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Ultras Ahlawy and the Spectacle: Subjects, Resistance and Organized Football Fandom in

Egypt

May- 2015

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## Glossary

Active	A word used by Ultras Ahlawy group to in reference to the person who is responsible for the neighborhood sections
Capo	An Italian word meaning leader, chief, or head and it is used by Ultras groups all over the world to describe the cheerleader in the stadium
Cortege	A term the Ultras groups use to describe the parade they carry out when Ultras follow their team to a faraway game, marching in the host city behind the Ultras banner while igniting flares, chanting, and announcing the arrival of their team
Curva	An Italian term meaning “curve” and it describes the curved part of the stadium where Ultras groups usually sit behind the goal keepers
Flare	A type of pyrotechnique that produces massive and colored lights. Ultras groups use it as a cheering tool all the time
Gestuelle	A French word means gestures and it is used to describe Ultras hands’ rituals and performances
Pyro-show	It is the show done by the Ultras in the stadium when all the fans ignite flares at the same time and they are distributed around the stadium
Section	Each Ultras group is divided to a number of sections depending on the neighborhood where its individuals reside, these subgroups are called sections. So section is the name of neighborhoods or quarters- based groups
Terrace	The stadium seating
Tifo/ intro	Tifo is an Italian word means Typhus and it is used to describe the choreographed intros the Ultras executes in the stadium at the beginning of the match. It is used to indicate excitement and feverish enthusiasm of the Ultras groups cheering for their teams.
UA07	Ultras Ahlawy is the Ultras that supports al-Ahly club, 07 indicates the year of group’s founding (2007).
UWK	Ultras White Knights is the Ultras that supports Zamalek club and the club’s color is white.

Ultras  
Individual

Ultras individual (*fard Ultras*) is the term used by the Ultras people to refer to anyone who belongs to them. They scarcely use the word “member.” Since it is not a membership based organization, I chose to use the word individual throughout the thesis to describe them as they themselves do.

## 1- Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1- Introduction:

This thesis focuses on organized football fandom groups in Egypt (namely the Ultras Ahlawy-UA07) and how the individual fan is constructed and disciplined in this collective, particularly in the urban settings of Cairo. I examine the Ultras through various lenses. Firstly, the research discusses how the Ultras fans perceive nationalism, how they relate their love to the club to their love of the country and the role of nationalism in creating an imagined community of al-Ahly supporters. Second, I engage in this male exclusive group by tracing how the game is socialized as a masculine game, how the young boys are introduced to the game, the gender dynamics in the group and the fraternity between the group's individuals. Third, I portray the different performances, graffiti, and ritual practices among the football fans. The making of the political subject and his agency by focusing on the Ultras involvement with the revolution is the fourth lens through which I explore the Ultras. Finally, the thesis discusses how through the Ultras, these organized fans reset their relation to the city through their space making practices in their neighborhoods, in the stadium, in the club, and in different sites where they congregate.

By following the group Ultras Ahlawy (UA07) – the supporters of al-Ahly club- and conducting in-depth interviews, I tried to reach a nuanced understanding of this organization and unpack the complicated and overlapping aspects of its subject formation during the revolutionary times, before and after. The Egyptian revolution in January 2011 has been crucial to the visibility of the Ultras. The images of Ultras flooding the square with their chants, their confrontations with the police on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January and the days after, chants and slogans they performed in the stadium in the early days of the revolution, all of these contributed to production of a certain idealized myth about them. This image has been changing significantly during the subsequent events. Media outlets, remnants of old regime and even other revolutionary factions wanted to have a monolithic account on the Ultras whether a mythologized one, glorifying them as the vigilante group of the revolution, or a demonized one defaming them as a violent infiltrated group. I argue that the realities of these groups are overly complicated than these simplified oppositional narrative of thug or hero. One of the aims of this study is looking at the Ultras as

microcosm to gain insights into the developments of the past few years and the changes to which they contributed.

## **1.2- Methods and challenges**

### **Methodology:**

The methodology of this study is ethnography of Ultras Ahlawy (UA07). I chose to focus on one Ultras group to be able to follow their different activities and also to enhance chances of building rapport and subsequently delving into their structure and organization. The choice of Ultras Ahlawy specifically was due to several reasons. First, al-Ahly is the biggest team in Egypt and consequently its fandom is the biggest one so it is easier in terms of access and more intriguing in terms of geographical proliferation of their followers. Another reason is that UA07 individuals were the target of the Port Said massacre which threw them in the realm of politics and reconfigured their intersections with the police, the judiciary system, and the army, among others. The massacre was a transformative experience for this group and it had its repercussions on the whole Ultras scene in Egypt.

### **Methods:**

I employed different methods. Beside the ethnographic research, I also used discourse analysis and content analysis. More specifically, I followed the group at different events (matches, meetings, sit-in, protests....etc.) and in-depth interviews with many Ultras Ahlawy individuals (UA07). Through these interviews I traced the whole process of subject construction from the early childhood until the present time. With some participants, these in-depth interviews lasted several. In my selection of interlocutors, I aimed to reflect the diversity of the Group in terms of generation, active membership, residential areas, “Capos”, leaders and ordinary Ultras. I obtained oral consent from the interlocutors, which specified that all the identities are kept anonymous. Hence all the names mentioned in this study are not the real names. The Ultras willingness to participate was contingent upon protecting their identities and anonymity.

I also conducted other types of interviews and this included unstructured interviews with Ultras individuals at different events, meetings and different field visits.

The archive of what has been written and documented about the Ultras (whether in newspapers, media outlets or club records etc.) constituted an important corpus of knowledge in this study. On one hand, my aim was to attempt to get a sense of the hegemonic narrative on the Ultras and the power dynamics that govern sports in Egypt. On the other hand, I further analyzed the counter hegemonic discourse of the ultras will take place through Ultras' social media statements.

Compiling and analyzing the objects (videos, music, chants, posters, t-shirts, pictures) has been a vital method that enabled me to understand specific meanings, ethos, values and connotations of the Ultras. A content analysis for 160 videos on Ultras Ahlawy's YouTube channels has been done along with thorough scrutinization of the chants they produced in their 2 CDs, their tunes and their lyrical value. In other words, following the spatial expanse of UA07 nationally (the branches and sections) is an important method, in addition to studying the stadium architecturally and spatially.

### **Challenges:**

A key challenge in studying the Ultras is the anonymity concern. As it is one of the Ultras' defining principles, most individuals would refuse to talk to me, and when they did they would not give names and will not allow me to record. Although this is an important marker of revealing their practices of anonymity it made it much harder for me to record the very long interviews, which comprise the main part of the study. Very few Ultras individuals agreed to record and all asked for their real names not to be used.

A second challenge is related to my gender. Being a female researcher in a male dominated community, made it easier for them to screen me and single me out, which reduced my possibilities of mixing and mingling with them freely. I tried to transform this challenge to a way in which I begin to understand their gender dynamics.

### **1.3- Literature review:**

The main question in this research is how a young man learns to be an organized committed fan who supports his team at every cost. Hence my analytical lens of focusing on the construct of subject and subjectivity to account for the particularities that constitute the ultras individuals. I

engage different conceptualizations of the subject to allow us unpack the disciplining processes the fans go through and at times also I explored the from this discipline takes. On the one hand how the fan is being introduced to the game as a masculine game and how he learns to be a male fan is a process that requires discipline. Moreover, the collective chanting and performance in the stadium is also a highly disciplined process. On the other hand this disciplined subject cannot by itself entail a straightforward and simple answer to all the aspects of their social being. For example, Ultras' participation in the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution invites us to engage with different meanings and enactments of subjectivity that go beyond the disciplining and training of the ordinary times of ultras. Yet the revolutionary participation could not be understood outside of the dispositions and relations that made the ultras prior to their January 25<sup>th</sup> engagements.

For post-structuralists, subject formation was enframed within the so-called cultural turn in theorizing. The debate Butler stirred in gender and cultural studies as well as in anthropology and other social sciences is due to her radicalization of the concept of gender. Butler has not only reaffirmed the hypothesis of gender as socially constructed, but she theorized it against our everyday lives. She accounted for the intelligibility of masculine and feminine acts by the repetitive performative practicing of these acts (Segal, 2008, p.382). In other words, the subject is trained to be man/ woman by theatrically repeating a series of acts which are attributable as masculine/ feminine without being man or a woman having anything to do with “ natural“ particularities; i.e. biological. I am following this process of masculine construction among the fans by listening to their stories of their early encounters with matches and how they developed their manly spectatorship cult.

In a similar, yet slightly different vein,, the Foucauldian subject emerges and functions through various planes, hence the image of different subjectivities that are constituted according to the different positions of seeing, knowing, speaking subjects and equally important as formed by and through discursive practices (Foucault, 1972). Foucault argues in “Discipline and Punish” that subject is simultaneously a victim and a perpetrator of a society of coercion and discipline (Hass, 1996, p. 62). In other words, possibilities of breaking out from society are almost impossible, since we are ourselves constituted by the same dispersed power.

These postulations on subject formation provide a helpful framework in this research in unpacking Ultras' subjectivity especially in areas where contradictory trajectories of subjectivity

prevail. . An example of this is how Ultras Ahlawy's aggressive animosity towards the police and the army did not deflect their desire for and pursuit of a long and tiring process of legal and judiciary trials to bring justice to their friends who were killed in the 2012 massacre. At one and the same time, the subject who is opposing the state is the one who addresses the state seeking legal reparations through state institutions, bodies and legal codes..

I am using Badiou's concept of subject and subjectvization in relation to Ultras participation in the revolution. Badiou describes how the fidelity of the subject and the unrelenting commitment to a cause.. In this kind of engagement, according to Badiou, we are carried beyond our limits; we aspire for immortal intensity at the expense of insignificant survival. For Badiou, it is not the agency that is diminished but it is the "objective knowledge" as the truth for the autonomous subject.. These truths are found in revolution, creation, passion and invention. (Hallward, 2003)

On the relation between Ultras and nationalism, I deploy Anderson's theorization on the concept of imagined community. According to Anderson, national communities are limited as they are related to modernity even if they rely on ontological stories of the past and imaginings of a limitless future, they are also sovereign as they do not aspire to be universal in sense that all people will have the same nationalist project, and finally they are imagined as no one would know all his fellow nationals (Anderson, 1990). Anderson's emphasis on the imagined ties between the people of the nation is not only useful on the scale of nations and states. It is of use to understand how the fans imagine their relation to club's administration. Fans have so many stories that they always recite to explain what ties them to this club and what ties this club to the Egyptian nation. On the other hand, these anecdotes also conceal the corporatization of the club at the hands of the administration

By looking at masculinity and organized young men groups, my research is also informed by the literature on youth gangs. Most of the research in this area either emphasized the criminal aspect of these gangs (Parks, 1995) or focused on racism, social disorganization and underclass position as an impetus for the formation of gangs (Spergel, 1992, p127). Other studies evolved around the social work, which is being done around it (Thomas & Curry, 1992). A more nuanced analysis is offered by Spergel who highlights the role of gangs as "social institutions," emphasizing the communal characteristics of the youth gangs not only the criminality. Spergel views youth gangs as an urban feature and stresses the gangs' role in providing social, cultural and economic

services to their members (Spergel, 1990). These two main characteristics are of special relevance to Ultras groups who are also urban organizations who also provide a lot of support to their members whether socially, culturally, educationally...etc.

Partially, my research speaks to a growing body of literature on organized football fandom. As fandom studies helped me in articulating specific questions. Research in this area paid attention to the masculinity of the fans, an area of interest to my research. Aesthetics of the spectators became a focus of research in recent years, especially when fans and the spectators of the game became themselves the spectacles (Diaz, P351). Voice, for example, was repeatedly studied as a milieu for support, seeking justice and even building communal ties (Kyto, 2011). Chants and rhythmic singing are indispensable in comprehending the Ultras. Additionally, as Power (2011) argues, fandom songs were used by Liverpool Football Club supporters to pursue justice for the victims of Hillsborough. Inspired by such studies, I follow an established tradition in examining “fandom culture” in its wholesome including rituals of hand waves, *tifos* and choreographs, banners and flags and flares. These embodied rituals and dedication made some theorists suggest that fandom is a global phenomenon (Peitersen, 2009).

The prevailing sense of exhilaration in the stadium brings to the fore the concept of the “spectacle,” especially with its relation to the carnival. The urban spectacles are no longer as passive as was proposed first by Debord. Theorists now suggest that the dichotomy between the performer and the audience is not as rigid as initially thought (Addo, 2009, p220) I am employing these propositions to explain Ultras performances in the stadium, their music, chants and bodily expressions. As Ultras performances are heavily ritualized, I find Schechner’s arguments of special importance as he explains how performances become ritualized ones, particularly in terms of techniques and the significance of repetition. Ultras always repeat their chants several times and this repetition in itself is worthy of further discussion. Theorists of carnivals and rituals argue that repeating specific actions leads to exploring creative potentials and experimentation with these actions and rituals (Addo, 2009. p 226)

Pleasure and fun play an important role in understanding the Ultras. On the one hand, their meetings and get together at the stadium and all the activities in preparation of the match is driven by their pursuit of pleasure and excitement. In this regard, I want to highlight the work of Pascal Menoret as he studied the car drifting activities in Riyadh city in Saudi Arabia where



young men gather at night in the streets of the city and skid with their cars “with the goals of overcoming the dullness of the city and having fun with whatever means available” (Menoret, 2011. p270). He uses the word playground to describe how the heavily policed city where morality police put people under surveillance during the day turns into a very exciting place at night when young people use stolen cars to drift and spin with them, specifically rural Saudi migrant youth. On the other hand, car drifting is a good analogue to fanatic football support activities because of the strong social condemnations of this hobby.

Ultras’ urban subjectivity evolves mainly around the stadium; hence I examine the fans’ relation to the city through the works of Harvey. Harvey stresses the right to the city in contrast to the liberal individualistic rights, which always reaffirm notions of property (Harvey, 2008). We have to see Ultras’ fights as fights against the tendency of the governments to privatize the control over the city by placing it in the hands of elitist corporatism. Following Harvey,, it is important to stress the collective aspect in the right to the city.

Finally, the writings Raul Zibechi and Asef Bayat have been very relevant to my research despite the fact that the former talks about urban organizations and the latter about urban non-movement. While Zibechi’s focus on contestations helped in accounting for the organizational part of the Ultras, Bayat’s arguments helped me understand the Ultras through the lens of youth group and politics in the Middle East. In his writings, Zibechi differentiates between association and community and gives insightful features to what constitutes urban community, specifically in terms of shared lifestyle, pleasures as well as deprivations (Zibechi, 2010). Bayat’s thesis is key in reading the Ultras because in his study of youth groups, he suggests that authoritarian states have deep and fundamental animosity to fun since pleasure and fun jeopardize the legitimacy of such regimes (Bayat, 2013).

#### **1.4- Situating the Egyptian Ultras in the wider fandom map**

Internationally, the emergence of Ultras has been connected to football teams in Mediterranean European countries, namely France and Italy. The name “Ultras” is borrowed from a radical leftist group in Europe in late sixties, when the first groups of Ultras started to be constituted. (Guschwan, 2007, p. 245). This may seem as a peculiar remark worthy of further exploration later

since there are many claims that football fandom are, by nature, apolitical and that sports are the new opium of the masses, in an alteration of the famous Marxist proverb. Some even go as far as to assume that if such groups would be involved in politics, they would be aligning with right-wing fundamental groups.

There is an important distinction to be made here, between hooliganism and Ultras. Hooliganism is also a form of organized football fandom that started in England where violence and alcohol consumption play important roles in their performances during and after matches. Moreover, their name is derived from a thuggish gang from England and this might clarify the centrality of violence in their structure. In contrast, Ultras are more for chanting for their teams, following them in faraway matches. While alcohol consumption and the escalated level of violence are not among their ideals, they don't dismiss violence altogether as they occasionally engage in fights but their main activities are not framed around it (Guschwan, 2007, p. 254). The confusion between Ultras and Hooligans is partially due to academic hegemony of focusing on hooliganism which came into existence first and has been extensively studied especially in England. (Spaaij, 2007, p. 412)

Ultras groups in different countries share many values and mandates, if I am to use such a word. The individuals meet during the week to raise funds, organize trips to faraway games, to design and rehearse their "tifo," demonstrations and songs inside the stadium. This is beside the eruption of violence every now and then, inside or outside the stadium (Guschwan, 2007, p. 254). The name "*Tifo*" refers to the different choreographic demonstrations, colorful pictures and cheerful songs (Basheer, 2011, p. 186). The name is derived from typhoid fever in an indication to their excitement and enthusiasm during cheering to their teams (Guschwan, 2007, p. 250). One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Ultras is their commitment to cheer for their teams throughout the duration of the match, i.e. for the whole 90 minutes.

On the national level, Ultras came as evolution of the much more minor, club-administrated football fandom clubs unions. Those who were involved in these unions had the opportunity to travel abroad and be exposed to other forms of fandom especially from similar Ultras groups in North Africa. In 2007, two groups of Ultra were formed to support the two biggest teams in the capital Cairo: al-Ahly and al-Zamalek, and their Ultra are named Ultras Ahlawy (UA07) and Ultras White Knights (UWK), respectively. (El-Sherief, 2012)

Throughout the years that preceded the revolution, different Ultras groups for different clubs have been initiated, most significant are, Yellow Dragons for Ismaily team, Green Eagles for Al-Masry team and Green Magic for Alexandrian El-Etihad team (Basheer, 2011, p. 192).

Moreover, proliferation of the two biggest Ultras; UA07 and UWK, took place and new sections were formed in different cities in Cairo and in different governorates in Egypt. Most of these sections are in urban neighborhoods. The presence of UA07 and UWK at other governorates reaffirms the popularity of the two capital-based teams, which is not only restricted to the capital. Beside Cairo and Giza, UA07 has sections in Tanta, Banha, Beni-Suef, and Kafr El-Zayat. Fayoum, Sohag, Assuit, Mahalla, Mansoura, and Damietta. (Ultras Ahlawy, 2013). Within Cairo different sections include: Masr El-Gedida, Nasr City, El-Salam, El-Zeitoun, Hadayek El-Kobba, Tagamou El-khames, Matareya, Ain Shams, Giza, Faisal, Haram, Omraneya, Imbaba, 6<sup>th</sup> of October, Sheikh Zayed, ShobraMasr, Shobra El-Kheima, Qanater, Qaluib, Banha, Maadi, Dar El-Salam, Tora, Helwan, SayedaZeinab, Manyal and Mokkatam (Ultras Ahlawy (UA07), 2013).

Given the fact that the Egyptian revolution's multitude was diverse and composed of different social sectors, it is not a surprise that the Ultras participated in the revolution. One faction was the Ultras and their revolutionary encounters are worth studying to apprehend another façade about the Egyptian revolutionary path.

I focused my research on Ultras Ahlawy UA07, which has been subjected to a massacre after almost one year from the eruption of the revolution. Many parties argue that this massacre was to penalize the Ultras for their involvement in the revolution. On February 1st 2012, horrific attacks on Ultras Ahlawy took place during the match between Al-Ahly and Al-Masry. Seventy-two people were savagely killed, by strangling, stabbing and stampede. No one had a conclusive answer on the executors of such a massacre. According to the UA07's individuals, the massacre was a tripartite plot between Ultras Green Eagles, the Ministry of Interior, and Supreme Council of Armed Forces, who ruled the country after the ousting of Mubarak. UA07 pledged to struggle for justice and for martyrs' rights. They held a sit-in by the vicinity of the people's Assembly later in 2012 to exert pressure on courts and they called for several marches, demonstrations and memorials at the martyrs' houses. Their struggles continue to the time of writing, though - like many sectors in Egypt –they also are subjected to the repressive machinery of the military state.

### 1.5- Chapters:

My thesis is divided into five substantive chapters beside the introductory one. “Love of the Club...Love of the Country: Ultras and Nationalism” is the title of the second chapter where I examine the love of the club as an absolute and imaginative value. I try here to understand what the love of the club means to Ultras and how this is related to their national sentiments by compiling different anecdotes that reaffirm al-Ahly’s role in different historical moments like colonialism, the Palestinian question and the revolution. These imaginative sentiments are simultaneously contested by Ultras members through their problematic relation to the club administration, especially corporatism and the board’s position viz a viz the Ultras and the right to the stadium since the beginning of the revolution.

