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The American University in Cairo  
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

NARRATIVES AND EVIDENCE: STRUGGLES OVER MOHAMED MAHMOUD

A Thesis Submitted to  
The Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and Egyptology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
The degree of Master of Arts  
By Manar Hazzaa

Under the supervision of Dr. Hanan Sabea

January/2016

## ABSTRACT

This research focused on the construction of competing narratives of the events of November 2011 in Mohamed Mahmoud Street, popularly named as the Mohamed Mahmoud events. Since the making, naming and categorization of the "event" has not been limited to the happenings of November 2011, my research thus asked how is an event made into a narrative, what are its temporal boundaries, and what evidence is used to construct it as an event and as a historical narrative that is recognized. Since each narrative/story is presented with its own evidence; I analyzed the production of different stories by different participants, how they construct the event, and how they use evidence to render their construction more credible, authoritative, and legitimate in relationship to others. The research addressed some key questions such as: who is telling what stories about what happened, in which way, using what kind of evidence. Additionally I ask how these different stories construct an event as a recognizable event and how the construction of this event by itself produces evidence.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The word Hanan in Arabic language means tenderness, kindness, mercy and love. I was truly blessed to have all of that with Dr. Hanan Sabea being my advisor through this long journey. Hanan was there for me on many levels. She believed I could make it, in times when I lost believing in myself. Thank you for being an endless source of Hanan to me.

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Hashem and Ward... I hope one day you get to read "Mama's book" and be proud of your mom :) I love you.

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## Preface

We now know that narratives are made of silences, not all of which are deliberate or even perceptible as such within the time of their production. We also know that the present is no clearer than the past. (Trouillot, 1995, p152)

People do not just tell you the “truth”. Sometimes, they tell you what they *can* say. Some other times, they tell you what they think *you* want them to say. And at other times they say nothing. Between this and that, silences are born. These silences are different from the ones produced intentionally; the ones that are tailored at editorial desks in the newsroom. The former are harder to detect, and, sometimes, are even impossible to unfold. The latter are more vulnerable to revealing the process of manufacturing “truth”. Especially, under social media and technological advancement that allowed people more access to more information.

But having access to *information* is not all. There exists the problem of “*imagined truth*”; a notion that I want to highlight. Due to the mental capacity of individuals -and also that of groups – there are certain ideas about the truth behind *any* story, that mentally push forward and design a “truth” or an imagined truth, if I may say so, about the story of what happened. This was part of the baggage I carried while doing my research. Letting go of my own imagined truth about Mohamed Mahmoud was neither easy nor did it come at the beginning. It was not until near the end that I had to face myself that my story about what happened was just a story. This does not mean that it did not happen; after all I believe that “[n]owhere is history infinitely susceptible to invention” (Trouillot , 1995, p.8) but rather that I embraced the fact that while my story was unfolding, other stories that are particularly different than mine - on many levels - were constructed too as truths.



## Introduction

Amid the flux of events that Egypt witnessed since 2011, the question “what constitutes evidence?” became a constant site of struggle. Struggles between different groups and individuals over what is said to have happened remain unabated four years after the events of January 2011. What constitutes credible narratives and what evidence is deployed to render them credible, with what authority and effect, are critical questions at present. Exploring these questions is the aim of this thesis.

More specifically, my research is focused on the construction of competing narratives of the events of November 2011 in Mohamed Mahmoud Street, popularly named as the Mohamed Mahmoud events<sup>1</sup> (MM). Since the making, naming, and categorization of the event has not been limited to the happenings of November 2011, my research thus asks how is an event made into a narrative, what are its temporal boundaries, and what evidence is used to construct it as an event and as a historical narrative that is recognized. Since each narrative/story is presented with its own evidence; I analyzed the production of different stories by different agents, how they construct the event, and how they use evidence to render their construction more credible, authoritative, and legitimate in relationship to others.

In a few pages, I first want to introduce you to the man whose name was written on that blue street sign. Mohamed Pasha Mahmoud<sup>2</sup>, his name formed a special position for many people in the past few years that followed January 2011. Regardless of the fact that many Egyptians knew little about him.

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<sup>1</sup> From now on I will refer to Mohamed Mahmoud as MM, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Photos of Mohamed Pasha Mahmoud that I used in this introduction are both scanned from the book *al-'a'ilah al-Salimiyah: sirat 'a'ilah min sa'id Misr* (The Solimani Family: a Narrative From Upper Egypt) (Azab & Hamdy, 2008).



محمد محمود باشا

**Figure 1: Mohamed Mahmoud Pasha.**

Born in 1878, Mohamed Pasha Mahmoud is the son of Mahmoud Pasha Soliman. His family is one of the notable families in Upper Egypt. Mohamed Pasha Mahmoud was the first Egyptian to graduate from Oxford University. His good grasp of the English language gave him an advantage over many of his fellow national leaders, such as Saad Zaghloul and others (Azab & Hamdy, 2008, p.54). Young and ambitious, he held many important administrative positions in the Egyptian state from the year 1901- 1917. There is one narrative told by Abd ElAziz Pasha Fahmy, that it was originally Mohamed Mahmoud's idea to form a delegation of esteemed Egyptian political figures to travel to Europe and claim Egypt's right for independence, this narrative was later confirmed in Saad Zaghloul's memoir (Azab & Hamdy, 2008, P.82-83).



**Figure 2: Mohamed Mahmoud Pasha (2).**

Mohamed Pasha Mahmoud was appointed four times as Egypt's Prime Minister before 1952. Three times out of four Mohamed Pasha kept the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to himself, besides being the PM. His name eventually was associated with the position of Minister of Interior, as an irony, that is because he was famous for his "iron fist" policy (Azab & Hamdy, 2008, p.149). The irony comes from the ever-present tension between Egyptian people and the MOI, as a symbol of state oppression. An article was published in *AlWafd* newspaper (online version<sup>3</sup>) on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011 titled: *Mohamed Mahmoud: Sharea' Nal Men Qaswat Sahebeh Naseeban (Mohamed Mahmoud: A Street As Cruel As It's Eponym)*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <http://alwafd.org/نصيبيا-صاحبيه-قسوة-من-نال-شارع-محمود-محمد-125867/الاحيرة%20%الصفحه>

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting here that what became known about Mohamed Pasha Mahmoud as a cruel Minister of Interior, has much to do with his political enmity with *AlWafd* party. And that so far I did not encounter a single document that indicate that he was brutal or violent, in the same sense that we use today when we describe other ministers of interior such as Habib EL 'Adly who is known for his cruelty, that goes beyond politics and can be more accurately described as crimes not policies.

I tried searching the reason behind naming the street after Mohamed Pasha Mahmoud, but could not spot any specific rational behind it. The location of the MOI is on Mansour St., which is very close to Mohamed Mahmoud Street, as it is close to other streets as well, such as *EL Shikh Rihan* St. But even so, there were many other political figures that held this position, why Mohamed Mahmoud's name gets to be the one on that blue street sign? I do not have an answer for that.

However, Why did I choose to study the Mohamed Mahmoud events? That's a question that I have an answer for. It was not until one year after the first MM, that more people started to analyze what happened and why is it that these events hold so much significance, that it should be commemorated? (Al-Jaberi, 2012) Later, I started to form a preliminary hypothesis about the nature of MM as a diagnostic event and its implication on the political discourse in Egypt. What started on November 19<sup>th</sup> was different in many ways than other events that preceded and followed. A turning point some would call it, it certainly was one for me. After all, this was my first time, after January, to leave my son at home and go to Tahrir Square to help. It was the first time I smelled gas bombs, and saw the wounded on the ground. It was as if I was in a battlefield.

More than a year later, my brother Aly had me interested in *The Walls*, a project he worked on in 2012, documenting the walls of downtown. We talked about how they turned into a *Mazaar* (shrine), downtown walls in general, and those of Mohamed Mahmoud in specific. I started paying more attention to what these walls represent and who are the people sharing this interest? Whether by painting the walls or just the passers by who stop in admiration and take a picture next to the beautiful murals.

If all of that was my field inspiration, then I owe my theoretical inspiration to the American historian Howard Zinn, especially his lecture on *The Interpretation of History*, where Zinn says: “You can tell the importance of history by how much controversy is raised when people start to write or speak different kind of history”<sup>5</sup>. And in another speech on *The War on Terrorism and The Uses of History*, he speaks of the “loss of history” and how history should work as a pillar that supports people against their governments if they would lie to them, and they always lie according to Zinn! He further affirmed the importance of “alternative sources” as a way to avoid “bad history”, the kind of one-sided history, which often suffers from “national amnesia”. It was in Zinn’s ideas that I started to find academic ground, and started to develop my topic about narratives and evidence and the struggles over Mohamed Mahmoud.

\*\*\*

In the first chapter, *Evidence between Present, History, and Memory*: I discuss concepts and theories that are relevant to my research. The body of literature in this chapter engages the following concepts: evidence; present and pastness, memory and commemorative events; competing narratives, power and history production. Throughout this chapter, I introduce a dialog between theory and practice. Thus, I brought in my fieldwork notes and experiences that preceded field research, either to affirm a theoretical point of view, or to challenge it.

In the following chapter titled *The Making of Mohamed Mahmoud*, I introduce to the reader a background on Mohamed Mahmoud events, developed through my personal experience and research, and supported by different other accounts that were

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KEHbtr89\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KEHbtr89_4)

offered by my interlocutors through the past two years. Introducing the geography of MM is very challenging, the boundaries of the street is constantly changing. It is almost impossible to say that there is one layout of MM; it depends on where you are standing and how you situate MM within the surrounding area. I then move to how different people/ groups viewed MM in time and space as an event; followed by a discussion on the way MM is classified also regarding space (street) and time (events). In that section, I analyze how the categories Epic vs. “*Moulid*”<sup>6</sup> seem to appear as dominant classifications over the different MM narratives. This chapter also includes the methodological approach and research techniques that I used. I end the chapter with a gallery: a collection of letters, drawings and pictures that people employed to tell stories about MM.

The third chapter titled *Body as Evidence* analyzes how people who were injured during the events, injuries of a permanent nature like losing an eye or having a scar on the forehead deal with their injuries as evidence. I discuss how they attempt to address the subject of their injuries through the law and in relation to other people; and what evidence they rely on to tell their stories of MM? In addition, I discuss in the second part of this chapter how evidence is processed through the Egyptian legal system as well as in the context of truth commissions. And the various challenges that faced the people who got injured and their families, with regard to their legal rights to know what happened. Highlighting the fact that both the legal system and the truth commissions, that were formed post January 2011, failed to deliver justice.

In chapter four *In Other Words, Other Pictures: Young Active Journalists and Photographers* I explore the notion of evidence through the process by which

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<sup>6</sup> *Moulid* is an Arabic word derived from the verb *Melaad* meaning birth in Arabic. *Moulid* is a noun that means the celebration of the birthday of a prophet or a saint, sometimes used as an adjective, as in this context to describe the festive nature of an event.

knowledge is produced. I employ the definition of sensual scholarship in relation to those who take up this mission of production. The chapter will be a continuation of the gallery I started early in the thesis. It will further explore how alternative narratives about MM got to be produced through visual media. Photos, live streaming, and films, all are indicative of the crucial and critical link between “truth and sight”. The chapter also highlights the lack of Egyptian mainstream sources of information that are objective and inclusive. In the second half of the chapter I present further attempts to produce and analyze such alternative knowledge.

## **Chronology Of Significant Events In This Thesis**

### **The Revolution (25 January – 11 February 2011)**

Since the 1950s, Egypt has been annually celebrating the National Police Day on January 25<sup>th</sup>. And on the same day, in 2011, an unprecedented number of people gathered in Tahrir Square in downtown, Cairo to revolt against Mubarak's regime. The gathering was a result of various calls made by and addressing the Egyptian youth through social media such as Facebook and twitter, to go to Tahrir Square and revolt like what the Tunisians did a few weeks earlier. The call for protest was preceded by years of resistance taking different forms and organizational structures, such as *kefaya* (enough) demonstrations, National Association for Change, workers and students protests.

The gathering in Tahrir Square was dispersed hours after midnight. Nonetheless, protests were held again in the following two days in Cairo, and in other governorates such as Suez and Alexandria. Then on the 28<sup>th</sup>, millions of Egyptians took the streets after noon-prayers, responding to what was known as *Gom'et al Ghadab* (Friday of Anger). After a long day, full of clashes with the Egyptian Riot Police or what formally known as Central Security Forces (CSF), people finally took Tahrir Square and the police withdrew from the scene. During that day and the following days mobile and Internet networks were busted in Egypt. After a couple of days, the networks were working again. Egyptian people stood for 18 days, protestors took over the main squares of major cities and towns, chanting and demanding the downfall of Mubarak and his regime. Battles and clashes ensued meanwhile. Until the moment they have been waiting for came, and Mubarak finally stepped down on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011. And handed his powers to the Supreme Council of the Armed



Forces (SCAF) through a statement made by Omar Suleiman, former Director of the General Intelligence Directorate and recently named Vice President.

### **The Battle of the Camel (2 February 2011)**

On February 1<sup>st</sup> Mubarak gave an emotionally charged speech. Going into their second week of camping, many people in Tahrir Square were exhausted. Suddenly on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, the army pulled back their cordon and Tahrir Square was open. Pro-Mubarak loyalists, who entered the square riding horses and camels, got into Tahrir clashing with protestors violently, hoping to disperse the campers and put an end to the revolution. “The battle of Camel” as it was named later, continued until later at night. A famous scene of the battle is when Molotov cocktails were thrown onto the protestors from rooftops. Some flames reached the Egyptian Museum that night. The battle left nearly a dozen of people dead and hundreds wounded.

### **Maspiro (9 October 2011)**

Maspiro events describe the killing of peaceful protestors in front and in the vicinity of the infamous state media building overlooking the River Nile River in Cairo. The protest, which was largely composed of Coptic Christians and secular activists, was heading to Maspiro from Shubra to protest the demolition of the Church of St. George, in the village of Al-Marinab in Aswan. The situation was complicated by the sectarian policies of the Governor as well as the sectarian rhetoric. Military police and CSF opened fire on protestors and ran them down using armored vehicles. Reports counts nearly thirty deaths and almost three hundred injured, mostly Coptic protestors.

### **Mohamed Mahmoud Events (19-25 November 2011)**

On the morning of Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> the CSF violently dispersed a small sit-in in Tahrir Square. The sit-in primarily consisted of families of those martyred and wounded in January 25 Revolution. The images and videos showing an extremely violent dispersal went viral. It was a matter of hours then people took Tahrir Square, once again to protest. The scene in Tahrir Square resembled the early images of January 25. Some called the protests “a second wave of the Revolution”. Hours later, the focus shifted from Tahrir to Mohamed Mahmoud Street as the clashes continued between the CSF and protestors. The violent clashes continued for days, despite all efforts to calm the clashes and start a truce. On Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> the Egyptian Army installed a concrete wall in Mohamed Mahmoud Street to separate the protestors and the CSF. It is estimated that around fifty people were killed during the clashes, and thousands were injured. Around sixty protestors went to Qasr AL-Eini Hospital with eye injuries. A famous video of a young official sniper, targeting protestors in Mohamed Mahmoud went viral, accusing the sniper of targeting eyes. Thus, the high rate of eye injuries was regarded intentional.

### ***Magles El Wozaraa’* Cabinet of Ministers (16 December 2011)**

Cabinet of Ministers events (also famously called Blue Bra Girl events) December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011 followed Mohamed Mahmoud 2011 events. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) tried to alleviate the public discontent/anger by removing Dr. Essam Sharraf, the first prime minister post 25th of January revolution. By appointing old guard political figure Dr. Kamal El Ganzoury as the prime minister, SCAF inflamed revolutionary forces. There was a large sit in in front of the Cabinet of Ministers headquarters not far away from MM Street and Tahrir Square. Despite

official assurances that no violence would be used to disperse the sit in, military police forces used excessive indiscriminate force to disperse the sit in, resulting in many deaths, tortures and injuries. Perhaps most famously is the Blue Bra girl who was stripped naked and dragged by four soldiers. The girl has become an icon for the Cabinet of Ministers events and sparked international interest and condemnation.

### **Port Said Events (2 February 2012)**

What started as a match between two old football rivals namely Al-Masry of Port Said and Al-Ahly of Cairo, ended up with a massacre. Minutes after Al Masry team had won the match, chaos took over the scene, and thugs started attacking Al-Ahly fans, leaving 74 young fans dead, all members of "Ultras Ahlawy"; a football-cheering group formed predominantly of young men with great dedication to one of Egypt's oldest football clubs. This was widely perceived as a conspiracy, executed by Mubarak's loyal men, however, leaving the bitter blame on the police and the military police, who stood still while the violence unfolded before their eyes. Some people think that this was a way of "getting back" at Ultras Ahlawy, for their pro-revolution and anti-police roles.

### **Mohamed Mahmoud Second Events (2-3 February 2012)**

Refers to the clashes taking place on and after February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012 in Mohamed Mahmoud Street and the adjacent streets. Large numbers of Ultras Ahlawy members along with unaffiliated protesters were present in those events. The march started by a social media call by Ultras Ahlawy angered by the Port Said events. The angry march proceeded to Tahrir in the evening of Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> to protest the killing of 74 fans in Port Said after the football match. According to official reports, 8 people died in the

clashes and several hundred people were injured. The Tax Authority building located in Mohamed Mahmoud St. was set on fire during these events.

### **Commemoration of Mohamed Mahmoud (19 November 2012)**

One year after the original events, under the rule of Mohamed Morsi, the first elected president after the revolution (who was one of the Muslim Brotherhood leaders), protestors were commemorating MM events. Towards the evening, the events turned from commemoration into clashes. Gika, (Mohamed Gaber) the first martyr during Morsi's era, was killed in Mohamed Mahmoud 2012.

### **Rabaa (14 August 2013)**

On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013, the Army deposed the first elected civilian president, Mohamed Morsi. The overthrow of Morsi was preceded by massive public protests, demanding early presidential elections, and for Morsi to end his term. In the aftermath of July 3, Muslim Brotherhood supporters organized two large sit-ins. Both in Cairo, one sit-in took place at Nahda Square in Giza, and the other at Rabaa Square in Nasr City. Rabaa then became the name given to the events of August 14, 2013, in Rabaa Square and the surrounding area. While both sit-ins were violently dispersed on the same day by the police and military forces, the number of people camped at Rabaa was much greater than those in Nahda, consequently, casualties were much higher in Rabaa. Human Rights Watch estimates that more than eight hundred were killed in Rabaa alone that day. Rabaa further marked a new turning point, with regards to the levels of the violence used by the state.

## **Chapter One: Evidence: Between Present, History And Memory**

In this chapter, I discuss concepts and theories relevant to my research. I believe theory should be a reflection to fieldwork; it should not stand alone, stripped from any context. Thus, in this chapter, I am keen to put theory and practice in conversation with each other. I use both theory and field notes as a lens, trying to analyze MM events, and its aftermath. Starting off with evidence as a central concept, the chapter is divided into seven sections that cover the concepts and notions of: historicity, digital memory, management of meaning, sight and presence and their link with “truth”, the concept of event, and finally creating memory projects.

In the first section in this chapter, I discuss how the concept of historicity, as introduced by Michel-Rolf Trouillot, is core to my analysis of evidence and to they way narratives about MM are constructed. I further engage Trouillot’s concepts with George Simmel and put both in conversation with my fieldwork notes. I move on in the following section to challenge the notion of “digital memory” and shed light on two main problematic issues with regard to the digital. In the third section I lay the ground for what has become known as the different dominant narratives about MM. Moreover, I try to see where they fit with regard to the concepts of “cultural authority” and “management of meaning” as discussed by Arjun Appadurai. The following section discusses the notions of sight and presence and their link with “truth”, as argued by Maurice Bloch and Christopher Pinney. Next, is an analysis of evidence as an under studied notion in anthropology. Focusing on Mathew Engelke and his article *The Objects of Evidence*. Finally I examine MM as an event, showing how it is indeed a “diagnostic event”. And end with the creation of memory projects, in light of the January revolution in general and MM in specific.

## A Narrative From A Fixed Past

*The play of power in the production of alternative narratives begins with the joint creation of facts and sources for at least two reasons. First, facts are never meaningless: indeed they become facts because they matter in some sense, however minimal. Second, facts are not created equal: the production of traces is always also the creation of silences. Some occurrences are noted from the start; others are not. Some are engraved in individual or collective bodies; others are not. Some leave physical markers; others are not. What happened leaves traces, some of which are quite concrete – buildings, dead bodies, censuses, monuments, diaries, political boundaries—that limit the range and significance of any historical narrative. This is one of many reasons why not any fiction can pass for history: the materiality of the sociohistorical process (historicity 1) sets the stage for future historical narratives (historicity 2). (Trouillot, 1995, p.29)*

In *Silencing the Past*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) speaks of the meaning of history and differentiates between<sup>7</sup> “what happened” historicity 1, and “that which is said to have happened” historicity 2. He continues, “the distinction between both is not always clear”, it is indeed “quite fluid” (pp. 2-3). In that sense Trouillot is trying to look outside the boxes of classic constructivists model theories of history, and point out to the limitations they pose. He thinks that the positivist and the constructivist approaches both did not give sufficient attention to the process of producing historical narratives. Trouillot’s critiques of such theories of historical narratives, which tend to privilege a one-sided historicity, fall in agreement with what I try to depict in this study. I explore how the variable narratives produced about the events of MM are

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<sup>7</sup> “What happened” is the social and historical process that took place in the past and after. And “that which is said to have happened” is the sum of “facts”, stories and any other related form of information about that process.

constantly countering each other from different positions; the state, the MBs, the mainstream, the revolutionaries, and the list could further go on.

More importantly he adds, that historical narratives “claim truth” through two stages, one when the producer of the narrative “makes a claim of knowledge” and the other is when the narrative passes as “believed to have happened” from the viewpoint of the people who receive it (p. 158, footnote 4). “Authenticity implies a relation with what is known that duplicates the two sides of historicity: it engages us both as actors and narrators” (Trouillot, p. 150) This becomes very true with regard to MM events; as claiming truth as a narrator is part and parcel of being an active actor in the events. I will stress on that point later on in this chapter when I discuss notions of sight and presence and how they are linked to power and truth. (See p. 37)

In addition to the importance of the concept of historicity, another factor that both actors and narrators highlight is the way an event is perceived, as this, after all, will directly affect the process of creating a narrative/s about the event. According to George Simmel, a historical incident or an event can only be perceived as fragments. For him, it is unmanageable to logically understand an event in its “immediacy and wholeness” (p. 33). Our mission then, is not only to fragment this event in order to understand it, but also to take in consideration the different positions of the different parties that take part in this occurrence, and track the psychological sequences that each hold. Only then, can we decode the construction of any given event (1971, p. 33).

