Jannis Julien Grimm

# Contested Legitimacies

## Repression and Revolt in Post-Revolutionary Egypt

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*Repression and Revolt in Post-Revolutionary Egypt*

*Jannis Julien Grimm*

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# Preface

Accounts of revolutions are necessarily situated and partial. As Jack Shenker (2016) writes, "What defines a revolution – where it can be located on a calendar and a map, what it includes, who speaks for it, the things it seeks to change – is never a neutral question" (p. 11). Accordingly, this book is political by default: for its perspective, which honors the premise that "the vision is better from below" (Haraway, 1988, p. 584); for its choice of topic – an investigation of struggle and contention within a regime that professes unity and concordance; and for its source archive, which gives voice to the mobilized people as the agents of change.

Many of the crises described and investigated in this book are rooted in group-based forms of inequality. These inequalities are not just testing grounds for refining and elaborating theory. On the contrary, they are real arenas of struggle that affect the livelihoods of real people. Critical research must recognize these struggles as such by taking them as the point of departure and by aiming towards their solution. Discourse analytical projects, such as this book, have a particular responsibility in this regard because power relations that cement inequalities and legitimize oppressive modes of domination have a vital discursive basis of reproduction – in Egypt as much as elsewhere. Accordingly, I hope that this book remains not just an academic treatise, evaluated only by methodological quality criteria, but one that also provides some insights for activists on how to maintain their resistance in the darkest hour. The presented cases demonstrate that even when the physical space is limited for protest, there often remains discursive space for contesting oppressive power relations.

Different stories could have been explored in this book about Egypt's post-revolutionary trajectory. One could think about exploring how the Rabaa massacre has produced embodied memories that still leave an imprint on Egyptians' fears, desires, and action choices today. One could explore how Egyptians have grappled with individual and collective memories of bloodshed. One could investigate how the nationalist turn has catalyzed the emergence of an affective regime to govern the desires that were born out of the revolutionary experiences of 2011. Or, more modestly, one could explore how emotions in Egypt, up until today, are subjected to a friend-foe binary to support the antagonizing of all those who dare articulate dissent.

Given the constraints of this book, I am unable to follow up on these and many other threads. Nor am I able to write about the variety of actors who have been mentioned in this book in passing and whose voices have not been

explored with the same level of detail. To reach a better understanding of those fateful months after the military coup in Egypt, it would be necessary to explore these silences in more detail. Aware of these constraints, I don't claim to provide an exhaustive account of Egypt's bloody summer of 2013. The presented truths must be taken as "positioned truths" (Abu-Lughod, 2014, p. 468). Many more stories could be told without providing a complete picture. I believe that putting these different perspectives into dialogue with one another is what gives our individual subjective accounts value and worth.

# 1 Introduction

The lessons of the Arab Spring for the study of protest in Egypt

**Abstract**
The Arab Spring left a deep imprint on Middle Eastern and North African societies, but also on social movement scholarship. In particular, three lines of inquiry provide vantage points for investigating protest in the region today: critical approaches that avoid the structuralist bias of early analyses of the Arab Spring and, instead, focus on the imaginative terrain of social protest; constructivist approaches that retrace how political subjectivation processes enabled innovative revolutionary alliances; and relational approaches that investigate the interactions between different players during the 2011 uprisings. This book is situated at the intersection of these strands of literature. It is an attempt to map contentious politics in post-revolutionary Egypt and show how different social arenas, street politics, and the politics of signification, interrelated, and informed the country's transition.

**Keywords:** Arab Spring, Egypt, social movements, alliances, political arenas, contentious dynamics

A decade after the popular uprising of 2011, Egyptians are witnessing an authoritarian comeback under the auspices of a military-backed government, a politicized judiciary, and a weak shadow parliament. This restoration of autocracy is all the more astounding as it was first initialized by a military coup that was backed by millions of Egyptians marching in the streets and then enforced by a fierce crackdown on the supporters of the deposed president. Spearheaded by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB), several groups had organized themselves in a broad coalition that rejected the coup against President Mohammed Mursi, himself a Brotherhood member, as an illegitimate intervention into the country's democratic transition. The so-called *National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy* (*NASL*),

commonly referred to as the Anti-Coup Alliance, defied authorities with country-wide peaceful protest marches. The alliance organized the largest wave of Islamist mobilization in Egyptian history, occupying several public squares in the capital with large camps, not unlike the earlier sit-ins on Tahrir Square.

This protest campaign was met with fierce repression by the Egyptian security forces, which cracked down on protesters indiscriminately and with utmost brutality. But other than during the 2011 Tahrir uprising, this time, they were successful. Even as police violence peaked in mid-August with several massacres, authorities drew scant criticism on a national level. On the contrary, state violence came with vigorous attempts by media and public figures to justify the killings (Grimm, 2013). Many defended the massacres as a legitimate police operation against terrorist forces. Others did not necessarily welcome the violence but justified it as a necessary evil to end the Muslim Brotherhood's grip on power, and as a corollary of the mass protests that had ousted President Mursi who hailed from the group. Declarations of solidarity with the victims of the massacres thus remained limited to the Islamist segment of society.

The "coup-volution" (Hamada, 2014, p. 37) against President Mursi several weeks earlier had set the stage for this muted reaction to unprecedented bloodshed. In an overwhelming show of political determination, large masses of Egyptians, including many groups that had been key in the mobilization against the Mubarak regime, had welcomed Mursi's removal from office on July 3, 2013. In their eyes, Mursi had derived his legitimacy from a narrow victory in a contentious election, where the choice, for most of the Tahrir activists, had been between two evils. Not realizing this predicament, he had done little to placate his opponents' fears of the advent of an Islamic state in Egypt. He pursued an exclusivist winner-takes-all policy and alienated the revolutionary opposition along the way. The various new political forces that had entered the scene with the Tahrir revolution were not provided with platforms for dialogue or inclusion. Instead, the government and its supporting Freedom Justice Party took Mursi's marginal electoral victory in the presidential runoffs with 51.73 percent of the cast votes as grounds for uncompromising policymaking. They also took to discrediting all dissent as an illegitimate disruption of the democratic process. When the *Tamarod* [rebel] campaign filled Tahrir Square with hundreds of thousands of angry protesters, his uncompromising stance had undermined President Mursi to such a degree that any insistence on his democratic legitimation held little credibility outside of his core constituency.