The third chapter, “All Boys Love Football,” traces the construction of the Ultras fan as a macho male subject. I follow how fans are first introduced to the game by their fathers, elder brothers or other male relatives early in their childhood. In this chapter I attempt to understand how the whole set of values related to identifying oneself with specific team, certain color and particular players are embodied, along with the values of winning, championship and fight. Following this thread, I then explore the fraternity concept between Ultras individuals, what this brotherhood means to them, and what it provides them. This chapter discusses Ultras’ interpretations of violence and all the problematic related to state legitimate violence and spectators’ violence.

The fourth chapter: “The Ultras: Here Comes the Carnival,” is an attempt to communicate the colorful diversified and tactile performances of this group. This section traces how individuals practice their subjectivities in the stadium through enacting the different rituals and ritualized performances. I analyze elements of these rituals, specifically the significance of the voice and the body within the Ultras. Individuals’ accounts of the training and disciplining of these rituals is also discussed,.

The fifth chapter is titled “the revolutionary subject.” In this chapter, I trace how the decision to join the revolution was taken on individual and collective levels, the different motives behind Ultras’ participation in the revolution and what happens to the disciplined Ultras subject in the time of revolution. I also analyze the reflexive nature of Ultras encounter with the revolution.

Finally, I conclude with a detailed account on the Port-Said massacre as narrated by one of the survivors..

The final chapter, “Our stadium...Our city,” explores the urban socio-spatial aspect of the Ultras. In this section, I map the Ultras presence in the city by following the distribution of their sections, their presence in specific areas whether in the stadium or in the club vicinity and how the borders of these sites constantly change at specific moments. How the revolution took the Ultras’ performances out of these confined zones (stadium and club) to the wider streets is a segue into understanding how this move has influenced the Ultras’ presence in public space. Different struggles fought by Ultras will be detailed in this section from the lens of production of the space and the politicization of public space battles. I thus focus on the stadium as a battlefield between fans and security forces.

I conclude with a discussion that tries to engage with the questions and contradictions I encountered during my research and through which I try to propose meaningful questions for future research.

## 2- Chapter Two: Love of the Club.... Love of the Country: The Ultras National Subject

In this chapter I address the national register in Ultras' subjectivity. I will first discuss the notion of "love of the club," trying to unpack what al-Ahly means for Ultras members. Then I will move to the different anecdotes and tales UA07 members use to reify the proposition that al-Ahly is the club of patriotism and how they are inculcated with this narrative. This will be followed by a discussion of how nationalism can function as a gloss over the relationship between the fans and the club, particularly its administration and board. Finally, the transnational aspect between Ultras groups shall be examined.

### 2.1- Here comes the imagined

Ultras' love of the club is an absolute and uncompromising value. It is not related to winning or losing, and the club for them is something to die for. It is the highest and most precious value for the group. Individuals of the "secret group" of UA07—the smaller inner group responsible for making decisions, and it is the group that is always updated with the news that concerns the larger group of ultras as a whole—are selected based primarily on their commitment to and love of the club. Ramez, the UA07 capo, and others expressed frustration and disappointment because of the visibility Ultras gained after the January 25 revolution. Hundreds joined the Ultras post-January 25 as the group gained exceptional popularity. This exponential increase in membership was not a source of joy for most of them. Ramez says,

*"It is not a trend. These guys love the Ultras, not the club. They would put on the group's t-shirt on any given day and go to the café, they don't get the Ultras mentality and the anonymity. If you asked one of them how many championships al-Ahly won, they would not know. They started to care about football only after the Port Said massacre. The Ultras is for the entity." (By "the entity," he means al-Ahly.)*

But what is al-Ahly for Ultras Ahlawy individuals? What constitutes that entity? Is it the football team or all Ahly teams? Is it the players themselves or the board? Or is it the physical spatiality? And if so, is it the one in al-Gezira or the one in Nasr City? I tried to understand the intricacies of what constitutes "the club" or "the entity" (*al-kayan*), as they call it.

When I first asked UA07 members about what al-Ahly is for them, the initial response was puzzlement and confusion. Apparently, al-Ahly cannot be reduced to its football team, as UA07 individuals support all the ballgame teams associated with the club. In addition to football, the group attends volleyball, basketball, and handball matches. When I asked them if al-Ahly for them means the players, they denied this, saying that players change but al-Ahly remains; the same applies to the board of the club. As for the physical entity, al-Ahly has two main branches, the old one in al-Gezira, very close to downtown Cairo, and the second one in Nasr City on the eastern side of Cairo. All UA07 individuals love the club in al-Gezira—Ramez describes it as “the soul of al-Ahly—but that one in Nasr City is not al-Ahly.” We must bear in mind that Ultras individuals do not have access to the whole club, rather only to the practice pitch and the indoor stadium where the handball, basketball, and volleyball matches take place. This attachment to the Gezira branch is thus questionable. All the answers to the question of what constitutes al-Ahly were vague statements. Ramez said that “al-Ahly is a symbol, name, entity,” while Adel mentioned that “al-Ahly is bigger than its players, boards, etc.” Of course, being with them in the stadium and elsewhere and listening to them talk about football would contradict many of these categorical statements. They are doubtlessly more attached to football than other games; they also feel related to the players and they have a very ambiguous relationship with the club administration.

In short, there is an imaginative element to their love of the club. The concept of al-Ahly is somehow imagined. This absolute love is also something they are inculcated with. The fans continuously listen to chants about the club’s greatness, singing these chants individually and collectively and spraying graffiti on the same theme. They learn to love the club whether it wins or losses. Thus, the principles of the Ultras and the activities they undertake such as chanting and spraying graffiti are expressive of the group, but at the same time they are constitutive of individual subjectivity. This imagined love also has a national register.

Following Anderson (1990) and his idea that the nation is an imagined political community since people would never know all those who live with them in the nation, we find that loving a club is similar in many ways where the fans do not know all Al-Ahly supporters whether the Ultras or the non-Ultras. To justify this love, the club must be “national.” The imagination of the fans must then be fed with stories and anecdotes that narrate the great national role played by al-Ahly

at different historical moments. The truthfulness of these stories is not of concern here; it is that sense of imagination, not as in fabrication, but as in possibility that I would like to emphasize.

Al-Ahly means “the national;” the founders of the club translated it as such (“the National Club”*Al-Ahly*) rather than transliterating it. *Ahl* in Arabic means “people” and the “y” at the end of the word is equal to the pronoun “my,” which is a form of the possessive case of “I” as an attributive adjective.<sup>1</sup> So Ahly may also mean “my people,” a very endearing word. Al-Ahly is known among its fans as the “club of patriotism,” as the graffiti depicted below (Figure 1) shows. Ultras individuals take pride in the patriotism of their club, narrating many tales and citing incidents glorifying al-Ahly’s role in the resistance against British colonialism, its support of the Palestinian cause, and Al-Ahly’s actions during the 1956 Suez Crisis (also called the Tripartite Aggression) and the Six-Day War in 1967. Their stories are also part of their training as Ultras; they all use the same vocabulary to tell these stories and in the same order as they appear below. The older Ultras generations extend these narratives to the younger generations. They also make chants and graffiti about these stories, as well the occasional intros and *tifos*. In addition, many web pages and books are written to augment these narratives. While the ordinary al-Ahly fan (the non-Ultras) does not necessarily know these stories, even if he is an enthusiastic fan and knowledgeable about al-Ahly’s championship history (though not its national history), it is very hard to find an Ultras individual who is not aware of them.

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of “my” is from the dictionary <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/my>.





*Figure 1: Graffiti: Al-Ahly is the club of patriotism*

Another characteristic of nationalism as described by Anderson is that it is limited, by which he means related to a specific territory; beyond this land lies another land for another nation (1990). The same is valid regarding the nationalism of the club: it exists only in comparison and in relation to rival clubs' lack of nationalism or even disloyalty. In other words, nationalism is positional and must be exhibited in relation to other factions. As the capital's clubs, al-Ahly and Zamalek have always been the bitterest rivals in the National Champion League, and the fans of each club are always claiming that their club is the best, using different ways and discourses. Al-Ahly fans are proud that al-Ahly is the club of patriotism, while, according to them, Zamalek is the club of the English colonial power. This story was even choreographed in one of the intros to an Ahly-Zamalek match, "the Dustbin of History."

Intriguingly, many fan responses indicate that they are not necessarily following the National Team matches. Even those who do tried to clarify that they do so only due to their interest in football and the game, not for nationalist reasons.

In the next section, I present various anecdotes narrated by Ultras Ahlawy individuals to demonstrate and reinforce the notion of the “club of patriotism.” I relate the stories as narrated by the fans or written on many fan websites and books to the history of the Ahly club. However, I sometime intervene to clarify certain details, or to illustrate the selectivity of their narrative and how it highlights certain details while disregarding others.

### **2.1.1- 1907 The founding of the club: Omar Lotfy and Saad Zaghloul**

*“Al-Ahly was founded for the love of Egypt, but the football itself has nothing to do with the love of Egypt.”*

Amir, UA07 individual

Omar Lotfy, the president of the High School Students Club, a political club founded in 1905, came up with the idea of the Ahly club in 1907. Nationalist leader Mostafa Kamel, with the National Party, gave speeches at the High School Students Club, which was resisted by the British occupation authority. Lotfy, a lawyer by training and a close friend of Kamel, believed that young people needed more than just a political club, so he founded al-Ahly as a sport and social club to unite Egyptian youth. The first meeting was held on April 24, 1907, which is commemorated annually by al-Ahly, and the meeting was attended by Omar Lotfy and other public figures like Ismail Sirri Pacha and Amin Sami Pacha. The first meeting was held in the home of Micheal Anas, an English consultant to the Ministry of Finance, who led the meeting. He was also chosen to be the first president of al-Ahly, a position he filled for a year before resigning and returning to Britain (Mistekawy, 1997). This detail is always overlooked when the fans tell the story of founding the club.

The founders branded the club as a national one, not only by adopting that name, but also by opening up membership to Egyptians, especially high school and college students. The membership forms were distributed in the High Schools Students Club at Omar Lotfy’s office. Moreover, Saad Zaghloul, the prominent revolutionary leader, was selected to be the president of the first general assembly of the club (Mistekawy, 1997). Websites narrating the history of al-Ahly mention that the club color (red) was inspired by the Egyptian flag, which at the time featured a crescent and star in the middle of a red background. There are numerous chants

commemorating the role of Omar Lotfy and Saad Zaghoul in founding the club, and Ultras individuals also spray graffiti of Saad Zaghoul and celebrate the anniversary of the club every year in April.

### **2.1.2- 1944: re-narrating the defeat and support for the Palestinian cause**

In 1944 the derby ended with al-Ahly defeated by Zamalek 0-6. Ultras Ahlawy consider this defeat “the honorable defeat” which, they say, is better than “the shameful victory.” They attribute the defeat to the “noble stance” of Ahly captain Mokhtar al-Titch, who accepted the invitation of Palestinian leaders in 1943 to play a couple of matches there to support the cause and show solidarity with Palestinians, who were resisting British colonialism and the British conspiracy to establish Israel.

Ultras Ahlawy individuals always say that the British colonial power was terrified of the trip so they asked Haidar Pacha, the President of Football Association, to prevent the club from travelling. The Minister of War then asked al-Titch not to travel, but al-Titch turned him down and asserted that they would travel. Haidar revoked the players’ passports, but with the help of Fuad Sirag al-Din, then Minister of Interior, they managed to get new passports and traveled to Palestine, where they were well received and celebrated by Palestinians. The short visit was extended to 23 days and they played five games in revolutionary circumstances. They were scheduled to return to play the final game against Zamalek for the Egyptian Cup Championship. The trip angered King Farouk and the British, and they blamed Haidar Pacha so the latter issued a decree suspending all al-Ahly activities for ten months. Fan protests erupted and demands were made to resume them. The National Party and its president Mostafa Kamel intervened to resolve the problem, but Haidar Pacha insisted on an apology from al-Titch as the captain of al-Ahly. In response, al-Titch wrote a famous letter, parts of which are often quoted by fans, such as, “If nationalism requires an apology, I am not honored to be a football player in the Football Association you [Haidar Pacha] are the head of it.” Fans and players staged a mass protest during which they headed to Abdin Palace, chanting against the King, British colonialism, and Haidar Pacha. The King then asked Haidar Pacha to lift the suspension. Haidar Pacha scheduled the postponed game with Zamalek only ten days after the resumption of Ahly activities. According

to fans, the defeat was completely understandable and even predictable because the team had not played for ten months and accordingly the players were unprepared. They also note that the very short notice for the game was a form of punishment for al-Ahly. They thus take pride in this defeat, which has roots in national causes.<sup>2</sup>

### **2.1.3- The role of al-Ahly during wartime and revolution**

In addition to the club's solidarity with the Palestinian cause, a documentary film on al-Ahly, made by al-Jazeera, mentions that many club members volunteered in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and many lost their lives. The documentary also states that al-Ahly supported the 1952 revolution and the military regime that ended the British occupation by setting up military training camps inside the club (Jazeera,2011).

When the discussion turned to nationalism during interviews, fans eagerly recounted stories of what al-Ahly did during various Egyptian wars. During the Suez Crisis or the Tripartite Aggression of 1956, the club collected donations. After the defeat by Israel in 1967, all athletic activities were suspended in all the clubs, and fans say that al-Ahly collected donations from its members for the military, while the board encouraged members, male and female, to respond to the nation's call and volunteer in the resistance effort. During the October 1973 war, al-Ahly organized a massive blood drive to help the military.

### **2.1.4- Saleh Selim: the maestro**

The history of the club at times converges with national history, as in the abovementioned incidents, but at other times the two diverge. It is specifically at these moments, when the club is focused solely on sports that fans need to construct stories to support their nationalist proposition. Saleh Selim was a renowned Ahly player and later became the club's president, starting in 1980 until his death in 2002. He was an Ahly icon due to his charismatic character and the unprecedented number of championships al-Ahly racked up under his leadership. Yet, these achievements are related only to the club itself. In fact, the Jazeera documentary observes that

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of the online pages narrating al-Ahly history:

<https://www.facebook.com/El.Ahly.History?fref=ts>

<http://www.ahlynews.com/beta/content/2030.html>

<http://www.ahlynews.com/beta/content/2030.html>

starting in the 1980s—the beginning of the Saleh Selim era—al-Ahly drifted away from politics and concentrated only on sports. Selim’s most famous slogan was “al-Ahly above all,” a chauvinist slogan that recalls the now current “Egypt above all.” He also created another slogan; “al-Ahly is the club of principles.” His leadership of al-Ahly was very controversial: on one hand he won numerous championships in many sports, not only football, and under his presidency al-Ahly was chosen as the club of the century. On the other hand, he led the club with a totally different strategy than his predecessors, monopolizing players and buying many players from other clubs, whereas al-Ahly had always depended on the club’s own junior footballers. In a way, his presidency witnessed the corporatization of club. All this invites us to engage with the question of capital and how the fans deal with it. This part will be fleshed out in the final discussion of the thesis.



*Figure 2: Graffiti: Saleh Selim, the Maestro*

But the fans relate a particular incident about Selim, consistently citing it when they talk about nationalism. Amir, an AU07 active, narrated it to me:

*“It was a final game for the Arab Club Championship and it was being played in Cairo stadium. The match was al-Ahly versus a Saudi team. Saleh Selim was surprised that his seat in the exclusive box was in the back seats, behind many rows of ministers and VIPs, so he asked to be moved to the front seats beside President Mubarak, saying ‘I am the president of al-Ahly club.’ He threatened not to attend the match so they had to accept his demand.”*

The fans always consider this a challenge by Selim of the Mubarak dictatorship and see Selim as victorious in the battle.

### **2.1.5- January 25: the fans replace the board**

In the various web pages and football forums that glorify the history of al-Ahly and its patriotism and even in interviews with Ultras individuals, fans relate the aforementioned incidents. When they reach the moment of the recent uprising in Egypt, they point to the participation of fans, specifically Ultras Ahlawy, in the revolution, and they use this to cover the reactionary position of the club administration, which backed Mubarak and the old regime. It is also important to highlight that many of the Ultras Ahlawy individuals who participated in the revolution insist that their participation was motivated by nationalism, not politics. Commenting on the Ultras’ participation in the revolution, Adel and Amir completed each other’s sentences as they spoke:

*“Ultras is not a political group, we don’t belong to the streets. We are a national group and we belong to the terrace. We just believe in the principles of the revolution like everyone else who participated. We are football people.”*

Asking Ultras Ahlawy individuals if they perceive the current board as nationalistic as the previous ones reveals the contradictions inherent in their attitude toward the club’s administration. The fans say that this board is not patriotic, but the Ultras paid the club’s nationalist dues to the revolution. Amir, an AU07 individual, said,

*“This board does not represent the Ahly club at all. The club belongs to its fans, this club is ours. This board will leave someday. We just don’t want to bring this board down, to preserve the interests of the club and because we are winning.”*

Why do Ultras individuals dissociate themselves from anything political? Why do they consider the revolution a national event rather than a political one? From my research and readings, I could not reach a plausible answer to these questions. The reason might be their constant discipline as national subjects, and that they belong to the terrace rather than the street. Another possibility is that the Ultras came into being in Egypt in 2007, in an era of complete

depoliticization of the club and the demonization of politics. This question requires further investigations.

## **2.2- What kind of community does nationalism create? Nationalism as binding glue between the fans and the club**

At this point I want to take the discussion into a different vein, away from the constructed narratives about the nationalism of the club and towards an examination of why nationalism is invoked in the first place in the construction of the Ultras subject. Why do the fans need to hold to a national discourse regarding their club? How do they deal with all the contradictions this nationalist discourse creates?

I argue here that nationalism is crucial for Ultras subjectivity. Nationalism has always functioned as a social balm to bolster class differences (Hobsbawm, 1990). If it were not for the popular nationalist sentiment prevalent among the Ultras, their resistance to the club's board would have been severely radicalized. The central question in this part is about the nature of football as commodity and hence the nature of the production relations between different parties in the production process. Marxist relations of production suggest that football clubs on one hand and Ultras and football supporters on the other form a relationship of producer and consumer (Kennedy& Kennedy, 2010). The communal nature of football is actually the most important reason for the instability of the commodity structure. Since football is a cultural collective practice, there is always a tension between football as a traditional, local neighborhood activity and a hyper-commoditized, commercialized, and interest-based industry; this is in fact the dialectical nature of football (Kennedy& Kennedy, 2010). Ultras fans are facing the hyper-commodification of the game. In many ways they are resisting forms of this commodification, but at the same time they cannot totally separate themselves from the club, since they still require the partial endorsement of the club and must attend practices and matches; they also need the club to act as a buffer between them and the state. All these factors help explain why they need this imaginative bond with the club's board.

Stories and anecdotes are always used by the fans to prove the greatness of al-Ahly. The stories are repeatedly used in chants, *tifos* and cheering; they are tools to create "the common" between people of one nation or community, which is shared histories. In one of the chants, the fans say



“all my life, I tell stories about al-Ahly”, the stories create what is quintessential as al-Ahly as national club, and as Anderson contends, the shared histories and common things in one nation make people forget many other things like the inequality. We can deploy the same argument here: the role of al-Ahly as a national team and club makes its Ultras fans disregard inequalities between them and the club’s members or board members since they are all “al-Ahly supporters”. Love of al-Ahly here becomes the horizontal comradeship bond that conceals the inequalities.

In his definition of the nation, Anderson posits that the nation is an imagined concept. The Ultras need this imaginative concept and nationalism firstly to assert the greatness of their club and secondly to reconcile with the club’s board. Nationalism here is the connective tissue between the fans and the administration. Anderson explains how the citizen does not know his fellow citizens but nevertheless feels attached to them; the same applies to the UA07 and the board, as the fans view both as entities working for the interest of the club.

### **2.3- Ultras between nationalism and transnationalism: football fandom in a globalized context**

Do the individuals of Ultras Ahlawy identify more with the members of al-Ahly or with the Ultras of other groups in other countries?

