamed Morsi may well have become a category-error when it was joined by the Armed Forces on July 3. Clues pointing to this conclusion could be derived from statements of the parties, unions and individuals themselves. Upon the appointment of the six opposition figures to government, both the Constitution Party and the Egyptian Social Democratic Party issued remarkable statements in *support* of the Armed Forces’ roadmap and the new government but *denying* that their members in government were their representatives. They were chosen for individual qualities that, if they were linked with constituencies, were thus linked at a much more abstract level than the political party – (lack of) criteria confirmed by the man who did the choosing.<sup>36</sup> Mohamed el-Baradei was dismayed when the interim president’s constitutional deceleration entrusted in the presidency all executive and legislative powers, a renegeing on what he claimed was a prior agreement with General Colonel el-Sisi that the presidency would be a ceremonial post with all powers entrusted to his appointee, the prime minister. Were these commitments, and the dismay at their breaking, a matter of public dispute? They were not, he revealed; all were private.<sup>37</sup>

For his part, the labor leader Kamal Abu ‘Aita had resigned as the founding president of EFITU, the labor union federation, in order to assume the cabinet position.<sup>38</sup> Signaling his support for the process underway, he had called for a one-year moratorium on labor protests, a proclamation that was met with dissent by his second-in-command, Fatma Ramadan,<sup>39</sup> and lack of support by the Egyptian Democratic Labor Federation (EDLC), the other large grouping of

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<sup>36</sup> Personal interview with Mohammad El-Baradei, October 2014, Boston.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> A position for which he ran uncontested in March of 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Personal interview, July 17, 2013.

independent unions that emerged after the breakdown of state's monopoly of labor representation in 2011. The still extant corporate body that had lost that monopoly, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), was as enthusiastic about the new order, offering to donate 2.5 Egyptian million pounds (EGP) of its members' dues to the state in order to ease the latter's financial crisis,<sup>40</sup> as it was hostile to the appointment of Abu 'Aita, whose prior activities it deemed illegal. This last claim, given the persistence of Law 35 of 1976 governing the parameters of permissible institutional frameworks for collective action by workers, was technically correct.

Abu 'Aita, a much more charismatic figure than the naturally withdrawn el-Baradei, made bolder, testable claims about what he had come to describe as a 'personal mission' in government. Whilst promising to work with 'everyone,' including the hostile leadership of ETUF, he also promised a new union law 'within 48 hours.' With a law not forthcoming, Abu 'Aita's claims were subjected to a measure of sorts when a group of labor activists inaugurated a webpage called 'The Abu 'Aita Meter.'<sup>41</sup> When military personnel broke up a sit-in by workers by Suez steel workers on August 12, the new minister justified the action as an intervention in order to prevent the self-immolation by one of the protestors, and further hinted that members of the Muslim Brotherhood were behind the protest.<sup>42</sup> By the time he was replaced in March 2014, the minister who had made himself most accountable by inviting measurement had failed to deliver on any of his promises; the meter long having become an arena of vociferous denunciation. It would take him a whole year to move back from quiescence to a claim that the

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<sup>40</sup> <http://m.almazryalyoum.com/news/details/232496>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/abo3itah>

<sup>42</sup> *Sawt al-Omal*. "Abu 'Aita Yakshif 'an Ta'rid Qiyadat Ikhwaniya lil-Umal min ajl al-tadhahur" (Abu 'Aita Reveals Incitement by Brotherhood Leadership of Worker Protest). 13 August 2013: <http://www.soutalomal.com/>

“the methods of the regime” had become “worse than those [regimes] that were befallen by revolutions.”<sup>43</sup>

It is precisely an indifference to the sort of details just recounted that has enabled political scientists to understand, unlike many other observers, that this ship of Theseus remained an essentially military vessel even as all of its components were shuffled and reshuffled. The correlation of hundreds of observations of coups with undemocratic outcomes suggested, sagely as it turned out, that this is a polity, when taken as a case, would be one in which any reasonable measure of democratization would suffer. But the clarity afforded by this indifference comes, I will argue here and in the chapters to follow, at a prohibitive cost if we are to untangle mechanisms rather than outcomes. If we were to embed a military coup in a larger study of democratization - its successes, failures and prospects – then correlation would render an impoverished account of a (set of) process(es) that even within comparative politics has come to be understood as an outcome of ‘multiple causal pathways’ (Geddes 2003, 2007). More proximately, we would fail to understand the mechanism of the coup itself; namely why the end looked very much like the beginning.

The military coup is a political act that is, almost by definition, shrouded in secrecy. The opacity of deliberations within militaries produces a reliance on assumptions of institutional interests, which for a polity such as Egypt in which those economic interests are known to be large (Abul-Magd 2011) and the military’s role as a pillar in the authoritarian apparatus of the state well-established (Kandil 2012), leads to the production of fairly coherent decision matrices applicable to a given situation, such as that through which the Egyptian military seized power in

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<sup>43</sup> Diab, Abd-el-Ghani. *Al-Arabi al-Jadid*. 7 March 2015



the summer of 2013. The search for variance, alongside an availability heuristic, then leads to a study of other members of the ‘coup coalition,’ whose motivations are then explored. Though the liberals, leftists, Nasserists, labor leaders and intellectuals and so on may be more or less representative of constituencies, more or less coopted, their status as actors of consequence, *rather than individuals whose ephemeral presence is of consequence* is assumed.

The assumption is rooted in a weak form of methodological individualism. The most persistent proponent of methodological individualism in political science, Jon Elster, has argued that functionalist explanations of social phenomena -- that is, accounts not rooted in “properties, goals and beliefs” of individuals -- are “condemned to remain at the level of speculation” (Elster 1982: 454, 1989, 2007). Comparative political scientists, who do not on the whole import much from the sub-discipline of political theory, have taken up methodological individualism as a tool from economics in order to furnish their accounts with micro-foundations. They have, fortunately, been sufficiently influenced by a competing trend within that same discipline of new institutionalism (March and Olsen 1982), leading them to analyze the behavior of extant political actors – unions, parties, states and so on – and impose on them coherent decision matrices in models that account for empirical variation across cases. What the persistence of methodological individualism as an ideal has obscured however is that the atomized individual is not the bedrock upon on which all political action rests, but a power effect which any given political situation more or less approximates. The availability of utterances, actions and inactions of representatives of the civilian contingent of coup coalition makes available a set of preferences that in some fashion were aggregated as an outcome that underwrites mass incarceration, mass murder, and foreclosure of the expression of competing preferences. Political scientists, so clear-eyed in their reading in the events of July 3, 2013, were reduced to despair: “It was not simply the military’s

successful coup that was shocking – such a denouement was always a possibility,” wrote Marc Lynch, “The shock was the coup’s embrace by many of the popular forces upon whom hopes of irresistible change had been placed.”<sup>44</sup>

Yet it is no more coherent to despair at ethical degradations accompanying military rule, any more than it is to celebrate the virtue of some of those same forces in bringing about the fall of the entrenched authoritarianism of Hosni Mubarak. It is then a likely finding that individual-level motivations will be largely be in sync with macro-level outcomes with an unstated, commonsensical, but scarcely empirical assumption that an aggregation of a kind has translated these motivations into a foundational political act. The result is a sort of generalization of culturalist arguments previously focused on those associated with political Islam; wherein individual level attitudinal prerequisites for democratic outcomes would immunize a citizenry against authoritarian manipulations to the exclusion of whatever else actual processes of democratization might entail (Mitchell 2013).

There is of course no reason why, in the absence of formal modes of political representation, we should expect positions articulated through speech, action and inaction to track closely with those of the nominal constituencies that the civilian contingency in the ‘coup coalition’ was there to ‘make present again.’ The posing of the question in those terms however betrays certain limitations of method, and a related infidelity to the actually existing empirical situation. Inherent in the question is an assumption of a sort of principal-agent relationship between the crowds in the square and those present on stage; with as little as fireworks after the Colonel General’s declaration as evidence of some sort of linkage. Yet it has been decades since

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<sup>44</sup> Lynch, Marc. “Reflection on the Arab Uprisings.” *The Washington Post*. November 17, 2014. <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/11/17/reflections-on-the-arab-uprisings/>>.

Hanna Pitkin's groundbreaking work on political representation shattered the naïve assumption of the unidirectionality of this, the most central of relationships in political life (Pitkin 1967). Embedded in her overlapping taxonomy of formalistic, symbolic, descriptive and substantive representation is an argument that is far more obvious to observers than it is to political scientists; that preferences are at least partly endogenous to representation. When Pitkin's later work is taken into account, a rendition of political representation as 'quasi-performative' emerges (Pitkin 1975, Disch 2012). Here then, given the production and reproduction of preferences, we must pose the question, to what end is this put to use? Preferences, no matter how widely dispersed, do not political action make.

In this heterogeneous conception of representation, the claim that liberals, Nasserists, leftists and labor leaders poorly represented their constituencies becomes ineligible; it refers to external criteria which were not operative at the time. The symbolic representation by persons did indeed play a role in an event which, *post-facto*, could only be coherently summarized as the military take-over of government. That many persons played many and varied roles in the production of this outcome, goes to their autonomy, which again, *post-facto*, maybe be judged to have been deficient given the negligible impact of their exit from an alliance in which they were eager participants. Until a prospective model of the autonomous political actor is introduced (see next section) and situated within the theories of democratization, we may propose a preliminary definition of the political actor as *that agent capable of destructive withdrawal from an alliance with authority*. The encapsulation of this quality by agents who concretize a citizenry's abridgement of economic and the political would be the foundation of a materialist theory of democracy which turns not on an "institutionalized uncertainty" (Przeworski 1991) but an *institutionalized vulnerability of authority*. The outlining of such a theory must attempt to

illustrate, develop, and to a limited extent (using within-case variation) test the veracity of these theoretical propositions.

To re-appropriate a well-known aside, theorists may be entitled to their own methods, but not their own actors.<sup>45</sup>

The summer of 2013, however, was not an occasion on which to illustrate the emergence and assertions of newly autonomous political actors, but rather to witness the re-assertions of one political actor through the dismemberment of others. It does not seem to be entirely true that ‘men make their own history,’ but more precisely, it is political actors that do, and though they are indeed ‘constrained by circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past,’ this need not be the past of ‘generations,’ as Marx would have it, but something rather more proximate. In effecting its coup, the military actor rearticulated the phenomenon of mass protest under whose pressure the regime of which it was a pillar had unraveled. In this sense, its reformatting of the polity is extremely derivative, its authorship limited to an emplacement of others in a scheme already given. From its practices however, its iterative coping with political contestation, we can surmise that this authoritarian institution had derived its own practical conception of representation. Over the next year, the majority of prominent individuals that had emerged after the fall of Mubarak were given a transient role in the new order. In addition to the aforementioned, the founder of the Egyptian Democratic Labor Federation (EDLC), Kamal Abbas, was appointed to the state’s National Council for Human Rights, and the newly elected president of that federation, Yusri Ma’ruf, was one 50 people appointed to a new constituent assembly headed by the man who came in fifth in the 2012 presidential elections, Amr Moussa.

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<sup>45</sup> Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s quip was about facts; and in a sense, political actors, not rational individuals, are the authors of political facts.

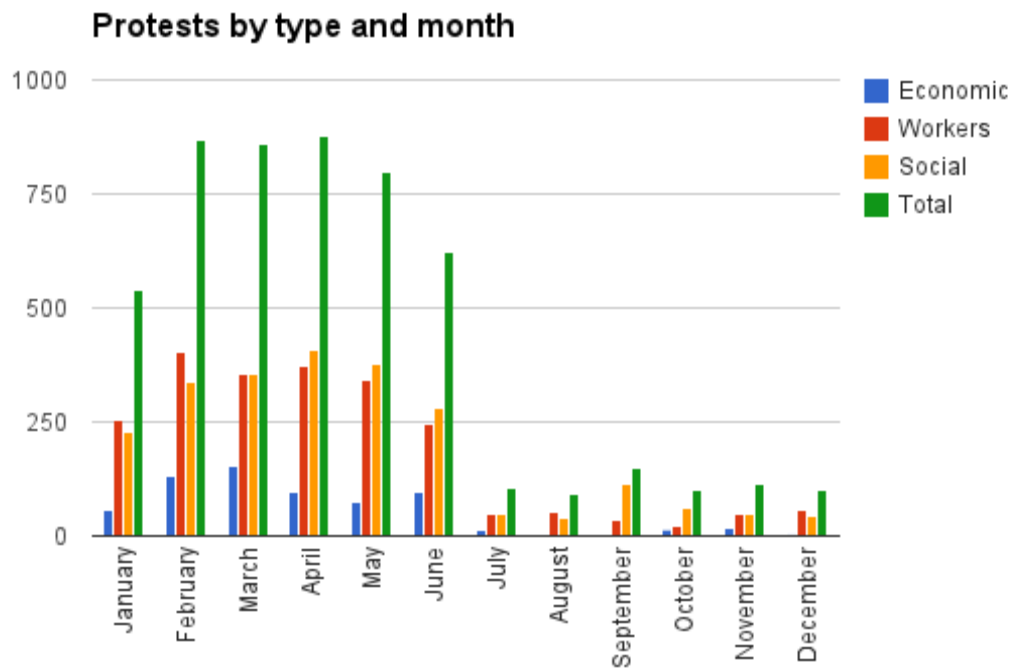
The man who came in third in those elections, Hamdeen Sabahi, would be the only candidate to enter the 2014 presidential race alongside now-Field Marshall el-Sisi. One derisive, but not inaccurate, reading of Sabahi's performance judged him to have come third in a two-man election.<sup>46</sup>

By the end of 2013, the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) released a comprehensive report on protest on matters excluding politics. From a distance, someone unfamiliar with inveterately local nature of Egyptian labor protests could conceivably judge that the moratorium promised by an incorporated, individuated labor leader had been respected by an expectant constituency. In some ways the tools of the gun, the massacre and the curfew look very much like incorporation into a governing coalition:<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The number of spoilt ballots in the 2014 elections was greater than number of votes received by Sabahi. The final tally was 93.3% for el-Sisi, 3.7% spoilt ballots, and 3% for Sabahi.

<sup>47</sup> "Taqrir al-I'tijajat al-Sanawi 2013" (Annual Report on Protests) by the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights: <http://ecesar.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Protest-report-2013-Web.pdf>



**Figure 1: Annual Report on Protests in Egypt**

Was the ‘labor movement’ neutered by the incorporation of one its most charismatic leaders? For those tracing the political work involved in the stitching together of a collective actor (Collier and Mahoney 1997) to mobilize in a complex process of democratization, there can be no immediately encouraging answer to the question. Either an actor had been formed and successfully mobilized in a military coup against an elected president, or the thousand or so unions nominally mobilized on June 30 were little more than an illusion sold by the leaderships of two incipient federations in a new order of things; with no real capacity to ally and withdraw allegiance from the new regime.

The answer to this question is considerably more complex than the dichotomy would suggest. After eighteen months of fieldwork spread over two years I have come to second Benin’s observation that all labor action remains resolutely local (Benin 2013). Yet the nexus of

the overlap with national level politics has undoubtedly grown. When I first arrived in Egypt with the intent of investigating the rapidly changing capacities for labor action, I sat down with a group of workers from the Suzuki Automobile Company at a coffee shop where they were meeting an activist, Wael Tawfik - technically a journalist - who was advising them on strategy to adopt with an employer who was refusing to negotiate with their newly established union. The employer, along with others, Tawfik reported, was making hurried concessions to workers all over the country. At Suzuki, the general manager had summoned the workers on February 11, the day of Mubarak's resignation, offering a pre-emptive deal. Two years later, the haphazard, blustering negotiations that I had been tracking between a worker delegation and al-Nasr Company for Clothing and Textiles (KAPO) had broken down in mid-June when the majority owner's emissary told the delegation that negotiations over unpaid wages would be halted until June 30. In early July all the worker leadership identified as agitators in the largely female workforce were fired and negotiations were not resumed.

Workers never sought systemic change, yet everywhere they were within its throes.

In December of 2013 I returned to Giza to visit with Tarek el-Beheiry in the Imbaba Garage (bus depot), one of the leaders of a headline-making bus strike that had paralyzed the capital city in September 2011. The encounter was illustrative of the quotidian frailty of individuals and the difficulties, even ill-advisability of embedding attitudes in the causal order leading to an emergence of a political actor. El-Beheiry, an intensely charismatic man, baby-faced, rotund with large beard of the kind favored by Salafists, sat behind a desk in an office he rehabilitated as a Benevolent Association for workers in the Public Transportation Authority. Behind him was a large poster with the four-fingered Rab'aa sign that had come to symbolize opposition to the new regime by memorializing its greatest atrocity. As we sat down, a lowly

security person, associated with the Ministry of Interior in a non-obvious way, walked in and asked for my identification papers.

“He’s Egyptian you know,’ said el-Beheiry with a laugh to the man from the ministry. He then turned to me and said, “You know I talked a Norwegian student two weeks ago named Kristian. They docked me one month pay for espionage (*takhabur*). When I called Kamal Abu ‘Aita about it, he said ‘this is ridiculous; for espionage you either get a death penalty or you’re innocent.’”

I had resolved to write an ethnographic account based on people’s actions, not their responses to questions about beliefs and attitudes. But I could not resist.

“You have a relationship with Kamal Abu ‘Aita? What do you think about his role in this government?”

“Kamal Abu ‘Aita is the workers’ beloved (*habib il-umal*),” he said, “but if there is a war he knows which side I will be on.” His tone remained matter of fact when he said, “He called me you know.”

“When?”

“The night before the clearing. He said, ‘Sheikh, don’t go tomorrow.’”

He didn’t go.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Interview, Tarek el-Beheiry. 22 December 2013.



Most Marxist writing on revolution has focused on what causes it, how to bring it about, and surprisingly little on its outcomes (Walzer 1980, cited in Foran and Goodwin 1993). In a similar vein “the social history of Egyptian labor,” writes one prominent historian and political scientist, “is written from left to right” (Goldberg 1996: 163). Outside of economics, much of the academic work on labor in general, and Egyptian labor in particular, has been one of a recovery of agency in the manner of ideological assertion. Yet in the decade preceding the Egyptian revolution so stark was the rise in labor action, ranging from demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes and riots, that a body of empirical data on the phenomenon became impossible to ignore; ‘a wave of protest unprecedented since the 1940s’ (Benin 2009: 2). There was an immediacy to the phenomenon. The secular increase in number was punctuated by particular actions. Between June 2005 and May 2006 there was a 25% increase in the number of labor protests, jumping from 198 to 250.<sup>49</sup> Labor protests continued with vigor through 2007, when a three-day strike organized by spinning and weaving workers at one of the biggest public sector factories (employing 27,000 workers) lasted for three days, marking the biggest labor strike since 1994.<sup>50</sup> The following table, circulated widely prior to the revolution, records a 400% increase in protests in the decade between 1998 and 2008.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Al-Masri Al-Youm, 1/5/2006 no.687, <http://arabic-radio-tv.com/newspapers/egypt/almasryalyoum.htm>

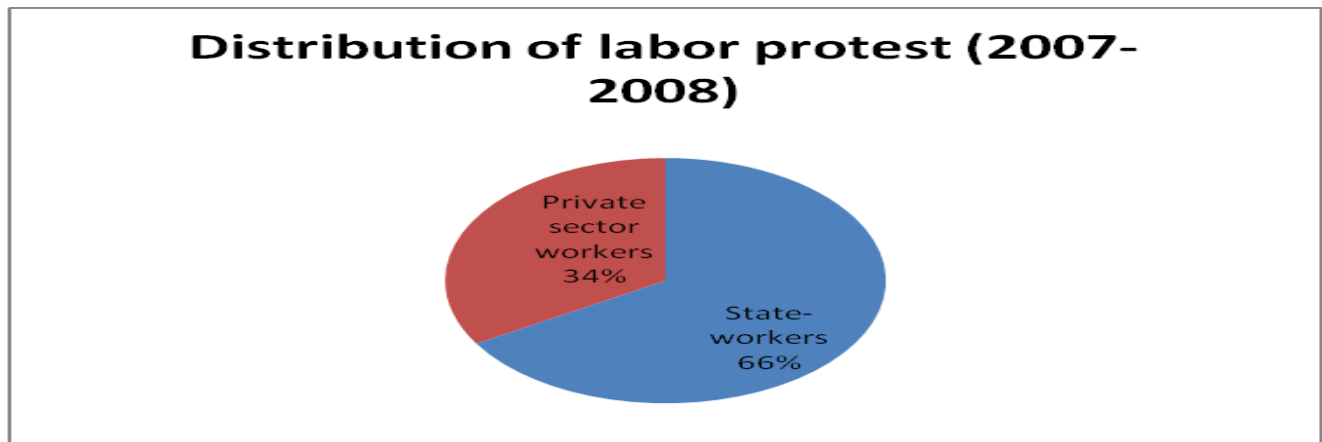
<sup>50</sup> Aljazeera, 5/2/2007, <http://aljazeera.net/portal>

<sup>51</sup> Adly, Amr. “The Political Economy of Trade and Industrialization: Turkey and Egypt in the Post-Liberalization Era.” PhD diss., European University Institute, 2010: 200

<b>Year</b>	<b>Protests</b>	<b>Strikes</b>	<b>Sit-ins</b>	<b>Demonstration</b>	<b>Gathering</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1998</b>	42	40	18	14	NA	114
<b>1999</b>	60	54	32	18	NA	164
<b>2000</b>	NA	40	48	47	NA	135
<b>2001</b>	NA	19	32	64	NA	115
<b>2002</b>	NA	24	26	46	NA	96
<b>2003</b>	NA	25	22	6	33	86
<b>2004</b>	NA	43	90	46	87	266
<b>2005</b>	NA	46	59	16	81	202
<b>2006</b>		47	81	25	69	222
<b>2007</b>	19	74	179	49	179	500
<b>2008</b>	29	129	218	78	NA	454

**Table 1: Labor Protests by Year in Egypt**

What is more, there was also evidence to suggest that the majority of these protests were undertaken by public sector workers or civil servants; as in a sample from 2007-2008 for example. This suggested an erosion of a large negative constituency by the regime. The state could no longer rely on a ‘wage truce’ with wage earners effected through the happenstance of low inflation rates in the 1990s, following the spike in those rates in 2004 (Soliman 2005) .



**Figure 2: Distribution of labor protests in 2007-8<sup>52</sup>**

The state’s own corporate body, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), which had monopolized labor representation, was set up in 1957 as a pillar of a corporatist authoritarian system, and within that context and those constraints was able to mitigate some of the deleterious effects of a turn towards market economics. It became an arena where a ‘moral economy,’ rather than class consciousness, was the mechanism through which workers were protected (Posusney 1995). That mechanism, however poorly it functioned, was further eroded in 1995 when the state removed legal personhood of ETUF’s 2500 firm level union committees,<sup>53</sup> channeling all dues to its 24 general unions. Access to board membership of those general unions was manipulated through timing of elections, in which newly elected members of the union committees were given one week to run. When they could not meet the criteria, an appointment was made by THE remaining board members. “What went up,’ Yusri Bayumi, the Muslim Brotherhood treasurer of ETUF told me during his brief tenure, “never came down”<sup>54</sup> in a structure that was and remains supremely hierarchical, as approximated by Marsha Pripstein Posusney (1997: 67).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> There were a further 1000 ‘administrative committees,’ which were exactly the same [as Union Committees] in their role, but functioning without the state’s acknowledgement of the elections through which their leaders were chosen. Interview with Yusri Bayumi, Muslim Brotherhood member and Treasurer of ETUF. April 6, 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

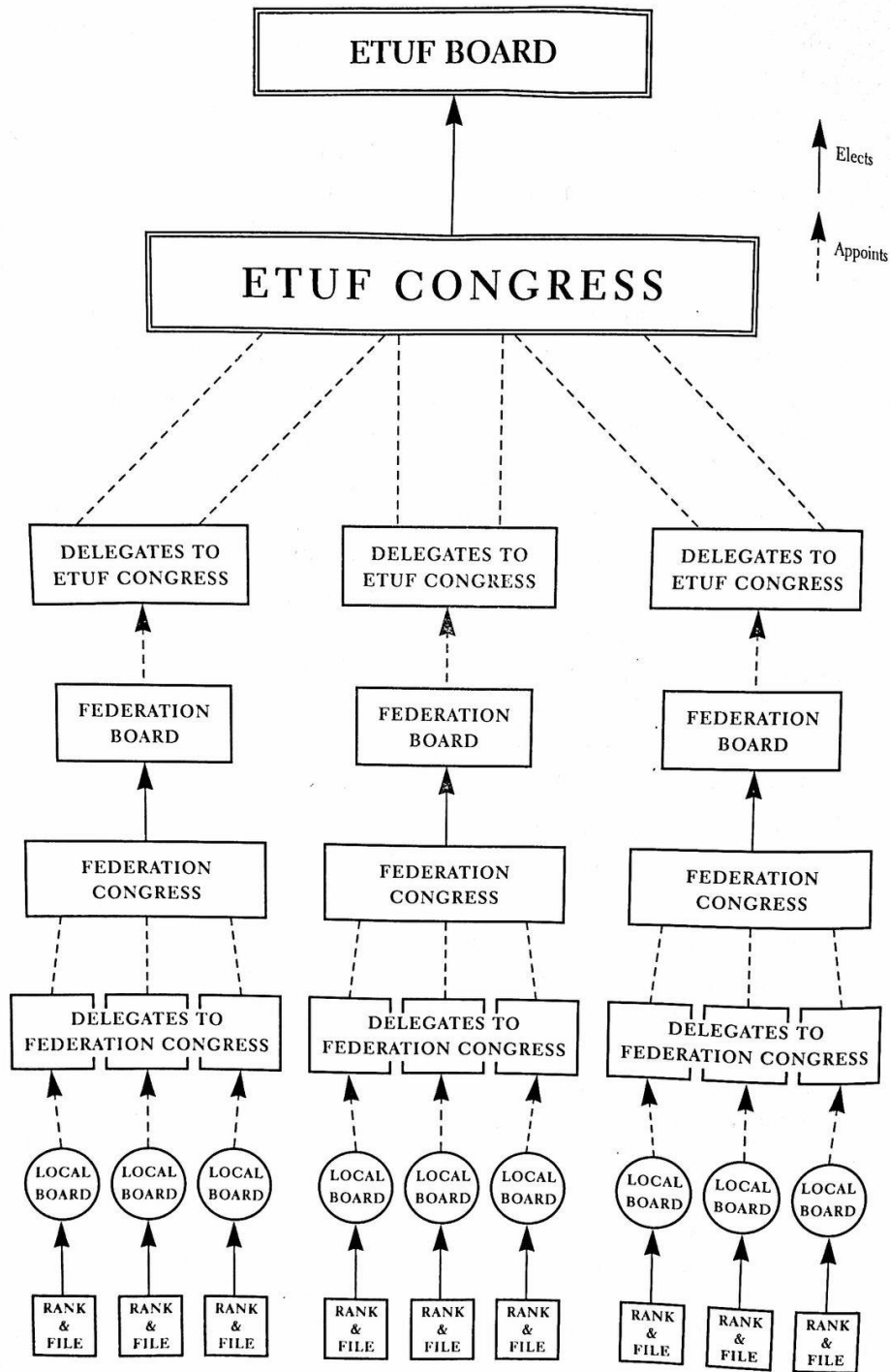


FIGURE 2.1

Structure of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation

### Figure 3: Structure of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation

With its corporatist structure decaying, the state deployed highly selective violence in its attempts to repress the unprecedented wave of protests, linking the protest's perceived capacity for diffusion with the decision to repress (La Chapelle, forthcoming), endeavoring to keep the broad socio-economic protests isolated from Cairo centered political protests (Benin 2009). Though Benin and others have claimed that the role of labor strikes was decisive in the Egyptian revolution of 2011 (Benin 2012), sources more closely associated with labor mobilization were more skeptical.<sup>55</sup> In any event, as a truism utilized in recruitment, the statement was not very effective, eliciting fear that the speaker was occupied with goals more general than those to which particular workers were immediately concerned, as often as it instilled a sense of empowerment. The impact of labor action on revolution and its impact on democratization must be analytically disaggregated; That is to say that mobilization of workers in popular protests, and the construction of unions as autonomous representatives of workers are activities that do not necessarily track together.

It was in the summer of 2011 that I first encountered the younger, less self-consciously academic group of leftists best represented by a slogan often attributed to the Trotskyist organization the Revolutionary Socialists: "Sometimes with the Islamists, always against the state" (Abdelrahman 2009).<sup>56</sup> Although of course anxious to emphasize the 'revolutionary role'

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<sup>55</sup> "We made a lot of calls," Nabil Abdel-Ghani, one of the founders of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions and later secretary general of the Egyptian Democratic Labor Federation, told me, 'but it was the kids in Tahrir who were crucial. Our people were not very responsive.'" Interview with Nabil Abdel-Ghani, February 2012.

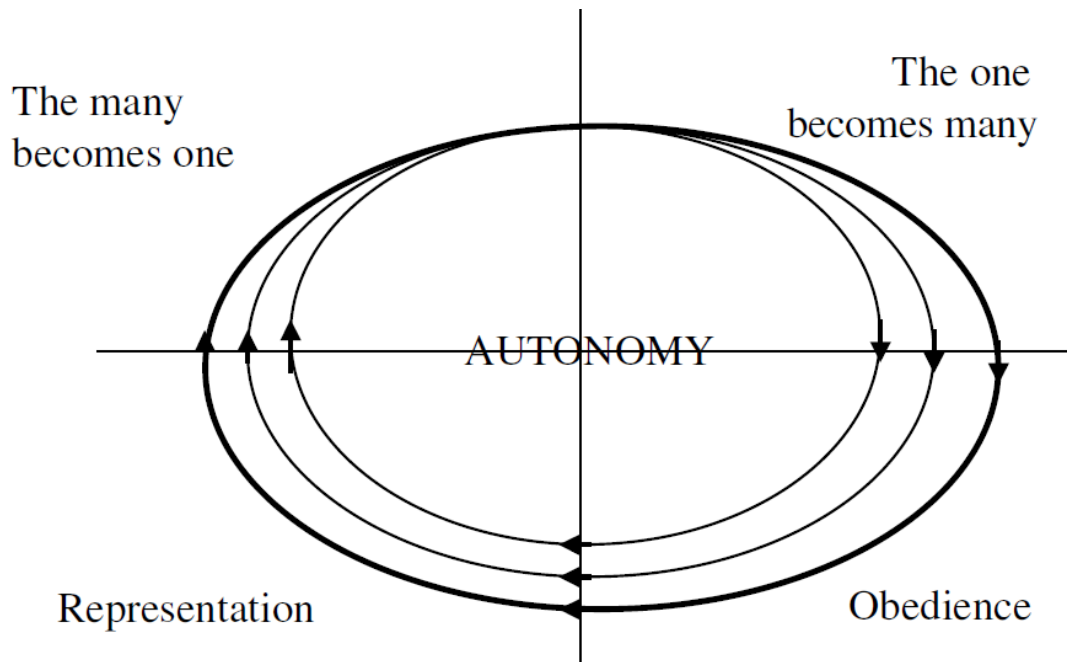
<sup>56</sup> The older leftists within the independent labor union movement had undergone what was for them a significant ideological transformation, since union pluralism was a heresy propagated by very few self-identified leftists, most prominently Attiyah el-Serafi in the 1970s and for the rest of his life until his death in 2006. Egyptian Marxists' ideological commitment to the 'unity of the working class' meant they remained committed to ETUF even as they were locked out of it. Still, vestiges of their days spent organizing in secret were visible in interviews; when Nabil

of the workers, what was more interesting about this small but highly mobile group was the quotidian work they undertook in building alliances across organizational divides, and their legal, and occasionally financial support, they gave to labor organizers. These, mostly, young people belonged to several organizations including the Revolutionary Socialists, the April 6 Youth Movement, the Popular Socialist Alliance Party, the Strong Egypt Party, and various NGOs including the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights. In their efforts to advance and protect ‘labor rights’ I saw an opportunity to investigate the success and failures of a stitching together of an autonomous political actor.

What then would that actor look like? The clue should come from the behavior of the military described above; an actor capable of endogenizing preferences, an actor capable of ‘looping the loop’:

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Abdel-Ghani told me about his days in a textile factory in Helwan in the 1950s, he lowered his voice, and drew closer to me as he said “I was in a secret organization...the Communist Party.”



From Latour, 2003: 150

**Figure 4: The Structure of Political Autonomy**

Consider the figure above, a tautology within the political sphere that enables the tracing of an autonomous group. On the left hand side we have a familiar idea of representation as somehow unifying the multitude. On the right hand side we have the exercise of power, what Latour (2003) bluntly calls obedience. The key point here is that the two questions regarding how to obtain representation and how to wield power are not, in fact two questions, but one question twice posed. To be autonomous one must be both the author of the law and must conform to it as a manifestation of docility. Tautology is constitutive of autonomy

The model is in fact derived from Bruno Latour's analysis of political speech, what he calls 'an enunciation regime.' Unlike Latour, I will not, in this dissertation be categorically opposed to reduction (Latour 1988) nor will I remain at this level of abstraction, rather I will try to recognize how reduction can be a powerful tool that workers put to use: what do street

vendors in Cairo do about the hostile ‘public,’ what do Alexandrian lawyers do about ‘docile women’ in a textile factory, what do brick workers in al-Saf do about ‘contracts,’ what does the state’s Petroleum Union do about the ‘*ikhwan*’ (the colloquial term for Muslim Brotherhood members), what do federation leaders do about ‘paper unions’?

The failures of elitist theories of democratization (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Acemoglu and Robinson 2003, 2006, Boix 2003) are not failures of egalitarianism. Rather they are not unlike the fortunate reductions of comparativists in the analysis of military coups; a failure to recognize that democratization is a struggle for power by political actors who are more or less autonomous; and a related recognition that though events may be repeated as tragedy, it is not history that does the repeating.



## Overture to Chapter 2

The elements of the breakdown of a regime are always embedded in the functioning of its old institutions. The recognition of a consequential politics in the rich array of authoritarian institutions beyond a legitimating façade has gone a long way to elucidate the dynamics of change in some regimes, including democratization, after the fact. Whether or not convincing mechanisms of political transformation are uncovered in such analyses, works in this vein are precariously prone to predicting the continuation of present trends; the perpetuation of the carefully extracted outcome a work is marshaled to explain, and the relegation of all events that are, in these terms, far too haphazard to qualify as an “outcome.” This is a mistake. This institutionalist approach is bound to the legacy of the work of Samuel Huntington on democratization; and I herein refer to this sort of analysis as Huntingtonianism or neo-Huntingtonianism. The status-quo bias of this neo-Huntingtonian institutionalism trades in one fallacy for another. By privileging a paradigm of democratic transition over revolutionary change with the implicit expectation of the reinvigoration of the barren institutions of the old order, models of democratization have underspecified the mechanisms of political change. This approach’s preference for parsimony is powerful when clear institutional coherence and interests can be assigned, as they were when the Egyptian Armed Forces overthrew President Mohamed Morsi in the summer of 2013. Yet as we saw in Chapter 1, when a principal actor from the ancien régime sought to generate sufficient leverage to act decisively upon the course of the political transition, it reanimated *revolutionary* means to re-assert its primacy in the new political order, ones that were initially directed towards the regime of which it, the Armed Forces, had been a pillar. Far from being a precisely defined strategic situation, Egyptian politics from

revolution to military coup, was an arena in which the rules and actors were subject to rapid, radical and consequential alterations. Just as the velocity of change blinded many a close observer to the gravitational pull of entrenched institutional interests, the stubbornness of identity politics and the enduring mysteries of class mobilization, the conclusive failure of the democratic transition has in turn occluded an appreciation of political transformations effected during the battle.

This chapter outlines a theoretical critique of recent institutional analyses in the literature by arguing that in this mode explanation of authoritarian breakdown and persistence, mechanisms that are at play in situations as complex and multifaceted as popular revolutions are permanently elided, to the detriment of our understanding of democratization in general and political prospects in the Egyptian case in particular.

## Chapter 2

### The Stage of Politics

Exhaustion of the politics of the ruling bloc does not automatically prefigure a radical alternative. It is a particularly sad chapter of a story which had begun with the promise of something like an 'Indian revolution', an understandably unpractical and sentimental beginning which promised to 'wipe every tear from every eye'. Even if we consider only the socially relevant tears, the promise is as distant today as at the romantic time when it was made.

Sudipta Kaviraj<sup>57</sup>

Things that can't go on forever, don't.

Herbert Stein, Chairman of Economic Advisors to the Nixon Administration<sup>58</sup>

Never mind, at least you saw the new world born.

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe to defeated Prussian troops after the Battle of Valmy, 1792<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Kaviraj, Sudipta. "A critique of the passive revolution." *Economic and Political Weekly* (1988): 2429-2444.

<sup>58</sup> See Krugman, Paul. "This Can't Go On." *The New York Times*. 4 November 2003.

<sup>59</sup> In another formulation: "From this place, and from this day forth begins a new era in the history of the world, and you can all say that you were present at its birth." (Doyle 2002: 193)

## **Part 1: Against Huntingtonianism**

Acting “as if” political institutions matter under the rule of authoritarian regimes has ceased to be a puzzle. For the investigators of democratization however, the discipline’s new findings brought into sharper relief extraordinary tensions that permeate our narratives of how countries become democracies. Institutions of government contain within themselves mechanisms by which resources and authority are distributed and reproduced. This seems to hold true in polities in which the deviation between the nominal functions that animate an institution’s modular form is very large. By design, evolution, or as a settlement of a non-fatal struggle, elections (Schedler 2002, Levitsky and Way 2002), parties (Brownlee 2007, Magaloni 2007), legislatures (Malesky and Schuler 2010, Blaydes 2011), judiciaries (Moustafa 2007, Hilbink 2007), even informal institutions (Singerman 1995) are arenas in which consequential adjudications of who gets what, when and how take place under political authoritarianism.

In the expanding literature on authoritarian institutions there has been a sense of excitement, even astonishment, at the discovery of their consequence. In a narrow disciplinary sense, this was important insofar as it has made politics in most of the world newly accessible. The maintenance, contestation and capture of power was invisible in metered readings of elections, legislations and judicial rulings as markers of a continuously or intermittently exercised popular sovereignty. Once these institutions were reintroduced as meaningful instruments of government, albeit non-democratic, a universe of cases became available to orthodox comparative politics that had previously been addressed holistically as part of an interlocking and evolving international order (see for example Mitchell 1991).

The emerging consensus revealed an apparent tension in the role of institutions regarding the question of democratization. It turns out that institutions provide the structure for collective agenda setting, dispute mediation between elites, incorporation of client networks, and the channeling of opposition. In the Arab world, elections (Lust-Okar 2006), ruling parties (Brownlee 2007), legislatures (Blaydes 2011), unions (Bellin 2000) and courts (Brown 1997) have worked together to undermine the autonomy of actors not already incorporated into the authoritarian regime. An illustration of the basic operation of these institutions maybe illustrated as follows: an election is run where an identifiable segment of the opposition is included, another excluded. The promise of a modulated degree of success incentivizes the moderate opposition *not* to join forces with the more radical excluded opposition in this rationally devised “divided structure of contestation” (Lust-Okar 2005). Once they have engaged this process, regime loyalists and the loyal opposition engage in an electoral competition that functions as a “decentralized distribution mechanism that aids authoritarian survival by regulating intra-elite competition,” whilst also simultaneously keeping elites invested in the regime, hence “extending their horizon beyond a single defeat” (Blaydes: 8,9, 63 2011). The emergent legislature is dominated by a ruling party whose first function is the administration of the ambitions of men and women, and who are secondarily cajoled and forced to cooperate and collaborate to produce law at the behest of the executive (Brownlee 2007). Whether or not these laws guide the work of a meaningfully autonomous judiciary, the rule of law undergirds a statist agenda that variously directs protests to longwinded legal struggles that end in rulings enforced, or not, at the will of the executive (Brown 1997) whilst simultaneously furnishing capitalists and international patrons with credible commitment to the enforceability of property rights and contracts (Moustafa 2007).

The contributions of this emerging literature have therefore all pointed to the utility of functioning political institutions for authoritarianism. This strongly empirical literature sat atop a taken-for-granted political development literature drawn the early career of Samuel Huntington who had famously reoriented considerations of newly independent nation-states from their “type of government” to their “degree of government” (Huntington 1965, 1968). The decoupling of efficient, rational, even ‘good’ governance from democratic governance in comparative politics bore within it the tension that any single narrative of democratization must at some point become a paradox; namely in the process of “consolidation.”

Having rejected the somewhat teleological projections of the modernization theorists writing at the dawn of the cold-war (prominently and nearly ubiquitously Lipset 1958 and Lerner 1958), the new Huntingtonian emphasis on efficacy offered that post-independence nation-building was composed of the largely domestic processes of integrating population and assimilating them into the emerging state apparatus, which might be authoritarian in the immediate term (Halpern 1964). Investigations of universal sources and processes of democratization were presented with a serious hurdle to clear; it seems that in order to create institutions through which and by which democratization takes place, a polity required a degree of ‘stateness’ (Linz and Stepan 1996: 16),<sup>60</sup> a requirement that citizens respect the boundaries and prerogatives of the states their rulers govern. It can, and for many has followed that to the degree that political breakdown can be parlayed into meaningful change that is then consolidated - for democratization to take place - the (re)establishment of order must precede the reassignment of sovereign power. This logic makes of Samuel Huntington’s acclamation and recommendation

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<sup>60</sup> To be clear, what Linz and Stepan indicate by this mean is not an authoritarian order, but technical and pragmatic administrative apparatus.

of a “non-communist Leninist type party” for “changing societies” a logical reflection of this priority of order for democratization.

The more recent literature on authoritarian institutions crystalizes the tension in the scholarship. The nebulous, and obviously nonlinear, relationship between political development and democratization bore within it a force that simultaneously shores up authoritarianism, up to and until the point it does not. It is at this historical/economic/political/demographic/cultural/technological juncture that the existence of differentiated, adaptive and complex authoritarian institutions enable successful democratic consolidation. An exemplary text in this vein is Beatrice Magaloni’s rich account of the 71-year rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Mexico.

Violence and fraud were never the staples of the longstanding regime, argues Magaloni, but rather secondary instruments in the modus operandi of generating widespread support through the building of an “oversized governing coalition.” On the governing side of authoritarianism, the seemingly inefficient strategy of seeking a super-majority becomes quite natural given that overwhelmingly poor voters can be ‘bought’ at a low price. Clientelism exercised through corporate networks in turn generates a dynamic in which poor voters rationally select authoritarianism that has incorporated their interests under certain specified conditions. Crucially, the authoritarian equilibrium jointly produced by elites and masses by the means of a political party and (relatively) free election is a dynamic one. Economic changes, induced by the perpetual need to facilitate the patronage at the heart of Mexican authoritarianism, and enabled by successful corporatization of workers and peasants, augured an economic transformation that eventually transformed the incentive structure for the Mexican voter, who on July 2, 2000, was

able to transcend the “tragic brilliance” of a system that had induced her to “vote for autocracy” for 71 years, bring to an end “*la dictadura perfecta*” (the perfect dictatorship).<sup>61</sup>

The increasingly expensive Mexican voter is an effective protagonist for a Huntingtonian transition. Orderly and scientifically measurable, her vote furnished two important components of the apparatus; it was peaceful *and* it provided all important micro-foundations of a theory of transition – in this case away from hegemonic party authoritarianism.

Magaloni’s richly empirical, theoretically informed explanation of the end of Mexican authoritarianism is an exemplary work and is no more a defense of authoritarianism than any of the works on authoritarian institutions cited above.<sup>62</sup> The mechanisms elucidated are only instructive regarding the measurable event that transpired on July 2, 2000. If these same mechanisms were discovered and corroborated by a 70-year-old Mexican voter in July of 1999, than it is obvious that they would explain authoritarian persistence rather than exit. That the mechanisms required the outcome to become discoverable is of course not a deficiency in work designed for that explicit purpose. In her enumeration of hegemonic party systems, for which the Mexican case of democratization would prove instructive, the reader finds Egypt under the rule of Hosni Mubarak’s National Democratic Party as an analog (37). This is precisely the sort of narrative produced by the Mubarak regime in the final two decades of its rule (Soliman 2005) a narrative which cannot be directly integrated into a comparative study of democratization, but which by design betrays a conservative, that is, status quo bias. Put another way, whereas Magaloni’s empirical analysis of the demise of an actually existing authoritarianism is obviously

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<sup>61</sup> The novelist Mario Vargas Llosa’s description of Mexican authoritarianism.

<sup>62</sup> Indeed on a basic level, it is straightforward to argue this literature is a critique of authoritarian regimes’ claims to democratic legitimacy. In keeping with the tradition of positive political theory, there is a strict segregation of the normative and the analytical. As characterized by the doyen of the tradition in the field of democratization, Adam Przeworski, the choice of topic maybe driven by normative concerns that must leave no trace on the conducting and production of the research itself (Interview in Munch 2003).



not an advocacy for its revival, Huntington, whose institutional logic underlies much of the comparative politics of democratization, did just that. Whatever acuity it may possess in explaining outcomes, a Huntingtonian theorist must always argue for the persistence of institutions up to and until they fall apart.

If it seemed at times that academic studies of democratization - their pride of place in regimes of diplomacy, aid and legitimacy - furnished authoritarian regimes with discursive repertoires, inasmuch as studies influence political outcomes at all, it is *not* clear that the scattershot critiques of the comparative politics of democratization effectively demonstrated such a relationship. The simplest and least sophisticated critique is one of bad faith. Writing of USAID's efforts directed at democratic institution-building in the Middle East in the 1990s, Egypt scholar Robert Vitalis argues that such efforts were an adaptive extension of Cold War politics. The American government furnished academic experts with funds, and protected an international order of patron-client relationships between the United States and authoritarian allies:

Reflections on the interests that currently operate in academic enterprises goes a long way toward understanding both the ready recruitment of scholars as auxiliaries in the democracy industry and the degree to which cynicism has come to replace criticism in the post-Cold War intellectual repertoire (Vitalis 1994)

It is not obvious whether this sort of direct critique interrogates either the underlying assumptions of research or the empirical findings of the comparative politics of democratization. Written in the 1990s, the thrust of this work is anti-interventionist, which, particularly after the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies, aligned with neo-Huntingtonian critiques of rapid political change, including democratization (see for example Mansfield and Snyder 1995, Snyder 2000).

Subtler and more powerful is critique sometimes leveled in political theory. Writing about comparative politics and revolution, Sheldon Wolin thought it “facile” to devote oneself to detecting “ideological” elements in the study of revolutions. More than facile however, this sort of “Project Camelot” explanation of our discipline’s cumulative investigations of democratization forsakes a deeper understanding of its shortcomings and its strengths:

Both Weber and Durkheim helped to develop a tradition of social science which has been rich in the language of order. One thinks of Weber's discussions of bureaucracy, organization, and authority, as well as of Durkheim's notions of solidarity and collective representations. But concerning revolution, there was no corresponding richness, only silence. For this reason the contribution of Parsons, the most famous theorist of contemporary social science as well as the official interpreter of Weber to American readers, becomes significant. Parsons' achievement was to accommodate revolution to the requirements of order. He accomplished this by a strategy which tacitly rejected both the Marxist conception of revolution as radical transformation of man and society as well as the older understanding of Edmund Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville which had pictured revolutions as convulsive and dramatic, heroic and/or satanic, and, above all, as extraordinary. Parsons brought revolution literally within the "system" by treating it as a species of "social change." His concept of change, in turn, was derived from his famous construct of "the" social system. The social system, according to Parsons, seeks a state of "equilibrium" and it is within the confines of this search that revolution acquires meaning, not from what the revolutionaries may happen to think either about the system or their own intentions. (Wolin 1973)

Recall now the broad the contours of the events traced in Chapter 1. In the contrasting fortunes of the discipline’s ability to explain two different types of dramatic political upheaval through the available repertoire of explanations is a clue as to what is amiss in our consideration of democratization. The events of July 2013 in Egypt were analogous to hundreds of cases of coups after which prospects of democratization generally suffered, resulting in an incisive and clear-eyed judgment on the relationship between coups and democratization (Powell and Thyne 2011).<sup>63</sup> A global pattern could be anchored in the coherently rendered incentive structure of the

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<sup>63</sup> The authors present exceptions of course, though it remains the case that military coups against elected leaders being non-conducive to democratization is a consensus position.

most relevant political actor, namely the military, and their decision matrix. The modularity of the outcome invites a search for micro-foundations, a role best performed by individual citizens who in their protests, voting behavior, and their explicit and implicit acquiescence, are the source of both political change and retrenchment.

This study takes a different approach. There were two distinct points of departure. The first was as an opportunistic reading of Rueschmeyer, Stephens and Stephens' important, ambitious and somewhat idiosyncratic synthesis of the literature, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (1992). The authors were motivated by the extreme reductiveness of large-n quantitative studies of democratization that affirmed a generally opaque but statistically consistent relationship between economic development and democracy.<sup>64</sup> They noted that historical studies that emphasize qualitative examination of complex sequences tend to trace the rise of democracy to a favorable historical constellation of conditions in early capitalism (4). The disconnect was alarming in that it brought into question any general theory of democratization. It may be the case that developments in global capitalism that marked the emergence of the democracy-demanding industrial bourgeoisie in Europe are not replicable at temporally more advanced stages in the international economic system, or for that matter in polities more peripheral to an integrated international system's core. Although the authors do not quite put it in those terms, it may have been the case that the rich rule in Europe but that elsewhere (or later) the rich are rich because they rule.

