Revolution, play and feeling

Assembling emotionality, national subjectivity and football in Cairo, 1990-2013

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Declaration for SOAS PhD thesis

I have read and understood regulation 17.9 of the Regulations for students of the SOAS, University of London concerning plagiarism. I undertake that all the material presented for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person. I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the work which I present for examination.

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[ABSTRACT]

This thesis explores transformations of emotionality and national subjectivity in the realm of Egyptian football. The research traces developments from the late Mubarak era, when football experienced an unprecedented boom, into the years immediately after the 2011 Revolution, when the sport became politically contested and lost much of its appeal. Approaching football as a social assemblage, encompassing clubs, players, fans, media infrastructures, pick-up pitches, cafés, stadiums and unpredictable match results, the dissertation examines politically charged emotions and subjects that emerged, transformed and broke down. Contestations over the contingent subjects and feelings of football were part of an ongoing battle over the Egyptian nation, before as well as after 2011.

The first chapters explore how state-financing, booming sports media and unprecedented success on the pitch assembled in a 'football bubble' – a dominant complex of emotions and national subjectivity – in the late Mubarak era. It is also shown how this emotional nationalism around football became increasingly questioned after a bitter loss to Algeria in 2009. The middle parts trace the development of the Egyptian Ultras. I argue that the younger Ultras fans constituted a novel 'emotional style' that challenged the bubble's homogeneity. I also highlight how the Ultras – following a stadium massacre in 2012 – turned into one of Egypt's most adored revolutionary forces, embodying a respectable and purposeful masculine subjectivity. Shifting scales, the final chapters attend to emotional attachments to football among a few key interlocutors. I argue that changing rhythms, occasions and connotations contributed to processes of 'ruination' that made it difficult to feel for the sport. However, I also detail how and why some dimensions of football – what I theorise as 'debris' – remained emotionally charged.

Taken together, the thesis is simultaneously an emotional-political narration of Egypt's revolutionary transition and an ethnography of the reassembling of the nation's most popular sport.

[CONTENTS]

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heroes, at Studenternas IP and stadiums all around Sweden. And still we do dream – *Om några år så kan det hända...*

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[NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION]

In my transliteration of Arabic into English, I have used a simplified version of the system suggested by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. I have used diacritical marks for the letters *ʿayn* and *hamza*, as well as in passages of Egyptian dialect, when the letter *qaf* turns into a *hamza*. I do not normally transcribe a *hamza* in the beginning of the word, nor the *ta marbuta* at the end of a word, unless it makes a genitive with the following word in the sentence. I have used *j* to render the Arabic letter *jim* when used in Modern Standard Arabic contexts, such as newspapers, and *g* to mark the Egyptian colloquial pronunciation (*gim*). A *shadda* is denoted with two letters, but I do not make distinctions between long and short vowels.

Names have been transliterated following the same principles, except for in those cases where an established English spelling for a certain name or place already is in place.

Emotions and subjects in a changing football assemblage

This PhD dissertation is an ethnography of football in Egypt in a period of rapid transformation and change. In the late years of President Hosni Mubarak's long rule (1981-2011), Egyptian football experienced an unprecedented boom. The clubs as well as the national team were immensely successful and popular; coverage of the sport in the Egyptian media expanded; and football became a main concern among the country's political and cultural elite. In the years immediately following the January 2011 Revolution, this hype was replaced by an ever deepening sense of crisis. The Egyptian teams' results deteriorated and interest and attachment plummeted, while in the media, the sport was almost completely overshadowed by the political processes that swept the nation. A tragic stadium disaster in Port Said in early 2012 aggravated the situation further. The league was interrupted and several big football media outlets went out of business. However, as football lost its dominant position in everyday life, its politics, values and social functions were debated more than ever before. A relatively new type of fan groups – the so-called Ultras – emerged at the centre of a politicised struggle that linked football's past, present and future to the nation's ongoing revolutionary process.

The thesis takes off from this dramatic saga from boom to bust. On the most general level, its aim is to shed light on this transformation and to make sense of how and why it

happened. To make this exercise more feasible and concrete, the ethnography primarily explores conflations between emotionality, subjectivity and politics: how people involved with Egyptian football felt, how they became who they were, and why that mattered politically. The research is guided by the following questions: how and why did the Egyptians' feelings for football change in the years before and after the 2011 revolution? What subjectivities did football craft in Egypt in the different phases of this development? How, more precisely, did emotions and subjectivities link up with national politics? By answering these questions, my ethnography illustrates how the national-political and the subjective-intimate were calibrated and how they worked on each other through the mediation of Egypt's national sport. On a broader, theoretical level, the dissertation considers how emotionality and subjectivity emerge, are transformed and wither away, as well as how they come to have political effects.

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The dissertation is a product of twenty months of fieldwork in Cairo, which I conducted between early August 2011 and late March 2013. My exploration was carried out at multiple sites across the city. As often as I could, I joined friends as they went to the stadium to watch their favourite teams play, and a couple of nights or more every week, I watched televised domestic or international football in coffee shops (*ahawi;* sing. *ahwa*). For a while, I was a regular in one particular *ahwa* in the Abdeen neighbourhood, where I met many of my best friends in Cairo, but I also continuously tried out new cafés all around the city. In addition to watching football, I played pick-up the game regularly with different constellations of friends on pitches throughout the city. During the final six months of my research, I also spent increasing portions of my time at a few of Cairo's state-run youth centres (*marakiz al-shabab*; sing. *markiz al-shabab*). These centres provide a space for Cairene boys and youth from the lower and lower-middle classes to play football, either recreationally or under the supervision of a coach.

In all of my fieldwork sites, I tried to attend to a variety of dimensions that together constitute football as a game, experience and phenomenon. In addition to constantly observing football-related practices and discourses among the people I watched or played football with, I researched the spatial and material characteristics of physical, built-up

spaces, such as stadiums, coffee shops, youth centres and pick-up pitches. I also studied television technologies and the organisational, political and financial infrastructures on and around which football is built. Moreover, I regularly consumed a variety of Egyptian football media, in particular the daily newspaper *al-Shuruq*, the weekly sports magazine *al-Ahram al-Riyadi*, broadcasts on the public sports radio channel *al-Shabab wi al-Riyada*, programmes on football television channels such as *Modern*, *al-Jazeera Sports* and *AD Sports*, and the two football websites *FilGoal.com* and *Yallakora.com*. As my research traced historical transformations, I took interest both in the present state of affairs and in developments that had taken place in the recent past. In order to trace the history of spaces and technological-economical infrastructures, I relied mainly on interviews with journalists, supporters and people working in youth centres or in the television business. To get a sense of the historical development of media discourses, I also visited the newspaper archive at the American University in Cairo.

During the time of my fieldwork, I conducted 34 more or less formalised interviews about the game's importance, organisation, politics and history with football journalists and writers, club officials, players and coaches, particularly dedicated fans, and youth centre employees. Whereas I met most interviewees only once or twice, some became acquaintances or even close friends. Over time, a handful of circles of friends crystallised, with whom I spent time on a more regular basis: one group of young men around a coffee shop in Abdeen, whom I regularly watched and played football with; one based around my good friend Mahmoud, who worked at the gym I went to regularly; one that was centred around the people related to the youth centres in Bulaq Abu 'Ala and al-Ezbakiyya; one consisting of my good friend Hamada and the men he socialised with at the stadium when their favourite club al-Zamalek was playing; and finally one group made up of people who knew Mido, a former Ultras fan and passionate Ahly supporter from the suburb Heliopolis.[1] Through hundreds of hours of watching, playing and discussing football with these people, I learned what I now know about the emotional politics of

[1] To guarantee anonymity, the names of all my main interlocutors as well as some places have been changed in the text. However, I have retained the original names of the journalists with whom I conducted interviews. This is something they all consented to.

football in Egypt. The lion's share of the ethnography in the dissertation is based on the knowledge that these people provided.

Throughout my time in the field, I lived in an apartment at the northern edge of Downtown Cairo, a few hundred metres from the central railway station. My partner Karin, who was also conducting ethnographic fieldwork for her doctorate, lived together with me in the same flat. Her name will figure on a few occasions in the ethnographic chapters that follow.

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This introductory chapter serves a series of functions. The first section situates my research in the middle of Egypt's turbulent revolutionary process. It gives details about the crisis that football was understood to have been plunged into after 2011, it discusses common discourses about the relationship between football and politics, and it reflects on the implications that this prevailing sense of crisis had on my ethnographic research. The chapter thereafter turns theoretical. One section discusses my conceptualisation of football in Cairo as a complex social assemblage, consisting of a wide range of different components (infrastructures, matches, spaces, people, media etc.) which all 'work' to assemble football in Egypt. After that, I spend one section on each of the three main theoretical concerns of the dissertation: emotionality, subjectivity, and contingency. In each of these sections, I explain what I mean by the theoretical concepts I use, and I situate my research within literatures that I have found relevant. I also discuss how I understand that emotionality and subjectivity emerge and transform within the football assemblage. Towards the end of this introduction, I also elaborate in more detail on my methodological choices and some of their biases. Finally, I provide a chapter outline and a discussion of the type of ethnography that I am writing.

It is worth noting that this dissertation is an ethnographic study. Its primary aim is to tell a series of stories about Egyptian football in a period of change, and about life in Cairo in the revolutionary period more generally. The all-too-brief theoretical passages that this introduction encompasses are meant merely to introduce my understandings of some analytical concepts that my ethnographic chapters build on and mobilise. As for the

theoretical contributions that this dissertation also hopes to make, they are as a rule integrated into the ethnographic accounts, and elaborated on in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

Crisis, transformation, politics

Egyptian football in a crisis

The period when I conducted my PhD research, between August 2011 and March 2013, was a very special one for most people in Cairo. A series of revolutionary processes – which had been initiated in January 2011 and forced President Mubarak out of office in February – defined daily life. In the realm of formal politics, the country went from military rule at the time of my arrival, via parliamentary and presidential elections in 2011 and 2012, to one year under President Muhammad Mursi, and finally back to military rule again, three months after my departure. Demonstrations, sit-ins and protests – many of which developed into bloody clashes – filled Cairo's streets and squares as well as the national media. New independent labour organisations were established; large numbers of workers, in all kinds of sectors, went on strike. New types of media flourished and political discussions were everywhere. The police withdrew from the streets; rumours of rapidly increasing crime rates abounded.

In retrospect, it seems remarkable how *little* Egyptian football initially appeared to be affected by this turbulence. After a couple of months' interruption during the first revolutionary winter, the Egyptian Premier League restarted in April 2011, and the championship was completed by mid-July. The following autumn, the new season kicked off with the Egyptian Cup in September, and the 2011-12 league season commenced

according to plan in mid-October. However, as soon as I began my fieldwork and started talking to people around the sport, I realised that far from everything was back to business as usual. Almost all the fans, journalists, coaches and players who I talked to would rather tell me that Egyptian football was in a deep crisis (*azma*). One very apparent dimension of this predicament was the Egyptian national team's quickly deteriorating status. After winning three consecutive African Cups of Nations (2006, 2008 and 2010) and beating the reigning world champions, Italy, in the 2009 Confederations Cup, the team failed to even qualify for the two African Cups that were played during my fieldwork (2012 and 2013). On the FIFA World Rankings, Egypt dropped dramatically, from tenth place just before January 2011 to seventy-fifth in spring 2013.

Most of all, the football crisis was one of popularity and image. Literarily all Egyptians I met in Cairo between 2011 and 2013 admitted that their interest in football was significantly lower than it had been in the years that preceded the revolution. While this was already the case in autumn 2011, it became even more pronounced after the horrendous killing of 72 young football supporters at a stadium in the north Egyptian city of Port Said on 1st February 2012. In the wake of the tragedy, domestic football was called off for a year, and spectators were banned from most of the erratic international matches that were still played. The coverage of football in the media also fell sharply. Particularly during the recurrent periods of violence in the city, Cairo as a whole tuned in to politics; nearly every TV-screen in every shop, *ahwa*, home and workplace showed an aerial live feed from the location in the city where the clashes were presently ongoing. Like when a magnet is held under a paper full of steel dust in a high school physics class, and all of the dust suddenly turns in the same direction, attention and discussions were directed *en masse* to the country's turbulent politics. Football games, no matter how significant, were incapable of breaking through this dominant field of attraction.

This ever-deepening football crisis made the research I had originally planned to do very difficult. Having lived in Cairo for a year in the late 2000s, I had planned for a project about the sport's everyday social role in a football-saturated cityscape. When I began my fieldwork in 2011, the football-obsessed city I had remembered was no longer there. Participant observation of football-related masculinity construction in coffee shops

seemed less exciting than it had appeared on the drawing board, as I found that people in Cairo's cafés were not watching much sport any longer. My plans of intense research at live games were likewise scattered, as the league was indefinitely suspended only five months into my fieldwork. Egypt's football crisis in this way also became my own personal crisis as an ethnographer. As the future of the game looked increasingly uncertain, I began to feel like I was researching a moving target: a set of phenomena called football, whose configuration and appearance were elusive to say the least. I found myself constantly trying to adapt my methods, time plans and strategies to keep up with an object of study that was running away from me, if not completely disappearing.

The national game in the midst of politics

The 72 young men who were killed in the attack at the stadium in Port Said were all away supporters of Egypt's biggest club, al-Ahly. Importantly, they were also all members of the 'Ultras', a relatively new type of supporters groups, which had played an important role in the protests against Mubarak's police state before 2011 and later against the new military rulers. Because of the political profile of the Ultras, the massacre was widely understood as an orchestrated attack by the military and/or the police to teach the Ultras fans a lesson (more details follow in Chapters 3, 4 and the Interlude). As such, the revolution and the Port Said massacre did not only stop football, lower the interest in the game, and render sports secondary to politics. In addition, the time of the football crisis was also a period when football was drawn into the very centre of national politics. While football matches were rarely played in Egypt during the time of my fieldwork, the history, politics and societal role of football were constantly evaluated in the Egyptian media, and discussed by many people I met.

On the one hand, it is important to note that debates connecting Egyptian football to national politics were nothing new. In contrast, most historiographic writing about football in Egypt situates the sport in comparison to or as a metonym for the Egyptian nation and national politics. The most obvious example is the history of Egypt and Cairo's two totally dominant football clubs – the archrivals al-Ahly and al-Zamalek – which has habitually been narrated with reference to the very different roles and functions

of the two clubs in national politics.[2] In his unmatched account of the history of al-Ahly, Hassan al-Mistakawi for instance highlights how the club was the first to be aimed at Egyptians only, and large sections of the book illustrate how al-Ahly has been an integral part of the Egyptian nationalist movement, from its establishment in 1907 throughout the twentieth century (1997; see also Jacob, 2011:84ff). In poignant contrast, historical exposés of the history of al-Zamalek invariably note that the club was founded as 'mixed club' for Egyptians *and* foreigners in 1911, and that it was named after, and supported by, the corrupt King Faruq in the 1940s (al-Mistakawi, 1997:158f; Tahir, 2010:59ff; Tawfiq, 2010:54; Thabet, 2010:81). Recent historical accounts of the Egyptian national team's participation in the Olympics in the 1920s also emphasise how the team's performances sparked politicised debates at home about Egypt's overall image and performance on the world stage (Jacob, 2011:127-41; Lopez, 2009), discussions that were strikingly similar to the media discourse that surrounded Egypt's ultimately unsuccessful candidacy to host the 2010 World Cup (Lopez, 2012).

On the other hand, the rapidly *changing* position of football in Egyptian society – from successful boom to bloody tragedy – spurred a special type of commentary on the historic relation between the sport and national politics in the years I spent in the field. One more or less coherent set of tropes constituted an influential standard narrative (cf. Jenkins, 1994), which, because of its frequency, formed a backdrop to large parts of my study. In a condensed, inevitably simplified version, this story went something like this: the Egyptians have always been a particularly emotional people with a special chemistry and historically deep-rooted love for football. Because of the central place of the game in Egyptian society and in the hearts of the people, the sport has a latent potential for political exploitation (*istighlal siyasi*). As is well documented, this emotional-political flipside to the game has been mobilised continuously and cynically by the country's rulers to divert the people from more pressing needs: by the British colonisers (Tawfiq, 2010:53;

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[2] Al-Ahly and al-Zamalek's staggering dominance is well reflected in the distribution of titles. Whereas al-Ahly has won 35 and al-Zamalek 23 Egyptian Cup titles, no other club has more than 6 titles; al-Ahly has taken 37 league titles compared to al-Zamalek's 11, only 7 times have the league been won by any other club.

Thabet, 2010:78), by the morally corrupt King Faruq (Tawfiq, 2010:54f), and very actively in the Nasser era, a period when passions for football rose rapidly (al-Mistikawi, 1997:164ff; Tawfiq, 2010:60ff; see also Di Capua, 2004; Elrich, 1989:181). The ruler who, better than any other, had managed to exploit the Egyptians' love for the sport to control and mislead was President Mubarak. The way the president had drawn attention to his own persona by publically receiving players and coaches after each international triumph was, for instance, very often taken to exemplify this political utilisation of the sport. Particularly in the last decade of his long reign, when the Egyptian national team won its unprecedented three African Cups of Nations and football experienced its great boom and hype, President Hosni Mubarak – and increasingly also his two sons, Alaa and Gamal Mubarak – had deployed the game as an emotional vent. Some of the concepts that people liked to use when describing in retrospect the happiness and passions that the sport had engendered in the final years before 2011 were 'replacement' (*badil*), 'drug' (*mukhaddarat*), and 'concealment' (*taghyib*)(see also Thabet, 2010:126ff, 189f; Tawfiq, 2010:45ff; Sadiki, 2012).

This narration of football as a recurrent and very efficient means for a manipulative and ultimately false sense of unity resembles ideas of football as a distractive 'opiate of the masses', a critical discourse on sports more generally that has a long history and is widespread all over the world (see Kuhn 2011:57ff). In the revolutionary, post-Mubarak period when I conducted my fieldwork, however, football was not only discussed as a replacement, concealment and drug. There was also a strong sense among people I met that football was an 'opiate' and an addiction, which the Egyptians had now been able *to overcome*. 'I think the Egyptians have now finally woken up from that weird, passionate football dream', as my friend Amro expressed it in spring 2012. '*Al-kura khalas* (football is done with), people can now see the real world, and football cannot trick them to look the other way anymore', sports journalist Tarek Mourad told me during an interview in March 2013. Interpretations of why this powerful drug of the Mubarak era had lost its former lure tended to coalesce into a coherent and reasonable narrative: because of the revolution, the national project had been restored; meaningful and participatory politics had been reinstated. The revolution had made visible the real world, which the oppressive Mubarak regime had previously managed to hide behind the strong, but ultimately

deceptive passions elicited by the nation's most popular sport. Consequently, football as a 'replacement for politics' no longer made much sense. Indeed, many people I met would argue that football, in a reverse move, had now been replaced by politics.

In particular among people I met who identified closely with the revolution's aims and ideals, these ideas about football as a problematic, reactionary concealment and a drug made them approach the sport reluctantly and with hesitation in the post-2011 years. Some friends even expressed that they felt embarrassed by the way they had cared about football in the pre-revolutionary years. Yet, this did not stop them from constantly discussing, not so much games, players and tactics, as the history, societal role and future of the sport. For many Egyptian football fans, the revolution and the football crisis offered a chance to reconfigure the sport once and for all, so to again make it into the positive, progressive nationalist force that they knew it once had been, and which they wished that it would become once again. In a period when football as it had been was fading away very quickly, a series of intriguing debates on football and politics were hence ever-present; the time of the football crisis was also a time when people tried to work out what football had been in the Mubarak era and what it ought to be in the 'new' Egypt that was emerging.

Research in the midst of transformation

For my PhD research, the Port Said massacre retrospectively stands out as a break akin to what Pertti and Gretel Pelto have called 'serendipity disguised as catastrophe' (1978:185, cited in Rivoal & Salazar, 2013:180). As the league was discontinued, football fans turned their backs on the game, and the debates about the national function and history of the sport intensified, the tragedy effectively ended whatever had remained of an illusionary football normality. It was no longer possible to even attempt to carry out the synchronic exploration of football as a constituent of the everyday that I had originally planned for. To paraphrase Caroline Humphrey, who draws on Alan Badiou, my interlocutors and I were all 'marked' by the catastrophic event 'in the sense that [we] could no longer assume that only one kind of society was possible' (2008:363). It was as if time itself, for so long 'stranded in the present' (Scott, 2014:78ff), had suddenly accelerated. All around me,

constantly, I heard people talking about football fading away, changing and going through a historically unprecedented slump. It is hard to envision a situation in which writing a classic dissertation in the ethnographic present would seem more far-fetched.

The primary ethnographic and analytic foci of this dissertation directly result from my dawning, post-Port Said realisation that football as 'it used to be' would not return any time soon. The tragedy and the crisis made me recognize that I had to embrace change, and that I needed to do my best to track the historical development in the midst of which I found myself. From this moment on, the research project therefore came to be guided by an interest in the ways in which Egyptian football was reconfigured in the aftermath of the revolution and the stadium tragedy. As people around me consistently made historical comparisons and analogies, I also recognized that such an ethnography of change in the present required a significant historical component. To make sense of the trajectories along which the sport developed during the revolutionary years, I also needed to know about the sport's recent past.

The revolution and the football crisis also inevitably made my research more explicitly political than I had planned. As everyone I met related football and its emotions to politics, conflations between the emotional and the political very naturally came to be located at the centre of my ethnographic inquiry. Tracing the many debates and discussion about football's past, present and future that flourished in Cairo, my research came to explore ideas about football that also seemed to be ideas about the Egyptian nation, its history and its future. Through my explicit focus on people, spaces, media and institutions related to Egypt's biggest sport, my study was located somewhat on the margin of the protests, demonstrations and violent clashes that typically are understood as the main events and developments of the Egyptian revolutionary process (cf. Herzfeld, 2015). Yet, as we will see, the issues that my interlocutors debated and tried to make sense of – generational shifts, problematic masculinity, and appropriate emotionalities – were at the core of the momentous transformation that the nation passed through. Researching changes in football in this way became a way to research a changing nation.

The Egyptian football assemblage

A fundamental vantage point for this research about the transformation of Egyptian football in years before and after the 2011 revolution is that it takes the 'Egyptian football assemblage' as its object of study. Throughout this dissertation, this notion is understand to encompass a bundle of multi-faceted *processes of coming together* that constitute football in Egypt. I will shortly discuss some of the components that the Egyptian football assemblage comprises. First, however, a brief theoretical exposé is required.

A Latourian assemblage that works

The 'assemblage' is an analytical concept that has been used productively by anthropologists since at least the early 2000s (see e.g. Ong and Collier, 2005; Mitchell, 2002:19-53, 272-303; Larkin, 2008), but it is most explicitly theorised within Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and the writings of Bruno Latour. In his book *Reassembling the Social* (2005), Latour proposes a social scientific research programme that leaves behind the traditional exercise of explaining particular phenomena by means of placing them in a 'social context' or relating them casually to 'social' variables, such as class, the nation, gender or neoliberalism. For Latour, the 'social dimension' that these independent variables belong to is an unhelpful invention by the social scientists, which unnecessarily distances social scientific writing from the world it sets out to study (3f). Instead, Latour urges that we approach whatever phenomenon we want to make sense of as a 'flat' relational assemblage, where what might seem to be radically different entities are associated with each other at the same level through concrete ties, links and relays (5-16). For Latour, the aim of the social scientist is to 'trace' the 'trail of *associations* between heterogeneous elements' in the assemblage, and to 'reassemble' in writing the social world that she takes interest in (5). In my reading, the 'social assemblage' hence refers not so much to a certain object or entity as to an open-ended, theoretically informed heuristic. Throughout my research, my aim has never been to define and fix what football is but rather to allow my interlocutors to guide me through the various *assemblings* that make up

their football and their social worlds. These processes are what I have studied and written about in this PhD project.

Another important insight that this dissertation adopts from Latour is his attention to what he calls 'mediators'. In a Latourian social assemblage, mediators are actors that not only re-present and symbolise other entities, but also 'transform, translate, distort and modify' (2005:39). While mediators at times are human beings impacting on the world around them, they can also be influential discursive entities, such as concepts, symbols and narratives laden in history (cf. Navaro-Yashin, 2009). Importantly, material objects can also be mediators since, like humans and discourses, objects constantly act on, react to, and assemble with other components (Latour, 2005:63-85). Indeed, material things are typically the mediators that make otherwise feeble social realities durable and give them inertia. Because, as Latour puts it, 'it's power exerted through entities that don't sleep and associations that don't break down that allow power to last longer and expand further' (70). This stressing of mediators and their actions is similar to the way Brian Larkin, in his monograph *Signal and Noise*, ethnographically explores the cultural 'work' carried out by urban space, media infrastructures and popular culture in Nigeria (2008). Here also, we see an analytical move that disperses agency to actors well beyond the recognisable confines of agentive human subjects (cf. Latour, 2005:216). An auxiliary benefit of a perspective that hones in on the 'work' in processes through which social worlds assemble is that it facilitates an inquiry that highlights *effects* rather than representation and causes, what particular objects *do* rather than how they are conceived and where they come from. This analytical move has proved productive throughout the humanities and social sciences in recent decades (for a few different examples, see Butler, 2010; Hirschkind, 2006; Mitchell, 2002; Rollason, 2011b), and it has been a guiding principle throughout this research project.

The Egyptian football assemblage

The notion of the 'football assemblage' opens the way for an inclusive study that incorporates a wide range of seemingly disparate components, which all play their part in making football what it is. As Will Rollason has noted in an ethnographic study of men

who play football on Panapompom Island near Papua New Guinea (2011a, 2011b), football is often a strikingly obvious phenomenon: most people – in Panapompom, Cairo or elsewhere – have an intuitive sense of the rules and aesthetics of the game, and they can recognise it no matter if it is played on a field in Papua New Guinea, at Cairo International Stadium, or three-against-three in the street. However, the obviousness of football in Cairo seemed to me to be of a somewhat different kind than among Rollason's interlocutors. Whereas Panapompom people carefully produced the for them relatively novel phenomenon of football as a recognisable, visible effect (21-41), football in Cairo was supported by more than a hundred years of history, a well-established network of national clubs and institutions, a media industry that turned over millions of Egyptian pounds every year, and the inertia of material infrastructures that spanned the city and linked it to the wider world. In short, football in Cairo was what it was, did what it did and appeared the way it appeared in the shape of a large-scale social assemblage.

In the ethnographic chapters that follow, I will explore a range of different assembling processes, involving a variety of mediators that all worked, mattered and transformed the Egyptian football assemblage. Football supporters, who talked, acted and felt in relation to clubs, matches and each other are one important group of protagonists; men who played football recreationally are another. Discourses that framed, interpreted and mobilised the game also receive a great deal of attention in my ethnography, as do infrastructures along which media were propagated. Furthermore, the ethnography attends to the game's financial and organisational underpinning, as well as to the work carried out by the built, urban spaces where football was watched and played. In several chapters, the ongoing revolutionary process is also shown to have been tightly entangled with the sport. The frequent debates about the sport's history and problematic national function carried out a great deal of work in the (re-)assembling of football in the period of my fieldwork (see 'Crisis, transformation, politics' above), and so did dramatic events of death and violence. Other important mediators were individual star players and famous journalists who spoke and acted, and the actual results of particular matches, which, as we will see, could have wide-reaching effects well beyond the pitch. Tracing the associations between these components, which together assembled football in Cairo, the ethnography that I present traces how impact *circulated* and took on different shapes and character: how

words materialised in bodies and objects; how concrete infrastructures were crucial for the transmission of signs, stories and play; how a game turned into serious politics; and how the political constantly loomed alongside the played game.

Researching football as an assemblage enables an ethnography that simultaneously accounts for a range of phenomena that otherwise might be analysed in separation. Within the multi-disciplinary academic field of football studies, research on supporter identities has traditionally been dominant (see e.g. Giulianotti & Armstrong (eds), 1997, 1999; Sandvoss, 2003; see also 'Assembling subjectivities' below). However, scholars have also studied football and spatiality (see e.g. Akindes, 2011; Bale, 1993, 2000), football and gender (e.g. Pope, 2010a, 2010b; Stewart 2012), football as a global media phenomenon (Giulianotti, 2002; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2006; Giulianotti and Robertson (eds.), 2007; Sandvoss, 2003), the sport's economic-political ramifications (e.g. Onwumechili, 2014; Pannenborg, 2012), commercialisation and commodification (Amara, 2011:94-114; Ben-Porat 2012; Fletcher, 2014), and football as a recreational, played game (Ellis & Shamara 2013; Hussein, 2011; Rollason, 2011b; Stewart, 2012; Worby, 2009). Outside the immediate confines of sports, a wide literature has taken on media and leisure as tools used by elites to educated and civilise the masses (see e.g. Abu-Lughod, 2005:57-108; Zeleza and Veney, 2003; Martin, 2002) or, conversely, as spaces for localised resistance, creativity and identity formation (Abu-Lughod, 2005:193-225; Ang, 1989; see also Hannerz, 1989). Yet others have rather approached media as infrastructure. Often, such studies stress the immediacy of sound and images and the agency endowed to material artefacts and networks (Spitulnik, 2002; Sundaram, 2009; see also Larkin, 2013).

The potential of studying football in Cairo as a series of assemblings is that it allows for an integrated study of how these seemingly distinct aspects of football are relationally linked, and how they act, re-act and inter-act to and with each other. My research is in this regard inspired by the likes of Brian Larkin (2008), Charles Hirschkind (2006), and Timothy Mitchell (2002), all of whom have managed to seamlessly combine materiality and discourse, human beings and infrastructures in their ethnographic and historical work. The obvious flipside of this approach is that the object of study becomes uncontrollably vast and complex and that one runs the risk of proposing a study of

everything (cf. Larkin, 2013:338). Through its explicit focus on 'work' in the football assemblage, this dissertation attempts to pre-empt this problem and retain its sharpness: by paying attention to components that have impact and carry out work in the assemblage – and omitting those that do not – the scope of the study becomes less overwhelming. The study of the nebulous football assemblage has also been narrowed down by the dissertation's main aims and question. Throughout my fieldwork and in the ethnography presented, the focus has been directed to emotionalities and subjectivities, as well as how these dimensions of football were transformed in the midst of great political change. In the sections that follow, these three main themes of the dissertation – emotionality, subjectivity and change – will be discussed in detail, one at a time.

Assembling emotional politics

One overarching aim of this dissertation is to explore a series of shifts in the emotionality of football in Cairo. To simplify a narrative that I will elaborate on in the ethnographic chapters that follow, emotions around the game were intense in the Mubarak era, dissipated in the wake of the revolution, shifted after the Port Said tragedy, and continuously politicised and debated throughout my time in the field. In this section, I provide a theoretically grounded account of how I deal with emotions in the Egyptian football assemblage ethnographically. I also position myself in the literature on how to understand the relationships between emotions and politics.

Emotions in the football assemblage

Entanglements between emotions and discourse (understood broadly) are a recurrent theme throughout this dissertation. Several chapters illustrate how the ways in which

football was sung, talked about and represented – in the media, at the stadium, in coffee shops, or in popular culture – impacted on how people felt in relation to the sport. The debate about football as an emotional drug and concealment – a framing that was at the core of the game's post-2011 popularity crisis – is one good example of these dynamics (see above, 'Crisis, transformation, politics'). Within the sub-field of anthropology that takes an interest in emotions, such links between language and feeling are explored thoroughly. One key publication which has inspired my work is the edited volume *Language and the Politics of Emotions* by Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz, published in 1990. In the introduction to this anthology, the two editors coherently formulate a research programme that urges ethnographers to take 'discourse, often as the situated social practices of people speaking, singing, orating, or writing to and about each other, as the point of entry for the study of emotions' (ibid.:10). As the ethnographic chapters in the volume and subsequent ethnographic work have shown, the framework has proved a productive avenue for illuminating how what we tend to think of as personal 'emotions' are intrinsically enmeshed and codified in discursive systems and social contexts (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Appadurai, 1990; Brenneis, 1990; Lutz, 1990; for a recent, football related example, see Rollason, 2011b:187ff; see also Leavitt, 1996).

While discourses were crucial for the way emotions came together in the Egyptian football assemblage, they were only part of a bigger whole. To widen the analytical lens, beyond Abu-Lughod and Lutz's focus of discourse, my ethnography understands emotions as something practiced. In this, I am mainly drawing on the Bourdieu-flavoured work of Monique Scheer (2012). For Scheer, ethnographic and historical research on emotionality should hone in on different types of 'emotional practices': *mobilising practices* (i.e. how emotions are activated by social relations, spaces and the media), *naming practices* (how emotions are given names and are talked about), *communicating practices* (how people make others understand what they feel) and *regulating practices* (how people control and are controlled by each other and by social norms). While explicitly influenced by the discursive framework proposed by Abu-Lughod and Lutz, Scheer's approach is significantly broader. The way she incorporates a range of embodied, non-linguistic practices in addition to the discursive ones that she refers to as 'naming' has guided my

ethnographic inquiry (see also Griffiths & Scarantino, 2009; Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987).

Scheer importantly suggests that research about emotionality should not be a quest to solve the mystery of the individual's interiority but rather an exploration of concrete things that people say and do. However, to complete the picture of the emotional work in the Egyptian football assemblage, analytical tools that take into account material objects, infrastructures and particular spatial configurations are also needed. A lot of research in recent years has approached feelings from such a perspective. Often, these studies have tried to decentre the intentional 'speaking subject' from the analysis to instead stress the immediacy with which non-human objects make bodies feel (cf. Blackman and Venn, 2010). As such, this body of research tends to talk about 'affect' rather than 'emotion', and about affective 'intensities' (Massumi, 2002:28) of 'technical, material extensions which articulate the body' (Blackman, 2012:9) rather than about the conceptualised, discursive phenomena of 'qualified intensity' that are typically referred to as emotions (Masumi 2002:28, see also Mazzarella, 2010). Research on affect in this way resonates with phenomenological theorisations about feeling and the body (see e.g. Csordas, 1993; Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987; Jackson, 1996; see also Blackman 2012:86ff). Yet, affect studies typically goes a step further by bringing in Deleuze and Guattari's work about affect as transmitted through rhizomic agglomerates. Because of this, analyses of affect are often understood as an attempt to collapse the distinction between objects and subjects (see Blackman, 2012: 78ff).

In my ethnographic study of materiality and feeling in the Egyptian football assemblage, however, I have drawn inspiration more from researchers who take on affect empirically than from these highbrow theorisations. In particular, my ethnography resonates with work on sensing bodies in urban space (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Garrett, 2013), studies of the immediacy of media infrastructures (Featherstone, 2010; Henriques, 2010; Hirschkind, 2001, 2006; Larkin, 2008; Spitulnik, 2002), and the affective charge of objects and ruins (Bryant, 2014; Navaro-Yashin, 2012:81-160; see also Hunt, 2008). Given that part of my research is concerned with feelings that emerge at stadiums, where large numbers of people congregate, my ethnography is also conversant with the extensive

literature on how affect is spread and amplified in large crowds (see Blackman, 2012:26-45; Mazarella, 2010:294ff; Bailey, 2014). As recent scholarship has noted, theorisations of 'the crowd' have historically advanced politically problematic notions of crowds as 'contagious', 'animalist' and 'irrational', and as especially likely to attract classed and racialised Others (Blackman, 2012:33ff). While my analysis of how emotions and affect circulate in the football assemblage in Cairo recurrently attends to the particular force that large gatherings of people bring about, I therefore intentionally avoid presumptuously approaching 'the crowd' as a given entity with certain pre-determined potentials. Instead, my ethnography tries to bring in crowds as one of many variables that together assembled affect and emotionality in and around football in Egypt.

To sum up, the ethnography in this dissertation takes inspiration both from the anthropology of discursive and practiced *emotions* and from studies that explore the materiality and immediacy of *affect*. As such, I situate myself close to a body of literature that in recent years has tried to bridge the affect–emotions divide, through arguments which elucidate how the material and the ideological, the intentional and the immediate-direct, can never be fully disentangled (Blackman, 2012; Leys, 2011; Navaro-Yashin, 2009, 2012). Contributing to this scholarship, my ethnography illustrates how feelings in the Egyptian football assemblage emerge through circulating moves that link together objects, infrastructures, discourse, media, space, politics and the 'mindful bodies' of human beings (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987). In some chapters, I also attend to how bodies over time acquire (or do not acquire) the 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977) of 'emotional skills' (Scheer, 2012) required to be moved by the affectively charged milieus that the football assemblage affords. I am in other words interested in the processes through which people 'learn to be affected' (Latour, 2004; see also Despret, 2004; Hochschild, 1979) by football in a time when football as an ideological, material and emotional assemblage was rapidly changing. My research is grounded in a conviction that that the sharp distinction between the material-immediate and the ideological-contemplated is better considered as an entangled continuum. Because of this, I am intentionally not making a distinct difference between 'feelings', 'emotions' and 'affects' in my writing. As we will see, the concepts will instead be used more or less interchangeably throughout the thesis.

Emotional politics

As already touched upon above ('Crisis, transformation, politics'), the emotionality of football was widely understood as political among the people I worked with in Cairo. As we will see in chapters to come, such articulations between football, emotionality and politics were common throughout my time in the field as well as in the historical material that I examined. By taking a stance and having an opinion about the different emotional registers that the game engendered, people positioned themselves in a quickly shifting political terrain. The function of the sport – in the past, present and the future – was habitually linked to its ability to foster strong emotions, a fact that made Cairo a unique site for ethnographic research about the sport's emotional politics.

While this type of politicised 'emotion talk' (cf. Bednarek, 2008) constitutes an important theme running through this dissertation, it is not the only realm of conflation between politics and emotions that I take interest in. In addition, my ethnography recurrently returns to the assembling of football's emotionality on the aggregate, collective and national scales. This move takes inspiration from the work of Laurent Berlant. In her book *Cruel Optimism*, she writes:

> I am extremely interested in generalization: how the singular becomes delaminated from its location in someone's story or some locale's irreducibly local history and circulated as evidence of something shared (2011:12).

The generalisations that Berlant refers to are the ways in which affect and emotions become collectively shared as 'bundles' of experiences that in turn foster what she discusses as a 'genre' or a 'historical present' (2011:51-93). For Berlant, these affective environments that we are all trained to partake in are fundamental visceral-affective dimensions of dominance, rule and citizenship. It is a type of power that works through the taken-for-granted and which, at least in part, bypasses ideology. In some ways, the politics of aggregated emotionality is hence similar to what Antonio Gramsci (1971) and later Stuart Hall (1996) have analysed as 'hegemony' and 'common sense'. Compared to Hall, who tended to analyse hegemonic power in linguistic idiom, my research is more closely related to the work of Ann Stoler. I frequently return to her argument about how colonial regimes ruled through a systematic 'redistribution of sentiments', and through a

type of 'statecraft' that relied on carving out of long-lasting 'affective states' (1989, 2004). In addition, I also critically engage with Raymond Williams's famous concept 'structure of feelings' (1977). The way I ethnographically make use of Williams's infamously vague notion is through my own re-adaptation and interpretation: to identify historically contingent, mediated and always politicised emotional experiences, which dominate a particular social settings and space-time. As I am mostly interested in processes of assembling and emotional change, I also tend to talk more about *structurings* than *structures* of feelings in my ethnography.

To better understand how different aggregate patterns of politicised emotionality come about, I make use of different empirical studies in my different ethnographic chapters: studies on infrastructures for mediatised and financial flows (Larkin, 2008; Mitchell, 2014; Soliman, 2011), on popular-cultural articulations of Egyptian nationalism (Abu-Lughod, 2005; Armbrust, 1996), on affective geographies and spaces (Smith et. al. 1999; Stoler, 2008), and on overlapping national-political rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004; Edensor, 2006).[3] In sections of the dissertation that deal with more confined patterns of emotionality in the football assemblage, I recurrently mobilise the concept 'emotional style'. This notion is associated with the Bourdieu-inspired approach to emotion as practice discussed above (see Scheer, 2012). In a recent review of research that has used this analytic, Benno Gammerl aptly defines an 'emotional style' as 'the experience, fostering, and display of emotions, and oscillate between discursive patterns and embodied practices as well as between common scripts and specific appropriations. This notion of "style" is, thus, quite similar to "habitus"' (2012:163). Gammerl's article also argues that the notion has proved particularly productive in research that explores competing 'styles' for being emotional at the centre of historic-political transformations (ibid.162; see also Seymour 2012). In my

[3] Another influential body of anthropological research taking on how political regimes and political violence impact the emotional-subjective realm is the one gravitating around the concept 'social suffering' (see e.g. Das et. al (eds.) 2000; Kleinman et. al. (eds.), 1997). The focus on how politics and violence engender 'suffering' and the propensity to explore feelings and milieus associated with 'mental illness' have made this literature less applicable to my study of football, where the emotional registers typically were of a very different kind.

dissertation, I have also found this concept most generative in such contexts, more precisely in my ethnographic explorations of the emotional-political struggle of Cairo's Ultras fan groups.

Assembling subjectivities: masculine, national, political

A second major objective of this dissertation – beside the exploration of emotionality – is to trace the formation of subjectivities in the Egyptian football assemblage. All of my six ethnographic chapters deal to some extent with these processes, which – as Will Rollason has aptly put it – 'make people who they are' (Rollason, 2011b:1). This section provides necessary theoretical groundwork for the ethnography that follows. I outline what I mean by subjectivity and how I understand that subjectivities come into being. I also make some particular remarks about *masculine* subjectivities, and discuss how and why subjectivities in the Egyptian football assemblage took on political meaning and effects.

Researching subjectivities

First of all, it is important to stress that the approach I take to subject formation (and its synonymous terms 'subjectivity formation,' 'subjectivation,' or 'subjectification') is post-structural rather than psychoanalytical. The subjectivities that I research are in other words *not* located in the interiority of the human psyche, but in a much more slippery social realm (cf. Navaro-Yashin, 2012:21ff). One implication of this post-structural vantage point is that my ethnography tends to be more interested in *processes of subjectivation* than in finalised end products, i.e. *subjectivities*. What the dissertation attempts to shed light on is closely related to the problematic that Louis Althusser famously talked about as 'interpellation', or the 'hailing' of human beings by discursive-symbolic subject positions

(1971). My ethnography recurrently returns to this issue. Several chapters explore how fans, players and journalists 'articulated' themselves and their Others with differently connoted and valorised identities, labels and narratives (cf. Slack, 1996). My study of subjectivation in the football assemblage is, in this sense, an ethnography of what Stuart Hall has called 'positionings' in signs and narratives (1993). It shows how 'floating signifiers' are filled with history and meaning, as well as how they become attached to and signify flesh-and-blood human beings (see Laclau and Mouffe, 2001).

Being a subject – and the auxiliary condition of *having* a subjectivity – goes beyond merely identifying with historical narratives and symbols of belonging. As my ethnography will elucidate, subjectivities often encompass a variety of dimensions all at once: behaviour, feeling, desire, experience, perception and visual appearance. The subjectivities that I sketch are in this sense similar to those explored historically by Michel Foucault. In his writings, subjects come into being through dispersed, yet regulated discursive practices – what he calls 'power' – that concurrently produce 'truth' about the subject and the 'subjectivity' itself (see Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982:48f). In Foucault's earlier work, discursive practices of power were often imposed from an institutional outside – hospitals (2003b [1963] or prisons (1977 [1975]) – but in later texts, he increasingly turned the attention to self-regulatory 'technologies of the self' through which individual craft themselves as normalised, desiring, and feeling subjects (1998 [1976]; 1982:777f; 1997b). Indeed, and as we will see in my ethnographic chapters, subjectivation in the Egyptian football assemblage typically incorporated elements of both: reiterative labelling and discipline by outsiders *and* careful self-cultivation by the subjects themselves.

A similar insight about subjectivity as a dialectic between structure and agency is found in the work of Pierre Bourdieu. I find particular useful his theorisation on how class and gender distinctions *structure* as well as being *structured by* practices and behaviours, which over time turn into largely unconscious 'principles of vision and division' (1984, 1993). Bourdieu famously refers to these disposition as 'habitus' (1977); in my ethnography, they are intrinsic to the production of subjects in and around Egyptian football. I am also theoretically indebted to the work of Judith Butler, who whilst building on Foucault further accentuates the inherent instability of subjects, which she understands as a

product of performative practices (1993, 1999) and precarious frames (2010). Finally, my study regularly explores emotionality as a central component in processes of subjectivation. Being a subject in the football assemblage is, as I show, closely linked to affective registers and emotional styles. The processes through which particular emotional experiences work out subjects by means of 'sticking' to human beings are therefore fundamental to the dynamics that I try to make sense of (see Ahmed, 2004:15; see also Ahmed, 2003).

Similarly to how I approach football as an assemblage of a variety of eclectic components, I also think of subjectivities as shaped through processes of assembling. In my different ethnographic chapters, I hone in on how particular configurations of media, materiality, space and infrastructures enable different kinds of subjectivities to come together. A good chunk of my ethnography is devoted to how football fans and supporters in Cairo become who they are. Football's propensity to foster competition and division plays an important role in these processes (cf. Rollason, 2011b:161ff). In Cairo, as well as Egypt more widely, football supporters are traditionally split between *Ahlawiyya* (al-Ahly supporters; sing. *Ahawi*) and *Zamelkawiyya* (al-Zamalek supporters; sing. *Zamelkawi*), although in recent years, rivalries between European clubs have also become increasingly influential. My ethnography also indicates how being a supporter turns people into subjects with political connotations and historical roots. As such, the dissertation adds to the historical and ethnographic literature on football fans and identity politics (for examples that look at the Middle East and Africa, see Alegi, 2010; Amara, 2011; Ben-Porat, 2001, 2014; Fletcher, 2014; Kozanoglu, 1999; Sorek, 2003, 2007; Tuastad, 1997, 2014; Vidacs 2010; see also Raab, 2012). While inspired by previous work within football studies, the dissertation does not join the dominant strand within the discipline that approaches football as a 'liminal space' (Turner, 1969), for 'carnivalesque' behaviour (Bakhtin, 1968) liberated from the social structures of the everyday (see e.g. Finn, 1994; Giulianotti, 1991; Giulianotti & Armstrong, 1997; Hughson, 2000). The problem of such an approach is that it perceives of the sport, its spaces, its fans and its commentary as an *extraordinary* and very much *separated* realm of ritual, where 'action [is] wrapped in a web of symbolism' (Kertzer, 1988:9) and where subjectivities are particularly malleable (see Turner, 1969). In this dissertation, I have instead intentionally tried to find a language that

attends to how subjectivities *come together* through processes of assembling, and how football and its subjects *link up* with the wider everyday's social fabric.[4]

My ethnography on subject formation in the football assemblage is often explicitly written in conversation with the wide literature that exists on subjectivation and identity formation in Egypt. Several chapters draw inspiration from the production of Egyptian national identity in the realm of popular culture (see Abu-Lughod, 2005; Armbrust, 1996, 2002a; van Nieuwkerk, 1995, 2013). I addition, I also take on the literatures on the Egyptian state's production of obedient citizens (see Ismail, 2006a; Sobhy Ramadan, 2012), the formation of neo-liberal and Muslim subjects (Elyachar, 2005; Schielke, 2012b; Sobhy Ramadan, 2012; Winegar, 2014) and research specifically concerned with the formation of young emotional subjects (Bayat, 2010; see also Joseph, 2013). The way my research takes interest in media infrastructures and the shaping of subjectivities in coffee shops also make it congruent with the work of Charles Hirschkind (2001, 2006) and Anuk de Koning (2009). Finally, I am also inspired by previous ethnographies about subject formation in the realm of football as a recreational game that people play in the Middle East and elsewhere (Rollason, 2011b; Stewart, 2012; Worby, 2009).

Masculine subjectivation

For reasons that I will discuss in more detail below, an overwhelming majority of the interlocutors, interviewees and media voices that I spin my ethnography around are men. An important facet to the subjectivities in the football assemblage explored in this dissertation is thus that they are gendered as masculine. In research on gendered subjectivation from Egypt (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Herrera, 2001; MacLeod, 1992; Mahmood, 2005), as well as in the realm of sports (see e.g. Pope, 2010a; Stewart 2012; Fozooni, 2008), gender has very often equalled women. In the research that has been conducted about men *as men* in football, the focus has often been aggressiveness and violence (Marsh, 1978; Smith, 2000), or on the way men use football to break free from

[4] See Rommel (2011), for a more extended version of this critique.

obligations and conventions (Hughson 2000; King, 1997; but see also Archetti, 1999). A similar set of foci were also dominant for a long time in the research on masculinity that came out from the Middle East. A lot of attention has been given to male-dominated institutional settings, such as the army (Haugbolle, 2012; Kaplan, 2000; Sinclair-Webb, 2000), the *hammam* (Farhi, 2000) or circumcision rituals (Bouhdiba and Khal, 2000).The spotlight has in other words often been directed, either to 'hyper masculinities' found in wars and conflicts, or to highly sexualised all-male rituals or spaces.

While my ethnography about subject formation in the Egyptian football assemblage is similar to this previous research in so far that I almost exclusively consider male-only environments, it intentionally avoids singling out spaces as sealed-off arenas where masculinity is particularly prone to 'happen' or transforms. My general understanding of subjectivity as assembled situates my research closer to some more recent scholarship from the region that looks at masculinity as relational and as a process of 'emergence,' for example in sexual encounters made possible through global tourism (McCormick, 2011; Jacobs, 2009) or in relation to reproductive technologies (Inhorn, 2012). I am also inspired by Will Rollason's anthropological work on men who play football in Papua New Guinea (2011a, 2011b), a research project that, whilst tackling nuances of masculinity construction in the realm of football, consistently locates manliness at the intersection of a series of overlapping processes of subjectivation. Most frequently however, I draw on Farah Ghannam's rich work on men and masculinity in a working-class district in Cairo. In particular, the way Ghannam's writing allows masculinity to emerge as oscillating between performative, repetitive action, regulated scripts, and often ambivalent social codes has been an important source of inspiration for several chapters of this dissertation (2013; see also Marsden, 2007; Schielke, 2008, 2015).

Subjectivation and national politics

In contrast to elsewhere in the world, where football has been shown to locate subjects in realms that transcend boundaries of 'local or 'native' culture (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007; Rollason, 2011b), the default mode of the Egyptian football assemblage is to carve out subjects with *national* connotations. As already discussed, football was widely

understood as Egypt's national sport during my time in Cairo, and its national role and function was a widely discussed theme (see 'Crisis, transformation, politics' above). This axiomatic national framing was shared with the country's revolutionary politics. Indeed, all relevant factions in the political process that unfolded during my fieldwork years portrayed themselves as 'nationalist', and they accepted the 'national' as the stage and measure for their political projects. From President Mubarak who was ousted shortly before my arrival, via the revolutionary youth, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists who dominated politics in the period I spent in the city, to General el-Sisi, who took charge shortly after I left, every political player with ambitions invariably claimed that their policies served the 'nation's interests' (*maslahit al-watan*) and that they were the true representatives of the authentic will of the Egyptian people (*iradit al-sha'b*).[5] As several scholars have noted, this valorisation of national unity was by no means new. Nationalism and appeals to the will of the people have been fundamental pillars of political mobilisation in Egypt for more than hundred years (see e.g. Abdelrahman, 2007; Geer, 2011). In a political arena where all political factions understood themselves as nationalist, the political struggle often came to stand over how the national subjects should be appropriately understood, perceived and defined. As a realm where unquestionably national subjects assembled, football thus became an important stage for this contest over the nation.

Several chapters in this dissertation will illustrate how subjectivities in the football assemblage emerged as contested epitomes of the nation and upheld ideals for the Egyptians to strive towards. In these sections, my ethnography builds on a wide historical and contemporary literature that analyses popular culture as a site for narration and contestation of Egyptian national identity and subjectivity (Abu-Lughod 2005; Armbrust 1996, 2002a; Fahmy, 2011; Jacob, 2011). I also draw on scholars who have shown how

[5] Importantly – and contrary to some understandings of Islamism as a mainly trans-national, pan-Muslim movement – I would contend that nationalist ethos and goals were fundamental also among politicians representing the Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt's Salafist parties in the years after 2011. The Muslim Brothers have from the 1920s promoted themselves as the only truly nationalist Egyptian movement (Geer, 2011:166ff).

subjectivities of famous and not so famous Egyptian artists have habitually been evaluated with reference to their national authenticity (Danielson, 1997; Winegar, 2006). Because of my focus on masculine subjectivities, I have been particularly inspired by literature that illustrates how national and masculine ideals are co-constitutive (Armbrust, 2002b; Jacob, 2011; see also Nagel, 1998). Recurrently, my narrative also elucidates how national football subjectivities emerged in a moralising discursive field, spanned by notions of 'respectability' and 'vulgarity' (Amar, 2011; Bayat, 2010; Ismail, 2006b; Schielke, 2008, 2012b). Within the football assemblage, this politics of respectability was often intermingled with moral panics around classed 'problematic' masculinities, which were understood as a threat to the respectable subjects of the nation and in need of securitisation and control (Amar, 2011, 2013b; Ismail, 2006a, 2011a; see also, Hall et. al. 1978). Finally, my research also touches on the ambivalent mix of pride and anxiety that tends to be invoked around Egyptian national subjects on display on the global stage (Armbrust, 2002a; Jacob, 2011; Lopez, 2009; Pratt, 2005).

Re-assembling football: contingency, events, ruination

The third and final main concern of this dissertation – besides emotionality and subjectivity *per se* – is to trace how football-related emotions and subjects emerged, were transformed and faded away. The conceptualisation of football as a series of processes in a multi-component assemblage is useful for elucidating such dynamics. In an ethnography that understands football as assembled, alterations in one mediating component can be shown effortlessly to propagate and alter the work of other components. From such a vantage point, both emotionality and subjectivity – as well as the politics that surround them – appear as inherently precarious, ephemeral and contingent.

Several chapters in the dissertation explore circulating moves, through which changes in one part of the football assemblage induced chain reactions that restructured feeling, subjectivity and politics. Depending on the particular processes of assembling explored, inspiration has been drawn from different bodies of literature. Whereas some sections deal with the transformative potential of large-scale infrastructures (Larkin, 2008; Hirschkind, 2006), other parts rather attend to the precariousness of emotions and social lives that infrastructures enable (Larkin, 2013; Mitchell, 2014). Several chapters look at the instability of emotions and subjects that are dependent on discursive-political 'floating signifiers' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001); yet others take interest in the uncertainty inherent in the fact that football is ultimately a very unpredictable game (Rubin, 2014). Parts of my ethnography also illustrate the wide-ranging transformative powers that deaths and martyrdom can unleash (see Armbrust, 2013a; Gribbon, 2014). Finally, contingency in the football assemblage is also located in the sport's social, spatiotemporal rhythms (Edensor, 2006; Lefebvre, 2004), as well as in the fact that results of revolutionary political action are always determined by the actions of others, which are impossible to fully foresee and control (Scott, 2014).

The dissertation pays particular attention to the transformative potential of discrete moments and events. These sections of my ethnography draw loosely on Veena Das's concept of 'critical events': those important historical occasions that in her Indian context fundamentally and unpredictably reconfigured social organisation, kinship systems, discursive genres and the intimate realms of people's feelings (1995). As I will suggest in my ethnography, Egyptian football lived through a series of major events in the period that this dissertation considers, all of which induced large-scale 'redistributions of sentiments' (Stoler, 2004) and 'crystallisations' of a range of novel subjectivities (Humphrey, 2008). In particular the tragedy in Port Said left a profoundly reassembled Egyptian football in its wake: powerful structurings of feelings faded out; the history, purpose and ideals of the sport were intensely contested; and many Egyptians adopted an ambivalent attitude towards football, mixing repulsion with longing and nostalgia. In the latter parts of the dissertation, I analyse this period of crisis in the catastrophe's aftermath as one of 'ruination' (Navaro-Yashin, 2012); a period of rapid re- and de-assembling, when football as it had been was laid in ruins, 'interventions' to re-build and reshape

numerous (Simpson, 2013), and in which new, more 'revolutionary' visions for the game seemed possible and even likely (cf. Scott, 2014).

Finally, it is essential to note that even in this period of unusually rapid transformation, not everything withered away. In parts of my ethnography, I explicitly deal with interlocutors whose emotional skills and habitus could not catch up with the processes of ruination, and who therefore struggled to 'learn to be affected' anew (Latour, 2004; see also Scheer, 2012). Several chapters also touch on the infrastructure, work and maintenance that are required to make concepts, subjectivities and emotional social interaction stick together and remain stable in times when change is imminent (cf. Latour, 2005:28ff). In these sections, the ethnography at times employs the analytical term 'debris' (Stoler, 2008) to denote those spheres of the sport that still mattered and affected my interlocutors in the midst of ruination. Through my focus on football as assembled of human and non-human mediators alike, the ethnography thus illuminates in detail, both how and why the game was so drastically transformed, and how parts of football took on an inertia that sustained previous structurings feeling and well-established processes of subjectivation.

Notes on methods

Research in the Egyptian football assemblage

As I have already discussed in the very beginning of this chapter, my ethnography is based on an eclectic range of data, gathered at a variety of sites in Cairo. To recap, I conducted participant observation at stadiums, in coffee shops, at pick-up matches, in government-run youth centres, and at demonstrations and other political manifestations.

I also consumed large quantities of football-related media, traced the historical development and present state of material and technological infrastructures, and conducted several dozen semi-structured interviews. Given this dissertation's conceptualisation of football as a social assemblage, such multi-dimensional field research was a necessity. My ethnography actively tries to include material objects, spaces, infrastructures, and match results as actors in their own right as a complement to agentive human beings. Compared to the politicised debates that raged about football's function, history, and future, these might not appear as the ethnographically 'thickest' aspects of football. Yet, they were nonetheless crucial, both for the way these political discourses were distributed and spread, and, more broadly, for the circulation of football-infused emotionality and subjectivity in Cairo. Arguably, such 'non-representational' (cf. Thrift, 2007) dimensions of the assembling of the social are particularly important to consider in studies of sports, which have a strong 'transparent' (Rollason, 2011a) component.

Similarly to material objects and infrastructures, I also habitually mobilise media voices, statements and narratives as protagonists in my ethnography (see 'Chapters and ethnography' below). Furthermore, my extensive usage of media material was also invaluable as a means of understanding the heavily mediatised daily lives of my interlocutors. As Walter Armbrust notes in reference to the study of another cornerstone of Egyptian popular culture – films – a researcher needs an 'Orientalist' knowledge of names, dates and narratives, which people who have grown up in Egypt take for granted, in order '[t]o approach anything remotely like a "native" ability to understand how Egyptians deploy their common stock of imagery and personalities' (1996:6). My 'Orientalist' knowledge about Egypt football was admittedly very limited as I began my fieldwork, and I would not claim to have fully mastered the 'enormous corpus' of Egyptian football texts that my interlocutors were versed in (ibid.). Yet, twenty months of daily football media consumption at least made me acquire an acceptable level of knowledge about players, clubs, famous matches, goals and incidents. Over time, this enabled me better to engage in conversations with my interlocutors about the sport, the media, and its history.

It is also worth stressing the immense role that social media, and in particular Facebook, played in my field site. For many of my best friends, Facebook was a realm of social interaction at least as important as the coffee shop of the workplace. All sorts of relevant football media – written newspaper articles, video-clips of highlights from matches, full-length television talk shows, and footage from the Ultras groups' manifestations – were circulated on Facebook and consumed online (cf. Sakr, 2013; Karagueuzian & Badine, 2013). Hours and hours on Facebook and the web more generally therefore became an intrinsic and invaluable part of my field research about the Egyptian football assemblage.

'Samples' and biases

The nebulous football assemblage in Cairo entailed literally millions of objects, spaces, texts and people that could have been relevant to look at, visit, read or talk to in my research. While my guiding research questions about emotionality and subjectivity always lingered in the back of my mind, I was never particularly systematic in my choices of what parts of the assemblage I 'covered'. The way I 'reassembled the social' (Latour, 2005) during my field research was rather the result of a series of snowballing effects. Starting out more or less randomly with people I met at home, in coffee shops, at stadiums, in my language school and at pick-up games, the networks of people I interviewed, had coffee, played or watched football with branched out as I went along. Interviewees became friends; people I sat next to at the stadiums became interviewees. Contacts gave me contacts who gave me new contacts. My networks of interlocutors defined the particular spaces, infrastructures and media that I took into account. Naturally, I took most interest in the spatial, technological and material milieus where my closest friends watched, played and felt for football. I also attempted to consume approximately the same football media as the people I socialised with. My trajectories through the assemblage hence made me akin to what Hazan and Hertzog have called an ethnographic 'nomad' (2011), and I clearly allowed a certain portion of serendipity to 'shape the ethnographic process' (Rivoal & Salazar, 2013:178). Partly, this was an intentional choice inspired by Latour's suggestion that we better let our interlocutors define their social worlds and the people, categories and groups that matter for them than try to 'cover' a 'sample' of people distributed over a set of pre-defined social variables (2005). Most of all, however, this haphazard research

design was a result of the way life worked, in Cairo as well as I suppose in most other places in the world.

My unsystematic sampling inevitably led to a series of biases. The first and most striking one is that all my interlocutors were men, a fact that importantly makes this thesis a study of male emotionalities and male subjectivities. There are several co-related reasons for this. First, football is widely considered a masculine pastime in Egypt: the sport is overwhelmingly played by men, watched by men, and the football media is close to completely a male domain. Some exceptions exist: at private upper-middle class clubs, I occasionally came across teams of young girls playing, and many people I met would tell me that during the late Mubarak era, when the sport's popularity had peaked, a growing number of women had attended matches at stadiums. Yet, at matches I went to, the proportion of women at the stadiums was extremely low, and in the coffee shops that I frequented, there simply were no women at all. None of the Egyptian women I knew considered themselves particularly interested in football, although they might watch the national team play on particularly important occasions. Indeed, one Egyptian woman once told me that she tried to avoid being out in public at the time of big football matches, as the large congregation of emotionally animated men worsened the perennial problem of sexual harassment. While I am sure that countless Egyptian women passionately followed both clubs and the national team intensely and regularly at home, I never managed to get access to them. The ethnography of football in Egypt from the perspective of women is, in other words, still to be written.

A second bias of the study is that an overwhelming majority of my interlocutors were young: except for a handful of older interviewees and one or two older friends, everyone I talked to was between 18 and 35 years old, and men who were about to be, or had recently married were notably over-represented. Most definitely, this was a consequence of me belonging to this age bracket, a fact that for obvious reasons lubricated friendship. It is also worth noting that unmarried Cairene men constitute a group with relatively large amounts of spare time (cf. Ghannam, 2013:64ff). Men in their late teens and twenties hence dominate the stadia, most often watch football in coffee shops, and regularly play

football in the street. Supposedly, they are also most likely to have time to discuss football, politics, life and whatnot with anthropologists.

Partly related to this generational bias is the fact that a majority of the people that I met – and an even greater portion of the people I would call close friends – were 'revolutionaries' (*thuwwar*). The way I use the term 'revolutionary' is in line with the recent ethnographic work of Samuli Schielke, who shows how this label in the post-2011 years came to encompass a range of ideologically-political affiliations that collapsed the previously dominant fault line between secularism and religiosity (2015:191-215). Revolutionaries in this sense do *not exclusively* refer either to activists and bloggers, or to the people who actively participated in protests on Tahrir Square, but rather to the significantly wider segment of the Egyptian people who self-identified as supporters of the 'revolution'. Some of them sternly supported Islamist parties, whereas others were more secularly orientated; some were rich and some were poor; and their ideas of the revolution's means and ends varied. In fact, only a minority of my revolutionary interlocutors would regularly take part in protests and demonstrations, but they were united by a strong aversion to the security state and a belief that change was needed to make Egypt a better place.