On that basis, Simmel (1971) critiques what he calls “historical realism” or the past “as it really was”. For him, all history is a creation of the human mind “the material of history is mind itself” (p. 3). Based on that, Simmel thinks that there is no

such thing as a fixed past that we retrieve our memories from; this is an idea that both Trouillot and Simmel agree on. Trouillot believes that “at any rate, there is evidence that the contents of our cabinet [mind] are neither fixed nor accessible at will” (1995, p. 14). He further explains that “the relations between the events described and their public representation in a specific historical context... debunk the myth of [t]he [p]ast as a fixed reality and the related view of knowledge as a fixed content.”(p. 147)

On the other hand, what I came across in the fieldwork speaks of a “fixed past” trapped in the form of videos and photos of different events. Certainly not fixed as one shared collective past, but fixed in the minds of individual actors who may obtain “fixed contents” in the form of videos of what happened to them, “accessible at will” by a click on their electronic devices. An example of this could be the story of Mohamed F. who carries his evidence with him on his mobile phone. Mohamed’s “fixed past” is so significant to the part that I shall offer to the reader now, although the story is detailed in chapter three. (See p. 108)

As far as Mohamed can remember, he told me about “El Kammashah”<sup>8</sup> and his attempts to escape it. Mohamed’s description of the scene is almost the same as everyone else’s who was there at that moment. This includes the AUC security guards whom I interviewed later who had very different political views on the matter. Mohamed’s escape failed, as he fell off the curb while one of the soldiers was chasing him with a stick... Mohamed remembers little after the fall, as he became unconscious... He does not remember getting beaten after he fell on the ground. However, he managed to tell me in details what happened “I downloaded the video

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<sup>8</sup> El Kammashah in Egyptian Arabic usually refers to a tool that grabs hold of something from two sides; the English equivalent for it is pliers. People refer to one of the attacks in MM specifically as El Kammashah, because they think that it was planned that the army and police corner the protesters from the two sides of the outer area of MM from Tahrir Sq. Square so that no one escapes them.



because I was afraid they will take it off YouTube, I have it on my smart phone memory card” he likes to carry the evidence of “what happened” with him to show it to anyone who is skeptic of his story. Although his body was brutally injured, it did not serve in his mind as evidence. Bruises and broken bones can heal, leaving Mohamed with no tangible evidence, however, the video he has on his mobile “protects”, in Mohamed’s point of view, his claim of truth. As he was unconscious, this video is what saved/fixed his narrative.

Individuals I met who do not particularly share the same stories about this particular event, or even do not conceive this event as one “fixed” event, each of them hold a fixed past in their minds. And indeed they have competing contradicting narratives about MM. So, if the material of history is mind itself, then I would argue that as much as this conceptualization of history leaves much room for contesting narratives to exist, it leaves equal chance for each narrative to claim truth through a mind filled with “fixed content”.

Moreover, according to Simmel individuals tend to group themselves with others who share the same qualities: “we see the other not simply as an individual but as a colleague or comrade or fellow party member...” (p. 11) Simmel thinks that this applies also when we think of other individuals who are different from us, so therefore Simmel states, “the civilian who meets an officer cannot free himself from his knowledge of the fact that this individual is an officer” (p. 11-12). This idea that human mental categories affect the perception of events, therefore, affects the creation of narratives about the past, is a valid idea. However, the critiques of “historical realism” or the past “as it really was” cannot be precisely accurate now in the point of view of those who hold their digital pasts dearly. In the year 2015 narratives claim truth through “realism” offering digital evidence (videos, photos, access to other

people's evidence/episodes). Thus, Mohamed's claim to truth "this is what happened to me" "as it really was", might be possible to grasp.

### **The Digital Effect**

At the same moment, this "fixed/saved" memory does not have enough ground to dismiss valid questions/critiques such as 1) the fragility of the digital against erasure, 2) the question of the authenticity of any content; after all, photos and videos "*do not lie*" but also do not offer *a complete truth*. Over the period of time that I have conducted my fieldwork, I have encountered some situations of "systematic erasure" of digital "archives"<sup>9</sup>.

Sometimes it is rather personal, when some people deactivate their social media accounts permanently, or temporarily to get away from social media. Maybe not knowing at all that this means they are deactivating all their "digital memory" posts, videos, photos, etc.... as if it never existed before. Luckily, during my fieldwork I encountered this only twice, the first time, I directly called my interlocutor and asked her to give me access to her account. She was kind enough to activate her account for a couple of hours, so that I take screenshots of her posts. The other time, I had nothing to do but be patient enough, for this person to activate her account once again, as I had no contacts for her. After a couple of weeks, her account was active again. Nevertheless, what if she did not activate her account? We lose digital memory every time someone decides they want to "deactivate/erase" their accounts.

Another form of erasure was the shut down of *Ikhwan* online the official website for the MB. Before Rabaa, the website had a digital archive containing all the

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<sup>9</sup> I use archives here in a broad sense to include official and non-official material.

statements by the Brotherhood, especially the official statements, including all the ones about MM. However, after the shut down of the website, most of the content has become unavailable. After the re-launching of the site, *Ikhwan* online stated in big red font “the website is pilot broadcasting.” On one hand, this draws many concerns around how much power the state has to suppress archives. On the other hand, it raises a serious question: who will get to decide what gets to be in the “new” *Ikhwan* online archives. Which material will get included and which will get excluded? No one knows.

One more type of erasure exemplified through what happened to the video of Mohamed F. Originally filmed and broadcasted through *Al-Masry Al-Youm* YouTube channel, as Mohamed F. predicted the channel removed the clip. However, we have no clue what the exact date of the erasure was. When I was just about to give up on finding the video, and call Mohamed to tell him that they did erase it, I stumbled over the same clip broadcasted through another channel<sup>10</sup>. The video still has the logo of *Al-Masry Al-Youm* on it. This is not just about Mohamed’s video, which went missing from the Internet. A lot of other videos and news as well are being erased. Over the period of my research, I found it very difficult to retrieve many statements, news reports and articles, the only digital archive available, and, somewhat, intact, was that of Shorouk news.

Another form of erasure results from the constant competition over the narratives. Each group while trying to promote their narrative, seek to establish/focus on some “facts” and silence others. By choosing a certain set of “facts” to present a narrative, the credibility of other narratives gets affected. And this goes the other way

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<sup>10</sup> RT channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/RussiaToday>

around. A clear example of that is the number of short clips uploaded on YouTube, by different users, all presenting one brief part of Mohamed Badae's interview on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (El-Liethy, 2011), disregarding everything he said before and after this part. The clips only focus on the few minutes where the Supreme Guide of the MBs said it would be "a big mistake to join in MM." Focusing on this sole sentence and the fact that it is anti-revolutionary, even some would go as far as calling it: treason. Taking this sentence out of its context, made it much more acceptable for the other groups (revolutionaries and later on state) to deny the fact that despite what Badae said, some MBs were there in MM. (See p. 69)

On the other hand, concerns of authenticity of content addressing the second question about the fragility of digital are well argued in Ed Kashi's article *The Future of Photojournalism*. Where he discusses how the development of photography and the advancement of software programs that are used for editing have added to the profession and have compromised it at the same time. He continues that the "powerful post production tools have blurred the lines of truth more than ever and allowed weakening certain standards within the profession" (Kashi, 2015).

Not just that, Kashi adds, "[t]here are so many opportunities now, coming from all sorts of different places: audio, video, phone cameras ... you have to have a strong style and vision and an eye for great stories that the media will want." (2015) Therefore, the last few words in Kashi's sentence, "stories that the media will want", endorse that silences are inherent in any given narrative due to power relations. The person who takes up that mission to document, whether professional or an amateur "selects" at the very moment where s/he presses record. The possibility of a verified story seizes to exist the minute this video starts and ends.

To give an example of the power play between the authority of the state and that of sight and presence invested in digital memory, and its implications on the matter, I recall when I asked Ahmed Osman<sup>11</sup> about the “valid evidence” that Egyptian law courts approve, and to what extent videos are considered as legal evidence? He showed me a copy of a police report on his desk, where a police officer filed a report against some people that were part of an Islamist anti-Sisi march. The officer filed the report as a witness. He described the march as non-peaceful and claimed that the protestors attacked the police first .I asked Osman if this were to be contested by a video showing the march was clearly peaceful with no weapons to attack the police, would the judge accept that as part of the evidence? Osman told me, “the judge could easily dismiss such a piece of “evidence” on the grounds that it only shows the demonstration of a certain amount of time, from a certain angle, and that they could have started the attack on the police the minute that video was over...” (2015, interview)

It is reasonable to accept the call of a judge who would take an eyewitness’ statement over a video. After all, this eyewitness, who is supposed to be truthful, has the advantage of “presence.” In addition, unlike scholars, judges cannot spend the same amount of time studying a case, as they need to deliver a judgment in a relatively short time (Good, 2008). However, in the context of unconventional events or “generic moments” as Bruce Kapferer (2015) addressed them in his article, dismissing such evidence seem unreasonable.

Notwithstanding all the problematic features of the digital, still, in the case of “generic moments” such as MM and other events that preceded it and followed,

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<sup>11</sup> Lawyer at AFTE.

disqualifying active digital memory as “incomplete” while favoring eyewitnesses, is as problematic as the digital. The bottom line, a witness’ statement can be “incomplete/unauthentic” in many ways, just as a five-minutes video spotting one angle of the occurrence.

Bearing in mind, that digital retrieval does not solve by itself struggles over memory and narrative. Although, narrators can go online and retrieve active episodes from “history” to augment their narratives, MM narratives among other narratives too about other significant events, remains a site of struggle. The key aspect here is power. Thus, the question here becomes: who have more authority? This will be tackled in the next section.

### **Whose Narratives have More Authority?**

I present below a layout for the main contesting narratives around MM. This is a broad categorization that includes three main groups; each broad categorized narrative holds within itself a set of sub-narratives. A fourth set of narratives, however, is linked to Rabaa and how it further pushed MM as an event, and the narratives around it in contestation. Details of the narratives are presented in the following chapters.

### **The Revolutionaries’ Narrative**

It is somewhat challenging to define those who either proclaim themselves as *el thuwwar* (the revolutionaries), or are granted this label by others. Who are they? Although it seems like a very basic question, technically it has countless answers depending on the source. However, when I use the label revolutionaries in this thesis, I use it as my interlocutors did, to describe those who revolted against the Mubarak regime and participated in the events of January 2011 and after. They were mostly

young people, but not exclusively. Being revolutionary for my interlocutors was about loyalty to the Revolution and to the 18 days in Tahrir Square. The fact that all of them were not affiliated with any political party, prior to the revolution, indicate that politics and the political in general, is being redefined in Egypt after the Revolution. Although my interlocutors have got in political debates, they might even have gone to a demonstration or two, but they were never officially involved in the political process, such as participating in elections or any other political procedures. In other words, revolutionaries according to my interlocutors would be those people who participated in the revolution and its events because they wanted to, not because they got orders from any party to participate.

So even if one is affiliated with a party, as Safa was, at the time of MM 2011 (and she is not anymore), she did not go to MM to fulfill orders from her party, nor did she try to propagate that she was a member at this *Hizb* (party) in order to get her party the revolutionary label. In fact, the opposite happened. During our interview, she was critical of her leaders and how they tried to use her injuries to prove that a member of the party was injured while participating in MM. Again, as some kind of evidence that this *Hizb* is a revolutionary one. Safa chose not to have any “direct political gain” and refused to give such gains to her party.

Therefore, I establish here that the label “revolutionaries” does not represent one stream of people. However, it represents, according to my interlocutors, a set of “qualities” and “values”. In that sense, what MM represents for “the revolutionaries” is a turning point, as they identified, based on participation in MM who holds these qualities, and who supports these values, and who do not. At a time where the political game had taken a new turn towards, what we can call a normalization of the political course, which manifested in the preparation for parliamentary election, those

in MM were spoiling that turn. Thus, phrases such as *ifsaad al'ors al demoqraty* (spoiling the democratic celebration of elections) were perpetuated by the MBs blaming those in MM for the unstable situation. The blame, however, fired back when MM revolutionaries pointed fingers at the MBs insisting “the MBs sold us out in MM!”

A story by Khalil El Masry, co-founder of “*Selmiyah*”<sup>12</sup>, about a document is a great example of how narratives around MM remains contested, forming sub-narratives that compete with each other, and with the other contesting narratives as well. The story was about a document that holds a list of names and phone numbers of people who stood for hours creating a human wall between the *midan* and MM Street during events in November 2011. Khalil, as a member of *Selmiyah* tried with others to prevent people from going further into the street, in order to stop the ongoing clashes. It was around the fifth day after the initiation of the clashes. The story of the human wall appeared from a different angle, when a police officer claimed that the police officers’ coalition worked a deal with different political camps and youth coalitions in Tahrir to form this wall, as a starting point for truce (Al-Masry Al-Youm, 2011)<sup>13</sup>. However, this attempt was a failure as the protestors condemned these political figures telling them “where were you at night? When we were beaten and attacked... each one of you is seeking his own benefit” (Gondy & Amer, 2011). In another narrative, AbelHalim AbdAllah told me during our interview that he believes the MB’s Youth were the ones behind the idea of that wall, as they wanted the clashes to end fearing it will affect the parliamentary election.

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<sup>12</sup>Selmiyah is a peace initiative, created after the events of January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011 as many civil society initiatives were founded at the time.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/128314>



Regardless of all that, Khalil told me that his first trial was in vain, as Karim Omar, another interlocutor confirmed in his statement. Khalil broke down and started yelling at people that they must listen to him. He managed to gather a crowd that sympathized with his proposed idea of a human wall. After succeeding in forming the wall and keeping it from falling apart Khalil decided to gather the names and mobile numbers of those who stood all night to help calm things down. He stopped by every single one of them and asked for their contacts. By that time after dawn, they all knew that Khalil was the person organizing the human wall; most of them trusted him enough to give him their contacts. He even told me that he met a couple of them afterwards and is still in touch with some until now.

The story of the human wall as offered from three different views, one by Khalil, another by the police officer, and a third by Halim, further confirms that even inside the same camp/group, as both Khalil and Halim are revolutionaries, the story of the wall is still contested. Authority over who have the most credible evidence is fragmented.

### **The Muslim Brotherhood's Narrative**

In my view, this is the most complicated narrative so far. There are three layers at play; the first one is: official narrative vs. unofficial (on the ground) narratives, the second layer is: old MBs vs. young MBs narratives, and the last layer is pre vs. post-Rabaa narratives. However, this one will be discussed separately below, as it includes narratives from the MBs as well as the state and other players.

The first layer is signified in what Mohamed Badae', the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, had to say in a televised interview on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011. He described MM, as "this is a plot". This was echoed by some of the MBs

themselves according to two of my interlocutors, who shared similar stories about their *Ikhwani* relatives. Sharing the same official rhetoric, they believed that this is a plot to ruin the elections. However, on the grounds of MM there was a different story going on. Despite their official standing against participating in MM, there is much evidence on the presence of young *Ikhwan* during MM 2011; some even claims that particular elder leaders were present in MM, particularly to help with the wounded (Deeb, 2011) and to show their personal support to those who were there (Shorouknews, 2011).

The second layer has to do with those young *Ikhwan* who were there against their parents' wishes or against their leaders' commands. Their presence was a marker of the inconsistency between the old and the new inside the Brotherhood. Up until that point, *Shabab El Ikhwan* (young MBs), those who participated in MM regardless of what the official narrative was, they appreciated the same "qualities" and supported the same "values" as their fellow revolutionaries.

### **The State's Narratives**

After Mubarak had stepped down in February the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) undertook his responsibilities. Appointing the first government after the revolution, and supporting the police to maintain security all over the country. However, the SCAF leaders were keen on showing through their statements that they are a separate front, separate from the government and from Mubarak's regime. Their statements consistently started with the same preamble "A statement from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces..."

Field Marshal *Mohamed Hussein Tantawi* made the first televised official statement around MM events. Since he was the head of SCAF at the time, I take his

statement as the leading source of the Military narrative around MM. The core messages in the statement regarding what happened primarily in MM, and maybe hinting at what happened at Maspiro, were that the military exercised the highest levels of self-restraint; and secondly, that what happened was a plot to tarnish the good name of the Egyptian military<sup>14</sup>.

At that time, *Essam Sharaf* held the position of the first Prime Minister after the revolution of January 2011. However, the Cabinet was thought of as “weak-willed and subservient to the military council” (AboulEnein & others, 2012)<sup>15</sup>. On Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> of November at night, Sharaf gave a statement declaring the full support of the government to the ministry of interior; regarding their mission in carrying on with the preparation for the elections, and praising their role in facing violence with self-restraint. He demanded of the protestors to clear Tahrir Square and addressed “*al-gamahir al-wa‘eiah*” (sensible audience) to “save their revolution and its objectives and help keeping peace and stability” (MENA, 2011).

At the same day, Assistant Deputy for the interior minister for security affairs Maj. Gen. *Samy Sidhom*, declared the protestors in Tahrir as “thugs and ill-behaved” and that the Central Security Forces (CSF) were un-armed to begin with, and it was the protestors who attacked the CSF with bird-shots, gas bombs and Molotov cocktails (Ali, 2011). The next day, there was some confusion about dismissing the government; and rumors around the resignation of some its members. However, an unidentified official source discounted any news about that (Bahnasawy, 2011). This was not for long, as the Cabinet announced its resignation on Tuesday, three days

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<sup>14</sup> Link to Tantawi’s full speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2pBOEEZ7Wk>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2012/11/19/remembering-mohamed-mahmoud-the-good-the-bad-and-the-brotherhood/>

after the events had started. And it was eventually accepted by the SCAF. Although technically Sharaf's cabinet remained in charge, until *Kamal El Ganzouri* the new appointed PM formed his cabinet.

### **Post-Rabaa: Rabaa-Mohamed Mahmoud A Reversed Curse!**

Rabaa is the name given to the events of August 14<sup>th</sup> 2013, where a sit-in by the supporters of the former president Mohamed Morsi was violently dispersed by the police forces. It further marked a new turning point, concerning the levels of violence used by the state. According to Menna El Masry, a researcher at AFTE, after Rabaa, it was unattainable to keep up with numbers of those who were missing, and also the numbers of the people who were arrested during the disperse.

In addition, Rabaa narratives formed another layer with regards to the narratives about MM. The stakes have been raised in Rabaa. On August 14<sup>th</sup>, there have been more missing people, more killings, and more violence in general towards protestors from the state's end. The label "revolutionary" has never been contested like it was after Rabaa. Competing now, rightfully, with those who denied them the label revolutionary on the ground that they "sold them out in MM"; *Ikhwani* narratives post-Rabaa, reverses the curse, insisting "we were there at MM, but you sold us out in Rabaa". In addition, the state, which on many levels acted against those who participated in MM, issued a commemorating statement through the MOI to pay attribute to those who died in MM (see p. 76).

August 14<sup>th</sup> 2013 formed another diagnostic event. However the irony became apparent after Rabaa, when MM was used/abused as a "revolutionary badge" specifically by MBs and the state who proclaimed MM as "a plot" and the people in MM as thugs. Different media channels serving different contesting groups played a

powerful role in manipulating positions and statements. In order to maintain power relations, they had to counter each other constantly, using MM as their reference (see p. 74).

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Since these “pasts” stand, by and large, in a segmented relationship to one another, does this simply imply that there is no generaliz[ed] view of the past that is *shared* among those who have regular interest in the [events, no matter how different their positions are]... There is such a shared past, although it is largely composed of elements already contained in the divergent ‘pasts’ of [those] particular groups. (Appadurai, 1981, p. 216)

Thus, the debatability of the past from what Arjun Appadurai (1981) argues in *The Past as a Scarce Resource* is not different from the present debate around MM. The concepts discussed in Appadurai’s piece are relevant to my hypothesis, the four cultural dimensions (Authority, Continuity, Depth and Interdependence), which he argues “minimal universal structure for the cultural construction of pasts” (p. 203). This idea of competing authorities is specifically useful to my analysis of what MM main narratives employ as authoritative. The revolutionaries depend on the authority of sight and presence (see next section). However the Muslim Brotherhood use their popular discourse of victimization, this shows through Badea’s clear statement “MM is a plot”. Last but not least, the state, which technically holds official authority, deploys the “honor and national service” rhetoric, to compete with other existing authorities, investing in slogans such as “the army and the people are one hand” and “the army protected the revolution” and so on... One last important example of this rhetoric is the speech commemorating MM in 2013 made by the MOI (see p.76).

All the groups at one point claimed authority over what happened in MM, presenting their own evidence to render their construction credible. Tensions were

always part of the debate of whose story has more authority? Since they were all countering each other, no one had the full authority, and not a single narrative prevailed over the others. Since the authority over the event was fragmented, and no group has “fully” succeeded in imposing a certain MM narrative over the others, the definition of management of meaning as “the competitive process by which values are defined, images of transactions contrived, and interpretations of a situation successfully imposed by one party on others” (Appadurai quoting Cohen and Comaroff, 1981, PP.202-203) fails to apply to MM.

### **I Saw It With My Own Eyes!**

Quoting Matthew Engelke in *The Objects of Evidence* “when everything is potential evidence, how do you make it legible...? ... [Y]ou do not *necessarily* need ‘a lot’ of evidence- however one wants to quantify it- to have a compelling argument.” (2008, p. S15). Just as the people who gave statements to El Nadim Center after MM 2011, insisted on the use of numbers “we were thirty-six people inside the room” (El Nadim, 2012), to show that they have a “compelling argument”, as if they wanted to confirm through the different statements: it was not just me! There were many other people who witnessed this! (See p. 99)

A compelling argument claims truth through the same two stages that were introduced by Trouillot regarding narrative production, first “makes[ing] a claim of knowledge”, and second one when the narrative passes as “believed to have happened” from the viewpoint of the people who receive it (1995, p. 158). This claim of truth is well linked in the piece by Maurice Bloch (2008) *Truth and Sight: Generalizing without Universalizing*; the article is offering a seemingly controversial argument. Bloch introduces his work on the Zafimaniry village, where as a part of his

research he conducted an experiment referred to as the “false belief task”. What Bloch called the “Zafimaniry theory” is based on the conclusions of the villagers; the most important element of it is the link between “speech and lying”. In short, “language enables humans to lie” (2008, P.S25).

As a consequence, it is assumed to the Zafimaniry people that “pragmatic deceit is the default of social life”(p. S26) and that makes the “claim of truth” a great matter that “must be clearly distinguished from the everyday” (p. S26). Accordingly, Bloch states that to the Zafimaniry culture when someone wants the ultimate claim of truth, they would say, “it was seen by my own eyes” (2008, P.S26). Zafimaniry theory is echoed well in the lyrics of *No Comment*, a song by The Chorus Project that talks about MM, from a revolutionary viewpoint, in the first couplet it sings, “they lie to you. Plug ears. Have eyes” (see p.96). This song is a clear an example of how authoritative sight is, especially through actual presence.

The article by Bloch goes further to argue for the concept and to discuss more its implications. - Although the definition of evidence employed by Bloch is much critiqued

In the *Oxford English Dictionary* the first definition of evidence is ‘the quality or condition of being evident; clearness, evidentness’ As Bloch ... highlighted; this quality is often linked to the sense of sight. To be ‘in evidence’, the *OED* states, is to be ‘actually present, prominent, conspicuous’. What needs to be stressed, however, is that in any professional or academic inquiry the primary definition of evidence is insufficient. Indeed, for an anthropologist (among others) the quality or condition of being evident exists more as a desire than an actual state of affairs... We need evidence first as a tool, not quality or condition. (Englke, 2008, Pp.S4-S5)

Unlike Englike, I find that this particular definition is confirmed through my study for the past two years. I have constantly encountered the same link between truth and sight. The debate around evidence as a “tool” not a “quality or condition” do not have to be situated, in my view, in an either/or form, evidence can serve as both for the anthropologist. Further, it is clear to me that there is a sense of awareness among the people I interviewed of the idea of “deceit.” Most of my interlocutors, if not all of them, “claim truthfulness” based on their condition of being present at the event, and most importantly the fact that they saw with their own eyes what happened, or did not see. The way they narrated what they witnessed, and the way they stressed in other points that they did not see this or that, but someone told them or they heard it somewhere, further affirm their dependence on sight even more than presence to claim their narratives more credible and authoritative.