The location in history and within an international order were not the only sources of contingency and complexity. The signal contribution of *Capitalist Development and Democracy*

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<sup>64</sup> Famously, Adam Przeworski has argued that this is a relationship in which the "endogeneity" problem cannot be solved (Przeworski et al 2000, Przeworski 2004).

is the designation of the working class as a decisive actor in a model (or rather multiple models) of democratization that is animated by a balance of class power. That the consideration of a significant role for the working class in the breakdown of an authoritarian regime and the consolidation of democratic one was just then gaining traction in comparative politics would have perhaps, and perhaps justifiably so, been looked upon with alarmed bemusement by political historians. The contribution of *Capitalist Development and Democracy* however was not merely to introduce a new dictum of “no working class, no democracy” through assertion or the amassing of anecdotal evidence, but rather to produce a series of theoretical models in terms analogous to contemporaneous works in positivist comparative politics (Huntington 1991, Przeworski 1991, Higly and Gunther 1992). By restricting their dependent variable to a relatively narrow, procedural definition of democracy, they brought dynamic class politics into a space restricted to the measurable and previously confined to the poles of structuralism (Moore 1966) or radical contingency (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Przeworski 1991).

The implications for an analysis of the Egyptian situation are far-reaching. At the beginning of the first period of my fieldwork, in the spring of 2012, numerous individuals, groups, organizations and parties were presenting themselves to an attentive public, utilizing old and new laws and forming durable and nominal alliances. The end that marked the failure of democratic consolidation was not yet at hand. Once reached, the fervent politics became relevant only insofar as they made manifest new mechanisms through which a) a dearth of democratic pre-requisites (Masoud 2013) and b) the authoritarian institutions reasserting themselves (El-Shimy 2016) could be measured. In the midst of this, another recourse to Rueschmeyer, Stephens and Stephens proved rewarding. Alongside their central claim that the working class had demonstrably and consistently been a force for democratization was the conceptualization that

this force was brought to bear in the process of power struggle in which parties had played what was to the authors a surprisingly important role (282). Against an outcome-derived functionalism, here was a harking back to an earlier conceptualization of democratization as a political process, in which politics is a fundamentally conflictual practice of group formation through the hazardous marking of friend and enemies (Schmitt 1927), who then ally with men and circumstance and settle (or not) on a measurable democratic apparatus (Rustow 1970).

This theoretical disposition was enough to accompany my interlocutors in their messy intermingling with the sixteen parties and four electoral alliances then vying for the first post-Mubarak parliament. The anti-Huntingtonian bias was widespread amongst them as well, even where one would least expect it. I started to appreciate this on visiting the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) in February 2012 to conduct an interview with Fatma Ramadan, a board member at the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (and the informal second in command at that still fast growing body) and who had been hired to cover labor issues for the NGO. Ramadan was a longtime labor activist who had worked for years at the Ministry of Labour and Manpower. The year following the fall of Mubarak had seen a palpable expansion in the number, size and scope (and possibly funding)<sup>65</sup> of civil society organizations. EIPR, in its impressive new headquarters in the upscale neighborhood of Garden City, was the greatest exemplar of this temporary phenomenon. On entering the EIPR office I was surprised to run into

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<sup>65</sup> A controversial and taboo subject for most NGO employees given that the Mubarak regime, and later the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, would periodically mobilize nationalist sentiment and a strand of the contradictory pieces of legislation on funding to suppress and prosecute actors in this sector. For a brief period of time after the fall of Mubarak, organizations with the sophistication of the EIPR embarked on a search to locate domestic funding streams for their different projects. “It was a novel thing for most of them, but it started to happen,” Adel Ramadan of the Civil Liberties unit at EIPR told me of their approaches to wealthy local donors in 2011 and 2012. This immediately came to a halt after the coup in 2013. EIPR, which had undergone an ambitious expansion and the introduction of a research program after 2011, including a division on labor rights, has since let go of 70% of its staff. (Interview with Adel Ramadan, March 2014).

Amr Adly, a fellow political scientist who had just completed a dissertation at the European University Institute comparing the political economy of development in Egypt and Turkey.<sup>66</sup> He told me he was working for EIPR. I knew Amr's work to be a methodologically orthodox and narrowly incrementalist addition to political economy of authoritarianism literature, something that was completely and deliberately at odds with his profound interest in German and French philosophy, which he quoted frequently and liberally, a practice that would be intolerable were it not always accompanied with his cutting and sometimes shocking humor. Amr was not a radical and had not participated in any protests. If it signified anything, his presence there suggested that such work was entirely safe. It suggested something else too. We had a brief discussion:

“Are you writing about the revolution?” he asked.

“No, I refuse to explain that,” I replied jokingly, “I prefer to think of it as metaphysical.”

“Yes, I don't think anybody should write about this now. Maybe in five years,” he said.

The exchange proceeded for a few minutes and as I excused myself to go talk to his colleague Fatma about the state of independent labor unions.

“You know what's strange?” he asked rhetorically as I was leaving. “This is probably the only place in the world right now where they are taking this stuff seriously.”

What stuff did he mean?

“The parliamentary elections, the constitution...all of this,” he replied gesturing to everything around him.

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<sup>66</sup> Published as *The Political Economy of Trade and Industrialization: Turkey and Egypt in the Post-Liberalization Era*. European University Institute, 2010. See Adly 2010.

The work of Rueschmeyer, Stephens and Stephens gave me (temporary) reprieve from an exclusive focus on elite bargaining and macro-level indicators and facilitated the kind of research in which an account of the formation (rather than transformation) of organizations and actors could be incorporated into literature on democratization in the field. A second and more radical point of departure is embodied in the work of Partha Chatterjee and Timothy Mitchell. In *Politics of the Governed* (2004) Chatterjee argues that forms of representation in government exist in most of the world, but that these forms of representation are embodied in institutions such as parliament, policy-making apparatuses located within the executive or a network of international and national agencies. Most of the population is excluded from the utopian domain of the “rights-bearing citizen,” but is instead subjected to the power of the post-colonial state through developmental policies as populations. The response of communities is a mark of what Chatterjee calls “heterogeneous time,” (cf. Anderson 1983), a mode of politics that functions in the permanent incongruence between the political unit and those subjected to its policies (cf. Gellner 1983). The case Chatterjee chronicles, that of a squatter community on the outskirts of Calcutta, is one where negotiations by the population targeted by policy-makers for eviction is able, through tools unrecognizable and irreducible to those available in electoral politics. Through controlled violence and sit-ins, the squatters were able to transform “an empirically assembled population group in the morally constituted form of a community” (75). Put another way, Chatterjee suggests that there is a fundamental dichotomy in which “bourgeois politics” follows a particular modality and the politics of the underprivileged follows another.

In *Carbon Democracy* (2011) Timothy Mitchell makes a complex argument through which he traces both democratization and de-democratization as a global phenomenon in which physical and economic networks arising *between* nominally discreet political units intertwine to

produce instances of collective agency, which, owing to its basis in the properties of technology assembled to extract and transport energy, he terms “socio-technical agency” (27). The relationship between these forms of agency and opportunities for mobilization are elided in our propositions for necessary conditions for authoritarian breakdown, democratization and consolidation. In important ways, Mitchell argues, democracy has been “carbon based.” The “dendritic” (38) natures of coal networks in Europe ameliorated the need for “class consciousness” that had been seen by Marxist and other political theorists describing and agitating for collective action by the working class. The technical properties of coal and its extractive networks were substantively different than those that arose around the extraction of oil from the Middle East in the twentieth century, which had “the properties of a grid” (38), and was more flexible and less vulnerable to action by workers at any single point. Local authoritarianisms, particularly in the emergent Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, then produced a system of scarcity that facilitated rent extraction, which in turn was at the heart of the economic functioning of what we think of as industrial capitalist democracies in the West (200-230).

There is another related sense in which Mitchell contends that democracy and democratization have become “carbon based.” Describing a scene in which an American expert is brought in to meet Iraqi leaders following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Mitchell captures something that is at the heart of the academic politics of democratization, the elite politics of democratization and, contra Mitchell, I will argue at the heart of the popular politics of democratization:

Ignoring the apparatus of oil production reflects an underlying conception of democracy. It is the conception shared by an American expert on democracy sent to southern Iraq, nine months after the US invasion of 2003, to discuss ‘capacity building’ with the members of a provincial council: ‘Welcome to your new democracy’, he said, as he began displaying PowerPoint slides of the administrative structure the Americans



had designed. **‘I have met you before. I have met you in Cambodia. I have met you in Russia. I have met you in Nigeria.’** At which point, we are told, two members of the council walked out. For an expert on democracy, democratic politics is fundamentally the same everywhere. It consists of a set of procedures and political forms that are to be reproduced in every successful instance of democratisation, in one variant or another, as though democracy occurs only as a carbon copy of itself. Democracy is based on a model, an original idea that can be copied from one place to the next. If it fails, as it seems to in many oil states, the reason must be that some part of the model is missing or malfunctioning. (Mitchell 2011: 12, emphasis added)

The accounts of collective agency arising in the domain of exclusionary political regimes advanced by both Chatterjee and Mitchell contain much that would require a rigorous work of translation and indexing to be brought into dialogue with the literature on democratization in comparative politics. The boundaries of a case which would be made available for comparison to the analytical narratives and large-n studies that are the corpus of this literature are absent. With Chatterjee asserting that his account is that of “three-fourths of contemporary humanity” (3) and Mitchell advancing the case that politics in the twentieth century has been denatured by an organization around the idea of the “economy” which in turn has inflected our assessment and measurement of political phenomenon, it is, on the face of things, an intractable task to meld these works with others in political science. The mix of empirics and theory are simply not aligned. Yet at their center, these works contain an implicit theory of political modularity that is independent of the “colonial governmentality” (Chatterjee) and “socio-technics of energy” (Mitchell) that the authors claim animate exclusionary forms of government.

The fall of Hosni Mubarak in February of 2011 marked the beginning of a period in which individuals and groups took “all that stuff” seriously. Executive, legislative and even some constitution-making authority was transferred to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the joint leadership of the army under the tutelary control of Field Marshall Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Mubarak’s minister of defense. Given where authority now resided, what

occurred was by definition a coup, which, with hindsight was a method to change personnel whilst maintaining an essentially praetorian regime (Geddes 1999, El-Shimy 2016). What occurred immediately afterwards was a massive expansion of political participation in the informal and formal institutions of government. In March 2011, a SCAF-appointed committee drafted a series of constitutional amendments that were put to a popular referendum on the nineteenth of that month. The participation of over eighteen million people in that exercise (or forty-one percent of forty-five million eligible voters) was unprecedented in the history of electoral politics in Egypt, and signaled a congruence of sorts between the high degree of mobilization of the designated electorate and the forms devised by sovereign powers to contain it. In the government of the transition, the proposed political forms were being rapidly embraced by citizens whose government had for decades been heavily tilted towards demobilization.

Taken together, the highlighted aspects of *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, *The Politics of the Governed* and *Carbon Democracy* make it possible to follow political actors into the field vacated by a political economy of decaying institutions (Chapter 3) and contesting a reconfigured media and legal frameworks (Chapters 4 and 5). The heuristic proposition is that democratization is a fundamentally conflictual process in which political actors, old and new, utilize the modular political process to fashion themselves into a decision-making apparatus capable of destructive withdrawal from alliance, with labor-autonomy bending the arc of politics towards phenotypically recognizable Dahlian polyarchy (Dahl 1956, 1989).

Entering the field without an event that can pose as a credible outcome of the process underway (Huntington's two elections test, for example), I knew that the evidence collected would not be marshaled to refute and test the proposition in the classical sense. With the outcome described in Chapter 1, I sensed that the sort of neo-Huntingtonian literature whose

tropes I had been resisting had itself been restored. I could almost picture an expert on democracy in a room with the many intellectual supporters of the coup: “I have met you before. I have met you in Chile. I have met you Brazil. I have met you in Indonesia,” and so on. The expert, drawing on the sizeable universe of cases, would be right. This invites a reckoning. The clue is not in the outcome dependence (endings), but exclusions and mechanisms.

To illustrate why our theories of democratization would do well to resist the modular for as long as is possible in Egypt, let me recount an ethnographic fragment from the beginning of my period in the field that did not make it into the extended narrative below.

## **Part 2: Ethnographic Fragments**

This fragment is from July 29, 2011, in the aftermath of what came to be contemptuously referred to as ‘*Gom’it Kandahar*’ (Kandahar Friday) also known as ‘*Millioniyat Kandahar*.’<sup>67</sup> The aforementioned March constitutional referendum signaled the beginnings of a polarization along a religious-secular divide. On the one hand, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Da’wa Salafiya (Salafist Call) and the Gama’a al-Islamiya (Islamic Group) aligned themselves closely with the military’s proposed amendments and utilized their considerable mobilizing power to deliver an affirmative vote. Though Article 2 of the then-suspended 1971 constitution, which mandates that Islamic Sharia be “the major source of legislation”, was not one of the articles to be amended, the campaign was organized along that emplaced wedge, with a new, unified and well-organized Islamist alliance forged in the heat of the campaign utilizing an infrastructure of mosques and well-financed civil associations to defend the police, the SCAF, and, most forcefully “Islamic identity.” The campaign resulted in an overwhelming victory, with 77% of voters, some

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<sup>67</sup> The word ‘millioniya’ is the feminine adjectival form of the word million, as it related to a mass demonstration, as in “mudthahara millioniya.” (A million [Strong] demonstration).

14,192,577 people, affirming the amendments. In an interview with Ayman Nour, a former political dissident and head of the liberal Ghad al-Thawra party, two days after the referendum, he articulated the multilayered fears about an Islamist super-majority as follows:

“Even if you can guarantee me that the Muslim Brotherhood would not bring in the Salafists into government, and I believe that, can you guarantee me that they would not ally with the military to re-instate dictatorship?”<sup>68</sup>

By the summer of 2011 the polarization between a number of non-Islamist parties and a fluid collection of energized movements on one side, and Islamists in apparent alliance with the military leadership on the other, had reached unprecedented levels. A smattering of intellectuals began to float the idea of “supra-constitutional principles,” a nebulous constraining device to be imposed by the governing Supreme Council of the Armed Forces with its temporary monopoly of executive, legislative and constitution-making power on any parliament, who, owing to the results of the referendum, was now expected to be dominated by parties associated with the organizations of political Islam; the Muslim Brotherhood (the Freedom and Justice Party), the Salafist Call (the Nour Party) and the Islamic Group (the Building and Development Party). Over the summer, the Muslim Brotherhood, with its differentiated cast of experienced politicians who had developed relationships and reputations across the political spectrum, had sought a sort a moderator role, in which they defended the actions of the military and the ministry of interior whilst maintaining the position that the military must eventually exit politics.

The public flirtation with “supra-constitutional” principles was the occasion for a reversal -- bringing the army leadership into the moderator role. The Muslim Brotherhood reacted by accelerating its consensus-building measures with disparate liberal, left-wing and

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Ayman Nour in his luxurious, somewhat garish, apartment located in the upscale island neighborhood of Zamalek on the evening of March 21, 2011.

youth groups and agreed to participate in a unified *millioniya* in which only demands on which there was a broad consensus would be raised; namely the prosecution of Hosni Mubarak and members of his regime<sup>69</sup> and the setting of a date for the handing over of power by the SCAF. It was publicly agreed by prominent members of the Brotherhood, including those said to belong to its liberal wing, Mohamed el-Beltagi and Hilmi el-Gazzar, that issues of identity and Shari'a would be avoided, and that the signs and slogans would reflect this agreement.

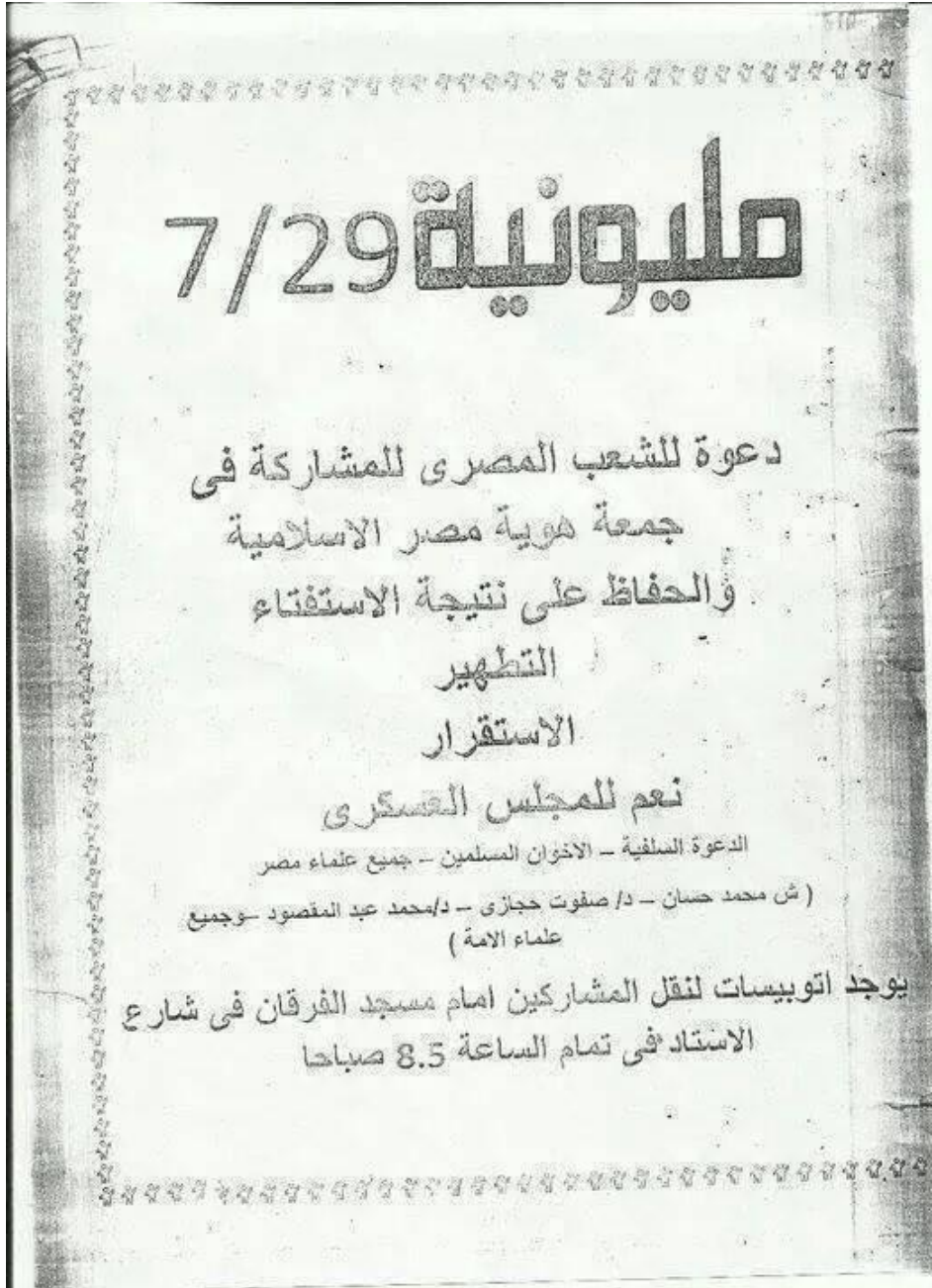
On July 29 at noon I made my way across the Qasr-al-Nil Bridge connecting the island of Zamalek in the middle of the Nile with Tahrir Square. As I approached the end of the bridge, I saw a middle-aged man walking in the opposite direction wearing a flat cap similar to mine. "Don't go," he said. "This one's not for us." I was taken aback by the man's presumption and the new standard of ideological dress or demeanor to which I had evidently been oblivious. The Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters, I was quite sure, did not have a distinct dress-code.

Unlike the smattering of unveiled women and beardless young men who made their way awkwardly through the square, I was well aware that the Brotherhood had reneged on their promise sometime before demonstration, having been handed a leaflet a week before by a journalist friend who had picked it up at his local mosque: the "invitation to the Egyptian people to participate in the Friday of Egypt's Islamic Identity" went on to enumerate the goals of the demonstration as follows: a) protection of the results of the referendum, b) cleansing (a reference to ancien régime personnel and influence) and c)

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<sup>69</sup> Mubarak's first court appearance would be on 3 August, 2011. His first conviction was on June 2, 2012.

stability. “Yes to the Military Council” is written above the names of the demonstrations’ sponsors: the Salafist Call, the Muslim Brotherhood and “all of Egypt’s jurists.”<sup>70</sup>



**Figure 3: Leaflet circulated a week before July 29: “An invitation to the people of Egypt to participate in the Friday of Egypt’s Islamic Identity.”**

<sup>70</sup> The word ulama (lit. scientists) refers to Islamic jurists in this context.

In the square itself, there were three elaborately constructed platforms with small-building sized speakers atop each of them. On the platform nearest western entrance of the square, a young preacher was fiercely excoriating “the secularists” and “the secular media.” Beneath him, a dense throng of men in shortened *gallabiyas*<sup>71</sup> shouted: “*Islamiyah, Islamiyah, raghm anf al-‘almaniyah*” (Islamic, Islamic, despite the noses of the secularists). On the southern side of the square, in front of the gargantuan Soviet-style center of Egyptian bureaucracy, the Mugamma (lit. the Complex), was another platform on which a younger man was reading the Quran into a microphone. Behind him was an unfurled banner that read “*Ya musheer min il-naharda inta il-emir*” (Oh Field Marshall, from today you are the Emir). At the eastern end of the square was the Muslim Brotherhood platform, which I recognized because the former and future parliamentarian Mohamed el-Beltagi, was speaking, dressed, as he normally was, in a suit and tie. Behind him were banners condemning the proposed supra-constitutional principles. From what I could make of his speech as I exited the relentless aural field, his were passionate but canned comments about the need to prosecute the former president for murder and the nefarious influence of the ‘*felool*’ (a strange-sounding but resonant descriptor of the members of the ancien régime that made its way into everyday parlance in the six months following the fall of Mubarak).<sup>72</sup>

As soon as he was finished, I was surprised to see two groups of men either side of the podium start to disassemble the platform even as he was shaking hands with supporters. It

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<sup>71</sup> The *gallabiyah* is not an unusual or particularly meaningful choice for Egyptian men. The shortened version of the one piece garment however usually signifies adherence to Salafism, amongst whom it is considered a mark of Sunna (the practice of emulation of the companions of the prophet).

<sup>72</sup> Perhaps the most prominent addition to the public lexicon brought upon by the revolution was the introduction into common usage of the classical Arabic word for broken swords, *felool* to describe members of the ancien régime or those deemed to have been its beneficiaries. In usage the word seems to have been quickly divorced from its linguistic origins, with most people employing it seemingly unaware of its origins and even unaware that it is the plural form, and hence commonly designating this or that individual as *felool* as in ‘she is *felool*.’ In the months following the revolution, marking individuals out as *felool* was an effective act of delegitimation.

seemed like it was flattened and packaged in minutes. Just like that, the Muslim Brotherhood's formal participation in the demonstration was over.

I wandered around square for a while longer. Even with a disposition generally resistant to alarm, the scene induced a double-take. Towards the northern end of the square, in the space next to the Egyptian Museum, were rows of buses and micro-buses stretching for at least a hundred meters. In some of the smaller streets that branched into the large streets spilling into the square tents had been erected, and sheltering from the sun were large groups of families with provincial accents. But it was in the square where the political peril lay; there was a sea of black al-Qaeda flags,<sup>73</sup> with a smattering of green Saudi flags.



**Figure 4: Two men carry a banner with a message from the “people of Farshot” in Upper Egypt with slogan “Islamic, Islamic, despite the noses of the secularists,” which had become one of the main slogans of the day. Source: Dotmisr.com**

The distance between democracy and authoritarianism is vastly greater than that between Islamism and secularism. That in any case was and remained my position in the

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<sup>73</sup> Commonly known as the al-Qaeda flag, the black banner with the Islamic declaration of faith depicted in white lettering had become associated with Islamist groups in the 1990s.



sort of political chatter in the decade leading up to the revolution. I had closely read, with mild but growing irritation, the literature on the doctrinal fit (or lack thereof) between the rhetoric and programs of various Islamist actors and the tenets of liberal democracy. In the best of these works, the Islamists are differentiated and understood to be tangled in webs not just their own creation, but of those who govern them (Starret 1998, Wiktorowicz 2001, Wickham 2005). Indeed in one particularly adroit and dense reading of the history of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt they are adjudged to “consummate political actors, neither extraordinarily gifted at mobilization nor historically adept at deception” (El-Ghobashy 2005: 374).<sup>74</sup> Yet, the spectacle was almost a *reductio ad absurdum* act of political demagoguery, which with the raising of the slogan inviting the Field Marshall and Minister of Defense Hussein Tantawi to become the ‘emir’ became perilously close to a strategic proposition; an offer that the army assume an executive role if the political leadership of those assembled would be granted their wish for immediate parliamentary elections.

That volatile period in Egyptian politics was one which I had found incredibly auspicious. By the summer, I had resolved to propose to study the emerging network of independent labor unions, which seemed to be quickly multiplying. I had forged relationships with some of the people seeking to organize this movement, who had already utilized the breakdown of the Mubarak regime to gain formal recognition and had built sufficient momentum to entice thousands of workers across the country to sign up. I had to think now about the implications of this development at the symbolic center of politics for that ongoing process.

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<sup>74</sup> See also Richard Mitchell (1969) on the structure of the movement; still one of the more relevant texts on the Muslim Brotherhood.

I made my way across the square again towards the old American University in Cairo campus. Across the street in an apartment on the second floor was Al-Balad, one of those bookstores that also functioned as a space for cultural events (book signings, poetry readings and so on). Of more immediate relevance was the fact that it offered a place to sit, free wireless internet and cheap coffee. I sat down in a room that had one other table and a young man pacing beside it and talking loudly on his cellphone. On *Al-Badil* (The Alternative) news website, I saw that Islam Lotfy, a young member of the Muslim Brotherhood, had condemned his organization for reneging on the promises it had made. I looked up and the young man had stopped talking on the phone. I recognized him from several protests. He seemed eager to talk. Before I could devise a way to start a conversation, he immediately introduced himself as a member of the “Revolutionary Youth Coalition” and the “*shabab al-ikhwan*” (Muslim Brotherhood Youth). He asked me if I belonged to any organization.

“I made out an authorization for the *Ta’aluf al-Sha’bi al-Ishtiraki* (Popular Socialist Alliance). They didn’t seem to have enough people,” I said, which, in retrospect, was somewhat defensive.<sup>75</sup>

“So do you agree that we must have elections immediately or not?”

“Is that what you were arguing about just now?” I asked.

“You (people) don’t understand. We are on the brink of another ‘54,”<sup>76</sup> he said impatiently.

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<sup>75</sup> An authorization was a legal document produced by founding members. The requirements to form a political party stipulated that 5000 notarized authorizations be made from at least 10 different governorates. It was the requirement for geographic variation that was the more difficult to hurdle to clear for left-wing parties.

<sup>76</sup> In 1954 the new military regime led by then Prime Minister Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser turned its back on its ally, the Muslim Brotherhood and embarked on a severe crackdown on the organization that was the forerunner of the consolidation of the authoritarian order that would come to be known as the ‘July State.’ For a robust account see Mitchell (1969) and Gordon (1992).

With the union movement at the back of my mind, I said that I was not sure that seeking an end to this stage of politics, with all its possibilities, was the thing for which we should be pushing. And, I added, argumentatively, how does 1954, when Colonel Gamal Abdel-Nasser turned on his Muslim Brotherhood allies and subjected the movement to years of repression, justify the extolment of the Field Marshall?

He grimaced, evidently losing patience. He thanked me, shook my hand sarcastically, and left.

The brief, hostile exchange stayed with me. I was aware then that the statement of allegiances and opinions by young men in coffee shops was better studied by those interested in the field of identity politics, who would then go on to argue about how that is indicative of trends that may have an effect on specific political outcomes. I was comfortable with the fact that our opinions did not really matter very much; and if they were to be taken as parts of a larger whole, then it must also be conceded that this would represent an extremely impoverished form of sampling. But the exchange took on a new meaning when I returned in early 2012 for the first nine months of fieldwork. I attended a meeting of *The Revolution Continues*, an electoral alliance of seven different parties that had contested the recently concluded parliamentary elections. Towards the front of the hall, next to a still-empty podium, was that same young man. He was holding a poster destined for the wall behind the speaker bearing the insignia of the *Egyptian Current Party*, which had been formed by disaffected younger members of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the bloody days preceding the first round of the parliamentary elections in November, 2011, the new party threw in their lot with the Ta'aluf al-Sha'bi al-Ishtiraki (Popular Socialist Alliance) and

other liberal and left-wing parties. It seemed that although I had cast vote from the Egyptian consulate in New York, the young man and I had ended up voting the same way.<sup>77</sup>

For his part, Ayman Nour, the leader of the liberal Ghad al-Thawra party, entered into an electoral alliance with Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, who, in turn, had parted ways with the Salafist Call's Nour Party. In seat after seat across the country run-offs were held between the Brotherhood and the Salafists. When all was said and done, after six weeks and three rounds of voting, the combined seat allocation going to Islamists was 356 or 71.5% of the 498 seats on offer – a result not dissimilar to the 77% achieved for the 'Yes' vote in the Islamist-backed referendum. The judgment that this outcome is the political expression of Islamism would, of course be in an important sense correct. It would highlight a particular rendering of the situation that reconfigured the outlook and incentive structure of old and new actors in the field. A more careful consideration of the events would be able to chronicle what determined the autonomy of a new political actor in formation, the Nour Party and the Alexandria-based Salafist movement it had channeled into a new political force that captured 25% of all seats in the first post-revolutionary representative election. In this case one would be better placed to insert the phrase "when all was said and done" on the podium in July 2013 when the representative of the Nour Party signaled his party's support for the military coup removing the Muslim Brotherhood president from office.

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<sup>77</sup> The young man, who I got to know briefly after our exchange, will remain unnamed, as he was not one of my interlocutors and is not, in any meaningful sense, a public figure.

### **Part 3: There is no Anthropological Solution**

The shortcomings of our systematic study of democratization are severe to the point where the suggestion of an existence of a “wave” (Huntington 1991) or global phenomenon shaping local institutions required great accommodation in the comparative method. It remains the case for example that in the political science produced on the divergent outcomes in Egypt and Tunisia, which finds causes in the disparity in civic infrastructure (Masoud 2013), the character of the countries’ Islamists (Ghanouchi 2013) or the role of military in the ancien régime (El-Shimy 2016), none has sought the scorchingly suggestive notion that the Egyptian military coup itself exerted a powerful influence on Tunisian political behavior.

There is an important argument most famously articulated by Milton Friedman inviting researchers to “act as if” their models of the world were true (Friedman 1953). The basic methodological tenets of Friedman’s argument have resonated in political science in general, to great benefit and cost. At the limit, this can amount to political analysis without politics, which, if the actors in question are in the process of transformation, can lead to blinding elisions – the skipping of the stage of politics altogether. The critiques of this approach have been, I will argue in the concluding Chapter 6, wrongly enmeshed in debates about epistemology and are totalistic in nature. In complex political struggles subject to both accretionary logics and paradigm shifts, suspensions of rules and gravitational pulls, a case-based intervention cannot afford to derive mechanisms from outcomes. *It is in fact the modularity of actors and institutions that is principle variable of interest.*

In taking the political autonomy of labor as guide to the study of failed democratization in Egypt (2011-2013), I thought it imperative to preserve a richness of

narrative experience of those who achieved a certain institutionalized power and autonomy, and those who did not. A full consideration of the proposition that the political autonomy of labor may be an important variable in a political transformation away from authoritarian rule does not answer basic questions about the revolution. The analytical decoupling of revolution and democratic transition does not unproblematically track the recent history of Egyptian politics. The mechanisms charted in comparative cases of democratic transition were in the Egyptian case nested in a paradigm shift in which, for a time, their operations and their linkages to regenerative constituencies (e.g. bureaucracies, religious groupings, international forces) behaved “as if” they were suspended. Rather than insisting on the intractable task of “explaining the revolution,” a political economy of the conditions leading up to revolution must therefore track political collectives best-placed to exert influence in this singular suspension of the rules, be they labor unions or the Egyptian Armed Forces. It must also track the fraying institutions of the old regime, be they the police or the crony capitalists of the defunct National Democratic Party, to comprehend the moment in which the gravity of institutional history “suspends the suspension,” so to speak. Only in this phase can we re-assert the importance of the incremental operations within governing institutions to understand how extraordinary suspension of the rules of the game has radically reconfigured actors; labor, capital, the police and the Egyptian Armed Forces among them. All of these actors may impart an image of the restoration of the old order even under the guise of new parties, laws, and mandates. But that cannot be the case because, as the neo-Huntingtonians have taught us, authoritarian institutions matter.

The neo-Huntingtonian emphasis on disentangling the logics of extant institutions is important in one more respect; to guard against a rich and critical literature that takes the

fundamental observation that no government is founded purely on violence (Arendt 1951) and seeks to find uniquely indigenous reasons for a people's non-rebellion against authoritarianism. In contrast to the emplacement of local politics in a network of modular vestiges of colonial government or global energy networks as Chatterjee and Mitchell have done, works by Fredric Schaffer (1998) and Saba Mahmood (2005) have marshalled thoughtful and sensitive fieldwork in order to essentially move the goal posts on the question of political democracy. In *Democracy in Translation* by Schaffer and *Politics of Piety* by Mahmood, the authors interrogate Western notions of democracy (Schaffer) and secular-liberal thought (Mahmood) by undermining the notion that democracy and liberty are universal ideals of which political institutions fall short, and emphasizing the existence of indigenous ideals to which local institutions should, and to a degree invisible to Western liberals, do give expression.<sup>78</sup> The implications of this sort of analysis can be side-stepped by laying down explicit criteria for democratic transition, with Huntington's two-election test serving as an arbitrary, if reasonable, measure. The sidestep would be a mistake because the fundamental flaws are extremely instructive in building an alternative theory of democracy that goes well beyond arguments in a pre-political realm pitting universalism versus relativism.

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<sup>78</sup> This is an economical summary of the authors whose prominent works are praiseworthy in ways not necessarily contingent on this central thrust. I use them here as prominent exemplars of a species of humanist critiques of positive political science that exists in the disciplines of anthropology and some parts of political science. The objections raised by the Western Kantian liberals would result in an arguments about the universalism of the human condition. As is evident above, and will become more so in the concluding chapter of this dissertation, one can side with liberals without making arguments about things that have no independent existence outside utterances in contextually defined situations. In a materialist theory of democracy such as that which is advanced here, a "democratic ideal" exists when employed as part of a complex of practices and utterances; as a slogan in a protest, or a ruling by a judge, or indeed a coup by an army to "restore order that is more conducive to our democratic ideals." In all cases the existence of this "cultural resource" and its deployment of this rationale exists in a complex of other resources mobilized towards a particular end; comrades on the street, legislation on the books or indeed officers with guns at one's command.

Fundamental to both Schaffer and Mahmood's work is the existence of a discrete set of ideals and practices which exist independently of the world in which models of democracy and of liberty have been conceived. Yet the prominence of these notions in local contestations of power belies this radical separateness, even if, as the authors would have it, things that are quite different are connoted by the word "democracy." The notion of the radical separateness of the populations from global political and economic trends must also concede that the points of separation shift overtime as these ostensibly separate corpuses of moral reference intermingle. More crucially to mainline comparative politics, the method of discovery of these worlds is through the solicitation of the subject's disposition towards their non-democratic environs. Despite the explicit rejection of the "liberal individuated self," it is the opinions and practices of individuals that explain their place in the authoritarian hierarchy, even if a close analysis of their worlds suggests more complex existences than complicity or victimhood. It turns out that for all their differences with Huntingtonians, this sort of critique is equally deficient in explaining radical political change and indeed on the surface would exhibit an even stronger status-quo bias than those who attribute authoritarian persistence to carefully designed institutions. Here too is an absence of a conflictual politics in which resources can be deployed to institutionalize new vulnerabilities in the governing coalition. Put another way, for political scientists dissatisfied with theories of democratization, there is no anthropological solution.

An alternative materialist conception must recognize the functional universality of forms sought by autonomous groups, members of which may be convinced that a two-election test is a reasonable measure of the attainment of some democratic aspiration.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Although the prospects of the measures utilized by political scientists in order to conduct large-scale comparisons mapping onto the goals and aspiration of groups actually engaged in political contestation are, admittedly, remote. A



Through its rooted description of the conflicts that draw on resources that existed prior to revolution, its account of battles conducted after the collapse of the regime subject to radically altered rules, and an accounting of the durable remains of those battles after the establishment of a new authoritarian regime, a materialist theory of democracy can then advance abstract propositions about the mechanisms of engendering institutionalized vulnerability of an authoritarian political regime. Engendering an institutionalized vulnerability to regimes serves as possible theoretical formulation for the democratizing effects of autonomous political actors.

In the chapters that follow, I will weave an ethnographic narrative of the four salient labor organizations active between 2011 and 2013 in thematic chapters on the political economy of the ancien régime (Chapter 3), the privately controlled public sphere (Chapter 4) and operations of law in political conflict (Chapter 5). The accounts of the Egyptian Democratic Labour Congress (EDLC), the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU), the Permanent Conference of Alexandria Workers (PCAW) and the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) are mined for the process of articulation of political power bearing on a political system in transition.

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materialist theory of democracy must therefore concede to limit itself to measurement, and accept what is banally accepted in the political sphere from which its arguments are drawn; that there exists a line between democracy and authoritarianism and that such a distinction is a meaningful one to actors in the field.

### Overture to Chapter 3

Models of democratic transition are representations of institutional elaboration, creating new spaces for action and transaction. Models of revolutionary transformation are models of decay and autonomous collective organization. Chapter 3 provides empirical material to be utilized in the bridging of those streams of explanation. The first part, “The Political Economy of Hollow State”, is an accounting of the institutional decay of the ancien régime through an analysis of the political economy of the final Mubarak government. The specific structure of this political involution of the state apparatus is the background condition in which one particular union in the brick industry in the town al-Saf arose in the desert orbit surrounding Cairo. Part two, “Taking Things Seriously,” is an account of that effort. The union became associated with, then a constituent of, the Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress (EDLC), one of several national level labor organizations examined in this dissertation. Ethnographic material from al-Saf and Cairo collected in the spring of 2013 is deployed in a manner that links the particular mode of political economy of the ancien régime with the needs those arrangements created, and the political opportunities taken seriously by an exceptional labor organizer. A brief concluding section, “The Gravity of the Situation,” foreshadows discussions of the opportunities and constraints of politics itself, the public sphere (Chapter 4) and the law (Chapter 5) whilst remaining cognizant of suggestions that local deficiencies in these forms of politics are wedded to global deficiencies in democratic politics, even an international politico-economic crisis, of which the failure of the Egyptian revolution to bridge the institutional gap between a new authoritarian regime and a democratic political order is part (Chapter 6).

## Chapter 3

### Taking Things Seriously



**Figure 5: “Why don’t the sons of scum (ever) die?” Graffiti in Cairo depicting the face of a young man killed by the police and posing a question about those the artist holds responsible for the killing.**

For my own part I have always maintained that to claim for the Socialist movement that it is a "class" war dependent for its success upon the "class" consciousness of one section of the community is doing Socialism an injustice, and indefinitely postponing its triumph. It is, in fact, lowering it to the level of a mere faction fight. Socialism offers a platform broad enough for all to stand upon who accept its principles ... Socialism makes war upon a system, not upon a class.

Keir Hardie (Founder of the Independent Labour Representative Committee, later the Labour Party of Britain, 1907)<sup>80</sup>

Of course it was a *sabooba*.

Reda Sallam, of the Brick Workers Union in al-Saf

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<sup>80</sup> Keir Hardie was clearly an inconsistent Marxist, a quality that seemed to aid his mobilizing ability as it shortened his leadership at the head of the organization he helped build. For a comment on Hardie’s socialism, sometimes referred to as ‘romantic socialism’ see <http://labourlist.org/2015/09/100-years-on-keir-hardie-the-socialist/>.

## **Part 1 - The Political Economy of the Hollow State: Capital and the Desert**

The minibus ride from Helwan, the last and southern-most stop on the Cairo metro, to the village of al-Saf takes around thirty minutes. Al-Saf's administrative designation as a village exemplifies the tenuous, but consequential, link between official designation and quotidian reality. In the latter years of the Mubarak regime, the state had once again succumbed to the temptations of "white elephant" projects; a peculiar obsession that involved the contradictory bringing together of the quasi-Soviet national project of the early Nasser-led republic such as the Aswan High Dam (Mabro and Radwan 1976) with the state retrenchment mandated under the Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program (ERSAP) sponsored by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Abdel-Khalek 2001). The exemplary case was the Nile Valley Project (also known as the "Toshka Project") in the late 1990s, a multi-billion dollar land reclamation project marketed with great fanfare by the regime as Mubarak's high dam. The scheme drifted from view and was eventually abandoned (Bush 2007). Others, including grandiose visions of urban renewal and reconfiguration, remained.

In 2008, the government in conjunction with an international team of experts began promoting what it was calling "Cairo 2050 vision", a series of mega-projects designed to redistribute the city's eighteen million inhabitants such that the 60% of them who reside in an unsightly, ad-hoc informal dwellings (known as '*ashwa'iyat*') would be transferred to dwellings in spaces that the government and non-governmental organization (NGO) presenters described as being associated with "modern global cities," namely business parks, luxury hotels, tourism centers and office towers. It is unclear how committed the ancien régime had been to the implementation of the two-dimensional, glistening computer generated imagery presented in the offices of the Ministry of Housing, the United Nations Development Program, the United

Nations Human Settlements Program, the World Bank, the German Society for International Cooperation, and the Japan International Cooperation Agency – the institutions associated with this particular scheme. The regime of Hosni Mubarak had maneuvered itself, or rather stayed in place, as it became the greatest recipient of foreign aid in the world in the 1990s and early 2000s, some of it funneled to projects such as the Cairo 2050 project through a large network of NGOs whose relationship to the state, in the words of one government official, was that of a “father and his children” (Abdelrahman 2004: 166).

The schemes to institute and regulate a free market economy as a system and to reconfigure the citizenry’s built environment to which the Egyptian regime committed formally in 1991 encountered intellectual resistances familiar in other contexts. Within Egypt, the “neoliberalism” of its economics, public discourse and urban planning produced critiques that channeled positive accounts of state developmentalism to mobilize against the reforms of Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif’s government (2004-2011) in which the cruelty of the new elites was contrasted with encompassing nationalism and “socialism” of President Gamal Abdel-Nasser (1954-1970). In academia, the responses were no less stolid, imparting narrative accounts as full-blown critiques of “liberalism” (Mahmood 2005), “neo-liberalism” (Elyachar 2008) and “high-modernism” (Tarbush 2012). A minority of more probing academic work revealed a reality far more chaotic and less ordered than any off-the-shelf alternative hypothesis or plan would remedy. A political logic of winners and losers existed inasmuch as chaotic change and crises of authority serve as occasions for reconfiguring who gets what, when and how. But through-lines were not immediately visible. Wherever the government, approved businessmen and corporations built housing and parks, there existed vast complexes of under-occupied structures that probably doubled the size of the capital. The less picturesque part of the whole, one in which

an estimated two-thirds of the capital's population lived, was, and is, the product of relatively efficient auto-development" (Sims 2011: 267). This sort of success was mediated by the now-normative practice of most of the population to do that which is proscribed by law: to build new dwellings in already dense neighborhoods and await the authorities' acquiescence as they extend the electrical grid and water to the illegal dwellings.

Undergirding this "system" was an economic transformation of sorts. In the vast desert outside the capital and along the Mediterranean coast, the Egyptian regime(s) and its private sector tributaries built and built. They built satellite cities and roads connecting them, industrial parks and port facilities, and carpeted the desert coastline with tourist resorts (Sims 2013). In the desert the Egyptian regime could set and enforce new rules of a political game. In the Sinai Peninsula and along the Mediterranean coast local squatters were able to charge state-approved developers a fee for the land. The more formal official sale of the land from the organs of the state to the developers was a separate process, and would only be completed upon approval by the Armed Forces, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Archeological Authority.<sup>81</sup>

It is through this authority that the Egyptian military became the *primus inter pares* of rent seekers in Mubarak's Egypt. Under Law 143 of 1981 the Ministry of Defense must sign off on any transfer of property in the desert. Presidential decrees in 1981 and 1982 further allowed the military as an institution to sell public land previously marked for military use on the market and to deposit the proceeds in commercial banks.<sup>82</sup> Public-private initiatives, initiated after the

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<sup>81</sup> These are the three organs of the state that must sign-off on the transformation of desert land into private property

<sup>82</sup> In fact the military's role in the economy as an entrepreneurial actor is probably considerably smaller than suggested. Rather it is a predatory ruler (Evans 1989). For more, see Barayez, Abdel-Fattah "This Land is Their Land", *Jadaliyya*, 25 January 2016: [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/23671/%E2%80%9Cthis-land-is-their-land%E2%80%9D\\_egypt%E2%80%99s-military-and-the](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/23671/%E2%80%9Cthis-land-is-their-land%E2%80%9D_egypt%E2%80%99s-military-and-the)

economic reforms of the 1990s, further facilitated the participation of the Armed Forces in this new economy, with retired military generals serving as executives in public enterprises (Abul-Magd 2011) through which the elites of the Armed Forces (Bou Nassif 2015) were granted the tools to engage the newly empowered “whales of the Nile” (Sfakianakis 2004), the network of businessmen that was best situated to capture the streams of rent in the Egyptian political economy after 1991.

In the 1990s, the Mubarak regime’s commitments to restructure the economy were formally met; with praise from both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, government expenditure as a percentage of GDP declined consistently from an average of 36.8% in the period 1990-95 to 26.6% in 1995-2004. This decline was reflected on the budget deficit as a percentage of GDP, which was slashed from 22% in 1990/91 to 1.5% in 1995/96 (Abdelkhalek 2001:117).<sup>83</sup> The resource allocation decision was to shield the state’s formal employees from penury; even if, consistent with regime type (Linz 2000), the measure of their “support” took the shape of absences, that is to say de-politicization. The state’s administrative force continued to grow in spite of the overall retrenchment<sup>84</sup> and so too was the capital allocated for their tenure. The share of wages also sustained its expansion from 23.98% of total expenditure in 1990/91 to 30.57% in 1997/98, a level it mostly maintained until 2006 (28%). The share of wages in total expenditure stood at an average of 23.57% in the period 1990-2007, and at almost 30% of total current expenditure of the same period. Those unshielded from austerity were the informal and amorphous underclass, glimpsed in the datum that direct subsidies targeting the urban poor

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<sup>83</sup> Even when the budget deficit rose again in the 1990s this was due to a decline in revenues rather than an increase in expenditure.

<sup>84</sup> The number of employees in the government bureaucracy increased from 3,948,000 in 1990/91 to 5,657,583 in 2007/2008 (The Ministry of Administrative Development) cited in (Adly 2010).

through food provisions kept declining as a percentage of total expenditure from 12.23% in 1990 to 5.23% in 2000 (Soliman 2005, Ikram 2006).<sup>85</sup>

No organization of the underclass existed to bear the marks of this selective acquiescence to austerity. The Egyptian state's previous attempt to take direct aim at its poorest clients were a direct precursor to spontaneous, violent, nation-wide riots. Whatever mechanisms animated the "bread riots" of 1977 (Tucker 1981, Beattie 2000), when the regime attempted to partially lift the subsidy on bread, the scale of the revolt was such that the regime halted all plans at subsidy reform for over a decade. By the middle of the 1990s and early 2000s, several material things had changed.

First, as direct spending on the urban poor was cut, allocations for the state's repressive apparatus were significantly increased. Between 1993 and 1997, the Egyptian regime engaged in violent confrontation with radical Islamic militants, namely al-Jihad and al-Gam'aa al-Islamiya (the Islamic Group), from which it emerged a clear and decisive victor. The principal instrument of this systematic crushing of an anti-systemic challenger was the police force, which by then were well underway to becoming, at least in terms of personnel, larger than the Egyptian Armed Forces.

A good proxy for the metastasization of the domestic security apparatus is the rising ratio of security expenses to total GDP; this rose from 3.5% in 1987 to almost 4.8% in 1997. More dramatically, the ratio of police personnel to total government employees increased from 9% to 21% during the same interval (Soliman 2005:84). The police budget had grown considerably from an annual average of 3.5 billion Egyptian pounds (EGP) (approximately

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<sup>85</sup> This entailed the reduction of the number of subsidized basic goods from eighteen to four (bread, wheat flour, sugar and cooking oil). (Ikram 2006: 67). Ikram, Khalid. *The Egyptian Economy, 1952–2000: Performance, Policies, and Issues*. New York: Routledge, 2006.