This political bias in my sample of close interlocutors – whose politics I generally sympathised with – inevitably refracted my fieldwork experience and the ethnography in this thesis. During fieldwork, I had the opportunity to study revolutionary individuals, revolutionary fan groups, and revolutionary football media outlets from the 'inside' through participant observation, extensive conversations and many interviews. In contrast, my data about the political opponents of these revolutionaries is, with the exception of a relatively limited number of formal interviews, largely based on media sources. In my writing, I have made an effort to be as transparent as possible about my different sets of data and the political allegiances and positionalities of my protagonists. However, this hardly compensates for the fact that the author of this dissertation was a supporter of the revolution, a dedicated Arsenal fan and, admittedly something of an al-Zamalek supporter in disguise.

Chapters and ethnography

Chapter outline

This dissertation contains six ethnographic chapters, a shorter interlude, and a conclusion. While all the chapters explore emotionalities and/or subjectivities in the Egyptian football assemblage, the scales, perspectives and periods under consideration differ. Chapter 1 – 'Assembling football, assembling Egypt' – traces the assembling of football in the latter half of the Mubarak era. Starting with Egypt's participation in the World Cup in 1990, I illustrate how new legislations, increased semi-public financing, a booming football media, and a great generation of talents all came together in an unprecedented era of hype and international success by the mid-2000s. In the last years before 2011, this boom worked out a series of nation-wide structurings of feelings and subjectivities around the sport, which I – employing a term originally coined by one of my interviewees – call the 'football bubble'. The chapter details a set of dominant masculine subjectivities of the bubble, subjects that connoted a particular national-emotional normality. I also suggest how and why the bubble came to be politically beneficial to the Mubarak regime.

The football bubble that is introduced in Chapter 1 plays a crucial role throughout the dissertation. In a very general sense, all the remaining chapters can be understood as an account of how the bubble was challenged, reassembled, transformed and partly broken down. Chapter 2 – 'The revenge of the respectable' – initiates this narrative, focusing on the weeks before and after two immensely anticipated and emotionally charged World Cup qualifier matches against Algeria in late 2009. Through a close analysis of the heated debate that raged about football in the Egyptian press at the time, the chapter depicts this pair of matches, both as the height of the bubble, and as a time when – following a bitter loss in the decisive match – the emotional politics of football began to be questioned. In particular, I argue that the criticism of football and its politics united secular intellectuals and Islamists, two 'respectable' groups who had been marginalised from the football bubble's vision of the nation. The chapter also discusses the inherent precariousness inherent in a social assemblage contingent on unpredictable match results.

Chapter 3, called 'New kids on the blocks,' tells the story of the Egyptian Ultras football fans, from the establishment of the first Ultras groups in 2007 until January 2012, i.e. just before the Port Said massacre. The chapter's main focus is the particular 'emotional style' of the Ultras fans, a set of emotional practices that, in my reading, was crucial to the new fan groups' great appeal among Egyptian youth. I also argue that the emotional style of the Ultras challenged the structure of feelings of the football bubble. This, I suggest, was a primary reason why the Ultras, from the very outset, found themselves criticised by the football media and persecuted by the Egyptian security forces. Towards the end, the chapter also discusses how the image and position of the Ultras fans were transformed and strengthened in the revolutionary year that followed January 2011. Their politics was re-evaluated, their emotional style became increasingly influential within the football assemblage, and they managed to come across as 'respectable' in a way that made them avoid the widely circulating accusations of 'thuggery' (*baltagiyya*).

Thereafter follows a shorter Interlude, called 'Suddenly the lights went out'. It consists of an ethnographic account of my personal experience of the Port Said tragedy on 1st February 2012, as well as a summary of the wide-reaching effects that the massacre came to have for Egyptian football and its ever-deepening crisis. I also expand on the theoretical concept of 'ruination' that I make use of extensively in the final three chapters of the dissertation. The Interlude is in this sense also a prelude to the second half of the dissertation, which explores emotionality and subjectivity in the ruined aftermath of the Port Said catastrophe.

Chapter 4 – 'No country for old men' – is the first of three 'aftermath chapters'. It is also the second and last chapter to look at the Egyptian Ultras movement. The chapter follows the politicised campaign for justice and reforms that al-Ahly's biggest Ultras group, Ultras Ahlawy, ran between September 2012 and January 2013. If Chapter 3 primarily accounts for the emotional style of the Ultras, I am here concerned with the assembling and reassembling of their subjectivity. Through a series of ethnographic vignettes paralleled with media analysis, I show how the subjectivity of Ultras Ahlawy in autumn 2012 assembled a series of positive traits – respectability, positive masculinity, order and purpose – that for a while turned them into a group of young, revolutionary

role models for football and the nation at large. In the end, however, the chapter also illustrates how and why this subjectivity lost a lot of its appeal in January 2013. The chapter ends with a discussion about the contingency of assembled subjectivities in periods of rapid political change.

Chapter 5, which is called 'Misfit,' continues the exploration of the football assemblage's state of ruination. Compared to Chapters 1 to 4, the ethnography here changes gear and scale. The spectacular national politics of football are left behind, as I instead take a closer look at one of my best friends in Cairo, and the way he gradually lost the ability to feel for football in the aftermath of the Port Said disaster. Through a theoretically driven ethnography that takes on changes in discourses, occasions, rhythms and expectations, the chapter illustrates how the re-assembling and de-assembling of football reworked emotions and attachments in the period of crisis. I suggest that this reassembling led to a state of 'misfit' between bodies which were trained to feel for football as it had been assembled, and a new everyday reality, dominated by the rhythms of politics. The chapter also illustrates how the emotional work of revolutionary politics had many similarities with the structuring of feelings for football. As such, the two realms constantly intersected, and the emotions and subjects of football were recurrently compared to those of politics.

Not all emotions in the football assemblage withered, however, in the period of crisis and ruination. In fact, and as I explore in my sixth and final ethnographic chapter – 'Debris' – some parts of the game stayed on more or less unscathed. The ethnography in this chapter depicts in detail two such realms that stayed on: televised football from Europe viewed in a coffee shop in the neighbourhood of Abdeen, and football as a played recreational game. In both of these cases, my ethnography traces how infrastructural and spatial arrangements enabled emotional socialities and masculinities. I also suggest that these types of minor football 'debris' – in contrast to Football, the big spectacle – stood tall in the midst of ruination, because of the way they were considered 'just football' and 'mere entertainment'. In contrast to the national Football that I explored in Chapters 1 to 5, this was a set of practices that were not conflated with the momentous political transformation, and hence possible to act out in parallel to politics.

Finally, in the concluding Chapter 7, I sum up my main findings and arguments. Returning to the three main themes that I outlined in this introduction – emotionality, subjectivity, and contingency – I discuss how my ethnographic chapters have drawn on and added to these literatures. I also suggest avenues for further research.

Notes on ethnographic writing

The stories that I tell in this dissertation are in other words more or less chronologically sequenced. It begins in the Mubarak era in Chapters 1 and 2, passes the January 2011 revolution in Chapter 3 and the Port Said massacre in the Interlude, and ends in the year of crisis that followed (Chapters 4-6). All of my narrative threads are intentionally cut short at the time I left Cairo in March 2013. In addition to this chronology, my account is also structured in terms of scale. Roughly speaking, the first two chapters about the football bubble trace emotional registers, subjectivation and debates on the national scale, the two middle chapters explore revolutionary politics from the perspective of the Ultras fan groups, and the final two ones hone in on emotions and subjectivities among a small set of close informants. This shift from the large to the small should not be taken to imply that I consider these three realms separate. Rather, the ethnography recurrently illustrates how diverse scales were calibrated and interrelated. In this, I attempt to create an ethnographic account about the re- and de-assembling of Egyptian football that 'reassembles' in writing the complex social reality in which football-related emotionalities and subjectivities came about.

As the chapter outline above indicates, approximately two and half of my six full-length chapters account for developments that took place before I arrived in Cairo. Compared to what one might dare to call a classical anthropological dissertation, the thesis does not include one chapter that provides an 'historical context' to an 'ethnographic present', which is subsequently explored. Instead, my entire research tracks historical transitions of assembling, re-assembling and de-assembling, part of which took place before my arrival in Cairo in August 2011, and part of which happened in the course of my fieldwork. The type of writing that we find in the earlier, historical chapters, I have opted to term a 'historical ethnography'. This notion draws inspiration from the work of John and Jean

Comaroff. What they call 'historical ethnography' – or at times 'historical anthropology' – is an anthropologically informed historical inquiry that shuns simplified grand narratives of world orders, all-encompassing imperialisms, and predictably linear transformations. Instead, Comaroff and Comaroff urge us to write history that pays attention to intricacies and surprises, as well as 'how realities become real, how essences become essential, how materialities materialize' (1992: 20; see also Larkin, 2008; Leach, 1970; Sahlins, 1993; Stoler, 1989). The way my study takes off from a problem in the present – how and why the Egyptians' immense emotional attachments to football could change so dramatically – also makes my approach similar to what Michel Foucault would call a 'history of the present' (1977). In a similar vein, my historical narrative about Egyptian football since the 1990s is not a quest for origins, but rather an attempt to uncover a 'genealogy' of 'descent' that elucidates the 'emergence' of the present situation (Foucault, 1997a; see also Garland, 2014).

My historical ethnography is stitched together by a diverse data set. In part, I make use of primary sources: old newspapers from the archive at the American University in Cairo; recordings of past matches found on YouTube and in the video shelf of my friend Bilal; old postings on the Ultras groups' Facebook pages; and feature films and pop songs from the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, in which the sport plays an important role. I also use a lot of secondary writing (Abdel Shafi, 2010; Bashir, 2011; al-Mistakawi, 1997; Tahir, 2010; Tawfiq, 2010; Thabet, 2013) semi-structured interviews with journalists, writers and club officials about the sport's history, and many long conversations about the past with acquaintances and friends. The way I combine textual traces of many different kinds and readily mix 'ideological' and 'objective' history makes my methodological approach similar to the one Comaroff and Comaroff suggest for their historical ethnography (1992:19f). It is well worth noting that significant parts of the material I use – all of my interviews as well as many secondary sources – are the product of the period of rethinking about the sport's history that coincided with my fieldwork. The football crisis in the present thus not only stirred my interest to explore history. In a circular movement, it also induced a great deal of the commentary and historiography about the sport, which my historical narrative is spun around.

Finally, a few words should be said of the way my ethnography uses the media as data. Particularly in Chapters 1 through 4, voices from the media are habitually used as protagonists in their own right, on the same analytical level and in constant dialogue with flesh-and-blood interviewees and interlocutors. The Ultras fan groups' official statements on their Facebook pages are one voice that recurrently occurs as a mediator in the football assemblage that the ethnography explores. Another group of protagonists that play important roles in several chapters are the pundits at the football shows on the satellite TV channel *Modern*, and especially the two famous talk-show hosts Ahmed Shoubair and Medhat Shalaby (for more details, see Chapter 1). This extensive usage of social media and television is an attempt to craft an ethnography that reflect the media-saturated social reality of Egyptian football, and which, to borrow from Lila Abu-Lughod, 'experiment[s] with ways of placing television more *seamlessly* within the sort of rich social and cultural context' (2005:32, emphasis added). At the same time, it is crucial to bear in mind how different media voices have radically different infrastructural underpinning that impact on their ability to reach out. Following my conceptualising of football as a flattened assemblage, where materiality, texts and people relate to and act on each other at the same level of analysis, my ethnography always attempts to situate media voices within the particular histories, technologies and financial constellations that enable their circulation. Through an ethnography that carefully attends to how the *analytically flat* football assemblage was *financially and technologically stratified*, the analysis of the work that media texts carried out on emotionalities and subjectivities in the Egyptian football assemblage hopefully becomes more nuanced.

[CHAPTER ONE]

Assembling football, assembling Egypt

A bubble of national normality, emotions and success

> If signification and representation (what things mean) are no longer the only primary realm of the political, then bodily processes (how things feel) must be irreducibly central to any notion of the political.
>
> Puar, 2012:151

In the early hours of 3rd February 2006, the Egyptian passenger ferry *al-Salam 98* sank in the Red Sea on its way from Duba in Saudi Arabia to the Egyptian port of Safaga. More than 1,000 people, a large majority of whom were Egyptian guest workers, drowned. As it happened, the tragedy took place on the same day as Egypt's quarter-final match against the Democratic Republic of Congo in the African Cup of Nations, a tournament hosted in 2006 by Egypt. Rather than directing his attention to crisis management and to assisting the victims' family members, President Mubarak stuck to his original plans and attended the national team's morning training session as well as the match at Cairo Stadium in the evening. In front of the sell-out home crowd, the Egyptian team won the match easily by four goals to one and progressed to the semi-finals. On television, President Mubarak was seen happily celebrating the win together with family members, friends and political allies in the VIP lounge. For the President of the Republic, the day

which had begun with one of Egypt's worst human tragedies seemed to have ended on a surprisingly positive note.

During my time in Cairo, more than five years after the event, this episode was often cited as illustration of how the Mubarak regime had used football's immense popularity and emotionality for political ends (see also Thabet, 2010:125f). The way Mubarak was understood to have hidden the tragedy and his own responsibility beneath a growing national football euphoria was taken to exemplify how the regime had utilised football as a 'drug' and 'concealment' (see Introduction). It was also often noted that the *al-Salam 98* tragedy was not an isolated incident. In fact, it constituted one in a series of political crises that Mubarak had cynically managed to dilute in the strong emotions elicited by the national sport. The trial of the ferry owners, for example, was scheduled conveniently on the same day as an Ahly-Zamalek derby in March 2009. And when the workers at the huge textile plant in Mahalla went on strike in 2008, prompting a violent intervention by the security forces, the attention of most Egyptian media outlets was rather turned to the 'betrayal' of star goal keeper Essam el-Hadary, who under turbulent circumstances was leaving al-Ahly for the Swiss club Sion (Thabet, 2010:128).

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The main objectives of this chapter are to ethnographically explore and critically unpack the emotional-political importance of football in the last years of the Mubarak presidency. The approach adopted is influenced by Ann Stoler's work on 'affective states', i.e. the ways in which colonial regimes in Southeast Asia exercised power though emotionality and affect. At one points Stoler writes:

> Critical analyses of colonial authority have often treated the affective as a smokescreen of rule, as a ruse masking the dispassionate calculations that preoccupy states, persuasive histrionics *rather than the substance of politics, the moralizing self-presentation of the state as itself a genre of political authority* (2004:6, emphasis added).

Stoler's insight informs this chapter's choice of focus, shifting it away from football as a 'drug' and 'emotional smokescreen' that conceals the regime's actual *realpolitik*. Instead, the attention is directed to how a particularly strong 'redistribution of sentiments' in and

around football materialised (ibid.). As we will see, patterns of desire and feeling associated with football were at the core of a broad programme of techno-politics in the years preceding the revolution. Like in Stoler's work, these emotions facilitated a specific 'management of the agents and subjects [that] depended on the reformatting of the visceral' (ibid.:7). By partly zooming out from the Egyptian politicians' cunning manipulation of the sentiments that football no doubt induced among the masses, this chapter thus advances an alternative, perhaps less conspiracy-driven reading of how so many Egyptians 'learned to be affected' (Latour, 2004) so strongly by football in the years before the revolution.

In the first part of the chapter, 'Assembling football', I detail a set of transformations in the Egyptian football assemblage set in motion by the Egyptian FA's decision to make football 'professional' in the early 1990s. I show how the new professionalism fundamentally augmented the sport's financial infrastructures, a change that made it difficult for smaller clubs to compete. To compensate for the growing inequalities between big and small clubs, a large number of 'company clubs' emerged from the 1990s onwards at the very top of the Egyptian Premier League. As I demonstrate, the Egyptian government indirectly bankrolled many of these clubs, which typically had no supporters. This *de facto* state funding strengthened the finances of Egyptian football, in particular in comparison with the rest of Africa. Thanks also to a generation of particularly talented players and a new, booming satellite TV industry, football in Egypt hence entered a period of unprecedented success, media coverage and public interest in the second half of the 2000s.

The second part of the chapter, 'Assembling Egypt', takes on a particular distribution of emotion, affect and subjectivity that football assembled in the last decade of the Mubarak presidency. The chapter introduces the analytic term, the 'football bubble' – originally coined by one of my interviewees – to which I will return and add nuance in several subsequent chapters. The ethnography about the bubble illustrates how football structured a widely shared set of emotions based around the sport's immense popularity and the many national victories. These registers of emotionality did, I suggest, define a certain nationally normal subject. I also identify a set of 'vulgar' (Armbrust, 1996) traits

related to a masculine subjectivity that, at least in retrospect, has come to epitomise the ethos of the football bubble. Finally, this part of the chapter returns to the question of how and why the football bubble worked politically. Rather than 'concealing' the regime's 'real plot', the bubble in my reading smoothly aligned the Mubarak family's ethos, aesthetics and emotional persona with a positive version of the nation. In this sense, the emotional bubble that was assembled around football granted the regime a sense of normality as well as a reason to collectively celebrate and be proud of the Egyptian nation. This argument is further elaborated and expanded in the chapter's short conclusion.

The chapter is based on what I, in the Introduction, discussed as 'historical ethnography'. While the first part of the chapter mainly relies on interviews with football journalists and supporters and two historical books (Tawfiq, 2010; Thabet, 2010), the second part also draws heavily on press archives as well as my readings of Egyptian movies, in which football figures as part of the plot. The subjectivities of the football bubble that the chapter identifies are hence primarily based on popular cultural representations and memories of the past refracted through the present time of my fieldwork.

Assembling football, 1990-2010

A new professional system

In June 1990, the Egyptian national team participated in the World Cup in Italy. After a promising 1-1 draw versus Holland in their first game, the team failed to score in their remaining two fixtures – a dull 0-0 stalemate with the Republic of Ireland and a 1-0 loss to England – and Egypt was consequently one of eight countries to return home after the

first round. It was the first time since 1934 that the national team had reached the tournament, and interest in the team was enormous throughout Egyptian society: many Egyptian friends of mine – some of whom were no older than five or six at the time – could recall exactly where and with whom they watched the games in 1990. Many still remembered in detail how they celebrated when Magdi Abdelghani scored Egypt's one and only goal from the penalty spot in the Holland game.

The World Cup in 1990 is general considered the beginning of the modern era in Egyptian football. In interviews I conducted with fans, sports journalists and club officials, I liked to start by asking my interviewees to give an account of the most important developments in the sport's history. Almost without exception, their answers began with the football craze in the summer of 1990. Whereas some interviewees would argue that the World Cup in Italy had shaped the sentiments for the sport for a whole generation born in the 1970s and 1980s (see also Tawfiq, 2010:37ff), others would point to 1990 as a watershed for another reason. After coming back from Italy, the popular national team coach Mahmoud al-Gohary had managed to convince the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) to introduce a 'professional system' (*nizam al-ihtiraf*) from the 1990-91 season onwards (see also Hawkey, 2010:285). In many of my interviews, this new professionalism was singled out as a crucial catalyst, which had broken football free from its amateur past and propelled it into a new epoch. In a long interview at the sport desk of the state-owned evening newspaper *al-Masa*', lasting well beyond midnight, the paper's senior sports editor Tarek Mourad recalled this historical transition with some nostalgia:

> After the wars in 1967 and 1973, there was a football crisis in Egypt. All the big stars of the Nasser era had retired. So in the 1970s everything was small and the players were young. In the 1980s, this generation grew up. Personally, I think they were the best we ever had: Hassan Shehata, Mustafa 'Abduh, Farouk Gaafar, and Mahmoud al-Khatib [...] You know that this was when we began to win titles in Africa? And at the same time, these players had morals and manners (*ikhla' wi sulukiyat*); the fans loved them; the atmosphere was very nice. [...] It changed a bit in the 1990s when the professional system arrived. But at the same time, it was of course the system for the future (*nizam al-mustaqbal*) (11th March 2013).

According to Mourad professionalism set off a 'fundamental change in the very concept of football and of the player'. Form this point onwards, the 'commitment (*intima'*) of the

player was no longer primarily to the club or to the colour of the shirt (*lun al-fanilla)*, but to the constitution of his monetary contract'. Mourad also explained in detail the wide-ranging impact that the new professional system had on the sport's financial infrastructure and circulation. One important change was that the players, who had previously been paid only result-based bonuses (*mukafa'at*), were now entitled to salaries specified by contracts. As a consequence, the clubs' expenses on wages for players and coaches rose dramatically. The professional system also initiated a development of rapidly increasing transfer fees. The national team player Rada Abdel 'Al, for example, was bought by al-Ahly from al-Zamalek for the then staggering sum of 650,000 EGP in 1993. At that time, no Egyptian player had ever been signed for more 100,000 EGP. However, only a decade later, during the transfer window in 2005, the total amount of money circulating between the fourteen clubs in the league had since long dwarfed the Abdel 'Al deal, reaching almost 80 million EGP (Tawfiq, 2010:163). Another recent example was provided by an Egyptian FA employee who I interviewed. He told me that in the last season to be played before the 2011 uprisings, the players in the Egyptian League had contracts worth approximately 120,000 USD per annum, with the biggest stars making over a million dollars a year.

The costs for running an Egyptian football club, in other words, increased dramatically since 1990, and the cost structure tilted significantly towards players' wages and transfer fees. While money had been important for Egypt's football clubs before, professionalism necessitated new and larger revenue streams. In contrast to many countries in Europe, where the value of broadcasting rights took off at approximately this point in time, private television was not introduced in Egypt until the beginning of the new millennium. The club that most successfully managed to raise new income was al-Ahly. Since the 1990s, the club has continuously managed to sign highly lucrative contract with sponsors. For some of my Zamalek supporter friends, these deals were a result of the fact that al-Ahly's president between 2002 and 2014 – Hassan Hamdy – was also chairman of Egypt's biggest advertisement agency, the state-owned al-Ahram. Others – above all *Ahlawiyya* – would rather understand al-Ahly's appeal to sponsors as a reflection of the club's superior market value, which in turn was a consequence of its famous stability, principled nationalist ethos and great popularity (see al-Mistakawi, 1997:77ff, 127f, 182-98).

In any case, there is no doubt that al-Zamalek's sponsorship deals have never been able to match those of al-Ahly. Consequently, Cairo's second largest club has increasingly found itself forced to look for other revenue streams to stay competitive. While different people gave me different explanations for how al-Zamalek actually brought in the money to pay for their expensive players,[6] most Zamalek fans accepted that their, much less stable and constantly crisis-ridden club ultimately had relied on the private wealth of its club presidents (cf. Tahri, 2010). As many of my *Zamalawiyya* friends would bitterly acknowledge, however, these revenues had been neither sufficiently large nor steady enough to grant the club the stability needed to fully compete with al-Ahly over a sustained period.

Al-Zamalek was not the only Egyptian football club to become dependent on donations from wealthy businessmen-cum-fans as the costs for players' wages increased in the 1990s. As Yasser Thabet shows, all of Egypt's big 'popular clubs' (*andaya sha'biyya*: member-owned clubs that have supporters) have at times been presided over by business tycoons, who channelled their private money into the clubs, through interest-free loans or by directly paying transfer fees and wages for the clubs' biggest stars (2010:251-62).[7] The problem with being dependent on the money of individuals is that such funding tends to be unstable. This is particularly true for membership-based clubs, where the president-patron is elected for a limited period. Consequently – as Yasser Thabet explained to me (interview, 19th November 2012) – it was really only al-Ahly and (to a lesser extent) al-Zamalek with their huge, all-Egyptian fan bases that managed to increase their revenue streams to match the rising costs of the professional system. In the 1990s, the gap

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[6] Former board member of the club, Abdel Khaliq Yusif, pointed to the yearly membership fees from more than 50,000 members (interview, 21st February 2013). Tarek Mourad at *al-Masa'* newspaper suggested that they make good money from a string of shops on the outside of the club in the upmarket Cairo district al-Muhandisin (interview, 11th March 2013).

[7] In contrast to most of its rivals, Al-Ahly has not been presided over by businessmen since President Nasser forced the monarchic millionaire Ahmed 'Abbud Pasha to resign in 1961 (see Di-Capua, 2004:148). As mentioned, the Club President between 2002 and 2014 Hassan Hamdy arguably brought in as much funds as any millionaire through his connections with the regime and his chairman position in the al-Ahram advertisement agency.

between these two giants and smaller popular clubs like al-Ismaily, al-Mansoura, al-Tersana and al-Masry hence grew dramatically, as al-Ahly (and al-Zamalek in periods when they had money) simply bought all the best talent available in the country. For these reasons, Tarek Mourad described the late 1990s and early 2000s as a dull period in the history of Egyptian football: the league could at best be considered a two-horse race; all but one or two clubs were in financial disarray; the level of the league was poor; and stadiums were often empty. Many provincial clubs, which traditionally had had quite substantial local fan bases, lost their supporters to the Cairo giants. Due to exacerbated financial inequality, the professionalisation of the game hence made an already strong concentration of support for al-Ahly and al-Zamalek even more pronounced.

A governmental priority

The development in Egyptian football towards a professional, increasingly unequal league and fewer spectators at the stadiums fits a general, continental pattern. As several scholars have noted, increased commercialisation and privatisation of football induced similar scenarios in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa from the 1980s onwards (see e.g. Alegi, 2010:106-12; Hawkey, 2010:289; Pannenborg, 2012:35-41). The transformation of the economies of many African countries through neoliberalism and structural adjustment after the 1973 oil crisis is generally acknowledged to have started this trend. The government-owned companies and institutions that had previously been the most important funders of many of Africa's best football clubs were in this period either privatised and or significantly weakened financially. Because of the financial difficulties caused by restructuring, many African football players migrated to Europe, and the African leagues fell in popularity (Alegi, 2010:20f; Hawkey, 2010:206f; Onwumechili 2014:146; Pannenborg, 2012:35ff). As Arnold Pannenborg has showed in detail in a recent PhD thesis about the political economy of football in Ghana and Cameroon, the governments' financial withdrawal from the game often opened up a space for men with wealth, either to take control over popular, 'community-based' clubs or to found new 'one-man show' football clubs (2012:59ff). A growing number of dominant clubs on the continent hence came to rely heavily on the patronage of Big Men. As in the Egyptian case, this dependence on private funds from individual owners or chairmen led to

instability, power struggles and an increasing divide between richer and poorer clubs (ibid.:49ff).

A few key features of the Egyptian game in the professional era distinguish it from the general African trajectory of privatisation and crisis. One is the al-Ahly club, which reinforced its position as the country's, arguable even the whole continent's, biggest and richest club through new sponsorship deals rather than through funds from a rich owner. Another aspect that makes Egyptian football unique relates to the ownership of the clubs in the top division. Comparing the teams in the Egyptian Premier League as of 2013 with those competing for the title ten or twenty years ago, a large number of member-owned 'popular clubs' (*andiyya sha'biyya*), like al-Mansoura, al-Tersana, Baladiyyat al-Mahalla and Aswan have disappeared, to be replaced by a range of 'company clubs' (*andiyyat sharikat*), with no or very few supporters. While clubs affiliated with governmental agencies have been part of Egyptian football since the early twentieth century, company clubs started to become even more prominent from the 1970s onwards. In this period, the social clubs that many Egyptian companies and state agencies run to provide recreational spaces for their employees' families rapidly increased their spending on football teams. Before long, some of these teams found themselves competing at the very top of Egypt's and Africa's club competitions.[8]

The number of non-popular clubs, run by companies or the government (both types are often talked about as 'company clubs') really started to increase in the late 1990s. For Ahmad Saied, Chief Editor at the Egyptian football news site *FilGoal.com*, this new development should be understood as a result of the new football economics after 1990:

> When professional football was introduced in 1990, prices spiked and football turned a bit commercial. Initially, the money came from basic sponsor deals, nothing huge, and millionaire fans, like the owners and chairmen of British clubs. [...] This was the case in every popular club, al-Ahly, al-Zamalek, al-

[8] The most successful company club in this era was al-Muqawilun al-'Arab (Arab Contractors), a state-owned construction company founded by the engineer, entrepreneur and politician Osman Ahmed Osman. Al-Muqawilun won the Egyptian league title in 1983 and three Egyptian Cup titles in the 1990s and 2000s. It was also won the African Cup Winners' Cup three times.

> Ismaily, al-Masry from Port Said and al-Ittihad from Alexandria. [...] At this time, the football league had 14 teams: Muqawilun al-'Arab belonging to a company, the rest, 13 popular clubs. [...] Then at the end of the 1990s, it started to shift towards companies, because when money starting to kick in really big, individual businessmen couldn't afford it anymore, so clubs like ENPPI [a governmental oil and gas company] went up, clubs belonging to the military went up [to the top division] (interview, 7th May 2012).

Other people put some of the blame for this development on legislation in 1975 that regulates Egypt's social sports clubs, a law that al-Ahly's board member Khaled Mortagy dismissively categorised as 'socialist' (interview, 24th March 2013). As Abdel Satar – a football journalist at the daily *Ruz al-Yusif* – explained to me, the law tied Egypt's clubs very closely to the Ministry of Sports.[9] This was partly because the Minister was entitled to appoint some of the clubs' board members, but the law also curtailed the possibilities for private investors (with the exception of club presidents) to invest in football teams 'like in any other business'. Moreover, the law prescribed that the football activities of Egypt's clubs should not have budgets separate from the rest of the clubs' social activities. According to Abdel Satar, this legal structure made Egypt's member-owned, popular clubs financially dependent on the goodwill of the state, both in terms of direct state support (which dwindled in the late 1990s), and in that state-appointed board members had to be convinced of any plans for external financing. Importantly, this was not the case for football teams run by companies or governmental institutions, which were much less regulated and for which football activities constituted only a relatively small fraction of their much larger budgets. As the costs of running an elite football team escalated in the late 1990s, company-run clubs therefore grew increasingly competitive, at the expense of the country's struggling popular clubs.

Perhaps the most paradoxical aspect of this development toward more and stronger company clubs with less governmental control is the fact that so many of them are actually owned by the government. Among the eighteen teams that competed during the 2013 Egyptian Premier league season, three belonged to the military (Haras al-Hudud,

[9] After a couple of cabinet reshuffles in recent years, this ministry is at the time of writing included in the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Tala'i' al-Gaysh and al-Intag al-Harbi), two to the Ministry of Interior (al-Dakkiliyya and Ittihad al-Shurta), two to companies run by the Ministry of Petroleum (Enppi and Petrojet), and another three clubs were part of other government-owned companies (Telifunat Beni Sueif, Misr al-Makassa and al-Muqawilun al-Arab). Among the remaining eight teams, two were run by private enterprises (al-Gouna and Wadi Degla), leaving only six members-owned, popular clubs of the type that dominated the game completely before 1990 (al-Ahly and al-Zamalek from Cairo, al-Ittihad al-Sakandari and Smouha from Alexandria, al-Ismaily from Ismailiyya and Ghazl al-Mahalla from Mahalla al-Kubra). This pattern of the government controlling approximately half of the clubs in the Egyptian Premier League has been rather stable since the middle of the 2000s. For many people I talked to, this peculiar ownership structure could only be interpreted as ill-concealed state sponsorship to boost the level of the league. Tarek Mourad at *al-Masa'* summarised the development like this:

> During the 1990s, the general level of Egyptian football dropped as a result of the small clubs losing their great stars. Here, the state entered the picture and opened the door for clubs belonging to ministries and companies (*wuzarat wi sharikat*). The Ministry of Petroleum got into football with ENPPI and Petrojet; the Ministry of Defence opened the door for Tala'i' al-Gaysh, Harras al-Hudud and al-Intag al-Harbi, and the Ministry of Interior entered with al-Shurta and al-Dakhiliyya. The introduction of these clubs led to a type of balance (*nu' min al-tawazun*), since these clubs had great financial power and the ability to keep their stars. [...] The state paid for this, to assure the level of the players, which had collapsed in the period when al-Ahly monopolised everything. [...] They did this to assure that there was a proper competition, because without competition, the level of players and the national team cannot be sustained.

As details of the budgets of state-owned companies and government offices are tricky to access, no one I talked to could tell me exactly how much money the state had spent on their many football teams in the last decade. Considering the wages the company clubs had to offer to compete for players and the almost complete lack of revenues available for clubs like these which have neither fans, nor the popularity needed to attract sponsors, the sports journalists I talked to estimated the cost to be tens of millions EGP every year for each club.

It is illuminating to relate this peculiar type of indirect state sponsorship to more overarching economic-political tendencies in the late Mubarak era. As scholars such as Timothy Mitchell (2002), Ulrich G. Wurzel (2009) and Samer Soliman (2011) have argued, it is incorrect to assume that the neo-liberal reforms that the Egyptian regime pushed through from the late 1980s onwards led only to privatisations and ever-shrinking responsibilities and control for and by the government. Rather, what mostly characterised Egypt's neoliberal experiment was a 'merger of the old (military-technocrat-bureaucratic) state class with the class of regime-connected big businessmen' (Wurzel, 2009:119). As Soliman has argued, the state was fiscally fragmented from the 1990s onwards: the security sector (in particular the Ministry of Interior) and certain aspects of the 'propaganda machinery', such as cultural productions and the huge state media apparatus, were prioritised, whereas many other state institutions were marginalised and increasingly had to raise their own revenues to cover their costs. Not surprisingly, some sectors within the state raised revenue more easily than others. The Egyptian military, for example, was in control of a vast industrial empire that generated enough surpluses to compensate for diminishing direct support from the state budget; and for sectors in control of rentier incomes, such as the various companies within the Ministry of Petroleum, bringing in their own revenues would never really be a problem. In contrast to activities like schools, health care or local social services, these were also the governmental sectors where salaries were highest, budgets least strained, and money most readily available for all kinds of projects (2011:164f; cf. Winegar, 2014).

It is, in other words, hardly a coincidence that all of the government-owned football clubs that flooded the Egyptian league during the decade before 2011 belonged either to the 'prioritised' Ministry of Interior, or to self-funded sectors such as the military and the Ministry of Petroleum. The ways in which these rich governmental units contributed to the financial scaffolding of the Egyptian league in the late Mubarak era was simply a reflection of the financial-political backbone of the Mubarak regime. This *increasing* centrality of the Egyptian state as a distributor of wealth and resources within the football assemblage was in many ways opposite to the radical *dismantling* of government involvement in the sport that unfolded in other parts of Africa. While this indirect state funding significantly boosted the level of the Egyptian league and the Egyptian national

team, the relative boost compared to Sub-Saharan Africa was hence even more pronounced. The particular character that neoliberalism and crony-capitalism took on in Egypt in the 1990s and 2000s hence gave Egyptian clubs a considerable advantage in the African football competitions.[10]

The rise of *al-fada'iyat*

The Egyptian government's investments in football during the first decade of the new millennium were not only channelled through the clubs it controlled. Egypt hosted both the African Cup of Nations in 2006 and the Under-20 World Cup in 2009, and large sums of state money were spent on the building and refurbishment of stadiums. The semi-independent budgets of the military and the Ministry of Petroleum were also often used for this purpose: whereas the army built two brand new stadiums in Cairo and Alexandria to be used during the 2009 tournament, Petro Sport Stadium outside Cairo – inaugurated in 2006 – was financed by money from the government's oil and gas industries. What the money did not manage to achieve, however, was the return of spectators to the stadiums. In contrast, the influx of governmental clubs totally devoid of fans, at the expense of popular clubs with local support, resulted in many matches being played at shining new, but totally empty stadiums. Journalists Ahmad Saied and Tarek Mourad were among those lamenting this development when I interviewed them; both explained that the only chance to find an Egyptian stadium vibrating and full of people in the early half of the 2000s were at international fixtures and on the few occasions each season when two of the handful of surviving popular clubs faced each other.

Just because the stadiums were often empty, it would be incorrect to conclude that sentiments for the game were absent. On the contrary, football arguably played a bigger part than ever in Egyptian men's lives during the decade before 2011, although in front of TV sets, radios and computers rather than on the stands. Egyptian football media in the

[10] The differences in the state's involvement in football were the biggest in comparison to sub-Saharan Africa. Studies from Morocco and Algeria indicate that the situation in the Maghreb was more similar to the Egyptian case (Amara, 2012; Boum, 2013).

late Mubarak era can be understood as a layering of infrastructures that originate in different historical eras (cf. Larkin, 2008:6). The first sports pages in the daily press had appeared in *al-Ahram* in the 1920s (Lopez, 2009:286f), and football matches started to be broadcast on Egyptian radio in the 1930s (al-Mistakawi, 1997:119). The coverage of sports on Egyptian radio increased significantly in the Nasser era (Di-Capua, 2004:154; Sadeq, 2012), and prime fixtures began to be shown on television in the mid 1960s (al-Mistakawi, 1997:184). According to a good Egyptian friend of mine called Zizu – a fifty-something former football coach from Upper Egypt – the African Cup of Nations and the World Cup have been shown live on TV at least since the 1970s. Until the 1980s, Zizu did however remember the sports media coverage as rather low-key: even al-Ahly's games were not always shown live on TV if they were played in 'remote governorates'. After the 1990 World Cup and the hype around football that followed, things slowly started to develop. The first weekly football magazine programme on TV– *Kamira fil-mal'ab* (Camera at the Stadium) – appeared, as did a number of printed sports magazines produced by the big state-owned newspapers (see Thabet, 2010:124). For Zizu, who had previously gone to great pains to obtain Arabic football journals printed in the Gulf, the release of *al-Ahram al-Riyadi* and *Midan al-Riyada* meant that the standards of Egyptian sports journalism reached a new level. With their long analyses and articles by well-informed and educated journalists like Hassan al-Mistakawi, Yasser Ayoub and Alaa Sadeq, the coverage of the domestic as well as the international game was intensified and deepened.

The most influential type of football media in the late 2000s as well during the years of my fieldwork was privately owned satellite TV. The first private Egyptian TV channel, *Dream*, came on air in 2001, and over the course of the 2000s, the number of Egyptian *fada'iyat* (private satellite channels) grew rapidly (Abu-Lughod, 2005:196; Sakr, 2013:325f). Quite early on, the channels began to take interest in the financial potential that the popularity of football presented. Lacking the financial muscle necessary to compete for international broadcasting rights with the more moneyed channels in the Gulf (see Chapter 6), Egypt's *fada'iyat* instead directed their attention to the domestic game. A commercial problem was, however, that Egyptian law granted the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) a monopoly of the 'signal' (*ishara*) of all matches in the

Egyptian league and cup. In other words, the state owned the exclusive rights to broadcast or re-sell all games in Egypt's most prestigious club competitions, and it was unwilling to pass on these rights exclusively, in particular to pay-to-view TV channels. Indeed, and somewhat ironically given that Egyptian citizens in the late Mubarak era found themselves forced to pay at least partially for so many other state services (see e.g. Sobhy Ramadan, 2012), the ERTU argued that it was 'the right' of all Egyptians to watch domestic football for free. In contrast to matches in the European leagues and international competitions like the World Cup, the Egyptian Premier League consequently never ended up on expensive pay-to-view TV channels (Ahmad Saied, interview, 7th May 2012).

The free-to-air broadcasting rights that the ERTU put on the market were initially relatively modestly priced. Sherif Hassan, a friend who works as a journalist at *FilGoal.com*, once told me that the price for broadcasting the Egyptian League was approximately 1.5 million EGP before the market really took off in 2007 and 2008. In these early years, three different satellite channels and terrestrial state TV showed the games, and the total income from TV distributed to the clubs was hence approximately five million pounds per year. In the three or four years before January 2011, these prices skyrocketed. In fall 2011, the Egyptian FA demanded 160 million EGP for the rights to broadcast the 2011-12 season (Ahmedhassan17, 2011). This steep price increase reflects surging demand: Egyptian football television was by the end of the 2000s a highly lucrative business. A large number of satellite channels devoted more and more programming time to football, and a series of football-only channels came on air. Because of the ban on pay-to-view TV broadcasts, all the revenues paying for the expensive rights had to be raised from advertising. In the late 2000s and early 2010s, this financial arrangement led to a situation where a wide range of channels – many of which only showed football programmes – competed fiercely for the viewers and did all they could to keep people watching for as long as possible. In combination with the fact that the 24-hour sports channels rarely had the rights to show international football, the result was a uniquely Egyptian type of football journalism, based heavily around seemingly endless studio analyses (*studio tahlil*) before and after the league games, and talk shows lasting up to six hours that mixed football with populist politics and other types of light entertainment.

While these shows also featured telephone call-ins from players, coaches and fans, their most characteristic feature was long monologues by a lone host who, seemingly without any script or time constraints, discussed the latest rumours on the transfer market, the constant financial and political crises in al-Zamalek, and al-Ahly's most recent victory. Obviously, the popularity of these hosts was crucial for the channels' success. Over time, the most prominent of the football channel hosts – as well as many of the pundits that seconded them in the studio before and after the matches – developed into some of Egypt's highest-earning television personalities, with contracts worth millions of pounds per year. Typically, the hosts and pundits were not trained journalists, but rather retired popular football players, like Ahmed Shobair and Mustapha Yunis or, in the case of Medhat Shalaby, a former police officer (see Tawfiq, 2010:169ff).

As Ahmad Saied at *FilGoal.com* put it in an interview (7th May 2012), the best way to understand the business model of the *fada'iyat* might be to consider them, not primarily as doing football journalism, but rather as a sensational type of 'tabloid TV', for whom 'football games only matter in so far that they provide the opportunity to make more tabloid content and to sell more advertisements'. Regardless of their most appropriate label, the football channels and the talk show hosts were immensely popular in the years up to 2011. Many people claimed to me that they had watched and discussed these shows with their friends more or less daily. Mahmoud – a sports instructor and Zamalek supporter with strong Islamist who was one of my closest friends in Cairo – once put it like this:

> Shalaby's and Shobair's shows were the things everyone talked about before the revolution. We all watched them. I did not really like their style, but honestly, I did care a lot about what they said. I got very angry when they insulted al-Zamalek, and I loved when they made fun of al-Ahly.

As problematic as the sports *fada'iyat* might have come across in retrospect, they clearly constituted an extremely important component of the Egyptian football assemblage in the decade before the 2011 revolution.

An unprecedentedly successful generation of players

In the second half of the 2000s, most of the components necessary for making the football assemblage a fundamental part of the Egyptian nation were hence in place: a new type of financial scaffolding based on rentier incomes and the wealth of the business complex belonging to the military, which made the league the financially strongest in Africa, the most modern stadiums on the continent – with the exception of South Africa preparing for the 2010 World Cup – and a booming private satellite-television industry that made the sport penetrate widely throughout everyday spaces, discussions and popular discourse. To really understand the immense impact that football came to have in the final years of the Mubarak regime, however, an impressive string of international results by Egyptian teams on the pitch must also be added to this picture. The financial and infrastructural strength of the league certainly constituted an important precondition for this success. But as everybody who knows the game will understand, money and infrastructures alone could never guarantee that al-Zamalek and al-Ahly would win five African Champions League titles between 2001 and 2008, and certainly not that the Egyptian national team – whose strongest African opponents fielded stars from the financially much stronger leagues in Europe – managed to win an unprecedented three consecutive African Cup of Nations tournaments in 2006, 2008 and 2010.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of this run of success for the hype that football assembled. My friend Ahmed – who used to be a devoted al-Ahly supporter but who after the revolution shifted his affection toward FC Barcelona – recalled that prior to 2006 the Egyptian national team had a tradition of always coming out short in their most important games. 'We had an *'uqda*' (knot, psychological complex),' he once told me.

> Especially when we played other Arab teams from North Africa, they always beat us. Because of that, when we won our group ahead of Morocco in [the African Cup of Nations] 2006, it was a very important release. We started to believe in ourselves. It all changed and we began to win every important game instead. The team felt unbeatable, especially in 2008.

The generation of players who turned the once underachieving Egyptian teams into such an unstoppable winning machine were born in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Undoubtedly, this particular age group included some extraordinary talents. Players like Muhammad Abu-Treika, Mohamed Barakat, Ahmed Hassan, Amr Zaky, Essam el-Hadary and Hosny Abd Rabo, who all reached their prime in the late 2000s made up a by all means a unique cohort. In an African perspective, it is intriguing to note that almost everyone in this golden generation of Egyptian players played the best years of their careers for Egyptian clubs. Furthermore, among those who tried their luck abroad, many failed to make a mark and soon returned home to al-Ahly or al-Zamalek. The relatively high wages that stars were paid in Egypt compared to other leagues in Africa was certainly one reason behind this general pattern. Many of my friends and interviewees would also argue that the players stayed on in Cairo because of the well-known 'fact' that Egyptians never really feel home anywhere else in the world, and that there is no point for an Egyptian to make great money if he cannot show off the things he buys for his friends at home. Be that as it may, it remains crucial that most of the big stars played together in al-Ahly during most of the 2000s. Very obviously, this contributed to the club's seven league wins and four African Champions League titles in the decade before 2011. Arguably, it was also a contributing factor for the collectively very well organised style of play that the Egyptian national team strength was built on.[11]

Finally, two other individuals cannot be left out of this success story: al-Ahly's manager in the periods of 2001-02, 2003-2009 and 2011-2012, the Portuguese Manuel Jose, and the national team coach (2005-2011) Hassan Shehata. Al-Ahly fans I knew could talk for hours about the changes brought to the club as Jose took over in the early 2000s. Jose turned the discipline of players, training regimes, and diet infinitely more international and professional; this professionalisation is generally understood to have built al-Ahly's superiority in Egypt as well as on the African continent. The legacy of former Zamalek star player Hassan Shehata as a coach, on the other hand, is more often described as a mentality of never being satisfied with anything less than victory. Shehata's reputation as a coach took off as he led the Under-20 national team to great success in the early 2000s.

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[11] Because of the high concentration of players at home, the national team could for example have unusually long preparation camps prior to their tournaments, as the Egyptian Football Association simply suspended the league for several weeks.

After winning the Egyptian Cup with the second division club al-Muqawilun al-Arab in 2003-04, he took over the national team in 2005. Shehata's dominant and self-assured coaching style turned out to be a perfect match with the talented generation of players just about to reach their prime. Together with Jose and the country's star players, he hence both contributed to and personified the unprecedented period of success, victories and glory that Egyptian football entered during the last half decade of the Mubarak presidency. In the second part of the chapter, we will see in more detail how this well-built assemblage of money, media, talent and success shaped particular patterns of emotionality and subjectivity. I will also discuss how more precisely football came to matter politically.

Assembling Egypt, 2005-2010

The football bubble

On 6th June 2012, I sat down in an upmarket coffee shop in the middle-class suburb, Nasser City, for a long interview with Amro Hassan. Hassan was at the time working as a correspondent for the LA Times, he had previously worked as a football journalist at the website *FilGoal.com*, and he would, over time, turn into a dear and close friend. It was just a couple of weeks before the second round of the presidential elections, and a lot of our chat came to revolve around the prospects of either the Muslim Brotherhood's Muhammad Mursi or Mubarak's former Prime Minister Ahmad Shafiq soon becoming Egypt's next president. While not particularly enthusiastic about Mursi, Amro was more worried about what would happen to his country, were Shafiq to take control. In particular, he feared that much that had in recent years started to change for the better in Egypt – culturally, socially and terms of 'mindset' – would be turned back to the old ways

of the Mubarak era that he vehemently despised. Asked to elaborate on what exactly he disliked about the way Egypt 'used to be', Amro started to talk about a 'suffocating bubble' within which everyone had exactly the same preferences:

> When I was in school, Amr Diab [Egyptian pop star] used to come out with a new album every summer. All 60 million Egyptians would buy and listen to this album the whole summer, and they would all like it, even before it was released, since Amr Diab, he was like a music god. I didn't, so I was considered crazy. There was no difference in opinion. You *are* crazy. It is not a matter of preferences or taste. If you do not like Amr Diab, it is something really wrong with you. You should get yourself checked. It was the same with movies, television series, ambitions... When I was that young and I tell someone that my ambitions were to study abroad and then try to live abroad, everybody was always like: "Go to Europe? You are not gonna make much money there." And I would be like: "I just want to go there and live there." And they would go: "No, no, no, the best place in the world if you have money would be Egypt. You should become an engineer, because that is the good proper job for all of us. Then you go to the Gulf and make some good money there, and then you come back and be the king of Egypt with the money that you have." Among my closest group of good friends, nine out of eleven became engineers. The other two became police officers. [...] In this bubble, football became a crucial part, especially with all the success in the last decade. Everyone was supposed to support the team that was winning, whether it was al-Ahly or al-Zamalek, and everyone should cheer for the national team like crazy. [...] If [Shafiq] comes to power he will do his best to recreate this fake bubble of football games, Amr Diab, Adel Imam [famous Egyptian actor], the television series in Ramadan, the summers in Marina [posh beach resort west of Alexandria], the businessman who killed his maid... All of this was part of the same politically non-dangerous bubble of the former regime. It is no coincidence that all the famous artists – *all of them* – as well as the football players were against the revolution. They all want Shafiq. The bubble was their heaven. They were supported, they were praised, they reached a sort of stardom [...] that they would never have dreamt of considering their talents. It was all connected to each other: football, music, television and business. It made people dream of the same things, aim for the same things. We all dreamt of being singers or football players.

Amro's experience of the 'bubble' under Mubarak was certainly filtered through his particular social background ('just slightly above middle class') and his generation (born in the early 1980s). Yet, large parts of his story no doubt resonate with what most of my friends in Cairo told me when they tried to explain how different Egyptian society had been before 2011. In contrast to the rapid political developments during the time I spent

in the city, my good friend Abdu (whom we will return to in Chapter 6) once characterised the period pre-2011 as 'without any movement at all'. At another occasion, he told me that during his youth, there was not really anything in life but 'boredom, football, *Rotana* [a Saudi channel mainly showing music videos] and sexual frustration'. For both Amro and Abdu, football was crucial for the dominant ways in which feeling, desires and subjectivities came to be structured in the late Mubarak era. Through large governmental investments, immensely popular stars, intense media coverage and great successes on the pitch, the football assemblage in this period played a crucial role in the structuring of everyday practices, socialities and discourses for many male Egyptians, in particularly the generation born in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. What is more, the 'football bubble' arguably came to play an important role in shaping broad resisters of nationally coded affect, emotions and subjectivities, an issue to which we will now turn.

The winner takes it all

As already touched upon, one of the most important dimensions of the 'bubble' assembled around football in the late Mubarak era was the way it circulated victories and emotions associated with success. In the same Nasser City interview, Amro Hassan interpreted this as a result of the particular character of Egyptian football fans:

> The whole community here was raised around the fact that you should win everything you can. So, let's just win in football, otherwise there is no point. You are not gonna waste your time watching a football team that is losing, even if they are playing well.

For Hassan, this centrality of winning and winning again was also the main reason why such an overwhelming majority of Egyptians support either the most successful club, al-Ahly, or their only real competitor, al-Zamalek. Another sign of this obsession with success was the fact that I did not really find any traces of hipness or claims to authenticity in supporting an underdog or a local, weaker team among the people I met in the field. With the exception of some particularly westernised sports journalists (like Amro himself, who is a die-hard Blackburn Rovers fan), most people I talked to had a very hard time understanding how I could support my beloved, but admittedly

unspectacular third-division club in Sweden, which has never won a single title.[12] Football without winning was simply considered of little value.

Given the centrality of success, it comes as no surprise that it is among practices and discourses related to celebrations that some of the most characteristic aspects of the football bubble may be found. The huge street parties that swept Cairo after each big victory in Africa – and in particular in the wake of the three consecutive African Cups of Nations in 2006, 2008 and 2010 – was a phenomenon often singled out by people trying to explain the immense popular appeal of football in the pre-revolutionary years. As I happened to live in Cairo at the time of the 2008 tournament, I have a fair sense of the ways in which this type of collective emotionality was expressed. Back then – long before Egyptian football became the object of my PhD research – I watched in a packed coffee shop in the working-class district Shubra as Abu-Treika score the decisive goal in the final against Cameroon. Later on, I followed hundreds of thousands of jubilant Egyptians as they sang and danced their way downtown towards Tahrir Square, where fireworks, honking cars and waving flags filled the cold winter night until the early hours. The scenes of happy Egyptians of both genders and from all walks of life were remarkable. In a period when large gatherings of people were regulated by the state, and collective scenes of public happiness very rare indeed, the night stood out as extraordinary and impossible to forget.

At least as fascinating as the celebrations themselves was the enthusiasm with which the media turned their attention to them in the days that followed. I remember watching satellite TV broadcasting hour after hour of footage and interviews with citizens, who congregated in packed streets and squares all over Cairo and the provinces. And in subsequent archival research, I found copious newspaper coverage from the time with images, interviews and comments from the extensive festivities (see e.g. *al-Akhbar al-Yum,* 16th February 2008). In this way, the media helped to sustain the carnivalesque

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[12] Jessica Winegar has similarly noted that Egyptian artists, whom she worked with, rarely strived toward embodying subjectivities that diverted from the mainstream and which could be considered 'alternative' (2006).

atmosphere and a positive emotionality of success: through a peculiar type of emotional circuit, the media relayed the emotional communication of the celebrating masses in the streets, mobilising additional emotions of the same kind, through a regime akin to a positive feedback loop.

As everyone who has attended an electrifying football game will know, similar but much more short-lived patterns of affective, reinforcing circuits are also common in stadiums. Momentum can suddenly build between players and the home crowd, coursing electrifying affect back and forward between the stands and the pitch as pressure mounts towards the away side's goal. Football as an emotional spectacle relies heavily on this type of emotional circuits, and in Egypt they came in a variety of shapes in the final years of the Mubarak era. First, there were the short-term loops at some stage during a match, at stadiums or among friends in front of TV sets. Second, there were the medium-term hypes during a particular tournament, like the one in 2008, built up collectively by optimistic media coverage, good results, and the ever-increasing expectations and hopes among the general public. And third, there was a long-term emotional momentum, built up over time from the mid-2000s onwards, by the booming coverage of football by satellite TV, the succession of victories for the national team and al-Ahly, and the ways in which the politicians stressed the nationalist aspects of the country's many victories (see 'The bubble and the Mubaraks' below). In short, the football bubble of the late Mubarak era comes across as an ever-increasing pile of jubilant parties and street celebrations. 'Football was happiness and party (*farah wi hafla*) in those days,' as Abdu once put it (for a further discussion on this topic, see Chapter 5).

Needless to say, the generally positive registers of affect and emotionality that were built up around Egypt's national sport were by no means the only dominant structuring of feeling in Egypt during this period. Abdu's contrasting description of the same period as static and dominated by 'boredom, football, *Rotana* and sexual frustration' points to a range of much less upbeat affective registers, existing in parallel to the football bubble. Similarly, many of my friends would refer to the 'frustration' (*ihbat*) that grew across the nation in the late 2000s as a key reason for why the 25th January Revolution eventually became inevitable. A growing body of social scientific writings explores the frustration

and hopelessness many Egyptians experienced on days when there was no football victory to celebrate. Salwa Ismail has, for instance, attended to how the increasingly violent and militarised disciplining of lower-class men by the Egyptian police cultivated sentiments of humiliation, chaos and despair (2011a, 2012). Another example is Hania Sobhy Ramadan's PhD dissertation about the production of authoritarian, neo-liberal citizenship in Egyptian secondary schools, a study full of stories about humiliated and frustrated students and teachers within a school system on the brink of collapse (2012). Focusing more on boredom than on frustration, Samuli Schielke's work among young men in a village in northern Egypt, who struggle to kill hours when nothing happens, is yet another account dissecting a similar range of emotionality during this epoch (2008; 2015:ch. 8). All in all, Amira Mittermaier's characterisation of the Mubarak era as strikingly 'undreamy' seems close to the mark (2011:1).

Against the backdrop of this literature, the way in which the football bubble in the same period forcefully structured emotions associated with happiness and victory comes across as somewhat odd and discordant. Perhaps this dissonance could be the reason why football has so consistently been left out of the academic canon accounting for the mood in Egypt during this particular period.[13] As Schielke has convincingly argued however, people in Egypt always had to juggle an array of different registers for how to be a good, emotional and ethical subject and citizen (2009). In a similar way, the sentiments of victory and success fostered in the bubble that Egyptian football assembled existed simultaneously, and in parallel to all that frustration, humiliation and despair. Perhaps, the game did even – at certain times and for certain individuals – function as a necessary complement that eased life's many burdens. In addition to being such a refuge – the opiate of the masses that journalists and my interlocutors often likened the game to (see Introduction) – football also linked up with politics and popular culture to work out particular scripts for being Egyptian. These effects of the football assemblage will be explored in the next section.

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[13] While Schielke briefly mentions football in one article, he rather approaches football watching as an example of the reigning boredom than as a realm of positive feelings of success (2008).

An emotional bubble for the nation's normal

The bubble around football often spilled over into other domains of Egyptian popular culture. The relationship between the Egyptian film industry and the football business was, for example, very close. As will be explored in some length shortly, football appeared in the plot of several movies. Several players also made more or less successful appearances as actors in big feature films, and movie stars made sure to be seen at the stadium and to express passions for and interest in the game (Tawfiq, 2010:91-102). Moreover, the hype around the national football team led to the revitalising of a battery of nationalist songs, previously mainly associated with celebrations of the Egyptian army's victories in war. Tunes like *Yi habibti yi masr* (Oh my darling, oh Egypt), *Bahibik yi masr* (I love you, oh Egypt), *Masriyyatna wataniyyatna* (Our Egyptianness is our patriotism) and *Masr hiyya ummi* (Egypt is my mother) were played on television and radio before and after important matches. In addition, new nationalist songs were recorded and performed by some of the Arab world's most famous pop stars in the years when the football bubble reached its peak: these include *Law sa'altak inta masri, ti'uli eih?* (If I asked if you are Egyptian, what would you tell me?) by the Lebanese superstar Nancy Ajram, *Masharibtish min nilha* (Didn't you drink from the Nile?), recorded by her Egyptian rival Sherine, and *Wallahi 'amiluha al-rigala* (I swear, the men made it), sung by Hamada Helal (ibid.:103-7).[14]

In a book chapter entitled *Kull 'asr yushbih abtaluh* (Every epoch resembles its heroes), Muhammad Tawfiq reflects on the tight connections between football, popular culture and Egyptian nationalism in the late Mubarak era. He argues that, whereas earlier eras in Egypt's history were embodied by the likes of the great academic Taha Hussein, the singer Umm Kulthum or president Gamal Abdel Nasser, the most heralded heroes in Mubarak's Egypt were the country's great football players (2010:13-21). Through popular cultural vehicles such as celebrity media, music and film, players and coaches were turned into role models for the nation, making the successful football assemblage a main stage for anyone aspiring to national fame and glory. Moreover, celebrations of the national

[14] The national team coach Hassan Shehata once claimed that Ajram's song was played in the dressing room before each important game, to raise the players' nationalist spirits (Tawfiq, 2010:105).

team's victories were repeatedly characterised as the most authentic expressions of patriotism (ibid.).

In this period, football grew into an arena where national belonging and subjectivity were at once visibly reflected, spectacularly expressed, embodied and mundanely practiced. A close reading of the depiction of football in a few films is illustrative of the way the nationalism propagated by the football assemblage was represented, understood and changed over time. The popular *Gharib fi bayti* (A stranger in my house, directed by Samir Sayf) from 1982 is a good point to start. In this movie, star actor Nour el-Sherif plays the uneducated but talented Shehata Abu-Kaf, who moves to Cairo from Upper Egypt to make a career playing for al-Zamalek. As a result of a series of coincidences, he ends up renting the same apartment as a single, attractive and well-educated mother, played by the even bigger star Soad Hosny. The remaining parts of the movie consist of a series of comedic episodes in which the immoral life and behaviour of the uneducated, bachelor football star are moulded through his interaction with the morally sound single mother. Inevitably, the two fall in love. At the end of the film, Abu-Kaf realises the virtues of a proper family life. The couple gets married, and Abu-Kaf leaves his scandalous life as a Zamalek star. Instead, he opts for a continuation of his career in one of the League's new company clubs, where he is assured a stable salary and the ability to provide for his family.

The development of Abu-Kaf from a rural and uneducated bachelor to urban, enlightened and moral husband fits a historically recognisably modernist genre. As scholars like Walter Armbrust (1996) and Lila Abu-Lughod (2005) have detailed, Egyptian television and film have, since their early beginnings, promoted a particular ideal national subjectivity that resembles the one that Abu-Kaf eventually comes to embody. In Armbrust's readings of films, TV and music from the 1930s to the early 1990s, this idealised, modern Egyptian subject is characterised as middle-class in the making: the perfect blend of an often rural *ibn al-balad* authenticity (lit. 'son of the country', for details see Messiri, 1978), refined through urban, modern education, without ever being too westernised or losing touch with his or her humble origins (Armbrust, 1996:25ff, 75-86, 95-105). Similarly, Abu-Lughod discerns what she calls a genre of 'developmental realism'

in many of the Ramadan TV series she analyses. Also here, the down-to-earth urban middle classes are constantly valorised, and the need for pedagogical interventions to reform and develop the rural backwardness of Upper Egypt forms a recurrent theme (2005:55-108). In *Gharib fi bayti* this genre is clearly drawn upon as Abu-Kaf gradually manages to resist the city's immoralities and blend his humble background with his woman's education and refinement.

In *Gharib fi bayti,* stardom and al-Zamalek symbolise the immoral seductions of the big city that Abu-Kaf has to overcome eventually to become a morally sound and caring family man. This idea of football as ultimately problematic for the nation's men and morals is less pronounced in films from the 1990s onwards. In movies from this period, the sport rather acts as a largely positive metaphor for national unity. The 1994 blockbuster, *al-Irhabi* (The Terrorist: Nadir Gilal) is a good case in point.[15] The plot once again revolves around an uneducated man from Upper Egypt coming to Cairo. Ali, played by the mega-star Adel Imam, is not, however, arriving to play football. Rather, he is an Islamist extremist on a mission to execute a vicious terror attack. After successfully assisting in the killing of a senior police officer, Ali is run over by a car as he attempts to escape. Coincidently, he is taken care of in the home of a Cairene upper middle-class family with three university-age children, who believe his story that he is a university professor. As a non-educated, fundamentalist from the countryside, Ali struggles to conceal his real identity. He is acutely incapable of reproducing the middle-class behaviour that men of his profession should be fluent in. Towards the end of the movie, the entire family, Ali and a couple of intellectual, Coptic neighbours come together to watch the national football team play a crucial World Cup qualifier. Initially, both Ali and the Coptic intellectual are very resistant to the spectacle: Ali presumably because of his fundamentalist beliefs, and the intellectual explicitly because of his scepticism towards the irrational 'fanaticism' (*ta'assub*) that he associates with football. As the match progresses, and in particular after Egypt turns it around with two late goals, this quickly changes. After the decisive goal, everyone celebrates wildly, and Ali even hugs the Coptic man he is

[15] For an analysis of the politicised depiction of Islamist terrorists in *al-Irhabi* and the film's wider function in the Egyptian state's battle against the Islamists in the 1990s, see Armbrust (2002a).

meant to hate. The message is clear: the feelings of nationalist belonging brought forward by football are too strong to resist; they override differences, such as class, religion, gender and generation. In front of the TV and the national team, everybody is simply Egyptian, and it is football that brings them all to this realisation.[16]

Al-Irhabi is one of several films to represent football as a neutral, national sphere of emotionality in the decades preceding 2011. Other later examples, which from different angles carved out football as a core dimension of a normalised Egyptian subject are *Ana mish ma'hom* (I am not with them; al-Badari, 2007) and *Wahid Sifr* (One Zero: Abu Zakri, 2009; for details see below). The message that all these films communicate is that it is natural for all Egyptians – except for some marginal figures such as the overly religious and overly intellectual – to feel strongly for the nation through its football. Indeed, *al-Irhabi* suggests that even those deviants that would not readily admit to liking the game would be carried away by the emotional force of particularly important matches and victories. Together with the many other links that existed at the time between football and the country's popular culture elite, is seems reasonable to argue that the football bubble constituted something of a neutral centre point within the national formation. To feel strongly about football was truly normal for any Egyptian man. Yet, this did not necessarily imply that all of the subjects that football accentuated were connoted positively by everyone. The next section looks at this tension, internal to the Egyptian football bubble.