Many interviewees repeatedly noted that, “the Ultras is a mentality.” This slogan is quite ambiguous. It sometimes refers to the lifestyle of the fans. At other times, it is used to describe the Ultras as a movement. That was the case after the massacre, when both the Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights had a joint meeting and agreed they would work together to claim the rights of the martyrs. They issued a joint statement on March 12, 2012, saying that they were wrong to foster enmity between the two groups and that they care about the Ultras as an ideal. They asserted that they would not be amicable, but would defend the Ultras as a collective. Many capos use the word “movement” to describe different Ultras groups in Egypt and the threats they faced.

In addition to national solidarity, we must bear in mind that Ultras groups are transnational as well. The first Ultras groups emerged in southern Europe, in France and Italy (Guschwan, 2007), and many groups have since emerged in many regions. Different groups in different countries borrow melodies and cheers from each other, and they support each other in hardship and crisis.

Sometimes, two Ultras groups from two different countries engage in “twinning.” For some time, Ultras Ahlawy was twinned with the Ultras Esperance, which supports the Tunisian Taragya club. As part of the twinning, each Ultras group receives its counterpart when in one another’s country, and they defend and back each other in various situations. Ultras groups are also bound by transnational solidarity. Many Ultras groups worldwide condemned the Port Said massacre, and some even refused to deal with the Ultras Green Eagles due to their alleged participation in the massacre.

It is obvious that Egyptian Ultras groups are part of a larger transnational movement that defends the rights of the spectators. This invites us to think more about the strength of the national discourse in the transnational context.

In conclusion, the Ultras Ahlawy may be part of a larger, transnational Ultras scene, but a strong national narrative prevails among them. It is a constructive element in their relationship to the club as administration and as historical entity. The training of the Ultras subject comprises a didactical element on the role of al-Ahly as the club of patriotism. This nationalist discourse might impede a more rooted resistance to the policies of the club’s board.

### 3- Chapter Three: All Boys Love Football: The Ultras Masculine Subject

In this chapter, I discuss how boys are introduced to football as a masculine game and then how they learn to internalize this through playing, cheering and fighting. I then expand on the question of violence to clarify some of the mystified aspects of the relation between Ultras, violence and the state engaging notions of masculinity. Finally, I present their arguments on gender exclusivity of the group and discuss them along the group's gender dynamics, conceptions of manhood and fraternity.

#### 3.1-From father to son: Introduction to the game

An early discursive moment many studies refer to is when fans are first introduced to the game by their fathers, elder brothers or other male relative. Both Chiweshe and Robson pointed out to these early moments in constructing the fan (Robson. 2000, p72; Chiweshe, 2011, p.178-179). Tracing how boys are introduced to football is key to understanding the association between this game and boys and men. It is an early moment of enunciation.

Love of football for boys, in most cases, is embodied in them as a normative value and as part of a whole value system, a process we can describe as “boying the boys”, a term inspired by Butler's concept of “girling” where she describes the processes of turning females to girls by playing with lipsticks and other acts (Salih, 2007, P61). Similarly, we can notice how the first popular game in Egypt is being socialized as a masculine game. Parents bring T-shirts of popular players to their children. Fathers are eager to make their sons supporters of the teams they themselves support. The boy learns to grow attachment to the team's t-shirt and the team becomes present in material objects and not only as a TV game or something to be merely watched. Asking Ultras individuals on how they were introduced to football and specifically to al-Ahly as a team, answers ranged between father or older relative who passed the love of the game to them or if the family is not interested in football, the young boy would find his passion in football through school mates. Adel, a 30 year old Ultras individual narrates his story with the stadium saying:

*“My father was a very committed fan; he used to go to the stadium to attend al-Ahly matches. I cannot recall my first time in the stadium, I was too young to remember.” Speaking on why he chose al-Ahly like his father, he said, “My father has not obligated me to support al-Ahly, I was fascinated by his belonging to al-Ahly. He was a true believer that al-Ahly is the best team even when al-Ahly loses. I was watching the matches and there was always the red team (al-Ahly) and the white team (Zamalek) I found myself belonging to the red team*

*without my father instructing me. I just found myself loving it. It something planted into you”.*

Ramez, a famous *capo* of UA07 says he was introduced to football through his elder brother and he recalls memories of wearing al-Ahly T-shirts under his school uniform to be able to go to the match after the school without his family knowing about it. This early discipline makes the boys identify the color of the team they supposedly support; even when they still don't fully grasp what this game is all about. They learn to cheer when the team scores and scream and get angry when the team loses. All these learning and disciplining processes contribute to their “boying,” they listen to their fathers curse while watching the matches and in many families the time of the match is a time of emergency at home as men become nervous and the climate becomes explosive. Young boys embody this spectatorship cult.

Many fans cite the first match they can recall as transformative experience, something similar to the “Rite de Passage” as this kind of exposure transforms and changes the state of the young boy (Turner, 1969, p.94). Here the young boy separates from his life as he knew it before and migrates to adopt these spectatorship norms and then integrate it back to his life.

Another Rite de Passage is the first time the young boy enters the stadium. Adel, although not remembering his first time in the stadium but he remembers the life changing experience he had with his father once, he says

*“I remember once, my father took me to Cairo stadium and it was a testimonial match for one of al-Ahly players, I can't remember who. I remember that in this match, I went to the playground and shook hands with the players and as a little boy, they hugged and took photos with me. That made me very attached to the stadium. For me, watching the game in the stadium is worth the whole world.”*



*Figure 3: From father to son: an older fan accompanies his younger relative to the stadium*

As for those who do not have a male relative, who would play the role model, they always find their passion at school through playing football with their schoolmates and consequently they start to develop this passion by watching matches at home or with friends.

### **3.2- The Violence Paradox**

According to Judith Butler, gender attributes are constructed from a very early age in boys and girls lives. It is crucially important to bear in mind how football is socialized as a masculine game. It is the game for boys in Egypt; it is the first popular game.

In this section, I explain the Ultras complicated relation to violence. I will first discuss their violent encounters with both the other fan groups and the police in relation to masculinity. Then, I will focus on their violence vis-à-vis state violence inspecting it from the lens of legitimacy.

By the violence paradox, I mean how Ultras individuals always reaffirm they are non-violent, nevertheless, they are usually caught in violent situations whether against the police or between the different Ultras groups. Ultras individuals are very aware to distinguish themselves from Hooligans.

While hooligans glorify violence and seek it, Ultras, theoretically, do not believe in violence, consequently they do not initiate violence. Rather, they keep their right to defend themselves and defend the group. There are two main kinds of confrontations or violent encounters in which the Ultras are involved. One is with the police and the other is between different Ultras groups.

First, we have to make the connection between violence and joy and excitement and their role in constituting the masculinity of these young boys (Robson,2000,p. 74). Researchers of gangsters examined this relation between violence and physical excitement; the group celebrates its abilities to defeat the enemy. Second, the concept of “defending the group and the group’s honor” is vital in understanding the Ultras’ violent encounters. UA07’s individuals justify the violence against other groups and against the police by saying they are defending the group’s honor.

Disputes between different groups arise for various reasons. For example, stealing the group’s banner or the flag is considered a sign of disgrace for the whole group and would definitely spark a fight to defend the honor of the group. In such incidents, a group organizes what is called “entrapment” *kameen*, where they know individuals of the rival group would pass by specific area with the banners; they wait for them, steal the banners or the T-shirts or beat them up. The fights do not erupt only between different Ultras groups supporting rival teams; sometimes Ultras groups who are supporting the same team would fight over the control of the terrace. A fight between Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras Devils (both groups are al-Ahly supporters) erupted during the match I have attended with them in Gouna in August 2013 because Ultras Devils wanted to take over Ultras Ahlawy’s seats. Most of these confrontations do not get very serious, one of Ultras Ahlawy's individuals referred to them in an interview as “folkloric”. Using this specific term may index the performative nature of the violence enacted between the different groups. Robson stresses the importance of the performative aspects of violence in his thesis on Millwall fans explaining that boys are expected to contribute by their bodies to this collective sociality as they are expected to show physical valiancy to their peers and rivals as well (Robson, 2000, p.79).

Yet, these battles between different Ultras groups are not always performative or of small-scale. Before the tragedy of Port Said massacre, many “Capos” of different groups were worried about the escalating level of violence between different fans; they feared that this new trend is pulling

the wider Ultras movement in Egypt to a more violent turn that might have grave consequences. Some of them explained this tendency to some individuals' desire to adopt more hooligans-like culture.

On the other hand, their confrontations with the Ministry of Interior are more serious and frequent than the battles between different fans groups. First of all, enmity with police is one of the most important Ultras' ideals. The fan is being familiarized with this on discursive level by slogans like "A.C.A.B" which means All Cops Are Bastards, by chants, which describe police as "crows". On the everyday level, the Ultras have to face the police in most of the matches, since the police bans the fans' entrance to the stadium if they are carrying any cheering aids like banners, flares.....etc. Sometimes, they object to the group's T-shirts. The police is thus seriously threatening Ultras' chances for joy and for supporting their team the way they like. In other words, the police emerges as the key opposition to the whole idea of collective organized fandom. A detailed account for the different encounters between Ultras Ahlawy and the police is detailed in Chapter Six. Here, I want to focus more on the discourse used to justify or reframe the violence between the Police and Ultras Ahlawy. These clashes, definitely, contribute to and reaffirm specific masculine values. During all the interviews, fans took pride in being able to beat up the police, they often boasted of their knowhow that everybody else lacked in their fights with the police during the early days of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January uprising. Showing bravery in fights is central in the construction of Ultras masculinity.

Beside defending the group's honor as mentioned before, young boys are always encouraged to defend themselves against bullying, and particularly in working class settings, boys are expected to defend themselves physically. This does not mean to be indiscriminately violent, but there is a critical balance that Farha Ghanam describes as "the real man" or *reegil bi gad or gada*, which indexes a man in terms of a mix of chivalrous, strong and honest. (Ghanam, 2013, p.53, 54).\

Ultras Ahlawy are not strictly working class organizations. Yet, interpretations of popular class' masculinities or masculinities of European fandom groups or gangsters should not be overlooked as the collective factor is important in understanding these young fans. Unlike Ultras groups in Europe - where theorists and academics can easily make claims about the homogeneity of the structure of organized fandom as belonging to specific class or social strata- this is not the case in Egypt where the group is overwhelmingly consisting of young boys (14 years olds- to early

twenties). Age and more broadly generation, plays a more determining role rather than class in the making of the ultras. The organization is relatively a cross-class but still those of a middle and lower class background have a significant presence.

Informed by gang literature, it might appear that these collective violent incidents serve as a connective tissue and binding factor among the Ultras collectivity. I will elaborate further on the nexus of violence and collective in the fraternity section where defending your friend's back is among the defining characteristics of the Ultras. The violence here would contribute to building a collective "physical capital" for the group and also a repertoire of actions related to "insults and counter insults, claims and counter claims, threat and counter-threat" (Robson, 2000,p. 78-81).

An important aspect to be examined here is the legitimacy of the ultras' battles according to them and how they re-define violence. Yet, away from the association of violence with bravery and manhood, a question of legitimacy is critical in addressing Ultras' clashes with the police. For long time before January 2011, organized football fandom," Ultras groups" in Egypt have been faced with police brutality, arrests and threats. Police was then facing what they propagated as a group of "deviant youth" who committed illegal acts ranging from flare ignition and singing to physical confrontation with rival fans and ending up with confrontation with the security forces themselves. Reproducing the police discourse, various media outlets portrayed the Ultras in a similar vein, and presenting them to (and by) society as male-dominated communities of football fanatics.

Ultras tried many a time to challenge the dominant notion of the legitimate violence of the "repressive state apparatus," if we are to use Althuseer words. Revolution further helped them in refining their counter-hegemonic discourse in which they tried to delegitimize state violence against them. After the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, and more specifically after Port-Said massacre in February 2012, Ultras Ahlawy started to escalate their enmity and violence against the police. Several marches were organized against the police and army's complicity in the massacre, beside a sit-in in April 2012. In the protests and marches, the fans used slogans aiming at delegitimizing the violence perpetrated by the repressive state apparatus. These slogans included "*al-Dakhlya baltageya*" or "ministry of interior are thugs" and "The thug with the shield and the stick, who calls himself a government". They were also insulting the police and the army in a more aggressive way through their terrace chants. In a way, the Ultras individuals were trying to reveal



and expose the violence perpetrated by the state by using these statements through which they transcended from the symbolic to the actual and vice versa.

The Ultras' confrontations with the police did not stop at the level of rhetoric or even the level of the stadium fights and protests. Ultras individuals were always at the frontlines in the recurrent clashes between people and the police throughout 2011, 2012 and 2013.

On March 9, 2013, hundreds of Ultras Ahlawy (UA07) individuals protested against the court rule acquitting twenty-eight police officers who were accused of taking part in Port Said Stadium massacre. The angry protests that erupted that day ended up with burning down the police's football club and the Egyptian Football Union. Ultras leaders denied any responsibility for "the riots" while their press statement which clearly says "What happened today in Cairo is just the beginning of the anger.. Wait for more if all the actors involved in the massacre will not be disclosed" (Ultras Ahlawy, 2013)

I talked to many of ultras about their responsibility for burning down the police club, almost all of them denied any responsibility in what happened. One 20 year old guy who was the only one to admit taking part in burning down of the club said that this was anger and not violence and when he was requested to differentiate between this binary he said that anger has reasons and is justified while violence is not. His response is very telling about how it is important for people to distance themselves from "the accusation" of inflicting violence to the extent that they have to mask these acts with more acceptable or at least less inadmissible disguises like anger.

Here comes the power of ideological state apparatus. These young boys cannot admit their relation to any violent act not only to avoid legal liability but also due to the power created by the ISAs about the myth of "the non-violent revolutionary youth *al-shabāb al-tāhir*. This term that was created and promoted by the media outlets aimed at criminalizing any act of revolutionary violence like burning down of police stations in the early days of the revolution by claiming that only thugs were involved in these incidents while the pure revolutionary youth were peaceful non-violent protesters. This battle was so fierce to the extent that there was a huge dispute in media and social media outlets whether to consider those who died in front of the police stations thugs or martyrs. Here again, we go back to Althusser and his proposition on how ideology interpellates the subjects (Althusser, 1970). The Ultras individuals here are captive of the ideological state apparatus in assigning meaning. In other words and as eloquently articulated by Orser "Every power is condemned with symbolic violence because of its ability to impose meaning which legitimizes violence" (Orser Jr., 2005, 393).

The subject interpellation is not only manifested in their confused situation from violence but also in their belief in the judiciary system despite their absolute lack of faith in the police and the army. They have gone through the whole legal path starting from filing complaints, collecting evidences and providing testimonies in order to gain justice to the martyrs of Port-Said massacre. Some of them would argue that they do this to satisfy the martyrs' families. But many of the Ultras individuals expect justice from official institutions. Nonetheless, it is still very questionable why they resort to the state as the guarantor of justice despite the fact that the state here is the perpetrator of violence lashed against them. Is it conceivable that the group lost faith in the repressive arm of the state, but they in a way, still believe in the concept of the state and its more bureaucratic reparation processes, bearing in mind that courts are part of the repressive state apparatus as well? A totally different position towards the judiciary was expressed by the individuals of Ultras White Knights after the defense of the stadium massacre in February 2015 – the second massacre against the Ultras in Egypt after the revolution. This time the White Knights individuals declared through their official page on Facebook that they are not seeking justice through the judiciary system as these courts never brought justice to people. In a way, delegitimizing militant revolutionary violence in favor of constructed glorified non-violence.

### **3.3- Gender exclusivity, gender dynamics and fraternity;**

Ultras groups in Egypt have been always accused of being patriarchal because they are male-dominated communities who do not allow women among them. First, we have to be careful and not equate gender exclusivity with patriarchy as using the two terms interchangeably is imprecise and might lead to quick conclusions regarding the complicated gender dynamics in this group. In the next section I try to enumerate the reasons UA07's individuals gave for their exclusion of women and girls out of the organization, then their wider dynamics regarding having girls amongst them are discussed, and finally I draw some remarks from my personal ethnographic experience as a female researcher among this overwhelming male presence.

Violence is the most cited reason of why girls are not included in Ultras. Fans say that there is no room for girls in the Ultras as the hostile climate in the stadium and elsewhere, make the fans all set for a fight, the presence of the girls in the middle of fights would definitely distract the fans from fighting. Others would universalize claiming that this is not something specific to the Egyptian context, as Amir 23 years old UA07 mentioned to me “Ultras No Women, it is a well-known rule”. In the face of these justifications that tend to universalize, there are other justifications which rely heavily on the relativization, where so many of Ultras Ahlawy told me at different occasions that we are an oriental community that does not allow boys and girls to mingle with each other. A *capo*, in an interview, told me the presence of the girls might create problems and disputes over relationships. There were also some confused responses; Bola, a relatively old individual told me

*“Actually, I don’t really know. It might be because we are an oriental society, some groups in other countries have women, but this is not the case in Egypt and this might be attributed to the abundance of our problems and we don’t want girls to get hurt. I was not interested in such an issue and we did not ask the older generations in the group about it. Personally, I have an objection, at least at this stage, for several reasons. The way boys look at girls is problematic and requires much time to be reformed, we also encounter so many problems and if I am amid clashes, am I supposed to beat my rivals or protect my friend’s back or protect the girl?”*

The presence of women might be viewed as threatening to the ties between men since disputes and fights might erupt because of women. Some Ultras individuals gave answers that signify their indifference to the whole issue and negating any responsibility to this exclusivity. Ramez, the prominent UA07’s *capo* said in the interview “We just chose to be only boys. If girls wanted to have their own group, they have the liberty to do so. We have not prevented them from doing so.”

Another problematic incident was during Ultras Ahlawy’s sit-in in April 2012. In the middle of the sit-in which took place in the vicinity of the cabinet near El-Qasr El-Ainy in Cairo to protest the state deceleration in taking the proper legal action in response to Port-Said massacre, a sign was held stating the rules of the sit-in. Among such rules were “Girls are not allowed to be present in the sit-in after 10 pm;” “Girls are not allowed to smoke in the sit-in.” Such rules

provoked many revolutionaries at the time. Some famous female activists insisted on going to the sit-in minutes before the Cinderella's timing that the Ultras determined for women to go back home to make a point that they will resist these rules. A group of feminist activists – including myself- visited the sit-in an hour before our time to leave and we started to spray feminist graffiti in the sit-in. Photos of famous female actresses saying “there is nothing for men only”, a name of the movie from the sixties about two women who wanted to invade the field of petroleum engineering which was exclusive to men and other graffiti were sprayed. Many of UA07 individuals gathered around us to discuss the fact that girls are banned from spending the night at the sit-in and as usual responses and justifications varied significantly. A number of them said they are not allowed to cite any reason to us in this regard and if we want to address this issue, we have to talk to their leaders and “capos,” others would say it in different manner “We don't mind the presence of women but this is the group's decision. Ismail, a former “capo” I met mid-2012, told me that girls' staying over-night is a huge jeopardy for the whole group since the media is already aggressive against them and will abuse this to defame the sit-in and to spread rumors that Ultras individuals are having sex with girls and are using drugs in the tents of the sit-in and they cannot afford this. All the debates erupted on this issue failed to convince them to change their minds and the banner remained there and active for the whole two weeks of the sit-in.