## History in the Making

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

> It inheres as well in the naming, appropriating, and displacing of this violence as cultural artefacts do the work of constituting history. This work of constituting history takes enormous effort. Events must force their way into historical subjects' fields of attention and action, and while violence is not an essential ingredient of all historic transformations, it is a condition of many of them. Great things are at stake, including the remaking of social and political identities and the redistribution of power and resources. (p. 1358)

In Egypt, the well-studied January 25 uprising against Husni Mubarak has been described as such a crucial moment of experiencing history live unfolding – and as one conditioned and accompanied by levels of political violence in the streets which were unprecedented in the country's republican history. The historic impact of this violence as a precipitating force manifested itself in Mubarak's ouster after close to three decades in power. But it also showed itself through the emergence of new ways of *doing politics* in a country where decision-making had always been a prerogative of the regime and its cronies. The brutal repression unleashed upon those who occupied Tahrir Square marked the beginning of the end of this top-down

approach. When authorities began to treat every walking Egyptian citizen as a potential enemy, this decisively undercut Mubarak's claim to political legitimacy. As state violence reached unprecedented levels, his regime increasingly resembled "an occupying force, an authority whose legitimacy is based, above all, on naked power" (Naeem, 2019).

It is no coincidence that the quest for political legitimacy and the struggle over its sources took center stage in post-revolutionary Egypt. As Nicola Pratt (2015) has argued, since the 2011 uprising, "the most significant contest revolves not around institutions or political party programs, but conceptions of Egyptian identity" (p. 44). During the so-called "18 days of Tahrir," the place where the people gathered, the square itself, had replaced Egypt's state institutions as the incarnation of the Egyptian populace, and thus as the ultimate source of all political legitimacy. But this consensus eroded in the months after, and a vicious struggle began over the nature, source, and consequences of political legitimacy in the post-Mubarak era. Thanassis Cambanis (2013) has summarized the implications of this struggle:

> What grants legitimacy to a leader? The question usually arises in the abstract realm of political theory, but in today's Egypt, it has become one of visceral, daily importance. How big does a crowd of protesters have to be to indicate an elected leader is no longer the voice of his people? When do self-interested or authoritarian policy decisions go so far as to invalidate the mandate of an elected government? On the streets of Cairo, these questions have come to occupy the center of a serious, messy conversation about how to build a healthy and accountable new state.

In retrospect, the 2011 Tahrir occupation can be interpreted as the first episode of this conversation. This episode has been at the center of countless studies of the so-called *Arab Spring*. Equally significant, but significantly less studied, are the episodes at the heart of this book. The massacres of *Rabaa al-Adawiya* and *Al-Nahda* two and a half years after the Tahrir uprising were a watershed moment in the history of modern Egypt.[1] Like the Tahrir uprising, this critical juncture represented a violent moment of history in the making. Hardly anyone witnessing the events unfolding on August 14,

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1    For better accessibility, I have refrained from making use of various complex scholarly systems of rendering written and spoken Arabic in the Latin script. Instead, throughout this study, Arabic has been transliterated according to a simplified version of the system employed by the International Journal of Middle East Studies, available at https://ijmes.chass.ncsu.edu/docs/TransChart.pdf. All translations are my own.

2013, either live, on television, or through social media, failed to notice the liminality inherent in what they saw. Horrific images emerged of the Egyptian army and police troops brutally cracking down on protesters in the streets and squares that had witnessed an iconic uprising against authoritarian governance only two years earlier. These images were broadcasted in infinite loops over the following weeks and supplemented by gruesome footage from Cairo's morgues. They left a deep imprint on those who saw them. Egypt, after *Rabaa*, would never be the same. As Dina Wahba (2017) wrote in her powerful recapitulation of the events in the fourth year after,

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

At the time of the crackdown, I had been working on the mobilization efforts by the National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy (NASL), commonly referred to as the Anti-Coup Alliance, for several weeks. The mostly Islamist protest alliance had defied authorities with country-wide peaceful marches since President Mursi's removal from office. I had talked with participants of the protest camps in Nasr City in the weeks before the massacres. And I followed up on these conversations in their aftermath. The central aim of these conversations was to try to make sense of the counter-intuitive effects of the massacre on Egypt's political public. Unlike after the experience of disproportionate state violence on Tahrir, a backlash to the repression, in terms of dissident mobilization across ideological and social cleavages, had failed to materialize (Grimm & Harders, 2018). The repression was condemned by local and international human rights defenders as crimes against humanity. But it barely drew any criticism at the national level – let alone popular outrage that could have materialized in protests. The overwhelming majority, including public intellectuals of all political persuasions, welcomed the security forces and their strongman's resolve against the Islamists. Those protesting the violence were shamed, expelled from parties, and chastised on social and public media. It was disturbing to witness many of those who had been victimized by repression only two years earlier now relativize or even cheer for the very same kind of state violence. Amongst those supporting the repression were respected journalists, activists, and the leaders of several ostensibly pro-democratic and liberal parties and social movements.

Moreover, the witnessed sequence of events also ran counter to much of what sociological theory suggested about the impact of brutal police violence on protesters: driven by the question of why repressions worked in some instances, but not in others, social movement scholars had explored the mobilization-repression nexus for over four decades. While this body of research found the empirical link between mobilization and coercive response to be so stable that it assumed a law-like character (Davenport, 2007b, p. 7), a heated debate had been fought over the effect of repression on mobilization, with a variety of conflicting correlations being statistically established over time. In an attempt to refine their models, scholars had turned to the material qualities of repressions to explain the diverging reactions on the protester's side: repressions were found to be effective when applied pre-emptively and selectively (M. Hafez, 2003; Mason & Krane, 1989), when violence was not employed indiscriminately against opponents and regardless of their rank (Khawaja, 1993), and when the level of repression did not surpass a certain threshold (Alimi, 2009; Hess & Martin, 2006). Otherwise, regime forces risked a "moral shock" (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995, p. 498) to society that raised such a sense of public outrage that individuals became inclined to act, even in the absence of prior networks of recruitment and mobilization.