The following tags were repeated almost in every single interview of mine, and it was also clear that social media statuses that started with “that’s what I saw with my own eyes” had more authority, and was rather considered to be a statement of fact not an opinion. Abd El Hamid, Hayman, Hazzaa, Safa, Marwa Barakat, AUC guards, Osman and the rest of my interviewees, they all used at least one tag of the following along their statements: “I saw it with my own eyes ...I went there in order to see for myself ...that is what I saw...we have seen it all, etc....”



November 21, 2011 · 🌐

**Marwa Barakat** shared Mohamed Ali's photo.

محدث يتخيل دي مبالغة! .. اللي شفته بعيني في الميدان أكبر من كدة بكثير , و اللي سمعته بودني عالتيلفزيون المصري أسخف و أقدر من كدة بكثير "الداخلية لم ولن تستخدم المطاطي أو الخرطوش على المواطنين - متيري الشغب يمتلكون أسلحة و يصيون أفراد الأمن بالأعيرة النارية و المطاطي و الخرطوش!"

Mohamed Ali

Figure 3: Marwa's status reads: Do not think this is an exaggeration. What I saw with my own eyes in the square, is much more... and what I heard with my own ears on the Egyptian TV, is way more ridiculous and dirty. "The police did not and will not use rubber bullets or birdshots on citizens - the rioters own weapons and cause injuries to security personnel with live shots, rubber bullets and bird shots!!"

The caption in cartoon reads:

Presenter to security personnel: "What would you like to tell viewers of Egyptian TV?" Security personnel: As you can see we observed the highest level of self discipline ... and the square is squeaky clean"

Crucial to this point, is the work of Chirtopher Pinney (2008) on photography as a cure and a poison. Pinney argues that photos may serve as “evidence of an event” and at the same time “evidence of a *mentalité*” he continues, “[an image] is both evidence of something which happened and evidence of someone’s theory about what happened” (2008, P.S34). Pinney’s view brings us back to Simmel (1971) and his idea of history as a material of human mind. Pinney’s article shows how photography was “perceived as cure”, as a “solution to the weaknesses and corruptions of earlier technologies of representation” (Pinney, 2008, PS34). In the context of the Amritsar massacre on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1919 in Punjab, Pinney tells us a story about Narayan

Vinayak Virkar a “committed young photographer” who was able to take photos shortly after the massacre. In analyzing Virkar photos, Pinney thought “for the most part he wielded his camera not as a documentary tool but rather as a medium for production of authority” (2008, P.S36). The term “production of authority” summarizes the point I want to bring home. This discourse of contestations about MM, primarily lead to a fight over authority.

### **Evidence: An Under Studied Notion**

The discussion around the concept of evidence in anthropology comes to a peak in the *Objects of Evidence*, an article by Matthew Engelke that brings attention to the issue of evidence as an understudied notion in anthropology. Engelke states that “it is relatively difficult to find social and cultural anthropologists writing about the concept of evidence in an explicit or sustained manner” (2008, p. S1). He concludes that anthropologists tend to be more attentive to the methodological aspect of evidence; however, it is the “epistemological” aspect that we should pay more attention to (Engelke, 2008, p.S2). The *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* dedicated an entire volume to the topic, which Engleke’s article is part of, *The Objects of Evidence: Anthropological Approaches to the Production of Knowledge*. This volume is a valuable collection of literature around the concept and it handles more than just one aspect of knowledge production and evidence.

The articles in this volume offer different take on the definition of the concept “evidence.” Complemented by a variety of topics such as *Cultural evidence in courts of law* by Anthony Good. Where he discusses the problems arise when “culture” enters the legal context as “objective evidence”. Good bring up in that regard some important points, such as, the admissibility of expert evidence, and the different legal

approaches to “objectivity”. Concluding that the legal “define reliability in terms of technique rather than content” (Good, p.S49). However, Good’s paper does not offer a detailed discussion around the difference between lawyers and social scientists with regard to their ways of thinking and reasoning, thus explaining the different ways they deal with evidence. Towards the end of his article, under the section *cultural evidence in court*, Good stress on the issue of “anthropological advocacy” with regard to legal matters. Good concludes that it is the duty of the anthropologist to concur the legal, if the case in hand is “dealing with ‘cultural’ phenomenon” in order to avoid misguided perceptions and “distorted understandings”(p.S57).

Another piece in the same volume is one by Sharad Chari *The Antinomies of Political Evidence in post-Apartheid Durban, South Africa*, where he looks at how evidence is assembled in political work. Chari reflects on the writings of Njabulo Ndebele (1998) who argues that issues of memory and realism were part of the post-Apartheid debate. He further reflects on how knowledge production, led to either unity or enmity. Moreover, presenting the effort of the men and women in Wentworth with regard to their efforts in producing political evidence to limit the state racism. Chari’s article is a great attempt to present ethnographically how political evidence, and the creative process of its formation, can be used to fight marginalization (P.S74).

The production of knowledge is a part and parcel of anthropology as a discipline. Engleke (2008) adequately argues that evidence, as one form of knowledge, is under studied in anthropology. Despite anthropology’s heavy reliance on evidence with regard to methodology, still, studying production, value, and effect of evidence on narratives seems yet to develop.

## Mohamed Mahmoud as An Event<sup>16</sup>

An event is not necessarily best understood as exemplification of an extant symbolic or social order. Events may equally be evidence of the ongoing dismantling of structures and the voicing of competing cultural claims. Events may reveal substantial areas of normative indeterminacy. (Falk-Moore, 1987, p. 729)

Sally Falk-Moore (1987) speaks about the ability of a field worker- i.e. anthropologist, to sense what events may have this capacity within. She defines these kinds of events as “diagnostic events”, which have the quality, as Falk-Moore claims, to expose information about the “ongoing contests and conflicts and competitions” (p. 730). The notion of “diagnostic events” applies greatly to MM. A clear example of that is the Facebook status by Ahmed Kamel as shown below, in which he wrote about Ahmed Merghany (a football player) who attacked President El Sisi on social media recently. Merghany found himself suspended from the team he is playing for, and heavily attacked by the media<sup>17</sup>.

In this Facebook status Kamel was referring to the fact that Merghany is “the only player who participated in clashes, and got injured after the Port-Said massacre in Mansour Street...” referring to MM second events in February 2012. The comments below the status indicate confusion between Mansour Street and MM events. Kamel went into a debate with others about the timing of Merghany’s injury, whether it was in the first MM or the second.

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<sup>16</sup> This section is a theoretical foundation for the definition of diagnostic, significant and commemorative events. The next chapter, however, *The Making of Mohamed Mahmoud* is dedicated to discuss how MM as an event is bound, both spatially and temporally, and how it was recognized, named and structured through the different narratives.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.madamasr.com/news/footballer-sacked-calling-president-failure>

**Ahmed Kamel**  
July 5 at 1:41am · Edited · 🌐

الواد مرغني عنده ثبات انفعالي وابتسامة مستحيلة  
شاب اتدمر مستقبله من كام ساعة وحملة من اغلب الاعلاميين والدلائيل بيواجهها  
بشجاعة وابتسامة وادب مفرط ومفكرش يتراجع خطوة للخلف حتي ينقذ بيها  
مستقبله واكل عيشه..  
افتكروا دايمًا جملة: الحرية وسام علي صدري  
مرغني وسام علي صدورنا جميعا  
بالمناسبة هو اللاعب الوحيد اللي كان بينزل اشتباكات واتصاب بعد مذبحه بورسعيد  
في شارع منصور وهو بيهتف قصاص عدك شهيد مات بالغدر

👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share

You, Mosa'ab Elshamy, Mona Seif and 1,214 others like this.

380 shares

**Mesh Wessam**  
ورجله اتصاب في محمد محمود  
Like · Reply · 👍 9 · July 5 at 1:42am

**Ahmed Kamel**  
مهى دي شارع منصور بعد المذبحه  
Like · Reply · 👍 3 · July 5 at 1:44am

**عمر القاضي**  
لا في محمد محمود الاولى  
Like · Reply · 👍 1 · July 5 at 2:17am

**Ahmed Kamel**  
لا الثانية  
Like · July 5 at 2:17am

**عمر القاضي**  
صدقني الاولى لاني كنت عامله خير انه اتصاب وكلمته يومها  
Like · July 5 at 2:18am

**Ahmed Kamel**  
راجع التاريخ هتلاقي انه كان بعد بورسعيد  
Like · July 5 at 2:20am

**عمر القاضي**  
ممكنت يكون اتصاب ثاني بس هو الاولى جاله خرطوش في رجله ثاني يوم  
الاحداث  
Like · July 5 at 2:21am

Figure 4: Facebook status by Ahmed Kamel

Other social media debates, similar to that one, indicate that MM events have become indeed a part of the popular political discourse in Egypt. A comment relating to MM is expected to be a part of most political conversations online. People refer to MM as a defining element in these conversations. It defines their/your positionality, whether revolutionary, MB supporter or state devotee.

This theoretical approach regarding the concept of event is echoed well in Bruce Kapferer's (2010) essay *The Event – toward an Anthropology of Generic Moments*. Kapferer presents the theoretical progress of the concept and its “conventional” uses in anthropological practice and tries both, to be guided by it and to “break away” from it.

Kapferer (2010) marks at the very beginning what he thinks as two “conventional usages” of the concept event in anthropology. The first is “event as illustration”, which according to Kapferer comes in the form of case studies of “general ethnographic descriptive or theoretical assertions”. The second use of an “event” is the event as “happenings or occasions, slices of life, that establish a conundrum problematic that the presentation of an ethnography and its analysis will solve or otherwise explain” (2010, P.1) Nevertheless, building on those two frameworks, Kapferer raises many important issues with regard to the capacity of event as an analytic approach, in which Gluckman's Manchester School serves as a starting point in the anthropological ethnographic practice.

According to Kapferer, “significant events” as defined by Manchester School, are “[e]vents of conflict or of tension... that were likely to reveal the social and political forces engaged in the generation or production of social life. Rather than normative harmony or social integration...” (P.2). The importance of such methodological understanding of event according to Kapferer is the capacity of that definition to inform us about the “obscure”, better than the everyday typical event would (P.3). Therefore, he highlights Gluckman's recommendation for detailed ethnographies, as the crux of Gluckman's method of “situational analysis”; explaining “[t]he stress was not merely on the presentation of practices but also on the process of analytical unfolding in the course of ethnographic presentation. Situational analysis

demanded a setting out of the steps that are involved in abstract understanding while descriptively laying out the dynamics and process of action encompassed in events” (Kapferer, 2010, P.4).

Kapferer concludes this part about Manchester School and Gluckman’s approach by stressing once more that this approach towards “significant events” requires a more “fluid” and flexible understanding of social frames. This approach fits Falk-Moore’s definition of “diagnostic event,” and echoes as well my own understanding of MM as an event.

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On another level, commemorative events have been an important medium in the Egyptian revolution. Commemorative events are “performative” and “corporeal”, Connerton (1989) thinks these are essential qualities an event to be “commemorative” (p. 4-5). Many commemorations have been held so far to honor the “Heros” of Mohamed Mahmoud. Different events were created through Facebook, sometimes on the same date. These “hero” events were part of a process of production of the revolutionary narrative. These events serve as generators of knowledge. They serve as both, first as a confirmation of existing revolutionary narratives about MM, and second, as an opportunity for some political and social groups/factions to recondition their positions (see pp.74-77). For a while MM “hero” narratives, as part of the revolutionary narratives, have been commemorated/celebrated the most.

[C]elebrations are created and this creation is part and parcel of the process of historical production. Celebrations straddle the two sides of historicity. They impose a silence upon the events [narratives of events] that they ignore, and they fill that silence with narratives of power about the event they celebrate. (Trouillot, 1995, p. 188)

One of the various commemorative events that was held to support the “hero” narrative was an event that “Selmiyah”<sup>18</sup> initiated on Facebook on November 19, 2012: Come See the World from my Place, a Commemoration of the Events of Mohamed Mahmoud Street. In memory of the 2011 clashes, this event was organized for people to pay tribute to those who died in the fights, as described by the organizers. They asked people to bring with them “anything that remind them with what happened” (Selmiyah, personal communication). People wore eye patches in honor of those who lost their eyes, and brought gas masks.



Figure 5: November 2012, “Well done pasha!” taken by Aly Hazzaa

Photo taken by Aly Hazzaa during a commemoration event of MM, the man in focus wearing an eye patch written on it "Well done pasha!" mocking the famous

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<sup>18</sup> Selmiyah (Peaceful ) is an initiative by a group of young Egyptians who are working on promoting a culture of peace, between the Egyptians.

<http://www.facebook.com/selmiyah>



video <sup>19</sup>(BBC, news, 19 November 2012) where the young police man was shooting protesters in Mohamed Mahmoud and a voice of someone praising him strikes in the background “Well done pasha! You got him in the eye!”.



**Figure 6: November 2012, MM Friends, taken by Aly Hazzaa.**

The next section is a continuation to the discussion around commemorative events as I focus on different memory projects dedicated to the Revolution and to MM.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-20395260>

## Creating a Memory

Keeping track of evidence of “what happened” is a not a simple task, as Judy Barsalou argues: “documentation of historical events, preservation of materials, creation of memory projects and memorialization are highly politicized processes that reflect power dynamics within society” (2012, pp 135-136). Barsalou continues to explain, in the Egyptian post-Mubarak context, that information as one form of evidence is still held in control by the Egyptian state. She notes that state policies regarding access to information are still the same as before January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011. Referring to the “security clearances” needed in order to have access to material in the Egyptian National Archives for instance<sup>20</sup>. This is one of the factors, as Barsalou mentions in her article, which led to the failure of many promising projects that aimed to document the January 25<sup>th</sup> revolution.

Khaled Fahmy, a prominent Egyptian historian, shares the same concern with Barsalou (Shenker, 2011). As he was asked to lead a national archiving project for the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution, and Fahmy was hesitant. He feared the work with a governmental establishment such as Egypt’s National Archives would give the wrong message. Fahmy did not want the Egyptian people thinking that the state is writing the history of the revolution (Shenker, 2011). However, hoping that the benefits will outweigh the risks, Fahmy accepted to lead the Committee to Document the January 25 Revolution; but soon he and the other members of the committee realized that there are some fundamental questions that obstruct any documenting project

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<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, it must be taken into consideration that the problems of archiving go beyond state restrictions. Though it may seem like the biggest challenge that might face a documentation project. If we hypothetically roll out the state with its power relations, we will still find that contesting narratives among people and notions of “treason” employed to claim authority over other narratives, are equally challenging.

(Shenker, 2011 & Urgola, 2014). Issues such as “what is the revolution? When did it start? When did it end?” were debated by Fahmy and others (Shenker, 2011).

Another memory project is *Visualizing Revolution: The Epic Murals in Tahrir*, held by the American University in Cairo (AUC). Organized by the Center for Translation Studies and The Department of Rhetoric and Composition, the event took place at Tahrir AUC Campus on April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012. Hosting three prominent graffiti artists, Alaa Awad, Ammar Abo Bakr and Hanaa El Degham (Coletu, 2012). The discussion included questions about political engagement, and how painting in Tahrir as “visual commentary could be an effective call to action” (Coletu, 2012). The most controversial question was about “preserving” the murals. The three artists agreed that preserving the painted walls goes against what they believe as the nature of graffiti as “transient art”. Nevertheless, Awad thought it is reasonable to preserve the colors with a coat of varnish “for as long as it remained”, while Abo Bakr was totally against it (Coletu, 2012). AUCians took matters into their own hands, lead by Ebony Coletu herself, and decided to buy the varnish and coat the walls, however, Coletu gave clear orders that no one would come near Abo Bakr paintings, respecting his views. (Coletu, 2012)

This “varnishing party” as Coletu called it (2012), drew attention of the passersby in the street. Thinking it is an attempt to paint over the murals, they got a lot of people anxiously asking, “what are you doing!” but when they knew it was an initiative to “preserve” not to erase the murals they “enthusiastically took rollers in hand to finish the job” (Coletu, 2012).

This spirit of preservation among ordinary people is underlined in Barsalou’s article, where she focuses on other forms and processes through which “memory is

created” (2012, p. 135). Barsalou gives an example of what she calls “civil-society initiatives” that aim to “collect, preserve and organize materials related to the revolution” (2012, p. 140). Presenting different initiatives, like *Kollena Khalid Sa‘id* (we are all Khalid Sa‘id) a Facebook page that was launched before the January 25 revolution to raise awareness of what happened to young Khalid; posting graphic photos of Sa‘id’s corpse after the police had brutally beaten him to death. Barsalou properly argues that this was the starting point. For other initiatives followed the steps of *Kollena Khalid Sa‘id*, documenting all different sorts of occurrences, ranging from police violations and transgressions, to other daily life material that they thought are worth documenting. (Barsalou, 2012)

*Memory of Modern Egypt* is another memory project by Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA), a state-sponsored organization. The project started before the revolution. Designed originally to collect archival material starting from Mohamed Ali Pasha 1905, and ending with the death of President Anwar El Sadat 1981 (BA website). According to Barsalou *Memory of Modern Egypt* made an attempt to extend its scope and added some material about the revolution, “during a period in which BA’s close ties to the Mubarak family brought it and its director, Ismail Serageldin, under fire” (2012, p.141)

The definition of archive offered by Trouillot cannot be missed here, as he defines it as, “the institutions that organize facts and sources and condition the possibility of existence of historical statements” (1995, p. 52). More importantly, Trouillot stresses the idea that the act of collecting is not a passive act. It is rather a dynamic, active and, at the same time, a selective process of production, that defines what is historical and what is not. This leaves a little room for other uncollected narratives to challenge those definitions, so the power of archives set the limits/

constraints that Appadurai sat in his article (1981), according to Trouillot archives “convey authority and set the rules for credibility and interdependence; they help select the stories that matter” (1995, p. 52). This further explains both Khalid Fahmy’s concerns about working with the National Archive, and why the BA’s attempt to document the revolution was unwelcomed.

It is important to note here that it is not only the institutionalized official archives that bear this quality. It is possible that even the people and the initiatives that consider themselves as the anti-formal or as Barsalou termed them “Artistic Activism”. Such a name indicates that they are guardians of memory or the ones who fight for the uncollected stories lest be forgotten. They themselves commit no less an error of selection, of course not in the same aggressive scale that an official institution is capable of. Some silences may serve as a measurement of safety for example, as Mosireen a media collective once mentioned in a tutorial about their work. They preferred not to publish videos where some of the protestors might be identified for acts against the law.

Not all silences are necessarily by intention or deliberation; sometimes they are just an act of negligence. Just as in the story of the human wall, as told by Khalil El Masry, he ends up losing the document, which he created by passing by people who stood there all night creating the wall, to get their contacts. Khalil then turned this piece of paper into an excel sheet, and then mis-located the original paper. Although we now have an excel sheet with these people’s names and contacts, we lost their handwriting. And maybe lost a few notes about them along the way. If we imagine the amount of unintended silences mounting up, we would be worried.

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The texture of memory is such that we, as a society, do not often recall major cultural events as such, but rather as those events have been re-told and re-created by witnesses, historians, or other storytellers. The elements that construct the texture of memory may be thought of as remembering one another rather than their explicit subject. (Dickerson, 2012, p.3)

In his study of media and collective memory of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Jacob Alan Dickerson highlights that in order to achieve “cultural authority” these narratives compete with each other, searching each for “reliable” referencing (2012, p. 3). In other words, and following Dickerson’s argument, we do not remember MM events in 2011, what we actually recall and remember is the multiple narratives competing with one another for validity and legitimacy. Even those who were in the events, eventually they rely on their personal diaries, photographs, and videos, and primarily now Facebook timeline, as evidence to complement their actual experience and to revive their memories. Or even rely on a friend to remind them with what happened, as in the case of the AUC guards whom at one point in my interview with them, called their fellow guards and disputed over dates and what exactly happened and when.

In his book *Sensuous Scholarship*, Paul Stoller writes about the issue of memory in a very interesting way. What Stoller highlights as sensual has to do with the “memory of the sense” and how memories of the sense are not at all “static”, an example he gives is a trip to Greece and how “social memory in Greece is baked/sung/smelled”(1997, p. 85). In my case, a trip to Mohamed Mahmoud in 2011 “smelled.” As I stood there in the entrance of the street, I inhaled gas bombs for the first time in my life. The panic I felt when my mother was pounding on my door later the same night to tell me that she saw someone severely injured on TV that looks

exactly like my brother, and the minutes that followed trying actually to track him down to make sure it was not him in this scene.

Stoller introduces a definition of the role of a “committed” sensuous scholar as someone who locates “lost biographies, memories, words, pains and faces which cohere into a vast secret museum of historical absence” (1997, p .83 quoting Alan Feldman). This “sensual quality” of Stoller’s is indeed very useful to a study like mine. It gives room for multiple mediums to be considered when trying to unpack memories. Especially that I relied on the vigorous visual and sensual literature that has grown out of Mohamed Mahmoud.

Concerning smell, Ahmed Hayman (2015, interview) told me that the smell of gas gets him depressed, he believes it is not psychological, he insists that it is physical. He even admires the physical capacity of those who stood in front lines with no gas masks; with nothing to protect them from the gas effect “people with gills!!” he calls them. Unlike Kalosha who seemed unbothered with the gas smell, it reminds him of great days and great people

Until now, I still hear the sound of bullets and smell the gas bombs. When I remember the gas bombs, immediately the martyr Mohamed El Shafiee comes to my mind, my mate, that I did not know, we hunted bombs together... Mohamed El Shafiee will always represent the true meaning of the word: \*Glory is for the unknown\* (Kalosha, 2014, letter)<sup>21</sup>

Laura Marks further speaks about absence in *The Skin of The Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and The Senses*. Marks argues “many new works in film and video call upon memories of the senses in order to represent the experiences of people...” (Marks, 2000, xi). In her search for a language- a medium-

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<sup>21</sup> See Kalosha’s letter is in the next chapter, with translation.

to express and to make evidence of “cultural memory”, Marks thinks that the use of “silence, absence and hesitation” are a trademark for this kind of cinema, cultural cinema. Those absences and silences are to be considered “new forms of expression” (Marks, 2000, p.21). In her chapter The Memory of Images Marks (2000) interestingly talks about the struggles that are fought when “people’s existence is denied” (p. 55) it is then that they, she continues “‘invent themselves’ best when the official discourse has explained them squarely away: as ... rioters, terrorists” (p.55-56). This language of absence and hesitation has powerfully materialized in the work of many photographers and video makers in the past couple of years in Egypt. One of which is Ahmed Hayman with his eight minutes video titled Art Uprising: 1 شارع عيون الحرية,<sup>22</sup> the video is filmed in 2012 and published on YouTube in 2013. Hayman opens the short film with the following sentence: “Mohamed Mahmoud Street, known as the street of the eyes of freedom, it’s becoming an iconic space”. The video is a powerful combination between writing, music, video footage and still images. The idea of art as a form of uprising defines in a way the graffiti of MM. The fresh paint, intended to erase the painting on the walls does not cover well the graffiti underneath; you can still *see* the last graffiti if you look closely. In fact some of the artists would be standing there on a wooden ladder with their brushes and jars of paint during the clashes, according to Hayman.