The subjects of the bubble: 'vulgarity' and 'capitalist realism'

To better understand the composition of the subjectivities that the football bubble brought to the fore, the works of Walter Armbrust and Lila Abu-Lughod are helpful to consider. As mentioned above, these scholars have both illuminated how Egyptian popular cultural productions reproduced an ideal modern, national subjectivity as an appropriate blend of rural or working-class authenticity and urbanity, refinement and

[16] This scene has been analysed in a similar way by Armbrust (2002a).

education. Interestingly, both Armbrust and Abu-Lughod do however also point to a shift *away* from this idealised middle-class balance since the 1980s. In Armbrust, this transition is described as the rise of 'vulgarity', i.e. the increasing popularity of stories that lacked smooth, successful endings, and in which (morally) corrupted *nouveau riche* personas became filthy rich and powerful, whereas ordinary, hard-working men stayed poor and humiliated regardless of their education and behaviours (1996:165-210). Similarly, Abu-Lughod, drawing on Schudson (1984), identifies a shift in genre towards 'capitalist realism' beginning in the 1990s. In short, this was constituted by a dramaturgy that, if it did not valorise, at least accepted consumerism, glossy lifestyles and stardom as ideals to aim for and herald (2005:193-245). Both writers depict this development in films and TV series as popular throughout large sections of Egyptian society. While people did not always whole-heartedly endorse the grim image of their country presented in these narratives, it was generally acknowledged that they more accurately depicted the predicaments of the everyday than the modernist plots that had previously dominated. In an era of neoliberal reforms, privatisation and widespread corruption, the new vulgar genre realistically illustrated what it took to succeed in Mubarak's Egypt.

When analysing how the Egyptian football bubble worked out national subjectivities in the later years of the Mubarak era, this increased stress on capitalist vulgarity, in popular culture and society at large is useful to bear in mind. The characters in the 2009 movie *Wahid Sifr* (One zero) – an ultimately tragic narration of a series of life destinies intersecting during the night when Egypt beat Cameroon and won the 2008 African Cup of Nations – gives a good idea of the types of subjectivities that the football bubble was understood to connote: a morally corrupt TV presenter with alcohol problems runs the show before and after the game; a good-looking female singer with limited talent desperately tries to get her five minutes of fame by promoting her latest single live on TV before the match starts; doctors at a hospital forsake their life-saving duties, since all they care about is the match in Ghana; and all around the city, people are drawn into a hype that is explicitly shown to benefit only the already powerful and wealthy.

Compared to *al-Irhabi*, which is 15 years older, or *Ana mish ma'hum*, two years earlier, *Wahid Sifr* is a much more critical depiction of the social world that football represented

and accentuated in the late Mubarak years. As such, it points to a tension inside the football bubble: on the one hand, we find representations of the sport as emotionally uniting and nationally normal; on the other, the sport was a symbol of widespread despair and corruption as well as of a troublesome idealisation of victory at any cost. Because of its critical angle, *Wahid Sifr's* treatment of the 'taken-for-granted universe' (Abu-Lughod, 2005:228f) built up around Egypt's national sport is better synced with the association that football elicited during its popularity crisis in 2011-2013. When I asked people to reflect on what football had represented in the years prior to the revolution, some of the most common words used were 'corruption' (*fisad*), 'connections' (*wasta*), 'remnants of the old regime' (*filul*) and *sububa*, which approximately translates as an immoral mentality of grabbing for quick gains. Almost everyone involved – from players and coaches to people in the media and the millionaires and army officers who bankrolled the clubs – were understood to have embodied some, if not all, of these non-flattering traits.[17] Among those succeeding within the football business, there had been 'many men with money, but few men with morals and culture', as my friend Omar – a lovely, kind-hearted father of two, and a passionate youth coach – once put it. He explained:

> The players were our heroes, of course, because of everything they had won. We dreamt about being like them, even though we of course saw that their behaviours (*sulukiyyat*) were not very good. Now it is much clearer that this was not good. Especially the media, and all the money and politics. I do not think football will ever be as big and as important again in Egypt.

When Omar complained about the 'men with money' but without 'morals and culture' in the football business, he was hinting at a certain set of chauvinist, masculine subjectivities that for him and many others epitomised the booming football bubble. The manifestation of this masculinity most commonly referred to was found in the football talk shows and studio programmes that, as we saw above, mushroomed on Egyptian satellite television in the late 2000s. As many of these programmes were still around in the post-2011 period, they also provided me with a window to study the type of men who had dominated football in the recent past.

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[17] As I will discuss in Chapter 4, the one big exception was Egypt's best and most popular player Muhammad Abu-Treika.

The men who populated the studios in Egyptian football television were generally referred to as *kabatin* (lit. 'captains'; sing. *kabtin*). These men in their forties, fifties and sixties were most often former players, who typically sported pitch-black, obviously dyed hair, shiny suits and heavy golden watches. Egypt's two most famous *kabatin* – during my fieldwork as well as in the last years before the revolution – were the talk show hosts Ahmed Shoubair and Medhat Shalaby. Shoubair was a former goalkeeper for al-Ahly and the Egyptian national team, who had started to work as a commentator on Egyptian state television after retiring as a player in 1996. In the early 2000s he switched to private satellite TV. Soon, he turned into *the* biggest star of the booming football TV industry, famous for his strong loyalty to Ahly and passionate rants against his opponents in football as well as in politics. In the late Mubarak era, his immensely popular talk show changed network several times, and in the late 2000s his contracts were worth several million Egyptian pounds a year. Shoubair was also a member of parliament for Mubarak's National Democratic Party between 2005 and 2010, and he had close connections within the Egyptian FA (see Tawfiq, 2010:170f).

In contrast to Shoubair's angry temperament, Medhat Shalaby rather built his charisma around a witty and very smooth style of talking. Unlike most other *kabatin*, Shalaby was not an old player but a retired police officer, who had started his career in the football media as a humorous commentator. His constant smiles and mild appearance were, however, accompanied by a political line that (at least in the revolutionary period) relentlessly promoted national 'stability', law and order. As many of my friends liked to point out, Shalaby was, in this sense, first and foremost a police officer, who for some mysterious reasons had been allowed to vent his reactionary opinions in endless, daily monologues on prime-time football TV.

The *kabatin* in general, and Shoubair and Shalaby in particular, constituted a constant point of reference as my friends tried to explain to me what football under Mubarak had communicated and represented. Amro Hassan – the LA Times journalist who originally referred to football as part of a 'bubble' – for instance told me that he 'utterly despised' this 'rotten' aspect of Egyptian football. In particular, he had always been 'disgusted' by the football media's blatant display of the values they stood for.

> It is not only that they were corrupt and rich and completely part of the politics of the Mubarak regime. They did not even try to hide their corruption, power and wealth. I mean, that was rather something they were proud of, the thing that made them so popular! Thankfully, this does not work any longer after the revolution (interview, 6th June 2012).

As Amro also helped me understand, this particular masculinity at the intersection between wealth, victory and authoritarian power was also taken on by many of Egypt's best players at the time. Most football stars seemed to have enjoyed being part of the football bubble, and they gladly combined training and matches with a glamorous life among pop-stars, actors and celebrity parties in Cairo or in the resorts on the North Coast. The dominant masculinities that emerged within the Egyptian football bubble, and which I have analysed in my reading of *Wahid Sifr* and the football talk shows, in this way both reflected and forwarded the general shift toward vulgar aesthetics and ideals within the Egyptian nation that Armbrust talks about (1996). Through its emotions and aesthetics, the hugely popular football bubble in other words connoted a morally ambivalent mix of normality, nationhood, stardom and success. In the next section, I will explore how this complex assembling of the sport took on political meaning and effects.

The bubble and the Mubaraks

President Mubarak's blatant efforts to form close ties and connections to the success of the country's football teams were a favourite topic among my friends in Cairo. The 'receptions' at the presidential palace after each African triumph, during which the president and the players celebrated their latest victory as 'sons and their father' and the players expressed their gratitude to the support of the nation's leader have been well documented (see Tawfiq, 2010:75ff; Thabet 2010:115-51). Another illustrative example from Tawfiq's book is that journalists often wrote things like '*the president* reached the World Cup [in 1990] and took five African Cups of Nations' (2010:76, emphasis added) in articles summarising Mubarak's achievements during his presidency. In an interview I conducted with Tawfiq on 26th April 2012, he elaborated further on this point. Among other things, he described how every Egyptian TV channel had shown images of the players celebrating in the dressing room together with the president's two sons, Gamal

and Alaa, after Egypt had won the third straight African title in Angola in 2010. Understandably upbeat, they chanted a catchy, rhyming phrase into the cameras: *zay ma 'al al-rayis, muntakhab masr kwayis* (Like the president said, the Egyptian national team is great).

Coverage in the weekly state paper *al-Akhbar al-Yum* from the final week of the 2008 African Cup of Nations provides a lucid example of the imagery and tropes that were applied. The entire first page of the issue from 9th February – the day before the final against Cameroon and shortly after Egypt's 4-1 thrashing of the favourites Ivory Coast – was devoted to nationalist celebrations with Mubarak at the very centre. Under a bold, over-sized headline stating *Tul 'umr wiladik yi biladna...rigala* (Oh our country, your sons will always be men), one finds a huge photo of the president and his wife Suzanne, happily waving and giving thumbs-up. The picture is surrounded by eighteen smaller photos: the biggest star players and coach Shehata in action during the match; the EFA President Samir Zahir and President of the National Council of Sports Hassan Saqr; and, at the bottom, jubilant fans with flags and match shirts in the streets of Cairo. The page illustratively summarises a patriarchal vision of the nation: the leader and father-figure, his heroic player-sons, and the masses, all united in celebration after a historic victory in foreign lands.

In this issue of *al-Akhbar al-Yum* – as well as in the special supplement released the following week (16th February) to celebrate the triumph in the final – President Mubarak's importance for the team's performance was repeatedly reiterated. His many telephone calls to the team in Ghana throughout the tournament were said to have raised the spirits of coaches and players (9th February); pictures of the joint celebrations at the palace after the team's return to Cairo filled several pages (16th February); the golden generation of players was described as 'brought up in the spirit of the October war', i.e. the war against Israel in 1973 that Mubarak participated in as Commander of the Air Force (ibid.). The 16th February special supplement also included seven full-page advertisements, in which a range of semi-private and state-owned banks, real estate companies and travel firms offered their congratulations to the Egyptian people and its national team for the historic victory. In several of these ads, the first line of congratulation was not directed to the

players or the coaches, but rather explicitly to 'our leader, President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak'.

As this sample of TV clips, articles and advertisements illustrates, President Mubarak was consistently represented as intrinsic to the national team's victories. While this type of portrayal was particularly pronounced in state-owned newspapers like *al-Akhbar al-Yum*, the close connections between the president, his family and the football were also persistently stressed in talk shows on private satellite TV. At the same time, it is important to note that in oppositional newspapers like *al-Dustur* this type of connections was avoided. What is striking in this paper's coverage of the same final week of the 2008 African Cup of Nations (7th to 12th February) is that articles focus strictly on the players, matches and tactics, a coverage which makes the tournament come across as a much more ordinary and non-political sporting event. According to Tarek Mourad – the sports editor on the state-owned *al-Masa'* – this discrepancy in framing was a reflection of a political rift. As Mourad explained, governmental newspapers like *al-Akhbar al-Yum* (and presumably also his own *al-Masa'*) had at the time adopted an editorial line that 'perhaps exaggerated (*baligh*) what Mubarak did and decided'. Yet for Mourad, what the 'oppositional media' had written was equally problematic, since they would 'never admit that the government did anything good. There was no balance'.

Given this multitude of press voices, it is not easy to assess if, or how, this overt state propaganda worked and was efficient. To what extent did football fans in Egypt really perceive of Mubarak's role in the football bubble as a leading one, and how did this impact on the position and status of his regime? Political scientist Lisa Wedeen's study of the cult of large-scale spectacles, symbols and images built around the Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad in the 1980s and 1990s makes an interesting comparison. On the one hand, Wedeen shows that most Syrians did not really believe in the great stories that were circulated about the nation's leader, and she convincingly argues that the spectacle granted al-Assad neither wide-spread charisma nor additional legitimacy. On the other hand, she also suggests that millions of Syrians acted 'as if' they believed in and adored the flattering stories and extravagant displays. If anything, it was this repetitive acting and

(often forced) mass participation that rendered the symbolism of the Assad-cult politically powerful (1999).

In some respects, the politics surrounding the framing of Mubarak's key role in the 2008 African Cup of Nations victory by *al-Akhbar al-Yum* seems akin to those of the Assad-cult that Wedeen depicts. For many Egyptians, the headlines about Mubarak's decisive phone calls to the players and the grand, post-tournament celebration at his palace were most certainly perceived as empty and transparent attempts to bolster the regime's popularity. The extravagant mediatised spectacles also, arguably, associated Mubarak with the football bubble's aesthetics of 'vulgarity'. As we saw in the previous section, this set of ideals elicited ambivalent associations of popularity and immorality, similar to Wedeen's description of the spectacle around al-Assad as 'shabby' (Wedeen, 1999: 3). At the same time, and in contrast to Wedeen's findings, there are no indications that Egyptians were forced to act 'as if' Mubarak had won the African Cup of Nations. To celebrate the country's football victories *en masse* was rather something that people would do anyway, no matter if the President of the Republic joined in the festivities. The approach that Egypt's football fans adopted vis-à-vis the spectacle at the Presidential Palace and in the media is hence perhaps better understood as a mechanism of what Slavoj Zizek calls 'cynicism'. Many times, it indeed seemed as if the regime 'insist[ed] upon the mask' of leadership and importance even though this 'ruling ideology [was] not meant to be taken seriously' (Zizek, 1995:28-9, cited in Navaro-Yashin, 2002:160).

The all-too transparent – and ultimately unbelievable – spectacle around Mubarak-the-leader was, however, not the only dimension of the football bubble that worked to the regime's benefit in the years before 2011. For a more complete picture, is also necessary to bring into the analysis the circulation of a somewhat different set of media stories. These narratives deal with the Mubarak family's passions for football, as fans as well as players. As Tawfiq notes, Alaa Mubarak dedicated support for al-Ismaily Club was regularly mentioned in the press in the late 2000s (2010:80f). Similarly, the footage of both of the president's sons playing 5-a-side football with their friends in a five-a-side tournament in 6th of October City outside Cairo that circulated on television and social media reconfirmed an image of the ruling family as passionate about football (see Thabet,

2010:148) A final example of this type of press is found in the *al-Akhbar al-Yum* special supplement published on 16th February 2008. On the first page, the paper's editor-in-chief, Mumtaz al-Qatt, reports on an exclusive telephone interview that he conducted with the President of the Republic shortly after the final.

> I asked President Hosni Mubarak about his feelings at the moment when Egypt scored the decisive goal in the African Cup of Nations and he told me: "My emotions were like the emotions of every Egyptian citizen. I almost jumped off the chair and I could almost hear my heart beat. I raised my hand to praise God at a moment when millions were shouting the name of Egypt."

In contrast to the figure of the elevated leader who hosts extravagant spectacles after the tournaments, the President and his family were, in these football narratives, rather portrayed as perfectly ordinary, football-loving Egyptian citizens. Crucially, stories like these also side-stepped the popular and adored yet at the same time problematically vulgar ethos that the football media, and to an extent also the players, embodied. Instead, this type of press effectively appended the ruling family to the positively connoted and far less ambiguous emotional normality and nationalism associated with being a fan of the game. As such, the football bubble and its emotionality added another dimension to the rebranding of President Mubarak as a family man in touch with his people that, according to Lina al Khatib, was initiated during the presidential election campaign in 2005 (2012:124f). At the stadium, on the pitch or in front of the TV, the Mubaraks were as emotional as everyone else in those years, when a bubble assembled around football encapsulated the Egyptian nation.

Conclusion: Football as a vulgarisation of power

The material presented in this chapter has told a story about the relationships between football, emotions and politics in the decades before the 2011 Egyptian revolution. As my

historical ethnography has shown, we cannot understand the Egyptians' strong passions for the game as something given, natural and ready-made. The subjects of national normality, vulgarity and success that I have analysed as the football bubble must rather be thought of as the result of a particular 'redistribution of sentiments' (Stoler, 2004: 6) in the later Mubarak era, which in turn was contingent on the particular assemblage of football at this particular moment in time. As we have also seen, the football bubble partly came about as a result of direct regime interventions: specific legislation on the financing of sports clubs and live broadcast, as well as the unique role of the state as the owner of several elite clubs, influenced the hype that was assembled. At the same time, it is also clear that the football bubble emerged as a result of a bundle of processes too complex to be fully controlled by the government. Private media, individual talents, pop-stars and movies were all important mediators, necessary for the particular distribution of affect and subjectivity that the Egyptian football assemblage fostered. Perhaps therefore, sports journalist Abdel Satar at *Ruz al-Yusif* was getting at something important, when in an interview he described the recent hype around football, not as a direct 'decision of the system' (*qarar al-nizam*) but nevertheless as 'something systematic' (*haga nizamiyya*) (19th February 2013).

My reading of the relationships between the football bubble and the Mubarak regime makes it possible to critically re-evaluate the influential idea of football working politically as a 'drug' and 'concealment'. Rather than mainly hiding a more real and true reality, I would suggest that the power of football's structuring of emotions, discourses and subjectivities lay in its ability to 'make a world' (Ahmed, 2004), and in the way it staked out the contours of a nationally coded 'historical present' (Berlant, 2011). In his ethnography about media and urbanism in northern Nigeria, Brian Larkin has illustrated how large-scale infrastructures during the British colonial rule acted as what he calls a 'colonial sublime'. Through this term, Larkin suggests that grand technological constructions, such as bridges and movie theatres, induced feelings of awe and powerlessness among the colonised subjects by appearing simultaneously glorious, terrifying and exalting (2008:35ff). The assemblage of big business, satellite TV, stardom and unprecedented victory that was built up around Egyptian football had a similar sublime function. It was one of relatively few spheres in an otherwise rather dull and

desperate historical present to be widely adored and revered, and which still shone brightly. In stark contrast to colonial Nigeria, however, Mubarak's football was neither separated from the people nor did it shine down on the masses from another universe. In contrast, football was, as we have seen, politically potent because of the way it *appended* Mubarak and his family to a world of normal, positive nationalism and upbeat emotionality. As such, the narrative about the successive Egyptian teams and people also came to encompass the political regime; the national subjects crafted around football conflated the ethos and aesthetics upheld by the president.

What needs to be highlighted if the politics of football in the Mubarak era is to be fully understood is hence how a historically contingent assembling of the sport created a bubble of emotion and subjectivity, wherein the people partook spontaneously, side by side with the nation's ruling family. By staking out what Achille Mbembé has called a 'master-code' (2001:103) or an 'imaginary of an époque' (1992b:2), the football bubble formed a rare realm of unity between the Egyptian citizenry and an otherwise unpopular regime. While the state as an 'organizer of public happiness' (Mbembé, 2001:31) certainly played due part in this process, media reports about Mubarak and his sons playing football, and cheering like 'any other citizen' were arguably at least as important. The dynamics that the football assemblage in this period managed to put into motion were in this sense similar to what Mbembé in an earlier text has described as the 'vulgarisation of power'. By this he means the:

> cultural and political "work" (*travail)* by which State power "comes down to the level" of the greatest number of people [...] becomes "down-to-earth" (*terre à terre*); spreads the knowledge of itself and its habits, renders them accessible to a society (1992a:129).

Because, more than anything else, the affects and emotions of the football bubble made legible and sustained an upbeat, successful and victorious version of the Egyptian nation. In so far that the President Mubarak and his family were portrayed and understood as congruent with the structuring of feeling and subjectivity around the game, football thus provided the president with a platform to join the celebrations of the people, of the country and in effect also of himself. At a time when very few other social phenomena could be pointed to as exemplary, football became a nodal point of the regime's hopes

and aspiration. This 'down-to-earth' type of state power, tied to the nation's most popular sport, was however not without risks. As we have already seen, the 'vulgar' aesthetics that dominated that bubble included its own ambivalence and tension. In addition, it was highly dependent on the string of success that in the late 2000s seemed unbreakable. As we will see in the next chapter, these contingencies would eventually make the bubble burst, as Egyptian football encountered its most painful backlash in November 2009.

[CHAPTER TWO]

The revenge of the respectable

The 2009 Algeria qualifiers – the football bubble peaking and cracking

It is commonplace that violence erupts between fans at football games, but what happened in Khartoum far exceeds football violence (*shaghab al-mala'ib*). The Algerian Air Force planes transported thousands of armed Algerian thugs (*baltagiyya*) to Khartoum and assigned them with one particular mission: to assault and insult Egyptians. […] Egypt is the biggest Arab country and the biggest source of human talent in the Arab world. The Egyptians have had the honour of contributing in building the renaissance of many Arab countries: the universities were established by Egyptian professors; the newspapers were established by Egyptian journalists; the institutions for the arts, cinema and theatre were established by Egyptian artists; the cities and buildings were built by Egyptian engineers. The hospitals were erected by Egyptian doctors, even the laws and constitutions were often put in place by Egyptian legal scholars. Yes, even the Algerian national anthem was composed by the Egyptian Mohamed Fawzi. This Egyptian excellence shaped the relations between the Egyptians and the Arab peoples.

Egyptian author Alaa al-Aswani, *al-Shuruq*, 24th November 2009

Laziness is the most appropriate rubric for the state of nationalist revival around football (*li-halit al-ba'th al-watani kurawi al-tabi'*), because it is a nationalism that does not demand anything from you, and which invests all your ambitions and hopes as well as the entire 'nationalist dream' on eleven individuals and perhaps the same amount of coaches, managers and substitute players.

Egyptian intellectual Hani Shukrallah, *al-Shuruq*, 21st November 2009

In November 2009, Egypt played two hotly anticipated World Cup qualification matches against Algeria which, unlike any other games before or after, turned the attentions of the Egyptian nation towards the football pitch. The matches spurred jubilant celebrations, intense anger, a state of shock and mourning, and hectic debates over the role and function of football in the country. The two quotes that kicked off this chapter illustrate the passions with which some of Egypt's most prominent intellectuals debated football's links to nationalism at the time. During my fieldwork in Cairo, a couple of years later, the episode was referred to constantly; many of my friends felt sorry for me, the football anthropologist who had missed the most intense week of football that ever was.

In this chapter, I take a close and detailed look at this short but intense period of time, when the hype around Egyptian football – what I discussed in Chapter 1 as the 'football bubble' – reached a crescendo. The chapter illustrates how, in the course of a few days, the mood in the country rapidly shifted from celebrations to angry outrage and political crisis. In rapid succession, the way the game was talked about and perceived also went through a remarkably quick transition. The generally positive connotations that football had had, and which I explored in Chapter 1, waned, whereas criticism and questioning increased dramatically. In particular, the chapter outlines the contours of a heated public debate over the appropriate social, political and cultural role for football that filled the press in the weeks after the second of the two matches. As so often in Egypt, the struggle over the country's biggest sport was, as we will see, fought explicitly within the parameters of the national (cf. Abu-Lughod, 2005; Armbrust, 1996; Jacob, 2011; Winegar, 2006).

In the final analysis, the chapter suggests that the Algeria games acted as what Michel Foucault has theorised as an 'incitement to discourse' (1998) within the Egyptian football assemblage. Suddenly, everyone seemed to have an opinion about football's virtues and vices. Especially after Egypt lost the second match and missed the World Cup, a period of reflection and self-criticism ensued. Whereas positive notions of football as unifier and symbol of success were downplayed, issues like 'fanaticism', 'vulgarity', and the sport's tendency to foster 'lazy' nationalism were accentuated. In this debate, it was particularly the voices of secular intellectuals and Islamists – two groups who had found themselves

marginalised from the imagery of national-emotional normality that surrounded the football bubble – that were strengthened. Towards the end of the chapter, I suggest that these 'respectable' actors had long been critical of the inflated hype and vulgar ethos of the sport, and that the Algeria matches allowed them to get a sort of revenge. In noting how the eventual loss on the pitch was crucial for opening up a space for the latent criticism of football by these groups, the chapter concludes by exploring how and why the inherent unpredictability of matches and results mediates in large-scale, but ultimately precarious social assemblages built up around great sporting spectacles.

The chapter – like Chapter 1 – is based on what I have discussed in the Introduction as 'historical ethnography'. While I do draw on some material from interviews conducted in 2011-2013, press material constitutes the bulk of my data. The wealth of clips available on YouTube and my friend Bilal's VHS recordings of old matches have been two invaluable sources of Egyptian television coverage of the games and their aftermath. I also went through all the issues of the national daily *al-Shuruq* from November 2009.[18] As in Chapter 1, I frequently refer to two popular historical accounts of Egyptian football to substantiate my narration: Muhammad Tawfiq's *Masr bitil'ab* (2010) and *Hurub kurat al-qaddam*, written by Yasser Thabet (2010).

A version of this chapter has been published in *Critical African Studies* (Rommel, 2014). While in large parts similar to what I present here, the article included additional and deeper discussions about the debates connecting Egypt to the Arab World, Africa and the West that had to be left out from this chapter.

[18] As a non-state outlet, *al-Shuruq* has arguably given me a perspective on the crisis that is less steeped in the government's standard narrative than a state-owned paper like *al-Ahram*.

A football bubble at its peak

A great party in Cairo

On 14th November 2009, Egypt played Algeria at home in the final round of the last group stage of the African qualifications for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The stakes were as high as they were clear: if Egypt won by three goals or more, they would be going to South Africa the following summer; a two-goal win for Egypt would leave the two teams inseparable in terms of points, goal difference and head-to-head results, leading to an historically unprecedented re-play on neutral soil; all other results would send Algeria to the World Cup. The buzz around the game was by all measures enormous. While Egypt had won two African Cup of Nations' titles only in the previous three years, they had failed to qualify for the last four World Cups. To qualify for the tournament in South Africa was in this sense a rare chance for the great Egyptian football team to finally get international recognition.[19] *Al-Shuruq* featured the national football team as a main story for several weeks prior to the clash; on match day – 14th November – 16 out of 24 pages were solely devoted to football. On the newspaper's front page, the match was described as the 'most important' in the history of Egyptian football. Several pages reminded the readers of the episodes of tension and violence that in recent decades had surrounded the Egypt-Algeria fixture.[20]

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[19] For illustrations of the importance of international recognition for Egyptian sports team throughout the 20th century, see Jacob (2011: 130) and Lopez (2009, 2012). See also Rommel (2014).

[20] The most commonly referred to precursor was the almost identical fixture on 17th November 1989, when Egypt last time claimed a spot in the World Cup. Also then the Algerian team had come to Cairo for a hyped decisive match in the group, and the game was surrounded by troubles. Other troublesome matches between the two countries were the two World Cup qualifiers in 2001, and most recently in summer 2009, when, allegedly, the Egyptian team was poisoned in their hotel in the hours before the a match in the same qualification group in Blida, Algeria (*al-Shuruq*, 14th, 18th November 2009; Thabet, 2010:119ff; Montague, 2009; Oliver, 2009).

The hype around the game was not only visible in the press. When tickets for the match were released, they sold out faster than at any previous occasion, and riot police had to be called in to disperse the crowds fighting to get hold of the treasures. For those who made it and got hold of a ticket, the fight was potentially a lucrative one; just a couple of days thereafter, tickets were sold on the black market for up to one hundred times the original price (*al-Shuruq*, 8th, 12th, 15th November 2009). The immense importance of the occasion was also reflected in the unprecedented, 24-hour studio show that was co-produced by all of Egypt's biggest football satellite-channels, in reports of President Mubarak visiting the training ground the day before the game, and in the Coptic Pope Shenouda III praying for a good result in the Sunday Mass. In the hours prior to kick-off a mix Quran-recitations, Sufi-inspired prayers and nationalist songs mobilised passions and excitements among the sell-out crowd at Cairo Stadium for what promised to be a truly extraordinary football occasion (*al-Shuruq*, 15th, 17th November 2009; Thabet, 2010:159f).

Neither did the dramaturgy of the game itself disappoint: Egypt scored a first goal early on, but although they pressed the Algerians almost constantly for 90 minutes, creating a vast amount of chances, frustration turned to despair as it looked like the second goal was just not meant to come. But then, in the 95th minute – deep into injury time – a final opportunity suddenly appeared: a cross from Sayed Moawad, a precise header from Emad Moteab, the ball found its way into the bottom-left corner of the goal, and Cairo Stadium was erupting into some of the most passionate scenes of ecstasy and euphoria ever witnessed at an Egyptian football stadium. In the following days the Egyptian media could not get enough of photographs and articles portraying and re-establishing the game and its aftermath as *the* occasion for national, all-Egyptian celebrations, happiness and success. Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, Muslims and Christians, everyone seemed to have been out in the streets that night, coming together – as the political analyst Wael Qandil expressed it in an op-ed column – in a 'hug of national unity' (*'inaq al-wahda al-wataniyya*) (*al-Shuruq*, 16th November 2009; see also *al-Misri al-Yum*, 16th November 2009).

As the decisive play-off game – scheduled to be played only four days later – was quickly approaching, Egypt was in other words still celebrating. I had many conversations with

football-loving friends in Cairo in 2012 and 2013 about that week in late 2009, and several admitted that the way Egypt had dominated the game in Cairo had made them and everybody around them convinced of a victory also in the decisive play-off. The self-confidence was further boosted by the upcoming match's location: Omdurman, outside the Sudanese capital Khartoum. Due to the realistic prospects for a re-play, a hypothetical second game had been planned for already in advance. The Egyptian FA had wanted the game to be played in Sudan, whereas the Algerians had preferred Tunisia and the final decision had hence been made through a lottery draw. When Sudan emerged from the tombola, many Egyptians had considered it good news; on 13th November, *al-Shuruq* described Sudan as a 'brother country', forever tied to Egypt through the countries' common history.[21] Indeed, friends of mine in Cairo recalled how the Egyptian media at the time insisted that the game in Khartoum would be like 'a second home game' and hence an unproblematic affair. This was apparently also what many within the Egyptian economic, political and pop-cultural elite were thinking, as a large number of business tycoons, actors, singers and TV celebrities travelled to Khartoum to attend the match in airplanes chartered by the ruling National Democratic Party. The game in Khartoum promised to be the culmination of the hype and 'bubble' around the victorious Egyptian nation that had been built up around football over the previous years (see Chapter 1), and which had reached yet another crescendo after Moteab's late goal at Cairo Stadium. The plan was to celebrate the nation as never before once the World Cup spot had been secured in Khartoum, and the Mubarak regime and its allies thus made sure that they were going to be present at the party (see Tawfiq, 2010:180).

An ugly craze in Khartoum

There was however also another side to the story of the game in Cairo, left out by most Egyptian media reports. This story – which made big headlines both in Algeria and in Europe – was not one of jubilant Egyptian masses dancing in streets, but rather one of

[21] For details about the problematic colonial relationship between Egypt and Sudan, see Trout Powell (2003).

ugly violence. According to this narrative, the Algerian team's bus had been pelted with stones on the way from Cairo Airport two days prior to the match, leaving a handful of players injured. Moreover, there were also reports of clashes in the streets between fans before and after the game, during which tens of supporters (mostly Algerians) had been severely injured (Thabet, 2010:160). In his book, Yasser Thabet provides illuminating details of the vast difference between the press coverage in Egypt and Algeria at the time. He shows that, whereas Egyptian journalists problematically ignored all reports of violence,[22] Algerian newspapers like *al-Shuruq* (no relation to the Egyptian *al-Shuruq*) instead heavily exaggerated the brawls, claiming inaccurately that Algerian fans had been 'systematically' assaulted and that several supporters had been killed (2010:165f). Because of these divergent understandings of what had actually happened, the atmosphere in Algeria was completely different to the festive, celebratory party mood that reigned in Cairo in the interim period between the two matches. Indeed, a series of episodes of retaliation against Egyptian citizens and companies in Algeria had started immediately after the first match in Cairo (ibid.:175). The upcoming game in Sudan was however described as the real chance for the Algerians to get revenge, on as well as outside of the pitch (ibid.:165ff).

As many commentators and several of my Egyptian friends liked to point out in retrospect, most Algerians attending the match in Khartoum were of a very different social background than the Egyptians making the journey to Sudan. Whereas most Egyptians were reasonably or very wealthy sports journalists, entertainers and politicians, the Algerians were – in Thabet's (upper middle-class) words – 'non-educated elements (*'anasir ghayr muta'allima*) and groups who perhaps do not adhere to civilised manners (*sulukan mutahaddiran*)' (2010:187). During an interview I conducted in 2012, the journalist Sherif Hassan at the football website *FilGoal.com* did however depict the differences in the

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[22] One of few exceptions was the Egyptian football website *FilGoal.com*, which was criticised for being unpatriotic, after publishing a couple of reports of injured Algerians players and fans, similar to those featuring in the Western media (chief editor Ahmad Saied, interview, 7th May 2012). In *al-Shuruq*, this side of the story was either neglected or reported on in a tone that indicated that the Algerians had made it all up (see e.g. 14th, 16th November 2009).

crowds in slightly different terms. For him, most Algerians in Khartoum rather seemed to have been 'quite normal football fans from the lower and lower-middle classes.' From Hassan's perspective, the Algerians had also all reason to be 'angry because of the injustice they felt had been done to their compatriots in Cairo' as well as 'excited because they could reach the World Cup for the first time in 24 years'.

Regardless of what intentions the Algerians were actually coming to Sudan with, the presence of 8,500 Algerians supporters in Khartoum seems to have been enough to leave many in the smaller group of 3,500 Egyptian, mostly elite fans, shocked and scared already upon arrival (Thabet, 2010:170) [23] In *al-Shuruq,* reporters and Egyptian celebrity-fans described Khartoum as a hellish, dirty, and undeveloped place full of aggressive Algerians 'thugs' (*baltagiyya*) or 'mobs' (*ghugha'*), who were speaking 'incomprehensibly' and approached the Egyptians with 'vulgar gestures' (*ishara badhi'a*) that indicated that they would 'slaughter' their opponents (20th November 2009). Contrary to the widely held assumption that all Sudanese would support Egypt, the Egyptians were also shocked to find thousands of Sudanese waving Algerian flags in the streets. In *al-Shuruq*, this scene was reported on with great disappointment. In a lengthy piece, it was claimed that the Algerians had cunningly 'bought' the feelings of large swathes of the 'poor and simple' Sudanese by means of 'drowning' Khartoum in Algerian flags and giving each and every one 100 US dollars for supporting Algeria (20th November 2009).

The match itself was a disaster for Egypt. The national heroes underperformed badly when it mattered the most, and Algeria won deservedly with one goal to nil. However, the worst was to come after the final whistle: on the way back to the airport several Egyptian busses were allegedly attacked by Algerian fans, and in at least one case, a group of Egyptians had to hide inside a factory space for several hours after their bus had been completely destroyed (Saied, 2009). Among the people hiding was the famous actor and singer Muhammad Fouad, whose desperate phone calls from inside the factory to Egyptian TV and to the Sudanese Foreign Minster begging for help show that the

[23] Several of my interviewees pointed to this large number of less well-off Algerian fans in Sudan as proof for that the Algerian government paid for the long trip across the Sahara

situation, at least for these people, seemed quite acute.[24] In addition, the chaotic and haphazard treatment that these Egyptian celebrities, politicians and businessmen received at the airport was certainly very different to what they were used to. In the middle of the night, and in the midst of rumours about violent attacks from Algerian 'mobs', people had to wait for up to seven hours in crammed planes that for some felt like 'microbuses' before being able to take off (*al-Shuruq*, 20th November 2009). These unpleasant experiences came to form an intrinsic part of eye-witness reports of the close-to-death encounter with hostile Algerians in Khartoum that in the days after the game flooded the Egyptian media (see Thabet, 2010:174f).

A heady political aftermath

What at some point 'only' had been a football game now escalated into a full-blown political crisis. After the first match, the Algerian government had imposed additional taxes on Egyptian companies (*al-Shuruq*, 19th November 2009), and media reports had it that Egyptian citizens residing in the country had felt forced to leave a hostile environment and go home to Egypt (Thabet, 2010:175f). These reactions had been condemned in the Egyptian press, and taken as signs of the Algerians being terribly bad losers. However, in the chaos that followed the Egyptian loss in Sudan, Egyptian politicians and journalists soon began discussing similar measures, which they felt were necessary to defend 'the dignity of the Egyptians' (*karamit al-misriyyin*) (ibid.:171).[25] In the first hours after the second match, with a great number of unconfirmed reports of violence against Egyptians circulating all over the media, President Mubarak later claimed that he had been close to sending army troops to Sudan to protect Egyptian citizens (ibid.:140). As *al-Shuruq* reported on 20th November, many prominent public figures also demanded that the Egyptian ambassador to Algeria be recalled. Furthermore, the Algerian embassy in Cairo was attacked by angry demonstrators, leading to violent clashes with

[24] One of Fouad's famous call-ins is found in this YouTube clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWiJhvcz9tI (accessed 9th April 2015).

[25] Abeer al-Najjar has analysed this as an example of an overarching sense of patriotism, which often dominates journalism in the Arab world in times of crisis (2011).

Egyptian State Security forces, and there were several incidents in which Algerians in Egypt were targeted and/or expelled by angry Egyptian mobs (*al-Shuruq*, 26th November 2009).[26]

A wide range of actors at this time jumped on the anti-Algeria bandwagon: the Egyptian Olympic Committee suspended all sports exchange with Algeria (*al-Shuruq*, 22nd November 22); al-Ahly publically contemplated selling their only Algerian player (ibid.); the Doctors' Lawyers' and Engineers' Syndicates published statements demanding the expelling of the Algerian ambassador to Cairo (*al-Shuruq*, 23rd November 2009); Egyptian singer Khalid Salim recalled an album as it included a song sung in an Algerian accent (*al-Shuruq*, 24th November 2009); and the popular *sha'bi*-artist Shaaban Abdel Rahim released a new single which he described as taking a 'serious and strong stance against the terrorism' that the Egyptian fans had been exposed to in Sudan (*al-Shuruq*, 23rd November 2009).

Immediately after the Khartoum match, there was also a qualitative shift in Egyptian media's coverage. In *al-Shuruq* – as well as in private and state television – what had previously been reported on as a hugely important football match and an occasion for national celebration was now rather discussed as a national crisis.[27] For several days, it was the biggest news story by far, with coverage reaching far beyond the sports pages. Meanwhile, the match itself received hardly any reportage at all, as nobody seemed interested in analysing what had gone wrong on the pitch. Instead, *al-Shuruq* published page after page of eye-witness reports about 'barbaric' acts of extreme violence, photos of evil-looking Algerians, and speculations about how the Algerian government had planned the 'massacre' well in advance (particularly 20th, 21st, 22nd November 2009). Even the paper's senior sports columnist Hassan al-Mistakawi, who in the days prior to the first

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[26] This was confirmed by an Egyptian man I met in Cairo in 2012. Due to his blond complexion, he was taken for an Algerian and almost beaten up inside his local supermarket in Cairo a few days after the match in Khartoum. In *al-Shuruq* no incidents of this kind were reported on until the 26th of November, eight days after the second match.

[27] A succinct summary of the most famous episodes from Egyptian television at the time is found in *al-Shuruq*, 15th November.

match had called for calm and reason (e.g. 3rd, 4th, 9th November 2009), now joined the anti-Algerian outcry. Pointing to the long history of unacceptable Algerian behaviour at football games over the last two decades, al-Mistakawi argued that what happened in Sudan had to be understood as the result of the Algerian people's 'deep and piled up hatred towards the Egyptians' (*karahiyya makhzuna lil-misriyyin*) (20th November 2009).

Such opinions were also very common among the football pundits and political analysts on television. In talk shows and studio programs, calls were repeatedly made for a distancing from what some called the Algerian 'culture of armed terrorists' (see Thabet 2010:188f). Famously, President Mubarak's eldest son Alaa also telephoned into one of the football talk shows, emotionally accusing the Algerians in Sudan of being 'mercenaries' (*murtaziqa*) and 'criminals', attacking the Egyptian fans whom he described as well-mannered and friendly 'families'. Alaa – who attended the game in Sudan together with his brother, and at the time presidential-hopeful Gamal – also depicted the Algerians as incapable of speaking proper Arabic and he portrayed the Algerian media as utterly corrupt, and as solely preoccupied with insulting Egypt and the Egyptians (the interview was summarised in *al-Shuruq*, 22nd November 2009 and in Thabet, 2010:137ff).[28] As many commentators have noted, Alaa's media appearances were very popular with broad layers of Egyptian society. His passionate reactions in defence of the Egyptian honour came across as authentic and normal, as had they been expressed by 'any other' Egyptian citizen (see e.g. Ibrahim Eissa's column in *al-Dustur*, 21st November 2009; Hassan 2009). Like so often during the last years of the Mubarak era, the presidential family's emotional practices and expressions in relation to football struck a chord with a widespread and popular structuring of feelings. In this agitated period of rage and humiliation, Alaa Mubarak said what 'everybody' felt, and the emotional registers he communicated were hence well in sync with the nationally dominant 'bubble', which football played such a key part within (see Chapter 1).

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[28] Alaa Mubarak also made a similar phone call to the talk show *Beit Beitak*. This call-in can be found in this YouTube clip http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYTH6Vn7zIQ (accessed 9th April 2015).

A football bubble under attack

The beginning of an end of an era

In this heated atmosphere of nationalist chauvinism and anger, it was very easy to get carried away. With a few years distance, several of my Egyptian interlocutors, somewhat embarrassed, admitted that they regretted their behaviour in the immediate aftermath of the second match: for example, one interviewee told me that he 'could have killed an Algerian at the time, I have no idea why'; another – a journalist who in 2009 had been writing for a western newspaper – revealed that a text of his had been turned down by his editor the day after the match, a text in which he 'went too far' in his criticism of the Algerians and which he would have 'regretted massively' had it been published.

What makes this episode in November 2009 particularly interesting however is not only the scale and intensity of the emotional anti-Algerian momentum that swept the nation, but also how this wave of affect, anger and antagonism soon died out and turned into something very different. For my friend Bilal – a sincere, somewhat shy man in his late 20s, who during the time I knew him spent most of his time preparing for his upcoming wedding and subsequent family life – it was clear that the game in Sudan had marked the end of an era. One chilly night in January 2013, I visited him in the old one-bedroom flat in the lower-middle class neighbourhood Abdeen, where he had grown up with his now deceased grandparents, and where he was temporarily residing at the time. As most evenings this year, Bilal had gone straight from his office job in Maadi in the southern part of the city, to do refurbishing work on the flat he had recently bought for his future married life in a 'cleaner but a bit boring' newly developed area close to the Pyramids in Giza. When he had finally made his way home to Abdeen and I came by to see him, it was already well past midnight, but Bilal seemed undisturbed by the fact that he had to get up and drive to work again in less than six hours. He invited me for a late supper of instant noodles, mango juice and sweet tea, and whilst zapping between different football channels on his grandfather's old TV, he told me about the emotional rollercoaster ride of those autumnal days in 2009. 'I always watched football here, in this room with *giddi* (my

grandfather), *Allah yirhamuh* (God bless him)', he said and looked up on the photo of the grand old man on the wall.

> We watched every Ahly match and of course also the national team. *Giddi* used to record the games on VHS, so the big games, like the Cairo derby [al-Ahly vs. al-Zamalek] or the final of the African Cup of Nations, we watched maybe ten times. But the Algeria games were something very, very special (*haga khasa awi, awi*), because the biggest dream of all Egyptians was the World Cup. I was so nervous during the Cairo game; I could not watch, and the last ten minutes I was in the bed in the reception, out there, under a blanket and cried because we were losing. But then of course, Moteab scored that goal, and you see, our TV is a bit slower than the ones at the *ahwa* (coffee shop) down in the street – it must be something about analogue and digital – so I heard all the people screaming in the street and when I came into the room, I saw the goal live with *giddi*. It was the biggest happiness, and I cried, I cried a lot. But then of course, four days later [the game in Sudan], we sat here again – me and *giddi* – and we could not say anything. We were very shocked, because we were so sure of winning, and I remember that for the first time in my life, Abdeen was totally silent outside the window. No cars, nobody said anything. After that I promised myself to never watch football again. It was a bit stupid, and of course I did not keep my promise. Of course you know that Carl; we have watched many games together. But there was something that changed. For example, the cup in Angola [the African Cup of Nations in 2010 which Egypt won] was nice, but mostly because we beat Algeria [in the quarter final]; actually, that felt better than the final. And in 2010, I also started to miss Ahly-games for the first time. And then *giddi* died, and then came the revolution, and now I have too much to do with the flat and the wedding. Football is not what it was, not at all (*ya'ni, al-kura mish zay ma kanit, khalis*).

Bilal's distancing from the game in the aftermath of Egypt missing the 2010 World Cup can partly be understood in terms of the big transformations that have since taken place in his personal life. Yet, I would suggest that his story also says something about a broader reconfiguration of interest, emotionality and attachment that the loss in Khartoum initiated. In contrast to what was seemingly the case in the late Mubarak era, football was – as I have mentioned in the Introduction and will return to in chapters to come – something more marginalised and much more problematic during my research in Cairo between 2011 and 2013. Moreover, Bilal was not the only one I met who retrospectively talked about the Algeria games as a time when something irreparably 'was lost' in terms of passions and interests. Indeed, if one was to identify one point in time

when the great football bubble that I outlined in Chapter 1 began to burst, that second match against Algeria in Khartoum seems like a good candidate.

Football and its media as a problem for the nation?

One way to understanding what exactly it was that made so many Egyptian football fans 'lose something' in late 2009, is to explore how the Algeria matches acted as an 'incitement' to great volumes of football-critical public discourses (Foucault, 1998). Already a few days after the alleged 'massacre' in Khartoum, a realisation dawned that perhaps, things had not been as terrible as they had first seemed: when all supporters had returned to Cairo it was established that no Egyptians (but two Sudanese) had been killed and that the injuries sustained were relatively minor. At approximately this point in time, more and more press voices began to criticise 'the media' (*al-i'lam*; referring to television but not necessarily to the printed press) and leading politicians for having blown the events out of proportion (*al-Shuruq*, 21st November 21 2009; see also Thabet, 2010:172,179f). Certainly, a lot of the anger against Algeria was still around, and yes, Alaa Mubarak was still telephoning-in on TV-shows demanding the expulsion of the Algerian ambassador almost a full week after the match in Sudan (*al-Shuruq*, 24th November 2009). Yet, as November drew to a close, such voices were dwarfed by a growing numbers of self-identifying 'intellectuals' (*muthaqqafin*; sing. *muthaqqaf*), speaking out against the political madness that football in their opinion had brought about. As I showed in the Introduction of this dissertation, discussions about football's problematic, political side-effects have a long history in Egypt. Already in the weeks before the game in Khartoum, one could find scattered examples of this type of rhetoric in the press, e.g. by the oppositional journalist Ibrahim Eissa in the regime-critical *al-Dustur* (13th, 16th November 2009) and in Hassan al-Mistakawi's sports columns in *al-Shuruq* (3rd, 4th, 9th November 2009). However, in the end of November and early December the amount and volume of this football criticism reached a new level, as seemingly every prominent Egyptian *muthaqqaf* suddenly wanted to put their two cents into a heated public debate on the problematic relationship between emotions, nationalism, politics and football (see Abdel Shafi, 2010:127-41).

One recurrent theme in articles from this period was the detrimental effects that football in the Mubarak era had had on Egyptian nationalism. In fact, many of the tropes about football as a 'drug' or 'empty replacement' for the 'real nationalist cause' that I so often came across during my fieldwork (see Introduction) were articulated in the press at this point in time. The 21st November issue of *al-Shuruq* included a series of articles that well exemplify this pattern. In an op-ed, the famous economist Galal Amin for instance portrayed the current football-crazy era as the pinnacle of a culturally deprived, celebrity-focused 'age of mass audiences' (*'asr al-jamahir al-ghafira*) that had been initiated in the Nasser era, and which was sadly devoid of any 'real love' for the nation. In another column, the public intellectual Hani Shukrallah complained about the 'laziness' of the sport, whilst arguing that football induces 'a nationalism that does not demand anything from you' and which appeals to 'supporters' rather than 'citizens'. There was also one full page of articles that discussed the problematic effects of the increasing popularity of football talk shows on satellite TV.

In this period, several *muthaqqafin* also brought up football as a threat to Egypt's pan-Arab relations. On the back page of the same 21st November issue of *al-Shuruq*, Fahmy Huwaydi devoted his daily column to Egypt's TV pundits. For him, they were to blame for having 'instigated and provoked' (*tahrid wi ithara*) 'hatred and bitterness' (*baghd wi marara*), as well as for 'poisoning the relations between Egypt and Algeria.' In the days that followed, the same theme was picked up on by commentators like Ibrahim Eissa, Hassan al-Mistakawi and Mustafa Kamil al-Sayd in articles that self-critically depicted Egyptian journalists and politicians' treatment of the crisis as overly smug and superior (see articles by Al-Sayd and al-Mistakawi in *al-Shuruq*, 24th November 2009. Al-Mistakawi's text explicitly draws on an earlier article in *al-Dustur* by Eissa). To overcome the huge rift that the football had opened up between the two 'brother countries', these voices argued that Egyptian TV-journalists and politicians needed to stop their heady rants about Egypt's natural leadership status in the pan-Arab struggle; to reclaim a sound Egyptian nationalism and good relations to the country's Arab neighbours, a more modest tone of reason had to be adopted.

Football and its media as a problem for the *Umma*?

Another dimension to the shifting mood around the sport was partly set in motion by the Islamic calendar. On 26th November, eight days after the Khartoum match, Muslims all over the world began celebrations of *Eid al-Adha*. The *Eid* is one of the two biggest Muslim festivals of the year, and it fundamentally reorders the city's rhythms for a few days: most workplaces are closed, people stay home with their families, and those who can afford it slaughter an animal in the street and distribute the meat among relatives and the poor. Judging from the media coverage in *al-Shuruq*, the *Eid* of 2009 put an end to the most intense hype around the Algeria matches. The focus in the paper shifted towards the religious rituals that were performed *en masse* all over the city, and football once again largely retreated to its pre-Algeria-hype location in the sports pages. An unusually large number of Muslim scholars and Islamist activists were also given the opportunity to speak out in the paper at the time of the festival. Some of these religious men used the space to voice critical opinions about the exaggerated attention that football was given in Mubarak's Egypt. On 25th November, there was for instance a long report about an Islamist lawyer aiming to take the president of the National Council for Sports, as well as President Mubarak himself, to court for their lavish public spending on bonuses for the national team's players, instead of much needed medical equipment. Two days later, the paper also extensively reported that the Islamist group *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* had launched an initiative, aiming to bring an end to the 'fanaticism' (*ta'assub*) that the football matches had brought about, and which had led to a sad state of animosity between two Muslim countries.

Islamists in Egypt and elsewhere have a tradition of criticising sports in general and football in particular. As Shavit and Winter have shown in a detailed analysis of sports-related *fatwas*, the positive effects that sports have for creating an 'healthy soul in a healthy body' have since more than hundred years been balanced against the inherent risks of stirring up exaggerated emotions that divert Muslims from God (2011:257; see also Thabet, 2010:275ff). One person I knew, who clearly thought so was my friend Mahmoud, a somewhat Salafi-leaning gym instructor and Zamalek-fan, with whom I often discussed the intriguing relationship between football, politics and religion. For

Muhammad, the excessive importance attached to the game had made football increasingly problematic in the years prior to the revolution. Like all physical activities, Muhammad the gym-instructor, believed that football could potentially be a positive force in society and also in for Islam. 'But the problem', he once told me,

> is when people prioritise football before the family, or before one's prayer, or even before *Allah*. It is like other Western things that distract us *(bitishaghghalna*), like music, cabaret or film. They do not have to be bad, but when your feelings for them become too much (*lamma ahsasak tab'a ufer*), then there is a problem. That is fanaticism (*ta'assub*).

Islamists being critical against football were in other words neither something new nor particularly uncommon. However, the space given to a terror-associated group like *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* by *al-Shuruq* to articulate this position was noteworthy, and I would argue that it cannot be understood outside the broader context of football-critical commentaries in the Egyptian press at this particular historical juncture. Moreover, it is also striking how this religiously based criticism of the game alluded to football's fostering of problematic, secular nationalist sentiments. Because, as the spokesperson for *al-Jama'a* contended in the article mentioned above, what the recent craze around the sport had brought about was nothing less than a coordinated plan by the secular media in Algeria and Egypt to weaken the Islamist *Umma*. By means of 'turning football from a game we pass our free-time with (*nilhu biha fi awqat faraghna*) into a national project, which the people rally around (*yltiff hawluh al-sha'b*),' football had taken on an exaggerated role of diversion and distraction that it was now time to seriously question (*al-Shuruq* 27th November 2009).

The problem of *ta'assub*

One theme that both the *muthaqqafin* and the Muslim sheikhs in this period located at the core football's problems was *ta'assub* (or at times the similarly connoted term *'asabiyya*). This substantiated verb lacks a straightforward one-to-one translation in English. According to Hans Wehr's *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* it means all of: creation of

a team, clique or coalition; plotting against someone; taking sides; chauvinism, bigotry, fanaticism, zeal, partiality and racial or national pride.[29] The singling out of *ta'assub* (or the correspondent adjective *muta'assib/muta'assibin* (sing./pl.)) as a problematic effect of football's intertwining with emotions and politics in late 2009 was no novelty. Already in the 1960s, the great Egyptian intellectual and long-time *al-Ahram* editor-in-chief Mohamed Hassanein Heikal depicted the violence that then ravaged Egyptian football stadiums as an exaggerated *ta'assub* that resulted from the regime's precluding of the 'normal' *ta'assub* for political parties which a pluralist democracy brings about (quoted in Tawfiq, 2010:60f). The question of how to understand and eventually eradicate *ta'assub* from the sporting arenas has also been a favourite topic among Egyptian sports researchers. In a book from 2002 solely devoted to this topic, Muhammad Hagag portrays *ta'assub* as a drastically worsening problem within Arab sports, and as ultimately resulting from 'lack of objectivity' and 'automatic, unfounded passions' (21f). In the end of his long exposé of the concept and its connections to sports, Hagag proposes how the problem could be overcome. He stresses the importance of more 'education [that] spreads tolerance and love (*al-tasamuh wi al-muhabba*) between people' (95), and he suggests a proper media reform so to stop the spreading of non-objective, partial propaganda (*da'aya*), through which false ideas and prejudice – i.e. *ta'assub* – are fostered (101ff).

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[29] Linguistically, most Arabic words stem from a three-letter root. The root *'ayn-sad-ba*, which *ta'assub* derives its meaning from, does in its most basic form mean to wind, fold, tie, bind or wrap. The transitive verb *'assaba* is explicitly associated with the process of winding a bandage or a turban on somebody else, whereas the reflexive derivate *ta'assaba* is used when a turban (or bandage) is winded onto one's own head. The self-winding that *ta'assaba* refers to can however also be used more metaphorically: to create a team, clique of coalition; to plot against someone; to gang up or to take sides; to be chauvinist, bigoted, fanatic. As the substantiated form of the verb *ta'assaba, ta'assub* technically denotes the process or state of carrying out these different actions: the own turban-winding; the team- or clique-creation; the plotting; the taking of sides; chauvinism, bigotry, fanaticism. There are also a series of additional translations for *ta'assub*, such as 'zeal', 'partiality' and even 'racial or national pride'. In addition, several words that in one way or another refer to nerves (*a'sab*, sing. *'asab*) can also be formed from the same root: nervous (*'asabi*) nervousness (*'asabiyya*). The latter of these can also be used as a synonym for *ta'assub*. *Muta'assib* (pl. *muta'assibin*) is the adjective and noun used for the one who has or carries out *ta'assub*.

When debates about football as a source of problematic *ta'assub* emerged all over the Egyptian press in the aftermath of the game in Khartoum, they in other words tapped into a rich genealogy. What is fascinating with the way the debates developed in November 2009 however is how the presumed instigators of *ta'assub*, as well as who were rendered *muta'assibin*, quickly shifted as time passed by. In the first days after the second match, the Algerian people's long history of *ta'assub* was often identified as a main reason behind their outrageous behaviour in Sudan, often with reference to violent incidents at matches between the two countries in the past (see e.g. *al-Shuruq*, 20th November 2009). Yet, as the critical scrutiny increasingly came to be directed inwards, it was rather the tendency among Egypt's politicians and football media to poison 'normal nationalist feelings' and the relations between two 'brother people' with 'blind *ta'assub*' that was being lamented (*al-Shuruq*, 23rd, 24th, 29th November 2009). It is important to note however, that in all of these articles the Egyptian people were never singled out as the root cause of the rot. Rather some internal or external Other were always assumed to have led people astray toward *ta'assub*. Whether crazy Algerians, secular sports journalist, or even the president's own son ranting against the Algerians on prime-time television, the *muta'assibin* took very different forms depending on the commentators' politics and ideology. The common theme was however that *ta'assub* and the *muta'assibin* were understood as serious problems for the nation to solve and overcome.

At the same time, it is important to note that *ta'assub*, and in particular the closely related concept of *'asabiyya,* could also be associated with a more positive and progressive type of nationalist fervour. Indeed, as Benjamin Geer has shown in his detailed exploration of the formation of Egyptian nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th century, some of the most important figures in the Egyptian nationalist awakening highlighted *'asabiyya* – which Geer translates as 'group solidarity' – as a foundational building block for the broad and vital national solidarity (2011:407ff). Geer does however also point to the close connection between *'asabiyyat* (group solidarities) and *ahzab* (political parties) in the historical material he explores, attending to the concept's parallel connotations of partisanship and tribalism. Both '*asabiyya* and *ta'assub*, in other words, relate ambivalently to the highly upheld value of national unity. While being potentially necessary for the fostering of solidarity, the way they risk creating internal, partisan divisions and sub-

solidarities that override the national interest potentially poses a threat (see also Abdelrahman, 2007).

In the light of this ambivalence inherent in the relationship between football feelings characterised as *ta'assub* and sentiments for the Egyptian nation, what the Algeria matches most of all seem to have fostered was a re-articulation and break in perceptions and associations. During the heyday of the Mubarak era's football boom, the positive role of the game to foster strong emotions of national solidarity had arguably overshadowed the potential problems of the same emotional ruse. However, in November 2009 – and as we will see in further chapters even more so in the post 2011 period of uncertainty and instability – it was clearly the latter, threatening aspect of this double-edged sword that dominated the debate about football's *ta'assub* and *'asabiyya*. The *ta'assub* that time and time again was identified as a core outcome of the overgrown football business and the satellite media did from this point in time onwards generally begin to come across as politically divisive, partisan and demoralising. The combination of football and *ta'assub* was widely singled out as serious threat to the national whole.

A problem or not? The Egyptian intelligentsia divided

The wave of football-critical discourses that followed in the wake of the second match in Khartoum did however never stand completely unchallenged; the argument that football and its *ta'assub* were poisonous for the Egyptians' feelings for the nation and the *Umma* was not accepted by everybody. As Ashraf Abdel Shafi observes in his book *Muthaqqafin wi kurat al-qaddam* (The intellectuals and football), the debates that followed the Algeria games rather opened up a rift within the Egyptian intelligentsia (2010:127-41). While the likes of Galal Amin, Fahmy Huwaydi, Hani Shukrallah and many Islamists sheikhs directed stern criticism against football as 'empty', 'dangerous' and a 'replacement', a couple of very prominent figures did – at least for a while – dismiss this discourse as elitist and as not taking the 'true feelings' of the Egyptian people seriously. The internationally renowned novelist Alaa al-Aswani's column in *al-Shuruq* on 24th November is arguably the most striking case in point. In this text, al-Aswani located the 'assault' (*i'tida'*) and 'indecency' (*sifala*) directed against the Egyptians in Sudan as the latest episode

within a long series of historical-heroic events – such as the nationalist struggle against the British and the war against Israel in 1973 – during which Egyptians had paid with their lives for 'raising the Egyptian flag'. Al-Aswani also forcefully argued for the Egyptians' cultural superiority vis-à-vis the Algerians:

> Egypt is the biggest Arab country and the biggest source of human talent in the Arab world. The Egyptians have had the honour of contributing in building the renaissance of many Arab countries: the universities were established by Egyptian professors; the newspapers were established by Egyptian journalists; the institutions for the arts, cinema and theatre were established by Egyptian artists; the cities and buildings were built by Egyptian engineers. The hospitals were erected by Egyptian doctors, even the laws and constitutions were often put in place by Egyptian legal scholars. Yes, even the Algerian national anthem was composed by the Egyptian Mohamed Fawzi. This Egyptian excellence shaped the relations between the Egyptians and the Arab peoples.

Hence, al-Aswani continued, it was completely understandable that common Egyptians felt 'humiliated' by the shameful treatment the Algerians had given them. In contrast to those intellectuals who argued that Egypt had to tone down their rhetoric and show more modesty toward its Arab brother country, al-Aswani argued that it was imperative that normal people's feelings against the Algerians were embraced as 'truly nationalist' and taken seriously (quoted in Abdel Shafi, 2010:130ff; see also Thabet, 2010: 227-8).

Towards the end of 2009 and even more so in the course of 2010, arguments such as al-Aswani's did however become more rare and the criticism against the Mubarak regime's usage of football to bolster problematic nationalism all the more unified. In fact, many of those who, in the first days after the game in Khartoum, had stood firmest against everything Algerian now turned to self-criticism. In late December, Youssef Ziedan – another famous novelist who, similar to al-Aswani, had gone on a remarkably chauvinist rant against the Algerian fans and politicians in an infamous op-ed in *al-Misri al-Yum* (25th November 2009) – published an apology for the unfortunate 'anger that conquered him' after the game (quoted in Abdel Shafi, 2010:136). Both the Egyptian government and the Egyptian Olympic Committee also began to backtrack on their earlier threats of boycotts against Algeria, and their primary focus instead shifted towards damage control and reconciliation (*al-Shuruq*, 26th November 2009). As I discuss in more detail elsewhere, the

Egyptian FA also gradually gave up on their initially very outspoken campaign to force FIFA to punish the Algerians and get the match replayed (Rommel, 2014:171f).

As Thabet notes in a chapter of his book that details the shifts in media discourses in late 2009, many people within television, who had initially 'ridden the wave' of popular, nationalist emotions against Algeria, abruptly began to propagate calm when they realised that the state had changed its position to one of accommodation and compromise. Within the satellite channels, which as we have seen had been the target of a lot of the accusations of 'instigation' (*tahrid*) and 'stirring' (*ithara*) of the lazy football nationalism, a blame game quickly evolved in which the owners accused the talk show hosts, who in turn argued that they could not be held responsible for a general atmosphere in society, which they merely tried to reflect as best as they could. Yet – Thabet continues – the general public did not buy the trick. Therefore, the 'crisis resulted in a big crack' (*sharkh kabir*), not only between Egypt and Algeria, but also between the Egyptian media and their viewers (2010:214ff). In an interview on 26th April 2012, Mohammed Tawfiq – the author of *Masr bitil'ab* – expressed this general turn to a more critical approach to the Egyptian football media as something akin to an abrupt awaking:

> After the games against Algeria in 2009, everybody suddenly understood what was going on and they realised that Shoubair [the famous talk show host discussed in Chapter 1] was trying to use the popularity of football to promote Gamal Mubarak's inheritance of power (*tawrith al-sulta*). It became clear, because it was too much. And then people stopped believing in it.

Something had cracked; something was lost. Football was criticised like never before, and for Bilal as well as many of his fellow Egyptians, it became more and more difficult to just sit back and enjoy the show.

The revenge of the respectable

It is worth noting that most of the attacks on football's 'empty nationalism' and excessive *ta'assub* that surfaced in the Egyptian media in November 2009 were waged from two specific camps: on the one hand, people within the cultural and academic intelligentsia, and on the other, Islamists and Muslim scholars. This pattern did not emerge out of the blue. As we have seen above, Islamic scholars have a tradition of being hesitant towards spectator sports and they have often bemoaned the exaggerated emotions that football stirs among the masses. Similarly, Tawfiq argues that many of Egypt's intellectuals since the 1980s turned increasingly antagonistic to football. The prime reason for this was that the more 'refined' activities, which the *muthaqqafin* represented and endorsed – be it the arts, literature or theatre – lost influence and popularity to the booming football hype (2010:125ff). The criticism that these two groups articulated against the sport's values and politics was hence often latent, but it was given more space and a larger, more attentive audience in the wake of the bitter loss in Khartoum.