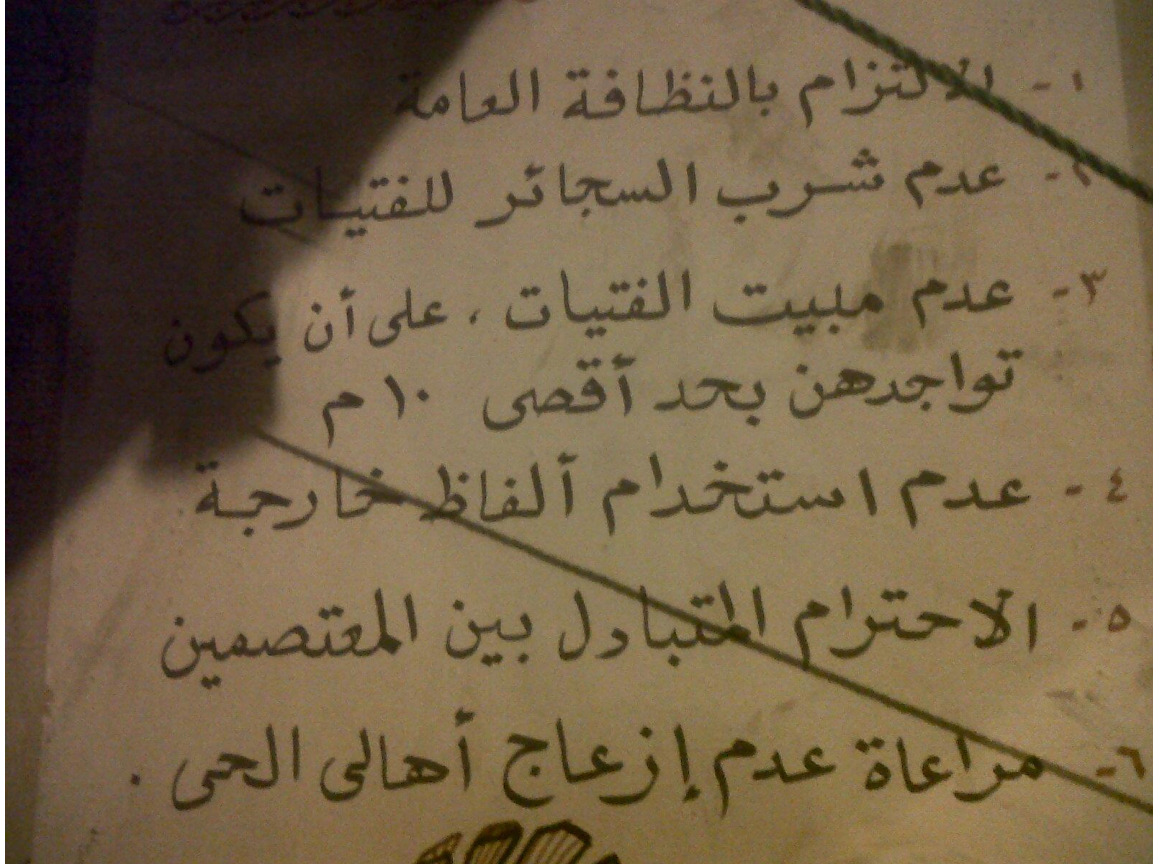


Figure 4: The guidelines held in UA07 sit-in, photo taken by me

As a female researcher, my presence among them in the stadium, in marches, or public meetings was never an easy thing and I never got used to it, nor did they. In every field visit, I encountered their striking smell, the smell of something very young, enthusiastic and very manly. Their encounters with me could be framed in gender hyper performativity framework. They performed their masculine gender in a manner that at each minute, I was reminded that I am woman; it is not a field where gender could ever take a back seat. My field visit taught me that I would either be very visible or totally invisible. In a public meeting that I attended in March 27, 2013, a meeting in Nasr City, in the vicinity of the stadium that was booking the new T-shirts produced by the group, in a sideway beside the 6<sup>th</sup> of October panorama, at 9 pm. The setting was dark with hundreds of young men scattered all over the street island and the rest standing in big chunks. In no time, I was screened and a guy approached me to ask me who I am, what I wanted and I what I was doing there. This attitude of instant screening and acknowledging presence was dominant at all the times I attended a match or training with them.

The group leaders in a way are practicing a form of biopolitics in controlling the group and maintaining its male exclusivity, guarding it against female trespassing. It is noticeable how the control of the group is naturalized as if it is “something aside within the genealogy of sex” (Wallenstein, 2013, p.11). However, this policing and interrogative attitude was not there in their treatment with me in the stadium or the club. Instead, there was the protective attitude, they would make room for me in the terrace that allowed me to stand in relative seclusion; they would warn anyone who would touch me – even by mistake. When the *capos* were throwing bottles of water on the fans while we were in the stadium, I was, like the rest, thirsty and trying to catch a bottle. The mission was not that easy, I was competing with Ultras after all but a fan came across and took the bottle from the guy next to me before he even opened it and gave it to me to drink and all this happened in absolute silence. Hyper-performing the protective masculine chivalrous boy dictated my encounters with the Ultras.

This staggering presence would at other times turn into complete negligence. During my drive with the group to Gouna to attend a match, a whole bus managed to successfully ignore and avoid talking to me or even acknowledge my presence for five hours, except for some hideous comments about the presence of a woman at the beginning of the trip. And even on our way back, they talked to me only twice for purely logistical matters. In the rest house, I was dying to get out of the bus and stretch for a bit, this was when my accompanying “capo” told me “Do you really want to get out of the bus? I can get you what you need here. The presence of a single female among 3000 fan was not something he wanted to sort out. I stayed. I felt he wanted me to disappear. This avoidance is yet another face for performing manhood in an exclusionary manner this way.

What constitutes a real man in the Ultras’ perception does not seem to preoccupy them. Every time I asked them about manhood values, they gave blank face. Yet, articulations of manhood might appear in their conversation and they usually couple it with heroism. Habi, a former active Ultras individual was talking about Port-Said massacre when he said, “Only those who died were the real men”.

Ultras rituals and performances might in so many ways be considered paradoxical to “real manhood”. A famous malt beverage advertisement, released couples of years ago, depicted different kinds of fans cheering for their teams. The advertisement portrayed all the dancing,

jumping, singing and crying as unmanly characteristics and there was an re-enactment to all the cheering scenes after they drank the beverage and they became very aggressive and then the slogan appeared “Man Up!.

### **3.4-Ultras as fraternity: Together Forever**

Fraternity could be a plausible framework to further understand many of the groups’ convictions and values. “Ultras Mentality”, a vague motto always used to explain Ultras behavior and, it is always used to denote bravery, innovation, loyalty, unpredictability and many other qualities. One of these qualities is the brotherhood between the fans to the extent that “the real Ultras” would come sometimes as substitute to “real man”. On the road with UA07 back to Cairo from Gouna, a fan had a severe renal colic and we were looking for a pharmacy on the road urgently. While some fans took the issue lightly, another one told them preachingly that the real ultras would not let his brother in pain without help.

It is noteworthy that Egypt lacks the brotherhoods and sisterhood culture; and interestingly enough, the only other brotherhood known is the Muslim Brotherhood. We can look here at this brotherhood as the first route to form communitarian ties between the individuals of the group. I will argue in the next section how this community is formed, using Zibechi’s contentious politics and urban communities in his *Dispersing Power*. First, UA07 constitutes what Zibechi calls “non-divided community”, so there is no separate entity or militant group responsible for the confrontations, the whole group participates in the insurgencies (Zibechi, 2010, p.16). Moreover, Zibechi talks about the importance of shared experiences to form a community, namely shared lifestyle, collective pleasures and collective deprivation (Zibechi, p.23). Ultras may be looked at, as an organization or a brotherhood that is pleasure-oriented. People gather in the stadium, they sing, dance, cheer for their team, fight and protect each other’s’ backs, and outside the stadium, they would play video-games and go to their cafes together; older generations help the younger ones in their lessons, they attend each other’s social occasions, help each other financially and in the case of massacre, the fraternity outlived the death itself as the group each year commemorates the massacre; they write on their FaceBook pages in the memory of each one of the seventy-four martyrs’ birthdays; they pay visits to their families and



accompany parents of the martyrs to matches to be allow them experience what their sons died for.

If you are passing by a group of Ultras, a very common scene you would encounter is young boys walking putting their hands over each other's shoulders. This scene is best captured in a mobile network advertisement that was highlighting different groups of the Egyptian people and on the segment on Ultras, you would see group of enthusiastic fans jump up and down while putting hands on each other's shoulders and chant "Oh my friend and I are shoulder to shoulder, his presence reassures me. I know he will be by my side no matter how nuts I went... he is not a family... nor a father... nor an uncle but he chose to stand by me", this voluntary fraternity is what they are willing to die for.



*Figure 5: Graffiti: Together Forever*



*Figure 6: Fraternity*

While many sports anthropologists adopt Bourdieu's habitus to illustrate and account for this fraternity, I find Weberian status more insightful here. This also resonates with Zibechi's reading of Weber in his differentiation between association and community, as the former is related to self-interest and representation, while community connotes relations between subjects seeking to constitute a whole and it is not about representation, rather it is about solidarity (Zibechi, 2010, p.29). This thesis explains many of the Ultras ethos including anonymity and self-denial, so people in the group are not concerned to declare that they are Ultras; on the contrary they hide it and they always prioritize the interests of their fellow Ultras before their own. This desire for anonymity is also reflected in their anti-media stance. Another important aspect of this fraternal community is the shared management of resources. The organization is self-funded, unlike the fans unions that used to precede the Ultras and which were funded by clubs' boards. Ultras self-funding, according to them, is important for the autonomy of their decisions. The small circle of trust- which is composed of the *capos*, actives and those who are selected to be in the "secret group"- collect the money by selling the groups' products. So, each year, the group has a set of products including T-shirts, hoodies, polo-shirts, hats, scarves, trousers, shorts, CDs...etc. They announce through Facebook page meetings for prior booking for these products, where the whole group goes and pays in advance. After a month or so another meeting is arranged to hand people their purchases. Similar arrangements happen for journeys to follow al-Ahly in their matches. The money is managed by the small group mentioned before, they use it to buy the supplies needed for the intros in the matches and the *tifos*, they use it also to produce their CDs, to cover the travel costs if the money they collected was not enough.

## **4- Chapter Four: the Ultras: Here Comes the Carnival**

This chapter engages with the core activities of the fans in the stadium, namely cheering for the team through chants and ritualized performances. I will first address the chanting in the stadium: how do the chants enable the group to constitute communitarian ties? What is the group's sonic repertoire? What do the Ultras sing for? I will then look at these chants in the broader performative context, examining the performances as spectacle and how the stadium is transformed into a stage. I will focus on the intros the group perform at beginning of matches and move then to the concept of carnival and see how it applies to the stadium performances. I will rely on theories of performance and affective labor, both of which will allow a better understanding of the Ultras' performance.

### **4.1- The Roar of the terrace**

One of the astounding and defining features of the Ultras is their sound. Their chants never fail to induce goosebumps or bring a lump to one's throat, even in just passing by the stadium without the visual aspect of the performance. In the next section I will be looking at the sound as a constitutive agent in the Ultras' subjectivity, through examining how the voice plays a pivotal role in constituting a community as well as the mobility of the community of Ultras Ahlawy, how they move around but at the same time claim a territory through sound and performance. Then, I will look at the chants and songs produced by UA07 in an attempt to answer the question of what these fans are singing for, how they sing, and in the act of singing how they define the presence of a collective.

#### **4.1.1- Acoustic community**

In a megacity like Cairo, one is confronted by a myriad of sounds and voices. Yet the UA07's soundscape is hard to miss even in the acoustic chaos that overwhelms the city. The group's sound functions as a distinctive factor; if a person is passing by and hears their chopped, harmonized chanting, it is an announcement of the Ultras' presence. Since the group is committed to cheering for their team the entire 90 minutes of the game,

they must chant for the duration, which invites us to think about how this experience of extensive performance and chanting influence both the individual and the group as a whole.

It is important though to stress that “terrace songs” are not the Ultras’ invention. Their singing must be situated in the longer history of cheering by football fans as well as community singing in general. Before the Ultras, the fans—specifically those in the third-class seats, where the Ultras now sit — would sing for their team, cheering their players while insulting the players of the rival team or their own players if they felt their performance fell short. A cheerleader also led the fans with a whistle and/or percussion. Cheer-leaders were paid at times to praise or attack particular players, thus settling grievances between players. The song quality of these unorganized fans differed hugely from what we witness today with the Ultras, but they can still be considered the direct precursor of the current Ultras’ chanting. Ultras’ obsession with harmonization constitutes a significant difference between the chanting of regular fans and Ultras (I will discuss the role of this harmonization in the making of the community and the professionalization of fandom later). Another indirect precursor of group singing can be found in workers’ songs in Egypt and songs of fighters and soldiers during wars. In her study, Alia Mosallam (2012) argues that different communities in Egypt after the 1952 coup used songs as “intimate language” to express meanings whose full connotative range only they would understand. The workers on the High Dam and fighters in Suez and Port Said during battles against Israel all formed communities in which songs and collective singing played a significant role.

The voice of the fans has a central role within the Ultras. The heavy emphasis on synchronized singing capitalizes on the benefits of community. On the one hand, chants unite fans through their vocalization; with some researchers suggesting that these songs build ties between different fans forming an acoustic community (Kyto, 2011). The fan learns how to fade into the group vocally. It is no longer his individual voice but rather the roar of the crowd. The communitarian ties that are built through this collective singing can be seen as a way for the group to overcome class, regional, age, and other differences (Russel, 2008, p.127).

The vocal performance of Ultras Ahlawy is also a tool to demarcate their presence geographically. This is the spatial element in their soundscape. The Ultras' sound-based territorialization is bound to a specific place (the stadium, and more specifically the curve) while also being a mobile territorialization that delimits and declares their presence if they chant elsewhere, such as the street or on the bus. Within the stadium, UA07 seeks to demarcate their seating area, which is the northern curve of the stadium seats. This classification by area is the first aspect of establishing territoriality, followed by the communicative aspect and the control the group enforces over that specific area (Schnooderweord, 2011, p. 132–33). UA07's chants play the role of the communicative component in the territorialization process and moreover act as a tool of imposing control over the stadium, as the roar in the terrace deters the fans of the rival team and security forces from attacking their space in the stadium. The power of UA07's sound is not limited to the stadium; their harmonized choring signals their presence wherever they are. This is best evidenced by the "cortege," a term the Ultras groups use to describe the parade they carry out when Ultras follow their team to a far away game, marching in the host city behind the Ultras banner while they ignite flares, chant, and announce the arrival of their team. Here the chants establish an ephemeral territorialization. Their sound can be described as "a sound out of place," as Woodward called it when narrating his experience of being locked in the metro with dozens of football fanatics celebrating a victory. He remarked that the vocal presence of the group transcended their physical one (Woodward, 2011, p. 76).

The acoustic community is formed through harmony, which explains why the capos do not tolerate any dissonance. The synchronization in singing is pivotal for them. Capos stand in the stadium facing the fans and leading the chants through call and response techniques. If a capo notices that one group in the stadium is not keeping proper time with the chants, he makes the sign which means "stop" by opening his hand and closing his fist repeatedly. He then makes the group listen to the rest to know where they are before having them join the singing again.



*Figure 7: The capo is leading the synchronized chanting, photo credits: UA07 FB Page*

Observers of community singing in Britain after WWI saw the singing as a transfigurative process that turns the passive, modern listener into active singers (Russell, 2008, p. 128). A similar argument can be made about the Ultras, who believe in an active role for spectators, who should not remain silent and watch the game without asserting their presence. At the same time, the activation of the spectators' role is itself a disciplining process. It cannot be fully read as resistance to the modern, silent spectator, but is a more complicated process in which spontaneous singing, dissonance, and chaotic performances are no longer accepted and are supplanted by a systematic professionalization of football fans. In other words, the process of memorizing the chants and singing them in harmony is a process of turning these fans into affective labor, a concept that will be further discussed below. UA07 individuals are fully aware of the significance of their voice and its role, and they express this repeatedly in their chants. As one of their chants states, "I have nothing but my voice and a fearless heart." They also boast that their voice rocks the mountains. This power of sound is a double-edged sword: on one hand it protects the group and intimidates their rivals, but on the other hand, it allows many people to reduce this complicated group to just a roaring sound. Explaining why the Ultras participated in the revolution, Sambo, a capo, mentioned that the Ultras wanted to prove that they are more than just a sonic phenomenon.



*Figure 8: The Capo is leading the synchronized chanting. Photo credits: UA07 FB Page*

#### **4.1.2- What do the Ultras sing for?**

First, I want to shed the light on the role of songs and hymns in the making of the Ultras Ahlawy subject. These chants provide the fans an everyday praxis. Memorizing the chants is crucial, enabling the fans to sing them in the stadium. The fan typically buys the CD or has the songs on his computer, mobile phone, or MP3 player. Fans listen to the songs repeatedly, and they hum them during their gatherings and their trips following the football team inside or outside Egypt. Moreover, the fans use these chants as their ringtones and call tones. In the stadium, they also repeat the same chants several times, especially the new ones, which facilitates memorization.

Repetition of the chants is worth contemplation. In any given match or practice, the group never sings a chant once. They usually repeat it several times, but no two performances are exactly alike. It might be useful to reflect on Deleuze's thesis on repetition and difference. Ultras' repeated chants can be seen in terms of "that which cannot be

repeated,” which is “the singular” (Deleuze, 1994). The studio recording of the chants is totally different from the experience of listening to the fans in the stadium. Even stadium chants during practices differ fundamentally from performances in the stadiums during matches. On inspecting the Ultras’ performance, I found that their singing varied—once slow, once faster, once with a trumpet and once without, once with clapping and once without. They would be singing monotonously and suddenly become enthused and start jumping while chanting. When the fans are chanting and the team scores a goal, the chant breaks into tremendous joy, after which they resume chanting in an even more energetic manner. There is an apparent indulgence of the fans in the lyrics they are chanting. The repetition here is not mere addition to the first performance, but is more synergistic; in Deleuze’s words, it is “carrying the first time to the tenth power, or repeating the unrepeatable” (1994, p. 1).

This, in turn, leads us to think about the chants themselves in terms of tunes, lyrical values, and what they express. I am here examining the chants produced by Ultras Ahlawy in their two CDs, the 2011 disc with 19 songs and the second CD, “We Will not Stop Singing,” comprised of 20 songs and produced in 2013, in addition to a number of single chants. This brings us to a total of approximately 40 chants, not counting the chants they composed before the revolution, as there were no CDs then, and also not counting the chants in the Ultras Devils’ CD produced in 2012. The table in Annex 1 contains the different chants, their subject matter, and a translation of most of them. In annex 1, there is a compilation of the chants names and their themes.

These chants are of very modest artistic value. In most cases the words are repetitive, redundant, and even naïve. This is not something specific to UA07’s chants, as some theorists argue the existence of a connection between popular choralism and lyrical poverty (Russel, 2008). Yet, a close look at the lyrics offers insight into the didactic role of these chants. In other words, analyzing the repertoire of chants reveals that certain values are reinforced over and over again. Ultras Ahlawy individuals are expected to adopt these values, and by repeating them, they become part and parcel of their lives and value systems. Chants of the Ultras Ahlawy are variations on just a few themes, most prominently, the greatness of al-Ahly as a club. They sing about al-Ahly’s victories,



emblems like the color red, or the eagle, the club's symbol. They also chant about the history of al-Ahly, narrating the national positions of al-Ahly throughout history and glorifying figures like Omar Lotfy, Mokhtara I-Titch and Saleh Selim. In most of the songs about al-Ahly's history and accomplishments, they tend to position the club in relation to their rival competitor, Zamalek. Rivalry is an ongoing theme in the chants. Expressing contempt for Zamalek and mocking it is essential in defining Ultras Ahlawy individuals' love and respect to al-Ahly.

They also chant about their relationship to al-Ahly, constantly defining what it means to be a fan—or more specifically, to be Ultras—by enumerating what they are ready to do for their team: to follow it, sing for it, take pride in its winnings, support it even during times of defeat, abide to specific seats in the stadium and express their attachment to these seats, express their ultimate love to the club, and finally be willing to die for the club. In some sense, they produce Ultras subjectivity in the process of collectively singing about values, history, and the detailed practice of the seat and the stadium. At some level, they are singing for themselves as Ultras and about the making of the Ultras.

Consequently, the fans extract specific sentences from these chants and use them during matches as a way to articulate their feelings. The most famous mottos coming out of these songs are:

*The day I stop cheering, I'll definitely be dead.*

*We follow you, Ahly, from Delta to Upper Egypt.*

*Take my whole life, God, and make al-Ahly win.*

Beside the pedagogical aspect of the chants, it is worth considering these chants as a social balm, especially after the massacre. Ultras Ahlawy chant for the 74 martyrs, the 72 who died in the Port-Said massacre inside the stadium, and the two others who died in revolutionary events. They remember their names, pray for them, promise to pursue justice to bring peace to their souls, and place them among the revolution's martyrs. Along with these songs, they stress their hatred of the police and uncompromising valorization of freedom. Mourning people through community singing is also not

unprecedented. In the late 1980s, after the Hillsborough tragedy that left 96 football fans dead, Liverpool fans used to sing a chant, “You Will Never Walk Alone,” as an act of mourning and solidarity at the beginning of every match (Xu, 2013). In doing so, the divide between the living and the dead is challenged in the constitution of the collective; those who died never cease to be part of the collective or involved in collective singing. The martyrs are rendered visible through chanting and through choreography as well.