Such a moral shock failed to materialize after *Rabaa,* even though repression was applied reactively and indiscriminately against opponents. Contrary to what social movement theorists would have expected, since the military overthrow of President Mursi, rather than protest, Egypt witnessed a rapid counterrevolution. Ten years after the popular uprising, national security and the "war on terror" have become the dominant frameworks for the implementation of ever more restrictive domestic policies in Egypt. They have replaced the coalition-enabling revolutionary slogan of "bread, freedom, and social justice" of 2011 in the mobilization of the political public. Gradually, the security discourse constructed by state officials has been extended from including only the Islamist segment of society to all actors voicing criticism of the regime or the security forces' handling of street protests. Today, mobilization efforts have all but ceased.

This book essentially attempts to retrace how Egyptians got to this point. Starting from the puzzle of absent repression backlash despite ideal-typical conditions, it examines the patterns of contention in Egypt since the summer of 2013. It thereby seeks to provide an answer to the pertinent question asked by Donatella Della Porta (2016) in a recent intervention: "Where did the revolution go?" In other words, this study closely traces the unfolding waves of mobilization and repression in Egypt *after* the extensively

investigated revolutionary period of the so-called Arab Spring (2011-2012). Broadly speaking, the topic of this book is thus the issue of mobilization in an authoritarian setting. More specifically, it is the interaction processes between different political players in Egypt's post-revolutionary arena that takes center stage – between protesters of different colors, and between today's rulers and their former contenders.

The eight chapters of this book narrate Egypt's post-revolutionary history through the lenses of contentious politics. This narration begins in late 2012, with the wave of dissent that emerged in Egyptian streets against the policies of Egypt's first freely elected president Mohammed Mursi which were widely perceived as erratic and despotic. Popular discontent with the administration's performance manifested in country-wide street protests and culminated in the iconic *Tamarod* [rebel] uprising on June 30, 2013, which paved the way for Mursi's ouster. It then moves to the mass protest against the military coup, on July 3, 2013, which arguably represents the most significant wave of mobilization since the iconic mass protests on Tahrir Square in January 2011. As one of the first academic works, this book takes a closer look at this episode, illustrating how it established path dependencies for a powerful counterrevolution that reversed most of the achievements of the 2011 uprising.

The way how this counterrevolution and authoritarian restoration unfolded in the months after *Rabaa* is the topic of another episode discussed in this book. It covers the post-coup period in Egypt and reconstructs the emergence of a new hegemonic consensus that legitimized the restoration of the most repressive regime in Egypt's republican history – embodied in the leader-ship of General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. Alive to the debate about the general's prospects as Egypt's new "president-for-life" (R. Owen, 2012), the narration ends on a positive note. The final episode of contention covered in this study shifts attention back to Egypt's streets to show that the new authoritarian order in Egypt is far from consolidated. The popular protests against the transfer of a small Red Sea archipelago to Saudi Arabia illustrated how the seeds of resistance have already been planted: When certain historic events made it apparent that authorities did not walk their talk, mobilizing players were provided with an opportunity to subvert the securitizing discourses that sustained the status quo. This opened windows for mobilization and facilitated oppositional alliance building in a seemingly closed context.

Zooming in on these different contentious episodes, this book empha-sizes the performative and discursive interaction of diverse coalitions of contenders and their authoritarian counterparts as key for understanding the trajectory of Egypt's post-revolutionary transformation. Above all, three

different lines of inquiry in social movement studies of the Arab Spring provided the conceptual basis for this project.


## Interactionist Approaches and the Arab Uprisings

The contentious relationship between protesters and policing agents has been investigated extensively by social movement studies with the help of case studies from across the globe. From this work, as Christian Davenport (2005: vii) noted, we have a sense of what tactics will be used on both sides and what provokes violent behavior; we have some insights into what consequences are likely when movements take to the street, or when protests are crushed by repression, and we have some idea of where to look for information. For the most part, however, investigations of what is varyingly called the mobilization-repression nexus (e.g., Davenport, 2005; Johnston, 2012; Tilly, 2005) or the repression-dissent nexus (e.g., Lichbach, 1987; Tilly, 2005) rarely transcended the study of aggregate accounts. Attempts to establish causality and derive action-reaction models black-boxed the interaction process itself, effectively reducing the study of protest and repression to an endless correlation of the total aggregate level of one output (repression) with another (protest) (see Lichbach, 1987, p. 288). As a result, and with few recent exceptions (Moss, 2014; Soudias, 2015; Della Porta & Tarrow, 2012), the current state of research on protest-repression-dynamics broadly consists of two separate strands, with each investigating either of the two sides of the interaction.

By contrast, the volatile situational dynamics of the Arab Spring in late 2010 and early 2011 clearly illustrated the need to move beyond such unidirectional analyses. The sudden appearance of mass protests against authoritarian rule in the Middle East and North Africa caught scientists by surprise as it posed a major puzzle for both, movement and regime scholars. The grievances of Arab societies caused by the "lingering political, social, and economic crises" (Harders & König, 2013, p. 7) had been known for more than a decade and fueled the notion of Arab exceptionalism from the supposed global democratization trend (Valbjørn & Volpi, 2014). These old crises of the Arab regimes held little explanatory power for the wave of new protests across the region. Besides, in the run-up to the popular uprisings, neither the cohesion among regime elites, nor the composition and permeability of their polities, nor the capacities of their coercive apparatuses had undergone significant changes. In the light of quite stable political opportunity structures, political players and their choices seemed to hold

answers to the puzzle of how regime-threatening popular protest could erupt in a context of authoritarian contraction. During the Arab Spring, it was both, regime agents and mobilizing groups that created new windows of opportunity for social transformation in their highly dynamic interaction (Davenport & Moore, 2012; Harders & König, 2013; Ketchley, 2014; Shokr, 2015; Volpi & Clark, 2019).

Particularly in the Egyptian January 25 Revolution, increased mobilization efforts and the radicalization of protesters' demands can be attributed to short-dated interaction effects (see El Chazli, 2018, p. 150). When the authorities awakened to the fact that the turnout during the first days of protests was unprecedented in that "for the first time in most protesters' memory, they outnumbered police" (El-Amrani, 2011, p. 3), they hastily shut down the cell phone and internet networks across the country to undermine online mobilizing structures. Contrary to their intention, however, this only sparked more demonstrations – largely by people who had until then abstained from participation, but were now disrupted by the shutdown and dragged into the confrontation (Hassanpour, 2011, p. 28). Anti-regime protests culminated on January 28, 2011, dubbed by activists the *Friday of Rage*. Unable to control the masses, police forces eventually withdrew from the streets, ceding the first victory to the protesters on Tahrir Square. The 18 days of Tahrir thus clearly demonstrated the need to closely study the patterns of interaction between different political players including state institutions and social movement organizations on a day-to-day basis.