To better understand why these two groups were the sport's leading critics, it is also useful to recall the version of normative Egyptian nationalism that the 'football bubble' carved out in popular culture and public discourse (Chapter 1). In an interview, the author and journalist Muhammad Tawfiq told me that the only two groups of male Egyptians he could think of, who (stereo)typically had not liked football in the late Mubarak era were 'the sheikhs in the religious TV channels, and the professors at the university' (23rd April 2012). As we remember from my reading of the film *al-Irhabi* in Chapter 1, this was a widely reproduced trope. Through a discursive and highly political process that highlighted football as a sphere of popular normality uniting the nation (and its leader), secular intellectuals and people with strong Islamist sympathies had often been left out. They were portrayed as the abnormal Others for whom football did not matter; consequently, they did not really fit the influential narration of the Egyptian nation that the sport provided.

The strong criticism that Islamists and secular intellectuals directed against football in the weeks after the Algeria matches can be seen in this light as an attempt to claim back

something of the social status which the groups had either lost or never had, but which they had always somehow felt entitled to. As such, the vengeful attacks on football can partly be framed in terms of lost class privileges and diminishing cultural capital (cf. Bourdieu 1984); the critical targeting of the 'uncultivated', 'unaware' and 'uneducated' presenters at the satellite TV stations, for instance, reveals a lot of elitism and disdain for the non-educated *nouveau riche*. Given that not all intellectuals (cf. Winegar 2006) – and by no means all Islamists – in Egypt belong to the *economic* upper (middle) class, it is however also clear that an analysis limited to class cannot give a full picture. Instead, I suggest that it is more illuminating to highlight how these football critics all self-identified as 'respectable' (*muhtaramin*). As Paul Amar has noted, the ordering principle of respectable–vulgar has a very strong valence in contemporary Egypt. Amar also shows that this dichotomy sometimes overlaps categories of class as well as the frequently employed secular–religious analytical binary. At other times, divisions between the respectable and the non-respectable (or vulgar) rather cut across those other dyads. The notion of respectability hence stakes out a somewhat different set of societal fault lines that, while highly classed in terms of education and refinement, do not necessarily map distributions of material wealth (2011).

As I discussed at some length in Chapter 1, the literature on Egyptian film and TV series has convincingly shown how a set of vulgar aesthetics and moral codes came to dominate Egyptian popular culture in the 1980s and 1990s (Armbrust 1996:ch.7; see also Abu-Lughod 2005:210ff). However, at least from the early 2000s onwards, this rise of vulgarity was also widely countered by voices calling for cultural refinement, purposefulness and non-vulgar respectability. As several scholars have pointed out, these calls for morality and purpose often united elite actors across the perceived secularist–Islamist rift. Salwa Ismail has for instance demonstrated a strong convergence between the Egyptian state actors and Islamists around questions of public morality (2006b:58-81). Tarik Sabry has noted how the turn to respectability saw the Islamic revival join forces with secular nationalist elites in their defence of 'culture' (*thaqafa*) against a surge of *sha'bi* (popular, for the people) cultural productions (2010:45f; see also Armbrust, 1996:37ff). A similar alliance has also been identified in the work of Jessica Winegar, who shows how state-run programmes for enhanced cultural awareness among the nation's youth have been based

on very similar neo-liberal ideals and assumptions as debates about the value of art proposed by the popular Islamic New Preachers on Satellite TV (2014). Finally, Samuli Schielke has argued that the secular project of developmentalist nationalism that has long dominated the Egyptian state shares its disdain for purposeless entertainment with the likewise purpose-oriented Islamic revival (2008, 2012b).[30]

When Egypt's respectable Islamists and intellectuals criticised football as vulgarly corrupt and fanatical, and as a lazy nationalism without real purpose, they in other words fit neatly into an already existing complex of moralising discourses, state interventions and calls for direction and purpose. Tapping into a plethora of anti-vulgar sentiments, a front of self-proclaimed 'respectable' struck back against the 'vulgar' politicians, businessmen and entertainers, who had employed football to define how the Egyptian nation should be talked about, represented, lived and felt for. Yet, and in contrast to the respectability blocs that emerge in Ismail, Schielke and Winegar's studies, it was neither the glitzy American University-educated New Preachers, nor the Sheikhs at *al-Azhar*, nor the state's ideological functionaries who took up the battle against football in November 2009. As Tawfiq has argued, the entrepreneurial upper middle-class religiosity of the New Preachers was, by contrast, quite compatible with the ethos of the football bubble (2010:153ff; see also Thabet, 2010:277ff; Winegar, 2014:461).[31]As we saw in Chapter 1, parts of the Egyptian state – and in particular the ruling Mubarak family – were also actively embracing the vulgarly coded aesthetics of football. In the very same period as the Ministry of Culture worked so hard to spread the virtues of respectability and cultural refinement (Winegar, 2014), the football bubble was in other words rarely considered a pressing problem.

The division between the nation's respectable and vulgar subjects that was carved out through the criticism of football as *muta'assib*, immoral and problematically vulgar was

[30] These sentiments have also fed into the booming industry of moral, purposeful art (see e.g. Kubala, 2007; van Nieuwkerk, 2013).

[31] As we will see in Chapter 4, the most important exception to this rule was the sport's biggest star Muhammad Abu-Treika, who was explicitly supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood. For further discussions of the 'New preachers' inventive mix of piety and consumer ethics, see Sobhy (2009).

therefore, at least in part, a novel one. Crucially, the bloc of respectability that came together at this time did not necessarily fit the hegemonic narrative of a moderate, non-political Islam within a broadly secular state that the country's elites had long promoted (see e.g. Bayat, 2010:128ff; Abu-Lughod, 2005:163-91; Sobhy Ramadan, 2012; Starrett, 1998). Instead, the eclectic anti-football front that emerged in November 2009 was constituted of outspoken, oppositional intellectuals like Ibrahim Eissa and Fahmy Huwaydi, as well as Islamists belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood and the country's Salafi movement. In contrast to many of those who, on other occasions and in other contexts, had taken a stance for respectability in Egypt, the football critics in 2009 stood out as significantly more antagonistic to the ruling Mubarak regime. Although in some ways each other's opposites on the political spectrum, they were united in their opposition to the deprived nationalism of a football bubble that they had never felt part of. The Algeria games were a chance for these football critics finally to have their voices heard. As such, it was the beginning of a revenge of the respectable – against football and against the Mubarak regime – that would grow stronger and more influential in the years that followed.

Conclusion: Things fall apart

In retrospect, the matches against Algeria stand out, both as the pinnacle of the bubble around football that I outlined in Chapter 1, and as the time when something was irreparably broken and eventually lost. Practically every person I spoke to during my fieldwork a couple of years later singled out these weeks in November 2009 as the moment when the national buzz around football had been the greatest in their lifetimes. At the same time, I was also told, over and over again, that football 'lost something' that week, and that people's feelings for and attachment to the game and the players had been in decline after the defeat in Khartoum. Not even the victory in the African Cup of

Nations in February 2010 was able to fully reignite the nation's passion, although – as Bilal and other people indicated – the 4-0 demolition of Algeria in the quarter-final provided partial solace. As Egypt's new African Cup of Nations qualification campaign got underway in fall 2010 with a draw at home to Sierra Leone and a shocking loss in Niger, it became increasingly apparent to everybody that Hassan Shahata's unbeatable Pharaohs had passed their zenith. As Egypt quickly moved towards the tumultuous year of 2011, a decade of extreme football hype and success had in other words come to a close.

In parallel to deteriorating results, the bubble around football also began to lose its position as a positively connoted centre point for the national project. Narratives and images that accentuated and questioned the links that had always existed between football, immorality and vulgarity (see Chapter 1) became more common also outside the newspapers columns that I have so far mostly considered. Such a shift can, for example, be traced in Egyptian movies that took football as a topic in the final years before 2011. Unlike some of the slightly older films discussed in Chapter 1, the sport was no longer portrayed as unifying and emotionally uplifting; relations between nationalism and fandom were instead often framed in more problematic terms. A good example of this is *Wahid Sifr* from 2009, which as we remember from Chapter 1 raised questions about immorality and corruption as well as about the problematic effects of the media-driven football obsession. Another telling movie from 2010 year is *678*, directed by Mohamed Diab. The topic of this dark film is Egypt's endemic problem of sexual harassment. In one scene, the main protagonist is sexually assaulted by a crowd of Egyptian football fans. The mob arguably acts as a metaphor for the Egyptian nation as a whole, a nation in which football is located problematically at the very centre. Furthermore, the fact that two popular history books that critically scrutinized the connections between football and politics – Yasser Thabet's *Hurub kurat al-qaddam* and Muhammad Tawfiq's *Masr bitil'ab* – were published in 2010 is part of the same tendency. The type of scepticism and scrutiny of the game that this chapter has detailed were clearly bubbling in many corners of the Egyptian public sphere in the last year or two of the Mubarak presidency.

In his book from 2010, as well as in an interview I conducted with him on 20th November 2012, Yasser Thabet discussed this changing mood around football as a 'depression', which struck the people in general and the elites who had invested heavily in Egypt reaching the World Cup in particular (180). In our interview, Thabet re-emphasised the fact that Egypt *lost* the game in Khartoum as a crucial, but sometimes overlooked reason for what had happened.

> The World Cup in 2010 would have been the main stage for Gamal Mubarak both internationally and here in Egypt. Therefore, [the regime] put all their cards into the games, and they got very upset to miss out on this opportunity [...] everyone was getting ready to celebrate, to make use of it, to justify the popularity of Gamal Mubarak. This is why it hurt them a lot [...] this was mainly a propaganda story for Gamal Mubarak and his businessmen friends, who went with him to the game in Omdurman [Khartoum]. It was a big party, like going to the opera. [...] Like any other dictator, like Hitler or Mussolini, they should have known better. I think it was Goebbels who once told Hitler: "Do not put us in any propaganda situation which we might lose".[32] It was a risky investment in popularity that worked well as long as Egypt was winning, but when the team became inconsistent, it was over.

Thabet is not the only Egyptian writer who has pondered the immense repercussions of the defeat throughout Egyptian society and politics. Journalist Adel Iskandar, for instance, has argued that 'the gaping wound of not making it to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa brought the little tranquilizing effect football success had on Egyptians to an abrupt end' (2010). Winning and winning again had been a defining feature of the national bubble of emotionality and subjectivity that football had been associated with, and which had made such a good match with the ethos that the Mubarak family represented (see Chapter 1). However, as has been pointed out by a variety of scholars, any structurings of subjectivity, affect and emotionality is contingent on a constant need of repetition – in this case of victory – that ultimately makes it precarious (see e.g. Butler, 1999,2010; Jacob, 2011: 25,261f; Larkin, 2008:249f). One thing that the transformation of discourse, emotion and subjectivity that followed the loss in Khartoum illustrates is hence how particular match results can play a pivotal role in social assemblages built up around

[32] According to Gabriel Kuhn, this quote was not made by Goebbels but rather by the Nazi regime's Foreign Affairs secretary Martin Luther (2011:53).

sports. Indeed, and as Joshua Rubin has argued in a recent ethnography on the politics and symbolism of rugby in South Africa (2014), the inherent unpredictability of games grants them a certain autonomy that players, businessmen and politicians can only ever partly control.

As the country quickly moved on towards the momentous year of 2011, the bubble that had surrounded football in the later Mubarak era was, in other words, already beyond repair. The match that had been singled out as the 'most important ever played' had been akin to what Veena Das has called a 'critical event' (1995). A set of new discursive genres had been incited; no longer protected by its previously immense popular appeal, the vulgar and non-respectable aspects of the football spectacle had been increasingly highlighted. The 'events' in November 2009 also enabled what Caroline Humphrey has theorised as the 'crystallisation' of novel subjects, building on a different type of 'truth' about the sport, its politics and its social function (2008:359). In the following two chapters, I will focus one such subjectivity, which became increasingly influential and visible within the Egyptian football assemblage in the post-2011 years: the young, oppositional and emotionally intense Ultras supporter. Later on in the dissertation (Chapter 5 and 6), I will instead turn to how many Egyptians in the post-2011 period adopted a significantly more cautious emotional approach to football. Given that the national political debate in this period increasingly turned into a struggle between secular, anti-Mubarak intellectuals and Islamist groups – the same football-critical 'respectables' that I have discussed throughout this chapter – this widespread distancing from the sport can arguably be understood as a prolongation and expansion of a shift initiated in late 2009. The events that this chapter have honed in on, in this light, stand out as a key moment in the transformative historical trajectory of Egypt's politicised national sport in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Perhaps – as many people I met liked to speculate (see also Gabr, 2013) – could a different result in that stadium outside Khartoum have given the Mubarak regime the boost necessary to survive another year or two?

[CHAPTER THREE]

New kids on the block

The Egyptian Ultras movement, a younger emotional style

> In the beginning, in 2007 and 2008 nobody in the clubs or the media took us seriously. They considered us some small guys and crazy ones, and they left us alone. This changed in 2009 and 2010, because we became really big, so al-Ahly Club started to use us in negotiations with sponsors and TV-rights: 'Look at our fans, they are the biggest and most passionate in Egypt so we should get more money', that kind of thing. The club also started to use our culture and songs in the official things they sell in al-Ahly Store. You have been there right? You saw the things they sell? It is of course not our official t-shirts, but they are very similar, and they play our CD in the shop. [...] Just before the revolution the club helped us once when 15 members were arrested at a match in Asyut [in Upper Egypt], but most times they said some bullshit like 'they are not part of us, not real Ahly fans' when we got into trouble. Only after Tahrir did people change their minds. Now, they have started to understand that youth in Egypt can do something really big.
>
> Shadi – a long time member of Ultras Ahlawy

Cairo International Stadium is the centrepiece of a vast complex of sports facilities, located between two of Cairo's busiest thoroughfares and straight lines of sand-coloured apartment buildings at the fringes of Nasser City. The stadium area was originally constructed in the late 1950s as part of the Nasser regime's large-scale investment in sport and has since undergone multiple renovation schemes and extensions. Being the home

stadium of both al-Ahly and al-Zamalek as well as the Egyptian national team, this is the arena where most of the country's biggest sporting events have taken place for more than half a century.

On the occasions when I went to Cairo Stadium to watch Ahly and Zamalek matches in autumn 2011 and winter 2012, however, it was often rather difficult to comprehend that this, until recently, had been a space for so much jubilation, euphoria and national pride. On dark winter nights, when the cold, dry wind from the north blew across the eerie two-tier concrete oval with its dusty grey plastic chairs, the place appeared rather grim and unpleasant. With fewer than 10,000 spectators spread out across the 75,000 seats, watching live football in this otherwise hopelessly congested city was often a surprisingly forlorn activity. Sometimes I felt as if the heavy concrete, the hazy black sky, and the green, floodlit pitch below comprised an alien world on its own, detached from the rest of Cairo's urban fabric.

One particularly cold night in mid-January 2012, al-Ahly played Smouha – a small club from Alexandria with minimal popular support. My friend Karim, with whom I sometimes went to games, had called me just before we were supposed to leave, mumbling something about headache and errands (*suda' wi mashawir*), but I decided to go anyway, preparing myself meticulously with gloves, a hat, long-johns and multiple sweaters. I hailed a taxi at Opera Square in Downtown, and after a frighteningly fast ride through al-Azhar Tunnel and up along Salah Salem Street, I got off at the 1973 war memorial at the northern edge of the stadium compound. I bought a cheap, third-category ticket for 10 EGP from one of the hawkers in track-suit pants and leather jackets outside the entrance, passed a quick security check, and climbed the staircases to Karim's and my favourite spot at the top of the north-eastern upper tier. I took out a paper napkin and wiped off the thick layer of dust from one of the chairs, opened a packet of crisps and a bottle of water, and sat back on the uncomfortable plastic.

The view was breath-taking: the steep, grey and sparsely settled terraces formed a giant bowl below me; on the rectangular field beneath, small red figures and white balls drew intricate geometrical patterns against the greenery during al-Ahly's warm-up. As often before, I was struck by the lack of regulation. While there were hundreds of policemen

behind the high fences on the running tracks that encircle the pitch, I could not see a single security guard or police officer monitoring the spectators behind the two goals, or on the entire eastern stand along the pitch to my left. Consequently, fans moved around as they pleased, crossing low fences into sections for which their tickets technically were not valid. Behind me, a dozen supporters had scaled the five-metre high neo-pharaonic boards that crowned the top of the roof-less stands. High up there, they had attached Ahly-flags and scarves to the torn murals of the Giza pyramids and the Sphinx. Most of the kiosks in the interior of the stands were closed. Instead, a number of independent vendors moved around the lines of seats, selling tea, crisps, biscuits and *kushari*[33] from brown cardboard boxes.

Throughout the vast space, one exception to the general impression of informality and lack of discipline stood out. Opposite where I was sitting – on the lower-central part of the main, western stand – neat rows of black-clad policemen encircled a lone section of very different order. Over there, club officials, former players and people from the football federation watched the game next to journalists and those able to spend several hundred pounds on first-category tickets. When the two teams marched in, and the crowd rose to sing the national anthem, the main action took place in front of this small VIP section, and at half time, spectators on that side could enjoy refreshments from numerous, well-staffed kiosks. Moreover, the advertisement placards that surrounded the pitch faced the main stand and the TV cameras, and in contrast to where I sat, the VIPs could hear the stadium speaker and announcements through functioning loudspeakers. In short, almost all organisational, commercial and infrastructural efforts were concentrated on this small sealed-off part of the stadium. As such, a well-polished footballing event was created for a tiny elite at the stadium and the millions who watched the game on TV. In January 2012, this felt like a powerful image of what the boosted football bubble (see Chapter 1) had shrunk down to: a choreographed and condensed spectacle for television and the rich, in the middle of an otherwise cold and uninspiring, footballing wasteland.

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[33] *Kushari* is a cheap staple dish, made of pasta, rice, lentils, chickpeas, fried onions and tomato sauce.

And yet, on the lower tier below me, right behind the northern goal, another type of organisation, another type of event, was unfolding. There, where the view of the pitch is the worst, some five thousand men in their late teens and early twenties had amassed, standing on their chairs. Many of them were dressed in red t-shirts with hoodies tucked in underneath to protect against the cold. Above them, from the upper tier, they had hung flags and banners with texts like *a'zam nadi fil-kun* (The greatest club in the universe), *Together Forever* and in the middle, over the section's entrance: *Ultras Ahlawy*. At the very bottom, in front of the intimidating security fence that separated the spectators from the police on the running tracks, two young men in skinny black jeans and red t-shirts had scaled a couple of three-metre-high loudspeakers. Ten minutes before kick-off, the two men stood up, balancing on the narrow speakers. They turned towards their friends on the stands, like directors of a symphony orchestra. From that moment on, until well beyond the final whistle, the youngsters sang without a break, about their club, their freedom, their martyrs and their revolution. Led by their leaders on the speakers – the *capos,* who urged them to keep up when energy briefly flagged – Ultras Ahlawy filled the cold night and the concrete on *talta shimal* (Ultras Ahlawy's section – or *curva* – behind the goal) with a choreographed mix of song, dance, flags and burning *shamarikh* (emergency flares originally used at sea).[34]

When the players entered the stadium and lined up in front of the VIPs, TV cameras and advertisement boards, a few Ultras members on the upper tier unfolded a huge flag, on which they had painted the head of a devil, alluding to the club's nickname Red Devils. Simultaneously, everybody in the all-male crowd below held up pieces of black, red, white or yellow plastic, forming a pattern that provided the devil with a body that stretched out across the stand. Neither this impressive display – tonight's *dakhla* (entrance scene, tifo) – nor the Ultras' singing and dancing was to be given much attention by the mainstream media. However, it was all filmed by a couple of Ultras members behind the opposite goal, and published the same night on Facebook and YouTube.

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[34] *Talta shimal* means the third category stands to the left (*shimal*). The opposite *curva*, where al-Zamalek's Ultras White Knight are located, is called *talta yimin* (right).

Two parallel events were hence taking place at Cairo stadium that night: one older, commercialised, official and formal for the clubs, the Football Association and television; and one younger, unsanctioned, louder and more energetic, for and by the al-Ahly Ultras fans. The middle-aged men with kids, spread out on the rows in my section were very much excluded from both. Our view was perfect, though, and as much as we could, we split our attention evenly between the two. Certainly, we sang the national anthem before kick-off, and we all cheered when al-Ahly scored and the players celebrated in front of one of the TV cameras behind the goal. However, for long periods, we also followed with curiosity what the Ultras below us were doing. When we knew the lyrics, we joined in some of their more famous songs, we laughed at their witty and provocative banners, and when the whole *curva* behind the goal was lit up by *shamarikh* and red smoke in the middle of the second half, we took up our mobile phones and recorded the grand show of sound, light and intensity.

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This chapter narrates the history of Ultras football fans in Egypt, from the establishment of the first Ultras groups in spring 2007 until the night in January 2012 depicted in the vignette above. In the main, my story illustrates how the popularity and influence of these fan groups within the Egyptian football assemblage grew steadily in the final years under Mubarak, and how this development accelerated after 25th January 2011.

The first sections of my ethnography show how the Ultras – inspired by an international movement in North Africa and Europe – insisted on organising themselves independently from the clubs and in explicit opposition to the way football had hitherto been moneyed, politicised and mediatised. I also highlight how the Ultras actively worked to engage emotionally in the sport in novel ways. Drawing loosely on the work of Benno Gammerl, I am analysing the emotionality of the Ultras as an assembled 'emotional style', i.e. a more or less coherent 'community' of feeling that encompasses 'the experiencing, fostering, and display of emotions, and [which] oscillate[s] between discursive patterns and embodied practices as well as between common scripts and specific appropriations' (2012: 163). The chapter argues that the principles and emotional style of the Ultras struck a chord among large sections of the Egyptian youth, who loved football and al-

Ahly or al-Zamalek, but who were fed up with the sport as it had been organised, discussed, mobilised and experienced within the 'football bubble' (see Chapter 1 and 2).

Later on in the chapter, I explore how the Ultras fans, from early on, were framed as a problem to be dealt with by people in the Egyptian football media, the clubs and the security apparatus. Consequently, Egypt's Ultras continuously faced criticism in the mainstream media and had numerous fights with the police. Due to a combination of interlinked factors, however, this repression and regulation of the new fans' emotions and action at the stadiums and beyond gradually weakened in the course of 2011. This persistent resistance against the Ultras from the football establishment and the state can, I argue, be understood as a combination of their oppositional principles and uncompromising insistence on doing their own things and feeling their own feelings. In conversation with the work of scholars such as Samuli Schielke, Asef Bayat and Salwa Ismail, I suggest that the Ultras' emotional style provided a new and different type of fun and energy among Egypt's youth that fundamentally threatened the affective statecraft (cf. Stoler, 2004) that the football assemblage sustained in the late Mubarak era.

In the third main section of the chapter, my ethnography takes on a set of discourses about *baltaga* (thuggery), an accusatory problematic that the Ultras and the wider revolutionary movement often had to relate to. In a slight detour from my main story, I detail this trope's historical genealogy and illustrate how it mobilised a complex of issues related to class and privilege, respectability and problematic masculinity. As I show, this discourse was particularly influential in Egyptian public debates at the time of the protests and clashes in central Cairo in November and December 2011. For the Ultras, the problematic of *baltaga* initially meant that they took an ambivalent stance vis-à-vis the protests. After the death of one of their members, the Ultras were, however, able to pre-empt and reflect the accusations. They were also brought back into the centre of the struggle, and the public image of their emotional style and stadium spectacles was strengthened.

Finally, as a conclusion, I return to the point where the story started: the match between al-Ahly and Smouha at Cairo Stadium in January 2012. I argue that the Ultras emotional style at this point was less restricted and more appealing than ever. Similarly to the

'respectable' block of intellectuals and Islamists described in Chapter 2, the Ultras fans formulated a stern criticism of the way football had been run under Mubarak. Managing to bridge revolutionary charisma, an emotional style that appealed to the youth, and certain notions of respectability, they also showed a way forward. For many, these new kids indeed seemed to embody a revolutionary football for the future.

Large parts of this chapter trace a development before I arrived in Cairo in August 2011. As in Chapter 1 and 2, I am hence also here partly presenting a historical ethnography (see Introduction). The data that these historical sections build on largely originate in books about the history of the Egyptian Ultras movement (Bashir, 2011; Thabet, 2013) as well as interviews with football journalists and Ultras members. In the latter parts of the ethnography – dealing with the period between August 2011 and January 2012 – I also draw on participant observation and extensive media analyses of Facebook posts, YouTube clips, as well as online and printed press. Given this set of material, the emotional style of the Ultras is predominantly explored through discursive accounts, memories and press commentary. The story presented about the Ultras' transformation over the years is likewise mainly an account of shifting imageries, labellings and representations of and by these supporter groups.

Successful radicals with a novel emotional style

Principled puritans

The first Egyptian Ultras fan-groups were established in 2007. The two first groups were Ultras Ahlawy (UA) – who support al-Ahly – and Ultras White Knights (UWK), cheering

for al-Zamalek.[35] Shortly thereafter, Ultras groups supporting clubs outside Cairo also emerged, although UA and UWK remained the largest and most influential.[36] Already in 2009, Cairo's Ultras were able to mobilise several thousand young men and teenagers on especially important match days. During my fieldwork a couple of years later, as we will see in this and the following chapter, the presence of the Ultras movement was steadily increasing, in the press, in everyday discourses and in Cairo's urban space. At the time of writing in March 2015, the Cairene Ultras groups' very active Facebook pages are 'liked' by 873,000 (UWK) and 1,076,000 (UA) users respectively. At least in numerical terms, the short history of Egypt's Ultras is hence a remarkable success story.

The appeal of the Ultras among Egyptian youth is typically understood to be a result of the new fan groups' radical ideology. In a book by blogger and former UWK member Muhammad Gamal Bashir, *Kitab al-ultras* (The book of the Ultras) – the by far most thorough account of Egypt's Ultras movement to date – large sections are for instance devoted to the group's founding principles of organisational and financial independence. Bashir tells us that when UA and UWK came into being, a handful of similar fan associations, which targeted the youth and tried to introduce new ways of cheering, already existed in Cairo: al-Ahly Fan Club (AFC, established 2005), Ahly Lovers Union (ALU, 1996) and Zamalek Lovers Union (ZLU, 2005). However, because of these earlier organisations' high membership fees and close relationships with the boards of the clubs, their activities were considered too controlled, too commercialised and simply too expensive to attract large numbers of supporters (2011:35-67).

Many of the founding members of Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights had previously been active in AFC, ALU or ZLU. The new groups that emerged in spring 2007 were their attempt to break free more radically from the clubs' control, and to

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[35] The term 'group' (*grub* in Egyptian Arabic) is frequently used by Ultras talking about their own associations. In this dissertation, I consistently talk about the Ultras as 'groups'.

[36] Famous examples are Yellow Dragons (al-Ismaili), Green Eagles (al-Masry) and Green Magic (al-Ittihad). In addition, al-Ahly's Ultras in Alexandria are organised in Ultras Devils, a group which is semi-independent from Ultras Ahlawy. This dissertation mainly focuses on the Cairene groups Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights.

establish truly independent supporter organisations (Bashir, 2011:35-67).[37] In contrast to the rigid hierarchies in AFC, ALU and ZLU, the new Ultras groups also adopted decentralised structures of command, wherein local *sekashin* (UA; sing. *sakshin*, lit. 'section') or *dawal* (UWK; sing. *dawla*: lit. 'state') organised day-to-day activities (see below), and through which the *capos* and all other leaders were elected (ibid.:84-6). To make the groups accessible to young Egyptians of all classes, compulsory membership fees were also abandoned.[38] All kinds of financial support from the clubs were also strictly ruled out, to ensure the movement's independence. Instead, the economy of UA and UWK came to rely on sales of T-shirts, scarves, CDs and other merchandise, all of which were designed, produced and sold by and among the members (ibid.:163ff).

In his book, Bashir details how UA and UWK's novel and popular approach to fandom came to be based on a few non-negotiable principles: cheer for 90 minutes no matter the result on the pitch; stand throughout every game; travel to all games that your team play, home as well as away;[39] and stand in a specific section of the stadium, typically the cheapest one, behind one of the goals (2011:78ff). As Bashir also notes, these basic rules were inspired by those of similar groups within a pan-Arab, indeed intercontinental Ultras movement. During trips to matches in the Maghreb in the pre-2007 years of AFC, ALU and ZLU, the founding members of UA and UWK had first-hand experience of the Ultras that had sprung up since the early 2000s around the biggest clubs in Tunis and

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[37] One early episode that is often brought up is al-Ahly's 100-year celebratory match vs. FC Barcelona in April 2007. Many older Ultras referred to the way tickets to this great event almost completely had been allocated to sponsors and VIP-people rather than to normal fans as an eye-opener that made them understand that a new type of oppositional fan culture was needed (see also Bashir, 2011:59f; Thabet, 2013:22f).

[38] Exactly how much Ultras members are assumed to contribute financially to the groups is a bit unclear. One UWK-member told me that he at the time paid 30 EGP per month to his *dawla*. Others have suggested that Ultras members make voluntary contributions to the groups. While rich members might pay as much as 100 to 150 EGP per month, less well-off fans give much less (Woltering, 2013: 300).

[39] Given that al-Ahly and Al-Zamalek regularly participate in African club competitions, this principle has resulted in many longer supporter trips. It was impressive to listen to well-off Ultra members' stories about all the far-away places across the African continent, where they had gone to support their teams.

Casablanca. The impressive *dakhlas*, organisation and dedication of these pioneers were important sources of inspiration for the way UA and UWK were set up, and the relationships between Ultras groups across North Africa have been strong and active ever since (2011:35-67; see also Elgohari, 2013). What is more, the Ultras in Morocco and Tunisia had, in turn, drawn a lot of their inspiration from the Ultras in southern Europe, who had played an important role at football stadiums in countries like Croatia, Italy, France and Germany since the 1950s and 60s (Bashir, 2011:31ff; Thabet, 2013:12f; see also Kuhn, 2011:159-77). Through their general principles, the Egyptian Ultras groups were hence a branch of a loosely connected international movement of football fan groups.

One striking dimension to the self-identification among Egyptian Ultras is the way they think of themselves as radically different to other types of football fans, whom they consider less dedicated and pure, more controlled and corrupted. According to Bashir, Ultras would for instance never support only the teams that win, and their loyalty for the club transcends the worship of individual players. Furthermore, the Ultras in Egypt like to distance themselves from the charismatic cheer-leaders (*hatifin*), who board members and businessmen in the old days paid to sing certain songs or to incite the crowds against certain players, coaches or officials (see e.g. Bashir, 2011:57; Thabet, 2013:16f). In contrast to the 'passive millions' who rather watch the games on TV, Ultras are also always present at the stadium. Finally, Ultras are not – like 'hooligans' in England or 'Bara Brava' in Latin America – connected to criminal networks, and they are never violent unless provoked (ibid.:18-30). Taken together, this oppositional ethos of Ultras – in Egypt and elsewhere – is often summarised in the catchphrase 'against modern football': a loathing for the commodified, globalised and mediatised sport paired with nostalgia for a more local football, played for the fans at the stadium who really care (ibid.:170-84; see also Kuhn, 2011). For the Egyptian Ultras that I met in Cairo, the famous 'against the media' stance of the international Ultras movement also translated into a particular aversion to Egyptian football television, which the Ultras regularly accused of hypocrisy, corruption and regime-bias, as well as for spreading a tilted, negative image of the Ultras ideals and activities (cf. Bashir, 2011:181ff). Independent, principled and dedicated: the

picture that Bashir's book paints of the Egyptian Ultras is one of a disciplined movement of young football puritans.

A machinery of emotional excess

Through stern principles, sharp media critique and strict organisational independence, the Egyptian Ultras provided an alternative framework for football fandom, detached from and opposed to the football bubble of the late 2000s. Clearly, this alternative ideological approach to the sport was welcomed by broad layers of young football fans and a crucial reason behind the movement's growth. When I asked UA and UWK members to describe what had made them join the Ultras in the first place, many indeed cited the group's radical principles. Often, I heard them praise the 'freedom' that being Ultras gave them. As Ultras, they told me, they were able to do their own thing, in their own way, far away from the hypocritical media and corrupt big business that so much of football in Egypt had become.

As important as the oppositional ideals of the new fan groups might have been, an important layer arguably goes missing if the popularity of UA and UWK is analysed solely as a result of their grand principles. For people like Muhammad – a UWK member in his late teens, with whom I used to play football outside the palace in Abdeen on late weekend nights (see Chapter 6) – being an Ultra was also strongly related to a particular set of collective emotional experiences. When I got to know Muhammad in spring 2012, the league was suspended, and we never got the chance to go to the stadium together. But before and after playing football, he sometimes told me about a recent past when his life had revolved almost solely around the group and the *curva*. 'For me, the basic thing was always to work hard every week in the local *dawla* preparing for the match', Muhammad once told me:

> Sometimes we wrote new songs, sometimes we designed or sold T-shirts, sometimes we tagged graffiti in our neighbourhood, sometimes we prepared a *dakhla*, sometimes we recruited new members, sometimes we collected money for *shamarikh*. There are many things to do, and when everybody in all *dawal* do their best, the songs, flags and *dakhlas* that the capos decide to use at the match become better, more professional. Because the match at the stadium is

> the best thing in the world (*ahsin haga fil-'alam*). You must come with me one day; I can't explain it to you. When everyone is together on *talta yimin* [UWK's section at Cairo stadium], and we sing about al-Zamalek, and we dance, and then comes the *shamarikh* and then aaaaaaah!!! [pumping his fist up and down in the air and laughing] We just continue for 90 minutes, we never stop. All of us together, our *dawla* and perhaps 15,000 people more. You feel strong and you feel free, and it is so much fun. I love it a lot.

In Muhammad's description, UWK comes across as a dispersed, yet well-oiled machine, which channels hours and hours of hard work by each and every *dawla* into intense collective experiences at the stadium. In an insightful recent analysis of the potentials and limitations of the Ultras as a force in Egyptian society and politics, Mohamed Elgohari has similarly argued that this ever-ongoing collective project, rather than the movement's abstract principles, has been essential for holding the groups together (2013). The common efforts of painting flags, composing songs, organising trips to away games and choreographing *dakhlas*, however, do not only provide the groups with common goals and a sense of togetherness through iterative practice. What Muhammad's story also alludes to is the magic of the collective emotional occasion in the *curva*, and the sense of 'freedom' that these strong emotions connote. One other late night after a tough game of pick-up football, he told me:

> I cannot understand young people who go to the stadium and sit down for 90 minutes. OK, if you are old and weak, of course you cannot jump and sing, but if you are young, you miss the point if you only watch the game. I mean, you can see the match better on television, but it is only at the stadium that you can sing, burn *shamarikh*, jump and do *dakhlas*. If you don't do that, you miss what is special about real football. Honestly, you miss the fun and the freedom (*bi-siraha al-mut'a wi al-huriyya fatitak*).

Muhammad's depiction of the stadium as a space for a particular kind of emotionality linked to 'freedom' is important. My friend Amro (see Chapter 1) – who was slightly too old to join the Ultras, but followed them closely as an Ahly-fan and a sports journalist – once enviously described the younger Ultras' distinct way of feeling and acting as 'more organised and somehow more modern and international' than that of older fans like himself, who 'basically just go to the stadium to swear at al-Zamalek for 90 minutes'. What the Ultras managed to achieve was in this sense to assemble democratic organisation, strict discipline, flags, firework, songs and special clothing into a distinctly

novel 'emotional style' (Gammerl, 2012) for Egyptian youth to partake in. Through their active use of social media, awareness of the new style of football fandom and freedom soon circulated far beyond Egypt's football stadiums.

The great appeal of the Ultras emotional style of fun has been noted by sociologist Ashraf el-Sherif. El-Sherif argues that the new fan groups constituted a new paradigm of 'joyful liberation from the shackles of social and institutional norms to create gratifying chaos', set up in opposition to a ruling 'paradigm of depression, control and normalisation of apathy' (2012). In light of my discussion in Chapter 1, I would be wary of singling out the Ultras' emotional style as the *only* fun around in the late Mubarak era. As we have seen, the football bubble of success, for example, provided many people with a different set of upbeat emotional registers in an otherwise rather gloomy and desperate era (cf. Schielke, 2008). At the same time, the Ultras' festive joy at the stadiums did facilitate a parallel realm of footballing fun which, to many young men, seemed international, exhilarating and free. That the new emotional style for football fandom combined 'fun' and 'freedom', does not, however, mean that it was a product of an individualist do-what-you-will absence of regulations and constraints. In contrast, and as we have seen, the feelings that made the Ultras so appealing were crafted through strict organisation, internal discipline and decentralised hard work (cf. Mahmood, 2005:29f). Through these means, Cairo's Ultras groups manufactured 'a particular quality of social experience' in Egypt's football stadiums at the end of the 2000s (Williams, 1977:131f). 'Structuring feelings' around football in an innovative way, a new masculine emotional style took shape, well-fitting to an emergent 'sense of a generation' (ibid.). However, their popularity in one generation was not necessarily shared by slightly older people. This is the issue to which we now turn.

Revolutionary fists, revolutionary feelings

Clashing with the police and the media, 2007-2010

The Ultras' relationship to the Egyptian security forces was always one of tensions and conflict. During an interview on 17th May 2012, Sherif Hassan – a journalist at the football website *FilGoal.com* who for many years has written extensively about the Ultras movement – explained to me that the real troubles began in 2008, when the police started to monitor and regulate the groups' activities, equipment and messages in the *curva.* According to Hassan, the groups deemed the police control measures unacceptable, and hence met any attempt at enforcement with violent resistance outside as well as inside the stadium. In fact, the more the police challenged them, the more UA and UWK made a point of increasing precisely those types of activities that the authorities wanted to regulate. When UA took their usage of fireworks to a new level at an infamously smoky match in Ismailia in January 2009, the conflict escalated further. A few days later, several *capos* from both UA and UWK were arrested in a coordinated raid on their homes. The arrests happened only a couple of days before the derby game between al-Ahly and al-Zamalek, and to protest the capture of their leaders, both UA and UWK decided to either boycott the match, or to attend without their red and white t-shirts and without cheering. According to Hassan, this meant that Cairo Stadium was eerily silent during the entire match; since both *curvas,* where the Ultras usually stand, were only sparsely filled with people dressed in normal clothing, the match is still known as the 'Black Derby' (see also Thabet, 2013: 38ff).

Shortly after the Black Derby, the *capos* were released from arrest, although this was not enough to deescalate the conflict. In contrast, both UA and UWK found themselves clashing violently with the police on numerous occasions throughout 2009 and 2010. The Ministry of Interior even established a special office to monitor and control the capital's Ultras groups (Elgohari, 2013), although the supporters consistently defied the regulations imposed on their activities, as well as on the controversial pro-Palestinian rhetoric that they started to communicate in the *curva* (Sherif Hassan, interview, 17th May 2012). As

Hassan described it, the Ultras won a series of incremental victories during this period, and towards the end of 2010, they had managed to carve out a unique space for freedom of expression at the stadiums (see also Thabet 2013; Elgohari, 2013; Goldblatt, 2010). The way in which the groups proved able to take on the dreaded security state in violent street fights made them even more popular among the youth, and the membership numbers increased rapidly. Given also that UA and UWK fought each other at times, it seems fair to argue that certain resorts to violence over time were incorporated as intrinsic parts of the Ultras style and ethos.

In our interview in May 2012, Hassan described these last couple of years before the revolution as the time when the Ultras movement began to be properly covered by the mainstream football media. Having previously been more or less neglected, the combination of the groups' new ways of cheering and defiant resistance against the police now arose as a serious issue to be dealt with. In an article in *al-Misri al-Yum* on 5th January 2009, star TV presenter Ahmed Shoubair, for instance, described the Ultras as 'solely concerned with firing rockets and taking all sorts of drugs; hence the only reasonable thing is for them to be hit and arrested, since they are out of their minds (*fi ghayr wa'ihim*)' (cited in Thabet, 2013:39). Almost exactly two years later, the senior football journalist Hassan el-Mistakawi devoted his 2010 New Year's Eve column in *al-Ahram* to the problematic new 'manners' that the Ultras had brought to Egypt's football stadiums. Starting the article by making clear that his 'belief, hope and dream' had always been that these groups of youth would be a 'positive force', he then went on to lament how the 'energy' of these boys had been channelled into 'hatred, insult and abuses' incongruent with the spirit of sport. Moreover, al-Mistakawi questioned how such a large organisation could possibly have been set up so quickly without financial support from some 'political organisation hiding behind the curtain of sports and its supporter organisation' (cited by Thabet, 2013:45f). Insinuating that the Ultras must be part of a conspiracy, al-Mistakawi thus added to Shoubair's call for a 'solution' to the 'problem' that the Ultras fans had become: for the sport, for the police and, indirectly, also for the stability of the Egyptian state.

Discovered on Tahrir Square

As Sherif Hassan and Ultras members I spoke to would tell me, there was a strong feeling within the movement that the media had intentionally tarnished the groups' image. By solely focusing on the violence that UA and UWK were involved in and consistently relaying the police's derogatory narratives, the dominant media image of the Ultras was most certainly one of violent, unruly troublemakers at the time when al-Mistakawi wrote his article at the very end of 2010. The revolution that broke out less than a month later challenged this perception. While none of Cairo's big Ultras groups explicitly encouraged their members to join the demonstrations at Tahrir Square, many joined in 'as individuals', and as a result, the Ultras songs, flags, clothing and fireworks (*shamarikh*) were visibly and audibly present throughout the eighteen days of protests (Hassan, 2012a). Because of their experience of efficient on-the-ground organisation and street fights, the groups were acknowledged early on as important participants and leaders in the protection of the sit-in on the square, in particularly on 28th January, the so called 'Day of Rage' (Dorsey, 2011; Zirin, 2011). Within the Egyptian football community, the Ultras' politics thus stood in stark contrast to those of most club officials and players, who instead – to the great disappointment of many Ultras – more or less actively supported the Mubarak regime and called on the protesters to go home (see e.g. 'Auish, 2011).

During the course of 2011, the Ultras were 'discovered' by many of Cairo's revolution-inclined activists and journalists. Their struggle against the police became a frequently used trope in a dominant narration of the revolution as a liberal quest for 'freedom', run by different groups of youth. Invariably, these accounts highlighted the international Ultras movement's deep aversion to the police, summarised in the abbreviation A.C.A.B. – All Cops Are Bastards – which can be found on Ultras flags and graffiti throughout the world. Typically, a point was also made of how previous clashes with the security forces had constituted a laboratory for the revolution to come; it had 'prepared' the groups for street fights and fostered the discipline and organisation necessary for pushing the police back from Tahrir Square (e.g. Bilal, 2011; Elkayal, 2011; Lindsey, 2011; see also Bashir,

2011:95ff; Elgohari, 2013).[40] Another episode often mentioned, which added to the narrative of the Ultras as long-time revolutionaries, was when UA had shouted 'Tunis, Tunis' and illegally put up a banner with the text 'Freedom' at a match on 23rd January 2011. Nine days after the ousting of President Ben Ali in Tunisia, the event was in retrospect understood as a prophecy of what was to come in Egypt, beginning only two days later (Hassan, 2012a; Thabet, 2013:63f).

A telling event for the way the tide of media coverage and public opinions was turning in the Ultras' favour in 2011 took place in the aftermath of an Egyptian Cup game between al-Ahly and Kima Aswan in early September 2011. This was, incidentally, the first match I ever went to at Cairo Stadium, and as I had heard a lot about the radical fan groups, I made sure to get a seat with a good view over the action in the *curva*. Throughout the game, I observed UA provoke the Central Security officers, who were positioned at the bottom of their section, for their humiliating defeat at Tahrir Square in January, and they repeatedly insulted their antagonists' former boss, the then imprisoned, former Minister of Interior Habib el-Adly. Right after the final whistle, the police had clearly had enough. On a given order, they launched a surprise attack against the fans. The policemen chased the fans up the steep stands and out through the narrow exit, indiscriminately arresting, kicking and hitting the young men with their batons. Luckily for me, I was sitting in a separate section. Shocked by what had I had experienced on my virgin trip to the stadium, I hurried home in the opposite direction, to instead follow the clashes, which continued as riots in the street, on television and via social media.

Throughout the night and the following days, the brawls and the ensuing arrests of nine UA members were a major topic in most Egyptian news media. As Sherif Hassan later confirmed in an interview, the coverage was significantly more extensive than it had been during similar episodes in the past. On the sports websites *Yallakora.com* (Dayf Allah, 2011) and *FilGoal.com* (Saied, 2011), as well as in many private newspapers, such as *al-Tahrir* (Abu Bakr & Al-Hamid Sharbani, 2011), the Ultras' version of the incident as an

[40] Interestingly, the Egyptian security forces likewise thought of the clashes against the Ultras prior to 2011 as a kind of 'training exercise for how to disperse political demonstrations' (el-Zatmah, 2012:806).

unreasonably violent and largely unprovoked attack was reconfirmed. The seemingly arbitrary arrests were also widely criticised. Only in state newspapers such as *al-Ahram* (7th September 2011), and on the football television talk shows on *Modern* that were always critical of the Ultras, did I find the Ministry of Interior narrative of 'infiltrators inciting violence' and the police showing the 'utmost degree of self-control' relayed without question. In contrast to in earlier years, the media coverage was thus not only more extensive, but also distinctively more favourable to the Ultras. For media outlets that considered themselves 'revolutionary' in September 2011, the police were the ones to dislike and discredit. UA fighting with the police in stadiums or in the streets was widely understood as the continuation of a progressive, revolutionary struggle for freedom and self-determination.

Breaking free from the bubble

The long series of confrontations between Cairo's Ultras groups and the Egyptian state between 2008 and 2011 demonstrates that the new fan groups were highly politically contentious. The now well-known narrative about the extended tug-of-war between the Ultras and the police, their struggle for 'freedom', the A.C.A.B acronym, and the Facebook and street-fighting knowhow of the youth do, however, risk giving a somewhat limited version of the aims and politics of the Egyptian revolution. In recent years, this standardised narration of the revolution as waged *for* a set of liberal principles, *by* a social media-savvy body of 'youth', *against* the police, and *in* the surroundings of Tahrir Square, has come under increased scrutiny and criticism. Instead, scholars have argued that January 2011 must be understood as a culmination of gradually growing contradictions and a more heterogeneous discontent. A growing literature has, for example, shown how labour organisations and peasants came to resist the desperate economic conditions that several decades of neo-liberal policies had brought them, well before 2011 (Armbrust, 2011; Bush & Ayeb (eds.), 2012; see also El-Mahdi & Marfleet (eds.), 2009). Others have perceived of the revolution as a continuation of the Egyptian people's grand tradition of anti-imperialist, nationalist mobilisation (El Shakry, 2012). Yet others have placed the political upheaval in the context of a long power struggle between the Egyptian military and the police (Kandil, 2012).

To better understand the growing tensions between the Ultras and the state, I suggest another reading that adds to this literature on the revolution's multiple contexts and causes. Specifically, I once again argue that the intertwining of football, fandom and politics are better grasped if we attend to the emotional and affective realms. One example of what such a perspective makes legible is found in an article by Salwa Ismail (2012). Ismail locates the Ultras' famously teasing songs about the idiocy and stupidity of the security forces within a broader, 'affective' revolution by lower-class men against the 'humiliation' caused by the police's systematic, 'semi-military' surveillance campaigns. Ismail's awareness of the affective dimensions of the Mubarak regime's *modus operandi* provides us with an alternative framework (beyond A.C.A.B.) for understanding why fighting, insulting and provoking the police had such a strong appeal among millions of young Egyptian men. As such, Ismail also adds a more serious facet to those analyses that identify the 'carnivalesque' character and playful 'fun' of the Ultras groups as the emotional registers that made them political and subversive (Abd al-Hameed, 2014; el-Sherif, 2012). At least among the lower-class segments of the socially very heterogeneous Ultras movement, a sense of affective revenge was certainly also part of the political potency of these new fan groups.

A focus on the emotionality of the Ultras movement can also illuminate why the Egyptian police worked so hard and insistently to regulate seemingly petty things like fireworks, flags, chanting and dancing in Egypt's football stadiums. As I have shown in this chapter, these practices and equipment constituted the material scaffolding for the Ultras distinct emotional style of intense fun and freedom. In a sense, the state's attempts to control the Ultras hence link up with broader tendencies toward regulations of pleasures in contemporary Egypt. The reformist Islamist movement has a historically rooted suspicion of joy and fun, especially among the youth (Bayat, 2010:138-58; see also Shavit and Winter, 2011). As reformist interpretations of Islam became increasingly dominant throughout Egyptian society in the 1990s and 2000s, the influence of moralism and restraint within Egyptian popular culture consequently increased (Ismail, 2006b:58-81; van Nieuwkerk, 2013). As I noted in my discussion on respectability and anti-vulgarity in Chapter 2, the new moralist calls for restraint and purpose were not, however, enforced by Islamists alone, but by a broad range of actors including popular TV sheikhs, scholars

at al-Azhar, state authorities, and local guardians of morality (Ismail, 2006b:58-81). A similar argument has also been made by Samuli Schielke, in his monograph about the popular, festival-like celebrations of Sufi saints called *mulids*. Schielke argues that reformist Islam and modernist secularists should be understood as a powerful discursive bloc, united by values of progress, order and clarity. As such, secularists and Islamists were often unified in their disdain and opposition to the *mulids*, whose ecstatic fun came across as backward, ambivalent and without proper purpose and order (2012b:81-110).

The intricate politics of fun and joy in the Mubarak era were, however, not only concerned with limitation, repression and bans. What made the unholy alliance between the notionally secular Egyptian state and its Islamist opposition so successful was that it also successfully fostered politically unproblematic entertainments and desires. In Asef Bayat's writings, this is talked about as Egypt's 'secularegious state', a particular structuring of respectable and moderately religious amusements and passions. This dominant complex was epitomised by the popular Muslim preacher Amr Khaled, whose 'balanced' message of 'faith and fun', self-responsibility and success propelled an emotional mobilisation among large sections of the Egyptian youth (2010:128-36; see also Winegar, 2014). As I argued in Chapter 1, the bubble assembled around football was another popular cultural phenomenon that distributed a similarly moderate range of upbeat, yet non-subversive emotions in the same period. At least until the Algeria games crisis in late 2009 (Chapter 2), the 'affective state' (Stoler 2004) built up around the country's most popular sport often overlapped the secularegious block of moralised amusements that Ismail, Schielke and Bayat's writings shed light on. At the same time, football's flirtation with a more vulgar aesthetics and its non-elitist connotations of common-man normality arguably made it even more influential. As the hype around football reached its peak in the late 2000s, football's structuring of feelings certainly reached well beyond Amr Khaled's largely middle-class fans and follower. The sport's sanctioned version of how to have fun thus crucially contributed to defining the affective contours of Mubarak's Egypt.

From this perspective, the violent, and after January 2011 increasingly desperate, attempts by the security state to regulate the Ultras emotional style appear in a new light. Because,

if the particular distribution of sentiments that the football assemblage circulated in the late Mubarak era was at the core of a highly successful crafting of the state and the nation, then I would argue that the parallel emotional style of fun, freedom and transgression, which the Ultras embodied, challenged this particular form of 'statecraft' (Stoler, 2004). Although not necessarily a struggle *for* fun and *against* power – as El-Sherif (2012) and Bayat (2010) would suggest – the rising popularity of the Ultras coincided with a period when *different registers* of football-related joy and fun were sanctioned and encouraged by the media, popular culture and the wider football-political establishment. For many men with power, the alternative, younger emotional style of the Ultras was hence a challenge to what football, its spectators and, in effect, the Egyptian nation had been and should be about. Like the *mulids* in Schielke's work (2012b) or the burgeoning youth movements that Bayat identifies as threats to the homogenous secularegious Egyptian state (2010:135f), the Ultras challenged the football bubble through their independently crafted energy, affect and freedom. They had a different type of fun, and embodied a different form of power (cf. Schielke, 2012b:7). Hence, it should come as no surprise that the state security apparatus made such an effort to curb what the new, young football fans were doing and feeling.

In the wake of the 2011 revolution, as I have shown in this section, this long-term police repression of the fans was questioned more than ever before. In the next section, I will explore how the Ultras also had to face accusatory attacks in the discursive realm. As we will see, this was especially so in the eventful, revolutionary autumn of 2011.

Respectable revolutionaries or brutal *baltagiyya*?

Are the Ultras *baltagiyya*?

In a long article published in *al-Misri al-Yum* on 19th April 2012, Sherif Hassan looked back at the Egyptian Ultras movement's first five years of political struggle. In one section of the article, he reflected on the clashes and arrests that had taken place after the match between al-Ahly and Kima Aswan in September the previous year. With a good six months of hindsight, Hassan saw this event both as a turning point and as an indication of what was to come. On the one hand, the arrests of nine Ultras members had united UA, UWK and the broader revolutionary movement against the security state. This united front had eventually reached a historical victory: after a short period of outrage – at the stadiums, in demonstration and in the media – the regime had backed off and released the young men. New regulations had also been put in place that stipulated that the police forces from now on should be positioned *not* among the Ultras on the stands proper, but on the running tracks, on the other side of the security fences. At the same time, Hassan also argued that the Kima Aswan clashes had triggered a change in tactics among those who tried to counteract the Ultras' rise to power.

> The regime (*al-nizam*) realised that they could not oppress these groups in the traditional way of violence only. Therefore, they once again resorted to the media, which portrayed the youth as *baltagiyya* (thugs), who were paid to unsettle the county's stability.

Hassan's observations are very much to the point. When Cairo's big Ultras groups throughout autumn 2011 insistently pushed for their rights to use *shamarikh* at the stadiums, they were consistently met by accusations of being *baltagiyya* (sing. *baltagi*) by the football media, the clubs, the police and the EFA (see al-Din Muhammad, 2011). The Ultras were by no means the only groups of young Egyptians to face this accusation. In fact, the phenomenon of *baltaga* (thuggery) played a fundamental discursive-political role within the Egyptian revolutionary process more broadly, in particular in autumn 2011. The ways the Egyptian Ultras had to deal with this issue was, in other words, only partly specific to football. To fully understand the importance of the *baltagiyya* discourse for the

development of the Egyptian Ultras movement in autumn 2011 and beyond, a brief historical and etymological detour from our football-focused story is hence necessary.

The *baltagiyya* on Muhammad Mahmoud Street

During my fieldwork in Cairo, the issue of *baltagiyya* was discussed most intensely during the bloody protests and street fights that took place on and around Muhammad Mahmoud Street, Tahrir Square and (slightly later) the Cabinet building in November and December 2011. During this month of bloody unrest, I noted how many people began to draw distinctions between the axiomatically good 'revolutionaries' (*shabab al-thawra*) and a variety of bad elements – *al-baltagiyya* – that tried to destabilise the nation and derail what had so far been achieved. Friends, who previously had been largely positive towards Tahrir Square, popular power and demonstrations, began to question the usefulness of more protests, clashes and deaths. In particular, as the parliamentary elections were approaching, many asked themselves if it would not be more productive for the country to enter a new phase of a more ordered type of revolutionary politics.

A good example of the direction the public debate was taking was an article by the novelist Youssef Ziedan in *al-Misri al-Yum* on 30th November 2011.[41] In this text – a detailed exposé of the historical and contemporary usage of the term *baltaga* – Ziedan made clear that the *baltagiyya* are very different to revolutionary youth. As part of an argument, which at least partly tried to understand the social predicaments of the *baltagiyya*, he sketched out a telling list of miserable characters that the notorious label for him encompassed:

> What are they really, except for a mix of fugitives from the prisons and runaways from the law (*haribin min tanfidh al-ahkam*) – and those are criminals. As well as inhabitants of *al-'ashwa'iyyat* [the vast, informally constructed residential areas that today house more than half of Cairo's population], who have lost all hope and come to hate the general society, which oppressed them – and those are excused. As well as those who went too far taking heavy

[41] This is the same Ziedan as was discussed in Chapter 2.

> drugs, which crippled them in their work due to their urge and need for natural and chemical drugs – and those are addicts. As well as young adolescents from areas where development has been neglected, even though they sneak around between the houses in the luxurious neighbourhoods (*yigusun khilal al-diyar fil-manatiq al-muraffiha*) – and those are victims of injustice (*mazlumun*).

For Ziedan, the *baltagiyya* consisted of the 'hungry, ignorant, homeless and desperate', who had been the biggest 'victims of the Mubarak era'. Such connotations of social marginalisation, crime and threatening disorder were common in the debates that raged in the public sphere parallel to the clashes. Among many of my friends, who were critical or at least ambivalent about the never-ending fighting, questions and rumours started to pile up: who were these people who kept on defying the Ministry of Interior's tear gas and bullets? Where did they come from, and what did they want? Were they really revolutionaries, fighting in the nation's interests? Or were they simply *baltagiyya*, who had come to destroy and break down?

As Ziedan also shows, this ambivalence around the *baltagiyya's* identity, aims and actions has deep-rooted historical origins. The term originally derives from the Turkish word *balta:* a particularly heavy weapon, which it was the task of the *baltagi* to carry in times of war or at public executions in the Ottoman era (see also Ghannam, 2013:122). The *baltagi* was hence from the very outset a male figure, who depended on his physical strength for making a living. However, as the modern Egyptian state took shape in the nineteenth century, the *baltagi* was disassociated from the state apparatus. Instead, his societal role came to oscillate diffusely between extortion and protection, predominantly in Cairo's popular (*sha'bi*) neighbourhoods. In constant tension and dialogue with the similar but more favourably connoted male figure *al-futuwwa*, the history of *al-baltagi* has hence been a steadily shifting one (cf. Jacob, 2011:225-62). However, the *baltagi* has consistently embodied a somewhat problematic, semi-legal and masculinised subjectivity, associated with physical strength, violence and money.[42]

[42] See Abu Magd (2010) and Brown (1990) for accounts of the history of bandits and/or *baltagiyya* in Egypt.

The *baltagi's* precarious position at the fringes of legality went through a particularly quick series of perturbations in the last decades of the Mubarak era. Salwa Ismail has argued that thuggery effectively replaced Islamist terrorism as the main threat to the nation in Egyptian public imaginaries in the late 1990s.[43] In her ethnography, Ismail details how this focus on poor, young males as threatening *baltagiyya* led to heavily increasing securitisation measures and middle-class moral panics. For particularly 'suspicious' characters – such as street vendors, minibus drivers or just any working-class man in Cairo's informal neighbourhood (*al-ashwa'iyyat*) – this necessarily implied vastly increasing police violence and surveillance (2006a:139-45). Many times, the problematic masculinity of the *baltagiyya* was also associated with the serious and widespread problem of sexual mob violence against women in Egyptian public spaces (Amar, 2011).

As has been shown by Paul Amar (2013b), the Egyptian regime did not as much confront as cynically make use the *baltagiyya*. Facing increasing numbers of protests in the 1990s and early 2000s, the police gave up their half-hearted attempts of fighting the thugs and instead 'appropriated them as a useful tool' (211). More precisely, Amar claims that the

> Ministry of Interior recruited these gangs to flood public spaces during times of protest [...] ordered [them] to mix with protestors and shout extremist slogans in order to make the activists look like "terrorists", or, alternatively, to wreak havoc, beating civilians and doing property damage in the area of the protest (211f).

The result of this incorporation of the *baltagiyya* into the security apparatus, Amar has termed the *baltagi effect*: a manufactured depiction of oppositional demonstrations 'as crazed mobs of brutal men [...] according to the conventions of nineteenth-century, colonial-orientalist figurations of the savage "Arab Street"' (212). Moreover, it is also well known that the police employed a network of former prisoners that many would consider as *baltagiyya* to act as informers all across Egypt. In this way, the issue of the *baltagiyya* at

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[43] An indicative event that Ismail identifies as the beginning of a new era is the passing of the 'thuggery law' (*qanun al-baltaga*) in 1998 (2006a:121f). Perhaps, it could be argued that the period when the *baltagiyya* were the main threat to the nation ended in summer 2013. Since the 3rd of July coup, and el-Sisi's war on terror, Islamist terrorism once again seems to have taken the place as the most acute issue to be dealt with.

the same time crystallised as a discursive construction, a political tool applied by the regime, and as hordes of men of flesh and blood who roamed the streets.

This historical trajectory of the term and its mobilisation is important to bear in mind if we are to understand how and why the *baltagiyya* emerged as a major problematic during the weeks of clashes in late 2011. However, before returning to our more particular story about Ultras football fans, one final general dimension of the discussions about *baltagiyya* versus revolutionaries has to be pointed out. As several commentators have noted, the tendency to separate the country's political actors between good and bad elements came with a bundle of problematic knock-on effects. During a round-table discussion at the conference 'Narrating the Arab Spring', held at Cairo University on 21st March 2012, political scientist and leftist activist Rabab El-Mahdi, for instance, pointed to the strong class connotations of the *baltagiyya* discourse, which in her view created a counterproductive split between 'respectable' middle-class 'revolutionaries' and the 'vulgar' lower classes. Another similar and very timely intervention was an article by historian Lucie Ryzova, published on *Al-Jazeera's* website on 29th November 2011. Ryzova here noted a distinct division between the lower-class men on the frontline of the Muhammad Mahmoud clashes and the middle-class protesters, who were more likely to be located in the relative safety of Tahrir Square. Coming into central Cairo from the informal neighbourhoods on 'cheap Chinese motorcycles', whilst sporting 'a particular dress code and hairstyle that often involve copious quantities of gel', the type of men that Ryzova saw fighting at the frontier had for many years been portrayed as troublemakers, sexual harassers and a threat to public order in the Egyptian mainstream. Hence, Ryzova argued, the notion of *baltagiyya* would always come in handy for middle-class Egyptians when speaking about this particular lower-class masculine habitus. And yet, it was precisely these young men – often driven by a deep desire for revenge after many years of police harassment (see also Ismail, 2006a, 2012) – who threw rocks at the police, carried the injured to hospital on their motorbikes, and paid with their blood as the security forces retaliated with birdshots and sharp ammunition. Somewhat paradoxically, the group of men typically labelled as *baltagiyya* were hence simultaneously the villains and the unsung heroes of the revolutionary struggle.

The story of two martyrs: *al-dakhiliyya – baltagiyya*

The focus on *baltagiyya* in Egyptian public discourse at the time of the Muhammad Mahmoud Street protests made legible an abject, problematically masculine Other. Simultaneously and dialectically, the trope also carved out a set of revolutionary ideals that connoted non-violent respectability and middle-class normality. This influential discourse clearly affected the stance of the Ultras groups towards what was happening in Downtown. While Ultras I spoke to later confirmed that many members of both groups actively participated in the protests, UA and UWK's Facebook pages never directly encouraged their members to join the fights. For UWK, this attitude changed to some extent, when one of their members – Shihab Ahmed – was killed on Muhammad Mahmoud Street on the third day of the fighting. Thereafter, the group's criticism of the police and the military became fiercer, and all UWK members were called upon to attend the martyr's funeral. However, not even at this point did UWK officially tell its member to join the struggle en masse. On the contrary, representatives of UWK as well as Shihab's family had to face questions about the dead man's history, morals and motives. In an interview published in the online football magazine *alforsan.net* five days after Shihab's death, his mother struck back against those who questioned that her son was a real revolutionary martyr. Understandably shaken and pressured by the media questioning her son's role in the street fights, she claimed that 'the one who goes to a protest prepared to sacrifice his life (*musta'id lil-tadhiyya bi-ruhi*) cannot possibly be a *baltagi*, but he is a hero and a man and not a tramp (*mutasharrid*) as some people claim.' The title of the article was indicative of the mood in the country and the protestors being on the defence: 'The mother of the martyr: those who die in Tahrir are not *baltagiyya*' (Diyab, 2011).