Another point that requires scrutiny is which chants are recorded and which are not but are still sung in the stadium. Chants with swearwords, profanity, and ribaldry, whether against the rival team or against the police, are often sung in the stadium. Profane insults of the rival team are common practice in playgrounds, but the Ultras took this to another level. Firstly, they directed these insults—unprecedented even in football—toward the police in a systematic manner, and secondly, they took the obscenity and profanity out of the stadium, especially during the revolution. Chanting swearwords loudly and in a synchronized manner was a revolutionary act in itself, a breach of the social taboo that allows profanity during fights but never in political protests and demonstrations. As for the chant melodies, some of them are adapted from internationally famous songs such as Mary Hopkins’ “Those Were the Days,” which the Ultras inverted to “We Witnessed Death Together”; similarly, the well-known Spanish tune “Commandant Ché Guevara” became “Youssef the Hero.” The fans also turned the famed “Sway” into the very engaging “al-Ahly Club Is a Giant Team.” In addition, they adapt melodies and chants from different Ultras groups worldwide. Some of their chants are inspired by traditional or classic Egyptian songs, like those of Muhammad ‘Abdal-Wahhab, Muhammad Fawzi, Sheikh Imam and others. Ramez, an UA07 capo, believes that this adaptation represents the “Egyptianization of the Ultras.” He considers it important to situate the Ultras in the Egyptian context through inspiration from the Egyptian musical tradition; by doing so, Ultras Ahlawy will be contributing to the Ultras movement as a whole and UA07 would then represent a source of inspiration to other Ultras groups outside Egypt. Hence, transnationalism in the Ultras movement is never a one-way street, but is more dialogic and reflexive, where Ultras in countries like Egypt believe that they can have an edge and offer something to “the movement,” the term they use to describe Ultras groups all over the world.

The analysis would be very limited if we looked at these chants separately. Thus in the next section I will analyze the chants along with *tifos* and the choreographed performances of the Ultras Ahlawy in the stadium in an attempt to understand the group's performative rituals.

#### **4.2- Ultras performance: the carnival**

This part casts a critical eye at the stadium performances of the Ultras Ahlawy. I begin with a detailed description of the performances as seen through the analytical lens of corporeality and the body. I then move to the carnivalesque aspect of the performances, exploring the notion of the spectacle. Finally, I end with a focus on the fans' performances and their dedication and constant cheering using the lens of concepts derived from affective and immaterial labor frameworks.

Ultras groups fundamentally change the experience of the game in the stadium. The terrace becomes their playground as—through their choreographies—they turn the spectators of the game into a spectacle. “The first- and second-class spectators watch us.” This is what an Ultras Ahlawy individual told me in an interview when I asked him their relationship to the rest of the fans in the stadium. Next, I will take the reader on a journey through the whole match from the beginning until the end to understand the experience of 90 minutes in the stadium.

“The intro”, or *al-dakhla* in Ultras language, refers to the choreography performed by the fans at the beginning of the match. Some refer to it as *tifo*, a term derived from typhoid fever, which indicates excitement and enthusiasm of cheering for their team (Guschwan, 2007, p. 250). The particular choice of the typhoid disease to express the feverish mood of the fans in the stadium is a signifier of the viscerality of the experience of cheering for the team from the Ultras' seats. Fans repeatedly describe their feeling in the stadium as a sense of heat, produced by the movement of the collective. The intro can be a whole choreographed scene, huge banners held by the fans, or simply chanting. The choreographed intros are the most sophisticated and thus require enormous effort and strict discipline to be executed precisely. The aim of these intros is to send specific

messages addressed to different audiences, including the club, the players of their own team, the players of the rival team, or its fans.

A thorough examination of the 160 videos posted at the Ultras Ahlawy YouTube channel reveals that intros are actually an important source of pride for the group. Scrutinizing different intros of the Ultra Ahlawy, it is apparent that *tifos* were not limited to athletic themes; political, social, religious, national, and revolutionary issues were also features in these *tifos*. These included for example, the condemnations of sectarian strife in Egypt (seen after the Maspero massacre in October 2011), the glorification of martyrs, and expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Of course, the most frequent theme was honoring al-Ahly and its legendary players. Fans celebrated the anniversary of the Ultras, memorialized a historic Ahly victory (6-1) against its rival Zamalek, and honored Aboutrika, the most talented player of the Ahly team and a fans' idol. The fans always cited specific intros to testify the greatness of the group or how they managed to embarrass the rival team. One of these is the "Dustbin of History" intro, depicted in the next three photos. Bola, one of the fans, spoke very enthusiastically about this specific *tifo*, executed in the derby match between al-Ahly and Zamalek in the final game for the 2010 Cup Championship, as if it happened only yesterday. Bola said, "In that game, the people of Ultras White Knights were paled by our *tifo*, because they did not see it coming." In this *tifo*, UA07 expressed their contempt for the Zamalek club with a fully choreographed routine: they held the sign of al-Ahly club, known as "the club of patriotism" and the sign of the Zamalek club, beside it a dustbin can on which the words "dustbin of history" were written, with a banner reading: "The combined club, only for the English." With this, the fans were glorifying the nationalist history of al-Ahly compared to what they describe as the disgraceful history of Zamalek, which was founded for the English community in Cairo, the colonizers of Egypt at that time.



*Figure 9: Tifo: the dustbin of history*



*Figure 10 Tifo: Dustbin of History*



*Figure 11: Tifo: Dustbin of History*

The icons, the references, and the language used in these choreographies were also of special importance. Guschwan (2007) mentioned that Ultras individuals have employed photos of Ché Guevara and Alex, the protagonist of Stanley Kubrick’s “A Clockwork Orange.” In other words, the symbols they use swing from far right movie and comic villains to heroes of the far left. His proposition applies to Ultras groups in general in Egypt, which use Guevara and the Joker (the Batman villain) equally in their performances and rituals. Ultras Ahlawy uses icons related to the club, such as the eagle (the club’s symbol) and the devil’s pitchfork as well as national icons like the crescent and the cross. They also use phrases from famous comedies and pieces of news. The level of preparedness of Ultras Ahlawy differs from one match to another, with derbies and finals requiring a different level of sophistications. Habi, a previous UA07 individual who left the group after the massacre, spoke very proudly about the intro of one of the

African matches where the UA07 decided to feature the Ahly eagle in a gigantic *tifo*; above it they wrote, “Fly high freely, oh you eagle of the club of patriotism.”



Figure 12: *Tifo: Fly high freely, oh you eagle of the club of patriotism*

Salem, a relatively older individual who is also no longer active in the group, cited a *tifo* that is dear to most of the group, produced for Aboutrika’s testimonial match, Aboutrika is the most beloved and talented Ahly player. He said, “We made a tribute for Aboutrika where we used special techniques to make a 3D *tifo*. That was unprecedented in Egypt.” The photos below show the *tifo* and depict Aboutrika saluting the fans.



Figure 13: Tifo: Aboutrika 3D intro



Figure 14: Aboutrike bows to the Ultras in his testimonial match

Habi commented on the *tifo* saying, “These intros are highly confidential. It would be scandalous if the rival team discovered our intro before the match. It has to come as a surprise, even for the vast majority of the group.” He added,



*“So a very small number of people know what exactly the tifo will be. Every Ultras individual has the right to think of ideas for the next tifo or choreography and communicate it to those responsible for the sections. I remember that one UA07 individual approached me, since I was an active and responsible for one of the sections, and he told me that he had an idea for a tifo to honor Kareeka, the UA07 individual who died as a martyr in the Cabinet incident in Cairo in December 2011. Unfortunately, the massacre took place after this and we did not have the time to do that intro.”*

Responding to the question of how they think about *tifos* and intros, Hamed referred to the concept of the “Ultras mentality,”

*“Your whole thinking is directed to al-Ahly, so if you are just walking down the street and you see a building that grabs your attention, you would spontaneously think, how we can use the concept of this building in a tifo or for something that would benefit the club.”*

In the high level meetings before the matches, capos and actives make decisions about which *tifo* will be performed in the next one or two matches. Tasks then become clearer and are divided between Ultras individuals. The choreographed entrance is designed first, based on the seating and the stadium where the game will take place. For this purpose, they at times use a kind of seat map or they use a robe when they go into the stadium to demarcate the *tifo*. Other tasks include buying colored cellophane wrapping paper and cutting it into small rectangles to make the desired shape. All of this depends on the number expected to attend the game and where the game is being played. On match day, the group arrives at the stadium hours before the game and begins by putting the stunt cards on the stadium seats. They repeatedly instruct everybody to raise the card on his seat when he sees the capo raising his colored card. Almost everyone seated in the curve participates in this ritual, even if they are not Ultras. If there are two *tifos*, two stunts cards will be put on the seat, one on the seat itself and the other on its back.

The intro regularly takes place in the few minutes preceding the match. By the end of it, fans start to chant and one can see their bodies jumping up and down in synchrony under

the small placards they are holding. The *tifo* is the beginning of the Ultras' extended ritualized performances.

#### 4.2.1- Ultras performance as a form of affective labor

Turner (1969) assumes rituals suspend social hierarchy, make a temporal rupture with the structure, and consequently create new ties between positionless people, although people resume their positions after the end of the rituals. In Turner's proposition, rituals are not theatricalized, but are more sacred. Perhaps it is therefore more useful to engage with Bakhtin's concept of the carnival. Here, the rituals are theatricalized, turning the stadium into a stage and the spectators into a spectacle (Bahar, 2014). The fans soon engage in a whole repertoire of performances and chants, which include call and response, chanting, roaring, and igniting flares. The individual subject lends himself to the collective and at this moment, fans are no longer small, individual, helpless bodies; rather, they become "a social body" or "one body," to use the expression of one Ultras individual describing in an interview how he feels in the stadium. I found it thought provoking that Ultras people always use the term individual (*fard* Ultras) to refer to any one belonging to them, but at the same time their presence is always collective. One Ultras individual commented on this observations saying:

*"We repeatedly mention the word "individual" but the individual here is anonymous, we don't say names. The individual here seeks pleasure. I go to cheer for al-Ahly and when al-Ahly wins, I get happy, and if al-Ahly loses, I would still enjoy what I am doing. Nobody is obligating me to do what I am doing, it is my choice."*

The centrality of the body in the Ultras experience cannot be overlooked. The experience is highly visceral. Every time I mingle with them, I am astonished by their distinctive odor, which is strikingly youthful, manly, and adventurous. But the body of the Ultras individual is highly disciplined. Firstly, in terms of attire, they all dress in almost the same code: the group t-shirts, polos, shorts, trousers, and scarves. These items are not arbitrary, all express something about the Ultras. They wear red, the color of their team, and they use scarves and hoodies to reinforce the notion of anonymity and to hinder their

identification, and consequently arrest, by security forces. Second, in terms of motion, every fan must raise his stunt card at the right time for the intro to be successful. They clap their hands together, stretch their hands in front of them together, and jump together. All these performances or *gestuelle* (a French word meaning gestures, used by the Ultras to refer to their hand performances) are orchestrated by the *capos*, who stand on the stadium's amplifiers with their backs to the playing field and their faces to the fans, giving them constant instructions. Moreover, Ultras are disciplined by the voice and its synchronization as mentioned above.



Figure 15: Ultras gestuelles.



*Figure 16: Ultras Gestuelles*

As the match progresses, Ultras individuals are never silent for a moment and their dedication to cheering for their team throughout the entire 90 minutes of play is translated into a form of serious affective labor. Affect here does not stop at the different emotions they sense or experience in the stadium, such as joy, euphoria, sorrow, fear, or disappointment, but implies a corporeal aspect as well, where the fans are stimulated by what they are experiencing and accordingly they “move” or react physically (Thrift, 2004, p. 60) by jumping, chanting, shouting, or clapping.

They are not just an agglomeration of bodies. There is a purpose for these moving, choreographed bodies, namely the pursuit of joy and pleasure. According to Negri, the joy experienced by people functions as a precursor to recreate the encounter (cited in Ruddick, 2010, p. 32).

Yet, the common notion of Ultras cannot only emanate from the recreation of joy; there is also a destabilizing aspect to their experience, to employ Deleuze’s words in his

interpretation of Spinoza's affect. Their recurrent confrontations with the police in the stadium and the resistance and aversion they face from society contribute to the creation of "a cramped space" or "a dark precursor of thought," which pushes them to reject common sense and create their own common notion (Ruddick, 2010, p. 33). This dark precursor, I argue, could be considered rebellion against the securitization and hyper-capitalization of football, even if this resistance is emerging from within the system itself or partially contained therein.



*Figure 17: Pyroshow*

#### **4.2.2- Pyroshow and the carnivalesque**

As time advances in the stadium, the set of performances and rituals enacted by UA07 individuals make their bodies a reservoir of something else; their bodies transform into a colored stunt card one moment, the sound of clapping or a magnified vocal cord at another. Their bodies themselves become the message they want to deliver as Ultras.

The non-stop movement in the stadium soon leads most of the fans to remove their shirts, whether in summer or winter, due to the excessive enthusiasm and the heat produced by their constant motion. The mood is usually festive, even if there is tension in the stadium because of the police. The discipline of the collective performance and synchronized chanting is broken occasionally by igniting a flare here or there, but at certain moments, the whole order is suspended. At this point, the terrace is transformed into a real carnival, where the public order is suspended for a state of profanity, vulgarity, and mocking. Although mocking and ribaldry dominate the terrace from the first moment, when the fans mock the police and the rival team, this typically takes place in a specific order; when that order breaks, fans dissociate into dancing individually or in groups, while the collective chant functions as umbrella to these moments. Here other bonds are being created between UA07 individuals. Beside the acoustic ties we discussed in the previous section, the suspension of social order enables the fans to transcend class, religious, and age differences. Through this suspension of order, they also resist many forms of social control imposed on them as they take control of the stadium in the face of the police, use profanity in the face of the society, and ignite flares as the epitome of pleasure and enjoyment.

In the second half of the match I attended with them in the summer of 2013 in Gouna stadium in a coastal governorate, the capos brought hundreds of water bottles. At the beginning, I thought they were only for drinking, since there were no vendors at or around the stadium. They later threw the bottles on us then people drank and started to throw water on each other. Thinking it would only be a few drops, I kept drying my glasses. But they continued to splash each other. Many flares had been lit by that time; everybody was extremely wet, and most of them had taken off their shirts. The smoke was so heavy that we could not see the pitch. It was a magical moment, with everyone singing, dancing, and jumping amid the water, colored fire, and smoke. Some danced alone as if they were involved in a Sufi ritual. At that moment, al-Ahly scored the second goal, which prompted them to jump out of happiness and fall on one another. I later learned that this is an important ritual in the matches, the pyroshow, in which dozens of flares and colored smoke shots are ignited at the same time.

As the 90 minutes approached its end, everybody was exhausted and drained. Yet, Ultras individuals continued encouraging each other to sing, as if they were on a true mission and had to cheer for the entire 90 minutes. This is what art critics call “durational performance,” when the performer extends his performance so long that it breaks the body, or must go beyond the body. The fans know that there is a certain feeling or effect that can only be reached after a certain time (Bahar, 2014). The words they used to encourage one another to continue chanting signified that affect not only drives this group to this form of labor, but it actually constitutes the group (Ruddick, 2010, p. 24). The fact that this group is non-exploitive and depends on the power of “man” in Spinoza’s words makes it incumbent on us to think of new political imaginary or potentialities of being as a collective.

## 5. Chapter five: The Revolutionary Subject

Writing about the relation between the Ultras and revolution is very similar to walking through minefields. The relative novelty of the experience and the dramatic unfolding events starting from the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 until this moment, do not leave much space for deep insightful thinking about what happened. In this chapter, I explore the transformations in the Ultras subjectivity during revolutionary times in the beginning of 2011 and the different impetuses behind Ultras participation in January 25<sup>th</sup> event and its aftermath. I then try to unpack the complicated encounter of Ultras Ahlawy with the revolution arguing how the Ultras presented the revolution with a whole fresh repertoire of carnivalesque resistance and also with their combat expertise. In contrast, I am discussing the influence of the visibility Ultras gained from the revolution and the political disputes that erupted between them within the group and between them as a group on the one hand and the other revolutionary factions on the other. I end this chapter with a detailed account of the Port Said massacre from an AU07 individual who witnessed it.

### 5.1- Revolution as an event and the revolutionary subject:

How does an Ultras individual take the decision to join the revolution? When and how does the collective “ultras” decide to join? More importantly, how do the disciplined individuals of the Ultras decide to take part in the revolutionary protest? Is it a dictated order or a personal decision?

All the previous questions concerned many of those who are following the Ultras groups in Egypt. Answers from different UA07 and UWK individuals and capos all reaffirm that the two biggest capital Ultras groups did not take a formal decision of participating in the protest of 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011. “A. M.”, previous active individual in UA07 commented on this saying

*“The Ultras groups started the revolution even before the revolution started, by their resisting to the ministry of interior. There were heated discussions in the secret group about whether we should participate officially in the protests or not, but of course we cannot ask the group to*



*participate though we knew that so many Ultras individuals will participate; we preferred to leave this to people's individual decisions."*

Ramez, the prominent *capo* echoes A. M.'s comment saying,

*"Those who join the Ultras do so to support Al-Ahly, it is none of my business if one of them belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood or the other is supporting Mubarak. If we asked the group to participate officially this means that we bear this responsibility for their lives and safety and we have to care about them, we cannot do so."*

If this was the case, how then can we comprehend the mass participation of Ultras individuals in the revolution? Asking those who are not in the secret group about how they took the decision of joining the protest, one told me "I was already involved with other political groups and movements so I was with them on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Jan". Amir said "I went to the protests of the Friday of Anger on 28<sup>th</sup> of January with the "group" and we joined the Giza march. Amir stressed they joined as individuals not Ultras despite the fact that he joined with his section; he added "We participated to defend our freedom and our dignity".

The subjectivity of the Ultras here is reconfigured by facing "an event" in the Badiou sense. The revolution came as an opportunity to liberate oneself and allow the birth of a political subject, a subject who is marked by fidelity and commitment to something, to a cause and to being true and faithful to it. In this kind of engagement according to Badiou, people are carried beyond their limits. "The revolution actually owes nothing to anyone, each one of us owes the revolution something", UA07 individual answering the question of what the Ultras presented to the revolution. Here as Badiou proposes people aspire for immortal intensity at the expense of insignificant survival and this is why they are ready to die for this. For Badiou, it is not the agency that is diminished but it is the 'objective knowledge' as the truth for the subject is autonomous. These truths are revolution, creation, passion and invention. (Hallward, 2003). According to Badiou, an event is:

*"that moment when the ordinary rules according to which things consist in a situation are suspended, and the indistinguishable 'stuff' [inconsistent multiplicity] that is thus made consistent [consistent multiplicity] is for a passing instant exposed as what it is, as pure inconsistency or pure indetermination." (Dewsbury, 2007, P. 445)*

On the contrary, the individuals' agency here is liberated from the group's discipline even if they still move as a group. Many accounts and explanations were offered to account for Ultras participation in the events of 25<sup>th</sup> of Jan and what followed. A very common and popular account is that Ultras have always longed for an opportunity to have revenge from the Ministry of Interior. Mohamed G. Basheer, a former UWK "capo" and the author of the Ultras Book, agrees that enmity with ministry of interior was the main cause behind the Ultras participation in the revolution. Ultras definitely has unsettled grievances with police, however attributing their participation solely to their animosity to the police is a bit reductionist. An AU07 individual was talking to me saying "We were there to fight the injustices experienced by the country as a whole, not only the injustices we are as Ultras experience but the whole situation; we are part of this country". There was something beyond that direct hostility between the Ultras and the police; they saw the potentials of achieving something bigger and being part of larger community of Tahrir square. Joining the revolutionary masses, as I believe, is comparable to be called into being." Being" here is something beyond what could be articulated (Dewsbury, 2007, P. 445).