It is hence not surprising that the aftermath of the Arab Spring saw relational and interactionist approaches make their way into the study of protest in the Middle East (Berriane & Duboc, 2019; Bishara, 2015; Grimm, 2019; Grimm & Harders, 2018; Volpi & Clark, 2019; Volpi & Jasper, 2018). Earlier studies of the uprising had overwhelmingly focused on the economic, social, or technological conditions, and hence the macro-structural environment of the uprisings. As Frederic Volpi (2014) laments, one was hard-pressed to find an account of the Arab uprisings that did not include "a lengthy account of the social, economic, and political structures that underpinned the uprisings" (p. 154). By contrast, studies of protest in the post-revolutionary period recognized the explanatory power of interaction, confirming an overall trend in the study of social mobilization "away from vague macro-level structures that are posited by the observer but are otherwise invisible, toward concrete micro-level phenomena that are commonsensical and visible to anyone" (Jasper & Volpi, 2018, p. 17). These contributions centered on the interactive and situated processes of mutual orientation between different players as

central explanatory variables for investigations of social movements and social mobilization processes (see Jasper, 2012).

Notably, the new cultural-interactionist turn in the research of protest in the Arab World was championed by researchers that resorted to the vocabulary of *players and arenas* as building blocks of their analysis. Developed by James Jasper and Jan Willem Duyvendak in several articles (Jasper, 2010; McGarry et al., 2016) as well as two complementary volumes with examples of empirical application (Duyvendak & Fillieule, 2015; Jasper, 2015a, 2015b), the "players and arenas"-framework emphasizes the situatedness and contingency of social change. It posits a "strategic-interactive picture of politics, full of actions and reactions, expectations and calculations, and also emotions" (Jasper, 2015a, p. 20). At the core of this approach are thus not the far-reaching and long-term changes in the structure of society or the emergence of social crises or new conflict cleavages, but the behaviors, strategies, and emotions of the actors at the center of these macro-processes. As Frédéric Volpi and Janine Clark argue (2019, p. 2), this fine-grained view of contentious politics facilitates transcending the common but limiting dualist focus on the outcomes of political processes and an orientation towards the micro-interactions that drive them. Sequences of interactions by strategic social players in different social arenas are attributed special importance in explaining social movements and revolutionary processes, such as the Arab Spring. They help explain the emergence of powerful coalitions of contenders, such as those between marginalized workers, disenfranchised Islamists, professional liberal activists, and organized Youth groups that were tantamount to the success of the Arab uprisings. But they also help explain the failure and success of autocrats in repressing these coalitions and their actions.

The events of the Arab Spring exemplified, for instance, how repressive measures can backfire on their agents, and have even a catalyzing effect on mobilization (see Grimm & Harders, 2018; Holmes, 2012; Shokr, 2015). Strategic interactionist perspectives, in turn, help understand how such backfire effects come about or why protests, in response, may turn violent (see Ketchley, 2014; Nassauer, 2016, 2019). Above all, they conceptualize regimes as complex compound players and hence help to decompose, or "break down" (Duyvendak & Jasper, 2015) states, as the uniform actors they are often assumed to be. Instead, the state is deconstructed into its constituent actors and arenas, into fragmented units, such as different executive institutions, different branches of government, and different policing agents – for instance, the riot police or the armed forces in the case of Egypt. In complex social arenas, such as the protest setting of post-coup

Egypt, these different players meet, interact strategically with each other, and negotiate their boundaries. At times, these interactions even manage to blur the boundaries between movement and state actors (see Verhoeven & Bröer, 2015), such as in those cases where players defect and change sides in the struggle of the people vs. the state.

Such defections have been the topic of ample discussion with a view to the Arab Spring (see Grewal, 2018; Holmes & Koehler, 2020; Nepstad, 2013). Especially for the Tahrir uprising, countless articles have investigated the process by which the army and the people became "one hand" (Ketchley, 2014), thus setting the stage for the breakdown of the ruling coalition and Mubarak's ouster. The Egyptian case seemed to prove that it was particularly the perceived violation of moral codices (e.g., of a people's dignity) which inspired rifts and defections within the ranks of formerly unified players (see Khosrokhavar, 2018, p. 169ff.). Previous works from other geographical areas supported this line of argument. They suggested that, regardless of regime type, structural disposition, or repressive capacity, any state conduct could mobilize opposition if it was only considered illegitimate or disproportionate concerning their expectation of how authorities should behave (e.g., Almeida, 2003; Hess & Martin, 2006; Opp & Roehl, 1990).

Yet, how is it that something comes to be perceived as unjust, illegitimate, disproportionate, or abusive by a critical mass? How does this perception translate into action? Our expectations of situations, after all, are culturally mediated, as Jim Jasper has stressed (2018):

> How people understand the world around them – including other players, arenas, and even themselves – is central to any theory of action that aspires to go beyond the simplistic, self-interested individuals of rational choice theory. There is an objective world outside our interpretations of it, but it only affects how we act when it is filtered through those interpretations. Meaning is unavoidable. (p. 13)

This is equally true for the meaning that is attributed to witnessed interactions. Different political players are audiences for each other's actions, hence their maneuvers must be investigated through an interpretive and cultural lens (Jasper, 2015a, p. 10). Yet, the link between what happens, how the people make meaning of it, and how this meaning is acted upon – partly guided by cognitive schemas, scripts, and ideologies, and partly conditioned by reflex, urges, mores, and affective commitments – remains largely understudied.

## The Egyptian Revolution as the Result of a Hegemonic Crisis

The bulk of literature on contentious dynamics has focused on the material features of repression and collective action. Much less has been said about the interpretation of events on the ground or the discursive and emotional subjectivation processes by which, as Farhad Khosrokhavar (2018) put it, "what was accepted as a sad fact of life becomes unbearable due to heightened indignation, shared and amplified" (p. 160). Only a few studies have acknowledged that the popular protest of the so-called Arab Spring was situated in an "imaginative terrain" (Chalcraft, 2014, p. 179) and hence, if it was to be adequately understood, attention had to be given to the role of symbolic contestation.