The longer the unrest wore on, the more difficult it became to rid the protests of accusations of *baltaga*. After a short period of calm during the parliamentary elections in early December, the fighting broke out again on 16th December after a sit-in outside the Cabinet building was broken up by military police. The scenes of tear-gas, Molotov cocktails, stone-throwing teenagers and armed police men firing rubber bullets, bird-shots and live ammunition felt like a ghastly re-run of an all too familiar script. Yet, a distinct change in attitude towards what was going on was also noticeable. One taxi driver told

me: 'the police must hit them harder, to save the revolution'. At the grocer's, I was told: 'the state must defend itself against those criminals. The people in this country need someone strong, someone like Mubarak.' My close friend Mahmoud was one of those who most drastically re-conceptualised the political process around him. Only a few weeks earlier, Mahmoud had been firmly against the outrageous level of violence committed by the military and the police. Three days into the second wave of violence – and just 24 hours after footage of Egyptian military police dragging and beating a veiled woman across Tahrir Square, famously revealing her bare belly and blue bra, had spread across the world – he instead told me:

> Have you seen those who camp in Tahrir Square now? I pass them every day, and I can tell you, they are not good people, not respectable (*mish muhtarama*). Probably they are paid by Gamal Mubarak to destroy the elections. By the way, that woman [in the blue bra], she was not a real *munaqqaba* (woman wearing the full-body veil called *niqab*). You could see that on the type of underwear she wore. This is a Muslim country, Carl. It cannot be run this way. But *Insha'Allah*, it will be re-built step by step through elections and institutions. All of them are *baltagiyya*! Honestly, it does not matter to me if they die or not.

For people like Mahmoud, it seemed the imagery of the immoral *baltagiyya* had become so well established that conflicting narratives and images did not affect him any longer. The 'frames' – as Judith Butler would put it – were already so firmly stabilised around the protesters that their lives had become 'ungrievable', 'lose-able', or even lives whose 'loss[...] is deemed necessary to protect the lives of the "living"' (2010:31). Towards the end of December, the fighting subsided. According to the Ministry of Health, the last wave of clashes had left 12 people dead and 815 injured. The proportions of *baltagiyya* versus respectable revolutionaries among the casualties were very much in the eye of the beholder.

What is crucial for the story in this chapter is that one of those casualties – a young student called Mohamed Mustafa, who often went under his nickname 'Karika' – was a member of Ultras Ahlawy. In retrospect, Karika's death comes across as a turning point for the involvement of the Egyptian Ultras movement in the wider revolutionary process. When the fighting had started anew in front of the Cabinet building, the Ultras had been

even less enthusiastic about it than during the Muhammad Mahmoud brawls a couple of weeks earlier. Together with the widespread discrediting of the protestors as disreputable and randomly violent *baltagiyya*, leaders of both UA (18th December 2011) and UWK (19th December 2011) had made statements on their Facebook pages, disassociating themselves from what was going on. Moreover, the UA *capo* Ahmed Idris had come out in the press and vigorously denied the rumours that one of the men who had been killed in the clashes had been a member of the group. Instead, he made clear that UA were against 'any action that hurts the interest of the country and its institutions (*maslahit al-balad wi munsha'atiha*),' and that all individuals present at the protests were there as 'citizens' only and not as members of any kind of group (*al-Shuruq*, 21st December 2011). In a politico-discursive climate where the protests connoted *baltaga* – a concept which in turn was singled out as the main threat to the nation – Idris and UA opted for an easy refuge, siding with the 'respectable' common good against the troublemakers.

When Karika was shot dead on Qasr al-Ainy Street on 21st December, the same day as Idris's statements were published in *al-Shuruq*, Ultras Ahlawy were abruptly pushed straight back into the political struggle. Two days later, al-Ahly played Maqassa at Cairo Stadium, and the entire match was turned into a tribute to the martyr and a manifestation against the state violence that had killed him. Most Ultras fans present were dressed in black instead of the normal red, the *dakhla* before kick-off covered *talta shimal* with a huge black and white portrait of their dead friend, and al-Ahly's Portuguese coach Manuel Jose showed his sympathies by wearing a T-shirt under his grey tweed jacket, on which was printed 'RIP Mohamed Mustafa'. Throughout the game, the fans' chanting against the ruling military council and the Ministry of Interior was also more explicit than before; high up above the *curva*, an enormous banner was hung with a message that read: 'The engineer Mohamed, martyr of freedom. The *baltagiyya* killed him with live ammunition' (*Al-muhandis muhammad shahid al-hurriyya. Qataluh bil-rusas al-baltagiyya*) (see Ultras Ahlawy's Facebook, 23rd December 2011).

The contrast between the dead engineer – Mohamed Mustafa had been an engineering student – and the *baltagiyya* who killed him – referring not so vaguely to the Ministry of Interior and the military – had an important function. In the days that followed, Mustafa's

educational qualifications and the fact that he had been one of the country's best tennis players were constantly reiterated in the media (see e.g. Maher 2011). This framing of the dead supporter effectively disrupted the narrative of the ongoing protests as a matter of lawless *baltaga*, because every Egyptian would instantly recognise that an engineering student, who in addition played an expensive sport like tennis was not just anybody, but a member of the country's respectable upper middle classes. It is particularly noteworthy to compare the ease and confidence with which UA acknowledged and publically honoured Karika as the group's revolutionary martyr, and how this narrative came into circulation in the Egyptian press, with the much less extensive and more doubtful coverage of Shihab Ahmed's death. Clearly, Shihab's much more humble background in the poor, informal neighbourhood Bulaq al-Dakrur gave his martyrdom a very different position within the discursive field of respectability, class and *baltaga* which dominated Egypt at the time. This contrast becomes even more pronounced if we recall that the general image of the protests was far more *positive* at the time when Shihab was killed on Muhammad Mahmoud Street than when Karika died a few hundred metres south, along Qasr al-Ainy Street a month later.

If we want to understand the powerful emotional and political 'work' (Gribbon, 2014) and 'productivity' (Armbrust, 2013a) of Mohamed Mustafa's martyrdom – in contrast to that of Shihab Ahmed – the former's respectable middle-class status must hence be taken into account. In a period ridden by 'hypervisibilisation' (Amar, 2013b) of low-class *baltagiyya* as *the* urgent problem for the nation to deal with, Mustafa's death provided UA (and to a lesser degree also UWK) with a way out of the deadlock of passivity and hesitation. Karika's death not only pushed Ultras Ahlawy back into the fight against the police and the military. Through an assemblage that also included a grand stadium spectacle, graffiti of Karika's face on the walls of Cairo, and extensive media coverage, his life also came to 'matter' for the idea and memory of the struggle itself (cf. Paul, 2015). After the death of a middle-class member, Ultras activities could not as readily be dismissed as a *baltagiyya*. With time, the entire month of violence – including the death of Shihab Ahmed – would be incorporated in the narration of the Ultras as revolutionaries fighting the Egyptian security forces (see e.g. Mosbah, 2015). Possibly as a result of this new articulation, the group's emotional style and spectacle seemed more self-confident

than ever on the night in December 2011 when they honoured Karika at Cairo Stadium. It made perfect sense for them to reflect the discourse of the establishment back onto the police and the military. Singing from the stands their most provocative song about Egypt's policemen as failures in school and corrupt 'crows' that destroyed the fun for the youth, the fans returned over and over again to a rhyming chant that was both simple and effective: *al-dakhiliyya – baltagiyya* (The Ministry of Interior – are *baltagiyya*) (Ultras Ahlawy 07 Media, 2011).

Conclusion: A new dawn?

With ten minutes remaining of that chilly game between al-Ahly and Smouha in mid-January 2012, I had had enough of the cold wind, and I decided to climb down to the sheltered lower tier where Ultras Ahlawy congregated. The home team was winning 3-1, so the fans had all reasons to be happy. When I entered the stands, passing under the red banners, the presence of a few thousand young, red-clad male bodies jumping up and down, whilst singing *min talta shimal, binihizz gibal, wi bi-'ala sut daymin binishagga' al-abtal* (from *talta shimal,* we are shaking mountains, and we always support the champions in the loudest possible voice) had a pleasant effect on my frozen body. Down at the bottom, next to the security fence, the two *capos* on the loudspeakers stood leaning towards us, pumping their open palms in the air, urging the group to sing even louder, to jump even higher. Of the tight security measures and policing of previous years there was nothing to be found. The concrete walls around me were covered in graffiti; most of it simple tags of Ultras Ahlawy, UA07 or Ultras Devils, but there were also A.C.A.B. tags, insults directed at the corrupt football association, and stencils of the characteristic, smiling face of the martyred Karika. Many members carried flags with critical messages directed at the military council, the police, the football media and 'modern football'; all around me, people were shouting insults to the state-security personnel, positioned at safe distance on

the running tracks behind the fence. Finally, it seemed that the Ultras, with their distinct aesthetics and emotional style had gained absolute control of their part of the stadium, which they had always insisted to be their inalienable right (see Bashir, 2011:144). The young men and teenagers around me were not merely guests at the game, accepting the rules of the stadium hosts. Rather, they were the *de facto* owners of the *curva*, entirely in charge of a parallel, emotional-political event that had grown into something quite substantial.

The self-confidence and strength that Ultras Ahlawy's emotional style radiated that night in mid-January 2012 reflected a remarkably quick reassembling of Egyptian football. Just one year earlier – in the weeks just before 25th January 2011 – things had been very different indeed. A ban on banners and flags inside the stadiums had still been strictly enforced by the security forces, police men had been stationed among the Ultras inside the *curva,* and a broad coalition of journalists, club representatives and the football association had unanimously portrayed the groups' emotional practices as an issue to be carefully contained. This consensual block of control and regulation had broken down in the course of 2011. Following the January revolution, the Egyptian police had been discredited, and its presence significantly decreased in public places. At the football stadiums, this meant that the bans on flags, banners and graffiti could no longer be enforced. After the Kima Aswan clashes in September, the police were not allowed into the stands, a decision that allowed the Ultras even more freedom to act and feel as they pleased. As of December 2011, the Football Association had also given up on their attempts to stop the fans' lighting of *shamarikh*. Moreover, the Ultras fans' emotional spectacles were also circulated more widely than before: through their Facebook pages, whose popularity was increasing rapidly, and in online football media like *FilGoal.com* and *Yallakora.com*, which targeted a younger, more 'revolutionary' audience, more supportive of the Ultras than the previously dominant football satellite channels. Finally, the general image of fans' activities, aims and politics had also been fundamentally rearticulated: due to their participation at Tahrir Square and long-time combat with the security state, and due to the 'respectable' status – far from accusations of *baltaga* – that Karika's martyrdom had granted them.

One year after the 2011 revolution, the once marginalised and oppressed emotions of the Ultras, and their ideals for what football fandom should be about and feel like, were consequently emerging as a serious alternative to the previously dominant emotional-political configuration that I discuss in Chapter 1 as the 'football bubble'. The carefully assembled emotional style, of decentralised organisation, material equipment and collective hard work among the new fan groups, was being allowed to come together without much of the resistance, regulation and questioning that it had faced in years gone by. The alternative sphere of football that Ultras had assembled since 2007, in and outside the stadiums as well as in social media, was however not the only prevalent criticism of the *status quo*. As we learned in Chapter 2, a coherent set of public debates around the sport's 'fanaticism', lack of 'respectability' and 'exaggerated nationalism' had also been in sway since the bitter loss to Algeria in Khartoum in November 2009. In January 2012, the distinctive bubble of football, politics, media spectacle and emotionality of the Mubarak era was thus squeezed and questioned from two directions at the same time: from an unholy alliance of increasingly powerful Islamists and anti-Mubarak intellectuals, who considered the recent football hype a vulgar, non-respectable distraction from more pressing concerns; and from the young Ultras groups, who inspired by like-minded fans in the Maghreb and Europe, rather despised the football bubble for being old-school, corrupt and hopelessly boring.

While united in their criticism of the politicisation, organisation and regulation of football under Mubarak, the two flanks of this joint attack certainly did not agree on everything. On the contrary, many of the 'respectable' voices that looked down on football for its unrefined fanaticism and vulgarity would probably consider the Ultras groups part of the problem and as yet another proof of the sport's detrimental function as an opiate of the masses. What made the ideals and demands of the Egyptian Ultras unique was, hence, how they not only criticised what had been, but also staked out a way forward toward a concrete alternative. While this had been part of the Ultras movement's zeal and creed already in the late Mubarak era, their emotional style and revolutionary visions for a new type of football became more widely known, understood and supported after the fall of the old regime. As the story of this chapter ends in January 2012, UA and UWK's emotional style of fandom was thus something as rare as a realm of football that was on

the rise in an Egyptian society otherwise sceptical about football. Indeed, there were even indications that the Ultras would manage to *combine* their style of youthful energy and radicalism with the classed respectability that the other bloc of football criticism requested. As we will see in Chapter 4, this balancing act would continue in the year that followed. Before that, however, a dreadful event would shake and shock the Egyptian football assemblage in general and the Ultras movement in particular. I will discuss this momentous occasion in the short Interlude that now follows.

[INTERLUDE]

Suddenly the lights went out

On Wednesday 1st February 2012, just as another golden Egyptian sunset faded into an inescapably cold and windy winter's evening, a gruesome event of death and violence transformed Egyptian football irreversibly. In a football league including just half a dozen 'popular clubs' with supporters (see Chapter 1), the fixtures that night were as spectacular as could be: at 5 pm, al-Masry from Port Said hosted al-Ahly, and right after, at 7 pm, al-Zamalek was to take on al-Ismaili at Cairo Stadium. During my morning Arabic class, I noted an unusually high level of anticipation among the school's administrative staff, Basam and Hani. As I was well known as the 'football researcher', they were eager to hear me predict the results for the two matches, and they took turns telling me how a combination of historical and geographical factors had made the football fans in Port Said and Ismailia the country's most fanatic and locally patriotic. 'It has always been like that along the Suez Canal [where both cities are located]', Basam told me:

> They say it has to do with the way that region was always at the frontline in the wars. In '56, '67 and '73, Israeli attacks destroyed the canal cities. All of the people had to move; also the football clubs. I think this made them very proud of their cities and their football. Much more than in Beni Suef [Basam's hometown], where everyone supports al-Ahly and al-Zamalek.

Hani added:

> In that period, when al-Ismaili Club had to be in Cairo because of the wars, they asked al-Ahly if they could use their facilities to train and play matches. To be hosted, you know (*istidafa ya'ni*). But al-Ahly said no, so they asked al-Zamalek. And they said yes. After that, the people in Ismailiyya hate al-Ahly. It is similar in Port Said.

This story about al-Ahly not hosting al-Ismaili during the war was something I had heard before, and versions of it would be retold time and time again by interviewees and friends in the months to come. While the stories about how and by whom the canal clubs had been hosted in the war years varied, the fact that al-Ahly had never had many fans at all along the canal – in contrast to everywhere else Egypt – was common knowledge. In fact, Hani told me, al-Masry against al-Ahly was, apart from the Cairo derby, Egypt's fiercest rivalry. Hence, it was one of rather few matches this revolutionary season that he was not going to miss. 'You know that I am *Ahlawi*,' Hani told me as I packed my bag and got ready to leave, 'but I tell you what, the most passionate supporters in Egypt come from Port Said. You should go to a game there some time, to do research. There is more enthusiasm (*hamasa*) there than here in Cairo; those guys are really crazy (*maganin bigad*)'.

Already a few days before, my good friend Hamada – a pharmacist and passionate *Zamelkawi*, who we will meet again in Chapter 5 – had bought tickets for the two of us to attend the Zamalek-Ismaili match. The plan was that I would come to his pharmacy in the afternoon, and that we would go to the stadium together in his car. After talking to Hani and Basam and reading some pre-match reports in the newspapers, I had however become convinced that the match in Port Said was a fixture not to be missed. Instead of driving to the game with Hamada – and effectively being stuck in rush-hour traffic during the first of the two games – I therefore decided to go to the stadium earlier, and watch the first match on TV. Finding an *ahwa* (coffee shop) that showed football in the sprawling area of motorways, apartment blocks and war monuments that surrounds the stadium in Nasser City turned out to be something of a challenge. Eventually though, I stumbled on a small café in a community-centre-cum-vegetable-market at the centre of a symmetrically planned semi-circle of socialist-style building blocks. Relieved, I found a seat and sat down, just as the game was about to start.

The place was packed, the waiter was unfriendly, my coffee was far too sweet, and my chair was broken and uncomfortable. Yet, the *ahwa* had a TV that nobody's attention left for a second, and around me, people were emotionally involved in the match in a way that I had often hoped for, but previously rarely experienced in my fieldwork. From what I could catch of the atmosphere at the stadium close to the shores of the Mediterranean, the crowds and the occasion also seemed to evoke precisely that mix of intensity and intimidation, which I had always found so appealing. When at half-time, tens of al-Masry fans climbed over the security fences and ran around on the pitch with little interference from police or security personnel, a discussion broke out among the *shisha*-smoking men around me. A few *Ahlawiyya* to my left found the behaviour completely unreasonable (*mish ma'ul khalis)*, and a sign of the infamous *ta'assub* (fanaticism; see Chapter 2) among the supporters in Port Said. In contrast, many al-Zamalek supporters (myself included) could not help but feel quite amused and impressed by the strong emotional reactions and clearly visible tensions.

In the second half, the atmosphere became even more charged: al-Masry put on a surprising comeback, turning a 0-1 deficit into a 3-1 win; al-Ahly's Portuguese coach Manuel Jose had an unknown object thrown at his head; fireworks were shot from the stands towards the players on the pitch; and the game had to be interrupted several times, as al-Masry fans repeatedly made their way over the security barriers. The heat of the occasion was tangible, and through the television, right above the fridge filled with Pepsi, Miranda and 7Up, it was effectively relayed directly into the small Nasser City coffee shop. With each al-Masry goal, a group of *Zamelkawiyya* and I became more and more up-beat, as our hopes increased that al-Ahly might be heading towards a rare defeat. For those supporting al-Ahly, however, the lack of organisation and control of the supporters at the stadium was nothing less than a scandal, and the main reason for their team's unexpected collapse. 'Look at our players, Jose and the referee', I heard a man behind me say, 'they all look scared; this is not right; this is not football'.

A few minutes before the full-time whistle, I had to drag myself away from the televised drama to meet Hamada at the stadium. I found him at his usual spot, high up on the second-category stand, enthusiastically discussing the al-Ahly game with some fellow

Zamelkawiyya who had followed the other fixture via a portable radio. As he saw me ascending the steep staircases, he held up three fingers in the air and shouted: 'They lost by three! Did you hear it, Carl, the game is finished: al-Ahly lost 3-1. Now if we beat al-Ismaili we will go top of the league. *Insha'Allah* this season we will win the title.'

Soon after, our match started on the pitch below us. It was a fast-flowing game in high tempo between two of the country's best sides, who both hoped to capitalise on al-Ahly's slip-up earlier in the evening. Just before half-time – with the score-line 2-2 – I made a quick note in my phone:

> great atmosphere all day.
> Joy, excitement and passions.
> this is how football should be.

A few minutes into the interval, a young guy with a radio, a few rows behind us, suddenly spoke up:

> Listen folks, two from al-Ahly's fans are in the morgue in Port Said. They say there might be more (*Asma'u yi gama'a, itnayn min gumhur al-Ahly fil-mashraha fi bur sa'id. Biy'ulu mumkin tiktir*).

Quickly, rumours started to spread. Everyone tried to get hold of reliable news. People congregated around radios; men with smartphones updated Twitter frenetically; I called Karin and told her to turn on the TV. Someone said there were six dead, then 15, then 22. Hamada and I could at first not believe what we were hearing, but when our game was called off, and we saw the players and al-Zamalek's coach Hassan Shehata crying on the field below us, we realised that something really terrible had happened. In the car, on our way back, we sat quietly and listened to radio reports that just would not stop the awful count: 26, 32, 38. Later, at home watching TV, I got a better sense of the scale of it all. Everything had been broadcast live on television, and through the night the dreadful images rolled over and over again: several thousand exhilarated spectators from the home-stands storming the pitch right after the final whistle; the police stepping back, doing nothing; the Ahly players desperately fleeing, barely managing to take cover in the dressing room; hundreds, perhaps thousands of al-Masry's supporters continuing across

the field up to the al-Ahly Ultras sections, once again without any police interference; the lights in the stadiums suddenly and mysteriously going out; fires burning on the terraces; the glimmering of what looked like long, sharp weapons; chaos; death and horror.

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The death toll of the Port Said stadium massacre finally stopped at 72, making it by far the deadliest stadium disaster in Egypt and the fourth worst tragedy ever to happen at a football stadium anywhere in the world. All of the victims were members of Ultras Ahlawy or Ultras Devils, and all of them were young: the youngest – Anas – was only 15 years old. Some had been stabbed to death with sharp objects, others had been strangled, yet others were pushed or forced to jump from the top of the stadium, falling down on the pavement some 15 metres below. Many of the casualties suffocated in a stampede as people tried to flee down a narrow corridor towards the exit, only to find the iron gates facing the streets locked.[44] At least one supporter died inside the al-Ahly dressing room among the shocked players. Somehow, he had been brought in there to get first aid treatment by the team's medical personnel, although it sadly turned out to be all too little, all too late.

Shorty before half past three in the morning, a train from Port Said pulled in at Cairo's railway station. On board were most of the injured and shocked supporters, who had been lucky enough to survive the bloodbath. Broadcast live on several of Egypt's biggest TV channels, the entire arrival hall, all the platforms and even most of the tracks were packed with relatives, friends, activists and Ultras from both UA and UWK. As the train slowly made its way through the crowds, a persistent chant echoed over and over again throughout the spacious, nineteenth-century building: *yi nigib haqquhum, yi nimut zayhum* (either we will get their right, or we will die like them). This collective manifestation of determination, shock and anger was a first indication of a transformation of the Egyptian Ultras movement's practice and profile. After the massacre, Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras Devils suspended all of their normal, stadium-based activities indefinitely to mourn their

[44] According to some accounts, the doors had been welded shut (Mohsen, 2012).

dead and to seek justice, and their rivals in Ultras White Knights took a similar decision in a gesture of compassion and support. The interruption of the Ultras' displays at the stadiums did not, however, mean that the groups disappeared from the public sphere; quite the opposite, as al-Ahly's Ultras groups (with some support from UWK) came out in the streets in an impressively organised, highly visible and emotionally charged campaign for *qasas* (justice, retribution) and *haqq al-shuhada'* (the right of the martyrs). Large demonstrations with songs, flags and fireworks were organised, pressuring the judiciary and the country's newly elected parliament to ensure fair trials and harsh penalties; graffiti with the names and faces of the Port Said martyrs spread quickly on the walls all around Cairo; strongly worded statements and evidential material of what had happened at the stadium were published on the group's Facebook page and shared widely through social media. A peak in media attention was reached during a fifteen-day sit-in, which the group and the families of the martyrs organised outside the parliament in March and early April. Indeed, and as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, in the course of 2012 UA became one of Egypt's most highly profiled factions of full-time revolutionaries.

The Ultras fans were not the only part of the Egyptian football assemblage to change dramatically that February night. In the wake of the tragedy, entire sections of the infrastructures that circulated football in the country were dismantled. As the Egyptian Premier League was suspended, there was no domestic football to watch, and at the infrequent international matches that were still played, supporters were typically banned from the stadiums. The sports coverage in Egyptian newspapers was also heavily reduced, and several of the all-football TV channels that had flourished in the Mubarak era were closed down or shifted to other types of programming. As I will explore in more detail in Chapter 5 and 6, many of my friends considered Port Said the ultimate proof that something had been and still was deeply wrong with the way football had been run, utilised, sponsored and supported in recent years. The notion of the sport as a politicised opiate of the masses, which had been began to circulate after the Algeria games in late 2009, and which had gained even more ground after January 2011, spread wider than ever before (see Introduction and Chapter 2).

Effectively tearing down and ripping apart whatever had still remained of the dominant Egyptian football bubble, the Port Said massacre profoundly changed the object of study for this dissertation. As such, the tragedy constituted another very 'critical event' (cf. Das, 1995): a distinct divider between what was before and what came after, which everyone involved had to deal with and relate to. After Port Said, it became obvious to almost everybody that football, as it had been, could not be rebuilt; the de-assembling of the infrastructures, politics, popularity and emotionality of the sport had simply gone too far. To make better sense of these processes of dismantling and decay, I mobilise the analytical term 'ruination' in the remaining parts of this dissertation. This notion helpfully connotes a few distinct things at once. Firstly, ruination points to how Egyptian football – after the Algeria games, the 2011 revolution, and finally Port Said – gradually became de-assembled. Because of this, football was discharged of its previous capabilities to move and affect, and many of its previously taken-for-granted meanings, politics, and history suddenly appeared to be up for grabs. Secondly, and drawing on the work of Yael Navaro-Yashin (2012), I understand the ruination of football as a process that left behind a set of abandoned, eerie phenomena and spaces which Egyptians found repulsive, uncomfortable and abject. Finally, I also make use of the terms 'ruins' and 'ruination' metaphorically to refer to how memories of what the game had been, done and felt like acted on my interlocutors through longing and nostalgia (cf. Seremetakis, 1994) within a 'haunting presence of ruined time' (Scott, 2014:9, discussing Derrida, 1993; see also Hunt, 2008).

The three chapters that follow substantiate these processes of ruination through concrete and varied ethnographic examples. While Chapter 4 returns to the Ultras political campaign for justice, Chapter 5 focuses on affect registers that were no longer there. Chapter 6, finally, takes on some of the 'debris' (Stoler, 2008) that was still around, in the midst of the devastation. Each of the three chapters explores the assembling of subjectivities and emotions in different sub-sections of the Egyptian football assemblage in the year after the event in Port Said. As such, the chapters in different ways and from varying angles forward an ethnography of aftermath: an ethnography of a present steeped in what was.

[CHAPTER FOUR]

No country for old men

The masculine subjectivity of the revolutionary Ultras Ahlawy

> Everyone saw how we [the Ultras] came out in the streets and on Tahrir, and now I think they understand that they have a problem. Football is dying after Port Said, but the Ultras are really strong. [...] We have shown that we can do things; whatever we want we do it, we do it. But they [the old establishment] still do not understand us. They are old and thinking in old ways. It is the same everywhere: in the clubs, in the media [i.e. television] and among real football journalist, like Hassan al-Mistakawi [senior columnist at *al-Shuruq*]. They cannot understand us, but also they cannot stop what we are doing. Maybe it sounds strange after all that happened, but I am sure that the future of the sport in this country belongs to the Ultras.
>
> Shadi – a long time member of Ultras Ahlawy

In late August 2012, a couple of days after the *Eid al-fitr* holidays that mark the end of the holy month of Ramadan, and almost two months after the inauguration of President Muhammad Mursi, the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) decided to resume its domestic football tournaments, which had been interrupted since the tragedy in Port Said seven months earlier. In a short press release, EFA announced that a Super Cup match between the reigning league and cup champions, al-Ahly and ENPPI, was to be played on 9th September and that the new league season would commence a week later. Within the Egyptian sports media, the decision was generally applauded and portrayed as a sign that the period of political chaos and mourning finally was over. The country had an elected

president, things were getting back to normal: the 'return of the football activities' *('awdit al-nashat al-kurawiyya*) was part of this national re-start.

However, the planned football revival would not be as smooth as many journalists and EFA officials had hoped. In the early hours of 3rd September 2012, a statement was posted on Ultras Ahlawy's official Facebook page. Under the rubric, 'The league will not return over the blood of the martyrs' (*lan yi'ud dawri 'ala dima' al-shuhada'*), the statement described the decision as hasty, disrespectful, and driven by monetary greed:

> - The currently dominant language of money, which changes everything and puts falsehood above truth (*tida' al-batil fawq al-haq*) is the language of him who has sold his conscience and all his feelings for humanity in exchange for a slice of the sporting cake. [...]
> - The discussion about the return of football, and the noise which the corrupted media is making to display it as a religious festival (*eid*) shows complete disdain (*istihtar*), not only for the feelings of the martyrs' families and relatives, but also for the young men who were present in Port Said, but whom Allah destined to stay alive (*katab lihum Allah al-haya'*). [...]
> - Do you want to return football? Do you want to reduce this affair to a handful of money (*tulakhkhisu al-qadiyya fi hafna min al-mal)?* Do you count the values of those who died in money? If there are those who buy and sell among you, then that is your misfortune. We however do not perceive that money (*nafis aw ghali*) equals the value of those who died in our arms.

After suggesting that the decision to restart the league before justice had been done was an attempt to 'distract everybody from what actually happened' in Port Said, the statement closed on a determined note:

> - Neither the Super Cup nor the league will be played before *al-qasas* (retribution). [...] Thereafter you can talk about activities and tournaments. Although for now, what you dream about is a black comedy which draws superficial smiles on your faces. But if you insist on going ahead with this tournament [Super Cup], we will fondly wait with the same smiles for what will happen next...
> - O God be our witness.

Initially, these ill-disguised threats from al-Ahly's biggest supporter group did not draw much attention. The preparations for the new season continued as planned. On 5th September, the draw for the first round of the league took place at the EFA headquarters, in a ceremony broadcast live on television. Just a few hours later, images of a different kind of drama at the same building, on al-Gabalayya Street on the lush banks of the Nile, again filled the airwaves. Hundreds of young men in Ultras Ahlawy attire broke into the EFA premises, burned *shamarikh* (flares, see Chapter 3), smashed windows, destroyed document and computers, and displaced some of the National team's trophies. This was UA's way of showing that their threats were serious: they would not just sit back and let the season start 'over the blood of the martyrs'.

A few hours after the attack, my friend Mido called me. An upper middle-class man in his early thirties, Mido had been a member of Ultras Ahlawy from the very beginning in 2007. He had travelled to countless al-Ahly games all over Africa, and he knew the *capos* well enough to act as what he liked to call an 'older consultant' in periods of crisis. 'You saw what happened, Carl, didn't you?' he asked me in his flawless English, acquired through private language school education and regular trips to England since his early teens. I told him that I had seen the news on Twitter and asked him about his opinion. I was a bit surprised to hear how worried he was:

> I don't know. Really, I am not sure... Of course I understand the boys; that they are angry and want to stop the game. But I fear this could be counter-productive. Ugly attacks like this all over the media will not help our case. I think we will lose a lot of the middle people [sic] that have supported us since Port Said. I don't like to tell you, but I think this was a big mistake.

The following day, I had dinner with a group of friends, who would probably qualify as the 'middle people' whose sympathies Mido worried about. They were all devoted football fans in their late twenties or early thirties, and they all considered themselves 'revolutionary' in so far that they had voted for Hamdeen Sabahi, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh or Muhammad Mursi (i.e. *against* the former regime's candidates) in the recent presidential election. As I asked them what they thought about the resumption of football and attempts by the Ultras to stop it, I could tell that this was a complex issue for most of them. Mahmoud – the one around the table whom I knew the best, and who was aware

that I was meeting Ultras members on a regular basis – explained that this was not an easy choice between good and evil:

> The football media and the FA and all the clubs are of course completely corrupted. You know how much I dislike them. But at the same time, what the new government needs now is stability and some time to work. What we do not need is more insults and fanaticism (*shata'im wi ta'assub*), like in Port Said or at Gabalayya [the EFA] yesterday.

Mahmoud's work colleague Ahmad did not entirely agree:

> I don't know...if it just leads to trouble, why do they have to play this match? I am of course against violence, that is not the solution, and if it is true that they stole the African Cup trophy, then that is not only bad manners and fanaticism (*illit adab wi ta'assub*) but a crime against all Egyptians, since these cups are ours (*al-ku'us di milkina*). But at the same time, we have to understand these youths. They lost their friends and they have not got anything back. It is understandable that they got tired. Nothing happens in this country unless you push for it.

The others around the table nodded silently.

***

In this chapter, I continue the story about the Egyptian Ultras movement that I began in Chapter 3 and the Interlude. In particular, I am detailing Ultras Ahlawy's campaign for retribution (*qasas*) and against the resumption of the domestic season as it unfolded in the months that followed the Super Cup (September 2012 to January 2013). As we will see, this was a particularly eventful period within the Egyptian football assemblage. In the aftermath of the Port Said tragedy, the football bubble that I sketched out in Chapter 1 and 2 was in a state of crisis, and the Ultras' calls for radical reforms were widely supported, at least initially. The recently installed Mursi government also had very different priorities vis-à-vis sports than the country's previous rulers. The struggle over the future of football was therefore played out on a reshaped playing field, where almost everything suddenly seemed up for grabs. The chapter is in this sense the first of three to explore processes of 'ruination' (Navaro-Yashin, 2012) in the football assemblage.

The chapter's main objective is to trace a set of transformations of the subjectivity of Ultras Ahlawy. As I outlined in the Introduction, my usage of this analytical term is informed by post-structuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu. In short, I understand subjectivities as taking shape at the intersection of habits, performances, scripts, discipline and affect. The processes of subjectivation that I take interest in are hence inherently slippery, and constantly oscillating between agency and power, intimacy and structure, self-perception and discursive violence. While the chapter's analysis of UA's subjectivity in many ways overlaps with my discussion of the wider Ultras movement's 'emotional style' in Chapter 3, the approach is here broadened and less solely concerned with emotionality. Moreover, subjectivation always happens relationally and in opposition to an Other. My study of shifting subjectivities among Ultras Ahlawy hence also reflects on a set of parallel processes of subjectivation among the group's opponents in the football media, the clubs and the EFA. Finally, it is also worth stressing that Ultras Ahlawy's subjectivity was a masculine one. Throughout the chapter, I therefore often use the terms 'subjectivity', 'masculine subjectivity', and 'masculinity' more or less interchangeably.

The chapter is divided into four ethnographic parts, each of which accounts for a key moment in the process through which Ultras Ahlawy's subjectivity was assembled. The first part hones in on the time of the contested Super Cup in September. It shows how repeated attempts by the Ultras to stop the restart of football were framed in the now familiar tropes of *baltaga* (thuggery; see Chapter 3) and *ta'assub* (fanaticism; see Chapter 2), and as a serious threat to the nation's stability (*istiqrar*). In September 2012, these measures of discursive othering did not, however, work very well. In contrast, the Super Cup made UA turn increasingly self-confident and offensive, as their subjectivity became associated with an ordered type of selective and purposeful violence that resonated well with valorised notions for Egyptian masculinity.

The second ethnographic part of chapter zooms in on al-Ahly's and Egypt's most famous player, Muhammad Abu-Treika, and his decision to boycott the Super Cup game in sympathy with Ultras Ahlawy and the Port Said martyrs' families. In an historical detour, I show how Abu-Treika's ethos of respectability, Muslim piety and Muslim Brotherhood

sympathies never fully matched the 'football bubble' as it was assembled in the late Mubarak era. After the revolution, and especially after Mohamed Mursi's election victory however, Abu-Treika's virtuous personality emerged as a powerful role model for a new, respectable and revolutionary Egyptian football. His decision to support the Ultras hence strengthened the group's image as both revolutionary *and* respectable.

In the third part, the focus shifts to two demonstrations in October 2012 when Ultras Ahlawy's influence and power arguably reached a peak. A first ethnographic vignette depicts the ordered, disciplined and self-confident character of a UA demonstration against the resumption of football in the middle of the month. In a second vignette, this is contrasted with a much more desperate, unordered and scruffy manifestation turning violent, which the country's professional football players and journalists organised a week later to demand the immediate restart of the game. I argue that a comparison between the ways in which the two demonstrations were reacted to and commented on gives us a good understanding of how UA at this point came across as ordered, role models for the revolution and the nation.

Finally, in the fourth part, I discuss the period in January 2013, when the verdicts in the Port Said court cases were announced. As I show, the verdicts were in many ways a victory for Ultras Ahlawy, and the celebrations that followed were very emotional. However, in the aftermath of this victory, UA quickly lost much of its former appeal. The group's revolutionary credentials were tarnished, their politics and affiliations were questioned, and the respectable and ordered subjectivity that they had built up over the previous couple of years was partly lost.

In the chapter's conclusion, I sum up my ethnography and reflect on the rise and fall of Ultras Ahlawy's subjectivity. Drawing on the work of David Scott, I suggest that the period I analyse should be seen as an 'exceptional time' when the possibilities to make 'intervention' rapidly expanded. In autumn 2012, this made the Ultras emerge as revolutionary role-models that could push large parts of the football assemblage in the direction that they wanted. However – and as the turn of events in January 2013 shows – the group was never able to fully control their own subjectivity. Rather, I suggest that UA's subjectivity must be understood as contingent on an ever-changing social

assemblage. This multi-dimensional contingency made their political project inherently vulnerable.

The ethnography in this chapter is based on a mix of media material, interviews, and participant observation at demonstrations and other public events. Public discourse about the Ultras has mainly been drawn from television, whereas UA's Facebook statements have been an important source for getting a sense of their version of the story. In the section about Abu-Treika, I also use a limited amount of press archives from a period that preceded my fieldwork in Cairo.

The Super Cup

'They have to follow the rules and the system!'

In the days that followed Ultras Ahlawy's attack on the Football Association headquarters, the supporter group arose as an acute problem within the Egyptian football establishment. While EFA, the clubs and the media insisted that the Super Cup match on 9th of September had to be played, the Ultras vowed to stop the match, if necessary by force (Ultras Ahlawy Facebook, 5th September). In his talk show *Masa' al-Anwar* on the football channel *Modern*, Medhat Shalaby described the action as an 'act of thuggery (*baltaga*)', carried out by a selfish 'minority', whose aim is to 'destroy national security and stop the national economy' (3rd September 2012). Visibly outraged, Shalaby made clear that 'a small group of fanatics (*muta'assibin*) who destroy the joy of millions' was something completely unacceptable. However, he also assured his viewers that this would not change anything:

> Egypt is too strong to crumble for youngsters. [...] All competitions will go ahead as planned. What is most important to remember is that Egypt is a state of law (*dawlit al-qanun*) not a state of disorder (*dawlit al-fawda*).

On the day of the match – scheduled to be played at Burg al-Arab Stadium outside Alexandria without any fans – the tense build-up reached a climax. Despite a late, collective decision by Ultras Ahlawy to cancel their organised all-out efforts to interrupt the game (see below), a smaller number of Ultras decided take action anyway. In the late afternoon, reports began to circulate about groups of youths in red t-shirts, marching the 35 kilometres from central Alexandria towards the stadium, across the desert under the blazing sun. At 6 pm, a pre-match show came on air on *Modern* (9th September 2012). Hosted by Medhat Shalaby and also featuring former players and regular pundits Mustapha Yunis, Ibrahim Yusif and Magdy Abd El-Ghani, the program's dramaturgy was however more comparable to a (relatively action-less) action movie. For almost three hours, the experts in the studio in Cairo anxiously tried to make sense of scattered and predominantly unedited footage from the dark and empty roads surrounding the stadium. For a full 20 minutes, images from a car following the al-Ahly team bus on its journey from the hotel to the stadium were at the centre of everybody's attention. Was the bus going to be attacked? Could there be Ultras hiding somewhere in the shadows on the verge of the road? Would the players reach the stadium safely? When it became clear that the bus had made it safely inside the iron gates to the stadium area – surrounded by multiple fences and cordons of security police – the focus for a long while shifted to a camera filming the stadium complex's main entrance. Every few minutes a car passed by. Once, as a suspicious *tuk-tuk*[45] drove up to the gates and the driver asked the guard something inaudible, the excitement grew. 'Look! A *tuk-tuk*! Could it have transported the Ultras?' Yunis exclaimed. Twenty seconds later, the *tuk-tuk* returned in the same direction it had come from, disappearing into the night. Whether or not it had ever served the movements of football supporters remained unclear.

Toward 8 pm, it was increasingly clear that the Ahly Ultras would not use any violence. Having expressed their anger outside the players' hotel, their protest dissolved shortly

[45] A small three-wheeled vehicle that is used as a taxi in Egypt's less developed areas.

after the team left for the stadium. For the excited pundits at *Modern*, there was in other words relatively little drama to report. Instead, a more general discussion about the Ultras as a threat and problem ensued. In particular, Yunis was visibly very angry at the fans' audacious behaviour: in one memorable phrase, he urged the police to 'send some dogs against those kids so that we can finish off this story once and for all'. The more general consensus in the studio was that the football had to return, not only because of the future of Egyptian football, but also for the 'stability' (*istiqrar*) of the Egyptian nation at large. 'If we let go now of even the smallest of the principles constituting the state of law (*asghar mabda' bita' dawlit al-qanun*), they will never learn', Yusif explained: 'that would be the same as accepting that thuggery and chaos rule Egypt (*baltaga wi fawda bitihkum masr*)'. Shalaby agreed and continued:

> We must be strong, not for us, but for the five million who football feeds (*illi ta'akkul al-kura al-'aysh*), and for the entire nation. To show that Egypt is a state of law is a matter of the prestige of the state (*hibit al-dawla*). The whole world is watching tonight and thinking, "Should we invest in Egypt?" "Should we go there on holiday?" They will laugh at us if we cannot secure a football game. Egypt is a strong state; we are not India (*masr dawla qawiyya; ihna mish al-hind*).[46]

At 9 pm, one hour delayed, the match eventually kicked off. At an eerily empty stadium, al-Ahly won by two goals to one and added yet another title to their impressive record. The next morning, I was out and about searching for new pair of football boots. As usual when looking for sports gear, I went to a small store in Downtown, which for 30 years had been owned by a now greying gentleman and *Zamelkawi* called Rami. As I tried out a few different models, Rami, who knew about my research, vented his opinions about the recent crisis:

> Thank God the game was played. What those boys are doing is completely unreasonable. Those who died in Port Said have nothing to do with this match. That episode is being investigated by the police, and it will be taken care of by the courts. What is the relation to the FA or to al-Ahly? *Maynfa'sh* (lit. cannot be; also approx. 'no way')! They cannot just do whatever they

[46] For an account that discusses Egyptian imaginaries of India, see Ghosh (1992).

> want, like this! They must follow the rules and the system (*lazim yitba'u al-qawanin wi al-nizam*)!

I asked Rami if he did not think that the Ultras should have a say about the resumption of football, but he did not want to listen. Instead he continued:

> What is important to understand for your research is that Egyptian society was not always like this. There was respect and order (*ihtiram wi nizam*) and much less fanaticism and insults (*ta'assub wi shata'im*). It has changed since the 1970s. No education, more fanaticism, and a lot of bad manners. Unfortunately, all of this became much worse after the revolution.

On my way home from the store, I thought about what Rami had just said. Like the pundits on *Modern*, he had perceived the Ultras resistance to the return of football as an instance of a more general problem for the Egyptian nation. Like so many other youngsters, the Ultras were violent and non-ordered, and they did not 'follow the rules of the system'. As such, they were a threat to the sought-after 'stability' and a serious problem that somehow had to be dealt with.

'You are calling the shots now!'

The fact that EFA, backed up by the police, the clubs and the football media, persisted in their plans to get the Super Cup played despite UA's threats, should not necessarily be perceived as an outright victory for the former. In contrast, a couple of incidents in the days before the match make it possible to perceive of the episode as a major boost for the Ultras' morals, cause and project. On 7th September, two days before the match, Muhammad Abu-Treika – al-Ahly's captain and Egypt's most popular football star – announced that he refused to play the game 'in solidarity with the Ultras' martyrs' (further details below). The following day, the Minister of Sports, al-'Amri Faruq, partially conceded to UA's demands, as he decided to postpone the start of the league until mid-October. That same night – with less than 24 hours left until the scheduled kick-off in Burg al-Arab – several hundred Ultras Ahlawy members invaded al-Ahly's club premises on al-Gazira Island in central Cairo. As Wael Abbas from *al-Misri al-Yum* who was present reported, the police did not try to stop them, and a nighttime meeting was held about the best strategy to stop the game (9th September 2012). After Abu-Treika and the Sports

Ministry's favourable decisions, the atmosphere was understandably upbeat. One of the *capos* self-confidently agitated his fellow members: 'You are calling the shots now. You are making the difference. This is just the beginning. We will continue until we have restored the right of the martyrs (*hatta yi'ud haqq al-shuhada'*). There will be no domestic tournaments before *al-qasas*,' he started. Later, the same leader also outlined the group's visions for a future, reformed football without corruption:

> We will establish new principles according to which this fascist state (*dawla fashiyya*), which only thinks about individual interests, will be run. The postponement of the league is the first step in our cause and our demands. The rest will come. We aim at fulfilling all our demands, which we will not give up. They are: the cleansing (*tathir*) of the Ministry of Interior, the cleansing of the media, the cleansing of the Football Association, preventing the list of [FIFA executive committee member] Hani Abou-Reida, [sports pundit] Ahmad Shoubair and the remnants of the previous regime (*filul al-nizam al-sabiq*) from running in the EFA elections, the cleansing of al-Ahly club from the board of monetary self-interest (*maglis idarit al-sububa*) which runs the club. We demand the resignation of [club president] Hassan Hamdi and his board and the appointment of Muhammad Abu-Treika as president of al-Ahly club, because he is the most manly (*argal*) belonging to al-Ahly club.

And yet, despite these bold calls for change and action, the overall message coming out of this meeting was one of restraint. Earlier that day, unconfirmed reports had circulated on television and in social media about the Ministry of Interior having struck a deal with the leaders of one of the Bedouin tribes, who populate the area surrounding Burg al-Arab. The troubling rumours had it that the state authorities had urged the Bedouins to attack the Ultras, in case the latter would try to stop the match. In the light of this development, UA decided to cancel the large operation that they had originally planned in Alexandria the following day. To stop the match by force was simply not worth the risks. Because, as the al-Ahly Ultras expressed on their Facebook page later that night:

> we do not accept any sort of confrontation between us and individuals of this people [...] who do not have any relation to this issue, except that the security service have presented them with false information and excuses. Because, we only have an issue with the corrupt Ministry of Interior, which protects the corrupt football organisations, and not with any other Egyptian citizen (Ultras Ahlawy Facebook, 9th September 2012).

Consequently, and as we have already seen above, the group of Ultras who turned up at Burg al-Arab ended up being relatively small. No real attempts were made to stop the game, and the match could go ahead according to plan.

Two camps and a shift in momentum

Through discourse and action, the Super Cup game in September 2012 carved out two distinct camps with contesting versions and visions for Egypt's national sport: on the one side, a bloc of established actors, such as the Egyptian FA, the clubs and many older football journalists and supporters, who stressed the virtue of stability, order and the need for football to get back to business; on the other, the oppositional Ultras Ahlawy, who argued that the sport was beyond repair, and who demanded a prolonged interruption coupled with a series of far-reaching reforms. The struggle between the two fronts also reverberated outside the realm of sports. On 10th September 2012, the day after the match, the issue was brought up on Yosri Fouda's talk show *Akhir Kalam* on *ONTV*, Egypt's arguably most influential political show at the time. In the studio, Sherif Hassan – the *FilGoal.com* journalist and Ultras expert whom we remember from Chapter 3 – and Ahmed al-Faqi – a leading member of Ultras Devils from Alexandria – were given 45 minutes to present the Ultras case against the resumption of the league as well as their demands for reforms. The show also featured a call-in from *al-Shuruq's* senior sport columnist Hassan al-Mistakawi. In contrast to Hassan and al-Faqi, Al-Mistakawi justified al-Ahly's decision to go ahead and play the game, and he found the club's stern disciplinary actions against Abu-Treika to be in order.[47] He reminded the younger men in the studio that al-Ahly Club's history of successes and popularity were a result of the club always prioritising its collective 'principles' over any individual, regardless of how important or successful he might be.[48] This argument about stability leading to triumphs and acclaim was however challenged, first by Fouda and later also by Hassan. As Hassan

[47] Abu-Treika was given two months suspension and fines amounting to half a million Egyptian Pounds. He also lost the captaincy of the team.

[48] It is worth remembering that al-Mistakawi as the author of the most comprehensive account of al-Ahly's history to date (1997), is one of the main contributors to this historiography of al-Ahly Club.

pointed out, many of the most memorable episodes in the club's history were in fact remembered as patriotic, *not* primarily because the club followed its principles, but because it had done so at times when these principles stood in conflict with an unjust ruling order.

> For example, in 1948, al-Ahly went to play a charity game in Palestine. It was at the time of the '48 War [between Israel and the surrounding Arab states], and the team was led by Mokhtar al-Tetsh [legendary Ahly player and leader in the 1920s, 30s and 40s]. At that time, they were forbidden by the [Egyptian] Football Association to go and play the match, but they did so anyway. When they returned, the team was suspended by the EFA, but Mukthar al-Tetsh went to the President of EFA and insisted that he was right. Today, Mukhtar al-Tetsh is the one who has given the name to the stadium inside al-Ahly club. At the time, he was punished but history cleansed him. This is a type of example that many people today do not understand, but they will understand it in a few years time.

It is perhaps indicative that at the time when Hassan expressed this opinion, al-Mistakawi had already hung up. Both al-Faqi and Fouda seemed to agree with what Hassan had just said. Following its rules and principles to resist oppressive rulers might have built al-Ahly's popularity in years gone by, but it was far from certain that the same behaviours would continue to grant the club respect in the present period of revolutionary change. If anything, the Ultras programme for reform and transition were now on the front foot. In the large privately owned newspaper, *al-Misri al-Yum*, a couple of long articles were published that clearly sided with the Ultras against the FA and the clubs (9th, 10th September 2012). Many prominent political actors – from the leftist Revolutionary Socialists to the conservative Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party – also voiced their support for the group's demand for 'no football before *al-qasas*' (*al-Misri al-Yum*, 9th September 2012; Murshid, 2012). In particular, among many of my younger friends, there was a noticeable change in opinion and support. The football channels had lost whatever credibility they had previously had after the 2011 revolution, and their calls for 'stability' sounded shallow and old-fashioned (cf. Makram Ebeid, 2014). Change, in contrast, felt urgently needed – for football as well as the country more generally – and the Ultras seemed to show the most likely way forward.

Selective, purposeful violence

In order to fully comprehend why and how UA's programme for a revamped Egyptian football drew so much support at this time, it is arguably crucial to consider the group's approach to violence. As Gamal Bashir has argued, the Egyptian Ultras have always presented themselves as masculinised, strong and disciplined (2011:9ff). However, in contrast to hooligans in England or Bara Brava-groups in South America, Ultras like to claim that they only use violence in self-defence, and always in an organised manner, for certain well-defined purposes (ibid.:87-9,123-5). In the week of the Super Cup, this attitude was reflected in what, at a first glance, might look like contradictory stances and actions: first as Ultras Ahlawy violently broke the law and destroyed public property in their attack on the Football Association, and later as they – to many observers' surprise – cancelled their planned attack on the match itself, after realising that there was a risk of hurting innocent Egyptian citizens. Arguably, this insistence on using violence selectively, without harming outsiders impacted favourably on the group's public image. In addition, it made Medhat Shalaby's portrayal of the Ultras as a violent and fanatical minority opposed to the interests of the masses less credible. Instead, this measure of self-restraint proved the organisation's 'civil' character (see Ismail, 2011a, 2011b; Salvatore, 2011; Saouli, 2011; Volpi 2011). It also strengthened and broadened the image of classed 'respectability', which the movement had managed to establish in the preceding year and a half (see chapter 3).

UA's insistence on purposeful, selective violence also resonated with a set of moral codes for masculinity in Egypt, which well preceded the revolution. In her long-term ethnographic study of the shaping of masculine subjects in the working class district al-Zawya al-Hamra, Farha Ghannam states that 'knowing when to use or avoid violence, the right context for its use or avoidance, and amount of violence to use is an important skill not mastered by all men' (2013:121). Ghannam argues that it is especially important for a real man to deploy violence to serve the 'social good' and not merely to seek 'personal gains' (ibid.). Indeed, such use of violence that 'further[s] the public good' is an important sign of *gada'na* (adj. *gada'*, *gid'an* (pl.)): a valued virtue in Cairo's *sha'bi* (popular, low-class) neighbourhoods, which translates as a mix of 'gallantry [...] "nobility, audacity,

responsibility, generosity, vigour and manliness'" (Ghannam, 2013:122, quoting el-Messiri, 1978:49). By using violence selectively when needed, whilst shunning it when it risked harming innocent Egyptians, Ultras Ahlawy can in this sense be understood to have passed as *gid'an*. At least for those who already understood their cause as just and serving the social good, this combination of stances added to the status of group members as real Egyptian men.

Finally, the purposeful use of violence for the social good also helped them sidestep a constantly lingering threat. Because as Ghannam also shows, in al-Zawya al-Hamra a man who in contrast to the *gada'* uses violence to 'impose his own will' is known as a *baltagi* (2013:122). The *baltagi* is in other words not only, as we learned in Chapter 3, a masculine subject, whose violence locates him on the fringes of legality. In fact, almost all men in less well-off parts of Cairo will have to use violence, break the law and confront the police at times in order to simply get by and make a living. What distinguish the *gada'* from the *baltagi* is that the former is an altruistic subject, who ultimately cares for the common good. Ultras Ahlawy's selective use of purposeful violence did in this way provide them with a recognisable masculine aura of *gada'na* and altruism, which rendered their rule-breaking, destabilising deeds and rhetoric acceptable, progressive and just. Such working-class virtues alone would however hardly be enough for a subjectivity to become acknowledged in a public sphere dominated by the middle classes. For this, *gada'na* had to be paired up with respectability, an issue that I will discuss in the following section.

'As long as he is on our side, they will never go against us'

A few days after the Super Cup, I left Cairo for a family event back home in Sweden. When I returned at the end of September, a lot had happened that I had to catch up on. In a series of statements on their Facebook page, Ultras Ahlawy had continued to raise their demands for a cleansing of the EFA, al-Ahly Club and the football media, and they presented statistics that countered the widely circulated claims about 'five million Egyptians' working in football (13th, 26th September, 6th October 2012; see also Saied, 2012). Moreover, Ultras Ahlawy had continued their street politics offensive against the resumption of the league: on 23rd September, they attacked and interrupted one of their own team's training sessions (Maher, 2012a), and two days later, they blocked Medhat Shalaby and Ahmad Shoubair from entering *Modern's* studios in Cairo's Media Production City, effectively cancelling the duo's talk-shows that night (Maher, 2012c). Simultaneously with this attack, UA published a YouTube video with a sarcastic song called *I'lam al-sububa* (approx. 'The media of monetary self-interest'). With a catchy melody and lyrics that poked fun at the corruption and non-professionalism among the famous football-TV personalities Medhat Shalaby, Ahmed Shoubair, Mustapha Yunis, Khaled El-Ghandour and Mahmoud Ma'luf, the song was an instant success. The short video spread widely on social media and became an object of discussions, jokes and laughter among many of my friends in the weeks that followed (Ultras Ahlawy 07 Media, 2012).

A couple of days after returning to Cairo, I met Mido – my slightly older, veteran Ultras Ahlawy friend, who had been uncertain about the attack on the EFA in early September – at his favourite, up-scale coffee-and-*shisha* hangout in the suburb Heliopolis. As I knew that he had been busy 'consulting' the *capos* in the recent weeks of action, I was curious to hear his insider's opinion on everything that was going on. The broad smile and glimmering eyes with which he approached me when I stepped into the café was enough to tell that in his view, things were going well, very well indeed. I sat down at Mido's table, ordered a lemon juice and a large burger with chips, and let him do the talking:

> So, what do you think, Carl? Not a bad couple of weeks? You've missed a lot. The Super Cup has changed everything! I can't believe it. First, we started to hate all the people in our own club, because we saw that they did not care about the martyrs, only their money and power and careers. But then – you've been following right? – we decided to finally change everything that is rotten in the game. Because after al-Ahly betrayed us, we do not care about the club's reputation anymore.[49] It makes us freer in a way. Now we can really target the corruption, which is everywhere. Everywhere! Did you see when we attacked the training? Or 6th of October [the part of Cairo where the Media Production City is located]? No one tried to stop us; no one can stop us. Hahaha... We can push them wherever we want now, *Insha'Allah*. We will stop the league, sure, but that is only a first step. The boys [capos] understand that this is the chance to really change everything that is old and corrupt: clubs, players, *ittihad al-kura* [EFA] and the media – everything!

I asked him what he thought would happen next.

> I told you before: this media will die. When there is no league, these amateurs will go bust. All the young people are already on our side, and many journalists. Did you see the video [*I'lam al-sububa*]? Even here at the coffee shop, all these *filul* [remnants of the old regime], everyone has seen it; also people who actually agree with Shalaby laugh at it. And why are the police not stopping us? Because [President] Mursi does not care! Football is not important to them [the Muslim Brotherhood], so why would they pick a fight with us when many people like us? That sport's minister is still one of the old guys: corrupt. But he cannot do anything; his boss does not support him. [...] But in the end, it was of course Abu-Treika's decision [to not play] that changed everything. Everybody loves Abu-Treika after all his goals and the way he is. People don't know it, but he has helped the martyrs' families so much since Port Said, giving money and inviting them for *iftar* [the breaking of the fast] during Ramadan. And of course, he is important for the Brotherhood. As long as he is on our side they will never go against us.

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[49] When Mido talked about the club's 'betrayal' he was partly referring to its decision to play the Super Cup. In addition, he also referred to the fact that the club had neglected to send any representatives or lawyers to the appeal tribunal at the FIFA headquarters in Zurich, where the EFA's decision to suspend al-Masry for two seasons had been lifted (see Hassan, 2012b).

A pious role model and the country's best player

Later that night, as Mido drove me home along the 6th of October flyover-bridge in his black BMW, our conversation returned to Abu-Treika's enormous popular appeal. 'There are so many things with Treika', Mido told me, whilst casually overtaking a microbus on the inside.

> You can't reduce it to him being Egypt's best player in the last decade. Actually, that is the least important thing. Why is he the only individual player that we have special songs about?[50] Why do you find so many Zamalek fans who also love him? Because of who he is, as a human being. He is so much more than just a brilliant football player.

A brief historical detour is necessary to understand the pivotal role that Abu-Treika came to play in the ongoing contest. Born in Giza in 1978, Muhammad Abu-Treika played for the fading Cairo giant club al-Tersana during his teens and early twenties. Something of a late-bloomer, he signed for al-Ahly at the age of 25, and the peak of his career squarely coincided with the years of extreme success for al-Ahly and the Egyptian national team between 2005 and 2010. In this period, Abu-Treika proved remarkably able to step up to the occasion, scoring a string of decisive goals for club and country from his position as offensive midfielder. While these goals no doubt were instrumental in building his popular appeal, the full picture only emerges if his exemplary moral behaviours are also taken into account. In contrast to many of his colleagues, who in the years before 2011 embraced a glamorous celebrity lifestyle of luxurious cars, extravagant fashion, parties at the North Coast, and scandalous affairs with pop-stars (see Chapter 1), Abu-Treika always came across as faultless and down-to-earth. He held a BA in philosophy, he rarely figured at celebrity events, and he led a quiet and religiously pious family life. As Omar Tahir notes in his book celebrating al-Zamalek Club's centenary, these multiple layers to Abu-Treika's popularity can be traced in his many nicknames, which not only include *harif* (the skilful) and *sani' al-sa'ada* (he who brings happiness), but also *al-qadis* (the saint) (2010:107). Simultaneously the most moral and the most talented player of his generation,

[50] Ultras fans often make a point of supporting their clubs rather than individual players. In the case of Abu-Treika, Ultras Ahlawy made a rare exception.

Abu-Treika was almost impossible to dislike, an untouchable, pristine 'saint' to love and revere.

Abu-Treika's ethos never really fitted the chauvinist-nationalist and emotional bubble that football assembled in the late Mubarak era. He might well have been the nation's biggest star and best player, yet his more or less explicitly stated sympathies for the Muslim Brotherhood, his shunning of glamour, and his reluctant attitude towards President Mubarak's pompous receptions after the football teams' triumphs made him a somewhat odd figure. One famous incident, at which this dissonance crystallised, took place during Egypt's group stage game versus Sudan in the 2008 African Cup of Nations. After scoring yet another goal, Abu-Treika pulled the national team shirt over his head, revealing a t-shirt with a printed message in Arabic and English for the cameras and the world: 'Sympathize with Gaza – *ta'atufan ma' ghazza*'. The gesture drew enormous attention all over the Arab world, and it turned up his already immense popularity yet another notch. In a full-page interview in the oppositional newspaper *al-Dustur*, Abu-Treika later explained that he had been aware that he would receive a yellow card for the gesture and perhaps even further disciplinary actions for mixing football with politics. But, as he so typically expressed it, 'everything has a price [...] The declaration in sympathy with Gaza will be judged by God [...] I do not want any compensation for it in this world (*la urid lihi ay jaza' fi al-dunya)*' (8th February 2008).

For less oppositional media outlets than *al-Dustur*, this political manifestation by the national team's most popular player did however implicate a delicate dilemma. In the state-owned weekly *al-Akhbar al-Yum,* Abu-Treika's gesture and 'high morals' were, on the one hand, praised as expressions by an 'exemplary Egyptian' on the world stage. On the other hand, the paper's articles also made sure to stress that this was an 'individual', 'non-political' gesture of 'human sympathy' (*ta'atuf insani*) that would not be repeated, and which the coaches and the rest of the team had not known anything about (2nd February 2008). As friends in Cairo later explained to me, this ambivalence was caused by the fact that a t-shirt like this – indeed any reference to the Palestinian cause at the time – would automatically be understood as a criticism of the Mubarak regime's hopelessly uncourageous foreign policies. The synergetic effects elicited by a pro-Palestine stance

from a national hero with Muslim Brotherhood sympathies were hence explosive, and certainly not something that could easily be incorporated into the tight-knit, regime-friendly bubble that assembled around football in this period.

A transgression illuminating a new present

If Abu-Treika's subjectivity had been somewhat out of sync with hegemonic notions of power and masculinity in the last years under Mubarak, this had changed drastically by September 2012. Post-Khartoum, post-Tahrir and post-Port Said, the football of yesteryear was now both criticised and questioned (see Chapter 2, 3 and Interlude), and Abu-Treika's respectable, piously Muslim, and broadly 'revolutionary' ethos more appropriate than ever. During these early months of the Mursi presidency – whose campaign Abu-Treika in stark contrast to many other within the football establishment had actively supported (see al-Banna, 2012) – Abu-Treika's status was monumental. In fact, I often felt that people around me attached unrealistic and contradictory hopes to his ethics and politics. Many of my pro-Ultras and/or anti-army friends would, for instance, tell me that Abu-Treika had refused to shake hands with Field Marshal Tantawi, when Egypt's then *de facto* Head of State had visited al-Ahly's players after the Port Said tragedy. Insistent rumours also had it that he was boycotting particular TV stations and journalists because of their pro-Mubarak history. The fact that Abu-Treika himself neither confirmed nor rejected these claims was often understood as him being silenced by his employer al-Ahly, and prohibited from expressing his true convictions. Other people – who also loved Abu-Treika but did not support the Brotherhood or the Ultras – had a different take on the great star's ethics and politics. My good friend Zizu – a Coptic former football coach and *Ahlawy* in his late forties, who had voted for Shafiq – put it this way in late September:

> He is a man of high morals and he has a big heart. But sometimes he wants to do too much; he does not understand that at the end of the day, he is only a football player. He did what he did [boycotted the Super Cup] because he felt for the kids who died, but then he realised that it was wrong, so he apologised to his club and his colleagues and accepted his punishment. What he does has nothing to do with him being *ikhwani* [supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood]

> or a pious Muslim. He is a respectable man (*ragil muhtaram*), who knows when he has made a mistake. We all love him.

Regardless of people's politics, Abu-Treika's specific background and image seemed to epitomise a moral and respectable vision for a better, post-revolutionary Egypt.[51] When he decided to take a stance for the Ultras against the resumption of domestic football, it was hence not merely a public manifestation of one star player's ideological-political position. In addition, it also effectively made Ultras Ahlawy's subjectivity much less vulnerable to the apparatus of othering – as self-serving *muta'assibin* or *baltagiyya* against the common good – which in a predictable manner was set in motion by satellite television and the wider football establishment as the crisis intensified. These loaded tags simply did not stick very well to a group who had the endorsement of Abu-Treika. Moreover, and as Mido noted, Abu-Treika's boycott of the Super Cup also made it more difficult for the state to confront the supporters For the Mursi government, the continuous support from Abu-Treika was far more important than that of the football industry, which in any case opposed the Brotherhood (al-Banna, 2012). Possibly, this was a reason why the police so often remained passive as Ultras Ahlawy carried out their attacks.