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<sup>22</sup>[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQitjdnRZXM&index=1&list=PL4w9IO5rU\\_3WktElHftnL7QDpHLjhqDrY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQitjdnRZXM&index=1&list=PL4w9IO5rU_3WktElHftnL7QDpHLjhqDrY)



## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I put a dialogue between theory and practice. The literature I introduce ranges from concepts that augment my hypothesis and findings, to other concepts that do not. I started by discussing the concept historicity, which supports the way I analyze the different MM narratives. At the same time, I problematized ideas by both Trouillot (1995) and Simmel (1971), which dismissed the possibility of retrieving memories based on the premise that the “past is dynamic.” Brining one of my fieldwork cases to the point, to prove that although the past is dynamic, it can indeed be fixed and retrieved, through a digital memory.

However, this notion of the digital is not without problems. I discuss some of the digital memory fragile sides, through two questions, the first addresses the issue of erasure, and the second tackle the issue of authenticity. Despite the shortcomings of digital memory, I argue that digital evidence has as much power as any other piece of regular evidence wither in the ethnographic or the legal contexts.

I outlined what has become known as the different contesting narratives of MM. Defining who are the “revolutionaries” was solely based on my interlocutor’s definitions. This outlining includes the MBs and state narratives. I further discussed how Rabaa formed a turning point for MM narratives. Concluding that the competition of authority around MM puts a limit to each group. Since they are all constantly countering each other, the authority over the narrative of the event is fragmented.

Although no one has authority to impose their narrative, claiming authority through notions of sight and presence, and associating sight with truth is very common. In this section, I depend on both Bloch (2008) and Pinney (2008) to confirm

my argument. I refer to my fieldwork stories where I encountered this link between truth and sight many times. Agreeing with Pinney (2008) that photography, in that matter, is indeed a tool for producing authority.

On another level, producing authority through sight is a side effect. In a more general sense, production of knowledge is what the anthropologist is after. Engleke (2008) argues that evidence as one form of knowledge is under studied in anthropology. Despite anthropology's heavy reliance on evidence with regard to methodology, still, studying production, value, and effect of evidence on narratives seems yet to develop. This thesis attempts to contribute to the study of evidence as an epistemological concept.

Studying events as evidence in themselves is one approach that I borrowed from Sally Falk-Moore (1987) as I analyzed MM as an event. In this section indeed theory and practice meet. My original hypothesis was that MM is a turning point, a diagnostic event as defined by Falk-Moore (1987). Research and fieldwork both confirmed that different people use, sometimes abuse, MM as to define and mark political positions. I also focused on Kapferer's (2010) definition of "significant events", and also Connerton's (1989) definition of commemorative events.

Finally, creating a memory about MM events certainly is a political matter. As the different groups strive to gain authority, creating memory projects become part of the competition. I listed in this section a number of projects that aimed to document what happened in MM and in the revolution in general. I found it very useful to use the concept of sensuous as introduced by Stoller; it allowed me to unpack multiple layers of memory for my interlocutors and myself.

## **Chapter Two: The Making of Mohamed Mahmoud**

In this chapter, I offer a background on MM events developed through my personal experiences and research. The chapter is divided into four sections: In the first section, I discuss MM as a space and the challenges one would find defining it geographically. I further review the context of MM as an event: what triggered it and the dominant dates that are linked with it. Then, I highlight the labels and stigmas produced along the creation of MM itself. I focus in the second section on the analysis of two labels, *Epic and Moulid*. Followed by my methodological approach, or as I call it: How I constructed MM. The last section of this chapter is a *gallery*, where I present different pieces of material about MM, a sketch, Facebook statuses, a letter, political cartoons, and lyrics of a song. This gallery is an extension to how different people constructed MM as an event and as a memory.

## The Mohamed Mahmoud Events In Space And Time

Introducing the geography of MM is very challenging. The boundaries of the street have been constantly changing. After the revolution, one aspect of change was the installation of walls in downtown Tahrir area, in MM, Mansour, Qasr al-Ainy, Qasr al-Nil, Nobar, Abd al-Kader Hamza, Shikh Rehan, and Youssef el Gindy Street. The effect of these walls went beyond limiting the space for people to demonstrate, which was the original purpose of the walls. These walls forced a new geography. People living and working around those streets adapted to this new forced geography by creating small halls through the wall or by jumping off, they managed to get their daily life going (Hazzaa, 2014). Despite the apparent adaptation, attempts to break down the walls never stopped and many times, in fact, were successful.<sup>23</sup>



Figure 7: Attempt to break down the wall in Qasr al-Ainy Street. Photo taken by Aly Hazzaa.

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dl-R-Gu8\\_k8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dl-R-Gu8_k8)



Figure 8: Man passing through the wall in Abd el-Kader Hamza Street. Photo taken by Aly Hazzaa.



Figure 9: Mohamed Mahmoud Street During Ramadan. Photo taken by Aly Hazzaa.

*Because MM is surrounded by many walls, it lost its significance [as a road]... it gets you almost nowhere... after it was once, a busy street. Traffic is rare now. (Mariam Aboughazi, 2015, interview)*

It is almost impossible to say that there is one layout of MM. The layout always depends on where you are standing and how you situate MM within the surrounding area. For me, MM has always been one of the surrounding streets of Tahrir square. After the first MM events I learned that it is one of the main streets leading to Mansour St. where the main building of the Ministry of Interior is located. Some of the main landmarks of MM Street are: AUC old campus, the Lycee School, and McDonalds.

Another significant aspect of geographical change for MM Street, is how the walls of the street not only had it witnessed intense violent confrontations between protestors, residents and security forces, but also the walls enveloping the street have been sites where murals and graffiti narrate different facades of the Egyptian revolution. The street walls worked as a memorial wall calendar. Marking all the important events, including the events that happened in MM Street. Thus turning MM into what Mona Abaza (2012) calls “an emerging memorial space”:

*All the violent encounters and clashes with the junta were wonderfully recorded on the walls of this memorable street. These vivid images have virtually turned Mohammed Mahmud Street into a temple, or rather into a ‘memorial space’ that is constantly visited and photographed--at least before graffiti withers away once again. Mohammed Mahmud is also becoming a space for posing and for taking group photographs against its fantastic murals. It is not unusual to observe passersby on the Street telling*

*bystanders and complete strangers about their experiences and memories of the revolution.*

MM is not defined by space alone. The making of MM is also anchored to specific dates. Aly Hazzaa guides us through this process of turning MM from a space into an event:

*The making and naming of MM did not come right away... what happened is that we [journalists and photojournalists] lost interest in what is going on in Tahrir after a few days, who are there? What are they doing? It was clear that it was all happening in MM [the street] we went there daily... after a few days we automatically went to MM directly not Tahrir... but you'll not find a single folder<sup>24</sup> named MM in the first few days "there was no such a thing called MM" it was "Tahrir clashes" it was not until the weekend that we changed that... (Hazzaa, interview, 2014)*

Among the eighteen narratives I gathered, thirteen people link the first MM events with Friday November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011<sup>25</sup>. That day some protestors decided to take the square after the *Meliounya* (a million-person march). The people who decided to stay after the march were mainly families of the martyred and the wounded of the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. Early in the morning of November 19<sup>th</sup> – a date that marks the start of the clashes for all thirteen interviewees- the police stormed into the square and started burning down the tents of protestors and brutally beating everyone. The sit-in was only in its second day, according to Marwa, one of my interlocutors, "it was a very small sit-in". She continues that the sit-in only occupied *elgenena beta'et*

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<sup>24</sup> As photojournalists archive their shots by dates, some label their folders with events' name as well.

<sup>25</sup> Although they may not remember the dates of days, they recall the proceedings of each day.

*elmidan* (the square's garden) indicating that the measures of dispersal were too brutal for such a small gathering.

Shortly after the dispersal, some YouTube videos of the dispersal found their way to social media (Twitter and Facebook). One famous video, with more than one version<sup>26</sup>, was referred to by many of my interlocutors as their signal to take back the square from the police, and end police brutality. The video contains scenes where a number of policemen/military police drag a young man's body and throw him next to the curb, or to be more specific into a pile of garbage next to the curb. It is important to note here, that Marwa sent me this specific video twice. I believe she wanted to stress on how much personally she was affected by it. Aly Hazzaa recalled vividly what happened on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November and referred to the same video. However, Aly missed recalling military soldiers in the video. When I showed him the video during our interview, he was surprised how he forgot such images! Aly's response was that "after so many events, things like that skip your mind... it is all a mess".

Aside from the dominant dates of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of November as the beginning of MM events in 2011, there is an earlier date in some narratives also associated with clashes in MM Street. There are four narratives out of the eighteen that I gathered, when the date 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 appeared<sup>27</sup>. However, what happened on January 29<sup>th</sup> 2011 is not well articulated in other narratives about MM as much as the November 2011 events. Hazem Abdelhamid a photojournalist recalls:

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<sup>26</sup> Soldiers drag young man's body into the garbage: a short version of the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92CUzekZ5AA> the longer (clearer) version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wq5JoptZnlo>

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that also these four narratives acknowledge the dominant dates of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of November to be the mark of MM events.



*On Jan 29<sup>th</sup> [2011] I went to the square to take pictures, there was a march coming from the Museum's direction and the army stopped it, but they insisted on entering the square. An army officer took the microphone and said, "Protest all you want but do not go outside [Tahrir]. We are with you and no one will harm you – but do not enter MM street" I do not know why he said so, but mostly there were clashes inside the street.*

*I entered MM from Tahrir. As I sat foot there I heard live ammunition – not rubber bullets – and saw people running. I turned back and entered the street from Bab El Louk next to a street that has a café that we frequently sat at it, it is called the AUC café*

*I had only one picture where MM intersects with the street I am standing in. I did not have enough courage to enter MM and take more pictures. I saw a lot of injured people coming from there. It was not until the army went in and brought the people back. Some say the army convinced them [the protestors] to retreat to the square. Afterwards there were no protesters or police in MM.*



**Figure 10: Photo taken by Hazem Abdelhamid on 29th of Jan 2011.**

In November 2011, Egypt was preparing for its first parliamentary elections after January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. As far as I remember, some candidates such as Amr El Shobaky, Mostafa El Naggar, and Amr Hamzawy decided to suspend their electoral campaigns in solidarity with the protesters and as a political stance to force the Supreme Council of Armed Forces SCAF<sup>28</sup> to stop the fighting and to set a date for the presidential election<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> SCAF is short for The Supreme Council of Armed Forces, who was ruling the country at that time, since the fall of Mubarak.

<sup>29</sup> I tried searching for any records to back this up and I could not find any sources. However, two of my interlocutors confirmed this.



Figure 11: Marwa's Facebook screenshot 2011.

A screenshot from Marwa's account on Facebook showing two posts, one before she had learned about MM, and another after. The post at the bottom, dated 19<sup>th</sup> of November Marwa shared a link with the names of parliamentary candidates, for the first phase of elections from SOOTBELADY.COM (which translates: the voice of my country). At the top of the screenshot, Marwa's post dated 20th of November, reads the following: “the Field hospital in Tahrir needs bandages, 5 ml syringes...spray antibiotics [for wounds]... please re-tweet [in order to give this wider circulation] ... the Field hospital is in its old place in Tahrir behind Hardees' ... the injured are getting treated on bare floor... we need blankets... share now and do all you can”.

In the meantime, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP)<sup>30</sup> and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), declared officially through a statement on their website<sup>31</sup>, and through a TV interview on El Mehwar channel<sup>32</sup> with the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood then Mohamed Badae' that they are not joining protests in MM. According to the interview, the official narrative of the MBs was: we are not going to be “dragged” into fights with the SCAF. Accordingly, MBs candidates did not suspend their electoral campaigns. “This is a plot,” echoed many more times by MB members. Marwa and Mariam two of my interlocutors shared similar stories about their *Ikhwani* relatives. Members of *Ikhwan* believed very much in their officials and they endorsed the official MB narrative.

On the other hand, Marwa told me that her *Ikhwani* cousin, a doctor, was in MM. Regardless of the fact that she is a very strict member who abides by their rules; the doctor felt that she belonged to the field hospital in Tahrir. Helping out the wounded, Marwa tells me that her cousin spent all days of MM in the Field hospital. Marwa continues the story about her cousins, telling me about the doctor's younger brother. Although coming from an *Ikhwani* family, he was not a member of the brotherhood. The young brother stood in the front lines of MM, defying the police and his family as well.

What Marwa wanted to highlight through her story is the dual pressure her young relatives faced between two circles. The first circle is their family, as they had

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<sup>30</sup> The political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood.

<sup>31</sup> The statements are no longer available on the MB website [www.ikhwanonline.com](http://www.ikhwanonline.com), I do not know why exactly these data became unavailable and I am not sure if it will be available again in the future or not. (See p.23)

<sup>32</sup> The complete interview with Dr. Mohamed Badae':  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlcwXF-7UWQ>

*Ikhwani* parents who were against protests in MM. The second circle is their non-*Ikhwani* fellows who were bashing them for their identity (familial ties) as *Ikhwan*.

After all, the statements that Badae' made in the interview provoked feelings of disappointment for the revolutionaries. Badae' clearly stated that MBs should not join in MM, as it will only result in a higher death toll and disturb the relations between the MB and the SCAF (El-Liethy, 2011) notwithstanding the impression of Badae's statement as supportive of the regime. However, during the same interview Badae' condemned the violence committed by the police in MM. Badae' even blamed PM Esaam Sharaf because Sharaf had praised the performance of the police in his statement about the events of MM (see p.34). Badae' was trying to balance his political speech, by appealing to the government to block the street and grant the protestors the right to a secured sit-in (El-Liethy, 2011).

It is worth mentioning that while searching YouTube for this interview with Badae', I found many shorter versions of the interview. All containing the same part where Badae' says that it would be "a big mistake to join in MM". These short versions focused on and highlighted how this specific statement is anti-revolutionary, in fact it was perceived as treason. It was later, I believe, that this statement constituted the basis of the famous line "*el Ikhwan ba'oona fi MM*" which translate to: the MBs sold us out in MM.

"The Muslim Brotherhood sold us out in Mohamed Mahmoud!" has become a very common<sup>33</sup> yet controversial statement. Especially when backed up by videos showing MB figures of authority illustrating their official narrative of MM as a plot. There has been a trend among social media participants and talk shows to rely on the

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<sup>33</sup> The statement became too common that it is no longer traceable to a certain source.

participation in MM as a marker of the revolution, as key criteria, which delineates the different positions toward other events (see p. 44). Based on that trend, statements by Badae‘, and later statements by *Ikhwani* parliament members with regard to protestors in MM, serve the supporters of MM as evidence of the MBs’ treason<sup>34</sup>.

Yet, it seems that my interlocutors are aware of the different layers (see p.32) within the MBs position. According to all my interlocutors, the MB youth were there in MM, some of my interlocutors recall they had their own tent in Tahrir. To this end, Aly Hazzaa pointed out “the leaders of the MBs sold everyone out in MM, including their own youth, *shabaab el ekhwan*. (2014, interview)

An example narrative of how the MB youth themselves negated the stigma of “treason” is the story of Abd El Rahman El Deeb. During MM 2011, Deeb was one of the *Ikhawani* doctors camped at Tahrir Field hospital. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2011, Deeb appeared in a video by Al-Masry Al-Youm talking about the events<sup>35</sup>. He wrote a Facebook note the day after, on November 21<sup>st</sup>, about his presence in MM:

*Curse all you want!*

*For those who speak about the absence of El Ikhwan from Tahrir,,*

*Though he might be setting at home himself!!!! Or not!*

*My father is one of the MB’s candidates for the next elections, the one [elections] that you think we are running after,, though, my brother was in Tahrir since Saturday, and I was all day there yesterday,, there are many volunteers in Tahrir field hospital who are members of the MB,, Dr. Safwat Hegazi visited us yesterday at the field hospital,, also Dr. Mohamed El Beltagy was present in Tahrir,, I met most of my Ikhwan friends there, inside the hospital and outside in Tahrir,, Dr. Khaled Hefny and his wife Dr.*

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<sup>34</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEwwWByx\\_dY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEwwWByx_dY)

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvi3pNdyf9o>

*Omaima Kamel both are FJP candidates and they were there too in the field hospital all night long,,*

*Honestly, we are fed up; we don't have to give proof to you that we love this country as much as you do,*

*We are fed up being defaced, insulted, and marginalized by you,,*

*We are always in front lines defending Egypt, just like the rest of honest Egyptians do, but then only the Ikwan gets blamed and defamed from those who weren't there [in the front lines] to begin with,,*

*We love our country, and aspire to Allah's contentment, we do not wait for thanks, but we will not tolerate abuse...*

*However, curse all you want,*

*Keep using us in your theories and analysis like lab rats,,*

*Judge us all you want,*

*Label us with all the bad labels that are there since god created Adam*

*We only aspire to Allah's contentment... it's enough that Allah knows what is in our hearts...That is enough...<sup>36</sup>*

Deeb used the reportage of Al-Masry Al-Youm at the end of his note, as a clear reference/ evidence of his presence in the field hospital during MM 2011. Deeb was later killed in Rabaa. And his note was circulated among social media after his death as a counter narrative; so that the message “you sold us out in Rabaa” would reach those who believed that “the MBs sold [them] out in MM”<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Deeb note is retrieved from:

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A8/%D8%A5%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%A1%D9%88%D9%86-/248402891880090>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/EngineersAntiCoup/posts/288258437979428>

On 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2011 SCAF accepted Sharaf's Cabinet resignation<sup>38</sup>. At the same time, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi appeared on national T.V addressing "the great people of Egypt." Tantawi began his speech by expressing "regret" over the recent incidents "that are taking us backwards," and offering his condolences to the victims' families. Before his speech, according to the DailyNews website, the Cabinet announced on its Facebook page that Central Security Forces will be pulled from the Tahrir area. The DailyNews article also referred that "another statement published on SCAF's Facebook page also minutes before the speech, said that investigations into Maspéro's Oct. 9 violence and the clashes of Nov. 19 and 20, will be transferred from the military to the public prosecution"<sup>39</sup> (Abdoun, S. & Rabie, D., 2011).

Although technically MM events in 2011 ended with the installation of a cement wall, the political implications of the event were perceived then as a step forward, pushing the regime to submit to further changes. Tantawi's statement, the cabinet change, as well as shifting prosecutions from military to public (with regard to certain events), adding to that setting a date for presidential elections, all count as triumphs that were achieved because of MM, from the perspective of the revolutionaries.

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2011/11/22/scaf-accepts-cabinet-resignation-moi-to-pull-police-from-tahrir/>

<sup>39</sup> I could not find this statement on the SCAF's Facebook page, however I found many newspapers and online blogs mentioning it and even posting images of this specific statement.



## **An Epic Turns Into A “*Moulid*”**

The different presentations of MM, varied from one extreme to another. It was presented as either “sacred” or as a “plot”, either as an “epic” or “*moulid*”. *Moulid* is an Arabic word derived from the word *Milaad*, meaning birth. *Moulid* is not just any birth festival; the word became in the Egyptian context a synonym for the celebration of the birth of a prophet or a saint. However, *moulid* is also used as an adjective, as in MM context, to describe the festive nature of an event.

Almost every *moulid* has a *mazaar*. *Mazaar* is another Arabic word, which translates into the English word “Shrine”. A *mazaar* is commonly associated with a ritual visit to a holy site. Although with regards to MM, the word *mazaar* refers to the fact that the street has lost its revolutionary essence and turned into a mere touristic site, or rather into a *moulid*. According to Aly Hazzaa & Mona Abaza (2012), MM Street has become a shrine/temple.

The next picture, by Ravy Shaker a young photojournalist, depicts the status of the street at the funeral of Mohamed Gaber (known as Jika). Gaber was the first martyr under Mohamed Morsi’s rule. He was shot during the first commemorative events of MM on the 20th of November 2012. The photo portrays what many of my interlocutors referred to as “a moment of holiness” of MM, the powerful combination of the plain wooden coffin contrast with the painted walls in the background and the seemingly infinite number of people mourning Jika.



Figure 12: Photo by Ravy Shaker. Mourning Jika

How did MM become a *Mazaar* (shrine)? The rationale behind calling MM a *mazaar* was driven by the labels that became inseparable from the revolutionary discourse: “epic”, “sacred”, “memorial”, “symbol”, “iconic”, and “special”; all are labels given to MM by those who protested in it. The claim of “holiness” that derives from these labels is in itself the reason why some people like Aly developed mixed feelings towards the Street. Aly feels that he owns a piece of it; after all he was shot by birdshots in MM 2011, yet, he despise the fact that “it became a *mazaar*” (2014, interview) or in Abaza’s words that the street is becoming a place for people to take “group photographs against its fantastic murals.” (2012). It resembles more than that for someone like Aly, and for others just like him as well, and the fact that the ritual visit, consists now of posing and taking pictures is a bit frustrating for them.

For Aly, MM has lost its spirit of holiness. But losing holiness was not solely because of the MM's *darawish* (dervishes) and their pictures next to the walls. As time passed, different narratives of MM have become a part of the political games in Egypt during the past four years. We can get a better understanding of that if we analyze the official state rhetoric towards the end of 2013. After June 30<sup>40</sup>, in order to gain sympathy from the “revolutionary” bloc, the media<sup>41</sup> went on and on not sparing any efforts to paint the brotherhood as “traitors”.

A clear example of that is when the Tahrir channel anchor, Rania Badawy (2013) and her production team came up with an episode, where she played around the famous theme of betrayal “the MBs sold us out in MM”. In the video, Badawy used scenes from the parliament where an Islamist PM was saying that “those in MM are a bunch of thugs”. She then proceeded that Saad El Katatny, a member of the MB and then chair of the parliament, claimed that no one got shot in MM. Badawy seemed upset with the statements that both Islamist PMs had made. She was stuttering when she had to talk about the videos that were viewed on the screen next to her, clearly showing scenes where the policemen were firing guns at the protestors. Badawy's statement is a mix between painting Islamists especially the brotherhood as “villains” and not incriminate the police at the same time. However, her choice of MM gave her little room for maneuver, she had to show/acknowledge the violence committed by the police, and Badawy seemed greatly uncomfortable doing so.

*Katatny acquits anyone or any entity [she used the word gehah] who did that [referring to firing ammunition/ birdshots at protestors in MM] ...of course*

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<sup>40</sup> June 30, 2013 marked one year after Mohamed Morsi was elected as president. Millions of Egyptians took the streets on that day, demanding the immediate resignation of Morsi. June 30 as an event and what happened after in July 3<sup>rd</sup> is highly contested by the different political and social groups in Egypt.

<sup>41</sup> By that time all the available media channels were supportive of the state.

*there are videos that can't be erased from history... it is true that the police have different positions now. After June 30 things are different, we want to support the police, but there are things in history that won't be forgotten... the police must spend huge efforts in order to erase these tragic events from the memory of Egyptian people... transgressions (El Tagawozaat) from the police in MM and in other events too, cannot be forgotten easily... thugs or not, there were gun shots, who are the shooters? [Video on the screen next to her showing the police firing]... it is true that a third party abused the situation and fired... there is no denying that the police also committed some transgressions (kan feeh tagawoozaat)... but the whole scene was unclear and no one knew where the truth is? However [in a sarcastic tone] Katantny knew the unknowable and expressly announced that the minister of interior told him that they are not firing at protestors therefore there are no guns fired at protestors... despite all the videos [Badawy started stuttering again when she got to this part] and you will see some videos where police men aim their weapons at them [the protestors] whether it was birdshots or fake shots, just sound guns, this is a matter only for courts to decide... who gave Katantny the right to speak and say that the police were not firing, and to say that this comes from the minister himself... [she was interrupted by a video] there you go, a video showing gun fire in MM events... and they say [the two islamist PMs] the police did not do it!! And they say people there [in MM] are thugs, and now [in November 2013 I assume] they come and say we want to celebrate the memory of MM.*

Badawy's rationale provides good example of how MM was manipulated and morphed from an epic and iconic event into a bargaining chip, in the post June 30<sup>th</sup> political games. Although Badawy criticized the police for their "transgressions", she and other media outlets failed, at the same time, to recognize the double-edged position of the ministry of interior. An official video statement by the ministry was issued on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 2013 under the title *official Statement by the Ministry of Interior in the occasion of reviving the memory of MM martyrs*. In the statement, the MOI used a pro-revolution tone. From the point of view of those who were

against MM, the ministry's tone was rather soft. On the other hand, people who were for MM, thought that the ministry is just being hypocritical, as usual.