Significantly, those that did, built largely upon a Gramscian reading of the revolutionary events of 2011. This is evident in their attempts to account for the observation that, during the 18 days of Tahrir, social subjects interpreted the world around them in a political way and subsequently acted on these interpretations "in a disruptive, transgressive, and collective fashion" (Chalcraft, 2014, p. 159; see also Chalcraft & Noorani, 2007, pp. 1-19; Pratt, 2015). In their reading of the Egyptian uprising, January 25 represented a rupture that enabled counter-hegemonic forces to come to the fore and challenge the status quo, maintained by dominant players and legitimized through their narratives.[2]

The January 25 uprising took place in a context of entrenched authoritarianism and thus a tightly controlled and largely static political arena. What was commonly referred to as the Mubarak regime effectively represented an authoritarian hegemonic block with remarkable stability. Aside from the presidency, it included the armed forces, domestic intelligence, as well as members of the country's business elite. For several decades, this block was sustained and its dominance over the country's political affairs naturalized by a hegemonic "national modernization" discourse (see Pratt, 2012). After the demise of the grand ideologies (Anti-Colonialism, Pan-Arabism, Socialism), which had supplied legitimacy to different regimes in the region, this discourse relied largely on a social contract of informality (Harders, 2009, p. 300). It promised Egyptian citizens a certain degree of social welfare and a fair share of economic development in exchange for a waiver of political representation and social demands, and for their political acquiescence of the status quo.[3]

2    Gramsci (1971) has referred to this superstructure as "hegemony" (p. 161). The concept denotes a consensus on the naturalness of existing relations of power, backed by the coercion of the state apparatus.
3    If anything, after the fall of the bipolar world order, of the grand old ideologies only political Islam and its notion of Islamic unity were still able to inspire popular support and establish

The legitimacy of this informal social contract, however, had eroded in the years before the uprising as a consequence of a massive social "transformation without transition" (Harders, 2015, p. 148). These social dynamics manifested in the shape of demographic change, increasing digitalization (and thus enhanced popular access to information), unequal economic development, and the proliferation of civic mobilizing structures (see Chalcraft, 2014, 2016; Joya, 2011). Since the late 1980s, this erosion was additionally catalyzed by the implementation of economic liberalization policies and the Mubarak regime's *tawrith* [succession] crisis.

Roberto Roccu (2013a) argues that neoliberal economic reforms promoted the emergence of a capitalist oligarchy at the expense of social cohesion and the integrity of the ruling hegemonic bloc (see also Achcar, 2013; Hanieh, 2013). Neoliberal reform may have been a necessary structural condition to deliver on the promises of economic prosperity. But the implementation of reforms impoverished and alienated vast strata of the Egyptian population, eroding the political hegemony that hitherto sustained Egypt's ruling class. As Brecht de Smet (2015, 2016) argued, one of the reasons why Mubarak's regime fell was because his neoliberal business cronies failed to gather enough consent for their project. Andrea Teti and Gennaro Gervasio (2011) come to a similar conclusion:

> In short, having sacrificed remnants of its populist revolutionary legitimacy on the altar of its narrower self-interest, and alienating increasingly large swathes of the population in the process, the ruling elite found it impossible to compensate politically for its economic choices. (p. 323)

At the same time, alternative visions that could have been incorporated by the regime to reform the incumbent governance culture and reinvigorate the hegemonic order could not be expressed publicly given the tightly controlled political space and the severe limitations in freedom of speech. Consequently, a counter-hegemonic culture developed only in the shape of several alternative political grassroots projects. Their claims remained primarily confined to the private sphere or the few pockets of political activism that were tolerated by the Mubarakist security state. Until the 2011 uprising, with the notable but short-lived (2005-2007) exception of the

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legitimacy for its champions. Precisely for this reason, Islamist movements have been among the most suppressed political actors in the region (even if to varying degrees and at times in conjunction with their co-optation) as they represented the greatest cultural challenge to the incumbent autocratic regimes' legitimacies.

*Kefaya* movement (Chalcraft, 2014, p. 162)*,* most of these discourses were unable to travel beyond the boundaries of these secluded counter-publics.

Thus, such discourses failed to resonate among Egyptians in a way that could have challenged the hegemonic social order. Recourse to the repressive apparatus effectively prevented the widening gap between Egyptian society and its ossified regime from being addressed in the public sphere. In the long-term, however, the dissonance between the hegemonic superstructure that meant to legitimize and naturalize the exclusionary rule of an elitist clique (see Roll, 2010), aggravated the latent crisis of legitimization (see Herrera & Mirshak, 2018) laying the ground for the urban middle-class revolt of 2011. As Chalcraft (2014) argues, in 2010, the governing regime was factually a case of "dominance without hegemony – a situation in which coercion outweighed consent in the political order at large" (p. 165). The performative disruption of the tacit hegemonic consensus of the Mubarak era through the first protest marches on January 25, 2011, in this view, became the tipping point that brought the latent crisis to the fore. According to Nicola Pratt (2015), it demonstrated that "Egyptians rejected the domination and coercion of Mubarak's regime and that the latter had lost its hegemony over a large part of society" (p. 46).

Similarly, Chalcraft (2014) contends that the sight of demonstrators overpowering riot police across the country and exhausted policemen deserting their posts signaled that "even the regime's instruments of domination – as opposed to its long-defunct forms of hegemony – were now vulnerable" (p. 175). As the symbolic "barrier of fear" crumbled, empowering disenfranchised Egyptians to speak their minds about long-held grievances, the Tahrir uprising triggered a proliferation of countless new competing political projects with contending visions for the country's political future (see Wessel, 2017, Chapter 3). By debunking the hollow protectionist rhetoric of the Mubarak regime, it set the precedent for new forms of mobilization that would dominate the following 18 days until Mubarak's ouster, and the years to come.

## Political Subjectivation and the Emergence of New Contentious Alliances

The Tahrir protests also triggered a range of political subjectivation processes that "transformed passive moods into active emotions that promote action, in particular, social protest" (Khosrokhavar, 2018, p. 160). Leaning on poststructuralist notions of collective identity, subjectivation in the context of collective mobilization is defined here as the discursive articulation of togetherness, a sense of belonging, or a political collectivity to identify with, within an ongoing

antagonist political struggle. As Khosrokhavar (2018) has argued, subjectivation processes open up the possibility of individuals asserting themselves as "a person who participates in politics through street protests" (p. 163).