USD\$449 million in early 2016) in the decade before 2002 to twelve billion pounds (USD\$1.54 billion) in 2005, roughly twenty billion EGP (USD\$2.6 billion) in 2008 and was projected by the finance ministry to reach twenty-two billion EGP (USD\$2.82 billion) in fiscal year 2011/2012.<sup>86</sup>

The asymmetric increase in size relative to funding foreshadowed behavioral changes as well. On the eve of the Egyptian revolution it was estimated that the Ministry of Interior employed 1.7 million people (Abdelmottlep 2015). Through a decree of the Ministry of Defense (31/1981), the Ministry of Interior formally became a militarized body, and young males subject to obligatory conscription for three years may now be deployed to the police instead of the Armed Forces (EIPR 2011).<sup>87</sup> These conscripts formed the bulk of the uniformed presence at demonstrations that gathered momentum in the early 2000s. The majority of the policing personnel were the so-called *umana' el-shurta* (“police secretaries”)<sup>88</sup> who were neither conscripts nor graduates of a much sought after place in the Police Academy; but were rather the product of much briefer training and were the beneficiaries of a much lower level of remuneration. The strata’s real incomes were buttressed with explicit predation of the citizenry and embeddedness in criminal-business networks (Rashed 2013). In turn, this strata ran a very large group of informally affiliated *baltagiya* (“thugs”)<sup>89</sup> who were selectively mobilized against

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<sup>86</sup> “The State’s General Budget for FY 2011/2012”, Finance Ministry, [http://www.mof.gov.eg/English/Papers\\_and\\_Studies/Pages/budget11-12.aspx](http://www.mof.gov.eg/English/Papers_and_Studies/Pages/budget11-12.aspx); also “The 20 billion EGP annual budget of the interior ministry lost in the backdoors of the general budget”, *Al-Ahaly*, 5 October 2011. In comparison, the military’s budget had consistently exceeded those sums in absolute terms, but, significantly, its growth rate over the 2002-2012 decade had been comparatively meagre. The defense budget, in fact, had risen from 13.2 billion EGP (\$1.7 billion) in 2003 to about 25.4 billion EGP (\$3.25 billion) in 2012. In effect, the police budget had swollen six-fold over the past decade, whereas the military’s had merely doubled. See “The State’s General Budget for FY 2006/2007.”

<sup>87</sup> Like military personnel, all Ministry of Interior personnel are denied the right to vote on the grounds of the necessity of their neutrality. They also share the same justice system with military personnel insofar as their criminal infractions are subject to military, rather than civilian courts (EIPR 2011).

<sup>88</sup> Something of a misnomer as there is no relationship with administrative tasks or desk work.

<sup>89</sup> There are various estimates of numbers of the ministry’s *baltagiya*, usually hovering around half a million people. Interestingly, the term was deployed by state actors in the 1980s as part of its ongoing armed confrontation with Islamist militants. The term, which came to conjure the image of a “a young, unemployed, poor, illiterate man” who “lives in a shanty or slum area, but usually works in middle and upper class districts where people need his services to replace the rule of law” (Ismail 2006:143), an elaboration of a character in Egyptian culture and history known as

political and labor protestors, and, increasingly, attacks on voters in parliamentary and professional syndicate elections. Indeed the *baltagiya* were but one class of several groups utilized in policing; the increasing reliance on whom was a clue to a shift in state practice from surveillance to coarser modes of control. Writing in the mid-2000s based on fieldwork conducted in the late 1990s, Ismail described the other two categories as follows:

The expansion of state security and police practices of surveillance has entailed the recruitment of a large number of informants. According to one report, Egypt has become “a state of informants and watchers.” The security apparatuses employ an estimated 250,000 informants. These include conventional informants collecting crime related information, but also those who operate as undercover watchers in NGOs, political parties, government departments, and local communities. Three designations are currently in use to refer to different surveillance tasks: guide, informant, and watcher. Watchers are generally used in the surveillance of criminal activity and are recruited from among individuals who have criminal records. Guides (*murshid*) are recruited from within the civilian population to assist intelligence agencies and security police in their collection of information. In addition to guides who are informally recruited, the police have a body of official informants, known as *mukhbir*. They do not wear uniforms and are on the police payroll (Ismail 2006: 152-153).

The *baltagiya* were tasked with operations in neighborhoods where explicit police presence was considered risky. Though not formally employees of the state, they retained a bureaucratic imprint with their possession of Ministry of Interior affiliation cards they deployed when arrested by officers to which they did not directly report. When Hosni Mubarak won the first multi-candidate presidential election in 2005, he had promised, along with a great many

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*al-fitiwa* who took on the semi-legitimate monopoly of violence in popular neighborhoods – the memorable subjects Naguib Mahfouz’s epic *Al-Harafish* (1977). With unaccounted for rise in income disparity amidst high rates of economic growth, particularly in the last years of Mubarak regime [2004-2011], the term rose in popular parlance alongside the rapid increase in the number of gated communities offering security and protection. Long before the term was brought back by protestors to describe the increasingly arbitrary violence of the expanding police force, it was deployed to legislate ‘anti-terrorism’ laws (such as Law 97 of 1992) that built upon a formal ‘state of emergency’ in perpetual existence for all of Mubarak’s time in power. The figure of the *baltagi* was a figure of attribution, at whose feet criminal culpability lay, and whose existence justified securitization and oppression. One of the signal acts of the breaking of taboos in the protests leading up to the revolution of 2011 was routing of this charge back to the regime and, its then most representative arm, the police. In an era of the unsubtle, cruder, more existentially tinged politics, the term took a backseat to *irhabi* (terrorist) or more specifically *ikhwani* (brother, as in a member of the Muslim Brotherhood).

other promises, to create some four million new jobs. As increasing amounts of political protestors<sup>90</sup> were subjected to street violence and sexual assault, a bitter joke in opposition circles was told and retold; that this was the one promise actually kept by the regime through the implementation of a *baltagiya* hiring program at the Ministry of Interior.<sup>91</sup>



**Figure 6: Protestor carrying a sheet of paper on which they had written ‘al-dakhlīya baltagiya,’ [(The Ministry of) Interior are Thugs] in 2011. The metonym [Interior] is a reference to the police.**

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<sup>90</sup> See Chapter 1 on the differential levels of selective violence applied to political and labor protests.

<sup>91</sup> More of the picture may be found here:

[http://www.gharbiaonline.com/Uploadedimage/NewsImg/01\\_12\\_15\\_11\\_52\\_index.jpg](http://www.gharbiaonline.com/Uploadedimage/NewsImg/01_12_15_11_52_index.jpg)



**Figure 7: Outside of formal protest, the focus on the police continues in graffiti in graffiti painted around Cairo (2012) – with the same slogan, “al-dakhaliya baltagiya.”**

A parallel transformation in Egyptian political economy was not discernable in national accounting data, but certainly no less significant. In a heavily circumscribed political arena, the Mubarak regime had permitted, even facilitated, the self-organization of capitalists. “Egypt is in flux,” said the head of the Egyptian Businessman Association (EBA) to his members in 1995, “you could not pick a better time for influencing it” (Murphy 1995: 22).<sup>92</sup> The EBA, a registered non-governmental organization under the restrictive Law 32 of 1964<sup>93</sup> in 1979 had only 450 members and ‘no interest in increasing its size’ (Rutherford 2013: 205). It seemed an overconfident claim to make for such a small organization had it not been indicative of other trends. Alongside the EBA was the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt (AMCHAM), which had more than double the membership and was the beneficiary of legal exception in the form of a presidential decree by Hosni Mubarak that established what remains the largest and most active

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<sup>92</sup> Remarks reported by Caryle Murphy in “The Business of Political Change in Egypt,” *Current History*, January 1995, p. 22.

<sup>93</sup> See Chapter 5.

organization in the region (Fahmy 2002, Rutherford 2008). There is no direct evidence that either organization were provided material support for significant policy change, or, more saliently, served as effective launching pads for the political ascent of independent ‘businessmen’ as the biggest category of regime challengers in the most meaningfully contested elections under Mubarak, the parliamentary elections. Rather, the public confidence indicated the growing primacy of capital in the political system in ways that fit within the ‘Structural Adjustment Program’, and in ways that did not. Formally, the state’s economic retrenchment was supposed to be accompanied by a massive rise in private sector investment, with the government’s own five year plan estimating that private sector investment was to grow from 15% of GDP in 1993 (two years after the start of the program) to 45% of GDP by 1997 (Handoussa 2002: 92).

The EBA’s 450 members claimed to represent companies with a combined worth of 22 billion EGP employing some 300,000 workers. The chamber’s 1000 members’ economic role was even larger, with its president claiming that its constituent enterprises were responsible for more than 20% of Egypt’s GDP in 2005 (quoted in Rutherford 2008: 204-205). These organizations were the protagonists of the narrative of economic transformation. The ascent to power was by members who were not necessarily in the direct elite network of the EBA and AMCHAM, but just as the political embrace of economic retrenchment created the space empowered organizations of capital to join the Nasserist state’s corporatist organs, namely the Federation of Egyptian Industries (the FEI with over 7000 members) and Confederation of Chambers of Commerce (the CCC with over 3 million members)<sup>94</sup>, so too did that embrace empower nominal constituents of capitalist organizations in ways that were clearly unplanned.

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<sup>94</sup> In contrast to the fierce opposition between the corporate state’s Egyptian Trade Union Federation and the new independent unions that emerged with the fall of Mubarak, there is no evidence of a considerable turf war between the organizations of capital, old and new. Despite the existence of a group of Egyptian industrialists, notably with the Federation of Industries, with a more protectionist/nationalist bent, there is no evidence of the articulation of

Under Mubarak, access to formal political power was subject to the authoritarian executive's discretion with one limited exception; election to the lower house of parliament, *Majlis al-Sha'ab* (The People's Assembly). In its management of elections the regime employed legal restrictions, fraud and violence, that is to say, a large selection of the 'menu of manipulation' available to authoritarian regimes (Schedler 2002). This accomplished two principle goals; first, the containment of opposition and, second, the doling out of patronage to clients; a form of 'elite management' (Blaydes 2008). By the mid-1990s, the second plank of the stratagem began a process of breakdown that may have seemed benign to the authoritarian executive. Bureaucrats and members of the regime's old guard were frequently defeated by independent (though not centrally organized) businessmen who sought, among other things, a parliamentarian's immunity from prosecution.

More often than not, such candidates had sought, but failed to obtain, the formal nomination of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). Instead they ran as 'Independents on National [NDP] Principles,' wherein they promised to join the ruling party upon defeating its nominee.<sup>95</sup>

Through these "independent members-to-be", the NDP maintained a sweeping majority in the 1995, 2000 and 2005 parliamentary elections. The weight of these independent/NDP members has been considerable, rising from 100 MPs in 1995 to 207 in 2000, standing at 161 in 2005 out of the total of 444 (Soliman 2006:85). These victories signified that in an atmosphere of

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such preference to any considerable degree. Indeed there was a considerable overlap in the memberships of the organizations; for example textile magnate Galal el-Zorba, the president of the Federation of Industries, was also a member of the American Chamber of Commerce alongside his membership in the National Democratic Party's Policies Committee, the business oriented organ inside the ruling party that was most closely associated with President Mubarak's son Gamal and the elite business community – and often characterized as the 'New Guard' of the regime (Personal interview with el-Zorba, 2006). For an outline of the emerging differentiation between the old and new guards inside the ruling party, see Brownlee 2007.

<sup>95</sup> This prompted the promulgation of a whole genre of puns and jokes regarding the nature of said principles,

political repression fostered by the regime, and with state patronage on the wane, it was capital, in its most basic, monetary form that secured political victory – in effect what had increased was the — ‘political purchasing power of capital’ (Soliman 2005).

There is little evidence that empowered organizations of Egyptian capitalism directly influenced the changing electoral misfortunes of the ruling party’s nominated members or the fortunes of their ‘members-to-be’ competition. As political institutions in the narrowly defined sense of the term, they can be quickly set aside into the abstract intractability of the endogeneity problem.<sup>96</sup> More proximate to the empirical case at hand, was that neither the capitalist organizations empowered by the economic retrenchment (EBA, AMCHAM) nor the old corporatized institutions of the Nasserist state (FEI, CCC) were directly involved in parliamentary electoral politics, which, for the contestants were never programmatic. As with the surprising and widely distributed wave of labor strikes and protests starting in 2004 up to the fall of Mubarak (see Chapter 1), the political ascent of capital in formal political arena, its incorporation into the regime was adaptive - not by design.

Upon his return from another ‘door-knocking’ trip to Washington D.C. in 2005, Mohammed Taymour, a prominent member of AMCHAM and elected member of its board of governors dismissed the importance of the upcoming parliamentary elections. “Atef Ebied<sup>97</sup> would run to them and promise that the pound would never be devalued, but that disastrous position was not for their benefit. It was because they were a do-nothing government,” he told

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<sup>96</sup> The problem, to which a considerable portion of comparative politics is dedicated is succinctly summed up by Adam Przeworski as follows: “Imagine that only those institutions that generate some specific outcomes, say those that perpetuate the power of the otherwise powerful, are viable under the given conditions. Then institutions have no autonomous role to play. Conditions shape institutions and institutions only transmit the causal effects of these conditions.” (Przeworski 2004: 527)

<sup>97</sup> Prime Minister of Egypt [1999-2004].

me (Personal interview 2005).<sup>98</sup> The ‘business community’ acting as a corporate body influenced policy through direct lobbying of decision-makers, not members of the legislative branch. In 2005 the relationship between representatives of this corporate body and the decision-makers had only recently become cooperative, with the ascension of a new ‘government of businessmen,’ some fourteen years after the embarking of the structural adjustment and privatization program.<sup>99</sup>

“In 2000, I was in a meeting with Abeid when he was Prime Minister. There 12 of us, including Ahmad Ezz and Abdel-Moneim Seoudi.<sup>100</sup> I brought up the issue of the Pound over and over again. He refused to even entertain it and claimed that [allowing devaluation] would be catastrophic. I told him, and others agreed that that the results of defending it were already catastrophic. The real catastrophe of course was the government had stopped paying contractors and [domestic] creditors. This had a multiplier effect. A month later the Pound started to fall anyway. The man, like the rest of the government, had no vision. He simply could not make a decision.”

The complex mechanisms through which class power is asserted in contemporary polities remain without a unified general theory, but ever since Fred Block’s described a set of conditions under which ‘The Ruling Class Does Not Rule’ (Block 1977), it has become possible to discern how the emergence of a class-interest politics is possible without decision-makers’ acquiescence to organized and aggregated preferences of that class. For the first 14 years of the Mubarak regime’s embrace of the so-called Washington Consensus policies, the top echelon of business groups encouraging reforms were, in fact, utterly dismayed by its results. What triggered the more fulsome commitment to insufficiently adhered-to neoliberal framework was the systematic

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<sup>98</sup> Mohamed Taymour. Personal Interview. Transcript available at Economic and Business History Research Center at the American University in Cairo, where I worked at the time. [March 2005].

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ahmad Ezz was the young steel magnate who was also a member of parliament and that member of the ‘new guard’ most closely associated with Gamal Mubarak. Before his arrest in 2011, he was estimated to be the wealthiest person in the Egypt. He has since been released from prison. Seoudi was the owner of an eponymous supermarket. His associations with the Muslim Brotherhood have led to a sequestration of his assets and the state’s expropriation of his businesses after the military coup of 2013.



and repeated defeats of state's bureaucrats to a disorganized class of person willing to dispense resources in a way the state itself could no longer afford.

The permitting of capitalists to compete for state patronage enabled the regime to utilize privately accumulated capital to cultivate patron-client networks by proxy among the electorate, and thus secure a parliamentary majority. This became evident once it became apparent how much money was being spent on these non-programmatic elections in the era of economic restructuring. Soliman (2006) estimated the much higher expenditure on electoral campaigns in 2000 as being the highest in modern Egyptian history. The 2005 elections was the occasion for even higher expenditure, estimated at 5 billion EGP (the then equivalent of USD\$1 billion). The inflation in campaign expenditure tracked an increase in the number of businessmen holding parliamentary seats, from 12% in 1995, to 17% in 2000 to 22% in 2005 (Soliman 2006: 85).

“Youssef Boutros Ghali is a real economist. And I've known Mahmoud [Mohieldin] for a longtime. They seem to be serious...but we will see,” said a cautiously optimistic Mohamed Taymour in 2005 about the minister of finance and minister of investment.<sup>101</sup> The American Chamber of Commerce itself was far more enthusiastic in its pitch to American officials and investors, singling out Mohieldin, who would be put in charge of rebooting the stalled privatization program for special praise in its ‘Door-Knocking’ Mission Statement.<sup>102</sup>

“In July 2004 a new dynamic cabinet, representing a younger generation and the private sector, was appointed. The cabinet includes several outspoken advocates of reform who understand and appreciate the private sector, taking genuine and key reforms to move Egypt forward....Dr. Mahmoud Mohieldin, the youngest member of the cabinet and the former head of the economic committee of the National Democratic Party [NDP] was appointed head of the newly created Ministry of Investment.”

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<sup>101</sup> Personal Interview, 2005.

<sup>102</sup>“AmCham Egypt Doorknock Mission to Washington D.C: Egypt Moving Forward (March 7-March 11, 2005)”:

<http://www.amcham.org.eg/operation/doorknock/dk2005/Doork05.asp>

The disorganized incorporation of a business class into the governing elite would not have been explained as an adaptive measure to a political defeat, but rather by a newly invigorated faith in a rational doctrine espoused by a young group of businessmen, who, from 2004 now surrounded the president's son, Gamal, and formed a 'new guard' within the National Democratic Party. As if by design, three decades after President Anwar el-Sadat announced the embrace of the free market with his 'open door policy,'<sup>103</sup> more than a dozen years after the formal declaration of the Economic Restructuring and Structural Adjustment Program, the regime of Hosni Mubarak had, as far as advocates of this dramatic turn were concerned, finally discovered economic rationality.

Mainline development theorists, specifically those for whom the regime's turn in 2004 signaled a policy-coherence in pursuit of inevitable goals, implicitly recognize the political conflict that is likely to arise with the implementation of their recommendations. This is a literature peppered with reference to 'painful reforms,' 'brave decisions,' and 'political will.' Political scientists who accept the fundamental rationality of neoclassical economic doctrine make the authoritarian-requirement explicit. Writing in 1991 at the dawn of a decade of drastic economic restructuring in post-Soviet states and other polities in the Global South, Adam Przeworski wrote of the challenge of the 'J-Curve' (Przeworski 1991). The logic is as follows:

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<sup>103</sup> In 1974 President Anwar el-Sadat introduced Law 43, initiating a shift in Egyptian economic policy. This reduced taxes and import tariffs for foreign investors and exempted them from key labor laws – a clear indicator that policy was now to be focused on the global market. A stream of legislation followed, facilitating *infitah*, 'the opening' or 'open door' by which el-Sadat aimed to move from state ownership of strategic industries and a dominant role in service provision and foreign trade towards the free-market model. This event, and the presidency of the el-Sadat more generally, animated much of the intellectual left opposition to late Mubarak era economic policy, of whom Mubarak was seen as unmediated continuation. This narrow focus by a group of writers largely deprived of a public audience in an arid politics up to 2004, and often identifying as 'Nasserist' made of the government policies a coherent, doctrinaire program of neoliberalism and American hegemony. This focus blinded such critics to the desperate coping and political defeats that also underlay the regime's predatory behavior. A prominent exemplar of such critics is the economist Ahmad Sayyed al-Naggar. See Bibliography of this dissertation for some of his writing.

since economic reforms only produce public goods in the medium to long term, governments should expect strong social resistance in the short term (161). It follows that governments embarking on such programs would find themselves set against society. To advance reforms, Przeworski counsils that the mission requires that one of two things be done: "governments must either seek possible support from unions, opposition parties, and other encompassing and centralized organizations, or they must work to weaken these organizations and try to make their opposition ineffective" (182).<sup>104</sup>

Within this framework, the palpable increase in state violence associated with expansion of a predatory criminal-police nexus (Marfleet 2013) and a separate but accelerating combination of labor and political protests<sup>105</sup> are not necessarily signs of alarm, but signposts on the road to liberal democracy. Perversely, this setting of the state against society have been utilized by regime insiders as signs of democratic reform; protests signaling a liberalization of the public space, as they were by the Mubarak regime in response to calls by the George W. Bush's administration for 'political reforms.'<sup>106</sup> The ascension of a business-oriented cabinet was coupled with openings in public politics. Alongside the increased presence of independent-

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<sup>104</sup> Without breaking with neoclassical foundations, there has been pushback within the discipline based on empirical evidence in the decades that followed. See Hellman (1997) and Frye (2002). The point here is that short-term repressive tactics were entirely coherent in this basic framework of the 'J-Curve', i.e. a rational course of action in pursuit of a liberal democratic polity, broadly construed.

<sup>105</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>106</sup> Though the efficacy of this tactic maybe overstated by scholars who fail to consider material beyond public pronouncements, it is part and parcel of a discourse that naturalizes and subsumes acts of resistance in the service of a program made coherent by the vista of liberal democratic capitalism achieved through a sequential ordering of economic growth followed by political reforms. The mechanism was clearly articulated by Slavoj Zizek in writing about mass anti-war protests in the United States and Britain in the lead up to the Iraq War in 2003; Zizek (2007) makes the point that both Blair and Bush responded to the protests by stating that the right to undertake such protests was precisely why they were embarking on the invasion! In effect 'space was allotted to protest by the hegemonic state.' Though the Mubarak regime was much more oppressive in its response to protest; the 'young and dynamic' cabinet responded to the wave of protests starting in 2004 in precisely those terms. The increased levels of violent repression that came with the coupling of economic retrenchment and the securitization of the response did not require a more robust defense after 2006, when Hamas's electoral victory in the Occupied Palestinian Territories was associated with a decrease in pressure for democratic reforms by the Bush Administration.

turned-NDP members of parliament, the opposition Muslim Brotherhood had secured an unprecedented 20% of the available seats in the lower house of parliament, and the regime had finally allowed for the existence of an independent press, removing the monopoly on press licenses that had previously been the sole purview of state-run papers and legal opposition parties. In 2005, observers outside the regime circles, could detect that a ‘political awakening’ in conjunction with revamped economic austerity program was, at least in part, being facilitated by the authoritarian regime.

The rough stone of rolling along the J-Curve of economic restructuring is, according to the modular program to which the Egyptian government was now ostensibly committed must, overtime, reorient the factors of production towards exports. This did not happen. No structural change happened to the Egyptian economy during the tenure of Mubarak’s last government (2004-2011). The much celebrated high growth rates (6-7%) that were subject to special praise from the World Bank<sup>107</sup> were in fact associated with higher energy prices that gave a boost to Egypt’s natural gas sales, workers’ remittances and Suez Canal fees (Adly 2012). It is noteworthy that the Egyptian economy witnessed high growth rates in the 1970s that hovered around 7% thanks to the same rentier factors. Such a growth pattern did not change much over a period of four decades, the second half of which was under the aegis of a determined, and politically explosive program of economic transformation.

“Man is an animal,” asserted the great anthropologist Clifford Geertz, “suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” (Geertz 1973).<sup>108</sup> In the final years of the Mubarak regime; there was an emphasis by critics of the regime on the purported ferocity of its neoliberal

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<sup>107</sup> Egypt was singled out as ‘one of the world’s top reformers’ by the World Bank in 2008. See World Bank. 2008. “World Bank Annual Report 2008: Year in Review” (51). [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTANNREP2K8/Resources/YR00\\_Year\\_in\\_Review\\_English.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTANNREP2K8/Resources/YR00_Year_in_Review_English.pdf).

<sup>108</sup> Paraphrasing Weber.

program of policies. It was implied by many of the regime's domestic critics that an American backed doctrinaire policy was being implemented without compromise. Particular ire was directed towards the 'true-believers' Youssef Boutros Ghali, the minister of finance responsible for modernizing tax collection, and Mahmoud Mohieldin, the minister of investment, whose activities were subject to positive appraisal by the fellow believers in the political economy that lies at the end of the J-Curve; including the previously cited representatives of the World Bank and the American Chamber of Commerce. They proceeded to embark on a program to increase state capacity and rationalize the deployment of resources under its control, a toolkit for a modern export-oriented market economy. This included the creation of an anti-trust body the Egyptian Competition Authority (ECA), the devising of a new tax code and the elaboration and defense of a new labor law, the Unified Labor of 2003 (al-Naggar 2010).

These, and other measures, were unalloyed failures, though one would scarcely know it reading the regime's critics, whose insistence on the ideological coherence of the program obscured its specifically political foundations.<sup>109</sup> On the eve of the revolution, the Egyptian state's extractive capacities remained as low as they had ever been, with share of taxes to total state revenues still well below 70%, close to where they had been for four decades (Adly 2012).<sup>110</sup> The privatization program which had targeted the public sector's remaining, investment starved 153 firms had been so riled with corruption that under the aegis of swiftness, the Ministry of Investment devised a scheme to simply give away the companies to citizens in a

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<sup>109</sup> This focus blinded such critics to the desperate coping and political defeats that also underlay the regime's predatory behavior.

<sup>110</sup> Post-1990 Egypt provides a fine contrast with some other developing countries, including Turkey. The share of taxes in total revenues remained at levels considerably lower than countries of similar developmental levels like Morocco (77.2%), Turkey (80.%) and Tunisia (82.5%) for the same span of time. Moreover, while the ratio of revenues to GDP continued expanding in post-1980 Turkey, from 17% (1980-85) to 25.6% (1991-2000) and then to 32.5% (2000-2006), the ratio was declining in Egypt, sustaining the divorce between the state and economic growth.

poorly devised voucher program that was defeated and shelved as much by relentless ridicule as protest.<sup>111</sup> The functioning of the new anti-trust authority collapsed when Ahmad Ezz, the ruling NDP's secretary for organizational affairs and chair of the parliamentary planning and budget, intervened to remove regulations penalize offenders with fines up to 10-15% of their profits (al-Naggar 2010: 40). Ezz was also the Chairman and CEO of Ezz-al-Dekhaila Group, which controlled over 60% of the market, producing more than seven times as much steel as its nearest competitor (Selim 2006: 37). As notable was the fact that he was a prominent member of the business-oriented Policies Committee within the NDP and a close ally of the president's son, Gamal. Finally the Unified Labor Law was relegated to a formal non-encumbrance as the state itself avoided implementing its proscription on long-term temporary contracts in its hiring practices. As detailed in Chapter 1, even champions of the law on the ground of incrementalism could not argue that its formal authority served as an organizing factor in ameliorating disputes in the years leading up to the fall of the regime.

What remained relatively obscure were the political transformations nested in the policy maneuverings. For decades the regime had been ensconced within a scarcely comprehensible system of interest representation that one political scientist described as 'unruly corporatism' (Bianchi 1989); the conservatively accretive outcome of cautious tinkering around the decaying institutions of the Nasserist state when more proactive lurches by Mubarak's predecessor ended so catastrophically in 1981. Walking along the Nile in the capital city one would likely run across decaying buildings in prime real estate locations, on their greying unpainted walls old signs designating service to very specific constituencies such as 'The Delegates of the State

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<sup>111</sup>A prominent economic liberal, an ostensible ally of the regime called the proposal "*kalam fadi*" (nonsense). Qutb, Misbah. "Al-sukuk al-sha'biyah dun ab shar'i" (Public Voucher Project Without a Legitimate Father). *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 28 December 2008.

Lawsuit Authority Club’, and other small groups marked for special patronage by the Nasserist state. Economic retrenchment, privatization and, later, inflation, meant that the regime had been drifting in a decades’ long stalemate in which it lacked the ability to mobilize these groups for the trip along the J-Curve to which it had been nominally committed and had chosen instead to leave small groups to protect their turfs.<sup>112</sup> The abandonment, rather than active mobilization for, or against, was an outsourcing of the Mubarak regime’s primary tools of pacification and repression.

The new political economy was not created out of whole cloth. In the 1990s the governor of Alexandria, former intelligence officer General Abdelsallam Mahgoub, had stood out for his ostentatious ‘beautification’ projects in Egypt’s second-largest city. He did this without requiring additional funds from the state budget. Appropriating national messaging about the ‘Social Role of Businessmen,’ he signed an agreement with the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce where members would be rewarded with free land for the construction of commercial premises in exchange for depositing a portion of their profits in a special fund for the development of the city of Alexandria (Soliman 2011: 89). The practice of creating ‘special funds’ would quickly become endemic in local administrations and public corporations where investment starved entities could meet shortfalls, make side payments through the levying of various fees and acceptance of ‘gifts’ from individuals in a manner that was entirely invisible to national budget accounting,<sup>113</sup> invisible to parliament, *but* consistent with austerity promises to international financial institutions. It could even be presented as a form of decentralization:

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<sup>112</sup> With some strategic exceptions; namely military, police, journalists and judiciary.

<sup>113</sup> Indeed members of the Muslim Brotherhood sought to resolve a looming financial crisis in 2012 through the opening up of all these ‘special funds,’ whilst making the impossible to verify claim that such funds held tens of billions of dollars. More proximately, misuse of such funds by management was a consistent charge by protesting workers in public corporations.

There is a virtually unanimous consensus in the political science literature that decentralization has a major role to play in improving public services. To do the Egyptian ruling elite justice, they are aware of this, as testified by the relative autonomy given to local authorities at the outset of the Sadat and Mubarak eras. But in both cases, the regime quickly repented and recentralized. Authoritarian regimes find it very difficult to release their grip. In Egypt's case, where financial straits propelled the government strongly toward decentralization, but where the regime could not tolerate the consequences of true decentralization, the solution was the special funds. The autonomy thus granted was quasi-social, certainly not constitutionally or legally codified, and therefore easily retractable. In addition, this autonomy is exorbitantly costly, first because it flies in the face of one of the most important fiscal principles of the state, the all-embracing unified budget, and second because it is necessarily associated with a high level of corruption. If anything, recent developments in the relationship between the central authorities and the local government speak not of decentralization but of fragmentation (Soliman 2011: 96).

Fragmentation of the state's corporate structure, including the compromising of the state's fiscal coherence, leaves open a space for the emergence of new groups at the cost of old groups; an intra-elite conflict through which much of what would follow could be explained. The institutionalists were not short of signs of friction, tensions, even a split, that pitted an old guard of longtime political advisors of Mubarak the elder against the new guard comprised of young, professional, dynamic, reform-minded, business oriented allies of Mubarak the younger, Gamal (Hassabo 2006, Brownlee 2007, Collumbier 2007, Shehata 2008.) In turn, the apparent split within the ruling party was accompanied by a potentially more serious split within the governing coalition, between the military on the one hand and business-dominated party and police on the other. "It was preposterous that the police could obtain this many armored vehicles and high-end weaponry," a retired military general told political scientist Yasser El-Shimy. "Does this mean that our domestic enemies are stronger than our external ones? Mubarak showered them with gifts, because he wanted to rely on them to bring his son to rule" (El-Shimy



2016: 135).<sup>114</sup> Kandil (2012) places the institutional rivalry at the causal core of the fall of Mubarak:

...if intra-regime relations were not volatile due to the simmering political struggle within the ruling bloc, the military would not have turned its back on its political and security partners at this critical juncture. After having been sidelined by the security and political apparatuses for years, the military saw the revolt as an opportunity to outflank its partners and get back to the top (Kandil, 229).<sup>115</sup>

What is absent in this reasoning is any accounting for, or of, the instigating event, the revolt, in the midst of which arose an opportunity to outflank partners or rivals. Whilst uniquely difficult to explain, the popular revolution of 2011 was not functionally equivalent to a successful coup d'état carried out at the same time as an outcome derived explanation would portend.<sup>116</sup> Lost are the important conjunctions of transformations in the political economy with actions of autonomous institutions which would not merely *fit* the outcome, but comprise the material through which politics proceeds after the conclusion marked for explanation. It is important to note here that attitudes expressed by generals to El-Shimy, and others quoted by Kandil, were *after* the fall of Mubarak and resting on the weak premise that the economic privileges of the Egyptian Armed Forces were 'a myth.' There is ample reason here to pause before exempting the military from political economic transformations leading to a de-institutionalization in which, as it turns out, they were a principal protagonist.

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<sup>114</sup> By the same token, that is, on the evidence of attitudes revealed after the fall of Mubarak, the rivalry was not one sided. A retired police general said the following to the same scholar: "We have our own slice of the cake (through political appointments and economic benefits), but the armed forces have the cake itself" (El-Shimy 2016: 95).

<sup>115</sup> This mode of explanation, which can best be described as Historical Institutionalism up to a point of 'critical juncture' (see Thelen 1999 for an overview) is additionally attractive to political scientists for its congruence with an important tenet of the sometimes much too voluntarist transitionology literature; that "there is no transition whose beginning is not the consequence – direct or indirect – of important division within the authoritarian regime itself" (O'Donnell et al. 1986: 19).

<sup>116</sup> See Chapter 6.

In the years of the Mubarak's last government, the regime outsourced its tools of pacification to two discreet entities over which, owing to its growing fiscal crisis, it exercised less and less control. Overtime, the loss of party autonomy seemed less a symptom of increasingly arbitrary police force and rent-seeking businessmen now forming a considerable portion of the ruling party – since these entities' autonomy was demonstrated only by the powers its individual members could exercise without accountability – than a feature of the National Democratic Party (NDP) itself. In the 2010 parliamentary elections the party attempted to exercise some control over their 'independent-to-be' candidates by allowing more than one party nominee to run for the same seat, a sign of the collapse of the party machinery, that included somewhat farcically, violent attacks by NDP member against their own party headquarters when *other* NDP members were allowed to win elections so severely rigged that in the history of an authoritarian order in which fully free and fair elections had never been held, it was credibly marked as the 'most fraudulent poll in Egypt's history.'<sup>117</sup>

The importance of the poll has been overstated however; with much too great an emphasis on its lopsided results rather than the significance of the way in which it was run. In retrospect, many have considered the 2010 elections a last straw, after which political groupings such as the Wafd Party and the Muslim Brotherhood began to reconsider the utility of participating in elections at all (Shehata 2011).<sup>118</sup> The shortcoming of this outcome derived

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<sup>117</sup> Tisdall, Simon. "Hosni Mubarak: "Egyptian Pharaoh Dethroned Amid Gunfire and Blood." The Guardian. 11 February 2011. So risible was the political organization of the elections, which were boycotted by most of the recognizable opposition parties (with the notable exception of the Muslim Brotherhood), that the second round saw state-security intervene to rig polls against several NDP candidates in favor opposition parties in order to secure a token presence in parliament. For their part, the Muslim Brotherhood secured 1 seat out of a possible 544 and joined the call for the boycott in the second round of the elections.

<sup>118</sup> Apart from not being evidence based, the implication here is that these grouping were then driven to a revolutionary disposition. Of course these same groupings had boycotted elections before. And, during the uprising when Mubarak's new vice president sought to negotiate with a grouping with autonomous power, they called the Muslim Brotherhood. They showed up. But it was too late.

analysis is not only that it attributes organizing power to such groupings that they clearly did not possess, but rather that it revealed a reduction in the menu of manipulation available to the state to an offering of brute force. There was not only a reversal of electoral openings, but marked recorded rise in violence in manners that no longer accorded with an informal set of rules selectively targeting a particular class of person, but more arbitrary in a way that intersected with the quotidian lives of previously pacified citizens. In 2002 rights groups had reported systemic police torture at 38 police stations, by 2008 that number had risen to 88 stations (Abdelaziz 2009: 59).<sup>119</sup> The moribund relationship between the police and the citizenry was captured by liberal intellectual Amr el-Shobky - not especially inclined to oppose neoliberalism and had even hinted an acceptance of Gamal Mubarak as a form of ‘civilization’<sup>120</sup> – when he called the regime both ‘flaccid and violent’ in an interview with the Qatar based pan-Arab satellite channel Al-Jazeera. He added that in Egyptian politics ‘it is now the case that what is formal [*rasmi*] is not real, and all that is real is informal or illegal.’<sup>121</sup> The novelty of the situation was that the force of law was no longer operative because the violence was no longer politically motivated, and therefore no longer avoidable:

From the 1950s to the 1970s, the ordinary citizen who liked President Abdel-Nasser or President Sadat and walked next to the wall (*mashi gamb il-‘ait*)<sup>122</sup> was largely safe from the assault (*batsh*)<sup>123</sup> of the security apparatus. The citizen who joined a communist organization or the Muslim Brotherhood was exposed to arrest and perhaps torture. This was the case under Mubarak in the 1980s and even 90s with organizations

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<sup>119</sup> These figures, recorded by the Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of the Victims of Torture are remarkable, they have likely underestimated the increase violence against citizens as it excluded other detention facilities located as State Security Offices, Jails and Prisons and Governorate Security Complexes where widespread reports of torture were rampant (ibid). Conjoined with the increased predation by the police was a fall in other functions, namely maintenance of order and fighting crime either because members of the police were themselves involved in crimes, that resources were devoted to politics, or, most saliently that citizens would not voluntarily interact with the police even if they had been victims of crimes. See for example: Abu al-Ghar, Mohamed. “Ghiyab al-amn wa al-‘unf fi bar masr,” (Absence of Security and Violence on Egyptian Land). *Al-Masry Al-Youm*. 20 September 2009.

<sup>120</sup> On this view, Gamal Mubarak would have been the first non-officer president of the republic.

<sup>121</sup> “‘Asba’ al-wad’ an kul ma huwa rasmi ghayr haqiqi, was kul ma huwa haqiqi ghayr rasmi qanuni aw hata mukhalif lil qanun.” Interview with Ahmad Mansur on his program Bila Hudud (Without Borders). October 4. 2007

<sup>122</sup> The expression may roughly be translated as ‘played it safe.’

<sup>123</sup> Though translated as assault, the word batsh also implies an absence of direction, target or reason.

such as Jihad. What has happened in this latest period is that most of these people (victims of police '*bats*h') are not against the regime. They have no political position. They are the ordinary citizen walking next to the wall. They have now been exposed to assault, humiliation and rape in way that is unprecedented. In my opinion, there is no political decision behind these actions. Therefore no political decision can stop them. It is systemic. It requires a new political elite (*nukhba siyasiah gadidah*).

The discretion granted to businessmen was of a different kind, most of whom were not part of organizations pressing for reform of the convoluted subsidy for example, as the AMCHAM and EBA reportedly were. The businessmen who actually made up the new membership of the National Democratic Party, became an identifiable group only under the aegis of the party. They were not otherwise organized. For a regime dependent on rent in an age of declining external rents, the incorporation of successful political entrepreneurs constrained and shaped its patronage. The privatization program, over and above the often severe contestation put up by workers, was grinding to a halt. It also engendered sustained legal challenges that required a repertoire much broader than brute force given that the government had not only to defeat its opponents, but also convince investors that this transfer of property was part and parcel of a credible legal regime to which they themselves could eventually resort. With the increasing challenges to such transactions that in some cases resembled asset stripping, this mechanism of constituency maintenance would never prove sufficient. Instead, the path of least resistance for the new constituency was the tapping into what must have once seemed like a wasted resource and that now must have seemed like an infinite one; the government took business to the desert.

In 1999, Timothy Mitchell had noted that the development tracts spreading in the fields and deserts around the capital city represented 'the most phenomenal real estate explosion Egypt has ever witnessed' (Mitchell 1999: 28). The trend was not reversed in the era of economic retrenchment; indeed the rise was exponential and spectacular. The desert, as many studies,

pamphlets, and presentations on the economic development of Egypt remind reader is that 96% of the land mass on which Egyptians do not live; a vivid contrast between geography and demography (Mitchell 2002: 209). Marked as a vast resource, the desert has tempted successive regimes with the pursuit of some of the aforementioned ‘white elephant projects,’ a series of desert dreams ‘creating projects whose main value lies in their sheer pronouncement’ (Sims 2014: 4). They also served a different function; in 1979, President el-Sadat made a gift of 5000 hectares (12, 500 acres) of ‘unimproved’ desert land to a friend. In turn, the friend used government machinery at no personal cost to reclaim this land rendering it arable and therefore livable. In 1986 the land was sold for 25,000,000 EGP, or, at the then prevailing about US\$13 million, with proceeds from the sale being deposited outside the country (Roy 1992). In the 2000s, the practice of self-dealing in the desert exploded.

The incident with el-Sadat was a germinal precursor of this self-dealing. The first recipient of this form of rent were the Egyptian Armed Forces, who, as we have seen, have had this privilege written into law. In the middle of the 1980s “almost 5% of all housing constructed in the country was by and for the military including a substantial percentage in the new military cities scattered around the desert” (Springborg 1987: 8 quoted in Sayigh 2013: 20). In the 1990s with the enormous growth of resort ‘villages’ that utilized the 300 mile Mediterranean coast between the cities of Alexandria and Marsa Matruh, the Egyptian Armed Forces utilized its exorbitant privilege to build its own resorts and into partnerships on others (Droz-Vincent 2014). Like other entrepreneurial bodies, the Egyptian Armed Forces sought sectoral diversification, and congruent with the efforts of others operating in an era of economic retrenchment in which domestic production would re-orient the economy towards exports, there is little evidence that publically identifiable civilian and military production was that much more successful. Indeed

‘expert’ estimates of the size military economy vary so widely as to become essentially a signaling device on the legitimacy of its sources ‘from 5% to 40% or more’ of the entire Egyptian economy (Marshall and Stacher 2012: 12). Yet in the brief window after the fall of Mubarak when some critical debate on the military’s accumulation of capital made into the public sphere, many of the products and industries cited to sketch the contours of the empire, simply could not sustain a discrete economic unit which in late 2011, under the leadership of the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces announced that it (the Egyptian military) had decided to ‘loan’ a sum of one billion dollars to the Central Bank of Egypt.

Indeed, with an incentive towards inflating rather than deflating the achievements of the ‘empire,’ a proud minister of military industries, Sayed Mesh’al, announced that the production for which he was ultimately responsible has reached 3.6 billion EGP in 2009, that is less than one half of one percent of Egypt’s gross domestic product that year.<sup>124</sup> Given that this almost certainly underestimates the resources available to the military top brass, there must have been other modes of capital accumulation.

From 1991 onward, Defense Minister Tantawi oversaw the wholesale shift of officer housing toward the so-called military or “desert” cities, of which 24 have been built, with three more under planning and construction. The first two generations of these are still commonly labeled military cities, in which large housing blocks and associated facilities were allocated to officers. Now billed as “new urban communities,” they are also open to the burgeoning new middle class that expanded with the deepening privatization of the Egyptian economy over the past decade. They currently boast a population of 5 million, with an expected final size of 17 million (Sayigh 2013: 20).

Yazid Sayigh, one of the more forensic analysts of the Egyptian military, takes this as evidence of the creation of an ‘officer’s republic’ in which the physical separation of military

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<sup>124</sup> See Mamdouh Sha’ban, “Mesh’al: Sales of the Military Production Sector Reached 3.6 Billion EGP”, *Al-Ahram*, 24 October 2009.

and civilian is underlined. He carefully reconstructs the pathways uniformed interests navigated from the military to the public and private sector, and the institutional cover provided by the Mubarak regime for penetration. Yet the sum total of these facts constitutes evidence of a quite different phenomenon. Sayigh (2013) and other scholars of the Egyptian military (e.g. Kandil 2012) want to say that the existence of such privileges put the top brass on a collision course with other components of the governing elite who threatened these privileges with relative diminution which, in turn explains, in the case of Kandil, the 2011 revolution, and in the case of Sayigh, the 2013 military coup. The surface flaw in this analysis is that the revolution and public mobilization become epi-phenomenal. The deeper flaw however is that the empirics collected by Sayigh need not reflect a *longue durée* take-over of the state by ‘Military Inc’ but rather an avid participation in the rent-seeking capitalism of the final years of Mubarak - notwithstanding some haphazard grumblings about the latter’s corruption by generals after his fall. The evidence of animosity collected through interviews that the ‘military as institution’ was prone to intervene ‘in defense of the state’ or even their own interests, which in the latter years of Mubarak were extremely well served. Indeed, even with the opacity which is granted to the economics of the Egyptian military by their exemption from government oversight bodies such as Central Auditing Organization (Sayigh 2012), the behavior of the Egyptian military in the era of retrenchment is consistent with a broader *de-institutionalization* of the authoritarian state. Whereas Sayigh and others view the many and varied privileges granted to generals in the apparatus of the Egyptian state – a preponderance of positions in everything from local authorities to boards of public sector corporations to governorships – as inherently incentivizing institutional resistance to the regime’s economic program, a preference for statism, sometimes

couched in nationalist/Nasserist rhetoric, the actual behavior of the Armed Forces points to a different dynamic.

Whence we return to the General Abdel-Salam Mahgoub, the enterprising governor of Alexandria who in the 1990s had managed to raise local funds without drawing on the state's budget by granting special privileges to local businessmen, we start to see how this worked. Mahgoub had also managed to facilitate direct military ownership in the Alexandria Port Authority. In turn the military's representatives in that enterprise and other ports found much to work with in the regime's newly serious, and to its critics, deeply ideological commitment to restructuring the economy by the likes Prime Minister Ahmad Nazif, Minister of Finance Youssef Boutros Ghali and Minister of Investment Mahmud Mohieldin. Consistent with that ideology was the economic apparatus of the 'public-private partnership,' wherein the military became the 'public' representative in an 'investment stampede' into Egyptian ports; a facilitator and minority partner of the world's largest maritime conglomerates "the Danish Moeller-Maersk, the French CMA CGM, and Cosco Pacific and Hutchison Port Holdings" and so on (Marshall and Stacher 2012: 14). By the mid-2000s, the position of the Egyptian Armed Forces were less an old guard of a decaying state, then the fierce protagonists of a new age; the primus-inter-pares of rent-seeking capitalists.

What the introduction and then expansion of real-estate schemes granted the top brass was not just a foothold in the particular streams of rent that were expanding in the serious neoliberal phase, but a broad based ability to monetize the institutional privileges by engaging with the economic activities of the multi-sectoral 'new guard' within the National Democratic Party. Belying the narratives of conflict endemic within the regime's elites, the explosion of desert cities whose spectacular existence was predicated on the with-holding of the veto power of



the military and the facilitation of the executive of the distribution of land. In this game, there is little evidence of conflict, but rather an alignment behind a common strategy of market avoidance, sectoral diversification and alliance with the state to appropriate public resources for private gain.



**Figure 8: Graphical Mock-up of Madinaty, ‘a world city in Egypt’ built an 8,000 acres city built by the Talat Mustafa Group (TMG) north east of the capital. The group’s chairman, the billionaire Talat Mustafa was member of the NDP’s Policies Committee and a Presidential appointee to the Upper House of Parliament. He was removed from both positions when he was convicted of murder in 2009.**



**Figure 9: Advertising copy for Palm Hills, a development built on ‘the largest land bank in Egypt,’ owned and managed by the Mansour Group and the Maghrabi Group under a new corporation, Mansour and Maghraby Investment and Development the corporate entities of Policies Committee member and billionaire Mohamed Mansour, the minister of transport in Mubarak’s last government and Ahmad el-Maghrabi, the minister of housing in the same government.**





**Figure 10: Advertising copy for New Giza, a luxurious gated community jointly owned by Salah Diab, (founder, chairman and CEO of PICO, a diverse collection of companies in energy, agriculture, finance and real estate) and Mohammed el-Gammal, who is Gamal Mubarak’s father-in-Law. Diab is also the co-founder and co-owner with billionaire Naguib Sawiris of Al-Masry Al-Youm, the largest and most widely circulated privately owned daily newspaper in Egypt.**

The much reported obduracy of the determined reformers of ‘Gamal’s cabinet’ that had supposedly sown the seeds of a conflict between a bureaucratic old guard, the military and the young business-oriented reformers never actually produced noteworthy defections from the core group of military and party personnel. Inasmuch as there were accounts of conflict, they were often a product of projection by non-decision-makers of ideological commitments they accused the regime of betraying, whether for its abandonment of its infamously unruly corporatism, or its insufficient enthusiasm for doing so. “The Mubarak regime was like a frog suspended in a bath of hot water,” said Muhammad Taymour the AMCHAM-based proponent of Mubarak’s last government, “every year the temperature is raised without eliciting a reaction. Then one day the

frog will find itself in boiling water."<sup>125</sup> The warning was supposed to push for stronger commitment to the ideas of the young economists he admired in the new government. There was no cause for pause that the young reformers Mohieldin and Boutros Ghali happened to be scions of pillars of the so-called old guard.<sup>126</sup> Nor had the centrality of rent-seeking in the desert by companies such as PICO, MMID and TMG, all corporate members of the American Chamber of Commerce, brought into the question the sustainability of such arrangements. Though the extent of the military's capture of new streams of rent was, and is, not known with precision, the distant prospects of a future equilibrium seem to have been just enough to quell criticisms of sudden fortunes and random instances of violence. As late as 2010 an HSBC report on the real estate equity in Egypt was 'extremely bullish' about the prospects of the desert cities. This was 'despite very low occupancies' owing to the fact that a buyer needs at least USD\$100,000 to 'get in the door', which only "addresses 12% of the population." An investment in Palm Hills, its top pick, remained fundamentally sound owing to the country's very large population who will eventually need housing.<sup>127</sup>

January 25 was chosen as a day of demonstration because the regime had marked it out as 'police day.' That a protest against the police ended in the toppling of the regime owes in no small portion to the behavior of the police towards those protests which, it must be recalled, had as their limit demand the resignation of the minister of interior, Habib el-Adly. On January 28, the police force killed an estimated 800 demonstrators and had by the end of night, been

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<sup>125</sup> Personal interview with Mohammad Taymour, 2006.

<sup>126</sup> Mohieldin is the nephew of two prominent members of the Free Officers who, alongside Gamal Abdel-Nasser were at the core of the group guiding the early stages of the 1952 coup. Boutros Ghali is the nephew of Boutros Boutros Ghali, the foreign minister under President Anwar el-Sadat and later secretary general of the United Nations.