*Amid the many calls from political currents and revolutionary movements to revive the memory of Mohamed Mahmoud's martyrs; The Ministry of Interior, as it undertakes its duties in protecting the country's resources and sacrifices its aspiring youth for its security, stability and the safety of its people, reaffirms its respect for reviving the memory of all martyrs in memory of their role in the march for national action and its keenness on accomplishing the celebratory events of this memory in a context that suits the awareness and civilization of the participants. The ministry emphasizes that it is working in the interest of all the people without discrimination under the law, which governs the conduct of its men.*

*The ministry announces that it will take the necessary procedures to protect the participants in reviving this memory and calls on all to be extremely attentive and vigilant so no one infiltrates them to disturb the events' peace or steer it away from its goals.*

*In this occasion, the Ministry of interior offers its condolences to all the martyrs of the revolution whose pure blood was shed to revive the tree of national strive which history will record [at this decisive stage] (my translated transcription of the MOI statement, 2013)*

In my view, the phrase used to refer to the commemoration in the official statement by the Ministry of Interior is very indicative of the epic vs. *moulid* theme. In the Arabic language, the phrase "*B hazeah al Monasabah*" بهذه المناسبة is often used to refer to a celebratory event, a joyful mode, a festivity. The closest equivalent in English would be "in the occasion of". It is linguistically awkward to use the phrase "*B hazeah al monasabah*" in the context of death, sadness, or memory of those deceased. Instead, the word "*Zikra*" (translated: memory) would have been more appropriate in the context of MM.

I was personally humored by the choice of the word "*Monasabah*" with regard to MM. I believe it links to the Egyptian collective consciousness with the famous operetta "*El Layla El Kebeera*" or the "Grand Night" which tells the story of a *moulid*. One of the main lines in the operetta is "*Be Monasbet Haza Al Mawlad Ya Wlad, Yogad Bernamig soirée! Olo Heh!* [Chorus] "*Heh! Heh! Heh!*" which translates: In this *Moulid* Occasion Oh Kids, There is a soirée program, say Hooray!

## **Methodological Approach Techniques: How I Constructed Mohamed Mahmoud**

I wanted my methods of research to cover the different contesting narratives about the events of MM as well as the geography of the street. The diverse groups of participants that I primarily intended to interview were crucial to the construction of diverse meanings about MM. I originally divided participants in this research into four main groups, as follows:

- A) People who participated in the events from different backgrounds. Ideally, this group would have also included agents who represent the police and the army forces; however, due to personal risks involved with such attempts, I relied on content analysis of their statements, as indicated below.
- B) Area residents, including those who work but not necessarily live in the neighborhood.
- C) Artists and photographers who reproduced the events of MM through different mediums.
- D) Institutions and initiatives that were mentioned in the context of my preliminary interviews, such as ElNadim Center, and Ana Mubasher<sup>42</sup>.

However, the political situation in Egypt prevented me from approaching some of the groups that I mentioned above. For instance, I was not able to approach people who live or work in the street, other than the AUC guards, and ask them about political issues or even memories about the clashes in MM. For it is a matter of

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<sup>42</sup> El Nadim Center for the Management and Rehabilitation of victims of violence is an independent Egyptian NGO that was established in August 1993 as a civil not for profit company (retrieved from their website: <http://alnadeem.org/en/node/2>)  
Ana Mubasher (I am Live) is a media platform that aims at collecting all live streaming coming out of Egypt.

national security nowadays, some might even get arrested just for doing such a research. As the incident that happened recently with four employees of an NGO who got arrested for conducting research “without appropriate permissions”; the permission is not the problem, however the matter is that the people of the area were the ones filing a report against them<sup>43</sup>. The researchers eventually got bailed, but the message is clear: no one is welcomed to do research.

Due to the nature of their art, most graffiti artists prefer anonymity. Some are currently based outside of Egypt as Zeft and Ganzeer. Other graffiti artists, who are still based in Egypt like Alaa Awad, Amar Abo Bakr and others, face legal threats of prosecutions. A draft law was to be presented to the government by the Ministry of Local Development to ban “abusive” graffiti<sup>44</sup>. The penalties one would face if found guilty with an abusive graffiti could be four years of prison or a fine of 100,000 Egyptian pounds. (Al-Masry Al-Youm, 2013)

Even before the talk about a law that incriminates graffiti; in my interview with a senior AUC guard, he mentioned that guards used to see graffiti artists camping outside the AUC MM gate, painting murals on the wall. AUC guards did not mind the presence of graffiti artists, in fact, guards used to offer water and tea for the artists. The same guard recalls, one night the police came and arrested a bunch of graffiti painters claiming that they were sabotaging the walls of the AUC, and took them into custody. Two of the senior guards went to testify at the police station that the painters were peaceful and that the university wall is intact. After a couple of hours, according to the guard, the police let go of them, and he even recalls that they

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2015/07/05/arrested-employees-of-leading-rights-group-released-on-bail/>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/cabinet-preparing-bill-abusive-graffiti-minister>



went back to thank the AUC guards for their testimony and support. Ahmad Osman's statement rings true: "You are asking about Law... here in Egypt nothing is governed by law." (See p.115)



Figure 13: Comments by social media users on the news about the proposed law draft<sup>45</sup>.

I depended on the enormous material available online; video interviews with graffiti artists, as well as articles written by them, or about them. I was also lucky that I bought my copy of the book Walls of Freedom before it was banned from Egypt<sup>46</sup>. The book is a collective gallery that paints an amazing collage of what Egypt's street artists produced over the years that followed January 2011.

<sup>45</sup> <http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201311062211-0023173>

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.cairoscene.com/ArtsAndCulture/Walls-of-Freedom-Banned-From-Egypt>

I relied on five main methods of collecting information:

- 1) Interviews with individual participants about their experience and to further know which narrative each participant produces and what evidence is used to support each narrative of the events of MM.
- 2) Content analysis of official statements by police, army and government from different media resources (TV interviews, press, official statements), to gain knowledge of the “official state narratives” of MM.
- 3) Use of map drawing with participants to explore the spatial context of the events and how it shifts among the different groups and what evidence is brought to explain the spatial layout of events.
- 4) Use of visual and audio aids that I collected during the events as well as those produced by others, such as photographs, paintings, poems, and so on, to engage participants in interviews.
- 5) Commemorative events of MM are part of the analysis of this research in order to gain more knowledge about the collective aspect of the narratives, and how it continues to shape the production of MM, although it was unattainable to participate myself in one of these events because of the security issues that I discussed before. I got to ask my interviewees about the events and their experience of MM.

## **People of My Mohamed Mahmoud**

I conducted eighteen in-depth interviews with participants that I either knew personally or have a direct connection with, through someone I trust. There are other conversations that I did not obtain proper consent to include in the research; however, these discussions gave me a general indication of the narratives they promoted. Below is the list of my eighteen interlocutors:

- 1- Aly Hazzaa: (33 years) Engineer, in the year 2011 specifically after the revolution, decided to quit his job and pursue a career in photojournalism. He worked at el Shorouk news from 2011 until early 2015. Then he decided to steer away from journalism and become a freelance photographer.
- 2- Lobna Tarek: (27 years) studied mass communication (class 2009) works as a photojournalist in Shorouk news, until present moment.
- 3- Safa: She preferred not to share personal information.
- 4- Karim Omar: Head of computer graphics unit at The Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage CULTNAT. Karim was a part of a CULTNAT team that worked on a project that aimed at archiving the publicly generated documentation of the eighteen days of the revolution in January 2011. The material that the team gathered was presented in 2012 in an event in the UNISCO using an interactive visual data-show.
- 5- Mohamed F.: (35 years) Architect/Environmental Consultant.
- 6- Ahmed AbdelFatah: (30 years) by November 2011, he was a video journalist in Al-Masry Al-Youm. AbdelFatah now is an Audio/Video Producer at the International Committee of the Red Cross.
- 7- Ahmed Hayman: (28 years) Photojournalist at Al-Masry Al-Youm

- 8- Mariam Aboughazi: (24 years) works at the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression AFTE. Mariam is a part of a team that works on a project titled “Conscience and Memory”<sup>47</sup>; it aims at producing alternative narratives about events that took place since 2011. Each year the team picks an event or two to document, using the available material (videos, articles, court cases) and conduct interviews with participants of the events, families of victims, people who live in the same neighborhood. It happened that this year (2015) the team is working on MM events and *Magles el Wozaraa*.
- 9- Menna El Masry: graduated from faculty of law Ain Shams University, worked as a lawyer at AFTE. Currently holds a position as a Program Coordinator and Researcher at the same association. Menna also is part of the same team as Mariam Aboughazi working on the project “Conscience and Memory”.
- 10- Ahmed Osman: Lawyer. Works at AFTE. Ahmed is from ElSharkia governorate, but currently is based in Cairo.
- 11- AUC Senior Guard: This person did not want to be personally identified.
- 12- AUC Junior Guard: This person did not want to be personally identified.
- 13- Hazem Abdel Hamid: Photojournalist. Worked in El Fagr News during the period of January 2011. By the time MM November events occurred, Hazem was working in Al-Masry Al-Youm newspaper, and still works there.
- 14- Hany El Sharkawy: (32 years) Engineer and interested in social organization and empowerment.
- 15- Khalil El Masry: Software developer, Khalil developed an electronic gateway in 2010 called “Politica” which aimed at serving civil society activists, by

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<sup>47</sup> Conscience and Memory is a project under the umbrella of a bigger project which is *al haq fe al ma'rafah* (The Right to Knowledge)

providing information about the parliamentary candidates at that time. The gateway provided names of candidates and other available information retrieved from Google since no one made such information available, not even the political parties those candidates were affiliated with. After the revolution, Khalil renamed the gateway from “Politica” to “Bawabet El *Midan*” which translates into “The Square Gateway”.

16- Mosatafa Mohie: A journalist at Mada Masr. Mohie previously worked at Al-Masry Al-Youm website and multimedia department.

17- Marwa Barakat: Architect, Marwa worked for a while after the revolution at The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. She currently works at Takween: Integrated Community Development. Takween is an urban development company established in 2009 by a young dynamic team with extensive experience in response to the growing need of urban solutions to support and complement efforts of tackling urban challenges.

18- AbdelHalim Abdallah: Studied tourism, and worked in management. Then by the year 2013, he decided to make a career shift and be a fulltime journalist. Worked at Daily News for six months and moved to Agence France-Presse AFP, until August 2015.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced MM as a geography in light of the changes that occurred after the installation of the walls in Downtown Cairo. I also situated MM as an event within a broader context: what triggered the events? What are the dominant dates that are linked with it? I discussed how the MBs were stigmatized because of the official stance of the Brotherhood towards participation in MM.

Then, I analyzed some key labels associated with MM, focusing on *moulid and mazaar*, as two interesting labels that unpack the relation between MM as a space and as an event. In the third section, I presented how my methodological approach; in other words, I outlined how I constructed MM as a researcher. I discussed the challenges that faced me, and the limitations that were forced upon me during my fieldwork. I ended this section with a detailed list of my eighteen interlocutors.

The last section of this chapter, yet to be presented, is a gallery. Where I present different pieces of material by other people about MM, a sketch, Facebook statuses, a letter, political cartoons, a map, and lyrics of a song. I like to think of this gallery as a sample of how different people constructed MM as an event, and as a memory.

## Gallery

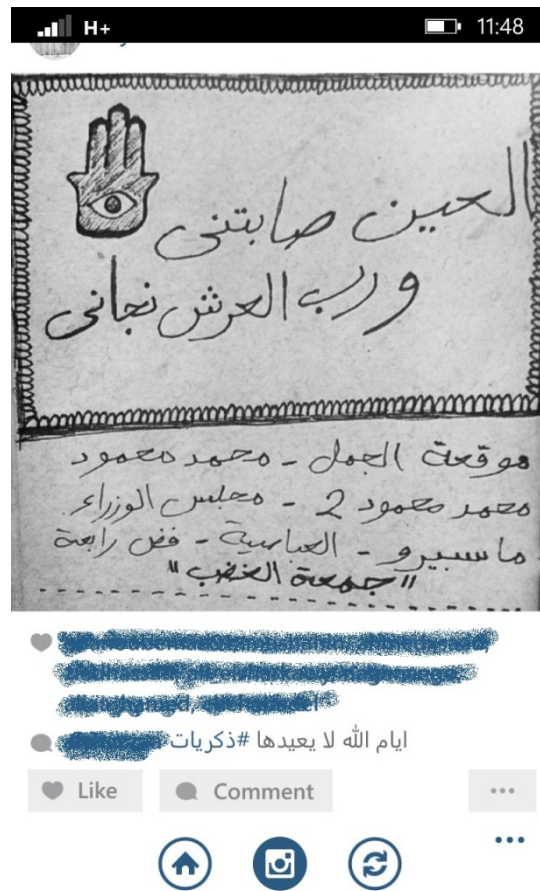


Figure 14: Sketch by Aly Hazzaa.

A sketch by Aly Hazzaa, reads:

I was hit by the Evil Eye but the Lord of the throne has saved me<sup>48</sup> [inside the frame]

The Battle of the Camel- Mohamed Mahmoud – Mohamed Mahmoud 2- Cabinet of Ministers- Maspiro- Abbasia- Rabaa Dispersal<sup>49</sup>

“Friday of Rage”

#Memories # days may Allah never bring back

<sup>48</sup> The use of this proverb is significant so far; being saved from the “Evil Eye” classifies these events (or the fact that this person survived them) as mythical.

<sup>49</sup> All are names of battles “events” that happened over the past years since January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011.

When I asked Aly to elaborate on the sketch, this is what he told me:

*I felt for a moment that I was lucky to be alive, lucky that I did not go through serious troubles because of being there in these events, some went through financial crisis... had their equipment damaged/broken [photography equipment], some even gave up photography they went through psychological troubles that they can no longer hold a camera again... some are behind bars... and some got serious physical injuries like losing an eye... I had good luck, I was part of these events whether by choice or not, sometimes I had to cover these events just because of my work, although back then I had no problem being there, because when you go to cover an event you do not know how [bloody] it is until you go there... If I could go back in time I would not go to either Maspiro or Rabaa...*

The wish that Aly expressed in his hash-tag “#memories #days that may Allah never bring back” maybe contrasted with the Facebook statement and letter below by Mohamed Kalosha<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Kalosha is a social media user whom I stumbled over his Facebook account when I was doing my preliminary research.  
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=850005868364681&set=a.185276611504280.44036.100000658288153&type=1>





Figure 15: This picture is retrieved from Kalosha's Facebook account and his status below was linked specifically to this picture.



**Mohamed Kalosha**

" تذكروا محمد محمود " ❤️

وانا قاعد كدة مع نفسى إفتكرت أيام محمد محمود وكل الكلام إللى كان بيتقال فيه.

-محدثش يجري "إثبت ، إثبت ، إثبت"  
 -إتنفس من بوتك مش من مناخيرك.  
 -نظم النفس بتاعك .  
 -محدثش يحذف طوب من ورا.  
 -وأنت داخل بـ إزارهه ، تلاقى واحد بيقول عطى عطى عطى عليه.  
 -وتلاقى الرجل الرخم إللى بيبيع الكمامة واقف فى الصف الأول بيقول الكمامة بـ جنيه.  
 -كمية الأحضان والأدعية إللى الواحد كان بياخذها لما كان بيشيل قنبلة ويحرقها ع الداخلية أو فى النار بعيد عن الناس.  
 -كسروا طوب ، تلاقى ع طول إثنين جايبين شابلين شوك متعبى كله طوب.  
 -عن شوية الخلل إللى الواحد كان بيحطهم فى منديل ويحطهم فى الأسكارف تاحية مناخيره.  
 -عن لما واحد يُقع تلاقى الموتوسيكل جاي شايبة وواخده طياره.  
 -عن أرجل ناس عرفتها فى حياتى فى الشارع ده " يمكن فى ناس متعرفش إسم بعض، لكن أول لما بنتقابل بنضحك لبعض ونسلم ع بعض"

❤️ "ليت هذه الأيام تعود يوماً"

Like · Share · October 21

👍 123 people like this.

💬 12 shares

Figure 16: Kalosha's status.

Below is a translation of Mohamed Kalosha's Facebook Status:

Remember Mohamed Mahmoud

As I was sitting by myself I remembered those days of MM and all that was said back then.

- Don't run, stand your ground, stand your ground, stand your ground.
- Breathe from your mouth, not your nose.
- Stabilize your breath.
- No one throw rocks from behind.
- When you go in with a bottle [Molotov cocktail] you'll find someone yelling: cover him, cover him.
- And the silly guy selling masks that you will find standing in the front lines selling his masks for one pound!
- The many hugs and prayers that you get, when you throw away a gas bomb back to the police lines or just away from people.
- When someone yells, "break some rocks" and you will find two guys in a moment carrying a big sack of rocks coming towards you.
- And the vinegar that you put on a tissue and then into your scarf.
- That moment when somebody falls and the motorcycle guys pick him up out of clashes (speeding like an airplane).
- Mohamed Mahmoud is about the bravest men I ever met in my life.
- We may not know each other by name, but whenever we meet, we laugh and we greet each other.

I wish those days could come back...



The translation of Kalosha's letter<sup>51</sup> goes as follows:

\*In memory of Mohamed Mahmoud 19/11 \*

What marks my revolutionary path is my belonging to MM fights, the Heroes Street, Mohamed Mahmoud Street. I learned everything through this epic, I met the bravest men in my life. If we take pride in one thing, it would be those who sacrificed their lives in this epic.<sup>52</sup>

\* Glory is for Allah, and glory is for martyrs\*

MM comes this year while I'm in prison, it is not just me in prison but most of us who were there that day, or in that historical battle, which we will never forget. Most of us are either between the hands of Allah or scattered among the several prisons here in Egypt.

\* If I were to get out of here alive, I will not give up on vengeance for all martyrs, and MM will always be my place of comfort and tranquility.

\* Until now, I still hear the sound of bullets and smell the gas bombs. When I remember the gas bombs, immediately the martyr Mohamed El Shafiee comes to my mind, my mate, that I did not know, we hunted bombs together... Mohamed El Shafiee will always represent the true meaning of the word: \*Glory is for the unknown\*

In memory of Mohamed Mahmoud

\*believe\*

Torra prison

Prison ward 2

Room 12/2

17-11-2014 Kalosha

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<sup>51</sup> The letter is retrieved from:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=866407173391217&set=a.185276611504280.44036.100000658288153&type=1>

<sup>52</sup> Kalosha used the word epic twice in this paragraph and I did not want to change it in the translation because it echoes and asserts the categorization of MM as "an epic event"



Figure 18: A poster shared on social media to mobilize people for a million persons march on Tuesday, 22nd November 2011.



Figure 19: *Matensounaash fel zahma* translates “Don’t forget about us amid the crowd”, the caption comes out of the coffin that reads MM martyrs while ballot boxes take up the rest of the space.



Figure 20: Amr Gharib status reads: the memory of #Mohamed\_Mahmoud is the season of distributing the revolution and revolutionary titles. (Published on November 19, 2015).



قادم صلاح الدين

22 hrs · 🌐



اللي ماسك القنبله دا احمد جمعه  
مساعد جهاد الحداد المتحدث باسم الاخوان المسلمين  
في أحداث في #محمد\_محمود  
و هو حاليا معتقل.

قولتولي مين باع مين....!!!



Figure 21: The status reads: The one holding the bomb is Ahmed Gom'a, assistant of Gehad Haddad the MBs Spokesman during MM events. He is in prison now. Come again? Who sold who...!!! (Published on November 19, 2015).



Marwa Barakat shared her photo.

November 21, 2011 · 🌐

شهادتي من ميدان التحرير : يتم استفزاز الثوار منذ أول أمس لاستدراجهم للهجوم على الداخلية و تشاع الشائعات عن تقدم البعض للهجوم على الداخلية و سقوط أفراد الأمن "المدافعين عن أنفسهم" أمام الداخلية , تنشر هذه الشائعات حتى داخل الميدان... الشوارع حول وزارة الداخلية مؤمنة بالكامل و مغلقة و محاطة بمدركات الأمن و أفراده .. الثائرون في شارع محمد محمود يقومون بحماية مدخل الميدان و عندما يتراجعون تتقدم قوات الأمن و تلقى بقنابل الغازات فيندفع الثوار لحماية الميدان مرة أخرى ..



Marwa Barakat

November 21, 2011 · 🌐

موقع وزارة الداخلية بالنسبة لشارع محمد محمود

Figure 22: A map from Google Earth edited by Marwa Barakat to show how far the building of Ministry of Interior from MM Street.

Marwa's Facebook status (my translation):

*My testimony from Tahrir: The revolutionaries are being provoked to lure them to attack the Ministry of Interior. Rumors are being spread that an attack has taken place in the ministry and some security personals defending the building, had fallen victim. The rumors are being spread even in El Midan. The streets surrounding the MOI headquarters are secured and cordoned by CSF armed vehicles, and by CSF personal. Revolutionaries in MM Street were protecting Tahrir entrance, when they [the revolutionaries] retreated, CSF attacked el midan with gas bombs, so the revolutionaries went back [inside the street] to protect Tahrir once again.*

It is worth mentioning here that, during our interview Marwa shared with me the original story about making that map. As she was going to her family house near Al-Tahrir, after a long day during MM 2011, and after rumors spread that protestors in MM are trying to attack the ministry's headquarters. She stopped to buy something from a supermarket, and she got into an argument with some people there including the shop worker about the nature of the clashes in MM and the purpose behind them. Marwa went home disappointed that she could not do anything about those rumors. Then Marwa figured out, as an architect, her contribution should be a map, which clarifies the distance between MM and where the revolutionaries are, and the MOI headquarters.



Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha	ها ها ها ها ها
No Comment	لا تعليق
No Comment	لا تعليق
No Comment No No	لا تعليق لا تعليق
They lie to you	متصدقش الكذب عليك
Plug ears! Have Eyes	سد ودانك شوف بعينيك
Congrats brave folks	ميروك يا جدعان
Gave you a Tarboosh <sup>53</sup>	ميروك الطربوش
"bullets weren't shot"	مفيش رصاص
And no Khartoosh <sup>54</sup>	مفيش خرطوش
The one who died	واللي مات
Not killed by me	أنا مقتلتوش
The one who shot	واللي قتله منعرفوش
Unknown to me	ميروك يا اخوانا
Congrats our brothers!	زغروطة للجدعان
Zaghroota <sup>55</sup> for the brave!	ركبوا الثورة .. أخذوا مكان
Jumped on board the masses	عملوا الصفقة مع باتمان
And had a good seat	نشن أضرب
Made a deal with Batman	جدع .. يا باشا
Gave us a good beat	زور منتج
Focus and shoot	ذيع ع الشاشة
Well done Pasha <sup>56</sup>	نشن أضرب
Let's forge and feign	جدع .. يا باشا
Then show on screen	لا لا لا لا لا
Focus and Shoot	اقتلني وليك الحق
Well done Pasha	اسحلني وليك الحق
NO NO NONONO	أنا واقف أهه بسلمية
Kill me! Your right	وأنت نازل دق
Drag my body with all your might	
I stand! In peace I yell	
You hammer! You strike! You kill! <sup>57</sup>	

<sup>53</sup> Tarboosh is an old-fashioned kind of cap, worn by the elite and the educated in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Egypt. The idiom "made you wear a Tarboosh" means they have deceived you and got the better of you by trickery or flattery.

