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Revolutionary Art during and after the Egyptian Revolution: Liminality and Creativity

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Abstract

This research undertakes a critical interrogation of revolutionary art in Egypt in and following the 2011 revolution by historically grounding understandings of this art within the temporality of the Egyptian revolution. Temporality is understood here through the framework of liminality which helps us address the Egyptian revolution as a historical process and a period of liminal time characterized by “in-betweeness” in which the normative order is momentarily suspended, and essentially turned upside down to give space for a new order, new narratives, and new ideas to emerge.

This research argues that the Egyptian revolution led to the emergence of different liminal moments (through its three main phases) which informed how Egyptian art producers perceived their understandings of revolutionary art as the revolutionary process unfolded.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The Egyptian revolution of 25 January 2011 witnessed the emergence of Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo as a location and platform for popular politics, with its simultaneous manifestation of solidarity, conflict, consent, resistance, defiance, peace and struggle. This was paralleled by the decentralization of cultural production from state-supported ventures to art and artistic performances in unconventional spaces, including walls and public spaces, such as of the *Mugama* (the much-hated administrative complex in Tahrir Square), streets, sidewalks, roads, squares, alleyways and other public places. Cultural expression literally exploded with the proliferation of public performances and practices of artists and non-artists alike - from powerful graffiti on the walls, roads, and Egyptian military vehicles, to defiant musical and dance performances on the street - solidifying a narrative of the revolution as not only a “political” revolution, but also a “cultural” one. The emergence of political forms of protest combined with unconventional forms of cultural expression rendered Tahrir Square as symbolising “a myriad of possibilities through a conjunction of an emerging public visibility of an unprecedented powerful visual culture” (Abaza 2013: 88-109).

Broadly speaking, many narratives of the “artistic revolution” and/or the “cultural revolution” associated with the Egyptian revolution have tended to romanticize and glorify the practices and producers of art in public spaces as a phenomenon that emerged out of nowhere and that was led by formerly apathetic¹ youngsters. As Mona Abaza notes,

¹ The political apathy of young Egyptians prior to the revolution was addressed in the 2010 United Nations Development Programme’s report on the state of young people in Egypt, which found that those in the 18-29 age group were the least likely to engage in political activity. Furthermore, it found that most young Egyptians felt they were being openly discouraged from taking an active role in politics at all, and were being encouraged instead to focus their energies on private concerns (UNDP, 2010: 105-110).

this sudden gaze towards revolutionary art could be interpreted as part of the Western euphoria in analysing the Arab Spring as an ahistorical, unprecedented and sudden revolt. While the January revolution mesmerized the world...such analyses that focused on the Facebook revolution often ignored the long cumulative history of political struggles, demonstrations, and numerous protests that took place prior to 2011. The same could be said about the long-established traditions in the field of art and culture in the Arab world (Abaza 2016: 318).

The socio-aesthetic analysis of art of the Egyptian revolution was often reduced to a recurrent notion that art was simply acting as a representation of the revolution, a reductive analysis which Jessica Winegar urged researchers to avoid. As she wrote,

Dear art writers and curators who go to Egypt to check out the scene there: the scene is much more complex and much more interesting than the same 5 artists and 3 galleries that everyone else before you “discovered.” (No offense to those artists and galleries, of course). Try a little harder. At least get a translator so you can speak to some artists not fluent in English or French. Challenge yourself with other visualities that don’t necessarily fit your definition of “critical art.” And stop asking artists to represent a revolution. Thank you (Winegar, 2014).

There is no doubt that the Egyptian revolution produced a visible surge of creative cultural activity in public spaces, including Tahrir Square, but reductive narratives that spoke of this creativity as a “cultural awakening” in a politically and culturally dormant country effectively ignored the underlying (and rich) historical, social, and political undercurrents of its emergence and existence. Such narratives, which appeared in academic articles and in the media, were also supported by international festivals showcasing these “new” cultural activities. Ilka Eickhof noted that festivals, such as the annual Shubbak Festival in London and the 2011 Venice Biennale, helped reinforce these narratives because they “problematically us[e] art as a code word for proper consciousness or modernity. Representations of the educated, modern, graffiti-spraying rebel do not challenge global structures....rather, the assumed anti-position of the Arab

artist fits into the Euro-US ideal of the progressive individual who breaks with tradition, closely allied to the rise of the bourgeoisie in modern Europe (Eickhof, cited in Gribbon, 2014).

However, as Egyptian filmmaker Philip Rizk says, these discourses also tend to focus on particular aspects of the revolutionary cultural output. As he wrote: “Academia, film, art; the world of NGOs relied on us as the ideal interpreter of the extraordinary. They all eventually bought into and further fuelled the hyper glorification of the individual, the actor, the youth subject, the revolutionary artist, the woman, the non-violent protestor, the Internet user. All this took place in the undercurrent of an unrelenting need to identify, validate and valorise the role of the familiar” (Rizk, 2014). In an effort to position Egyptian revolutionary artistic production differently, Surti Singh stated that “a new set of questions is crystallizing about the role of art in contemporary Egypt” and asks “[c]an art still preserve the revolutionary spirit that spilled out in the graffiti and murals that covered Egypt’s streets? Should this even be art’s focus?” (Singh, 2014). Singh’s questions reflect the emerging debates over what constitutes “legitimate” art following the 2011 Egyptian revolution in the wake of the pervasive presence of new forms of art in public spaces, something that garnered a large influx of Western and local coverage. As Singh points out, this new visibility brings new questions: what is art’s role after the Egyptian revolution? What constitutes “real” art, in the light of a major turn of events?

This has been a subject of debate for artists and non-artists alike. One of the most vocal participants to comment on this debate was Ganzeer, one of the most locally and internationally recognized Egyptian artists of the revolution, and has created iconic works associated with the Egyptian revolution in 2011, such as “Tank vs. Bike” and

“The Mask of Freedom.” Ganzeer was accused of being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, due to his critical art work of then presidential candidate Abdel –Fattah El-Sisi. Ganzeer denied the claims and left Egypt to reside in New York in May 2014. Ganzeer’s opinion of what now constitutes “real” art is an art which is constituted within the political, historical, and cultural context of the Egyptian revolution. As he noted:

there are a bunch of thirty-something artists in Egypt today who think of themselves as cutting edge for adopting a 1917 [citing Marcel Duchamp’s ‘Fountain’ as the example] art form that most Egyptians do not relate to—they adopt it anyway out of an urge to appeal to art institutions centered in Europe and the USA. Such an art form has no place in Egypt’s revolutionary climate. Although many Westerners may want to believe that Egyptians revolted against our regime out of a desire to adopt more “Western” values—or Western products, as was suggested by French author Guy Sorman in a public debate with me in 2011—in fact Egyptians were revolting against a bad regime that had taken much of its legitimacy from other world powers while simultaneously revolting against the conformist traditions of older generations. What the Egyptian people sought was independence in its truest form. Although Egyptians have obviously failed badly at achieving that (for now), it does not mean that the effects of the revolution should not find their way into art and culture. Conceptual Art in Egypt, with its compass oriented to point north-west, proves itself to be a rather anti-revolutionary art form. Which could very well explain the rise of Concept Pop (Ganzeer, 2014b).

Adham Selim, an Egyptian architect, wrote a response to Ganzeer’s idea of “Concept Pop” entitled “Toward an art that hides nothing behind”, suggesting that Ganzeer promoted a reductive binary logic wherein the choice lies between pro- or anti-revolutionary art: “Viewing the art itself as a secondary category reflects a tendency to believe that art should be about something else outside art itself. This ‘aboutness’ is a dangerous practice because it ditches the sensory, experiential aspect of art in favour of hermeneutics, that is: instead of fully experiencing art, indulging our senses in the

erotica, humour or playfulness of artistic expression, we've turned into the poor subjects trying to outsmart each other fathoming the depth of the work" (Selim, 2014). Yet even before Ganzeer and Selim's debate, the art of the revolution was already being addressed as a "failure" by an Egyptian PhD student named Shehab Fakhry Ismail, who wrote an opinion piece in *Mada Masr* (a Cairo news website borne out of the Egyptian revolution) saying that:

Perhaps the biggest failing of Cairo's revolutionary art is that it fails to see itself as art. It fails to reflect on and experiment with its aesthetic vision as aesthetics. Rather, Egyptian revolutionary artists have succumbed to the temptation of seeing their art as subservient to a higher cause, which neither really helps this cause nor offers anything artistically novel, thus unnecessarily limits them to an impoverished aesthetic vision...Instead of the facile aestheticisation of the revolutionary moment and instead of political sloganeering, artists would do better to revolutionize the vocabulary of their art, which in no way precludes treating political themes in a more radical manner. Perhaps then will art do what it can actually do best: shake us away from the complacency of unthinking (Fakhry, 2013).

These debates foreground the importance of understanding revolutionary art from the perspective of its form and content. However, my research seeks an alternative approach – it examines why and how people make art during different temporal registers of the revolutionary moment, or liminal moments, and argues that different revolutionary temporalities led to different understandings of revolutionary art, including after the end of the revolution.

1.1 Research Focus

This work starts with the premise that the debate over what should (and should not) constitute revolutionary art and whether it should be more political/conceptual or more "aesthetic"/experimental, or an appropriate mix of both, is too narrow an

analytical framework and limits the understanding of the role of art in the Egyptian revolution.

Instead, it argues that revolutionary art needs to be analysed through addressing the Egyptian revolution as a “spatial and temporal liminality” (Thomassen, 2017: 297). Indeed, revolutionary contexts and the temporality and processes of these contexts, as this research shows, are crucial to understanding the evolution of artistic practices, events and narratives that emerge in the temporal registers of any revolution or upheaval. As Jillian Schwedler argues in her memo “Temporality and the Arab Revolutions”, different moments call for “different narrative understandings about the event”, and so “[m]any narratives, discourses, analytic frameworks, best practices, and so on, are anchored in specific temporal registers. They shape, and are shaped by, what actors do and what they understand to be happening” (Schwedler, 2016).

The emphasis on the dynamics of time and practice in understanding art practices does not suggest that the works of art and the image should be dismissed. Art works are significant as visual artefacts and products of revolutionary imaginary and consciousness, the aestheticised and very visible “face” which aesthetically frames the narratives of the revolution. Rather, this research undertakes a critical interrogation of popular understandings of revolutionary art during different phases of the Egyptian, and examines whether this art can exist at the close of the revolutionary process by historically grounding art works within the liminal moments of the revolution.

The concept of liminality was first introduced by Arnold van Gennep in 1909 in his seminal work, *The Rites of Passage*, and later developed by Victor Turner beginning with the chapter “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage”, in his 1967 publication, *The Forest of Symbols*. Van Gennep wrote about

the significance of understanding the rites of passage as a significant (and highly ambiguous) period of transition, a ritual in which an individual transitions from one state to another during transformative events such as the shift from childhood to adulthood. These transitions essentially “transform one’s social state” (Armbrust, 2017: 226) which means that in the liminal phase, individuals, communities, even society as a whole “experiences *communitas*, does things one normally wouldn’t do; feels bonds with people one normally wouldn’t feel bonded to, and then emerges transformed” (ibid). As Victor Turner suggested, *all* rituals (and not just rites of passage as van Gennep set forth) “involved breaking away from social norms, and entry into a liminal phase in which normative social conventions are expected to be overturned”(Armbrust, 2017: 226). Therefore, Turner argued that all rituals could be studied using the three stages of the rites of passage, which are comprised of the phases of “separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying “threshold” in Latin), and aggregation” (Turner 1969: 94). According to Turner,

The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a “state”), or from both. During the intervening “liminal” period, the characteristics of the ritual subject...are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-a.-vis others of a clearly defined and “structural” type (Turner, 1969: 94-95).

Turner also argued that one of the ways we could understand these “transformative social events” (Armbrust, 2013b: 844) was through the analytical

framework of what he called “social drama” (Turner, 1969) defined as an “eruption from the level surface of ongoing social life, with its interactions, transactions, reciprocities, its customs for making regular, orderly sequences of behavior. It is propelled by passions’; compelled by volitions, overmastering at times any rational considerations” (Turner, 1988: 90). An intense form of social change, such as a revolution, “exhibit[s] a processual structure not unlike those...described for rituals. Peterson further notes that a crucial difference is that whereas rituals have a ritual specialist to keep liminality under control...social dramas are partly defined by the fact that they are, at least initially, out of control of any particular social actor or institution...they became revolutions because they spun out of control” (Peterson, 2015a: 176).

Bjorn Thomassen, who applied van Gennep and Turner’s conceptualization of liminality beyond rituals to political theory and revolutions, suggests that “the concept of liminality has its relevance to political and social theory...as it was developed by anthropologists to make sense of human experience and processes of subjectivation during moments of dissolution, in other words, during social and political crises” (Thomassen, 2014: 118). For him, the framework of liminality – and its three primary phases of ritual (breach/rupture, liminal phase, redress) - helps us address revolutions as a historical process as well as a period of liminal time/liminal crisis characterized by “in-betweeness” and in which the normative order is momentarily suspended and essentially turned upside down to provide space for a new order, new narratives and new ideas to emerge.

Liminality allows us to focus on the temporality of the Egyptian revolution as essentially characterized by anti-structure, which can manifest in intense creativity

and endless possibilities. As such, it foregrounds agency, subverts economic, social, and political distinctions, while at the same time highlighting a heightened sense of collectivity and a utopian community of equals (*communitas*). In Turner's argument, the three stages of the ritual process (rupture, a breach in the normative order – liminal period of play, destruction, ambiguity, creativity – redress, an attempt to re-establish order and structure), would, according to Thomassen, “take political form via the stages of epistemic rupture and radical critique, followed by a playful liminal period of unlimited freedom and questioning of prevailing norms, reintegrated and normalized into realized political emancipation, protected by a constitution of legitimate order to the benefit of the general populace” (Thomassen, 2017: 303).

Middle East scholar Walter Armbrust also emphasizes that with regards to the 2011 Egyptian revolution, the three phases of ritual (breach/rupture, liminal phase, and redress) could not be neatly applied. As Armbrust writes, “Initiates in the ritual were joined together in a state of solidarity that Turner termed ‘communitas,’ which we can understand intuitively as Tahrir Square during the mythical first 18 days of the Revolution. Finally, initiates in the ritual process would be re-incorporated into normative society in new social positions. This, of course, did not happen after the 18 days of Tahrir Square of the Egyptian revolution (Armbrust, 2017: 226).

Mark Peterson similarly argues that initially the Egyptian revolution neatly fit the breach/rupture-crisis-redress phases of social drama (which is a kind of ritual) described by Turner, in that the revolution began with “a breach of the structures of ordinary life” which then led to the “ensuing crisis [which] ushered in a period of antistructure, in which the ordinary rules of governance and civility did not apply”,

and that throughout the 18 days crisis, “various actors of many types sought to define the ends of the revolution and to bring some form of redress that would bring it to a conclusion” (Peterson, 2015a: 176). However, Peterson notes that in the aftermath of the 18 days of the Egyptian revolution there was no return to structure and law, and that the revolution remains in a contingent process over its meaning and direction by various actors (Peterson, 2015a: 176), which, along with its uncertainty, pushes people into “into liminality from which there is no known exit, and hence no way back to whatever previously had constituted normality” (ibid.). In these understandings, revolutions, as Walter Armbrust suggests, are “liminal crises” since they are constituted as “a state of being stuck in liminality with no obvious way to get out of it” (Armbrust, 2017: 227).

In the case of Egypt, what seems to characterize the contemporary moment following the January 25, 2011 revolution is a move “from rupture to permanent liminality” (Thomassen, 2017: 303), described “as time stalled, without hope for emancipatory futures” (Haugbolle, Bandak, 2017: 192). In fact, given the ambiguity of the post-2011 state of Egypt,² scholars remain at odds over how to understand the initial rupture of the Egyptian revolution which captivated our imaginaries and invoked a sense of endless possibilities and potential.

This research draws on the framework of liminality to make sense of art production of the 2011 Egyptian revolution. It addresses how the different temporalities of the revolution - each period defined by different revolutionary events

² Several of those I interviewed argued that January 25 was not Egypt’s true revolution, but a prelude to it, and that the next revolution, if/when it arrives, will be a bloody battle – antistructure and destruction without *communitas* and creativity.

and contexts - produced different liminal moments that demanded new strategies and responses, including artistic productions. Indeed, it suggests that as we look back seven years after the initial revolutionary moment in January 2011 and attempt to make sense of the events which occurred (and their consequences), one of the ways in which we can most effectively do so is to look at what people *did* and *why*, and what it meant in that particular time and place. Revolutionary art is one of the ways in which the revolution was experienced, contested, described, and narrated, as the revolutionary process itself unfolded. Indeed, as Sune Haugbolle and Andreas Bandak aptly note, if we are to take the “practice of politics seriously” (Haugbolle, Bandak, 2017: 191) outside of its more formal understandings, this necessarily “means that we pay attention to what revolutionaries do—their repertoires of contention—as much as we pay attention to what they say and write as they seek to create a new political world” (ibid).

1.2 The Fieldwork Moment & Research Questions

For me, the actual moment when I began the fieldwork was central to understanding what seemed to be an existential crisis affecting many of those I interviewed. In the aftermath of the killing of supporters of former ousted president Mohammad Morsi in Rab’a Square in Cairo by the Egyptian army in August 2013 (widely known as the Rab’a massacre) this period of fieldwork seemed to indicate that the revolutionary process had come to a definitive end. But, following Thomassen, although we tend to “know a great deal about why revolutions start” (2017: 298), it remains that “we still know surprisingly little about how revolutions end. Detailed analyses and comparative theorizing of revolutionary endings are sorely lacking” (2017: 298). The beginning of the Egyptian revolution is clearly marked as January 25, 2011, a day intentionally chosen as the first day of the revolution which

marks Egypt's National Police Day, as an ironic and subversive twist to the much-hated entity of the political order – the police - which was one of the primary causes of the outbreak of the revolution.

When I entered my fieldwork in November 2013, it was not entirely clear where the revolution stood, even though what was clear was that revolutionary fervour was at an all-time low. Those I interviewed for this research were shocked by the events of Rab'a and its tragic aftermath, the subsequent lockdown of public dissent, the return of the emergency law, and the apparent rise of the "honourable citizens" who did not allow any criticism of the army. During this period, many of those I interviewed stopped creating art while others created revolutionary art sporadically but were overall hesitant to produce art in the street, as was the case during the first revolutionary period in January 2011. Most of those I interviewed argued that in the aftermath of the Rab'a massacre the revolution was over; others declared it still ongoing, while others argued it did not yet even truly begin (and that when it did, it would be much more bloody and violent than the 2011 revolution). The uncertainty of my fieldwork moment is clearly articulated in what Armbrust described as being "stuck" in a state of liminal crisis – a state of limbo - with no obvious way out. In this research, and based on the fieldwork, there were three revolutionary moments. The first stage is the breach – or the moment of rupture, in which thousands of people took to the streets to protest against the humiliation faced by the police and the Mubarak regime. This period began on January 25, 2011, until Mubarak's ouster on February 11, 2011. The second phase is the liminal moment, characterized by the struggle over the normative order and by acts (by political elites and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces) to re-establish order and send the revolutionaries home. This period lasted from February 2011 until June 2012 when

Mohammed Morsi of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood became the fifth president of Egypt. During this time, revolutionary art took off and evolved. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

The third stage is also characterized by liminality and acts of redress which sought to reconstitute the normative order during the struggle against Mohammad Morsi's Brotherhood rule. While initially many revolutionaries had believed the Brotherhood as partners in the revolution, this feeling dissipated in the winter of 2011/2012 when the Brotherhood began to ally with SCAF. Furthermore, during Morsi's rule the government adopted many controversial laws against women as well as introduced unpopular constitutions amendments of November 2012, which, he claimed, would "protect the revolution", but which many human rights organizations argued would only increase repression and undermine the rule of law. This stage was marked by bloodshed, protests, and dissent and lasted up until the major protests calling for Morsi's resignation on June 30, 2013 and his ouster on July 3, 2013. Muslim Brotherhood members and Morsi's supporters gathered in Rab'a square in solidarity with Morsi, until the army forcibly removed them, killing hundreds, in what was known as the Rab'a massacre of August 13, 2013. This day decisively marked, for many of those I spoke to, the end of the revolutionary process, whereas for others, it indicated a severe setback.

As my fieldwork was conducted in the aftermath of this politically turbulent and violent period, the ambiguity of the moment was clearly captured throughout my interviews, raising questions about whether revolutionary art can continue to exist after the apparent defeat of the revolution. The answers are not entirely clear cut because they reflect a critical existential crisis faced by those I interviewed as they

make sense of what is art/revolutionary art in existential terms, and their role (or lack of) in it.

1.3 Research Motivations

This research is positioned within the literature on revolutionary art of Egypt within a particular historical and political moment. Most studies on the art of the Egyptian revolution during 2011 and 2012 reflected the initial optimism of the revolution's outcome, whereas my findings reflect the existence of an existential crisis of revolutionary art in the post-Rab'a massacre moment, after the revolution itself had apparently been defeated. The beginning of my fieldwork in November 2013 was a period when revolutionary art was no longer being celebrated, but whitewashed, and when revolutionary artists were being ostracized and even killed (such as the tragic case of Hisham Rizk and Issa³). Therefore, the fieldwork was conducted in a period that seemed to mark the end of a revolutionary process, when revolutionary art was no longer considered fashionable or trendy or supported by the public as it was during the height of revolutionary fervour. Therefore, this research examines revolutionary art in the aftermath of the revolution through a historical perspective, where each phase was marked by different ideas, different strategies, and different understandings. The findings chapters will detail these issues.

My interest in this study was conceived in the aftermath of former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's ousting on February 11, 2011 after the January 25th, 2011

³ Hisham Rizk was a 19 year old member of the Revolution Artists Union (RAU) and a graffiti artist who was found a week after his disappearance in a morgue in late June 2014 (Abaza, M., 2015). Issa was a revolutionary artist who was also killed during the period of my fieldwork, though the circumstances and context of his death were not known to me.

revolution - 18 days of popular revolt which saw thousands demand “bread, freedom, and social justice”, the slogan of the Egyptian revolution. The revolution was set against a background of on-going police brutality, pervasive corruption and poverty, and the possible succession of Mubarak’s son Gamal as an extension of his rule. I travelled to Cairo in April 2011 to see for myself what a post-Mubarak Egypt looked like, as he represented the dominant symbol of power that had once been part of my daily life, from the images on the front page of every government newspaper to the government propaganda street posters I would see on my daily commute downtown from Nasr City to the American University in Cairo (AUC) between 2005 and 2007, Mubarak’s “image domination” was a prevalent visible force in the everyday Egyptian landscape. The use of the term “image domination” is not an underestimation of the aesthetic hegemony of Mubarak’s face and name in Egypt’s public spaces and places. According to New York Times reporter Neil MacFarquhar,

cataloguing every public use of the Mubarak name would require an effort not unlike constructing the Pyramids. It was plastered across schools, libraries, hospitals, clinics, bridges, roads, squares, airports, stadiums, ministry buildings, industrial complexes, dormitories, scouting centres and various national prizes. You name it. The Ministry of Education reported that 549 schools had been named after either the president, his wife, Suzanne, or their son Gamal. The president was the namesake for 388 schools, compared to 314 for the three previous presidents combined...the profusion of Mubarak rooms, photographs and statuary in the National Assembly rivalled that of Julius Caesar in imperial Rome. In fact one marble bust that media reports said cost around \$30,000 gives the former president a passing resemblance to the Roman emperor (MacFarquhar, 2011).

Samir Sabry, a well-known Egyptian attorney who called for the “de-Mubarakization” (the removal of his name and image) in a lawsuit he filed on March 1, 2011, arguing that “Egyptians have adopted this habit for centuries—since the time of the pharaohs,

when the image of pharaoh was everywhere. Corrupt people should not be honoured. I do not want to delete 30 years of Egyptian history, but I want to remove that name” (MacFarquhar, 2011). The lawsuit initially only demanded that Mubarak’s name be removed, but an addendum covered the removal of all images as well (MacFarquhar, 2011), and in April 2011 a Cairo court officially “ordered the removal of all pictures of ousted president Hosni Mubarak and his wife from Egypt’s streets, squares and public institutions” (Stanglin, 2011).

During my time as a graduate student at the American University of Cairo, and just as a regular visitor to Egypt, I was acutely aware of this visual domination as well as the hegemonic practices represented by self-censorship (not even in a cab or on the telephone could anyone complain about the regime without fear of reprisal) and the police force. I witnessed several protests with *baltageyeh* (plain-clothed thugs) mercilessly beating protestors and throwing them into armed vehicles outside the headquarters of the Egyptian Journalists Union. Interning for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also put me in direct contact with government negligence, corruption and bureaucracy, allowing me to witness first-hand how local civil society organizations would scramble to fill in the gaps for these marginalized groups in the fields of health care, accommodation, and education.

Therefore, what I witnessed in April 2011 in the aftermath of Mubarak’s resignation in February 2011 appeared to me to represent an overnight change in the Egyptian visual landscape. I saw female college students collect coins and money (and, to my surprise, people happily donating) in the streets to buy paint to a “beautify

Cairo” campaign without getting harassed, and I watched groups of schoolchildren randomly sweeping and collecting garbage off the streets. A communal and participatory spirit prevailed, and as I witnessed these events I felt that Egyptian society had been transformed. Notices the like of which I had never seen before in my own apartment building in my twenty years of living and traveling to Cairo (see Image 1 and 2), called for a “clean, civilized society” and urged people to volunteer in cleaning up the streets. In that particular space and place in time, it truly felt like Egyptians were attempting, in a very real and visible way, to reconfigure their environment as a different one to the reality they had been accustomed to under Mubarak’s rule. The normative order under Mubarak’s rule seemed to be replaced by a new normative order, one which laid the foundation for a society ruled by a communal spirit.



Image 1: A sign posted in my apartment building in Nasr City, Cairo (April 2011) that says “*A Clean Society = A Civilized Society* [my translation]”.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 2: A sign posted in my apartment building in Nasr City, Cairo (April 2011), which says “From now on, this country is your country, be conscious of God in your work, do not throw garbage, do not cross a red light, do not pay a bribe, do not forge a paper, do not walk the opposite way, do not enter from the exit door in the Metro, do not harass girls, do not say ‘Why should I care’, or we will have nothing left! Build your country.

We urge the youth of the City [Madenat Zahrah] to go down for three days next week (Wednesday – Thursday – Friday) in order to clean our City. Please bring your own necessary tools (shovel, broom, garbage bag) or money to buy the necessary tools.

*We hope you will join us.
 Shabab [Youth] Al Madina*

**We will meet immediately after afternoon prayers in front of the Madina mosque tomorrow, on Friday, after prayer. Everyone come at the day which is suitable for them* [my translation].”*

Source: Photo by Author.

During my April 2011 trip, I decided to take a walk in Nasr City with my father, a veteran journalist and media consultant, and my late uncle. For the first time since my first visit to Cairo in the summer of 1992, I witnessed something culturally and artistically unconventional on the streets—vibrant colours and messages of freedom and patriotism (“This is just the beginning”), unity (“Christians and Muslims, we are one”), and message of social duty (“don’t throw garbage). I felt that it was the visual beginnings of a society transformed from the experience of the revolution as a unique historical moment in time.

Images 3 to 20 are only a few of the many photographs that I took during my first experience of seeing the kind of revolutionary art which had gained traction and visibility after the initial 18 days of the revolution. They encapsulated real and symbolic feelings of fraternity, patriotism, solidarity, and optimism of the beginning stages of the revolution in the aftermath of Mubarak’s ouster. Recurring symbols and images illustrated in these visual artefacts (i.e. revolutionary art) of the revolution embodied the initial feeling of victory and national pride and consisted of such images as a combination of fists raised in defiance and unity, as well as signs of peace, chains breaking, and the Egyptian eagle proudly spreading its wings.

Images of and on social media – such as Facebook and Twitter – pay homage to the role that the virtual sphere played in acting as the revolutions legitimate news outlet⁴ which countered official media outlets which downplayed the revolution and

⁴ Although social media outlets and the virtual sphere played a significant role during the revolution, the physical public sphere was, arguably, the most significant space of interaction of the revolution – leaflets such as “How to Revolt Intelligently” with instructions and revolutionary tactics were passed out, and walls were considered the “revolutions journal”, as Ammar Abo Bakr and others informed me during our interviews. In the absence of the Internet and telephone/mobile lines, which the regime cut off on January 28, 2011 (“The Fridy of Rage”), in the early days of the revolution, many

portrayed the revolutionaries as hooligans in relaying information, organizing protests, and communicating with other revolutionaries. Other images encouraging unity and civic duty (such as keeping the streets clean) as well as patriotism (“Proud to be Egyptian”) are a reflection of what Salwa Ismail described as a form of active citizenship understood beyond simply a legal sense, to one which “signifies a normative orientation towards a certain kind of civic self that assumes responsibilities as a member of a collective and that seeks to reconcile individual interests with the interests of that collective” (Ismail, 2011: 990). In this sense, Egyptians “performed” their citizenship by taking it upon themselves to regulate traffic, protect one another, and to clean the streets, among other things. In this sense they disrupted the normative, everyday relationship between the state and the public of one of *ihana* and *mahana* (humiliation) to one of national dignity and regaining a sense of civic identity, ownership, and civic duty in the running of one’s country (Ismail, 2011: 991). The formation of subjectivities which situate themselves in a place of power, instead of subversive to power, i.e. the “oppositional self” (Ismail, 2011: 990), was performed not only through civil and political conduct, but also through cultural forms of expression witnessed in public spaces during the revolution, which, as Ismail argued, are acts which are intrinsically “linked to imaginaries of modern citizenship and the subjectivities through which it is performed” (Ismail, 2011: 990).

It is, therefore, not entirely surprising that the celebratory and optimistic tone of revolutionary art – combined, of course, with the more subdued and crucial commemoration of the martyrs of the revolution - in the immediate aftermath of

revolutionaries relied on scribbling information to other protestors and writing cautionary notes warning of government agent’s presence in certain areas.

Mubarak’s ouster represented a form of mediated socio-political discourse of the actions of the revolutionaries in Tahrir and throughout Egypt which emphasized both individual and collective responsibility and power, along with a sense of civic/collective duty and patriotic sentiment. It was these images, and the elation of the revolution which they captured – along with the liberating notion that anyone could now pick up a spray can or paint brush and create art in previously patrolled and restricted public spaces – which initially captivated my attention and sparked my interest in exploring revolutionary art further.



Image 3: On the Egyptian Media Landscape, with the words “Free Media” on the left, taken in April 2011, taken in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo

Source: Photo by Author.



**Image 4: “Egyptian & Proud”, taken in April 2011 on Ahmad Al Fakhry Street,
Nasr City, Cairo.**

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 5: Taken in April 2011, in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 6: “We are Egypt”, alongside an image of the Crescent and the Cross, taken in April 2011, taken in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 7: “Proud to be Egyptian” written in the colours of the Egyptian national flag, taken in April 2011, in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 8: Peace Sign with Wings, taken in April 2011, in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 9: Boy gesturing the peace sign next to the Egyptian flag and pyramids, taken in April 2011, in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 10: An image of a girl holding her hands above her head, next to the word “Liberty”, taken in April 2011, in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 11: The word “corruption” (*fasad*) being broken in half by Egypt’s national emblem, the Eagle of Saladin, with the word Egypt (*Masr*) underneath, next to the words “twitter” and “25 Jan”, taken in April 2011, in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 12: The words “Facebook” and “Freedom” alongside an image of an Eagle (painted with the colours of the Egyptian national flag) breaking the chain it is tied to, taken in April 2011, in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 13: Image of a boy painting “I love you my country”, taken in April 2011, in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.

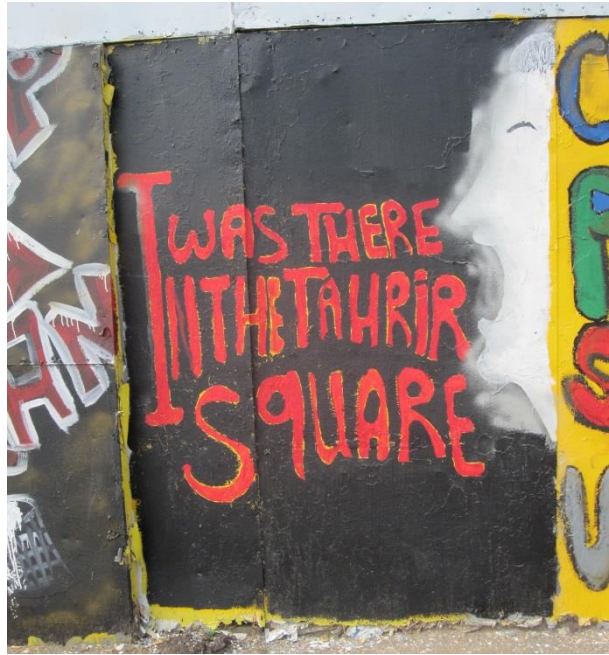


Image 14: “I was there in Tahrir Square”, taken in April 2011, Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 15: A man (carrying the Egyptian flag) and little girl holding hands, with the words “Heaven is my country”, taken in April 2011, in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 16: “Keep it Clean”, taken in April 2011, in Ahmad Al Fakhry

Street, Nasr City, Cairo

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 17: The names of martyrs of the revolution, taken April 2011, in

Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 18: “Only you can make change”, taken in April 2011, in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 19: The image of a hand making the peace sign, set within a backdrop of peace signs and the word “Egypt” written underneath, taken in April 2011, in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 20: An image of a fist held up high inside a red star, taken in April 2011, in Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 21: My father (centre) and late uncle (far left) with a group of Egyptian construction workers who they wanted to pose with in a picture. This picture represents the elation and brotherhood experienced during the post-Mubarak atmosphere. My father and uncle felt such pride and kinship towards the Egyptians' resilience and success which led to Mubarak's ouster that they wanted to take a picture with a group of Egyptians that we met as we were viewing the revolutionary art on Ahmad Al Fakhry Street, Nasr City, Cairo.

Source: Photo by Author.

The affective power and proliferation of Egyptian revolutionary art has been a fashionable topic to discuss since the January 25th revolution, with commentators using the oft-repeated phrase that Egyptian revolutionary art is a “form of revolution” (Rashed, 2013) and applauding it as a “fiery visual reminder of Egypt’s revolution” that “packs a punch” (Sooke, 2013). The art I saw on the walls in April 2011 was steeped in this initial optimism and jubilation in what seemed to be the initial success of the revolution with Mubarak’s ouster in February 2011. However, the moment I entered my fieldwork in November 2013 was a different time altogether – when revolutionary art, where it existed, was more subdued and as a cultural form of expression no longer celebrated or garnered the vast support it did during the revolution as it seemed to indicate a return to a disorder a large majority of the public no longer desired, as they craved the “order” that the military vowed to restore.

A desire for a return to the status quo seemed to be the ultimate goal at the time I began my fieldwork, and although I could not have predicted the turn of events (the Rab’a massacre) that occurred in the summer of 2013 which essentially subdued revolutionary art during my fieldwork, it led me to ask myself - what does it mean to create revolutionary art within different moments of the revolution – or rather, can there even be revolutionary art at the end of the revolutionary process? What role do artists and non-artists alike see for themselves, and their art, if any? These will be detailed in the chapters that follow.

1.4 Structure of Thesis

Chapter Two provides a brief contextual and historical background on the relationship of the state to the cultural field and how each regime (starting from

Gamal Abdel Nasser's rule) essentially "directed" cultural policy according to its own political, economic and social goals.

Chapter Three addresses the academic literature addressing the intersection of art, culture, and politics during the Egyptian revolution that provides the conceptual framework to my research, as well as examines the literature on liminality theory and the different ways it has been applied to examine the Egyptian revolution.

Chapter Four presents the methodological impetus for this research as well as outlines the practical reasons I chose to undertake certain methods versus others. In the absence of other forms of more intensive, practice-led research due to the unstable political environment I entered my fieldwork, this chapter places emphasis on the importance and the centrality of oral history, stories, and interviews to my research.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven apply the liminality framework to address the three primary phases of the revolution discussed earlier in order to contextualize how those I interviewed made sense of their art and their role in its creation within different phases and liminal moments of the revolution, and positions them within specific events and iconic pieces associated with those events which define key moments of the revolution.

Chapter Eight addresses the time period post-Rab'a - the actual moment of fieldwork from November 2013 until August 2014 – whereby those I interviewed were facing an existential crisis and debating whether "revolutionary art" can

continue to exist in what seems to be the end of the revolution, what art now means to them, and what they feel is their role in its creation.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis by summing up the major arguments and findings of my research, as well as suggests potential future areas of research in this field which extend the research questions beyond the Egyptian revolution.

Chapter 2. Culture & the Egyptian State: A Background

...After we renew what is authentic in our culture and tie it to what is useful from our modern lives, we must disseminate this civilization among the people...cultural elements are diffused in society from above to below...

(Extract from a high-school science text in Egypt, ‘Abd al-Gawwad and Amir 1988, cited in Armbrust, 1996: 25).

The cultural field in Egypt, much like its regional counterparts (see, for example, Wedeen, 1999; Cooke, 2007), has been mostly controlled from the top. Although a private sector does exist, boasting independent art galleries and non-profit cultural organizations, they remain under the regulative control of the state. While these areas lie beyond the remit of this paper, it is important to note that the relationship between the state and culture finds familiar theoretical ground within Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, which explores the relationship between culture and power. Although Gramsci did not provide an exact definition⁵ of cultural hegemony, the closest definition is arguably (Lears, 1985: 568), “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production (Gramsci, 1971: 12). Gramsci explored the ways in which dominant groups maintain hegemony and dominate by consent. Thus, for the purposes of this chapter, it is significant to take

⁵ T.J. Lears notes, furthermore, that relying on any one definition of cultural hegemony would be “misleading” as “culturally hegemony can only be understood within a variety of historical and intellectual contexts” (Lears, 1985: 568).

note of the ways in which the underlying political and economic framework of the state directed - or failed to direct - cultural policy.

The beginnings of the establishment of modern national culture in Egypt date back to the late nineteenth century (Gershoni, 1992). As several writers have noted (Armbrust, 1996; Karnouk, 2005; Winegar, 2006; Mehrez, 2008), it brought with it questions and struggles over how to develop a “modern” (a word identified as a Western construct) Egyptian cultural field while retaining the *asala* (authenticity) of Egyptian identity. Although the roots of the modern national cultural industry began before the twentieth century, I use Gamal Abdel Nasser’s socialist rule as my historical starting point, as it was under his reign that the current centralized cultural structure that still functions today was established. Although I refer to Nasser’s rule as the beginning of the establishment of the state cultural industry after the overthrow of the monarchy and under the newly established republic, it is important to note that “the change of political regime in 1952 was a continuation, and systematization of the role of the state in the production and dissemination of the expanding Egyptian culture industry” (Mehrez, 2008: 209). This in turn owes its foundations to the rule of Muhammad Ali (1805-1849), who “instated various institutions responsible for the production and dissemination of modern cultural products in the cultural sphere... with a serious effort to forge a national Egyptian image and culture” (ibid: 209).

The aim of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the extent to which the state dominated the cultural field. In modern Egypt, this dates back to the Egyptian republic established under Gamal Abdel Nasser (1952-1970) and continues via the neoliberal state characterized by the open-door (*infatih*) rule of Anwar Sadat and the dissolution of the state cultural field (1970-1981) to Hosni Mubarak’s

strengthening of neoliberal policies and support of crony capitalism and the disparaging role that the Ministry of Culture played in establishing unpopular cultural policies. In this way, the chapter aims to summarise and illustrate the ways in which culture is both an “object” and an “instrument” of governmentality (Bennett, 1992).

In order to highlight the continued efforts of the state to dominate and regulate culture by cementing its political objectives, I briefly discuss what is called the “Brotherhoodization” of culture under Morsi’s rule, whereas the control of the cultural field under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi’s regime in the final findings chapter.