<sup>127</sup> Gaffney, Patrick. "Picking Winners in Egypt's Real-Estate Sector." *HSBC Global Research*. 12 January 2010. The Palm Hills land deal is still tied up in court. After the fall of Mubarak, el-Maghrabi, then minister for housing, was arrested, charged with corruption and sentenced. He has since been released on appeal after the military coup of 2013.

completely withdrawn. The uprising would soon embroil autonomous actors capable of calculated decision-making, with the formal endorsement of the protests by the Muslim Brotherhood and the deployment of the Armed Forces on to the streets weeks before their devastating withdrawal from their alliance with Mubarak. In the intervening period were several focal points that required little direction. The first, was temporal; the designation of Friday, a day off work in Egypt, as day of mass protest. The second and third were physical and political; and complicate the sanitized narrative of a non-violent revolution; before the convergence on Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo, demonstrators throughout the country gravitated towards two sets of locations; regional headquarters of the National Democratic Party and local police stations. In the early days of the uprising, to the exclusion of all other buildings and institutions, party offices and police stations were set ablaze.

## Part 2: Taking Things Seriously: Brick Workers and the Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress



**Figure 11: The long chimneys of rising out of the brick firing kilns in al-Saf. Most of the factories are small and there are estimated 1000 of them employing some 200,000 people in the area. Personal photo taken on smart phone (Samsung Galaxy Nexus) on the morning of July 14, 2013.**

The village of al-Saf is in the desert orbit around the capital, but a world apart for the desolate desert empires of late-era Mubarak. It is 20 kilometers south of Cairo on the east of bank of the Nile; though it is, for reasons not divulged by local interlocutors, part of the Giza governorate that otherwise lies on the west of the Nile. The distinction did not denote meaningful differences in policy or resource allocation, as Egyptian governors were, and remain centrally

appointed by the president, and ‘local government’ was legally amended to ‘local administration’ in 1988 when the Mubarak regime let another episodic accommodation to a new developmental orthodoxy wither away by removing the scaffolding of prospective decentralization. In July 2013, interactions with the new governor were relevant again; incipient local organizations had reason to take government seriously in order to discover that germinal path to the state that had been consigned to semi-legal graft of semi-formal fee and license bestowing (Soliman 2011: 78-79) - all features of moribund bureaucracies of the later Mubarak years.

The main thoroughfare in the village is lined on either side of the dust covered and smog filled street with utilitarian looking business establishments and interrupted by even more utilitarian looking male-only coffee-shops; garage like contraptions filled with white plastic seats surrounding light metal tables with only a picture of the owner decorating the walls. My principle interlocutor there, Reda Sallam, was a man who had been interviewed as the head of a new Brick Workers Union in the press, and whose union was part of the incipient Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress (EDLC) one of the two organizations that by all appearances were undergoing a rapid expansion in the process of achieving formal personhood.<sup>128</sup>

In a judiciously executed founding ceremony at the Journalists’ Syndicate on April 24, 2013, in downtown Cairo - heavily attended by new union representatives from around the country, the press, union officials from Europe and the Arab world, Mohamed al-Trabulsi, the head of the International Labor Organization office in Cairo, and Jaan Wiene, the deputy secretary general of the International Trade Union Conference- the organization announced itself

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<sup>128</sup> A legally ambiguous designation insofar as it was recognized internationally by bodies with which Egyptian governments was engaged, the International Labor Organization (ILO) being the most obvious example, but not under Egyptian law. Legal recognition and general, rather than targeted public outreach dominated the leadership’s strategies in both the EDLC and EFITU; with their constituent unions left behind in the quest for these national goals. For more consideration of the divergence between federations and constituents see Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation.

to the world and prepared for a two-day private conference at an upscale hotel in the suburb of 6<sup>th</sup> of October in which union representatives would elect the new body's leadership. At the event Wiene, speaking in English with a translator seated next to him, spoke to the new union representative and the cameras behind them:

Your government still doesn't understand that workers have the right to form their own trade unions. We only see these matters of not recognizing independent bodies in dictatorships, not democracies.

The sense of occasion was heightened by the presence of Kamal Abu-'Aita, the president of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) sitting on the podium next to his rival Kamal Abbass, the president of the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS), an NGO that served as an incubator for the new federation.<sup>129</sup> Until the democratic election of a leader of the EDLC at the closed conference in the weekend following the event, the always carefully modulated Kamal Abbass was the de facto leader of the new federation.<sup>130</sup> In

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<sup>129</sup> Abbass was a respected but never beloved figure in labor circles at this time. He had come to prominence through his leadership of a large scale industrial action at a giant steel plant in Helwan in the south of Cairo where 15,000 workers held a sit-in in protest over the arrest of two of their fellow workers who had demanded a per diem. The factory was stormed by a 5,000 uniformed Ministry of Interior conscripts resulting in the death of one worker and Abbass's arrest. A short time later he would go on to found the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS) as a non-governmental organization with that sought support, financial and institutional, from international and foreign organizations, including Solidarity in the United States. It also courted academics and policy advisors and generally model of reformist 'Civil Society,' including advocacy or legal and institutional reform rather than one based factory level organization. This attracted liberal academics, both foreign and local, including Ahmad Hasan el-Bora'i, who was an advisor to the NGO and later became the Minister of Manpower who decreed that independent unions could be set up without further legislation (see Chapter 1). Abbass's relative success, both personal and institutional engendered a degree of suspicion in the small world in which labor organization and politics overlapped in the early 2000s. Implicit in some of the reservations are not just personal animosities and petty jealousies that are particularly severe in ideological communities deprived of audiences and publics, but a more serious critique of a liberal-reformist disposition in which members of the NGO were consulted and contributed to the Unified Labour Law of 2003. Liberalism and democracy were a somewhat heretical propositions in the small circles of communist and social organizers from the 1950s to the 1970s given that calls for union independence were considered 'dangerous to the unity of the working class.' As fiercely irrelevant as these differences were to grand political debates in the 1970s, the publications of the worker-intellectual Atia el-Sirafy calling for labor independence from the state's Egyptian Trade Union Federation [ETUF] are remembered as the foundation on which the possibility of directing labor action towards this end arose. Those who chose to follow this course of action were communists who had given up on a previous generation ideas of 'capturing' ETUF. Though often identified as communists ('shu'iyin'), the older generation of activists who broke away

<sup>130</sup> And many would say, for a considerable time after that. The election, credibly, resulted in the accession of Yusri Ma'ruf to the presidency of the Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress, a candidate not favored by Abbass owing to a



any event, Abu-‘Aita gave a characteristically rousing speech in which he briefly lamented the inability to ‘become one fist,’ but implored all present to ‘hit in the same direction’ as he waved right fist in the air, simulating a blow.

One of the principle differentiators that the new independent federation from its main rival was in its name; the addition of the word descriptor ‘Democratic’ was an implicit repudiation of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Union (EFITU) which had declared itself an entity in Tahrir Square by simply passing out a leaflet to that effect and had declared Abu-‘Aita its leader by default when he ran, unopposed, for the support of members of whom not even a list could be produced in early 2011. “From the beginning there were two opinions,” Talal Shokr, the exceedingly polite executive board member of the soon to formalized federation told me in March of that year, “The first was to urgently set up unions without clarifying the actual needs of the workers. Our opinion was different from this; we took as a point of departure the union itself. We supported workers in creating unions and when they were empowered and ready we created the federation. In this way we are different from our colleagues in the Egyptian Federation [of Independent Trade Unions]. We are not just fighting for freedom to unionize; we

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militant reputation earned by leading a strike at the Alexandria International Container Terminal in October of 2011 that resulted in 3 year sentence that had since been overturned (an enterprise, incidentally in which the Egyptian Armed Forces and a Chinese company named ‘Hutchison of China’ were two parts of a ‘public-private partnership’). In the aftermath of the military coup in the summer of 2013, Ma’ruf was appointed as a representative of labor in a new, 50 member constituent assembly charged with writing a new constitution. Disappointed that articles seemed to materialize from ‘sources outside the assembly, including ones concerning labor’. Ma’ruf publicly resigned from his place; the only member of the 50 do so (Personal Interview, 28 December 2013). This produced great ire within the upper echelons of the organization and, in hastily organized series of press releases, the secretariat effected an internal coup against Ma’ruf, replacing him with the EDLC’s general secretary. In late 2013, there existed, briefly dueling presidencies in the federation. However, even at the few occasions conducted in support of Ma’ruf in closed spaces in Alexandria (including at the Permanent Conference for Alexandrian Workers), it became abundantly clear that the battle within the EDLC were exceedingly minor amidst the waves of mass killings and arrest. Supporters of Ma’ruf were couching their support in language directed at the country’s new leadership rather than the federation, a situation he himself found awkward given his own support for the larger coup. Ma’ruf then quietly accepted his removal and is today the president of the Federation of Egyptian Ports Workers. On his personal Facebook page he now also lists his membership of the constituent assembly as his principal descriptor; with a group photo of him with the other 49 appointed members as his background image; suggesting a reorientation regarding the position he once took in late 2013.

insist that that our unions are also schools for democracy”<sup>131</sup> His younger deputy, Hussein el-Masry, more expressive and less prone to diplomatic-speak, causally offered to show me ‘the books.’ In the large windowed meeting room in the CTUWS office in Garden City, he produced a large leather-volume and opened it on the conference table. Pages and pages of lists with a good number of rows on every page crossed through in blue ink. “We cross out paper unions (*binushtub al-naqabat al-waraqiyah*). They [EFITU] don’t do that.”

What was the state of the brick worker’s union in al-Saf, I asked, curious about how the place I had visited several times was represented?

“Reda Sallam! They’re very active from what I hear.”

Were they in the book?

“Yes, they must be in here somewhere.”



On my first trip to al-Saf, I learned later that Reda Sallam had been injured when his motorcycle collided with a car at dawn, on his way from the last location on his route after another night of machine maintenance in the desert factories east of the town. Before hearing the news that the man I had come to see was in the hospital, I engaged in conversation with nearest patron at the spartan coffee shop where we’d agreed to meet. He was a labor *mi’awil* (contractor) for the brick factories. His job, as he described it, was show up to the factory with a certain number of workers for the day. One of those workers was sitting at the same table, and agreed with him that the job is difficult because the workers, who are day-laborers without contracts are always on the lookout for different work, given the conditions at the factories. An hour of conversation later, it was clear that the half dozen or so people patronizing the establishment

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<sup>131</sup> Personal interview (March 27, 2013).

were all brick workers or otherwise involved in the industry; the aforementioned contractor and a truck driver were also seated there.

The only person not involved in the industry was the proprietor, who pointed to the gas station up the road that I had used as a marker to find his place; Haj Saad el-Gammal who also owns three factories, he said. El-Gammal, a man who seemed to need no introduction to anyone else, was the former National Democratic Party Member of Parliament and had not been seen around since the revolution. There are lots of *felool*<sup>132</sup> in al-Saf he said, and they were ‘coming back.’ Apart from the proprietor’s evident animosity towards the agents of the old regime, there was not a great deal of interest in politics amongst the small group of patrons. Given that this was the place that Reda had asked to meet, it was not a surprise that everyone there knew him. He’s a good man who’s always trying to help children who get injured on the job, someone said. Were there many children working in the brick factories? Yes, someone answered, they often replace their fathers who were themselves injured working at the factories? What sort of injuries did they suffer? Loss of limbs at the mixers was the most common injury, after which a worker could no longer work. Were people aware of Reda’s union? No, in fact they themselves were not aware. They just knew he was trying to help children.

“In [19]83 there when I was about ten years old, there were four factories at heart of our village. There were about forty or fifty overall, some in [neighboring] Ayat and Desamy,” Reda told me, “today there are a thousand factories here, and they are bigger.” We were sitting on the bank of the Nile outside the small, two story, building where he, his wife, their three children, his two brothers and his older brother’s two children lived. “The factories are also bigger; they range from some smaller ones producing 125,000 bricks per day to ones producing more than 250,000

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<sup>132</sup> See Chapter 2 for an explanation of this word’s origin and usage.

bricks per day.” The smaller factories employed as many as 150 workers per day, the larger ones over 300. Given that there were an estimated 1000 such factories in the area, as much as a quarter million people were directly employed by this industry in the South East Giza alone.<sup>133</sup>

An evening cup of sweet tea by the Nile, before the nightly work as machinist at the factories, was a ritual for Reda. Of all the activists, workers and officials I had met over the course of the two years between 2011 and 2013, Reda Sallam stood out; he exuded a sort of relentlessness independent of a larger cause or disposition, but never so narrow as to be indifferent to larger battles underway. His commitment to the cause of brick workers preceded the revolution, but he had utilized the institutional opportunities made available by the successful toppling of Mubarak. In the spring of 2013, with Egyptian politics at a feverish point of polarization, he always prioritized an account of brick workers within his larger worry that the polarization, the failures of the Muslim Brotherhood, the re-emergences of the *felool* would impact them. There was a pragmatism in the mildness with which he expressed worry about national politics, always giving way to a carefully calibrated account of the conditions of the workers. It was a dense account, filled with details, numbers and anecdotes rendered in an inviting sing-song cadence that could not be ascribed to the slight *sa'idi* (Upper-Egyptian) accent that is sometimes part of the way people speak in al-Saf. When he and I were joined by his younger brother Walid, a freelance journalist, and his older brother Essam, who was unemployed, and who were both eager to talk politics with a researcher in the field, they exhibited the same deference to the middle brother that the workers in the factories did. His

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<sup>133</sup> These are roughly the same numbers presented at a conference organized the Italian NGO COSPE in Cairo where the figure of one million brick employees nation-wide was bandied about. The figure includes villages that are functional extensions of al-Saf, namely Ayat, Desamy and Arab-Abu-Sa'id. In al-Saf proper, the figure is roughly 100,000. See Charbel, Jano. “In the dangerous profession of brick-making, talk of organizing.” Mada Masr: 13 February 2012.

stature was based not on force of personality or formal position, but rather an intense level of sincerity that was recognizable by people in his community.

“Essam is a kind man (*ragil tayib*),” Reda said in the car on the way to the first of the factories we would visit that night, “but Morsi and politics have taken over his mind (*raqba dimaghu*).” His older brother was 43, widowed, without a job and living with his three children with Reda and his wife and children. Essam was very defensive of then Mohamed Morsi and though he was not involved in political organization at all, took it upon himself to join protests supportive of the president, who in the spring of 2013 had become embattled. This worried Reda in a sense that of a greater worry about a man two years older than he was, but without the means to make his own way through life having just lost a wife to illness a year before. Walid, who was more than a decade his junior, was revolutionary (*thawri*) in his outlook, which in spring of 2013 was roughly defined as being critical of both the Muslim Brotherhood and the forces that might depose them. Walid was journalist who published work on many of the new venues that proliferated after the fall of Mubarak. Although this work did not pay very well, Reda was quite proud of Walid, who sometimes published accounts of his brick workers and their efforts to organize. In his brief, undramatic and candid account of his family, there was a priority of their well-being rather than correctness of the divergent positions they espoused.

Work in the brick factories was not Reda’s first job. He had done manual labor at the factories in the summers as a teenager, but his route back to the industry was through an apprenticeship at a local, privately owned steel plant. As a 19-year-old he became an assistant to the engineer responsible for the maintenance of the water pumps, cranes and winches at the plant. The assistance became an apprenticeship when the engineer started to parcel his attendance at the plant to as little as once a week; delegating most of the work to Reda. Though the job had the

important attribute of being formal – that is to say functionally ‘tenured’<sup>134</sup> – employment, it was one he left voluntarily after ten years. “People told me that it would be easy to do the work on the machines at the brick factories and they were right. The money was good and I had control over my time.” That schedule ran either between, or more often than not, after the last shift at a brick factory; but always included interaction with workers on the job, who, on the nine visits I made with Reda in 2013, all greeted him with familiarity and warmth.

The work, it seemed to me, put him in an exceptional position for labor organization, given that allowed him access different factories, owners and sets of workers. He agreed, indeed it was to the repetition of certain class of incidents that he attributes his organizing work:

There would be an accident, a man, sometimes a child, would suffer an injury, break a bone or their back. Often times, children would stick their hands in the mixers and immediately lose a limb. There is then a fracas (*hila*), and the workers make a lot of noise (*dawsha*). It usually ends with the workers collecting money for the injured person, or the dead person’s family. The owner is often sympathetic (*muta’atif*) and makes a gesture of paying 10,000 pounds or something like that to the family. Sometimes they offer the injured man or the child an easy job that they can still do. Sometimes they pull a child out of school and give him his injured father’s job. But then time passes and the injured man is eventually laid up at home. His wife becomes a widow even if the husband is still alive and she goes around asking others for money. Even when someone dies, there is usually no police report. Someone from the station will show up and do a write-up (*ma’dar*), but it is always shelved (*yit’ifidh*) as the owners and the police secretaries (*umana’*) are all related. This happens with even the sympathetic owner. And the safety inspectors from the ministry (of manpower) don’t even show up. The owner takes care of all that.

The relatively mutable comportment of factory owners in the industry was intriguing, but not entirely surprising. Earlier in 2013 I had visited Kafr el-Shaykh Ali in the Delta governorate of al-Gharbiyah with a view to consider developments in labor organization in the same industry, across two regions. I had been drawn there by news reports that brick workers from the village

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<sup>134</sup> Makram Ebeid (2012) convincingly argues that there exists in Egyptian labor a relatively underappreciated premium on ‘*istikrar*’ (stability). In Reda’s case he had both social insurance and health insurance; two principal demands that his incipient union was making for brick workers.

had taken the extraordinary step of occupying and shutting down the nearby highway.<sup>135</sup> Upon arrival in the village – which unlike al-Saf was a much more even split between green agricultural fields and long smoking chimneys associated with brick production – I had found that a young, austere owner who had inherited two small family factories had led his workers to the protest. In the midst of raging energy crisis<sup>136</sup> in which the prices of Mazot and Solar (Diesel),<sup>137</sup> of the principal fuels used in the production of bricks had doubled, the owner had been forced to shut down production. “There are areas in which the factories had agreed amongst themselves to raise prices and others in which the factories still compete on price in a way that does not allow for such an agreement,” the owner Medhat Ramadan told the reporter I had been travelling with, “This is the case in the area in which I work. I have been compelled to stay at the

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<sup>135</sup> Of all the forms of labor protest including demonstrations, sit-ins, mass hunger strikes, the shutting down of highways always drew the most severe and immediate response from authorities. When prosecuted, the charge levelled against protestors is usually ‘*qat’ al-tariq*’ (Blocking the path) which is the legal equivalent of armed highway robbery rather than the milder charge of unauthorized protest. From 2011 to 2013 the severity of the official response, when not entirely arbitrary, was dictated by a political rather than legal calculus. In the *reductio ad absurdum* of the political deployment of the charge, the General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood Mohamed Badie was sentenced to death in 2014 after it was determined by a court that a demonstration that he and supporters engaged on a highway on July 22, 2013, against the military’s removal of President Morsi constituted ‘*qat’ al-tariq*.’ See “Ihalat Awraq Mohamed Badie wa 9 Mutahamin fi Qadiyat Ahdath Qalyub il al-Mufti.” CNN Arabic. 7 June 2014: <http://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2014/06/07/egypt-ikhwan-trial-mohamad-badea>

<sup>136</sup> Mohamed Morsi’s year in charge was plagued with severe energy shortages that effected both producers and consumers – who saw an exponential rise in power outages, water shortage and long queues at gas stations. The situation dramatically improved immediately after his ouster, prompting credible speculation of sabotage of his presidency from within that complex and disparate bundle with the state bureaucracy responsible for the administration of energy supplies. “This was preparing for the coup,” a Morsi-era spokesman of the Ministry of Supply told a journalist, “different circles in the state, from the storage facilities to the cars that transport petrol products to the gas stations, all participated in creating the crisis.” (See Ingersoll, Geoffrey. “There’s Growing Evidence of a Vast Conspiracy to Undermine Former Egypt President Morsi,” *Business Insider*, July 12, 2013 <http://www.businessinsider.com/theres-growing-evidence-of-a-vast-conspiracy-to-undermine-former-egypt-president-morsi-2013-7>.) Though difficult to prove, the dramatic nature of the improvement makes such propositions impossible to ignore. Some mitigation against the conspiracy theories may be that they suggest a higher level of coordination within the state apparatus than there is otherwise evidence for, and the dramatic rise in oil shipments from Saudi Arabia in support of the post-coup government. For a business like macro level account see Volkmar, Peter. “In Depth – The Energy Crisis: Egypt Gets Creative as It Seeks Fuel.” *Business Monthly*. June 2013. For news analysis of the dramatic transformation immediately following the coup see “Egypt’s Energy Crisis Sparks Conspiracy Theories.” *France 24*. 13 July 2013. For a polemic in which it is argued that energy shortages were deliberate sabotage by agents of the ancien régime see Massad, Joseph. “The Struggle for Egypt.” *Counterpunch*. 13 July 2013: <http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/07/12/the-struggle-for-egypt/>

<sup>137</sup> Properties of Mazot and Diesel. Local study: Fahmy et al (2004). “Impacts of Fuel Oil (Mazot) Combustion Products of Brick-Kilns on Air Quality and On Two Economic Plants.” *proc. 3’d Int. Conf. Biol. Sci. (ICBS) Fac. Sci. Tanta Univ.* 28 - 29 April 2004. Vol. 3: 25-39.

old prices and suffer severe losses.”<sup>138</sup> For Ramadan, the energy crisis was an existential one, and worker demands were secondary. Indeed, the absence of coordination with other factory owners meant that he had to rely on his workers to protest, and organizing them in more permanent way appealed to him. “I understand that it is severe work, so my main problem is actually finding enough of the people who have worked before to do it again. When my *mi’awil* (contractor) goes as high as 100 pounds per day, most of the workers just choose to work fewer days and spend their time looking for *ta’yin* (tenured work) in (nearby) Tanta instead.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> For resulting story see Gad, Mohamed. “Hikayat al-Masriyin ma’ azma sawda’ bi-lawn al-naft” (The Stories of Egyptians with a Black Crisis Colored in Oil). *Al-Shorouq*. 5 April 2013.

<sup>139</sup> This is essentially a conservative case for labor organization which, in this case, may have been mandated by this particular factory owner’s situation in this particular industry. This was, however, a pillar of the argument put forth by the ‘two Kamals’ (Kamal Abu ‘Aita as the head of Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) and Kamal Abbass, the head of the Center for Trade Unions and Workers’ Services (CTUWS) and the principal force behind the Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress (EDLC) when they spoke on many of the privately owned channels that proliferated after the revolution. The emphases on worker discipline and net gains for the employer were less, though not entirely absent when they spoke to a labor audience (especially in the public sector where it was more often the case that workers were more keen than the government and its public sector managers on the perpetuation of the enterprise as an ongoing concern). For more on the media strategies of labor organizers see Chapter 4 of this dissertation.





**Figure 12: Part of the production line at a small factory maintained by Reda. The second picture is of the inside of the large oven (kiln). The bricks are stacked and the covered. The hareeq (burner) and his assistant then walk across a roof carrying between them a heat source that raises the internal temperature of the pictured space to over 900 degrees Celsius (1652 Fahrenheit). The third picture is of small resting room that sits atop of the kiln where the hareeq and his assistant rest between operations of their night long work. The hareeq and his assistant are separate from the rest of the workforce; often working when others are not and performing a task with a unique skillset and unique dangers. All photographs taken in an ad-hoc fashion on smartphone (Samsung Galaxy Nexus).**

In al-Saf, the center of brick manufacture in Egypt, employers *were* able to coordinate. “Up until now, they have not seen anything from me that would anger them, but all owners of capital are enemies of the workers,” Reda told me about the owners when I asked about their attitudes, an uncharacteristically ideological assertion in content, though not in tone. The combination of sincerity and pragmatism was valuable not just in organization but in collection of the necessary information otherwise not available to workers. “There are 100,000 brick workers in al-Saf itself,” he told me as we drove from the first factory to the second on the first night I joined him. How did he have this figure, given that most the employment is informal? “The Association of Brick Producers” was setup two decades ago he told me, headed by a lawyer from a family that owns factories who also works at *Majlis al-Dawla* (The State Council).<sup>140</sup> The owners liked that he worked there and the association helped navigate dealings with the state inasmuch as they needed to be navigated at all. When they signed a protocols with a company a private company called Idea Egypt in order to implement a Mazot-to-Natural Gas factory conversion scheme financed by the Canadian Development Agency in 2007 that would eventually lay the groundwork for a Carbon Trading in the industry.<sup>141</sup> One consequence of that partnership was that the association produced a list of factories of al-Saf and their sizes.

“Abdelaziz Azouz, the vice-president of the association is a very nice man who sits with us at the café all the time. They were doing classes for children who worked at the factories and a

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<sup>140</sup> The judicial body that that gives legal advice to the government, drafts legislation and excercises jurisdiction over administrative cases. For the clearest layout of the convoluted Egyptian judiciary see (Brown 2012). See discussion in Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>141</sup> This activity was part of a “Climate Change Initiative” funded by foreign doners; one of the many examples of NGO activity that the Mubarak regime tolerated without interegerating their activities into an overall policy program. See Boctor, Leslie-Ann. “Egypt: An Environmental Makeover for an Ancient Industry.” Inter Press Service. 19 October 2007: <http://www.ipsnews.net/2007/10/egypt-an-environmental-make-over-for-an-ancient-industry/>. For a broad based analysis of the relationship of NGOs and the Egyptian state see (Abdelrahman 2006).

number of us wanted more information on that. He gave us the list of factories. We did it in a nice way.”

The ability to navigate the perils of people’s dispositions outside the scope of labor relations is mandated by a feature of the makeup of al-Saf, at least for those who frequently travel between dusty town itself and the factories to the east. The vast growth of the number of brick factories since the early 1990s went in the direction of the desert; bringing the formerly agricultural community of al-Saf into contact with a group that was wholly separate, “the Arabs.”<sup>142</sup> Indeed to get to the desert expanse where most of the factories are located, one has to go through a large area of gated houses that always seemed to be dark. On the three all night drives on which I accompanied Reda from factory to factory we were invariably stopped by a group of smiling young men with very heavy accents. They would peer in and offer to help with always stuttering but still running 1970s Japanese sedan we were driving. At this point Reda would, in a gregarious way, reference a meeting he had with ‘Hajj Ibrahim’ and thank them. He would later explain that it is vital to mention a prominent member of their community; a signal for an implicit agreement for safe passage. After the encounter at dawn at the end of my first night in al-Saf, he gestured around him to the car in which we were travelling, which had required the collective action of three sets of workers to leave one factory and head to the next, and the old Nokia phone with which he had communicated with factory owners to arrange visits; both were battered. Had they been any more attractive, they would have been stolen regardless of the name he mentioned at the stop. “They are drug dealers and thieves,” he said matter-of-factly,

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<sup>142</sup> The usage of the designation Arab in rural and semi-rural Egypt is complex as it does not signal that the speaker does not themselves identify as ‘Arab’ in the way the term is commonly used. Rather it is used in reference to tribal groups that are, for the most part, closed to the speaker. This designation is prominently deployed in the south, that is Upper Egypt, but is also used in reference to Western Desert and Sinai; where the variation of A’rab, Irban and Badu’ (Bedoiun) are used.

without condemnation, almost as if it were an ordinary vocation. What about the police? “They never come here, and if they do, they have to speak with one of their elders first.” As a service to some of the owners, the police will sometimes offer to act a neutral conduits in the remunerated restoration of stolen property. Was this behavior the result of the police collapse during the revolution? No, this has always been the case. Policing, whatever form it took, was of the population living of workers and (remaining) farmers living by the Nile and their desert workplaces in the east, but never the area in between.<sup>143</sup>

The revolution had broken down some constraints for labor organizing nationwide; namely it had shaken the monopoly of formal labor representation by the state’s corporate entity, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) and allowed for the existence of competing bodies, such as the EDLC, where a new union of could find voice, solidarity and a place in an institutional grid. In the late Mubarak era labor action was always local in cause and objective though it sometimes national in appearance owing to the sheer scale and frequency of protests (see Chapter 1). There always existed a threat, sometimes carried out in accordance with a discernable logic that local labor action be kept separate from explicitly political protest (La Chapelle forthcoming, Benin 2009), that any collective action by workers would be met with violent police suppression. Yet the suspension of these constraints could not have a uniform effect on workers in different vocations; for one thing, not all of these constraints existed in the

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<sup>143</sup> The model of the police officer as a ‘go-between’ in the recovery of stolen property was generalized as part of a strange variation of ‘work-to-rule’ by the police in 2011 after the ‘return’ police force. Police personnel systematically ignored an exponential increase in property theft in 2011 but often offered to act as go-betweens between car thieves and citizens who filed reports. See “11,000 cars stolen in Egypt since revolution started: Police General.” Ahram Online. 28 September 2011: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/22725/Egypt/Politics-/-cars-stolen-in-Egypt-since-revolution-started-Po.aspx> . In turn, the vast army of *umana’ el-shorta* (police secretaries), temporarily deprived of other sources of income by a temporarily triumphant citizenry, took to organizing against their employer, the Ministry of Interior and, in an underreported incident engaged in a mass protest outside the Ministry’s headquarters in downtown Cairo that resulted in large fire in the main building. See “Fire tears through Egypt Interior Ministry Building.” Al-Arabiya News. 22 March 2011: <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/03/22/142636.html>

same way. In al-Saf, a nexus of linkages between the owners, local authority and the police primarily revolved around securing property right to land and quarries already-in-use in the desert. “All the factories, and even the quarries, are *wad’ yad* (lit. ‘laying of hands’).<sup>144</sup> That is how they were all set up.” The quarries and the factories would only become subject to the government regulation after they had started to function. The first, and most of the time last thing they do is set up a cabin outside the quarry and collect a charge on every truck filled with *tufila* (clay) headed to the factory.” In turn, the function of the police in the industry was to secure this property from challenge and extortion, which was a role filled by ‘the Arabs,’ and seldom the workers. Were the police ever involved in oppressing labor action in al-Saf? “You sometimes have *baltagiya* show up in certain situations, often when there is a fight between workers and an owner. But it is usually when an injury happens or it’s a personal dispute.”

Given the contours of this situation, where did the impetus to form a labor union come from? Unlike industrial situations where the scaffolding of labor representation existed in the form of an ETUF affiliated firm level ‘*lagna naqabiyah*’ (Union Committee) that formed a model which could either be taken-over or substituted by independent entity, was this an ex-nihilo product of the revolution?

“Actually, we’ve been doing this for more than five years now. At first we wanted to start an association like the owner’s association, but overtime people advised me to take a union line instead.”

Who were those people?

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<sup>144</sup> Or squatting.

“There was an Italian organization here called COSPE and they wanted to give classes on industrial safety. I would take groups of workers to their headquarters in Cairo. They would get bored and not show up the next week.”

Why? Were these classes a *sabooba*?

At this point Reda laughed at my loaded interjection. “They said they did not like the air-conditioning. That they would not be able to go back to work if they got used to that. And of course it was a *sabooba*.”

The word *sabooba* is a grammatically odd colloquial diminution and feminization of the word *sabab* (Arabic for reason or cause). Rather than implying a lesser reason, the designation of an activity as a *sabooba* implies the false presentation of an activity for the achievement of a goal that everyone involved knows is unachievable. What is gained through what then becomes a ritual activity are the externalities accruing to participants; per diems, travel, food, air conditioning etc. Though universal cognates of what may be deemed a species of corruption exist, what maybe distinctive of a *sabooba* is the absence of deception as an organizing principle.<sup>145</sup> Without the existence of a model form from which the training workers for safe practices would be an inefficient deviation, a *sabooba* signifies a degree of opportunism that is different from the regime’s dealings with NDP businessmen in the privatization program for example, which were characterized as *fasad* (corruption).<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> This contrasts intriguingly with Pierre Bourdieu’s famous concept of misrecognition. Bourdieu wants to imply that embedded in an activity such as gift giving are reproductions of practices of reciprocity and hierarchy and so on (Bourdieu 1977). The embedding is achieved through well-worn rituals that take form over time. In contrast, the *sabooba* is an abuse of a novel practice whose nominal existence is recognized as disconnected from the experiences and expectations of the participants. One can also contrast this with what the anthropologist David Graeber provocatively calls ‘bullshit jobs’ in modern corporate capitalism, where he implies there is a considerable degree of self-deception. See Graeber, David. “On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs.” *STRIKE!*. 17 August 2013: <http://strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs/>

<sup>146</sup> Perhaps owing to the correspondence of the era of economic retrenchment with an increase in the number of foreign-funded development organizations, workers in this field were vulnerable to the charge of partaking in what could be described as a *sabooba*. This was coupled by frequent attacks by the regime on those NGOs in order to stir

“They never offered any money. And they were very strict about that. My conclusion is that they got more money than they spent here from the Italian government. I met a lot of people there, not all of them from COSPE.”

A relatively persistent but anecdotal observation I had formed through contact with constituent unions in both EDLC and EFITU was that unions formed in places where there had been no form of labor representation before were much more successful in the recruitment of the sort of membership that was actively involved enough to pay union dues, or to offer up some sort of monetary contribution to the collective effort.<sup>147</sup> Instead of demanding dues, which would suppress the number of independent unions, the new federations focused their efforts on regulatory reform that would deprive the state corporate body ETUF from the funds routed at source from workers’ wages and instead allow workers the choice of which union to support.<sup>148</sup> In situations where no prior representation existed, this issue did not arise; and yet the federations were at pains not to stress the issue of union dues. The brick workers union seemed exceptional in that, according to Reda, that not only had it met the low threshold of collecting 50 legal authorizations for the formation of the union, but that its more than 2000 members were actually contributing money for headquarters and an injury fund.

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up nationalist sentiment – though these attacks were often layered with a conspiratorial charges of espionage and the like. This sort of attack was expanded by the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces and reached a sort of fever pitch after the military coup in 2013. Having thus summarized the situation, it must also be stated that successive authoritarian regimes in Egypt, that is Mubarak and even el-Sisi have had a complex relationship with NGOs that cannot simply be characterized as adversarial, with variation in time and sectors remaining meaningful. For background, see (Abdelrahman 2004).

<sup>147</sup> Even the EDLC, which had emphasized its rejection of ‘paper unions’ suspended the question of payment of dues for the foreseeable future. This suspension however meant that any links forged with their 300 unions were more tenuous than they would have otherwise been.

<sup>148</sup> In interviews within ETUF, some members within the hierarchy denied that a legal requirement for the payment of union dues existed, and that workers could always ask that deductions not be made. However, despite these assertions, no such demand was honored before the revolution, and very few after. See Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

“The *mo'tamar* (EDLC) don't do anything at all. They are fighting [with each other]. They have not even sent a single pound here. But we are doing ok. When we get back to the house, I'll show you the book.” That morning after the night's work, Reda showed me the carefully lined book with members' names and their contributions. “This is the one I take with me, but I keep another one upstairs that I transfer everything to every week, in case something happens.”

The relative success of organizing because of the pressing needs of the workers. Over and above the perennial concerns with wages that occupy workers everywhere were often secondary to the catastrophic repercussions of the frequent long term injuries in what has come to be recognized as one of the country's most dangerous professions.<sup>149</sup> Regardless of the size of the factory, whatever documentation exists, it records factories as employing “two to three people, sometimes four.” The law, subject to enforcement by inspectors from the Ministry of Manpower, mandates that the equivalent of 40% of a worker's compensation go toward social insurance, roughly 10-14% to be paid by the employee, and the rest covered by the employer.<sup>150</sup> The transparent fiction that a factory that normally requires 300 men to operate can be recorded as employing a hundredth of that labor force requires a blatancy that suggests complete inconsequence of regulations arising from the law. I was therefore surprised that a ritual visit is paid by an inspector to a factory wherein the owner, having received a phone call warning him of the visit by the same inspector, shuts down the factory and instructs all the workers to take a break for several hours. Why go through this costly ritual? The inspector is usually compensated

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<sup>149</sup> Charbel, Jano. “Egypt's Most Dangerous Professions.” *Mada Masr*. 2 June 2014: <http://www.madamasr.com/sections/economy/egypt%E2%80%99s-most-dangerous-professions>. Of note is the fact that three out of four most dangerous professions; brick manufacture, cement manufacture and construction are all related to the building boom and the relatively unregulated explosion of private sector, often informal employment associated with it.

<sup>150</sup> More precisely, the employer is to pay 26% of the basic salary and 24% of the variable salary, over and above the minimum amount to which an employee is entitled. Social Insurance Law No. 79 of 1975.



by the employer for their cooperation; and, the three or four people are actually insured, though seldom present, still require paperwork that is exchanged and signed by both parties.

Intriguingly, the basic contours of this arrangement was repeated by Reda sitting alongside a factory owner, who straightforwardly confirmed it. As an independent owner he was far more enraged at the energy prices and shortages than he was at workers' organizing efforts, to which he seemed somewhere between sympathetic and indifferent. "We don't have a stable work force, so if I offer up someone's name for insurance, how am I supposed to know if he will ever show up again. The workers do what they want." At this point, he was eager to denounce 'this revolution' and point to 'the ruin' (*kharab*) that it had wrought.

In July of 2013, the energy shortage had almost crippled brick production in al-Saf. In the period between the military's announcement of that Morsi would be removed as president, but before the Rab'aa massacre in August after which the country would be subject to a months-long curfew, it was common enough to hear to vociferous denunciations of the revolution that brought 'all this' about. A year prior, the defeat of the ancien régime was seen to be unambiguous, and any denunciation of a popular revolution against it would have seemed more costly. For his part, Reda, who was friendly with the owner maintained his studied pleasantness, a disposition reflective of his pro-revolution but generally non-partisan positioning of himself and his work.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> The position is complicated and was about to get more complicated, but not uncommon. In the year following the revolution, acceptable, common sense attitudes towards it ranged from 'glorious' to generally a good thing, with most misgivings relegated to more private settings. With the candidacy of Ahmad Shafik for president, hostility towards the revolution took on a more explicit form, though mostly in the shape of a 'lack of security' for which it was blamed. Only after the summer of 2013 where the awkward emplacement of the removal Morsi as a 'second revolution' quickly giving way to waves of arrest of independent groups outside of the Muslim Brotherhood – including the designation of the April 6 Youth Movement as a 'terrorist group' - did being 'pro-revolution' become an explicit stance of opposition to the government.

On the evening of August 14, I received a phone call from Reda. His older brother Essam had been shot and killed while fleeing the police on a street near al-Nahda square.<sup>152</sup> In the military imposed curfew that was imposed that day, Reda and his younger brother had travelled to the Dokki Police Station near the square to collect their brother's body. They were immediately arrested upon arrival for breaking the curfew and placed in confinement alongside hundreds of others suspected of protesting against the new government. From his cell, he had tried to seek assistance from the hierarchy of the Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress. They were unresponsive were not responsive, leaving him to reach out to a researcher instead.<sup>153</sup> The EDLC recognized the death in a statement of condolences in the name of the institution that gave no indication of its circumstance. The statement was followed by a formal statement on behalf the federation on the day's violence. In it, the EDLC condemned the 'terrorist Muslim Brotherhood group' and expressed support for "the army and the government" in its "war against terrorism."<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Al-Nahda square, in front of the gates of Cairo University, was the site of the second largest sit-in in the capital, and was hence the site of second bloodiest *fad* (clearing) on August 14, 2013. For more, see the report published by Human Rights Watch a year after the massacres: All According to Plan: That Rab'a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protestors in Egypt, 14 August 2014: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/08/12/all-according-plan/raba-massacre-and-mass-killings-protesters-egypt>

<sup>153</sup> Online entreaties and phone calls resulted in a lawyer from the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights [EIPR] visiting the police station and securing Reda's release.

<sup>154</sup> In keeping with ad-hoc but feverish nationalism that had overtaken permissible public expression after the coup, the author's of the EDLC's official position on the violence also sought to express to the "United States, Israel and Europe" that their "enmity was an honor to us [the EDLC]."



## اتحاد عمال مصر الديمقراطي Egyptian Democratic Labour Congress (EDLC)

يتقدم اتحاد عمال مصر الديمقراطي بالتعازي في كل الدم المصري الذي أريق في أحداث العنف المستمرة حتى الآن وتجدد تحميل جماعة الإخوان الإرهابية المسؤولية عن كل نقطة دم سالت علي أرض مصر .. وتؤكد أن حريق الكنائس والمساجد والمؤسسات الحكومية التي يملكها الشعب المصري و بناها من قوته وعرقه وقتل الجنود و العمال المصريين في كل ربوع مصر من سيناء إلى أسوان فاق كل توقعات الشعب المصري عن مدى دموية هذه الجماعة ولم يكتفي هؤلاء القتل بسفك الدماء بل باعوا الوطن لكل أعداء مصر ونري أبطال العدوان الثلاثي فرنسا وبريطانيا واسرائيل تعود للجهر بالأعداء لمصر تحت رعاية أمريكية أوربية لنصرة العملاء الخونة الارهابيين الذين لم يتوانوا في استدعاء أعداء مصر لتصرتهم ففاقوا كل الخونة والمرترقة علي مر العصور ويؤكد اتحاد عمال مصر الديمقراطي وعماله الشرفاء علي ولإعهم الكامل للتراب المصري واستعدادنا لبذل أرواحنا دون أي تردد في سبيل مصرنا الغالية وأتينا تدعم ثورة 30 يونيو 2013 وندعم الجيش المصري والحكومة المصرية في حريها ضد الإرهاب ولن ترهبنا المجازر التي يقوم بها الاخوان الارهابيون بل تزيدنا ثباتا وقوة وحرصا علي حماية وطننا ونقول للارهابيين أننا سنبتلي مؤسساتنا ومصانعنا ومساجدنا وكنائسنا من جديد ولكنكم لن تكونوا موجودين في مصرنا الحرة الجديدة التي لا وجود فيها للارهابيين الذين خانوا الدم والعهد وخانوا الثورة منذ أحداث محمد محمود وحتى حمل السلاح في وجه المصريين وقتلهم والتمثيل بجثثهم لا لشيء إلا لانهم مصريين .. ورسالتنا لأمريكا وأوربا واسرائيل عداكم لنا شرف نبتغيه ... وولاءنا لكم عار لا نرتضيه ... وستدفعون ثمن كل اساءة لشعب مصر العظيم ولن ينفعكم عملاؤكم الاخوان الذين علمنا من دفاعكم عنهم كم كانوا خائنين لوطننا الحبيب وراجعوا التاريخ وأسألوا أجدادكم .. من هو الشعب المصري ؟ ومن هو الجيش المصري ؟ عاش تضال العمال في المصانع والعيادين ..

المجد للعمال ..

اتحاد عمال مصر الديمقراطي

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Figure 13: Official statement by the EDLC in response to the events of August 14, 2013.

Given the turmoil and the strictly enforced curfew, there were little indications of what had occurred in al-Saf itself on August 14. It would emerge later that of the many violent incidents that took place that day, one which the state would go back and seek to prosecute over 30 people for, was the burning of the police station in al-Saf for the second time in three years:



**Figure 14: The burning of al-Saf police station on August 14, 2013<sup>155</sup>**

### **Part 3: The Gravity of the Situation**

Is there a paradox of effective cooptation? Writing of the Mubarak regime’s strategy to control labor dissent, Dina Bishara argued the state’s ability to fully co-opt leaders maximized the loyalty of the leadership to the regime, but that the extent of the co-optation undermined those leaders ability to fulfil their designated task of co-opting rank and file members (Bishara 2013: 28). In the immediate aftermath the military coup, Kamal Abu-Aita the president of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions was appointed to the post of Minister of Manpower, Kamal Abbass of the Center for Trade Union and Workers’ Services was appointed to the states’ National Council for Human Rights (where he remains) and Yusri Ma’ruf the president of Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress was named to a new constituent assembly

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<sup>155</sup> ONA News Service: “Tajdid Habs 30 mutahaman bi-harq qism shurtah al-saf 15 yawman ala-dhimat al-taqiq” 21 January 2014: <http://onaeg.com/?p=1421937>.

charged with drafting a new constitution. There is therefore a striking similarity between the state's complete capture of an institution's leadership in the Mubarak era, and the complete hollowing out of that institution's ability to act autonomously because of the capture.

There are, however, important differences. Egypt under military rule has been more oppressive than any time in its history as a republic; but within that shift in the overall level of oppression, there remains a discrepancy between the degree and kind of state violence directed against explicitly political actors and localized labor protests. The fundamental division of modalities of control remains; that is the relative caution of taking direct policy action against groups whose democratic representation it will not accept, but would instead seek to implement the Mubarak era policy of 'ignoring' (Bishara 2013, 2016).



**Figure 15: Reda Sallam, third from the right, at a meeting in the new headquarters of the brick workers’ union in al-Saf in 2014.**

It is therefore the case that though their leaderships were crippled by deprivations of resources and complicity, the institutions to which they belonged also remain as intact as they ever were – that is, in a legal limbo that has not ended despite the existence of docile, military friendly parliament elected in 2015. The strategies of pursuing legal change and engaging a wider public pursued at the elite level of what constituted itself as ‘the labor movement’ proved to be deficient, but a not insignificant number of the formations at the bottom of these defanged federations remain. It is not yet clear how many estimated of 1000 unions legally recognized in 2011 have become ‘paper unions,’ but it is also not clear that there exists any resources in the

new authoritarian state's repertoire of (in)actions to reach down into this denser network of bodies to find leaders to co-opt.

One of them is Reda Sallam whose union had, by 2014, grown to 4000 members. By then the growing membership was in increasingly desperate straits as an unresolved energy shortage had led to successive shutdowns and lockouts by the factory owners. I was also surprised to learn that Reda had been elected to the executive board of the Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress. His sorrow over his brother was never linked to the anti-government stance of his public pronouncements. The state's energy policy that for years pushed owners to adopt natural gas instead of the environmentally polluting Mazot (Diesel) left the industry devastated when el-Sisi's second government reduced energy subsidies such that many of the factories became untenable. By 2014, a reported half of the factories were closed down, leaving workers in al-Saf, who were never covered by social or health insurance, entirely without a safety net.<sup>156</sup>

The revolutionary re-enactment that preceded the military coup, as I have argued in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, signified a recognition that political change must be achieved through methods dictated by the popular revolution of 2011. Autonomous political actors, namely the military and the Muslim Brotherhood recognized, that what had happened in Egypt could not be assimilated into 'an ongoing process.' Their autonomy is signaled by ability to act in a new arena rather than merely become their product. But the derivativeness of the coup from the revolution that preceded it, the closing act of a democratic experiment from its opening one, has also signaled that the new authoritarianism is built on resuscitation of what had come before. Hence successive governments of Egypt after the summer of 2013 that have sought to control labor, the law and the media, have done so through means derived from the last years of the

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<sup>156</sup> Salam, Walid. "Naqib 'Umal Masani' al-Toob: Irtifa' Si'r al-Ghaz wa al-Asmant wa al-Solar Awqaf Masani' al-Toob wa Kharab Biyutnah." *Ahdath al-Sharq*. 25 July 2014: <http://hisspress.net/?p=30240>



Mubarak regime, buttressed by, and requiring increasing levels of violence.<sup>157</sup> The incongruence of this derivative political administration has meant an even greater degree of hollowing out of institutions such as the judiciary, the legislature and the media in order to immediately cement the seizure of power and make complicit groups who may at some point form centers of opposition. The crises of authority at the center of this storm of state violence is as acute as it ever was. Should the storm abate, there is some evidence of a different set of actors taking things seriously.

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<sup>157</sup> In July of 2015, a Special Forces contingent was sent to an apartment in the suburb of 6 October where 13 lawyers of Muslim Brotherhood were ‘liquidated’ by the Ministry of Interior, signaling the entry of the ‘Death Squad’ into Egyptian politics. See “Egypt Forces Kill 13 Muslim Brotherhood Members in Cairo.” Middle East Eye. 2 July 2015: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/9-muslim-brotherhood-members-killed-cairo-688879342>



## Overture to Chapter 4

The systemic impact of changes in political communication and the media is poorly understood. Within a revolutionary political situation, the political function of mass communication is subject to rapid transformation, wherein the causal impact is itself subject to enormous variation. There is a radical disjuncture between the temporally proximate situations in which ‘opinions count’ and one in which individuated and divided expressions are cast into an ether without resonance. This disconnect has proved useful to extant political actors and detrimental to the point of being annihilative to political projects seeking the attainment of affirmative consent of an audience.

The socialization of dyadic communication embodied in online social media stands accused of effecting monumental political change in world politics. First as mechanisms facilitating protest under authoritarianism, magnifying political forces that are otherwise assumed to be organizationally weak. Second as amplifiers of populist nationalisms that have taken hold in established democracies. In this chapter, I argue that analyses of politics that posit an ontological divide between fundamental politics and virtual politics in their consideration of media are flawed. Such analyses correspond to philosophical ideas about the mind and the body, and obscure more than they reveal. Instead, I identify and present three modes with which citizens engage different forms of media: power signification, logistic transmission and individuating monological. These analytical categories offer more purchase than theories rooted in a country’s assigned level of political development whilst allowing for variation in context and institutional checks and balances. Rather than rely on untenable counterfactuals, or surveys that measure what individuals think, I argue that the mechanisms with which individuals and groups utilize political communication and the media are best accounted for by non-Marxist materialism

that emplaces these methods of political production in assemblages whose outcome may lead to collective action, demobilization or the constitution of a political actor.

## Chapter 4

### The Means of Political Production: The Media



Figure 16: Man holds up a copy of Al-Ahram with a headline “The People Have Brought Down The Regime” on February 12, 2011.