<sup>54</sup> Khartoosh is the Arabic word for birdshots. The writer here is referring to the denial of the Minister of the Interior of having this type of ammunition and his strong assertion that the Egyptian police forces have never used it during the MM events.

<sup>55</sup> Arabic for Ululation: a typical Egyptian expression of joy and celebration.

<sup>56</sup> Referring to the famous incident where police officer Mahmoud Shinnawy was caught on video aiming at protestors during MM events in 2011, someone in the background was praising him "Well done, Pasha! You got him in the eye"

<sup>57</sup> Song translated by Dr. Magda Hasabelnaby Professor of English literature, Ain Shams University.

### **Chapter Three: Body As Evidence**

In the first section of this chapter, I analyze body as evidence in the context of MM events through presenting seven stories: Karim, Safa, Mohamed F., AUC guards, among others. I attempt to define how my interlocutors relate to their injuries or to other people's injuries and bodies. Do injuries serve as evidence? Who used them to render his/her story more credible and how those different people address this issue with regard to law and to other people's perceptions of MM?

In the second section I discuss how evidence is processed through the Egyptian legal system as well as in the context of truth commissions.

## Introduction

“To live blind with dignity is better than having sight but a broken eye” in Egyptian colloquial to break someone’s eye is to make them live in humiliation and ignominy. *Eyes for Egypt*<sup>58</sup> a documentary film by Eman Helal and Roger Anis talks about those who lost their eyes during the Egyptian Revolution. Ahmed Sa‘dawy, a photojournalist at Al Gomhoreya newspaper, appears in the film telling his story about MM. Sa‘dawy got shot in the eye on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, coincidentally in MM (see p.63). The street was not famous yet for being *Share‘ Eyoun El Horreya* (Eyes of Freedom Street). The words *Share‘ Eyoun El Horreya* were written on a blue street sign that rests still against the wall of the old AUC campus on what until then was called MM Street. It was Saturday and Ahmed Sa‘dawy recalls that it was his day off from work, however, he insisted on being at Tahrir Square. When Sa‘dawy got to Tahrir Square, someone told him “the military is firing at people in front of the Ministry of Interior building”. Sa‘dawy recalls that when he got to MM entrance<sup>59</sup> he saw blood on the ground, and heard birdshots and gunfire. In the midst of everything, Sa‘dawy was unable to identify which direction the sound came from. Not long after, he got shot in his eye, “I was in shock... so I asked some guy next to me ‘do I have something in my eye?’ the guy told me, to hell with your eyes we are dying here” (Anis & Helal, video, 2013).

How many people lost their eye/s in the Egyptian Revolution? How many in MM alone? Both are questions that were addressed to me by many people, as they think I should employ statistics of injuries as evidence. However, what I wanted to present in this chapter is a critique of numbers as evidence. Except that I found

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<sup>58</sup> The film can be retrieved from: <http://vimeo.com/61055140>

<sup>59</sup> Sa‘dawy did not specify which entrance, but I assume it was Tahrir entrance since he was in Tahrir Square at the time he decided to get in MM, and he did not indicate .

through analyzing twenty-five statements sent to me by El Nadim Center<sup>60</sup>, that many victims tend to augment their positions by the use of numbers, as if injured bodies alone are not enough evidence. On another level, it seems that they used numbers to affirm that they were not alone; other people were there to witness what happened to them. At first I had a problem with the use of precise numbers, especially big numbers, for instance “we were thirty-six people inside the room” (El Nadim, 2012). Later I came to analyze such statements through notions of sight and presence (see p.37). In that view, victims want to prove that the larger the number of witnesses, the harder it becomes to render their stories as fiction.

### **Narratives**

The four main narratives that I present here are: Karim, Safa, Mohamed F. and the AUC guards. The first three fall into the revolutionary narratives, and the last adopts military/state narratives. I believe the narratives of both Karim and Safa speak to each other. Both are revolutionaries, however, Karim’s account presents an analytical aspect of the event, which other revolutionary narratives usually lack. Safa, on the other hand, took me back in time, with the present tense she used, and with the intense details of her account.

On the other hand, both Mohamed F. and AUC junior guard share, almost, the same details about the proceedings of the same day, except they view what happened differently. In other words, the fact that AUC junior guard believes it is the duty of police and military to use force to clear Tahrir Square, and to maintain security, puts his narrative into a contest with that of Mohamed F., Safa, and others

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<sup>60</sup> El Nadim Center for the Management and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence is an independent Egyptian NGO that was established in August 1993.

like Ahmed Abdel Fatah. This contestation mood is the heart of the struggle over MM narratives.

### **Karim...**

I met Karim early in January 2015; we met at his office at the Center of Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (CULTNAT). Karim told me about the project he worked on, that aimed at archiving the publicly generated documentation of the eighteen days of the revolution in January 2011. The material that the team gathered was presented using an interactive visual data-show. The first show was on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2012 in the UNESCO, Geneva. The show was also presented in governmental events such as the first Cairo ICT after the revolution, as the theme was “Technological Revolution and Youth Revolution”. We also discussed Karim’s personal memories of MM. He seemed unsure about my views and me... at least that’s what I felt.

I leave you with part of Karim’s statement about MM:

*It was absolutely a fight over dignity, at first it was understandable, but to go on over three, four days where people went back and forth between the shari’ (street) and el midan (the square) to catch their breath, some come out of the street injured, w ba’dohom yergaa’ gothath (some come out as dead bodies) ... for me, this was moo-wagahah abathya geddan (absurd). Some of my friends tried to engage in some ‘separation initiatives’ [to separate people and police forces] but that also went with the wind.*

*There was a strange determination on [that being entering the street to fight the police] I have no explanations... some people say that it was the intelligence/military intelligence that were manipulating people into doing that, some say they had people infiltrating the sit in.*

*But what was really frightening for me, is something else; I started noticing all through the revolution since January 25, that the revolution ignited desires of self-fulfillment and self-assertion... There is a whole generation that felt neglected and unappreciated, among other feelings... the revolution*

*opened up the horizon to fulfill those needs of appreciation... this young unappreciated generation put other people's patriotism into question, bidding how much of a revolutionary you are if you were to refuse the way they chose to express themselves. 'We must get in [the Street], we must take revenge...' even if it was against the basic common sense to do so. After a day and a half I believed it was suicidal.*

*The youth, who took the street, especially very young ones, those were the ones who got me the most, they strove for self-assertion, and they wanted to feel their adrenaline levels up. This was among other elements like for instance: the political background and the fact that they are miserable over the death of their friends, add to that their hatred for the regime / government embodied in their fight with the police; at the end they [the youth] were the biggest losers.*

*In my opinion those who are called nashiteen (activists), the elite ones, especially those who are known to be in El Midan, known to the media and press by name; some are even associated with big political organizations; they encouraged those young men, who in return regard this encouragement/appreciation as an objective in and of itself... they did what they did for people to celebrate them, care about them, starting from the man who grabs him- who got injured- to that person praising him and his courage on Facebook and twitter.*

*There was an ongoing mood of unbalanced/disturbed self-realization more close to what you may call suicidal... on top of that, you have the story of 'Helm el Estesh-haad' (martyrdom dream), and that was 'it' for me! It is terrifying, for me the revolution is about living a good life... not dying a 'good' [glorious] death... it is never about dying, we are fighting to live, live with dignity, to preserve our lives, to achieve justice, to establish a country with good education and a good health system.*

*So, suddenly you have a different tone among revolutionary media [I asked him in which way] Karim said: early in January people took the streets to call for eish horryea kar-rama insaniya (bread, freedom, human dignity) (wa lamma khelset el sawra) and when the revolution was over [Karim is referring to the 18 days in Tahrir Square] people asked why not clean up?! How naïve!! Turning from building a community into Baltagya w afatkher (a thug and proud!), poems about Molotov and writings that express longing for*

*martyrdom. A mentality shift materialized, it became a war with a legendary front, and no one saw beyond that.*

*If you ask me, I think if people were to get together in the midan for ten days without getting into the street (MM) and back then it was feasible, we might have reached the same results/gains... between the clashes and the non-clashes were only a few meters... you could have went back 20 meters and not die, you could have just waited next to Hardee's with no harms... at Hardee's you are exposed to nothing.*

### **How safe Hardee's can be?<sup>61</sup>**

When I was interviewing Safa she cried several times, I offered her many times to end the interview immediately, and I apologized to her for bringing up painful memories, she assured me that “it’s OK...I did not forget and I do not try to forget...justice was not delivered, the least that I can do is not to forget”.

We agreed on meeting at Tahrir old AUC campus to do the interview, it was around the end of 2014. I knew Safa from before; we met once in January 2013. Back then, she told me briefly about her experience in MM. She mentioned that there were army soldiers and officers. At one moment of our little chat, I remember not believing the part where she told me that there were army soldiers, I asked her are you sure? This was back then in 2013, when I did not know that Safa’s body is a material evidence standing in front of me. As much as I like to tell myself that many people, just like me, thought that it was entirely the police that attacked and beaten people in MM 2011, I now feel ashamed that I did not “see” when I watched the videos. I leave you with part of Safa’s statement about MM:

**Safa...**

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<sup>61</sup> I need to clarify that Safa was in Tahrir Square one day before Karim arrived, so what Karim probably referred to is the fact that clashes continued in the street for several days, after the first two days, which according to Karim was absurd.

*When I got there... it was all gas... some rubber bullets, I know because I got two, one in my leg and another in my shoulder... the clashes in Qasr el Neel continued for hours, I got there late in the Afternoon and it wasn't until dark that we suddenly were able to get into el midan [Tahrir]. We ran there and we could still hear the gas bombs in the entrances of Magles el Wozaraa Street and MM Street.*

*People took turns to help those inside the street, there was too much gas. I stayed there until dawn. And then I went home to rest and sleep.*

*The next day I went straight to MM... from what I remember MM was the place with [troubles] it was the place where they entered el midan from... back then my purpose was to prevent them [police and army forces] from El Midan... we didn't want them to get in there again.. We were there [in Tahrir Square] and we weren't going to leave... so we wanted to keep the 'karr wa farr' (attack and retreat) within MM Street.*

*That day I came with preparations, I brought medicine and other stuff to help with the gas... what I did is that I was standing in the front lines to help those who were standing there... I wrapped my head with scarves so I didn't feel anything, I sprayed their faces with the medicine I had, in the front lines they sometimes didn't have a chance to go back to 'el mostashfa el maidaany'' (Field hospital) other people did what I did, I was not the only one.*

*So that was it. They sometimes came near us as we did too. We went back through side streets, until one moment, they [the police] approached us more than ever they were shooting at us... I think it was only rubber bullets, I did not see anyone shot with live ammunition, but they were targeting us! Someone next to me suddenly started to groan... I could not see because of the gas where he was shot in his body, so I did not know what happened to him... but what is important was the fact that we were targeted.*

*We ran. People pulled each other away from the shooting into the back streets, they [the police] were attacking us with their black tank.*

*I was with other people when I entered the side streets. Across from El Gama'a (the University) [referring to the old AUC campus] we were in the back of El Mostashfa El Maidani, when we entered the street people shouted there are Qannasa (snipers) on roof tops khallo balko (take care)... that was the mood... so we ran again... until I found myself in El Mostashfa behind*



*Hardee's [the fast food restaurant] ... when I arrived there I saw two people that I knew... one was a friend of mine, a doctor, I asked her to refill my bottle of medicine which was broken by that time, so I used another bottle to contain what's left... while I was waiting for her, I saw a guy that I know holding a friend of his..., his friend's leg kanet maftooha (had an open wound) I'm not sure how did he get this wound... it was awfully bloody... This was the only time that I saw someone shot with 'Tallq' live bullet... but I did not see anyone [from the police] shooting live bullets. His leg was totally opened.*

*People were holding him, I do not think he fell off the sidewalk or anything, falling cannot cause such a wound... from under his cloth... da elly ana fehemtoh (that what I understood/interpreted)*

*When I finished, I took the bottle of medicine, my bag and said goodbye to the people I know. I was just getting out of the street where Hardee's is on its corner from the hospital's side... I was just beginning to wrap my Shall (scarf), I wrapped several ones to protect me from the gas... I found people are running again, and I did not understand what is<sup>62</sup> happening, I got jammed, totally immobilized that I could not even go back to the field hospital, I was literally within a group of people who are pushing each other mafzooe'een faza'a 'faze' (panicking) with no clue what is happening around you. Until I began to realize what is going on, because el nas hawalya badaet te'ill, badaet tekhlal! (People around me were starting to get drastically fewer) ... And I found that it was not the police who was beating us... it was the army.*

*Before, they were only police, wearing black; all of a sudden there is the army!*

*At that moment I couldn't understand why the army soldiers are beating us?*

*I understand that they [the army] committed violations before... I know they dispersed the July sit-in but I was not there to witness/see that is why I could not imagine that.*

*There was two or three soldiers for each group, I assume because we panicked we did not do anything... by time I started to see there are many*

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<sup>62</sup> Safa used present tense.

groups and each group is getting beaten... what I meant is that we were many and they were only few of them using only Harrawaat (cudgels)... the state of panic that we were in, was the reason that we did not do anything... so we just got beaten.

I tried to yell at them 'there is a girl in between' kol da ana lessa fe a'shamy en da geish w keda! (I still had hope that they are 'The Army' and so...)

When they realized that there is a girl in between they pulled me, only to continue beating me and harassing me individually, bet-tzahrou ya awlaad el...<sup>63</sup> (they called me names ...)

At that moment I laid on the ground in two rows, I was on the outside row...they pulled me, so there was people underneath me, part of me was on the sidewalk and the rest of me was on other people's legs... all of us were getting beaten.

I was not sure if my head was hurt or not, I was trying to cover it. They were beating us all over our bodies... all people were getting beaten all over their bodies. Game over... there was no hope... you can't even think for a moment that you can do anything, because it was over<sup>64</sup>

That was until one of them... a higher rank, his clothes were different from theirs... he was wearing plain khaki... they wore Momawah (camouflaged)... he wore a casket and so... was he supervising them? I'm not sure, he was standing there with them... unexpectedly he pulled me out "get up... get up!" I got up unaware of where am I supposed to go now?! They are<sup>65</sup> everywhere... all I can see is<sup>66</sup> army soldiers everywhere and many people marmeyeen (thrown) on ground... so I ran... I ran until I got to the metro station, the one that was closed afterwards.

On my way to the station they continued to beat and harass me, they were the ones who pushed me into the station... down at the metro station I found a lot of people hiding, After they got me in, they closed the doors behind me.

When I went downstairs, I found many injured people. There was one girl marmeiya (thrown) on the ground with her pants pulled down and head

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<sup>63</sup> Safa's voice at this point was trembling and her eyes were full of tears...

<sup>64</sup> She clapped her hands: *khalas keda khalaas* (as in game over)

<sup>65</sup> Safa used present tense.

<sup>66</sup> Safa used present tense.

*opened with a bloody wound, when I tried to ask her what happened she told me “it fell while I was running” we helped her up and other people took her, it seemed they managed to establish some kind of a field hospital underground, I did not follow.*

*By that time, I had panic attack. I was not aware of what is happening around me, I sat on the ground and cried.*

*[Safa started crying at that moment, I asked her if she wants to stop the interview but she said no]*

*We started to hear news that they got to the field hospital... I panicked even more, because I knew my friend was there, I did not know what will happen...*

*I couldn't move my arm... I took one of my scarfs and wrapped my arm with it... I couldn't move it at all, it was swollen.*

*One of my friends called me on my mobile, which was broken but still had signal in it... we talked and agreed to meet at Dokki station. I told him I want to go to a hospital; I don't want to go home now. So we went to the 6<sup>th</sup> of October Hospital in Dokki. We went into the ER.*

*First the doctor examined my arm; he ordered an x-ray and wanted to put it in a splint. While I was waiting for the x-ray results they put us in a room full of people, they were all injured coming from Tahrir. Mine was the least of others injuries.*

*I had some bruises on my face, but it was mainly all over my body [the bruises]. My face was somewhat intact. There was this guy who literally had his leg opened not some bloody wound, it was OPENED... many people had their head in bandages with blood coming out of them... many strange things... I could not even begin to understand what happened to them over there... in the hospital I knew that some people died<sup>67</sup>... someone was holding his mobile told us: there are two dead.*

*Finally they had my arm put in a splint. Before I go I told him (I assume she is talking about her friend who took her to the hospital) my body still hurts... I still didn't know what was going on underneath my cloth... until I found a female doctor I told her I want someone to examine my body, the other*

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<sup>67</sup> I asked Safa how they knew people died; she told me that people used social media especially twitter to exchange news.

*doctor only examined from the outside, I want to examine my body just to make sure that my backbones are ok. I told her my body hurt, I cannot stand or sit. When she left my cloth up, the female doctor and another girl that was standing with me gasped, when they saw the bruises on my body. I asked them what's there... they did not tell me, the doctor gave me medication. When I got home my mom took the shock with me... I had blue bruises all over my body my breasts were also blue... my mom asked... I told her it was the soldiers.<sup>68</sup>*

What struck me the most about Safa's narrative is her use of present tense, repeatedly, during our interview. Safa's use of present can be understood in light of Trouillot's conceptualization of past as position "[n]othing is inherently over there or here – the past has no content. The past – or more accurately pastness- is a position" (p.15). Thus, what Safa is narrating is not "past"; to her, it is very much present, in metaphor and grammar.

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<sup>68</sup> At that point Safa started to cry again.



**Figure 23: Military police beat protestors near Tahrir Square/ 20 November 2011 (photo and caption are copied from the Walls of Freedom Book p.101).**

### **I Carry The Evidence With Me**

The only information I knew about Mohamed F. when I met with him was that he has participated in MM, and that he has a story to tell. I wish I knew more before we met; at least I would not jump in and ask him that silly question “were you injured in the clashes?” for it was only a matter of a few minutes that I came to know later that not only was he seriously injured, but also the scene of his injury was caught live on one of the famous videos of MM by Al-Masry Al-Youm. It is worth mentioning that Mohamed showed me the video downloaded on his smart phone, however, when I got back home I tried to look it up on YouTube in Al-Masry Al-Youm channel, but I could not find it. Nonetheless, while I was searching for another video, I found the video Mohamed showed me but through another channel on YouTube.

As far as Mohamed can remember, he told me about “El Kammashah”<sup>69</sup> and him trying to run to escape it. Mohamed’s description of the scene is almost the same as everyone else who was there at that moment, including the AUC security guards whom I interviewed later. However, Mohamed’s escape failed, as he fell off the curb while one of the soldiers was chasing him with a stick ... Mohamed remembers little after that. On the way to the hospital, Mohamed remembers getting into the metro, with the help of someone he did not know, where people were staring at him, trying to help him by pouring water over his face and body that was covered in blood. Through this person who helped him get out of Tahrir Square, Mohamed got to the hospital; he managed to get in contact with one of his friends, and then later his family and the rest of his friends came. His friends took pictures of his face, injured and puffed with bloody bruises; they did so for documentation and to post it on social media as evidence of what happened. Not knowing by then, I assume, the whole episode was captured live on video.

Mohamed does not remember getting beaten after he fell on the ground. However, he managed to tell me in detail what happened “I downloaded the video because I was afraid they will take it off YouTube, I have it on my smart phone memory card” he likes to carry the evidence of “what happened” to him<sup>70</sup> to show it to anyone who is skeptic of his story. Although his body was brutally injured, it did not serve in his mind as evidence. The video he has on his mobile “protects”, in his point of view, his claim for truth. As he was unconscious, this video is what saved his narrative from getting lost.

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<sup>69</sup> El Kammashah in Egyptian Arabic usually refers to a tool that grabs hold of something from two sides; the English equivalent for it is pliers. People refer to one of the attacks in MM specifically as El Kammashah, because they think that it was planned that the army and police corner the protesters from the two sides of the outer area of MM from Tahrir Sq. so that no one escapes them.

<sup>70</sup> A question pose itself, if we

The moment we finished our meeting I was approached by one of the waiters in the café where we were sitting in. Mohamed and I were still gathering our stuff off the table when the waiter asked: “so, tell me who killed the protestors in Tahrir Square?” the question was for me! Then he proceeded “I couldn’t help but overhear what you were saying and I have some questions for you”. I sensed trouble and I did not want Mohamed to get in trouble because of me, neither did I want to get in trouble myself. I started answering the waiter with general answers, for instance I told him you could search the Internet to find out who killed the protestors. He insisted on challenging us, he kept telling me that he searched and couldn’t find any clue that incriminate the police.

It was the first time during my fieldwork to encounter a “counter” narrative, a one that embrace and believe state and military narratives. I was nervous and I felt that moment that he was stalling, I feared then that he might even turn to be one of those whom we call “*mowateneen shorafaa*”<sup>71</sup>. And that he might have already called the police for us! I asked Mohamed to leave immediately, as I was leaving myself. He told me no, I will stay and talk to him. As I was gathering my stuff I saw Mohamed showing his video to the waiter who stood there in denial of Mohamed’s narrative, even after watching the video. I regret leaving now! I should have stayed and listened to the waiter, or at least come back the next day. Although I felt sorry for Mohamed that had to go through this alone, in five minutes he sent me a text message saying that he got out of the café and left for home.

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<sup>71</sup> Loyal citizen is what *mowaten shareef* is, the term was promoted during the SCAF ruling and it was meant to call people to turn other people in if they suspect their involvement in any activity that might harm national security.

## **We Have *Seen* It All!**

Another story is by one of the security guards at AUC Tahrir campus. Got beaten on the head with a stick himself, AUC junior guard shares the same story as Mohamed F. about El Kammashah. How it happened and how severe the beating was. However, junior guard has his own theory regarding all that. He asked me: “there were many people running away from the army and police on that day; how will they know who is good and who is not?? They had to beat them all”. Anyway, that day he was out buying lunch. What saved him from getting killed, according to what he told me, is the bag of food he was holding tightly in his hand. He screamed at the soldier hitting him on the head “I’m a security guard at AUC please let me go. I have an ID with me, I was just out to buy some food” junior guard told me “I grabbed hold of the stick as firmly as I could, to prevent the soldier from beating me further, and to force him into listening to what I was saying”. The soldier eventually heard him out and took him by the hand to the AUC gate, where they knocked on the closed door until the other security members recognized his voice. They opened the gate, and confirmed that he is a member of the security staff at the university, so the soldier let him go. His friends took him through the other gate on El Shikh Rihan Street to an ambulance, and then to the hospital where he got seven stitches on the head.

Unlike most witnesses, junior guard never thought for a moment that this soldier who hit him had done anything wrong, nor did he think that the security forces (El Dakhlyya) were responsible for what happened in MM. They did what they had to do, he thinks. He asked me in a sarcastic tone: “what were they (the soldiers) supposed to do? Take “the good guys” aside and then hit only the bad guys!!” He then laughed. That’s when I told him that they could have just dispersed the crowds with water hoses, “you wouldn’t have your head opened for nothing!” I said, he did not



comment on that. It is worth mentioning here, that for a junior guard the good guys were the people who could prove a reason, beyond protesting, for their presence at the site of events. Like himself, he had an “acceptable” reason from the soldier’s point of view to be there in the street during that time. That is why in the junior guard’s opinion the soldier let him go. Clearly, the junior guard is under the influence of “what brought them there?” theory<sup>72</sup>, which many media commentators employ when they are trying to defend police violence against protestors. They use the same rationale behind the junior guard’s analysis of good and bad guys.