2.1 Nasser’s Establishment of the Modern Egyptian State’s Cultural Institutions

Gamal Abdel Nasser’s rule as President (1956-1970) in the aftermath of the 1952 revolution saw the end of the Egyptian monarchy under King Farouk. One of the main tasks of the new regime, which had inherited a feudal system and the remnants of colonialism, was to institute a new direction for cultural policy (Awad, 1968: 143-161) that would embody and symbolize the modern Egyptian state. In order to do this, a centralized system was created to regulate cultural production towards serving (and legitimising) these nationalist goals via the establishment of state cultural institutions such as the Supreme Council for the Development of Arts and Literature in 1956 (Winegar, 2006: 143), as well as the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance in 1958 (ibid: 144).⁶

While the Council “coordinated, instituted and expanded arts activities and programs in several areas” (ibid: 143) the Ministry of Culture’s role was essentially to set the nationalist parameters under which artists would work to promote the new

⁶ “After 1956, government financial support and patronage were the only kind of funding the majority of artists could expect...as the curve of government payroll spending climbed to a record seventy-three percent in 1956, more people in the arts found themselves attached to the state” (Karnouk 2005: 67).

state and its activities, such as the construction of the High Dam. The Council, along with the Ministry of Culture, together “expanded and centralized state arts support even further” (ibid: 144). The establishment of these two major state cultural institutions ran parallel to the government’s establishment of museums, as well as the Egyptian Academy of Arts in 1960 (ibid: 144) and the creation of hundreds of “culture palaces” in small towns and villages which were intended to spread art to the public and act as a launching pad for many lower-class artists. This was considered a significant step in reducing elitist barriers into the cultural field. Winegar writes that not only were these palaces intended to “bring arts to the masses”, they also served to expand the spaces in which artists could exhibit, as well as lecture on art, and “administer these palaces as a way to serve the new nation” (ibid: 144).

What is significant about Nasser’s rule is that it instituted the main policy frameworks guiding the state centralized cultural field which have pertained until the present day, elevating the state to the position of being “patron, promoter, and protector of the arts” while the nation acts as the “conceptual frame...for evaluating artistic practices and policies” (ibid: 145). Pahwa and Winegar expand on this, by arguing that “the major goals at the time remain central to the Ministry’s mission today: to define the nation and national identity; to protect cultural patrimony; and to uplift the so-called masses by exposing them to the arts. To these ends, the Ministry employed legions of artists and literati who often did works in line with nationalist goals of the regime” (Pahwa, Winegar 2012).

However, although Nasser invested a great deal in establishing a modern cultural field which was severely restricted within the parameters of the national goals of the “new” Egyptian republic, it is important to note the context under which the

cultural field under Nasser emerged and examine the reasons behind the dominant nationalist overtones of cultural works.

Egypt was under a British mandate until 1922, yet British occupation continued, with forces still remaining in Egypt during Nasser's reign. The beginning of his rule saw him involved in a conflict between Israel, France and the United Kingdom who invaded Suez in 1956 in light of Nasser's announcement that he would nationalize the French-British controlled Suez Canal.⁷ This situates Nasser's cultural policy as constitutive of the promotion and maintenance of the revolution in which culture acted as an essential tool to resist foreign aggression as well as local mindsets that remained loyal to the *ancien regime* (of the monarchy the revolution overthrew),

The cultural revolution puts itself at the service of the political and social revolution. We are on the way to building a society based on self-sufficiency (*kifāyah*) and justice. We must have a cultural revolution which will be hostile to imperialism, hostile to reaction, hostile to feudalism, hostile to the domination and dictatorship of capitalism, hostile to all forms of exploitation - a cultural revolution which aims at [letting] the people know their rights, their [true] gains, their hopes, and finally who their friends and enemies are (Anis, 1967, cited in Crabbs, 1975: 387).

Nasser's pan-Arab continued to affect the pan-Arab and nationalist Egyptian tone of the cultural field during his rule, in line with his political vision of Arab unity and a fully independent, modern Egyptian state. The cultural field, albeit in line with dominant nationalist agendas restricting oppositional voices which did not fall in line with the state's overarching goals, still showed a "promising beginning" (Pahwa, Winegar, 2012) during Nasser's era. However, it took a complete turn and "devolved

⁷ France, the United Kingdom, and Israel eventually withdrew their forces after pressure from the United States, USSR, and the United Nations by 1957.

into decades of disappointment” (ibid) with Anwar Sadat’s rule, which I will address in the next section.

2.2 Sadat: *Infītah* (open-door) Policy & the Marginalization of Culture

Anwar Sadat, who was president of Egypt from 1971 to 1981, became President after Nasser’s death. His regime was characterized by a complete shift in political, economic, and cultural policies, which was adequately dubbed as “de-Nasserization” (Cull, Cullbert and Welsh 2003: 18) for its almost total reversal of Nasser’s policies. Nasser restricted the Muslim Brotherhood’s operations and jailed its members in light of an assassination attempt, operated a more “closed door” (Weinbaum, 1985: 206) policy through a socialist economy which saw the nationalization of key industries whilst promoting an Arab nationalist political ideology intent on ridding the country of foreign domination. Together, these policies were dubbed “Nasserism”. Sadat, on the other hand, allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to operate more freely,⁸ embraced neoliberalism and pushed for an open-door (*infītah*) economic policy which saw a large influx of foreign goods and investors into Egypt, as Sadat courted the West.

Sadat’s sympathies for Western policies and foreign investment saw him adopt unpopular recommendations by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The termination of state subsidies on basic foodstuffs led to the “bread riots” of 1977. Massive protests over high prices spread across Egypt, where people chanted slogans such as “Thieves of the *Infītah*, the people are famished” (Bohstedt 2014: 17). The riots ended with military intervention and the return of state subsidies. In line

⁸ Sadat used the Muslim Brotherhood group to counter nationalist and Nasserite groups opposition to his rule.

with Sadat's political vision was his attempt to "radically change cultural policy"—a policy which was "met with tremendous opposition. Sadat not only re-imprisoned many leftist intellectuals and student activists but also called for the dissolution of the Ministry of Culture under the slogan 'Culture is for the Intellectuals'" (Winegar, 2006: 150). This led to plans to cut resources and remove art subsidies through an even more intensive centralization and downsizing of the arts administration. Plans were made to replace the Ministry of Culture with a smaller Ministry of the State, to be administered directly by the president's office (ibid.).

A Supreme Council for Culture that reported directly to Sadat was formed and charged with running any remaining arts programs, presumably to bring cultural policy in line with political policy (Iskandar et. al., 1991, cited in Winegar 2006: 150). Winegar quotes one of the artists she interviewed as saying that Sadat was a "catastrophe [*nakba*] for the cultural movement in all of Egypt, because the political idea was *infitah* and consumerism. We changed to a consumerist society" (Winegar, 2006: 151). Mehrez also emphasizes the interconnectedness of cultural policy with economic and political policy, in which cultural aspects of Egyptian culture were marginalized in favour of foreign investments and open markets, and so,

...major shifts in political, economic, social and cultural policies, over less than a decade, produced a series of new realities on the ground: an accelerated immersion in a global capitalist market, the deregulation of a socialist economy, the collapse of the state cultural apparatus, the increasing visibility and influence of Islamic fundamentalism, the exodus of many members of the cultural field (professors, journalists, critics, writers, artists, painters) and the advent of foreign investors in several domains" (Mehrez, 2008: 210).

When Sadat was assassinated in 1981 by Islamists, Mehrez argued that what remained as the legacy of his regime was a “contradictory set of realities” (ibid: 210), which saw Egypt left with essentially a non-existent cultural field, a destabilized economy which was almost completely reliant on the West and financial packages from the United States, and a slew of opposition from leftists to the Muslim Brotherhood, which had abandoned its support for Sadat when he failed to implement *sharia* law and signed a peace treaty with Israel.

2.3 Mubarak: Using Culture to curb Political Islam

Hosni Mubarak’s (1981-2011) three-decade term was marked by an increasingly stifling bureaucratic system, crony capitalism, police brutality and the repressive emergency law (which gave the state unprecedented powers and curbed basic freedoms) implemented from 1981 and held in place for the entirety of Mubarak’s 30-year rule. His attempt to quash the rise of political Islam (Winegar, 2009) saw him reinstate the Ministry of Culture in 1981 and use the cultural sphere to counter “the rising Islamist wave and recaptur[e] a modern secular image” (Mehrez 2008: 210) in order to “thrust the marginalized and dominated cultural field into the centre of the political one” (ibid: 6-7). The 1980s and 1990s were dominated by a “massive increase in monetary, institutional, and discursive focus on culture in the Mubarak period [which] coincides with the spread of the piety movement and Islamic activism” (Winegar 2009: 190) which “can be directly traced to the early 1990s, when Islamist groups launched violent attacks against intellectuals, government figures, and Western tourists...It is clear that *thaqafa* [culture]—as defined in particular ways and created through certain government institutions and discourses—has become an

important feature of state projects to manage Islamic practice and identifications” (ibid: 190).

As Winegar and Mehrez have both noted, one of the main characteristics of Mubarak’s cultural policy was to curb the rising influence of Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, while at the same time dominating and monopolizing the use of Islamic symbols in its efforts to declare the state as “the sole moral and religious authority” (Mehrez, 2008: 3). Winegar argues that one of the main ideas set forth by officials at the Ministry of Culture was that “put simply, the loss or decline of a strong national Egyptian identity is understood to lead to a problematic rise in religious activity. But the rise in religious activity is also frequently presented as a cause of Egyptian national culture loss” (Winegar, 2009: 192). This preoccupation with using culture to essentially subvert or reduce the influence of Islamic extremism was so “dominant among state officials and among intellectuals generally that it is rare to find a critique of the state’s culture project outside of its terms” (ibid: 193).

The state’s efforts to counter the rise of so-called fundamentalism through its “enlightenment project” was signified by its “barn/fair” (Naji, 2014) strategy, which ensured the compliance of intellectuals (and marginalized those who did not follow suit) to stick to the political script by keeping them under the state’s financial wing. In Egypt’s 2008/2009 budget, the Ministry of Culture received 1.446 billion pounds, most of which was distributed among the Ministry’s 90,000 employees. In a department such as the Supreme Council for Culture, which includes a number of committees, each including dozens of intellectuals who are supposed to get together occasionally to ratify the state’s official cultural decisions, one finds instead that their

recommendations and decisions have no real power. In addition to that, the salary for Council employees, as well as their fees for attending meetings, reached up to 14 million pounds. This was the “barn” aspect of the strategy, turning the Ministry into councils that issue bonuses and salaries for Egypt’s intellectuals and elite class, thereby integrating them into the state apparatus and the regime’s control schemes (ibid).

Mubarak’s era thus witnessed a heavily controlled, inefficient and bureaucratically bloated cultural field—a strong reflection of the political field—whose primary intent was to promote a secular, modern image of the Egyptian state. Mubarak (and his wife, Suzanne) played a heavy role in promoting cultural fairs and projects, which provided the illusion of widening the margins of freedom in the cultural field through its increased activity despite remaining heavily regulated by the state and its censors. Mehrez argues that although there was a large influx of funds to the cultural field which promoted its activities – “behind the façade of state prizes, awards, stipends and costly public events in the fields of literature, theatre, music, dance, film and visual arts lurks the ghost of censorship, at all levels including self-censorship, that ensures the political field’s domination and control over the cultural one” (Mehrez 2008: 212).

Perhaps the irony of the failures of these policies comes through more clearly when seen in conjunction with a document (published on the tenth anniversary of Mubarak’s rule) outlining Egypt’s “enlightened” cultural policy, entitled *Culture: A Light Shining on the Face of the Nation*. The document advocated, among other things, “cultural democracy...the youth as the barometer of the art movement...and non-

centralization” (Winegar 2006: 154-155). Two examples embodied the failure of this cultural policy in fostering and retaining a genuine intellectual and culturally diverse environment. The first came at a meeting between intellectuals and Mubarak, at which the late prominent human rights activist Dr. Mohammed El-Sayed Said presented a “political reform program based on political pluralism, strengthening civil society, separating the head of state from the head of the ruling party, and enacting a new constitution” (Khodr, 2012). According to one journalist, “Mubarak immediately chided him and called him an ‘extremist’” (ibid), a label he initially reserved for political Islamists, yet later used as a tool against any opposition groups or activists to discredit them. In another example, leading novelist Sonallah Ibrahim publicly refused—on the podium of the Cairo Opera House and in the presence of then Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni—the Arabic Novel Award prize in 2003 given by the Ministry of Culture, because “it is awarded by a government...that lacks the credibility of bestowing it...We have no theatre, no cinema, no research, no education. We only have festivals and conferences and a boxful of lies” (Mehrez 2008: 212). He continued that he also refused the prize on the grounds of “the oppression of the people by the Egyptian political system” (El Attar, 2009).

These examples demonstrate the contradictions within the cultural field, in which there was no substantive activity other than a form of cultural window dressing situated within an increasingly repressive political system. Its incapacity to support artists on a larger basis strengthened the role by civil society organizations such as Townhouse Gallery (an independent art space founded in 1998), Al Mawred Al Thaqafy (translated literally to Culture Resource, which is a non-profit organization founded in 2004 which seeks to promote artistic activity), and Darb 1718 (a

contemporary art and culture centre founded in 2008). The 1990s and 2000s saw a proliferation of similar institutions in light of the gap in funding created by the state: Back in early 2000, independent organizations such as TownHouse Gallery, CIC (Contemporary Image Collective), and Al Mawred Al Thaqafy (Culture Resource) appeared on the scene and, with older commercial galleries such as Mashrabia and Karim Francis Galleries, pleaded for quality in art and independence from the corrupt state system. Most of these organizations, galleries, workshop spaces, and exhibitions venues are located in Downtown Cairo. Both state-sponsored spaces and the independent art scene remain inaccessible to the majority of the Egyptian population as they are either geographically, or socially exclusive.

However, there are still a few established organizations located in Cairo that have a community outreach approach, such as Artellewa, Alwan wa Awtar, and El Takeiba art spaces (El-Cheikh, 2016). Despite the growth of independent cultural groups and organizations, the Ministry of Culture remained the principal promoter, distributor, and sponsor of culture, and intellectuals which did not follow its political agenda were ostracized. Mehrez notes that although the presence of these alternative cultural spaces were significant, one could not forget that they operated within “a certain illusion of autonomy vis-à-vis the state” (Mehrez 2008: 214). According to Ibrahim, the reason why intellectuals were primarily marginalized during Mubarak’s era was due to a “deliberate distinction between what is cultural and what is political, rendering the opinions of intellectuals in politics invalid, and limiting the role of intellectuals in political organization” (Ibrahim, cited in Ahram Online, 2012).

It was interesting to note that in the immediate aftermath of the 18 days of the Egyptian revolution questions arose regarding the Ministry’s role in the cultural field

and how it could be “imagined” differently (Elwakil, 2011) or whether it should be abolished altogether, as I mentioned in the Introduction. For example, a conference held in February 2012 at the El Sawy Culturewheel entitled “The Future of Culture in Egypt” addressed questions of cultural identity, cultural production, and the effectiveness of cultural institutions, in which the Ministry of Culture’s role was attacked for its “passive and insufficient performance as simply a ‘censor of’ instead of as an ‘enabler of’ cultural development” (Montasser, 2012b). Unfortunately, major calls for the restructuring and alteration of the framework of the cultural field and the decentralisation of the Ministry so that its role would be reduced to funding rather than producing culture remains unrealized.

2.4 Culture under Morsi: Brotherhood Domination

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) ruled on an interim basis in the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution, until Mohammed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, was elected President in June 2012. Although Morsi’s Presidency was brief (it lasted from June 30, 2012 until July 3, 2013, when he was forcibly removed by the military), his economic, political, and cultural policies polarized the Egyptian public (Hellyer 2013). Morsi’s intervention in the cultural scene was swift, and many activists accused his amendment of the constitution as something that “threatens freedom of expression and creativity” for privileging religion over the law and civil society (Shaw 2013). The accusations of the “Brotherhoodization” of the Egyptian state and the cultural field (El Nabawi 2013) continued in the aftermath of Saber Arab’s resignation (in protest at the mistreatment and violence against protestors) who was replaced by Alaa Abdel Aziz, a Brotherhood member.

Abdel-Aziz removed prominent members of the cultural community⁹ and replaced them with Brotherhood members, arguing that he needed to “inject fresh blood in the cultural scene” (Metwaly, 2013a). His removal of Inas Abdel Dayem, the head of the Cairo Opera House (the largest performance venue in Egypt) proved especially controversial and led to Egyptian artists halting all performances for three days. This provoked a flood of statements by cultural organizations accusing the Brotherhood of wanting to “destroy the Egyptian culture” (Metwaly, 2013b), and the spread of widespread protests, sit-ins and dance protest performances outside the Ministry of Culture. During these protests, calls for the decentralization of the Ministry of Culture were repeated and one of the protestors argued that the Ministry of Culture should no longer retain its role as “producer, executor, and distributor” of culture, but remain only as a “funder and sponsor” (El Nabawi 2013). These protests illustrated the divisive issues faced by the Ministry of Culture, with artists from the independent arts scene arguing that the Ministry was redundant and should be removed as its role would always be to “advance the state’s agenda” (Jacquette, 2013). According to writer Muhammad Aladdin, “The Ministry of Culture is the same as it was under Mubarak, just with new faces. It still has a narrow and opportunistic understanding of Islam and culture. The real problem with the Ministry of Culture is the idea that culture can enlighten the masses, because funding can be used to push their agenda or ideas” (ibid).

⁹ “Abdel-Aziz dismissed three respected senior culture ministry officials without explanation: Ahmed Megahed, head of the General Egyptian Book Organization; Salah El Meligy, head of the Applied Arts department; and Inas Abdel Dayem, head of the Cairo Opera House, who he replaced with Badr El-Zakaziky. He unsuccessfully attempted to fire Sameh Mahran, head of the Academy of Arts, and decided not to renew the term of the head of the Egyptian National Library and Archives (NLA), instead replacing him with the Islamist-leaning Arabic literature professor, Khaled Fahmy” (Jacquette, 2013).

Morsi's unpopular rule was met with continuous protests, and according to Ahdaf Soueif, the Egyptian novelist and commentator, this was because "[Morsi] failed to honour every one of the promises he made in order to be elected. He basically behaved as though he had somehow legitimately inherited the old Mubarak regime with a veneer of piety" (Soueif, cited in Abdel Kouddous, 2013). In response to overwhelming public anger at Morsi's performance as President, in April 2013 a grassroots movement entitled *Tamarod* ("rebellion") was founded by members of the Egyptian Movement for Change (also known by its slogan Kefaya, or "Enough") and set as its main goal the collection of signatures in order to call for early presidential elections.

On June 29, 2013, *Tamarod* announced 22 million signatures (their original aim was 15 million) had been collected and on June 30, 2013, millions of Egyptians called on Morsi to step down. The next day the military gave the President a 48-hour ultimatum to solve the current crisis otherwise, as Sisi stated in a television address: "If the people's demands are not met, the military, which is forced to act according to its role and duty, will have to disclose its own future plan" (Bradley, Abdellatif, 2013). On July 3, 2013, the Military intervened and removed Morsi as President, overruled the Constitution and installed an interim government until the next Presidential elections, which Sisi won by a landslide in June 2014.

Chapter 3. Literature Review

3.1 Visual Culture Studies and the Middle East

Prior to the Arab revolutions there were several notable works on visual culture studies within a Middle Eastern context which have adopted a broader approach to looking at the image not as a disaggregated concept but as embodied within larger political and social practices and processes of circulation. Although these publications came out in the aftermath of the revolution, they do not address the revolutions (see for example, McLagan and McKee's *Sensible Politics: The Visual Culture of Nongovernmental Activism* (2012). This edited collection attempts to look at images as aesthetic practices (from documentaries, to bodies in protest, to pictures) that are in themselves "political acts...encoded in media forms" (ibid: 9). The various contributors attempt to move beyond dominant paradigms of representation in visual culture studies, and instead seek a more interdisciplinary approach (which combines media studies and cultural studies) to merge the political field with the "world of visual culture that...encodes and represents the political" (ibid: 9) in order to situate the images within the larger context of activism and networks of circulation that allow it to exist and "make claims" (McLagan, McKee 2012: 16).

Christiane Gruber and Sune Haugbolle's edited book *Visual Culture in the Modern Middle East* (2013) was developed as an outcome of a conference held in Denmark in 2009 entitled "Rhetoric of the Image: Visual Culture in Political Islam" (Gruber, Haugbolle, 2013: viii). Therefore, although the revolution itself is excluded from the book's analysis, it emphasizes the importance of the interdisciplinary character of visual culture studies within other areas such as media studies and art history. It also makes a significant intervention in moving beyond the largely Euro-

American scholarship on visual culture and instead shifts towards the role of the image in the “modern” Middle East, and emphasizes that the Orientalist perspective pushes forth the assumption that the visual has been marginalized in favor of more auditory cultural forms (ibid: xi). However, this volume mainly privileges examining the image in popular culture largely within the dominant modernist paradigm and is largely concerned with the formation of “Islamic subjectivities” in popular culture from a framework of a largely “Muslim” Middle East, and fails to take into account how the image is constituted within political struggles—especially during the political rupture of the Arab revolutions—as something which extends beyond a preoccupation with representations of a religious culture.

Although these volumes are indicative of the ways in which visual cultures were addressed prior to the revolutions, what is more relevant to my research are the publications that came in the aftermath of the revolution and which directly address the visual (revolutionary art, graffiti, images) as constituting a unique way of seeing—and understanding—the popular politics of the region, and not just the ways in which the image – in itself, through its modes of distribution and circulation – can make “claims” in the world as suggested by McLagan and McKee. As David Morgan has argued, “visual culture is what images, acts of seeing, and attendant intellectual, emotional, and perceptual sensibilities do to maintain, or transform the world in which people live” (2005: 33).

Addressing the role of the visual within the contemporary politics of the Arab world Anthony Downey (2011) calls for a more critical examination of visual culture (in light of the revolutions which avoids descriptions, representations, and

teleological understandings but rather is recognized as indicative of a change in the perception of the aesthetic order. In this sense, as he writes, art “is always already political” - not in the narrow sense of (for example) overtly political art – but rather for “its aesthetic availability and ability to realign ways of seeing and our understanding of the world and our place in it” (Downey, 2011: 4), in the way Jacques Rancière conceived of the potential for the political to be located in the “distribution of the sensible” (Rancière, 2004). In another essay written in 2013 specifically addressing the role of art and its institutions to civil society in the aftermath of the Arab revolutions, Downey further argues that visual culture – especially in times of conflict and uncertainty such as that presented in the Arab revolutions – is a site of “antagonism” (Downey, 2013: 3) whereby the relationship of art and politics should not be reduced to conceptualizations of political art or political protest, but rather, that art is constitutive of “the ongoing role of creative practices in potentialities of social engagement and civic imaginations” (Downey, 2013: 3) which may “effect[] a change in the way in which we view and engage with the political. And that, in and of itself, is a political act: to change how people engage, what they see, how they interact, and what they hear (and indeed fear), can only ever be a political gesture” (Downey, 2013: 16). Understanding the ways in which people engage with understandings of the political through effecting a change within established sociopolitical relations in a particular context is crucial to locating the potential of culture in the imaginations of citizenship.

In the context of the revolutions, it is more helpful to extend our understandings of visual culture in the ways in which it can not only be a site of “antagonism” and negotiations of normative conditions, but also a way to open up

spaces for engagement and difference (Downey, 2011: 5). Ariella Azoulay's *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (2012), too, addresses the ways in which the image can open up this face, and although she focuses on photography in the context of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this can be extended beyond this particular context to understandings of the relationship between the aesthetic and political in the aftermath of the revolutions.

Azoulay rejects the dualism of the judgment of taste regarding images as “too political” or “too aesthetic”—a circular debate in the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution which concentrated on establishing some kind of correct formula of how “revolutionary” art of the revolutions should appear and what it should address to be considered conducive to the moment. Azoulay argues that this misconstrues the political and the aesthetic as mutually exclusive. Instead, she argues that kind of debate fails to reveal the true source of art's political potential – for Azoulay, the political is “a space of relations between people who are exposed to one another in public” (Azoulay 2012: 52) in which cultural producers can become “citizens in practice” (ibid: 3) and that the aesthetic (in this case, photographs, which she says must be recognized as being the product of several actors) are but “one of the manifestations of this space” (ibid: 52). Her understanding of the political as being reasserted through the image was echoed by Sherief Gaber and Nina Mollerup who see , the image becoming significant in its ability to create the space of relations Azoulay conceptualizes. As they note: “Only when they enter into a conversation with their surroundings, and when people see them and reflect on what they see, do they become alive and become actors in the revolution themselves.” (Mollerup, Gaber, 2015: 2913). Yet going back to Azoulay's notion that the image is

continuously readdressed, most cultural producers I interviewed for this research did not describe their art as a means to an end, but it was the “doing” of art that was significant through the social relations it establishes. Art was a constant way of establishing, and continuing, relations which manifested themselves in different forms.

The potential for visual culture to manifest in the creation of public spaces as platforms of engagement and enacting citizenship and agency is examined in greater detail in Charles Tripp *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East* (2013b), in which he also addresses the relation of the image (through what he calls the “art of resistance”) as a tool of power and dissent and its capacity to produce collective identities and solidify presence and reclaim public space (Tripp, 2013b: 256-308). Tripp draws on the concept of power to argue that art is linked to a politics of resistance in that it “opens up a space for the possibility of debate and critical engagement with power. In doing so, it contributes to the creation of a politics that calls power to account to a public that it may have successfully ignored up to that point” (Tripp, 2013b: 308). Although focused largely on the intersection of art with notions of power and resistance and its reclamation of public space, Tripp’s conceptualization of art of the revolutions as manifesting in more explicit (versus covert, prior to the revolutions) expressions of artistic dissent in the Middle East is indicative of the ways in which the visual is implicated within broader contestations of (symbolic) power against the state and the ways in which art is a factor (in relation to other factors) which may “shape the environment in which attitudes to power are formed” which may subsequently lead to the creation of new spaces and transfigurations of existing spaces for “debate and critical engagement with power” (ibid: 308). It is important to mention

that Tripp's assertion of the importance of the visual in reclaiming public space has been a recurrent theme within the context of the Middle East in the aftermath of the revolution, which has emphasized the importance of the power of physical space, in some cases, to counter claims that the revolutions were a "Facebook revolution" (Elshahed, 2011; Tawil-Souri, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Abaza, 2011, 2014; Abaza in Berry et. al., 2013; Gregory, 2013; El-Hibry, 2014).

While Tripp focuses largely on different ways of understanding power through art and the potential of artistic practices to create and sustain an alternative reality and a political public, Lina Khatib's *Image Politics in the Middle East: The Role of the Visual in Political Struggle* (2012) focuses largely on the way politics is seen and how the image is constitutive of the "political agency of the region's people" (Khatib, 2012: 12) during the Arab revolutions, arguing that it was representative of the ways in which "political struggle is an inherently visually productive process" (ibid: 1). Khatib thus investigates how the image has played a central role in how we reimagine the notions of political struggles through a wide variety of spaces, that is, "physical, electronic, non-electronic virtual and embodied spaces" (ibid: 7), and how the visual has contributed to the transformation of the perception of Arabs as passive citizens into active agents, who can articulate political demands instead of simply being ruled over. In this way, Khatib adds a communicative dimension to looking at the politics of the image and the ways in which it is constituted within political struggles and brings in a range of political actors, thus altering our perceptions of how politics is mediated by these changing images. In focusing specifically on graffiti and murals in the case of Egypt, Khatib argues that the latter and former constitute legitimate forms of art and artefacts, and examines the way in which they can be considered as a "call to action"

and should be seen as “political tools” which can “reclaim the notion of agency for citizens...and to reclaim the notion of community-based nationalism” (ibid: 154).

Khatib’s analysis is significant in looking at the multiple roles in which the image may be adopted - specifically focusing on the graffiti and murals of the Egyptian revolution - as tools of protest and resistance. But what lies beneath the art? What about the invisible processes of its creation, which involves the perceptions and conceptions of those who make it? I have found, in my fieldwork, a more nuanced notion of art that does not attribute such a high degree of political efficacy as being a way to reclaim space or considered as an effective tool of political change. Those art and cultural producers I interviewed did not attribute such potential to the image, specifically, to the revolutionary art they created. Rather, they understood the role of art firstly through their role in creating it, and in this sense, most perceived art as a constant means with no discernible end – a continuing process of interaction, dialogue, conflict, negotiation with the public. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Other works which address visual culture in relation to the Arab revolutions is an edited collection entitled *Uncommon Grounds: New Media and Critical Practices in North Africa and the Media* (2014b), which avoids descriptive or teleological understandings of the image but focuses instead on the ways in which images—particularly through digital and new media—provide unorthodox methods and creative platforms for social and political participation which may widen our understanding of the potential of artistic practices away from the spectacle of the image and the revolutions, and how it may extend the boundaries of cultural engagement. As Downey makes clear, “art as a practice—in as much as it is about

what can be seen, said and heard in a given social order—is always already political” (Downey 2014b: 27) for its potential to challenge conventional binaries and alter the visual status quo. For the purposes of my research, such an approach—foregrounded within unique sociopolitical contexts and historical narratives—is essential to avoid the possible intellectual pit falls of producing a self-evident narrative or teleological understanding of a historical process which is still unraveling and producing new questions.

The literature on art is vast, and it is worth mentioning works that focus on a largely non-Western context; these include Downey’s *Art and Politics Now* (2014a) and T.J. Demos’s (2013) *The Migrant Image*. Downey’s work is a survey of contemporary art practices which challenge our conceptions of the “political” and focuses on how art works are constituted within activist practices and its potential to address the damaging effects of globalization and neoliberalism, and argues that the “increasingly political dimension of contemporary art has given rise to a number of important questions about the role it plays in society today” (Downey, 2014a: 10). Downey argues that the shift towards more political concerns is historically contingent upon major events and conflicts (such as 9/11 and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq), as well as due to the effects of globalization on all spheres of life on culture, politics, society, and the economy, and thus claims that all art has been, and continues to be, “inseparable from the political realm”, be they located in the past or present (ibid: 12).

Demos examines artistic strategies situated in the context of a state of affairs he calls “crisis globalization,” a term he uses to designate an “era of growing

economic inequality, one facing the increasing influx of migrants and refugees into the North, as they seek decent standards of living and escape from repressive regimes, widespread poverty, and zones of conflict” (Demos, xiii: 2013). By providing a more nuanced and detailed examination into examples of critical artistic strategies and acts which have transformed documentary practices in order to creatively respond to global crises and movements such as migration, it attempts to avoid “simplistic distinctions between the artistic and the political” (ibid: 247) and instead “examine[s] how practitioners from all sides are recalibrating and testing the relations between the creative arrangement of sensible forms and their engendering of modes of social equality, between the activism of artists and the visual culture of social movements” (ibid: 247).

While the politics of artistic practices, art and images matter in where and how and why they are produced, circulated, consumed, negotiated, appropriated, and situated within larger political and activist practices, my research focuses primarily on the voices of cultural producers, whose perceptions and conceptualizations of the visual are situated within a historical narrative and experiences.

3.2 Art, Culture, and Politics in the Arab World

In a Special Section in the *Review of Middle East Studies* published in 2009, Amahl Bishara and Jessica Winegar urged “scholars of the Middle East...to trace the multiple ways that culture is enlisted in political struggle, rather than assuming culture as an apolitical background to ‘real’ politics” (Bishara, Winegar, 2009: 167). Writing more broadly, Matar notes that “little consideration has been paid to the ‘cultural’ as a terrain for doing politics, or engaging with the ‘political’, partly because of a narrow, instrumentalist definition of politics, and, in the Arab context, partly because of elitist interpretations of culture that dominated Arab intellectual thought for much of the

twentieth century (Matar, 2012b: 125).” Indeed, the majority of Middle Eastern scholarship on “culture” (prior to the revolution) has been focused largely within “classic anthropological approaches to understanding systems of kinship, religious beliefs, rituals, and social structures, as well as, more recently, on popular culture, media production, and consumption (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Dabashi, 2006; Sreberny-Mohammadi, Mohammadi, 1994). Cultural studies have only recently started to influence the vast literature on the Middle East (Salih and Richter-Devroe, 2014: 14) as several works show (for example, Stein, Swedenburg, 2005; Sabry, 2010, 2012; Laachir, Talajooy, eds., 2013; Sreberny, Torfeh, 2013; Salih and Richter-Devroe, 2014). These studies set important precedents as the literature on art, culture as they moved beyond “Marxist political economy approaches or a nation-state-centered paradigms [which] understand power and resistance through an economistic, class-based angle, or one where the state and its bureaucratic institutions are the main enforcers of power. Both the political economy and the nation-state approaches thus consider cultural politics as a binary or a byproduct of the economic and the political. (Salih and Devroe-Richter, 2014: 15).

Given that the state had historically established itself as the dominant authority not only in the political field but in the production and policing of the cultural field it is difficult to ignore the state’s role in culture (Matar in Sabry, 2012) when it regulates its very parameters and controls the legitimization processes of acceptable cultural forms of expressions in its “nation-building” discourse. The role of the state in culture has been discussed in Lisa Wedeen’s (1999) *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* and Miriam Cooke’s *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official* (2007), both of which specifically focus on the Syrian regime’s control and cooptation of the cultural field prior to the 2011 Arab revolutions.

Wedeen sets an important precedent in articulating the ways in which cultural hegemony can be understood through the repertoire of state symbols and spectacles of power which leads to a self-perpetuating system of obedience. Yet it is also important to remember that even though “authorized discourse prevents the emergence of [what Arendt calls] ‘public personality’ ” and “depoliticizes citizens” (Wedeen, 1999: 45), opposition always exists in the form of counter-publics and through the development of cultural interstices – and it is in this recognition in which Wedeen’s work is significant to my research because she extends the understanding of politics beyond material interests to the cultural field, to emphasize the importance over contestations over the symbolic world and the appropriation of meaning (Wedeen, 1999: 30) which is significant to “people’s experiences of everyday political life” (ibid). The significations of our everyday lives cannot be reduced to understanding the cultural as a byproduct of the political and economic as Salih and Richter-Devroe noted above, but, as argued elsewhere (Stein, Swedenburg, 2005; Salih and Richter-Devroe, 2014), they are deeply entrenched and mutually constitutive of one another. For the purposes of my research, this is a significant premise to build upon when understanding how cultural producers’ criticisms of capitalism, the cultural field, the social field, the political field are all articulated in the same vein, as they stem from the multimodal system of domination of the Mubarak regime, and so are never neatly separated into isolated grievances.

In Egypt prior to the revolution, the literature on any forms of cultural dissent focused primarily on indirect and direct acts of dissent by cultural elite (intellectuals and prominent artists), such as Sonallah Ibrahim’s public refusal of the Arab Novel Award Prize in 2003, or renowned Egyptian artist Muhammad Abla’s paintings which,

as Tripp, suggests, “can be seen as a commentary on the everyday violence encountered by Egyptians at the hands of the security services. The series of paintings executed in 2004 that include *No More Killing* and *How Much is the Life of an Egyptian Worth* represent a fierce indictment of the corruption and violence of the status quo in Egypt” (Tripp, 2013a: 189).

Yet in the aftermath of the revolutions, “dissident” cultural acts (Cooke, 2007) and “artistic transgressions” (Wedeen, 1999) were not restricted to intellectuals, artists, or the cultural elite, but rather were stemming from the broader public. Those who were neither artists by name or profession or educational background became involved in cultural acts and it was this popular participation not only in the political field but in the cultural field which rendered notions of artistic specialization and formal education irrelevant – anyone could participate and anyone could become a cultural producer, and it was this notion of “anyone” which posed a direct challenge to the state’s dominance on the symbolic field, not only in what could be said (and where), but by whom.

It is important to note that work on social movements, political practices and history prior to the revolutions (Singerman, 1996; Bayat, 1997; Cronin, 2007) have spurred new studies addressing the agency of ordinary people. In his book, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (2010), Asef Bayat examines everyday acts of resistance and the practices of “non-movements”, which he describes as “the collective endeavors of millions of non-collective actors, carried out in the main squares, back streets, court houses, or communities” (Bayat, 2010: ix), thus re-establishing the notion that everyday forms of resistance exist beyond overtly political

manifestations such as full scale revolts. For him, ordinary people are not mere passive subjects who simply negotiate their way through authoritarian rule, but actively try to resist it in unconventional ways.

In my discussions with cultural producers, most of those I spoke to considered themselves political activists *per se* prior the revolution, nor did they see themselves as passive subjects, yet they were involved in their own way of resisting—contesting their school curriculum and teaching methods, defying acceptable parameters of art works for entry into state-sponsored art festivals, and failing to comply to societal norms. All of these constitute transgressions towards the state, even if they are not articulated as such, and provide evidence that reductionist and essentialist conceptualizations of what constitutes as “political” acts need to be, as Bayat argued, widened to include even the ordinary, and that agency can be enacted in a number of (unconventional) ways.

Yet beyond the central premise of his work on quiet encroachment, Bayat also makes an important contribution to the scholarship on the significance of the street (Lefebvre, 1970; Perec, 1974; De Certeau, 1984) in the context of the Middle East, although he argues that his conceptualizations are not unique to the region and can be applicable at a transnational level. Even prior to the revolutions, Bayat emphasized the significance of street as a site which could be transformed into its normative (and passive usage) – walking, driving, etc. to an active use of public space which disrupts the state’s regulating authority on the permissible uses of public space (Bayat, 2010: 11-12). Bayat calls this process – from passive uses of public space to active uses - “street politics”, in which he argues the street becomes not only the place where

“people express grievances, but also where they forge identities, enlarge solidarities, and extend their protest beyond their immediate circles to include the unknown, the strangers” (ibid: 12) which “signify a crucial symbolic utterance, one that goes beyond the physicality of the streets to convey collective sentiments of a nation or a community” (ibid: 13). This is what he articulates as the “political street”, which “collective sensibilities, shared feelings, and public judgment of ordinary people in their day-to-day utterances and practices, which are expressed broadly in the public squares” (ibid: 212). For the purposes of my research, and in the context of the revolutions, it is crucial to understand that street as not only a site of demonstration of physical political struggles but also, and equally significant, cultural and symbolic contestations.

Academic literature on Middle East history and politics proliferated in the aftermath of the Arab revolutions as scholars found that old paradigms could not adequately explain new developments, in which they questioned the validity of top-down examinations of politics that focus predominantly on modernist paradigms, Marxist approaches, and political economy analyses, thereby providing more nuanced examinations from a bottom-up approach which seeks to challenge the parameters of traditional theoretical structures used to analyze the social and political fields in the Middle East (Dabashi, 2012; Beinin, Vairel, eds., 2013; Gerges, 2014; Chalcraft, 2016). The literature addressing the historical moment of the Arab revolutions (through its trajectories, histories, dynamics, possible implications, etc.) are quite extensive (see, for example Khalil, 2011; Karoui, 2012; Badiou, 2012; Achar, 2013; Bisharah, 2013; Al-Sumait, et. al, 2014; Korany and El Mahdi, (eds.), 2012; Abou El-Fadl, 2015), my focus is particularly on the literature which concentrates on the intersection between art (culture) and politics.

Although there has been a growing body of literature in the cultural field (which tends to be focused particularly on Palestine) prior to the revolutions which has foregrounded the political within cultural studies and provides a more nuanced examination of art, cultural production, and its relationship to politics and the political (Stein, Swedenburg, 2005; Tawil-Souri, 2012; Azoulay, 2012; Matar and Harb, 2013), my research falls largely within the literature which addresses the role of art in the aftermath of the revolution which has gained traction in the aftermath of the revolutions and have undoubtedly coincided with the very visual displays of popular public dissent supplemented by wide spread cultural activities in public spaces – revolutionary art/graffiti, impromptu music shows, public performances, and public screenings of military/government atrocities by groups such as organized by Mosireen.¹⁰

More recent scholarly attempts to problematize the connections between culture and politics is becoming increasingly necessary in light of what Yves Gonzalez-Quijano notes are simplistic methods (which focuses on a surface analysis of cultural production such as distributive methods or analysis of symbols) which fails to take note of the relationship between young Arab artists and creative practices as being larger than the sum of their aesthetic parts and more complex than being representative as the “voices of the revolution” (Gonzales-Quijano, 2013). In locating the “revolutionary” potential within creative practices he argues that one must look at

¹⁰ Mosireen (which means “determined”), is a film collective which emerged during Egypt’s revolution that collected footage from people’s mobile phones documenting the events of the revolution, which included atrocities by the authorities. They would then organize public screenings of this footage throughout different governorates in Cairo to subvert the state’s narrative on the coverage of the revolution. They co-founded, along with artist Lara Beladi, Tahrir Cinema, which lasted for three weeks during the sit-ins in Tahrir in July 2011.

their existence outside of the established cultural field – that is, “largely outside normal legitimation processes” - in which they are not subjugated to “vertically impose[d] (‘from above’)...models that were in effect ‘chosen’ by a political, cultural, economic and sometimes even religious elite” and that “the new cultural forms in these ‘Arab Springs’ are essentially developing according to a totally different logic” (ibid).