The idea that the Internet favors the oppressed rather than the oppressor is marred by what I call cyber-utopianism: a naive belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside. It stems from the starry eyed digital fervor of the 1990s, when former hippies, by this time ensconced in some of the most prestigious universities in the world, went on an argumentative spree to prove that the Internet could deliver what the 1960s couldn't: boost democratic participation, trigger a renaissance of moribund communities, strengthen associational life, and serve as a bridge from bowling alone to blogging together. And if it works in Seattle, it must also work in Shanghai.

Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion*

If you live in a world of individuals where everyone is encouraged to believe what they feel and what they want and what they desire is the center of the world, which is pretty much the ideology of our time, it is very difficult to conceive of anything beyond your own death. That is one of the things the left has a real problem with; how do you herd a bunch of narcissistic piglets? It sounds silly, but it's sort of true. That's why politicians find it difficult to create collective movement because everyone is running squealing following their own desires. The one people who can manage it are social media, like Facebook because you all believe that you are a little piglet doing exactly what you want. In fact, the algorithms are saying all those piglets look exactly alike and we can tell them what to do. But the piglets feel they are still individuals. It's brilliant. They've squared the circle in a way a politician can't.

Adam Curtis, *A Documentary Filmmaker*<sup>158</sup>

Conventional analyses fail to emphasize that a "well developed" civil society is not simply a matter of many clamoring voices, but also the set of institutions and social norms that make pluralism a civil process of persuasion and reconciling of differences. No matter how well-intentioned and knowledgeable, non-governmental organizations promoting human rights tend to understate the tension between their ideal of an open society and the difficulty of establishing its preconditions in newly democratizing societies. As a consequence, their remedies may sometimes fuel nationalist mythmaking rather than dampen it.

Jack Snyder and Karen Ballentine,  
*Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas*

"If you don't want anyone one listening, don't talk on the phone."

Habib el-Adly, former Egyptian minister of interior

"We are what we pretend to be"

Kurt Vonnegut, *Mother Night*

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<sup>158</sup> Interviewed on the Chapo Trap House podcast, December 12, 2016. See <https://soundcloud.com/chapo-trap-house/episode-65-no-future-feat-adam-curtis-121216>.

## Part 1: Politics Between the Fundamental and the Virtual

On November 22, 2016, the British parliament approved a piece of legislation dubbed by its critics as “the snooper’s charter.”<sup>159</sup> The Investigatory Powers Bill of 2016 was not borne of the tumult that followed the so-called ‘Brexit’ vote in which a narrow majority of the participating electorate voted for their country to leave the European Union. A prior draft of the legislation under the name the Communications Data Bill was killed off in 2013 when the Liberal Democrats, governing in coalition with the Conservative Party, reportedly refused to go along with the law. The surprise results of the British general elections in 2015, conducted against the background of dueling English and Scottish nationalisms gave the Conservative Party an absolute majority in parliament, which in turn, resulted in the party’s head, Prime Minister David Cameron following through with a manifesto promise to conduct an ‘In-Out’ referendum on Britain’s membership in the European Union. The climate in the aftermath of the unexpected outcome of that referendum was one in which legislation the famous whistle-blower Edward Snowden called “the most extreme surveillance in the history western democracy”<sup>160</sup> passed with “barely a whimper,”<sup>161</sup> meeting with token opposition inside parliament, and scarcely any from outside.

The rationalizations for the law are consistent with previous, if less draconian iterations in other democracies as a fight against the ‘Four Horsemen of the Infocalypse’; terrorists, drug dealers, pedophiles and organized crime. Long established democracies such as Finland and

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<sup>159</sup> Travis, Alan. “Snooper's charter' bill becomes law, extending UK state surveillance.” *The Guardian*. November 22, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/29/snoopers-charter-bill-becomes-law-extending-uk-state-surveillance>.

<sup>160</sup> Edward Snowden, Twitter post, 17 November, 2016, 11:59 p.m., <https://twitter.com/Snowden?lang=en>.

<sup>161</sup> MacAskill, Evan. “‘Extreme surveillance’ becomes UK law with barely a whimper.” *The Guardian*. November 19, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/19/extreme-surveillance-becomes-uk-law-with-barely-a-whimper>.

Sweden have already passed law surveilling, but not limiting, citizens' online activities; with Germany in the process of undertaking a similar project.

In the United States, real-estate magnate and reality television star Donald Trump was elected to the presidency of the republic after conducting an unusual campaign that broke with established norms of American politics. Analyses of that electoral surprise resemble the early takes on the Egyptian revolution (see Chapter 1) in their designations of myriad factors to this, by definition, singular outcome. A point of intersection in the furiously growing Venn diagram of explanations is the prominence of both the traditional and new (social) media in the candidate's seizure of both the Republican Party and the highest executive office in the country.

In the aftermath of the insurgent populist's success, a great deal of attention has been paid to the complex relationship between his electoral campaign, social media and their coverage by the corporate, that is to say, profit-driven outlets, through which the electorate engages with politics.<sup>162</sup> The emerging consensus seemed to be that in the first phase of the presidential campaign, news-outlets provided round-the-clock coverage of the eventual victor that far outpaced all other presidential hopefuls across the spectrum. By the end of the campaign, it was estimated that Donald Trump had received coverage worth US\$4.96 billion (compared USD\$3.24 billion granted to his general election rival Hillary Clinton).<sup>163</sup> In the first phase of the campaign, that is prior to the candidate's clinching of his party's nomination for the presidency, the coverage had been relatively neutral and quite lucrative. The corporate media's deep embrace of the candidacy is best exemplified by a now notorious quote attributed to CBS President Les

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<sup>162</sup> Although news consumption in the United States has been enormously fragmented by the proliferation of online outlets and user-generated content on social media platforms, according to research by Pew it remains the case that, at least up to 2013, three out four citizens relied on local and network television for news. See <http://www.journalism.org/2013/10/11/how-americans-get-tv-news-at-home/>

<sup>163</sup> Both figures are record breaking. See <http://www.mediaquant.net/2016/11/a-media-post-mortem-on-the-2016-presidential-election/#respond>.

Moonves in February of 2016 at a technology conference sponsored by the investment bank Morgan Stanley that “it may not be good for America, but it’s damn good for CBS.”<sup>164</sup> It is widely accepted that beyond the threshold of the candidate securing his party’s nomination, coverage of Donald Trump took a sharp turn towards the negative – a consensus seconded by a systematic analysis.<sup>165</sup> His rival Hillary Clinton was also subject to hostile coverage, but insofar as the major media organs could express an implicit and explicit preference in the 2016 election, it was an unambiguous one for the Democratic nominee. One clear indicator of this preference was a simple count of official newspaper endorsements for Hillary Clinton in comparison to Donald Trump: On the eve of the election, Clinton had secured the endorsements of two hundred major newspapers in comparison to Trump’s six, only one of which could be considered a major newspaper.<sup>166</sup>

The centrality of messaging, and the role of new networked forms of political communication has produced a sustained panic about the phenomenon of ‘fake news’ on the internet.<sup>167</sup> Though only one of several possible explanation advanced in order to explain the political surprise, it has come with calls for a reckoning with a new arena of political communication wherein a new velocity and anonymity is said to threaten the norms of

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<sup>164</sup> Bond, Paul. “Les Moonves: It May Not Be Good for America, But It’s Damn Good for CBS.” *The Hollywood Reporter*. 29 February 2016: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/leslie-moonves-donald-trump-may-871464>

<sup>165</sup> In a report prepared in July of 2016 for the Shorenstein Center at Harvard University, Thomas E. Patterson empirically illustrates the trend in coverage with a graph that is almost a perfect "X"; coverage of the candidate went from 57% positive and 43% negative during the early Republican primaries to 61% negative and 39% positive after Trump defeated his last Republican rivals. See Patterson, Thomas E.: <http://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Election-2016-Primary-Media-Coverage.pdf> . Subsequent coverage was even more unremittingly hostile, with perpetual coverage of the candidate’s personal and financial improprieties, including a steady stream of allegations of sexual abuse.

<sup>166</sup> Donald Trump’s single major newspaper endorsement came from the Las Vegas Review-Journal, a paper owned by the casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, who was also one of the candidate’s largest financial contributors.

<sup>167</sup> Alarm bells were raised by the end of the campaign and reached siren levels in the weeks following the election; including calls for government regulation by the defeated candidate, Hillary Clinton. See, for example Rutenberg, Jim. “Media’s Next Challenge: Overcoming the Threat of Fake News.” *The New York Times*. November 6, 2016 and Kane, Paul. “Hillary Clinton attacks ‘fake news’ in post-election appearance on Capitol Hill.” *The Washington Post*. December 8, 2016.

journalism and political speech,<sup>168</sup> which alongside general, equal and certain laws are presented as pillars of American Democracy.<sup>169</sup> The causal chains leading from messaging – whether the focus was form or content, terminated in the specific binary action by a specific group of people on a specific occasion; that is the voting behavior of a defined group of people on November 8, 2016.

In the reckonings advanced in order to adapt political systems under democracy to novel forms of mass communication, there are tensions disguised by the fact that all political analyses are marshalled to explain a vote. On the one hand, a censorious logic envisions an already constituted group of terrorists, pornographers and drug dealers. New forms of mass communication may increase the scope and efficacy of their operations – but their prior existence to the networks embedded in new media is assumed. On the other hand, accounts lamenting the spread of ‘fake news’ in siloed echo-chambers that coalesce, amplify and magnify the voices of previously marginal political groupings – or in some accounts tendencies within individuals – seem to imply that the substance of political reaction is also its form; that communication without professional<sup>170</sup> gatekeeping and mediation is a lab for emergent phenomena without a

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<sup>168</sup> A counter-current of explanation is that which is based on ‘fundamentals’. The political scientist Alan Abramowitz’s “Time for Change” model (Abramowitz 1998) -using criteria that would be just as measurable in the late nineteenth century as the early twenty-first<sup>168</sup> (the growth rate of the economy during the second quarter of the election year, the incumbent president’s approval rating at mid-year, and the length of time the incumbent president’s party has controlled the White House) was one of several that predicted the victory of Republican precisely by ignoring the specificities of the candidate and his campaign. In the Abramowitz case, the model actually predicted a popular vote victory, but remains noteworthy for forecasting a Republican victory of any sort in the presidential race. Other ‘fundamentals’ based predictive models were consistently more likely to countenance a Trump victory than popular punditry. The presentation of such models in the post-election autopsy served to counter campaigns that political communication, and by virtue of the structure of national politics in the United States, electoral mobilization had been radically altered by a novel mixture online anonymous groups and mass rallies employed by the Donald Trump campaign. See Prokop, Andrew. “Few predicted Donald Trump had a shot at winning. But Political Science models did.” Vox. Nov. 9. 2016: <http://www.vox.com/2016/11/9/13571872/why-donald-trump-won>

<sup>169</sup> Relying as it does on commonsensically deployed reference to the Bill of Rights as the first of twenty-seven amendments to the country’s constitution.

<sup>170</sup> At least in the interested, professional sense – rather than programmers.



straightforward correspondence between demography, geography, attitudes and virtual avatars disseminating information and mobilizing collective action.

In liberal democracies, the guardians and critics of proposed regulatory and legal regimes designed to reckon with the new media landscape do not deliberate on the ontological status of online phenomena. Instead the debate is cast in terms of public good trade-offs between liberty and security, and their relationship to the ‘public interest.’ These are first order considerations at the heart of liberal political thought,<sup>171</sup> finding their way into partisan debate animated by cyclical elections (or in the Brexit case, a one off referendum which more, or less, approximates vote shares of organized political actors) where variations of outcomes are measurable. It is therefore possible to illustrate a causal chain, ornamented by audience shares and sophisticated content analyses to produce ‘net effect’ type analyses (see Friedman 1953 for a foundational statement) with media inputs on one side and vote outcome on the other. With a sufficiently large number of plebiscites across time and space, there are creditable materials for natural experiments.

The always available dependent variable of vote tallies in democratic politics has atrophied analysts’ - and political scientists’ - facility for illustrating causal mechanisms such that the question of what political communication actually *does* is seldom considered. The answers have remained mired in a comfortable vagueness by the tractability of vote counting as a coherent way in which theory testing is cashed out. The dissonant interpretations of surprising electoral outcomes in 2016 betray this gap at the heart of comparative politics.

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<sup>171</sup> Compare for example Beauchamp, Zach. “Russia has weaponized the American Press.” Vox. Oct. 17. 2016: <http://www.vox.com/world/2016/10/17/13245200/russia-wikileaks-american-press-democracy> Greenwald, Glenn. “On Wikileaks, Journalism and Privacy: Reporting on the Podesta Archive is an Easy Call.” The Intercept. Oct. 13. 2016: <https://theintercept.com/2016/10/13/on-wikileaks-journalism-and-privacy-reporting-on-the-podesta-archive-is-an-easy-call/>

On the one hand, modern democracy had long been subjected to a process of ‘mediatization,’ wherein a “a political system to a high degree is influenced by and adjusted to the demands of the mass media in their coverage of politics” (Asp 1986: 359 quoted in Hjarvard 2008: 9). This, even in the age preceding social media, fundamentally transformed politics. Scholars analyzing the use of television in the 1989 Brazilian elections, the rise and persistence of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy and the use of ‘spin’ in Britain described a politics that had ‘lost its autonomy,’ that had ‘become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media” (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999, quoted in Hjarvard 2008: 107). The advent of social media, defined as the “colonization of the space between traditional broadcast and private dyadic communication” (Miller et al 2016: 9) has jettisoned institutional brokerage carried out by the ‘Fourth Estate,” allowing for the coordination and coalescing of forces previously incapable of doing so. In this telling, the operating logic of profit-driven networks operated by companies that refuse to be called “media companies”<sup>172</sup> is a recipe for a politics detached from prior constraints. We may call explanations in this vein *Virtual Politics*.

The opposite argument suggests that the effect of political communication on surprising political outcomes is an example of an essentially spurious relationship. If new forms of political communication have had any effect on politics at all, it is to obfuscate the durable trends that shape political behavior, including voting. The aforementioned work of the political scientist Alan Abramowitz, a parsimonious and politically-neutral model, is just such an example wherein measures of economic growth and an incumbent’s popularity do most of the necessary work of

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<sup>172</sup> Bune, Catherine. “Facebook won’t call itself a media company. Is it time to reimagine journalism for the digital age?” *The Verge*. 16 November 2016: <http://www.theverge.com/2016/11/16/13655102/facebook-journalism-ethics-media-company-algorithm-tax>

explanation (Abramowitz 1988). Longitudinal analyses placed the electoral surprise as a fruition of long sown historical seeds, such as the adoption of the ‘Southern Strategy’<sup>173</sup> by the Republican Party in the United States after 1964 (Murphy and Gulliver 1972). An even wider prism is used by scholars who note a structural transformation in Western capitalism that, starting in the 1970s sought to systematically privilege creditors at the expense of debtors, emphasizing the role of citizens as consumers rather than workers through the adoption of policies that produced growing wealth inequality and stagnating wages (Blyth 2015). A decreased political responsiveness of increasingly self-referential, professional and technocratic parties, that is to say cartel parties (Katz and Mair 1995), created a horizontal cleavages ripe for exploitation by unconstrained political entrepreneurs. In this reading, transformations in political communication are largely incidental. We may call explanations in this vein *Fundamental Politics*.

The commonsensical resolution of these poles would be to assert that neither is without merit and that in some configurations, the strands of explanation are not mutually exclusive. That, however, would be missing what is revealing about the existence of such widely divergent assessments of the role of changes in communication on politics. The absence of a unified or consistent mechanism through which, and by which, political messaging and attitudinal measures produce political outcomes is in and of itself a noteworthy data point to keep in mind whence we consider strategies of state and non-state actors to organize and resist political power in the absence of a vote tally to confirm or refute the efficacy of political strategies. As things stand,

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<sup>173</sup> The name given to the strategy devised by future Republican president Richard Nixon to systematically deploy and make veiled (and often not-so-veiled) racist appeals to white voters in the American South, alienated by the Democratic President Lyndon Johnson’s push for racial integration.

the nebulousness of mechanisms involved has meant that most scholars exploring incongruent hypotheses about the effects of communication eventually find out that they are right!

Theorizing about political communication in the absence of the repeated electoral games should prompt a reconsideration of the largely ad-hoc conclusions about media and politics in general. What is revealing about reflections on the media and politics without the benefit of electoral outcomes, is the renewed need to explicate palpable effects other than mere votes, the competent prediction of which can obscure the absence of a coherent theory of what political communication does. In seeking to understand the effects of a changing ‘public sphere’ (Lynch 2006), or noting the existence of functional equivalents, that is to say ‘counter-publics’ (Warner 2002, Hirschkind 2006) in settings in which the formal conditions for free political expression are not met, scholars invariably write in the shadow of the foundational Habermasian description of eighteenth-century Britain (Habermas 1989).

The original argument goes something like this: For a brief moment, at the advent of ‘modernity’ when the public sphere was liberated from the state and from any threat of coercion but not yet the site of class conflict, conditions permitted the emergence of an arena for rational critical exchange in which wit gave way to arguments adjudicated on the criteria of reason. The shadow of the Habermasian public sphere is long - so much so that even his many critics can never entirely escape it.

Whether it was an internalized Habermasian framework that animated the Mubarak’s regime relatively mild disposition towards political expression in its final decade or merely an accretive, updated Bayesian strategy that had political scientists’ marveling that Egypt had become a ‘dynamic authoritarianism’ where “opposition supports authoritarianism” (Albrecht 2006), it was indeed the case that actions by the state reflected some logic regarding spaces for

political communication. As a stalwart ally of advanced, wealthy democracies, the Mubarak regime had navigated itself into a position where it had become the largest single recipient of foreign aid in the world on the eve of the revolution. The bulk of this aid went to the Egyptian military. Where it did not, aid was channeled into non-governmental sector undertaking projects organized around the conception of ‘civil society development’; that is, the readying of society for a future in which, in accordance with this logic, authoritarianism would no longer be necessary.<sup>174</sup> The resulting political-economy, described in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, was one in which the ‘public sphere’ was simultaneously stripped of assets to which public sector employees could lay claim, but also many of the constraints on political expression as tens of independently owned newspapers and millions of Facebook pages railed against governmental incompetence and despotism.

When Hosni Mubarak addressed a combined session of both houses of parliament after the elections in the fall of 2010, a group of opposition figures stood outside the building and conducted what they styled a ‘parallel parliament’ to protest the exceptional level of rigging that had brought those inside of the building their new positions. When he was asked about the widely reported on, and filmed spectacle later in the day, the president gave a now infamous reply, that, given what was to become of his rule two months later now seems Marie Antoinette: “*khallihum yitsallu*” (Let them have fun), he said (Makar 2011).

The dynamic authoritarianism worked until it did not. The toleration of the expression of political dissent, coupled with arbitrary and not especially political violence by the state (see

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<sup>174</sup> The incendiary formulation of ‘necessary authoritarianism’ is consistent with this vision of a separate and autonomous civil society nurtured to the point in which it is no longer necessary to constrain disfigurements that underlie long term authoritarian rule; be they various primordialisms or inequalities. Indeed this is essentially the framework of neo-Huntingtonian analyses, which otherwise does not break with classical Millian liberalism in its political ontology of state, society and a public sphere through which these are connected. As such, Neo-Huntingtonianism is a form of pragmatic liberalism. In this chapter, Snyder and Ballentine’s work is exemplary of this genre. For more on neo-Huntingtonianism, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Chapter 3), was part of the situation in which massive and escalating mobilization, represented, made public and amplified by means hitherto not controlled nor censored by the state resulted in the fall of the regime. As reported on by international media - and, after the resignation of Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011, by local outlets too - this was a phenomenon of virtual politics performed by a generation of citizens unconquered by the corporate institutions devised, captured and hollowed out in the six decades of the authoritarian republic. "How did beauty sprout amid all this rot?" asked the political commentator Hasan Nafa'a in a column in the independently owned *Al-Masry Al-Youm* on February 13. The sociological answer to which most early analyses were disposed was generational inasmuch as what was novel about Egypt on the eve of the revolution were its 'youth' and its 'youth movements' (Shehata 2014). In turn what was novel about this generation was its access to modes of expression and mobilization beyond the control of the state:

.... members of this generation, particularly the wired among them, exhibit distinguishing features common to growing up in the virtual age. For instance, they display more fluid notions about privacy and value horizontal learning and sharing. They seem to consider it normal and acceptable to speak back to power, to interact across lines of difference, and to cultivate fictitious and anonymous public personas. As a collectivity, this generation has also shown itself to be assertive and ungovernable, characteristics that have developed as larger proportions of them have participated in the growing opposition culture, both online and offline (Herrara 2014).

This operating theory seemed to be one shared by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the military organ that took over the executive and legislative functions of government with Mubarak's resignation. The SCAF quickly arranged to meet with 'youth groups,' and did so in a bizarre, televised lecture setting with several generals sat behind the podium addressing hundreds of clamoring young men who would later speak to television crews and introduce the name of their group. At the same time, SCAF, absent the institutions of press

officers and spokespersons, took to communicating decisions, proclamations and ‘communiques’ through their Facebook page. When the SCAF issued ‘Communique No.5’ on the February 14, 2011, denouncing labor protests and calling on ‘unions and syndicates to ‘bring normalcy to everyday life,’ they did so through Facebook – before the material was posted to the formal government website. Rather than attempt to establish control over what seemed like ungovernable media, as would be recommended by a handbook on seizing political control (Luttwack 1968), they sought to participate in the new political fora and address what they thought to be the denizens that dwell there. Following the fall of Mubarak, they seemed to be operating on the assumptions of a theory of virtual politics.

The military coup that took place in Egypt in the summer of 2013 was in many ways a reenactment of the popular uprising that toppled the Mubarak regime; with the claims of popular participation and unity bellowed across outlets and newspapers (see Chapter 1). The derivative spectacle, which supporters immediately dubbed ‘a second revolution,’ was mediated in a public sphere whose parameters seemed to have been transformed. In the intervening thirty months, new outlets, groups and streams of communications were setup. But what had characterized this pluralism was not merely the polarization and echo chamber effects thought to have galvanized an extremist virtual politics everywhere (including in long-established democracies), but a transformed relationship between audiences and broadcasters *in terms of expectations*. In their neo-Huntingtonian argument outlining the unintended consequences of a rapidly expanding public sphere, Snyder and Ballentine note that under authoritarianism, described in the Millian market metaphor as a ‘monopoly,’ fervent discourse is subjected to a level of skepticism by a populace used to a certain disconnect between official discourse and their lived experience (Snyder and Ballentine 1998: 14-15, Mickiewicz 1988). Whence an informal, accretionary set of

rules defined the boundaries of political expression and organizing under the Mubarak regime, the thirty months between the fall of Mubarak in February 2011 and the military coup in 2013, the semiotic system of that “enunciation regime” (Latour 2003) no longer held as people took institutional architecture of liberal democracy seriously, including a pluralistic and polarized media through which political entrepreneurs sought to mobilize rather than demobilize political support.



**Figure 17: A cartoon circulating online in July 2013. The title at the top reads ‘mughayabun’ (deluded). The speech bubble reads: “What do you mean this is coup? This is the will of the people. Don’t you watch TV? I don’t know what would make you say coup.”**

The public, and heavily mediated, reenactment of the uprising that took place was dependent upon streams of political communication that had been taken seriously by the population. But it quickly became clear that the building of a new order involved the severe curtailment of those channels utilized in the presentation of the spectacle. Just as well credentialed ‘revolutionary politicians’ were cycled into, and then out of, the post-coup



government (Chapter 1), so too were media personalities who had developed a reputation for independence soon pushed out of their turfs on privately own television stations and newspapers. In a staggered process, television stations associated with the Muslim Brotherhood were immediately taken off the air, with the deposed president, Mohamed Morsi's speech on July 3 being the last transmission of the Muslim Brotherhood owned Misr25 channel before a fade to black when, it was reported later in the international press, that soldiers had arrested the staff. Over the ensuing months, select newspapers were shut down, and particular media personalities were removed from outlets that were not.

What then was the operating theory that accompanied this capture of the state with regard to the public sphere? Without benefit of the accretionary logic of long term rule, the post-coup Egyptian state's disposition towards political journalism and commentary has been straightforwardly oppressive despite the liberal arguments put forth in its defense. The forthrightness of the oppressive measures that, alongside the mass killings and incarceration noted in Chapter 1, saw Egypt become one of the least safe countries to practice journalism by 2015.<sup>175</sup> What is noteworthy is the manner in which an extraordinary public mobilization, accompanied by a networked amplifier of opinion and rationalization was utilized in achieving this outcome. The many opinion pieces penned by the Egyptian liberal intelligentsia expressed support for the removal of the elected president in the name of narrowly defined negative liberties that they argued were threatened by the elected President Mohamed Morsi, the Freedom and Justice Party, the Muslim Brotherhood and their allies. As a derivative reenactment of a mass uprising against the constraints of an entrenched authoritarian regime, the military take-

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<sup>175</sup> The Committee to Protect Journalists ranked Egypt as the second highest jailer of journalists in 2015 after China. See: Jackson, Jasper. "Egypt jails record number of journalists." *The Guardian*. December 15, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/dec/15/egypt-jails-record-number-of-journalists>.

over of government involved an eruption of mobilization, expression and justification followed by a rapid curtailment of that very space.

It seems to have been important for many of the authors belonging to a class of intellectuals associated with the opposition to both Mubarak and Morsi that an international audience be made aware of the arguments supporting the political change underway. History professor at the American University in Cairo, Khaled Fahmy, wrote to his several thousand followers on Facebook about his endeavors in this regard on July 3:<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Khaled Fahmy, post on Facebook page, July 3, 2013.  
<https://www.facebook.com/khaled.fahmy3?lst=755395599%3A645846359%3A1488572281>.



**Khaled Fahmy**

July 3, 2013 · Cairo · 🌐

Torn between living history, making it (by demonstrating shoulder to shoulder with the masses), writing about it or pontificating about it on TV.

Finished an op ed piece for CNN, wrote my Shorouk article and sent it, gave 5 radio and TV interviews (I don't know with whom, but all in English).

And at 16:00 GMT / 5:00 pm Cairo time will appear on BBC World (TV) live from Tahrir.

Then an interview with NPR whose time has not been set yet.

Then a radio interview at 22:00 GMT / 11:00 pm Cairo time on BBC Radio 4.

The MB pundits will be spinning their version (maligned yet again, we were robbed of our victory, prez had legitimacy, the ballot box, etc), and it is important to beat them to it and present the other perspective and explain to everyone why 12 million people could not be fools, infants or anti-democratic.

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

**Figure 18: Khaled Fahmy, post on Facebook page, July 3, 2013**

Contributions and interviews by academics, artists, novelists and feminists appeared in outlets such as *The Guardian* and *The Financial Times* defending the military intervention as a democratically restorative measure.<sup>177</sup> The interventions were shared and debated on the

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<sup>177</sup> See for example “In Egypt We Thought Democracy Was Enough. It Was Not” by internationally renowned novelist Ahdaf Souef in *The Guardian* (July 1, 2013), and “Egypt: A People’s Revolution, Not a Crisis or A Coup” by internationally renowned feminist Nawal al-Saadawy that appeared in the Islamic Commentary blog on July 7 2013. < <https://islamiccommentary.org/2013/07/nawal-el-saadawi-a-peoples-revolution-not-a-crisis-or-coup/>>.

polarized and still largely unconstrained social media platforms of Facebook and Twitter.<sup>178</sup> In that supremely polarized space there quickly developed a disconnect between Egyptian intellectuals, and their many ‘followers’ on the one hand and international news coverage, which they saw as insufficiently supportive of the process underway, on the other. Over the summer of 2013, there developed a narrative of intense nationalism, first manifested as a dissatisfaction with perceived vacillation by the Obama administration and their initial reluctance to endorse the removal of Morsi by the military.<sup>179</sup> American University in Cairo economics professor Nagla Rizk, who had amassed 300,000 followers on Facebook by the summer of 2013 complained to her followers about the subject:<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> The blogger who publishes under the name Big Pharaoh had access to interesting figures regarding social media growth in Egypt. He told a gathering at Columbia University in 2015 that, as part of his job in online marketing in Egypt, he tabulated the year-on-year growth in social media usage. In 2012, he reported, there were 12 million people on Facebook in Egypt, a number that rose to 16 million in 2013 and again to 24 million in 2015. Twitter usage was less in Egypt but could still be measured at a not unimpressive 5.5 million users in 2015.

<sup>179</sup> This is somewhat perverse from the point of view of those opposed to the military intervention, and could be seen as a form of ‘working the refs’ by the many intellectuals making these sorts of arguments given that the Obama administration pointedly refused to use the word ‘coup’ to avoid its own legal requirement to suspend aid to countries in which a military coup had taken place. Speaking about Egypt on at the end of July, the American secretary of state said that the army had intervened to ‘restore democracy.’ See Gordon, Michael and Karim Fahim. “Kerry Says Army was ‘Restoring Democracy’ in Ousting Morsi.” *The New York Times*. August 1, 2013.: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/02/world/middleeast/egypt-warns-morsi-supporters-to-end-protests.html>

<sup>180</sup> Nagla Rizk, Facebook post, July 15, 2013. <<https://www.facebook.com/naglarzk>>.



**Figure 19: A public Facebook post by American University in Cairo professor Nagla Rizk, lamenting international coverage of events in Egypt. At the time, Rizk’s account was followed by over three hundred thousand people.**

As the summer wore on, there were several reports of officers from the Armed Forces’ *‘al-shu’un al-ma’naviya’* (Morale Affairs) stationed at the editorial rooms in privately owned satellite television stations and newspapers; exercising veto power over headlines. The coercive arm of military was difficult to discern amidst an overflowing enthusiasm, quickly taking on nationalistic tones; wherein Western enemies, and Islamists more loyal to a transnational ideology than the country, were cast against a military wrapped in the Egyptian flag. Whatever the level of support for the dramatic overthrow of the elected executive, it was visibly and discernably substantial. From early July, until mid-August when a three-month curfew was imposed by the military, the public display of Egyptian flags signaled support for the new order – overwhelming any unified insignia of the deposed president’s supporters, who were relegated to representation as bearded men with guns roaming through the streets on those television channels and newspapers that remained in operation.

A song by the popular singer Ali al-Haggar, ‘i’na sha’b wi into sha’b’ (You are a People, and We are a People) directed at the supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood scolded them with imagery of an authentic peasantry and unpretentious conscripts immune to their alien zealotry. “There is one God,” al-Haggar sings at one point, “but we have a God and you a [different] God.” The song with its Schmittean ethos was broadcast incessantly on the state owned ‘Radio Misr,’ and on all Egypt based television stations, in the place advertisements, rendering it inescapable on microbuses, taxi-cabs and in coffee houses. By the middle of August, with the Muslim Brotherhood-administered sit-in in Rab’aa al-‘Adawiya square closing in on its fiftieth day, prominent public figures were agitating for state to breakup what they called the ‘armed encampments.’ On the day of “The Clearing” in which a thousand people were killed, the internationally renowned Egyptian novelist, Alaa Aswany, tweeted out the following message to his two million followers:



**Figure 20: A tweet by internationally renowned Egyptian novelist Alaa Aswany to his two million followers on August 14, 2013, the day of the Rab’aa Square massacre that left**

**approximately a thousand supporters of the deposed president dead. It reads as follows: “In Egypt now there is a people, a government, a police force and an army in the confrontation with an armed terrorist group that is committing the most heinous of crimes for power. There is no middle ground. Either with Egypt or with terrorism.”**

The ascription of moral culpability is not the same as the discernment of causal impact. It is impossible to disregard the factor of complicity as impactful in the demobilization of the lively spheres of political exchange that had been dominated by the many intellectuals who supported the coup. The amplification and operationalization of the banal qualities of *individual* men and women such as ego, resentment, opportunism and so forth are a feature of post-coup politics. It is a feature that given a polarization that produced a deep and abiding need for validation and retribution, has, without sufficient scrutiny, been mistaken for a cause of democratic breakdown. The temptation to do so has been inescapable given the rich drama available in the contrast between enlightenment derived defenses of the military intervention and the authoritarian measures that quickly followed. The tenor of recrimination, allegations of treachery by and between ordinary citizens and commentators on platforms of social media were predicated on the implicit assumption that where one stood on the ‘coup’/ ‘second revolution’ was impactful. The act of signaling which side of the divide one stood was accomplished quickly and efficiently – without even the requirement of formulating sentences. The simple act of changing the avatar of one’s account on a social networking expressed this position. Sometime after the Rab’aa massacre, a four-fingered black silhouette of a raised hand against a bright yellow background became alternately a sign of support for the deposed president, and in some cases one of mere solidarity with the victims of the massacre.



**Figure 21: The four fingered black silhouette became a symbol of the massacre committed by security forces on August 14, 2013. The Rab'aa al-'Adawiyah square is named after a ninth-century Iraqi woman famous in Islamic history (sometime referred to as 'a Muslim saint'). The name 'Rab'aa' literally means 'fourth,' hence the adoption of the four-fingered silhouette and hand gesture.**

Three months after the coup, I attended a panel in the small Giza apartment that served as the headquarters of the Revolutionary Socialists, a small grouping with outsized prominence owing to their large presence online<sup>181</sup> coupled with extensive engagements with labor action, including the landmark April 6 Youth Movement strike in 2008.<sup>182</sup> The lecture was on

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<sup>181</sup> See their official website: <http://revsoc.me/>.

<sup>182</sup> The April 6 Youth Movement takes its name from the strike on April 6, 2008, by textile workers in the city of Mahalla. The young people who would later form the group had called for a general strike in support of the workers. The government reaction, which involved the filmed and broadcast deployment of thousands of conscripts around the country, betrayed an unusual level of alarm at the potential of the merging of the workers' protest and a wider political movement. This action also proved quite alarming to large swathes of the public who largely avoided the streets on the day, hence inadvertently participating in a 'general strike' that was far more successful than expected because of that dynamic. On the whole the movement borne out of this event has not been particularly tied to workers' mobilization in the events that followed.



‘Alternative Media and Labor Action.’ The speaker, the activist and journalist Hossam el-Hamalawy, was recounting a conversation he had with a labor leader in 2009:<sup>183</sup>

I asked him about the first strike he was ever involved in. He said it was in ‘88, just four years after he had joined the factory. Outside of the factory, the workers had assembled. They held up a coffin with Mubarak’s picture plastered on it. I was astounded to hear this. I had always thought that first time anyone protested against Mubarak directly was in 2003, when what became Kefaya took over Tahrir Square [during the Iraq war protests]. How did I not know about this, I asked him? Well, you didn’t have this, he said as he pointed to my laptop. Don’t you think that had we seen these images of workers carrying the coffin of Mubarak in ‘88, that this would have accelerated the coming of the Egyptian revolution? I think so.

The arguments for the ‘demonstration effect’ and ‘resonance’ were intuitive enough. But what stayed with me that evening was a throwaway comment by my friend, an economics journalist, Mohamed Gad. “Sometimes,” he said, “I think that what has happened here is that we have been found out” (*inkashafna*). What did he mean by that, I asked? “I mean that they thought that all the stuff we wrote and shared on Facebook was real. Now they know it isn’t.”

Gad, a close friend who remained involved throughout my fieldwork, clearly had not given the comment much thought. His own writing for the independent daily *Al-Shorouq*, about labor turmoil and collective action from 2009 onwards had piqued my interest in this ‘movement’ as a parallel and impactful politics that was subject to constraints not well accounted for in the literature on Egypt’s enduring authoritarianism. The state’s complicated relationship with labor action, wherein crackdowns was more selective than explicit political action (La Chapelle forthcoming), was translated, perhaps through yet further refracted logic to a relative preponderance of coverage of labor turmoil in final years of the Mubarak regime. When the regime fell several scholars noted that this was an unacknowledged revolt of workers against the

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<sup>183</sup> From the panel, ‘al-i’lam al-badil wa al-haraka al-‘omaliyha’ (Alternative Media and the Labor Movement). September 30, 2013.

state (Fadel 2011, Benin 2011), citing a preponderance of reporting on labor in outlets that were much more cautious in reporting on explicitly political protests against the regime. This may have been an artifact of what the scholar of Egyptian labor Ellis Goldberg wrote about labor history more generally, that it is ‘written from left to right’ (Goldberg 1996).

The dramatic rise in the use of new communication technologies, what in the development jargon is referred to as ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), has engendered no such uniformity. The reversal of fortunes of various actors across the political spectrum saw all of them utilize, and celebrate the new means of discursive dissemination. The dissonance between el-Hamalawy and Gad is reflected in more scholarly commentary on Egypt, with Marc Lynch, an enthusiast for democratic possibilities of a changing media environment in the Arab world (Lynch 2006), projecting an ambivalence that splits the difference between enthusiasts and detractors:

New social media and satellite television together offer powerful tools to protest organizers, reducing transaction costs for organization and presenting rapid and powerful channels for the dissemination of messages, images, and frames. In particular, they offer transmission routes for reaching international audiences and influencing foreign perceptions of stability or of the normative desirability of particular regimes. At the same time, they do not necessarily translate into enduring movements or into robust political parties capable of mounting a sustained challenge to entrenched regimes or to transforming themselves into governing parties. Further, these same tools can strengthen the surveillance and repression capabilities of authoritarian states. The new media environment has fundamentally changed the texture of Arab politics, but Arab states may yet prove able to adapt and absorb their challenge (Lynch 2011).

In contrast with the dramatic political upheavals in democratic polities where there was an available dependent variable of votes, cast freely and fairly, to cash out theories on the effects of new forms of political communication, the Egyptian military coup in 2013 has made the

systemic effects that much harder to gauge.<sup>184</sup> What it should do is prompt a reconsideration of what it is that we think the opening up of new spheres of communication does given particular contexts and constraints. Instead, contingency became the order of the day, such that what a citizen learns, as a consumer-participant in new avenues of political communication differentially equips that citizen for democratic participation. By implication – and mostly by assumption – the virtues of a free exchange of ideas, the synthesis of argument and counterargument – produce a human collective whose aggregated preferences are consistent with the set of conditions required for both democratic maintenance and consolidation.

Writing about a project designed to gauge political attitudes of citizens living under authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, the Arab Barometer Project, Timothy Mitchell notes how peculiar the set of assumptions animating such a project might actually be:

The premise of the project is that ‘successful democratization requires a citizenry that values democracy and possesses the elements of a democratic political culture’. Yet there is no reliable evidence, as far as I am aware, that the presence of a civic culture – attitudes of trust, tolerance, mutual respect and other liberal virtues – facilitates the emergence of democracy. There is, in fact, no shortage of historical evidence to suggest the opposite. One can find repeated examples in the history of democratic struggles in the West of tolerant, educated, liberal political classes who were opponents of democratization, fighting to prevent the extension of effective political rights to those who did not own property, to religious and racial minorities, to women, and to colonial subjects. In many cases, the civic virtues that dominant political classes possessed provided the grounds on which to oppose democratization. Their own civility and reasonableness, they often claimed, qualified them to act as spokespersons for the interests of those who were not yet ready to speak for themselves. Once democratic rights have been achieved, their exercise may encourage the development of virtuous civic attitudes, at least among members of the expanded political class –

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<sup>184</sup> A typical reassessment was offered by Adel Iskander, a scholar of the Arab Public Sphere speaking at an activist panel at Columbia University in 2015: “To recognize the role of social media is both imperative and deeply demoralizing. Twenty percent internet penetration in Egypt, fifteen in the areas where the Syrian uprising began, and in Yemen, in areas where protests were instigated, it was less than five percent. We must also consider the counter-revolutions’ counter-publics online! We have to understand that these spaces are now much more contested. The mass production of perplexing content has been a major threat to the contiguity of these new movements. We have to consider the agenda setting power and framing power of social media. There was a significant fracture in the mid-2000s, when the state, at least in Egypt, could no longer monopolize the media.” *Activism in Comparative Perspective*, ICRPL, Columbia University, 2015.

virtues whose inculcation and practice become a mode through which people subject themselves to democratic authority. Democratization, on the other hand, has often been a battle against those attitudes. It has required a more intransigent set of engagements and practices (Mitchell 2011: 4).

In the aftermath of the surprise political outcomes in two of the world's most conspicuous democracies, a lay variation of arguments for 'epistocracy' (Estlund 2008)<sup>185</sup> made their way back from the scholarly debates to mainstream political commentary. The failings of electorates as a knowledge source to track the path to broadly desirable outcomes re-emerged as an object of mockery. The most searched question on the premier internet search engine Google on the morning after the momentous Brexit vote in Britain was reported to be, with a great degree of schadenfreude, "What is the EU"?<sup>186</sup> In the United States, a distinct genre of intellectual writing in a similar vein gained prominence. Building on an august tradition dating back to Walter Lippmann (1922), and citing polling data demonstrating that roughly a third of the population believes that the Marxist maxim "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" is in the United States constitution, prominent writers in mainstream publications have begun to mount a 'case against democracy.'<sup>187</sup> The common thread in this genre is the renewal of arguments the dichotomizing of the democracy and the 'public good'.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> David Estlund coined the term 'epistocracy,' or rule of the knowledgeable to describe a long tradition in political theory whose exemplar is of course Plato's Republic.

<sup>186</sup> Tamblyn, Thomas. "Following Brexit, 'What is the EU?' Becomes One of the Most Searched Terms in the UK." *The Huffington Post*. June 24, 2016: <[http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/brexit-google-what-is-the-eu\\_uk\\_576d4f06e4b0232d331ded24](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/brexit-google-what-is-the-eu_uk_576d4f06e4b0232d331ded24)>.

<sup>187</sup> Crain, Caleb. "The Case Against Democracy." *The New Yorker*. November 7, 2016. Although augmented by the election of Donald Trump, this has been a distinct genre in American political writing that has long tradition exemplified by Walter Lippmann's seminal 1922 book *Public Opinion* in which the author asserts the need to manufacture the consent of bewildered herd. Conservative variations on the disdain for 'mass opinion' and 'public beliefs' have a similarly long tradition, but usually rely on reference on the foundational texts of the republic in The Federalist, most often Nos. 10 and 48 by James Madison, and setting up republicanism as antithetical to democracy. Examples of these sorts of arguments are regularly put forth in the popular publications of the American right such as The American Conservative, National Review and The Federalist. For a current example see French, David. "We're Losing Our Republic Because We Lack the Will to Restrain Democracy." *National Review*. July 20, 2016: <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/438115/democracy-mob-rule-leaders-defy-crowd-sometimes> .

<sup>188</sup> In both cases, the central danger of the democracy channeling a popular ignorance is to the public good of liberty. But particularly in the Brexit case, a fear for economic self-harm has also been expressed. This fear more often than

Scholars of authoritarianism and democratization, particularly those with a regional focus on the Arab world, will of course be familiar with the dynamic that pits liberalism against democracy. Prior to the Arab spring, the preeminent argument in the literature was the suitability of Islamists who make up the organized opposition to perform roles that other opposition groups played in democratic transitions elsewhere in the world. This is no small part due to the ambiguity with which various constituted Islamist actors have answered the fundamental question about the source of political sovereignty, vacillating as they have between the divine and the popular. The scholars bringing together the strands of this scholarship in the exceptional volume entitled *Democracy Without Democrats* (1994) stressed this dichotomy. “It is now the case,” wrote Abdelbaki Hermassi, a former Moroccan government minister wrote in that volume, “that fundamentalism is in opposition and secularism of the modern elites is still on the side of the state” (Hermassi 1994: 227). The dynamic is one in which a breakdown of authoritarianism can only lead to the rise of ‘illiberal democracy’ (Zakaria 1997), a promise fulfilled by the Muslim Brotherhood’s brief period in power in Egypt (Hamid 2014).

When Alfred Stepan historicized the periods preceding military coups in Latin America, he never failed to find a steadily growing chorus of intellectuals inviting military intervention (Stepan 1971). He argued that the propensity and success of military coups can only be understood contextually, that is as subset of the political system of which the armed forces are part. In order to make that case, Stepan analyzed editorial opinion in upper and middle class newspapers during five coups and coup attempts. These attitudes, Stepan argues, reveal the presence of a distinct civilian constituency for ending democratic rule that existed prior to the

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not is expressed as a fear for the general economic well-being rather than a class self-harm. When invoked, arguments about economic self-harm of the form “the people are voting against their interest” are deployed as evidence for the epistemic poverty of democracy, rather than a rallying cry on behalf of the losers in a transforming economic environment.

military's intervention. By this account, the study of elite opinion is at least predictive, if not necessarily causal, in breakdown of democracies.

Other work on the global south unearths colonial roots to elite intellectuals' nationalist mythmaking in the need to "state its case against formidable opposition" (Chatterjee 1986: 40), galvanizing in intellectuals the desire and the means to 'create their own domain of sovereignty' as their elevated position becomes predicated upon the subjugation and subsumption of the defeated 'fragments' of the colonial state (Chatterjee 1994). In Egyptian history, the native elite in the 1920s, the celebrated liberal era, produced cultural products in which they 'felt compelled to degrade local cultures and identities to accommodate liberal principles' (Maghouri 2006: 1). This disposition implanted in Egyptian intellectuals an enduring hostility towards their social environment: "Like the Europeans who defined their 'self' against the non-European 'other,' Egyptian liberals defined their national identity in opposition to the Arabo-Islamic Other" (Ibid: 69).

Taken together, these theoretical contributions allow us to turn the arguments about attitudinal prerequisites for democratization on their head. Content analysis of Egyptian intellectuals' cultural production in the dizzying thirty months from the fall of Mubarak in early 2011 to the military coup in the summer of 2013 can be mined for evidence of absence of the capacity to intellectually underwrite democratic consolidation, or the presence of discursive facility to shepherd an authoritarian constituency to the capture of the state.

Material for a 'failure of the intellectuals' narrative as a central plank of the failure of democratic consolidation in Egypt is certainly abundant in the mixture of their measured writings and less measured social media pronouncements. In late July 2013, I was traveling by train to Alexandria with Fatma Ramadan for the weekly forum at the Permanent Congress of Alexandria

Workers (PCAW). Ramadan, who was a ubiquitous presence in the movement, possessed qualities that scattered in many activists and politicians whose voices were heard in the thirty-month window of pluralist politics, but were never brought together in the same person. Though she was the acknowledged second in command of the boisterous Kamal Abu 'Aita, the head of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Unions (EFITU), she was a frequent speaker and dispenser of practical advice to groups of workers seeking assistance in their particular situation, regardless which nascent institution ended up adopting their case. On the train, the topic of conversation was General Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi's televised address to the country at the graduation ceremony of the Military Academy. In his speech, the then minister of defense asked the Egyptian people to "answer the call of the army just as the army had answered theirs." He asked for authorization and a mandate (*'tafwid'*) to combat what he called 'probable terrorism' in the form of mass demonstrations in public squares, which would be later broadcast as evidence of the procurement of this authority. Her proximate mission ended up being to speak out against the decision of all the peak level worker organizations to endorse, the soon to be broadcast, popular authorization by the masses.

I asked her if she thought it mattered at all that this dissent take place given that the overwhelming majority of public figures and political parties were incessantly backing the general's call. I expected, given her consistent, temperate pragmatism, for her to point to the importance of an advocate of autonomous labor organizations recording a contrarian stance for future reference. Instead, she pointed to a tatty volume I had been holding in my hand, an obscure history of the Egyptian legal system published by the Supreme Council of Culture: "It is an amazing thing (*shay' mudhhil*) how cheap it is for the state to buy off intellectuals (*muthaqafin*). All they have to do is publish these books that no one but someone like you would

buy. But they don't know anything other than this," she said, with a somewhat uncharacteristic, if still subdued, bitterness.<sup>189</sup>



**Figure 22: On July 24, 2013, the then-minister of defense, Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi, gave a televised speech in front the graduating class at the Military College, but addressed to audiences at home, asking the public to demonstrate in the squares to provide the army with a ‘mandate’ (tafwid) to fight ‘probable violence and terrorism.’ This widely circulated cartoon, first published on the independent news site Mada Masr, captures a skepticism invisible on television and in the printed press. The bubble reads: “He wants you to tell him**

<sup>189</sup> Her talk that night, conceived as a critical assessment of Kamal Abu ‘Aita’s, (her frequent collaborator and old boss) to accept the post of Minister of Labor and Manpower in the new, interim government. Without changing her topic, or failing to systematically enumerate the political and legal steps taken by the new government, she also offered the tens of people a quietly passionate argument against granting the authorization sought by the Armed Forces. Though she was an occasional contributor to the national daily *Al-Shorouq*, when she published the article ‘*Al-tawfid simun qatil*’ (Authorization, A Lethal Poison), in the form of a letter to Egyptian workers, it was only an online left wing magazine, *Al-Hiwar al-Mutamadin* (Civil Discourse) that published it. It was subsequently shared widely on the Facebook. “Today we are asked to go out and authorize el-Sisi for more killing. And we find that the three federations be it the government federation, the Egyptian Democratic Labour Congress, or the Egyptian Federation of Independent Unions (in which I am a member of the Executive Bureau and where I undertook an effort to convince the members not to issue a statement asking members and the Egyptian people to demonstrate tomorrow to assert that ‘the people, the army and the police are one hand’ as they said in the statement. But my position was a minority position, it was a position of 4 people in the face of 9 others with regard to the content of that statement). The three federations are seeking the participation of workers under the banner of fighting terrorism. In this we are like he who escapes ashes by jumping into the fire (*kal-mustajeer min al-ramda’ bil nar*). The Brothers (*ikhwan*) have committed crimes and it is imperative that they be held accountable for the crimes they have committed. In this way they are like police officers and military officers and the men of the Mubarak regime, who must also be held accountable for the crimes they have committed. Do not be fooled into replacing religious dictatorship with military dictatorship.” Ramadan, Fatma. “Al-tawfid simun qatil” (Authorization is a Lethal Poison). *Al-Hiwar al-Mutamadin*. 26 July 2013: <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=370369>



**to do the thing he wants to do so it seems that it is you who wants him to do it. Understand?"**

Why would a phenomenon, the behavior of intellectuals, so furiously adjudicated by all persons that a researcher or journalist might have interacted with in the summer of 2013 be both a poor explanandum and explicans of the political transformations of which they are part? It seems that within the context of political change, there are different means of political aggregation, including political expression of expert opinion. For all that is revelatory about an intellectual culture and a discursive political environment through an examination of public positions by ‘thought leaders,’ what is more revealing is the unanimity of support proffered on the military intervention by public figures who chose to speak. This suggests a far greater receptivity to one particular pole in a polarized political space, an ignorance of those who did not speak, and, most crucially, provides no coherent method with which these utterances, presumably acting on the minds of an audience induced to join the gatherings on the streets to which the state’s security apparatus could point to in order to justify, rationalize and legitimate the crackdown that immediately commenced. Yet even if we accept that these essays, statements, utterances are a product of a tradition, drawn upon by various individuals and as having been instrumentalized in the spectacle that culminated on July 3, we cannot ascribe these actions to a cost-benefit analysis of a political actor.