## **5.2- Between a rock and a hard place: Ultras between the group and the revolution:**

This section examines the different aspects of Ultras Ahlawy's revolutionary experience, how they were touched by the revolution and what their participation has added to the revolution. Furthermore, I look at the entanglements between Ultras Ahlawy and the rest of the revolutionary factions. In all cases, we should be attendant to the reflexive nature that defined the Ultras' relation to the revolution.

Ultras' presence in the square was something very hard to miss especially with their big numbers, performances, rituals and ribald chants. People were fascinated by these organized and ritualized performances: the *gestuelles* (body language), the harmonized chanting, the clapping and the overwhelming youthful spirit. Before the Ultras, the political chants in the protests were really dull, comprising of some rhymed sentences a

cheerleader would say them in the protest and the protesters would repeat them. The Ultrashas introduced the revolutionary masses to the carnivalesque resistance performances and techniques, which include using the trumpets, more whistles and big flags. This new repertoire in the resistance made the protests much more rich, colorful and enjoyable. If we look at the following photo, we will find the pictures of martyrs held on drapeau big flags, which were described in previous chapter in the rituals of the Ultras.



*Figure 18: A photo of a protest showing the drapeaux big flags with the pictures of martyrs on them. Photo credits to Mohammed Ammar.*

The performative and carnivalesque resistance was not the only thing that marked the Ultras presence in the revolution. Big numbers of them were among the front-liners in all the fights with the security forces whether police or military. Their expertise in the street fights made their contributions in the clashes invaluable.. They themselves talk little about it but many testify their exceptional bravery in confronting the police brutality. Sometime people would tweet about the Ultras presence in the areas of clashes as a

reassurance for the rest to join. As one of the UA07 explained, “We were the shield of the revolution.” Many interviewees stated that Ultras individuals were more present in violent clashes during the revolution than ordinary marches and protests because as they say “the Ultras individual is an individual moved by the battle”. Their prominent presence was during the Ministry of Interior clashes on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, the camel battle on the second of February 2011, Mohamed Mahmoud Street events in November 2011, the cabinet events in December 2011 and the Israeli embassy’s events. A 20 years old UA07 individual testified about this saying “everybody says that Ultras are trained on how to confront police, we are not trained, we are used to their tactics and their deception techniques.” They also believe that “Ultras Mentality” plays a role in their fearlessness. Bola described this mentality saying, “If the police is fiercely attacking a group and the people of this group are running away and only one of them stood still and decided to confront, this one is Ultras. This is an Ultras behavior and this is the Ultras mentality”.

In fact, researchers in the Committee of Documenting the Revolution, by the National Library and Archive claim that the famous guy who faced the military truck in the 28<sup>th</sup> of January and who appears in the following photo is actually an Ultras individual.



*Figure 19: Egyptian protest is facing military truck on the 28th of Jan 2011. Photo credits to Tarek Wagih*

Similarly, the revolution granted the Ultras unprecedented visibility. This visibility contributed to the extremely polarized monolithic narratives produced about the Ultras

whether demonizing or mythologizing ones. This in turn, made many people want to join the Ultras, the thing they saw as counterproductive as discussed before, because these newcomers are not dedicated to the club but they are fascinated by the Ultras. This also came with greater tendencies for objectification of the Ultras; all of the sudden they found themselves the subject of many movies, media coverage and advertisement and as they say this goes against the Ultras' principles which is against media.

Yet, the most serious feature of the entanglement of the Ultras with the revolution is the political disputes between the individuals of the same group -Ultras Ahlawy- or between the Ultras on the one hand and the other revolutionary groups on the other hand.

Unfortunately, this rift was inevitable especially with the stumbling of the democratic and revolutionary path and the repeated defeats the revolution faced. An early dispute within the group was during the presidential elections in June 2012, the elections created hostilities within the group. Different "capos" and leaders supported different candidates and that created many problems in the group and people expressed their discontent that politics was spoiling their organization. Ismail, a previous "capo" of UA07, said that this dispute was an early alarm on how politics could threaten the unity of the group.

The massacre entailed uniting the individuals in the group more, but to drift them away from the larger revolutionary groups. On the one hand, UA07 individuals felt that the group has unjustly paid more than they can afford. Amir commented on this saying "We have participated in the revolution but this is enough, this is actually more than enough, we have paid a really expensive price for this participation". On the other hand, other revolutionary factions felt that the Ultras individuals are only concerned with the retaliation due to the massacre and not the greater revolutionary cause. One example of this was during a march organized by Ultras Ahlawy in February 2013 demanding persecution of those who killed the revolution's martyrs including Ultras, fights erupted between Ultras individuals and other revolutionaries because the latter claimed the Ultras silenced chanting against Morsi and the Muslim brotherhood (Eskandar, 2013). After the massacre, the group tended more to retreat from the political life and reaffirms that the group's natural habitat is the terrace not the street. As A.M. articulated it "We never said we are revolutionaries, we are fans. We were being pushed to politics but everybody

should resist from his position. We, from the terrace, would resist the police and the regime but not from the street.”

Furthermore, a lack of sympathy or maybe a lack of understanding and prioritization for the Ultras’ battles to regain their rights to attend the matches also marked the relation between Ultras and other revolutionary powers. Revolutionary powers seem less receptive to “Football is for Fans” battle”, in which Ultras resisted to reaffirm their right to attend the matches after the police decided to ban the fans presence in the stadium claiming they – the police- cannot secure the stadium.

The picture is not that bleak, Ultras individuals still resort to popular protests and seek the revolutionary support when they face mass arrests and on the other hand revolutionaries more and more open up to the radical nature of Ultras’ battles to regain the stadium and attend the matches.

### **5.3 -The Massacre: I went with him to the match and I am back without him**

Discussing the massacre’s influence on the individuals of Ultras Ahlawy ‘might bean over-rushed process. In other parts of the thesis, I touch upon the repercussions of this massacre on their participation in the political events or the battles that might jeopardize them to more bloodshed. But here I chose to focus on a singular account from one of the previously active individuals of Ultras Ahlawy and how he experienced that day. I think that his detailed testimony might help us later to understand how the massacre altered or influenced the subjectivity of the Ultras whether by creating a guilt trip or even a victimhood discourse. Here is the story as narrated by Habi, the 23 years old young man;

*“At that day, we woke up like every other day. We went to the buses that are carrying us to Port-Said to attend Al-Ahly vs. al-Masry match. We were supposed to meet by al-Ahly club in El-Gezira by 7.30 so people have time to buy food, water or whatever they need for the trip and hit the road approximately by 9. We, the people who are organizing the trip, met by the club around 7.30 to 8 a.m., but we did not find the buses there. Asking about the buses, we were informed that the bus drivers are on strike so no buses would be available. The company told us they can do nothing about it and we have to sort it out and find other ways to go. We*

*thought it might be a good idea that we take the train to Port-Said. The club's administration decided they would book the train tickets for us. We moved by train around 11 pm – which was quite late- and the train was extra slow. We passed by Ismailia governorate and people there started to throw rocks on our train, we decided that we should not be bothered. Before Port Said by 20 or 25 Km, there was a huge military checkpoint called “Dabaa’ checkpoint, I think. They got all us out of the train, this was around 4.30 pm and they strictly searched all of us and then they told us there are buses that would take us to the stadium. These buses would use the International Damietta Road that would lead us directly to the stadium so we would then avoid getting into the city of Port-Said.*

*We heard that al-Ahly players were attacked by firework rockets while they were training. By the time we reached the vicinities of Port-Said stadium, we found lots of people throwing us with flares and other firework rockets....etc. The bus did not stop except in the garage of the stadium. While we were by the stairs between the stadium portals and the seats themselves, we noticed that the gate on the right is closed and the one on the left as well, the gate in the middle is the only open one. Finally, we got into the stadium; we have been carried away with cheering and supporting the team. al-Masry scored a goal and we got nervous. The first half of the match ended. In the half time, 15 or so of the Green Eagles<sup>3</sup> came down from the terrace and they reached to the boundaries of our seats and the police is letting them, they started to throw us from the playground with flares and parachutes flares. The players were going back to the playground while the fans of al-Masry were running back to their seats in the stadium.*

*I really cannot recall the final score whether it was a draw or if al-Masry scored another goal. The final 15 minutes of the match, everything started to move very fast, the Green Eagles individuals and al-Masry supporters started to attack us and coming towards our seats in the stadium, and some of us wanted to attack them back. The police was aggressive and it was apparent they are going to get violent. The policemen and soldiers started to ascend to our seats and beat us and arrest some of us. They were beating us and leaving al-Masry fans. Some of us moved to right in the terrace to bring back those of us who wanted to attack al-Masry supports and we were heading back to our seats. While we were doing this, Port-Said people<sup>4</sup> started to go down to the playground heading toward us in big numbers. A very important thing about us is that in the terrace we act as ONE person, the capos tell us when to move and when to stop and we act collectively. But, when the people of Port-Said started to head towards us, we dispersed, we ran out*

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<sup>3</sup> Green Eagles is the name of the Ultras in Port-Said that supports al-Masry team.

<sup>4</sup> Port-Said people is used as an alternative to the green eagles and Al-Masry supporters

*of flares and we had nothing to defend ourselves with. People from our side went to the front seats to collect the banners of the group and the trumpets. Those who had something to defend themselves with remained standing in the front seats of the terrace. We did not imagine that they would attack us in our seats. It's impossible that an Ultras group would attack another group to that extent. While they were in their way to us, the middle gate, the only one that was open, now was closed. We were surprised as they were passing through the security cordon without being stopped by the police and now they were in the running track just in front of our seats. They were thousands, three or four times more than us. What I saw was unbelievable, everybody who went down to the playground actually participated in the killing whether he really did or not. I saw 3, 4, 5 people of them attacking one person from our group and were beating him up and killing him. The way of killing depended on what weapon the attacker has. They started to come to our seats and we were in total disbelief, they were cursing us and asking us to take off our T-shirts. Luckily enough, I was wearing a grey sweater over my red T-shirt and they were attacking and running after those who were in red exactly like raging bulls. I saw them pointing guns to people's heads, 3 or 4 people would be cutting one's head with knives. All the weapons were there. Anything you would think of was there, guns, knives, sticks, penknives, bayonets....everything. Everybody of them used the weapons he mastered and you know they were happy while they were doing so. Our unity was disintegrated, everyone was utterly alone and we were no longer one unit. Iran toward the left gate searching for somebody I might know. It felt so weird as if I stepped in a jungle and there were monsters there, I saw my friends were being thrown from the upper seats of the terrace. As I reached the left gate, it was closed and there were two people from Port-Said and they started beating me with sticks and then they let me go. I stood still as if I am watching a movie or events that are not real or I am not part of, then I headed to the middle gate.*

*Now, all what I told you is just half of what happened and the second half is an event on its own and it is the gate event. Our friend Youssef wanted to go to the bathroom before all this begins so he went to the bathroom, which is outside and when he came back, he found the gate closed and he found a soldiers' unit so he asked them to open the gate and they refused. People where on the other side cramped by the gate and screaming.*

*Youssef kept asking the policemen to open the gate and they refused so he brought a brick block and started to break the gate. I don't know if it was the rush of the people and their huge numbers or what but the gate dissociated from the concrete that attaches it from both side, the gate then fell on Youssef and of course he died. People started to fell and pile up over each other. I was standing there listening to the sound of people's*



*bones are being crushed. Disaster! I was so in pain, how is this even possible?*

*I was on the stairs, in front of me people caught in stampede over the fallen gate and on the other side, people of Port-Said are continuing their attack on us. People who were behind me were pushing so hard so I was thrown away and I rolled down so I was pushed away from the gate and I was safe. But I was down again in the playground. What I saw then was one of the most surreal things I've seen in my life. I was standing looking at the people and the police are not intervening, and on my right was the players' changing room. The players started to come out. I went into the room to drink water and I found the doctor there completely helpless. We heard the news that one or two died, we started to carry the injured to the changing room. The beating has stopped by then and the people of Port-Said were saying enough. We were carrying the injured and lay them down in the changing room and as soon as we come back carrying more injured people, we would find the previous ones dead. Then, ambulances started to reach the stadium. We were trying to separate the dead bodies from each other; we saw people's wallets lying on the ground, single shoe, blood-stained t-shirts. We were unpacking bodies from each other and the ambulance carrying them away as some dead animals. We did not know how many one have died. We would hear that "Anas" has died. Anas is so young and he is from Sixth of October's section but he was travelling with us always so he started to get famous in the group, then we would hear that Anas is alive<sup>5</sup>. Mothers started to call to ask about their children, I was responsible for this trip along with others. People would ask, where Karim Khozam, nobody knows, his mother calls, where is Karim?*

*Karim was sitting with me in the train, I came back without him. We started to go back to the terrace; I was lost, receiving calls from people hysterically crying. We knew later that people from Port-Said replied calls on the phones of people they killed and they were saying to the families "we killed your children".*

*We were done. When we got back to the terrace it was as if it is a scene from an old war, the stadium was a totally ruined place. There were no people but only the belongings of people. We went back to the playground and stood on the grass. All Port-Said people had left and the security forces were discussing how they will get us out. They brought two military planes; one for the players and the other for the emergency cases. We remained there listening every minute to a new name among the dead and waiting for the next one. Till the day after, I did not know the exact number of those who died. They opened the gates and people*

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<sup>5</sup>Anas was only 15 and he is the youngest martyr in this massacre.

*of Port-Said came in and they were telling us “we are sorry, we did not do this”.*

*After half an hour, they brought us shielded central security vehicles to get us out of the city to the train station. It was very humiliating as if we were prisoners. We reached the train station and there were so many people from Port-Said telling us “It’s not us” and offering us food. We found a train waiting for us, but there were number of us who got out of the stadium running in the streets like crazy men and they got into the first thing they saw heading to Cairo. While the train was very slow in our way to Port-Said, our trip back was extremely fast. We stopped for 10 or 15 minutes in al-Sharqia governorate. People from this governorate brought us food and water and offered to have us in their homes. There was a great sympathy that only worsens our feeling that we have been oppressed heavily that day.*

*The last scene was the Cairo train station scene. I cried when I reached the train station, because of the overwhelming sympathy of the thousands who were waiting for us. If it was a football team winning African Championship, it would not have been so crowded. There were so many faces in the station and I felt that people were feeling pity towards us. There were people coming with Zamalek flag, political parties....etc. Egypt has not slept that day. There were families coming to look for their sons without knowing if he is alive or dead. I saw families who thought their sons are dead and then they found them alive. There were like 15 or 20 person coming for each one of us. Friends came searching for their friends. People were crying and hugging their sons and they were in hysterical conditions.*

*My brother and my friends were at my reception; I went home and sat by my desk saying only one sentence “Only those who died were the real men, we are not men”. The next day was Anas’ funeral, it was as if it’s for a popular hero, the mosque was so crowded and that was 2 February 2014. For 20 days after, I was in a roller-coaster. We were going around Cairo burying our friends, attending funerals and receiving consolations. I almost went to all Cairo’s mosques, I saw people from different classes, they all looked the same, all of them lost their sons.*

*We held a funeral by al-Ahly club and it was huge. People came from all over Egypt. In these days we were collecting evidences in the morning and go to funerals at night. We organized meetings to those who were in Port-Said and collected their testimonies and delivered them to the persecutor, we were caught in this bureaucracy with the DA. For three months, we were visiting the martyrs’ families regularly and check what they need and try to do whatever we can for them may be we have some relief. “*

### ***6- Chapter Six: “Our Stadium... Our City”: the Ultras Urban Subject***

This chapter is intended to explore the urban subjectivity of Ultras Ahlawy individuals, i.e. how they make their ways around a megacity like Cairo and how the Ultras reorganizes the relation of its individuals with the city. To do so, I look at how the Ultras individuals relate to their neighborhoods, the stadium, the club and its vicinities, and finally urban streets.

Ultras individuals' urban subjectivity, as I discuss below, is built around their relations to the aforementioned spaces. The boundaries of these spaces do sometimes matter to the Ultras and sometimes they are of minimum significance. In this chapter, I first examine the different neighborhoods where they live. Then I move to the stadium as a contested place between the fans and the security forces and more specifically the police, and how Ultras Ahlawy along with other fan groups managed to impose their control on the place. From the stadium I move to the club and explore the Ultras' relation with the club (al-Ahly club) as spatiality. Finally, I reflect on the Ultras encounter with the revolution from a spatial point of view.

#### **6.1-The Neighborhood: the Urban Organization of Sections**

Ultras Ahlawy- like Ultras White Knights “UWK”- is divided spatially according to the place of residence of its individuals. These residential units are called sections. An expansion of the two biggest Ultras groups - UA07 and UWK - took place during the past five years and new sections were formed in different districts in Cairo and in different governorates in Egypt. Most of these sections were in urban neighborhoods, and the significance of the other governorates' sections is that the popularity of the two capital-based teams is not only limited to the capital. Different governorates and cities where UA07 has sections are Cairo, Giza, Tanta, Banha, Beni-Suef, Kafr El-Zayat, Fayoum, Sohag, Assuit, Mahalla, Mansoura, and Damietta (Ultras Ahlawy (UA07), 2013). Within Cairo different sections include; Masr El-Gedida, Nasr City, El-Salam, El-Zeitoun, Hadayek El-Kobba, Tagamou El-khames, Matareya, Ain Shams, Giza, Faisal, Haram, Omraneya, Imbaba, 6<sup>th</sup> of October, SheikhZayed, ShobraMasr, Shobra El-Kheima, Qanater, Qaliub, Banha, Maadi, Dar El-Salam, Tora, Helwan, SayedaZeinab, Manyal, and Mokkatam (UltrasAhlawy (UA07), 2013). Twos eemingly contradictory yet equally

thought-provoking accounts on the neighborhoods and the expansion of Ultras sections, reveal the different ways Ultras individuals think about their organization. On one hand, Amir explains the slogan of “Ultras Against Modern Football” saying: “You have a commitment towards supporting your neighbourhood’s club and the players have loyalty towards their club too, that you would not allow money or deals to control your love for the club.” On the other hand, Ramez contends however that people repeat slogans like “Against Modern Football” or “Old School” without actually knowing what these slogans mean. “If us- Ultras want everybody from Aswan to Alexandria to support Al-Ahly, how then can we claim that we are against modern football? This is modern football, when fans are no longer bound to their neighborhood club.” These different accounts show how different ultras engage and situate themselves and their organization within larger fields of power that implicate the club, the administration of the club and the systematic trends of corporatization that have marked the recent histories of football clubs in Egypt and the world over.

The sections are located in different residential areas that include different class configurations. This cross-class nature for and of the Ultras should be examined further because of the multiple and complex ways in which it shapes the groups. Class enactments among the ultras are articulated in terms of other registers such as social status, educational background or residential area. Although rarely spoken of as a classificatory schema among the ultras, the everyday encounters are ripe with implicit class performances. During my trip to Gouna, I ended up in the Maadi section’s bus. Maadi is a relatively well-off middle and upper-middle class residential area. While stopping at the rest house along the road, the adjacent bus was the Helwan’s section bus. Helwan is usually constructed as a working class neighborhood. The fans in our bus were ridiculing and mocking the fans in Helwan’s bus saying remarks about how vulgar “*baladi*” they were. Similarly, during a meeting where the Ultras were pre-booking the new T-shirt on 27 March 2013, I went to ask the fans about their opinion regarding the new design. I was talking to an ordinary guy when I was approached by one of the “responsible people,” who told me that I should not be talking to anyone since not all Ultras individuals have a “good” educational background and that he will let me talk to some guys who would better represent the group! The cross-class ideology of the ultras

falters in everyday encounters that embody the constantly changing and complex schemas of class hierarchies in Cairo.

Neighborhood sections could be considered the primary brick in building the Ultras. By establishing ties between the group's individuals in places where they live, the connections among members are immersed in their everyday social worlds, thus cementing relations of cooperation and mutual dependence, and allows them to spend most of their times together. The mapping of the sections onto neighborhood lives also produces the social tensions that are inseparable from daily life as it unfolds. For each section, there are "actives" or the people who are responsible for this section. They keep track of the estimated number of people in their section and are in charge of organizing the section's meetings and activities, like spraying graffiti, preparations for the matches, or the collection of travel expenses for the team.