The initial protests on Tahrir Square provided the spark for such processes. They were a box-opener for contesting the dominant political players through a "new political language" (Filali-Ansary, 2012) that emphasized personal and collective freedom, human dignity, social justice, and political self-determination over statist conceptions of centralized and authoritarian ruling for the common good. During these expressions of resistance "a particular social imaginary was generated, a symbolic identity, forming around the unified position of alterity" (Smaldone, 2015). Bridging political divides by drawing the ultimate antagonist frontier in Egypt's political struggle not between different social or ideological factions, but between *the people* and *the regime*, this discourse allowed political groups and their respective mobilizing goals to re-emerge which had been largely repressed or discredited in the public sphere.

Moreover, the joint experience of protesting on Tahrir and confronting security forces during the defense of the protest camps led to the emergence of more durable affective commitments between the players on the square that supported the resilience of the protest movement against repression and disappointment. Combined, the political and emotional subjectivation processes enabled what Roberto Roccu (2013b) has referred to as "embryonic forms of alliance between the dispossessed and the discontented" (p. 423). Significantly, the Egyptian January 25 Revolution has been attributed by many authors to this successful alliance formation – not only between the mobilized streets and the elites within state institutions, such as the military (Nepstad, 2011; Roll, 2016; Barany, 2011) but also between various oppositional groups in a process of cross-movement mobilization that blurred former social and ideological divides (Beissinger et al., 2015; Durac, 2015; Goldstone, 2011; Harders & König, 2013). This ties in with the studies of social uprisings in other regions of the world, where scholars also identified the emergence of cross-class and cross-movement coalitions as a precondition for successful mass mobilizations against authoritarianism and an active precursor for almost all popular-driven revolutions in the 20th century (Foran & Goodwin, 1993; Goldstone, 2011; Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010; Goldstone, 2009).

It is important to note that this process of coalition-forming, in the Egyptian case, was not ad-hoc but built on prior groundwork (see Beinin & Vairel, 2011; Clarke, 2011; El-Ghobashy, 2011). Mark Beissinger, Amaney Jamal, and Kevin Mazur (2015) have shown how, across the Arab world, different regime

strategies vis-à-vis domestic socio-demographic and political pressures had laid the foundation for contentious coalitions in the run-up to the 2011 Arab uprisings by creating "sites of heightened grievance and configurations of opposition mobilizing structures" (p. 2). In Egypt, these sites gave rise to formal organizations and mobilizing structures which were tested, for instance, in the *Kefaya* campaign of 2005 (see El-Mahdi, 2009), but they also promoted the spread of informal ties and networks which Asef Bayat (2010) has referred to as the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (p. 33). These long-term developments provided the parameters for coalition building in the Egyptian case. Yet, as Gilbert Achcar (2013, p. 151) stressed, until 2011 the desolate state of organized civil society gave little hope for cross-class collective action.

In effect, the emergence of objective structural grievances is rarely enough to precipitate eventful sequences of action that actuate a revolution. In Egypt, only the emergence of players that aggressively articulate the unfavorable status quo as a legitimacy crisis of their rulers provided the subjective factor that tipped off further mobilization potentials and catalyzed the emergence of a new coalition of contenders. The shared experience of victimization by state repression then galvanized oppositional identity. Atef Said (2014) argued that particularly the case of Egypt seems to illustrate that "how coalitions are weakened or strengthened, or the very choice of making coalitions, are shaped by and occur in response to state actions or control in the political sphere." He is right. But at the same time, only joint participation in demonstrations created personal bonds and forged crucial affective ties of mutual trust and care between protest participants (Harders & König, 2013). These subjectivation processes were tantamount to the success of 2011. The diversity of the protest movement that resulted from successful coalition-building provided political legitimacy to the uprisings and offered some protection by increasing the repression costs for security forces. Through their coactions, the mobilized people then produced their own windows of opportunity for social transformation (Kurzman, 2012).

## Situating this Project

*Contested Legitimacies* is situated at the juncture of these three strands of literature and their central concepts: strategic interaction, discursive contestation, and political subjectivation. As a key for understanding the highly volatile mobilization dynamics in Egypt, in an era of authoritarian contraction, the book explores the competing narratives articulated by the

contending political players since the 2013 military coup and investigates how they informed their struggle for moral leadership and political legitimacy. The contentious struggle for legitimacy in Egypt is thus conceived of as one over people's "hearts and minds" (Pratt, 2015, p. 46). In this struggle, different players – both civil society and from the ranks of the regime – reinforced or challenged prevailing relations of power with the end to influence the conditions of possibility for their mobilization. Depending on which of many competing narratives about contentious events prevailed and were able to affect people cognitively and emotionally,[4] police forces adopted different postures when facing disorder, and protesters evaluated their available choices of repertoire differently. Depending on which interpretation prevailed, players' actions inspired *revolt* or created windows of opportunity for *repression*.

Accordingly, this book concentrates on what Stuart Hall (1982) has referred to as the "politics of signification" (p. 64), that is, the competing and changing meaning that contending players construct and voice about specific events to discredit political opponents, rally support for their cause and advance their struggle in a contingent and highly dynamic political arena. It focuses on the outcome of the constantly fought discursive battles over interpretation in Egypt after the 2013 military coup and systematically traces their effects on the action choices of different contending players (e.g., their repertoires, their mobilizing strategies, their proneness to violence, or their composition). It is argued that contested perceptions and interpretations of the dynamics of contention *on the ground*, captured in the post-structuralist notion of *articulation*, crucially account for variances in the reaction of social movements to regime action, and potentially mobilizable publics to both protest and repression.

The Egyptian case is a prodigious one to study in this regard. Over several episodes of contention related to the construction of legitimacy for political power, it very much illustrates the role of the symbolic and the intervention of the discursive sphere into processes of both, political mobilization, and state repression. At the same time, the Egyptian case provides an opportunity to analyze these processes in a highly contested political realm with several collective actors frantically interacting with each other in shifting alliances and political constellations. The challenge of this case study, accordingly, lay

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4    In line with Jasper (2018), emotions are here understood as causal mechanisms that relate to the transforming capacity of protest as well as the transformation and permutation of movements themselves. Paired with and partly conditioning cognitive processes, they help explain "how one action leads to another in politics" (p. 12).

in the volatility of the competing and often partly overlapping discourses that emerged as a product of Egypt's early post-revolutionary struggles. These meaning ascriptions, rather than becoming sedimented, were re-signified, incorporated, and re-appropriated by different players in their struggle for normative discursive hegemony.