Along with other security staff, the junior guard thinks that this event and other events named After MM were all planned. In fact, one of the senior security staff told me “it is all connected, (he means since January 25, 2011) I saw all of it, from up here, from the top of the science building you can see it all” he then proceeded to tell me the story of what came to be known as Mawq’at El Gamal (the Camel Battle). And how *el thuwwar* (the revolutionaries) opened up Tahrir Square for the people with the horses and camels to come in and beat them! I asked him what evidence you have to support this claim. He told me that with certain tools, he could see as far as the October Bridge from the top floor of the science building “we do not have weapons here at campus, but I have to *see* danger and be ready ahead of time”. At this point I asked him, what is the logic behind opening El *Midan*? If they [*el thuwwar*] knew those people would assault them, why would they have stayed in Tahrir Square? He explained to me that this way “the revolutionaries” would gain

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<sup>72</sup> Shortly after MM ended, and *Magles el Wuzaraa* events started, a great controversy occurred when the Blue Bra girl incident happened (see chronology of events). One famous anchor provoked the situation even more, by asking “*eh elly waddaha henak?*” (What brought her here?), as if the problem was the girls presence in the scene not that the soldiers dragged and undressed her violently.

more sympathy if they got beaten and managed to pin it on Mubarak and the National Democratic Party (NDP).

The junior guard believes the same regarding MM. He told me that things got out of control when certain people showed up<sup>73</sup>, and the clashes calmed when those individuals left. “It was planned” he said firmly. And that those people who got paid to attack El Dakhlyya (the Ministry of Interior MOI), had someone giving them directions. The guards believe that a group of young good-looking people always showed up when this person Ziko came, they gave him some sort of a starting signal. And Ziko in return had his people who helped him escalating the fights. The guards believe that it does not make sense that the police would initiate fights with people, especially After the 18 days of the revolution. “Egyptian people already hate the police, why would the police go and do that if it only leads to more hatred towards them?” The senior guard asked.

The security staff spoke with confidence. They claim their narrative truthfulness on the fact that they witnessed the events, and that they have no biases, they stood there as spectators, or at least that what they are telling me. With nothing else to do but to protect the campus, and to analyze what is happening; the guards have a clear input on the matter of “what happened” versus that “which is said to have happened”. They believe that their narrative belongs to the first category, and assume that the rest of the world only knows that “which is said to have happened” and that they are not the same.

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<sup>73</sup> He refused to elaborate on that.

## **I Am Still Waiting To Hear From Forensic Authority**

Ahmed Abdel Fatah,<sup>74</sup> a professional photographer and video maker, who worked for Al-Masry Al-Youm during November 2011, got shot in the eye while taking a video of the clashes from the protestor's side. When I asked him about his injury now, he confirmed that he is fully recovered and can see with his injured eye as normal. His biggest fear back then was the idea that he will not be able to stand behind the camera again. After he got sixteen stitches in his right eye, his friends insisted that he should go and file a report at the Attorney General's office. Ahmed, as many other cases who filed reports regarding MM, knew how this was a matter of performance more than anything else. Although Abdel Fatah Knew that filing a complaint was not going to be taken seriously, and that it is a mere formality that would get him nothing in return, he did it anyway. He told me this as he was laughing, "they told me that they will send some kind of letter from forensic authority to set an appointment to check my eye's condition, after three years have gone, I am still waiting to hear from forensic authority".

## **Law And The Making Of Evidence**

### **Legal Process As A Performance**

One theme particularly stood out from the above narratives namely that the legal process failed those injured in MM. Safa, Mohamed F., and Abdel Fatah agreed that the legal process was a useless performance to them. In Safa's own words, her official police report *et-hat fe el dorg* (literally translate to: was put in the drawer). Safa's statement indicates that her complaint will not proceed in the legal system any further. Thus, terminating Safa's chances in getting her case heard. In Abdel Fatah's

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<sup>74</sup> Abdel Fatah likes to refer to himself as el sahafi (the journalist).

case, his eye healed before an investigation was even commenced regarding his complaint.

Along the same lines Ahmed Osman<sup>75</sup> explicitly told me “you are asking about law, here in Egypt nothing is governed by law”. We discussed how the power of politics controls the legal system, to the extent that some cases would be sent to courts in a matter of days without a decent prosecution process, just to satisfy political orders or to comply with the pressure of the media. One extreme example of how void the law in Egypt, as Ahmed told me in the interview, would be “the protest law which indicates that the police officers who arrested the protestors should be dressed in their official police uniform -a law that aims fundamentally to repress, even that is not respected and you find officers wearing plain cloth making the arrests”. Ahmed concludes, “It’s all political”.

Even in the context of truth commissions, the various commissions failed victims of violence in and post January 2011. Partly because they failed to abide by the international standards used by such commissions in collecting and assessing evidence of violence, but mostly because the Egyptian Truth Commissions failed to disclose their findings to the public. Thus, confirming the idea that legal process in Egypt is a mere performance.

### **You Do Not Have The Right To Know!**

Simultaneously with the second commemoration of MM events the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE), under the program of

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<sup>75</sup> Osman is a junior lawyer at the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE). He was keen to help me with the legal information that I needed for my research. Although, Ahmed graduated recently he seemed to know exactly where to trace information needed, using those gigantic law books.

the right to know, published a paper titled *The Right to Know Truth and the Violations of Human Rights* (El Masry & others, 2013). The publication was meant to be a gesture of the importance of commemoration as “an essential mechanism for preserving history, guarding the conscience of the nation, and morally compensating the victims” (El Masry & others, 2013).

Earlier in November 2013, the state inaugurated a memorial At the time of publishing the paper the state was inaugurating two memorials in memory of MM, one at Rabaa Square, and another one in Tahrir Square a couple of weeks later (Spencer, 2013). These memorials gain their significance only from their locations, Rabaa and Tahrir Square, as sites of struggles (Olson, 2013). Publishing *The Right to Know Truth* paper at that time came as a counter narrative, as expressed by the authors of the paper<sup>76</sup>, counter to the one offered by the state. The paper aims at documenting the violations committed by the state at different incidents since January 25 until the publishing date. Those memorial statues have been seen as an attempt by the state to silence the narratives accusing it of perpetrating violence at MM and Rabaa (Olson, 2013; Spencer, 2013). Not only those memorial statutes are trying to silence these narratives, but they also count as an attempt to replace these narratives with others, which portrays the state as a non-violent actor in these struggles, or better as a supporter who celebrates the memory of MM. As argued by Sally Touma “The killer is building a memorial to his victims” (Spencer, 2013).

In view of that, *The Right to Know Truth and the Violations of Human Rights* paper addresses five main themes: first, is the right to know truth as a concept. The second theme is about the right to know truth and transnational justice. The third

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<sup>76</sup> [http://afteegypt.org/right\\_to\\_know/2013/11/19/5717-afteegypt.html](http://afteegypt.org/right_to_know/2013/11/19/5717-afteegypt.html)

theme is about truth commissions as a mechanism of knowing truth in post-conflict countries. The fourth theme presents a sample of nine Egyptian Truth Commissions, since January 25<sup>th</sup> until publishing the paper. The last theme is a case study of the second Egyptian Truth Commission, which was formed during Morsi's rule.

The paper highlights the growing doubts around Egypt's ability to develop a system for transnational justice, by pointing out to the shortcomings of the nine commissions that were formed during different occasions after January 2011. In addition, the authors of the paper believe that the practices of the nine Egyptian truth commissions, presented in the paper, violated all the standards of establishing such a commission. By not revealing their work rules, objectives, or disclose their budget, these commissions were in serious breach of "information policies" which according to the authors "undermined the credibility and transparency of the nine commissions" (El Masry & others, 2013).

With no one held accountable for these "crimes", the paper concludes that the absence of "political will" is the main reason behind the obvious miscarriage of justice. Although international law elevates the right to know as one of the fundamental human rights, as it appears from the above analysis, in Egypt people do not seem to have the right to know. The authors of the paper conclude, the absence of political will to disclose the findings of these commissions is intentional. Since the state itself is involved in the execution of these "crimes", state involvement renders disclosing such "truth" impossible.

### **One-sided Court...One-sided Historicity**

I met with Menna El Masry the researcher who put *The Right to Know Truth and the Violations of Human Rights* paper together. We discussed the larger context

of the project *The Right to Know*, and we discussed MM in particular as an event and as a narrative. Menna pointed out that the only case we have in court now regarding MM, other than ElShinnawy, the eye sniper,<sup>77</sup> is a case where the only suspects accused of killing protestors and vandalism are civilians. However, she thinks that what this represents is a one-sided story, which is the official story of the state. Menna believes that we need to have other sides of the story in court, where the MOI is charged for violence against protestors. She fears that the act of pardon that Morsi issued, when he was the president, is even more problematic. Menna believes this pardon will later serve as an official document. That negates the innocence of those in MM, from accusations such as vandalism. She hoped instead that a role of innocence would replace the pardon.

“How will this be seen in fifteen years from now?” Menna thinks that if we do not have other narratives officially acknowledged, people in fifteen years will only think of those in MM as a bunch of thugs who attacked the building of *el-Dakhlyya* (the MOI). Menna accordingly thinks, “In fifteen years from now, the only official texts available will be documents from courts we civilians are accused of attacking public property and vandalism, and a presidential pardon for some, and not one rule of innocence for those accused in the MM trial.”

In his rather important book *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992* Shahid Amin (1995) uses court statements and trial reports, beside oral narratives, as evidence of what happened in “Chauri Chuara” 1922 event. In the book Amin offers narratives from local and familial memory, the multiplicity of sources

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<sup>77</sup> Shinnawy case is based on the famous incident where police officer Mahmoud Shinnawy was caught on video aiming at protestors at MM Street, someone in the back ground was praising him “Well done pasha! You got him in the eye”. <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/03/05/eye-sniper-sentenced-to-three-years/>

give Amin's book a chance to present the different facades of Chuari Chuara (CC) as argued by Mary Margret Steedly (1997). According to Steedly, Amin's book "display the complexity of the event [and] its metaphorical power as a two-sided image of criminality and patriotism, and its persistence in local and familial memory" (p.696). However, Amin himself stated, "Judicial pronouncements live to be heard even in the familial recall of an event... [the] narratives that I collected were inescapably tainted or vitiated or colored in varying degrees by the hegemonic master narratives." (p.118). Amin's book documents the journey of CC event from 1922 to 1992, and his statement above proves the validity of Menna El Masry's concerns. The legal process of gathering official evidence once in CC 1922 is not far-off in spirit from MM 2011.

### **Concluding Notes**

In their stories Safa and Sa'dawy along with others carried their bodies as evidence for a while. Even after the fights were over, whether they were bruised, had stitches or broken bones, they considered their bodies, at the moment, and for many moments yet to come, as evidence. Nonetheless, others as Abdel Fatah (16 stitches in the right eye) and Mohamed F. (broken nose along with a long list of other body injuries) did not consider their body injuries, as sufficient evidence. Both considered videos that document their incidents of injury as "the evidence". I strongly believe that their experience with the legal system had much to do with their views. Although, Egyptian judges have the power to dismiss any video, or any other potential evidence for that matter as insufficient evidence, Abdel Fatah and Mohamed F., believe that the videos they pose are sufficient, authoritative evidence. As Christopher Pinney would argue that a camera could be used as "a medium for production of authority" (2008, P.S36), it gave them a sense of security, that they could always prove their narratives. They have "access at will" to the contents of their stories, unlike what Trouillot



rendered impossible thinking that “at any rate, there is evidence that the contents of our cabinet [mind] are neither fixed nor accessible at will” (1995, p.14).

## **Chapter Four: In Other Words, Other Pictures: Young Active Journalists and Photographers**

In this chapter I explore the notion of evidence through a process by which counter knowledge is produced. I employ the definition of sensual scholarship in relation to those who take up this mission of production. The chapter will be a continuation of the gallery I have started earlier in this thesis. It will further explore how multiple narratives about MM got to be produced through visual mediums. Photos, live streaming, and films, all are indicative of the crucial and critical link between “truth and sight” as Maurice Bloch and Christopher Pinney would argue (2008). Thus, the chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is dedicated to *Ana Mubasher*<sup>78</sup> project, and the second section focuses on photojournalists as sensuous scholars. The last section, however, tell a visual story of the walls in MM.

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<sup>78</sup> Ana Mubasher is the Arabic translation of (I am Live), which indicates that this person is on live broadcasting.

## Introduction



Figure 24: 2012, AUC wall, right side of the gate, MM Street, taken by Amira Khalil<sup>79</sup>.

Graffiti on the wall located in MM reads: “Whether you erase it or not.... What will you benefit oh sheikh<sup>80</sup> ... Whatever you erase is inscribed in our hearts and in the heart of history”. For graffiti artists MM has become of great significance, each time these walls are erased/whitewashed they insist on painting the walls again. For them, they are painting this “heart of history” which seems to be an enigmatic place where no “truth” can be lost! (See pp.50-51 & p.61)

“Losing truth” by erasure is similar in core to what Abdel Fatah and Mohamed F. were afraid of when they considered their injured bodies as insufficient evidence. Bruises and broken bones can heal; leaving no tangible evidence behind, however, knowledge about these injuries is in itself evidence, which can protect these scarred bodies and their narratives. The question then becomes what type of knowledge is considered as evidence? Evidence in the historical sense, which is knowledge produced and preserved that grants authority to those who carry it. And there is evidence in the legal sense, which is basically the same, except that it derives its

<sup>79</sup> Permission obtained by researcher to use the photo.

<sup>80</sup> The word shikh in Arabic means old man, I believe the use of it here is to refer to the Muslim Brotherhood or maybe the old state of Mubarak. Or could be both.

authority from the quality of being legally admissible in courts of law. And since the legal process in Egypt so far failed to deliver justice to those who got injured during January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011 and after (see pp.110-111). Most people no longer seem to care about the outcome of the legal rituals!

In the past few years after 2011, I would claim, based on my fieldwork, that most of the Egyptian youth were driven to answer questions about evidence. As well as questions of proper sources, what, who and how do we define “proper evidence”? Let alone the dilemma of truth and truthfulness, as problematic concepts. We could claim at least that they were driven to think about these questions.

Some of these young men and women went beyond just answering these questions; they took matters into their own hands and decided that they need to produce counter knowledge, hence produce counter evidence. Counter to what the state has been offering. In terms of what Pinney (2008) argues, that the camera is not a mere tool for documentation, but rather it is a way of producing authority. These young men and women are indeed producing authority, counter to the state, and counter to other parties that do not share the same perspective as they do. “Creating objective sources and making records” is the most important issue at hand for these men and women, as AbdelHalim AbdelAllah (2015) the co-founder of Ana Mubasher phrased it.

### **The Ana Mubasher Project**

“People make the revolution & people live broadcasts it!” this slogan is the short description you will find on Ana Mubasher’s social media accounts.<sup>81</sup> It all started when Saleh and Halim, a couple of friends, felt the need to do something

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<sup>81</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/AnaMubasher/info?tab=page\\_info](https://www.facebook.com/AnaMubasher/info?tab=page_info)

during the 18 days of the revolution<sup>82</sup>. According to Halim what started as a pure act of amateur activism grew into a much more mature project only one year after<sup>83</sup>. Officially, it was not until the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2012 that Ana Mubasher was launched, the timing was *Zekra el thawra* (The commemoration of the revolution):

*The idea of Ana Mubasher was to create a platform to collect live streaming from all over the country...Ana Mubasher means literally I am Live, citizen journalis[m] is live, is there<sup>84</sup>. We had a call on twitter 'elly andu smart phone yeegy we han'alemu'<sup>85</sup>...people were skeptic and only few people showed up for the training but we did it anyway... our first feed was about the 25<sup>th</sup> of Jan 2012, we had people from Alexandria, Suez, Tanta, and several people from Cairo. (Halim, 2015)*

Ana Mubasher's coverage opts for neutral content, as they never adopted any certain political agenda. Since Ana Mubasher predominantly relied on live feeds from events on the ground, they echoed what social media collectively offered. Ana Mubasher worked both as a generator of live streaming feeds as well as a hub hosting external links from other users. Bearing in mind that social media feeds are vastly

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<sup>82</sup> Halim insisted during the interview that he could not call the 25<sup>th</sup> of Jan 2011 a revolution. It was in the context of discussing the Ana Mubasher slogan that I asked him if he would change anything about it now that it has been 4 years? He told me that he would change the word revolution as he thinks it is "naive and unprofessional in a 'journalistic' sense". Then in another context during the interview where he discussed how non-ideological MM was as an event and how ideologies started to kick in later after the parliamentary elections, during that part of the discussion he problematized the word "Egyptian revolution" and the word "revolutionary" saying "anyone who use the foloul vs thawry classification is ignorant!" stating that the 25<sup>th</sup> of January was not ideological; confirming "it is a popular uprising, where people gathered around certain goals... and then ideologies kicked in later".

<sup>83</sup> It is worth mentioning that Halim used four terms during our interview interchangeably: (citizen journalism and activism media) vs. (independent journalism and objective media). Halim associated citizen journalism with activism media. To my understanding, for him both indicated amateur and biased journalism. On the other hand he linked independent journalism to objective media, together they represent, for Halim, a professional and fair process of doing journalism.

<sup>84</sup> The small, maybe incomplete sentence "is there" is indicative of how much the authority of sight and presence, the quality of *being there* marked the technique that Ana Mubasher used, which is live-streaming.

<sup>85</sup> The Arabic sentence translates: Whoever owns a smart phone, just come and we will teach you.

diverse. So, even though Ana Mubasher team “selects” material for publishing, they chose to make the collection of feeds they are selecting from, a wide diverse one.

Halim then tells me about the obstacles that faced the project right from the beginning. He starts by the fact that the technicalities were not available to many people at first. Not many people owned smart phones, let alone iPhones in the year 2012. The application needed to stream videos from android phones was blocked in Egypt at that time, so the only candidates back then for the project were people who owned iPhones. The technical challenges were but one aspect of the problems Ana Mubasher faced. Another was funding. Halim tells me that people had to spend from their own pockets, which meant that only well-off people could participate in the project<sup>86</sup>. Halim then recaps a story of a candidate from outside Cairo<sup>87</sup> that they ended up losing him because of the lack of resources<sup>88</sup>.

*I worked not to save money for myself; I spent nearly all my savings on Ana Mubasher, Internet payments, extra batteries, and an iPhone... (Halim, interview, 2015)*

Internet bills were nothing of a burden compared to the threats Ana Mubasher received for dealing with security issues. According to Halim live streaming kick started after Rabaa<sup>89</sup>. As the state closed nearly every Islamist media channel, live streaming was the only option left for Islamist opposition to disseminate their narratives. It was hard enough for the Ana Mubasher team to do the usual news

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<sup>86</sup> That is somewhat obvious, since the budget you need to buy an iPhone or a good android phone is relatively a big one.

<sup>87</sup> Halim did not want to give me further info about which governorate that this person lived in.

<sup>88</sup> Although Halim did not expressly state it during our interview, but I think he feared that without proper funding not only that Ana Mubasher will not be able to expand, but also on a more personal level, Halim himself will be economically drained.

<sup>89</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/14/world/meast/egypt-sayah-rabaa-anniversary/index.html>

covering, things got worse after the close down of El Jazeera office in Egypt<sup>90</sup>. Halim tells me “El Jazeera used live feed from people on the ground, this threatened us... this put us in jeopardy”. He was referring to the famous case “the Marriot Cell” of el Jazeera journalists, who were detained on December 29<sup>th</sup> 2013. The journalists were accused of broadcasting false news “that damaged national security” (BBC, 2013). The three journalists of el Jazeera were not the only journalists imprisoned back at that time. Even before the Marriot cell case, and especially after Rabaa dispersal, a number of journalists and photojournalists were detained with no clear charge. Mahmoud Abu Zeid (known as Shawkan) a freelance photojournalist got arrested while covering Rabaa’s violent dispersal. Shawkan got arrested on August 14<sup>th</sup> 2013. He spent over 700 days in detention, and is still detained, a procedure that violates Egyptian legal codes (see pp. 110-111). At this moment in 2015, Shawkan is still imprisoned without any clear charge (Amnesty, no date). Rabaa was indeed a diagnostic event, as Falk-Moore believes that such events have the quality to expose “ongoing contests and conflicts and competitions” (p. 730) (see p.43). The fact that Ana Mubasher’s logo is black and yellow and Rabaa logo has also the same colors was to the Ana Mubasher team “really disturbing”. The team considered this association with Rabaa as a further threat.



Figure 26: Rabaa Logo



Figure 25: Ana Mubasher Logo

<sup>90</sup><http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/201113085252994161.html>

*By that time people who supported us at first, like family and friends, started questioning who we are and what we do... one close family friend<sup>91</sup> even told me 'now is not the time for objective journalism, being neutral now is a betrayal'... (Halim, 2015)*

A question posed itself when Halim mentioned the incident above: was Ana Mubasher objective all the way? The answer given to me was simply no; Ana Mubasher “grew” from activist media into objective media, and that process of growth did not take much time. It happened that Halim himself was live streaming during MM second events in February 2012, when his mobile camera caught a clear shot of a guy throwing Molotov “his face was showing and I caught everything on video” (Halim, 2015) The second Halim realized what is happening he turned the other way “that was my basic instinct [and] it was wrong” he says. Halim further explains this was an act of activism, and that as an “objective journalist” he was not supposed to turn. In a couple of months after the MM February events 2012, Halim was covering Al Abbasiya sit-in. He tells me “thirty thousand people were watching that night the live streaming I broadcast from my mobile” (Halim, 2015) at that moment he realized that he is no longer a citizen journalist, he came to terms that what he is personally doing should be more of an independent journalism.

On the difference between both citizen and independent journalism, Halim tells me “citizen journalism is something that is ridiculed by the whole world! I worked at AFP<sup>92</sup> until recently; if I were to mention citizen journalism to the editors

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<sup>91</sup> This person is a public political figure, which I have not obtained consent from Halim to disclose their name.

<sup>92</sup> Agence France-Presse



there they would mock me”. He explains that the concept of citizen journalism in the West is different than what he imagined at first when he called himself a citizen journalist<sup>93</sup>. He explains, anyone could write a simple topic about how beautiful the sea is and he would be identified as a citizen journalist, and so on. What they have in Ana Mubasher is something different, according to Halim “a very peculiar experience with citizen journalism” where they tried to make “journalists” out of ordinary people. It was by offering them technical support, on how to use the different applications for live streaming, and other technical related issues. Another training goal was to promote the participants’ sense of objectivity, by showing them examples and on how to write news objectively.

Being biased and aligned with certain political agendas disqualifies any media project from calling itself independent. During our interview, Halim mentioned Rassd<sup>94</sup> in comparison with Ana Mubasher; he believes “their biases prevent them from being objective” and that is why he asserted that Ana Mubasher had never collaborated with Islamist driven media projects because “they always exaggerate, we had different editorial lines... we did share their links [out of the need to cover everything] but we put their newsfeeds with our added headings, the idea again

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<sup>93</sup> In December 2011 Halim was covering *Ahdath Magles El Wozraa* (Cabinet of Ministers events), at that moment he was not yet live-streaming. He filmed with his mobile what was happening. During his presence there a man next to him was shot dead and Halim was able to film this incident. He was later asked to give an interview to an Australian reporter about that. Halim told me that on a side talk with John Lyons (the Australian reporter) he was asked how he would like to identify himself; he chose “citizen journalist”. Lyons did not want Halim to settle for that, telling him that the work he produces is far from citizen journalism and that he should identify himself as an independent journalist.