This “different logic”, according to Gonzales-Quijano, means that they were able to break away from predetermined ideological/political constraints which subjugates cultural production under a certain rubric of, for example, “modern-ness” or “authenticity” and that culture can no longer be “treated as a poor relation in studies on the Arab World, and often analysed solely from the perspective of political Islam” (2013).

Gonzales-Quijano outlines an important problematic affecting cultural production in the Middle East as a whole, which is echoed by Lucie Ryzova who argues that the “rich photographic culture” and “the variety of the local photographic traditions in the region” of the Middle East continues to be sidelined in favor of a post-colonial discourse through an “Orientalist aesthetic”, in which “agency (whether as technology or as cultural forms or expertise) emanates primarily from the West, and local production remains cast as a derivative of western models or reactive to them” (Ryzova, 2015: 159). Most of the cultural producers I spoke to were aware of the ways in which revolutionary art, revolutionary artists, and the revolutions were being covered in Western narratives as a way to, as Philip Rizk notes, “familiarize the unfamiliar” and package the politics and culture of the revolutions to make them more “accessible” to a Western audience which lead to the subversion of the voices of the

majority who did not fit the “particular profile using a specific political discourse” (Rizk, 2014). Therefore, this research makes a small attempt to address the politics of cultural representation and circumvent efforts to neatly package the art of the revolutions within a dominant narrative which simplifies the nuances of its manifestation, by highlighting the conceptions and perceptions of art by cultural producers themselves. Although this is not intended to be an exhaustive list, the works above provide an important precedent in which to situate my understandings of the relationship of art to politics within an Egyptian context, which I examine in the next section.

3.3 Art and Politics in Egypt before the Revolution

Prior to the revolutions, there was a noticeable gap in “bottom-up” examinations of art by informal actors in informal avenues in the Middle East as a whole. The scholarship on art in Egypt has certainly not been an exception. As Anneka Lenssen notes: “The existing scholarship on modern art in Egypt [consists of] a body of work that typically takes biographical data or stylistic trends as the primary point of analysis” (Lenssen, 2007/2008: 225). This sentiment is echoed by Katarzyna Pieprzak, who notes that although contemporary art in the Egyptian context is ...gaining disciplinary attention [in the fields of art history and cultural studies]...too often the approach is limited to formal studies of artwork rather than the institutions, practices of production, and people that create it. If the latter is addressed, it is usually through a postcolonial theoretical context that is keen to show how marginalized communities respond to a history of reification and work to subvert dominant visual forms (Pieprzak, 2010: 662).

The literature addressing culture and arts in Egypt (usually with an emphasis on the mega-city of Cairo as the political and cultural capital) tends to focus primarily on the formations of contemporary and modern Egyptian art from an art history perspective (Karnouk, 1995; 1998; 2005) or on media and/or cultural ethnographies (Abu-Lughod 1986, 2005; Armbrust 1996; Winegar, 2006; Singerman, Amar, (eds.), 2006) which examine the consumption and/or production of culture and art within the politics of national identity and/or representation. These studies are foregrounded within global discourses and focus on popular culture and/or the formal art field or official media outlets, thus privileging official institutions, private galleries and formal cultural players through a political economy framework. Therefore, there was a noticeable gap on the literature on the public art in the Egyptian context, but as Ashour writes,

There was no such thing as public art in Egypt. What was called public art was actually “public business,” because everyone was just trying to make money. And because such business in the private sector was limited, everyone sought work with the government. What had happened, with the governor giving very little time to the artist to produce a work of blatant nationalism for purely political purposes, was par for the course when one mixed art, business, and government...in the end the artist wins financially and he can still put on an exhibition to redeem himself artistically. That was how the faulty system worked (Ashour, quoted in Winegar, 2006: 210)

In Jessica Winegar’s *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (2006)¹¹, she examines how Egyptian artists, critics, curators, and collectors “created meaning and value in a period of social, economic, and political transformation” through their “‘reckoning’ (a term, she argues, contains a diverse range of meanings and uses) with genealogies of the modern” (Winegar,

¹¹ A term she chose to highlight “the importance of discussion and debate in their lives” (Winegar, 2006: 6).

2006: 5-6). Specifically, Winegar explores how these art interlocutors struggle with notions of cultural identity and reconcile concepts of authenticity with modernity. Though Winegar briefly addresses public art, she discusses it as art sanctioned by the government and produced by artists who work within the purview of formal institutions. Winegar's focus on individuals in the formal art world (curators, artists) informs debates on a wide range of issues on how these cultural players negotiate cultural authenticity and national culture with modernity in the formation of nationhood and artistic subjectivities, and how this has informed their artistic practices.

A similar historical account which focuses on the early to mid-twentieth century can be found in Patrick Kane's study of artistic and literary production in *The Politics of Art and Culture in Modern Egypt: Aesthetics, Ideology and Nation-Building* (2013). Kane argues that artistic practices essentially reflected the sociopolitical conditions of that time) and preoccupations with identity and the nation in the arts of that time were to set become the main standard for discussing art, particularly "fine" art (which dominated the cultural field), in Egypt for the majority of the twentieth and twenty first century.

Whereas Winegar and Kane focus specifically on the nation as the frame within which artistic practices and subjectivities are formed, Samia Mehrez's *Egypt's Culture Wars: Politics and Practice* (2008) focuses on cultural production (from visual art, to literature, and television) and its struggles, in which she notes that although much has been written about the "economic, social, and political fields in Egypt; however, the cultural field, its politics and battles, as well as the structures and frameworks within

which these develop, remain...highly underdeveloped” (Mehrez, 2008: 3). Mehrez examines the cultural battles as being situated primarily within the field of power largely under Mubarak’s rule since 1981, and argues that these must be examined within both local and global contexts in order to understand the tensions between understandings of the “traditional” and “modern” which are crucial to understanding why the cultural field in Egypt is so contested.

Mehrez, like Winegar, privileges the examination of culture and politics as it is played from the top down—between the Egyptian state and formal artists, cultural elite, and/or well-known intellectuals. Furthermore, their use of dominant paradigms—Winegar from a modernist perspective and Mehrez from a globalized perspective—overlook informal avenues of cultural production and participation, and the informal actors involved in not only creating culture, but debating its value, understandings, and role. Cultural struggles within the Egyptian context (and arguably the Middle Eastern context in general) prior to the Arab revolutions tend to privilege the examination of the cultural within intellectual discourse and contestation against formal networks and institutions of production, distribution, and circulation, through state institutions or private galleries. Any mention of art or culture from below tends to be confined to examining how people “consume” culture and the politics of its production and circulation. The nation tended to be the predominant and central ideological frame that was constantly referred to in the literature as being re-imagined, re-enacted, and represented through different media and cultural forms, and neoliberalism, globalization, modernization were the primary forces against which Egyptian identity was negotiating against and with.

The exclusion of informal avenues and actors was not surprising given the degree of penetration of all aspects of the cultural field by the state, and this is what makes the examinations of the cultural producers (artists and non-artists alike) of the revolutions pertinent, simply for being located outside of the “legitimation processes of the state” (Gonzales-Quijano, 2013), and—by nature of their location and bypassing official cultural institutions—disrupts the normative functions of the cultural field over what can be seen and said, thus challenging who can participate, debate, and be involved in the cultural field. Given the increasing marginalization of Egyptian (and Arab) populations from the political and cultural sphere, these struggles—on the part of lesser known actors working in less formal avenues—deserve greater recognition for the role they are playing in intervening, and not merely reflecting, the sociopolitical climate.

Thus, studies on the art, culture and politics of Egypt (and the Arab region in general) tended to be relegated within a modernist paradigm that was confined within the contours of a nation-state framework in which culture is examined largely as a matter of policy, politics, and products from the “top down”—that is, through its production, regulation, negotiation, and distribution via state official state channels, mediums, and institutions. Although there were significant publications prior to the revolutions which set important precedents for a more nuanced approach, it was the events of the revolutions which signaled a crucial shift in the way we look beyond the normative processes of the cultural field away from the state.

More recently, however, there has been a proliferation of works challenging the ways in which we approach culture and politics in an Egyptian context, one which does

not privilege the state or the analysis of culture within a post-colonial and/or modernist paradigm. A special issue in the *International Journal of Sociology* entitled “How Culture and Politics Intersect in post-January 2011 Egypt” (2015) takes off from the premise (Rizzo, 2015: 172-173) made by Charles Kurzman that one must understand the lived experiences of those who (or who did not) participate in the revolutions and how they made meanings of their lives within the particular tensions of this historical and political movement (Kurzman, 2012: 377). Mariz Kelada and Noha Khattab’s articles in this issue focus on alternative cultural and artistic organizations and practices which function as social non-movements (according to Bayat’s conceptualization) in which they represent “more subtle manifestations of resistance that might be regarded as mundane and ordinary” (Kelada, 2015: 223). As Kelada argues, “these nonevents [show] the potential and power for alternative ways of being and becoming, an alternative way of resistance” (ibid: 223) which “embodies a nonrepresentational body politics” which is “more meaningful than the politics of the Egyptian parliament” (ibid: 232).

In looking back as I write this paper over five years after the revolution, one must acknowledge that the absence of large scale collective mobilization on the streets does not mean that resistance no longer exists, but that it takes different forms, which Kelada conceptualizes as an internalized form of resistance which focuses on a

...new way of imagining and doing things differently [which is] not necessarily an act of radical revolution. Instead, it is the internalized process that slowly works within the people that leads them to rediscover and interrogate their perception and imagination of themselves and the world. This is a complex process because it is not just about the individual, but it is interwoven within communities, spaces, and time (ibid: 232-233).

In the absence of a radical revolution, and in the presence of a return to the normal way of doing politics (parliaments, ballot boxes, governance, laws and legislation of the state), Kelada makes an important point that a meaningful form of politics can – and still – exists within the internalization of new subjectivities. As Bayat noted, even though it seems that the “old order is now back in business,”

...something is fundamentally different: these are the old ways in new times, when the old order faces new political subjects and novel subjectivities; when the memories of sacrifice, the taste of triumph, and betrayal of aspirations are likely to turn quiet but lingering mass discontent into periodic social upheavals. These are uncharted political moments loaded with indefinite possibilities, in which meaningful social engagement would demand a creative fusion of the old and new ways of doing politics (Bayat, 2015).

Several works have already embodied more creative approaches to addressing the cultural politics of the revolution, such as Samia Mehrez’s *Translating Egypt’s Revolution: The Language of Tahrir* (2012a) and Mona Baker’s (2016) *Translating Dissent: Voices From and With the Egyptian Revolution*. Marwan Kraidy’s *The Naked Blogger of Cairo: Creative Insurgency of the Arab World* (2016) uses the body as the central framework through which to examine the intersection between aesthetic and politics, specifically through the revolutionary politics of the Middle East in relation to creative practices.

These publications are representative of a growing trend towards unconventional paradigms and frameworks being used to explore creative practices in Egypt to complicate – and widen - the discourse on art, culture, and politics away from the dominant paradigms of the state or political economy framework. With this broader context, I now turn to the literature which specifically examines revolutionary

art in Egypt in order to illustrate the various ways in which it has been discussed and framed in relation to the sociopolitical context of the revolution and its aftermath.

3.4 Revolutionary Art in Egypt in the Aftermath of the Revolution

There have been numerous publications examining the history, definition, development, and usage of revolutionary art and graffiti as a global phenomenon/movement (Lewisohn, 2008; Riggle, 2010; Ross, 2016), as a form of communication (Rodriguez, Clair, 1999), a tool of resistance (Chaffee, 1993; Ryan, 2016), or a potential site of heritage (Merrill, 2015). It is impossible to deal with all of these and, in what follows, I focus particularly on the ways in which revolutionary art in Egypt was analyzed in the aftermath of the revolution, since I am interested in more local (versus global) examinations and discourses of art within a particular moment in Egypt's political and culture history.

There have been fragmented writings on revolutionary art, often in blogs and much less frequently, newspaper articles. There has, however, been a number of “coffee-table” style books (Gröndahl, 2012; Boraïe, 2012, Maslamani, 2013) and surveys of revolutionary art with critical commentary and essays (Hamdy, Karl, 2014), newspaper and magazine articles, and documentaries (for example, “Art War”, 2014; “Nefertiti's Daughters”, 2014). Scholarly work has also broadly examined revolutionary art trends in a post-January 25 Egypt (Abaza, 2016), to revolutionary art's representations of martyrs and its creation of a memorial space (Lau, 2012-2013; Abaza, 2012), and graffiti as a form of protest and documentation (Sharaf, 2015). One of the most recurrent themes addressed in the literature is the understanding of revolutionary art as a form of dissent and an “aesthetic product of resistance” (Sanders IV, 2012: 143) which can reclaim and de-territorialize space to promote new

understandings of belonging to that space. In other works, Bahia Shehab discusses the ways in which revolutionary art in Egypt can be seen as translating artists emotions into the walls through a largely descriptive account of her own involvement in the revolutions (Shehab, 2016); John Johnston looks at the Egyptian revolution's revolutionary art (in relation to revolutionary art in Northern Ireland) and argues that Egyptian artists need to see themselves as embracing the "role of public educator" (Johnston, 2016: 178) in promoting a "critical public pedagogy", which, he says, is currently missing in Egypt's revolutionary art as it only "inform[s] rather than transform[s]" and that one of its main limitations is that it fails to adequately address certain issues such as gender inequality (Johnston, 2016: 191). In another commentary on revolutionary art, Christine Smith explores the ways in which art in public spaces during and after the revolution did not just act as a tool of documentation, pedagogy, or protest, but more importantly, she argues, they acted as a "diagnostic...in assessing social and political transformation" (2015: 22).

Hannah El Ansary (2014) attempts to complicate the discourse on revolutionary art in Egypt by looking not only at the production and perception of art, that is, the way in which "artists and activists think about their work as makers and shapes of aesthetic and political meaning", but also urges us to look at "how this same art has been viewed by the broader Egyptian public" (El Ansary, 2014). Based on her study on the reception of revolutionary art, El Ansary concluded that most Egyptians did not feel they were being spoken to, but being spoken at. El Ansary interviewed about 57 people on their opinion of graffiti and revolutionary art, and although that might be a miniscule number for the over nine million residents of the Governorate of Cairo, she makes a crucial point that the reception of revolutionary art and graffiti in

Egypt is widely understudied and should be focused on now more than ever, in order to gain a more complex understanding of their possible effects and transformative potential.

While the revolution represents the central political figuration in which analyses of art and cultural production took place, these articles—published several years in the aftermath of the revolution—does indicate the need (as Abdelmagid argues) to go beyond Tahrir and the political events of the revolution, and see the ways in which (in its aftermath) actors in dispersed spaces continue to displace normative subject-positions and constitute new ways of “doing” art and politics within the everyday. Furthermore, five years after the revolution and the return of what many call the Mubarak era, where some of those I spoke to said the government was in the process of erasing all memory of the revolution (not least of which is the whitewashing of all traces of “revolutionary art” on the streets and purging archive platforms of the revolution), the conversation has grown to now address the importance of the role of the artist and the archive in contemporary art in society (Downey, ed., 2015; Pinther, 2016). Major projects such as Lara Baladi’s “Vox Populi: Tahrir Archives” (2016) – described as an “index of online archives on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and its aftermath” (Baladi, 2016)—are setting a significant precedent in the ways in which the notion of the archive can be considered as an act of resistance, commemoration, and historical signification in preserving the events, acts, expressions of the revolution. The refusal to forget is a powerful instigator in archiving, with several Facebook pages dedicated solely to documenting revolutionary art not only in Cairo but in Egypt as a whole, the most active ones

beings “Graffiti in Egypt”¹², “Revolutionary art in Egypt”¹³, and “Walls of Freedom: Revolutionary art of the Egyptian Revolution”¹⁴. As Mark R. Westmoreland noted, five years in the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution “the prohibition on public image-making has been forcefully reasserted” (Westmoreland, 2016: 257), which makes the process of archiving – and not forgetting – even more crucial.

3.5 Theoretical Approaches: Art & Politics

This research takes off from Theodore Adorno’s premise that “it is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist” (Adorno, 1998: 1). In the case of Egypt, examinations of revolutionary art tend to focus largely on its relationship to the political field in a representational sense—where art represents the revolution; in a descriptive sense—in that art is a tool of resistance and political protest; or finally through a cause/effect analysis—in that revolutionary art produces and reclaims public space. Although these are all valid analyses and are part of a larger discourse which necessarily involves examining art within a wide range of perspectives, I attempt to avoid any self-evident explanation by relying primarily on the ways in which cultural producers themselves articulate their understandings of art and examine the ways in which these understandings may challenge, illuminate, or contest prominent theories of which understand art and its transformative potential.

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/Graffiti.in.Egypt/?pnref=lhc>

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/WallsOfFreedom/?fref=ts>

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/StreetARTnEgypt/?fref=ts>

In his 1934 publication, *Art as Experience*, John Dewey seeks to shift the focus of the understanding of art in its material form to as a manifestation of the process between man (the live creature as he refers to it) and his environment and day to day life, and that man is inseparable from his environment. By locating the aesthetic within “experience”, Dewey conceived the art object not as one of the most significant forms of communication, but as *the* most ideal form of communication, as it allows one to communicate one’s lived experience to the fullest and at the same time to and to propose *alternative* possibilities for experience. Later writings by Marxists and post-Marxists from the Frankfurt School elaborate—on the location of art within the social world away from experience as the basis of the aesthetic. Among such scholars, Lukács argued that art played an important role in overcoming the boundaries of appearance of the hegemonic order in the social struggle. Walter Benjamin in his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936) also addressed the interrelationship of artistic, political, and technological developments (focusing specifically on film and photography) within capitalist contexts. Benjamin argued that the loss of the “aura” (the authenticity, originality, uniqueness of a work of art) due to mass production was actually a good thing because it freed art from “the fabric of tradition” (1936 [2007]: 223) and its “parasitical dependence on ritual” (ibid: 224) of the “cult” (ibid) of those who favor the beauty of an art work above all else.

In this sense, Benjamin saw the importance of art in society and politics in its ability to subvert false distinctions and alter our understanding of how we communicate with art and how art communicates to us, and art’s (political and revolutionary) potential was in presenting a new way of engaging with artistic

production, thus capable of creating active participants which replaced the passive spectator, which would lead to a proliferation of creative and political endeavors and activities.

The relationship between art and revolution and/or politics has been much discussed in Western scholarship. For example, Herbert Marcuse, a member of the Frankfurt School, believed that art and politics (and by politics, I refer specifically to revolution, of which Marcuse wrote extensively on) occupied separate spheres even though they “are united in ‘changing the world’—liberation. But in its practice, art does not abandon its own exigencies and does not quit its own dimension...In art, the political goal appears only in the transfiguration which is the aesthetic. The revolution may well be absent from the *oeuvre* even while the artist himself is ‘engaged’, is a revolutionary” (Marcuse, 1972: 105). Just as Adorno made note of art’s very existence lying in opposition to society, for Marcuse, the revolutionary potential of a work of art lies in its “indictment of the established reality” (1978: xi). It is in this sense that art can effect—and change—social relations through a change in consciousness from the negation of this “established reality”, because art subverts to define what is real, because it is the art form which begins to appear as the true reality.

By extension, then, even if the artist themselves are involved in the revolution their art can never be integrated into reality without it losing its critical function through its dissolution of its aesthetic form (Marcuse, 1978: 8). Therefore, although art is situated in reality—and protests it—it must also transcend it in order to “subvert the dominant consciousness, the ordinary experience” (ibid: ix). Art that is immediately political is a disservice to the revolution as it “reduces the power of estrangement and

the radical, transcendent goals of change” (ibid: xii-xiii). Marcuse’s argument that art and politics should remain in opposition to each other in an antagonistic relationship suggests that art remains autonomous and “beyond all political goals” (ibid: 181) and that it should not be geared towards the masses, since this sacrifices art’s truth and revolutionary spirit which are,

the extreme goals of liberation (not attained, though present, in the historical revolutions) remain alive in art: in words, images, and tones which are not of this world (this world = the given reality), and only in this otherness does art communicate these goals. However, (and this is the unique dialectic of art), it can create its own universe only through and ‘out of’ the existing universe of words, images, and tones’. Therefore, art ‘becomes a force *in* the (given) society, but not *of* the (given) society’ (ibid: 184).

Marcuse, however, completely overlooks the processes of producing art, the cultural producers, and the significance of society itself in the establishment of a revolutionary character and political potential of art by attributing to art’s form the capacity for liberation through a consciousness which may—or may not—occur.

On the other hand, Jacques Rancière’s “politics of aesthetics” (versus the politics of art) dismisses any self-evident connection between politics and art and its cause-effect analysis. Rancière argues that the critical art theorized by members of the Frankfurt School may produce a critical consciousness or enhance awareness of the exploitative conditions that they live in but that it is not a guarantee of any sudden urge to rebel against domination because “the exploited rarely require an explanation of exploitation” (Rancière, 2009a: 45). Rancière is thus not interested in what art is (a preoccupation by most art theorists, albeit in different forms) and discards the notions of politics and art as a relationship of representation or a form of critical consciousness. Rather, he sees the political potential of aesthetics (of which art is a

component of) in its ability to subvert normative understandings over who can or cannot speak or be seen – and in this sense, “a political and social movement was also an intellectual and aesthetic one, a way of reconfiguring the frameworks of the visible and the thinkable” (ibid: 203).

Aesthetics is therefore always inherently implicated in politics and society because it re-frames our perceptions of our world and challenges the common-sense configurations of how things *ought* to be to imagining how things—from society, to politics, to culture, to ourselves—*can* be, leading to the formation of political subjectivities (of a collective who digress from their designated place and position in life) whose perception of the world not only changes, but our “normal” place in it and how we experience and articulate it. Politics, for Rancière, is the “police order” which not only frames things in a common sense manner but also justifies the way those things are done. Yet Rancière (unlike most of the theorists I have mentioned) does not ascribe to the art work itself the capability of this rupture – rather, it is the aesthetic “metapolitics¹⁵ of the sensory community” (Rancière, 2005: 18) to which it belongs to which uncovers the “real mechanisms of social life and the true forms of community” (ibid) where real deliberations can take place instead of the appearance of deliberations exist.

This is because the “aesthetic revolution involved much more than a new view of art practices and artworks” rather “it involved a new idea of thought itself: an idea of the power of thought outside itself, a power of thought in its opposite” (Rancière,

¹⁵ Rancière’s concept of metapolitics, as Matthew Lampert notes, is somewhat “misleading” as it is “not really politics...but a disavowal of politics” (2016: 2), as Rancière defines it is the way “to achieve politics by eliminating politics” (Rancière, 1991: 63), in the sense that it is an imitation of doing politics, what we see in the real-world as politics is actually a concealment of the real politics going on “behind our backs” (Lampert, 2016: 7).

2005: 17) in order to shift from “the stage of appearances and conflicts about appearance to the ‘true’ stage where the forms of collective life are produced and can be transformed” (ibid: 18).

Rancière’s analysis goes beyond accounts of defining art, or examining current artistic practices, locating its shift within modernity and postmodernity (which he finds unhelpful for characterizing or understanding aesthetics), instead, Rancière outlines a central framework which characterizes his idea of politics, which is the “distribution of the sensible”, which,

...reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed... it defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language, etc. There is thus an ‘aesthetics’ at the core of politics that has nothing to do with Benjamin’s discussion of the ‘aestheticization of politics’ specific to the ‘age of the masses’... It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time (Rancière, 2004: pp. 12-13).

Dissensus is the core concept which connects the aesthetic with the political and represents a rupture that occurs within the “common sense” ordering of voices (2010), bodies, and capacities and the realm of “politics” (i.e. the police), therefore dissent enacts the political in a radical way. The political, for Rancière, was the site where politics meets its opposition to the hegemonic order of the police, where “the forces of the field of encounter and ‘confusion’ between the process between the process of politics and the process of police” (Rancière, 2011: 5). Therefore, political action consists in showing as political what was viewed as ‘social’, ‘economic’ or

‘domestic’. It consists in blurring the boundaries. It is what happens whenever ‘domestic’ agents – workers or women, for instance – reconfigure their quarrel as a quarrel concerning the common, that is, concerning what place belongs or does not belong to it and who is able or unable to make enunciations and demonstrations about the common” (Rancière, 2011: 4). In this way, politics exists when there is a disagreement about what is politics, when the boundary separating the political from the social or the public from the domestic is put into question.

Rancière’s view is striking because it extends beyond the most common approaches to art (from Marxist views, to existential aesthetics, to critical theory), which either examine art through “models of artist-artwork-spectator relations...drawing on understandings of so-called ‘art’ that are in truth drawn from the pre-art models of ‘ethical images’ or ‘representational arts’...or look[ing] to the content of an artwork for a political commitment ...[or] the form of an artwork for political inspiration” (Lampert, 2016: 7). So what is the political efficacy of the aesthetic? How can we articulate it? For Rancière, it is in the concept of emancipation which he argues,

...begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting: when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection... “emancipation” means: the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body (Rancière, 2009b: 13, 19).

It is this merging of the individual with other members of society which may lead to the “formation of enunciative collectives that call into question the distribution

of roles, territories, and languages. In short, they contribute to the formation of political subjects that challenge the given distribution of the sensible” (Rancière, 2004: 40) and this leads to the transformation of exclusionary, depoliticized, and passive use of spaces in which the subject is told to “Move along! There is nothing to see here!” into *active* political spaces of contestation. This transformation, says Rancière, “consists in refiguring a space, that is, in what is to be done, to be seen and to be named in it” (Rancière, 2001: 22).

3.6 Liminality Theory and the Egyptian Revolution

The literature on Egyptian revolutionary art in the aftermath of the revolution tend to focus largely on its relationship to the political field in a representational sense—where art represents the revolution; in a descriptive sense, in that art is a tool of resistance and political protest; or finally through a cause/effect analysis, in that revolutionary art produces and reclaims public space. Although these are all valid analyses and are part of a larger discourse which necessarily involves examining revolutionary art within a wide range of perspectives, I attempt to avoid any self-evident explanation by relying primarily on the ways in which cultural producers themselves articulate their understandings of revolutionary art within different liminal moments of the revolution. I entered my fieldwork at a time in which, in the aftermath of the killing in Rab’a and the subsequent implementation of the emergency law, understandings of revolutionary art was situated in a moment *after* what many had felt representative of the end – or the defeat – of the revolution itself. It is through this existential crisis that understandings of art during different phases of the revolution became visible through their articulation because in many ways, the liminal moment structured experiences and discussions.

The term liminality (from “*limen*”, meaning threshold), originates from anthropologist Arnold van Gennep’s *Rites of Passage* (1909) and to describe a transition stage or a passage between the three main phases of a rites of passage.¹⁶ However, it was Victor Turner who elaborated on the three stages which could be applied to all rituals, and expanded specifically upon the term liminality primarily in two major works, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*,” from *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967), and “Liminality and Communitas,” from *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969). Turner characterized the liminal period as being a state of “betwixt and between” (1969: 95), a temporary phase characterized by the suspension of the normative order (i.e. the structure) of society, which is essentially a state of anti-structure that is both a “realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (Turner, 1967: 97) as well as a potentially destructive¹⁷ (in its inherent ambiguity, unpredictability, and non-structure) time. In this period of time, sociopolitical and cultural categorization and distinctions are shed and resisted in which individuals are at the peak of heightened self-awareness and consciousness (1974: 255) which meant that the liminal period was marked not only by its enormous transformative possibilities and the importance of agency, but is characterized by a utopian society of sorts described as communitas. Communitas, according to Turner, is a “relatively undifferentiated...community, or even communion of equal individuals” (1966: 96) characterized by “an intense feeling of community, social equality, solidarity, and togetherness experienced by those who live together in a site in which the normal

¹⁶ van Gennep’s three stages during rites of passage are separation, liminal period, and re-assimilation (1909).

¹⁷ “In the liminal period we see naked, unaccommodated man, whose non-logical character issues in various modes of behavior: destructive, creative, farcical, ironic, energetic, suffering, lecherous, sub-missive, defiant, but always unpredictable” (Turner 1968: 580).

social statuses and positions have broken down” (Peterson, 2012: 6). However, the liminal period is intended to be a temporary state, as it is marked as a passageway from one structure to the next.

Turner did “hint” (Thomassen, 2012: 679) at an application of ritual studies and liminality theory towards major political transformations – what he called “macropolitics” (Turner, 1988: 91) as well as “social drama” (1969), a concept used to understand major transformative events. However, it was other scholars, such as Szokolczai (2000, 2009), Thomassen (2009, 2012, 2014), and Armbrust (2013), which have specifically articulated the need for an anthropological approach to understanding political revolutions by applying the framework of liminality beyond the concept of rituals. As Thomassen explains, the importance of liminality in the study of revolutions is that it highlights the importance of looking at the event itself and the need to “study such moments as real instances of contingency, moments where meaning-formation and symbolism condense and take new forms” (Thomassen, 2012: 702).

Mark Allen Peterson, too, has argued on more than one occasion (2012, 2015) that Egypt has been, since the January 25 revolution, suspended in an “extended liminal state” (2012: 17) in which Egyptian society is divided between those who wish to establish structure and order and those who continuously attempt to re-establish the antistructure of the revolutionary moment. This contingent state, argues Peterson, has been marked by a tug of war of sorts between different players and groups attempting to continuously appropriate and control the meaning of Tahrir Square (as the prominent revolutionary symbol) to legitimize their actions. Peterson’s

argument highlights the importance of meaning making not only during the actual 18 days of the revolution itself, but that revolutionary symbols (such as Tahrir Square) have been continuously used to contest and establish narrative legitimacy regarding where the revolution currently stands.

Walter Armbrust also suggests that Tahrir Square remains in a liminal state because it is the remaining icon of the January 25 revolution and continues to function as a site of political performance and a space in which contested narratives on the revolution (Armbrust, 2012) play out. For Armbrust, the Egyptian revolution is located in a state of liminal crisis, a state of suspended anti-structure “without familiar sociopolitical practices to contain it” (Armbrust, 2013b: 846) which enables shady figures such as the political trickster¹⁸ (Turner, 1969) to emerge and thrive. In his work, Armbrust argues that the trickster, much like a revolution, represents a “void” (Armbrust, 2013b: 860) with the ability to be creative and destructive at the same time. Armbrust sets forth the premise that the dangers of liminality are “controlled” by rituals, “this is not the case in revolutions, which become liminal crises precisely because there is no conventionalized means for closing off the state of being in-between” (2017: 221). Therefore, in this revolutionary situation “Tricksters” emerge, thrive, and exploit the ambiguity of the liminal crisis (to effectively gain power and quell the revolution, as he argues Sisi has by presenting himself as a force for returning things “back to normal”), rather than attempt to resolve them (Armbrust, 2017: 226, 237).

¹⁸ Armbrust was specifically referring to Taufiq ‘Ukasha, a well-known Egyptian talk show host and member of Hosni Mubarak’s former National Democratic Party (NDP) as the trickster figure in his analysis.

Hanan Sabea too draws on Turner's concept of "moment in and out of time" (Turner, 1969) to address the Egyptian revolution whereby she argues that the 18 days of the Egyptian revolution in Tahrir Square represents a "time out of time" (Sabea, 2013) whereby the ordinary and the extraordinary merge to open up the possibilities of the formation of new subjectivities and imagining different ways of being in the political and social sphere. Sabea argues that the ability to recall the critical imaginary of Tahrir is essential to being able to continue to fight for what Tahrir stood for in the initial 18 days of the revolution.

In this study, I draw on the concept of liminality to address revolutionary art during the Egyptian revolution, by examining it as a unique historical process and a liminal moment in time. This approach, I argue, helps me better focus on how art was understood by those I interviewed at different moments in time of the Egyptian revolution. I entered the fieldwork at a moment when revolutionary art was essentially over (the post-Rab'a period), and so using the liminality framework to investigate the central question as to how "revolutionary art", as an unscripted (liminal) narrative, is situated within different moments of the unique historical process that is the Egyptian revolution.

By primarily relying on my fieldwork through a liminal approach, I set forth a critical interrogation through the conceptual and theoretical framework established above to examine how cultural producers' understandings and approaches to art within different liminal moments of the revolution may creatively constitute nuanced ways to approach the understandings of revolutionary art within a particular time in Egypt's political and cultural history.

Chapter 4. Methodology

This study is based on semi-structured, open-ended interviews with several cultural producers in Cairo. I chose this method as I wanted to discuss the process of making art during a significant moment in Egypt's contemporary history and was looking for narratives, reflections, and a discussion of people's experiences of making art and participating in the revolution. Interviews allowed me to understand how and why cultural producers make art during different liminal moments within the Egyptian revolution, and emphasize the importance of first-hand accounts to my research. Interviewing is one of the main qualitative research methods in social sciences, and in this work, I primarily followed the "active interview" which considers the interviewer and interviewee as equal partners in constructing meaning, versus the idea of an interview being simply a method of transmitting information from a passive subject to an omniscient researcher.

Any interview is a "social production", with the respondents acting as "narrators or storytellers", and the researcher cast as [a] participant[] in the process" (Holstein, Gubrium, 1995: vii). In the interviews I conducted, I found that the more engaged I was, and the more I spoke of my own emotions and feelings on the current state of affairs in the region, the more my informants were willing to share their own feelings and elaborate on their stories. As a result, I engaged in incredibly rich, deep discussions and interview with most of my informants. Only a few respondents who, regardless of the time I took to forge an open rapport with them, were quite formal and were unwilling to talk about any details of their lives, including (for example) where they worked or what they did for a living. Given the tense political climate we were in, I felt that they did not want to divulge any more information than they had to.

The more informal my questions, the easier it was to connect with those I interviewed on such an intimate level. This method of interviewing was a more effective way of gathering information, because whereas I entered my fieldwork believing that issues of public space or the actual art itself was the most crucial issue that would be touched upon, it was actually their personal histories, lived experiences, the process of art itself which figured as the most central aspects in our discussions. Given the fact that I could not carry out participant observation during the time of the research, interviews afforded me with insights about both the cultural producers and the contexts within which they carried out their work.

I relied on interviews, discussions, and conversations to elicit a story – a story which combined a multitude of events, from their past history of life under Mubarak, to stories of their experience with the revolution, to their experiences (both past and present) in the sociopolitical and cultural field. In fact, the interviews provided a rich narrative of the Egyptian revolution of January 2011 as a unique historical event and process that cannot be understood without taking account of the lives, stories and narratives of the individuals and other agents who orchestrated, participated and sustained the revolution. Conducting interviews, listening, and documenting the narratives of those who participated in the revolution create a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of the revolution by situating individual stories – and individuals experience - within the broader social and historical context of the revolution.

4.1 Locating the Informants

Locating the informants (or the subjects of this research) began with an online search to make first contact with the informants. I began by casting a wide net, and not

discriminate based on any pre-determined criteria (be it gender, age, or “popularity”) as I was not concerned with differentiating between the participants along the normal divisive lines of gender, age or class. I initially started my search by focusing on those people I would read about in online social media websites and newspaper articles and who were profiled as “revolutionary artists” (though, of course, they do not necessarily approve of this label so I will not be using it to describe them).

I began with the names that were covered most prominently on social media sites—such as Ganzeer, Keizer, Hany Khaled, Alaa Awad, Ammar Abu Bakr, Sad Panda. These, among several others, were considered the “pioneers” of the revolutionary art movement and because they had a social media presence with their contact information available to the public, and I used them as a primary point of contact before asking them for the contact information of other less “visible” individuals who practice revolutionary art. I would also sift through countless newspaper and social media posts to find more “obscure artists”, those whose names appeared sporadically, and who did not receive much coverage, though when they were mentioned, they were praised for their critical art. I found these names more in Twitter “mentions” and tweets and Facebook tags, and less in newspaper articles.

While some of the participants had an online presence, be it through a Facebook page and/or a Twitter account, others would have neither and were more difficult to contact. I therefore decided to contact as many cultural producers whose information was readily available online, and then rely on word of mouth once I had established an initial contact with several respondents. Contact with these initial few artists opened the door to contacting more “obscure”, underground artists with no

social media presence, as I would mention if they knew so-and-so or if they knew anyone who did revolutionary art, and either they would, or a friend of a friend would, and through these kinds of networks I would eventually obtain the telephone numbers of other artists. However, contacting the artists was certainly not an easy venture, as will be discussed in the fieldwork obstacles section.

4.2 Ethical Considerations

I gave each of the participants a copy of the SOAS Research Data Consent Form (which contained full details of the nature of my research project and the object of study) and asked them to read it and ask me any questions they had. I also provided every participant with a copy of the signed consent form, and I informed them that the title and research questions may change based on my fieldwork, but that the main focus would always remain revolutionary art and discourses on art, politics, and culture. Therefore, the names I use in my research are the names they signed on the consent forms.

All cultural producers I refer to in the findings as anonymous insisted on maintaining their anonymity. I never knew their real names or any details of their personal histories. Although these anonymous artists have a social media presence (most notably Keizer, El Zeft, and El Teneen), they have not disclosed any personal details about themselves or post any pictures of their faces revealed to the camera. I have respected their privacy and never pushed to find out any personal details of their lives, except for information they freely disclosed themselves.

Several of the people I interviewed, no matter how much I kept in contact with them, reassured them of privacy, kept a great deal of our conversations off the record,

did not want all of our conversations to be recorded or any notes to be taken, and I of course obliged. I wanted to build their trust and ensure them of the ethical nature of my work, and I wanted participants to feel confident that I would not abuse my position as a researcher to obtain information by any means necessary. Many of them had come across bloggers, journalists, and academics who had manipulated their quotes, therefore they were distrustful of speaking to anybody from the media, students, or academics, and I had to ensure them repeatedly that I would use extracts from my interviews verbatim, and would not manipulate any of their quotes or use any information from our personal and off the record conversations. It was under this atmosphere of transparency and accountability that they felt comfortable speaking to me more freely than they might have if I did not continuously assure them that I would not disclose any information they did not want disclosed.

4.3 Profiles of Interviewees

The individuals I interviewed come from a wide range of social, academic, and professional backgrounds [see Appendix 1]. Their ages (roughly) ranged from 19 to 35 at the time of the interviews. Some of them are artists either through practice and profession and/or through education, while some were interested in art as a passing hobby or an emotional outlet. Others still had absolutely no interest in art whatsoever and the revolution was, in their words, their sole motivation to do revolutionary art (for various reasons, as will be discussed in Chapters Five and Six). The majority of them had obtained higher education certificates, with some at university at the time of the interviews.

While some of the respondents were open about their understandings of art and what it meant, several of the those I spoke to remained hesitant in indulging

information on their personal identity. So for example, I may know in great detail about their life (for example, their family life and situation, contemplation of suicide, psychological trauma of military service, etc.), but for the ones who wanted to remain anonymous, they did not reveal any biographical information that could identify who they were—that meant withholding information on their real name, age, where they studied and where they worked. I did not push, in many cases because I had sensed that it was a line I should not cross if I was to maintain contact with them, and I was already in a very sensitive political climate where artists in the street were already being threatened through a draft law with jail and fines, and ostracized and attacked by both the public and the military (Alfred, 2014; Amin, 2015), and even killed, as in the case of Hisham Rizk and Issa, as mentioned previously. Several of the respondents had already been injured (Far3on is almost blind in one eye from a rubber bullet that was shot at him) during the revolution, or knew someone close to them who had been severely injured (such as Mohammed Khaled's brother, who almost died during the Maspero protests) or killed (such as Mostafa Al Hussein's mentor, Egyptian artist Ahmad Al Bassiouny, who was killed on January 28, the Friday Day of Rage), there was also very personal details about their lives they did not want me to share or make any mention of in my paper, which I respected.

Below are the profiles of the twenty-five of the individuals I interviewed for my dissertation, which provides a snapshot of their personal, social, professional, and academic backgrounds. The names of the participants in the profiles below are spelt exactly as the individuals spell them, and in many cases, I only use their moniker, and not their real names based on how they would sign my research consent form. I have

included only the information they have allowed me to include, so in some cases, I withdraw information on their personal professions, specific age, or their real names.