Abu-Treika's siding with the Ultras against his club, the media and the Football Association can therefore be understood as what Michel Foucault has called a 'transgression,' i.e. an action that makes abrupt shifts in limits and distinctions recognisable. Like a 'flash of lightning in the night [which] gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies' (2003a:446), Abu-Treika's act did not so much resist the established order as inform about its ruination and illuminate a set of new, reconfigured fields of power. Through such a reading, the wrath that senior football journalists directed against Abu-Treika's 'embarrassing selfishness' (*al-Ahram al-Riyadi*, 12th September) and the 'damage he inflicted on the rights of his country' (Mustapha Yunis, interviewed in Ghanem, 2012) become more comprehensible. Within the reconfigured national game – made visible through and by Abu-Treika's persona and actions – previously efficient

[51] For other accounts of stars, who in other eras have embodied positive visions for the Egyptian nation, see Armbrust (2002b) and Danielson (1997).

mechanisms of power-knowledge and subjectivation could no longer be applied with the same effect. While definitions of what should count as *ta'assub*, *baltaga*, national interest, morality and respectability had already been up for grabs for a year or two (see Chapter 2 and 3), Abu-Treika's pivotal decision had made it difficult for anyone to pretend that football would smoothly return to what it once had been.

Veni, vidi, vici

Marching on the Presidential Palace

As September turned into October 2012, Ultras Ahlawy's campaign against the return of football in its old style continued its successful run. In quick transition, several of the group's key demands were fulfilled: al-Ahly's players issued a statement that implicitly apologised for playing the Super Cup and assured their unreserved support for the Ultras cause (Said, 2012); FIFA delegate Hani Abu-Reida and TV pundit Ahmed Shoubair withdrew their joint candidacy for the upcoming EFA elections (*FilGoal.com*, 3rd October 2012); and al-Ahly's club president, Hassan Hamdy was questioned by the country's Illicit Gains Authority, accused of wide-ranging corruption (Maher, 2012b). UA's most fundamental demand – no domestic football before *al-qasas* – was, however, yet to be fulfilled. On 11th October – with the league planned set to kick off six days later – the group therefore decided that it was time to give it all another, final push.

The events began as a meeting outside the 6th of October war panorama, close to the entrance to UA's *curva* at Cairo Stadium. Just as dusk fell that Thursday – during the worst rush hour of the week – several thousand Ahly Ultras sat down in the middle of Salah Salem Street, one of Cairo's busiest thoroughfares, to discuss how to best proceed to stop

the league once and for all. About half an hour later, I approached the area by foot, together with a friend; the knock-on effects from the blocked traffic in the form of chaotic congestion, desperately honking horns, adrenalin and frustration were noticeable several kilometres away. We reached the panorama just as the group ended the meeting and embarked on a march toward the republic's most elevated seat of power: the Presidential Palace at al-Ittihadiyya. The march almost completely blocked the eastbound traffic along the six-lane boulevard. We soon caught up with a group of teenagers walking at the end of the demonstration, and I began to ask the participants basic questions about why they were here and where they came from. Suddenly, a middle-aged minibus driver, who for a good while had tried but failed to squeeze his packed vehicle through the crowds, shouted at us through his open window: 'Is this the way you show pride in al-Ahly club, which we all love so much? Is this respectable behaviour? To stop the world like this (*bitwa"afu al-dunya keda*)?' The young guys around me looked surprised at each other, as if they could not believe what they had just heard and had to confirm that the others had heard the same thing. Then, slowly, they all turned towards the fuming man in the minibus, smiled calmly, and one of them replied:

> Fuck off, buddy. We do what we want. (*kuss umak ya 'am. 'amilin zay ma awẓin*). This is for our friends who died, for the martyrs and for the revolution. It is not we who stop the world, but the petrol crisis and the corruption. But if the league is played, then you will see. *Insha'Allah* we will stop the world for real (*Insha'Allah hinitwa"af al-dunya bigad*).

We turned away from the driver and his desperate attempts to navigate his crammed Toyota bus through the crowds. The group of friends walked on towards al-Ittihadiyya, leaving the minibus behind. Instead, they joined their companions' steady singing and chanting: against the media, against the league, against the corrupted al-Ahly Club and to the honour of the martyrs who died in Port Said. All along, smoke from *shamarikh* mixed with exhaust fumes in the warm, early evening air. The weekend rush-hour traffic simply had to adjust to the rhythm of the demonstration, and slow down to the speed of the march. Moving forward self-confidently and in an orderly fashion to voice their demands to the President of the Republic, the march easily crossed through a thin, quite inadequate police cordon that had been sent out to prevent the fans from approaching the palace. When the line of security police silently stepped to the side, letting the Ultras pass on to

set up a sit-in right outside the palace walls, it was as clear a sign as any. As night fell, a couple of huge banners demanding 'no league before *al-qasas*' were enfolded, calling on President Mursi to take action. When a small group of young women approached the area, the Ultras immediately formed their own cordons, ensuring that the women could pass through the area undisturbed. In so many ways, the young football supporters of Ultras Ahlawy were in control, both of Egyptian football and of Cairo's streets and traffic flows that night. And from the way they acted and reacted, sang, spoke and danced, you could tell that they knew it.

'Very strange indeed'

Ten days later, on one of the last really hot afternoons of the year, I was once again present at a demonstration in front of the Presidential Palace. In the meantime, Ultras Ahlawy's campaign had won yet another victory: the start of the league had been postponed again, this time at least until the end of the month. In the face of this uncertainty about the future, a few hundred professional football players and coaches from clubs in the first, second and third divisions decided to make their voices heard through an unprecedented public manifestation. Led by the two former players and present day media celebrities Ahmad Shoubair and Khaled El-Ghandour, the players marched from Cairo Stadium to the Presidential Palace to demand the immediate resumption of their profession. While the location of the protest and the issue under contestation was the same as ten days earlier, the mood and atmosphere differed distinctly. A first contrast was the age, style and outfits of the people present: well-built sportsmen in their twenties, thirties and forties, with fashionable haircuts, expensive Adidas or Nike track suits, shining trainers, large sunglasses and the latest smartphones in hand dominated the scene this time around, in contrast to the youth in cheaper and skinnier track-suit pants and red Ultras t-shirts who had filled the space a good week earlier. Second – and despite the numbers being much smaller – there was very little in the players' demonstration that was reminiscent of the unity, discipline and purpose that the UA march had so forcefully displayed. Every once in a while, Shoubair – sitting on the shoulders of a bold, big man with a thick moustache – or El-Ghandour – standing on the curb of the old and slightly elevated tram line that passes by the palace – would start a

chant. For a while, people around them joined in, denouncing President Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood's 'betrayal' of Egyptian football and coward concessions to the pressure from the Ultras. Very quickly, however, the chanting died out again. Shoubair jumped down from his elevated position, and the demonstrators resumed taking photos and checking social media on their phones.

As I walked around the demonstration, I constantly heard people arguing about the proper way to proceed: was it appropriate to stop the traffic passing the palace, or would that be to act as bad as the Ultras? Should they not also go after the Football Association, which had officially taken the decision to stop the league (but which many participants were professionally and privately connected to), or should they stick to chanting against the government, whose weak policies had forced the FA to act in this way? And what position should they take vis-à-vis al-Ahly and their players, who in recent days had showed understanding for the Ultras, distanced themselves from the other players' demonstration, and who continued to play matches in the African Champions League? In fact, al-Ahly was playing the second leg of their African semi-final that very night at a sealed-off military stadium in Cairo's eastern suburbs. Was it not egoistic and a sign of lacking solidarity – as one of the players rhetorically asked me – that al-Ahly, whose supporters were the ones stopping the league, were the only club still playing and still making money, whereas they, who had nothing to do with Port Said nor the Ultras, were not allowed to carry out their profession?

In the early evening, these disagreements spiralled into the realm of the bizarre. The demonstration split in two: one group led by Shoubair stayed at the palace and eventually disintegrated, while another moved on to the nearby Hotel Baron, where al-Ahly's Champions League opponents Sunshine Stars from Nigeria were residing in preparation for the match. Those going to the hotel were the ones most visibly upset with al-Ahly's egoism. Indeed, they were so angry that they took the decision to block the Nigerian players from leaving their hotel, as to stop the match from being played. The same players, who throughout the day had demonstrated for the resumption of the Egyptian League, were in other words now trying to interrupt a semi-final of the African

Champions League. Fascinated by this new turn of events, I left al-Ittihadiyya and walked over to Hotel Baron on the other side of the road from the airport.

The scene that met me of hundreds of Egyptian professional football players outside the entrance of the hotel, swearing at al-Ahly and President Mursi interchangeably, with the Nigerian players observing the spectacle from the open windows on the third floor was already surreal. Soon, however, it became even more extraordinary, as a few dozen Ultras Ahlawy members – led by two of their most famous *capos* – emerged out of nowhere and attacked the players with burning *shamarikh*, in order to allow the Nigerian players to get to the match in time. In the ensuing chaos, the players retaliated against the Ultras' attack with sticks and, as I was told afterwards, even the firing of a revolver. During the fight, I briefly took cover behind a car in a side street, from where I watched stones and smoke flying back and forward in the street in front of the lobby. Next to me, behind the car, I found Hani – a reporter for the state radio's sport channel *al-Shabab wi al-Riyada*, who I had met at the demonstration earlier the same day – enthusiastically calling in a live report about the ongoing action. When he was done, he looked at me and shook his head in disbelief. I could tell that he also had a hard time believing his own eyes: 'Very strange', he noted calmly, 'this is very strange indeed (*gharib giddan*). The players want to stop the match and they fight the Ultras with firearms. And the Ultras fight back for the match to be played. Very strange indeed.'

Upside down

In the end, the Ultras outnumbered and chased away the protesting players, the Nigerian Sunshine Stars got into their bus and to the stadium, and the match kicked off with only a couple of hours' delay. Al-Ahly played well, won the game easily, and qualified for the Champions League final. In the following days, however, the match was overshadowed by what had happened at Hotel Baron. On a number of levels, the struggle had been turned upside down. In a self-confident official Facebook statement shortly after the events, UA made a point of the fact that the players had used firearms and other weapons. Aptly, this violence was described as acts of *baltaga*, effectively reflecting back onto their opponents the securitising discourse that so often had been used against

themselves (Ultras Ahlawy Facebook, 22nd October 2012; cf. Chapter 3). Shortly thereafter, a counterstatement from the players emerged on the website of the newspaper *al-Wafd*. Under the signature 'Egypt's honourable sportsmen (*riyadiyyu misr al-shurafa'*),' the pronouncement justified the manifestation as a long overdue response to and protest against the new government's 'negligence' and unacceptable 'fear of a group of youngsters who call themselves Ultras.' The statement also portrayed the Ultras as the cause of all trouble within the sport. In a recognisable manner, the fan groups were accused of the increase of *ta'assub* which had ultimately led to the blood in Port Said, of financial self-interest (*masalih shakhsiyya*), of corruption, and of financial ties to the former regime (Riyadiyyu Misr al-Shurafa, 2012). In a video interview that was published on *Yallakora.com*, one of the participating players expressed that he had felt 'forced' to take to the streets to safeguard his basic interests, 'like doctors, workers, teachers and garbage collectors'.

With images of famous football players throwing rocks and fighting with sticks in the streets to protect their well-paid jobs circulating all over the media, these statements came across to many as somewhat out of touch with reality. The players' random-looking violence made it very difficult to portray the Ultras as the dangerous, self-interested *baltagiyya* whose violence threatened the common, social good and order.[52] Many people I met in the following days expressed the same type of sentiments: the Ultras attacking property and stadiums were something they had grown used to. Yet, that professional football players – a highly privileged and pampered elite in the Mubarak years – were taking to the street to fight back was difficult to comprehend and accept. Whereas the way UA had protected al-Ahly interests outside the hotel was recognised in the press as 'honourable and noble' (*mushrif wi nubil*) by a former al-Ahly player (Fawzi, 2012), what

[52] A parallel can here be drawn to Ghannam's depiction of the so called 'Battle of the Camels' on the 2nd of February 2011, in which protesters of Tahrir Square were attacked by thugs paid by the Mubarak regime (some riding on camels). As Ghannam shows, this event turned the opinion among her informants against the regime. Also then, notions of whose violence was ordered and purposeful and hence a sign of *gada'na*, and whose was random, and self-interested (*baltaga*) were used to morally make sense of what was going on (2013:121ff).

the players had been up to was by one commentator described as a 'march of disgrace' (*musirit al-'ar*) (al-Banna, 2012). The irony that the players had tried to *stop* the Champions League game, whereas Ultras Ahlawy – and not the police – had stepped in to ensure that the game was *played* was not lost on anyone.

While the Ultras' demonstration strengthened their revolutionary subjectivity's connotations of order, purposefulness and discipline, the players march rather oozed desperation and defeat. It is also noteworthy that – in contrast to after the Ultras demonstration – the state and the EFA made no concessions to the players' demands, nor did the authorities promise help with their grievances. Clearly, the people in charge did not recognise the players' fear of losing their jobs as serious enough to constitute an 'impulse to take action' a fact which, according to Caroline Humphrey (2013:289), could be read as an indication of them losing their position as 'nice and normal human subject[s]' within the national formation (ibid.:302). If anything, the chaotic and largely undisciplined emotions and actions that the players and media stars' demonstration had displayed made them lose even more sympathy across the Egyptian state and society. Ahmed Shoubair and his fellow players and journalists had taken the struggle to the streets and they had been bitterly defeated. Being sports people, they should perhaps have known better than choosing to play such a decisive match on their opponents' home turf.

Judgement day

Retribution or chaos

Fast-forward three months, to January 2013, and Egypt's Ultras were once again making headlines. On Saturday 26th, one day after the second anniversary of the revolution and

less than a week before the one-year commemoration of the Port Said tragedy, the verdicts in the Port Said court cases were due. Among 73 defendants, nine were high-ranking police officers, three were officials from al-Masry Club, and 61 were Masry-supporters, many of whom were members of the Ultras group Green Eagles. The policemen and the club functionaries faced charges of facilitating, allowing or organising the attacks. The defendants accused of actually having carried out the killing were all football fans from Port Said (*FilGoal.com*, 21st January 2013).

Following an independent investigation based on eye witness accounts and press materials, Ultras Ahlawy had already in February the previous year declared that the responsibility of the massacre rested on three different groups: the al-Masry fans who had carried out the killing, the police who had allowed the attack to happen, and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces that effectively ruled Egypt at the time (Media9313, 2013). This understanding of the crime and its culprits had been a fundamental part of UA's campaign for justice for almost a full year. In the weeks before the decisive court session, the group consequently made it perfectly clear that they expected the defendants to be convicted and the sentences to be harsh. Aware that no single policeman or state official had so far been convicted for any crime committed during the revolutionary period, they made sure to put as much pressure as they possibly could on the court. Graffiti calling for 'retribution or chaos' (*al-qasas aw al-fawda*) and 'blood with blood' (*damm bi-damm*) spread like wildfire on walls all over the capital; several large demonstrations raising the same demands were organised all across the country.

On Wednesday 23rd January, three days before the verdicts were due, UA members were suddenly everywhere in the city all at once: some of them surrounded a police station in Nasser City; another group blocked the entrance to the Stock Exchange in Downtown; yet another raided and interrupted al-Ahly's training session. Several hundred Ultras also stormed into Saad Zaghloul Metro Station and climbed down onto the tracks, where they sang songs, burned *shamarikh* and interrupted the subway traffic for almost a full hour. Shortly thereafter, a similar scenario unfolded on the 6th of October Bridge in central Cairo, causing massive interruptions on the capital's main East-West traffic artery. At 4.45 pm, the coordinated wave of civil disobedience ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Later

in the night, two messages appeared on the group's Facebook page. The first one was very short, directed to the public, and read: 'What happened today was neither chaos (*fawda*) nor *qarsit widn* (lit. a pinch in the ear) what happened today was to inform you that the chaos is coming'. The second, longer message urged all members in all sections of the group to mobilise in the early morning on the 26th, and to be prepared to take justice into their own hands should the verdict be disappointing (*Ultras Ahlawy Facebook*, 24th January 2013). Putting Cairo to the halt had merely been Ultras Ahlawy flexing their muscles; they had indicated what they were capable of doing, but their full force was yet to be unleashed.

Party time

The momentous day arrived, tense with fears and expectations. In the street between al-Ahly's club complex and the opera house in central Cairo, several thousand people, mostly UA members and families of the martyrs, gathered in the early morning to receive the verdicts via radio. When I arrived in the area with a journalist friend of mine shortly before 9 am, fifty or sixty Ultras Ahlawy had scaled the walls surrounding the club, standing on top of the main gate, looking down on the mass of people below. Right behind them was huge billboard-like sign, some six metres high and about 30 metres wide. In the centre of the black sign, the number 72 was printed in four-metre high, red digits. On either side of the number were 36 photos and names, portraying the men who died in Port Said; along the top ran a white line of text: *lan nansakum* (we will never forget you). A majority of the fans, who had climbed the gate, stood in front of the sign, but a handful had found a way to reach the top of it, more than ten metres above street level. Most of the young men were dressed in Ultras Ahlawy t-shirts or hoodies, but quite a few were bare-chested under the bleak January morning sun.

Suddenly the crowds started to move. The verdict was read out, calling for death sentences for 21 of the Masry fans, while adjourning the case against the remaining 52 defendants to 9th March. Immediately, the sleepy morning mood transformed into celebrations, somewhat out of control. People were dancing, crying, and hugging each other. *Shamarikh* burned. Insulting, sexualised chants against al-Masry and the people in

Port Said echoed in the narrow space, and the whitewashed walls around us were shaking. Many of the bare-chested men on top of the billboard obscenely pushed their hips forward, flexed the muscles on their bare upper bodies and raised their arms up into the air. The whole scene oozed of masculine superiority. Egyptian and foreign journalists took photos and recorded videos. My friend and I soon felt we had had enough of the celebrations, and we went home to my place to have breakfast.

Shortly after we had left, Ultras Ahlawy's and the families of the martyrs were let into the stadium on the club premises, where the celebrations continued for several hours. Perceived as an important first step towards the inclusive justice and retribution that they had so long demanded, the day was a very emotional one for everyone involved. When Mido called me briefly around lunchtime and asked me why I was not present, he was in a great mood, describing the day as 'in a deep sense better than all our *butulat* (titles)'. A mother of one of the boys who had died was interviewed on al-Ahly TV's live coverage of the day's events. She praised God for the sound verdicts, which were granting her 'happiness, like I have never experienced in my whole life'. She also expressed that she hoped that this would bring an end to all violence and insults among Egyptian football fans and that the day would be remembered as the beginning of a better future for the country's youth. It was all a giant family event and picnic on the grass where the Ahly players usually trained. On the terraces above the pitch, UA put on a long set of well-choreographed *dakhlas* (tifos), songs and chants, which one Ahlawy friend of mine later described as a 'beautiful and well-deserved moment of joy after a long and hard struggle'.

A victory that raised questions

The events in January 2013 could easily come across as a month of triumph for the Ahly Ultras. Their spectacular manifestations received a lot of media attention, their threats to create 'chaos' were surely taken seriously, and the death sentences passed were celebrated as an important, if partial victory. Moreover – and as Yasser Thabet has noted – Ultras Ahlawy's cause for justice now also gained the support from an unprecedented number of actors within the political and social elite (2013:122). Both in a state newspaper, *al-Ahram*, and among representatives of the ruling Muslim Brotherhood, a great deal of

understanding was shown for the movement's actions, including when they effectively closed down parts of central Cairo on 23rd January (Fathi, 2013). Both al-Ahly club and the EFA expressed their satisfaction with the verdicts (*Masa' al-Anwar, Modern*, 26th January 2013). In what seemed like an attempt to appease the group and avoid further civil disobedience, President Muhammad Mursi also issued a very timely 'republican statement' on 24th January that officially declared the fans that died in Port Said 'revolutionary martyrs' (a long-term demand by UA) (EMSS, 2013). Even talk show-host Medhat Shalaby – who, as we have seen, had always been among the group's fiercest critics – was surprisingly supportive of UA and praised the group's bravery and principles in his show *Masa' al-Anwar* on *Modern* on the night of the verdicts (26th January 2013).

Cairo was, however, not the only city in Egypt to be eventful in that week in late January. As soon as they learned that 21 of their friends had been put on death row, al-Masry Club's Ultras group Green Eagles took the lead in a series of angry protests against the unjust court system, the police and the Mursi Government, which swept Port Said in the days and weeks that followed. The protests soon turned both ugly and violent. Snipers ruthlessly fired live rounds at unarmed citizens, who tried to approach the prison where the convicted were held. Thirty-seven people were killed and many hundreds injured only in the first 48 hours. Like UA more generally, Mido dismissed the Green Eagles reaction as 'idiotic': 'More than 30 killed after a death sentence against 21; such fools,' as he told me when I reached him on the phone. Also in the football media, the demonstrations in Port Said were widely condemned in similar language: Medhat Shalaby for instance described it as an illogical and overly emotional reaction of 'random violence' (*'unf 'ashwa'i*) that was incompatible with the rule of law and merely worsened the crisis (*Masa' al-Anwar, Modern*, 26th January 2013). Ultras Ahlawy and their sworn enemies on football televisions were in other words increasingly forming a united front.

And yet, the support from the political and sporting establishment that Ultras Ahlawy now enjoyed was a double-edged sword. Among the ranks of revolutionary activists and journalists who had wholeheartedly adored the Ultras project and actions over the past years, the enthusiasm for the movement was beginning to cool. Troublesome questions increasingly began to be asked. How come these self-declared 'revolutionaries' were now

backed by the Mursi government, as well as large parts of the football establishment? Why had UA accepted and celebrated the verdicts, even though no policeman had been convicted and no one from the military even tried? And perhaps the most pressing: given the deep distrust in Egypt's corrupt court system among the young, revolutionary-minded people I knew, why should this particular death sentence against 21 young football fans be considered true and just? For many of my non-Ultras friends, it seemed all too likely that the fans from Port Said had been scapegoated to calm down the Ultras in Cairo, while the real culprits in the police and the military walked free. Many journalists and activists even began to look at Green Eagles' fearless battle with the security state in Port Said as *the* new frontline of the revolutionary struggle. Indeed, more and more Egyptians with revolutionary agendas did, in late January and early February, side with Green Eagles and the people in Port Said, against the security state and the Mursi government, and indirectly also against Ultras Ahlawy (cf. Thabet, 2013:138ff).

Cracks and relapse in a divided nation

The events in January 2013 altered the public image of Ultras Ahlawy. The group's interests and politics were understood to have slid closer to the state apparatus and the Mursi regime. In part, this had been a long time coming. On 22nd November 2012, President Mursi had issued highly controversial constitutional declaration, which, among other things, gave the president the right to overturn rulings by the judiciary that could impede the ongoing drafting of a new constitution. While Mursi's supporters generally saw this as a bold and necessary revolutionary move, most oppositional forces understood it as an unacceptable power grab by the Muslim Brotherhood. Large protest ensued, which in December turned into violent clashes between Mursi-supporters and oppositional protestors. Since then, Egyptian politics had increasingly crystallised along a sharp and bitter secular–Islamist divide.

As I learned from my interviews and chats with group members, Ultras Ahlawy's leadership and membership base were very much split across the secular–religious fault line. Hence, the group could not possibly take sides in the increasingly polarised political terrain. While being neither Islamist nor secular had arguably been a source of appeal for

the movement in the recent past, it became a problem as 2012 drew to a close. The previously so proactive Facebook page became passive and reactive, and the group found itself without an active role to play in the conflict that engulfed the nation. Furthermore, Muhammad Abu-Treika's endorsement started to become a burden. Because of his outspoken support for the government, Abu-Treika's unquestioned popularity and nationalist, role-model status was quickly weakened in the new era of sharpening Islamist–secularist divisions.[53] As a result of the group's passivity and silence, their close relation to Abu-Treika, and the police's reluctance to confront them since Mursi had come to power, insistent rumours began to circulate in the media about the Mursi government having struck a deal with Ultras Ahlawy (see e.g. *al-Misri al-Yum*, 18th January 2013).

By January 2013, the subjectivity of the Egyptian Ultra was hence, for several reasons, more difficult to read, understand and like than it had been just a few months earlier. Their positionality in the new, emergent political environment was no longer untainted and in many ways more problematic. If they previously had come across as a group of principled, disciplined subjects struggling for the common, national good, their subjectivity was now frequently understood as 'political' (*siyasi*), a notion which at the time bore negative connotations of manipulative and calculative self-interest. This tendency was exacerbated after the Port Said verdicts, as the country seemed to split between al-Ahly and al-Masry, Ultras Ahlawy and Green Eagles, Cairo and Port Said and perhaps also between the Mursi government and an emergent, secular opposition. A common phrase used among friends who began to question UA's intentions in this period was that everything had 'become politics'. 'First they were against everyone, then they were with Mursi and against Port Said, right? And now I hear that they want to claim that will be against the police again? Honestly, I am not following any longer', as my friend Sayed – a young coffee shop owner, *Zamelkawi,* and strong advocate of the secular strands of the revolutionary movement (see Chapter 6) – expressed it in early February.

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[53] A good example is the interview Abu-Treika gave on *Misr 25 Mubashir*, 22nd November 2012.

Finally, it is also worth noting that that for many neutrals, the lasting memory of the day of the verdict would be the iconic images from UA's celebrations outside al-Ahly Club that in the days that followed circulated all over Egypt as well as the rest of the world. In particular, these were images of bare-chested, muscular men making obscene gestures and singing humiliating songs against Green Eagles, al-Masry, and Port Said. For many, this behaviour was not at all appropriate. To insult a group of fellow Egyptian citizens, who had recently been sentenced to death and whose guilt most non-Ultras anyway doubted, was difficult to justify and make sense of; Sayed, for example explicitly brought up the flexing of muscles when we discussed the scene, as part of what he found reprehensible with the turn the Ultras had taken. Similarly, the reaction on social media among revolutionary activists and journalists was largely one of disappointment with a group they had thought they had known, and which they had loved to adore and support. Did Ultras Ahlawy's spectacular campaign against corruption, oppression and police violence merely boil down to this after all those months of struggle? Had it just been a matter of getting revenge against their long-sworn rivals in Green Eagles, and not a fight against the security state, after all? An eye for an eye, and all of a suddenly the fans showed their real face? Indeed, the entire scene of masculinised, self-serving violence seemed to reinforce the image of Ultras Ahlawy as fanatical *baltagiyya*, which they over the previous years had successfully managed to erase. The questions were plentiful; the respectable subjectivity and masculinity of the Ultras, until recently so well suited to the revolutionary moment, were increasingly being surrounded by doubts.

Conclusion: A masculinity of emergence and contingency

The story about Egypt's Ultras movement that I have told in this chapter and the previous is one of a subjectivity going through a full circle. Having been widely ostracised in the years prior to 2011, the groups came to embody a masculine subjectivity with

largely positive connotations in the aftermath of the revolution. This was particularly accentuated in the eventful months that followed the Super Cup in September 2012, when a piecemeal-assembled 'emergent masculinity' (Inhorn, 2012) materialised: their active participation in the revolution and martyrdom in Port Said had already provided them with strong revolutionary credentials; their selective use of violence, for good purposes, proved their *gada'na*; Abu-Treika's decision to side with them appended a component of respectability; and their orderly and well-organised demonstrations turned them into popular role-models for the new post-revolutionary nation. The unique balance in this well-assembled subjectivity, between working-class *gada'na* and middle-class respectability, revolutionary 'transgressions' and 'good behaviour' (cf. Groes-Green, 2010), could not, however, be sustained as the country moved on into the new year. At the time of the Port Said verdicts, the subjectivity of the Ultras football fan rather, as we have just seen, began to be questioned as 'political', 'vulgar' and selfishly violent. Once again, the accusations of *baltagiyya* seemed relevant and apt.

In a broader sense, my ethnography about Ultras Ahlawy's struggle for justice, retribution and reforms has also illustrated how the revolution in 2011 and the Port Said tragedy in 2012 opened up new fields of action and imagination. At the end of 2012, it was clear to everyone who paid attention that the days of the football bubble were definitely over, and that the sport had entered a period of deep crisis and change. As such, it was a period akin to what David Scott, in a recent study on the 1983 revolution in Grenada, has theorised as 'an *exceptional time*' (2014:34): a time when everything seems to be at stake, and 'in which human action, in its capacity to intervene, stands out starkly against established patterns, past action now congealed to automatism and repetition' (ibid.). This uncertainty and volatility, I argue, was part of the processes of ruination that the Egyptian football assemblage went through.

In the exceptional time that followed the Super Cup, Ultras Ahlawy's actions certainly acquired an unprecedented 'capacity to intervene,' and they constantly challenged a variety of 'established patterns'. The bundle of discourses about national stability, security and thuggery that in previous years had been mobilised to discredit, regulate and police the new fans lost much of their former efficacy. The way the subjectivity of Ultras

managed to side-step these accusations is particularly remarkable given that the group frequently assembled large numbers of young men in public space. As was touched on in Chapter 3, these were precisely the type of scenarios that had long been associated with the widespread and increasingly debated problem of mob-based sexual harassment. Indeed, the masculinity of groups of young men in Egyptian public space had often, over the 2000s, been discursively worked out as an uncontrolled problem of hyper-sexualised *baltagiyya*, and as such in pressing need of being violently securitised by the police (Amar, 2011). While similar power-knowledge assemblages were mobilised against the Egyptian Ultras movement in the contest over the restart of football that unfolded in autumn 2012, these labels did not seem to stick to the emergent revolutionary masculinity that UA embodied. One reason for this was certainly the unique balance between revolutionary novelty, middle-class respectability and more *sha'bi* notions of *gada'na* that their actions and statements connoted. Partly, it was also a result of direct interventions, by which the group actively pre-empted accusations of sexual harassment. The way the Ultras members made sure to let women through their ranks at the demonstration outside the Presidential Place in October 2012 is a good example of how this could be played out.[54]

Scott's analysis of the Grenada revolution not only depicts it as an 'exceptional time' for bold action that intervenes and makes a change. He also convincingly argues that while revolutionary actors can 'initiate action', they 'cannot entirely calculate its final outcome' (2014:51). For Scott, this inherent 'vulnerability' is a result of the fact that the results of what we do are contingent on other actors' actions. Often, as in the Grenadian case, this contingency eventually turns revolutionary hopes and well-intended attempts to shape a better world into violent 'tragedy' (ibid.:33-65). This observation is useful to think with as we analyse the material presented in this chapter. For Ultras Ahlawy, the events that

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[54] Another famous example was the sit-in that Ultras Ahlawy organised outside the parliament in March and April 2012. To pre-empt the problem of sexual harassment and the perennial accusation of 'prostitution' and 'promiscuity' that other revolutionary sit-ins had faced, women were not allowed to smoke, and they were asked to leave the encampment at 10 pm every night. While these regulations annoyed some of the Port Said martyrs' female relatives, they strengthened the public image UA as respectable rather than *baltagiyya* (*al-Shuruq*, 8th April 2012).

unfolded in early 2013 can clearly be read as an ultimate 'tragedy'. However, my ethnography seems to suggest a contingency of a somewhat different character than Scott's. While political actions of others – the Mursi government, Ultras Green Eagles, revolutionary activists – certainly mattered for UA's fall from grace, a series of different agencies also played their part: the outcome of the Port Said court verdicts, well-established codes for respectability and masculinity, and the general mood in the country vis-à-vis the revolution, to list but a few. To avoid over-stating the importance of individual 'action', it hence seems more apt to understand the emergent masculinity of the Ultras as a contingent 'crystallisation' within a wider assemblage, which in turn was being re-shuffled by 'events' such as Port Said, the Super Cup and the January verdicts (cf. Humphrey, 2008). Within this assemblage, Ultras Ahlawy were very much in control of shaping themselves and the world around them through action in autumn 2012. Yet by the beginning of 2013, they largely lost their capacity to intervene, as other forces outside their control increasingly became dominant.

The infrastructures that circulated media images and narratives about the group played a key part in these processes of crystallisation and subjectivation. Through large-scale investments, Egypt's football media networks had built up a powerful platform (Chapter 1), which over many years had distributed largely negative stories about the Egyptian Ultras movement (Chapter 3). Although in partial decline in 2012, this wide-reaching and financially strong media machinery would always be very difficult to counter for a group of football fans, who only had social media at their disposal. In 2011 and 2012, the Ultras, as we have seen in this and the previous chapter, managed to get their stories, statements and demands circulated in the burgeoning, pro-revolutionary news media in a way that balanced and temporarily even numbed their fiercest critics. As soon as these revolutionary journalists lost interest in UA's case in early 2013 however, the group once again found themselves struggling to get their messages across outside their own social media platforms. The re-articulation of the Egyptian Ultras' masculinity that took place in the revolutionary period was hence highly contingent on specific infrastructural set-ups and media circulations outside UA's direct control.

Finally, I would also like to suggest that the particular composition of Ultras Ahlawy's acclaimed emergent masculinity made their position contingent on a set of values and norms that ultimately contributed to their 'tragedy'. While UA had always come across as young and radical, their insistence on being perceived as ordered, planned and purposeful was crucial for giving them an aura of respectability. As many scholars have noted, the importance of 'order' in contemporary Egypt has often been mobilised in class-phobic contexts of development and planning (see e.g. Dorman 2009; Sims, 2010). Furthermore, the notion of 'respectability' comes, as I have repeatedly argued, with strong class connotations (see Chapter 2 and 3). In contrast to Paul Amar, I am hence not reading Ultras Ahlawy's rise to fame as an example of 'vulgar', 'aggressive' and 'working-class' young men creating 'boundary-challenging gender solidarities' in *opposition* to the dominant moralistic principles of (middle-)classed respectability (2013a:51ff). Ultras Ahlawy's project for a transformed football was rather fundamentally *reformist*: for a while, the group very successfully managed to pass as ordered and respectable, yet they never challenged the classed, gendered and moralising order as such. As a consequence, their positionality as respectable, ordered and purposeful revolutionaries would always be contingent on whatever 'respectability', 'order' and 'purpose' were assumed to connote. As the arena of national politics moved on in 2013, so did these valorised notions. And as a consequence, the masculinity of the Egyptian Ultras reassembled yet again, and it came to join the vulgar, unruly bodies thought of as threatening the Egyptian nation.

Nevertheless, the spectacular political campaign of the Ultras was not the only stage where subjectivities related to football reassembled in this year of ruination and change. Emotions, attachments and subjects were transformed well outside the media spotlight. Such shifts of a very different scales and magnitudes are the topic of the final two chapters of this dissertation.

[CHAPTER FIVE]

Misfits

An ethnography of affect that was no more

> Disruptions and crises always have origins in and effects on rhythms: those of institutions, of growth, of the population, of exchanges, of work, therefore those who make or *express* the complexity of present societies. One could study from this perspective the rhythmic changes that follow revolutions. From 1789 to 1830 were not bodies themselves touched by the alterations in foods, gestures and costumes, the rhythm of work and of occupations?
>
> Lefebvre, 2004:44

On the first day of June 2012, the Egyptian national team played Mozambique in their opening match of the qualifications for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. It was the first competitive match for the 'Pharaohs' since they had crashed out of the African Cup of Nations qualifiers almost exactly a year earlier.[55] The match was also the first real test for the team's new American coach, Bob Bradley, and it was scheduled on a Friday night, the weekly day off from work for most Cairenes. For an anthropologist interested in the cultural and emotional work that football does in Egypt, this might have seemed like the perfect occasion to explore ethnographically how people in Cairo experienced, talked and

[55] After a 0-0 draw versus South Africa on 5th June 2011, Egypt lost their last chance to qualify for the 2012 tournament.

felt about the national game when it mattered the most. Indeed, interviewees and friends had often described how, just a few years earlier, national team games like these used to be emotionally loaded occasions of national hysteria and festivities. As I have discussed in several previous chapters, however, football in Egypt had transformed since its heyday in the late Mubarak era: the enormously popular national coach Hassan Shehata had been sacked, and several of the most popular players of yesteryear had been replaced by younger, less famous talents. The Port Said tragedy had led to a suspension of the local game and a refocus of the media's attention from games and tactics to the Ultras' political campaign for justice (see Chapter 3 and 4). Moreover, in June 2012 the country's eventful political process was reaching yet another climax. As it was only a couple of weeks before the Presidential election run-off between Mubarak's former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq and Muhammad Mursi, from the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party, everyone I met was discussing politics. Football in contrast, felt very distant indeed.

In other words, it came as no surprise when I switched on the TV a couple of hours before kick-off and found that even the *kabatin* (approx. pundits, see Chapter 1) on Medhat Shalaby's pre-match talk show on *Modern* – Egypt's most influential football channel of the previous years (see Chapter 1 and 4) – did not really seem to care. On the surface, the channel was making a big thing out of the national team being back in action: two hours were devoted to analysis prior to the game, and some of the channel's most prominent experts – former star players Mustapha Yunis, Magdy Abdelghani and Ibrahim Yusif – were lined up in the studio. However, after a few initial minutes packed with clichés about the 'lack of experience' in the young starting line-up and the need for Bradley to play an 'offensive football that makes the Egyptian people happy', the discussions left the game aside to instead focus on the upcoming elections. For instance, Yunis and Shalaby devoted much time to a discussion of what they perceived as a biased smear campaign against Shafiq in the Brotherhood-controlled media. Shalaby also stressed every voter's 'right to choose what is the best for him and for the stability of the country', an argument that clearly positioned him on the side of Shafiq's stability-focused campaign. With only ten minutes left before kick-off, almost nothing had been said about tactics, and Mozambique's players had not even been mentioned. Instead, the men in the studio had spent a good hour and a half reaching a consensus that 'in the difficult

circumstances that the country passes through' (*fi al-umur al-sa'ba illi bitmurr fiha al-balad*) a 'strong man' with 'political experience' was necessary to lead the country into its uncertain future.

As the match was about to begin, I decided to go for a walk and observe how the match was followed in the city's historical areas: al-Azbakiyya, Bab al-Sha'riyya, al-Muski and Darb al-Ahmar. Similar to in the TV studio, the dominant impression here was also that attention was directed elsewhere than the national football team. In the small alleyways, a fair number of people were indeed watching the game in *ahawi* (coffee shops; sing. *ahwa*), and most TVs in the open stores and workshops that I walked by were showing the action from Burg al-Arab stadium outside Alexandria. And yet, the coffee shops were not particularly full, and shop owners regularly left their TV sets to chat with customers and passers-by. When Egypt sealed the game by a couple of goals in the second half, the celebrations were moderate and reserved. In an odd moment just after the second goal, I found myself cheering loudest of all the customers at a tiny *ahwa*, in one of the small lanes tucked in behind the medieval city gate Bab Zuweila. In vain, I did my best to convince a middle-aged man sitting next to me of the importance of the goal just scored. Needless to say, he was not persuaded.

On the way home towards Downtown along Muhammad Ali Street, I plugged in my earphones and listened to Bradley's post-match press conference on the radio. He said that he was very happy with the result and the performance, and I agreed: Egypt had played convincingly and the victory was well deserved. Then, he continued by saying that what made him the happiest was that he knew the team's victory had been 'followed passionately by 85 million Egyptians', and that 'it feels fantastic to make all of them happy in this period of political turmoil'. I took a look around at the TV screens lining the street along which I was walking. Not even half an hour had passed since the end of the match, but everywhere I looked, the political talk shows analysing the elections were back on. Neither Bradley, nor the players, nor any post-match analyses were anywhere to be seen. At least here, along Muhammad Ali Street's semi-open furniture shops, kebab joints and coffee shops, Bradley's comments came across as dissonant and out of tune. People were elsewhere that night; football did not seem to 'be followed passionately by 85 million'; the

game did not seem to affect. If the people around me went to bed happy that Friday it was more likely because they had made a bargain on a piece of furniture than because of their national football team taking a first step towards the World Cup in Brazil.

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This chapter continues the exploration of the 'ruination' of the Egyptian football assemblage, which was introduced in the Interlude and expanded in Chapter 4. In particular, the aim of the chapter is to reach a better understanding for how and why the dominant structurings of feelings, which I in Chapter 1 discussed as the 'football bubble,' broke down and lost their ability to affect and move Egyptians in 2012 and 2013. Large parts of the chapter's ethnography tell the story of my good friend Hamada: the *Zamelkawi* pharmacist mentioned briefly in my account of the day of the Port Said massacre (see Interlude). As we will see, Hamada had been a regular visitor to Cairo Stadium for several decades, but for various reasons he increasingly lost touch with the sport during the post-2011 years. By foregrounding the story of Hamada, the chapter provides detailed ethnographic insights into how one Egyptian football supporter experienced and coped with the emotional ruination that was underway.

In Chapter 1, I proposed an inclusive narrative about a complex social assemblage of financial infrastructures, television, talented individuals and politics, which all came together at a certain historical juncture to form a nationwide 'football bubble'. Based on the same basic premises, this chapter suggests that the narrative of how emotional attachments to football were lost in the first years of the 2010s needs to be a story about how this multi-dimensional assemblage was 'de-assembled', or at least 'reassembled' in new ways. While Chapter 4 traced how these processes of ruination informed reassemblings of the political subjectivity of Cairo's biggest Ultras group, this chapter and the next shift the lens, to instead zoom in on the reformatting of more mundane, everyday emotional subjectivities and attachments. The scale of the ethnography is in this sense distinctly different to that of previous chapters, even though processes of reassembling and ruination remain the main object of study.

In contrast to previous chapters, this does not follow a clear chronology. Instead, the ethnographic material is organised thematically and theoretically. More precisely, each of the chapter's four main sections tackles a distinct dimension of football's ruination, as well as how this particular facet of the reassembling impacted on Hamada's ability to feel.

The first section – which is called 'Atmosphere' – introduces Hamada. It gives historical details about his family and professional life, and it details his passion for the 'atmosphere' at the football stadium. In addition, the ethnography also shows how football was talked about in a new and more negative way after the Port Said massacre, a change in discourse which, I argue, radically re-coded the emotionality that the sport elicited.

The second section is called 'Occasion'. Here, I discuss how football's emotionality depends on precariously assembled occasions. I also show how such occasions stopped coming together in Egypt during the period under consideration, a fact that impeded Hamada's ability to feel for the game. Drawing loosely on the work of Magnus Marsden and Monique Scheer, I also argue that the expectations for being emotional in relation to football plummeted. As a consequence, people stopped working on themselves to be emotional, and the lower expectations became self-fulfilling.

The third section – 'Rhythm' – takes the perspective of Henri Lefebvre and Tim Edensor and looks at changes in football's rhythms and pulsations. It shows that many football rhythms were interrupted and discontinued in the revolutionary period, and that the rhythms of politics instead became increasingly dominant. Moreover, the section also suggests that the there were many similarities between the emotional work that the rhythms of football and revolutionary politics carried out.

In the fourth section, which I call 'Misfit,' I bring the earlier strands together in a more comprehensive analysis of how and why Hamada lost his ability to feel for football. In conversation with the work of Yael Navaro-Yashin, I suggest that in this period Hamada experienced a complex state of misfit. Trained to feel within the football assemblage as it had been set up, the ruination left him out of sync, both with whatever remained of football, and with a new everyday steeped in politics and uncertainty.

Finally, in a conclusion, I take the story back to where the chapter began, in June 2012. I suggest that the affective and emotional ruination of Egypt's national sport must be understood as a complex reconfiguration of sentiments, entailing striking conflations and overlaps between the affective registers of, on the one hand, sports, and on the other, politics. The chapter ends with another ethnographic vignette that illustrates this point.

The chapter is mainly based on interviews and casual chats with Hamada and a few other interlocutors. I also use data from participant observation at a few football matches, which I attended with Hamada at Cairo Stadium.

Atmosphere

Hamada the pharmacist

In retrospect, it feels natural that I met Hamada during a Zamalek game at Cairo Stadium. In early autumn 2011, only a good month after I had arrived in Cairo, I had convinced a Scottish friend to come along to watch al-Zamalek play Haras al-Hudud in the semi-final of the Egyptian Cup. It was the first Zamalek game either of us had been to, and we had all sorts of problems locating the right street and the right gate within the vast and poorly signposted stadium area. We were thus already late for kick-off when we hastened up the stairs to the second-category section and quickly sat down on the first seats available, a few rows from the very top of the steep stands. The match fulfilled all our expectation: the stadium was all but full, Ultras White Knights put on a series of impressive tifos and choreographed, pyrotechnical shows, and al-Zamalek won and progressed to the final after a late decisive goal. What I, the curious anthropologist, found the most interesting to observe, however, were the constant gestures and social interactions among a group of

broad-shouldered men – many sporting thick moustaches and track suits – who were sitting immediately above and next to us on our right: insults at the referee and the players from both teams; loud, sexually explicit jokes and laughter; angry arm gestures into the air; and in particular, intense, never-ending chain-smoking.

One slightly corpulent man right next to me, however, was a bit different. First of all, he was not smoking. Second, I did not hear him swear very much. And finally, rather than being angry and furious at everybody around him, his straight, almost strained posture and concentrated gaze at the game below oozed tense nervousness. I also remember it as striking that, in each and every heated argument that evolved on the stands about a certain player, the referee or the opponents, my neighbour always seemed to have some details to add: about a similar game in the past; about a certain player's previous carrier; about goal scoring statistics, or just about anything else that could be relevant. I also noted that, despite his somewhat reserved looks and manners, he possessed a certain authority within the group. His fellow comrades always listened to his historical mini-lectures once their raging outbursts had subsided. I was therefore more than happy, when during an injury break in the middle of the second half, this man turned to me and asked me who I and my friend were. As I told him about my PhD project and he realised that I spoke some Arabic, he gave me his card and insisted that I come to see him in the pharmacy that he ran. He promised to tell me 'everything he knew' about the history of Egyptian football. I thanked him and told him that I would love to come and visit, and so it happened that I and Hamada became friends.

In the year and a half that followed, Hamada and I would go to al-Zamalek games together as often as we possibly could. I would also regularly visit him in his pharmacy, which is located in a poor neighbourhood at the fringes of the sprawling southern part of the city referred to as 'Old Cairo' (*Masr al-qadima*). Hamada's memory of old games and statistics was unmatched among the people I met in the field, and his willingness to share his knowledge with me made him an excellent interlocutor, from whom I learned an enormous amount. Hamada was born in 1979. His father, who had retired a few years before I met him, had worked as a doctor in the Egyptian Army: a prestigious position that secured the family an established middle-class status. Through his military

connections, the family had managed to acquire a relatively cheap flat in a sought-after area of Nasser City, next to Cairo International Stadium. As it happened, Hamada was hence brought up in direct proximity to the epicentre of the Egyptian football universe. He often told me that as a child in the 1980s, he used to sit in his window and watch the festive mood in the street, as supporters, merchandise touts and snack vendors congregated outside the stadium in the build-up for big Ahly, Zamalek or national team fixtures.

The first time Hamada entered the stadium was probably in 1987, when his father, also a *Zamelkawi*, took him to a Zamalek game. In the very early years in school, Hamada had wanted to support Ahly 'since they were winning all the time', but from the early 1990s, when he started to go to the stadium more regularly, he shifted his allegiances to Zamalek, mainly because he found their style of play 'more artistic' (*al-fanniyyat a'la*). One early, fond and formative memory was the season of 1992-93, when al-Zamalek won the league and both derby games against al-Ahly. In the following two decades, however, the disappointments had been much more numerous than the highlights, as al-Ahly – with due help from referees and an Egyptian football establishment heavily biased towards al-Ahly, according to Hamada – almost always came out on top. Despite all these sorrows, Hamada had continued to come to the stadium regularly to watch al-Zamalek as well as the national team for more than two decades. In fact, he had watched an impressive number of the most iconic occasions in modern Egyptian football history live from his favourite section at the stadium, where I first met him.

After finishing his pharmaceutical studies at Cairo University, getting married and having a first child in the mid-2000s, Hamada had had to accept that his visits to the stadium became less frequent than they had been during his teens and student years. Especially after separating from his first wife and marrying a second wife with whom he now had two more children, his financial situation had become increasingly strained. Neither of Hamada's wives was working – 'they have enough to do at home, it is better that way' – and in order to support two homes and a total of six people, he often worked twelve hours a day, six days a week and often also half of Friday in his pharmacy. Even in these last, tough five or six years, however, he had always made sure to take time off to watch

the most important Zamalek and National Team fixtures at the stadium. While he did have a small TV set in the pharmacy and could follow matches while he was working, he explained to me that for him, a televised game could never match the experience of watching a match live. 'For me, real football is at the stadium', he once told me.

> The atmosphere (*al-gaw*), all the people on the second-category stand (*daraga tanya*), who I know but only meet there. And the sound and space itself. That is what I have always loved and come back for. TV is not the same. Of course the football could be nice. But there is no atmosphere (*mafish gaw*).

Football talk and emotions in the wake of the disaster

As for so many other men in Cairo, the massacre in Port Said in early February 2012 stood out as a transformative 'critical event' (Das, 1995) for Hamada's emotional attachment to football. While the 2011 revolution – and in particular the security vacuum that followed the withdrawal of the police from the streets – had significantly altered his daily life in Old Cairo, football had continued to constitute a significant part of Hamada's everyday routines throughout 2011. He had perhaps gone to the stadium a little less frequently than before – 'when security is not so good you want to stay home with your family a bit more' – and at the pharmacy he had noted that customers who used to discuss Ahly and Zamalek, instead spoke about elections and parties. However, as he once admitted when I visited the pharmacy, just after the first round of the parliamentary elections in December 2011, 'I still begin reading the sports pages in the newspapers; honestly, I prefer reading about a Zamalek victory than the number of votes for the Free Egyptians Party [the liberal party that he had just voted for].' When I called him two days after the tragedy in Port Said, he made clear that this was now about to change. As he explained to me, he felt 'disgusted by what had happened and with all of football actually'. In addition, I also heard him using particular turns of phrase that were repeated over and over again on TV in those days: 'This is not football, it is only politics'; 'It will be difficult to return to the stadium'; ''Football should make people happy, not kill people'; 'For me football is now without taste (*min ghayr ta'm*)'.

In the days, weeks and months that followed, I had countless discussions with friends who, in a similar way, told me that after Port Said football would 'never be the same'. Very often, their reasons for turning away from their previously dominant pastime were couched in emotional idioms, stressing the impossibility of finding pleasure and joy in a game that had resulted in so many deaths. Many expressed that they were 'fed up with' (*ẓahi't min*), the political and violent circus that football had turned into. Strikingly, tropes that had frequently, at least since the Algerian matches in November 2009, been used by those journalists, activists and intellectuals, who I in Chapter 2 discuss as 'respectable,' now spread much more widely. Suddenly, Hamada and I – who previously had spoken almost solely of players, transfers and tactics – critically discussed how the sport's former 'beauty' and 'morals' under Mubarak had developed into a 'tool for politics', 'concealment' (*taghyib*) or 'drug' (*mukhaddarat*). For some, it had even become embarrassing to get carried wholeheartedly away by the game, into which they had previously invested so much of their interest, attention and emotions. Already in December 2011, a friend of mine called Basam – a father of two in his mid-thirties who was working in digital marketing and writing an informative blog about Egyptian sports media – lamented that he had stopped making Facebook updates about football, since among his 'revolutionary friends' he would then be accused of being 'shallow' and not dedicated to Egypt's 'real' problems. After Port Said, and especially as the Presidential elections in May and June 2012 were approaching, such a sense of guilt and ideas about football as futile, unimportant and problematically 'political' circulated more widely than ever before.

To understand more precisely how football's reassembling after the revolution and the Port Said tragedy affected Hamada and other Egyptian men's feelings for the sport, it is crucial to bear in mind these new ways of talking about football. As previously dominant tropes about football as normal, uniting, and uplifting (see Chapter 1) were replaced by a new set of hegemonic discourses that stressed fanaticism, death and dirty politics, it impacted on the Egyptians' feelings for the few matches that still were being played. It is worth re-stressing that this shift in 'football talk' often involved vocabulary that directly referred to the game's emotionality. The 'atmosphere' (*gaw*) at the stadium that Hamada had loved so much was simply not there to talk about in the post-Port Said period.

Instead, he often expressed that football had lost its 'taste' (*ta'm*) and that he felt 'fed up' (*zahi't*). As anthropologists Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz (1990) and historian Monique Scheer (2012) remind us, such discursive practices of naming provide crucial entry points to the study of emotionality. Emotion talk does not merely represent emotions; rather, it fundamentally constitutes emotionality as a socio-culturally embedded experience. The reconfigurations of discourses about football and its emotions were hence one key dimension of the changing emotional work that the football assemblage carried out among Egyptian men like Hamada in 2012 and 2013. However, to get a fuller picture of the processes of emotional ruination that took place, a sole focus on discourses is not enough. In the next section, I will hence explore another aspect of the football assemblage that also changed and also mattered: football's emotional occasions.

Occasion

Fleeting occasions of intensity and feeling

In discussions about our common passion for football, Hamada and I often contemplated the unmatched, almost magical, experience that a well-played game and a really good stadium atmosphere sometimes elicit. For each of us, our most evocative football memories were those very special occasions when pleasure (or pain) had reached all-time highs. One such event that Hamada – like so many other Egyptian men – liked to bring up as *the* occasion to remember was the first of the two World Cup qualifiers against Algeria in November 2009 (see Chapter 2). Hamada was one of the lucky ones who managed to get hold of a ticket to the game at Cairo Stadium, and the minutes immediately before and right after the goal in extra time that took Egypt to the brink of the World Cup constituted an affective memory that he would never forget. Time and

time again, he returned to this electrifying night at Cairo Stadium, and I was always fascinated by the way he added some fresh details to the story each time round. How he had arrived at the stadium more than six hours before kick-off to be sure to find a parking spot and his preferred seat with the optimal view. How he had spent 15 pounds on an Egyptian flag outside, although he never usually bought anything in the street. How people around him at the stands had shared food and drinks, while waiting for the game to start. How he had encouraged a stranger next to him to keep on believing, keep on cheering, even when things looked desperate and time was running out. How everyone in his section had stood up for the last twenty minutes of the match. And how he had seen Moteab steering that header into the goal but missed parts of the celebrations as he suddenly found himself covered under a huge Egyptian flag that had come falling down from the seats above him.

The many details that Hamada recalled from this great match in Egypt's football history had all been important building blocks of an immensely powerful emotional occasion. They were crucial in the way they had given the 'atmosphere' at the stadium its particular, personalised structure and 'taste', and they were important enough to be remembered vividly several years after the occasion. As such, Hamada's stories provide insight into the wide range of factors that, when coming together all at once, create an emotional occasion that truly sparkles: a match's significance in its particular competition, a particular historical rivalry, previous results, the spatial features and geographical location of the stadium, attendance, flags and other material objects that are brought into the stands, the weather, and the dynamics and result of the match itself. Moreover, Hamada's narrations of the night of this famous victory also illuminate how football fans work on themselves to make occasions happen. Individuals have to be prepared, properly stuffed with food and drinks, and carefully 'learn to be affected' (Latour, 2004) to fully articulate with their surroundings. To entirely partake in the crystallisation of the occasion and attend to the emotions afforded in a particular social and material milieu is, in other words, a highly complex matter that does not happen easily.

As we remember from Chapter 2, the Algeria Games episode in late 2009 did not end on a happy note for the Egyptian team and its fans. As much as the first match in Cairo

would provide the most memorable and narrated example of an occasion when everything had come together favourably to evoke emotions of happiness and success, the second match in Sudan stood out as the cruel counter-example. From what my interviewees and friends told me, it seemed clear that the build-up to this match had been at least as charged as for the previous one, and that expectations, hopes and passions had been as high as ever when people sat down in front of their TVs to watch the showdown. However, when Egypt lost, all of this immediately fell apart; what had been anticipated as an unprecedented party turned into a silent night of shock and tears. The match in Sudan is, hence, particularly instructive in showing the precarious nature of the emotional occasions that football assembles. Due to their dependency on matches, goals and results, really powerful emotional football occasions are rare and inherently unpredictable; one can never really know when they are going to happen, an aspect which arguably is a key factor behind the intense emotionality that is elicited when everything surprisingly does come together at the same time.

In 2012 and 2013, these precarious emotional occasions abruptly stopped coming together around football in Egypt. As fans generally were banned from the stadiums and the league suspended for a full year, the number of matches they could enjoy – live or on television – were very limited. Furthermore, when matches were occasionally broadcast on TV, there was rarely much for Hamada to celebrate: al-Zamalek's performance in the African Champions League in summer 2012 was dismal, and the national team – which had won three consecutive African Cups of Nations in 2006, 2008 and 2010 – failed to even qualify for the tournaments in 2012 and 2013.[56] This very tangible lack of spatiotemporal moments for football-related emotional practices was an important dimension of the 'ruination' that the Egyptian football assemblage went through in the time of my fieldwork. While the number of occasions when football could move was radically reduced for fans like Hamada, successful occasions, assembling positive feelings of victory and triumph, were all but eradicated. This obvious but nonetheless crucial factor fundamentally altered football's ability to affect Egyptians. The type of occasions

[56] For Ahly-supporters this was slightly different. Al-Ahly's somewhat surprising won the African Champions League in November 2012.

that had built the grand football bubble, just were not there anymore, and as such, the sport's previous role as a dominant structuring of feeling entered a state of decay.

Mourning occasions that were not meant to be

The fact that emotional football events simply did not happen any longer was not the only way in which the issues of occasion and emotionality fed off each other in the period of my fieldwork. In addition, it was notable how people remembered emotional occasions that were not meant to be. Because of the precarious nature of the affective joy that football promises but rarely delivers, it is often difficult to fully establish what is lamented the most after a particularly painful defeat: the loss itself (however that might be defined) or the missed occasion for jubilation? In conversations I had with Hamada and other football-loving friends in Cairo, the two were in any case difficult to fully entangle. Did the defeat to Algeria in Khartoum hurt more than other losses because of the historically tense rivalry between the two nations? Or had it mainly been painful because of the missed party in Cairo that night? Or due to the missing out on future occasions for jubilation during the month of the World Cup next summer? Nobody could really give me the answers; in the end, these were all aspects of a complexly assembled experience of loss.

A realisation of how bitterly people might mourn missed emotional occasions struck me, when Hamada and I sat in his car on the choked Salah Salem Street and tried to talk away our disappointment after the final of the Egyptian Cup in October 2011. As we had taken our seats at the stadium a few hours earlier, everything had been in place to make the night an occasion to remember for years to come: the warm and breezy autumn night, the sold-out stadium, all dressed in al-Zamalek's white and red colours, the chance for the club to end a humiliating three-year spell without a title, and the relatively weak opponents, ENNPI, a club owned by the government's gas company, totally devoid of supporters. The match had also started well with al-Zamalek clearly dominating possession. It was thus both deserved and expected when Amr Zaky scored the opening goal in the 47th minute, right in front of *talta yimin,* Ultras White Nights packed *curva.* When Zaky sprinted towards the stands to celebrate with the fans in that bull-like manner

that had given him his nickname *el-bulduzir* (the Bulldozer), the stadium had erupted in white and red and fireworks. Hamada and I, with 70,000 others, had stood up on our chairs, hugged each other and our neighbours, and screamed straight into the night. But then, just 10 minutes later, a shocking penalty – 1-1 – and shortly thereafter, another ENPPI goal after some sloppy defending (so typically al-Zamalek!). And thereafter, suddenly, panic and silence. The clock was running down all too quickly; and before long we had heard the final whistle blowing. Now we sat in the car and mourned the loss, mourned the occasion that had promised so much but never delivered. There was not much I could do to console Hamada, as he told me quietly,

> That was the first time in 15 years I saw the stadium like this, only white, no Ahly-fans, only us. For *Ahlawiyya* this happen all the time, but last time it happened for us was at the African final against Shooting Stars [from Nigeria] in 1996. Do you understand me, Carl? I do not know when there will be a new chance to be this happy again.

Self-fulfilling expectations

Hamada was right to fear that the emotional occasion that was missed that night was not to return anytime soon. No games of comparable magnitude were played in Egypt that first revolutionary autumn, and after the tragedy in Port Said in February the following year, football came to an almost complete halt. The sheer quantity of occasions for emotional mobilisation was however not the only thing that was reduced. When a limited number of fans were allowed back into a couple of al-Zamalek matches and a handful of al-Ahly games in the African club competitions in autumn 2012, the attendance was often disappointing and the atmosphere relatively bleak. In early September, I had to convince Hamada to come along as a few thousand tickets were sold to an al-Zamalek Champions League match on a smaller, military-owned stadium close to the airport. In the end he found both the people attending, and the haphazard organisation disappointing, and he told me that we better wait a bit – 'until the situation has stabilised a little' – before going to a match again.

Hamada's reluctance was shared with many of my friends. People like Karim, Bilal, Abdu and Mido (see Chapter 1, 2, 3 and 4), who had frequently gone to the stadium in the past,

did not feel like returning. When I asked them why, the horrendous event in Port Said was an important part of the answer; especially for Ultras Ahlawy members like Mido, it was – as I detailed in Chapter 4 – a matter of principle not to attend football matches before proper justice had been done. However, many people I talked to also mentioned that they had heard from friends or seen on television that the atmosphere at the stadiums was 'dead' or 'a bit boring', and that the football played had become very 'weak'. The fact that al-Ahly and the national team's games were played at the remote Burg al-Arab stadium in the desert outside Alexandria, more than two hours' drive from Cairo, and that only a fraction of the 80,000 tickets were sold, added to these sentiments. This arrangement effectively precluded any physical and emotional proximity between fans and players, something which was apparent to anyone watching the matches on television. The result of all of this was a widespread lowering of *expectations*: for the quality of the game, for the favourite teams' performance and chances in the competitions they participated in, and importantly also for the emotional occasion itself, which did not promise to be particularly exhilarating and moving.

The importance of expectations for the shaping of emotional experiences has been noted by several ethnographers. Deborah Kapchan has for instance shown how the 'promise' of an *expected* 'trans-cultural sonic translation' was instrumental in creating a unique emotional atmosphere at an international music festival in Morocco (2008). Another example is Magnus Marsden's exploration of a particular type of all-male gatherings in northern Pakistan, during which young men take on a rowdy emotional subjectivity, somewhat dissonant with their otherwise pious Muslim ethos. Marsden here illustrates both how his interlocutors *expected* certain emotional registers from the gatherings and how they thereafter *worked* on themselves and each other to materialise these expected emotions (2007). These observations resonate well with Hamada's story of the preparation and work that enabled the highly expected Algeria game in 2009 to be such an intense occasion: arriving six hours before kick-off, bringing flags and food, praying for a good result, and never stopping believing. When football was slowly reintroduced to Egyptian stadiums in autumn 2012, this was all very different. As neither I nor my friends expected football to move us anymore, we did not come prepared and did not put in the necessary work to get the stadium going. This was the case even at an occasion as big as

the African Champions League final between al-Ahly and Esperance from Tunisia, which was played at Burg al-Arab in November. Compared to much lesser matches only a year earlier, the media coverage in the build-up to the match was significantly scaled down. I also noted how preparatory practices such as arriving early, bringing in flags and standing up whilst singing and cheering were not particularly common. That is, if people did go to the game at all; most people did not even bother to make their way to Alexandria, leaving the stands less than half empty and the expectations for the occasion yet another notch lower among those of us who indeed were present.