What is crucial, and perhaps most methodologically controversial is an assertion that these dynamics are not understood by any of the relevant actors. A well-designed survey soliciting opinions on what individuals thought they were doing when they consumed and engaged with politics in the thirty months leading up the coup would yield an aggregate that cannot reflect the political efficacy or the mobilizing capacity of the media in its various forms, simply because

that is one of the very things that changed in the interim. It turns out that to choose to conceive of politics as the aggregate of bodies, wages, prices, distances and votes, that is to say *fundamental* politics, never entirely aligns with the politics as the aggregate of tradition, opinions, spectacle and slogans, that is to say *virtual* politics. In stable systems, there seems to have been a fixed enough relationship between the conceptions that models produced an equi-finality of results that elide the difference between the predictive and the post-hoc justificatory in academic political research. It has therefore been possible in the long-established electoral democracies to assert that political communication does not matter at all, or that political communication is politics itself (*mediatization*) and in either case, produce models that accurately predicted political outcomes. No such luxury exists for researchers, even ones inclined to ‘write a history from left to right,’ hoping to unearth the *fundamental* roots of revolt, when every organizer of a worker or citizen grouping invites the researcher to ‘join our Facebook page.’<sup>190</sup>

Measuring the ‘impact of social media’ has become an urgent task for political science in the last decade, from its inception to its exponential growth. Intuitions and suspicions that collective action through new forms of communication gives rise to weakly committed urban coalitions (Beissinger 2013) resulting in cases such as Egypt in revolutionary organizations with an inherent ‘organizational fragility’ (Gerbaudo 2013) are met, such as they are, with tacit acceptance. But the task, as will be alluded to in the concluding section of this chapter, is intractable, if not incoherent, given the networked nature of the phenomenon of which it is part makes the presentation of necessary counterfactuals deeply misleading. The coalitions and organizations are deeply intertwined in their formations with these forms of communication such that their failures to measure up to counterparts that have arisen out of different forms of

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<sup>190</sup> In the combined 18 months of fieldwork, the query of ‘*hadritak ma’ana fil safa?*’ (Sir are you with us on the page?) was far and away the most common final utterance to a first meeting with a labor activist.

political conflict negates this history. With reference to their inability to translate *virtual* collectivities to ‘real’ or *fundamental* collective action at the moment when the latter became proscribed by the military backed intervention, our Habermasian conception of the political discourse and the public sphere translates as an atrophied connection between a polity’s mind and its body. But what if the act of placing this distinction between virtual and fundamental politics was itself the political act par excellence; a boundary set by actors with means of enforcement?

The immense variation in the utility of networked dyadic political communication at different political moments; a rapid disjuncture that would have to be elided by a natural experiment that pits one political situation with high social media penetration in comparison to another. Additionally, and crucially, the analytical opportunity made available to unearth mechanisms by which political communication leads to collective action and institution building (or, indeed, demobilization and institutional dismemberment), would be forgone.

Consider the example of the intellectuals quoted above; intermingled with their essays, interviews, petitions and statements were the sort of banalities that characterize the sixteen million accounts of registered Facebook users in Egypt; including jokes, food recipes and so on. What emerges from a steady monitoring of the ‘intellectual class,’ their performative admixture of the public and personal is a flattening of the hierarchical order between leader and led and a dissolution of the space between the privileged expert opinion and their often hostile interlocutors online. Such was the case that when most of these scattered intellectuals exited the ephemeral ‘June 30 coalition,’ their exit had no demonstrable effect on the level political power exercised by the new regime. Whatever the effect of the effort into which they were mobilized, intellectuals did not constitute an autonomous political actor. Their role in highlighting the

spectacle of ‘the masses’ united in opposition to Mohamed Morsi abridged a politics of groups, climaxing in a Manichean confrontation between ‘two peoples,’ before dissolving into one of disconnected individuals in which utterances could not lead to mobilization.

The *individuating function* of political spectacle has been illustrated and understood by scholars of the media under authoritarian regimes. In what should now prompt a reexamination of our understanding of political communication everywhere, Lisa Wedeen analyzed the accretive impact of nonsensical claims in the rituals that constituted the cult of the leader in Syria under the leadership of Hafiz al-Assad (Wedeen 1999). It was the practices, not the beliefs which they did, or indeed did not, reflect that were key to understanding the mechanisms through which political power was exercised under authoritarianism. The claims made alongside the spectacles were not only false, but ones for which no refutation would be worthwhile. Given the arbitrariness of accompanying state pageantry with proclamations that the President-for-life was also the nation’s ‘premier pharmacist’ or ‘computer scientist,’ a refutation could never constitute a coherent locus for any group. The function of monological authoritarian discourse here in the Bakhtinian sense was not to convince, but to ‘make accomplices’ out of a citizenry, who, having participated in the ritual find themselves in a space where there is repetition of ‘monotonous and empty slogans,’ the engagement with which would still not amount to any coherent component of collective action or belonging.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Wedeen’s work is of obvious utility in understanding at least one phase of the politics of the media in contemporary Egypt owing to the historical, geographic and cultural proximity of Syria and Egypt. Although Hafiz al-Assad assumed power soon after the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, there are family resemblances between the rhetoric and pageantry deployed by the Assad regime and Nasser. The link is acknowledged by Wedeen (34). It is fair to say that some of the material, intermixed with ritualistic and over the top claims, may have served as a resource for the content of the discourse utilized after the Egyptian coup in 2013, particularly with the reversion to a semiotics of masculine militarism, nationalism (including anachronistic anti-Israeli rhetoric, given the welcoming stance taken by the Israeli government towards the coup). What is more crucial than the content, as we shall see, is the audacity of the propagation of demonstrably false claims, and the doubling down on those claims. It is the mechanism through which a media strategy of maximally authoritarian regime that is revealing. In this environment, an authoritarian political actor addressed an audience where, for very different reasons, that have been

As the military backed government in Egypt consolidated its hold on the state – utilizing draconian measures (Chapter 1) – many of the public faces, voices, and writers that had developed followings in the greatly expanded, if increasingly polarized, public sphere, either recused themselves, or were otherwise recused. To this category belong much of the cosmopolitan intellectuals who had expended much effort in defense of military’s intervention, to audiences both foreign and domestic. In their place there quickly developed a style of political discourse that invited, and received, vociferous ridicule.

First came the claim that a popular online puppet show, *Abla Fahita*, was delivering coded ‘terrorism messages’ to the Muslim Brotherhood. Then there was a claim by a slightly unbalanced looking man who claimed to be an army general to have invented a ‘medical device’ that cured both hepatitis and HIV and transformed both diseases into ‘*kofta*’ (a variation on a minced meat patty). Third came the claim by a popular television presenter, a strong supporter of the new regime who had not been removed from the post, that Mohab Mamish, the former commander of the Egyptian navy and member of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, had imprisoned the unnamed commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> fleet of the United States Navy off the Mediterranean on the eve of the clearing of the Rab’aa protest.

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made into pacified ‘accomplices.’ Taking a broader view, Wedeen’s work is not the only one to describe the functioning of public culture in a way that is incongruent with baseline Habermasian conceptions of an autonomous civil society that, through the fostering of rational-discourse exerts a democratizing effect on an equally autonomous state. A rich, and in some ways exemplary recent work that illustrates several radically different mechanisms at work is Alexei Yurchak’s outstanding *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (2006), in which there is no clear public/private divide between dissimulation and discrete truths in the practices of a population who were evidently all ‘caught by surprise’ by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Rather, their adaptive cultural practices contained within them both the elements that reproduced the Soviet System and channeled the internal displacement that accompanied the demise of the state. Yurchak calls this state ‘hypernormalization,’ intriguing nomenclature that nonetheless suggests an accretionary process overtime. This points to a radically discontinuous paradigm-shift type mechanism of momentous political transformation; rather than the accretion of the products of practical rationalities leading to an enlargement of a public sphere. The events of 2016 in long established democracies suggest that many of these mechanisms teased out in authoritarian polities maybe at work globally, taking as their venue technological innovations not subsumed in the powerful settlements that had relegated public politics to realms supervised by gate-keeping institutions.

What is noteworthy is not that these were the particular stories that won out in a bidding war of fealty to the new order by ambitious would-be spokespersons, but that such claims were welcomed by different organs within the regime. A formal investigation was initiated by a state prosecutor into the popular puppet's terrorism links, with the doll, rather than ventriloquist named as the suspect. The repeated assertions of the alleged international incident where the American navy was prevented from aiding the deposed the president's supporters by a heroic Egyptian general were never refuted, with the host, who frequently interviews official spokespersons for the post-coup governments, continuing to make the claim. And, when confronted with the question that a disheveled man may have been pretending to be a general in the Egyptian army who had invented a miraculous device; the military held a press conference with the man, identified as General Abdel-'Aati, now in full military regalia, in which they announced that the device was real. The device, they promised, would be presented to the public on June 30, 2014, to commemorate 'the second revolution.'<sup>192</sup> The press conference was attended by then minister of defense and future president Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi.

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<sup>192</sup> It wasn't.



**Figure 23: Top left: On his nightly two-hour political program on the privately owned satellite channel LTC, presenter Mohamed el-Ghiety makes the claim that the commander of the 6th Fleet of the United States Navy has been imprisoned by the Egyptian general and SCAF member, Mohab Mamish. Top Right: General Ibrahim Abdel-‘Aty holds a press conference in his military uniform doubling down on his claim that he had invented a medical device that cures Hepatitis and HIV/AIDS after an earlier interview with the privately owned satellite channel Al-Balad making the same claim was met with ridicule. Bottom: Abla Fahita, a puppet and designated suspect in a judicial investigation initiated to ascertain the truth of the claim whether ‘she’ had been sending coded terrorism messages to the Muslim Brotherhood.**

The promulgation of the senseless echoes the media environment described by Wedeen in the Syria under Hafiz Assad; one in which refutation and argument become Sisyphean tasks.

This attempted clearing of the public sphere of coherent loci of contention was an incomplete process borne of a radical disjuncture with an immediately proximate history through which the new regime was itself brought into being. Whereas the monological, and frequently nonsensical claims that accompanied Syrian state pageantry were the product of an incorporated bureaucracy of propaganda, in the Egyptian case the claims were offerings accepted by individuals currying favor with the new rulers. Taken in this way, the outlandishness of the claims is more explicable, given that they are a culmination of a bidding process, a competition for fealty. The distinction is important in order to avoid the premature, outcome derived, conclusions pointing to the existence of a governing strategy channeled through old and new media that successfully brought the military two power after thirty months in which its privileges were threatened.

In tens of interviews with my colleague Yasser el-Shimy, both on and off the record, military and police generals consistently expressed the belief that the Egyptian revolution was largely the product of foreign intervention exercised through influencing young Egyptians online.<sup>193</sup> That there existed a ‘dark side of the internet’ (Morozov 2011) which can, under particular circumstances ‘strengthen the surveillance and repression capabilities of authoritarian states’ (Lynch 2011: 32) was not a recognition made by authoritarian planners in Egypt, which they then eagerly put to use! Indeed, whatever enhancements networked individual self-expression and rapid group formation that social media provided for the breakdown of democratic consolidation and the ascendancy of an unprecedentedly oppressive political order,

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<sup>193</sup> Personal exchange. El-Shimy, who late wrote a political science PhD dissertation on the failed transition to democracy in Egypt, was the Egypt analyst for the International Crisis Group, the context which allowed him access to the top echelon of the security establishment. (see El-Shimy 2016). The rather unsophisticated understanding and incuriosity about new media was not limited to generals; Ahmad el-Zind, the leader of the Judges Club (the defacto judges’ union) and a sworn enemy of then President Morsi frequently inveighed against the evils of new media, and in one interview on the eve of the coup, called on the Armed Forces to shut down the internet in order to control the influence of what he pronounced ‘the foose-book and the tunayter,’ by which he meant Facebook and Twitter. He would become minister of justice in May 2015.



this was not based on a central understanding of those opportunities by the architects of the new regime. As the emancipatory promise of the exponential growth of social media has increasingly come under critical scrutiny, it is not clear that the opportunities that such networked communications present for *authoritarian* consolidation have ever become part of the governing philosophy of the new regime. It is here that Timothy Mitchell's materialist objection to the unempirical notion that democratization is brought about through dissemination of the democracy-friendly attitudes within the citizenry brings to light a perverse obverse. The flip-side is that even within the definitionally narrower group of an ascendant elite of an extremely repressive and authoritarian regime, for whom such knowledge should be urgently relevant, there need not be a particularly astute understanding of political communication as a means of producing outcomes. The generals and allies are themselves disposed to the hegemonic Habermasian conception of the dangerously emancipatory effects of unregulated streams of political communication. The fact that they acted within a revolutionary situation in which the means of political production were themselves challenged and recalibrated meant that any method utilized to seize power was one of the path of least resistance in accordance with the a particular context and set of constraints. The new rulers have *not* developed what would be termed in the marketing inflected language of social media, a sophisticated 'digital strategy.' They have acted accordingly.

In September 2016 the Egyptian parliament approved a new anti-cybercrime law so draconian that it was, according to prominent rights organizations, impossible not to violate unless one were to seize using the internet.<sup>194</sup> In a strident fifty-page report on a draft of the bill entitled 'Anti-Technology' jointly produced by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

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<sup>194</sup> Did al-Tiqniya (Against Technology) <https://eipr.org/sites/default/files/reports/pdf/cybercrime.pdf>

(EIPR), the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) and the Support for Information Technology Center (SITC), the authors lamented the fact that articles that survived all drafts of the law consistently mandated markedly more severe punishment for crimes deemed otherwise identical to ones already identified in the criminal code, a punitive premium for online conduct. “It is like attempting to draft different penalties for murder by firearms and murder by sword,” wrote the authors of the report, “claiming that the advent of gunpowder led to new crimes, whereas the crime remains the same, that is to say murder, regardless of how it was committed.”<sup>195</sup>

The measures, legal and extra-legal, taken by the new regime to cripple autonomous collective action have been successful. But success can be deceiving. This can be more easily glimpsed in the electoral democracies where the fateful decision for Britain to leave the European Union was decided by less than four percentage points.<sup>196</sup> Even more dramatically, Donald Trump became president on the back of 79,646 votes in three states out of a total of 128, having lost the popular vote by close to three million votes.<sup>197</sup> It is unlikely that the level of consideration of the degree of systemic crisis in the politico-economic model of the Western democracy would have been the same had those results gone differently. The Galton effect, or autocorrelation, further suggests, that the two events are almost certainly causally connected. In the most direct sense there is validation of one populist right-wing project by another, with all its related and transferable repertoire of resonant claims, echoing back and forth between constituencies in the making. A common causal descent, often suggested by left-wing critiques

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid. 5

<sup>196</sup> BBC website. “Brexit: David Cameron to quit after UK votes to leave EU.” June 24, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-36615028>.

<sup>197</sup> Bump, Phillip. “Donald Trump will be president thanks to 80,000 people in three states.” *The Washington Post*. December 1, 2016. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/12/01/donald-trump-will-be-president-thanks-to-80000-people-in-three-states/?utm\\_term=.3e55d5cf27e7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/12/01/donald-trump-will-be-president-thanks-to-80000-people-in-three-states/?utm_term=.3e55d5cf27e7).

of the prevailing economic order suggests that a nationalist moment is crystalized through the growing inequalities and the failure of elites to address relative deprivations in two populations ruled by similarly technocratic machines with sizeable democratic deficits. Indeed, at a still more specifically empirical level, some of the same personnel, organizations and even financing seems to have crossed from one these electoral projects to the other.<sup>198</sup> The causal entanglement is not, of course, limited to the linguistically complementary advanced democracies; On November 9, 2016, the Egyptian media which had been considerably more favorable to Donald Trump than his opponent,<sup>199</sup> reported that President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi was the first foreign leader to speak with the president-elect.<sup>200</sup>

The additional dimension of an international audience of patrons rapidly alters any sort of analysis of the media in the form of content analysis. In the months after the military coup, the flattening of domestic political discourse was accompanied by abrupt and synchronized messaging by the hosts that remained on the airwaves; a promulgation of a rhetoric of ‘terrorism and religious reformation,’ a realignment on the question of the Syrian civil war wherein the new regime was considerably more disposed to back the Syrian government, and a rough form of public diplomacy where hosts would variably praise or attack the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the

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<sup>198</sup> See for example the joint campaigning by Nigel Farage, the leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) campaigning with Donald Trump after the surprise success of the effort he had led for years. More pointedly, a media and finance infrastructure was pooled between the two efforts by the American billionaire Robert Mercer. See Cadwalladr, Carole. “Revealed: How US Billionaire Helped Back Brexit.” *The Guardian*. February 26, 2017: <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/feb/26/us-billionaire-mercero-helped-back-brexit>>.

<sup>199</sup> See for example Essam El-Din, Gamal. “A Trip to New York Leaves Egyptian MPs Impressed with Donald Trump.” *Al-Ahram Weekly*. September 24, 2016. <http://english.ahram.org/NewsContent/1/64/244576/Egypt/Politics-/A-trip-to-New-York-leaves-Egyptian-MPs-impressed-b.aspx>.

<sup>200</sup> Feteiha, Ahmed. “Egypt Say El-Sisi Was First Int’l Leader to Speak to Trump Today.” *Bloomberg News*. November 9, 2016. <<https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/trackers/2016-11-09/egypt-says-el-sisi-was-first-intl-leader-to-speak-to-trump-today>>.

principle financial underwriter of the new military backed regime, over issues which the patron and client were in conflict.

This overriding of the domestic public sphere, cleared by other measures of autonomous political actors, has the unfortunate effect of eliding the other political functions media has served in the politics of Egypt. In the revolutionary period the capacity of political communication to give rise to collective action, and for collective action to coalesce into political actors, has changed rapidly. One of the primary things that has changed is the relationship between social media and traditional media; which corresponds imperfectly with the designations of the virtual and the fundamental models of political ontology that comparativists and theorists have seldom been forced to bridge.

To illustrate the variations in the ‘political impact’ of the media, both old and new, we must consider actions taken by citizens engaged in politics on an empirical level (Part Two of this chapter). We may however conceptualize those modes of engagement of citizenry within their ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983) under three broad categories. The post-coup media environment may be characterized as an *individuating monological*. This is the mode of engagement to which a consolidating order aspires, wherein directed messaging produces in a citizen a disposition towards media content as a performance to consume. This does not necessarily indicate a lesser degree of engagement - however that is measured - but rather that the spectrum of engagement is expressed as enthusiasm for a product by consumer whose approval is not expressed through political engagement with groups. The second mode is *power signification*, as captured by the picture of an Egyptian man holding up a copy of the Egyptian state’s flagship newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, on the morning of February 12, 2011. The headline reads “The People Have Brought Down the Regime.” The man’s choice of the paper that was the least

likely to signal the success of the collective effort to oust the president was therefore an act of emphasis that the effort had succeeded.<sup>201</sup> The mode of engagement here is dependent on the conjunction of the content of the news with the powers associated with outlet/speaker. Citizens engage with media in this manner to discover, and utilize, what they identify as already constituted powers are ready to acknowledge or concede. In this mode of engagement, the outlet itself is identified as an actor or its/their representative. The derived and usable meaning in politics is dependent on the assumption of this representation, not the information transmitted. A third mode of engagement in politics is of *logistical transmission*. This is the model of information dissemination associated with simple correspondence theory of truth in its most naïve form, associated in philosophy with the works of Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore. Whatever the merits of a correspondence theory of ‘Truth’ are, it remains the case that a principle function of different forms of media is to discover actionable information. Knowing *that* an event is to take place, know *what* is required to submit an application, knowing *where* to go to collect a portion of a settlement and so on. This sort of activity was indispensable to the functioning of collective action, such as it has, in the thirty months from January of 2011 to July of 2013. Online social networks have been the primary form of this form of engagement.

It should now be obvious that all three modes of engagement are neither mutually exclusive and are seldom extant in unalloyed form. Encounters in the field illustrate how those

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<sup>201</sup> In effect, the man holding up the headline was using *Al-Ahram* as a ‘crucial case.’ A crucial case, as defined by Gerring, is a case that offers particularly compelling evidence for, or against, a proposition. This is sometimes referred to as ‘critical case.’ It assumes two varieties: least-likely and most-likely. A least-likely case is one that is very unlikely to validate the predictions a hypothesis. If a least-likely case is found to be valid, this may be regarded as strong confirmatory evidence. A most-likely case is one that is very likely to validate a hypothesis. If a most-likely case is found to be invalid, this may be regarded as strong disconfirming evidence. *Al-Ahram* is hence a least-likely case, that is the least likely outlet to acknowledge that the head of state for which it was the principle propaganda outlet, had fallen. See Gerring 2006: 2013).

variegated roles in a revolutionary environment have sometimes helped, and at other times hindered political action.

In the next part of this chapter, I will describe three reported events that are complicated and contextualized through the combination of micro-level ethnographic detail. The chronological advance of those events within the thirty months illustrate the changing efficacy of the media in a period of political transformation.

## **Part 2: Mediated Encounters**

### *August, 2011: A Free Exchange of Ideas*

The summer of 2011 was a time in which the expression of personal political opinion seemed to be of consequence. Coincident with this civically solicitous environment were the existence of fora of seemingly enormous consequence. In March, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) had responded to persistent protests in Tahrir Square by appointing Essam Sharaf as prime minister, a career bureaucrat who had nonetheless participated in the demonstrations against Hosni Mubarak.<sup>202</sup> His appointment, alongside the action by the judiciary and utterances by spokespersons for the ruling military body signaled an eagerly responsive ruling apparatus. When members of the military police attempted to storm an encampment of protestors in late February 2011, the SCAF issued a full apology on its Facebook page the very next morning: “An apology to the sons of the revolution. Our credit allows [for these mistakes]” was the famous and awkward phrasing of the release. Media personalities, including political commentators who had backed Hosni Mubarak, went on apology tours, or otherwise recounted unverifiable acts of defiance they had secretly carried out against the fallen regime.

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<sup>202</sup> Elieba, Ahmed and Marwa Hussein. “Meet Essam Sharaf: Egypt’s First Post-revolution Prime Minister.” *Al-Ahram Weekly*. March 3, 2011. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/6892/Egypt/0/Meet-Essam-Sharaf-Egypt-s-first-postrevolution-Prim.aspx>.

On August 7, a forum on the BBC Arabic satellite channel addressed the Sharaf government's decision to dissolve the administrative board of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation.<sup>203</sup> The panel included Khaled el-Azhary, a union committee member in the oil sector and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ahmed Mohib representing the Egyptian Federation of the Independent Trade Unions, Mohamed Gad, a journalist who had written extensively on Egyptian labor, and Abdel-Rahman Kheir the president of the General Union for Military Production and member of the recently dissolved board. What was remarkable is the quality of the argument on display and some of the claims put forth by the representative of the institution under attack by the other panelists; the Egyptian Trade Union Federation. In the debate, Kheir claimed to have aided employees of the ministry of finance in the formation of the real-estate tax collector's union in 2009, the first independent union to gain recognition from the state.<sup>204</sup> Surprised at the claim made by a staunch defender of the state corporate body, the program's moderator asked Kheir why he would do such a thing.

"It is the duty of the unionists to aid workers wherever they maybe and however they choose to organize," replied Kheir to the subtly incredulous moderator. Having gone on to interview all of the members of the panel over the ensuing two years, I found no support to Kheir's claim.<sup>205</sup> What was particularly noteworthy in this debate in which the representative of

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<sup>203</sup> Ajenda Maftuha: Qarar 'al Itihad 'Umal Misr (Open Agenda: The Decision to Dissolve The Egyptian Trade Union Federation [Sic]). BBC Arabic. 7 August, 2011.

<sup>204</sup> In fact, the recognition is quite ambiguous. See Bishara 2013:89, for empirical description of protest that led up to it.

<sup>205</sup> Abdel-Rahman Kheir (1946-2016) was a wily, complex, and dark figure. Of the many men of the labor-corporatist order, he possessed a somewhat unusual ability to navigate competitive politics in comparison to the somewhat bureaucratic, obsequious manners of the other heads of the General Unions that make up the Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions. One of the distinctions Kheir possessed over his ETUF colleagues is that he was the only member of the Egyptian labor hierarchy to be formally a member of an opposition party, the left-wing Tagammu Party. From his position in that party he had managed to secure the leadership of the obviously sensitive Military Industries Union and also managed to secure a seat in parliament; where it was widely reported that the state intervened to rig elections on *his* behalf. He was therefore able to negotiate a position in a rigid authoritarian order on his own unique terms. In a frequently paranoid, wide ranging interview I conducted with Kheir in the spring of 2013, he maintained that he had good relations with leaders of the independent labor movement and

the incumbent and temporarily incapacitated state-corporate body was the litany of practiced legal citation he was capably able to draw on, whilst conceding the right of workers to organize outside of his own organization.<sup>206</sup> His protest, he maintained, was against the use of the police powers to dissolve the leadership body of the federation without a final ruling on the matter by the Supreme Constitutional Court. The Muslim Brotherhood's Khaled el-Azhary, who would become the Minister of Labour and Manpower under Morsi, dismissed Kheir's arguments as that of a man so used to 'the seat' (power) that he was unable to imagine life without it.<sup>207</sup> In these early days of the revolution, the imagined consequence of an audience had seemingly forced holders of entrenched bureaucratic power to concede the fundamental principle of pluralism. The exchange is an exemplary form of what Jon Elster described as a positive feature of deliberation in public, the so-called "civilizing power of hypocrisy:"

Generally speaking, the effect of an audience is to replace the language of interest by the language of reason and to replace impartial motives by passionate ones. The presence of a public makes it especially hard to appear motivated merely by self-interest. Even if one's fellow assembly members would not be shocked, the audience would be. In general, this civilizing force of hypocrisy is a desirable effect of publicity. (Elster 1998: 111)

### *February 2012: An Unanswered Call*

The specter of the action-oriented public remained in evidence in the new year when there was a call for a 'general strike' and 'civil disobedience.'

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supportive of their goals, whilst simultaneously maintaining that the fall of the Mubarak regime was instigated by foreign intelligence. He seemed to command a rather large staff and had a very large space on the third floor of the giant ETUF building in the middle of Cairo. Of all the interviewees I've encountered during my time in the field, including with security personnel, Kheir was one of only two people to ever ask me for identification proving that I was a graduate student. The other person was Mohamed Sa'fan, then the president of the General Union for Petroleum Industries, and later the Minister of Labour and Manpower.

<sup>206</sup> Two years later, Kheir was not nearly as generous in what he was willing to concede.

<sup>207</sup> In government, el-Azhary's hostile position to the monopoly of labor representation by ETUF seemed to have softened, not least because of the Brotherhood's desire and capacity to fill its ranks with their own constituents. See Bishara, Dina. "Egyptian Labor Between Morsi and Mubarak." Foreign Policy. 28 November 2012: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/11/28/egyptian-labor-between-morsi-and-mubarak/>





### ليه هوة العصيان المدني؟

العصيان المدني هو عمل سلمي مدني، وبوجهه يتوقف كل مواطن عن كافة أشكال التعامل مع كل السلطات القائمة وأجهزتها ومؤسساتها ودوائرها ومسئوليه.

#### لماذا يلجأ الناس إلى العصيان المدني؟

يتم اللجوء إلى هذا الأسلوب السلمي المدني الحضاري عندما تمتنع السلطات ونظام الحكم عن الاستجابة لمطالب عامة للمواطنين التي يتبناها كل الرأي العام أو جزء مؤثر معتبر فيه

#### كيفية؟

إن كيفية تنفيذ العصيان المدني تتلخص في الامتناع عن الفعل والتعاطي والتواصل والاتصال بأي جهة من جهات النظام الحاكم لأي غرض سوى استلام الرواتب بالنسبة لمن يتقاضون رواتب

#### وسائل العصيان المدني:

١- خروج المصريين كلهم، على اختلاف انتماءاتهم وعقائدهم وأفكارهم وطبقاتهم

٢- رفض الذهاب للمدارس والجامعات والمصانع والمعاهد. وإغلاق كل المحلات والأفران ومحلات البقالة وامتناع سائقي السيارات العامة والخاصة ومحطات الوقود وسيارات الأجرة في داخل المدن وخارجها

٣- مساندة من هيئات التدريس والأكاديميين ومدرسي المدارس والمعاهد والخروج إلى الشوارع في صمت حزين جنازي ومن الأفضل الانتشاح باللون الأسود رجالاً ونساءً وأطفالاً وشيوخاً حداداً على أرواح أبنائنا الشهداء

٤- الجلوس في الشوارع الكبرى وتعطيل المواصلات بعشرات الآلاف من المواطنين

٥- وقف دفع كل أنواع الرسوم والضرائب وفواتير الكهرباء والماء والتلفون والمجاري وغير ذلك، بالنسبة للشركات أو المؤسسات التابعة للسلطة.

٦- ليس من حق السلطات والمؤسسات أن تقطع تلك الخدمات عن المواطنين بشكل جماعي سواء كأجاء أو مدن أو غير ذلك

العصيان المدني لا يشمل المستشفيات والعيادات الخاصة وسيارات الأطباء والمطافئ والإسعاف يستمر العصيان المدني حتى تتم الاستجابة الكاملة لكل المطالب

Facebook: a3raf



#### AUCians Strike Statement Number 1.

On February 11, 2012 AUC students will join millions of Egyptian students and workers in an open strike against an unjust regime. The death of our colleague Omar Ali Saad Mohsen confronted every AUCian with a fundamental fact about the current political moment in Egypt: people died in Port-Said not because they went to a football match but because we live under a regime that is capable of murder without accountability. If we do not stand firm now, there will be a day the regime will murder us here, inside the walls of this university.

We will stop attending classes starting February 11, 2012 and will mobilize students, faculty, and staff to join the strike. We will demonstrate inside AUC Campus and will join other Egyptian students who are on strike in the students' demonstration organized nationally on February 21, 2012.

Our strike is a non-violent political action. It is the first step towards a mass strike involving all sectors across Egypt and aiming to reach a civil disobedience. Our enemy is political oppression, lack of accountability and social injustice. We have no issue with the AUC. We are striking in solidarity with millions of Egyptians who refuse to live under the threat of military trial, arbitrary arrest, and lack of accountability for those responsible for the senseless murder of Omar and hundreds of Egyptians since February 11, 2011.

The nationwide strike that we are part of has two demands:

1. Swift measures to prosecute and punish those responsible for the Port-Said massacre, the torture and killing of hundreds of Egyptians over the past year and for the crimes of the Mubarak regime.
2. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces ("SCAF") to immediately hand over executive powers to elected civilians.

We call on all AUC students, faculty, and staff to participate in the strike because murder without accountability must stop; because our education has no value when our lives have none; because our individual silence and in-action will make each of one complicit in reproducing injustice. We strike to uphold the goals of the January 25 revolution of building an Egyptian society of dignity and justice.

Figure 24: A call for civil disobedience and a general strike on February 11, 2012, the one-year anniversary of Mubarak's resignation was made by, or supported by many nascent organizations online – and later in the printed press. The call was made to workers, as

**depicted in the Royalty Insecticide cartoon at the top, and students, and as depicted in the cartoon at the bottom. The appeal was broad based enough to include statements, in English, by the generally apolitical students of the American University in Cairo (Middle-Right) and was accompanied by numerous explainers and instructions on the meaning and methods of civil disobedience (Middle-Left).**

The largely crowd-sourced call circulated in an atmosphere of high public mobilization that pitted youth groups and non-Islamist opposition parties against a tense governing alliance between Islamists, who dominated parliament, and the military who controlled the executive through the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. During this period, the phrase *hizb al-kanaba* ('the party of the couch') was an important addition to the political lexicon; an initially derogatory designation of an ostensibly large segment of a watching public which promoters of confrontational political action derided as reactionaries who harkened back to Mubarak in the name of stability. On the other hand, spokespersons for the ruling alliance validated this invisible party as authentic Egyptians yearning for economic stability and a return to normalcy.

The demands for which the civil disobedience was called were multiple and all encompassing; including ending military rule and prompt presidential elections, faster prosecutions of Mubarak era officials, and accountability for the dead in recent clashes between demonstrators and security forces.<sup>208</sup> In turn, the circulating pamphlets called on people to demonstrate, to bring to a halt transportation networks by crowding out intersections, to refuse to pay bills, fees or taxes to the governments and last, but certainly not least, to participate in a general strike.

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<sup>208</sup> Abu Bakr, Mahmud. "11 Fibrayir Bi-Misr: Ma' wa Did" (11 February in Egypt: For and Against). BBC. 10 February 2012: [http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2012/02/120209\\_egypt\\_civil\\_disobedience](http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2012/02/120209_egypt_civil_disobedience)

The question of civil disobedience was so prominent in the public sphere that both Al-Azhar and the Coptic Orthodox Church issued religious edicts forbidding participation.<sup>209</sup> So serious was this claim that not only did every columnist in the land feel compelled to opine on the matter, indeed every constituted political body was compelled to issue a statement in support or condemnation of the action as well, including all the parties in the new parliament:

For	Against
The Free Egyptians Party (Liberal)	The Freedom and Justice Party (Muslim Brotherhood/Islamist)
The Egyptian Social Democratic Party (Liberal)	Al-Nour Party (Salafist Call/Islamist)
Al-Tagamuu Party (Socialist)	Al-Wafd Party (Liberal)
The Popular Socialist Alliance Party (Socialist)	Al-Wasat Party (Moderate Islamist)
The Egyptian Socialist Party (Socialist)	Building and Development Party (Islamic Group/Islamists)
Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions	Egyptian Trade Union Federation
April 6 Youth Movement	Al-Azhar
Revolutionary Socialists Movement	The Coptic Orthodox Church

**Table 2: Responses to Call for Civil Disobedience**

<sup>209</sup>Sliman, Mustafa. "Shaykh al-azhar yuharim al-'isyan al-madani" (The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Forbids Civil-Disobedience). Al-Arabiya. 8 February 2012: <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/08/193473.html>

When the one year anniversary of the resignation of Mubarak came and went entirely without incident, the state’s flagship daily al-Ahram ran an eight column headline the next morning declaring that “The People Have Refused Disobedience,” alongside an editorial representing the opinion of the paper in which praise was heaped upon the latest SCAF-appointed prime minister, Kamal el-Ganzouri’s, worn, nationalistic anthropomorphization of the nation: “Egypt will not bow,” they quoted him as saying:<sup>210</sup>



**Figure 25: The state’s flagship daily, Al-Ahram, announced that “The People Refuse [Civil] Disobedience” in its headline on February 12, 2012.**

The marking of the victory for those who stood against the call for civil disobedience and the general strike may have proved important in the events that followed, including perhaps a the revitalization of the discourse of ‘*istikrar*’ (stability) so prominent under Mubarak’s ancien régime (Makram-Ebeid 2012). The entry of the fecund *hizb al-kanaba* into the vibrant political

<sup>210</sup> “R’ay al-Ahram: Masr Lan Tarqa” (Al-Ahram’s Opinion: Egypt Will Not Bow). Al-Ahram. February 12, 2012.

arena was a significant one; for here was a constituency whose size is demonstrated by the absence of action; a valuable political resource to draw on. But to note only the defeat of the leaders of the parties and movement in the ‘for’ column is to miss an important feature of this event. It is beyond doubt that the scope of the demands made, and the utter inability to deliver those demands are revealing data about the people and organizations who inveighed for the strike. This is a revelation that is the product of the non-event of February 11, 2012. As far as the forces aligned on the right side column of the above the table were concerned, it was absolutely possible that calls circulating online, adopted by inchoate political organizations, could accomplish a general strike!

This is a quality of a revolutionary situation. Unlike stable systems, be they democratic or authoritarian, in Egypt in 2012 there was a palpable sense that declarations and propositions were unencumbered by the absence of precedence. So startling was the mass uprising of 2011 to past and would-be guardians of order and *istiqrar* that Friedrich Engels’ mockery of the Bakunist call for a general strike would equally apply to the romantic revolutionaries as they would to the traumatized rulers they challenge. That allies of the SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood were churning narratives about a “third force,” “foreign spies” and even the occult forces aligned against the nation only served to magnify the reach of the ambitious counter-narrative:<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> The apogee of these sorts of narratives was a series of stories and ‘investigations’ by the Freedom and Justice Party linking foreign influenced anarchist groups with occult beliefs to infiltrate demonstrations on the first anniversary of the revolution in order to cause maximum property damage whilst hiding behind the mask used in the film *V for Vendetta* (2006). Six months later, Egyptian television ran an advertisement warning citizens about foreign spies in their midst, and cautioned them against speaking to foreigners. The advertisement was attributed to members of SCAF. See Galey, Patrick. “Beware Foreign Spies, Egypt Warns, in Ridiculous But Dangerous Ads.” *The Guardian*. June 12, 2012: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jun/12/beware-foreign-spies-egypt-warns-ads>.



**Figure 26: The front page of the daily Al-Hurriya wa al-Adala (Freedom and Justice), published by the Freedom and Justice Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood – then the largest party in parliament. The headline reads: “The Mask of Bandetta [sic]: The Anarchists Lead to Anarchy on 25 January.”**

One month after the general strike that never was, I accompanied my friend Mohamed Gad, the economics journalist, to Sadat City, a dense industrial zone in the governorate of Monoufiyah. There, a local federation of had claimed the membership of 20,000 workers and was associated with the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions.<sup>212</sup> The president of the federation was Sa’ad Sha’ban, a unionist who had been active in the Local Union Committee of his company for two decades, and had built a network of relationships with employers and other labor leaders in factories – whether or not they held a formal position in the Union

<sup>212</sup> Upon the legal incorporation of the rival Egyptian Democratic Labour Congress (EDLC) (See Chapter 3), Sha’ban and the Sadat federation switched to the new federation, becoming founding members. In 2014, Sha’ban became president of the EDLC. Though Sha’ban was an exceptionally adept organizer, part of the success of his organizing endeavors in Sadat City was that the industrial town which housed hundreds of enterprises was part of a private-sector push by the regime. The state-sponsored Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) seldom, if at all, organized workers in the private sector (with the exception of companies that had been privatized). Therefore Sadat City represented a unique opportune organizing environment, in which the close proximity of workers with one another came together with an absence of a rival institutional force to compete for the workers’ loyalty, or otherwise embroil them in bureaucracy of union committees. At the end of the first decade of the 2000s, out of the hundreds of enterprises in Sadat City, only two had union committees associated with ETUF (Benin 2015:74).

Committees that were lowest rung of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation. The almost model success of the rapid incorporation was built on years of informal contacts with workers in close proximity. Among the tenets of his method in collective bargaining was to variegate and sequence worker demands so that wage disputes were never sole point of contention with an employer. “A good *naqabi* (unionist) mixes his demands, and must include in negotiations, demands that pertain to the production process itself, including the quality of the product. This variation is much more likely to get an employer to sit down with us,” he said.

Sha’ban’s was a practical philosophy of administration – but not without political texture. Sitting in the ground floor of the headquarters the new regional federation had set up, the veteran labor activist was methodical in his recounting of ongoing disputes in Sadat City; what was being contested, who the players were, and the linkages, or, importantly, lack thereof between the various disputes and national political developments. In exchanges with Mohamed Gad, the sympathetic economics reporter for the mass-circulation daily *Al-Shorouq*, he carefully directed four board members, each representing different unions and sectors within the city members to present a summary of the various situations he had hoped to see addressed in the press. In passing, and after questions were answered, he pointed to two of the members present; “Look, Mohamed is a Salafi, and Khaled is a sly *ikhwani* (Muslim Brother). I sometimes ask them to stand outside the building, like statues on a bridge,” he joked, “since I am a socialist, I believe we have everything covered.”

Only after he and his five colleagues had imparted the accounts they wanted to see covered did our exchange drift into less structured reflections, facilitated by the trust he had developed with Gad, with whom he had had a relationship for a number of years. What did Sha’ban think about the failure of the general strike the month before?



At this he became visibly irate. “You know, we had been sitting down with an employer for a month. At first he was absolutely adamant not to talk to anyone. It was all about pride with him. He shut down the factory. Then we started talking. Now Abu ‘Aita goes on TV and announces that everyone will go on strike. Of course the man stopped talking. And I don’t blame him. None of these people have any idea what is going on here. They just talk. Measure against this<sup>213</sup> many other examples here in Sadat and, I am sure, elsewhere.”

He had not asked anyone to strike. And had he done so, he said, he hoped that people would have sense to ignore him, he asserted. “We cannot work according to the whims of ‘*iyal*’ (kids) on the internet!”

#### *March 2013: We Will Take Our Chances in the Dark*

Drowning in debt, faced with seventy-eight unenforced court rulings against him and his businesses, ex-parliamentarian and Port-Said based tycoon Abdel Wahab Kouta saw the fall of Mubarak as a sign that whatever series of equilibria enabled his byzantine arrangements that included holdings in a number of sectors, were in peril. He fled the country. One of the businesses he left behind was Kouta Steel, where he had been embroiled with the 600 workers at the factory in a series of disputes that resulted in a lockout. For many months 300 workers, roughly half of the workforce, staged a sit-in at the public prosecutor’s office. The prosecutor conceded, in an unusual and unprecedented decision, and proceeded to hand over the administration of the factory to a committee of the workers. In August of 2012, a formal decision by a court in the city of Zaqaqiy was issued, upholding the public prosecutor’s decision to allow

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<sup>213</sup> “*Qis ‘ala kida*” (Measure against this), i.e. this is a mere example of a more frequent phenomenon.



the workers back into the factory. This functioned to legally underwrite the workers' self-formed committee to administer their workplace.<sup>214</sup>

In early 2013, this unprecedented victory was celebrated by activists, notably by the Revolutionary Socialists, whose young lawyer and prominent leader Haytham Muhamadein had provided legal guidance to the worker's committee throughout the process. The organization started to circulate an article entitled "Kota Steel; With Success, Much Remains" [to be done].<sup>215</sup> Though a relatively small group, the Revolutionary Socialists had become prominent online. Their Facebook page, on which they published their material, had attracted seven hundred thousand 'likes.'<sup>216</sup>

Yet this is the story about how this heralded achievement by a self-organizing committee of workers, a possible manifestation of *autogestion*, was removed from the public arena – by the workers themselves.

When I first learned that control and administration of a sizeable steel plant was won by a workers committee, it was at a youth group of the Popular Socialist Alliance party branch in East Cairo. There, activist Hani Ashraf had announced that a group from the party, in coordination with another group from the Revolutionary Socialists, were to commandeer three buses to the 10<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan in Industrial City in the governorate of Sharqiyah (where the factory was located) to express solidarity with the workers and their achievement.

I expressed interest in the trip and was further given the contact information of the steering committee of engineers and plant workers who were now legally administering the

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<sup>214</sup> Al-Bahrawi, Nadhima. "jinayat al-zaqaziq tu'ayid qarar al-na'ib al-'am bi-tamkin 'umal quta min al-masna' (Zaqaziq Criminal Court Affirm Public Prosecutor's Decision to Empower Kota Workers Over Factory). *Al-Watan* 14 November 2012: <http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/76683>

<sup>215</sup> Yusri, Ali. "'hadid Kouta...wa lil naga'u baqiyah" (Kouta Steel; With Success..Much Remains.) *al-ishtirakiyun al-thawriyun* 3 February 2013: <http://revsoc.me/workers-farmers/qwt-llslb-wllnjh-bqy/>

<sup>216</sup> Which for pages amounts to a something akin to a subscription.

factory. Over three nights in late February, I conducted a series of phone interviews with Ayed Muhamed Ayed, the line worker who had taken on the responsibility for media relations. Ayed was eager to talk about how the workers had used their own funds for supplies and how their primary motivation was protecting the workplace where most of them had spent their entire working lives. There was, however, a growing tension; he had no doubt that public pressure and solidarity had had an impact on the court's decision. It was also the case however that suppliers and distributors who had agreed to work with the new factory administrators were now hesitating. "The more we are in the papers, the more scared they are," he said. "Some of them have told us that they are now getting pressured not to work with us. Many other businessmen who are not in the steel sector are threatening them. Many people don't want us to succeed."

The trip remained on the schedule. In early March, the buses were parked outside of the Popular Socialist Alliance Party's east Cairo headquarters. As the group assembled, Ashraf emerged to make an announcement; the expedition had been cancelled. The worker-committee had decided that the show of solidarity was now counterproductive. "We must respect their decision," Ashraf told the young crowd. Privately, he later said that "given all that is going on" that the decision was probably correct.

### **Part 3: What Does a Forum Do?**

Giving voice to the voiceless is a conception of democratic freedoms popular among those inclined to write history; ancient, recent and contemporary, from 'left to right.' As such the character of the representation must always remain in question. In mainline political science, the voices are available through the tool of the survey. In an academic study that has been received an unusual amount of coverage, Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page measured the policy

preferences of individual American citizens from and 1981 to 2002 and compared those preferences to policy outcomes over the same period (Gilens and Page 2014). The resulting headlines are well represented by the one used by the BBC, “Study: US is an Oligarchy, not a Democracy.”<sup>217</sup>

In stable political situations, a defensible, if incomplete explanation of ‘oligarchical’ forms of rule is the existence of an oligarchical media establishment that in the words of the other prominent anti-establishment candidate in the 2016 US presidential elections, Bernie Sanders, shapes the scope of what is ‘possible’ and ‘realistic’:<sup>218</sup>

In 1983, the largest 50 corporations controlled 90 percent of the media. Today, as a result of massive mergers and takeovers, six corporations control 90 percent of what we see, hear, and read. Those six corporations are Comcast, News Corp, Disney, Viacom, Time Warner and CBS. In 2010, the total revenue of these six corporations was \$275 billion. In a recent article in *Forbes* magazine discussing media ownership, the headline appropriately read: “These 15 Billionaires Own America’s News Media Companies.”

The empirically defensible analysis is incomplete. There is an embedded assumption that political mass communication and politics itself are co-terminus; a condition that might describe national electoral politics in the United States, but is a situation whose generalizability to both the future of American politics, or other polities, is an open question. Whether resultant of the manner in which the new American president exercises power or the various explanatory variables marshalled to explain his unexpected electoral victory, it seems likely that the modes with which the American public engages the media; be it *power signification*, *logistical transmission* and *individuating monological* are likely to change.

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<sup>217</sup> BBC. “Study: US is an oligarchy, not a democracy” April 17, 2014. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-echochambers-27074746>>.

<sup>218</sup> Sanders, Bernie. “How Corporate Media Threatens Our Democracy.” *In These Times*. January 26, 2017. <http://inthesetimes.com/features/bernie-sanders-corporate-media-threatens-our-democracy.html>.

The highly context specific political utility of media - illustratable in the rapidly evolving Egyptian situation - makes already fraught construction of a counterfactual that is part of the assembly of *any* causal story (Fearon 1991) about the ‘impact’ of different forms of media likely misleading. Yet the existence of such an impact is undeniable, rekindling age old social scientific questions about whether new forms of political communication constitute a difference in the degree or the type of collective action it makes possible. In lieu of such a measure we must take two crucial lessons from the recent attributions to the power of media in the Egyptian revolution, the Brexit referendum and the American presidential election. The lessons are in tension with one another; but may, in fact, be inseparable.

First, we must dispense with the conceptual muddle that the quotidian distinction between *fundamental* and *virtual* politics that are variously adopted by analysts and commentators. Political expression and organizing online may possess different attributes than, for example face to face recruitment. It is intuitively sensible to propose that there is trade-off between reach and commitment when one method is used instead of another. The methods are *not* however of different *ontological orders*. Political engagement of the discourses of *power signification*, *logistical transmission* and *individuating monological variety* are not the *mind* to a demonstration or a vote’s *body*; but part of an assemblage whose entirety must be substituted in order to construct a coherent counterfactual. The designation of a fundamental and virtual politics is itself a political act par excellence, rather than analytical tool that differentiates between degree and type.