As regards the questions that drive this research, I thus investigate first, how collective actions and state responses to mobilization were represented in opposing discursive projects by political contenders after the military coup on July 3, 2013. How were central themes of Egyptian politics – revolution, nation, dignity, legitimacy – discursively renegotiated to inform both contentious claim-making or and repression? At the heart of these questions is an outline of the constitutive myth that surrounds the post-coup regime. It was a certain symbolism and discourse that empowered the new regime to articulate, implement, and create widespread consent to state violence and policies that aimed to suppress other political players and their projects. But black-boxing this relation of dominance by referring to it as "hegemony" will not take us any further in understanding its emergence, its functions, as well as its cognitive and emotional drivers. Accordingly, the investigations in this book are more concerned with the question of how exactly this discourse was manufactured to mobilize emotions; how cultural work managed to transform popular anger about the unruliness of the post-coup situation into indignation about the protesters and support for the post-coup regime; and how it naturalized repression and authoritarian relations of dominance after the deposition of President Mursi.

The second complex of questions at the heart of the following analyses relates to the impact of what William Sewell (1996b) has referred to as "transformative events" on this discursive struggle. On the one hand, the question is here whether we can discern certain historical events that managed to dislocate established meaning structures, thus shattering affective commitments and cognitive schemes established to interpret the political arena since the 2011 uprising. Did these disruptions allow for the emergence of new commitments among central players, thus catalyzing oppositional subject formation – and if so, how?

On the other hand, understanding why certain events – including some of the most mediatized and violent ones, such as the Rabaa massacre – failed to exert a transformative effect on the trajectory of contention in Egypt is equally important. William Gamson (1992) reminds us that "there are many political movements that try in vain to activate people who, in terms of some allegedly objective interest, ought to be up in arms" (p. 6). No matter

how passionate and how significant the collective claims and individual commitments of protesters, public manifestations of opposition do not automatically inspire people to join a cause. Equally, even the most brutal and indiscriminate repression does not automatically produce protests. Accordingly, several chapters of this book try to understand why certain instances succeeded or failed to mutate into transformative events. They retrace how the interactions of certain key players contributed to either outcome.

Furthermore, this book retraces what such critical junctures *meant* for contentious politics: What was the impact of shifts in the discursive and emotional architecture of contentious politics on opportunities for political repression or social mobilization? Could the subversion of players' established patterns of thinking of, feeling through, and talking about the world produce relations that favored coalition building and cross-movement mobilization? How did it affect different contentious players' horizon of expectations and or their perception of opportunities for action? And how did these players, through their actions, then transform the rules and parameters or reify the regularities of the political arena?

In its attempt to answer these questions, this project is inspired by and seeks to integrate works from the political sociology of social movements as well as ideas from the post-structuralist Essex School of discourse theory. The realization that the relationship between protesters and agents of repression is a dynamic one that works both ways (i.e., in which causal effects can be identified on both sides), which defines the conceptual perspective of this research project, is indebted to interactionist approaches from the field of social movement studies (a.o., Duyvendak & Jasper, 2015; Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015; Volpi & Jasper, 2018). Instead of ascribing the success or failure of protest cycles to structural conditions, unilinear ascriptions, or the idiosyncratic features or resources of a given protest movement, I follow these authors and their research program in their conceptualization of protest cycles as the results of complex interactive processes on the micro-level and in different strategic arenas.

This strategic interaction takes place on a material level, where it manifests in observable protest-repression-dynamics. And it takes place on a discursive level, too, where different readings of social reality are crafted and strategically promoted by the contending players. To conceptualize this discursive arena, this book draws strongly from discourse theory and the works of the so-called Essex School (a.o., Howarth et al., 2000; Howarth

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& Torfing, 2005; Laclau, 2005; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).[5] By emphasizing language's constitutive aspect, such a perspective helps to recall that the meaning attached to material events has immediate and tangible real-world effects. It constitutes the boundaries of responses by contending actors. My mixed-method analysis of textual communication, semiotic representation, and physical interaction in Egypt's post-revolutionary arena, whose methodology and sources are detailed in the Appendix, is guided by the premise that contentious claim-making is not only influenced by or influential on public discourse. Players' discourses, instead, constitute the conditions of possibility for social claims. Changing discourses about physical events thus provide the context for interpreting the diverging findings on the interactional effects of states and contenders on each other.

## Outline

This book consists of six chapters, in addition to this introduction and some concluding remarks. Of these, one chapter is concerned with developing a theoretical framework and outlining the methodological choices of this book. This entails a meso-level approach to the study of contention, a relational and interactionist framework of analysis, and special attention to the discursive arena of contentious politics. Five chapters are of an empirical and analytical nature. Structurally, the second chapter, after this introduction, describes the conceptual framework and theoretical underpins, embedding this paper in the broader research tradition of social movement studies. First, it introduces the idea of social mobilization as a population of contentious events (see Della Porta, 2011). These events can be viewed as the visible traces of the strategic interactions of different individual and compound social players, such as protest movements, police forces, or army units, who face each other in a complex and dynamic social arena (see Jasper, 2015b, 2015a; McGarry et al., 2016). At the same time, players themselves, too, represent arenas for internal struggles among their constituting individuals.

By adopting such a social interactionist and relational perspective, this case study compliments Charles Tilly's (2008) call for more refined evidence on contentious performances that, "look inside individual episodes to analyze

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5    Named after a graduate program at the University of Essex, the Essex School became the breeding ground for a generation of scholars who contributed to establishing their mentors' approach as a research tradition (e.g., Glynos et al., 2009; Howarth, 1998, 2013; Howarth et al., 2000; Howarth & Torfing, 2005; Torfing, 1999).

the interplay of actors, interactions, and contentious claims" (p. 35, see also Tilly, 2005, p. 222). As Tilly famously argued, protest episodes are not activists' solo performances. They involved a high degree of social interaction: spectators can become sympathizers or opponents that support or reject protesters' demands; they can become activists themselves or join forces with the agents of repression. Della Porta (2014b) has referred to this fluid and dynamic nature of contentious politics as a "dance" (p. 165) between challengers of authority, power, and privilege, and those who seek to retain and extend it. Building on this thought, this book conceives social movements as systems of relations between different individual and compound social players, whose political subjectivities and contentious performances are conditioned by and embedded in their strategic interactions with others.