Far3on is an Egyptian graffiti artist in his twenties and a college student. His real name is Hossam (last name concealed). He is partially blind in one eye, from a rubber bullet during a protest in the revolution on January 28, 2011, outside of the Mugama (a large administrative complex located in Tahrir). He dabbled in art on and off as a hobby, before the revolution, but stopped for personal reasons. He started again during the revolution. His method is more of a “draw and run”, whereby he uses stencils and quickly leaves before he is caught. He usually works alone but sometimes collaborates with other artists such as KIM or the Mona Lisa Brigades.

Saiko Maino is an Egyptian revolutionary artist, graphic designer, and junior calligrapher in his twenties who worked largely on art which addressed sexual harassment. He also founded the artistic organization AlMuthalath (translated into “the triangle”) in September 2015, which brings together artists of different backgrounds to collaborate on creative projects, as well as the Facebook page “Graffiti in Egypt”, which is a digital archive of photographs of revolutionary art around Egypt. His artistic profile page can be found on <https://www.behance.net/SayedGad>

Hany Khaled is a young Egyptian architect, also in his twenties, who graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Environmental Design/Architecture. Hany used to work as a graphic designer and an art director, and served his mandatory draft duty in the military in the Air Forces. When I spoke to him in 2014, he said he was

interested in doing his Master's abroad, on the relationship of architecture to street.

His professional profile can be found at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/hanykhaled>

Hala El Sharouny is an Egyptian expressionist artist (who goes by the moniker of “Boshou”) who graduated from Helwan University (Faculty of Art Education) in 2004 and holds a Masters degree (also from Helwan University, Faculty of Art Education) in painting and drawing 2011. Hala used to work in stocks (for two years) when she became disillusioned with art due to her university education and what she said was the Ministry of Culture's rampant corruption. She then returned to practicing art in the aftermath of the 2008 recession (when she quit her job as a stockbroker) and currently works as a professional freelance artist. Her artistic profiles can be found at <https://www.behance.net/bosho> as well as <http://hala-elsharouny.blogspot.com/>

Dia El Said is a graffiti artist in his twenties who studied Media Management in Misr University, a private international university in Egypt. Poor education was always an important cause for him, and he volunteered in an educational initiative in Egypt entitled “Educate-Me”, which is a non-profit foundation established in 2010 which addresses the poor quality of education in the Egyptian public education system.

KIM is an Egyptian graffiti artist, calligrapher, and junior graphic designer (real name is Kareem) who also runs his father's small family business, after his passing. He was interested in (and started) hip hop graffiti since 2005, and regularly teaches graffiti workshops at various locations in Cairo, such as Qalmi Bookstore.

His artistic profile can be found at <https://www.behance.net/kimletter> as well as <https://www.facebook.com/kimstreetart/>

Alaa Awad is an Egyptian painter and muralist from Luxor in his late thirties, who graduated from Luxor's Faculty of Fine Arts in 2004 (where he currently works as an assistant lecturer in the Department of Mural Painting) and in 2012 obtained his masters degree from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Helwan University in Zamalek. He began painting murals in Mohamed Mahmoud Street in February 2011, with Ammar Abo Bakr and Hanaa El Degham. His artistic profile can be found at <http://alaa-awad.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/AlaaAwadArt/>

The Mozzah is a revolutionary artist (from Europe) who lives and works in Cairo. She did not provide me with any biographical background. She tends to avoid creating art with a direct political theme or statement, and instead prefers to focus on women and their role in society. Her artistic profile can be found at <http://themozza.tumblr.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/TheMozzaStreetArt/>

Ammar Abo Bakr is an Egyptian revolutionary artist and muralist in his late thirties. Ammar was a former faculty member at the College of Fine Arts in Luxor, who worked in cultural heritage and cultural preservation projects. Having lived and worked in Luxor, he says he was greatly influenced by Egypt's cultural heritage and tries to incorporate it in his graffiti, which he began in February 2011, after permanently moving to Cairo (from Luxor) in the aftermath of the Port Said massacre. His profile page with his art work can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/Ammar.Abo.Bakr/>

Keizer is the pseudonym of an anonymous Egyptian revolutionary artist. I do not know much about Keizer, he divulged little personal details about his life and I do not know what he studied, his real name, or anything about his early life. Although he declares most of his work is political, he says that it is intended to carry universal messages of emancipation even though it is drawn largely from local context. His recurrent symbol, the ant, is in reference to “the forgotten ones, the silenced ones, the nameless, those marginalized by capitalism.” His artistic profiles can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/KeizerStreetArt/> and <https://www.flickr.com/photos/keizerstreetart/>

Mohammad Fahmy, (a.k.a. **Ganzeer**, which translates into “bicycle chains”), describes himself as a multidisciplinary artist who has been involved in graphic design, revolutionary art, illustration, video installations, and has recently released a science-fiction graphic novel entitled “The Solar Grid”. He currently lives in Los Angeles, California, after having left Cairo in May 2014 amid accusations that he was affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood. His artistic profile page can be found at <http://www.ganzeer.com/>

Hend Kheera is an Egyptian artist who studied at Egypt’s Fashion & Design Center, and currently works as a fashion designer and structural engineer. She has been drawing since she was a child, and loves to incorporate Egyptian cinema icons in her graffiti as she feels it is important to connect contemporary issues with iconography, proverbs, and quotes from Egyptian movies which, she feels, all Egyptians (from all classes) are familiar with and can relate to. Her art also focuses on addressing Egypt’s patriarchal society, women’s rights, and questioning societal

norms regarding's women's role. Rolling Stone Magazine did a profile on her in 2013 which declared that she was "one of the leaders of Egypt's revolutionary art boom" (Downey, 2013). Her artistic profile page can be found at

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/hend-kheera-71428269>

El Zeft is an anonymous Egyptian revolutionary artist in his twenties, who studied business in a private university in Egypt. El Zeft, the creator of the Nefertiti mask, created iconic works during the "No Walls" campaign in the Spring of 2012, particularly the famous "smiley face". I do not know much about El Zeft, except that he came from a wealthy background and that his family are supporters of Sisi. When we had spoken, he was still completing his draft military service. His artistic work can be found at **<https://www.facebook.com/el.zeft.7/>**

Sad Panda (Hashem, last name concealed) is an anonymous revolutionary artist, art director, music producer and DJ, muralist, and a freelance illustrator. He actively avoids any kind of political theme or message in his work, and instead, he would primarily paint a melancholy looking panda ("Sad Panda", the name of his moniker), which reflected his opinion of the sad state of affairs. His artistic profile page can be found at **<https://www.facebook.com/sad.panda>**

Mohammad Khaled (a.k.a. "The Winged Elephant") is an Egyptian revolutionary artist who studied fine arts with a painting major. Originally from Zagaziq, he now lives and works in Cairo as a freelance illustrator, filmmaker, and comic artist. Mohammad initially began doing revolutionary art as part of a beautification project in a rundown park, and later began doing more political

revolutionary art during the revolution. His artistic profile page can be found at <https://www.behance.net/WingedElephant>

Mira Shihadeh is a Palestinian graffiti artist certified yoga instructor in her forties, who studied in the American University in Cairo (AUC) and has lived and worked in Cairo most of her life. One of the main issues she addresses in her work is sexual harassment, human rights, and the perception of women in society.

Mohammed Alaa is an Egyptian revolutionary artist and performance artist in his thirties who focuses on the concept of “destruction” in his work. He enjoys creating unconventional pieces which cause conversation. When I was speaking to him, he was working on a book project which involves documenting the ways in which Egyptian photo studios Photoshop people’s photographs as a reflection of the changing sociopolitical landscape, in which he argues that during Mubarak’s era the photos reflected “social” dreams of expensive cars and houses, whereas in the aftermath of the revolution and during Sisi’s time, politics has become the central discourse, as his photos tend to be photo shopped wearing the Egyptian army uniform. His artistic profile page can be found at <http://mohamedalaaartwork.blogspot.com/>

Heyo is an Egyptian anonymous graffiti artist in his twenties. He did not divulge any information on his personal life or background, only that he was interested in graffiti long before the revolution, and that he likes to work alone or collaborate on projects with KIM. Heyo does not believe in political graffiti, rather, he argues that art should be for art’s sake.

Radwa Fouda (a.k.a. “**Radz**”), is an Egyptian artist and the Head of Media Unit at Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR), and is interested in graphic design, illustration, and art direction. Radwa majored in painting in the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Helwan. His artistic profile can be found at <http://www.radwafouda.blogspot.com/> and <https://www.behance.net/radz>

Tefa (Mostafa) is an Egyptian visual artist who became active in graffiti since 2010 working in Cairo, Alexandria and Upper Egypt. Tefa currently works as a video jockey (VJ) within the Cairo Shakers collective (<http://www.cairoshakers.com/>). Tefa has a prominent social media presence, and his artistic work and activities can be found at <http://www.te-fa.com/>, www.facebook.com/iTefaa, www.twitter.com/iTefa, and www.youtube.com/iMostafatefa

El Teneen is an anonymous Egyptian revolutionary artist and graffiti artist in his twenties. I do not know much about him or his real name or any details of his personal life, except that in university he studied a degree related to science. He was not interested in art before the revolution but it is now actively involved in revolutionary art. His artistic profile page can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/elteneen.teneen> and <https://twitter.com/elteneen>

Mostafa El Hosseiny is an Egyptian artist who studied at El Nahda Jesuit School (an art school in Cairo). He is originally from Zagazig but lives in Cairo, and is one of the founders of the Mona Lisa Brigades (an Egyptian revolutionary art collective which focuses on social issues concerning women and children) whose

artistic projects and works are focused in *sha'bi*, or popular, areas in Cairo), who started working in Giza and Cairo since 2010. Mostafa is currently serving his mandatory draft service in the Egyptian army.

Amr Nazeer is an Egyptian revolutionary artist who studied Business Administration in Cairo University. Amr used to work in *Juhanya*, an Egyptian dairy company, however, he currently works as a Business Developer in Axeer Studio, an Egyptian media production company. Amr founded #ColoringThruCorruption in 2013, a social awareness project whose main aim was to “expose” corruption. When I first interviewed Amr in March 2014, he called ColoringThruCorruption “a form of passive resistance” which was used to highlight, for example, “messed up streets, houses that don’t have electricity” (Amr Nazeer, Cairo, pers. comm., 9 March 2014). However, when we spoke again in May 2014, he said he stopped doing ColoringThruCorruption because he felt it was not powerful enough and wanted to focus on more hard hitting projects. Amr started working on revolutionary graffiti in March/April 2011. His professional profile can be found at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/amr-nazeer-277b6736>, and his Twitter page contains an archive of his graffiti pieces (both collaborative and individual), and can be found at <https://twitter.com/amrnazeer>

Layla Amr is a nineteen year old Egyptian revolutionary artist who studied interior design. Layla said she had always been interested in politics at the behest of her parents, and noticed random revolutionary art before the revolution, but said that it was the revolution itself that made her interested in becoming a type of “citizen

journalist” artist. During the revolution, Layla would assist other artists (such as Tefa and Ammar Abo Bakr) in collaborative projects.

Hanaa El Degham is an Egyptian artist who lives and works between Egypt and Germany (where she works in an atelier). She was never involved in politics prior to the revolution, but was always concerned with human rights, and the issue of Egyptian identity was always a central focus of her work. Her artistic profile can be found at <http://www.hanaeldegham.com/>

In addition to these interviews, I conducted interviews with two notable Egyptian academics and writers, Professor Samia Mehrez¹⁹ via Skype, and Dr. Ahdaf Soueif²⁰, whom I met twice at her apartment in Zamalek. Both Mehrez and Soueif had written about the intersection of the political and cultural scene, both prior to and after the revolution, therefore, their observations and commentary were invaluable in cementing the discussion of revolutionary art in an academic context.

4.4 Analysis: Interpretive Approaches

In analyzing the material, I set themes to organize my interviews, but these were not self-contained, but rather broad categories that encompassed the conversations and stories revolving around art and/or politics as well as other intersecting categories such as socioeconomic inequalities and societal norms that came up in the interviews.

¹⁹ Mehrez is a Professor of modern Arabic literature in Arabic and is the founding director of the American University in Cairo’s (AUC) recently Center for Translation Studies. For more about Professor Samia Mehrez and a list of her publications, please see her profile page on AUC’s website, at: <http://schools.aucegypt.edu/research/cts/Pages/SamiaMehrez.aspx>

²⁰ Dr. Ahdaf Soueif is an Egyptian novelist and commentator on Egyptian affairs.

I used thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Roulston, 2001; Patton, 2002) as it helped in “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data [as] [i]t minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (Braun, Clarke, 2006: 79) and “interprets various aspects of the research topic” (Braun, Clarke, 2006: 79; Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis has been a significant method for my research as it helps make sense of the “experiences, meanings and the reality of participants” (Braun, Clarke, 2006: 81) and therefore “acknowledge[s] the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of ‘reality’” (ibid). In this sense, then, a realistic approach to my interview data which allows me to look at the way those I interviewed make meaning of their collective and shared experiences in making and understanding revolutionary art throughout various phases of the Egyptian revolution. This allowed me to identify patterns of meaning relevant to my research question (Braun, Clarke, 2006: 81), which focuses on how revolutionary art is understood at different time periods of the Egyptian revolution.

The interviews I conducted during my fieldwork are the cornerstone of my research. The interviews provided a detailed, intimate, and first-hand account of people’s personal, emotional, and lived experiences of a significant political and cultural moment in Egypt’s history. The information I obtained, not only when asking questions, but also in informal conversations and by listening to people’s stories, adds nuance, complexity, emotion, and several layers of understanding not only how people processed the happenings of the revolution and their experience within its events, but also how they understood their role in creating revolutionary art, and what that art meant in a particular moment and place in time. Without the interviews and first-hand accounts of people’s experiences creating art during the

revolution, I would not have been able to place these understandings in any meaningful way – the human voice, the personal experiences, the stories of those who participated in the revolution, are absolutely crucial to its understandings as an awesome show of collective force and resistance against a thirty-year dictatorship.

4.5 Textual and Online Resources

In addition to the interviews, I regularly followed (and collected) coverage on the political and cultural scene via Egyptian blogs and Egyptian, regional and Western news sites (both English and Arabic). This meant I regularly checked Facebook pages, Twitter profiles, and Instagram accounts of any of the participants I interviewed who had a social media presence. This was relevant for me in order to build an understanding on their interactions online, the issues they discussed, and to investigate any relevant material they would post that would complement my understandings of the socio-political context.

4.6 Fieldwork Obstacles

“The one thing which is certain about fieldwork is its uncertainty” (Burgess, ed., 1982, quoted in Browne, Moffett 2014: 224).

Upon my arrival in Cairo at the end of November 2013, I had not received any responses to my initial first-point contact emails in early June 2013. The only two responses I had received via email were from Ganzeer and Hanaa El Degham whose profile is above. While still in Kuwait, where I reside, I conducted my first conversation with Ganzeer via Skype. This lasted for a little over two hours. I

also interviewed Hanaa the day before I traveled to Cairo, as she was in Berlin at the time, and had no immediate plans to return to Egypt.

However, none of my other contacts had responded. I began to understand that in this tense political climate, speaking to a PhD student and answering her questions regarding revolutionary art was not a priority—especially when they were facing unprecedented backlash from both the public and the authorities. In an article dated November 13, 2013, the general lack of enthusiasm for revolutionary art was articulated by Soraya Morayef, an Egyptian blogger, writer and journalist that focused on covering revolutionary art from the beginning of the revolutions, in her reaction to a proposed law banning revolutionary art,

Whatever popular support the graffiti scene may have had in the past two years seems to have decreased considerably... While always marginalized as a street subculture, many of these graffiti artists find themselves increasingly sidelined and ostracized for their political opinions as supporters of the January 25 revolution; neither with the military nor supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi. Increasingly, the space for them to express themselves as “others” is diminishing, the noose is tightening (Morayef, 2013).

This summation of the situation explained the tension and fear felt by the majority of the individuals I interviewed as they were also ostracized and labeled under reductive binaries as either “pro-Military” for their criticisms of the Brotherhood, or “pro-Brotherhood”. It was then that I understood why it took them a long time to contact me, and why they were hesitant to meet to talk about revolutionary art or their artistic activities. They were becoming increasingly marginalized and shunned for their opinions, not only from the police, but from the people, who (at times) turned out to be more dangerous than the regime. In this

political climate of uncertainty where revolutionary artists were once celebrated but now shunned, I realized that I had to be persistent, and open a dialogue.

After several weeks, responses began to trickle in and an open dialogue was initiated. I decided not to press people to meet me immediately, and instead, I had them ask me any questions about myself and my research, so that they could feel comfortable knowing fully who I was and what my research entailed. Due to the incredibly sensitive environment, it took me several months to build a strong rapport with those I interviewed, but I eventually I received their consent to meet. It was at times frustrating to wait for a reply, which could take weeks, because their response time was erratic. In my frustration, I had to remember that,

irrespective of the rigorous preparations made in advance of entering the field, adaptability and the capacity to think on your feet remain key attributes which researchers must learn to master at an early stage. With little advance warning, unforeseen situations arise, particularly given the fluid nature of fieldwork that takes place in a conflict or transitional setting, which require researchers to reevaluate their research strategy (Browne, Moffett, 2014: 224).

I understood why it was so difficult to meet them in public and to be heard speaking about the revolution or the current political, cultural, and social climate. Any criticism of the army meant loyalty to the Brotherhood²¹, which could put you in a position of danger not only with the authorities but with the “honourable citizens”, who could either verbally and/or physically attack you or report you to the authorities. As Philip Luther, Director of the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International, noted

²¹ Ganzeer was accused by a famous television personality of being a Muslim Brotherhood recruit. In light of these accusations, he left Egypt to the United States in May 2014.

of the increasingly restrictive political sphere, “In Egypt today anyone who dares to challenge the state’s narrative is considered a legitimate target” (Lynch, 2014).

4.6.1 Xenophobia against Palestinians

Being a woman and being a Palestinian with a Western passport (when both Palestinians and Westerners were highly scrutinized) restricted my movement. I was told by family and friends alike that if I was caught at such a sensitive time asking unconventional questions while conducting fieldwork, I could easily be subjected to harassment and arrest.

The negative feelings towards the Palestinians increased the likelihood of me getting harassed. It did not help that Mostafa El-Gindi, a former parliamentarian, suggested on the private broadcaster ONTV that the streets should be sealed off near flashpoints and checkpoints erected there so that “non-Egyptians” could be identified and that Syrians and Palestinians caught at the checkpoints should be executed (Sailer, 2013), because “Palestinians are anything but welcome in Egypt these days. Because of the bad media reporting, they are suspected of having connections with Hamas, which has its roots in the Muslim Brotherhood” (ibid).

Due to the unstable security situation in Cairo at the time which was becoming increasingly hostile (for students, journalists, and average citizens alike) in which my fieldwork was conducted, my research was limited due to external security factors beyond ones control, where it seemed any form of research lay itself open to accusations of being construed as a politically sensitive issue and may have dangerous repercussions for the researchers. Furthermore, my position was precarious not only with the authorities, but with the average citizen, who could

report me to the authorities simply for speaking about the revolution, Sisi, or the current state of affairs out in public. Two British-Egyptians and one Egyptian were arrested in a metro station in Cairo simply because a man overheard them speaking about politics and the January 25 revolution in English (Egyptian Streets, 2014). French Journalist Alain Gresh was detained for speaking in a Cairo café with two Egyptian friends, when a woman sitting in the same café—who accused him and his colleagues of wanting to “destroy the country” (Gresh, 2014)—reported him to the police for speaking about Sisi. It is this kind of environment of suspicion in which I conducted my fieldwork, and so I had to ensure that I was careful while conducting my interviews.

4.6.2 Challenge of Locating & Maintaining Contact

I had not realized—and certainly did not expect—the high degree of tension and suspicions in Egyptians until I began initiate a first point of conversational contact. I had already emailed potential respondents prior to my arrival to Cairo, mostly on Facebook as most of them did not advertise their personal emails online, with some responding prior to my arrival. When I managed to obtain their contact numbers (which was incredibly difficult to do as many of them are notoriously private and do not release their contact information) some would answer whilst others would not, despite repeated attempts.

I found that once I established contact, I had to initiate several phone calls and email discussions prior to being able to schedule a time for us to meet face to face. Even when we did meet face to face, our first meetings tended to be off the record as they seemed to be assessing how genuine I was and whether I could be trusted. It

was, therefore, difficult not only to establish contact, but to maintain contact, as it essentially began to feel like a game of cat and mouse. It took me several months of emails and telephone conversations to develop a rapport in order to establish our first meetings, and in many cases (and to my surprise) they did not show up to the appointment and their phones would be switched off or they did not respond to my calls. I would physically search for them at times in cafés known to be frequented by underground artists in (for example) Bab El Luq. Sometimes I was successful, sometimes I was not. I live in Nasr City, so to arrive in downtown Cairo on a daily basis struggling through traffic jams - which was exacerbated by the army's presence in the streets and the possibility of a skirmish or protest - proved quite tasking.

Furthermore, several of those I met were not easy to pin down. Most had no steady job (freelancers) and several—many of whom were underground artists—tended to suddenly have projects or activities they would get involved in and leave Cairo to go abroad or to another Egyptian city, and they would forget to give me prior notice or to cancel our appointment. Therefore, it was difficult to get in touch with them, and my mobility was sometimes limited based on the events of the day, and whether or not there were known protests scheduled which would have the army blocking traffic everywhere to the city. It was quite a challenge to navigate the logistical aspects, as well as to reach and find locations where the artists would feel comfortable speaking, due to the potentially sensitive nature of our discussions.

To add to this, the majority of those I interviewed did not feel comfortable going to more public locations, and so we would meet in loud, somewhat hidden locations - obscure coffee shops or restaurants - where they either felt comfortable

because they are friends with the patrons or because it was too loud for anyone to be able to eavesdrop. I met a few artists in their studios or apartments, because they did not want to have discussions publically, for personal and/or political reasons, and because of several incidents (which I mentioned previously) against locals and foreigners alike in which members of the public reported them to authorities based on conversations they were having in public on the current state of affairs. It was incidents like these, and the climate of paranoia, which made the respondents wary of where we spoke.

Despite these difficulties, the interviews I was able to gather provided rich material from which to gain a deeper understanding of the lived realities of these informants in which to examine why they became involved in revolutionary art and consequently what art means to them within different liminal moments of the revolution, and how, subsequently, they then understood revolutionary art in the apparent aftermath of the Egyptian revolution.

4.7 Research Limitations

4.7.1 Focus on Cairo

Initially, I had wanted to focus on several cities, not only Cairo. Cairo was my first choice because it is the primacy locus of the political and cultural events of the revolutions. It was also my first choice because it became the sort of “Mecca” for revolutionary art, with artists from other cities such as Luxor and Alexandria, traveling to Cairo to participate in revolutionary art and graffiti during and after the

revolution. However, the vast majority of academic research on the revolutionary art of the Egyptian revolutions is already focused on Cairo. Therefore, I had wanted to interview cultural producers in other cities from Alexandria to Port Said, to Dumiat and beyond. Given the primary focus on Cairo, my research might seem to marginalize other voices and lesser known places and spaces that have for long been important sites of cultural narratives and discourses. This was not my intention, but because the security situation in Egypt during the fieldwork made it difficult to carry out extensive research involving walking about and meeting people on a frequent, day to day basis, I could not be as visible, and as active as I wanted. It was this restriction on my mobility in Cairo—a city I knew the ins and outs of very well—which made me realize that I would not be able to (safely) travel and conduct research in other cities, as I could not imagine how I would be able to operate in other Egyptian cities I had absolutely no familiarity with and no contacts in. Being a Palestinian, which at the time was akin to a crime for the media's demonization of all Palestinians as supportive of the Brotherhood, and therefore terrorists, and being a woman traveling alone—in itself a dangerous endeavour in Egypt—with a foreign (Canadian) passport, I felt I could be easily targeted. Therefore, I remained in Cairo because although was still dangerous, it was an environment I was familiar with and understood how to operate within, therefore, I understood my limitations in terms of where I could go and when.

4.7.2 Number of Interviews Limited

It was not only my mobility which presented a major research limitation, but also the restriction on mobility of others. I was not able to have as many interviews

with as many people as I would have liked, which could have provided a more diverse range of perspectives. For example, I also wanted to include a larger number of women in my research (out of twenty five interviews with cultural producers, I was able to interview seven women, excluding the two academics I interviewed), but many were restricted by family members who were not comfortable with them conducting interviews in public spaces during a tense period, or meeting with someone in their homes to discuss what they felt was a politically sensitive issue.

4.7.3 A Contemporary Topic

Finally, as my research is about a contemporary and shifting space and topic, this might mean that the findings might change. Two years after conducting the fieldwork, I wonder whether the responses would be the same, or would completely diverge, given the changing socio-political contexts. At the time I spoke to those I interviewed, there was still some restrained hope combined with pessimism as far as the future was concerned, and I wonder whether that has altogether changed or whether or not they still have the same understandings and approaches to art, whether it was evolved, or whether they may have stopped caring altogether because of the increasing crackdown on public forms of expression and dissent. Furthermore, I also question whether some of the cultural producers I spoke to might by now have been co-opted to work with larger organizations amid the increasing commodification of art, perhaps leading to the eventual normalization of revolutionary art as just another form of trendy “art” which can command greater sums of money than ever before, and I wonder whether, over five years after the revolution, if the commodification of the art of the revolutions reduce the wider implications and understanding of the critical processes of its emergence and creation.

Chapter 5. The First Phase: The first 18 days of the Egyptian Revolution (January 25, 2011 – February 11, 2011)

The liminality of the Egyptian revolution informs my research and the ways in which art producers in Egypt, the informants of this research, talk about the process of producing this art through the three stages of the revolution. The first phase comprises the 18 days of the revolutionary process that began on January 25, 2011 and in which a breach in the structural order invoked a “critical imaginary” (Sabea, 2013). The second phase is marked by the ouster of Hosni Mubarak on 11 February, 2011 and the election of Muslim Brotherhood member Mohammed Morsi on June 24, 2012 (he was officially sworn in 30 June, 2012) and the third phase begins with his ouster on July 3, 2013. I use these phases as the historical temporal registers within which the story of the revolution – and its art – unfolded and evolved as it responded to each phase.

5.1 Producing Art in Liminal Contexts

Many of those I interviewed for this research had experimented with revolutionary art long before the Egyptian revolution which began in January 2011, despite the fact that the state did not officially sanction any forms of public art. In fact, public art in the Mubarak era was relegated to the confines of state sanctioned public works of art or monuments, encapsulated within state institutions and national museums or set up in approved public spaces. In this manner, art was regulated by the Ministry of Culture and the Supreme Council of Culture, two entities which were derided for their monopolization, mismanagement, and control of cultural production. The content of public art was thus conditioned by regulations of power and authority.

Art or writing outside of these confines, any form of revolutionary art which contained any hint of opposition to or criticism of the regime, was swiftly erased.

The control of public spaces created a preventative environment which minimised or erased any possible public acts of artistic dissent and the only material that appeared on walls and public places prior to the revolution was that of a non-threatening commercial or advertising nature, along with the scribbling of occasional profanities and proclamations of love. This omission of dissent is a “crucial indication of what current ideology will not allow” (Fyfe, Law, 1988: 123) and, according to Asef Bayat indicated that public spaces could be used not actively but “passively—through walking, driving, watching—or in other ways that the state dictates” (Bayat, 2010: 11).

The first 18 days of the Egyptian revolution – in which there was a breach/rupture and a subsequent “collapse of [the normative] order” (Thomassen, 2009: 19), saw the active use of public space in ways previously unseen in Egypt’s modern history, as well as a significant blurring of “geographical, physical, and symbolic separation [which] had been central to class distinctions” (Peterson, 2015b). As Peterson argues, this stark contrast between the normative order and the anti-structure of the Egyptian revolution – whereby distinctions collapsed and a strong civic identity was cultivated through individual and communal acts (Ismail, 2011) – is “absolutely essential to the significance of Tahrir as a revolutionary symbol” (Peterson, 2015b).

The Egyptian revolution’s disruption of the normative order saw an outpouring of individual and collective acts of dissent and creativity, which was romanticized,

mystified, imagined and lived in the consciousness of those who participated in and watched the widespread coverage in January and February 2011. Millions of viewers, including me, were in awe of the massive collective energy and the conduct and solidarity of the protestors in Tahrir Square (as the *de facto* center of the revolution) and throughout Egypt.

Yet viewing it was different than those who physically experienced its day-to-day uncertainties, battles and struggles. Even three years after it all began, those I interviewed from November 2013 to August 2014 during my fieldwork said it continued to significantly affect their perception of the political, cultural and social landscape, and that Tahrir remained an enduring revolutionary symbol. The question is why did those 18 days act as such a critical imaginary, as a “time out of time” (Sabea, 2013), that is able to continuously travel “both spatially and temporally” (Sabea, 2013) within the narratives of those I spoke to, even several years after the initial January 25, 2011 revolution? Why has the experience of liminality in Tahrir – and its enduring memory – transform those I interviewed?

Hanan Sabea argues that it was the ordinariness of Tahrir (its rhythms and routines, its aesthetics and sociality, and its possibilities and potentials) that became the very basis for the “extraordinariness” (or time out of time) of Tahrir (Sabea, 2013), which forms the foundation of this critical imaginary. One important theme that came across in the interviews for this research was that the revolutionary period saw the emergence of communities, or a “spontaneous communitas” (Turner, 1969: 132) – an organic manifestation leading to an intense sense of community, solidarity, and collectivity – in which gender, class, and sociopolitical distinctions were effaced and

replaced by a sort of society of equals. In this new formation, a civilized, utopian society in which the normative order was suspended and physical, political, and social distinctions essentially became irrelevant.

On January 25, 2011, tens of thousands of Egyptians from all walks of life - representing every social and political spectrum - gathered to join the protests called for by the April 6 Movement and the “We are All Khaled Said” Facebook page. On this day, riot police attacked peaceful protestors, while the government blocked Twitter to prevent further communication by revolutionaries, who erected tents and began sit-ins in Tahrir Square - the *de facto* command center of the protests in Cairo and the primary space of political performance of the Egyptian revolution (Armbrust, 2013a). As Peterson notes, “Tahrir square, and particularly the 18-day protest, came to stand for a hopeful process of revolutionary change, and participation in Tahrir Square became an important category through which people experienced themselves and others as participating in a revolutionary effort that expressed the collective power of the Egyptian people” (Peterson, 2015a: 166). This experience was reflected within my interviews, which I will discuss below.

5.2 Art in Liminal Times: a Break with “Normalcy”?

Although some of those I spoke to had sporadically practiced revolutionary art prior to the revolution, most of those interviewed for this research suggested that the revolution itself prompted them to create revolutionary art, or revolutionary art (*fann el-thawra*), as it was more commonly referred to in my interviews (though the two were essentially indistinguishable). This came clearly in the response by El Zeft, a revolutionary artist who preferred to remain anonymous,

I wasn't at all interested in politics before the revolution. Before the revolution I was something and after the revolution I was something else completely. I am raised in a very rich family. I went to a private school and a private university and in the summer I traveled to London with my friends and the summer after I traveled to Germany and the summer after to Turkey. We would think about which clubs to go to and where to go shopping - all I cared about is being happy (El Zeft, personal communication, 27 April 2014).

One of the aspects which made the Egyptian revolution so dynamic was the participation of unconventional actors such as people like El Zeft, who had no prior interest in politics or protests. While initially indifferent to politics and dissent, El Zeft explained that the events of January 25 completely transformed him as he experienced the revolution in Tahrir Square, he said he felt like he “was living elsewhere in a parallel universe. It was a shock” (ibid.). He kept repeating the word “normal” in reference to the *communitas* which “liberated people from conformity to social norms” (Peterson, 2015a: 171) to describe behavior traditionally deemed abnormal and unacceptable in Egyptian society, such as girls smoking cigarettes and sleeping outside in public places, and dressing as they like without getting harassed. Mohammad Khaled, an illustrator, artist, and filmmaker, also known as the “Winged Elephant”, said it was difficult to describe the experience one felt during the revolution, but that there was an immediate sense of a communal spirit, kinship, solidarity, and mutual trust established by a greater good which made any form of difference (gender, religion, social class, economic status, age, etc.) irrelevant and non-existent as embodied by the spirit of *communitas*. Tahrir Square had transformed from

being part of the normative space of everyday life under the Mubarak regime into [what Turner called] a field, an interstitial cultural domain where alternative paradigms for

social interaction, values, and symbolic representations are formulated, shared, and exposed to conflict with existing social and symbolic structures. Fields are sites of antistructure, alternative forms of structure and symbolism that derive from and reconstruct the social structure of the cultural mainstream (Peterson, 2015a: 171-172).

Furthermore, even though it was a dangerous time – characteristic of the struggle between the normative order and the antistructure of the revolution – this was not described as a negative part of their experience in the revolution. It also did not diminish the significance of the Egyptian revolution as a moment in time where distinctions were irrelevant and where a collective and individual sense of purpose working towards a greater good was the ultimate goal. Violence and resistance go hand in hand – as Samuli Schielke aptly notes, “we cannot separate beautiful resistance from terrible bloodshed, just as we cannot isolate the flourishing of cultural life from the spread of violent street crime in and after 2011. They belong to one and the same process” (Schielke, 2017: 205). This is reflected in Mohammad Khaled’s experience of Tahrir,

The hope we took from the revolution from 18 days of happiness...people died but for the first time you felt that the value of your life was very small compared to you wanting people to live a better life.... It was a dream, a real dream. Words arrived to you and made you believe – the moment of the word *irja’a* [come back], when we were standing and the police would come in with hoses and ammunition and tear gas and all that, we would all run away, but there would be about fifteen or twenty people that stayed standing and would shout come back come back, and we would come back. Just the fact that 15 people from the hundreds standing would say come back, we would just listen and come back. There was no social differences no physical differences, I accepted you and you accepted me (Mohammed Khaled, Cairo, pers. comm., 29 April 2014).

The two most critical features of the liminal stage, in “which structures of the everyday life of the immediate past have been disrupted or overturned” (Peterson, 2015b: 68) are antistructure and *communitas* (1969). Antistructure “refers not to a reversal or upending of the existing social structure, but rather to a situation in which many or most of the characteristics that defined the normal configuration of political, social and economic life cease to function” (Peterson, 2015b: 67). According to Peterson, this

certainly described the situation in Tahrir, in which youth replaced elders as organizers, protests multiplied both in locations and numbers, state security forces were rendered powerless, and headless collectives emerged to manage civil society and domestic security. The term “antistructure” calls attention to the arbitrariness and artificiality of social structure and social norms, and hence raises the possibility of alternatives (Peterson, 2015b: 67-68).

For many, the events in Tahrir during the 18 days of protests was described as being dislocated from the normative order and that instead, they found themselves located in an alternative world that they had yet to make meaning of, a world in which normative sociopolitical distinctions were suspended. For most of those I spoke to, this was a life changing experience which, even three years after the initial revolution (when I started my fieldwork, at the close of the revolutionary process), most described it as so powerful that were still affected and moved by it. As Egyptian expressionist artist Hala El Sharouny (or, “Boshou”, as she is known) described of her experience of the revolution in Tahrir,

The first time you saw another world was in Tahrir. You were like are these actually Egyptians cleaning after themselves? And whoever had some food in their hand would give it to the person next to them. Then you would find another person distributing juice

boxes to people, people in *jellabiya*'s talking politics next to activists. Salafi's and Brotherhood members were talking to girls who were not wearing the *hijab* [headscarf] and to the girl who drinks and smoke cigarettes. Inside Tahrir it was a state within a state, the best part of people came out during those 18 days because they had one goal. I will never forget it. All of these people suffered from oppression in one form or another (Hala El Sharouny, Cairo, pers. comm., 18 August 2014).

Dia El Said, who lives in a gated community in a more well to do area of Cairo and who said he did not know about any protests before the revolution, said that January 25 was the first protest he ever went to after following the "We are all Khaled Said" page, and that when he participated in the revolution and saw people of all backgrounds interacting, sharing, supporting, and helping each other – with people they may never have before - he felt that it was,

The best period in Egypt. It was really a utopia. You would see a complete *shab'eeh* [thug], who was raised in a completely different way sitting with someone from AUC [the American University in Cairo, which implies – generally – that they were more privileged, Westernized Egyptians] talking together normally. Not only was there no harassment but people were actually initiating conversations with each other. Everyone had one purpose, which was to say one word - "leave". So anyone who was with me saying that word it meant the both of us were on the same team, and that we're friends (Dia El Said, Cairo, pers.comm., 27 July 2014).

As most of those I interviewed relayed to me, it was on the very first day of protests on January 25 where it became apparent that the normative order was already turned upside down, and that it was the first time that collective goals and communal solidarity took precedence over individual self-interest. It was this feeling in which Keizer, an anonymous revolutionary artist, compared Tahrir - with its thousands of bodies consciously moving towards a mutual objective - to Mecca, the holiest city in

Islam, where bodies move in unison around the *Ka'abah*²² for the purpose of worshipping Allah. In this sense, Keizer attached a spirituality to Tahrir as being akin to the ultimate form of worship in Islam,

First two weeks I was camping out in Tahrir. The experience was pretty up there with a lot of other spiritual experiences I had, for example being in Mecca around a badgillion [sic] people and moving in harmony in one movement, one rhythm, that is something. In terms of the amount of people, this one tops everything else I experienced... I think it was the most civilized state we will ever see in this country, I think we will never go back to that. I think it boiled down to the people that were really fighting for freedom and seeking it for others and themselves...those were the people that were there, and if you were there in that corner of time [for those first two weeks], then you really got it and felt what a revolution was. (Keizer, Cairo, pers. comm., April 29 2014).

Keizer was in many ways alluding to solidarity acts as stemming from an “intense feeling of community, social equality, solidarity, and togetherness experienced by those who live together in a site in which the normal social statuses and positions have broken down” (Peterson, 2012: 6). The idea of a gathering of a collective in a revolutionary moment in time being compared to a divine experience, a utopia, and a spiritual ritual was a common method of describing the affective experience of bodies gathered together in unison in a spirit of community and cooperation during the eighteen days in Tahrir. As Turner argued, whereas structure “tends to be pragmatic and this-worldly” (1969: 133), *communitas* (during the liminal moment of antistructure) “breaks in through the interstices of structure...It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or ‘holy’, possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that governed structured

²² The first building, or “House of God”, built for the worship of Allah, which lies in the center of Islam’s holiest mosque, *Al-Masjid Al-Haram*, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency” (1969: 128).

Thus, for most of those I spoke to, the 18 days of the revolution with its communal spirit working towards a unified goal for the sake of others, the breakdown of distinctions, and civilized behaviour, which, even several years after the revolution, proved to be as enduring and powerful a critical imaginary as it was during the initial 18 days of the revolution. As Peterson aptly notes, the liminal moment of those 18 days, in which there was “[t]his experience of intense social solidarity, creative energy, and commonality of purpose that transcended social divisions [which] is absolutely essential to the significance of Tahrir Square as a revolutionary symbol” (Peterson, 2015b : 67).

5.3 Iconic Days

Although the first day of the revolution was significant in setting the state for the rupture in the normative order, it was the “Friday of Rage”, as the events on 28 January 2011 were called, that became one of the most iconic days of the 18 days of the revolution. This day saw protestors praying in unison during Friday noon prayers at the famous Qasr El Nil bridge (which connects Tahrir Square in downtown to the Opera House in Gezirah) being attacked by water cannons and tear gas by police (see Image 22 and 23 below), a powerful image of solidarity and continuity in the face of government aggression, in a battle which lasted several hours. It was during that moment that the bridge became the space in which the “oneness” of community bonds was displayed during a liminal time. The Friday of Rage was a turning point in the early days of the revolution – besides the powerful images of the Qasr El-Nil battle on the bridge

between protestors and police, the government also imposed a curfew and shut down the Internet and disrupted telecommunication services in an effort to quell the protests, a move which indicated that the government felt threatened by the protests. Another iconic moment was the burning of Mubarak's National Democratic Party's headquarters, further indicating that a barrier of fear had been broken between the regime and the people which would serve as a strong momentum for the continuation of the revolution.