For the interview with Halim please visit: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/video/id-d2M3g0NT097tBKaz1PY5fCYLgcyNzQb/Egypt-disillusioned-revolutionaries#.T7-Cxu2oUmk.blogger>

<sup>94</sup> Rassd is a news network that is known for its loyalty for the Muslim Brotherhood. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/rassd-news-journalists-referred-military-court-leaking-sisi-statements>

behind Ana Mubasher was to collect all live streaming coming out of Egypt in one place” (Halim, 2015).

Halim was keen during our interview to identify the “leap” they took as a team and as a project from “activism media to objective media”. It was fundamentally because they themselves as a team “got out of the activism and polarization loop” (Halim, 2015). What helped even more is the career shift that Halim made in 2013, from a job in management to a full time journalist at Dailynews Egypt. According to Halim this move had some major effects on Ana Mubasher, primarily on how they managed their editorial line.

*I was very conscious about the editorial line of our tweets, about our work in general in Ana Mubasher... I would read every single tweet from people who are posting... I was using my personal experience as a journalist, what I learned, to benefit Ana Mubasher... it was not all about me, we all grew with Ana Mubasher, [however] I was the most experienced because I chose journalism as a career. (Halim, 2015)*

Back in 2011 Halim was in his senior year studying tourism. He graduated in what we both recognized- in laughter- as *dofe’et el thawra*<sup>95</sup>. During the revolution, Saleh (the other co-founder of Ana Mubasher) had this idea that they should do something, which was later developed into Ana Mubasher. After graduating Halim got a job in management that he disliked for “work reasons”. Still, it was not until the MM events in November 2011 that he decided to quit his job because of the unwelcoming attitude he received at the office for participating in the events. “I was viciously attacked, so I quit! I decided to become an artist, or I’ll do anything!!” (Halim, 2015) It was not too long thereafter, when he was offered another job also in

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<sup>95</sup> Translates in Arabic: Class of the revolution. Although Halim had a problem with the term revolution, he had no problem sharing that label with me, it has been since 2011 that people refer to whoever graduated that year as class of the revolution or *dofe’et el thawra*

management, but that time the building had a view on Tahrir! With the new job located off Tahrir Square. and with the supportive attitude of Halim's new colleagues he was finally able to take his "Tahrir jacket"<sup>96</sup> on daily basis with him to work. He covered as much events as he wanted. He would go down to Tahrir and come up again to the office to resume work "I stayed in the office for days, working and planning Ana Mubasher at the same time with my friends there" (Halim, 2015).

On another level, Halim showed frustration with the current available media startups. He believes they were either bad translation of foreign press, or good, even great, elitist articles that do not target the mainstream Egyptians. Halim feared that the only hegemonic narrative that is available is the state narrative. In light of that, he believes that we lack objective media platforms that offer more than just one story to the mainstream. If this would be the case for the coming years Halim believes this will jeopardize the process of writing history in future years. Even if we had to do away with little objectivity and include all alternative materials, such as the material produced by Rassd or Mosireen<sup>97</sup> which both have political biases, I agree with Halim that:

*Any material... written, filmed or photographed is really important... one day it will turn into an archive.* (Halim, 2015)

As Menna El Masry once expressed her fears<sup>98</sup> that the presidential pardon that Morsi gave to the people accused in the MM case, will serve in future as a document of a negative proof that those in MM were not granted an innocence ruling from court, but rather they got pardoned for what they "committed". The most

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<sup>96</sup> Tahrir jacket: is heavy jacket that Halim used to wear in clashes, in order to protect himself from pellets.

<sup>97</sup> Mosireen is a non-profit media collective born out of the explosion of citizen journalism and cultural activism in Egypt during the revolution. This introduction to Mosireen was retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/user/Mosireen/about>

<sup>98</sup> see chapter three, page

frequent praise I heard over the past year while doing my field work, was that my thesis would serve one day as a document, a burden that I hope I lived up to during my work.

A while after Rabaa dispersal a serious burden was thrown on the Ana Mubasher team. When one of them received “clear direct state threats” that they need to stop their activity. They limited their activities drastically after that incident. Yet, I was struck by the announcement that Halim threw at me towards the end of our interview “I don’t think Ana Mubasher is going to exist anymore”. After I went home I processed his statement several times in my head, and since I did not want to assume answers I emailed Halim asking him to elaborate on his statement and here is his emailed reply:

*The current political climate doesn't welcome any objective criticism. Not to mention that the authorities have been using extreme measures against independent and citizen journalists since the crackdown on pro-Morsi protest camps in Rabaa and Nahda. Tens of journalists are now behind bars either because they didn't have proper accreditation or because they were accused of backing the "terrorist" Muslim Brotherhood.*

*The way Ana Mubasher has been functioning since it was founded no longer fits the current situation; it would only put sincere citizen journalists in [harm] way with a risk of spending at least five years in jail. Not to mention that the new anti-terror laws that the government is issuing would make us a direct target. So expanding, training new citizen journalists, and getting a wider audience is simply counter-intuitive at this moment.*

*We are currently laying low with minimum activity on social media, and our website has been temporarily suspended. We hope in the future when there is a functioning parliament we would be able to speak with MPs and convince them to adopt new laws that would protect citizen journalists and online*

*media projects. Only then we would be ready to re-launch Ana Mubasher or even start a new project that would be a hub for objective journalism that captures the pulse of the street. And hopefully would turn into a mainstream source of information.*

Halim adequately portrays the current scene in Egypt with his words. The Ana Mubasher project is but one example of the attempts to produce counter knowledge. Other media startups that are still functioning face similar threats. Notwithstanding, we still lack mainstream sources of information that are objective and inclusive, a curse that many young Egyptians are trying to challenge. The next two sections present additional attempts to produce and analyze alternative knowledge.

### **Photojournalists... Sensuous Scholars**

In the book *Sensual Scholarship* Paul Stoller is quoting Alan Feldman on his definition of the role of a committed *sensuous scholar* as someone who locates “lost biographies, memories, words, pains and faces which cohere into a vast secret museum of historical absence” (1997, p.83). I titled this section *Photojournalists... Sensuous Scholars* following the scope of Feldman’s definition. I believe that photography took a great part in shaping MM from the very beginning. Videos of the dispersal on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2011 created a momentum at Tahrir on the same day, and days that followed. Different people from different backgrounds depended on the loads of visual material around MM (photos and videos), which produced a plenty of evidence for them to utilize and employ to render their narratives more authoritative and credible. According to Ahmed Osman<sup>99</sup> the police threatened the families of detained protestors by telling them “we have pictures of your kids in MM, you will never see them again!” (2015)

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<sup>99</sup> Lawyer at AFTE

“I focused on the details, not just the clashes... hopefully one day my photos will be a reference” this is how Ahmed Hayman, a young talented photojournalist, defines his work. Among other photojournalists that I interviewed, Hayman had an explicit interest in documenting “what happened”, not just in MM but in general. As Hayman later emphasized, he wants to leave photos for next generations. Hoping that his photos will tell them “who we are now, and what we looked like” (Hayman, 2015).

Sorting memories about MM was confusing for Hayman. He mixed the first events with the second. However, Hayman was able to recap some stories with the aid of his dated photographs.

*I was in Ireland when the first MM events started. I was studying photography through a scholarship. I had visited Egypt before MM during the 18 days [of the revolution]... Days after MM started, I noticed that everyone is there [in Egypt] even foreign photojournalists are covering MM, I had to come back and be part of this... the moment I got to the street [Mohamed Mahmoud] wearing my gas mask; a gas bomb was thrown under my feet! I was trying to get the mask fastened and the strap got torn... I inhaled the gas and went unconscious...I woke up in a room full of people that look just like me [I asked in what sense] I mean they were all unconscious because of the gas... I checked my stuff, cameras and money all was there el hamdu le Allah... Then I decided to go back to the office and get another mask... I was enthusiastic [then].*

*After MM the first, and as part of my scholarship, I was inspired to design a handmade book around the Egyptian revolution. I called it Liberation, we were seeking liberty at that time and it seemed like the right name. Most of the photos I used were from MM. I printed the photos in Egypt and I designed*

*a leather cover from Sami Amin<sup>100</sup> for the book. I also used special paper for the captions, in order to make it more authentic... more Egyptian...*

The part where Hayman told me about the gas mask incident was a complete confusion. He linked this story with another one. A story about a man who got injured before him and he decided to snap a quick shot of the injured man. Then Hayman helped the man until someone showed for help. When we were going through the pictures Hayman took during MM events (both the first and second), we found the photo of that man dated 2012 not 2011. This led Hayman to question which MM was he talking about! In November 2011 Hayman was back from Ireland indeed; however, he was back for the aftermath of the first events. The first date appears in photos he took in November was on the 24<sup>th</sup>. By that time there was a truce between police and protestors. The clashes nearly came to an end, and a wall was installed in MM. The MM wall was the first in the Downtown area, followed by many other walls. Accordingly Hayman's stories about the gas mask and the injured man belonged to the second MM, not the first.

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What started at first as a project around the walls of MM ended up about *The Walls*<sup>101</sup> of Downtown, the talented brother of mine Aly Hazzaa was the one who introduced the idea of studying people participating in MM to me. While he was conducting a similar study with the means of photography, he thought we should collaborate in a visual anthropology project. Although he does not recall that story, I fully remember our phone call, I remember the room was sunny, and I was watching a

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<sup>100</sup> Sami Amin is a well-known Egyptian leather designer, famous for his authentic Egyptian motifs and good quality materials.

<sup>101</sup> <http://panorama.madamasr.com/2014/the-walls-by-aly-hazzaa-2/>

lecture by Howard Zinn on *The uses of history and the war on terrorism*<sup>102</sup>. It was then that Aly told me the story of a man “with very modest appearance” who seemed to care about nothing, throwing rocks in MM... and again he saw him in another day... but I can’t really remember more on that. However, what is interesting is that Aly decided to speak to the man and ask him about his background. He turned out to be a former employee of some sort, whom had to leave his job in order to be able to participate in the events of the revolution. The man had a wife and two kids to support. As far as I remember the story, Aly told me that this man had just sold his mobile phone to provide for his family, one more day.

*Mohamed Mahmoud is sacred, for those who name themselves revolutionaries. You can’t speak in a bad way about MM... for instance; you can’t say that people there were reckless... “NO they were demanding freedom” [he changed his tone of voice to indicate the other person] you will be announced as “traitor”... you can’t come near the subject... it is sacred... “People lost their eyes and you are so and so” [again using the other person’s tone]...*

*I was not supposed to be there in the first place... I was traveling to attend an exhibition in Turkey, however, after I got to the airport I discovered that my army clearance was outdated, and I missed my flight... I went back home and did not go right away to MM, it was not until the next day...*

*I can’t really recall most of the details... maybe I forgot or maybe I’m trying to forget... I do not even recall what was it all about?? I remember many signs “eyes of freedom”; I remember it [referring to MM the event] had to do with the parliamentary elections... It is hard to recall many things, especially in these past four years...maybe because they were my first four years as a professional photojournalist, I can only track down the dates through the pictures I took.*

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<sup>102</sup> Zinn, H. (2006). *The uses of history and the war on terrorism* [Video file]. Retrieved as two parts from: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V\\_Fc5W8amYM&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_Fc5W8amYM&feature=player_embedded) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVwB8cS19KM>



*Everything is muddled...it was all about the numbers, the number of people injured, the number of people lost their eyes, number of people killed, it was not about the demands, although you had political parties as well as revolutionary youth coalitions making political demands and statements around MM, it was never coming out of the Midan...*



**Figure 27: November 22, 2011: A call for a million's people march, below the poster is a list of four demands<sup>103</sup>.**

*The making and naming of MM did not come right away... what happened is that we [journalists and photojournalists] lost interest in what is going on in Tahrir after a few days, who are the people there? What are they doing? it was clear that it was all happening in MM [the street] we went there daily... after a few days we automatically went to MM directly not Tahrir... but you'll not find a single folder named MM in the first few days "there was no such a thing called MM" it was "Tahrir clashes" it was not until the weekend that we changed that...*

*I think that there are many narratives about MM that are made... I'm not suggesting they were lies but some narratives got stretched into other narratives and so on... the thing with the eye sniping is that birdshot is a very*

<sup>103</sup> The Revolutionary Youth Coalition list of demands consists of:

- 1- Resignation of the current cabinet
- 2- Forming another transitional cabinet that obtains full authority over the country
- 3- Setting a date for the presidential elections by April 2012 maximum
- 4- Restructuring the security system and put on trial anyone who is involved in corruption.

*random weapon, police officers, who are thick-witted by the way, were aiming at protestors in general not targeting their eyes... how many people got birdshots in their neck? In their forehead? In their eyebrows? other parts of their bodies? Did anyone count that? Getting shot in the eye is heartbreaking and frightening... I'm not saying necessarily that they were not targeting eyes I am just saying they are not that smart...*

*If you ask me, MM was not that ugly [referring to the amount of violence used by the police] Maspiro was much more heartbreaking... in MM you willingly go there in the frontlines and you know you are going to be shot... why not just stay in the Midan? You don't have to go and clash with the police, especially that there were times when they retreated way back [the police] ...at some points there was a tone of reason that got out voiced with the loud "we must get in there!" "we must fight"... that was agitating, something I hated about MM... Although I believed that we still had rights to demand, elections to be held, and that Egypt was not yet in order, I acknowledge the fact that we felt unrepresented by those in power...*

It was eye opening for us, for Aly and I, how people like that man who quit his job and sold his mobile to participate in the events, are part of a "secret museum of historical absence" (Stoller, 1997). I do not recall studying such stories inside the classroom, or even reading about these "small acts of revolt"<sup>104</sup> in history books that were present in our home library. Only great leaders are worthy enough to be present in history books, with fine stories full of "big heroic acts". However, some of these stories, found their way on the walls of MM; as will be presented in the next section.

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<sup>104</sup> What I mean by "small acts of revolt" is something similar to quitting your job to join the revolution, small regarding that it is individual or personal, so maybe quitting your job would not have a general effect on how the flow of events go, but if we put in consideration the sum of 'individual acts of revolt' that belong to the collectivity of people who took the street at that moment, we might be able to see how "big" they turned the flow of events.

## Once Upon A Wall!



Figure 28: 2014, MM entrance from Tahrir ... painted by Ammar Abo Bakr.<sup>105</sup>



Figure 29: Photo of Bassem Wardany in its final form, photo taken by Ahmed Hayman.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Photographer is unknown. The photo [edited by the author] is retrieved from The Walls of Freedom Facebook page: [https://www.facebook.com/WallsOfFreedom/photos\\_stream](https://www.facebook.com/WallsOfFreedom/photos_stream)

<sup>106</sup> Since I was unable to reach Hayman after the interview, I scanned the photo of Bassem, attributed to Hayman, from the book *Walls of Freedom*.

*Martyr Bassem Mohsen Wardany was a 20-year-old revolutionary who left Suez in February 2011 to join anti-Mubarak protests. He lost his left eye at the hands of a sniper in the Battle of Mohamed Mahmoud on 21 November 2011. He was sentenced before a military court early in 2012, beaten by MB supporters and finally joined Tamarod movement and was its leader in Suez. He was quickly disenchanted with the new leaders after their violent crackdown on Islamists. On 20 December 2013 he was shot at a pro-MB protest and died two days later. His story summarizes the revolution, for he was both its product and victim. Unlike previous portrayals of martyrs as angels, he is depicted metamorphosing into a fly to reflect his resilience as a revolutionary. In Egypt's New Kingdom (1550-1069 BC) the fly was used as military decoration awarded for bravery in battles and named the "order of golden fly" (or fly of valor) because of its persistence in the face of opposition. The artist likens protestors to flies because, despite their fragility, they are a nuisance and difficult to kill... (Karl, p. 261, 2014)*

Bassem's story as written by Don Karl in *The Walls of Freedom* echoes well my definition of "revolutionaries" (see p.29). Karl's creative depiction of Bassem's story as a summary of the revolution, further affirm the notion of MM as an epic. Since the location of this "summary" is placed on the walls of MM. As Karl indicated above, the decision to paint Bassem as a fly, suggests that the memory of Bassem is difficult to erase. Bassem's portrait symbolizes other narratives as well, of people who were killed during different events since January 2011 and after, but their memory was difficult to kill. The walls enveloping the street worked as a memorial wall calendar (see p.61); marking all the important events of the revolution, in addition to the events that took place in MM Street itself.

Not only is MM an emerging memorial space, as described by Mona Abaza 2012, but also the street has been constantly in a state of metamorphosis. The relentless transformation of the graffiti on the walls of MM, gave the street a lively

charm. MM was a street on a mission to document the Egyptian Revolution (see p.61). However, as Halim indicated in his email (see p.131) “The current political climate doesn't welcome... criticism” (2015). Thus, the graffiti, as it shows from the pictures below, stopped changing since 2014. The wall on the right of the AUC gate in MM Street is more or less the same<sup>107</sup>. The lively charm that the street once had faded away as the revolution itself started to wither. It is worth noting, however, that there have been no records that indicate any new attempts to whitewash the walls since last painted in 2014.



Figure 30: April 2012, MM entrance from Tahrir, taken by Hazem Abdel Hamid.

<sup>107</sup> During my last visit to MM Street, in August 2015, the wall on the right of the AUC gate was more or less the same. For almost one year, since last painted in 2014, with no added graffiti, and no whitewashing, the wall is some how halting, waiting for something to happen.



Figure 31: July 2012, MM entrance from Tahrir, taken by Aly Hazzaa.



Figure 32: November 2012, MM entrance from Tahrir, taken by Lobna Tareq.

The three pictures above, presenting three phases of *Illi Kalif Ma Matsh* (he who delegates authority has not died). All in 2012, the first one portrays Mubarak and Tantawy as one. The second one, in July around the time when Egypt held its first presidential elections after January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011, we see two more faces on the wall, Amr Moussa and Ahmed Shafik. The two were presidential candidates, who were associated with Mubarak's regime as they both held offices during his rule.

In the second and third pictures we see the face of martyr Mina Danial<sup>108</sup> on the right side. In the third picture, in November after MB candidate Mohamed Morsi won the presidential elections, we see the face of Mohamed Badae' next to Mubarak and Tantawy. It was thought then that Badae' is the one technically in control, not Morsi. The graffiti in its third phase added a message about whitewashing, portraying a young painter standing with his brush and palette, facing a vampire like military general.



**Figure 33: November 2011 AUC wall, right side of the gate, taken by Aly Hazzaa.**

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<sup>108</sup> Killed during Maspiro events 2011.



Figure 34: November 2012 AUC wall, right side of the gate, taken by Lobna Tareq.



Figure 35: October 2012 AUC wall left side of the gate, taken by Aly Hazzaa.





Figure 36: November 2012 AUC wall, left side of the gate, taken by Aly Hazzaa.



Figure 37: November 2013 AUC wall, right side of the gate, taken by Aly Hazzaa.



Figure 38: November 2014, AUC wall, right side of the gate, taken by Aly Hazzaa.



Figure 39: August 2015 AUC wall, right side from the gate, taken by Manar Hazzaa.

## Conclusion

This research primarily focused on the construction of eighteen narratives about the events of MM. I followed how each of them produced the events through his/her narrative, what were their spatial and temporal boundaries. How they situated MM events among other events before and after November 2011. Since all my interlocutors were actors and narrators at the same time, they all use their presence as a quality attached to the evidence they present. They do that in order to render their construction more credible, authoritative, and legitimate in relationship to others. It is fascinating how MM was labeled and tagged differently through the years that followed the first events in 2011. Mohamed Mahmoud went from an epic event into a memorial site, then into a *moulid*!

I introduced MM as a geography in light of the changes that occurred after the installation of the walls in Downtown Cairo. I also situated MM as an event within a broader context: what triggered the events? What are the dominant dates that are linked with it? I analyzed some key labels associated with MM, focusing on *mazaar* and *moulid*, as two interesting labels that unpack the relation between MM as a space and as an event.

The literature I used in this thesis focused on the concepts of historicity and present, and how the material of history is mind itself. Theoretically, there are no fixed pasts, according to Trouillot 1995 and Simmel 1971. On the contrary, based on my fieldwork, I argued that history is indeed dynamic, yet fixed. I encountered during my fieldwork many stories that render themselves “fixed”, contrasting the theories that both Trouillot and Simmel offered. Those theories dismissed the possibility of retrieving memories based on the premise that “past is dynamic”. I recall here the

stories of both Ahmed Abdel Fatah, and Mohamed F. who hold pieces of their past at hand, literally. It is not contradictory at all if we say that because history is formed through the minds of people producing it, that it can be fixed. Taking in consideration the time frame of these theories, concepts offered by Trouillot and Simmel indeed applied in the past, when memory was not yet digital. Today we can confidently argue that “the heart of history” is indeed a digital one, notwithstanding the shortcomings of digital memory, such as fragility against erasure and concerns about authenticity. Nevertheless, Abdel Fatah and Mohamed F. among others hold their “fixed” memories dearly.

While I argue for fixed, accessible at will, narratives, I stress on how diverse these narratives are. It was crucial that I pinpoint throughout this thesis: who is telling what stories about what happened, in which way, using what kind of evidence. Since each group, with its different contesting narratives was fighting for the memory battle. Though, no group so far has won this battle. The authorities over MM events is still somewhat contested and challenged, however, not to liking of any of the contesting groups. Thus, all the different narratives are still in competition over the meaning of MM as an event.

On the other hand, claiming authority through notions of sight and presence, and associating sight with truth has become a standard for many of my interlocutors. Tracing contesting narratives about MM events was my sole mission in the past two years; the untraceable amount of “I saw it with my own eyes” “that’s what I saw” is very much revealing. Consequently, granting the visual more recognition as evidence, and as an authoritative tool.

The fact that these memories are fixed and trapped in those photos and videos, bear another quality that served my analysis of body as evidence. I stressed on the fact that some bodily injuries fade, rendering injured bodies as insufficient bearers of evidence, for some people. This was also true when I addressed the legal aspect of the subject. As I established before through my analysis, the current Egyptian legal discourse represent a void process of legality. It renders the legal process as some kind of illusive facade.

“How will this be seen in fifteen years from now?” is a question that Menna EL Masry addressed to me during our interview. I honestly do not have an answer to that question. However, I am less anxious now that I know that people like AbedlHalim AbdAllah and Ahmed Hayman and others too, are taking upon their shoulders the “mission impossible” to produce alternative narratives, and most importantly to preserve them as well. The examples that I gave in my thesis do not exhaust, by all means, the vast attempts opting to produce counter narratives or, if Christopher Pinney (2008) would allow me, counter authorities.

The fact that some people forget small details such as dates, and sequences of events, as in the case of Ahmed Hayman, does not take away from their authority. As they believe holding *evidence* will render their stories credible no matter what. It might be frustrating for some that this evidence is not adequate enough for a courtroom, but others just believe that what they have, fixed and saved, is enough for them to defend their narratives in the future. Producing “other words” and “other pictures” is a mission that those people collectively undertook, even if it seems that the AUC wall stopped hosting new stories. What we have now, on the wall and elsewhere, is an ongoing battle. Where everyone is constantly countering what the others are offering, in what seems like a never-ending journey.

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