Second, we must recognize that ideas and measures taken by governments and their challengers with regards to the media do not necessarily reflect a coherent philosophy of action that more proximately aligns behavior with goals. The rationality of disposition towards media

by actors does not necessarily represent a course of maximal efficiency. A radical disjuncture in politics is likely to redound to the benefit of already constituted political actors, but need not be evidence of great understanding of the mechanisms involved by individuals aligned with triumphant group. To paraphrase and reduce more than a few conversations I've had regarding the behavior of the military in government since the middle of 2013: no theory of the workings of social media is required for authorities in order to arrest everyone who shows up to a protest called for on social media!

We must therefore return to empirical accounts of how people engaged with different forms of political communication to discern the multiple ways in which individuals have attempted to construct political actors; and how the intended and unintended consequences have more or less approximated those goals.

Consider the case of the Permanent Conference for Alexandrian Workers (PCAW), an organization set up as an institutionalized forum and a hub for support for the workers in the industries in and around the city. After a well-attended conference in December 2012, in which most of the figures associated with the labor movement were in attendance, a local respected veteran of the labor movement, Fathallah Mahrous, proposed that the 'conference' be made permanent. A space was donated by the Popular Socialist Alliance Party in Alexandria, and, with remarkable regularity and punctuality, the conference was in session at 6pm of every Monday ever since. I will return to this unique institution in the next chapter; but what is noteworthy here in conclusion to a chapter about the political communication and the shape of the public sphere is that in conception, this was setup as an educative institution. The premise, as conceived by Mahrous, was to provide current and aspiring labor leaders with an initiation into the history of the labor and union movement in Egypt. But Mahrous' accounts, compelling though they were

given his long history as a labor agitator who became one of the youngest political prisoners at the age of fifteen in Nasser's Egypt,<sup>219</sup> were poorly attended. Lectures by other elderly Marxists were even less so.

Gradually, worker delegations who had found out about PCAW on Facebook would set up sessions on a Monday, and their case would be heard by the staff, who would offer support, solidarity and strategy. The delegations however were, for the most part, a venue for legal redress; where Susan Nada, a lawyer, litigated their cases for free. What started out as a consciousness-raising endeavor gradually evolved into a legal clinic. Workers attending the Monday meetings were invariably introduced to ideas animating the independent union movement. As such, a regular attendee of the conference could discern the gradual refinement of the staff's pitch for independent unions.<sup>220</sup> Overtime, there was a greater insistence on the PCAW's non-affiliation with any political party and the primacy of the tactical over the ideological. An institution designed to give voice of imperiled workers to a wider public, and to raise the consciousness of the working class, evolved into one representing small groups of workers to increasingly unfriendly judges.

The inexplicability of revolution temporarily suspends the accretive political logics of history and readies groups for the possibility that modular forms of liberal democracy, the means of political production, are usable forms of politics. Such forms includes appeals to a wider public whose persuasion is unproblematically assumed to effect political outcomes. Egyptians' incomplete understanding of the precise mechanisms that underlie, precede and travel alongside these democratic models is not particularly more severe than it has been elsewhere; where the

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<sup>219</sup> Personal interview with Fathallah Mahrous, April 16, 2013.

<sup>220</sup> Indeed the PCAW helped shepherd dozens of unions into existence by filing the collecting the necessary signatures and preparing the paperwork to be deposited at the Ministry of Labour and Manpower in Alexandria.

models have fit the data for longer periods of time. To take the opportunity to understand what such a moment may teach us about political communication more generally, we should avoid what Hegel termed ‘monochromatic formalism,’ an immobile thinking that continually finds its own suppositions in its objects. We must consider not what persons, groups and actors are said to think, but what sort of actions those articulated thoughts are part of; that is, we must consider what they do.

## **Overture to Chapter 5**

The power of abstraction is not strictly an academic concern related to epistemological propriety, but a political tool available to actors who are able to assimilate political conflict into institutional arenas that advantages their priorities. It is in these terms that the role of law in the Egyptian revolution should be understood. As applied by the judiciary, a uniquely autonomous and powerful actor in Egyptian politics, this political method has been put to use at several junctures after the fall of Mubarak - and to serve corporate interests of the judiciary itself. I argue here that it is this power dynamic that best explains the behavior of judges within the revolution rather than an analysis of the legal tradition(s) on which jurists have drawn. The proximity of power politics to law is something that is recognizable to individuals who have sought to navigate, escape and utilize its deployment in the building of independent labor representation. Unlike political communication, a concept that with the advents of social networking has often been stretched to envelope politics itself, the law is specific and positive. The attempts by activists to abridge the distance between 'positive law' and 'law in action' has resulted in whatever success they have achieved in organization building. The vestiges of these efforts are embodied in the material connections and formal recognitions rather than achievement of their stated goals of legal change or more consistent application of favorable elements of extant law.



## Chapter 5

### The Means of Political Production: The Law



**Figure 27:** With its print version banned, a cartoon on the website of Freedom and Justice depicts the role of the judiciary in 2016. On the top right, above the hand holding the gavel al-qada' al-masry (the Egyptian judiciary) sprinkles water on the bloodied hands of qatalat al-mutadhahirin (the killers of protesters).

He who is the cause of another becoming powerful is ruined; because that pre-dominancy has been brought about either by astuteness or else by force, and both are distrusted by him who has been raised to power.

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*

This legitimacy is important for Baathists: a regime that passes public laws permitting it to pass secret laws.

Jill Crystal, *Authoritarianism and Its Adversaries in the Arab World*

No Comments on Judicial Rulings (“La ta’liq ‘la a’hkam al-qadaa,”)

A staple of obscure origin repeated by public commentators in Egypt about judicial rulings. It is in the imperative form.

## Part 1: Abstracting the Concrete

Abstraction is a vital resource. The remoteness of explanatory models from the quotidian experience and concrete actuality of the world is the subject of dispute within and between the different disciplines of the social sciences. But few, if any, do entirely without a baseline disposition towards the subject, even if it is limited to the choices of the subject itself in the most deliberately idiographic of histories. At one end of the divide, the reflexivity concomitant with those debates has engendered considerations of the political role that social science, and social scientists, may play in the construction of the world they describe. Burrowing from literary studies, most prominently from Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), a considerable group of social scientists have, with increasing rigor, emplaced the social scientists in the worlds of their subjects.<sup>221</sup> Even with this associating of 'discourse' and the exercise of power in the world described, the emphasis remains on the role knowledge producers, who are in some ways the peers of academics. The concerns of social scientists who have considered the power of abstraction in politics have therefore been inescapably mired in the epistemological rather than the ontological.

Yet for actors engaged in conflictual politics, the perch from which to utilize the power of abstraction need not be based on material accessible through discourse analysis, or broader

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<sup>221</sup> This a vast body of work across a multitude of disciplines that cannot, and need not be summarized here. Impressionistically, it seems that the majority of social science production that has internalized Said's groundbreaking work, and the philosopher Michel Foucault, whose work on "Knowledge/Power" provides the framework of *Orientalism*, is still principally concerned with how other works, be they social scientific or otherwise, inform and rationalize the exercise of power. That is, they consider the impact of knowledge producers on relationships of power, rather than consider how abstraction maybe used actors who are not themselves knowledge producers. It seems that academics, like other human groupings, fight their own battles first, and that their methodological disagreements are nested in conflicts better explained by the politics enveloping their own institutions and their environments than those of their subjects. In contemporary American academia, the social science that has imported the most from what is generally referred to as 'critical theory' is anthropology. For a related discussion on some of the issues that arise from this mode of social science on the question of democratization, see brief discussion of Saba Mahmood's *The Politics of Piety* (2005) and Frederic Schaffer's *Democracy in Translation* (1998) in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

semiotic events. There need not be an authorization from intellectuals or academics for there to be a recognition of the power of abstraction. The consumption, utilization and projection of available discourses and models in the battles within the Egyptian revolution are undeniably related to knowledge production about politics; everything from the ambitious claim that January 25, 2011, was a ‘workers’ revolution’, rhetorical battles about whether the demonstrations on June 30, 2013, amounted to a ‘Second Revolution’ or a were the foreshadowing of a ‘Military Coup,’ to the appointment of a minister for ‘Democratic Transition’ in the government of Essam Sharaf (March 2011 – December 2011). There is however another sort of abstraction that is achieved through the practices of complex, adaptable and differentiated institutions whose accomplishment of this task is not principally dependent on what is said and written about the procedures they enact.<sup>222</sup> In this chapter, I argue that the role of the Egyptian legal system in general, and the judiciary in particular, within the revolution can best be understood in those terms; as institution that has channeled concrete political struggles into a general framework more tractable for abridgement of one order to another – from one stage of the revolution to another; in a crude sense from Mubarak to Morsi, and Morsi to el-Sisi. This function emblematically evinced by the appointment of Adly Mansour, the chief justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court as interim president after the removal of Mohamed Morsi from office on July 3, 2013.

The role of a relatively autonomous judiciary under authoritarianism has presented itself as a puzzle in political science at later point than other institutions under authoritarianism. “Why would an entrenched authoritarian regime,’ asks Tamir Moustafa in his important book about the

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<sup>222</sup> Though of course what is said and written need not be irrelevant to the success of this political maneuver. The point here is that power to abstract (v) concrete political battles is achieved through the institution’s place in the political system and the networks of resources available to that institution; not only how such an operation is presented.

Supreme Constitutional Court in Egypt, “establish an independent constitutional court with the power of judicial review?” (Moustafa 2008: 1). The proposed resolutions for this puzzle are devised from comparative case studies to address the calculative decision at this singular historical point of inception in 1971. First, the need to draw in capitalist investment requires that credible commitments be made against expropriation, a rational concern given regime type, and, in the Egyptian case, particularly so given the Nasserist regime’s history of nationalization. Second, without the administrative check that legal oversight makes available, the maintenance of functioning order would be defeated by endemic corruption. The autonomous court therefore has a binding effect on the behavior of the regime’s own clients. Third, and related to the second; the absence of an autonomous court would consign the regime’s success to the success of its policies, the failure of which would brook no avenue for redress outside of dangerous, and abrupt policy change. The underwriting of policies by an autonomous judiciary would therefore serve a legitimating function. Finally, the legitimating function has a negative form; if an unpopular decision is to be made, the shifting of that decision’s authorship to a court helps diffuse the authoritarian regime’s responsibility – the more credible the autonomy granted to the court’s decision-making, the more diffuse the backlash against unpopular measures.

So far so instrumental. As the neo-Huntingtonians have taught us the prediction of the perpetual functioning of authoritarian institutions in keeping with their original intent is a perilous undertaking. How then did it come about that by 2008, a leading scholar of law and politics in Egypt would be able to state an emerging consensus position as follows:

Egyptian administrative courts and the Supreme Constitutional Court have become sites for individual and organized efforts to breathe life into Egypt’s formal democratic practices and institutions. Political parties seeking to gain recognition, individuals seeking political rights, NGOs challenging restrictions, and activists seeking to

eliminate unfair electoral procedures all have found the courts far friendlier places than other institutions of the Egyptian state (Brown 2008).

There seems to be a gulf in this assessment of the judiciary, much greater than the elapsed time would suggest, and a grim moment in March 2014 when a judge sentenced 529 people to death for the killing of a single policeman in the Southern city of al-Minya.<sup>223</sup> One month later, at the scene of another mass trial, a judge sentenced 683 people, including children, to death for the killing of another policeman.<sup>224</sup> The United States' government, a somewhat irate but still committed ally of the new order in Egypt, issued a deceleration that echoed some of the reactions to the wild stories floating around in the Egyptian media; Marie Harf, spokesperson for the State Department, said the trials "represent a flagrant disregard for basic standards of justice," and that "everything that happens on the ground, including this, will play into the decision about where our assistance relationship goes from here."<sup>225</sup>

The upending of democratic expectations is dramatic in other ways. In 2006 Egypt was in the grips of a 'judicial revolt' against the Mubarak regime led by the Judges' Club,<sup>226</sup> the 'de

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<sup>223</sup> Kingsley, Patrick and Manu Abdo. "Anger in Egypt as 529 Morsi Supporters Sentenced to Death." *The Guardian*. March 24, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/24/egypt-morsi-supporters-death-sentence>.

<sup>224</sup> *Al-Jazeera*. "Egyptian Court Sentences 683 People to Death." April 29, 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/egyptian-court-sentences-683-people-death-201442875510336199.html>.

<sup>225</sup> Kamal, Treza. "Brotherhood Head, 682 Others Tried in Egypt After Mass Death Sentence." *Reuters*. March 25, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-brotherhood-idUSBREA2O0F720140325>.

<sup>226</sup> Though established as a social association in 1939, the club had developed over the decades into a professional association defending what was, and remains, an unusual level of independence amongst Middle Eastern regimes. The type of authoritarian rule practiced by Gamal Abdel-Nasser, was one in which the independence of the judiciary was the least accommodated by the executive. In 1969, the reluctance of judges to join Nasser's single political party, the Arab Socialist Union, prompted his punitive dismissal of 100 judges. The incident referred to by writers on the judiciary, and judges themselves somewhat dramatically, as 'the massacre of the judiciary.' Though the measure were later rescinded, the role of the Judges' Club in the confrontation was an important station in its becoming the institution of the judiciary's self-organization. The club's membership includes all judges and prosecutors, except for constitutional and administrative jurists. See Brown, Nathan and Hesham Nasr. "Egypt's Judges Step Forward." *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Policy Outlook*. May 2005.

facto professional association for judges' (Rutherford 2008: 30) and its charismatic leader Zakaria Abdel-Aziz.

Elections in Egypt, up to 2007, were subject to judicial oversight. The occasion of the 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections, and the 2006 constitutional referendum, brought together the Judge's Club, the explicitly political Kefaya (Enough) movement, the Muslim Brotherhood and assorted individuals committed to challenging the Mubarak regime.



**Figure 30: In 2006, the leaders of the self-constituting body of the Egyptian judiciary, the Judges' Club, led a confrontation with Egyptian state. Their public protest attracted widespread support. In this photo on March 17, the judges stood in their formal sashes in protest outside the High Court in their formal sashes. Though their protest was silent, those attending in solidarity were heard chanting "Judges, judges, save us from tyranny."<sup>227</sup> Photo courtesy of the blog Baheyya.<sup>228</sup>**

Zakariya Abdel-Aziz had led slate of 15 candidates under the banner of *tayar al-istiqlal* (The Independence Current) to winning the club's internal elections in 2002, soundly defeating the more government friendly candidate. In their legal capacity as overseers of the electoral

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<sup>227</sup> *Al-Jazeera*. "Egypt Judges Take Protest to Street." March 17, 2006. <http://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2006/03/200849162549360973.html>.

<sup>228</sup> *Baheyya*. "Are Judges Heroes?" May 18, 2006. <<http://baheyya.blogspot.com/2006/05/are-judges-heroes.html>>.

process, the leadership of the judiciary took a severely critical view of the government's conduct; including its deployments of *baltagiya* (thugs)<sup>229</sup> to attack and intimidate voters and, on several occasions, supervising judges. Logistically, the judiciary was responsible for the supervision of 54,000 ballot boxes across 12,000 polling stations during the presidential elections, which unlike the parliamentary elections later that year, were not broken down into three phases. To make up for the fact that there were not enough judges seconded, state attorneys and other government employees that the ministry of interior argued were part of the judiciary, were used instead of bench judges. Observing the evidence of fraud and violence, and in light of its legally prescribed responsibility, the judicial leadership issued scathing reports on the elections under the banner of absolving 'Egypt's judiciary' from the behavior of the executive authorities. More pointedly, individual members of the judiciary, including prominent leaders such Hisham el-Bastawisi, Ahmad Miki and Noha al-Zeiny took to written and broadcast media to make the case against what some of them started calling 'the regime,' rather than merely the government.<sup>230</sup>

Nested inside these critiques were longstanding demands of the judiciary, represented by articulate spokespersons drawing on the institution's long tradition and internal democratic mandate to pursue them.<sup>231</sup> Those demands centered on the wresting of four core levers of control away from the Ministry of Justice, and therefore to the securing of greater autonomy: control of the judiciary's budget, promotions, secondments and disciplinary procedures (El-

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<sup>229</sup> For more on this term and its evolving use, see Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

<sup>230</sup> Several international monitoring organizations have issued reports outline the contours of events as described above. See for example the International Republican Institute's reports: "2005 Parliamentary Election Assessment in Egypt" available at [http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/fields/field\\_files\\_attached/resource/egypts\\_2005\\_parliamentary\\_elections\\_assessment\\_report.pdf](http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/fields/field_files_attached/resource/egypts_2005_parliamentary_elections_assessment_report.pdf)

<sup>231</sup> Whilst the executive has long history of attempting to manipulate elections in professional associations and union committees through structuring of the roles; its reach inside the Judges' Club is far more limited. The manipulation is delegated to pro-government judges who are in a position to offer judges monetary benefits through lucrative secondments, through the Ministry of Justice, to government agencies. The electoral process of the Judges' Club, which is not a formal union, has been beyond the direct control of the executive.



Ghobashy 2016).<sup>232</sup> Given the unique position which the Egyptian judiciary occupied in the assemblage of the authoritarian state, the dynamic politics, and the hollow political economy (see Chapter 3) that preceded the Egyptian revolution, a challenge to the regime by such a well-positioned political actor served as a focal point to which the rest of the opposition was drawn.



**Figure 31: In 2006 the Ministry of Justice initiated disciplinary proceedings against two prominent spokespersons for the judiciary, prompting their case to become a focal point for mobilization. On May 11, 2006, the Mubarak regime sent thousands of riot police to quash expected demonstrations in support of the judges Mahmud Mekki and Hisham al-Bastawisi outside the High Court. Only al-Bastawisi was censured, an inconsequential measure that was part of the regime’s disorderly attempt to contain the conflagration that arose out of its confrontation with the judiciary.**

The battle for judicial independence was folded into a battle for the banner ready ‘rule of law,’ and in turn, both were folded into a wider activation of anti-authoritarian mobilization that

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<sup>232</sup> Pro-government judges were leery of the confrontation with government, and were even prone to cast doubt on the democratic mandate of their more militant colleagues. One judge, the head of the Cairo court of appeals Rif’aat al-Sayid made the following declaration to a government newspaper: “The number of judges in Egypt is 13,000. There are at most 200 judges in the street. We cannot assume that these are all the judges” (quoted in El-Ghobashy 2016). Of course the leadership of the judiciary had been elected precisely to pursue these demands. What should not have gone unnoticed is that, by that point, the Mubarak government were actively courting judges opposed to their leadership to speak out publicly. In the interim, all of the opposition against Mubarak, including liberals, Islamist and Nasserists had coalesced around the Judges around the loose banner of the “Rule of Law.” The judges’ stance had also garnered favorable coverage in the international press. See for example. Slackman, Michael. “Democracy in Egypt Faces Two Tests Today.” *The New York Times*. May 18, 2006. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/18/world/middleeast/18egypt.html>>.



drew on the duel between the judiciary and the executive. On the judicial side, two spokespersons Mahmoud Mekki and Hisham al-Basatwisi, both sitting judges from the Court of Cassation,<sup>233</sup> made careful and poised arguments pointing to the legal and constitutional transgressions of the Mubarak regime.

It was around the same time that the fragmented political opposition began to recognize the potential significance of the cascading worker protests around the country and projected unto them democratic demands. So too was the case with the judiciary. In 2006, Islamists, liberals and Nasserists coalesced around the judiciary as vanguards of the opposition. The support of the last group was particularly revealing insofar as the narrative of judicial struggle against an authoritarian executive in the twentieth century marks the judiciary's confrontation with Gamal

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<sup>233</sup> The Court of Cassation is the supreme appellate court for Egypt's 'regular courts' – which cover the vast majority of civil, criminal and personal status cases. There are 450 judges on this body, though only 300 actually sit, with the remainder seconded to other countries, especially in the Middle East. Regular courts are only one part of the judicial apparatus in Egypt, and some of that apparatus, namely military courts which continue to try civilians, lies outside the body of the judiciary as an actor. Other components of the judicial system include the State Council (Majlis al-Dawla), which gives legal advice to the government and exercises jurisdiction over administrative cases, the Supreme Constitutional Court wherein the constitutionality of laws and regulations are challenged. Two additional bodies link the judiciary to the executive; beginning in 2005, Election Commissions headed by the president of the Supreme Constitutional Court, are responsible for overseeing presidential elections – whereas parliamentary elections are in the purview of the Court of Cassation. Finally, and important, there is the Niyaba (Prosecution), headed by al-Na'ib al-A'am (the Public Prosecutor). The body is staffed by members of the judiciary, and they are responsible for the investigation and prosecution of crimes. The head of this body is appointed by, but cannot be fired by, the president. Although the last public prosecutor under Mubarak, Abdel-Migid Mahmud quickly brought cases against members of the Mubarak regime after February 2011, it took him several months to charge Mubarak himself. He, however refused to bow growing public pressure to resign. Mohamed Morsi's firing and replacement of Mahmud through the instrument of a 'Constitutional Declaration' was arguably the breaking point with the judiciary; with Mahmud then joining judges fiercely opposed to the new president, and allied with Ahmed al-Zind, the Mubarak loyalist who had won control over the Judges' Club in 2009. Morsi's replacement, Talaat Ibrahim, faced such fierce opposition from fellow judges that he was induced to resign three days after his appointment on December 17, 2012, only to retract his resignation three days later. He was removed in the extra-constitutional state of exception that accompanied the military coup of 2013. His replacement, Hisham Barakat, who had moved to prosecute thousands of the ousted president's supporters, was assassinated in 2015. The intense scrutiny of this position in the judicial apparatus lies not only in the holder's nominal ability to mobilize the coercive resources of the state against individuals, but also in the position serving as the formal chord that ties the executive branch of government to the judiciary. The 2014 constitution no longer gives the president of the republic the power to select and appoint the public prosecutor, but instead the president is limited to the formality of appointing a judge selected by the Supreme Judicial Council. The non-confrontational process with which this concession to judicial independence and the judiciary's offering-up of a candidate whose record maintains the new regime's highly repressive and targeted prosecutions speaks to the close alliance between the judicial corporate body and the military-backed regime.

Abdel-Nasser in 1969 as the totemic point in that narrative (Roy and Irelan 1989).<sup>234</sup> The then Nasserist parliamentarian, and later presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabahi told *Al-Ahram* newspaper that “the judges’ demands are also popular demands. . . . which is why they [the authorities] are reacting in such a violent way.”<sup>235</sup>

Even if the judiciary and their fellow travelers have not, as we shall see, been blessed with a history on which they can draw to present themselves as an inherently democratizing forces, it is still conceivable that competing interests may still favor the ‘legalization’ of disputes even if they are not set to achieve anymore success within the law as they have outside of it. As Stephen Holmes has argued, that a legal infrastructure that tempts powerful interests to pursue and achieve their goals; that is a legal infrastructure whose outcomes mirror power discrepancies in society may still have net democratizing outcomes in long run when more and more organized interests and individuals avail themselves of this revitalized mechanism, occluding the monopolitization of power (Holmes 2003). Such a calculus may not have been operative in 2006 when individuals and groups aligned themselves with the judges, but it does highlight that what maybe better explained through the contemporary hegemony of liberal democratic forms (see Chapter 4) or the particular politics of that moment in Egyptian history, need not be inconsistent

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<sup>234</sup> Indeed one of the markers of differentiation that Nasser’s successor Anwar el-Sadat adopted was his championing of “the rule of law,” taking the heavily symbolic step of visiting the Judges’ Club and publicly apologizing to the judiciary (Roy and Irelan 1989: 171). In the waning days of his increasingly unpopular presidency, el-Sadat was fond of framing persecution of his opponents as a legal prosecution. ‘*Kulu bil-qanun*’ (All of it by law) was a phrase he was fond of repeating, which took a new sinister meaning once he promulgated *qanun al-‘aib*’ (Law of Shame), the appellation he applied to Law 33 of 1980, under which punishes “everyone who perpetrates what involves the denial of divine laws, or contravenes their rulings, either by inciting children and youth to abandon religious values, or through disloyalty to the nation, shall be subject to punishment according to what is stipulated in article 171 of the penal code, including all males and females over the age of 25.” The admixture of the religious and the political was a hallmark of el-Sadat’s presidency. Writing at the time, the journalist Salah Eissa pointedly remarked that el-Sadat had created a legal category of ‘political heresy.’ The law was abolished with the constitutional amendments of 2007. For a discussion of the evolution of repression under el-Sadat, including the legal component, see Brownlee, 2011.

<sup>235</sup> Howeid, Amira. “One Year On and the Confrontation Continues.” *Al-Ahram Weekly*. June 1 2006. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Archive/2006/797/eg7.htm>.

with all these groups' stated commitment to democratic transformation. In any event, in terms of a cost-benefit analysis, the ideological cost of supporting the judiciary was very low indeed.

One of the groups in solidarity with the judiciary was the Muslim Brotherhood. Outside of the High Court, twenty of the group's eighty-eight parliamentarians stood wearing sashes that read 'The People's Representatives with Egypt's Judges' (Shehata 2012: 129). In the crackdown that followed, hundreds of protestors were arrested, including Mohamed Morsi, then one of the parliamentarians in solidarity with the judiciary (Shehata 2006). In the avalanche of severe judgments rendered in Egyptian courts on the Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters there was of course the death sentence handed down to Morsi himself for his role in a mass jailbreak during the 2011 uprising, but it is also noteworthy that the first charge laid against the deposed president, and the nominal reason for his arrest, was 'insulting the judiciary.'<sup>236</sup>

The centrality of legal maneuverings and judicial adjudication in the failed transition to democracy in Egypt is difficult to avoid. In contrast to revolutionary upheavals spanning almost two centuries, "the Egyptian revolution was one in which legality and the interpretive decisions of the country's highest judges played a dominant role in its outcome" (Goldberg 2016 quoted in El-Ghobashy 2016). The character of a legal decision has the benefit of documentable tangibility, therefore biasing histories and social scientific studies to impute consequence without external validation. It is impossible however to give an account of the thirty months between the fall of Mubarak in 2011 and the military coup in 2013 without noting the impact of the law in general, and court rulings in particular, on the political conflicts in this periods, including the decisions to annul parliament by the Supreme Constitutional Court, the decision to annul the

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<sup>236</sup> Ashraf, Fady. "Morsi detained for four days for 'insulting the judiciary.'" *Daily News Egypt*. September 7, 2013. <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/09/07/morsi-detained-for-four-days-for-insulting-judiciary/>.

constituent assembly, and the Electoral Commission's decision to disqualify particular candidates for president – all fateful decisions made in 2012.

For most critical analysts of the judiciary's ultimate failure to support the Egyptian transition, the judges' behavior can be explained by looking more closely at this state organ, and questioning the contiguity of this branch of government as a unified actor. "What has happened to the Egyptian judiciary?" asked Mona El-Ghobashy, who has been writing about Egyptian judges for over a decade. This she asserts, may not be the right question:

The judiciary is not a uniform, faceless body. There are three apex courts, each sitting atop an intricate judicial hierarchy of its own, and specializing in civil/criminal, constitutional and administrative families of the law, respectively. And Egyptian judges have always been deeply divided over conceptions of the law, worldviews and orientations toward the executive. The dissident judges who were hailed as heroes during the Mubarak years are now purged, exiled, imprisoned or facing trial. The judges who dominate the bench and airwaves today, under President 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, stand shoulder to shoulder with generals and police chiefs to reassert state power. In the judiciary, as in every Egyptian institution, the 2011 revolution and the subsequent reaction exploded conflicts that had been contained and crystallized political loyalties. It also refocused attention as never before on the startling interpenetration of law and politics in contemporary Egypt (El-Ghobashy 2016).

Though never theorized in precise terms, this reading essentially equates the judiciary with other institutions in society, or better as a microcosm of a polarized society in which a constituted political actor, the military, emerged as a Bonapartist sovereign that favored one faction over the other and, in exchange, completely instrumentalized this branch of government in the process of consolidating authoritarian control. This reading accepts the claims of the reformist judges who took on the Mubarak regime so memorably in its last decade in their fight for great judiciary independence and autonomy. Though this faction lost internal elections in the

Judges' Club in 2009 to a pro-government slate of judges,<sup>237</sup> this loss is equated with a loss of autonomy, and the loss of judicial autonomy is folded into a compendium of forces working against democratization.

This narrative is consistent with a school of scholarship on the Egyptian judiciary and its history as a liberal island in illiberal waters; guarding against the variations of executive despotism and a rising tide of societal conservatism (Moustafa 2003, Brown 2008, Lombardi 2013). The core of this liberal disposition was the 1923 constitution which promulgated a liberal era that lasted until 1952, when a military coup brought Colonel Nasser to power, first as prime minister (1952-1954) then as president (1954-1970) at the helm of an authoritarian, centralizing, developmental regime. The history, tradition and institutional framework of this era is preserved and embodied in the judiciary; and its ability to activate this liberal essence is dependent on the degree to which it is free to do so. The success of reformist judges in their internal battle against pro-government judges is tantamount to the Egyptian judiciary *becoming itself* again.

Close historical examination of rulings and writings of jurists mitigates against this liberal enthusiasm. In his revealing work on law and politics in twentieth-century Egypt, Bruce Rutherford identifies two competing legal traditions that could reasonably claim any sort of unity and coherence by century's end. The first is what he calls Liberal Constitutionalism. In the writings, legal opinions and rulings that constitute the documents of this tradition, Rutherford finds a rigorous defense of horizontal accountability, but very little in support of vertical accountability of a government to a population:

Judges work with great energy and consistency to define the institutional boundaries between the various parts of the state. As noted earlier, this is particularly the case with regard to the independence of the judiciary. These limits on institutional power—defined by law and enforced by the judiciary—are the key to regulating the state and

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<sup>237</sup> Bradley, Matt. "Activists Lose Control of Egypt's Judges' Club." *The National*. March 12, 2009. <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/activists-lose-control-of-egypts-judges-club>.

holding it accountable to law. In contrast, the judges are ambivalent about the concept of government accountability to the people. They regard public participation in elections as important for enhancing the legitimacy of the regime. However, the substance of governing and meaningful accountability should lie with those citizens who have the relevant training, knowledge, and experience. This natural elite serves as the trustee of the public interest, which it defines through careful deliberation and study— not through consultation with the people. This body of jurisprudence has produced a distinctive conception of liberal constitutionalism. Like classical liberalism, it calls for a constrained and accountable state, the rule of law, and the protection of individual rights. It supports the core institutions of classical liberalism, including a clear and impartial legal code, the separation of powers within the state, checks and balances among these powers, an independent judiciary, an autonomous legal profession, and property rights (Rutherford 2013: 75).

Islamic Constitutionalism, a second tradition within Egyptian jurisprudence was characterized mainly by ‘vagueness’ but as exemplified by the works of the Islamic scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the former government minister Ahmad Kamal Abu-al-Magd, and the former judge and political historian Tarek al-Bishri, it contained kernels of *modi vivendi* for an Islamic liberalism.<sup>238</sup> This second tradition was never a complete, free standing corpus of judicial writing or legal jurisprudence, but was given form by the younger generation of the Muslim Brotherhood who mined the writings of these jurists “to lend intellectual weight and doctrinal credibility to their plans for moderate political reform” (Rutherford 2013: 129).

The convergence of these schools was brought about not by argumentation and consensus building amongst jurists, nor by any consequential ‘national dialogue’ of intellectual traditions, but rather by an accelerating crisis of authority of a hollowed out state:

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<sup>238</sup> “This approach,” writes Rutherford, “provides a clear doctrinal foundation for man-made law. However, it does not specify who holds the power to determine which areas are subject to man-made legislation. Similarly, they accept that laws should be written by an elected Parliament. But, they are unclear on the specific procedures for electing MPs, how long these MPs serve, and the extent of their power. The theorists also do not spell out the institutional relationships that create an effective balance of power among the branches of government. In addition, they frequently write that laws should serve “the best interests of the community.” However, they provide no criteria or procedures for determining how the community’s interests should be ascertained. Furthermore, they write that the ruler is accountable to the people and that an unjust ruler should be dismissed, without specifying how this accountability occurs or the procedures for removing a ruler...In essence, one cannot gain a clear understanding of contemporary Islamic constitutionalism by simply reading the works of theorists. One must examine how these ideas are given substance by Islamic political actors in a specific context” (Rutherford 2013: 128-129).

Both liberal constitutionalism and Islamic constitutionalism are, in part, products of the crisis of statism. Nasser's statist order was grounded upon the regime's control of several key institutions, particularly the public sector the subsidy system, and the bureaucracy. These institutions have weakened to the point where they no longer provide the minimal standard of living needed to sustain public support for the statist order. Indeed, even leading figures in the regime—including the president—have concluded that the ideology and institutions of statism no longer serve the country well. They have become reluctant supporters of market-oriented economic reforms that move the regime away from its statist roots (Rutherford 2013: 195).

The scale of the crisis of authority that enveloped Egypt in the last decade of Mubarak's rule could never fully be brought into view contemporaneously; with the rise in political participation just as likely to be attributed to a general 'awakening' of obscure origin as it was to rational-reformist tendency within the regime itself. For the thousands of individuals, intellectuals and groups who began to enter the spaces vacated by prior arrangements of a privatizing regime that was preoccupied with herding novice rent-seeking cadres to the desert (see Chapter 3), their individual participation took on an ill-defined but increasingly momentous character. Self-constituted movements of hundreds of individuals such as the *Kefaya* (Enough) existed alongside, but entirely separate from, the largest wave of labor action since the 1940s, including strikes, protests and riots (see Chapter 1). Surveying the scene, the few empirically minded social scientists grounded enough to take note of this political overflowing were stymied by its systemic nature. Academic political analysis was therefore limited to the empirically rich, but analytically moribund social-movement-theory wherein as much of this tumult could be relayed, but successes and failures were ascribed to ad-hoc categories related to 'framing' and 'opportunity structure' (Shorbagy 2007, El-Mahdi 2009). There were unprecedented political protests, unprecedented economic transformations, unprecedented usages of new media, and unprecedented worker protests. To say that more than one analytical narrative was available should *not* imply that there were only two.

In the last decade of Mubarak's rule the 'rule of law' became part of a front against a regime whose fraying architecture and ossified networks of control were not yet fully exposed. Crucially, and more so than the military, the law in general, and judiciary in particular, could be cast above partisan politics, and above even the combustible Islamist/secularist divide. With the fall of Mubarak, members of the judiciary moved with alacrity to prosecute and convict members of the ruling National Democratic Party.<sup>239</sup>

As political battle lines were drawn, a curious phenomenon began to take shape; the figure of *al-faqih al-dusturi* (The Constitutional Jurist) became a common one in the newly liberated airwaves of the early post-Mubarak era.<sup>240</sup> The aesthetics of their interrogation was that which was normally reserved for religious scholars. Elderly men who had been judges or belonged to law faculties were invited to draw on an esoteric knowledge from which they, in richly ornamented Arabic distinct from that of activists, would pronounce on the constitutional correctness of this or that measure taken by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the parliament, and later, the elected president.<sup>241</sup> These figures commanded a particular kind of space in addressing political controversy and translating said issues into edicts. It is noteworthy they did this with reference to a constitution that, for much of that time, did not actually exist. Yet as uncovered by Bruce Rutherford in his careful analysis of the Egyptian legal tradition, the liberal/Islamist divide within that legal tradition was one well suited to produce articulate

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<sup>239</sup> It should be noted that the prosecutions did not extend to members of the police force or the military, those parts of the old regime that were still standing. Whilst there many convictions for corruption of Mubarak era officials (most of which have since been overturned), there has been only one conviction of a police officer in the killing of the thousands of protestors since 2011; which, too, has been overturned.

<sup>240</sup> In the climate following the military coup in July, this figure gave way to that far cruder *al-khabir al-istratiji* (strategic expert), invariably a retired military general bellicosely promoting unverifiable claims of plots and conspiracies to which the security forces were responding.

<sup>241</sup> Though was never entirely made clear, the question of constitutionality was still operative in the absence of a promulgated constitution and with reference to historical precedent and universal principles outside the SCAF issued Constitutional Declaration, which was subjected to a referendum in March 2011. More often than not, the philosophical work required to justify drawing on precedence outside of that document was absent.



advocates either side of the polarized political space in the aftermath of the fall of Mubarak, which quickly developed along similar lines. Advocates for early decisions made by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and later president Mohamed Morsi would refer to opinions rendered by respected legal figures as Tarek al-Bishri and Hossam al-Ghiriani. Their opponents would point to Yahya al-Gamal, Mohamed Nour Farahat and Gaber Gad Nasar.<sup>242</sup>

The variation in the political inclinations of these jurists, most of whom were former members of the judiciary, did not reflect the more coherent collective behavior of the extant judiciary itself. In the period immediately following the fall of Mubarak, the hegemony of liberal democratic forms meant that few activists had any qualms about ‘litigating the revolution’ (Aziz 2016). The unifying banner of the ‘rule of law’ and the credentials associated with the judiciary’s confrontation with the authoritarian executive in the recent past obscured the fact that in the still more recent past, that is, 2009, the self-organizing body of judicial representation had democratically elected leadership that was fiercely opposed to that confrontation. The leader of the judges, Ahmed al-Zind, who would later become a minister of justice under President el-Sisi, came in on a platform of reversing the ‘political indulgences’ of his predecessors.<sup>243</sup> Whatever ideological battles existed within the judiciary, and the multiple legal tradition those factions embodied, on the eve of the popular revolution against the executive, this unusually autonomous organ within Egyptian politics had deployed its internal mechanisms to reach a decision that was aligned with the authoritarian order.

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<sup>242</sup> These figures were also active participants in politics. Al-Bishri was a member of the committee that SCAF assembled in order to draft constitutional amendments that would be put to a referendum. Gaber Gad Nassar, the current president of Cairo University, argued the case at Majlis al-Dawla (The State Assembly) against the makeup of the Islamist-dominated parliament’s first constituent assembly; arguing that the parliament could not appoint its own members to this assembly. They accepted his argument and the constituent assembly was dissolved in April 2012.

<sup>243</sup> Bradley, Matt. “Activists Lose Control of Egypt’s Judges’ Club.” The National. March 12, 2009. <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/activists-lose-control-of-egypts-judges-club>.

That there exists a minimal requirement of the rule of law for the maintenance of ‘high quality democracy’ is uncontroversial (O’Donnell 2004).<sup>244</sup> Yet as with other conceptions in the politically fraught debates around democratization, it is sometimes difficult to fully recognize the slippage between analytical conceptions and political mantras. As a unifying mantra, ‘the rule of law’ was, and perhaps remains, a powerful tool for political mobilization; but it is one whose unique mediation serves to transcend blockages in other types of political mobilization. Precisely that character of the mediation also recommends it as a tool to abstract ongoing, but poorly institutionalized political turmoil; a function that prioritizes order over change. This function was difficult to glimpse, though not impossible from within the frontist politics of 2006. The compacted contradictions of a politics that would rely on such a conception could be seen even then:

The ‘rule of law’ is curiously popular in the Arab Middle East today—if not as a reality on the ground, then certainly as a hegemonic slogan raised by an increasingly bizarre collection of odd bedfellows. Egypt is a particularly good example of this phenomenon. Over the past decade or so a diverse set of local and international voices has gradually come to rally under the same mantle, each with a different reason, in demanding ‘rule of law’ reforms from the Egyptian government. The World Bank says it’s good for development and the Bush administration says it’s good for democracy. Egyptian human rights organizations are joined by their international associates in naming and shaming rule of law violations, aided in this by a booming industry of ‘rule of law’ publications spanning academic scholarship, UN Development Program (UNDP) Arab Development Reports, position statements issued by funding agencies and policy documents developed by concerned think-tanks. Over the past year, the ‘rule of law’ has also become the single most unifying slogan shared among the splintered platforms of Egyptian opposition groups, whether secular or Islamist, as well as among a bevy of professional associations, intellectuals and civil society activists. While the latter are all deeply hostile to the World Bank and Bush administration, they also all happen to share a common enthusiasm for the same slogan (Shalakany 2006: 833).

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<sup>244</sup> Following O’Donnell we define this sometimes nebulous phrase minimally, as the fair application of laws that are written down and publicly promulgated by an appropriated authority before the events meant to be regulated by it. Fairness here refers to consistent application across cases without regard to class, status or relative amount of power held by parties in such cases. For discussion see O’Donnell, 2004.

In a roundtable discussion at the newly established Egyptian Social Democratic Party in March 2011, the late Egyptian political scientist Samer Soliman was asked by a young cadre whether it was a mistake to chant ‘al-geish wa-al-sha’b eid wahda’ (the people and army are one hand) given that the army was an authoritarian pillar of the old regime. Soliman’s response, though empirically difficult to sustain in the terms he articulated is revealing: “No,” he responded, “I consider that an extremely wise and necessary strategic choice by the masses, who were able to neutralize one part of the regime in order to defeat the other.”

The notion of a ‘strategic choice by the masses’ is untenable. It is however a useful one to consider when thinking about the resort to the law by individuals and political actors in the Egyptian revolution. In contrast with the multi-layered and variegated field of ‘the media,’ which under well-specified conditions may be deemed to be co-terminus with politics itself, the Egyptian judiciary is a specific institution, with specific traditions and discrete actions that may be ascribed to a process of autonomous decision-making. Activists have always demonstrated an appreciation of the limits of action through the courts, and the relatedness of those limits to the exigencies of the political moment rather than inherent qualities of the judiciary itself. As such, the behavior of the judiciary since the military coup of 2013 has been far less shocking to activists than it has been to political scientists. The terms of analysis in this dissertation should prove provocative to those who conceive of the judiciary as either a consistent, if skillfully deployed instrument of authoritarian control, or an institution whose liberal norms were overwhelmed by a rejuvenated military asserting sovereignty in a Brumairian moment.

We can instead posit the judiciary as a genuinely autonomous, if uniquely positioned, political actor capable of entering, and destructively withdrawing from, alliances. Conceived as

such, we must question whether, for the Egyptian judiciary, the events following the 2013 coup amount to failure at all.

## **Part 2: Political Action and Promises Deferred**

For those political participants who would later make up the leadership of the independent trade union movement, the plan of action was an explicitly legal one. With the exception of the April 6 movement, there was no question of instigating labor action. With the facilitation of the Center of Trade Union and Worker Services (CTUWS), an NGO, individuals who for the most part identified as leftists came together to influence and undermine the government's strong neoliberal turn. It is noteworthy that it was not any left-wing organization that organized this effort. Individuals participating in this effort, including ones who would become prominent in labor institutions setup after the fall of Mubarak, were able to do so despite rather than because of their prior belongings to legacy left-wing parties, such as the Tagammu Party, the Communist Party and the Nasserist Party. These individuals were participating not just in opposition politics but in a heresy of sorts.

The politics of 1970s Egypt were enlivened by Anwar el-Sadat's dramatic carving out of new alliances and commitments, and his concomitant attempts to impose a structural transformation of the Egyptian economy with promulgation of the 'Open Door' economic policy.<sup>245</sup> Nested within these shifts were a series of battles with opponents within the structures of the corporate state he inherited, as well as organized groupings from the Nasser era. One battle in this larger conflict took place within the state's principle corporate organ of labor organization, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF). In the 1975, the president of the

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<sup>245</sup> Alongside the Camp David accords, the '*infitah*' (opening) has been the headline item animating left-wing intellectual opposition to el-Sadat, and Mubarak as a continuation of el-Sadat's economic turn.

federation, Salah Gharib moved to purge the leaderships of the constituent general unions of leaders identified with the political left. In response, two unions; the Printing, Publishing and Telegraph Workers' Federation and the Electrical, Engineering, and Metal Workers' Federation (EEMWF) withdrew from ETUF, and then immediately returned; with their leadership vowing to stay and fight Gharib (Posusney 1997: 105). Whilst there would have likely been a crackdown on labor leaders endorsing this decision beyond their removal from their posts - a fate they eventually accepted – what was equally noteworthy was location of the resistance to the declaration of independence. On the eve of their purging from the legal-monopoly of labor representation, the organized left fiercely defended the integrity and unity of that body; which to leftists was identified with a 'unity of the working class.' On his union's rejoining of the government's federation, Saad Guma made it clear to his supporters that he had never supported the move for independence (Ibid).

That same year, Attiya al-Sirafi, a transport worker from Mounofiyah governorate who had been in and out of prison as a political dissident for more than twenty years, helped found the Egyptian Communist Party. From that political perch he began to publish a series of articles and pamphlets questioning the utility of ETUF as a representative of the working class. His colleagues, he insisted in erudite and wide-ranging comparative writings that drew heavily, and critically, on the Polish experience, had confused totalitarianism with unity (*ikhtilat al-shumuliyah bil wihdah*). In a 1983 pamphlet entitled "The Militarization of Labor and Union Life in Egypt" he counseled that his fellow leftists prioritize independent union representation as part of a larger priority of democracy:

The events in Poland have come as a lesson and a reminder that the plurality of unions and their independence is of utmost importance and the most urgent of necessities in all societies. This means that freedom is the engine of history, not economics. What is meant by freedom here is a freedom with a social content. It is now imperative to

distinguish between unity and totalitarianism in labor organization. Totalitarianism comes to the workers from an external source whereas unity only arises from within the working class (al-Sirafi, 1983: 3).<sup>246</sup>

These arguments were never accepted within the Communist Party, nor the pan-leftist Tagammu Party, which al-Sirafi later joined, and left, in conflicts associated with his heretical position.<sup>247</sup> Many years later his minority position furnished self-identified leftists with a foundation from which to argue for a pluralism whose elements were already taking shape in the disparate but simultaneous worker protests of the late Mubarak era.

As was the case with the legal traditions unearthed and marshaled by academics in their examination of the Egyptian judiciary, the historicization of the intellectual arguments drawn on by activists who broke with the ‘traditional left’ on the issue of labor union organization ultimately overstates the centrality of ideological conflict in the production of durable political outcomes. By the early 2000s, when Saber Barakat, a protégé of al-Sirafi, was leading the Coordinating Committee for Trade Union Rights and Liberties, all of the parties that made up that traditional left from which Barakat, Fathallah Mahrous, Fatma Ramadan, Kamal Abbass and Khaled Ali were ostensibly breaking were decayed shells with active memberships that could probably be counted in the hundreds of people.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> My translation. The full text of the pamphlet is available here: [http://elmasry-afndy.blogspot.com/2015/07/blog-post\\_21.html](http://elmasry-afndy.blogspot.com/2015/07/blog-post_21.html).

<sup>247</sup> In 1979, al-Sirafi gave a speech at a conference on labor issues organized by the newly formed Tagammu Party. The response, as reported by his protégé Saber Barakat, was not merely hostile, but violent. Three members of the audience volunteered to physically remove the speaker from the hall and proceeded to do so. For his part, al-Sirafi retained a combativeness about his position, which remained a minority one amongst his peers. In 2006 and at the age of 80, he penned an article proudly confessing to the crime of supporting pluralism in the labor movement. See al-Sirafi, Atiyah. “Al-Ta’aduiyah al-‘umaliyah wa-al naqabiyah jarimah” (Labor and Union Pluralism is a Crime). *Al-‘Hiwar al-Mutamadin*. October 4, 2006. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=77333>.

<sup>248</sup> The parties of the left, namely the Tagammu Party, the Nasserist Party and the Communist Party, had, as a function of the regime’s confrontation with violent Islamism in Upper Egypt in the 1990s, transformed themselves into supporters of the regime in that battle to the exclusion of all others. In the decade leading up to the revolution, the first two of these were essentially bureaucratic entities that, owing to their status as formally legal parties, were entitled to produce weekly newspapers. It is only through these publications that their existence could be demonstrated at all. The Communist Party, which was never legal, all but disappeared.

As an organization, the Coordinating Committee was formed nominally as an observer of the 2001 ETUF elections, but one that quickly found itself engaged in the controversy surrounding the promulgation of the 2003 ‘Unified Labour Law.’ The principle group would meet at the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre in downtown Cairo. Later, Khaled Ali, a lawyer at the center, would fold the activities of the Coordinating Committee into the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, which was located on the floor below the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre. Fatma Ramadan, who helped Kamal Abu ‘Aita transform the large protests and ongoing protests of Real Estate Tax Collectors in front of parliament less than a mile away into the first government-recognized independent union, would go on to join Abu ‘Aita in the founding of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions in 2011, serving as member of that organization’s executive bureau. Fathallah Mahrous would return to his native Alexandria to found the Permanent Conference for Alexandrian Workers (see Chapter 4). Kamal Abbass, whose Center for Trade Union and Worker Services worked with Coordinating Committee became the driving force behind the Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress (see Chapter 3). His and the groups’ legal advisor, the law professor Ahmad Hasan el-Bor’ai, a self-described liberal, would go on to become minister of labour and manpower in 2011, and in March of that year issue a decree that gave legal standing to all the independent labor formations that these individuals attempted to setup after the fall of Mubarak.

It becomes obvious rather quickly that the *effects* of this ad-hoc organization, dependent though it may have been on larger changes in the political environment, were not limited to the legal commentary and legal challenges that they mounted in the ten years preceding the revolution. In interviews conducted throughout the thirty months, the first station in any conversation was commentary on Law 35 of 1976, which proscribed union pluralism and Law 12

of 2003 which governed worker rights in the workplace. But the successes achieved with regards to building autonomous organizations that represent workers in the manner envisioned by al-Sirafi had very little to do with changes to those laws, which remain as they were since the day they were rubber stamped by executive-dominated legislatures in 1976 and 2003 respectively. Indeed more often than not discussions about the content of those two laws would veer into discussions about how some of the aspects of those laws that activists found agreeable were not enforced, as for example, is the case with the prohibition of temporary contracts in the 2003 law which activists complained, often bitterly, that government itself did not adhere to in its hiring practices.