In his seminal work on liminality, Turner has argued that liminal moments – in their inherent ambiguity - always contain an element (and the potential) of destruction. Yet destruction and danger do not necessarily indicate a negative turning point during a transformative moment. In the particular context of the Egyptian revolution, the destruction of the signs and symbols of a much hated regime (which represented the structural, normative order of the past 30 years) such as police trucks, police stations, and the NDP's headquarters represented, to many of those I interviewed, a rational destruction of the dangerous and humiliating system which preserved the repressive regime which kept the Egyptian population in a state of perpetual *ihana* (humiliation). Turner also argued that spontaneous *communitas* had an inexplicably subjective affective component in that there is something “ ‘magical’ about it” (1969: 139) which contains “the feeling of endless power” (ibid.) – this is represented by such moments of collective solidarity such as that shown in Image 18, where the image of protestors continuing to pray together in light of police attacks highlights the extraordinary individual and collective power of the revolutionaries and their resilience in maintaining their ground, illustrating the strength of the convictions of their belief that it is just and right to defy Mubarak's three decades long oppressive regime.

The notion of destruction during the first phase was seen as a logical – and necessary - destruction of symbols of state power as a sign of the public’s rejection of that power. This was put forward by Ammar Abo Bakr who said: “My refusal of state security institutions is because they are the ones who...steal and they are the thieves and then they come and reprimand the people. That is *baltageyeh* (thuggery). So I believe our refusal of these institutions is rational, because this is not acceptable (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014). To many of those I spoke to, the Egyptian revolution aimed to destroy the status quo and that anyone who assisted in (socially, culturally, and economically) maintaining and supporting the status quo must be destroyed along with it, as it was the status quo that was characterized as being dangerous, irrational, and abnormal, and the revolution was characterized as the way things *should be* - the common sense state of affairs. As such, their conversations indicated that their roles and understanding of their work had been redefined within this new temporal register, or liminal time. Ammar Abo Bakr makes this point clear,

I am participating in a revolution and a revolution is itself illegal and an act against the law. Terms and terminology that you want to apply in a society that is different from yours and that is in a *revolutionary* [he emphasizes this word] state, which means it is breaking all rules and laws and conventions - part of this is the gallery with the artist who sits in the atelier who is sad that the art market has stopped. This artist is a bastard, because he is completely isolated from his society and the goal of his art is to sell his work to the group of aristocrats and the capitalists who are all dirty *fulool* [regime sympathizers], and since the *fulool* left Egypt during the revolution and don’t want to spend money on art, so he has to hate the revolution, though he may act like he loves the revolution since he is an artist. Yet he isn’t an artist and isn’t part of the revolution, he just wants to take advantage of capitalism, and the revolution wants to destroy capitalism and the revolution hopes to go to these people who own all this real estate and villas and take it from them. Whoever wants to call it brutal, chaotic, destructive, so be it, because the revolution wants to destroy the foundations [of the existing system] (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).

Destruction of Mubarak's structural, normative order as a rational strategy of the revolution (in order to make way for new ideas, a new structure, a new order) was a common theme conveyed by many I spoke to, including Mohamed Alaa (see profile in earlier chapter), who said that just as the revolution sought to destroy the unjust status quo through physical, material means, art must also symbolically destroy old ideas, and parallel this notion of destruction of normative forms of artistic expressions in order to make way for the accommodation of new ideas. As he suggested,

art helps changes understandings of a lot of things, to destroy, and that is the idea behind the art project of destruction that I am working on, to break and destroy a lot of things, destroy taboos, traditions, a lot of things that we do without thinking, things that we do just because we were born into it, and the ideas of *haram* [permissible] and *halal* [forbidden] which enter into everything in differing degrees...So this is the idea of destruction, that we need to destroy a lot of things, but the question is do we destroy things until they collapse or destroy up to a point and leave some things intact that we can live with? Art does this. Change changes (Mohamed Alaa, Cairo, pers. comm., 13 August 2014).

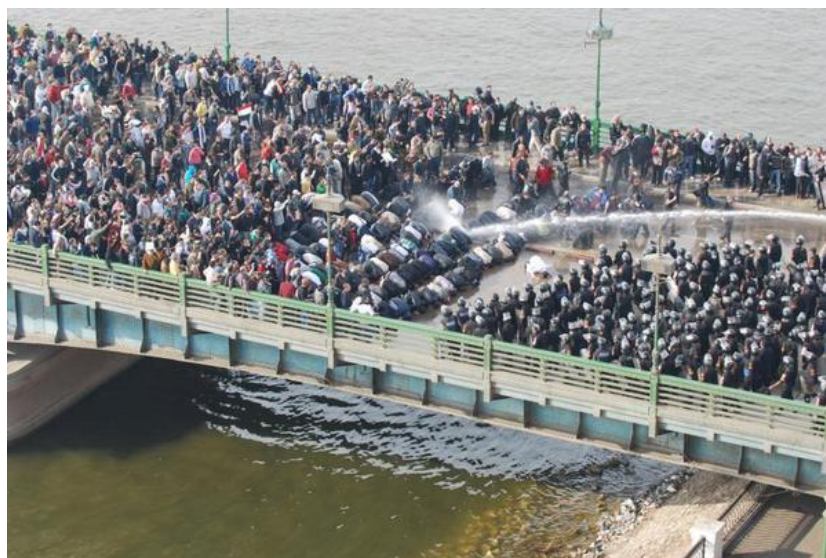


Image 22: Protestors praying during Friday prayers on the Qasr El Nil Bridge on January 28, 2011 - the “Friday of Rage” – while being attacked by the police’s water cannons.

Source: EAWorldView, 2011.



**Image 23: Stand-offs between protestors and police on January 28 (The Friday of Rage) on Qasr El-Nil Bridge, which show police firing tear gas and water cannons in an effort to push revolutionaries back.
Source: Ahram Online, 2012.**

On another level, some of those I spoke to were unable to describe their revolutionary experiences during the 18 days as it represented a deeply affective moment for them. For example, Far'on, an anonymous Egyptian revolutionary artist, stayed silent for quite some time when I asked him to describe his experiences during the revolution, and simply told me that "it is essentially something indescribable. You just felt something and that is it. My eye is practically gone...but from what I was involved in, its like my eye did not go...even if it did it did not matter" (Far3on, Cairo, pers. comm., 17 August 2014). Far'on's inability to describe his revolutionary experience during the 18 days because the experience disoriented him and affected him deeply enough to not be able to translate it into words, communicated to me just how powerful and moving the experience of the Egyptian revolution was to those I spoke to.

5.4 Existential Understandings of the Revolution

Revolution tends to be associated with political acts, and arguably it was during the critical revolutionary moments in those 18 days that a suspension of the normative notions of “politics” became possible. Yet, despite this, many did not see the 18 days of the revolution as “doing politics” in the formal sense because, as those I interviewed made clear, politics was located within the purview of the state, and so the revolutionaries distanced themselves from politics, because, as Saiko Maino said, politics “is, in general, seen as something *neges* [impure, foul]” (Saiko Maino, Cairo, pers. comm., 26 August 2014).

The Arabic word *neges* is used to imply something that is impure (the highest level of impurity), and in Islam only by performing ablution (*wu'du*) can one “cleanse” themselves in order to purify one’s self—it is thus used to connote both a moral and physical impurity. Attaching the term politics to *neges* implies to what degree the term is considered repugnant on both an internal and external level and thus should be avoided for fear of one also becoming impure.

For many of those I spoke to, the revolutionary moments in time were described, felt and understood as “resistance in the most basic, instinctive sense” (Ryzova, 2011b) in existential terms of a regime which systematically humiliated them. It was also described as a sacred, out-of-time experience, whereby what was seen as the illegitimate structural order (the status quo) was suspended, allowing for the emergence, albeit briefly, of an existential, communal, out-wordly spirit. Many of those interviewed said the revolution was a period of reflection, self-awareness, and intense solidarity whereby they felt connected to others – as equals - in a moment in and out of

time. This was absolutely revelatory in a society characterized by Sad Panda (a revolutionary artist, illustrator, and music producer) as having a “frightening class distinction” which led to intense divisions between different social and economic classes (Sad Panda, Cairo, pers. comm., 28 April 2014).

The idea of *communitas*, or a community coming together, was another recurring theme which greatly affected the experience of the revolution and their memory of it to those I interviewed. As Peterson mentioned, the revolution was not only significant on an individual level, through one’s own participation. More importantly, it was how one also viewed and experienced Tahrir Square with others which transformed it into a key site for the creation of civic subjectivities through the experience of *communitas* – “Tahrir square, and particularly the 18-day protest, came to stand for a hopeful process of revolutionary change, and participation in Tahrir Square became an important category through which people experienced themselves and others as participating in a revolutionary effort that expressed the collective power of the Egyptian people” (Peterson, 2015: 166).

Hala El Sharouny reminisced about how people cleaned streets together, KIM spoke of a sense of self-sacrifice that he had never witnessed and Ganzeer spoke of a renewed sense of national identity he felt as he witnessed new forms of civility on the streets, acts that Salwa Ismail described as a method of the Egyptian public reclaiming their national dignity from the state (2011) and Jessica Winegar talked of as a method of reconnecting with fellow citizens as a national family (2011). Others said the experience of the revolution, its very existence, served as a reminder that if one could

overturn normative conditions of the structural order, then one could also overcome their own individual, internal limitations. As, Mohammed Khaled noted,

...I wasn't confident of myself as an artist, before the revolution I was a story boarder, I draw a storyboard, and when I do something very nice and once in awhile people see it and there are comments. But when the revolution happened, there were no limits. Everything inside me changed – me, as a person, no longer had any boundaries in anything I do, and I believed more in what I want to do – if I want to be a filmmaker, why shouldn't I be a film maker? (Mohammed Khaled, Cairo, pers. comm., 29 April 2014).

Most of those who I spoke to attributed this change in themselves to seeing the change in the re-ordering of subject positions in Tahrir which made them realize that what was self-evident or real during Mubarak's regime was a fabrication. It was in this very sense that the liminal moment of the revolution initiated the "everything is possible" sentiment that came with the disruption and blurring of ideological, political, and social lines and the emergence of a heightened sense of community (*communitas*) as well as individual agency – the two were intertwined throughout descriptions of experiences of the revolution.

5.5 The Writings on the Walls During the 18 Days of the Egyptian Revolution

The majority of those I interviewed said they were completely immersed in the revolutionary experience during the initial 18 days of the revolution, and, as such, did not have time to produce revolutionary art during those 18 days of the revolution. In fact, as Amr Nazeer said, revolutionary art was not a primary concern for them at that moment,

During the 18 days of the revolution...nor two months after...did I do any graffiti no stencils I didn't even record any videos. My cousin would ask why I didn't record anything at this time, but I was so hooked up with the operations during those 18 days I didn't have time to document it, I was living it. It was overwhelming, and I never thought for a second to record it or do a stencil (Amr Nazeer, Cairo, pers. comm., 9 March 2014).

However, during the 18 days of the revolution, graffiti, or the scribbling on walls and tanks, was as a crucial method of information and communication for many, when all other technological forms were completely cut off (see Image 24), and played a vital role in getting messages across to the public as a sort of “journal for the revolution”, according to Layla Amr, who was still in middle school when the revolution occurred (Layla Amr, Cairo, pers. comm., 1 May 2014). Ammar Abo Bakr labeled the walls during this time as a “newspaper” and Saiko said that when all telecommunications were cut, the stencils he made with his friends (which, he said, played a very important role during the 18 days revolution for its ability to be sprayed on quickly and avoid the police) acted like “markers of the revolution” (Saiko Maino, Cairo, pers. comm., 26 August 2014), by continuously reporting what was going on or informing people where to head to for the next round of protests (ibid). As Ammar Abo Bakr noted,

When graffiti was written all over army tanks saying ‘Down with Mubarak’... it was a sign for the people at home as if telling them the army approved, because the army would have never allowed people to write this on their tanks if they did not approve. From what I understood in those 18 days this was a major sign that encouraged people to go down. Everyone focused on this sentence without tying it to graffiti or to writing, and artists did not write it, it was just regular people who had markers in their pockets or random spray cans or any tool they could use to be able to write. They would lend each other

money to buy things they could write with on tanks. This was pure popular action and had nothing to do with artists. In my opinion most artists at this time were acting the same way, for me during the 18 days I didn't draw anything, I was like the public I just wrote information on the walls, this was more important because it was a revolutionary tactic and we were in the midst of a revolution, how could I draw while I am in the midst of a revolution during those 18 days? I want the collective, as they move, to read crucial information on the walls (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).



**Image 24: Graph which shows the sudden drop in internet connectivity on January 28, 2011 – the “Friday of Rage”.
Source: Labovitz, 2011.**

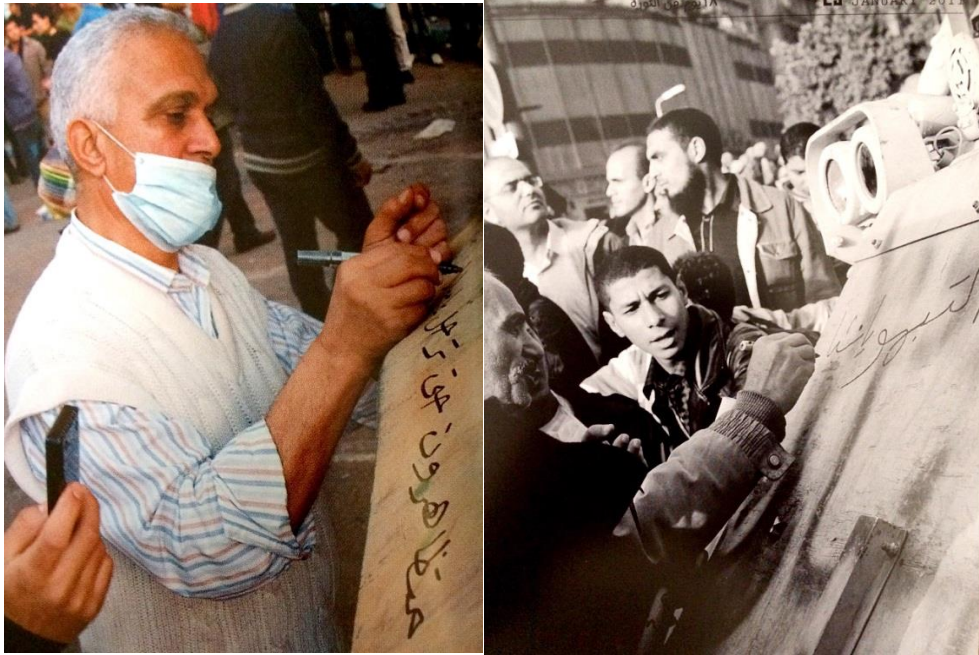


Image 25 (Top left): A protestor writes on “Protesting until you leave” on an army tank; Image 26 (Top right): A protestor writes “Be careful, guys”, on an army tank;

**Image 27 (Bottom right): A protestor writes “Leave, Leave, Mubarak”;
Image 28: (Bottom left) Protestors riding an army tank with the words “Down with Mubarak”, on Mohamed Mahmoud Street
Source: Walls of Freedom (2013: 26-29).**

El Teneen, an anonymous revolutionary artist who did not have any background or interest in art prior to the revolution, said it was irrelevant whether one could draw or not, because the idea of doing graffiti or scribbling on the walls during the 18 days of the revolution was not sensational, but natural. The liminal moment made it possible for everyone to participate on the walls in any way – either to

communicate, motivate, or articulate some sort of demands, in a very real effort to materialize their presence in public spaces. During this crucial liminal moment in the early days of the revolution, when it was unclear whether Mubarak would indeed step down, it was not considered sensational, trendy, or artistic to write on walls, rather, it was an organic, natural and necessary act for people from all backgrounds to communicate with drawings or words, either revolutionary slogans, messages warning revolutionaries to be careful, or articulating demands from the public. Perhaps one of the reasons why one was awe struck by the graffiti and writings of the 18 days was because it was part of a larger, improvised performance of revolution which captured the imagination in its sheer ingenuity. As Armbrust argues, Tahrir was a “symbolically prominent performance space” which was also “famously improvisational” (Armbrust, 2015: 88) through sociopolitical and cultural acts, which made,

[c]ountless observers marvel[] at the clever signs made, astonishingly, by novice activists with no previous history of protesting; at the creative use of history in invoking political resistance movements of earlier eras such as the student movement of the early 1970s, the 1919 Revolution against British imperialism, or cultural icons of the Nasser era; poetic slogans; ‘tweets from Tahrir’; or in some moments, the flexible tactics used to organize battles against regime forces (ibid.).

It was this improvisation, by people from all socioeconomic backgrounds, which arguably “made the 25 January Revolution so compelling to the world” (ibid.). During those 18 days, the necessity of having “something” on the walls, on the streets, on tanks, on government buildings, as Images 25 to 28 show, was not only embraced by those I spoke to, many of which became the famous revolutionary artists of the Egyptian revolution, but also embraced by ordinary people in the streets. This

organic, popular reaction to the transformative moment of the revolution and the need to document, archive, communicate, warn, or motivate, fulfilled a crucial need for that particular moment in time and produced a revolutionary narrative embodied the improvised voices of those involved in the “thick” of the revolutionary moment. As El Teneen said, simply the fact that one could now “do” something that has never been done before – such as openly writing or drawing on the walls – was itself an emancipatory and transformative act. For El Zeft, it epitomized the rupture in the structural order, and told me that this was revolutionary art at its finest because it was a new way of doing things, a transgression of the fiercely guarded public space of Mubarak’s regime by everyone and anyone - “the people who wrote ‘Hosni Mubarak should fall’ on the tanks, this is pure art – pure art. I wish I did it” (El Zeft, Cairo, pers. comm., 27 April 2014).

Hany Khaled said the revolution taught him how to engage with people from all social classes, backgrounds, and political leanings, and so he believed, for him, that art was necessary as a basis for a dialogical form of communication which involved debate, negotiations, and conflict (Hany Khaled, Cairo, pers. comm., 18 August 2014). It was not a value free form of expression but one which was very much imbued within conflicting sets of ideas and an open rapport during the revolution, one in which he wanted the public, during the revolution, to be involved in as part of the organic dialogue occurring in the streets.



**Image 29: Hany Khaled spraying “Down with Hosny Mubarak” on a wall during the Egyptian revolution
Source: Hany Khaled.**

Mohammed Khaled told me he had a similar experience, whereby he drew on the floor in Tahrir Square (since there were no walls in the actual *midan*), an act that initiated a dialogue between him and other protestors which encouraged him to continue doing it, and that the conflict – between himself, the art, and the public in which some people cut up his posters or removed his graffiti - made him feel that “this is the nicest thing about it, you truly are in a real struggle with the street. You put something that is going to be read and seen, and people who hate it will remove it – this motivated me even more” (Mohammed Khaled, Cairo, pers. comm., 29 April 2014). The ambiguity, struggle, and uncertainty of the revolutionary moment was never characterized as a negative liminal moment in time – it was the very struggle of the revolution through the breach of the normative order which was characterized as liberating for its uncertainty and endless possibilities and potential.

This understanding of art as a mode of antagonistic intervention was embraced by several of those I spoke to. Mohamed Alaa said that he could not separate political

action from cultural action and so he wanted to take the opportunity in the early days of the revolution to use art to create deliberate connections with the people gathered in Tahrir Square. For him, dialogue and conflict necessarily go hand in hand, and that it was the point of his project to interact with people – not to come to any final goal- but to initiate a platform in which people’s passions and desires can be articulated. Put differently, art is about being co-present with the public and therefore about being connected – either positively or negatively (in that the art is not necessarily intended to garner approval) – and stimulating engagement with other artists and between members of a community.

These understandings of art during those 18 days truly represented a scenario where respondents were located “on the limit” (Szakolczai, 2009: 148) during the rite of passage, in the liminal moment – that is, an unscripted state whereby their “previous certainties are removed” (ibid.) and they have now “enter[ed] a delicate, uncertain, malleable state” (ibid.) which may “alter[] the very core of one’s being” (ibid.). Indeed, the 18 days of the Egyptian revolution represented, through the interviews of those I spoke to, a period of existential renewal – a breakdown of old thoughts, norms, and ideas which people were attempting to understand and come to terms with, and to push forth in order to represent a new structural order built on those ideas. The 18 days of the Egyptian revolution embodied the “anything can happen” potential of the liminal moment, characterized by ambiguity yet also hope and endless possibilities, creativity, and potential, and because “anything” (and everything) did happen, in a sense (through creative, organic political and cultural acts of expression), those 18 days continue to serve as a powerful – and more importantly enduring - critical imaginary, illustrating that the Tahrir truly was a “time out of time” (Sabea, 2013).



Image 30: Egyptians in Tahrir during the revolution, writing their hopes and dreams on Mohamed Alaa's 50 metre parchment
Source: Mohamed Alaa.



Image 31: Egyptians in Tahrir during the revolution, writing their hopes and dreams on Mohamed Alaa's 50 metre parchment
Source: Mattei di Vincenzo, 2011.

Perhaps no movement or group symbolized the liminal moment of *communitas* and openness to the “play of thought, feeling, and will” (Turner, 1969: vii) than the Revolutionary Artists Union (RAU), or ‘*Rabita fannani al-thawra*’, an organic, grassroots movement initially formed by twenty-one artists, poets, filmmakers,

musicians during the 18 days of the revolution, with the aim of bringing together and channelling the raw, organic, creative and artistic potential and talent of ordinary citizens during the revolution. The RAU's make-shift "headquarters" and open space exhibition was in Tahrir Square, by the Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC – see Image 32 below), where artists and ordinary citizens gathered to draw, converse, and articulate their demands of the revolution and hung their art on the walls for all to see, inviting anyone to join in one of the most democratic and cultural manifestations of the Egyptian revolution. The anti-structural nature of the liminal crisis during the 18 days of the revolution instigated an openness, inclusiveness, and inherently democratic forms of behaviour and impromptu acts leading to the organic formation of movements such as the RAU. The importance of impromptu headquarters to create art which rejects and resists the normative order so openly in such a significant location in Egyptian public space in Tahrir Square, by ordinary people and artists alike in an organic movement such as the RAU – symbolizes the anti-structure of the liminal moment of those 18 days, because this type of public, defiant, and creative acts of dissent were simply not allowed to exist during Mubarak's regime.



**Image 32: The RAU’s “headquarters” and gallery by the KFC, Tahrir Square
Source: TahrirNews, 2011.**

The state of being “betwixt and between”, where socio-political categorizations became irrelevant, led to the intense “sentiment of ‘humankindness’, a sense of the generic social bond between all members of society” (Turner, 1969: 116), in which egalitarian behaviour – in the socio-political and cultural sphere – became a critical imaginary of the Egyptian revolution which greatly affected those I interviewed. The communal cooperation during the liminal moment and the blurring of distinctions reinforced the memory of Tahrir as the iconic symbol of the revolution, which continues to serve as an affective location of their revolutionary experience which transcends both time and space. During the first 18 days of the Egyptian revolution, creative practices were organic, improvised, and informed by practical considerations. Interactivity was a key underlying theme in understandings of art and would greatly affect the ways in

which art was understood in the initial 18 days of the revolution, whereby artists and the public alike were involved in the organic creation and visual aesthetic of the revolution.

Yet it was more than that. As Peterson notes, liminality is not just about grand transitions or wonderfully creative, organic acts – it also necessarily “involved a breakdown of social norms at microsocial levels” (Peterson, 2015b: 68). As he succinctly illustrates, that breakdown during the 18 days of Tahrir involved a,

diminishment of the practices of bodily separation that are typically a means of producing class distinctions in Egypt, as doctors, tradesmen, students, housewives, engineers, shopkeepers, street vendors and many, many unemployed rubbed shoulders in the crowded Cairo centre (Hafez 2012). Age distinctions were muted...Sectarian unity was also exhibited, with Christians forming a cordon of their bodies around their praying Muslim comrades, and Muslims vowing to protect Christians in turn...ordinary Egyptians formed security and neighbourhood watch groups and took on the responsibilities of policing not only Tahrir but communities throughout Cairo (El-Mahy 2012). Similarly, voluntary work crews managed the flow of rubbish during the occupation of the Square...[c]leaning up the trash was a literal enactment of the people taking care of the centre of Cairo because they had reclaimed it, but it was also symbolic of the growing sense that they were taking out the political trash that had polluted their country for so long, and caring for one another as fellow citizens in a national family (Winegar 2011a) (Peterson, 2015b: 68-69).

These acts could not be underestimated in their role in creating a critical imaginary which still affected those I interviewed, for the simple reason that it was so different to how things were before. As Peterson continues, this breakdown at a microsocial level during liminal times,

gain their salience from their difference from the norms that had been in place before. Prior to the gathering in Tahrir Square, geographical, physical and symbolic separations

had been central to class distinctions in Egypt (Peterson 2011a). Deference to elders and submission to their leadership has long been a deeply held part of family and community life (Badran 1995). Periodic Muslim– Christian conflict, particularly over places of worship, was a feature of life, one exploited by the Mubarak regime as part of its rationale for necessary authoritarianism. And cleaning the Square is an act that can only be understood in the context of decades of indifference to dirt, litter and pollution by both civilians and the state (Winegar 2011a) (Peterson, 2015b: 69).

The experience of Tahrir led to a creation of these civic minded subjectivities because it produced “[n]ew ways of seeing the world—of being in the world”, which was critical to its endurance as a revolutionary symbol, even years after the initial rupture of the 18 days of the Egyptian revolution.

Although the initial 18 days of the revolution fit neatly into Turner’s concept of liminality, and was, according to many I spoke to, representative of “an alternative experience of ambiguity, a time when unity and possibilities for real, meaningful change seemed genuinely within reach” (Peterson, 2015b: 69), the subsequent phases of the revolution are not as clear cut and “much harder to clarify through this processual model” (Peterson, 2015a: 177). The aftermath of the 18 days of the revolution was mired by contingency – those who wanted to pack up and leave Tahrir and restore order, while others wanted to stay and insisted that the revolution was only just beginning and that their key demands had not been met (Peterson, 2015b). This would later serve as a key source of tension between those who saw revolutionary art as a visual return to chaos and disruption. Yet the second phase of the revolution saw art remain as part of the revolutionary aesthetic and process, as it marked key events during significant moments of military rule, which I discuss in the following chapter.

Chapter 6. The Second Phase of the Revolution: SCAF Rule (February 2011 – June 2012)

The second phase of the revolution was, according to those I spoke to, characterized by mixed emotions – there was a sense of pride and accomplishment in Mubarak’s resignation. However, many of those I interviewed said they felt cautious and anxious when the revolutionaries left Tahrir and the military announced it would “safeguard” the revolution in the aftermath of Mubarak’s ouster. The antistructure and *communitas* of the initial 18 days seemed to give way to a “restoration of the preexisting social structure” (Peterson, 2015a: 172) as SCAF tried to quickly contain the revolution. Therefore, this phase saw the revolutionaries enter a “situation and space” (Peterson, 2015a: 172) Turner called the arena, which is “the situation in which new symbolic structures and cultural configurations are established and organized into a new social order. As the name suggests, the arena is a site of struggle between groups promoting different models of sociocultural structure. This describes the situation in Egypt after Mubarak’s resignation” (ibid.).

For those who were wary of SCAF’s takeover, it seemed to mark the beginning of the end of the revolution as political and social divisions began to take place, political alliances formed and sides taken, and “various actors in this arena sought to sponsor and enact particular visions of the new Egypt” (Peterson, 2015a: 172). The main question at this time was, “what’s next?”. As Armbrust notes, “while the transition from Mubarak necessarily plunged Egypt into a liminal state, experienced first as *communitas*, nobody knew what to do next. There was no ‘something else’” (Armbrust, 2017: 227). After the initial euphoria of the 18 days, there was no clear next step in the revolution’s progression.

Yet even within an environment of uncertainty and struggle after SCAF took control of the country, and perhaps because of it - the aftermath of the 18 days inspired the continued growth of a counter cultural scene which initially emerged from the sense of ownership and control of public space gained during the first phase of the revolution. This ushered in - as Elliot Colla suggested - a “DIY spirit on the street” (Shenker, 2011) during that particular moment in time, whereby people felt that “they can look after themselves following a revolution. They police their own blocks, they pick up their own trash, and they can paint on walls. They don’t need permission from anyone. It’s a fundamental shift. Before, the initial assumption regarding anyone doing anything on the street was always ‘who let you do that?’ Now the initial assumption is ‘I can do that’” (ibid.). This attitude was not only reflective within the sociopolitical sphere, but also the cultural sphere, whereby artist and activist Ganzeer, for example, argued that no matter the potential backlash by the authorities for the open cultural scene, an “[artistic] door has been opened and you can’t close it” (Ganzeer, Cairo, Skype Interview, 22 November 2013).

6.1 The Importance of the Street as a Liminal Space

This period of time ushered in an ambitious new era of revolutionary art – one that evolved from stencils and hasty, scribbled messages on the walls, streets, and army tanks (which marked the urgency of the revolutionary moment and the organic need for expression and communication during those 18 days) to large murals, posters, elaborate stencils, and stickers (most of which was made available to download on the internet, such as Ganzeer’s iconic “Mask of Freedom”²³ - see Image

²³ Ganzeer was briefly arrested for putting up posters and stickers of the “Mask of Freedom” in the spring of 2011, an image which represented the army crackdown down on revolutionaries sit-ins and continued calls to remain in Tahrir.

33). The primary target was SCAF, which was extraordinary given the military's "unquestioned prestige" (Armbrust, 2015: 101) as the central Egyptian institution (and the nation's pride, as is commonly reflected in narratives and images of the army). This prestige was swiftly attacked shortly after Mubarak's ouster, when, on March 9, 2011, "the SCAF began its first attempt to declare the revolution over by arresting activists who remained in Tahrir Square despite orders to leave" (Armbrust, 2015: 101) and the subsequent "virginity tests" of at least 7 women on March 10, 2011.

Not only did revolutionary art evolve from writings on the wall and simple drawings, but it also flourished, intensified, and became more collaborative - and varied - in content. From martyr murals, scathing criticisms of the army (where *yasqut hukm al-'askar*, or down with military rule, was frequently seen all over the walls, accompanied by chants during protests), attacks against Mubarak and supporters/remnants of the regime (*fulool*), and efforts to remind the public of the importance of maintaining the momentum of the January 25th revolution, revolutionary art significantly evolved in the second phase of the Egyptian revolution. The intensification of revolutionary art was largely a response to the struggle against military rule in an effort to reconstitute the liminal moment of the initial 18 days, and characterized most of the second period of the revolution. This would intensify with the escalation of conflict and the militarization of Downtown Cairo and Tahrir Square in the winter of 2011 and 2012, which will be discussed in this chapter in greater detail.



Image 33: The Caption on the Poster Reads – “New! The Mask of Freedom! Salutations from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to sons of the beloved nation. Now available for an unlimited period of time.”

Source: Ganzeer, 2011.

During this transitional period - and in the aftermath of the initial 18 days of the Egyptian revolution - the authorities swiftly tried to subdue the revolutionaries and regain “control”, instil “order”, and curb any potential “disruptive influences” (Shenker, 2011). In the revolutionaries efforts to “reconstitute that experience of antistructure” (Peterson, 2013a: 2) of the first (18 days) phase of the revolution, the second phase of the revolution would be marked by the magnification of violence and struggle between the revolutionaries and the military, as they felt that Mubarak’s regime was being continued under a different guise. This narrative was articulated in such graffiti as that shown in Image 34, the infamous image of the half-Tantawi half-Mubarak face, located on the corner where Mohamed Mahmoud Street meets Tahrir Square. The importance of this particular site for revolutionary art, on the corner of Mohamed Mahmoud Street (an iconic location of the revolutionary for being the site of

intense battles between revolutionaries and the authorities, nicknamed “the street of the eyes of freedom” for being witness to the revolutionary struggle and the site where many revolutionaries lost their eyes by snipers) and Tahrir Square, the central location of the Egyptian revolution.

In this respect, it is important to note that experiences of liminality are not restricted solely to rituals, but also different subjects (such as individuals and civilizations, social groups, whole societies) or to temporal registers (such as moments, periods, epochs), but they also have spatial dimensions as well, such as specific sites, locations, even entire countries (Thomassen, 2009: 16),²⁴ which makes liminality “useful for one to frame both very small interactions as well as cataclysmic events” (Armbrust, 2013b: 844).

Therefore, this particular corner of two significant iconic locations of the Egyptian revolution (Mohamed Mahmoud Street and Tahrir Square), was a particularly significant liminal space where the revolution was experienced and lived, and thus a central site of revolutionary art primarily due its location at the centre of revolutionary events, where lives were lost, martyrs mourned and commemorated (see Images 35, 36, 37), and battles between the government and protestors raged on. Abaza argues that the centrality of this particular street corner represents a “site of an unfolding continuous dramaturgical performance that visually narrates the history of the revolution” (Abaza, 2013).

²⁴ Thomassen argues that these three dimensions – subject, time, and space – tend to function together in a variety of combination, which emphasize the degree and intensity to which liminality is experience (Thomassen, 2009: 16, 17).

This corner represented the liminal state of being “betwixt and between” and the ambiguous, conflictual nature of the liminal moment of the revolution, and the revolutionary art reflected the uncertainty of the revolutionary moment after SCAF took power, such as that reflected in the half-Tantawi half-Mubarak portrait in Image 34 (a piece which continued to be evolved, and will be discussed later in this chapter and the next), which emphasized the continuation of the normative structural order under a different guise. Abaza had argued, at the time she published this piece on the second anniversary of the Egyptian revolution (January 2013), that as long as the revolution was as of yet “inconclusive[]”, and that “as long as Egypt’s wielders of power continue to undermine calls for revolutionary change in the country, the walls of Mohamed Mahmoud Street, and many others, will continue to offer an arena for the lively expression of political dissent and resistance. The dramaturgical performance that Mohamed Mahmoud Street is witnessing today will continue to unfold” (Abaza, 2013b). The conflict, ambiguity, and danger of the liminal moment produced creative forms of expression which, even seven years after the initial 18 days of the Egyptian revolution, serve as enduring – and powerful – artistic representations reflecting the deep-seated emotions, hopes, struggles, and uncertainty of the revolutionaries during a particular moment in Egypt’s political and cultural history.



Image 34: Revolutionary art on the corner of Mohamed Mahmoud Street, showing Mubarak and former Field Marshal Tantawi's face as one and the same face in March 2011, indicating that the structural order of Mubarak's regime simply continued in a new – military - guise. Above is written “the Revolution Continues”, and below is written “*illi kal’af ma matsh*” or “whoever delegates does not die” (*kal’af* is a word play on the word *khal’af* from the well-known Arabic proverb, *illi khal’af ma matsh*, or, “whoever has children does not die”) in reference to the continuation of Mubarak’s regime (even though he was ousted) under Tantawi’s helm.

Source: Huffington Post, 2014.



Image 35: Revolutionary art on the street corner of Mohamed Mahmoud Street/Tahrir Square depicting the martyrs of the revolution and an image which says “Murderous army”.

Source: Photo by Mona Abaza, Captured 29 August 2012.



Image 36: Revolutionary art on the street corner of Mohamed Mahmoud Street/Tahrir Square, the caption inside the white speech balloon it says “Bread, Freedom, Social Justice” (the slogan of the Egyptian revolution), next to the image of martyrs of the revolution. The red heading says “Glory to the Martyrs [of the Revolution]”

Source: Photo by Mona Abaza, Captured 26 September 2012.



Image 37: Martyrs commemorated on the street corner of Mohamed Mahmoud Street/Tahrir Square

Source: Photo by Mona Abaza, Captured 30 November 2012.

In regards to the importance of location to the creation of revolutionary art, many of those I spoke to reaffirmed Abaza's emphasis on the importance of art being located within the actual sites of revolutionary events, such as that particular corner of Mohamed Mahmoud Street/Tahrir Square, and that revolutionary art only made sense when it was created and displayed within these locations to the revolutionary moment, and so should strictly remain within these sites as they serve a particular purpose during a particular time as being part of the revolutionary discourse, through their narrative, commemorative, and reflective role.

Ammar Abo Bakr emphasized that during the Egyptian revolution, the reason why he remained in Mohamed Mahmoud Street was because it “made sense” (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014) during the liminal moment when everything was turned upside down and the street became art’s natural location (and not confined, private spaces such as art galleries), given that it was one of the major site of revolutionary events, and was also near to the centre of revolutionary events, Tahrir Square, as well as other key areas such as the Ministry of Interior.

In a liminal moment, when there is a breach in the structural order, the street (a previous unnatural location for art) became the natural location in which to create revolutionary art. Ammar told me that he would create art based on the revolutionary situation occurring at that moment, in that particular place – thus emphasizing the importance of both time and space coinciding within particular revolutionary moments. Ammar argued that not only was the location central, but that drawing revolutionary art as the events itself occur was even more crucial and powerful than drawing in its aftermath, as the art of the moment – in the actual moment - has a greater credibility, impact, and power for being a visual narrative situated within the present revolutionary moment,

It is impossible for me to miss a situation if for example a protest of 5,000 or 10,000 passes by me in Mohamad Mahmoud and I draw the martyrs as I see them, and I don’t take advantage of participating in this opportunity which contains this massive collective energy. I was so lucky and was the first person on the wall and the first one to stay and sit on the wall, not just draw and run –now drawing and running is it’s own graffiti style and is its own revolutionary tactic as a form of protest. However it depends on the place. Being in a place like Mohamad Mahmoud and being in an area which we [protestors, artists, activists] were essentially occupying anyways [in downtown Cairo], and the Ministry of Interior was barred from entering it, so why would I run? I am occupying

this space, it is mine. The Ministry of Interior put barricades all around their building and cut themselves off from the street and isolated themselves. For me it was a genius opportunity given the situation to stay standing in this place to draw, to talk to the people and have conversations, and to counter false media narratives with art (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).

El Zeft was also careful to choose particular locations as he said that “location is connected to an idea” when it comes to revolutionary art in public spaces (El Zeft, Cairo, pers. comm., 27 April 2014). A key example is his Nefertiti mask (see Image 73) which he said he drew intentionally on Mohamed Mahmoud Street – a street he called very “masculine” – in an effort to remind the public that women played a significant role in the revolution, and continue to play a significant role in socio-political issues, even if they are not as visible as men in the media’s coverage. The timing – and location – of El Zeft’s Nefertiti mask were intentional, as he told me that he drew it at a time when the Muslim Brotherhood were undermining women’s role in the social and political sphere.

El Zeft’s other iconic work, the smiley face on the barricade wall (see Image 57), was also intentionally chosen he said, because he drew it in a place where fierce clashes were occurring with protestors occupying that space, and that it was an intentional – and sardonic - attempt to mock security forces that even if they were beating them and killing them, the revolutionaries were still smiling and continuing their fight for the revolution regardless.

El Zeft also told me that his very cheerful Rainbow painting on Mansour Street, which, he emphasized, was a very bloody street where many revolutionaries lost their lives during clashes, was also intentionally chosen in its location and intended to be

sunny and cheerful, in order to provide a message of hope that the revolution will continue and that although “we (the revolutionaries) paid the price for tomorrow and we are going to take it, and that no matter what happens we are going to live happily later, because we paid the price” (El Zeft, Cairo, pers. comm., 27 April 2014). El Zeft’s portrayal of happiness, sunshine, hope, and smiley faces on the streets which were the site of death, destruction, and bloody clashes, is a stark reminder of the ambiguity – and danger – of the liminal moment, which sees contrasting images and behaviour as the norm.

El Teneen also argued that location was crucial and that one had to adapt revolutionary art to the space it occupies, which also includes important elements to consider such as language, which had to be accessible to those witnessing the art,

Anything that is done in the streets, any artistic or non-artistic act, it matters where it is done. So when we went down to the street which we believed was ours, you had to pick a good location – just like when you tidy your own house, you carefully choose how to rearrange it according to how you want. Everything has its own audience, it doesn’t have to say anything directly but can contain a specific idea, which fits in a specific location. So if I draw something in Bulaq, for example, I won’t write something in English. Everything has to fit its context. I want to do this and I want people to see it, it acts as a marker (El Teneen, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).