In a Bourdieu-inspired essay about how methodologically to research emotions, Monique Scheer suggests that practices through which emotions are 'mobilised' and 'communicated' are productive vantage points for social inquiry (2012; see also Introduction). However, within the Egyptian football assemblage, such practices of communication and mobilisation were often conflated through the mechanism of vanishing expectations in late 2012 and early 2013. When people arrived at a half-empty stadium, watched a match on TV without hearing any fans, read meagre reports in the newspapers, or heard their friends discussing more 'important issues' like politics, immediately after the Champions League Final, what they saw, read and heard was half-hearted practices of emotional communication. This communication in turn made them expect less from occasions to come, a sort of prognostication that impeded the work they put in to mobilise further emotions and affect. In this way, negative feedback loops started to spin that, over time, propelled football ever deeper into oblivion and neglect. In contrast to the plethora of upward-spiralling emotional circulations that saturated the Egyptian football bubble (see Chapter 1), lowered expectations, poor stadium attendance and weakened media coverage instead turned most emotional circulations downwards in the years when I did my fieldwork. Since people did not expect to be moved, few of them went to the stadiums, and the occasions did not sparkle. Low expectations became self-fulfilling, as memories of occasions in the past and projections for the future came together to dampen actions, desires and practices in the present. This, I argue, played a fundamental role in the processes of emotional ruination that this chapter takes interest in.

Occasions, however, do not only carry out emotional work independently. Crucially, occasions are also linked together into series with particular pulsations and rhythms. This is the theme of the next section.

Rhythm

Altered rhythms in a transformed everyday

In his short book *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, Henri Lefebvre lays out a somewhat unorthodox programme for the study of rhythmic reoccurrences and their importance in what people understand as 'the everyday'. Lefebvre suggests that 'everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy there is *rhythm'* (2004:15). More specifically, Lefebvre argues that rhythms are linear accumulations of longer or shorter cyclical phenomena (8, 74ff) and that the social world around us could be understood as a bundle of social, material and astronomical rhythms that constantly interact with each other, as well as with the biological rhythms of human bodies (10, 80f). What is more, *Rhythmanalysis* also distinguishes between powerful, 'dominating' and 'dominated' rhythms (18), and it urges us to pay attention to instances of 'polyrhythmia' (different rhythms existing in parallel), 'eurhythmia' (two or more rhythms in harmony), and 'arrhythmia' (dissonance between rhythms) (16).

For football supporters like Hamada, linear accumulations of cyclical phenomena such as weekly matches, year-long seasons, and biannual tournaments like the African Cup of Nations had, in the years leading up to the revolution, played important parts in the rhythmic constitution of the everyday. The discontinuation of the league and the national teams missing two consecutive African Cups hence disrupted a series of 'public rhythms'

(Lefebvre, 2004: 18) that had previously shaped temporality as well as spatiality, and which had provided daily life with its particular texture and flavour. With no matches to broadcast, discuss or report from, football was also increasingly omitted from the rhythmic 'mediatised everyday' (ibid.:50). Hamada, who had watched matches or football talk-shows more or less daily, could in 2012 and 2013 go weeks without turning on a sports channel. As a result of a combination of weakened pulsations, the sport thus gradually faded out of his and many other Egyptian men's lives.

One afternoon in February 2012, only a few hours before kick-off of the semi-final in the African Cup of Nations between Ghana and Zambia, I came to visit him at the pharmacy. After a cup of tea and a discussion that once again tried to make some sense of the terrible event in Port Said a few days earlier, I asked him if he could try to finish early so that we could watch the match together in a nearby *ahwa*. His reaction to my question was first one of slight confusion, but then he smiled at me, almost embarrassingly, and said:

> I don't know, Carl, but honestly until you said it, I did not even know that the semi-final was today, and I did not know who were playing. It is strange...Remember when you asked me all these details about the tournaments in the 1990s? I knew all the games and all the players, everything, did I not? In fact, I always watched every game and I remembered so many details about every tournament, I am really good at that. And now I do not even know who is playing in the semi-final; it does not matter for me (*mayifra'nish ya'ni*). It is really strange, but I just do not think about football anymore. Actually, the only one who wants to discuss football with me these days is you.

As a result of the revolution, the Port Said disaster, the league cancellation, and the poor results of the national team, the position of football in Hamada's everyday had been radically altered. The Egyptians turned away from the sport and began to 'organise their lives elsewhere' (Navaro-Yashin, 2012:157). Football's broken rhythms also rendered matches that had already been played the same season null and void. When the array of games was truncated for the most tragic of reasons, a long series of results, missed chances, referee decisions and injuries that, since October 2011, had built up a dramatic narrative and emotional momentum was suddenly rendered a stump, devoid of much of its former meaning. In 2012 and 2013, a bundle of footballing-rhythms of different frequencies and pulsations, which used to structure the everyday were in this way

disrupted or modified. As a result, football stopped being part of the repetitive 'refrain' through which 'background "noise" is lifted to significance', something which Pelkmans has identified as key to affective registers that work on bodies over long periods of time (2013; see also Blackman, 2012:100-23). Or, put differently in the vocabulary of Lefebvre: if the bubble of the late Mubarak era had been characterised by positive momentums, plenty of charged emotional occasions and *eurhythmia* between fans, media, politics and Egypt's national sport, the football assemblage had, in 2012 and 2013, entered a general state of ruination and *arrhythmia*. The emotional pulsation of the sport had changed beyond recognition; fans like Hamada were no longer able to follow, attach or care.

Dominant rhythms of the nation

The rhythms of the everyday do not only work on the emotional experiences of individuals. As Tim Edensor has argued, the 'repetition of innumerable quotidian routines and habits' is also crucial for the way societies collectively 'develop a sense of enduing time' and particular 'structures of feelings' bound to 'national temporalities' (2006:528; see also Blackman, 2012:111f). For football fans like Hamada, the rhythms of football had certainly played an important role in giving the national temporality its particular structure in the late Mubarak era. To use the language of Edensor, football matches, discussions and tournaments constituted the

> small everyday arrangements [that] merge the local with the national through serialization and the persistence of identifiable patterns [that] over time underpins a common sense that this is *how things are* and this is *how we do things* (2006:529).

In particular after the emergence of satellite TV and the resulting proliferation and variation of TV programming, big sports events became rather exceptional in the way they managed to simultaneously gather millions of Egyptians in front on their TV sets (ibid.:536). The sudden withering away of these national 'time keepers' (Edensor, 2010:10) and 'national synchronicities' (2006:534; see also Anderson, 1991) in 2012, in this sense, induced a comprehensive rearrangement both of the everyday and of a set of dominant structurings of feelings across the Egyptian nation.

At the same time as the rhythms of football faded away, a new set of temporalities and rhythms grew stronger in Cairo. Almost every Friday, demonstrations in Tahrir Square or other public spaces across the city drew large numbers of participants and many more to the television channels that broadcast the events live. At regular intervals, the protests turned into street fights that brought large sections of the city to a halt. Moreover, multiple elections and referenda dominated the media and public and private conversations for weeks on end. Live broadcasts from debates in the Egyptian parliament were also watched eagerly. And every night of the week, the latest political events were discussed on the very popular political talk-shows that mushroomed on the country's satellite TV channels. This quickly evolving political process certainly shaped the kind of 'national temporality' that Edensor theorises (2006:528). Without doubt, the revolutionary process's mediatised, violent and emotional rhythms were the nation's 'dominating' ones at this historical juncture (see Lefebvre, 2004:18).

An intriguing aspect of these dominant rhythms for political emotionality is how football-like they often turned out to be. The Ultras groups taking their emotional repertoires of chants, flags and fireworks into the centre of national politics was one very visible example of this trend (see Chapter 3 and 4). However, the Ultras' street politics were not the only arena where political participation and emotional practices associated with the nation's dominant sport conflated. When Basam – my digital marketing and football blogging friend whose reluctance to post 'unimportant' football-related comments on Facebook was discussed above – tried to explain to me in December 2011 why football had the ability to move him so profoundly, his way of slipping between two at the outset distinct contexts was illuminating:

> I don't know if this makes much sense, but it's one of very few things in life that you can actually watch it happening. In a particular moment, no one in the entire world knows what is gonna happen: if it [the ball] is gonna hit the post, or if it is gonna go in, or go out. This was the crazy things with the moments in Tahrir as well. You cannot believe that these things are happening right now when we are standing here, when you are actually out there with the people in the streets fighting against whoever you are fighting against. I think that is the crazy thing about it. We go to the streets together, we fight an opponent together. People form theories and are analysing stuff, but I do not know what they are analysing. If they really knew how football

> worked they should not sit in TV and analyse it afterwards; they could get rich very easily if they really knew the secret, but they don't. You cannot explain passions; when they happen they just happen.

In the years that followed 2011, demonstrations, sit-ins and clashes provided a rhythmic and seemingly never-ending stream of those political occasions for unity and friction, hope and adrenalin that Basam alluded to. Indeed, as Samuli Schielke has argued, the revolutionary process in Egypt was not primarily 'ideological, intellectual or imaginative, but physical and emotional' (2015:180); it was driven by 'embodied act[s] of doing something that could make a difference [...] physical move[s] that made the world appear in a different light (ibid.)', and through which 'action [ran] ahead of imagination and form[ed] it' (ibid.; see also Pearlman, 2013; Toma, 2015). Similar to the emotional momentums that grew with each and every football victory in the late Mubarak era, the bloody cycles of protests, street fights and clashes in 2011 and 2012 chillingly fed on expectations of more of the same kind. They continued for days without end, as death was translated into rage, rage into grief, grief into an urge to revenge, revenge into more fights, more adrenalin, more teargas, more bullets, more death (cf. Butler, 2014). What is more, the circulation of these emotional occasions through satellite television was also highly reminiscent of the mediation of football in the recent past. In both cases, live footage from the pitch/Tahrir Square was mixed with commentaries from experts in a studio, who analysed tactics and predicted the outcomes. And like football previously, the action Downtown became the default programme of choice, in coffee shops, restaurants and stores all over the city, during the days and weeks when the violence reached a peak.

The withering away of emotions within the ruined football assemblage post-Port Said must hence, at least partly, be understood as a process of replacement. When football disappeared from the rhythms of the national everyday, politics filled up some of the gaps. However, the substitution was not one of rational politics for emotional sports. Rather, and similar to what I argued in Chapter 1, the exchange was of one set of affective registers for another. Indeed, the intricate similarities between the emotional rhythms, occasions and circulations of the two realms indicate that the 'redistribution of sentiments' (Stoler, 2004:6) was a complex one of interdependence and contingency. The feeling of unity, unpredictability, collective chanting, and eventual victory when Mubarak

stepped down did, as Basam poignantly pointed out in the interview above, made Tahrir Square emotionally reminiscent of a great victory at Cairo Stadium. While the magic was similar, the differences were at the same time immense. Even for Basam, who found it helpful to compare the two, the moments he had experienced on Tahrir were 'of course the most powerful in my life'. The revolution had been far more unexpected, its unpredictability so much more open-ended, its outcomes of a different, life-and-death magnitude. Despite formal similarities in terms of dynamics, rhythms and effects, the structuring of feeling prompted by Egypt's political transformation dwarfed all competing national rhythms and temporalities, and it rendered sports all too petty, all too futile.

Misfit

'The atmosphere was not the same'

On a hot afternoon in July 2012, shortly after the presidential elections and a couple of days before the beginning of Ramadan, I met Hamada in an air-conditioned coffee shop in Downtown Cairo for a rare formalised interview. Football was at this time distinctly detached from Hamada's everyday life, and it was a good occasion to look back and reflect on how his attachments to the sport had changed in the last few years. The answers he gave me touched on several issues that have emerged in this chapter and are well worth citing at some length:

> I think that the problem is that the sport's morals have been lost. There is much more *ta'assub* (fanaticism, see Chapter 2) everywhere. I am not saying that there was no *ta'assub* and riots (*shaghab*) at football games earlier. Actually there was a lot in the 1990s, when I started to go to the stadium. For example, I was there when the audience threw a brick at Zimbabwe's goal keeper [famous World Cup qualifier in 1993], and I saw many riots at derby games.

> But there was a difference in the way people cheered (*far' fi nu' al-tashgi'*). In those days, in the time of al-Khawaga [popular cheerleader (*hatif*) at Zamalek-games in the pre-Ultras era], the songs were different and there was more joking. It was not so serious as it is now. The songs we sang were simpler, like *ya Zamalek, ya madrasa, la'b wi fann wi handasa* (literally. Oh Zamalek, oh school, play and art and engineering; a classic al-Zamalek chant), and most people were a bit older. Now, the Ultras sing all through the match; we who sit on *daraga tanya* do not sing very much. They are very young, and not conscious (*wa'iyyin*) and a bit ignorant (*gahilin*). And they are organised, so everything they do becomes very strong. [...] So the *ta'assub* has become worse. [...] For me, that is a reason why I went less often to the stadium the last years. The atmosphere was not the same as it used to be (*al-gaw mish zay ma kan ya'ni*).

During our conversation that afternoon, Hamada also explained how he felt that the media had, in recent years, distorted the football he used to love:

> The media is a big problem I think, because they amplify (*biyizawwid*), also the *ta'assub*. They are like petrol next to the fire, those pundits (*humma zay binzin ganb al-nar, al-kabatin dul*)! They are not neutral. For example, it is known that Medhat Shalaby and Shoubair are *Ahlawiyya* and that Khaled al-Ghandour is *Zamelkawi*. It should not be like that. And nowadays, they only speak about politics. That is even worse. We have a saying in Arabic: *iddi al-'aysh lil-khabaza* (leave the bread to the bakers). People should talk about the things they know something about. This is a big problem, not only in football, but in the whole Egyptian society. Everything has become mixed up: football, *ta'assub* and politics.

Before he had to leave and drive back to Old Cairo and his routines in the pharmacy, Hamada elaborated on why the atmosphere at the stadium never could be substituted by watching games on TV.

> I know a lot of fans, *Ahlawiyya* and *Zamelkawiyya*, who never go to the stadium. They just watch matches on TV. I told you before, for me that is a totally different thing. TV is like *khudar bayit*, you know vegetables that have been left out for too long. It is a different bad taste. Al-Zamalek play in the Champions League later this week. Perhaps I will try to watch it. But only if I have time. I do not have that channel in the pharmacy. I don't know. We'll see.

As we said goodbye, next to his car, we decided that we would try to watch the match together later in the week. I tried to call him on the day, but he did not pick up his phone.

Out of sync

Whereas Hamada mainly understood his lost interest and passion in terms of changes in the stadium atmosphere and an increased mediatisation that did not appeal to him, others proposed more personal reasons for why they no longer followed football in the same way: my gym instructor and good friend Mahmoud told me that he had decided to focus more on his religious duties after the revolution and that his daily prayers always had to be prioritised; Bilal, as we remember from Chapter 2, blamed all the work he had to do refurbishing his new flat; Hani, who worked in reception in my language school, told me that his new evening shifts clashed with the Ahly-games that previously had been the highlight of his week. These were all perfectly valid explanations. And yet, the broader question of how and why everyone's individual pretexts for following football less closely coincided so minutely, in this particular period, was still left unanswered.

To better understand the collective move away from football in 2012 and 2013, the different processes of ruination that this chapter has highlighted are helpful to consider collectively. In the wake of the Port Said tragedy, the bubble of emotions and attachments that Egyptian football used to assemble was discredited, torn apart, and de-assembled. Tropes about the sport being a politicised concealment and drug, a lack of emotional occasions, broken spatiotemporal rhythms, and drastically lowered expectations all worked in tandem to render Egypt's national sport difficult to care for. This ruination of Egyptian football was not merely one of dismantling and emotional discharge. As anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin has argued in her work on the ruined border regions of divided Cyprus, processes of 'ruination' tend to leave material objects and locations behind that elicit haunting, uncomfortably 'abject' affect (2012:129-75). Somewhat similarly, I often observed how people like Hamada took on an uncomfortable attitude to the occasional international matches that continued to be played after the tragedy. Arguably due to the way he felt that 'everything has become mixed up: football, *ta'assub* and politics', Hamada switched between approaching these haunting ruins of the game hesitantly, with repulsion, and indifferently, without much enthusiasm. Tellingly, he would often tell me that he *zahi't min* football, an expression that in Egyptian Arabic connotes being 'tired of', 'bored with' and 'fed up with' something. As more time passed

and the immediate shock of Port Said subsided, the more his feelings of being disgusted and fed-up turned into boredom and tiredness. By early 2013, the ruination of Egypt's national sport was so far gone that Hamada had become all but indifferent.

The relationships between ruination, affective charge and individually experienced emotionality that this chapter attends to are inevitably multi-directional, complex and contingent. As Navaro-Yashin also suggests in her book, 'the affect transmitted by the ruins [...] has to be situated within the contingencies and historicity of those *specific interactions between spatial materialities and human beings* that change through time' (2012:159 emphasis added). And later:

> it is these qualities of the objects, *in relation to* their viewer's knowledge about their context, that evoked irritability and feelings of uneasiness among those who came into their presence. Objects and material environment *can generate affect, then, but only as they get entangled in forms of human mediation* (214, emphases added).

Affect and emotionality are, in other words, always evoked *relationally*, in the intersection between materiality, spatiality, rhythm, narrative and interpretive-embodied human beings. In short, feelings in the football assemblage necessitate that 'mindful bodies' (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987) are appropriately 'entrained' (see Blackman, 2012:102) over long-lasting periods of time; or, to borrow from an oft-quoted phrase from Bruno Latour, feelings only happen if bodies 'learn to be affected' (2004) – sensually, ideologically and motorically – so as to be attuned to the affect afforded by particular material, mediated and spatiotemporal rhythms and milieus.

What Hamada's inability to feel for football in the year after the revolution and Port Said illustrates most of all is, thus, a severe state of *misfit*: his mindful body – entrained to be moved by the particular historically contingent arrangement of the sport that I have talked about as the football bubble – was no longer able to be affected by the ruined football assemblage's reconfigured rhythms, occasions and media circulations. Partly, this misfit was generational. As we have seen, family obligations made him unable to watch as many games as he had in his youth. The emerging and increasingly dominant emotional style of the Ultras (see Chapter 3 and 4) was also always going to be too young to be his type of football. However, the misfit that Hamada lived also went beyond his coming-of-

age. While the football he had loved, was now gone, what was left of the game had become too serious and too much connected to a mix of politics and fanaticism that he found appalling. As the stadium supporter he had always been, it was also difficult for him to find pleasure in watching the matches that were still shown on television. The assemblage of habits, preferences and rhythms that for more than two decades had rendered Hamada's learned body exceptionally able to feel a wide range of things in relation to Egyptian football, had in other words turned into a heavy and problematic inertia. As football rapidly reassembled, his habitus was not any longer 'in phase with the world' (Bourdieu, 2008:184), and he found himself severely out of sync with the limited and fundamentally restructured affordance that the sport now provided.

Adjusting, longing

As a hard-working family man in his mid-thirties, relearning to be affected anew in Egypt's ruined football landscape was never going to be easy for Hamada. At the same time, he had to adjust and adapt to a life without football, in which other rhythms had become dominant. In our interview in July 2012, he told me:

> I have been going to the stadium for more than 20 years so obviously, there is something that is missing in my life (*fi naqs fi hayati*). But the strange thing is that it has almost become normal to live without football. I think we all forgot about it a bit, especially with all of the elections. But now when we have a president again, the normal thing would be that football comes back, right? Of course the security at the stadiums has to be fixed, but I think it is not so difficult. I hope that the league will restart soon *Insha'Allah*. It would be nice. But at the same time, I am not sure if it will be as it used to be. Not for me anyway.

Eight months later, in March 2013, I visited Hamada in the pharmacy for the last time before wrapping up my fieldwork and returning to London. After a turbulent and highly uncertain period dominated by the Ultras Ahlawy campaign for retribution and football reforms (see Chapter 4), the league had just restarted, albeit without any fans being allowed into the stands. The immanent restart of football that Hamada had cautiously looked forward to the previous summer had in other words not materialised. In fact, he had only been to one single al-Zamalek match in the previous twelve months: the

somewhat disappointing game in early September, which I had convinced him to attend (see above).

The impression I got this dry and dusty spring day was that Hamada was disillusioned with the course the political process and his life had taken in the last couple of years. He told me that the economic downturn had hit his business hard, how he found himself working longer and longer shifts, and he worried about the increase in violence and a general sense of insecurity that was spreading in the neighbourhood. One of his customers had been shot recently; drug use was on a steep rise. For the first time in the 18 months I had been coming to see him, he suggested that I should take a taxi home instead of walking to the Metro station along the market street as I had always done in the past. During a short Coca Cola break, when the steady stream of customers – buying painkillers, hair gel, nappies or checking their blood pressure – cleared for a moment, Hamada summarised the disappointment he felt:

> You know I told you, most people here in Old Cairo were never really into politics and what happened in Tahrir. I never went to any demonstrations, but of course I hoped that things would get a little bit better (*al-hala bitithassan shiwayya*) also for people like us. But instead everything got worse: there is no security, no money and the electricity breaks down every day. I am fed up with politics; actually the only thing I am thinking of now is working and supporting my family. One has to focus on the most important things. Do you understand me? I try to watch al-Zamalek's games on TV but it is difficult when I am working, because there are always customers coming in, and as you know, my TV is very small and the sound is really bad. And the way the team plays...it is not as nice as before. Many players, like Shikabala, have left. Everything has become politics (*kull haga ba'it siyasa*); there is no fun left. I don't really know... Of course I miss the days at the stadium...But what could one do? (*Mish 'arif wallahi....tab'an al-ayam fi al-astad wahishitni, bas al-wahid biy'amil eih ya'ni?)*

Shortly before dusk, we said our goodbyes. We promised to keep in touch over Facebook, and I took a taxi home as Hamada had suggested. In the car, I thought about Hamada's struggle to adjust to the challenges he was facing. On the one hand, it was remarkable how smoothly and matter-of-factly he had accepted that he had to 'focus on the most important things', like his job and caring for his family and that football just could not be prioritised. On the other hand, I thought of how difficult it must be to

adjust to the new time's predicaments and rhythms. When Hamada had told me that 'everything has become politics; there is no fun left', the 'politics' he was talking about was quite clearly both worrying and distressing: a dramatically increased feeling of insecurity, constant violence in the streets and on television, a slumping economy that hurt his business, Ultras fans protesting at the stadiums and the streets. In an ethnography of the same post-revolutionary period in a village close to Alexandria, Samuli Schielke argues that this reigning feeling of uncertainty and chaos was a result of people no longer knowing the rules of the game.

> Different people based their actions on highly different understandings of what was going on in the first place. Various forms of paranoid fear towards political opponents, different assessments of what can and what cannot be done, of right and wrong, and a collapse of social taboos and inhibitions created a situation that was confusing, to say the least (2015:185).

Possibly, it was something akin to this sense of uncertainty that Hamada referred to as 'everything being politics': a radically expanded unpredictability and openness towards the future, which could be immensely exhilarating during a sit-in or demonstration, but which for Hamada mainly evoked anxiety, fear and insecurity. As much as Hamada embraced the revolution's aims and ideals, and did his best to move on to the most important things in his life, an ambivalence was therefore also always discernible. Whenever I asked him, he admitted that he missed the great atmospheric occasions at the stadium: the emotions he had felt, the people he used to meet, and possibly, also the person he had been allowed to be. There was a sense of longing and nostalgia for these lost feelings (cf. Seremetakis, 1994) that the ruins of football elicited (cf. Stoler, 2008:207f), and which he seemed to enjoy to cultivate with me, the only one with whom he still discussed football. Perhaps, this longing for football as it once had been was also a much more conclusive nostalgia for an era when things had been different; when the stadium afforded a rare sphere of regulated and contained unpredictability within an everyday life that was otherwise much more predictable. In a time when people like Hamada were not supposed to long back, I sometimes felt that football worked as an idiom that allowed him to do precisely that: to remember and mourn occasions and feelings from a less serious and less anxious past, when the rhythms of the nation had pulsated differently.

Conclusion: Conflated realms

The ethnography presented in this chapter has broadened our understanding of the processes of ruination that the Egyptian football assemblage underwent in the years of my fieldwork. More specifically, Hamada's story illustrates in great detail how and why individual experiences of emotionality and attachment came to be fundamentally reconfigured as the football bubble fell apart after the Port Said massacre. During 2012 and 2013, a great number of similar, yet always somewhat different, narratives of lost affect could have been attended to in Egypt, as shifting structurings of feeling around the sport contributed to what Samuli Schielke has called 'new configurations of desires, anxieties, materialities, and frustration' (2012a:36). As we have seen, this transformation was partly the result of a widespread questioning of the sport's function and relevance in the aftermath of the shocking stadium tragedy. However, the chapter has also suggested a broader understanding of the emotional ruination and dismantling that took place: occasions were missed and expectations were lowered; spatiotemporal and mediated rhythms were reordered. For Hamada, these changes developed over time into what I have called a state of misfit: as football reassembled beyond recognition, so did Hamada as a feeling subject; his learned and mindful body was no longer affected, only able to yearn for what had been.

The realigning of the axis of predictability-unpredictability has been a central theme throughout this chapter. Several sections have illuminated how the emotional lure of football thrives on its highly anticipated, yet ultimately unpredictable occasions: those rare moments when 'no one in the entire world knows what is gonna happen', as Basam so aptly put it. At the same time, these unpredictable occasions are also regulated, serialised, as they are, into predictable rhythms of seasons and tournaments that give the mundane everyday a familiar structure. Arguably, this type of carefully contained unpredictability in an otherwise predictable everyday was key to football's emotionality and popularity in the late Mubarak era. In the revolutionary years, this balance was altered; suddenly Cairo seemed brimful of even more unpredictable emotional occasions on Tahrir Square and at the ballot box, all taking place within an uncertain everyday that looked almost impossible to predict. As Basam's comparison between a big game and Tahrir Square, and Hamada's

lamenting that 'everything has become politics' suggest, the realms of football, politics and everyday coping constantly intersected. Through a complex of bleed-overs, the rhythms and occasions, emotions and affect of these realms, constantly overlapped. While these conflations might have lent the political developments a sense of familiarity, it also made football increasingly obsolete.

As the chapter's opening vignette from the day of Egypt's World Cup qualifier against Mozambique indicates, processes of cross-fertilisation between football and politics were particularly accentuated in June 2012. In the build-up to the Presidential Elections run-off between Muhammad Mursi and Ahmed Shafiq, there was a strong sense of political polarisation between two well-defined camps. On 14th June, two days before people were about to go to the polls, I was spending a hot afternoon at *Ward al-Qahira*, a favourite, football-focused *ahwa*, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6. Whilst waiting for the match between Croatia and Italy in the European Championships to begin, the news reached us that the Supreme Court had ruled Shafiq a legitimate candidate, despite his previous posts within multiple Mubarak governments. This verdict had been expected by most people I knew. Yet, the court had gone one step further and, very surprisingly, ruled to dissolve the Brotherhood-dominated parliament. For the *ahwa's* owner Sayed and his friend Abdu – both young and devoted revolutionaries, who reluctantly supported Mursi against the perceived greater evil of Shafiq – this was a tremendous blow. Despondently, they described the court ruling as a 'judiciary coup' (*inqilab qada'i*). For them, it was yet another sign that the 'deep state' (*al-dawla al-'amiqa*) would never allow Mursi to win.

Among a group of Sayed's regulars, who I had previously only known as hard-core Real Madrid fans, the atmosphere was much more upbeat. They were laughing loudly, and one of them was humming the 'Ahmed Shafiq song' that in recent days had gone viral on YouTube and which was blasted through loudspeakers on small pick-up trucks that circulated all over Cairo.[57] As soon as they saw somebody who they knew was a Mursi supporter, they loudly chanted 'Ahmed Shafiq, Ahmed Shafiq', rhythmically clapping their hands. A couple of times they also sang a true classic: *ma'salama, ma'salama, ma'salama, yi*

[57] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wF4d7X0O2oU (accessed 14th April 2015).

awlad el-wiskha (goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, you sons of a dirty woman). This was politics practiced and felt like a football game. In fact, I had observed almost exactly the same behaviour, at the same place and among the same group of people two months earlier, when Real Madrid had beaten FC Barcelona and effectively clinched the Spanish league title (see Chapter 6). At that time, the same teasing and mocking of the losers had been directed against the men and boys in the café known to be supporting Barcelona. By mid-June, the Spanish *El Clásico* had been replaced by the Egyptian presidential elections, but the repertoire of emotional practices in the moment of victory was strikingly similar.

In the end, Sayed and Abdu's cynical predictions turned out to be false. It was possible for Mursi to beat Shafiq. After a full week of severely delayed counting of the ballots, the president of the electoral committee, Faruq Sultan eventually started to read out the results in the late afternoon of 24th June. By that time, the anticipation was enormous, the occasion tremendously charged. Rumours and predictions circulated everywhere in the city. In Karin's and my morning language class, everybody at the school was speculating: would they give Mursi the victory, which we all hoped for and agreed that he deserved? Would they give it to Shafiq, and how would the Brotherhood react in that case? Could the rumours of planned terrorist attacks by the Islamists really be true? Would the authorities postpone the announcement to buy themselves more time? On our way home, we saw shops and restaurants closing early in the afternoon. Everywhere, people were leaving their jobs, hurriedly heading home. At 2:45 pm, 15 minutes before the results were scheduled to be announced, astonishing footage of completely deserted streets in some of the city's busiest business areas circulated on television and social media. Outside our windows, Cairo was quieter than I had ever experienced it. When Sultan belatedly started to read, first the electoral law, then an oath on his and his colleagues impartiality, thereafter a long list of complaints that the committee had received, and then finally – at 4:20 pm – the actual results, the tension of the emotionally charged occasion encapsulated Cairo in its entirety.

The actual announcement did not take more than a few seconds: Mursi had won with a margin of 3.4 %, approximately 900,000 votes. Immediately, the warm summer street outside our open windows exploded in fireworks, ululations, honking cars and

exclamations that God indeed is great (*Allah Akbar*). Later in the evening, we took a walk downtown towards Tahrir Square and Abdeen. Everywhere we went, there were families celebrating with ice cream and soft drinks; Egyptian flags were flying from cars, balconies and statues. When we reached *Ward al-Qahira* the quarter-final in the Euro between Italy and England was already running, but this was not a night for Pirlo, Rooney and Gerrard. Sayed and Abdu were all smiles, relieved by the outcome. Alaa – a member of the revolutionary 6th of April movement, which had joined the Mursi campaign in the weeks before the run-off – was handing out sweets to everyone around. The Real Madrid and Shafiq fans from the previous week were nowhere to be seen; possibly, they felt that it was better to stay home that night, since this time round they were on the losing side. This emotional occasion, with its sweetness of victory, was for the other half of Egyptian society to enjoy and celebrate.

[CHAPTER SIX]

Debris

Ethnographic observations from the game that stayed on

> To remain faithful to the people we work with, at times we have to discover simplicity.
>
> Rollason, 2011b:64

In the turbulent years when I conducted my fieldwork in Cairo, the crisis in Egypt's national sport was recurrently taken to symbolise something more general. In public debates about football, the sport was often mobilised as a litmus test for the nation's (lack of) normality. As I have already discussed in some detail in Chapter 4, a great amount of discursive labour went into linking what was often talked about as the 'return of the activities' (*'awdat al-nashat*) to a desired return to 'normal conditions' (*zuruf 'adiya*). For pundits on satellite TV (Chapter 4) and casual supporters like Hamada (Chapter 5), football represented the economic, political and social 'stability' (*istiqrar*) of the good old days, which they longed for and hoped would return (cf. Makram Ebeid, 2014).

When an abbreviated version of the Egyptian Premier League, without spectators at the stadiums, was launched in early February 2013, the 'return of the activities' was once again promoted aggressively in the football media. That winter, I often watched Medhat Shalaby spending more than half of his daily talk show on *Modern* praising the high quality

and exciting league games that 'gladdened millions' of Egyptians in these troublesome times (e.g. 3rd March 2013). Typically, he also stressed the sport's unmatched ability to make people focus on other things than 'politics and problems'. For Shalaby, the return of football was in this sense portrayed as a double blessing: it made people happy again after all their troubles, and it pre-empted the protests, demonstrations and sit-ins, which in his view risked 'destroying the country' (*yikhrib al-balad*).

Yet, Shalaby and his colleagues fought an uphill battle. As we have seen in Chapter 4, this was a period when much of the sport's symbolism, politics and values were contested. It was also – as Chapter 5 taught us – a time when football was often overshadowed by politics, and when many Egyptian football fans struggled to mobilise interests in and attachments to the sport. During winter 2013, multiple waves of protests and bloody clashes swept Egypt. Dramatic footage of street fights between changing constellations of security forces, Muslim Brotherhood supporters, oppositional demonstrators, Ultras fans and the mystical 'black blocs' filled the airwaves. The broadcasts from the empty, closed-off stadiums, where the league matches were played, had a hard time competing. To argue that 'normality' had returned to Egypt – let alone to its football – was very difficult indeed.

My good friend Abdu was one of many who found Shalaby's insistence that everything was back to business-as-usual dissonant with the current situation. 'I do not know if he himself believes all the stories that he makes up', he told me in March 2013, when I visited him in the gym where he was working.

> I could have died for al-Zamalek before the revolution, but it is not the same now. Should I watch these dead matches (*matshat mayta*), when I have friends being shot at al-Muqattam [a neighbourhood in Cairo, which had recently been the scene of a lot of violence]? Nobody watches his programme anymore, and nobody listens to his lies. Football is dead in Egypt (*al-kura matit fi masr*).

Only four months later, on 19th July 2013, Abdu's claim that 'nobody watches' came to appear prophetic. Having suffered heavy losses over many years, *Modern* announced that the channel was closing down and all its employees were made redundant. At the same time, it is worth noting that when Abdu announced football as 'dead' in the 'abnormal'

period that Egypt was passing through, he was more precisely talking about *Egyptian* football as a *spectator sport*. In fact, just a few days earlier, Abdu and I had excitedly watched Real Madrid narrowly beat Manchester United in the UEFA Champions League's round of 16 at a packed *ahwa* (coffee shop; pl. *ahawi*) next to the apartment building in the Abdeen neighbourhood where he lived with his parents and younger brother Muhammad. Later that night, after celebrating Madrid's victory with an extra cup of sweet tea, and teasing a couple of dejected United supporters he knew, Abdu, Muhammad and a few friends had played pick-up football against other groups of young men at a large square nearby. The games had continued until 2 am and I would surely have joined them, had I not broken my arm during a pick-up match at the same square a few weeks earlier. Throughout the evening and far into the night, Abdu had thus – as happened every so often – taken part in a range of football-related practices that constituted the baseline for various patterns of male-only social interaction. Many of these practices were highly emotionally charged, as Abdu cheered, swore and laughed, whilst watching the game in Madrid, and later on, passed and ran, argued, laughed and shouted, whilst playing on in the square. Abdu took part in all of this during a time when football – according to many Egyptians, Abdu himself included – was no longer moving. For a sport widely considered dead and buried, some aspects of the game were very much alive and kicking.

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In this chapter, I will explore subsections of the Egyptian football assemblage that remained emotionally active, and more or less intact, throughout the crisis that followed the Port Said tragedy. In this, I attend to Laurent Berlant's call not to overstate 'languages of nothingness, shattering [and] cleavage' in the analysis of 'events' but to also explore what is 'ordinary, forgettable, charming, boring, inconsequential or subtle' (2011:278). Inspiration has also been drawn from Ann Stoler's work on how lives are lived among 'imperial debris' that lingers on and 'continue[s] to inform social modes of organisation' even when empire has ceased to rule directly (2008:203). In a similar vein, I use the term 'debris' to denote spill-overs and continuities from one era to another, across what might seem like an abrupt and definite rupture. In the literature, the terms 'ruins' and 'debris'

have often been used interchangeably to theorise how affect stays on in material remains from the past (Navaro-Yashin, 2009, 2012: 129-60; Stoler, 2008). In the light of the ethnographic material presented in this chapter and the previous one, however, I have found it helpful to distinguish between the two. While I think of ruins in terms of haunting, abjection and nostalgia for the grand football bubble ravaged by reassembling and disarray (see Chapter 5), debris is rather the dispersed, yet largely unscathed material that is left behind, in the wake of the catastrophe. In this sense, debris is abiding and long-term, scattered yet available to work and reuse. It has a different, more salient quality than the ruins, which enables a distinct kind of work on emotionalities and subjects.

The chapter's ethnographic material is divided into two sections that attend to two distinct types of debris. The first section zooms in on an *ahwa* (coffee shop) called *Ward al-Qahira*, where I spent a lot of time during fieldwork, watching European football on satellite TV. The ethnography presented attends to a variety of contributing factors that, for a while, made *Ward al-Qahira* a particularly football-focused *ahwa*. I also delineate the contours of a particular, competitive 'emotional style' (Gammerl, 2012) related to the FC Barcelona–Real Madrid rivalry, which materialised in the *ahwa*.

The second section of the ethnography deals with football as a played game. Based on participant observation at a large number of pick-up matches and at a handful of Cairo's state-owned *marakiz al-shabab* (youth centres), I illustrate how and why football as a recreational hobby generated emotionality and homosocial masculine sociality. The ethnography focuses especially on two locales: a square in the Abdeen neighbourhood, where I played pick-up football on a regular basis, and one youth centre in al-Ezbakiyya, where I often went to watch boys and young men play.

In both sections, I trace how infrastructures (mediated, material and spatial) enabled emotionalities and modes of social interaction (cf. Mitchell, 2014). I also show how the emotional football sociality that I explored recurrently linked up with masculine subject formation of a particularly non-propositional and competitive kind. In comparison to most of the other chapters, I have intentionally made the chapter's subsections longer, to allow for uninterrupted flows of a more open-ended ethnography. One reason for this is that I want to let my ethnographic stories, rather than a particular theoretical framework

or an historical narrative, guide this final, full-length chapter of the dissertation. This is also an attempt to create a different tempo in the text, better calibrated with the slower pace and rhythms that these parts of the football assemblage seemed to foster.

In the conclusion, the chapter's ethnographic finding are summed up, compared and analysed. I argue that my material provides a more nuanced understanding, both of the football bubble that I sketched out in the early parts of the dissertation (Chapter 1 and 2), and of the processes of ruination that later chapters have explored (Chapter 4 and 5). In particular, the chapter shows that 'Football' with a capital F – i.e. the huge, mediatised spectacle of the national game – was but one part of a wider range of emotional football practices in Cairo during my fieldwork. Indeed, what I theorise as football 'debris' was able to construct a very tangible sense of normality and ordinariness – although vastly different from what Medhat Shalaby had hoped for – in an exceptional time, dominated by football ruins. In the final analysis, I suggest that this continuous potency of the football debris becomes fully legible only in comparison with and in relation to the haunting, discursive and symbolic ruins of Football, the great spectacle. The debris had always been seen as marginal to al-Ahly and al-Zamalek and was never included in the Football which so many Egyptians proclaimed as dead. As a result, it was not drawn into the processes of ruination that followed as the Mubarak era's football bubble burst.

The chapter is almost completely based on participant observation, among the employees and customers in *Ward al-Qahira*, with employees, coaches and players at the youth centres, and at a large number of pick-up matches on pitches all around Cairo. Especially in the second section about football as a played game, there is a distinct methodological shift towards participation in embodied practice, performance and non-propositional emotionality, which makes the data distinct to the largely discursive material that informs other parts of the dissertation. As we will see, this difference in material has impacted on the ethnography. It has made it possible to attend to parallel dimensions of the sport, which expand and nuance the exploration of the rise and fall of the football bubble that otherwise has been the main story of my research.

Infrastructural debris: European football in *Ward al-Qahira*

Ward al-Qahira

If you take a walk east from Tahrir Square, along Muhammad Mahmoud Street – (in)famous for the clashes between protestors and security forces in November 2011, and in later years for the impressive mural paintings and revolutionary graffiti that cover the walls along it – you will immediately pass the old campus of the American University in Cairo and a string of upmarket coffee shops like Costa, Cilantro and Beano's. Thereafter, you will find the rear of the ramshackle indoor food market in Bab al-Luq on your left, and if you glance down any of the streets to your right, you might catch a glimpse of the fort-like Ministry of Interior. At this point – only a few minutes after leaving the heart of Downtown Cairo – the character of the neighbourhood begins to change. Grand, yet fading colonial apartment buildings with restaurants, clothing stores and coffee shops on the ground floor – so emblematic of Downtown – still line the street you walk along; however, if you look into the intersecting narrow alleyways, you will find a more eclectic mixture of new and old buildings, small businesses and workshops, tailors, print shops, internet cafés and shacks selling *ful* (fava beans) and *ta'miya* (Egyptian falafel). Some ten minutes from Tahrir Square, Muhammad Mahmoud Street intersects with Muhammad Farid Street. Had you turned left here – due north – you would soon have found yourself back among the wide boulevards of Downtown and the Metro station named after Egypt's first president, Muhammad Naguib. If you instead turn right, the street narrows, the elegance of the buildings fades. As is common in residential neighbourhoods, you notice how the number of children and women in the street increases. On your right, you pass a large mosque and community centre that is always bustling with people; a few hundred metres down the road, you hint the entrance to an outdoor vegetable market. You are now in the heart of the working and lower middle-class, *sha'bi* (approx. 'popular', 'for the people') neighbourhood, Abdeen. On your left hand side – as the street suddenly widens and a few plants screen off an unusually broad pavement – you might want to consider having a cup of tea or coffee at the *ahwa* where I was a regular during parts of my fieldwork: *Ward al-Qahira*.

In spring and summer 2012, when I visited *Ward al-Qahira* several nights every week, the place was run by Sayed. Sayed had grown up just a few hundred metres from the *ahwa*, but his parents and extended family were originally from a village in the country's far south, which they had been forced to leave, as their lands were flooded after the building of the High Dam in Aswan. Sayed was in other words of Nubian origin, and he was outspoken about the plight of the Nubians and the racism that his people had to face in Egypt because of their darker complexions. Recently, he had married a Nubian woman, who had grown up in London and held British citizenship. At the time I got to know him, the couple and their baby daughter were living in a small apartment in one of Abdeen's side streets. Now in his early thirties, Sayed was working hard in his spare time to improve his English: in the future, he hoped to relocate with his family to the UK.

After graduating from university, Sayed worked for several years in a friend's company that designed and printed business signs. In 2010 and 2011, after saving up a little bit of money, he began to think about starting his own business. When he learned that the lease for the *ahwa* on the wide pavement was not going to be extended in summer 2011, he decided that it was time to give it a go. 'My idea was always to make this into a really good, international football *ahwa*, like *Sports Café* in Muhandisin, but cheap, Abdeen-style and open 24 hours,' he once explained.

> So, in addition to the 20,000 EGP deposit and normal things like backgammon and chess boards, I paid a lot for screens and sound systems. This makes us special. We have three TVs, two inside and one outside, and as you know, we have two boxes [satellite receivers], so we can show two games at the same time. All together, I paid 40,000 EGP for everything. It was not cheap. Actually I am not sure if it was good business. The problem is that in a place like Abdeen, you cannot charge extra for drinks just because you have the best TV. But I am happy anyway, because *Ward al-Qahira* is the only *ahwa* that really cares about football in this part of Cairo. And so far, I am making enough money to support my family, *Alhamdulillah*.

Ward al-Qahira was in many ways an archetypically Cairene *ahwa*. It was one of the many thousands of coffee houses that are sprinkled across the city, and which for hundreds of years have constituted the 'third places' outside work and home for men in the Middle East to meet, socialise and entertain themselves (Oldenburg, 1999; see also Ellis, 2004; Hattox, 1985). When Sayed talked about *Ward al-Qahira* as 'cheap' and 'Abdeen-style' he

also indicated that he was not running a 'coffee shop' (the English term used in Arabic), i.e. the type of mixed-gender, up-market places, like Cilantro, Costa or for that matter *Sports Café* in Muhandisin which he, in many other ways, tried to emulate (cf. de Koning, 2009). In contrast, *Ward al-Qahira* was a typical *sha'bi ahwa*: a semi-open, mixed-class, but strictly all-male space with wooden chairs, small metal tables, cheap tea, coffee and *shisha* (cf. Peterson, 2011:139-69).

Cairo's *ahawi* have since long been locations for media reception: storytellers performed here in the old days; later on, men congregated in the *ahawi* to listen to news or music on what was often the neighbourhood's only radio (Hourani, 2005:393). Today, close to every *ahwa* in Cairo has a television set that always seems to be turned on, and football is a staple of the programming. As Sayed and many other friends told me, domestic football has traditionally drawn the biggest crowds to Cairo's *ahawi*. This situation makes Egypt different to many sub-Saharan countries, where for decades European leagues have been closely followed in bars (see Akindes, 2011; Musa, 2009). While Sayed was well aware of this bias, he nevertheless found it unfortunate. 'People do not understand what they are missing,' he once told me. 'The football in England and Spain is much better, much more beautiful.'

When Sayed decided to make *Ward al-Qahira* an 'international' *ahwa,* explicitly focused on the European game, it was in part an attempt to change this 'unfortunate' attitude. To achieve this aim, it was necessary to access the international pay TV channels, which in contrast to Egyptian stations like *Modern* showed football from all over the world. In 2012, this was more straightforward than it used to be just a few years earlier. As of late 2009, the Qatari channel *Al-Jazeera Sports* owned the Arab broadcasting rights to close to all relevant competitions: the African and European Champions Leagues, the Spanish, French and Italian leagues, the World Cup, the African Cup of Nations and the European Championships. Compared to the Saudi station *ART*, which had previously controlled a majority of these contracts, the *al-Jazeera* package was accessible and relatively cheap. The only thing required to watch the high-quality live shows – featuring an impressive range of well-known international experts – was a subscription card for 1095 EGP per year that

could be stuck into any satellite receiver.[58] For a middle-sized coffee shop like Sayed's that turned over 15-20,000 EGP per month, this was very affordable.

The affordability and accessibility of *al-Jazeera Sports* had, by the time of my fieldwork, made the Spanish league, in particular, ubiquitous in Cairo's *ahawi*. What made Sayed's *ahwa* special, however, was that it also showed the English Premier League (EPL) on the Emirati channel *AD Sports* on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Watching EPL in Egypt had been tricky since 2007, when the broadcasting rights were transferred from *ART* to the pay-TV network *Showtime*. *Showtime* was not primarily a sports channel. Rather, it was profiled on recently released Western movies and TV series, and it catered for a distinctly high-end price segment. As it also required expensive HD technology that prevented the endemic problem of piracy, the number of *ahawi* in Cairo that broadcast English football dropped dramatically. While the move to *AD Sports* in 2010 meant that the price of the English matches, at least in theory, was reduced to similar levels as the *al-Jazeera* package, *AD Sports* required an encrypted receiver to be bought together with the subscription card. Or more correctly, this was how *AD Sports* was sold in all other Arab countries. In Egypt, the governmental company CNE, that has the monopoly on all pay-TV subscription sales mysteriously refused to market the necessary cards and receivers.[59] As a result, Egypt was a rare country where it was not possible to buy a subscription to watch the English Premier League in the 2010-11 and 2011-12 seasons. The only way of circumventing the problem was to bring an *AD Sports* compatible receiver and

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[58] If one found this too expensive, it was also possible to buy an illegal but widely available 'card-sharing box.' For a few hundred pounds each year, one could then watch a pirated version of *al-Jazeera Sports*, as well as a wide range of other pay-TV channels.

[59] When I contacted CNE in September 2012, I was told that the card was not available 'yet', but that 'negotiations were ongoing' with *AD Sports*. Friends had, however, received the same answer since *AD Sports* acquired the EPL-rights in 2010. Some speculated that this long-lasting problem had to do with *AD Sports* being scared of entering the Egyptian market, which was infamous for its inventive methods for piracy. Others were convinced that the real problem with the 'negotiations' was that CNE required a bribe for making the cards available. CNE suddenly started to sell the necessary receivers and subscriptions in autumn 2012, in the middle of the third and final season of *AD Sports'* 3-year deal.

subscription card from abroad. This was precisely what Sayed had done, through a friend of his who worked in Saudi Arabia.

This imported piece of Saudi hardware truly made *Ward al-Qahira* stand out. I knew of a handful of other coffee shops that in similar ways had acquired the necessary infrastructure to show games from England. Yet, these were all – like *Sports Café* – significantly more expensive. Indeed, Sayed's was the only *ahwa* I ever visited that combined a *sha'bi* and cheap atmosphere with *AD Sports* broadcasts. As Sayed happily explained, this was a key reason behind *Ward al-Qahira's* unique customer base and atmosphere. The rare British broadcasts made it *the* place in Downtown and Abdeen for Arsenal, Manchester United and Liverpool fans to watch their teams play. Due to the difficulties watching the EPL in recent years, people who closely followed English teams were relatively few and far between, yet – as Sayed liked to point out – those English fans who did exist were invariably the most knowledgeable and passionate. *Ward al-Qahira* in this way attracted a more specialised crowd, a fact that helped establish its reputation as an *ahwa* where football was the main focus. On big Champions League nights in spring 2012, when Sayed carefully lined up chairs in front of the big TV outside on the pavement, the space was typically packed with people long before kick-off. Many of them told me that they lived far from Abdeen – in Nasser City, al-Muqattam or Imbaba – and that they came to *Ward al-Qahira* because of the nice atmosphere and focused crowd. Given that Sayed at this point had only run the place for eight months, it was fascinating to consider how fast rumours spread among the city's football-lovers. Through his careful investments in TV technologies and infrastructure, Sayed had managed to create what he had aimed for: a football-focused *ahwa*, 'Abdeen-style'.

El Clásico

While the imported *AD Sports* receiver certainly attracted a particularly knowledgeable customer base and many fans of English teams to *Ward al-Qahira*, this did not mean that English teams and matches were at the centre of everyone's attention in Sayed's *ahwa*. The foreign league for which the collective stakes were the highest was – like everywhere else in Cairo – the Spanish La Liga. The outstanding availability of *al-Jazeera Sports* La Liga

broadcasts compared to *AD Sports* English shows definitely played an important role in this. Another reason was most certainly Barcelona's enormous successes in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Furthermore, the temporality of the matches gave La Liga another edge. Whereas big Spanish matches usually came on air at 8 pm or 10 pm local time, when people had finished work and the *ahawi* in Cairo were full, English games were played on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, when most people were working and the sunlight was so bright that Sayed's largest TV, outside on the pavement, could not be used. The national rhythms of the Egyptian working week (in which Friday is the day off), the astronomical rhythms of the scorching sun, and the international rhythms of football matches thus came together favourably for the Spanish League. The same combination of factors made the second strongest league in Europe more problematic to follow, even at *Ward al-Qahira* where the proper technological infrastructure was in place (cf. Edensor, 2006; Lefebvre, 2004).

The bias towards Spanish football was taken for granted by everyone. Even Sayed, who primarily considered himself a Manchester City fan but also had a soft spot for Real Madrid, admitted that Real's matches had become more important for him in recent years, 'since it is what everyone watches and talks about; they [Real Madrid and FC Barcelona] are simply the two biggest clubs.' Every customer in *Ward al-Qahira* was either a Barcelona or a Real supporter. As such, the Spanish club rivalry – and the corresponding competition between the world's two best players, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo – divided the men into two distinct parts. In a period when it had become difficult to care for al-Ahly and al-Zamalek (see Chapter 5), the Real-Barca antagonism became a complement, for some even a substitute, that in a recognisable manner split passions and allegiances. I once asked Abdu – my friend from the introduction to this chapter, who at the time worked as a waiter for Sayed – if he thought that the popularity of the Spanish League was related to it having a similar two-horse race structure as the Egyptian League. At least partly, he agreed:

> I'm sure you have heard that *Zamelkawiyya* support Real and *Ahlawiyya* support Barca? Some people say it is because Real and al-Zamalek are royal clubs, but I do not know; al-Zamalek has not been royal for more than fifty years. It could also be about the colour: I like al-Zamalek, so I like white teams or something. It is true though, most *Zamelkawiyya* I know support Real –

> perhaps we like losing or something – but it is not always so, it is not necessary.[...] Perhaps you are right...we are used to a league with two good teams. Egyptians would never support small clubs; you won't find anyone here supporting Tottenham, which have never won anything. [...] La Liga is like the Egyptian league: two teams – every week, two important matches. I am Real, so I support Real, and then I support the team that Barcelona is playing against. Like al-Ahly and al-Zamalek. For us who support Real it is almost better when Barca lose than when Real win, because it happens so rarely.

When Abdu told me this, it was early April and the European league seasons had just entered their final stage. Real Madrid was top of the league, but the general feeling at *Ward al-Qahira* was that Barcelona – which in the previous season had won both the Spanish La Liga and the Champions League – was bound to make a late comeback. However, just a couple of weeks later, on Saturday 21st April, the tide was turning; Real Madrid convincingly defeated their main rivals away at Camp Nou, effectively clinching the league title. It was one of the most tense nights I ever experienced at *Ward al-Qahira*; the place was packed already an hour before kick-off, more customers than usual wore match shirts to state their (anyway well-known) allegiances, and Sayed had bought a brand new TV screen for the occasion, as the old one outside in the pavement had recently encounter some minor problems with the screen. Before the match, I asked around for predictions, and the consensus was that Barcelona were big favourites. Somewhat uncharacteristically for Egypt, where I often found that people predicted the result they wished to happen well against the odds, even the most hard-core group of Real supporters, who always sat to the left, inside the door, were unable to believe that Barcelona could be beaten. When Real scored an early first goal after a corner, and then another, decisive one, on a high-speed counter-attack by Cristiano Ronaldo, the atmosphere among the white half of the *ahwa* thus turned as electrically jubilant as only a huge, unexpected victory ever could. People jumped up and down in front of their silent Barcelona friends; they pushed them around, called them names like *ibn al-wiskha* (son of a dirty woman) and *ibn al-sharmuta* (son of a whore) and mocked their *khawwal* (approx. 'faggot') hero Messi that had been duly 'fucked' by 'Cristiano' (Ronaldo). As the final whistle blew, people around me came together in a song: *ohohohohohoho...al-dawri ruh minko* [ohohohohoho...the league went from you]. Obviously, the triumphant chant was directed to the Barcelona fans, many of whom quickly paid their bills and hurried home.

While that night in late April arguably constituted the most charged emotional occasion I ever witnessed in *Ward al-Qahira*, it was at the same time merely one in a series. In spring and summer 2012, the division between Barcelona/Messi and Real Madrid/Ronaldo provided a bottomless well of inspiration for teasing, laughter and banter during matches in La Liga and the Champions League, as well as later on during Portugal's and Spain's matches in the European Championship. As Mark Peterson has noted, the traditional, male-only *sha'bi ahwa* is often a remarkably inclusive social space, where people interact across class divisions. However, it is also a location where men assert masculinity and classed hierarchies through notably sexualised jokes and insults (2011:139-69). At *Ward al-Qahira*, such performances of masculinity were very much present and always highly emotional. As an *ahwa* with a particularly football-focused and international profile, it also happened naturally that these performative assertions of power and manliness were structured along the fault lines of Spanish club sympathies.

The type of emotional sociality that football fostered at *Ward al-Qahira* relied heavily on division and competition. This became particularly clear to me, when I returned to the *ahwa* with some food, half an hour after the final whistle of the momentous clash in Barcelona. The group of Madrid fans, who I had seen celebrated wildly a short while ago, had now moved outside to the street to get some fresh, cooler air. I sat down next to them with my eggplant sandwiches, and asked them how they felt. One of them, called Nazif, smiled at me and explained:

> This was the first time we beat them, in a match that really mattered since 2007, and you ask me how I feel? I feel great of course, but I do not know how those Barca bastards (*awlad al-wiskha betu' Barca*) are feeling...hehe... I cannot see any, can you? Insha'Allah, this was the day of the death of Barcelona and the first day of dominance for Real (*awil yum fi saytarit Real*).

I looked around and noted that Nazif was right; every one of the *ahwa's* high-profile Barcelona fans was gone. As there was no one around to mock and insult, the atmosphere had cooled down. The Real Madrid fans were playing cards just as they always did, when all European games of the night were over, and Sayed was playing a music video on the television screens. There was no one to tease, not much to comment on, and not very much to say. Nazif and his friends simply enjoyed the warm night, the

tea and the *shisha*. Visibly, they were very pleased with the sense of dominance among their friends that their Spanish club's historic victory had granted them.

Professional infrastructures and a distinct emotional style

In late June 2012, the owner of the apartment building in which *Ward al-Qahira* was located announced that he was to increase the rent by more than 40 per cent from 1st July. Sayed found this unacceptable, and he decided to terminate the lease. Just 11 months after opening his business, he sold the big television screens, brought the Saudi receiver home to his nearby flat, and returned to his old job. While the coffee shop's name remained unchanged and some of his employees stayed on under the new management, the character of the place was altered. On the few occasions that I returned in autumn 2012, I recognised a few customers who seemed to have stayed on. However, as there was not even an *al-Jazeera Sports* subscription, let alone *AD Sports*, all of the most dedicated football fans had left *Ward al-Qahira*, rooting for their favourite teams somewhere else.

The period I came to spend at *Ward al-Qahira* was hence relatively short: early March to late June 2012. As I have shown in earlier chapters, this was a period when politics was the main concern for most Egyptians and when football was not a priority. Particularly at the time of the presidential elections in May and June, this was also the case at *Ward al-Qahira*. As the allegiances of customers and employees were split across all the main candidates, heated debates were very common. The dominance of the 'rhythms of politics' (see Chapter 5) made it difficult for the sporadic matches played by al-Ahly, al-Zamalek and the National team to mobilise interest, passion and attention also in Abdeen. The quality was substandard, it was all too political, and the matches on the empty stadiums did not come across as very attractive. It was the same story here as everywhere else; 'football is finished, there is no point (*al-kura khalas, mafish fayda*),' as Sayed told me when I asked him why the *ahwa* was so empty, when Egypt played a crucial African Nations qualifier in mid June.

And yet, come any Champions League Tuesday or Wednesday, or an important weekend league match featuring Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United or Arsenal, football was still there, football moved and mattered. For 90 minutes at a time, the particular assemblage of a cheap and *sha'bi ahwa*, good sound and footage from a European stadium, and an especially knowledgeable audience brought together a temporally confined and 'spatially defined emotional style' (Gammerl, 2012:164) that informed a particular type of competitive masculine sociality. Time and time again, European football did what the Egyptian game could not do. It overrode the otherwise so dominant rhythms of revolutionary politics, and brought sports right back into the everyday lives of all of us who spent our nights in the world of televised football that Sayed's *ahwa* enabled.

Infrastructures – those 'durable yet fragile, hidden but ever present' baselines that 'enable, transform, or inhibit ways of thinking and living collectively' (Mitchell, 2014: 437) – played a vital role in the shaping of this sphere of remaining passions. One Sunday afternoon in early May, this became more obvious than ever, when the electricity suddenly went down in Abdeen. As the televisions turned black and silent, the match between Newcastle United and Manchester City – a crucial tie in the second last week of the English Premier League – quickly disappeared. Mukhtar, an older gentleman temporarily back in Abdeen after many decades abroad, stood up and started a long monologue. With everyone else listening in surprise, Mukhtar talked and talked, about how unorganised and backward Egypt had become, about the people's laziness, about the impossibility of democracy given the widespread lack of morals, and about how everything had become worse since the days of King Farouq, when he had been a schoolboy. Unsurprisingly, Mukhtar's statements spurred a heated discussion. Sayed, Abdu and Sayed's brother Mazen took turns countering Mukhtar's rant. They questioned the relevance of comparing today's Egypt with the despotic monarchy that had been abolished 60 years before, and they asked how anyone could ever be 'ready' for democracy before being allowed to try it out. Another regular expressed his annoyance with Mukhtar's audacity to come home after so many years and complain about a society he neither understood nor seemed to like. Just as Mukhtar began to answer – assuring them that he was 'more Egyptian than anyone of you' (*aktar masri minku kulluku*) – the electricity suddenly returned. Immediately, his voice was drowned by a roar from Sayed:

City had scored twice in the 15 minutes we had missed, putting them on the brink of snatching the Premier League title from their local rivals United. He pushed his brother Mazen, who sat next to him, and grinned at Mukhtar on the other side of the room. Mazen and Mukhtar tried to avoid Sayed's teasing, staring at the screen in front of them. A minute ago, they had been political opponents. Yet, with the return of the electricity and the images from north-west England, they had swiftly turned into Manchester United fans again, and they both knew that they were close to losing out on the league title to the likes of Sayed.

An infrastructural perspective is also helpful for identifying some of the reasons how and why broadcasts of European matches could continue to carry out their emotional work among the customers in *Ward al-Qahira*. As Walter Benjamin noted in his classic study 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', carefully edited moving images have an ability to impose a 'direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert' (1999:227), since 'with close up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended' (ibid.:229). *Al-Jazeera's* and *AD Sports'* access to expensive and advanced image production, based on hundreds of cameras all around the pitches in Europe was in this regard something that mattered. In *Ward al-Qahira* we all constantly interacted with and commented on close-ups of players' facial expressions as well as with slow-motion replays of injuries, dribbling and unprovoked mistakes. Zoom-ins on a player that fell awkwardly on his bum never failed to evoke amusement and laughter, whereas slow-motion footage of a popular star twisting his knee or screaming after pulling a hamstring hastily translated into silence and grimaces. Moreover, *al-Jazeera* also employed the region's most famous commentator, the Tunisian Muhammad al-Shawali, who commented most big matches on the channel. His incredibly rapid and linguistically elaborate commentary was very much enjoyed and often laughed at by the men at *Ward al-Qahira* and clearly something that added to the experience that the Qatari station delivered.

The Gulf channels' higher technological sophistication was not the only thing that rendered them different to their Egyptian competitors. In fact, almost everything on these pan-Arab shows – from the matches themselves, to the commercials, studios, experts and

commentators – had a more 'professional' and 'international' appearance. Abdu once said, when I asked him to compare *al-Jazeera Sport's* broadcasts to the talk shows on *Modern* that he constantly complained about: 'It is two different worlds; there is no relation at all between the type of journalism they do. It is like the difference between Messi and Fathalla [defender in al-Zamalek], you cannot compare.' In contrast to the pundits and commentators at Egyptian football channels – who constantly deviated from the analysis of the actual match to make reactionary comments on the latest political developments (see in particular Chapter 4) – the Gulf network's (dubbed) international star experts and Arab pundits stuck strictly to the analysis of tactics, results and players. In the end, this clean sense of professionalism – so distant from the country's political quarrels – was arguably a reason why people still gathered *en masse* to watch Real Madrid and Barcelona at a time when al-Ahly and al-Zamalek did not do the trick.

Like debris left behind after a destructive storm has passed, international football was hence still present, still emotionally charged in *Ward al-Qahira*. As special as Sayed's *ahwa* was, it was by no means the only place where such infrastructural debris could be found active among the ruins of the Egyptian game. In contrast, the *al-Jazeera Sports'* accessible package ensured that FC Barcelona and Real Madrid's matches circulated widely throughout Cairo's 'media urbanism' (cf. Sundaram, 2009). From the small coffee shops frequented by Sudanese guest workers and migrants that filled the courtyards just behind Opera Square, to the small *ahwa* behind the large trees opposite Hamada's pharmacy in Old Cairo (see Chapter 5), the smart bars and restaurants in upper-class districts like Zamalek, *Sports Café* in Muhandisin, and hundreds of thousands of middle class homes in the city who could afford it, *al-Jazeera's* broadcasts from Camp Nou and Santiago Bernabéu constituted an emotional archipelago that spanned the Egyptian capital (cf. Hirschkind, 2006). As the domestic game was plunged ever deeper into its post-Port Said crisis, the technically advanced and professional infrastructure of European football continued to elicit laughter, anger, joy and pride, 90 minutes at a time, several nights every week. While the 'normal days', dominated by the Egyptian football stars, al-Ahly and al-Zamalek and channels like *Modern*, belonged to a different era, another sort of normality with a distinct emotional style was taking shape and gaining dominance.

Playing the ball: urban geographies of masculinity and emotions

Nights on *al-midan*

Abdeen was not only a part of Cairo where I spent a lot of time watching football from the leagues in Europe; from late fall 2012, I also regularly went to the neighbourhood to play the game myself. The person in charge of setting these games up was Abdu, Sayed's friend and former employee at *Ward al-Qahira*. In his late twenties at the time I met him, Abdu was, like Sayed, of Nubian origin. Apart from football – more precisely Arsenal, Real Madrid and al-Zamalek – Abdu's big passion was Egyptian novels. He always seemed to have a book around to read when he got some time off, both when he worked for Sayed in spring 2012 and later, whilst working in the reception at a nearby gym and health centre. Although deeply attached to Abdeen, where he had his family, his job and most of his friends, Abdu's big dream was to go abroad. In the last few years, he had gradually been saving money to move to Brussels, where a few friends of his were running a falafel restaurant.