In the spring of 2012 I spent two months at the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights and maintained weekly visits to the Permanent Conference for Alexandrian Workers from the spring of 2012 to the summer of 2013. There I started to get a sense of how legal activism worked in that rapidly changing environment. It would be wrong to impute the same motivations that animated the Coordinating Committee to these new organization, as there was a not an unreasonable expectation that laws promulgated after the fall of Mubarak would function differently than they had before. It made sense therefore that the public campaigns undertaken by the aforementioned organizations for changes in laws governing labor and labor organizations were undertaken with a reasonable expectation that the laws would change and that this change would be meaningful – that is to say that distance between ‘positive law’ and ‘law in action’ (Watson 1982) would change. It follows that the ancillary benefits of organization building were indeed ancillary rather than the primary motivations for action. What is perhaps distinctive about working for legal change as opposed to working to reach a wide audience through the media (see



Chapter 4), is the speed of recognition by activists and organizers of the secondary nature of the goals they thought were primary at the beginning of their endeavors.



**Figure 32: On March 14, 2012, I joined reporter Mohamed Gad on a trip to Alexandria where he was reporting on the work of activists who would later set up the Permanent Conference for Alexandrian Workers. In top left picture, Khaled Toson, a worker who was one of the founders of Conference, meets a group of construction workers outside a branch office of the Ministry of Labour and Manpower. Toson had helped the workers collect the fifty notarized signatures required for the setting up of a union. In the top right picture, the group raises signs reading “We are the daily construction workers. We want our rights” after Toson requests that they do so for my camera, with the photographs to be published in the daily Al-Shorouq. In the bottom picture, the workers hold up receipts stamped by ministry bureaucrats confirming the deposit of the necessary paperwork, and, according to the then-minister’s decree, establishing the Union of Construction Workers in Alexandria as a legal entity.**

The engagement with worker delegations who had found their way to the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) followed a general pattern. The center, which was located downtown Cairo, would set up a panel in the main room where a member of the center's staff would be joined by one or several of the workers. They would speak and take questions were fielded from invited reporters on that particular dispute. The representative from the center would then make a general statement in the form of demands and criticisms of authorities. Privately, one of the center's staff, or a volunteer associated with the center, would give the delegation advice on what to do and not do in the context of their current dispute. On January 14, 2012, for instance, I watched as Fatma Ramadan sat down four young men from Wadi Foods, a foodstuffs manufacturer owned by a Lebanese conglomerate. The young men said they had been subjected to a lockout by the owners when they demanded that their temporary contracts be made permanent. In turn, the owners had hired *baltagiya* ('thugs') from the area surrounding the factory on the Cairo-Alexandria desert highway to ensure that the workers, of whom the young men were representatives, would not be allowed back on to the premises. I was struck by Ramadan's generally practical advice that was tinged with a tone of pessimism. Their best bet, based on similar ongoing disputes, was persistent publicity which, coupled with the owners' uncertainty over how the judiciary was going to rule on a land dispute involving Wadi Foods may induce the owners to avoid the unwelcome attention and acquiesce to some of the demands. Whilst Ramadan and others were demanding that provisions protecting workers from arbitrary dismissal in standing law be applied, and that the certainty of their rights be enshrined in law, it was the *uncertainty* of the application of the law in matters not directly related to labor that was being utilized by advocates of workers in actual disputes. In February 2012, the ECESR

held a press conference alongside the four young men from Wadi Foods and received a write-up in several major dailies.<sup>249</sup>

In May 12, 2013, two months before the coup, Susan Nada, a lawyer who had become the head of the Permanent Conference of Alexandrian Workers (PCAW), was devising a similar plan for dismissed workers at KAPO, a textile manufacturer in Alexandria.<sup>250</sup>

In this constitution that they just passed there is a section on political freedoms, there is a subsection (*band*) on the freedom to form unions. This is something to keep in mind. So you have the backing of the constitution to build an independent union. Number two; even before this constitution, even before the revolution there was a judicial ruling for the real-estate tax collectors affirming their right to establish an independent union. Egypt was on a blacklist, the International Labor Organization's blacklist, because we did not allow for the establishment of independent unions. After the revolution, with the appointment of Dr. Bor'ai, we had a draft law (*mashru' qanun*) that they have yet to release, giving us the right to establish an independent union for every entity. So we have backing in the constitution, we have the backing of law, and we have backing of the international treaties, by which I mean the International Labor Organization. Got that? (*Tamam?*) Now you have 2,500 hundred signatures withdrawing confidence from your union [union committee]. But of course they did nothing. This is because the yellow union is a pyramidal structure, and who do they work for?

The audience, a mixture of the conference's regular attendees and the KAPO delegation, volunteered a litany of villains: *al-nizam* (the regime), *sahib al-amal* (the employer), *nafsuhum* (themselves). She did not quite see this supportive generality as helpful, so she continued in a more nuanced vein:

Well this general union does not represent us, and never brought us what we are owed (*haqina*)....except, so that we are fair (*munsifin*) in a few union committees, one in maybe two hundred. Not because of the committee, but because there is a man of conscience (*ragil 'anduh damir*) or a respectable man (*ragil muhtaram*). But we have no supervision of this respectable man. Maybe we like him now, but after a while, they

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<sup>249</sup> Abd-al-Alim, Wissam. "Mo'tamar Sahafi lilil-Tadamun ma' al-'Umal al-Mafsulin Min Sharikat Wadi Foods" (A Press Conference for Solidarity with Dismissed Workers from the Wadi Foods Company). *Al-Ahram*. February 19, 2012. <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/174390.aspx>

<sup>250</sup> Throughout my time at the Permanent Conference for Alexandrian Workers, I recorded the Monday sessions with the permission of the staff. I have transcribed and translated the exchange below from the May 12, 2013, session.

can raise his salary or give him perks and then he is corrupted. We are against this whole system.

This was well received. Nada then pivoted to the KAPO dispute. “We’ve been following this case for a while. We were there during the Ramadan strike when the workers were not paid.”

“This is a problem with our women,” shouted one of the workers, pointing to the fact that the workforce, who are majority female, did not hold out, and agreed to come back to work despite not receiving their back pay. Nada did not blink and did not change her tone. “It is a problem with the women, the men, and with everybody. We have to be organized and having the woman and her husband working in the same place can help us do that. We do not want five or six of us to speak up and then find that it’s only those names that are sent to management and the police.”

“This is exactly what happened,” shouted the same man who had spoken earlier.

This then led to an explosion of voices listing the names of 12 workers who had been fired. “What would a *naqaba mustaqila* (an independent union) do for us?” asked the worker.

“Exactly what a public union (*naqaba ‘ama*, meaning union committee) does.”

“You mean nothing,” he responded.

“No, I mean what it is supposed to do. If they fire a man, then one thousand workers show up at the factory door (*bab al-masna’*) the next day and say this man was arbitrarily dismissed. They can’t fire a thousand people. This is the idea of the independent union.”

“So if we do all this and we are fired, what are you going to do for us?” asked another member of the delegation.

At this juncture, Nada noticeably moved one step away from abstraction en route to the answer. “The independent union is a tool of organization. It’s like when you are in the kitchen and you have an implements and ingredients, it does not mean you have cooked anything. So in

the independent union we will have bylaws and we will have meetings. And then we will decide what to do together. It's the proverb that everybody knows, unity is strength."

"So that people don't wander off on their own," said the man who had posed the question, supportive but unenthusiastic in tone. He needed more from this meeting.

"Okay," Nada said. "Regarding this crisis we find ourselves in now. My private opinion: first we must guarantee that all our colleagues are with us. From our previous experience with KAPO, we had a strike. It lasted a month. Not everyone participated, and eventually people went back, and eighteen people were fired. We must learn from this. How do we guarantee this? People from this group must visit every section of the factory and talk to people."

"If anyone did this, he would be immediately reported," said a third man who had not spoken before.

"That's why you send people after you've collected signatures, so that they know that the person is speaking for a thousand people. And then you ask them why we had not received the 140 EGP we are promised, why are we not equal to Mahalla [branch] and all the other demands."

"It's still only one person talking," said the man who had tried to be supportive earlier.

"Okay," she said, "since we are scared. We will write a paper, and collect signatures. In it we will write that we want the 140 EGP that were promised, and the 30% production bonus, and we will point out that these are not new demands, but demands that were approved by the military council. This is why we must insist on signatures. We are seventy people here in this hall, and all of us saying we will kill them and cut them up and all the things we Alexandrians say. Then the serious moment comes and the man tells you that he has a daughter to feed."

This was did not quite resolve matters, so she shifted to another register:

Today you are asking me if I will get you what you are owed. I say no, you will do that. No one else can do that. I will tell you what I know. If you like it, you are

welcome. If you don't, you are still welcome. We will be workers who are in solidarity with you (*mutadamnin ma'akum*) and lawyers standing with you, and reporters (pointing to a woman to her left) who try to try escalate in the media. But the original action (*al-fi'l al-asli*) is you.



**Figure 33: Susan Nada (center), a lawyer and head of Permanent Conference for Alexandrian Workers speaks to a delegation of workers from the Schweppes Company on November 19, 2014.**

By the end of the evening the workers from KAPO all signed a list of demands they planned to circulate amongst their colleagues. Nada and others had known that by May 2013, the Ministry of Labour and Manpower had stopped accepting deposit papers for new unions; and that promoting the idea of a new legal independent union formation was now dependent on political change. The legal scaffolding provided by a framework through which political engagement took place was still in operation, however. At many points along the way there was a recognition that the pathways delineated by laws and regulations were effectively blocked; that the question was not whether there remained a chasm between positive law and its (mis)application, but that in the shifting relationship between freshly minted abstractions and the

enormous experiences accumulated in a short period of time, lie opportunities for productive conflict and collective action.

### **Part 3: Vestiges**

The much-quoted two part aphorism by the Elizabethan courtier John Harrington captures some of the strange politics of litigating a revolution. The reason treason does not prosper, Harrington quipped, is that when it prospers ‘none dare call it treason.’ The highest crimes cannot be litigated because the criminals transgress upon that part of the political system that extracts itself from the conflict to render a blow unto the transgressors from a carefully constructed ‘third position’ in a Manichean battle. Treason, or revolution by another name, attacks that perch of abstraction. It follows that at this time, law and the legal system that applies it would be more not less instrumentalized at such a time. The mistake has been the assumption that the autonomy of the institutions of justice necessitates the production of decisions consistent with liberal democratic principles and practices, and that instrumentalization implies subservience to other actors. Yet collusion need not imply assumptions of subservience when all the evidence points to is an alliance.

The law, however, is not universal and the institutions which promulgate and apply it are not without their history and traditions. This creates an exploitable lag in which individuals and groups engage in creative and productive conflicts (Varoufakis 1991) that even in defeat leave behind institutional vestiges whose future significance maybe unknown, but constitute a resource for the future.

The importance of the rulings made by the judiciary en route to the military coup seem only to grow with the benefit of hindsight. Of these, the annulment of parliament in April 2012 by the Supreme Constitutional Court seems to be the most direct assault on nascent democratic

institutions. The full impact of this particular decision can only be appreciated in the political context in which it was deployed. Timed as it was less than two months before the presidential elections, the removal of one branch of government as a perch for contestation signaled to the country's largest political force that their fate, even survival, depended on their successful contestation of the presidential elections. With the threat of annulment looming, the Muslim Brotherhood put forth not one but two presidential candidates for consideration, with the expectation that the courts had now raised the stakes. First, the financier and powerful Guidance Bureau member Khairat el-Shater was put forth as a nominal independent candidate, for whom the well-organized Brotherhood had no trouble collecting 30,000 signatures across 15 governorates.<sup>251</sup> The group put forward a second candidate, Mohamed Morsi, as the candidate of their political outfit, the Freedom and Justice Party.<sup>252</sup> In turn, a few days before the close of registration, it was announced that the former head of intelligence and Mubarak's last Vice president, Omar Soleiman, would also seek the office. In two days Soleiman is supposed to have mobilized a network of activists to collect the necessary signatures and was accompanied to the office of the Electoral Commission by a member of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, Hamdi Badeen, in an extraordinarily unsubtle signal that the Brotherhood's nomination of their hawkish and powerful financier would be met by the army's endorsement of Mubarak's feared intelligence chief. This confrontation electrified and polarized the political space such that for 48 hours MPs in the imperiled parliament publicly questioned if the elections should go ahead at all. In the shadow of this looming polarization, the judges on the Electoral Commission disqualified

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<sup>251</sup> The requirement that the signatures be spread across 15 governorates was to prevent the rise of 'regional candidates.' This requirement was particularly difficult to meet for independent candidates who could only count on support within particular areas of the country. See Hashem, Heba. "Presidential Hopefuls to Begin Registering Saturday." *Daily News Egypt*. March 9, 2012.

<sup>252</sup> Hence the unfortunate nickname for Morsi, *el-stibn* (the spare [tire]).



both el-Shater and Soleiman for technical reasons that were scarcely more credible than the latter candidate’s procurement of the necessary qualifications to begin with.<sup>253</sup> When the parliamentary annulment came, the Brotherhood doubled-down on the pursuit of the office with their ‘spare candidate,’ motivated, correctly as it turned out, by the evidence that institutions of the old regime had transformed the battle for office into a zero-sum game. They could not be deterred by the recognition amongst their hierarchy, one that they maintained since the fall of the Mubarak, that the capture of the office was a ‘poisoned chalice’ (Roberts 2013).



**Figure 34: The head of the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, Khaled Ali, ran for president in 2012. Outside of the office of the Presidential Elections Commission, after Ali had deposited the necessary paperwork, a supporter holds up one of the posters**

<sup>253</sup>Reuters. “SPEC Disqualifies 10 Candidates, Including Suleiman, El-Shater and Abu-Ismael.” April 14, 2012. <<http://english.ahram.org/News/39292.aspx>>.

**used in the campaign. Ali could not meet the 30,000 signature requirement to get on the ballot, and was not the candidate of a formal political party, but relied instead on the sponsorship of 30 sitting members of parliament, which according to electoral law was one of three ways a candidate could get on the ballot. Ali was one of thirteen candidates and finished with a little over 60,000 votes.**

. In the shadow of the increasingly polarized battle between constituted political actors, labor activists did not align with any of the candidates. The split amongst activists between different candidates meant that no ‘worker vote’ existed as such; further evidence of the failure to constitute organized labor as an autonomous political actor in the short time that had elapsed since the fall of Mubarak. In that space, however, Khaled Ali, the idealistic head of the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights decided to mount a presidential bid, one month past his fortieth birthday, the required legal age for nomination. The object of the campaign was to use the allotted time in TV appearances to push the agenda articulated by the new independent unions and he duly insisted on using the campaign as an opportunity to shape those demands, and that constituency, as an electoral force.

As a vote procurement exercise and as a constituency-shaping one, the effort was, unambiguously, a failure. The measures of success and failure however change with time, not least given the fate of those who were more successful at achieving their stated goals. In hindsight, it is not at all clear what the accumulation of second-order benefits activists have accrued in their attempts to exploit political openings and legally defined goals might mean. The experiences, connections, places, and legal statuses of extant unions are a resource for traditions and heresies on which to draw if, or when, one or more of the actors in the ruling alliance is induced to defect.

## Overture to Chapter 6

In political alliance, individuals are substitutable whereas autonomous political actors are not. In this concluding chapter, I reflect on the functioning of political autonomy by examining the actions of the Salafist Call and its political arm, the Nour Party. Political autonomy, I argue, enables actors to act in a way that transcends their ideological constraints and makes the strategic analysis of their action possible. I reflect on what it might mean for prospects of democratization should the level of political autonomy be more evenly distributed across the political field. In this, the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I argue that the political autonomy of actors is a necessary constraint on the political autonomy of rulers, which is one definition of authoritarian rule. This conclusion is consistent with a ‘minimal conception of democracy,’ which is in tension with the maximalist aspirations of revolutionary mobilization; but retains the possibility that the actions, resources, recognitions and networks developed in the months following the fall of Hosni Mubarak may be marshaled into the cycles of representation and obedience that together constitute the autonomous political actor. A prescriptive recommendation based on this analysis would be that projects to form unions, associations and parties not be abandoned in spite of the bleak prospects for democracy in Egypt in 2017.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Materials for Democracy**

No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity.  
But I know none, and therefore am no beast.

William Shakespeare, Richard III, Act 1, Scene 2

She moved all 57 muscles it takes to smile.

A Verse of Unknown Provenance

## Part 1: Self-Government in the Impossible State

On July 15, 2013, the Guidance Council (Majlis al-Shura) of the Salafist Call (al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya) held what was described as a 'sixth emergency meeting.' Broadcast live online from the organization's headquarters in Alexandria and presented as panel of recognized Salafist leaders who were there to address their followers.<sup>254</sup> The authoritative *mashayikh* were the decision-makers responsible for the momentous choice that saw the Nour Party's secretary general seated in the judiciously orchestrated spectacle behind Colonel-General Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi on July 3 (Chapter 1). In a marked distinction from the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafist Call never went to any lengths to differentiate itself from its political arm, the Nour Party, which in the 2011 parliamentary elections had secured a full quarter of the seats on offer, a remarkable and, to many observers shocking result. Cast as a junior partner of the Muslim Brotherhood, who had, in turn, won 47% of the available seats in the lower house elections, their combined tally became part of a narrative of Islamist political success, inducing talk of 'Islamist takeover' in quarters where such prospects were viewed with alarm. This specter of a unified, undifferentiated political Islam is an awkward analytical description of the structure of the relationship between the two political entities, whose dueling candidates represented the modal form of conflict in run-offs during the latter stages of parliamentary elections of 2011. The destructive withdrawal by the Salafist Call (and their Nour Party) from their alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood (and their Freedom and Justice Party) in the lead up to the June 30 demonstrations was emblematic of the former's charting of an independent course. But it had not been the only marker of this independence, or more precisely, autonomy.

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<sup>254</sup> "ijtima' majlis shura al-da'wa al-salafiyya al-sadis al-tari'" (The Emergency Sixth Consultative Council Meeting of the Salafist Call). Ana al-Salafi (I am the Salafist) Youtube Channel, 15 July 2013: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKOgfgXmsCI&feature=youtu.be>

On the eve of the 2011 revolution, Egyptian Salafism had been a quietist, self-consciously apolitical movement (El-Sherif 2015), which whether by design or political double coincidence of wants, meant that the Mubarak regime was considerably more tolerant of the Salafist Call's proselytizing and charitable works than they would have of a more explicitly political organization.<sup>255</sup> The quietism that induced the Salafist leadership to condemn participation in the demonstrations against Mubarak was quickly shed with the establishment of the Nour Party in 2011. The doctrinaire position against democracy as irreconcilable with a divine sovereignty manifest in the application of laws extrapolated from the Quran and Hadith, was quickly and

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<sup>255</sup> Antagonism towards the organizations of Salafism in Egypt has often manifested itself in accusations that Salafists were '*mukhbirin*' (lit. informers) working for '*amn al-dawla*' (State Security). The accusation is of course unsustainable when applied to a movement whose followers number in the millions, but credible claims of cooperation between Salafist leaders and Mubarak's feared State Security apparatus are difficult to refute, and often conceded by some members of the Call's leadership. When it was widely reported that representatives of the Call in Alexandria were visiting families of those killed by the police during the revolution to convince them to drop cases against individual officers and accept financial compensation on an informal basis, Yasser Borhami, the Vice-President of the Call freely admitted that they indeed had pursued such efforts for 'reconciliation' to prevent '*fitna*' (sedition). There will therefore always be a difficulty in characterizing the nature of the alliance between organized Salafism and different authoritarian regimes given the explicit doctrinal rationale that such leaders offer for acquiescence and cooperation. Indeed the non-opposition to Mubarak's rule by the Call and other independent Salafists, and hostility towards the political activity of the Muslim Brotherhood, is anchored (or at least *anchorable*) in the thinking of the movement's premier historical figureheads, such as Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani whose opposition to political factionalism (*hizbiyyah*) in general and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular was explicit: "Albani began to criticize Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood because, he felt, they rushed into popular mobilization through forming political parties. By prioritizing the political arena over the theological, Albani felt that they promoted an incorrect version of Islam—one that erroneously conflated traditional teachings with modern politics. He would later say that Brotherhood members 'gather around any ideas, cultures and traits that come to mind.' Elsewhere, Albani explains that although Islamists' 'interest lies in Islamic ethics and educating their followers about politics and economics... We see some of them not even praying, all the while calling to establish an Islamic society and Islamic governance. How preposterous! For an Islamic society cannot be realized unless its call resembles that of the Prophet's call to God...' (Olidort 2015: 13). Yet, as with the authoritarian regime's relationship with any center of power, this collusion was neither constant nor comfortable. Whilst the late 2000s saw an explosion of Salafist activity (including charity work and media) that was non-hostile to the Mubarak regime, this was but a chapter in the relationship. The regime had banned the Salafist Call as an organization in 1994 and imprisoned some of their leadership, but had by 2004 released all of the figureheads who would later come to dominate the movement (El-Sherif 2015: 9).

decisively reasoned away: As the second article of the Egyptian constitution proclaimed Shari'a (Islamic law) as the principle source of legislation, any laws enacted by a future parliament would inherently be rendered void were they to contradict Shari'a. Thus constrained, democracy was acceptable, and the principle mission of the Nour Party's entry into politics would be to safeguard Article 2 in the drafting of the new constitution.

Neither the fact that Article 2 of the Egyptian constitution had been in effect since 1971, nor the fact that every political party entering the fray in 2011 promised to uphold Article 2 in the drafting of the new constitution, deterred the forceful entry and mobilization by this novel political force. In the months that followed they entered an electoral alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood, but then quickly withdrew from that alliance. They demonstrated alongside the Muslim Brotherhood 'in defense of the Shari'a' (see Chapter 2) but, in a surprising move, refused to back the Brotherhood in the presidential campaign in June 2012. Instead, they chose to endorse the presidential campaign of the more liberal Abdel-Moniem Abul-Futuh, a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood who had been expelled from the organization and whose campaign manager and most prominent surrogate was a member of the Trotskyist organization the Revolutionary Socialists.

In a widely shared video, Yasser Borhami, the vice-president of the Call, told a large gathering of young people at his weekly seminar in an Alexandrian mosque that the best candidate was Mohamed Selim el-'Awa, that the best program was the *nahda* (renaissance) project put forth by the Muslim Brotherhood and their candidate Mohamed Morsi, but "we are endorsing Dr. Abul-Futuh."<sup>256</sup> This remarkable video was, at first, treated as a scandal, and as a signal of half-hearted

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<sup>256</sup>“Limatha tam iktiyah doktot abdul-moeim abu-el-futuh” (Why Was Dr. Abdel-Moneim Abu-el-Futuh Chosen.” From the ana il-salafi (I am the Salafist) Youtube, 29 April 2012: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zURGz7xAJbc>.

support for an ideologically incompatible candidate. But in the longer form of the video frequently not cited in the breathless political commentary that accompanied the first genuinely competitive presidential election in the history of the republic, Borhami goes on to outline a reasoning as blunt and as forthright as that deployed in support of the coup in the summer of 2013: El-‘Awa, he asserted, had little chance given that was not particularly acceptable to the public.<sup>257</sup> In his assessment, it was dangerous for one party to monopolize power at this point in history, and this precluded endorsing the Brotherhood candidate. This left Abul-Futuh. “It is important to say this, even though we repeat it every week: we do not choose what is best, but what is most appropriate for *al-marhala* (the [historical] stage),” he told his audience, who, from what can be discerned from their reaction did not protest this reasoning. When Abul-Futuh, who had led in some of the preliminary polls in the weeks prior to the first round of elections came in fourth with 3.9 million votes (or just under 18 percent of the votes cast), the Call and their party were accused by the candidate’s moderate backers of deliberately withholding the mobilizing power that saw them capture 25% of the parliamentary seats just six months earlier. Anecdotal evidence tends to exonerate them from the charge of complacency; whereas the candidate captured 18% nationwide, in the Mediterranean coastal city of Marsa Matruh that is entirely dominated by the Call, and where it runs many basic services, the moderate and liberal Abul-Futuh captured 33,531 of 64,902 votes

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<sup>257</sup> Borhami also added a sectarian aside in defense of his positive assessment of the Islamic legal scholar. El-‘Awa was seen to be friendly, or at least non-hostile, towards Shia Muslims, who have become the bugbear of the Salafist leadership despite the relatively small number of Shia in Egypt. “He doesn’t know them like we know them, he has been tricked by their *taqiyah*,” Borhami told his audience.



cast or 52% of the vote.<sup>258</sup> This is a discrepancy impossible to explain without the intervention of the Salafist grouping.<sup>259</sup>

When it was his turn to speak at ‘sixth emergency meeting’ in the summer of 2013, Yasser Borhami spoke to his audience about bearded men being attacked on the street because of the hostility the Muslim Brotherhood had engendered to Islamists. We have to protect ‘*houriyat al-da’wa*’ (the freedom to proselytize) he asserted matter-of-factly to the audience. He knew that an unspecified number of the *shabab* (youth) were joining the sit-in in Rab’aa square, and suggested that those who knew them to implore them to return home. The army’s *idulujia qawmiyah* (nationalist ideology) was closer to their way of thinking than that of the liberals and secularists, he said to his attentive audience.

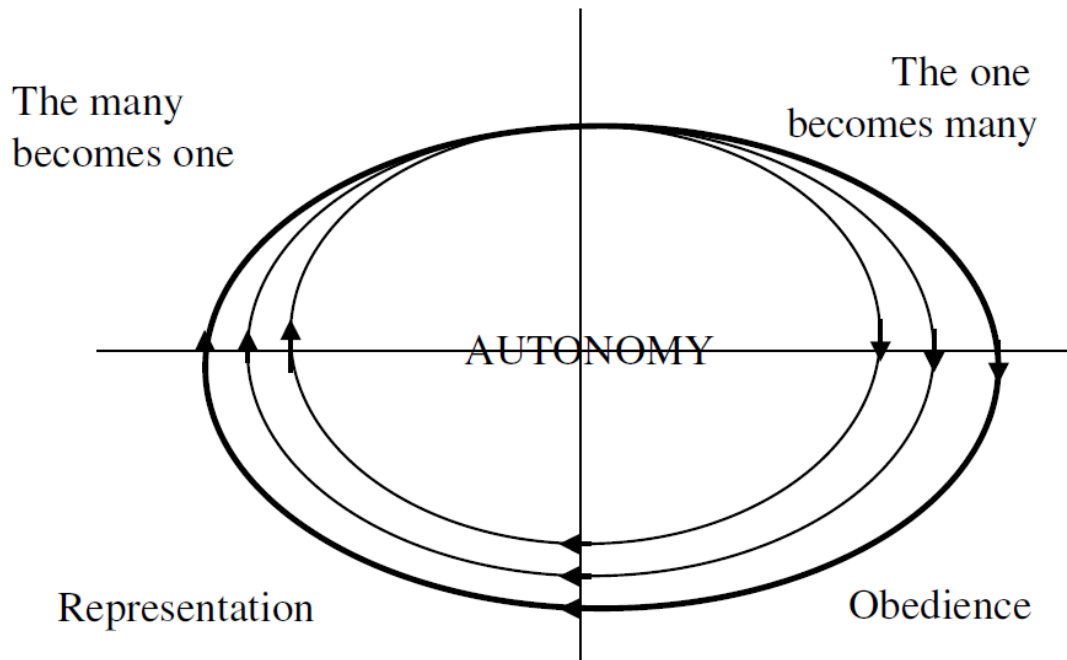
It was not so much whether these arguments were particularly convincing to his constituency of Salafist Call adherents, Nour Party members or unaffiliated, self-identified Salafists that is at issue. Indeed the fact that such an extraordinary and public council would be broadcast implies resistance to what was being proffered. It was that these arguments were *publicly proffered at all, to, rather than on behalf of, a constituency* that is remarkable. The implication was that the process would then be subsumed into the architecture of the decision taken by the organization, whether or not such a public engagement with an independent constituency

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<sup>258</sup> Whereas Alexandria is the city where Salafist Call is based, Egypt’s second-largest city is home to four million people amongst whom other political organization are significantly more robust than they are nationwide; notably the putative organizations of the Egyptian left. The highest vote-getter in Alexandria was Hamdeen Sabahi, the Nasserist candidate, who came in third overall. Abul-Futuh slightly over performed his national results in the city however. For a full picture of the results see Ahram Online, “Relive vote count in 1st round of Egypt presidential race: How Morsi and Shafiq moved on,” May 25, 2012. <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/42755.aspx>.>

<sup>259</sup> The surprising and disciplined decision by the Nour Party to endorse an ideologically dissonant candidate provides a noteworthy comparison point to other unions and parties. For example, the well-financed Egyptian Social Democratic Party refused to endorse any of the candidates because the party leadership could not agree amongst themselves on a choice. The left-wing Populist Socialist Alliance Party utilized its right to run a candidate without collecting the necessary signatures by nominating party elder and veteran leftist parliamentarian Abul-Ezz el-Harriri despite the fact that one of its younger cadres, Khaled Ali (see Chapter 5), was also running as an independent.

constituted measurable consent. This mechanism recalls the structure of the enunciation regime (Figure 4) introduced in Chapter 1:



From Latour, 2003: 150

The normative objection that the extraordinary decision by the Call leadership to back the military coup did not rest on any aggregative process that would measure the consent of their constituency (an internal vote of some kind) is a projection unto the organization of a means of politics that it did not need to achieve autonomy. That the Da'wa shed support, as their many vociferous Islamist critics vowed they had for their 'treachery,' would not have been surprising. But propositions regarding support were simply untestable given that votes were not the measure of political success in the tumult of the summer of 2013. Whatever support was shed, or remained, was not something that news organizations or pollsters would be able to ascertain. By virtue of

their self-identification, the many Egyptian Salafists, who have consistently been reported to vastly outnumber the membership of the Muslim Brotherhood,<sup>260</sup> would be implicated in the momentous decision taken by the Salafist leadership, up to the point and until they volunteer their own objections. That is because unlike, workers, liberals, leftists, Nasserists and so on, the existence of an autonomous organization such as the Call makes the question “What do Salafists think?” about this or that event in Egyptian politics an eligible one.

Indeed it is difficult to imagine any other political organization putting on a display such as that of the Salafist Call in the aftermath of the military coup. The many representatives of parties and union federations would have probably conducted internal deliberations before expressing their position to a wider public, of which their ostensible constituencies were a nebulous part indistinguishable from the military leadership, whom they were also addressing in their pronouncements. As figures who had become prominent in the thirty months since the fall of Mubarak lined up to join the new government, there seemed to be little or no coordination in their action. In sharp contrast to the strategic and coherent behavior of the Salafist Nour Party, the Egyptian Social Democratic Party (from which two cabinet ministers including the head of the new government, Hazem el-Beblawi, were drawn) and the Constitution Party from which three prominent figures, including the new vice president of the republic, Mohamed el-Baradei, were drawn) seemed to not have been part of any collective-decision making process authorizing the actions of their members.<sup>261</sup> For his part, Kamal Abu-Aita, head of the Egyptian Federation of

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<sup>260</sup> Indeed I was surprised to learn from interlocutors who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood that this is an assertion with which they generally agreed. It is important to note however that projections that Salafists vastly outnumber Muslim Brotherhood members (Davis-Packard 2014) are highly misleading. Membership in the Muslim Brotherhood (often estimated to number half a million people) is an organizational one, whereas the ascription ‘Salafist’ can be applied based simply on personal behavior.

<sup>261</sup> Indeed el-Baradei seemed surprised by the question of whether he consulted his party before joining the new government. He indicated that he had ‘spoken with friends about his decisions’ but did not point to any party specific considerations. Indeed the Constitution Party that he helped found a few months prior to the coup, and of

Independent Unions, did not seek to rationalize his decision to become Minister of Labour and Manpower to anyone before he indicated his acceptance of the position in a televised interview, as indicated to me by his deputy Fatma Ramadan (see Chapter 4). Inasmuch as these ‘launching institutions’ expressed any opinion of the actions of their prominent members at all, they were vague approvals proffered second-hand by individual members to a wider public. Somewhat incoherently, the Egyptian Social Democratic Party and the Constitution Party expressed, through statements by some of their leaders, that their members who had joined the government were doing so in an individual capacity rather than as representatives of the parties. This could, in an analysis more amenable to stylized facts than this one, be interpreted as a form of risk aversion, had they not also expressed enthusiastic support for the new government. They were therefore incurring costs whilst forsaking potential benefits of coalition.

In July 2013, the leadership of the Permanent Conference of Alexandrian Workers (PCAW) had expressed cautious optimism about the new order, citing the presence of Kamal Abu-‘Aita in government, a man whose commitment to their cause of independent labor representation was beyond doubt. Back in Cairo, I had expressed my bewilderment about his appointment in various conversations about the ongoing formation of the government; why would the military-backed government appoint someone determined to destroy the state’s monopoly on labor organization? Why would they seek to acquiesce to the demands of a constituency I now came to see that he did not have much control over? “I fear it is the other way round,” economics professor AbdelAziz EzzelArab told me in one of our many conversations about political events. “Abu-Aita

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which he was the figurehead, did not seem to be part of his narrative of events at all. Personal interview with Mohamed el-Baradei, October 2014, Boston.

is there to represent the new government to workers.” In that reading, the military-backed government was the principal and Abu-‘Aita the agent.<sup>262</sup>

In other words, the constituted political actor, the military, recognized that members of the government nominally representing the political spectrum were eminently substitutable to the degree that made their ideologies and personal pre-commitments of secondary, if not tertiary import.

Abdel-Moniem Abul-Futuh, the most prominent member of what was sometimes referred to as the liberal wing of the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>263</sup> used to respond to the questions about how things would change under a Brotherhood administration when he was still a member in good standing. Would alcohol be banned? Would beaches be closed? Would the tourism industry suffer? Would banks be shut down? What does an Islamic state look like? “Egyptians are overwhelmingly Muslim,” he would answer, “and Egypt is therefore already an Islamic state.”<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> In fact this reading is too generous to the evidently personalistic method with which Mohamed el-Baradei went about assembling the names for the transitional government. The military leadership were largely indifferent to the personnel, the choices of whom were delegated to el-Baradei in the formation of the government - with the exception of the ‘sovereign ministries’ (the foreign ministry, and ministries of interior and defense). On the choice of Abu ‘Aita, el-Baradei said that his friend Ziad (Bahaa el-Din, the deputy prime minister) had vouched for him as a “good man and a revolutionary.” In other words, even Abu ‘Aita’s allies were not particularly focused on his role in the independent labor movement. It also follows that the military leadership’s indifference to the choices outside of those they thought were essential for control, suggests that they saw the individuals placed in these positions as substitutable and not necessarily representative of any particular constituency other than a broad, uninstitutionalized, anti-Mubarak and anti-Brotherhood tendency.

<sup>263</sup> The language often used to describe ideological fissures within the Brotherhood was more often generational rather than a classic left-right/liberal-conservative spectrum. See Zollner (2007) and Harnisch and Mecham (2009).

<sup>264</sup> This of course was an outlier position within the Islamist movement, broadly construed. Critics would charge that the Muslim Brotherhood were ‘speaking out of both sides of their mouth’ with regards to the substance of an Islamic state. Abul-Futuh was in effect embracing the nebulosity of ‘*al-mashru’ al-Islami*’ (the Islamist project) to reduce widespread fears of radical change, working with, rather than against, what has otherwise been characterized as ‘the failure of political Islam’ to imagine a different governance model. This view of Islamism is carefully illustrated by Olivier Roy in his *The Failure of Political Islam*, but has roots in twentieth-century Islamic jurisprudential thought, most prominently in Azharite scholar, Ali Abdel Raziq’s *Al-islam wa-usul al-hukm* (Islam and The Source of Political Authority) published in 1925 where he argues against a specifically Islamic notion of government. The book is not popular within the Islamist movement.

Academic writing on political Islam often concerns itself with questions about whether Islamic Shari'a (Islamic law) can be reconciled with democracy. Rare amongst that subgenre is work that questions whether the premise is of an Islamic State is coherent at all. The most prominent of these is Ali Abdel Raziq's *al-islam wa usul al-huqm* (Islam and The Sources of Political Authority) published in 1925, in which the Azharite jurist argues that a specifically Islamic notion of government does not, in fact, exist. Emplacing this notion in history, Wael Hallaq's *The Impossible State* (2013), argues that the notion that modern state can be constructed on ethical grounds is a category error which would render the exercise of power through the edifice of the modern state intractable. But as we saw in Chapter 1, a category error in actually existing politics is as much a productive act as it is an analytical mistake. What does it mean to draft 'the liberals,' 'the leftists,' 'the workers,' or indeed 'the Salafists' into a coalition? It is indeed a category error to attribute action to actors that do not, in fact, exist, at least as actors capable of the sort of strategic action demonstrated by the Salafist Call in this chapter. The question then becomes, what if such actors existed?

The example of the Salafist Call is particularly instructive in this regard. It is a movement that is styled on the emulation and propagation of the behavior of '*al-salaf al-salih*' (the pious predecessors) in reference to the first three generations of Muslims who represent a 'golden age' (Olidort 2015: 9). As such, the movement seeks to expunge practices and beliefs that communities have accumulated in the intervening time between the very beginnings of Islam and their contemporary environs. The development of modern Salafism is informed by the life and works of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897), Muhamad Abduh (d. 1905), and Rashid Rida (d. 1935). Yet these are men who, in reductive terms, were modernists and whose anti-historical turn was geared towards an embrace of the new in place of what they regarded as accumulated superstition. That

‘the ironies of modernity’ (Lauziere 2016) would put the method to use in the propagation and securitization of insular, sectarian communities should not be lost on the historian. The ironies however are not limited to *longue durée* histories, but to their functioning in contemporary politics.

In its political manifestation, Salafism remained doctrinally hostile to democracy as a usurpation of divine sovereignty. As a self-consciously anti-historical movement it seeks to abrogate the accumulated tools of political practice and resistance that are available to groups in society. Indeed, as an anti-political movement, it rationalizes and often seeks to crowd-out associations designed specifically for the contestations of power under authoritarian rule. Aesthetically, contemporary Salafism is austere, conformist and discouraging of the sort of overlapping associations that are generative of vanguard movements. An unfavorable description of Salafist aesthetics would be as a sort of maximalist enforcement of religious minimalism. Yet none of these characteristics can be invoked in order to explain the Salafist role in the failure of democratization in Egypt.

As a marker of its autonomy, the Nour Party rallied against the candidacy of the independent Salafist and populist Hazem Salah Abu-Ismaïl, who in the buildup to the presidential elections had amassed more notarized signatures than other candidate in the race.<sup>265</sup> Rather than support the next most conservative candidate in the race, the Muslim Brotherhood’s Mohamed Morsi, the Nour instead chose to support Abdel-Moniem Abul-Futuh, whose candidacy was specifically designed to bridge the religious-secular divide that was beginning to animate post-revolutionary politics. Finally, and importantly, there was the momentous decision to support and

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<sup>265</sup> Abu-Ismaïl was later disqualified by the Electoral Commission after it emerged that his late mother had been an American citizen. It had been stipulated that in the amended provisional constitution that candidates for president could not hold dual citizenship, and could not be married to, or children of, those who did. See Michael, Maggie. “Over US Mother, Islamist Likely Out of Egypt Race.” Daily News Egypt. 6 April 2012: <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2012/04/06/over-us-mother-islamist-likely-out-of-egypt-race/>.

participate in the military coup against an elected Islamist president. None of these decision could be explained through an examination of doctrine. Indeed the last of these could arguably be the signal contribution of the movement to the process of de-democratization of the Egyptian polity; one that can be much better explained as the jealous guarding of autonomy and the predisposition for survival by a constituted political actor than by any appeal to the lineage of Salafist thought.

## **Part 2: Counterfactual Democracy**

This study began as an exploration of the emergence of an independent labor movement that sought to institutionalize itself in a radically transformed political milieu, inspired by the comparative analytic induction of Rueschmeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992) in which the role of an organized working class proved prominent in several historical paths towards democracy. This conflict-embracing account also had the added utility of emplacing local political developments in a global constellations of political and economic forces. It straddled, sometimes in an ungainly and inelegant fashion, the worlds of parsimonious political science and the richness of historical narrative. This stood in sharp contrast to the deterministic reductiveness of neo-Modernization theories (Przeworski et al. 1999)<sup>266</sup> or the cautionary conservatism of Huntingtonians (Chapter 2). In the alternative conception of Rueschmeyer, Stephens and Stephens, there were multiple pathways to democracy. Capitalist development did not automatically induce democratization, rather the structural correspondence between levels of economic development and democracy could historically be explained by its enlargement of the middle and working

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<sup>266</sup> The characterization of the work of Przeworski and his colleagues as belonging to the Modernization school is controversial. But it is important to note that this, the work most often cited in the study of democratization, does not in fact contain an explanation of the phenomenon. Instead, the authors present capitalist development as a condition for the safe-guarding of democracy should it arise for any number of exogenous reasons. That the answer to the question of the fate of a political revolution is a number (\$6055) is a not particularly illuminating insight into the dynamic developments of revolutionary politics.



classes, and hence meeting the existence condition for self-organization; and making it difficult - should such organizations withstand the cross-currents of political change - for the elites to exclude them. With the possibility of placing the Egyptian revolution in a world-historical moment in which the politico-economic model of neoliberal capitalism seems to be strained by the challenges of populisms of various forms (Chapter 4), and a license to narrativize political conflict as potentially transcendent of pre-given constraints, the choice to focus on organization of the 'working class' became particularly appealing.

In the Egyptian context the development of labor organization was appealing for additional reasons. It is not without reason that political scientists studying Arab authoritarianism had devoted so much time to the study of political Islam. It had become the case that the political order was made up of authoritarian regimes and Islamist oppositions, a joint production that made available certain kinds of politics and occluded access to others. A consideration of labor organization therefore afforded something more than the eternal quest for class politics in a pure form. In the classical political science sense, the addition of a dimension of political belonging and interest to memberships of already constituted groups produces 'cross-cutting cleavages' (Lipsit and Rokkan 1967, Dahl 1982) that transcend forms of conflict whose contours are inimical to the production of a sustainable democratic order. Less reliant on this aerial mapping of new avenues of political mobilization is the more intricate notion of exploring the production of political actors through the hemming together of people, resources and circumstances into agents to whom authorship in politics could coherently be attributed.

The non-emergence of an autonomous actor organized around labor invites making explicit counter-factual scenarios that animate all research questions in political science (Lustick 2011). The defensible proposition that the Arab Spring constituted a common treatment producing

different outcomes across Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria, sets up a natural experiment in which the method of difference serves to test proposition that an explanation embodied in a set of variables is present in some cases but not others; hence accounting the divergent outcomes.<sup>267</sup>

On the question of autonomy of organized labor, a structured comparison with Tunisia would therefore be indicated. It is generally accepted that the defection of the Tunisian General Labour Union (commonly referenced by its French acronym UGTT for Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail) from the Ben Ali regime in December of 2010 was an important factor in the toppling of the president (Angrist 2013). The UGTT's facilitation of national dialogue between political factions<sup>268</sup> was noted in its award of the Nobel Peace Prize "for its decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy in Tunisia."<sup>269</sup> The contrast with Egyptian formations of labor representation is marked, and the contrast begs the question of whether these differences could be marshalled as part of an explanation of the outcomes of the transition processes in both countries – presuming of course that likely competing hypotheses related to other institutional

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<sup>267</sup> There are already examples of such works relying the classic formulation of the comparative method. A strongly argued example is the work of Hicham Bou Nassif who examines the reactions of military leaders to the initial large scale demonstrations in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria. His multi-part explanation for variation in repression by the three militaries highlight a combination of incentive and capacity do so by the upper echelons of officers. In this reading, which relies on intra-military dynamics and relationships between commanding officers, mid-level officers and conscripts, Bou Nassif concludes that the Tunisian military elite had neither the motive nor the capacity to repress, that the Egyptians had the motive but not the capacity, whereas the Syrian elite had both. See Bou Nassif, Hicham. "Generals and Autocrats: How Coup-Proofing Predetermined the Military Elite's Behavior in the Arab Spring." *Political Science Quarterly*. Volume 130, No. 2 (2015): 245-275.

<sup>268</sup> As part of the National Dialogue Quartet that also included the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA, Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat), the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH, La Ligue Tunisienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme), and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers (Ordre National des Avocats de Tunisie). See [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2015/press.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2015/press.html)

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

legacies embodied in the military, economic development, international alliances and so on could either be rejected or incorporated into an explanation.

The comparison would go along the path of making the implicit counter-factual that animated this study explicit, addressing, with a great many controls and caveats, the proposition that had there been autonomous and encompassing labor representation operating in post-Mubarak politics, then the political outcome of the revolution would have been different. The counter-factual logic that animates this rough and reductive formulation at the core of this study is mitigated in political science by the notion that our expository empirical considerations are unfortunately impoverished versions of a science whose apogee is form of computer simulated Agent Based Modelling where researchers are allowed to design worlds ‘inhabited by agents that interact with each other following pre-specified simple rules...Whether these units are modelled as states, individuals, corporations, ethnic groups, villages or kinship groups it is up to the experimenter to decide’ (Lustick and Miodownik 2009).

To put forth the expository findings of this study in the service of such a project renders it a data point in a very different sort of work. But the vision of political science as one in which a simulation of history can be run and re-run with variations in the assumptions, boundary conditions, sufficient conditions for claims and the robustness of the results measured against expanding data-sets is not the only one. Though the production of this sort of research produces intriguing claims about politics itself, it misses, I think something fundamental about the nature of politics, which is revealed in a revolutionary situation and to which I have tried to draw attention in this study.

The political actor to which action maybe attributed is, itself, an important variable in politics; that is to say, authorship. Autonomous actors are political projects, and the degree to

which their actions maybe explained through the deployment of rational-choice, historical institutionalist or constructivist models of political behavior are dependent on the completion of that project. The actor capable of strategic action is therefore an ephemeral being, and analyses that all too often project unto individuals and other political units a calculative agency should understand the need to limit such a framework to well-defined strategic situations where such an agency is, in fact, operative. This insight would then inform comparisons between ‘Egyptian labor’ and ‘Tunisian labor,’ rather than negate them; a process, I believe that would be enriched by the knowledge that both projects are of a different ontological order in explanatory scheme; but with complicating knowledge that individuals working on both projects often seek to emulate the form of political action, which, in this case, is the union federation.

This study cannot conclusively therefore address the counter-factual claim implicit in its promulgation. With Robert Jervis we can concede that counterfactual thinking can alert us to the presence of causal pathways that we would otherwise ignore, but remain aware of its severe limitations. In complex systems, and a revolutionary politics emerging after decades of authoritarianism is nothing if not complex, the system has characteristics that cannot be inferred from the behavior of individual units within it. Changes in one relationship have ramifications for other relationships (Jervis 1996).

We can however, say something about political autonomy of actors as a condition for minimal democracy, a conception of democracy where the threshold for democratization is met simply by the existence of an electoral system in which different actors can win. The requirements for democratization in this conception do not have any substantive content and do not require any sort of accountability of those in power. It requires only that the political system is one where the holders of power can lose. The conception attributed to Joseph Schumpeter and defended by Adam

Przeworski (Schumpeter 1950, Przeworski 1999) is one that therefore constrains the autonomy of actors as holders of power, and does nothing else, recognizing that for a minimally democratic order to exist, the holder of political power must be substitutable. Autonomy therefore is compromised to the degree to which state power is acquired, a condition possible only if other actors in the political field possess autonomy.

This conservative vision of democracy bears little resemblance to the aspirations and slogans in the demonstrations that have come to define the aesthetic of a revolutionary period. It does however leave open the possibility that status, networks, materials that remain of the projects undertaken in the thirty months following the fall of Mubarak maybe reconstituted in a manner that approaches that combination of representation and obedience which constitute political autonomy.

In the face of a rising tide of authoritarianism; nativist populism in established democracies and the defeated revolutions of the Arab spring, there has emerged a resigned political line by democrats that through a complex, and mostly incoherent reasoning, embraces political breakdown as part and parcel of a ‘maximization of the contradictions.’ This line is associated with a sort of semi-digested Leninism, is not particularly prominent and is less indicative of a political strategy than it is of a sullen state of mind. It is however worthy of consideration in as much as it reveals some of our collective assumptions about how political transformation works, and emphasizes why expository, closely observed analytical work of political crises is necessary. Embedded in the statement are fallacies of both liberalism and Marxism in their crudest forms. In the hope that contradictory tendencies of a political order would lead to its collapse there is a moral plea to an imagined future audience in a public sphere who would finally discover truths previously concealed by less brutish political administration.

In the belief that out of these contradictions would be brought a collapse of emancipatory consequence that embodies a most feeble form of faithful determinism that sometimes emerges from politically quarantined Marxist circles. What a political analysis of breakdown and autonomy recognizes is the privilege afforded to constituted political actors in utilizing the contradictions. Indeed, as illustrated by actors profiled in this chapter, it is action that contradicts some of our expectation that often reveals political authorship. It follows that whatever exogenous shocks are visited upon politics in crisis it those who are already on the road to autonomy that are best positioned to deny others the privileges of authoritarianism. Those who seek to govern would have to cope with the credible threat of a destructive withdrawal from alliance that is put together in the pursuit of power.

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