Mostafa El Hosseiny, a member of the Mona Lisa Brigades (an Egyptian revolutionary art collective which focuses on social issues concerning women and children in more *sha’abi* [popular] areas), also told me that location matters in that revolutionary art needs to occupy spaces outside of the revolutionary events in order to bring people in to the revolution already who are not that widely exposed or located to the center of its events. He said that revolutionary art in

Tahrir which says “Go to Tahrir [to protest]” is irrelevant, and that this kind of art should necessarily be located in areas far away from Tahrir, in order to encourage people who are outside of central revolutionary locations, be drawn in to it and encouraged to join (Mostafa El Hussein, Cairo, pers. comm., 1 May 2014). Therefore, he emphasized that he focuses on working in more *sha’bi* areas with the Mona Lisa Brigades, such as Ard El Lawa, in order to spread the collective and participatory spirit of the revolution by using revolutionary art through collaborative art projects with people in *sha’bi* areas by focusing on more social issues.

However, others believed that although location was important, it was not significant for art to be located within the sites of revolutionary events. On the contrary, artists I interviewed such as Hend Kheera argued that for her, primarily, the most important factor in location is its visibility and that it should be seen everywhere, therefore, she argues that revolutionary art needs to extend far beyond Mohamed Mahmoud Street and downtown Cairo, since the purpose of revolutionary art was to reach the public, she said that common sense dictated it be located also in *sha’bi* (popular) areas where revolutionary art is not as prevalent or visible in order to reach the widest possible stratum of Egyptian society, and not only those who venture in downtown Cairo and upscale neighbourhoods such as Zamalek, Garden City, and Ma’adi (what Keizer told me were considered as “exposure areas”),

The future of revolutionary art in Egypt is that it will thrive, what we see now [pointing at Mohamad Mahmoud street during our interview] will just increase, but I hope what we see here will go to all the areas, the *sha’bi* areas, this is the most important thing. We need to do it more [spread art to *sha’bi* areas]. I should walk in a place where I wouldn’t expect graffiti and see graffiti. If I want

to see graffiti I go to Mohamad Mahmoud right away, as if you are going down to an exhibition or a museum. If I want to do graffiti right to send the right message, I will put it in a place where the message will arrive. I will not bring people to come see graffiti, graffiti should go to them. If they are going to come all the way here to see the graffiti [Mohamad Mahmoud] then they could see it on the TV or on Facebook or anywhere, no I will go to their areas and put the graffiti in front of them, this is the correct [way to do] graffiti time (Hend Kheera, Cairo, pers. comm., 26 April 2014).

When I asked many of the artists why revolutionary art was not as prevalent outside of downtown Cairo, most responded that it was because it would either not receive as much attention/coverage as key areas in downtown Cairo, such as Mohamed Mahmoud Street in particular (and, in result, would not be photographed and archived online where it would then also occupy not only a physical space but a virtual one and receive wider international/local coverage), and that it was difficult to enter into popular areas and more freely create art work, since people who live in *sha'abi* areas know each other, are protective of their neighbourhood, and tend to be suspicious of outsiders coming into their neighbourhood.

However, when I asked Keizer about the importance of location and in particular Mohamed Mahmoud Street for revolutionary art, he told me that “I don’t go to Mohamed Mahmoud street, because that is the playground for anybody that just wants to get popular” (Keizer, Cairo, pers. comm., 26 April 2014). When I asked him where his preferred location was to present his art, he said he did not have any particular area except those he was inspired by in regards to certain events, and that he preferred branching out to lesser known, more *sha'abi* areas around Cairo, and was not phased by the fact that it was more difficult to create revolutionary art in these areas than it was in downtown Cairo,

If you ask me who my target was, for the past 2.5 areas I have been doing my art in slum areas, not in Zamalek or Dokki. I do it in Ard Al Lawa, Imbamba, Ain Shams, I have been going everywhere. And I get the protection of those neighbourhoods when I do that work. So when I walk in, I spot a certain face, I can smell those people that are more sociable than others. I show them my site and webpage, and they say they will protect me and let me do what I want. And then an older guy comes for an explanation and he says ok why not. So I do it that way...If I am doing revolutionary art in a more traditional area, I know that location has a certain thing to it, that is why my intention is leading me there, I want those people to see it, I am not thinking so much of aesthetics but I want to please the people there (Keizer, Cairo, pers. comm., 26 April 2014).

Therefore, as Keizer emphasized during our interviews, location matters to the extent that it makes sense for art to be located in that particular space for a certain purpose, and that exposure meant reaching the widest possible local audience, and not having your art displayed on what he called “trendy” areas like Mohamed Mahmoud Street. For example, he told me that he drew a picture of Habib Al Adly (the much hated – and longest serving - Minister of Interior under Mubarak’s regime) on the walls of the Ministry of Interior intentionally on the day of his trial, and that even if he has no real strategy or approach to revolutionary art, he believes that the location should be intentional in order to achieve the maximum effect from it in terms of tying the place to the revolutionary events occurring, yet at the same time, emphasizes the importance of branching out to areas which has not been as exposed to revolutionary art as downtown Cairo.

For Hanaa El Degham (who is one part of the famous trio of Alaa Awad and Ammar Abo Bakr who created beautiful murals in February and March 2012 on Mohamed Mahmoud Street in the wake of the Port Said massacre), she argues that location matters to the extent that it will have the most powerful impact on people in terms of its relevance to revolutionary events, which is why she chose to stay in

Mohamed Mahmoud Street at the time. However, she argued that her being there was coincidental, not intentional, and that in actuality she believes that choosing a site of revolutionary events is not that important because “your visual will arrive to people no matter where you are”, and so she tries to,

....expand beyond the city center, we want to connect with people who are far away and do not know what is going on. The city center is also inundated with cultural activity. So I participated in a workshop in Dumiat, I got an invitation from an institution called Mahatat, so I liked the idea and I worked with amateur artists in their art centre. I liked that it was not in Cairo or Alexandria – we want to tell them that even there in Dumiat they can do what they want, they can be creative, it isn't just in Cairo or Alexandria. The kids thing it is just in Cairo and Alexandria. But I told them you don't have to be in the center, creativity has no location, you can go to the streets wherever you are. So we did a visual arts workshop and worked on the street in Dumiat, and with the kids I worked with we would look for local products that were available in Dumiat with which we could use to create art. We would present what we made in local markets and we presented it to the people in the street. We would think how we could get close to people that was part of the process, not just surprise them or impose yourself on them, to participate with them in your work, to make them understand what you do – but most people understand. A lot of artists that go out say the people don't understand, but they do, more than we can imagine – there is a lot of awareness... This is how awareness will come about everywhere, if one person starts with himself and the people around him, he will also learn because he needs that awareness as well (Hanaa El Degham, Berlin, Skype interview, 29 November 2013).

6.2 Martyr Murals, Mad Graffiti Weekend and the Tank vs. Biker (Spring 2011)

In one of the earliest examples marking the beginning of the demise of the revolutionary process and the contentious political battle over the symbolic and physical control of public space between revolutionary artists versus the authorities – a struggle which would remain throughout the revolution – was Ganzeer’s ambitious “Martyr Murals” portrait of Islam Raafat²⁵ in Maidan Falaki which was repainted over by the authorities. The “Martyr Murals” was a collaborative project initiated by Ganzeer (along with his friends and volunteers) in March 2011 to document and commemorate all the martyrs of Egypt’s 2011 revolution. According to Ganzeer, not only did he have many volunteers who contacted him via social media, he also had people on the street organically join and assist in the project, something which, he said, was new, and indicative of the liminal moment whereby organic collaborative art projects in public spaces became the norm during the height of the Egyptian revolution. Ganzeer had intended to do a separate mural for every martyr, however, as he mentioned to me - and as is documented in his website - it “proved to be difficult, as the death toll continued to rise and the revolution was evidently far from over” (Ganzeer, 2017). Only three murals were completed (see Images 38, 39, 40), Islam Raafat, Seif Allah Mostafa in front of the High Court, and Tarek Abdel Latif in Zamalek next to the Gezirah Sporting Club.

The effacement of martyr iconography was seen as a direct – and hostile – act towards suppressing their remembrance in order to erase traces of what the authorities called the “chaos” of the revolution in public space and return to the “stability” of the

²⁵ Islam was a martyr of the revolution, an 18 year old who was killed on the Friday of Rage (January 28, 2011) after he was brutally run over by a security truck.

normative order. This came across in the remarks by Ganzeer for whom the erasure of the mural of Islam Raafat was a sign that the system was attempting to return under SCAF, and that artists should continue to disrupt the return of that order by now directing their creative efforts towards criticizing – and delegitimizing – the military’s rule. As he recalled,

There was this martyr mural portrait in Failaki square, which was the second one I did [of Islam Raafat], there weren’t that many martyr murals yet, it hadn’t become a huge phenomenon yet, that one lasted about a month, and that was the first one to be erased, first martyr portrait to be erased...there was like kind of this reaction by people on the Twitterverse like who did this whatever, and they got very angry [saying] you have to do something you have to go repaint it again whatever. So from that angle you get rid of Mubarak and then the military comes in and says alright we’re safeguarding the revolution, and during this time we are painting martyr murals to commemorate them, during which someone....comes and paints over it (Ganzeer, Cairo, pers. comm., 26 April 2014).



Image 38: The mural of martyr Islam Raafat, which was painted over by government authorities in the Spring of 2011.

Source: Ganzeer, 2017.



Image 39 and Image 40: The other two martyr murals of Ganzeer’s collaborative “Martyr Murals” project. On the left, the mural of martyr Saif Allah Mustafa, and on the right, Tareq Abdel Latif. Ganzeer also managed to create a fourth mural of the martyr Omar Mohsen (not pictured here).

Source: Ganzeer, 2017.

It was this act that triggered Ganzeer to organize the two-day “Mad Graffiti Weekend”, the first collective graffiti campaign in May 2011, which he announced over several social media platforms. Ganzeer called on all individuals – artists and non-artists alike – to come together to collaborate on dissident revolutionary art in public spaces. This was the first concrete initiative which had brought many graffiti artists, as well as members of the public, together to collaborate on revolutionary art in a centralized effort to cement the status of revolutionary art as a cultural movement, not a passing trend. This would mark the beginning of more concerted efforts, in the aftermath of the 18 days of the revolution, to bring artists and ordinary people together in an act of creative – and very public - defiance against military rule. The momentum of the liminal moment was re-gaining strength after the first phase of the revolution, as

organic acts of creativity not only by artists but the public was increasing in its effort. As Ganzeer said,

the first Mad Graffiti Weekend was the first consolidated effort between several revolutionary artists along with volunteers and bloggers, it was the biggest at the time...So we repainted that martyr [Ismail Raafat] and we also did the Tank vs. Biker one in Zamalek, and then also simultaneously we did an anti-military piece and an anti-Tantawi²⁶ piece, and a “no to military trials” piece over the portrait of someone who was arrested in the middle of a protests and got sentenced in a military trial. So that was the first effort of many revolutionary artists working on one kind of topic at the same time...it was also the first time to kind of collaborate with bloggers and photographers and the media to all cover this event at the same time, it was met positively and very widely covered and blogged about and well documented (Ganzeer, Cairo, pers. comm., 26 April 2014).

The Tank vs. Biker mural was arguably one of the most iconic pieces created during this initiative in May 2011, as a collaborative effort by Ganzeer and his friends, volunteers and other revolutionary artists during Mad Graffiti Weekend (see Image 40). Initially, the image was of a tank aimed at a boy carrying ‘*aish baladi* (local bread, a staple food of most Egyptians) on his head – a harsh criticism of the army as actually being a repressive force against the revolution and the common Egyptian, an image which reverses the narrative during the 18 days of the revolution - when the military took to the streets on January 28, 2011 - that “The Army and the People are One Hand” (scribbled by people on the walls, and which protestors chanted in Tahrir). The melancholy panda on the right, created by the anonymous revolutionary artist Sad Panda, passively watches the confrontation as a sort of resigned witness to the scene

²⁶ Former Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi was the Minister of Defense and commander-in-chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces. Tantawi was temporarily the Head of State in the aftermath of Hosni Mubarak’s ouster, and was derided for his previous close ties to the former President, military trials of thousands of civilians in the aftermath of the revolution, as well as the violent and brutal tactics used by the military to suppress protests in the winter of 2011/2012.

before him which symbolized the violence and clashes which marked the post-18 days “utopian” revolutionary period.



Image 41: The original “Tank vs. Bike” Mural in Zamalek

Source: Suzeeinthecity, 2012a.



Image 42: “Tank vs. Bike: after the Maspero killings in October 2011

Source: Caledoniyya, 2012.

However, although the military was increasingly becoming unpopular in the aftermath of the 18 days of the revolution particularly when military trials were held

for those individuals accused of working against the state, it was the Maspero (in reference to its location outside of the Maspero building in Cairo, the headquarters of Egyptian state television and radio) killings in October 2011 that cemented – for many of those I spoke to – the brutality of military rule and was essentially the “subtext of which was to bury any attempts to forge cross-confessional pro-revolutionary alliances in an avalanche of sectarianism” (Armbrust, 2017: 222). In what was known as “Maspero’s Black Sunday”, 27 people were killed by the army when unarmed, peaceful protestors marched against the destruction of St. George’s church. One of those killed was Mina Daniel, a 20 year old Coptic Christian activist whose face was memorialized on Mohamed Mahmoud Street graffiti. Mina Daniel, like Islam Raafat, was a “representative martyr” (Armbrust, 2015: 83) – in which he symbolized the martyrs of the tragic event at Maspero, gave it a name, a biography, and a face to relate to. For many, Maspero would mark the beginning of intense and bloody battles between the authorities and revolutionaries in the winter of 2011 and 2012, which was supplemented by the intensification – and flourishing – of revolutionary art. This was the beginning of the unraveling of the revolutionary process which cemented the need to solidify their physical efforts on the streets and become increasingly critical of the army in their art. As Mohammed Khaled noted,

I started [doing revolutionary art] after the Maspero incident, not in the very beginning. ...Maspero to me was the real beginning, because my brother Ali was injured and almost died. He was in Maspero photographing and was shot by live bullets. We spent that time in the hospital, and my hatred began to increase. It became personal. (Mohammed Khaled, Cairo, pers. comm., 29 April 2014).

Mohammed Khaled and a group of friends (who would later become known as the Mona Lisa Brigades - an Egyptian revolutionary art collective formed during the

Egyptian Revolution which primarily focused on political issues but then shifted its focus on social issues concerning women and children)²⁷ directly referenced the Maspero attack – in which unarmed Coptic protestors were run over by military vehicles - with an image of protestors being run over by the tank, swallowed in a sea of blood (see Image 42). This was then defaced in January 2012 by a group named the “Badr Brigades”, who altered the piece to a pro-military narrative by replacing the masks the protestors were holding into Egyptian flags, removing the dead bodies and the blood under the tank, and spray painting (in Arabic) the formerly fraternal slogan during the 18 days of the revolution that “the Army and the People are One Hand” (see Image 43 and 44). In response, Mohammed Khaled and the newly formed Mona Lisa Brigades returned to the mural and painted over the people holding the Egyptian flag, with a monster like image of former Field Marshal Tantawi, viciously eating a female protestor (see Image 45)– which was later censored over with black paint. The mural would then undergo several transformations and additions, with artist Bahia Shehab²⁸ adding the “blue bra” stencils (see Image 46) and her simple, repetitive, and powerful “no” stencils as a sign of protest in reference to the veiled “girl in the blue bra” (see Image 47), who was dragged and beaten by the army during large anti-military protests in December 2011. The mural was completely effaced by a group of volunteers called the “Zamalek Guardians” in June 2013 (Hamdy, Karl, 2013: 129), which occurred roughly around the same time as the mural was completely erased, perhaps indicating that the normative order returned, and that the unabated, uncensored, and public dialogue of the revolution had ended. The evolution of revolutionary art, with its multiple expressions and narratives during the liminal

²⁷ After Mohammed Khaled’s first drawing was defaced, him and his friends formed the Mona Lisa Brigades, as a mocking reference to the Badr Brigades.

²⁸ Bahia Shehab is an Egyptian-Lebanese artist and historian, and Associate Professor of Design and founder of the graphic design program at The American University in Cairo (AUC).

moment of ambiguity and creativity, was being replaced by the silence of the homogenous, white walls of the normative order.



Image 43 and Image 44: The Badr Brigades alterations of Mohammed Khaled's additions, in which they removed the protestors being crushed in a pool of blood under the tank, with people holding the Egyptian flags. Above are the words (spray painted in red), "The Army and the People are One Hand"

Source: Gröndahl, 2012: 28.



Image 45: A “monster-like” Tantawi eating a female protestor next to stencils of a woman holding a gun and the Mona Lisa Brigade stencil.

Source: Gröndahl, 2012: 28.

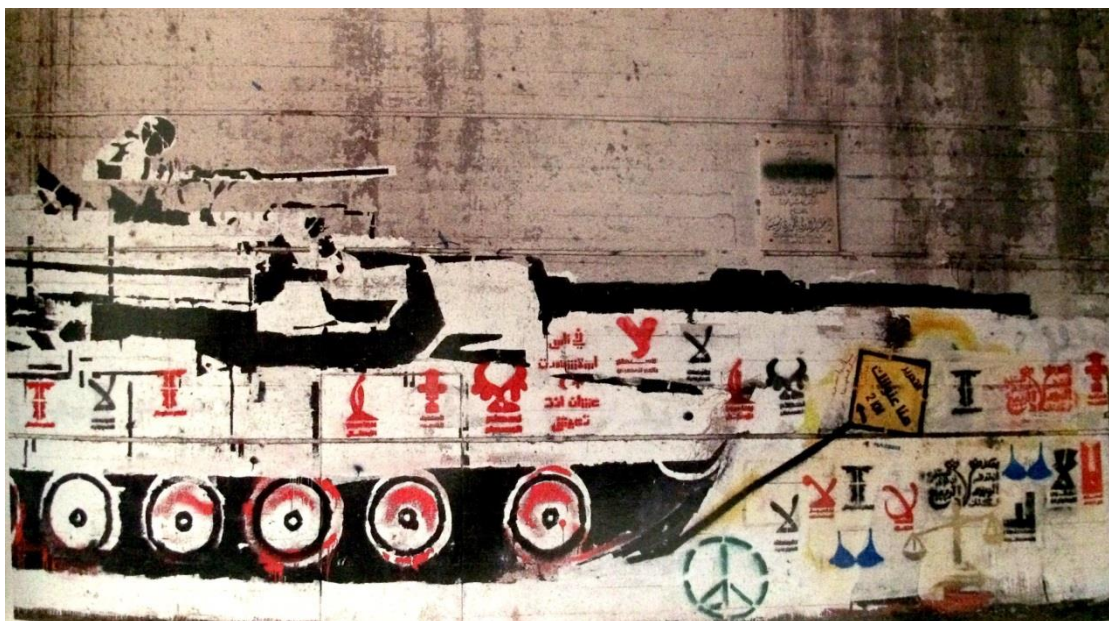


Image 46: Several other additions were later added to the mural, such as the “blue bra” stencils and the word “no” in Arabic, before the mural was completely removed in June 2013.

Source: Gröndahl, 2012: 29.



Image 47: The infamous image of the “girl in the blue bra”, which shows Egyptian soldiers attacking and dragging a veiled female protestor in December 2011. This image was largely seen by revolutionaries as indicative of the army’s blatant abuse of power and force.

Source: Stringer/Reuters/Landov, in Amaria, 2011.

The evolution of revolutionary art - such as that represented by the Tank vs. Bike mural - was celebrated as being an aesthetic revolution, a form of archives, dialogue, and debate, and represented a liminal narrative, in the sense that it was not intended to offer a final meaning, rather, it was a narrative which continuously reconstructed itself with overlaying narratives by different players to include multiple and opposing voices of the revolution (see Images 48 and 49 below). This was the significance of revolutionary art according to those I interviewed – not to remain untouched in perpetuity, but to constantly evolve and respond to the revolution, and in this way, mirrors the dialogue and conflict which occurred in the streets the art was housed in. Mohammed Khaled captured the essence of this sentiment when he said: “That wall always had a struggle – we draw, people mess it up, and we draw again,

and they mess it up again, and so on and so forth - it was an intense conversation, there was always a struggle between us and the regime for domination of these spaces. It was very comedic, and interactive between you and something mysterious, which is the government (Mohammed Khaled, Cairo, pers. comm., 29 April 2014).



Image 48: Representative of revolutionary art and graffiti during all three phases of the Egyptian revolution was the existence of multiple voices on the same wall. This was representative in a photo I took of a wall in Downtown Cairo in May 2014, prior to Sisi's elections, near one of the remaining wall barricades built around the Ministry of Interior. On the top, the phrase written in black says "Morsi is the President of the Republic", to emphasize that his supporters still view him as Egypt's legitimate President even after his ouster by the military. Beneath it is the phrase the "Nahda (Renaissance) Program", in reference to the Brotherhood's "political platform full of unrealistic developmental projects" (Armbrust, 2017: 230). Directly beneath it, a response to the "Nahda Program" graffiti is another graffiti written in black which says "Nahda' 'Ar", which translates into a "Shameful (or disgraceful) Renaissance",

for what critics say is Morsi's failed economic policy. On the bottom, in red, is the Ultras famous anti-police graffiti (which existed even prior to the revolution), which is A.C.A.B. – "All Cops are Bastards". On the right, in red, is the iconic name "Gika", in reference to the young martyr Mohamed Gaber Salah. And finally, on the far left is a stencil of Sisi with an eyepatch. Underneath his image it says *a'tara*, which means, "do you see?" in reference to professional snipers of the Central Security Forces targeting the eyes of revolutionaries. In the lead up to the elections, art which criticized Sisi was plentiful, as many believed that his soaring popularity guaranteed him the upcoming election, despite the fact that under his authority, several atrocities were committed, not least of which were the virginity tests of March 2011. This wall is intended to highlight the fact that they were not homogenous sites of unified opinion, but were the sites of multiple voices and dialogue, which were usually in conflict with each other.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 49: Revolutionary art and graffiti on Mohamed Mahmoud Street.

The existence of this diverse dialogue in public spaces – which reflected both conflict and cooperation – was, to many of those I interviewed, one of the most celebrated elements of the Egyptian revolution. One of the most interesting phrases can be seen in the center, above the eagles, where it says

“Al Magd La’l Mushaghibeen”, which means, “Glory to the Troublemakers”. SCAF would regularly refer to the revolutionaries as troublemakers causing chaos in an effort to undermine them and contain the revolution, so this phrase is in mocking reference to their “troublemaker” label by the authorities, for their efforts to continue the revolutionary struggle.

Source: Photo by Author.

The street was the central location for political and cultural acts, in tandem. The site of cooperation, conflict, and struggle, and where people made meaning of the Egyptian revolution and their experience in it. In the liminal moment, it was the ordinary space in which all forms of expression were performed. In writing about the public space in the Egyptian revolution, Peterson argued that the street was the central space within which contested narratives “construct[ed] moments of meaning in the contingent, unfolding experience of the ongoing revolution” (2015b: 65) by the revolutionaries and army/regime loyalists. It was the street, according to those I spoke to, that was the source of art’s political nature because of its feature as a space of civic as well as cultural performances and engagement. Yet the street was not identified as an exceptional place to create art, it was seen as its natural location – the normative space in which one was to create, and be creative. This was exceptional, given the restrictive nature of public space under Mubarak’s regime, in which public acts of defiance through artistic/creative means had always been repressed.

As the literature on liminality shows, in a liminal moment – such as a revolution - the structural order is turned inside out. In Egypt, the normative location for the creation of art tended to be restricted within private spaces and formal venues such as galleries and museums, however, during the Egyptian revolution the street became the “obvious” and natural place for artistic expressions just as the street became the “obvious” and natural place for political expressions and for the convergence of the public, as the street is the site of *communitas*, dissidence, expression, and creativity. Not only was it “natural” for anyone and everyone to write and draw in public spaces, but public spaces were also appropriate as the natural location for creative expression.

My interviewees agreed that the street was the most natural venue for revolutionary art because the street was not only the site of revolutionary expression, but revolutionary action. My informants were themselves constantly present on the street making art during the Egyptian revolution, yet at the same time actively participating in standoffs with the government, sharing experiences, and communicating ideas. Thus, art can not be dissociated with revolutionary acts/events, which is why most of those I interviewed would insist that even if they just said the word “*fann*” (art), it was a given that they meant “*fann el thawra*” (revolutionary art), as there was no artistic discourse outside the revolution at that moment. These two terms were indistinguishable during my fieldwork.

Furthermore, the conflict and struggle through revolutionary art was not necessarily seen as a negative act – according to several of those I interviewed, conflict and struggle are crucial components to creating a heterogeneous public space (refer to Image 42) and an active public sphere, and that meant that several narratives should necessarily be in conflict with each other, versus – as in the normative order during Mubarak’s regime – the public presence of one dominant narrative which was sanctioned in the public sphere - the government narrative,

It is very liberating to see the counter opinion defiantly existing in public space on the street when all of the other modes of expression are being highly regulated by the government. I mean people could even talk about it all the time, but it’s just talk [on the Internet vs. cementing opinions in public space]. It is liberating and also I think it is so important for it to exist, the counter opinion that a lot of people have to find a venue of expression (Ganzeer, Cairo, pers. comm., 26 April 2014).

As Peterson notes, although “the eighteen days [the first phase] in Tahrir Square neatly fit Victor Turner’s concepts of liminality, *communitas* and *antistructure*, the revolution failed to exhibit the inexorable ‘decline and fall into structure and law’ that Turner’s model predicts (Turner 1969: 132)” (Peterson, 2015b: 65). Instead, Peterson argues, what ended up happening was that “the Egyptian public sphere turned into what Turner calls an arena, in which the many political and social visions of a new, post-Mubarak Egypt are contested and struggled over, and various political institutions – from the remnants of the old regime to the narrowly elected president and his Muslim Brotherhood associates to the revolutionary youth to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) – struggle to create a new hegemonic narrative to define Egypt” (ibid.).

El Zeft agrees that art should necessarily involve conflict and was part of the revolutionary struggle which necessarily instigates active intervention, even if it means the erasure or criticism of that art, as it is indicative that at least a dialogue can occur (versus a homogeneous, controlled public sphere of the normative order which subdued dialogue). Furthermore, El Zeft argues that conflict and struggle on the walls (a reflection of the struggle on the street), also indicates that art has an affective, instigating effect, versus what many described to me as uncontroversial “sterile” gallery art that people passively viewed, and was so characteristic of the cultural scene during Mubarak’s era. As he said: “For me when I do something and then someone writes something I become very happy, because I am creating conflict and people cared enough with what I did to the degree that they didn’t like it so they wipe it off or they write no on it or they write a different message. It is awareness, it is awareness, and in the end, conflict. You want to create conflict not impose your own ideas, that was never

right, that would be a dictatorship in the end” (El Zeft, Cairo, pers. comm., 27 April 2014).

Being located on the threshold of a liminal moment necessarily leads to instability and conflict, however, those I spoke to said that during Mubarak’s rule, public space was so restrictive and regulated and the walls a representation of the homogeneity of the normative order. Therefore, the conflictual nature of revolutionary art during the liminal moment was celebrated, even with the counter-opinions of the authorities sprayed in response to revolutionary art, as it represented a turning point in public discourse where the street turned into a place of debate, conflict, cooperation, and struggle all at the same time. This effectively led to a breach in the structural order, and most of my respondents said that it had seemed, at the time, that anything was truly possible.

6.3 The Battles of Mohamed Mahmoud Street/Tahrir Square, the Militarization of Downtown Cairo, and Mad Graffiti Week (November 2011 – March 2012)

The winter of 2011 would mark the beginning of a very bloody period of the revolutionary process. Perhaps no incident was most representative of the intense conflict of the “Second Revolution” (second wave or the second life of the revolution, as many of those I spoke to labeled it) during the military transition period than the Mohamed Mahmoud Battles which started in November 2011, and would mark the beginning of a bloody 2011/2012 winter which would lead to a the Second Mohamed Mahmoud Street battle in February 2012. Much like the first phase of the revolution during the 18 days, the first Mohamed Mahmoud battle would be a second wave of

revolutionary struggle through a renewed battle for *karama* (“dignity”) and against *ihana* (“humiliation”) - however this time, it was a symbolic and physical fight as a response to the blockaded Ministry of Interior (*dakhiliyya*) building. As Ryzova notes, it is “not of *karama* as a universal human honour”, it is rather *karama* understood as,

a historically and socially constituted honour that has a lot to do with how honour and masculinity were constructed locally. They were not fighting for any high-minded outcome such as democracy; in fact, most possibly they do not think anything “good” would come out of the fight. But the fight gave them back their dignity, even if temporarily. *Karama* for them means their bodies not being subject to torture, not being mistreated at checkpoints and police stations, and having the small cash in their pockets extracted by each officer they pass so that they don’t get thrown in the police station overnight - until they can produce more cash. They don’t necessarily believe that any force (any political outcome that might come as result of this fight) would help them to recover their dignity. They fight to beat the *dakhiliyya*, to have beaten the *dakhiliyya* (Ryzova, 2011).

Mohamed Mahmoud’s strategic location, just off of Tahrir Square and leading to the Ministry of Interior, saw it become the prime battle ground and emerging memorial space over the course of the revolution (Abaza, 2012a; 2012b; 2013b; 2013c), as well as what Mona Abaza calls the “revolution’s barometer” through the revolutionary art which continuously emerged and evolved in response to the events in the street (Abaza, 2012b). As Jankowicz notes, “Many places in Cairo are home to revolutionary graffiti art; many others have become synonymous with revolutionary conflict. What makes Mohamed Mahmoud street unique is that it has become both” (Jankowicz, 2016). The first Mohamed Mahmud Street battle on November 19, 2011 saw central security forces violently disperse a sit-in organized by the families of those injured or killed during the 18 days of the revolution in January and February 2011 who called for the transfer from SCAF rule to civilian rule, and stated that they will boycott

parliamentary elections scheduled to begin at the end of November 2011. This move to attack by the authorities, Armbrust argues, was “sparked by tensions in the wake of the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces (SCAF’s) machinations to guarantee itself freedom from civilian oversight in whatever political order was to emerge” (Armbrust, 2017: 222).

This incident would instigate one of the most brutal battles on Mohamed Mahmoud Street by those angered by the attack on the families, during which more than 50 people were killed. This street battle saw the former allies of the revolutionaries, the Muslim Brotherhood, condemn the protestors as they allied with SCAF – as Peterson notes, within a social drama (such as a revolution), after the initial breach phase (the January 25, 2011 first of the Egyptian revolution) of the normative order, the crisis stage brings in a period of antistructure, where “sides are taken, coalitions formed and fissures spread and deepen through a number of coordinated and contiguous relationships” (Peterson, 2015a: 176). This period of time saw the reconstitution of the experience of anti-structure and *communitas* of the liminal moment of the initial 18 days of the revolution in a second wave of the Egyptian revolution, when social distinctions were irrelevant and Egyptians from different walks of life came together in solidarity against the brutal pushback of the security forces. As Ryzova writes,

Increasingly distinctions between the young men on the front line (Islamist youth, ultras, and *wilad sis*²⁹) are blurred. All of them share a history of engagement with the regime and its harshly imposed order and an articulation of codes of honour... One saw a social mix rarely seen in Egypt (though it was famously present in the First Revolution): middle-class men and women, some of them activists but most of them not; young and

²⁹ “The *wilad sis* are young men who might be described as working class, though most are unemployed, underemployed, unskilled and semi-skilled, doing occasional jobs that change every day (though on most days, there is no “work”). They are often marked by a particular dress code and hairstyle that often involves copious quantities of gel (the word *sis* alludes to the attention they often pay to their appearance, considered by other Egyptians as almost effeminate)” (Ryzova, 2011a).

old, in suits, *kefiyehs* and jeans, alongside the *galabiyas* and long beards of the salafis; bareheaded women as well as *munaqqabat* (fully veiled women). On the front line, by contrast (and naturally so given the nature of the battle), the demographic was predominantly (though not exclusively) young male and socially marginal. As in some of the key engagements of the First Revolution, major credit for holding the frontline goes to Egypt's football ultras. They know how to manoeuvre collectively, how to engage the police, and how to and play "hide, seek and hit" with the security forces. Crucially, they have a long-standing "open account" with the security forces, meaning that they had suffered at the security forces' hands, and wanted payback (Ryzova, 2011a).

The first battle of Mohamed Mahmoud was marked by an increase in violent tactics used by riot police against protestors, in which the extensive use of tear gas, rubber bullets, grenades, "eye snipers", and live ammunition was used to suppress the protestors. "Eye snipers" were called as such because protestors were shot in the eye by professional snipers, in a move believed to be an intentional targeting by the authorities to maim and kill protestors.³⁰ A disturbing video distributed on YouTube shows a central security force officer targeting a protestor's eyes with rubber bullets, with his colleagues congratulating him. The officer in the video, Mahmoud Sobhi el-Shinawi, was later arrested for three years after turning himself in. "Wanted" stencils were sprayed in downtown Cairo calling for his arrest after the video was released (see Image 50 below). According to Ahmed Aboul Hassan, an Egyptian political editor, this stencil "nourished revolutionary identity, growing it from infancy to adulthood, culminating in a fully formed entity that tracks down killers and taunts them on the walls near their neighborhoods and workplaces" (Aboul Hassan, cited in Hamdy, Karl,

³⁰ "It is claimed [that Central Security Forces], have targeted protestors' heads – it has been reported that more than 80 people have lost eyes and many more have sustained head and neck injuries since the protests in January [2011]...Claims by protestors that the targeting was more pronounced in the November clashes are backed up by Ghada Shahbender of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights, who says she heard a high-ranking CSF officer instructing soldiers to aim at the protestors' heads as she passed through their ranks on 19 November" (Tomlin, 2011).

2013: 134). Revolutionary art was continuously evolving, evading generalization and responding – and reacting - to revolutionary events as it constituted itself aesthetically, physically, and symbolically within the liminal experience of revolutionaries.



Image 50: A stencil of the “eye sniper” on the wall of the Mugama building which lies on the south side of Tahrir Square, which says (above) “Wanted: Look with the People”, (below) “First Lieutenant, Mahmoud Sobhi El-Shinawi, an Officer of the Central Security Forces accused of targeting the eyes of tens of revolutionary heroes in Tahrir”

Source: Hickson, A., 2011.

The most publicized victim of what came to be called the eye sniper was Ahmed Harara (see Image 48 and 49), profiled in Time Magazine as one of 36 iconic activists all around the world who participated in protests in 2011 (Hauslohner, 2011). Ahmed Harara lost both eyes during two decisive battles of the Egyptian Revolution - Friday’s “Day of Rage” on January 28, 2011 and the First Battle of Mohamed Mahmoud on November 19, 2011.

Harara, a former dentist who lost his job when he lost his eyesight, became a “living martyr” (Agence-France Press, 2011) of the revolution, and his image – and the use of eye patches – was used as a symbol of resistance, respect, and endurance, as well as a show of solidarity against SCAF rule. Graffiti and revolutionary art of revolutionaries and martyrs wearing eye patches were drawn all over Cairo. The eye patch was even drawn on famous statues, such as the iconic stone lion on Qasr El Nil bridge (see Images 53 and 54), the site of one of the most intense standoffs of the revolution – the Friday “Day of Rage”, on January 28, 2011 (see Images 55 and 56). The image of the eye patch not only became a symbol of resistance and solidarity, but also a symbolic sacrifice over what revolutionaries have lost – and are willing to lose – in their fight against the brutal security forces and military rule. It also was a sign that police brutality – the primary cause of protests and the revolutionaries anger on January 25 – was just as barbaric as ever under the rule of the military junta, the “faithful ally of the *ancien régime*” (Abaza, 2013c: 122), and that the structural, normative order of Mubarak’s regime (and the underlying police brutality) still existed in full force. As one journalist noted, “[t]he Eye Sniper may have been jailed, [b]ut the police culture that enabled his actions has barely changed” (Kingsley, 2013).

This particular event indicated that the liminal period was far from over, and that the revolution’s fight was only just beginning. The revolutionaries would continue to reassert their efforts to push the revolution forth, in spite of the brutal tactics by authorities to suppress attempts to reconstitute the *communitas* and antistructure of the Egyptian revolution and close the revolutionary process through physical (blockading

the streets, arresting, killing, and injuring protestors) and symbolic (by discrediting the revolutionaries through state media coverage and whitewashing graffiti) means.



Image 51 and Image 52: Ahmed Harara, who became known as the “blind hero of the revolution”, became an iconic figure in the revolution, having lost both of his eyes in two of the revolution’s decisive battles – written in Arabic on his right eye is January 28 [2011] and on his left eye November 19 [2011].

Source: Suzeeinthecity, 2011 (Image 51); Rashwan, 2011 (Image 52).



Image 53 and Image 54: The lion statue on Qasr El Nil bridge with an eye patch, and graffiti of the lion statue with an eye patch.

Source: Hart, D., 2012 (Image 53); Tomlin, J., 2011 (Image 54).



Image 55: Ammar Abo Bakr's eye patch mural of injured protestors who lost their eyes during the November 2011 battle of Mohamed Mahmoud street, on the wall of the AUC Main Campus on Mohamed Mahmoud Street.

Source: Suzeeinthecity, 2011.



Image 56: Protestors outside Qasr El-Aini hospital, wearing the eyepatch as a symbol of solidarity with those who lost their eyes since the January 2011 revolution, particularly after the brutal Mohamed Mahmoud battle in November 2011.

Source: Ismail, 2011.

The Mohamed Mahmoud battle in November 2011 was followed by renewed, bloody clashes during the peaceful Occupy Cabinet sit-in which started on November 26, 2011, to protest the appointment of Kamal El-Ganzouri as the new Prime Minister (responsible for forming a new Cabinet) for his previous deeply-held ties to Mubarak’s former regime. The sit-in lasted three weeks during parliamentary elections (the Freedom and Justice Party of the Muslim Brotherhood won an overwhelming majority of the votes - 47.2% - when the final results came out on 21 January, 2012) (Hamdy, Karl, 2013: 130), until December 16, when military police and revolutionaries clashed after one of the protestors was detained and beaten the night before. During the December 16 clashes, Sheikh Emad Effat, the iconic “Sheikh of the Revolution” who was a senior cleric at Al Azhar Mosque and the director of fatwas at Dar Al-Ifta (Hamdy, Karl: 2013: 113) and well-known by revolutionaries for his frontline participation in the January 25 revolution and his criticism of military rule, was shot and killed and subsequently memorialized in iconic graffiti, many of which depict him and Mina Daniel side by side, in a symbol of religious unity and their unification through the sacred status of martyrdom (see Image 57).



Image 57: A mural showing Mina Daniel and Sheikh Emad Effat together, (“representative martyrs of the revolution”), signifying Muslim and Christian unity as they spread their hands over the faces of the other martyrs.

Source: Suzeeinthecity, 2012b.

The next day, 17 December 2011, saw military police raid Tahrir Square beating, dragging, and detaining protestors – one of the most iconic images of this merciless attack was the shocking “blue bra” girl image mentioned above in which a veiled woman was beaten and dragged in the street. This day saw clashes with revolutionaries, journalists, and even innocent bystanders, while the Institute of Egypt³¹ burned down amidst the fighting (effectively destroying significant archives of Egypt’s rich history), and live ammunition was frequently used.

Amid the clashes, then-Prime Minister El-Ganzouri – whose initial appointment was the main cause for the sit-ins – ironically called the revolutionaries members of the “counter-revolution” in an effort to discredit them in the eyes of the public. During this time, the state media narrative continued their oft-repeated claims that the clashes were influenced by a “foreign conspiracy” and that the protestors primary goals were to aid and abet this conspiracy by attempting to cause chaos and disrupt daily life, and that they were influenced by so-called “foreign powers” (Hamdy, Karl, 2013: 114, 116). To many of those I spoke to, this was the standard discourse of the authoritarian regime which used the narrative of “stability” and “order” to reconstitute the normative order and discredit the liminal experience of the revolution as being one of destruction, instability, and chaos, in order to delegitimize the revolutionaries cause and generate fear among the public. It was the revolutionaries portrayal by state media and the authorities public statements as thugs, foreign agents, and troublemakers, which – according to many I interviewed - led to a major public loss in the support of the

³¹ The Institute of Egypt, located near Tahrir Square, was established in the 18th century by Napoleon Bonaparte – it contained priceless manuscripts, most of which were destroyed when the Institute was burned down on December 17, 2011 (Associated Press in Cairo, 2011).

revolution's fight, and would lead to the emergence of the "honourable citizens" which attempted to contain the revolutionaries activity and discourse.