Abdu lived with his parents and his younger brother Muhammad in an old apartment building, a few minutes' walk from *Ward al-Qahira*. Despite a seven-year age difference, the two brothers were very close friends. One thing they liked to do together at least once a week was play football. While Abdu and Muhammad often told me stories about matches they had played on the small *balat*-pitch (a type of stone tiles) at one of Abdeen's public schools, or at a nearby youth centre (*markiz al-shabab*), or on an artificial grass pitch in Maadi, the vast majority of matches I participated in were played at *al-midan* (the square): a vast open space, located between Abdeen Palace and the Cairo Governorate buildings. On the floodlit asphalt rectangle at the centre of *al-midan* – encircled by grass, popular with picnicking families, and two boulevards that connect Downtown Cairo with the city's medieval parts – teams of boys and men between seven and fifty constantly played pick-up matches with goals made of jackets, rucksacks or any type of rubbish lying around. Except for an odd festival or political rally, *al-midan* was, in other words, a space

where football brought men together across generations; as such, it turned into an important site for my fieldwork from the day Abdu first invited me to join them for a match.

Like most adults who worked or studied during the day, Abdu and Muhammad always played late at night. Abdu would typically call me at 8 or 9 pm on a Thursday or Friday evening. A couple of hours later, we would meet in a small *ahwa* at *al-midan's* southern perimeters and wait for the other regulars to arrive: Muhammad, and a couple of his friends, who like him were active Ultras members; a recently graduated medical doctor called Hassan, who worked at the same centre as Abdu and who sported a beard without moustache that made his Salafi-sympathies visible; Jake, a refugee from Eritrea, stranded in Cairo whilst waiting for a US visa to join his wife and daughter in California; a talented Sudanese youngster called Mahmoud, who worked in an Internet café close to *Ward al-Qahira*; and Abdu's old friend Zak, who often arrived late from his bank job and quickly changed from his sleek working suit to the blue track-suit pants he always played in. By the time everyone had arrived and it was time to move on to *al-midan*, it was often close to midnight.

The rules were simple and well known. A match lasted until one team had scored four goals; the team that won stayed on to play the team that had been waiting the longest on the sidelines. While the downside of this system was that we sometimes had to wait for more than an hour before it was our turn to play, Abdu liked to highlight the positive flipside: as long as we won, we were allowed to play on indefinitely. In contrast to many men on *al-midan,* who played in slippers or even barefoot, and in any type of clothing imaginable, all the members of our team had proper football shoes or trainers and reasonably appropriate sports outfits. Despite Abdu and Zak's habit of intensifying the experience by smoking marijuana just before kick-off, we were also relatively fit. Consequently we tended to win more often than we lost; it was not uncommon that we stayed out in the cold winter night, playing on the black asphalt under the yellow floodlight until two or three in the morning.

Playing at *al-midan* was not easy. The ball was usually not very good, the light did not fully illuminate the field, the hard surface made the ball bounce around, and it was difficult not

to slip. Given the difficult conditions, the technical level of many players was very impressive, in particular when it came to individual dribbling, skilled moves and clever finishing. Such technical finesse was always celebrated and highly appreciated by players and spectators. On the other hand, players who found themselves dribbled and tricked were duly mocked, laughed at and teased. Together with the obligatory insults given by goal scorers to goalkeepers as well as by the winning team to the losers after a match had ended, these emotional practices of celebration through mocking constituted a recognisable emotional style. The similarities to the competitive bullying that I had observed between Real Madrid and FC Barcelona fans in *Ward al-Qahira* were often striking. It did not seem to matter much that the high-tech infrastructure of wide-screen television sets, satellite receivers, studios in the Gulf, and hundreds of cameras on a packed stadium somewhere in Europe had been replaced by a flood-lit, rectangular piece of asphalt, a torn plastic football, and four jackets signalling goal posts. The game of football was sufficiently recognisable as a common denominator, and consequently, the emotions elicited and masculinity materialised played out according to analogous scripts.

However, the most characteristic emotional expression among the people I played with those late winter nights was the recurring outbursts of confrontational anger. These quarrels – which invariably unfolded at least once every match – were typically stirred by disagreements over the rules of the game and their enforcement. Everyone was aware of the rules: no shots above waist level; balls bouncing against the pavement were still in play whereas bounces against the low wall just above the pavement were not; no tackling was allowed. Yet, the collective enforcement of the regulations was, in the absence of referees, a constant source of arguments. Every single incident of body contact, every shot close to one of the makeshift goalposts, every ball that bounced on the pavement and/or the wall, indeed every vaguely unclear call could be reason for a dispute. Over time, I realised that one was not supposed *ever* to readily admit that one had fouled somebody else or that one had been the last one touching the ball before it went out of play. Instead, each such situation potentially led to a few minutes' interruption of the match, as two or more players began to quarrel over who should get a free kick, who should have a corner, or who should be awarded a goal.

I soon learned to recognise the cyclical stages that skirmishes on *al-midan* passed through. Typically, both of the main protagonists would first passionately swear to God that they were not the one who had touched the ball last before it passed the side-line (*wallahi al-'azim mafish lamsa!*). They would shout loudly at each other, with facial expressions that communicated disappointment, frustration and sorrow for not being trusted. They would confront each other, making straight gestures with their arms at an angle, and if the quarrel turned particularly serious, they might pull each other's t-shirts and call each other names (*ibn al-wiskha, ibn al-mitnaka*). With the exception of some odd figures – like Hassan the Salafi and the tall Swedish anthropologist – players in the same team were assumed to back each other up, no matter what they actually thought of the particular call under contestation. After a while, however, a senior member of each team – in our case most often Abdu – would seek to intervene, calm down and seek a solution. Sometimes, such mediation efforts merely escalated the drama, as the mediator himself got animated and involved in the fighting. Most often however, mediation was the beginning of the end of the scuffle, and the point when tensions started to fizzle out. One of the disagreeing parties might disappointedly shout 'take it if you want to have it', and kick the ball over to the other team's half. Invariably, this would result in the other part replying with something like: 'no, you take it, I don't want it, you play', kicking the ball back again. After a few rounds of kicking, someone else in either team would simply take the ball and start playing. The two combatants might walk around on the edge of the action for a few minutes, indicating the grave injustice that had been done to them. Yet, before long, they would rejoin the action and play on like everybody else.

Disputes akin to the ones I witnessed on *al-midan* certainly happen in spaces where men play sports all around the world (see e.g. Rollason, 2011b:141ff). At the same time, there were also traits of cultural specificity to these ritualised quarrels that are impossible to oversee. Anthropologist Farha Ghannam's rich monograph about masculinity construction in a Cairene working-class neighbourhood shows this in great detail (2013). In one of her ethnographic chapters, Ghannam argues that men and boys in Cairo, from a very early age, are encouraged to 'be a man', 'protect [their] rights', and never back off from fights or arguments (33-9). The book also convincingly argues that a balanced use of confrontational violence is a crucial aspect of manhood (*rugula*) (see also Chapter 4).

Indeed, all men – with the exception of those rendered *nas muhtarama* (respectable people, i.e. the highly educated and/or religious) – are assumed to get involved regularly in tightly scripted 'social dramas' of physical contestation. Typically, these dramas are collectively resolved by other men in the vicinity, who are socially obliged to step in and intervene, regardless of whether they know the combatants or not (112-19).

As Ghannam notes, masculinised social dramas such as these unfold all the time in Cairo: in shops and at the market, in the endless queues in the city's bureaucratic institutions, and – perhaps most visibly – in the hectic Cairo traffic (2013:111). When my friends on *al-midan* quarrelled over a ball that passed the low wall behind the pavement or over another one that might have touched a hand unlawfully, the basic scripts enacted were, in other words, not unique to football, let alone *al-midan* as a space. The reasons why Hassan and I – the Salafi and the academic – were exempt from the obligation to back up our team mates are also well in line with Ghannam's argument about *nas muhtarama* standing over these scuffles. The rules and the ball game on *al-midan*, in other words, not only provided us with a particular spatial, temporal and social arena for a football-specific emotional style based around mocking and teasing. The sociality enacted on the square on those late nights also articulated football with a wider cultural field of competitive masculinity and ritualised low-intense violence.

Finding a place to play

I often tried to get Abdu tell me something about why he found playing football such an enjoyable experience. In contrast to most other topics we talked about – most often al-Zamalek, politics or novels – he did not seem to find this a topic worthy of much discussion. 'I have always been playing, all youth (*shabab*) play football; it is normal', he told me once. Another time I asked him, he got irritated and reflected the question back to me: 'What do you want me to say Carl; why do you play with us? It is not complex. It is fun, right? (*mish haga mu'a"ada. Mumt'a sah?*)' After getting similarly short replies when asking him about why he still played football while he has stopped watching al-Zamalek's matches – 'there is no connection at all' – and later about the constant arguments on the pitch – 'that is football here in Egypt, simple as that' – I accepted that I would not be able

to bring home well-articulated and elaborate quotes about this topic, and I stopped asking my misplaced questions.

Realising that interviews and conversations would not make me understand what brought Abdu and his friends to *al-midan*, I instead began to pay attention to the spatial arrangements and material infrastructure that enabled this activity that 'all *shabab* do'. I soon realised that the well-lit asphalt rectangle on Abdeen's *al-midan,* where football could be played for free on a vast and car-free space, was if not completely unique, at least very rare. In most parts of Cairo's desperately congested urban space, such luxuries were not on hand, as close to all available space was commercialised, privatised or used as parking lots. Spontaneous street football, similar to the games we played in Abdeen, still happened throughout the city (see Hussein, 2011). Yet, many of my slightly older friends in particular often complained about how many spaces, where it had been possible to set up a very basic 3-on-3 or 4-on-4 match when they were kids, had disappeared in recent decades.

For a majority of the boys, teenagers and men who played football in Cairo on a regular basis, football had become a hobby that one had to pay for. Throughout my fieldwork, I played at a large number of pitches throughout the Egyptian capital. I played on *balat*-pitches at public schools in *sha'bi* areas like Abdeen and al-Hussein, where we paid the sports teacher a few Egyptian pounds each to let us in, several hours after the school had officially closed. I played with the Muslim Brotherhood-sympathising teachers at my language school on a well-maintained, but incredibly dusty gravel pitch inside the lush compound of the Faculty of Medicine on the northern tip of Rhoda Island. I joined a football journalist who I interviewed to play with his colleagues on a newly built, privately owned complex of artificial grass pitches, just next to the giant City Stars mall in Nasr City, where it cost several hundred pounds per hour to play on a late Friday night. I played every Monday evening for several months with a group of international and Egyptian journalists and artists on a torn artificial grass pitch at a posh private club in Agouza, and on Tuesdays, I sometimes joined a similarly composed group, who kicked around inside the British Embassy, a few hundred metres south of Tahrir Square. All in all, this myriad of pitches – unevenly distributed and starkly classed – constituted a

geography of football-based emotions and social interaction (cf. Smith et.al. 1999). The archipelago of pitches was a scattered football debris, which was still very much around for me and millions of other Cairene men to tap into, even in the revolutionary years, when Egyptian football as a spectator sport lay in ruins.

On a handful of occasions, I also played at one of the more than a hundred *marakiz al-shabab* that are sprinkled throughout the Greater Cairo area. Egypt's *marakiz al-shabab* (youth centres; sing. *markiz al-shabab*) are a network of state-owned sports and culture clubs that are managed by government employees. First established in the Nasser era, the aim of the centres ever since has been to provide less wealthy Egyptian children with an affordable substitute to private sports clubs: a chance to play sports and music, surf the internet cheaply, or just a semi-public space to hang out in their free time. As memberships are very cheap indeed (often no more than 10-20 EGP per annum) the *marakiz* are accessible to most Egyptian children. However, due to a perennial lack of funding and what some would call corruption, the facilities at many of the centres I visited were in a rather dismal state. It was not uncommon that many of the courses and sports classes on offer merely existed on paper; a range of recently imposed extra charges also made the activities at the *markiz* less accessible in practice than they seemed in theory.

Regardless of status and finances, however, every *markiz al-shabab* in Cairo invariably had a space for playing football. In the last months of my fieldwork, I spent a lot of time at a handful of Cairo's *marakiz*, watching boys and men play, talking to players, coaches and employees, and drinking implausible amounts of black, sweet tea. In this period, I learned about the crucial role of *marakiz al-shabab* as an infrastructural baseline within the Egyptian football assemblage. As I was told, the local *marakiz* were where almost every one of Egypt's best football players had first kicked a ball. Due to their accessibility, these had for a long time been the true homes of mass football in Egypt. The network of *marakiz* had also traditionally been the place where talents were spotted by scouts and coaches and channelled upwards in the football pyramid, to the big club's youth teams and academies.

By 2012 and 2013, though, this nation-wide, grassroots-level infrastructure had become very stratified and uneven. At some *marakiz* I went to – such as Rod El-Farag along the Nile, or Zenein in the middle of the large informal area, Bulaq El-Dakrur – there were large, brand-new, artificial grass pitches. At both of these locations, it was not uncommon to see former and current professional and semi-professional players from the area getting together for impressively high-level social matches on Friday afternoons, and the pitches were reserved for well-organised, and rather costly training sessions, led by professional coaches most evenings of the week. At other places – such as in Bulaq Abu 'Ala or in Nasser City – the pitches were smaller, but the playing surfaces were of a similar high quality. Most *marakiz* I saw, however, had been unable to make such investments. At these locations – such as Kozzika, al-Ezbakiyya and Darb al-Ahmar – the pitches were typically very small, and the goals often lacked nets. The boys and men played on the infamously slippery and hard *balat* (stone tiles), which had been standard to all *marakiz al-shabab* in Cairo until approximately a decade ago.

It is worth pointing out that these differences in terms of facilities did not necessarily correspond with the social standard of the area. In fact, one of the best-kept centres in the whole of Cairo was in Zenein, smack in the middle of the impoverished informal area, Bulaq al-Dakrur. The reasons for the varying investments rather seemed to boil down to a combination of factors, such as the sheer size of the centre, opportunities to attract outside private investors, and unpredictable decisions taken by the Cairo Governorate, the authority that distributed state funding to the centres. Furthermore, the fact that a *markiz* had a shining new pitch did not necessarily translate into excellent opportunities to play football for the boys in the neighbourhood. In contrast, investment very often led to steep rises in the pitch rental fees (up to 100 EGP per hour). It was also common that groups of adult men from companies anywhere in the city rented artificial grass pitches on the *marakiz* at set times every week to play recreationally. At *marakiz* where football was still played on *balat* there was no such outside demand, and playing was still affordable (10-15 EGP/hour). As a consequence, these less fancy pitches were often significantly more accessible than those which had recently been renovated. Somewhat paradoxically, the opportunity for mass football all the time, every night of the week was thus often better at the least developed of Cairo's youth centres.

Karim from al-Ezbakiyya

The first *markiz* I ever went to was also the one where I came to hang out the most. Its full name is *Markiz Shabab al-Ezbakiyya*, and it is one of the smallest and least developed in the whole of Cairo. The *markiz* is located a few hundred metres from Cairo's central railway station, just across the large and busy viaduct that connects the northern neighbourhoods of Shubra and Rod El-Farag with the city's central districts. On the opposite side from the viaduct coming from the station, one finds the run-down, working-class area Ulali: a densely populated neighbourhood of late-nineteenth century apartment houses, full of metal workshops and stores that sell different types of tools. Balancing on the edge of the viaduct, the *markiz* is encircled by high concrete walls that are meant, but do not always succeed, to keep the ball from disappearing down into the traffic. The centre is laid out around a courtyard. Right in the entrance, there is a small *ahwa*. To the right, one finds a low building with office space, a room for infrequent seminars, and a couple of broken ping-pong tables. Opposite the offices, on the left hand side of the courtyard, stands a ramshackle, two-storey structure that used to be an internet café, but which was destroyed by the police during the 2011 uprising. Almost all action takes place on the small – 30 by 15 metre – football pitch that fills the courtyard. The pitch's surface is a particularly old type of *balat* that is infamously slippery and several tiles are missing. Two goals of white-painted steel without netting are tucked close to the two buildings, left and right. Next to the entrance, there is also a small platform, originally intended as a stage for performances, which is convenient for spectators to sit on. Two lamps spread a faint, yellowish light over the pitch after nightfall. Sometimes, a few chairs are taken out from the office or the *ahwa* for the employees to sit on, whilst watching a match as they smoke a cigarette. That, I believe, is about all there is.

I originally started to come to the *markiz* in al-Ezbakiyya to follow the organised training sessions that a former player I knew, called Khatib, had told me that he was running there twice a week. As I soon realised, however, Khatib's planned training rarely seemed to materialise. Sometimes, he cancelled the sessions himself at short notice; sometimes when he was present, not enough boys form the area bothered to show up. At one of the few sessions that actually did take place before Khatib was replaced by an older, more popular

coach named Kabtin Zaza, I got to know one of the few players that actually seemed to appreciate Khatib's drills: an incredibly energetic and immensely talented 19-year-old boy from *Ulali* called Karim al-Far.

Karim had dropped out of school a few years before I met him. At the time, he sometimes helped out in his mother's business, which was selling imported sportswear in a nearby market, but most of the time, he seemed to be present at the *markiz*, playing football, helping Khatib, instructing, refereeing, or simply showing off as the younger boys played. Karim had a style and charisma that made him stand out. While most boys would play in sweatpants and football shirts, Karim never changed before a match. Instead, he played in the clothes that he always wore: extremely skinny jeans, t-shirt, a hoodie or a wind-jacket depending on the weather, and always his grey, knitted hat. Despite smoking constantly and making a point of never eating, he was an excellent player: quick, attentive, skilled with the ball, and blessed with a great right foot that on the day seemed able to score at will. Most characteristic, however, was the way Karim always came across as being in such a great mood. No matter if he was playing himself, helping the kids out, or sitting on the stage talking to me whilst keeping an eye on the match, I always remember him as extraordinarily helpful, smiling and laughing. He was also constantly cracking jokes, teasing and making fun of the *markiz's* middle-aged state employees. Sometimes they got annoyed with him, but my feeling was that they enjoyed having him around. So did I, anyway, because he always had time for me: to show me a new dribble or trick, tell me joke, drink a cup of tea, or most commonly, to tell me a story.

Every time I visited the *markiz* in al-Ezbakiyya, Karim seemed to have a new story to tell me about his many adventures and escapades. On the Friday that we first met, I remember him vividly describing how he and a few friends had spent Thursday night on the roof-top of an abandoned industrial building in Bulaq, drinking whiskey and smoking marijuana, before racing around the nearby Shubra neighbourhood on a motorcycle. Another time, he talked at length about the years before the revolution, when he had been an active member of Ultras Ahlawy, and how he had almost got arrested by security police at a match in Asyut in 2010, after smuggling *shamarikh* (fireworks, see Chapter 3

and 4) into the highly secured stands. Several times, I also heard him praise a famous man from the local area, who had given the family invaluable support at a time when a former parliamentarian suddenly claimed that a piece of land, that Karim's father had bought, belonged to him. Karim was well aware that this powerful friend of his family was often portrayed as something of a gangster or *baltagi* in the media, and that he had been imprisoned in the wake of the revolution. Yet, he assured me that for *sha'bi* people living in *Ulali*, men like him would always heroes, since they were the only one to turn to in situations when you needed to 'claim your right' (*tigib haqqak*).

Most of the time, Karim told me about playing football. I sometimes got the impression that he had learned to know the geography of Cairo and its vicinities through the dozens, possible even hundreds, of football pitches which he had played at over the years. When I mentioned that I had a friend working at a pharmacy in Old Cairo, Karim replied with a story about himself and a few friends from Ulali going to a *markiz al-shabab* in that area late on a Thursday night, beating a local selection by eight goals to one. When I told him about Karin's and my plans to go to the Fayoum oasis for a few days' break in the countryside, he showed a scar on his arm, and began talking about the half-season when he was 16 and played for the youth team of a club called Ittisalat. At the time, he had made a quite astonishing 7000 EGP per month, and he had been driven in a private car the 100 kilometres to the training sessions in Fayoum, before falling badly in training and breaking his arm. Indeed, whenever I told him about a pitch where I had recently played myself, he always seemed to know the location, some details about the facilities, and some of the talents in his own age-group from that area, who he had come across at a Ramadan tournament, at a club, or merely during a friendly game on a late Thursday or Friday night. Football had, in other words, not only provided Karim with a significant amount of money, but also with ample opportunities for 'urban explorations' (cf. Garrett, 2013). Such spatial freedom to 'tour Cairo and enjoy its offerings' is, as Farah Ghannam has noted, highly sought-after among most men in the city, in particular those in their late teens and early twenties (2013:65).

Karim's talent had been spotted by his sports teacher when he was only a schoolboy, and over the previous ten years he had tried his luck in several clubs and academies. Despite

all his attempts, Karim had never quite managed to get the breakthrough that people around him had assured him that he was destined to get. He was now approaching 20 years of age, and time for taking the step into professionalism was running out. As he was very well aware, his relaxed approach to training, appetite for cigarettes, and experimentation with alcohol and drugs did not help him either. During the time I met him regularly in 2012 and 2013, Karim was occasionally doing trials at academies, and for a couple of brief spells, he joined the youth teams in two clubs that Khatib had set him up with. However, both of these stints of more organised training ended abruptly: the first one after Karim fell out with the coach – 'He was an idiot, I swear; he did not know anything about football and just shouted and shouted' – and the second because the coach suddenly died in a car accident. While Karim constantly made plans for the future, and always seemed to be searching for contacts to clubs and coaches that might want to take him in, flashes of recognition were sometimes surfacing that perhaps, it was not meant to be. In particular, the crisis that Egyptian football had been plunged into after the 2011 revolution had prompted Karim to reconsider the role of football in his life. When I met him at the *markiz* just a few days after his coach at his latest club al-Sikka al-Hadid had tragically died, he was in an uncharacteristically sombre mood:

> There is no money and no future in Egyptian football any longer. You remember I told you I got 7000 pounds per months in Ittisalat? That was more than anyone in my family has ever made, and I was only 16. Now in *al-Sikka* I got 5000 for the whole season, plus 750 per month, and some players told me they had not been paid at all for several months. It is because there is no league and everything; there are no revenues. But I tell you something, I don't care anymore, because I don't like the coaches and the discipline and all the shouting. That is why I am here at the *markiz* instead. I am happy here, because there is no coach, no pressure. Only Khatib, but he is different. This is the football I always played. I am happy (*mabsut*) here. There is a big difference.

On Sunday the same week, I passed by the *markiz* in al-Ezbakiyya in the golden hour just before sunset. Karim was there and we talked for a while over a cup of tea as he smoked a cigarette. After a while, more and more of the regulars of Karim's age arrived: Karim's older brother Hamdi, who worked in their father's metal workshop; Nigm and Zizu, who had recently begun studying commerce at Cairo University; a chubby, talkative guy called Muhammad who worked in a nearby *ahwa* and who always played goalkeeper; and a few

other boys in their late teens, who I had often seen at the *markiz* but never spoken to. At ten past five – Hamdi had, as always, arrived late, smiling charmingly, so like his younger brother Karim – they divided themselves into three teams and began to play: three players in each team plus goalkeepers; first to three goals; the team that won kept on playing. During the first couple of matches I recognised a lot of the mocking, teasing and arguments that I was familiar with from my own late night games at *al-midan* in Abdeen. Nigm got annoyed with Hamdi over a ball that might have been over the line; Hamdi laughed and mocked Nigm and his younger brother after scoring a 3-2 winner with an elegant chip from an almost impossible angle, deep down in the corner between the stage and the office.

As night fell and the yellow lights were turned on, the talking and chatter gradually ceased. Increasingly exhausted from more than an hour of high-tempo sprints, dribbling and passing, the focus was narrowed to the ball, the space, and the other players. On the small, torn and slippery *balat* surface, the ball was rolling quickly between the young men. Muhammad throwing the ball to Karim; Karim finding Nigm at the centre of the pitch; Nigm playing the ball back to Karim – now at the left side-line – who received the ball and accelerated past Zizu down into the corner. Looking up ever so briefly, Karim saw Nigm sprinting towards the back post; with a simple touch with the outside of his right-foot, he sent the ball past the goalkeeper straight to Nigm's right foot, and into the open goal. When jogging back to defend the new attack that was already underway, Karim turned to me and gave me quick wink and a broad smile. It had all been so quick, all so simple. In perfect control of the tiny space, the torn ball and their own and their teammates' bodies-in-motion, Karim and his friends from *Ulali* were just playing on and on in the cool January evening. Like Karim, many of them had (or had had) dreams of famous clubs, beautiful stadiums and well-maintained pitches. However, this evening they were all returning to their home pitch at the small *markiz* above the viaduct. They had played hundreds of games together here, as small boys and now as almost grown men. Silently, they let the ball roll between their moving bodies for a couple of hours after their jobs and studies. They had done it before, and they would come back again. Because, quite simply, they enjoyed it.

Conclusion: Just football

As the ethnographic vignettes presented in this chapter all show, football continued to be a highly emotional affair for men in Cairo in the years of crisis that followed the revolution and the Port Said massacre. Many intense, lasting and very durable football experiences carried on, unscathed, despite and in parallel to the dominant rhythms of revolutionary politics (see Chapter 5). That football that remained was made possible by a bundle of overlapping material, spatial and organisational-financial infrastructures: *ahawi*, Gulf-financed TV technology, satellite dishes and receivers, *balat* pitches, governmental bureaucracies, professional foreign experts, and star players in clubs in Spain, England and Italy. Brought together, these eclectic components constituted an archipelago of homosocial interaction, which like Stoler's 'imperial debris', 'continue[d] to inform social modes of organisation' (2008:203). The debris afforded a wide range of emotional registers – sadness, jubilation, cockiness, anger – that articulated overlapping masculine subjectivities and positionalities: some men would win and other would lose hugely important matches on *al-midan* or in Barcelona; winners would mock losers; others would be mediators in fights; and some would just play on silently, and let their skilled bodies and the ball do the talking.

To approach an understanding of why these – in stark contrast to other – football-related affective registers continued to matter, it is instructive to consider Will Rollason's ethnographic work on men playing football in Papua New Guinea (2011a). Rollason demonstrates that a fundamental reason for football's popularity among his interlocutors was that the sport was treated as a visual phenomenon, 'which comes in from the outside and *stays as it is*' (487). In other words, football was something quite unproblematic and 'completely transparent' for his interlocutors as well as for himself; it was *just football*, something taken for granted, and its presence was hence not in need of discussion or elaboration. During my fieldwork, a similar obviousness did, I suggest, constitute a key demarcation line between 'Football' – with a capital F, denoting the great spectacle surrounding the domestic game – and other, smaller 'footballs', be it televised from Europe or played among friends. Because, while discussions about the status and purpose of Football, its history, future and current crisis, constantly haunted everyone with a

relation to the sport, one of the most characteristic aspects of the football debris that was still in use in *Ward al-Qahira*, *al-midan* or at the *markiz* in al-Ezbakiyya was its non-propositional character, and the lack of commentary and questions that surrounded it. The very obviousness with which this range of football practices was approached was often striking.

The transparency and matter-of-factness were most apparent in the case of football as a recreational game and hobby. As Eric Worby has shown in a beautiful ethnography about pick-up football in Johannesburg, the high degree of spontaneity that the game affords could potentially turn a park – or a square – into a 'field of urban social freedom' (2009:106), where a player's body can invent 'a fantasy persona' with its own style, charged with 'context bound charisma' (107). Arguably, this dominant dimension of embodiment was what made it so difficult for Abdu to express why he liked playing so much, and it was certainly recognisable in the silent, coordinated movement of bodies and a ball that Karim and his friends participated in at the *markiz*. However, as we remember from the night of Real Madrid's historic victory over Barcelona, there was also a similar, non-verbal facet to the emotional style spun around football from the big leagues in Europe. In poignant contrast to how details, tactics and events from historical derby games and crucial victories for the national teams could be spoken about for hours, the Real Madrid fans at *Ward al-Qahira* did not have much to say about the huge victory against Barcelona. 'I feel great, of course', Nazif had told me before silently continuing to play cards with his friends, shortly after the final whistle. The emotions had a scripted obviousness and transparency to them, which left little to reflect on and discuss.

The non-verbal and no-fuss obviousness with which international and recreational football was approached among my interlocutors drew a line of demarcation between play and seriousness within the Egyptian football assemblage. Through its distinct infrastructural scaffolding, non-propositional football in Abdeen and al-Ezbakiyya emerged as something qualitatively different from the highly politicised, ideologically dense and constantly discussed ruins of Football, the cracking national bubble. Consequently, the emotions and affect elicited around football's lingering debris stood out as incommensurable with the political development. It was thought of and practiced

as a parallel sphere for masculine emotionality and sociality: a realm of its own with separate rhythms, where a parallel set of subjectivities were assembled. Because of that, men like Abdu could shift their attention between the presidential elections and Real Madrid, between being a non-political football player and a political revolutionary citizen, in a way that, at the time, was not possible as a *Zamelkawi* or supporter of the Egyptian national team. The way Abdu and his friends used the same name – *al-midan* (the square) – for their nightly football pitch in Abdeen and for Tahrir Square, the revolution's unquestionable centre point, is illustrative of this duality. The two squares, their functions and meanings, belonged to different realms of action, practice and feeling. As such, *al-midan* as a reference would not possibly cause any confusion.

Neither was this remaining football debris ever considered when Football was talked about and remembered as a recent, somewhat embarrassing national craze and obsession. Possibly due to the professional broadcasts that circulated it, international football was not talked about as problematically 'corrupted' and 'politicised'; and in contrast to the game as a mediatised spectacle, it was not a problem for Salafis like Hassan, or Brotherhood members like my language teachers to play the game as a means of getting physical exercise (see also Shavit & Winter, 2011). It did not matter that millions of Egyptian men played football every night throughout the year on thousands of pitches all around the country, or that the following for Real Madrid and FC Barcelona's matches via *al-Jazeera Sports* approached similar figures. The non-political and non-problematised habits organised around these 'serial sites' never counted as having 'national' importance, and they were not considered constitutive of the nation's rhythm and temporality in the way al-Ahly and al-Zamalek's matches had been in the past (see Edensor, 2006:537). As a result, the decay, ruination and transition that the football bubble passed through in the years after the 2011 revolution and the Port Said massacre did not seem capable of affecting them.

At a time when voices were constantly raised in the media and elsewhere, claiming that Football had to 'return', to grant the nation 'normality' and 'stability', football never stopped structuring the rhythms of the everyday for men in Cairo. It might not exactly have been the normality that Egypt's TV pundits wanted to see returning, yet playing

football in spaces like *al-midan*, and watching Real Madrid on television at places like *Ward al-Qahira* certainly contributed to the production of a more predictable, more enjoyable and perhaps also more normal everyday for many men in the Egyptian capital. In contrast to Lori Allen's work in Second Intifada Palestine, the ordinariness produced was not saturated by the 'routinization' of the state of exception's violence, shifts and actions (2008; see also Das, 2007). Rather, the normalisation work carried out in these assemblages of material infrastructures, male bodies, club loyalties, feelings and banter was one of *separation* that sealed off the political and unpredictable from a confined sphere of familiarity. As the spectacle of the domestic game was increasingly becoming impossible to feel for (Chapter 5), these distinct football practices hence stayed on as possible, alternative forms of entertainment and recreation. In contrast to the simultaneous rise to fame of the Egyptian Ultras, the reason for the survival of these football realms could not be found in a great progressive purpose, nor in their revolutionary credentials (see Chapter 4). In a period when so much else in Egypt seemingly had to be meaningful, proper and politically useful to count and fit in, international football and the played game paradoxically found their lure and attraction in their very futility and apolitical meaninglessness. Merely considered a pastime and distraction, these were footballs that would not interfere with politics. And as a consequence, this debris was still around, still active, and still there to use and re-use in an otherwise exceptional period of revolutionary politics and ruination.

[CHAPTER SEVEN]

Concluding remarks

An ethnography of football in transformation and crisis

This PhD dissertation set out to ethnographically explore Egyptian football in a period of major transformation and change. The research has been dominated by a general sense of crisis. As I arrived in Cairo in summer 2011, some six months after the eruption of the 25th of January Revolution, I encountered a sport steeped in troubles and uncertainty. The enormous popularity and remarkable successes that Egyptian football teams, players and media had enjoyed in the later years of the Mubarak era were over. Instead, Egyptian teams lost more often than they won, the country's stadiums were often empty, and in the media, sports were marginalised and overshadowed by politics. All of this was further exacerbated after the stadium massacre in Port Said in February 2012: the league was cancelled; interests dropped to new, unprecedented lows; people I met and knew increasingly turned their attentions, interests and passions elsewhere.

Yet, all football did not come to a halt in Egypt's revolutionary years. Even in the midst of clashes, elections and violence, men continued to play the game on a regular basis, and the interest in European football was arguably larger than ever before. My time in Cairo was also a period when new types of fans – the young Ultras groups – took control over the stadiums and set up their most extravagant, highly choreographed and emotionally charged performances of dance, song, colour and smoke. Later on, after the stadium

disaster in Port Said, the aesthetics and emotions of the Ultras moved out from the stadium and into the streets, in a spectacular and political campaign for justice and reforms. The young Ultras football fans became central figures in the revolutionary struggle, which football as a whole was brought into.

The football crisis also spurred increased awareness and reflection about the sport's emotionality, politics, past and future. Among football journalists, Ultras-fans, more conventional supporters, politicians, religious scholars and club officials alike, the sport was historicised, debated and contested. Many argued that football had been an emotional drug that President Mubarak – like many Egyptian rulers before him – had cynically employed to distract and control. Others pointed to the increase in fanaticism and non-respectable immorality in recent years, within football as well as the nation at large. Many people I met also perceived football – the big business and media spectacle – as an extension of the corruption and crony capitalism that had been symptomatic of the country's recently ousted rulers. These different takes on the origins of the football crisis inevitably influenced how people envisioned that the sport should be reformed to play a more progressive role in the future, post-revolutionary Egypt.

The ethnography presented in the dissertation has explored the conflation of emotionality, subjectivity and politics within this nexus of footballing crisis and revolutionary change. Questions that I have explored are: How do we understand the enormous interest and strong emotions for the game that emerged in the last decade of the Mubarak era? How and why were certain registers of affect, passion and attachment transformed, amplified, numbed or left unscathed in the revolutionary years of my fieldwork? What masculine and emotional subjectivities did football work out during the different stages of its transformation? How did they become politically charged? And more generally: how did football enable the national-political and the subjective-intimate to get calibrated and work on and off each other during this critical period of Egypt's contemporary history?

To answer these questions, the dissertation conceptualised what I call the Egyptian football assemblage as its object of study. As my research has illustrated, football in Cairo was assembled by an eclectic range of components: media infrastructures, clubs, players,

fan groups, built urban space, circulations of media texts, physical objects, rhythms, occasions and the wider political situation. The dissertation's six ethnographic chapters have approached the football assemblage from different angles and in different time periods, illuminating different scales and multiple processes of assembling, re-assembling and de-assembling. A guiding principle throughout has been to identify the 'work' that football does on emotionalities and subjectivities, i.e. what people feel, and who people are.

This concluding chapter summarises the main findings of my ethnography, and suggests how my research about the Egyptian football assemblage resonates with broader theoretical and ethnographic questions. The bulk of the chapter is organised around three main themes first introduced in the Introduction of the thesis: emotionality, subjectivity and contingency. I begin by discussing how my ethnography advances our understanding of how emotions and social interaction emerge in large-scale assemblages. I then draw together results dealing with the assembling of national subjectivities, which, I argue, add to the literature on Egypt's social and political transformation in the years before and after the 2011 revolution. Thereafter, I pull together material from the dissertation that suggests a more nuanced understanding of the contingency and precariousness inherent in structurings of subjects and affect. In a final section, I briefly sketch what has happened to football in Egypt in the time that has passed since I left Cairo. In the light of this, I argue, the period when I did my research was an exceptional time. This observation opens up possibilities for further, related research.

Emotionality, subjectivity, contingency

Emotional politics in the football assemblage

The ethnography presented in this dissertation has recurrently demonstrated how football facilitates emotional experiences and social interaction within multi-component processes of assembling. The structuring of nationalist feelings of unity, success and pride that the dissertation discusses as the 'football bubble', for instance, was the result of a timely coming together of large-scale state-funding, legislations, new satellite-TV infrastructures, a great generation of talented players, favourable results on the pitch, feature films, pop music and a football-positive political regime (see Chapter 1). The emotional style of fun, intensity, youth and masculinity that since 2007 crystallised around the Egyptian Ultras movement was likewise assembled, although through a distinct set of components: principles brought in from Europe and North Africa, strictly disciplined organisation and decentralised work, the physical space of the *curva* at the stadium, and material-symbolic objects, such as flags, clothes, banners, graffiti and fireworks (Chapter 3). Furthermore, the story about my friend Hamada's struggle to stay affected by the game over the years when the 'bubble' disintegrated pointed to the significance of well-assembled occasions, apposite rhythms, prophetic expectations and suitably learned bodies for the emotions that Hamada (no longer) felt (Chapter 5). Finally, in Chapter 6, I detailed registers for masculine, competitive and emotional social interaction enabled by what I theorise as 'debris' (Stoler 2008): televised football from Europe and football as a played game for recreation. Also here the emotions discussed were assembled: in particular spaces, along specific media infrastructures, within the state-owned network of *marakiz al-shabab* and through skilled bodies that played, moved and felt.

The different chapters all illustrate how feelings emerge in the interplay between materiality, infrastructures, embodiment, texts and propositional and non-propositional practices. As such, my ethnography adds to a growing body of theoretical and empirical scholarship that suggests a collapsing of the strict binary between unmediated, materially induced 'affect' and conceptualised, discursively coded 'emotions' (see e.g. Blackman,

2012; Navaro-Yashin, 2009, 2012; Leys, 2011). In every part of my ethnography, what people felt depended on physical spaces, material objects and technology. Emotional experiences of goals, dribblings, wins and losses were often strikingly immediate and only exceptionally carefully thought through. Yet the intensity and quality of these direct reactions to and with football's materiality were always contingent on particular symbolic codifications and narrations: of favourite clubs, of historical rivalries, of fanatical behaviours, of (un)professional journalists, and of revolutionary fans and players. Moreover, my ethnography also shows that feelings for football are dependent on long-term processes through which people invest time and energy in order to 'learn to be affected' (Latour, 2004) by the game.

The politics of the emotionality assembled have been a particularly salient theme throughout the study. As I argued in Chapter 1, the nationalist sentiments and upbeat feelings that the football bubble condensed in the 2000s developed over time into a particularly penetrating and wide-ranging means of soft power. The Mubarak regime actively encouraged, bankrolled and managed the emotional hype around the sport, which favourably reflected back on the political establishment, and imparted them an aura of common-man normality. This was at least the case while the Egyptian teams were successful; in the wake of the loss to Algeria in late 2009, the nationalist emotions of football instead started to be framed as expressions of fanaticism, and as a drug that the regime spread to dupe and control (Chapter 2).

The last years of the Mubarak era also saw the rise of the Ultras fans. As I have argued, their main political potential lay in the way they embraced a new 'emotional style' (Gammerl, 2012) of fun and transgression that appealed to youth, and which opened up a space for an emotional football in opposition to the *status quo* (Chapters 3 and 4). Taken together, my ethnographic chapters hence illustrate that the emotional-political struggle over football neither stood between football as an 'emotional smokescreen' and a more rational type politics, nor for and against 'fun'. Rather, and in line with the work of Ann Stoler, I suggest that 'redistributions of sentiments' and 'reformatting[s] of the visceral' were at the core of a series of overlapping and in part oppositional political projects that all incorporated their own versions of enjoyment (2004). William Mazzarella's remark that

'any social project that is not imposed through force alone must be affective in order to be effective' (2010:299) therefore seems well worth recalling. Political mobilisation requires the inclusion of the emotional realm, in which football can be a very powerful mediator.

The dissertation has also illustrated interdependences between football, emotions and politics of a somewhat different kind. In the wake of the Port Said stadium massacre, and in the midst of turbulent revolutionary politics, the national spectacle of the football bubble was severely discredited and questioned. As the story about my friend Hamada in Chapter 5 illustrates, this re-articulation of the history of the sport circumscribed its ability to assemble emotions and affect. For Hamada, football's political connotations made it very difficult for him to care for al-Zamalek and the Egyptian national team in a time dominated by the rhythms of politics. However, these processes – which I discuss under the rubric 'ruination' (Navaro-Yashin, 2012) – not only numbed emotions and affect. At times, the once beloved but now increasingly problematic sport turned into an uncomfortably abject and haunting ruin, epitomised by eerie matches on empty stadiums. At the same time, football's associative relationship to the foregone era made it a permissible object of nostalgia for the stability, order and predictability that had existed in the past, for Hamada (Chapter 5) as well as for the pundits on football TV (Chapters 4 and 6). However, football's strong articulation with politics did not affect all practices related to the sport. Entire spheres of football – international matches and recreational games among friends – had never been understood as imbricated in national politics. Consequently, this 'debris' remained separated from the events, rhythms and processes of the revolution, a factor that enabled it to keep on assembling emotional socialities (Chapter 6).

Feelings for Egyptian football were thus a political affair in a double sense: while emotions contributed to defining political eras, notions of what should be considered 'political' also impacted directly upon what people felt. Indeed, and as touched on in Chapter 5, the emotional realm of football had a series of very striking similarities with the ongoing sphere of revolutionary politics. The way both relied on emotionally charged rhythms, occasions and self-fulfilling expectations; the importance of keeping up an

affective momentum in the streets or at the stadium; the appeal and longing for the unpredictable victory; the strong feeling of a collective, well-defined purpose. While this dissertation mainly used comparisons between the two realms to elucidate changes in emotionality among football fans and players, my research about Egyptian football indirectly tells us something about emotions in the revolution more generally: about the processes through which emotions were assembled in the street; about circulations, expectations and rhythms in match-like scenarios at Tahrir Square; and about the unpredictability and precarity of an emotional politics built up in multi-dimensional social assemblages.

A genealogy of national subjectivities

A second major topic and running theme throughout this PhD research has been football as an arena for *subjectivation*: those complex processes at the intersections of discourse, performance, power and feeling which, as Will Rollason succinctly puts it, 'make people who they are' (2011b:1). My ethnography about the Egyptian football assemblage has sketched a genealogical transition between a variety of football-related subjectivities, as they assembled, flourished, stagnated and/or broke apart. At times, these subjectivities emerged in tandem with emotional registers and styles. In the processes of subjectivation that the dissertation accounts for, circulations and work of emotionality were often supplemented by valorised notions of respectability, masculinity and Egyptian nationalism.

My story began in the late years of the Mubarak regime, the years of the hyped Egyptian football bubble. As I showed in Chapter 1, football in this period assembled an archetypical national-emotional subject of masculine normality: a not-too-religious, not-too-intellectual, and not-overly-critical man, for whom football and the mediatised spectacle around it were favourite pastimes for enjoyment and relaxation. I also suggested that this football-subjectivity of normality enabled the Mubarak family to 'come down' to the people. Through partaking in football's aesthetics and emotional codes of ordinariness, the Mubaraks became one with a favourably defined version of the nation and its citizens. In the weeks of the Algerian matches in November 2009, these

subjectivities began to be seriously questioned. As Chapter 2 detailed, in a wider public debate, more and more voices started to accentuate the fanatical, corrupted and vulgar aspects of the sport, which was portrayed as 'politicised' and as a source for a problematically lazy nationalism. I also depicted the coming together of a 'respectable,' football-critical subjectivity shared by secular intellectuals and Islamists. United in their aversion to football, they mobilised the sport as a metonym for the ills of Mubarak's reign and era, against which an oppositional national subjectivity crystallised.

In contrast to this respectable subjectivity spun around football criticism from the *outside*, the practices and feelings of the Ultras fan groups embodied an alternative subjectivity *inside* the confines of the game. In Chapter 3, I accounted for the assembling, from 2007, of the figure of the Egyptian Ultra: a younger, more radical and independent subject in explicit opposition to the ideals, politics and emotionalities of the dominant football bubble. As large parts of Chapter 3 and 4 illustrated, this subjectivity always had to face up to aggressive scrutiny in Egyptian football media, in particular accusations of thuggery, fanaticism and self-serving violence. However, the masculine subjectivity of the Ultras showed a remarkable ability to reconfigure and transform so as to slip through these machineries of 'othering', 'hypervisibility' and 'securitization' (cf. Amar, 2013b). My ethnography detailed a range of factors that mediated these processes of reassembling and recoding: successive battles with police and the football association, spectacular demonstrations in the streets and at the stadium, a distinctly middle-class martyr, the Port Said massacre, the support from the great star Muhammad Abu-Treika and a selective and orderly use of violence. As a result, the aesthetics of the Ultras movement became widely perceived not only as a way of cheering for a football team, but as a marker of a young and particularly successful revolutionary subjectivity. This successfulness singled out the Ultras as something of an oddity within a broader revolutionary struggle which otherwise most often found itself united by a never-ending series of defeats and setbacks (see Schielke, 2015:202f). At least in 2012, these young football fans came to embody a respectable masculinity of action, which firmly opposed the corrupted vulgarity of the establishment. As such, this subject staked out an alternative football beyond the bubble: a respectably revolutionary sport within a respectably revolutionary Egyptian nation.

An unbroken thread of continuity is worth noting in the midst of these twists and turns of dialectic subject formation. As I illustrated in the Introduction of this dissertation, Egyptian football has a long tradition of being assessed for its nationalist role and function. This axiomatic nationalist framing has been reflected throughout my ethnography: in the national connotations that the subjects of the football bubble took on in the Mubarak era (Chapter 1); in the heated debates in late 2009 over the good versus bad nationalisms that the game fostered (Chapter 2); and in the stand-off between Ultras Ahlawy and the football establishment over what was most in 'the interest of Egypt' (*maslahit masr*) after the Port Said tragedy – the resumption of the league, or a more sustained break, coupled with far-reaching reforms (Chapter 4). The taken-for-granted national framework also played an important role in the small-scale assembling of everyday football subjects that I dealt with in Chapters 5 and 6: in the troubles that many Egyptians had in combining being a football fan and a progressive national citizen in the post-revolutionary years (Chapter 5); and in the way emotions and practices related to the 'debris' of international football and the played game – which were *not* understood to have a national-political function – lived on precisely because of that (Chapter 6).

As so often in the realm of Egyptian popular culture, the battle over football subjectivities was hence also a battle over the contours of an appropriate *national* subject. Indeed, this was one of the reasons why football was drawn into politics. In a revolution where everybody claimed to be nationalists, political struggle very often played out around questions of Egyptian identity and subjectivity. A growing literature has highlighted how spaces for new types of politically charged nationalist subject formation were opened up in the years that followed 2011. Paul Amar has argued that transgressive 'gender-socialities' and experiments with 'self-sovereignty' flourished (2013a). Samuli Schielke has scrutinised the new self-declared, yet disparate group of 'revolutionaries' who were united by a combination of dreams for a better national future, a constant series of failures and shared affective experiences of violent, teargas-filled street fights (2015). Several ethnographies contemplate how the revolutionary experience augmented ethical subjectivities in relation to the nation (Abu-Lughod, 2012) and/or religious charity (Mittermaier, 2014a, 2014b). Finally, Walter Armbrust has argued that the counter-revolutionary movement has been reliant upon a flexible type of political subjectivity that

formulates new social formations in the face of open-ended liminality and uncertainty. Armbrust talks about this subject as a 'trickster' (2013b).

My narrations about shifting power, popularity and prestige among competing subjects related to Egypt's national sport expand this scholarship on subjectivation in the revolutionary years. My story can be read as an allegory of a broader political transformation in the country, in several ways. First, it shows how certain aspects of the Mubarak regime's 'vulgar' ethos became questioned by a block of 'respectable' football-critics in November 2009, more than year before Mubarak was forced to step down (Chapter 2). Second, I highlight how aversion to football as a symbolic and emotional remnant (*filul*) of the past spread widely in the period after 2011, and severely limited the possibilities for being a nationalist subject who cared for football (Chapter 5). That this broad turn against football coincided with a period of increasing political, moral and cultural influence by the same 'respectable' intellectuals and Islamists is well worth noting. And finally, my story can function allegorically by illustrating how the status of the Ultras groups as national revolutionaries was strengthened precisely when they managed to integrate an aura of respectability and order into their already acknowledged radically masculine subjectivity of action (Chapter 3 and 4). At all of these stages of the sport's reassembling, football became a battleground about who could be understood as the real Egyptian national subjects, serving the interests of the Egyptian people as a unified whole. Typically, these national subjects were carved out in opposition to those rendered partisan and political (*siyasi*) in the sense that they merely served their own groups' interests, and those who threatened to bring disorder, strife and chaos (cf. Abdelrahman, 2007). Finally, it is striking how respectability arose as a key problematic in each and every episode of my story about football's subjects of the nation. My ethnography in this sense points to a continuous conflation of nationalism and respectability which was central to a political transformation of football and its subjects that took off well before January 2011, and which continued through the years that followed.

The precarious Egyptian football assemblage

The third major aim of this thesis has been to elucidate how and why football's emotions and subjects transformed. To better understand this contingency in the football assemblage, Judith Butler's work on the precariousness of human subjects and lives is helpful to think with. In her book *Frames of War* from 2010, Butler proposes that subject formation should be approached not only as iterative processes of enunciation and performativity (see Butler, 1993, 1997, 1999), but also as inherently embedded in technological, discursive and mediatised 'frames'. For Butler, this 'framing' is precisely what makes subjects and lives truly social: frames make us interdependent on each other and on our social and material worlds. Moreover, frames make each and every subject precariously contingent on factors that stand beyond their direct control (2010:3ff).

My ethnography about the assembling of Egyptian football has highlighted several modes and levels of the 'differential distribution of precarity' around subjects that Butler urges us to study (2010:xxv). Being composed of a large and eclectic variety of *interdependent*, but in part also *independent* components, changes in one end of the social fabric were, as I have recurrently shown, relayed to other domains, inducing reassemblings of emotionalities and subjectivities. As I have argued, the feeble character of football's assembled feelings and subjects partly resulted from an unpredictability that is inherent to matches and results (Chapters 2 and 5). Yet precariousness was also the result of a more distributed contingency. In Chapter 5, for instance, I explored football's daily and weekly rhythms and occasions, which, when altered in 2011 and 2012, elucidated the precarity of the everyday emotions of the sport. In discussion of *Ward al-Qahira* in Chapter 6, I turned attention to the significance of complex, transnational networks of television infrastructures whose affective efficacy relied on uncertain electricity supplies and the (un)willingness of state authorities to sell particular types of hardware. Several chapters also sketched the contours of football-related subjectivities, which relied heavily on media circulations outside the immediate realm of sports. Chapter 1 noted the central role played by pop music and feature films in sustaining the football bubble. In Chapter 2, we saw how an intense debate that mainly took place in non-sports media outlets punctured the bubble and carved out a space for a new set of respectable football-opposed subjects.

Similarly – as explored in Chapters 3 and 4 – the positive connotations that surrounded the emotional masculinity of the Egyptian Ultras in 2011 and 2012 were dependent on media circulations in the mainstream press outside the social media channels that the Ultras controlled.

The research has also detailed how political climate and acknowledged discursive hegemonies acted as dominant Butlerian 'frames' around emotions and subjects. The period of seriousness, politics and purposefulness that followed the 25th of January Revolution was, for example, badly 'misfitted' with entertainment and play in general, and my friend Hamada's passions for al-Zamalek in particular (Chapter 5). At the same time, the Mursi government's indifferent attitude towards sports and unwillingness to protect the interests of the football establishment made autumn 2012 a time when hierarchies and power-relations were seriously challenged and novel football subjects assembled (Chapter 4). Throughout the period of transformation that the dissertation considered, several powerful social ideals, in particular nationalism and respectability, were also repeatedly returned to, drawn on and mobilised. As discussed in the previous section, these ideals would at times give particular subjects enormous popularity and appeal: the normal man who loved football during the time of the bubble (Chapter 1) and the revolutionary Ultras in late 2012 (Chapter 4). However, as these 'floating signifiers' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001) were not possible to control – neither by the Mubarak regime, nor by the Ultras – they turned the same subjectivities precarious and ultimately unstable as debates and common sense meanings moved on (Chapters 2, 4 and 5).

A number of singular 'critical events' (Das, 1995) provided dramatic and influential impetus for re-shuffle and change within the football assemblage in the period that the ethnography has accounted for. The first such watershed took place over a year before the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring, on the November 2009 night when Egypt's dreams of reaching the World Cup in South Africa were crushed in Sudan. As we learned in Chapter 2, this match and its disappointing outcome acted as a powerful 'incitement to discourse' (Foucault, 1998) that dramatically reconfigured the possibilities and politics of emotionality and subjectivities around the sport. The January 2011 Revolution was, for obvious reasons, another event of immense weight. In my ethnography, the uprising was

particularly influential in the way it recoded notions like 'youth', 'stability', 'the police' and 'politics', thereby altering the relative positionalities of Ultras fans, the football media and more conventional football supporters like Hamada (Chapters 3 and 5). However, the Port Said tragedy in February 2012 was the most critical of all the momentous events that my research hones in on. Indeed, and as I suggested in the Interlude and exemplified in Chapters 4 to 6, the horrendous stadium massacre left the sport in a state of 'ruination': without the emotional rhythms of regular matches, with a highly uncertain future, and in a state of limbo where everything suddenly seemed at stake, in motion and up for grabs. The politics of football were remade by yet another event in January 2013: the Port Said court case verdicts, and the Ultras Ahlawy's 'vulgar' celebration, a moment that tarnished the revolutionary and respectable subjectivity that had emerged around the figure of the Ultras fan.

The constant redistributions of sentiments and subjects within the Egyptian football assemblage accounted for in this dissertation thus tell a story of subject formation tied up in multidimensional contingency. Dramatic events played a key role in this narrative: in all of the grand moments summarised above, processes of subjectivation were spurred, altered or put to an end; new 'truths' informed new 'crystallisations' of partly new subjects (Humphrey, 2008). Rather than completely swiping away the past and starting everything anew on a blank slate, the momentous events created their own contingency and continuity (cf. Simpson, 2013: 50). January 2011 would not have had the same effect had it not been for November 2009; Port Said in early 2012 accelerated processes that were already underway because of 2009 and 2011, and which changed course once again in January 2013. Furthermore, the exact impacts of each discrete event upon the dominant subjectivities and affective registers of the sport were always tied to particular configurations of material, infrastructural and discursive inertia that football assembled at the time. The unpredictability at the core of revolutionary politics does not only, as David Scott reminds us, result from the interdependence of political action on the actions of others (2014). In addition, my ethnography suggests, distributions of subjects and affects are dependent on unpredictable events of different magnitudes and a wider assemblage of contingency. The research presented hence forwards an anthropological notion of contingency in which events and action are nestled in historically assembled

interdependences and Butlerian 'frames' that define and preclude. The unpredictability of history always finds itself entangled in the inertia and precariousness that an assembled social world necessitates. In the midst of it all, the historical present's emotional qualities and genres surface.

An exceptional time, yet time moves on

At the time of writing, it is almost exactly two years since the day in late March 2013 when I wrapped up my fieldwork in Cairo. In the time that has passed, I have watched from afar as Egypt has moved on. On the 30th of June 2013, mass demonstrations all around the country demanded President Mursi's resignation. Three days thereafter, Mursi was removed from office in an army-led coup. Since then, the Egyptian military and security state have re-established much of the power and control they (appeared to have) lost in 2011 and 2012. Under the pretext of a 'war on terror' – which more and more seems a self-fulfilling prophecy – a broad alliance of media, police and judiciary have clamped down on all sorts of opposition, killing hundreds and imprisoning thousands of activists and politicians: Islamist and secular, liberal as well as socialist. In May 2014 the country's *de facto* ruler Field Marshal Abdel Fattah el-Sisi won a landslide election victory; he was sworn in as President of the Arab Republic of Egypt on the 8th of June. Today, the return to a square one-like scenario, in many ways even grimmer than the Mubarak era, seems all but complete.

For Egyptian football, the same two years have brought some signs of normalisation. The Egyptian League was discontinued, once again, after the July 2013 coup, but was back on again only a few months later. The 2013-14 season that followed was the first to be

completed without major intermissions since 2010.[60] Al-Ahly has also continued to add to its impressive pile of African trophies, winning the Champions League in 2013 and the African Super Cup and Confederations Cup in 2014. The crisis in Egyptian football is however far from over. The national team's miserable run has continued: Egypt missed the 2014 World Cup after a humiliating 6-1 defeat to Ghana as well as a third straight African Cup of Nations after a poor qualification campaign in autumn 2014. Older stars like Muhammad Abu-Treika have resigned, and several of the country's younger players are trying their luck in the Gulf or in Europe. While fans have been allowed into some international fixtures, domestic football has continued to be played at empty stadiums. The ban on supporters at stadiums has been an important point of contestation in a long and bitter conflict between Cairo's Ultras groups, who demand to be allowed to watch their teams play, and the clubs, the media and the Egyptian FA, which oppose such a return. Recently, disagreements have been particularly fierce between the Ultras White Knights and al-Zamalek's club president, a controversial lawyer, millionaire and staunch Mubarak and el-Sisi supporter named Murtada Mansour (see Abd al-Hameed, 2014). On 7th February 2015, after UWK finally managed to get the ban lifted, severe mismanagement by police at the entrance to the Air Force Stadium outside Cairo resulted in a tragic stampede and the death of twenty al-Zamalek fans. After this tragedy, the Egyptian football league was once again interrupted.

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In his thought-provoking historical ethnography of the rise, fall and aftermath of the Grenada Revolution in the 1980s, David Scott has argued that revolutions are 'exceptional times' (2014:34) when the 'stalled present' (6), which dominates what comes before and what comes after, is suddenly accelerated, and time emerges as 'successive and progressive' (5). Scott also suggests that the experience of a revolution tends to be generational (71f), dependent on each age cohort's prospects in a reshuffled past-present-future. In retrospect, my ethnography of the Egyptian football assemblage very much

[60] The league was won by al-Ahly and the cup by al-Zamalek. Al-Ahly won the Super Cup match between the two clubs on penalties.

appears to be an account of such an 'exceptional time' in Scott's sense. For football as well as Egypt more broadly, the years I spent in Cairo were simply unique, particularly, I would argue, for the generation of self-identifying revolutionary football fans in their teens and twenties who I predominantly talked to and socialised with. For the Egyptian Ultras (Chapters 3 and 4), as well as for many of my friends who figure in Chapters 2, 5 and 6, 2011-2013 was a window when things seemed possible, indeed destined, to be remade differently and better.

This exceptional time of crisis and revolution was, as we have seen, a period when a new set of subjectivities for how to be an emotional, young and nationalist man were tried out in the realm of Egyptian football. Epitomised by the Ultras and Muhammad Abu-Treika but adored much more widely, these subjects drew much of their reputation and popularity from traditionally valued notions such as respectability and nationalism. At the same time, they also repeatedly managed to side-step the dichotomising languages – secular vs. Islamist, security vs. terrorism, urban vs. rural, progressiveness vs. tradition – which had paralysed Egypt for so long, and which were to return with a vengeance after the 2013 coup. The new emotional subjectivities that crystallised around football in this period of ruination and building anew therefore tell us something not only about a unique opening within Egypt's biggest sport. For many of my friends, as well as from my own political point of view, this new 'framing' of national subjects beyond established dichotomies points to a lost chance for the revolution more widely.

Elsewhere in *Frames of War*, Butler also notes:

> Precarity cuts across identity categories as well as multicultural maps, thus forming the basis for an alliance focused on opposition to state violence and its capacity to produce, exploit, and distribute precarity for the purpose of profit and territorial defense (2010:32).

By this, I take her to mean that our shared vulnerability and inevitable reliance on outside frames cut across patterns of identity politics in ways that make us all interdependent and in effect truly social. The immense powers that potentially lie embedded in this kind of framing were illustrated in my ethnography about the Ultras. When a broad coalition of revolutionary media, fan groups, politicians and famous players in unison framed the

activities, demands and emotions of the young supporters as respectably nationalist, it became very difficult for the football media and the security forces to vilify and violently repress them. And contrarily, when this unity was broken up in early 2013, frames were immediately readjusted and multiplied, and things quickly became very different. One set of frames portrayed the lives that were spilled in the clashes in Port Said as 'ungrievable'; another questioned the Ultras Ahlawy's links to Muslim Brotherhood; a third rendered their emotional celebrations non-proper and vulgar. The fragile unity built upon the predicament of shared precarity cracked, and it became much easier for police to once again repress, arrest and kill.

Sadly, this reframing of the Ultras, and the split within the revolutionary movement that it reflected, were but a precursor for worse things to come. In summer 2013, the powerful framing of half of the country as terrorists and a threat to the nation took on even more horrific effects. On 14th of August, more than 600 people – the vast majority of whom were supporters of the ousted President Mursi – were killed as the police broke up a sit-in on Rabaa Square in Cairo. In a split nation, the victims' lives had already been framed as ungrievable in a way that rendered their loss justified, and perhaps even necessary. The opening for a space beyond dichotomising stereotypes had yet again been slammed shut.

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As a very final remark, I would like to suggest how my dissertation opens up space for further research. The ethnography about Egyptian football that I have presented has highlighted the potential of studying revolutionary transitions with a lens directed towards cultural phenomena at the outskirts of the political centre. It has provided insights into subject formation and emotional adjustments, it has shown how alliances crystallise and break apart, and it has demonstrated how ruination and decay can metamorphose into openings for building anew. It has also shown the value of approaching social phenomena in transformation as multi-dimensional assemblages, both for the way this analytic makes legible processes of coming together, and for the way it aptly elucidates contingency and precarity that make things break apart. Detailed historical ethnographic studies that take on the reassembling of other Egyptian cultural and social fields in the same revolutionary period of time would be a valuable complement to my research. There are, for instance,

good reasons to believe that parallel transitions of subjects, attachments and popularity linked to class, generation and politics took place in the music industry. The type of Arab pop music and glossy videos that dominated Egypt in the Mubarak years came across, similarly to football, as somewhat out of sync with the revolutionary era of politics. At the same time, the popularity of the new, less polished genre of *mahragan* increased rapidly (for pioneering studies in this field, see Gilman, 2014; Swedenburg, 2014). One could also envision similar ethnographic studies of sports – or music, television or film – in the course of political transitions elsewhere in the world. While I was fortunate enough to do my fieldwork in a particularly dramatic period of political change, the socio-political worlds that sports are a part of reassemble continuously and are well worth studying.

It would also be of great interest to trace more the long-term effects that the 2011-13 revolution and crisis will have on Egyptian football. Such a study would imply a re-conceptualisation of the notion of 'aftermath' from the chaotic period of ruination, uncertainty and endless possibilities that I have accounted for in this project, to a more prolonged period, which seems set to be one dominated by perpetual crisis and/or reconstruction. Most probably, it will be both: a period akin to the decade after the big earthquake in Gujarat in 2001, recently depicted by Edward Simpson as one of constant interventions, sustained rebuilding and temporal and economic acceleration (2013). Aftermaths of disasters induce, Simpson argues, an 'aftermath of the mind': a particular mix of self-contemplation and self-admiration that makes people question and re-imagine themselves as well as the world around them (ibid.:4,18). A research project that in a similar manner traces projects of intervention and self-contemplation within the Egyptian football assemblage over a longer time span would be most interesting to follow. How will the crisis be tackled and overcome? Will the football ruins be rebuilt, and if so, how? What will the role of football be in the next phase of the country's history? As a state-controlled institution explicitly assigned to foster and mould the nation's youth, Egypt's *marakiz al-shabab* and the youth football being played there looks like a particular interesting nexus in which to locate such a study. If you want to rebuild your ruins, you need to start at the base: with particular interventions in the new generation that is destined to shape the future.

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