New people who wish to join the Ultras would go to the stadium regularly and consequently they start to get to know the people from their quarter or neighborhood. If they showed commitment to supporting the club in terms of attending the matches and cheering the whole 90 minutes, the "actives" then would invite them to attend the section's meeting. The relationship of the Ultras individual toward his section is something that develops organically. One *capo* describes this saying: "Usually you have different friends before joining the group, but after you join you start to see the group's friends more often even away from the meetings. They start to have a priority in your life than your previous friends. It's spontaneous".

The neighborhood sections enable the Ultras to build a fraternal community as I have discussed before. The individuals of the section socialize together almost on a daily basis. Hashem, a previous *capo* of UA07 explained:

*"People in the section meet to play football together, spend hours playing play-station, they memorize songs together. If someone for example is having difficulties in his study, the rest would help him. They would attend each other's occasions like weddings and funerals etc."*

They also go to the stadium together and when the group travels following their team, they are divided by sections, so every section has a separate bus. Amir expressed the

intimacy between the section's individuals, elaborating: "People from the same section are the closest to each other; they are friends, fans and neighbors". The construction of a fan base in a given neighborhood does not only happen by this extensive socialization with the other group's individuals, but also, a fan is encouraged to think about the advancement of his section, since there is a competitive spirit between different sections. People from the same section are encouraged to think of ideas and suggestions for *tifos* and intros and extend their suggestions to the "actives." The showcasing of the neighborhood sections is exemplified in the decorating of the buses heading to the different matches. The ultras of each section invest in representing their bus with slogans or confetti as a sign of their commitment and love of the club.

Graffiti spraying is an important activity in the neighborhoods. It is a collective activity, in which individuals of each section think of innovative ideas for graffiti, walls-selection, and times to spray. Pleasure here comes again as a marker in the Ultras activities. Spraying graffiti is a dangerous yet enjoyable experience; the risk of being arrested always looms large, yet ultras members do not stop spraying on the walls of their neighborhoods. The graffiti in each neighborhood works as a kind of declaration of the Ultras presence, it reads like a message "Ultras is here". In neighborhoods, by following Ultras graffiti, one can map their presence in the city, since they spray heavily on the walls in their residential areas. The two competing Ultras groups, UA07 and UWK choose the same walls in the neighborhood most of the time and juxtapose their drawings. The selected walls are mostly metro fences, local club walls like Maadi club's walls and other deserted walls that could serve as long strip carrying their graffiti. They also choose walls where their drawings would be relatively preserved and not painted over by others. Here the subject is introduced to totally different repertoire than what an average urban teenager is used to in his neighborhood. This experience alters the relation of the fan to his neighborhood and binds it to the Ultras and the club.



Figure 20 Graffiti: never Give Up



Figure 21 Graffiti: Oh Ahly, all my life

The two graffiti's showing how they choose the elongated walls.

Although marking presence and visibility through graffiti is one of the key aspects of Ultras in the neighborhoods, anonymity and individual invisibility has to always be preserved among Ultras individuals. No ultras should brag or reveal being an Ultras. Ultras members also should not put on the T-shirts of the group to publically display their belonging to the Ultras. Yet at the same time, they have to be present at places where they meet in the neighborhood. Walls and other vertical erections are not the only embodiment of their presence in the neighborhood. Cafés also testify to the Ultras

presence. Each Cairo district with an Ultras section has a café where they meet to hang out, collect the money for trips and follow up on other organizational matters.. Unlike walls which represent symbolic presence for the Ultras, cafés actually affirm their physical presence, and cafés are yet another male exclusive domain. Through the facebook page of UA07, sometimes they announce the names of these cafes as meeting points. In short, the lives of the Ultras in the neighborhoods are a constant navigation of presence and absence, visibility and invisibility. Becoming an ultras is about learning how to tactically move through these different paths on a daily basis.

The neighborhood sections thus create everyday bonds among Ultras individuals and instill the meaning of becoming ultras among the members. If Ultras Ahlawy is following the team for any match outside of Cairo, the buses are divided according to the neighborhoods. On my trip with the group to El-Gounaon 31st of August 2013, to attend Al-Ahly's Leopard match in the African league, I joined the Maadi section bus. It was fascinating to follow the interaction of the section's people with each other, the familiarity they enjoy, and their deep humorous fraternity. They all know each other's names, they kept calling each other in the bus's microphone with their nicknames as if we were in a wedding. They were mocking and ridiculing each other, how their mothers made them sandwiches, their performances in schools and many details of their daily life. On our way back, the section's active kept receiving calls from mothers of the individuals of the section asking about their sons, especially those who did not pick up their phones as they were either asleep or their phones were out of charge. He kept reassuring the mothers about the safety of their children and he would even wake them up to talk to their mothers.

In sum, neighborhoods' sections are the first cellular node in organizing the Ultras spatially, teaching novices on how to become ultras, and cementing local bonds among the fans. If we go back to gangs' literature, we would find the centrality of "the turf" in their organization. The turf is the urban territory where the gang claims its control over it. The sections might not be a territorial control tactic mirroring the gangs, but they are definitely critical in how fans define themselves and become ultras in everyday practices and tactics. Ultras identify with the sections embedded within the neighborhoods,



sections become their first register of identification, thus instead of just saying I live in this or that neighborhood, fans re-articulate physical presence by asserting I belong to this or that section. The sections embody prestige and are reaffirmed in everyday praxis for the fans by meeting daily and engaging in activities collectively whether related to al-Ahly or not.

Moving from the neighborhood sections to the stadium is the next spatial circuit that magnifies being Ultras in the lives of its members. Upon arrival at the stadium, sometimes those from the same section are stuck together, especially if they are raising a banner or doing choreography during the match, but in most cases, people lose themselves within the bigger Ultras presence in the stadium, as if the boundaries of these sections melt and disappear in the space of the stadium. .

## **6.2- The Stadium, the assemblage fortress**

In this section, I look at the stadium. How do the fans perceive the stadium and their presence there? Does the stadium qualify as a public space for Ultras individuals? I also look at how the stadium has been an area of contestation between Ultras on one hand and police and clubs' administration on the other hand. I examine the surveillance of the stadium. What kind of cheering is legitimized and what is not (the binary of good fan/bad fan)? And how the stadiums were used to reinforce specific kinds of authority?

The stadium represents the most central space for the Ultras. It is where their ultimate pleasure resides and where they can express themselves as Ultras the most. "It is a battle about who controls the stadium." This was the answer of a relatively old individual of Ultras Ahlawy when I asked him about the reasons for their recurrent clashes with the police even before the revolution. I have reached this conclusion long ago, but this was the first time an Ultras individual articulates it in such a way. This answer is very illuminating in regards to the nature of the struggles of these groups. Tracing the clashes between the Ultras and the Ministry of Interior in the years prior to January 2011 might give us some insights on the evolving and simmering conditions in the streets and public spaces of Cairo. Another response I got for the same question was, "they are violent with us because we have broken the fear barrier, the notion of 'listening and obeying'."

With the securitized state and its repressive apparatus growing wildly in Egypt before the revolution, the police was struggling to impose control over public space in Cairo. Crackdown on street vendors, football fans, protesters, and other segments of society, was just an everyday reality (Bayat, 2013, p13). In the stadium, the police wants the fans to be docile, conforming and non-disturbing. The fans, specifically the Ultras, want to cheer for their team in their own way. Singing out loud for the whole 90 minutes, wearing the group's T-shirt, igniting flares and holding banners and flags are all part and parcel of the expression of Ultras subjectivity. These are the core performances of the Ultras as a group committed to cheering and supporting the team and at the same time pursuing pleasure and fun. Adel says, "Nobody has the right to tell me how I am supposed to support my team. If I am igniting a flare, I do not throw it on the officer's face; I hold it in my hand, why does he have to object to this?" The police regularly banned the entrance of flags, banners, flares, and even the group's t-shirts into the stadium. They would demand the fans to take off their T-shirts to allow them in the stadium. Moreover, according to the fans, it was a normal procedure for the police to come before important and big matches like al-Ahly vs. Al-Zamalek derby and arrest the *capos* of the two groups and detain them until the end of the match. Sometimes they would arrest some Ultras fans at the gates and lock them up in the changing rooms, which are located at the circumferences of the stadium. This contestation between the Ultras and the police could be better understood if we considered the Ultras fans as "Urban Subjects" as explained by Asef Bayat in his thesis on "Subject in Neoliberal City". He argues that non-working, young people, housewives and others in neoliberal city, have no classical means of opposition and dissent since they are not institutionalized. Consequently, they do not protest or go on strikes, yet they engage "actively" with the public space. The Ultras are actively engaging with the public space to reclaim youthfulness and defend their rights to fun and joy. Bayat's proposition on the ethics of fun and joy is revealed in how youth prefer certain genres of music. With the ultras,, these ethics are related to the way the fans desire to cheer (Bayat, 2013). The only disagreement I have with Bayat relates to the question of being organized or not. The Ultras groups are organized, unlike Bayat's argument that the multitude he describes comprised disorganized singularities. At the same time, I think that Ultras – especially before the revolution- although being

organized, constituted part of the whole “non-movement” of Egyptian context Bayat details in his analysis..

This ardent contestation at the stadium could be also understood using Mbembe’s proposition on the banality of authority. According to Mbembe the relationship between the commandment and its targets has a very tense nature. He explains how people undermine the authority of the state by making the symbols of its power as objects of ridicule, the vulgarization of the cultural practices and the use of ribaldry (Mbembe, 1992, p. 5-12). This is very relevant when looking at the Ultras’ chants, which mock the police.

Police power and authority, as an instantiation of state power, attempts to display its power over the stadium as an arena for myth production, fostering an image of the state as all powerful and in control. This takes the form of what is called “Sports Mega Events(SME)” where both securitization and commodification take place (Giulianotti, 2011). Looking at the history of Cairo International Stadium, we would find that it was built by the same German architect Warner March, who built Olympic Stadium in Berlin in the 1930s as a propaganda tool for Hitler. Gamal Abd El-Nasser inaugurated Cairo stadium in 1960 at the eighth anniversary of the 1952 military coup. (Cairo Stadium, 2008; Third Reich in Ruins, 2000). The stadium has always hosted presidential ceremonies, related to the football or otherwise. Starting from Nasser through Mohamed Morsi, one can see different presidents using the stadium to consolidate and display their powers. Nasser hosted the Soviet Union president, Khrushchev, in the stadium in 1964 (Bibalex, na), while Morsi cut Egypt’s diplomatic ties with Syria in his controversial conference at the stadium in June 2013, few weeks before his ouster (Ahram Online, 2013).

Mubarak’s regime has an equally long history in exploiting sports for political ends. To augment pseudo-national sentiments during the organization of the Africa Cup of Nations in 2006, which was held in Egypt, Mubarak renovated the stadium and made a huge propaganda campaign encouraging people to attend the matches. In this championship, the notion of the good fan was generated as the media kept glorifying the images of upper middle class fans, celebrating the presence of women and the use of colorful hats by

those who sit in the first and second class seat. In contrast, that meant that the third class seat-fans, who are loud and vulgar, are not the kind of fans who should be celebrated.

We could even better understand how the authorities tried to exploit sports' events for political purposes through the matches of Egypt vs. Algeria in 2009, which were played in Cairo and Khartoum, in the competitions qualifying for world cup. Mubarak's two sons, Alaa and Gamal, attended the matches, a gesture many commentators saw as a push for the bequeathing the rule of Egypt to Gamal. During the match in Sudan and the clashes that followed, media personnel, artists, and newspapers celebrated the role the president's sons played in protecting the Egyptian spectators and players. This led to a diplomatic dispute between the two courtiers, but all was expected to intensify the popularity of the president and his "royal" family.

### **6.2.1- The architecture of the stadium**

All this would invite us to look at the stadium architecturally. This gigantic building definitely proves the power of architecture and its influence on the fans' experience. Here is how Sambo described his first experience in the stadium

*"I was too young first time I went to the stadium, I did not understand anything. What I recall from the flashes I have about this experience is that there were so many people walking, and they were smiling and laughing and joking. These scenes I never saw before except during the ceremonies of Eid prayers, where people go there and they are happy and laughing. I was not used to the collectives except in Friday prayers. It was very strange to see many people by the stadium's gate and having officers there and I was confused as to what they were doing there. When I got into the Cairo stadium, the seats, at the time, were not chairs but long benches, so while you are taking down the stairs, you have to be careful so you would not fall. So I remember the feeling of approaching danger, it was as if I was descending from a giant pyramid. Too many people, and so many heads present. At that moment, you cannot look away; you have to only focus on the stadium. The stadium was divided in a very red section where al-Ahly fans sit and a very white section where Zamalek fans sit. You can never find a red flag in the white section and vice versa. The match was at 7 pm and my father took me there at 3 pm and I was surprised why we are going so early but my father said we have to go early. So, football fans know all along that the match's day is a day dedicated totally to the match, it is not an activity you would take on during your day lightheartedly, like going to the movies. You would*

*find people there bringing food in cookers. People coming from Fayoum, Upper Egypt, Lower Egypt and you would meet all the people there.”*

The stadium is built in the tradition of Roman theatre where spectators watch the game as a “spectacle.” Both the Ultras and the police challenge this architectural assumption. Through their performativity and carnivalesque cheering, Ultras turn the ordinary spectators into a spectacle, a phenomenon of which some are aware. Some fans in the interviews would say that the spectators in the first- and second-class seats would be watching them instead of watching the game itself.

The police, on the other hand, occupy surveillance positions in different places in the stadium and at the different gates inside. Security forces are also deployed extensively in front of the curve, the third class seats where the Ultras sit and sometimes they would sit between them in the terrace. The photo shows the soldiers standing disproportionately in front of the curve.



*Figure 22: Security concentrated in front of the Ultras seats*

Some theorists argue that the stadium is a reversed panopticon (synoptic) where the many watch the one, especially with the multi-angled cameras. Giulianotti proposes further that the stadium is oligopticon, which is a fragmented panopticon as the police would not monitor all the spectators, but only specific groups like the organized fandom ones (Giulianotti, 2011, p.3301)

Within the stadium the Ultras insist on preserving their seats; the curve, third class seats. It is a statement and also a space making practice. By insisting on sitting in these cheap seats, Ultras individuals declare they belong to the third class seats' audience who are known to be fanatics and who can erupt using swearwords. In terms of space making, thus the ultras insist on occupying a very specific place in the stadium and guard its boundaries against attacks by the police by claiming this spot as their own. Furthermore, it is a practice of the Ultras subjectivity of self-denial and being totally devoted to the club as the spot they choose is a blind spot in the stadium as it lies behind the goalkeeper.

Ultras' battle over the stadium has also to be viewed as a battle for their right to the city. The Ultras groups have revived the habit of watching the game in the stadium after years during which this habit has been withering away as people became more domesticated and tend more to watch the games on TV. The state was trying to convert the stadium to a place of Mega Sports Events with hyper-securitization. Ultras in fact re-enlivened a forgotten public space; however their battle in the stadium is rarely being framed as such. Although their struggle is par excellence, an urban struggle for the right to the city, and as in Harvey's proposition, the right to the city is a collective one and it is related to people's right to access urban resources and their right to make and remake their cities (Harvey, 2008).

### **6.2.2- The stadium as a contested space**

In the following section, I map out the clashes between Ultras Ahlawy and the police, highlighting moments of suspension where either the Ultras or the police had control over the stadium. These chronicles will tell the story of these confrontations in temporal order and give us an idea of what sparks these battles.

#### **2008-2010: contested space**

- **2008: Ismailia stadium:** One of the earliest clashes with the police according to the group's individuals is the clash in al-Ahly vs. Al-Ismaily match. The clashes, according to the fans interviewed in this research started at the toll stations of Ismailia where the police tried to take away the flags and banners of the group. By the time the group reached the stadium, most of them were arrested and locked up in the changing rooms until the end of the match.
- **In 2008, in Cairo Stadium, a match al-Ahly vs. Itihad Shorta (police union):** The security forces were very aggressive and they tried to dispossess the fans from their banners and cheering tools, a fight erupted in the terrace and the fans ran to Salah Salem, the adjacent street to the stadium. The police followed them and the fighting continued.
- **In May 2009, Max Stadium in Alexandria, a match between al-Ahly Vs. Haras El-Hedood "Guards of the Borders":** The police arrested one of the fans while entering the stadium, the rest of the fans went to the terrace and started chanting against the police using swearwords, the police then let the fan go and kept his ID with them, two *capos* went to the police officers to fetch the ID cards, but they were detained. This angered the fans who attacked the police, destroying the bathrooms on the periphery of the stadium, and police car. The attacks continued until the security forces, freed their comrades. Before the match ended, one of the *capo* told the fan who was arrested in the beginning of the match to go back to Cairo alone and file a complaint that his wallet was stolen in Alexandria with his ID inside as a precautionary measure, as the Ministry of Interior (MOI) might file a case against him. He waited in the bus and refused to go back alone. Before the bus left, a *capo* came and gave him his ID back.
- **In 2009, al-Ahly was facing Assiut petroleum team in Assiut stadium:** The police in Upper Egypt is exceptionally aggressive, according to the fans. There was a passage lined up by soldiers starting from the buses' doors. They searched the fans, beat them and arrested several of them. They did not set the fans free after the match as usual, but rather they remained imprisoned for almost two weeks.

- **In June 2010, al-Ahly was facing Kafr El-Sheikh football team in a friendly match: Several** Ultras mentioned that on this day they sang one of the provocative chants, “Fear us, government”. Its lyrics go as follows:

“Fear us, government  
We are determined tonight  
Al-Ahly audience put things on fire  
Fuck the officer and the sub-officer”

The fans started igniting flares at the same moment, this is when the Central Security Forces soldiers started to beat the fans with sticks and arrested thirteen of them. According to the fans, the clashes continued outside the stadium and the Ultras decided not to enter any stadium for three months in objection for the detention of thirteen individuals of them. The media, however, narrated a different story, which has been a routine in reporting on and representing the Ultras and their encounters in the city. [The piece of news](#) cited by Youm Sab’aa reported that after the first goal scored by al-Ahly, the fans ignited many flares and threw them into the field, which was the reason for the security forces to intervene (Al-Araby, 2010).

- **December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010 coincided with the derby:** “This was one of the weirdest days for us as fans”, this is how one fan recalls the match. The police was unprecedentedly strict banning all the banners and any cheering aid. The SSF soldiers even changed their deployment in this match. They occupied all the spaces between seating blocks preventing any fan from changing his seat. The cheering that day was weird since there was no trumpet, flag or any other thing.
- **A culmination of the confrontations between the Ultras and the police –** according to the fans- was in the match between Al-Ahly versus. Al-Maqassa on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2011. Just two days before the eruption of the revolution, Ultras Ahlawy went to the stadium with the group banner, for the first time in nine



months, after the security forces have banned any Ultras from raising their banner after Al-Ahly vs. Zamalek match early in 2010. [The police tried to confiscate the banner](#), but the fans managed to raise it. Clashes erupted and some of the Ultras individuals were arrested for two days, and released on 25<sup>th</sup> of January (Hassan, 2012).

### **2011-2012: The victorious Ultras dominates**

In the early days after the January 25 revolution, matches were still played; the stadium then was almost under the control of the fans. The police was heavily defeated in the uprising and could not confront the Ultras in the stadium. The fans entered the stadium freely with all the flares, T-shirts, banners, and trumpets. It is worth noting that at this point, the wider revolutionary front considered these fans revolutionaries without any question. Ultras Ahlawy and UWK sang two very famous chants in the stadium, which became among the popular revolutionary chants and slogan; “freedom” by Ultras Ahlawy and “We are not forgetting Tahrir, sons of bitches” by UWK. In these songs, they directly insulted the police and reminded them of the defeat they faced on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January. In these early matches, security forces used to stand in the stadium listening to the insults silently and helplessly.

- **March 2011:** Police were nowhere to be found in the stadium and the fans were organizing people’s admission. In these matches, Ultras individuals made their exemplar shows. Like this pyro-show from Al-Ahly Vs. Super Sport in March 2011 in Cairo Stadium.