Besides the prolific media narrative that attempted to discredit and contest the validity of revolutionary actions and isolate the revolutionaries from the support of the Egyptian public, physical attempts to isolate the revolutionaries in urban (public) spaces was also decisively in place. In a move which indicated the authorities desire to cement control, another concrete wall was built in Qasr El-Aini Street³² to block the way to the Cabinet from Tahrir, and the Ministry of Interior was further barricaded with the erection of two more walls in Yousef El-Guindy Street and Sheikh Rehan Street. This, according to Abaza, made "life practically impossible for many" (Abaza, 2013c), and further marginalized revolutionaries from key protest points and restricted their movements and their ability to mobilize. Through the zoning of downtown Cairo, the military wanted to expunge the Egyptian revolutions "public culture of protest" (Abaza, 2012c: 125), which included a "novel understanding of public spaces as spaces of contestation, of communication and debate, as spaces of the 'spectacle'" (Abaza, 2012c: 126, Mehrez, 2012). Abaza argues that, in an ironic twist, the authorities want to re-appropriate urban space by applying

the lesson it learned from the 'frozen moment' of the 18 days of January, which paralysed the entire city – and was thus highly effective in bringing about the downfall of the regime. It has been counteracting the revolutionaries by 'zoning' and confining the protesters, segregating them in limited spaces of war. The junta imagines that what will bring the skirmishes to an end is the

³² "The blocking of Qasr Al-Aini Street, a vital Cairo artery, has made normal perambulation in downtown impossible. It appears as if the powers that be have a master plan to torment all the capital's denizens – pedestrians and car drivers, rich and poor (this is democracy) – via the tactic of 'detouring'" (Abaza, 2013c).

erection of multiple cement walls and the blocking of entire parallel streets with stone walls and military vehicles. The tactic of zoning, including the zoning of Tahrir Square, is also intended to lay the blame on the revolutionaries for paralysing the downtown area. The confining of the space of conflict is one way of restricting the street fights, as SCAF thinks that this is the way to contain rebellion...Zoning is thus one way of containing the protesters in specific areas while ‘normalizing’ the rest of the circulation and the business and banking sector in the city of Cairo (Abaza, 2012c: 127-128).

In a further move to subvert the public culture of protest and reassert control over urban space, over the course of the winter of 2011 and the spring of 2012, the authorities erected eight stone walls throughout key points in downtown Cairo (see Image 56 for an illustration of the walls/blockades set up by the military during this time, effectively segregating downtown Cairo). According to Mona Abaza, by February 2012, “there were eight walls around the area of Mohammed Mahmud, Noubar and Mansur Sheikh Rehan Streets, not counting the barbed-wire zones in front of the Ministry of Interior, check-points, the tanks blocking access and large green police vehicles filled with hundreds of security soldiers” (Abaza, 2013c: 126; Trew, Abdalla, Feteha, 2012).” Abaza argues that the main goals of the zoning of downtown Cairo was twofold. The first was to place the “blame on the revolutionaries for paralysing the downtown area” (Abaza, 2012c: 127) to further discredit them in the eyes of the public and represent them as forces of chaos. The second was to contain and “conf[ine] of the space of conflict” to restrict “the street fights” and “contain rebellion” (Abaza, 2012c: 127-128), in an effort to divide the city into a “normalized” space versus the “war zone” space (Abaza, 2012c: 128). This tactic – of “confining the protesters [and] segregating them in limited spaces of war” (Abaza, 2012c: 127) is one of the ways in which the military authorities attempted to implement violent redressive measures to ensure an end to the liminal phase to return to the much desired “order” of

the status quo. One of the normative features of the status quo – and elements of its power - is the authorities ability to effectively control public space and contain/remove any unwanted, dissident elements swiftly. Through the zoning of downtown Cairo, SCAF had sent a signal that it wanted to quickly regain this control. There was a ferocious attempt – by both the revolutionaries and SCAF – to establish control of the street. For the revolutionaries, the street had become a space of play, struggle, communitas, and creativity. For the authorities, the street was the site where redressive measures (through violent tactics) needed to be implemented in order to ensure a return to the structural order, where it was the authorities – and not the public – who had the ability to control and define the contours of urban space.

Not only was there an initiative in place to segregate downtown Cairo through these walls and barricades, but a prolific campaign to whitewash the murals off of the now iconic Mohamed Mahmoud Street had begun. In an attempt to reconstitute the structural order and subvert the so-called “chaos” of the liminal time of the Egyptian revolution, authorities completely repainted the AUC wall prior to the one-year anniversary of the January 25 Revolution, an effort which did not last more than a day. However, the act of whitewashing graffiti is an ideological move to clean downtown Cairo of “undesirable elements [which have] served to demonstrate the new regime’s attempts to impose its own order” (Ryzova, quoted in Jankowicz, 2016) in an effort to restore the status quo.



Image 58: Whitewashing the AUC wall of revolutionary art.

Source: Abaza, 2012a.

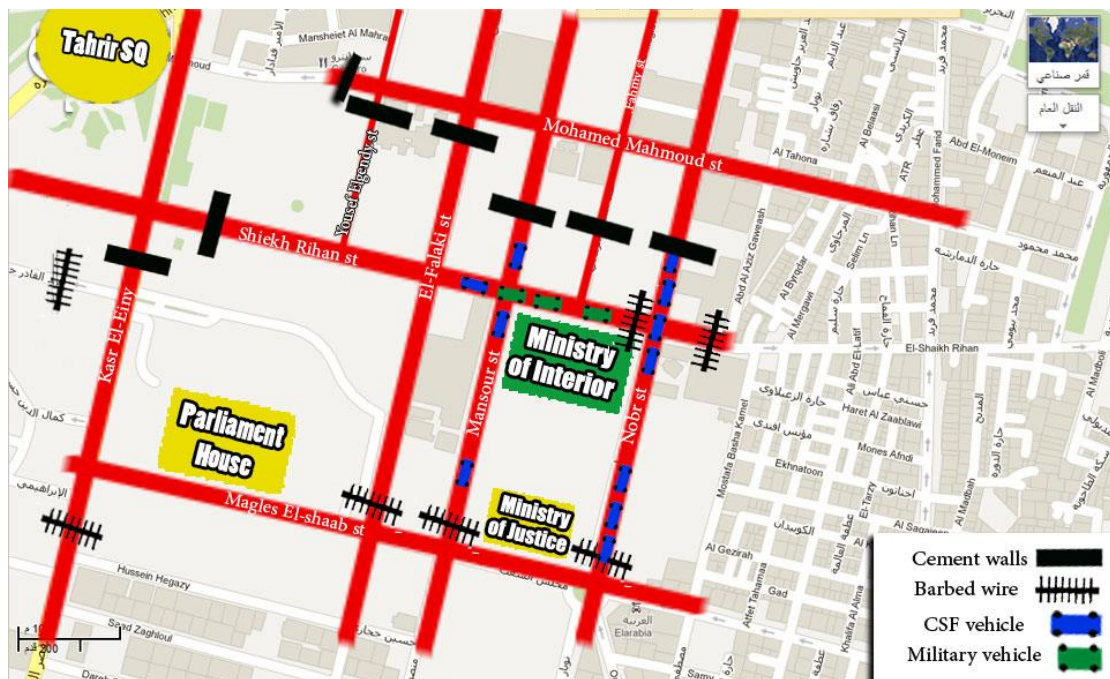


Image 59: The Militarization of Downtown Cairo.

Source: Trew, Abdalla, Feteiha, 2012.

These events led to two major initiatives in an effort to reconstitute the antistructure of the revolution and counter SCAF's redressive measures to contain the revolution and bring about a return to the structural order. The first is the "Mad Graffiti Week" – in response to the army's brutal tactics and continued hold on power, and the second was the "No Walls" campaign in March 2012 – a response to the increasing militarization of downtown Cairo from November to March 2012. Mad Graffiti Week was an open call by Ganzeer on December 20, 2011 (from 13 – 25 January, 2012, which coincided with the revolution's first anniversary), in which he appealed upon artist everywhere to,

...help save lives. The Egyptian Military Council has unleashed a brutal crackdown on peaceful protests by the Egyptian people, calling for the resignation of the military council and a cancellation of the sham [parliamentary] elections that they've been running under their supervision. Soldiers have shown us no mercy, hitting fallen women with their batons, stomping on skulls with their boots, and shooting unarmed civilians dead...Our only hope right now is to destroy the military council using the weapon of art. From January 13 to 25, the streets of Egypt will see an explosion of anti-military revolutionary art. If you are a revolutionary artist elsewhere in the world, please do what you can in our city to help us (Hamdy, Karl, 2013: 120).

This revolutionary art initiative significantly differed from Mad Graffiti Weekend, which was centralized primarily in Cairo and whose aim was to create a few large murals by several artists and volunteers. In its openness, Mad Graffiti week saw a surge in anti-military art and the documentation and archival of this art, through Facebook groups (the most prominent being "Mad Graffiti Week", "Mad Graffiti Week Alexandria", and "Graffiti the streets of Egypt", among others), Twitter accounts, and Flickr pages. A democratic, decentralized, and collective initiative, this was not a project revolving around the revolutionary artist "stars" of the revolution, but was

intended for everyone to do as they like. During this initiative, stencil booklets were available for download, making it easy for anyone to be able to use to spray paint in their cities or towns. As Ganzeer said,

I think Mad Graffiti Week was actually the first time an explosion a little bit [happened]. I want to say like revolutionary art but just people summoning up the courage to just go out on the street and scrawl something on the wall, even not just Cairo but shady little towns that are out in the middle of the nowhere. There were a couple reports of some kids getting arrested³³ for spraying slogans on police stations, stuff like that, in small towns. All this happened in Mad Graffiti week. And also there was this thing that we did, myself and other people, we just started sharing lots of designs online, that other people would take and use and cut and stencil and whatever and use it their own ways, so yeah I wouldn't say there was a big art movement from the art crowd...just from regular people (Ganzeer, Cairo, Skype Interview, 22 November 2013).

According to El Teneen, an event such as “Mad Graffiti Week” was significant in establishing connections between the physical and virtual word – through participatory, collaborative, and archival efforts – and that this was one of the main – and most significant - legacies of the revolution,

I joined in Mad Graffiti week, mostly doing stencils and giving it to people to use it...If I take a picture now and put it on Facebook, a link has been created since the revolution that has remained, whereby any picture of graffiti or any doodles on the walls, it would fly everywhere. The connection between the wall as a public sphere and social media outlets is strong. They have different domains and people deal with them differently, writing on the wall for example and writing on Facebook and Twitter by a public figure that has thousands of followers is different, you will take what he says differently than when some random guy writes on the wall in the streets. Writing on the wall is more

³³ During Mad Graffiti week, “three youths are reported to have been arrested — one in Banha City and two in Mahalla City — for acts of ‘vandalism.’ These youths were reportedly detained, questioned and then released on the same day” (Charbel, 2012).

democratic because it is more accessible and because most of the time you don't know who it is who did it (El Teneen, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).

Mad Graffiti Week further cemented calls by revolutionaries, the public, and artists alike that military rule needed to end, and to reassert their right to public space and to take to the streets, as indicative of some of its most iconic stencils seen in Images 60 and 62 below.



Image 60: One of the most prominent stencils of Mad Graffiti Week was a Guy Fawkes mask, written underneath it says “Thoughts against Bullets”, as well as a fist raised in defiance, under which it says “The streets are ours, go down on January 25 [2012, for the one year anniversary of the revolution].”

Source: Charbel, 2012.



Image 61: “Have you been vindicated”? next to the mural of the martyr Tarek Abdel Latif.

Source: Suzeeinthecity, 2012a.



Image 62: Stencils which read “the revolution continues” – one of the most repeated slogans seen on revolutionary art during the first anniversary of the January 25 revolution.

Source: Suzeeinthecity, 2012a.

Subsequently, the “No Walls” campaign in March 2012 was a collective initiative and response to the segregation imposed by the zoning of downtown Cairo through concrete walls and steel barricades placed in certain strategic points. The mission of the creative “No Walls” in March 2012 campaign was to aesthetically “open” the streets in order to symbolically subvert the walls very physical and imposing existence. Artists and volunteers from the public worked together to defy the authorities attempt at marginalizing their physical movements and disrupting citizens ordinary lives in an attempt to maintain the liminal moment of the revolution by continuously subverting the physical (and symbolic) barriers of the normative order. As El Zeft said, the barricade walls erected in downtown Cairo were a form of physical occupation that intended to disrupt the movement of everyday life, and confine the revolution (and the revolutionaries) to certain zones, which ultimately failed,

I felt exactly like I was drawing on the Apartheid Wall in Palestine [a common sentiment used by those drawing on the walls at this time], exactly, you feel like they occupied this place and they made a wall around it saying “this is ours and this is yours”. The point for me [of drawing on these walls] was that this wall does not exist. At the time...I remember the tone at the time was that the revolution was defeated and that we lost and that there was no more hope. So I went at night and the soldiers were still standing behind the wall, so I drew a rainbow and a little girl sitting with a dog, it was a hopeful image, to say that no matter what you do no matter how long you stay and no matter how long the wall stays, tomorrow is going to be nice as long as we are alive and as long as we are resisting we will stay, we won’t stop. Then we got together and we agreed that we would draw on all the walls - they were about seven [at the time], as if these walls don’t exist. One of my drawings was in Mansour Street, and everyone was helping each other, there was nothing that was specifically for one person. It was really nice. People would come and would want to help, it feels great (El Zeft, Cairo, pers. comm., 27 April 2014).



Image 63: El Zeft’s Rainbow Drawing, which he collaborated on with several friends, on one of the walls blockading Mansour Street in downtown Cairo. The left side is entitled “Tomorrow”, which shows a brighter future, while the left side is entitled “Yesterday”, and commemorates the martyrs of the Port Said Massacre.

Source: Suzeeinthecity, 2012d.

El Zeft’s other iconic drawing was on the wall blockading Qasr El-Aini street, which, to him, was a sardonic, sarcastic, and mocking gesture against the authorities (see Image 64), in which he said his message was a simple one - “There were people in clashes [at the time] and I put a smiley face looking at the square. Like ‘do whatever we want we still love what we do and we will keep doing it even if you kill all of us, fuck you’ ” (El Zeft, Cairo, pers. comm., 27 April 2014). Other collaborative works included the use of *trompe l’oeil* (see Image 66) where artists and volunteers together cleverly painted landscapes of what looked like the “normal” continuation of the street

- an ironic twist on a wall which has effectively disrupted the movement of everyday life – in order to mock the closure of the physical space and transcend its obstruction through the opening up of an imaginary space (Abaza, 2012c: 128).

It is in such subversive acts that illustrate that public space is no longer easily relinquished, yet is constantly being re-appropriated in novel ways in order to reconstitute the liminality of the revolution, indicating that the battle of contestation over public space is a symbolic one as much as a physical one. Attempting to reassert the ability to be actively present in public space - one of the most significant feats of the liminal moment of the Egyptian revolution – through the use of graffiti on the actual physical symbols of obstructions (walls/barricades) is a powerful attempt to discredit the return of the normative order and delegitimize its tactics.



Image 64: El Zeft’s “smiley face”, which he made in collaboration with revolutionary artists Amr Nazeer and Layla Magued, on the wall blockading

Qasr El-Aini Street.

Source: Abou Bakr, 2013.



Image 65: A protestor holding up a picture of the “smiley face”, underneath it is written in Arabic, “Smile (or laugh)...no matter the obstacles (or barriers, in reference to the wall) and hardships.”

Source: El Zeff, Facebook post, 2013 (photo by Mohamed Abd El-Hamid).



Image 66: A clever *trompe l’oeil* on the wall blockading Sheikh Rihan Street in downtown Cairo.

Source: Suzeeinthecity, 2012d.

The First Mohamed Mahmoud Battle of the Occupy Cabinet clashes in November 2011, and the ensuing violence in Tahrir in December 2011, were decisive moments in the Egyptian revolution's history. Not only did it effectively illustrate the attempts by SCAF to sideline the revolutionaries from taking any part in the political decision-making process and discredit them as "foreign agents" and "troublemakers", but it showed complete disregard for their demands and a continuation of the police and security forces brutality that characterized Mubarak's regime. This illustrated, to all of those I interviewed, that the authorities wanted the public to quietly return to the status quo in their efforts to re-establish the normative order.

This conflict was renewed in February 2012 after the Port Said Massacre and the ensuing Second Mohamed Mahmoud street battles. The Port Said Massacre occurred on February 1, 2012, after the home team (Al Masry) won against Cairo's Al-Ahly team. It was reported that Al Masry supporters attacked Ultras Ahlawy fans with knives, sticks, and clubs, although those I interviewed said they were undercover *baltageyeh* of the authorities posing as football fans in order to extract revenge against the Ultras Ahlawy for their support and participation in the Egyptian revolution, as they were a significant mobilizing force (see Jerzak, 2013, for how the Ultras became a revolutionary force) in the fight against the authorities. Many of those I spoke to said the evidence indicated that the attack was concerted³⁴ and organized, and that the exits of the stadium had all effectively been blockaded, obstructing Ultras Ahlawy fans from escaping.

³⁴ Many witnesses reported that the steel doors of the stadium were bolted shut (Al Arabiya, 2012; Doward, 2012; Fayed, Perry, 2012), and reports of police officers inciting the attacks could be heard. Indeed, twin brothers who play for the home team Al Masry "claim[ed] the violence was encouraged by the police with the backing of the army" (Doward, 2012).

The Ultras, an Egyptian football fan club and movement, present a significant force in Egyptian society since they became a fully established organization in 2007 (Jerzak, 2013: 242). The Ultras movement have a long history of conflict with the Egyptian authorities (see Rommel, C., 2015), and are known for their extreme devotion to their football clubs. Whether they are Ultras Ahlawy or UA-07 as can be frequently seen stenciled on the walls, the largest Ultras group which support the El Ahly football club, or Ultras White Knights who support the Zamalek football club, etc., they are a highly organized collective movement – even before the Egyptian revolution of January 2011, they were infamous for anti-police graffiti and skirmishes with the authorities,

The Ultras used to draw before the revolution... the history of the Ultras with the regime is a book on its own...they have their own cat-mice chase with the authorities, especially with the police – they draw for example pictures of their friends that were arrested, what happened in a certain soccer match, how the authorities have treated them. A.C.A.B. – this was one of the main things that Ultras write [even before the revolution], all cops are bastards (Radwa Fouda, Cairo, pers. comm., 13 August 2014).

The Port Said Massacre of the Ultras, one of the revolution's most vital – and organized forces - and the subsequent Second Battle of Mohamed Mahmoud Street on February 2, 2012, produced a surge of murals on Mohamed Mahmoud Street to commemorate the martyrs of the tragic event. Hanaa El Degham, an Egyptian artist who lives and works between Cairo and Berlin, said she happened to be in Cairo in February 2012 during the Port Said Massacre, and that she (as well as other volunteers from the street) spontaneously collaborated with Mohammed Khaled, Ammar Abo Bakr and Alaa Awad, another Egyptian artist and lecturer in Luxor's Faculty of Fine Arts. As El-Degham said,

Going to the street was what had to happen at that moment because the situation decrees that we have to all be together outside and discuss and draw. We found this is the best way to reach people, to show them the truth, and for me to find out the truth from them. Because newspapers and the media made it difficult to know what the truth was. ... Drawing on the streets attracts people. Standing in the street makes people take notice of what is going on, they want to know what we are doing and what our message is. It doesn't need a specific language to know what we are doing... When you are in the street and talking to the people, ideas come to you... (Hanaa El Degham, Berlin, Skype interview, 29 November 2013).

Organic, collaborative efforts such as these whereby artists and non-artists alike performed creative acts of dissent, commemoration, and protest was a significant marker of the liminal experience of the Egyptian revolution in light of efforts by the authorities to reconstitute the normative order. The Port Said Massacre inspired artists and non-artists alike to collaborate organically to draw the portraits of the 74 Ultras martyrs, in the largest yet seen collaborative effort between artists and the publics, which clearly indicated that revolutionary art was not just a “vibrant form of revolutionary art” (Abaza, 2013c), but, as Abaza argues, “extends also to the interactive and ‘performative’ encounters of various publics with the walls that visually narrate the dramatic events that happened in the street” (ibid.). As Image 64 shows, people would create impromptu commemorative signs to the martyrs, using leaves and sticks, whereas others would regularly place flowers and candles under martyrs portraits, creating sites where people could mourn and pay their respects. As Abaza notes, the Port Said Massacre was a key revolutionary event which led to the resurgence of *communitas*, and brought the public in to revolutionary art in greater force,

After the February 2012 Port Said massacre of the fans of the Ahli Ultras, even more publics came to interact with the space of the street after the appearance of many new

martyr portraits on the walls. The street was transformed into a memorial space, a shrine (a *mazaar*) to be visited and where flowers could be deposited (Abaza, 2013c).

Soraya Morayef, one of the most well-known bloggers to document Egyptian revolutionary art, described the interaction between the public and artists in the aftermath of the Port Said Massacre, where intense efforts to draw each of the martyrs portraits was in place,

For three consecutive nights on Mohamed Mahmoud, Ammar and his friends worked tirelessly, ignoring jeers by passersby and taking breaks to engage in heated debates with Islamists or to head to the frontline to throw rocks, only to return and resume painting. They are demonstrating artists, or artistic demonstrators. One moment that I was privileged to observe was on Thursday night, where four young men –barely in their twenties – stopped in front of the mural Ammar was painting of the 19-year-old martyr Mohamed Mostafa, and stood completely transfixed [see Image 65]. Then they began to cry. I asked them what was wrong, and they said ‘He’s our friend; we just came from his burial now.’ And they stared at the mural. Ammar approached them, explained that he wanted to commemorate each and every one of their friends who’d died, and that he’d found their photos on Facebook. ‘If you know any others who died, if you have any photos, please give them to me,’ he pleaded. And they nodded (Suzeeinthecity, 2012b).

Abaza also describes the collective act of commemorating the martyrs and using the space of Mohamed Mahmoud as a collective site of public mourning,

a man named Mr Emaisha came every evening to clean Mohammed Mahmud Street and decorate the area in front of the paintings of the young Ultra martyrs with bundles of dried jasmine. Every evening Mr Emeisha brought a vase with flowers, which he left in the street. On the ground, he shaped the bundles of dried jasmine to form the word Sun (Shams). On some days, he shaped them into the words: life + freedom=Egypt. Mr Emeisha told me that to experience the feeling of freedom once makes it impossible to give it up. This is why he will continue to bring in flowers to the street whenever possible...It was also during the beginning of March that one could observe in the evening young women and men stopping their cars to pay a visit to the street and leave flowers

in front of the martyrs' graffiti. The trauma of the massacre of November 2011 was illustrated in the collective act of turning the street into a memorial space (Abaza, 2012c: 134).



Image 67: A man arranges leaves to spell out “Glory to the Martyrs” on Mohamed Mahmoud Street, as Alaa, Ammar, and Hanaa as well as volunteers continue to work on the murals in February 2012.

Source: Aboul Hassan in Hamdy, Karl, 2013: 135



Image 68: The friends of Mohamed Mostafa in front of the portrait of their friend, an Ultra Ahlawy and a 19 year old student, one of the 74 martyrs of the Port Said Massacre.

Source: Suzeeinthecity, 2012b.

The repetitive use of the portraits of martyrs have been key to developing what Abaza calls a “repertoire” of revolutionary art (indicative of such repeated murals as martyrs and “glory to the martyrs”), which can be used to reconstitute the liminal moment of the Egyptian revolution, through such stark questions written under martyr murals, such as “have you obtained your right?” or “have you been vindicated?”. Martyr murals also have somber reminders written under them, such as, “do not forget why I died”. As Armbrust notes, the “martyr inconveniently asks, ‘who killed me?’ and true revolutionaries take up the cause, also asking, ‘who killed them?’ in the hope that they can beat the false patriots out of the fog (Armbrust, 2012). Ascribing an open ended call for the search for vindication and justice through martyr murals makes them a sign that authorizes the continuation of the revolution, as they serve as a reminder not only of the sacrifice, but as an embodiment of the true goals of the revolution.

There is also a more existential meaning to martyrdom which transcends the materiality of the need to vindicate. As Peterson argues, martyrs also “becomes an act through which the world is constituted in particular ways: in this case, as a deeply moral cause” (Peterson, 2015b: 71) which makes it “unthinkable that these men and women would have shed their blood for an uprising that failed” (Peterson, 2015b: 71). Many of those I spoke to, such as El Zeft, told me that even when they felt frustrated at the setbacks of the revolution (such as during SCAF transitional rule or Morsi’s presidency), the reminder of the martyrs was a deeply emotional reminder that they should continue the revolutionary struggle, because it was their duty, as fellow revolutionaries, not to have their ultimate sacrifice – their lives - be in vain. He recalled this to me in a conversation we had when he would respond to fellow revolutionaries who would complain that their efforts were in vain, “if you feel like

you are wasting your time, well what about the people who died and wasted their lives? When you say you are wasting your time, well what about the people who wasted their lives?” (El Zeft, Cairo, pers. comm., 27 April 2014). It was the powerful image of the martyr, as a sacred symbol of the ultimate price people paid for the revolution, which made it unthinkable not to continue the revolutionary struggle until justice and the goals of the Egyptian revolution had been achieved, and the martyrs life vindicated. According to most of those I interviewed, they told me they did not want their deaths to have been in vain.



Image 69, Image 70, Image 71: Martyr Murals of young Egyptian Mohamed Gaber Salah, famously known as “Gika”. Gika was killed on the first anniversary of the Mohamed Mahmoud street clashes in November 2012, when

he was shot in the head by security forces under Morsi's rule – above the image where his mother can be seen mourning him is a stencil which says “The Day you came is the Day you Leave, 30/6” in reference to the massive protest planned on the first anniversary of Morsi's rule, where revolutionaries would call for Morsi's departure. During Gika's funeral (Image 69, above, is a scene from Gika's funeral, drawn by Egyptian revolutionary artist Moshir), thousands marched across Cairo, and his face became one of the most important icons of the 25 January Revolution, reproduced on the walls, t-shirts, as well as protest posters.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 72: On the right hand side, above the green shaded martyr mural of 12 year old martyr Omar Salah, is the repeated phrase “Glory to the Martyrs” on Mohamed Mahmoud Street.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 73: A martyr mural of 12 year old martyr Omar Salah, a sweet potato seller, who was shot “accidentally” by an Egyptian army conscript in February 2012. On the left it says “The Child Martyr, Omar Salah”, and on the right it says “Through what fault was he killed?”, and above is the signature of the Revolutionary Artists Union.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 74: A portrait of a martyr of the Egyptian revolution. Written underneath is a somber reminder to others to continue the revolutionary struggle - “Don’t you dare forget why I died!”

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 75: One of the most frequently seen revolutionary art is that of the mothers of martyrs, mourning the loss of their loved ones.

Source: Photo by Author.

As mentioned previously, the repertoire of martyrs has led to the materialization of spaces such as Mohamed Mahmoud into a commemorative site that has led to public performances of mourning. In this way, key sites of revolutionary events such as Mohamed Mahmoud evolve as sites not only of communitas, political mobilization, public performances, and conflict, but also of commemoration, in which,

“The ritual activity” in relation to mourning is similarly traced in the space of Mohammed Mahmud street through depositing flowers, through filming and being filmed, through hanging on the wall a Quranic plaque, and writing Quranic verses

opposite to the martyrs, through displaying the photographs of the martyrs that appear and disappear time and again, through writing poems, insults or jokes (Abaza, 2013b).

These ritual activities in public spaces, where people gathered on the streets in public displays of commemoration and mourning the martyrs of the revolution, was a significant strategy not just “for political mobilization”, but “also the space in which political performance took place” (Armbrust, 2015: 83). Armbrust argues that in “Egyptian political rhetoric, martyrdom, *istishhad*, was one of the most important idioms of the 25 January 2011 Revolution”, in that it is essentially part of the “materiality” of Tahrir as a space not only for political mobilization, but also of political performance (Armbrust, 2015: 83, 84).

Thus, the commemoration of martyrs in art is central to revolutionary and protest actions in different contexts, but has been especially so in the production of the Egyptian revolution’s imaginary during the liminal moment where martyrs are seen as symbols of “an irrefutable call for redressive action” since they “paid the ultimate price for a cause” (Armbrust, 2015: 83). In his article “The Ambivalence of Martyrs and the Counter-revolution” on the different uses of martyr’s images during the Egyptian revolution, Armbrust observed that “In the months after Mubarak’s abdication no complex of symbols and images was as effective as a vehicle for trying to express Revolutionary meaning as that of martyrdom” (Armbrust, 2013a). Thus, their image represented a continuation of the desire for revolutionary struggle – and the return to the liminal moment - and served to foreground the revolution within the consciousness of the Egyptian public through its martyrs, serving as a somber reminder of the need to maintain the revolution’s momentum (and not let those who died, die in vain) until the public demands are fully met - “In the early days of the Revolution, martyrdom was

an actively performed rhetorical position — a kind of irresistible force in the eyes of those who took it up as a weapon in their continuing struggle” (Armbrust, 2013a).

6.4 Revolutionary Art as a Cultural Bridging of People and Places

The connection between artists (who are also revolutionaries), protestors and the public is an indication of the significance of the street as the primary site where *communitas* – both a physical and cultural *communitas* - emerges and re-emerges and solidifies itself with the revolutionary process. It is also a place where, according to Alaa, Ammar, and Hanaa, the language of dissent and revolution can be used to reconnect with the historical and cultural past. As Mona Abaza notes, it was not only the aesthetic appeal which led to the popularity of the Mohamed Mahmoud Street murals in February 2012, but also that they “exemplify a fascinating fusion between a variety of cultural artistic traditions that portray Egypt’s rich history, namely Pharaonic, popular Islamic and contemporary traditions. They all reinvent, adapt to and adopt universal schools of painting, adding a fascinating ‘Egyptian twist’ to express – sometimes humorously – the spirit of rebellion and resistance” (Abaza, 2012c).

Not only the portraits of the Port Said massacre martyrs, but the iconic murals produced during the Port Said Massacre represented the importance of an Egyptian narrative not necessarily as a marker of identity, but as a way to meaningfully connect people to their cultural past, as a way to “show people how much civilization and culture we have but we seem to have forgotten it because we stopped seeing it” (Hanaa El Degham, Berlin, Skype interview, 29 November 2013).

When I discussed with Alaa Awad regarding the significance of his murals having an Egyptian narrative (see, for example, Images 63 to 65), he argued that an understanding of culture is an existential understanding, that it is a basic structural element of society, not an aesthetic one, akin to Turner's depicted the centrality of culture as being an "existential bending back upon ourselves" (Turner, 1969: vii). For many of those I spoke to, Egyptian culture under Mubarak's regime was desecrated, and the only culture which truly existed was a capitalist one. Many felt that revolutionary art needed to re-instate Egyptian cultural elements within public space in an effort to reconnect with those spaces and reconstitute societal awareness – and pride – in their cultural background. This is what Alaa said to underscore the point,

Culture is a basic part of the structure of the community. As I mentioned earlier, culture is to be able to overcome disasters and catastrophes, because...these are temporary phenomenon. Culture is not painting and drawing; it protects. Culture is beliefs and principles; the principles of the community that were rooted during thousands of years. Culture's strength comes from its continuity. It continued for thousands of years despite the occupation of Egypt from 2000 years; hundreds of years of occupation by the Romans and before that the Ptolemaic rule, among others (Alaa Awad, Cairo, pers. comm., 28 August 2014).



Image 76: *Haraaer*, which are “free fighters, non-slave women in ancient Egypt” (Abaza, 2012c) drawn by Alaa Awad heading into battle carrying batons. Above is the *buraq*, an iconic figure of Egyptian (and Islamic) aesthetic culture that Ammar Abo Bakr wanted to include in the murals as part of Egypt’s visual memory.

Source: Abaza, 2012a.

Alaa, Ammar and Hanaa, all seemed to retreat from adopting a conception of art as an ahistorical, universal idea towards an understanding of art as located in narratives constituted within local socio-historical and cultural contexts. As artist Alaa noted, arts existence stems from its ability to adopt the context and language of society:

I am in Egypt, so I address the society through its culture and its political, cultural, and social situation. I have to express the society. Art that does not voice the whole society, politically and economically, does not exist. The artist cannot be

separated from the world that they live in (Alaa Awad, Cairo, pers. comm., 28 August 2014).

What is interesting, however, about Alaa Awad's work (such as those depicted in Images 76, 77, and 78), is that even though he was using traditional symbols as "forms of dissent and resistance" (Morayef, 2016: 197), he was not simply reflecting on the past, but rewriting it (Morayef, 2016: 204). According to Soraya Morayef (an Egyptian writer and journalist) – he took traditional symbols and decontextualized them in order to "subvert[] the established [and traditional] art form and empower[] anti regime protests" (Morayef, 2016: 204) by taking, "[f]amiliar images that surrounded Egyptians – on advertising billboards, one-pound notes, restaurant menus and schoolbook covers – and placed them in a different, contemporary context, surrounded by broken glass and shrapnel-filled walls that made the murals look so out place, they demanded we stop, stare and think about their relevance" (Morayef, 2016: 197).

The idea that revolutionary art materialized itself within symbols and forms of Egyptian culture in order to restore the forgotten (and rich) cultural heritage and history of Egyptians and reach the consciousness of the society was also a strategy adopted by Ammar, who added that the revolution emphasized *communitas* and connections between people and their everyday space through revolutionary acts. Therefore, he argues that one of the ways in which revolutionary art played a role in forging an active (versus passive use of space as Bayat mentioned) connection between people and their space was by adopting the aesthetic and cultural language of the everyday, and so he,

Adopt[s] a vulgar art, an expression with no boundaries, the art I adopt is this art, from the motifs on the *koshari* food stalls and the art that the shoe shine man does on his shoe shine box, I adopt this art that comes from a country which has been devastated over the years. It is impossible that you are going to reach the entire society if you don't reach his link, that is if you don't understand his tastes, you should be following his taste to see the material and the colours the regular Egyptian uses in his day to day life and how he uses it, such as what he uses to decorate tombstones (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).



Image 77: The Funeral, which is “a scene depicting ancient Egyptian women accompanying a sarcophagus symbolizing the death of the football Ahli Ultras youngsters who were massacred on 2 February 2012 in the stadium of Port Said.

Demotic writing (i.e. ancient Egyptian script) appeared a few metres away.

According to Alaa Awad, up to the present ancient Egyptian mourning traditions persist and can still be witnessed in Upper Egypt. Mourning women enact customs identical to Pharaonic ones, such as tearing their clothes,

hysterically shaking their bodies, weeping and smearing bodies and faces with mud to let sorrow out. The muses at the top of the mural receive the ascending soul of the martyr. The tiger is the symbol of anger for the 75 young martyrs who died in Port Said. The women carry the black lotus flowers as a sign of great sorrow.” This was drawn in the aftermath of the Port Said massacre.

Source: Abaza, 2013c: 131-132.



Image 78: The Cat and Mouse, which, according to Alaa in our interview, is intended to show that “things are reversed” (Alaa Awad, Cairo, pers. comm., 28 August 2014) - an aesthetic representation of the reversal of the structural order, with the cat (the government) fanning the mouse (the people)

Source: Suzeeinthecity, 2015.

Furthermore, the murals of Mohamed Mahmoud Street in particular (and revolutionary art in general), not only represent a collective, collaborative cultural creative effort which brought together members of the public, artists, and protestors alike (and they usually all fall under at least two of those categories), but also foreground agency in that cultural producers appropriated these spaces to make their voices heard and to solidify their continued existence to the authorities in light of brutal tactics to marginalize them from public space. As Abaza notes, these murals represented “a way of conquering the space in a situation of war” (Abaza, 2012c: 130), in an effort to counteract the presence of the authorities - from Mubarak, to the SCAF, to the Muslim Brotherhood – and their negative portrayals of the revolutionaries as being thugs and foreign agents. This was made possible, as Peterson notes, because immediately after the 18 days of the revolution, SCAF and the state media,

moved quickly to contain the revolution by endorsing it, at the same time limiting the term to refer only to the eighteen days in Tahrir Square. By reducing the 25 January revolution to the events at Tahrir that ended on 11 February, the SCAF was able to limit the meaning of the revolution to the fall of Mubarak, rather than interpreting it to denote the larger national reform called for by many vocal participants in Tahrir Square. This also allowed the SCAF, in many speeches, proclamations and media statements, to portray all subsequent protest activity as either hooliganism or itself counter-revolutionary activity (Peterson, 2015b: 73).

This tactic by the state media was one of the main motivations of revolutionary art to subvert, what they called, a “false narrative” of the Egyptian revolution which attempted to portray revolutionaries as either foreign agents or thugs. Which is one of the reasons why revolutionaries attempted to make their art “very Egyptian”, by

including symbols and forms including in the aesthetic landscape of Egyptian culture that is both familiar and accessible to the wider public,

The media was very dirty in their coverage, they publicized this street as being dangerous and that it was filled with *baltageyeh*. People kept accusing us - the revolutionaries - of being traitors and taking money from abroad, Israel, America, Serbia, all that stupid talk. So for me [to address these accusations] I cared a lot about my graffiti being very Egyptian, so you'll find next to my drawing of a martyr the traditional depiction of the Islamic star that's drawn on people's houses, and the *Buraq Al Nabawi Al Sherief*³⁵ that's drawn on houses. So even if people don't connect these images together, they have a visual memory, I rely on the visual memory of our society (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).

The murals, and the occupation of public space during this time, suggested a capture or a reclaiming of the street, or, as Ammar said, making it clear that this street is ours and that we have the legitimate right to physically exist in the street and to *be* in the street, or in other words to have an active public presence in the street. To have an active, versus passive, presence in Mohamed Mahmoud Street – the site of many a battle – turned the street into a living, breathing, evolving “memorial space” (Abaza, 2012a) and a site in which sectarian, gender, class and religious distinctions were suspended. Mohamed Mahmoud Street was a site of *communitas* both in efforts to forge revolutionary demands through street battles, and in times of mourning, in light of the trauma of the bloody events of the winter of 2011 and 2011, where its transformation into a memorial space was a result of a “collective act” (Abaza, 2012c: 134) by artists and non-artists alike.

³⁵ The *buraq* refers to the steed which Prophet Muhammad rode on in his journey to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem in *Isra'a wa'l Miraj* (the Night of Ascension), as mentioned in the Holy Qu'ran.

The bloody events in the winter of 2011 and 2012 significantly altered the revolutionary art scene in two primary ways – first, several people informed me that during this time was when revolutionary art “really” began because it became more deliberate, intentional, planned, collaborative, and creative. Revolutionary art altered from the hasty, scribbled writings and “spray and run” stencil tactics, which served their own strategic purpose during the initial 18 days of the revolution which acted as a sign - a marker urging people to join in the collective refusal of Mubarak’s regime, a critical form of protest and communication in the midst of a telecommunications blackout – to a physical occupation of the street and public places with their presence, by creating elaborate murals which responded to – and were located within – the events of the ensuing street battles on Mohamed Mahmoud Street. As Tefa said:

...people did not actually draw in the beginning of the revolution, drawing really began on the walls during Mohamed Mahmoud street battles. Before that it was just stencils. We were thinking we are still afraid of the military but we would go down and do stencils so we couldn’t get caught, because it is quick...Mohamed Mahmoud [battle] is when people started to go down and actually take their time and draw. People from the Fine Arts would sit with each other and would talk about how they wanted to go down and draw, so people like Ammar Abu Bakr went down and drew murals in Mohamed Mahmoud, and I went with Moshir and did stencils (Tefa, Cairo, pers. comm., 28 April 2014).

His comments suggest that artists had to respond to revolutionary events in real time, in an act which involved a type of archiving, as well as historicizing, narrating, and criticizing, the events around them as they were situated within the events – and not its aftermath. And it was through creating revolutionary art by being present in the moment of the events – an act which was initiated in the first 18 days of the revolution

and which would evolve as the revolution progressed - that art became a source of power and agency. As El Zeft said,

Art doesn't have to be beautiful, for me what defines art is that something moves you from the inside. While a war is going on and people are falling you will find a person writing "you are sons of dogs", this is history. The bodies and bullets will be removed and everyone will leave but in the end this is history, not what they write in their books or what we write, what is written on the walls, the people who were fighting they are the ones who did it. This is art. This is history (El Zeft, Cairo, pers. comm., 27 April 2014).