Finally, the second chapter suggests that discourse theory, by accounting for both linguistic meaning and the material event, can contribute to developing the concept of protest arenas by theorizing the discursive layers of interaction that accompany contentious struggles. Drawing on the works of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (above all, Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Laclau, 2005), it illustrates how discursive arenas can be thought of as the sites of players' struggles over key signifiers. The outcomes of these struggles condition what can be said, what problems can be named, who can be held accountable, and what solutions appear viable. This combination of strategic interactionist and discourse theoretical approaches allows for a methodology that combines protest event analysis, a tested method from the toolkit of social movement studies, and discourse analysis in a nested research design. This innovative nested research design is described in more detail in the Appendix, in the hope that it can serve as an inspiration for other scholars of contentious politics to adopt a disaggregated framework of analysis that pays equal attention to the production and the interpretation of protest and repression.

The empirical part of this book begins by retracing the chain of events that led to the uprising on June 30, 2013, and the ouster of President Mursi (Chapter 3). These events, I argue, can be interpreted as disruptive, transformative events that caused an irrevocable rift in the social order. This period of Egypt's post-revolutionary history has been the subject of much discussion by scholars of political Islam investigating the trajectory of one of the largest Islamic movements in the modern world, from its sudden rise to power to its quick demise and near extinction (El-Amrani, 2013), as well as by others assessing the impact of Mursi's short rule on the country's political transition (N. J. Brown, 2013; Stein, 2012). More recently it has attracted the attention of social movement scholars, with several authors reconstructing the dynamics of contention leading up to the 2013 military coup and those

following it (Biagini, 2017; Grimm & Harders, 2018; Ketchley, 2017a). While methodologically diverse, these accounts agree that Mursi's presidency had been riddled with conflict from the outset.[6] Chapter 3 explores how this conflict unfolded, polarized society, and catalyzed a clash between two competing hegemonic projects which culminated in Mursi's deposition by the military on July 3, 2013.

The next two empirical chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) explore the dynamics of contention in Egypt directly after the 2013 military coup, above all, the wave of Islamist mobilization by the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters which came to be known as the *Anti-Coup* campaign. Unlike the January 25 Revolution that has been discussed in extenso, the protests staged by the National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy (NASL) – commonly known as Anti-Coup Alliance – have been scarcely investigated. This is partly due to the rapid authoritarian regression and the restoration of autocratic modes of governance in Egypt that followed the contentious dynamics in mid-2013 and drew considerable scholarly attention. Partly it is because the brutal repression that accompanied the protests affected first and foremost demonstrators that could be counted to the Islamist spectrum of Egyptian society. Brutal massacres by state security forces against civilians, such as that on Rabaa al-Adawiya Square, could thus be signified as a reasonable, albeit failed attempt by Egypt's authorities to confront radical Islamic groups.

At the same time, the contentious dynamics in the summer of 2013 can be considered as one of the most formative episodes for Egyptian politics of the last decades, equaling only that of January 25 in recent years. It enabled the emergence of what has become one of the most brutal authoritarian regimes not only in the region but across the globe. An interlude chapter (Chapter 6) thematizes this autocratic restoration in the aftermath of the 2013 military coup. It describes how a new discourse took hold of Egypt in which national defense and the fight against terrorism replaced self-determination and civilian rule as the central signifiers. This discourse enabled the rehabilitation of the armed forces as representatives of the people's will and their inclusion into a new hegemonic bloc, an alliance of political forces with the ability to exert power through consensus, not only coercion (Gramsci, 1971, p. 365f.).

The contentious episode discussed in the last empirical chapter shows, however, that the post-coup regime's very reliance on a nationalist discourse for legitimizing its actions sowed the seeds for new resistance. Chapter 7 investigates how the transfer of the Egyptian archipelago of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia in early 2016 became a catalyst for oppositional

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

subject formation and the emergence of a strange bedfellow coalition under conditions of extreme repression. Drawing on another protest event catalog and an analysis of the competing discourses on the protests, the chapter illustrates how the *Egypt is not for sale!*-campaign [*Hamlat-masr mish li-l-bia'a*] undermined the regime's nationalist lingo, thus changing the perception of opportunities for mobilization and creating the conditions for innovative coalitions. Placing its campaign in the trajectory of the Egyptian revolution, the coalition established solidarity between liberals, leftists, and the nationalist youth who had so far toed the regime's line.

The final concluding chapter (Chapter 8) discusses the overall empirical findings critically in light of ongoing theoretical debates on the power of nationalism. An Appendix deals with methodological concerns. It covers the sources used in this investigation and presents the embedded research design of this study in detail. For the sake of reproducibility, it details the methods-mix employed for empirical analysis, namely a combination of protest event data, discourse analysis, and interviews; it discusses source selection and coding procedures, and it describes the procedure by which discourses are visualized as semantic networks in the empirical chapters of this study. An additional section in the Appendix deals with epistemological concerns and issues of positionality.

In sum, this book can be considered an attempt to map Egypt's post-revolutionary contentious politics. It includes tracing the unfolding protest dynamics during the above-mentioned contentious episodes in an event database that documents the scope and repertoire of the unfolding events. But it also includes tracing the effect of contested discourses on the performances and repertoires of different social players in the highly dynamic arena of Egypt's embattled streets. Thereby, a new narrative of Egypt's post-revolutionary history is developed. It contends that the story of President Mursi's fall and President Sisi's rise is not one of a journey back to square one. Nor is it the story of a failed revolution that was undermined by the wit of Egypt's elites and the machinations of a deep state, and that – once more – testifies to the structural resilience of authoritarianism in the Arab World. Instead, the trajectory of the Egyptian uprising and its aftermath is portrayed as the contingent rise and fall of competing players and their political projects in a highly dynamic political setting arena. These players, as will be shown, have all risen, struggled, and, at times, fallen over questions of legitimacy and over attempts to incarnate the will of the people and monopolize representations of the nation's interest. In this book, I retrace how this contest over legitimacy unfolded, and how it inspired repression and revolt in post-revolutionary Egypt.

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