*Figure 23: Pyroshow- March 2011, Cairo stadium.*

- **April 2011 marked the comeback of the police to the stadium after Zamalek Vs. the Tunisian African Club match in Cairo stadium:** Crowds of the both teams went down to the playground and clashes erupted. However, despite this comeback, the Ultras retained an air of superiority and dominated the stadium. The fans refused to be searched and they insisted on entering the stadium with all their cheering tools. They were still doing their pyro-show, the next photo is from Al-Ahly versus. Zisco at Cairo stadium in May 2011.
- **In September 2011,** the early days of the police listening to the insults silently had gone. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of September Al-Ahly was facing Kima Aswan in the competitions for the Egypt Cup. The Ultras chanted against Mubarak and Habib Al-Adly, Mubarak's Minister of Interior. In one of the interviews, an UA07 individual told me, "We've chanted against Al-Adly, their god father, so they had

to attack us.” A photo from Al-Masry Al-Youm newspaper shows the soldiers invading the curve where the Ultras sat and chasing them out of the stadium. Here, the boundaries were broken by the police as they converted the confrontation into a street fight in which one hundred and thirty people were injured (Fadl, 2011)



*Figure 24: A still from video depicts clashes between UA07 and the police*

[The video](#) shows how the insults and ribaldry were very intense toward the police, the government, Mubarak, and the old regime. It also shows in details the evacuation of the stadium by police forces. The black-clad armed soldiers temporarily substituted the red dressed fans and the curve was empty after that. The battle was also a battle of dispossession. Police confiscated T-shirts, flares and banners and the fans destroyed the police’s vans and cars. Police attacked with sticks and tear gas, the Ultras responded with rocks (Man, 2011).

### **Stadium as a killing ground**

On the 1st of February 2012, Ultras Ahlawy individuals were in Port Said stadium to support Al-Ahlyas it played against Al-Masry team. In the second half of the match, the stadium witnessed a horrific massacre where seventy-two Ultras Ahlawy individuals were killed either by strangling or stampede in the presence of police who did not intervene. The stadium gates were locked and people could not escape the attacks they faced from the fans of Al-Masry team. Shortly after the massacre, Ultras Ahlawy issued a press release through their facebook page in which they considered the massacre a punishment against the Ultras for their participation in the revolution and a plot by the police and the military along with individuals of Ultras Green Eagles, supporters of Al-Masry team. Here the police emerged victorious.

#### **6.2.3- The nature of Ultras urban battles: Right to stop and attend matches**

After the massacre, there was a temporary suspension of the league competitions, but soon afterwards, the clubs' boards and media channels started to be vocal in calling for a resumption of the league. Ultras Ahlawy fiercely resisted such trials. The clubs and the media were losing millions by suspending the matches. UA07 held a sit-in on March 2012, behind the people's assembly building to pressure the authorities to advance the court case of the massacre, prosecute the accused, and suspend the league until justice is attained.

The sit-in was suspended in April as UA07 declared it has met its goals. When the matches resumed for other championships like Egypt cup and African championships, a ministerial decree was issued, banning the audience from attending matches. Ultras groups, especially UWK, decided to fight for their right to attend these matches. Unfortunately, the right to attend the match was not adopted by the larger revolutionary factions. The revolutionary masses have not endorsed the Ultras' demand of the right of the spectators to attend the match. The reason why most people overlooked this battle is not really clear. It might be that revolutionaries do not qualify pleasurable activities like

attending the matches as radical enough or it might be that these are not the rights that people readily register as human rights, as Harvey reminds us “the right to the city is among the most neglected rights”. This happened despite the fact that Ultras groups have stressed their right to be in the stadium over and over again, and coupled it with the rights and liberties that should be guaranteed to people after the revolution. They also stressed the fact that football is being played in the first place for the fans and hence they should have the right to watch these matches. Throughout the previous months, Ultras groups have won the right to attend some matches especially regional and international ones. Yet it is still in the hand of the police to allow or ban Ultras’ access to the stadium. The last match when UA07 individuals were allowed to the stadium, they had a *tifo* saying “Football for Fans” in so many languages.



*Figure 25: Tifo: Football For Fans*

Ultras always affirm that football is played for the spectators and fans and not for the sponsors. Moreover, even if in modern times football has become heavily televised; they

also remind us that it is primarily played for those who are in the stadium, especially since most of the clubs have started as neighborhood clubs. Beside the right to public space, Ultras' battle is also about "the pursuit of fun." The fierce backlash they face from the police is not only related to control over the public space as well. It also has to do with the police's animosity to fun. State's fear of fun is transcendent to the state's glorification of work over leisure, but fun jeopardizes the rigidity and even the legitimacy of the state as it presents "a powerful paradigm, with new set of presumptions about self, society and life" (Bayat, 2013, p.146).

### **6.3- Ultras Relation to the Club**

The relation of the Ultras towards the club spatially is a very complicated one. Al-Ahly is one of the most expensive clubs and its membership is an expression of particular class status. The vast majority of the Ultras are not members so they are not allowed to enter "their club." They are only allowed to attend trainings of the team and the matches of volleyball, handball and basketball that are being played in the indoor stadium in the club. Yet, to attend these trainings, they have to enter the club from a side gate that would allow them to access only the playground where the training takes place. They remain unable to access the rest of the club and its facilities like restaurants, pools etc. It is worth noting that Ultras' presence at the club's vicinity is so common, not only before and after attending the trainings, but also it is a common ritual to go to clubs' vicinities to celebrate winnings and championships and to also object to specific defeats. During the past three years, marches of Ultras Ahlawy whether to Tahrir square to join a bigger revolutionary protest or to the DA for protesting the massacre or the usual arrest of the group's individuals, they always meet by the club. The ally beside Al-Ahly club is a place where one would find Ultras individuals meeting up and moving freely and comfortably. It remains fascinating though that during all the trainings I attended with them in the "*Titch*" stadium inside the club, they filled in the whole section designated to them despite the fact that it is really hard to reach these seats. It is not only accessible through a side gate, but in fact you have to jump to reach the terrace, as there are no stairs to reach the terrace itself. There is also no electricity, so it is a common scene that all the fans are

turning on their mobile torches to reach the terrace. After we are there finally, you would look at the other side of the playground at the seats designated to the “club’s members” and you’d find them empty. Attending the training is important for the fans since according to them the real Ultras follow the team wherever he goes and supports the team all the time. The frequent presence at the club is also a practice of claiming the club as a popular club not only social club “for the members only”.

The fence of Al-Ahly club is entirely sprayed with drawings of the martyrs of Port-Said massacre, in the longest strip of martyrs’ photos in the country. Graffiti artists have always drawn martyrs’ photos on the walls of Mohamed Mahmoud Street, but those drawings have been removed several times by the police, the army, certain political parties, but those on the wall of the club have been preserved. The club’s gate also holds a big banner with all their pictures and names.



*Figure 26: .Al-Ahly club's fence with photos of Port-Said martyrs. Photo credits to website Donia Elmala3b<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>6</sup><http://www.donia-almala3b.com/%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%87%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%>

The Ultras' relation to the club might be border-based as explained above. Yet, the club also serves as a spiritual icon. The fans put al-Ahly club above everything else and their love and loyalty to al-Ahly is absolute and non-questionable as mentioned in the previous chapters. However, there is also a non-spatial component of the fans relation to the club which can partially explain their indifference toward not being able to enter the club. Many of them don't even know how much it costs to be a member and they are not interested in knowing. Their relation to the club does not evolve around their physical ability to be inside the club.

Ultras Ahlawy have the ability to break into the club, the group has the capacity to do so, but in general they respect the club's regulation and reify these borders of what is allowed and accessible to them and what is not. Nonetheless, the fans sometimes break that agreement with the club and break into it either to object some decision by the club or to claim specific rights. The most recent break into the club was during December 2014, after they were denied attending a match in the indoor stadium.

#### **6.4—Ultras in the middle of the street**

Ultras Ahlawy have a very specific relation to the streets. The fans carry out some activities related to the club in their neighborhood as stated before. Also, the group individuals familiarize themselves by the vicinity of the club. Moreover the vicinity of the Cairo stadium is an important spatiality for the group and this is where they hold meetings for booking the group's products. The stadium's vicinity is also the point of departure when the group is travelling after the football team for a match team in another governorate. Despite all this, Ultras Ahlawy have limited presence (as a group) in the streets. In fact, it is part of what the individuals learn about being Ultras is that they belong only to the terrace and outside the stadium; people are not allowed to show they are Ultras. Amir was speaking about this saying "If I am in the metro and people are talking about the Ultras, in good or bad way, I have no business with them," Revolution broke the Ultras' separation from the street. Before the massacre, Ultras Ahlawy did not officially announce their participation in the revolution, they thought it was up to



people's individual choices, but in reality large numbers of members participated actively in the revolution and especially in the clashes with the police. Many of them were among the front-liners as they had the knowhow of street fights and having had a long history of clashes with the police even before January 2011. In the stadium, Ultras Ahlawy have always glorified the revolution, chanted for it, made *tifos* for the martyrs etc. The situation remained so, until the Port-Said massacre in February 2012, which represented a turning point for Ultras Ahlawy and its relation to the revolutionary streets and squares. On one hand, they had larger presence as a group in marches and sit-ins, but on the other hand they retracted from the protests and demonstrations that were related to issues other than the massacre.

Ultras' marches were done mostly for reasons related to the massacre and the trial. There were growing sentiments among them that the revolutionary multitude has not done enough for them after the massacre and there is a tendency to exploit the Ultras for political gains without attending to the Ultras demands. They felt also that the price they have paid was more than they could afford.

The sit-in that they occupied was yet a new space conquered (The back street of the People's Assembly) for more than two weeks; 25 March- 9 April 2012. The sit-in was peculiar and different from any other sit-in after the revolution. Ultras Ahlawy's leaders wanted to have a similar control over the sit-in as to what they do in the stadium. There was a spreadsheet hung on a building containing the rules of the sit-in. Among the rules, women were not allowed to spend the night at the sit-in and they were not allowed to smoke cigarettes there. The sit-in was so organized with regular patrolling of the sit-ins and picking up people who are not Ultras and those who were suspected for being security planted. In addition, the distribution of food took place at a specific time and was organized by the group leaders. They would awake the strikers at a specific time in the morning and chant collectively. For the very first time, the Ultras came together collectively as a group in a place other than the stadium, but it is very hard to say that the sit-in dynamics were organic. The group's *capos* and leaders were trying to impose control over everything.

Ultras Ahlawy suspended the sit-in on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 2012 with a press release stating that they are suspending the sit-in at that time because they have achieved their aim, since the accused policemen were arrested, determining a rapid court hearing for the massacre and other demands were met like continuous suspension of the matches.

One of the goals of the sit-in for UA07 was to prove that the fans and the spectators are the ones who decide when the matches are to be played and when not. They wanted to show that it is not the football union's decision, nor the police's decision or even the ministry of youth and sport's decision; it is the group's decision.

At the moment, if you ask an Ultras individual about their political affiliations, he would tell you that the Ultras belong to the terrace and that they have nothing to do with politics. However, when there is a mass arrest against them like what happened when the police arrested a number of their *capos* in Cairo airport while they were in reception of al-Ahly handball team in October 2013, they sought the revolutionary repertoire and called for protests asking the revolutionary factions to join them. Asking A. K., UA07 previous active, about this apparent contradiction between their retreat from participation in street protests and their call for the revolutionaries to join them in the march demanding the freedom of the Ultras detainees, he replied by saying "We are weakened by our presence in the street while the political movements are actually empowered by their presence in the street". So, it might be that Ultras Ahlawy individuals feel that their urban subjectivity is only bounded to a specific space (the stadium, the club and the neighborhood) and it is undermined when they are present in big numbers in the streets and squares.

## REFLECTIONS

In this journey with the Ultras, I ended up with more questions than I started with. I gained several insights about how the organized fan is being constructed as a masculine urban and national subject. Moreover I learnt how the fans are being disciplined through voice and bodily performances. The most illuminating findings for me were the ways in which the group creates communitarian ties through different spatial and temporal practices. Following Ultras Ahlawy turned out to be following how they constantly are trying to establish bonds between the fans whether through chanting and rituals in the stadium or by hanging out together in the neighborhoods. They build their communities in their residential areas, in the stadiums and in the trip they travel after the team. This community is also fraternal, a brotherhood between young men and boys who help each other in daily life and protect each other's backs in fights.

Furthermore, it is a community dedicated to fun, in a gloomy city like Cairo with the political turmoil it witnesses; Ultras could be seen as an organized fandom that is attempting to reclaim pleasure to young people. They managed to revitalize stadium as public space and claim their right to access the stadium and cheer for their team in the way they want and to achieve this they confronted their families, the police and the state media.

What underlieS the process of studying the Ultras were the tentionsand paradoxes I was faced with in every and each aspect of the group's life. Three main contradictions have emerged clearly during my study to Ultras Ahlawy; these contradictions are related to question of gender, state and capital.

People tend to rush to judgments about the gender question and the Ultras, it is very common that people would use the terms "male exclusive" and "patriarchal" interchangeably without bearing in mind that the gender dynamics within the group is much more complicated. An important contradiction has to be highlighted here; first by situating the Ultras as an organization resisting many of the predominant social norms.

They are doing so by the very basic notion of having such a brotherhood in a time where most families would not encourage their children to join any form of collectives; families tried to convince many of the Ultras individuals that these groups are dangerous, deviant or politically infiltrated. Ultras individuals challenge the social norms by also engaging collectively in violence against police and security forces. Moreover, their ribaldry and profanity represent the most adamant challenge to social control. However, would this mean that they necessarily adopt progressive convictions all the way long and specifically regarding gender notions? Bayat argues that young people's mobilization is not necessarily a revolutionary thing (Bayat, 2013, 109), I want to make a similar argument here where the organizations that challenge the social norms might reinforce these norms in other aspects of their praxis. So, the Ultras groups are challenging their families, schools and the security forces, yet they also exclude girls and impose very restrictive and regressive conditions for the women's presence among them as in the case of the Ultras sit-in in March 2012 where they banned smoking for women and conditioned that all women should leave the sit-in by 10pm. What is more fascinating is that they do not even question this exclusion and the individuals in these groups are totally overlooking the gender issue. As one of them said once "We have never discussed this issue." This is why when I asked them about the girls' absence from the group, I received an array of responses reflect different subjective points of view.

The second contradiction is related to the concept of the state. Ultras groups are very radical in confronting the police; they are non-apologetically violent against security apparatuses. They even take pride in their confrontations and clashes with the police. A deep conviction about how oppressive the security forces are, prevailing among them. Yet after the massacre, they went through the whole process of filing complaints to the persecution and following the court cases. The corruption of the judiciary system in Egypt is no secret and it is just a part of this whole criminal justice system that in which Ultras groups lost trust. Some of them would say "nobody would persecute his cousin" denoting the relation between police and judiciary, others would say we are only doing so because this will satisfy the families of the martyrs and some of them says we know that we are going nowhere with this but at least we are doing our best. This contradictory and confused position towards the state by groups who are in direct confrontation with the

state is something Zibechi has touched upon stressing the fact that these groups and communities tend to consolidate the state as much as they want to disrupt it, there is “subtle statist element” in those who are fighting the state (Zibechi, 2010, P65. 66).

The last contradiction which is related to the issue of capital is maybe the most complicated one since it is directly related to the essence of the Ultras groups. Throughout the all interviews Ultras individuals confirmed that defending the rights of the fans is part and parcel of the Ultras principles. Ultras individuals believe that the football is being played primarily for the fans not the clubs’ boards, not the sponsors or the players’ brokers. They are against commodification of the game and they always cite their fight against high prices of tickets to the matches. They articulate this position differently, some put it in the simple phrase “Ultras Against Modern football”, One interviewee even said once that the Ultras is a totally leftist organization that fights the greediness of the sponsors and sports media. But at the same time, they do not object for example to the club’s decision in players’ deals although they prefer not to buy players but to invest in the club’s own junior footballers. They also do not criticize the provocatively high salaries of the players. Asking the Ultras individuals about these incidents and the current club administration and how they are the worst manifestation of modern football and represent everything the Ultras fights, they respond by saying that they cannot object to the administration’s decisions as long as these decisions are in the interest of the club and as long as the team is winning. So the question here is whether or not winning and gaining championships in sports is enough to restrain fans from addressing issues related to capital? Does this have to do with the nature of football as commodity? Or maybe we are invited here to think how the worst manifestations of capitalism are capable of generating their antidotes and at the same time contain them. So how a resistant organization like the Ultras could flourish in the shadow of capitalist tycoon like al-Ahly club yet the flourish of Ultras is limited and partially co-opted. Is the nationalist discourse being invited here by the fans to conflate this contradiction?

As I mentioned before, I do not have a clear answers for these questions. I am just highlighting some of the contradictions I struggled with; they might represent questions for future research on the Ultras and the organized fandom in Egypt.

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**Appendix 1: Ultras Ahlawy's chants and their themes**

	Song	Tune adapted from	Theme
2011 CD			
1	The Terrace		Singing to their place in the stadium, situating themselves against rivals
2	100 years	"Your eyes learnt me" by the Egyptian Mohamed Mounir	Taking pride of Al-ahly's accomplishments and what fans are ready to do for it
3	Liberta		Eulogizing freedom and stressing enmity with police
4	Al-ahly is above		Taking pride of Al-ahly's accomplishments and history
5	The Curva Nord		Enthusiastic chant for their place at the stadium
6	6-1		Teasing the rival team, reminding them of historic defeats
7	The giant		Singing for Al-ahly emblems: red color, the eagle..etc
8	Omar Lotfy		Narrating the national history of Al-ahly
9	Al-ahly is in my heart		Expressing their ultimate love for the club and their determination to follow the club anywhere
10	Al-ahlawy		Reaffirming the greatness of Al-ahly and its fans
11	The greatest club		Ultimate love for the club
12	60 millions		Quantifying Al-ahly fans (as if they are the whole Egyptian

			population) and their dedication
13	Four Litters		Taking pride of Al-ahly's accomplishments
14	Tonight we will tell the story		Demonizing Zamalek
15	How much!		Expressing ultimate love for the club
16	Al-ahly's shirt		Singing to Al-ahly's emblems
17	Its audience is its protector		One of the most famous chans for UA07, singing for their extraordinary love fo Al-ahly
18	His love is in my heart		Love of the club and singing for winning
19	We followed it		Describing what the fans do for the club.
2013 CD: We will never stop singing			
20	We witnessed death together	Those were the days by Mary Hopkin	Glorifying martyrs and love of the club
21	Ahlawy		Define who is the fan and describing his belonging and loyalty to the club
22	90 minutes		Expressing how fans spend their time with the Al-ahly's teams
23	Al-ahly's legends	Soundtrack of a famous Egyptian movie "Shams El Zanaty	Narrating the national history of Al-Ahly club
24	Al-ahly is our life		Expressing loyalty for Al-ahly no matter what
25	The paradise of immortals		Telling the whole story of the massacre
26	Try to enter the stadium		Describing the experience of watching the game in the stadium
27	Your prestigious name	The cotton tonight For Egyptian singer and composer	Expressing the joy Al-ahly gives to its fans

		Mohamed Abd El-Wahab	
28	We are yours Ahly		Describing what the fans are ready to do for the club and their love to it
29	Bounce track		Music only
30	The sweetest memory	Fly us my heart For Mohamed Fawzy	Remembering first time the fan buys a T-shirt or watches the game...etc.
31	Toured around the distant world		Stressing the aspect of following the team
32	The entity		The values of Al-ahly and its history
33	I am Ahlawy and proud of it		Taking pride of Al-ahly's accomplishments
34	Oh, Ahly greatest entity	Be blessed Egypt A national chant	Expressing the greatness of Al-ahly throughout the years.
35	The Eagle of the freedom		Singing for the symbol and emblem of Al-ahly (the eagle) and its cry for justice for the martyrs
36	Ahlawy		Explaining what does it mean to be a fan.
37	The crow	Helle Nixon Papa by the Egyptian singer, Sheikh Imam	Enmity with police.
38	We will not stop singing		Explaining what does it mean to be a fan.
39	Youssef The Hero	Hasta Siempre Che Guevara song by Nathalie Cardone	Glorifying one of Port Said martyrs