The battles of Mohamed Mahmoud street were revolutionary events through which efforts to re-establish the normative order was fought in the physical and symbolic sphere. The creation of revolutionary art cannot be addressed in isolation from the revolutionary events it is situated from, or within the community or the collective from which it is produced. As many of my informants said, it became necessary to occupy public space and establish their physical presence with their art in public to show they fight alongside the public and that they are part of a new Egyptian narrative which sought to delegitimize the state's narrative that the revolutionaries are foreign agents seeking to plunge Egypt into chaos and disarray.

Chapter 7. The Third Phase of the Revolution: Morsi's Presidency (June 2012-July 2013)

Morsi and the Brotherhood's unpopular rule was marked by an intensification of revolutionary art, as they became prime targets of satire and scathing insults (just as Mubarak and SCAF before them) for their failure to deliver on their campaign promises. Most of those I spoke to said that the widespread sentiment in the street was that Morsi's Brotherhood rule, from its early days, was viewed as a continuation of the crony capitalism characteristic of Mubarak's regime (see Image 79), under an Islamic guise.



Image 79: Protestors carry an image of Morsi and Mubarak's face converged as one, with the name "Mohamed Morsi Mubarak" written underneath.

Source: Jones, 2013.

7.1 May 2012 Elections

Most of those I spoke to said that the repertoire of the authorities were simply recycled under the Brotherhood, and that their at times ostentatious remarks regarding women or what is *haram* (forbidden) made them a prime target of ridicule in revolutionary art. As Mohammed Khaled summed up the sentiments of several of

those I spoke to, “During Morsi’s rule the graffiti was amazing” (Mohammed Khaled, Cairo, pers. comm., 29 April 2014). This graffiti targeting Morsi began during the lead-up to his election in June 2012, such as the iconic art production of the Mad Graffiti week in January 2012 – the marionette graffiti which came out of the collaborative efforts of several artists (such as Far3on and KIM, among others). This marionette depicted SCAF controlling the candidates of the presidential elections. Initially, they were faceless, however, towards the last phase of the elections when it came down to two candidates (after the elimination of other candidates such as Hamdeen Sabahi, Khaled Ali and Abdul Moneim Abul Futouh, and Amr Moussa), Morsi and Ahmad Shafiq (a former Prime Minister under Mubarak’s regime who was also found to be responsible for the “Battle of the Camel”³⁶). This made them the target of what Abaza calls the “professional whiteners of walls” (Abaza, 2012c: 125). KIM told me that when the candidates were faceless, it was not as controversial then the second time they edited the drawing with the two candidates (Morsi and Shafiq). For KIM, this is when he believes that it took on a more outright political message that all the candidates - even though they present themselves as occupying different ideological platforms - were initially the same and were controlled by the SCAF puppet master (see Images 80 and 81). As he noted,

There was a funeral service for the army, and this was the second time we did it...The second time also what ousted the picture was that Shafiq and Morsi’s face were drawn in the puppets and they were quickly erased - Morsi’s face was erased three times. The first two times it was erased within an hour. We finished and then after an hour we found the face crossed out. Our friend that

³⁶ The infamous “Battle of the Camel” of February 2, 2011 in Tahrir Square refers to an “armed attack by groups of armed Egyptian civilians and Mubarak supporters against underarmed Egyptian civilians ... carried out in medieval fashion; camels, horses and knives were deployed. Nearly a dozen people were killed and more than a thousand were injured. The Fact Finding Mission concluded that figures [such as Ahmad Shafiq] from the ruling regime were behind the attack” (Hamamou, S., 2016).

drew his face redrew it and it got erased within an hour (KIM, Cairo, pers. comm., 18 August 2014).

Mona Abaza emphasized that the “depressing choice between two authoritarianisms: the Islamists and/or the army represented by Shafiq” (Abaza, 2012c: 124) had confirmed “the fact that the nation has been witnessing a farcical masquerade, with the SCAF creating a semblance of elections and the setting up of a parliament with a majority of Islamists who have previously made a pact with the army” (ibid.). Hend Kheera, a fashion designer and structural engineer, also expressed her disappointment at the elections how it ushered in Morsi’s rule,

I didn’t vote, when they announced the results and that Morsi won, we cheered and were happy because the other side [Ahmad Shafiq] didn’t win. After a moment we looked at each in the coffee shop and we were walking celebrating as we were leaving the coffee shop and then when we arrived to Mohamad Mahmoud Street we started crying. Why should we be happy? We went to an even worst direction. Then we had a lot of depressing moments after every one of Morsi’s speech, it was a difficult time (Hend Kheera, Cairo, pers. comm., 26 April 2014).

Most of those I spoke to said they felt that the elections were an orchestrated act, and so revolutionary art such as that made by Ammar, where he wrote the words (over his own martyr mural), “Forget the past and stick with the elections” (see Image 83), was intended to be “a biting ironic statement that attacks the entire procedure of elections and those who believe that elections could be the solution to circumventing the might of the military junta. Abu Bakr’s words convey the idea that elections are merely a bluff to divert citizens from the martyrs and the 12,000 people incarcerated under military rule” (Abaza, 2012c: 138).

During the election period, many of those I spoke to said that revolutionary art served primarily as a tool to remind the public that in light of redressive measures to implement structure and law, it was unacceptable in light of the continued atrocities committed by the authorities and failure to hold those responsible for their crimes.



Image 80: The Puppet Master “SCAF” controls the faceless candidates of the Presidential elections in May 2012.

Source: Qantara, 2012 (Reuters/Amr Abdallah Dalsh).



Image 81: Phase two of the “Puppet Master” – SCAF, controlling the two final candidates of the presidential elections – Morsi’s face has been covered in black paint in this image Shafiq’s image remains. The rest of the candidates are shown as skeletons.

Source: Abaza, 2012c.



Image 82: Phase 2 of the mural of the half-Tantawi/half-Mubarak face, which included the half-faces of then presidential candidates Amr Moussa and Ahmad Shafiq, all seen as being a continuation of the structural order through their former close ties to Mubarak’s regime. According to those I spoke to, they were all essentially the same face.

Source: Abaza, 2012c.



Image 83: Ammar Abo Bakr painted over the martyr murals in late May 2012, where he intentionally "graffitied" over with the words “Forget what is past and support the elections”. Although many people thought it was being vandalized, in a video posted on Facebook, Ammar said he was the one who actually graffitied over the martyr murals because “I think you don’t need to see the martyrs’ faces anymore, because you didn’t follow the way of the revolution. An election under military rule has nothing to do with what the martyrs were fighting for.”

Source: Abo Bakr, 2015.

Most of those I spoke to were underwhelmed by the elections and the choice between Shafiq, a remnant of the Mubarak regime, and Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood which had formed a temporary alliance with the military under SCAF's transitional rule. Among those I spoke to, the ones who voted for Morsi (they choose not to be named) did so because they did not want a former Mubarak crony to win. They said they later regretted it and wished they did not vote since their choices were initially one and the same and that the status quo was continuing under the guise of "democratic elections", in a way to define the ends of the revolution and "to decide some form of redress to bring it to a conclusion" (Peterson, 2015a: 176). The repertoire of revolutionary art leading up to Morsi's election was primarily focused on emphasizing that the normative order was continuing under a different guise (see Images 82 and 83), and that nothing would change with the elections. Even with the façade of the implementation of structure and law, it was, according to most of those I interviewed, the structural order repeating itself with the same narrative.

7.2 Morsi's Presidency

These sentiments would set the tone for the third phase of the revolution, which saw Mohammed Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood elected as president. Although Morsi's Presidency was brief (it lasted from June 30, 2012 until July 3, 2013, when he was forcibly removed by the military), his rule was controversial and his economic, political, and cultural policies polarized the Egyptian public (Hellyer, 2013). Morsi's intervention in the cultural scene was swift, and many activists accused his later amendments of the constitution (in December 2012) as something that "threatens freedom of expression and creativity" for privileging religion over the law and civil society (Shaw, 2013), and was accused of being "is undemocratic and too Islamist, and that it could allow clerics to intervene in the lawmaking process and

leave minority groups without proper legal protection” and marginalize women in the political field (Beaumont, 2012).

Accusations of the “Brotherhoodization” of the Egyptian state and the cultural field (El Nabawi, 2013) continued particularly following the resignation of the former Minister of Culture Saber Arab in protest at the mistreatment and violence against protestors, who was replaced by Alaa Abdel Aziz, a Brotherhood member. Abdel-Aziz removed prominent members of the cultural community³⁷ and replaced them with Brotherhood members, arguing that he needed to “inject fresh blood in the cultural scene” (Metwaly, 2013a). For example, his decision to remove Inas Abdel Dayem, the head of the Cairo Opera House (the largest performance venue in Egypt) proved especially controversial, and led to Egyptian artists halting all performances for three days. This provoked a flood of statements by cultural organizations accusing the Brotherhood of wanting to “destroy the Egyptian culture” (Metwaly, 2013b), and the spread of widespread protests, sit-ins and dance protest performances outside the Ministry of Culture.

However, it was not only in the cultural field where unpopular measures were being implemented. In the political field, most of those I spoke to said that Morsi began to go against every promise he had made during his initial alliance with “a segment of the revolutionary forces named the National Front. The Front campaigned for the

³⁷ “Abdel-Aziz dismissed three respected senior culture ministry officials without explanation: Ahmed Megahed, head of the General Egyptian Book Organization; Salah El Meligy, head of the Applied Arts department; and Inas Abdel Dayem, head of the Cairo Opera House, who he replaced with Badr El-Zakaziky. He unsuccessfully attempted to fire Sameh Mahran, head of the Academy of Arts, and decided not to renew the term of the head of the Egyptian National Library and Archives (NLA), instead replacing him with the Islamist-leaning Arabic literature professor, Khaled Fahmy” (Jacquette, 2013).

Brotherhood's then-candidate in return for pledges he made. Their role was decisive given the slim victory he obtained – hardly 51% of the votes. Today, almost all of them have turned against the president” (Khorshid, 2013).

According to many I spoke to, from the beginning of his presidency, Morsi had immediately went against his campaign promises – a reason why most of revolutionary art painted out to be a liar - such as forming a national salvation government, and turned his back on the National Front (Khorshid, 2013). Several of those I spoke to said that Morsi began to transform into an Islamic version of Mubarak, as he implemented measures which went against the revolution, such as forming “temporary alliances with the interior ministry accused of killing protesters; with the military responsible for the deaths of protesters in the months that followed Mubarak's ousting; and with the businessmen accused of corruption under Mubarak” (Khorshid, 2013). Furthermore, instead of “restructuring the interior ministry, Morsi praised it, saying that the police was ‘at the heart’ of the revolution. And instead of holding the army responsible for the deaths of protesters under military rule, Morsi said it ‘protected the revolution’” (ibid.).

Morsi’s use of the revolution to justify – and suit – his political goals, was a continuation of the recycled SCAF narrative that they would “protect the revolution” in an effort to actually contain it. As Peterson argued, central to the process of a revolution, as a “political, economic and, above all, symbolic process” (Peterson, 2015b: 64) is the “iterative, contingent and interdependent relationship between the Egyptian revolution as a series of actions and events, and the revolution as a constellation of contested narratives through which people assign meaning to these

events” (Peterson, 2015b: 64-65). This was played out, as Peterson argued, through what Turner called an “arena”, in which “the many political and social visions of a new, post-Mubarak Egypt are contested and struggled over, and various political institutions – from the remnants of the old regime to the narrowly elected president and his Muslim Brotherhood associates to the revolutionary youth to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) – struggle to create a new hegemonic narrative to define Egypt” (Peterson, 2015b: 65).

Morsi, like SCAF before him, appropriated the 25 January revolution to legitimize his authority, however, he also used it in an attempt to protect his presidency. In light of the nationwide protests calling for Morsi to step down on June 30, Morsi asked “How can we protect our revolution from being stolen? I'll tell you: the revolution of the 25th of January and its goals, protecting its legitimacy - the price for this is my life because I want to protect your lives” (The Telegraph, 2013). In the aftermath of the January 25 revolution, where “distinctions of class, religion, gender, education, political loyalties and religion coloured the ongoing and unpredictable post-Mubarak political process” (Peterson, 2015b: 67) the use of the revolution (and Tahrir Square, in particular) was a common practice appropriated by different political parties to “generate[] political capital” (Peterson, 2015b: 67) as it reminds people of a time “where such divisions did not matter” and that everyone participate in “a unified Egyptian nation above and beyond the state” (ibid.).

In light of Morsi’s unpopular rule - where, according to one journalist, “[s]tep by step, Morsi turned his back to the revolution” (Khorshid, 2013) – revolutionary art intensified in an effort to deconstruct what they saw was Morsi’s failed campaign

promises and lies. According to Mona Abaza, the backlash against Morsi was fierce, and the art on the walls did not fail to address every one of his shortcomings,

Al-ikhwaan khirfaan (The brotherhood are sheep) was one main slogan that has multiplied all over the walls [referring to them as followers void of critical thought], which was often accompanied with plenty of tamed white sheep. *Dustuurhum ghair dusturna* (Their Constitution is not our constitution), *Dustuur al-ikhawan Baatel* (The Muslim Brotherhood's constitution is invalid). Morsi has been portrayed in graffiti as a hand puppet [see Images 85 and 86 below], as a thug, as a liar [see Images 87 and 88] displaying his chest (alluding to his performance during his first speech after becoming president when he bared his chest to the crowd at Tahrir Square to show that he is one of the people and does not require a bullet-proof vest), or as the queen of clubs card being manipulated by a bigger evil looking joker (Abaza, 2013c).



Image 84: Morsi depicted as a hand puppet. Portrayals of him as such were common, representative of notions that he was controlled by the Murshid (the supreme leader) of the Brotherhood, Mohammed Badie. Next to him is the symbol of the Egyptian republic, the Eagle with a beard, representing the “Brotherhoodization” of the Egyptian state.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 85: Morsi sitting on the lap of the Supreme Leader (Murshid) of the Brotherhood as a puppet, with the Murshid being the ventriloquist. Popular sentiments on the streets was that Morsi was simply the face behind the organization, and had no real power. He only said what he was told to say by the Murshid. Above it says “I am the decision maker”. Many of those I spoke to believed that Morsi was a puppet to larger powers, such as in one conversation with Sad Panda, where he told me that “Morsi isn’t the problem, he is the most one who was taken advantage in all this, because he really didn’t have anything to do with this. When the Murshid doesn’t tell him what to say he doesn’t know what to say” (Sad Panda, Cairo, pers. comm., 28 April 2014).

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 86: An image of a “Super Morsi”, with the Muslim Brotherhood logo altered to read, “if it happens, he will deny (or lie) about it.”

Source: Suzeeinthecity, 2013.



Image 87: Graffiti which says “You are Liars”, which is against “religious extremists and the Muslim Brotherhood’s attempts to censor art”

(Suzeeinthecity, 2013).

Source: Photo by Author.



**Image 88: More art mocking the Brotherhood and their rhetoric. This one says
“we will implement *shari’a* law even if we break it”.**

Source: Photo by Author.

The continued evolution of revolutionary art on the street corner of Mohamed Mahmoud Street/Tahrir Square once again addressed the Brotherhood’s unpopular rule, and Image 90 below was taken by Mona Abaza in September 2012 after the walls on the corner of Mohamed Mahmoud Street and Tahrir Square were once again erased by “professional whiteners”. This time, there was an addition of a portrait of Muslim Brotherhood General Guide Mohamed Badie, as well as an image of a painter using his brush as a weapon in confronting a policeman’s stick (Abaza, 2013b). A poem at the bottom reads:

“You, a regime scared of a brush and a pen

You were unjust and crushed those who suffered injustice

If you were honest, you would have not been fearful of painting

The best you can do is conduct a war on walls, and exert your power over lines and colors

Inside, you are a coward who can never build what was destroyed” (ibid.)

This art is in reference to the “war” declared by the “professional whiteners” on the “growing dissenting underground culture” (Abaza, 2012c: 125) of the Egyptian revolution, and that their art would continue regardless of the authorities attempt to whitewash the walls into the homogeneity representative of the structural order.



Image 89: “The half-Mubarak-half-Tantawi portrait was repainted in a smaller size, with the addition of a portrait of Muslim Brotherhood General Guide Mohamed Badie. Below it is an image of a painter using his brush fresh with dripping paint as a weapon in confronting a policeman’s stick.”

Source: Abaza, 2013b.

In November 2012, on the first anniversary of the Mohamed Mahmoud Street clashes, where clashes once again occurred and many, such as young Gika, died, Ammar Abo Bakr repainted the martyr murals (see Image 90), however, his intention this time was not to commemorate the martyrs, but to serve as a stark reminder (through such graphic images) that violence would continue and that nothing would change under Brotherhood rule,

On November 2012, on the first anniversary of the fights against the security forces in Mohamed Mahmoud Street, I came back to paint a martyrs' gallery again. But this time, I painted them with really gruesome faces – exactly as they looked after they died. I wanted to give the people a sign that there would be more bloodshed (Abo Bakr, 2015).



Image 90: November 2012 Martyr Mural on Mohamed Mahmoud Street. On the left, it says “the reality is uglier”.

Source: Abo Bakr, 2015.

It should be noted that the majority of informants did not discuss this period or dwell on it as much as they did the first and second phases of the revolution. In hindsight, this was perhaps because my fieldwork, and hence my interviews, began at the end of November 2013 (in the aftermath of the second anniversary of the Mohamed Mahmoud Street clashes), when the state media narrative against the Muslim

Brotherhood was prolific and when any show of sympathy with or any conversation around the Brotherhood was considered suspicious and potentially dangerous. Most of those I spoke to did not speak much about the art they did, nor about their activities during this time. It was, as such, clear to me that without exception, all of those I spoke to did not agree with Morsi's rule while those who voted for him said they did not vote for him with conviction because they felt "forced to vote for him because of the choice between bad and worse" (Amr Nazeer, Cairo, pers. comm., 9 March 2014).

Many were hesitant to speak about particular pieces they produced during this time – for those who did produce any revolutionary art – as they were more focused during our interviews on explaining their resentment towards Morsi's presidency, which was almost for all of those I spoke to, expressed as the same resentment they had towards the former military rule under Tantawi and Mubarak – it was, according to them, simply an extension of the same, corrupt structural order under different ideological guises and different faces – "the content of my graffiti has not changed...my first target was Mubarak, then Tantawi, then Morsi... the principle is the same ...you do not support any of these people. When I was cursing the army the public was against us when we were against Morsi...So we are in a perpetual state of being everyone's enemy because we stick to our principles" (Amr Nazeer, Cairo, pers. comm., 9 March 2014).

Mohammad Khaled also explained to me that for him, his revolutionary art stayed the same (though he did not want to speak in detail about specific pieces since we were speaking in public), only the target kept shifting because he was essentially attacking the same status quo, "I did revolutionary art on the army. Of course during Morsi's time I did stuff on the Brotherhood because I believe they are on the same

degree of filth and dirt. To me, they are both one and the same...they are at the bottom of filth. They both commercialize on people's dreams" (Mohammed Khaled, Cairo, pers. comm., 29 April 2014).

This was a sentiment echoed by most of those I spoke to – that the structural order was simply repeating itself over and over again in what seemed to be an endless cycle. Although this was not put on any walls, Mira Shihadeh told me that she created a piece (Image 91) that reflected the opinions of most of those I spoke to that the army, the *fulool*, and the Brotherhood are essentially one and the same, that they are all part of the “system”, which Ammar describes as a “system is repression, and everything is a sickness. It's like cancer” (Abo Bakr, 2015),

There is another piece I did that is out there [initially she put it on Twitter] but that I did not put on a wall – it says “the revolution continues in the past and the present”. It is these three figures, I really believe this is about the three figures, the Army, the Brotherhood, and the *fulool* – they are really one and each other, they need each other (Mira Shihadeh, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).



Image 91: Mira Shihadeh's “Circle of Evil”, which depicts the shadowy figures of a member of the military, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, and a

member of the *fulool* as continuously re-enforcing the normative order.

Source: Sultan Al Qassemi, 2015.

Pieces such as that made by Mira Shihadeh above, as well as the half-Mubarak face which evolved under SCAF and the Brotherhood illustrate, that “graffiti artists have drawn- and continued to draw – the strong analogy between Mubarak, the SCAF, and the Muslim Brotherhood for being one and the same continuing mode of rule. The artists wanted to convey one main point: nothing has changed (see Image 92)” (Abaza, 2013b).



Image 92: An image of a police officer with the words “The [Ministry] of Interior is still exactly the same”, indicating that the culture of police brutality which instigated the Egyptian revolution of 2011 still exists in full force under Morsi’s presidency. According to one journalist, Morsi’s biggest downfalls was that “ “[i]nstead of restructuring the interior ministry, Morsi praised it, saying that the police was ‘at the heart’ of the revolution” (Khorshid, 2013).

Source: Photo by Author.

While others complained that they halted their activities in the street during Morsi's election, Ammar Abo Bakr said Morsi's presidency and Brotherhood rule was not an impediment to his cultural and creative activity because it was an underestimation of the Egyptian people to assume that their identity was tied to any one political or ideological basis. As he said,

...artists would keep whining that they could not be creative during Muslim Brotherhood rule, that they could not draw in the streets. This is evidence that these artists don't know or understand or are connected to the people, that they don't know the behavior of society – that they underestimate their society. The media kept ranting that the Brotherhood would halt the Egyptian Opera, that they would close the door on Egyptian film and cinema that all creative cultural production would stop and that they would divide everything into *halal* [permissible] and *haram* [forbidden]. I do not like the Muslim Brotherhood, we do know that the Muslim Brotherhood and some Islamists in general are backwards all the way to their roots, however for those who know Egypt well and have been around in Egypt and been exposed to and integrated in Egyptian society will understand differently (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).

In fact, the point Ammar was emphasizing was that the concepts of *communitas* and *antistructure* experienced during the liminal time of the revolution were familiar notions to Egyptians because of their experience and participation in another liminal time, the annual *mulids*, or "Saints Festivals".

The *mulids* see hundreds of thousands of people coming together to celebrate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (specifically called the *mulid Al-Nabi*), however in Egypt it also includes the birthday of those regarded as saints by Sufis, such as as Imam Al-Hussein, the Prophet's grandson, or Sayeda Zaynab, the Prophet's granddaughter. Ammar's continued involvement (both before and after the revolution) in documenting and participating in the *mulid*, made him "drawn to the collective because of this background with following the *mulid*. I have a collective form of thought, a collective way of thinking" (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014), and he said this occupation of public space – where they carved a space for themselves in the city and performed spiritual rituals crucial to understandings of who they are - convinced him that Egyptians could impose their presence regardless of any governing authority, if

they did it out of conviction and for a higher cause, in that the “idea of the *mulid* is the only proper gathering of simple people who have modest means of living. I do not like to use the term *faqir* [poor], I prefer the term *busa’ta* [modest]...the *mulid* is what the idea of the collective is based on, the one thing that Egyptians could do in occupying space and impose his traditions on anyone (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).

In this sense, then, the political is not necessarily only a disordering of the visible order of the police, nor is it only the space of ever-present conflict antagonism, nor was the political necessarily reduced to “rare moments of epiphany when it seems to emerge in all its glory” (Azoulay, 2012: 37), as this fails to see that “the political cannot be calibrated in accordance with certain measures nor can it be circumscribed. Azoulay argues that constantly rendering the political as a practice “centering on problematization, resistance or contestation” (Azoulay, 2012: 108) does not allow us to take other practices into account, such as Ammar’s understanding of the *mulid* and the revolution as existential experiences (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014). Thus, the political can also include symbolic and spiritual contestations over space allows us to understand the importance of the political as “inherent in every encounter between human beings” (Azoulay, 2012: 101) and can include less “obvious” political ruptures.

Although this may be an over-conflation of notions of the political which may lead to the “everything is political” notion Rancière is against, it is helpful in this sense to think about the political outside of the margins of a certain configuration of experiences or issues of disarticulations of the hegemonic structure. For Azoulay, “politics” can be found in “other domains” outside of the state or in the presence of certain configurations which renders the political visible (Azoulay, 2012: 108), a notion

that came across in Ammar's recollection of his experience of the *mulid* and the revolution as both being liminal times, where a utopian *communitas* emerged and distinctions collapsed. As he said,

I disagree with people who do not see the strength or power of the collective – look at the revolution. The meaning of revolution in its most essential meaning is groups of people going down in the street - it has no other meaning. How can you be with the revolution and reject the collective? Don't speak of the revolution then if you can't speak of the collective. The acceptance of the other is one of the main conditions of the collective. The romantic and beautiful [he speaks sarcastically] state during those 18 days of everyone accepting everyone during the revolution of which everyone speaks of is what we mean when we say the acceptance of the other in the collective. Go to a *mulid* as you are now [pointing at me] and you will see how they will accept you as you are, they will not ask you if you are Muslim and Christian. Go to the *mulid* in this spirit of acceptance of the other (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).

Ammar's intimate experience participating, documenting, and observing the *mulid* is indicative of the ways in which the experience of liminality can be central to the creation of different subjectivities, and how one can come to know and feel the world and gain knowledge of that world. During a liminal time, when one is located on the threshold, there is a critical moment of self-realization and reflection, and part of this is attributed to the aesthetic, which lies in the heart of experience, in which we come to perceive, feel, and know the world. In this sense, then, there is an understanding of revolutionary art as constitutive of everyday experience, much in the same way Dewey articulated his understanding of art.

Ammar's knowledge and connection with the collective in the *mulid* and the revolution alike transcend an experience confined to a certain time and space - it has affected the very way he understands public mobilization and the ways in which one

can come to occupy space through a more existential understanding which supersedes formal notions of politics or political action.

Thus, our engagement in the world can be construed by those I interviewed as a creative engagement, and therefore, in a sense, is never actually complete or final – revolutionary art is in constant process, embedded within the processual nature of the liminal time - and can transcend different realms, it is not only a matter relegated to the cultural field. Experiences are constantly transferred into other realms of experience, and this can enrich our understanding of the political not only as a rupture of the consensus with the hegemonic order as conceived by Rancière or by Mouffe, but by a rupture within understanding the political not in the formal sense, but in an existential sense, in the way in which we understand ourselves and relate to others.

Although several people I interviewed, such as Ammar, continued working on revolutionary art focusing on the Brotherhood and Morsi and calling for the public to arrest him, he said he stopped in December 2012 in order not to “give the Army or the *fulool* any more ammunition”, and so focused more on issues of culture and identity (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014). There were many artists I spoke to who felt this way, which translated into a complete halt in their artistic activities. For Mira Shihadeh, it was the attacks against women in Tahrir, particularly on the second anniversary of the revolution, that promoted her to create art. As she said,

I told El Zeft lets go down and do something, and I read about the sexual harassment...I am trying to talk about organized harassment, it is not just random...I was trying to address the organization of it during protests. The men in the image are saying things like, “I am tired so what else should I do”, “Don’t be scared we are trying to help you” but he is also harassing her, “Look what

she is wearing”, “But she isn’t my sister” because there is always the comment to these people like “what if this was your sister?” People need to see this kind of image in front of their eyes to realize how horrific it is (Mira Shihadeh, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).



Image 93 and Image 94: The “Circle of Hell” by Mira Shihadeh and El Zeft, on the wall barricading Mansour Street where the image of El Zeft’s rainbow mural used to be.

Source: Photo by Author.

The issue of sexual harassment during this time was horrific not only because it became so prolific, but was - as Mira Shihadeh mentioned - not spontaneous. This period of time started to exhibit anti-structure without the *communitas* of the first two phases of the revolution, where there was a breakdown within the social sphere which restored the divisions of Mubarak's regime and saw sexual harassment return in full force. These assaults took on a different form – they were more of an organized and concerted attack against women in public places where, only two years prior, the *communitas* of the revolution saw men and women mingle together equally and protect one another during clashes with the central security forces. It was this anger, this return to the antistructure of the normative order in the absence of the *communitas* which propelled the revolution, which made El Zeft announced his iconic “Nefertiti” mask in September 2012 in a Facebook post (see Image 95) which he had stenciled on Mohamed Mahmoud Street.

El Zeft told me he was greatly affected by the widespread reports of incidents of sexual harassment and assaults in Tahrir Square and downtown during Brotherhood rule, and the undermining of women in speeches by Muslim Brotherhood members which would further degrade the status of women in Egyptian society. He said that it felt as though, all of a sudden, the chaos of the normative order under Mubarak returned when people started to forget that women played a crucial role in the revolution,

Everything bad was happening suddenly, harassment increased. It snapped suddenly. I don't understand. It was brutal, 20 people raping someone in Tahrir. At the time the Islamists were saying things about women like marrying girls when they are 9 and I don't know what they were saying, the image of the woman was becoming distorted a lot. But the nature of the battle that had transpired in Mohamed Mahmoud in the past made it, in

a way, a very masculine street. So I wanted to say that they [women] had a role exactly like ours, that they existed, they were with us. I wanted to tell people we are all together, that she has a role, that she is equal. In a lot of the clashes we would find the women were with us not just spraying water, they actually [physically] joined us in the clashes. What I was thinking is that Nefertiti was known as the strong queen and she supported her husband against everyone. She is the most known Egyptian woman in history. And I used the gas mask as a global symbol for the revolution (El Zeft, Cairo, pers. comm., 27 April 2014).



Image 95: El Zeft pays tribute to the significant role Egyptian women played in the revolution.

Source: El Zeft, Facebook post, 2012.

The social and political importance of El Zeft's aesthetic visualization of strong Egyptian women – during what seemed to be a breakdown of Egyptian society, where there were countless reports of concerted attacks against women in broad daylight. El Zeft's "Nefertiti Mask" was an attempt to highlight one of the most significant achievements of the liminal moment of the revolution, which was the visibility, participation, and importance of women during the socio-political and cultural

landscape of the revolution was one of the revolution's most celebrated achievements, even if it was temporary. The image of the woman, for El Zeft, is a reminder of her importance during the revolution and to counter the more masculine image of the Egyptian revolution and to address later issues of sexual harassment. However, it reaffirms the importance of location in the creation of revolutionary art. As El Zeft told me, he chose to put Neferititi in Mohamed Mahmoud Street because it was a "masculine street", and his image of a strong Egyptian woman in a gas mask was intended to solidify the importance of women in the Egyptian revolution as being equally significant as men's, even if their image is not as prominent or publicized. This image would later be appropriated for sexual harassment campaigns and protests not only in Egypt, but also in places such as Germany, where Amnesty International organized protests against the widespread cases of sexual harassment in Egypt during Morsi's rule (see Image 96).

The importance of this image makes sense in its location as it emphasizes the importance and presence of women in urban space and urban battles, at the forefront of the fight in Egypt's revolution, as well as reaffirms their strength as part of a historical narrative of the significant role Egyptian women have played throughout their history. Its appropriation through stickers, posters, stencils, and graffiti throughout Egypt and internationally is a testament to its significance as a symbol of the presence of women in the public sphere – they have been active fighters in the Egyptian revolution, in street battles and clashes, and this image serves as a reminder against the Muslim Brotherhood members testimonies during Morsi's rule that women should be marginalized in public life, both socially and politically.



Image 96: Protestors in Germany against sexual harassment in Egypt

Source: Walls of Freedom, Facebook post, 2013.

Morsi's unpopular rule was met continuous protest, and according to Ahdaf Soueif, the Egyptian novelist and commentator, "[Morsi] failed to honour every one of the promises he made in order to be elected. He basically behaved as though he had somehow legitimately inherited the old Mubarak regime with a veneer of piety" (Soueif, cited in Abdel Kouddous, 2013). In response to overwhelming public anger at Morsi's performance as President, in April 2013 a grassroots movement entitled *Tamarod* ("rebellion") was founded by members of the Egyptian Movement for Change (also known by its slogan Kefaya, or "Enough") and set as its main goal the collection of signatures in order to call for early presidential elections.

On June 29, 2013, *Tamarod* (see Images 97 to 99) announced 22 million signatures (their original aim was 15 million) had been collected and on June 30, 2013, millions of Egyptians called on Morsi to step down. The next day the military gave the President a 48-hour ultimatum to solve the current crisis otherwise, as Sisi stated in a

television address: “If the people’s demands are not met, the military, which is forced to act according to its role and duty, will have to disclose its own future plan” (Bradley, Abdellatif, 2013). On July 3, 2013, the Military intervened and removed Morsi as President, overruled the Constitution and installed an interim government until the next Presidential elections, which Sisi won by a landslide in June 2014.



Image 97: The word “Tamarod” (rebel) is written, and underneath it says “The Beginning of the End” (of Morsi’s rule), in reference to June 30, when massive protests were planned calling on Morsi to step down.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 98: In red it says “Tamarod” (rebel), and below it says “On you and the Brotherhood”. The background is Morsi’s face.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 99: Morsi's face in the background with an "X" drawn on it. It says on the upper right corner "30" in reference to Tamarod's call for action on June 30, 2013, the day when nationwide protests were planned, to call on Morsi to step down. Next to Morsi's face it says "Red Disaster".

Source: Photo by Author.

Chapter 8. Can Revolutionary Art exist in the Aftermath of the Revolution? The Fieldwork Moment (November 2013-August 2014)

The revolutionary euphoria that sparked my initial motivations to begin my research when I visited Cairo in April 2011 had significantly waned by the end of November 2013, when I began my fieldwork. This was the post-Rab'a moment, when the military re-assumed its authoritative position of power – resuming, full circle, to life under SCAF rule once again. Unlike other moments of the revolutionary process, this phase was different than the first SCAF rule from February 2011 to June 2012. The first phase of SCAF's initial rule was marked by an openness to revolutionary art and revolutionary artists critical of the army and its conduct. During this period, campaigns such as Kazeboon ("liars") emerged in December 2011 (following the Mohamed Mahmoud Street battles), which were intended to counter state media narrative through public screenings of footage of the army's brutality and to call for an end to SCAF rule (and later, Muslim Brotherhood rule). Other significant, and public signs of dissent against SCAF rule such as the Occupy Cabinet sit-ins and Tahrir Square clashes of December 2011 amidst parliamentary elections also saw scathing revolutionary art against the army and its officers.

Interestingly, however, open criticism of the army in the aftermath of Rab'a was no longer acceptable, not only by the authorities, but mainly by the public themselves - the "honourable citizens" whose resentment towards the Muslim Brotherhood through Morsi's controversial presidency saw the forced removal and killing of his supporters in Rab'a. The political trickster (as Armbrust argues) *par excellence* which emerged victorious from this period and led to the "defeat of the

Revolution’s architects” (Armbrust, 2017: 233) was General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, who lead the assault in Rab’a.

In the aftermath of Morsi’s ouster, and in the run-up to the Presidential elections of May 2014 (during which I conducted the majority of my fieldwork), Sisi’s popularity sky-rocketed. Sisi was depicted as the iron fist savior and “national hero” (El-Din 2014) of Egypt, and his supporters declared in songs and on posters and banners that “Sisi is my President” (see Image 100). During this time, “supporters tried very hard to make him the new [Gamal Abdel] Nasser, not the Nasser of war and defeat, but the Nasser of progress and national pride” (Armbrust, 2017: 235), in an attempt to cement his status as parallel to that of the iconic Nasser, the charismatic face of Arab socialism and Arab nationalism, who generated massive public support.



Image 100: On the third anniversary of the revolution (January 25, 2014), a supporter outside of the El-Itihadeya Presidential Palace hugs a “Sisi is My President” poster, a familiar slogan repeated in the run-up to the Presidential elections in June 2014, indicative of the “cult of Sisi” (Lindsey, 2013) that developed in the aftermath of Morsi’s ouster.

Source: Reuters/Amer Abdallah Dalsh.

I began my fieldwork during this critical moment, when my informants were caught in a dangerous predicament – they did not approve of the Muslim Brotherhood

and resented Morsi's presidency, but were hoping that plans to remove him from power were led by a legal, peaceful and public initiative rather than armed confrontations and violence. They did not want the return of army rule, which they said was inevitable with Sisi's rise to stardom in the public sphere which led them all to (correctly) predict that he would win the elections in June 2014. Their position – of supporting neither the Brotherhood nor supporting Sisi's rule - located them in a very dangerous grey zone where any expression of disdain for the military and its actions in Rab'a made them susceptible to the violence of so-called honorable citizens (which they now feared more than an attack by authorities), and where any expression of disdain of the Muslim Brotherhood saw them being attacked by their supporters. A criticism of one would lead to the immediate conclusion that they supported the other. Thus, the period in which my fieldwork was conducted – from November 2013 to August 2014 – was a period that lacked the initial optimism that saw the emergence of art in 2011 and 2012.

This uneasy time – which could also be characterized as a liminal moment in terms of being “between two (uncomfortable) states” – was not marked by intense creativity, social solidarity (*communitas*), or a foregrounding of agency, though it most certainly was marked by anti-structure, ambiguity and violence. In this tense atmosphere, most of those I spoke to said they were taking an indefinite break from revolutionary art or created it sporadically, at certain times when they could not be seen for fear of attacks not by authorities, but the general public.

The sentiment I received from the cultural producers at the time of my interviews was one of cautious hope combined with a disenchantment of ‘look at

where we were and where we are now’, as some of the interlocutors noted, in terms of their freedom to create art in the street and the intense social bond they formed fighting and creating art alongside the public, who were, for the most part, all in solidarity against the authorities. Some, such as Keizer, said that although they felt “deflated” by the divisions and sociopolitical atmosphere at the time, they still had hope that the “chaotic unpredictability which allowed the first revolution to happen” - would return, and that the liminal moment would again be a reality (Keizer, Cairo, pers. comm., 26 April 2014). For the revolutionaries, the liminal moment of the revolution represented the time they aspired to return to – where solidarity, *communitas*, agency, and creativity flourished, even amidst the backdrop of struggle against the normative order, which, to them, represented chaos and uncertainty and destruction. However, in the aftermath of Rab’a, the authorities’ state media claims - that those who continued the call for a revolution were seeking to disrupt normal life in Egypt and return it to a chaotic state, and that lack of support for the army meant *de facto* support for the Brotherhood – was a dangerous narrative that was replicated within society. I witnessed it first hand, sitting in a coffee shop in Downtown Cairo during my fieldwork, when two young male AUC students who were speaking with each other against the military were reprimanded by one of the waiters, who called them traitors and members of the Muslim Brotherhood. They were harassed and eventually forced to leave after a light skirmish.

As I have shown in previous chapters, the initial phase of the revolution in 2011 and 2012 was marked by violence of the authorities and security forces against the public, who collectively retaliated and gathered around unified demands and goals, first against Mubarak, then the first SCAF transitional rule, and then Morsi’s

presidency. Yet in the aftermath of Rab'a in the summer of 2013, the violence was between Muslim Brotherhood members and the army, and between members of the public – those who supported Sisi (the vast majority) against and those who did not. This divisiveness marked a volatile period, and most of those I spoke to had halted their artistic activities in the street altogether as they said that fear returned as a central component of their lives, and they were angry at the situation in which they were harassed, beaten, or insulted for creating revolutionary art by “honorable citizens” who were either supporters of Sisi or Brotherhood members. They said that in all cases, they were marginalized from public space from both the authorities and the public, but it was the public that they feared more, even more than the bullets of the regime during the revolution. As El Zeft said,

Now you are afraid more of the people than from the regime. If you insult the army in the street people will fight with you and push you around, not the regime itself. I wasn't afraid at the time at all, for example in the morning you could be at the front lines facing live bullets, and at night you were drawing on the walls. So you felt it was so silly what you were doing at night compared to what you were doing in the morning, so I didn't feel much fear. Now you don't know anything, so now you will be more are afraid from the people (El Zeft, Cairo, pers. comm., 27 April 2014).

The uncertainty and violence of the liminal moment during the initial phase of the revolution was not portrayed negatively – the ambiguity and struggle of that moment, as well as the violence of the battles between the authorities and the public was reflected upon as a period embedded with hope because of the sense of community and agency. However, the uncertainty and violence of the period after Rab'a was depicted negatively, as being a return – to an even greater degree – of the fear, displacement, and humiliation of an unfamiliar normative order which they had

yet to fully comprehend because of the feeling that the revolution was being dismantled and derided by the authorities. As Sad Panda told me in this regard,

the whole Mubarak regime was really bad, it was horrible, the whole system, and people used to live in misery. But somehow, it was stable. You understand? We're in shit, but we know it is shit, and it is there. So people, after years, they started to figure their way out around the shit. But now no, now nobody knows anything, and this shit keeps on going, it is not stable. So you can't even find your own way. And people are so stressed out now - even during Mubarak's time regardless of everything he did, there wasn't as much blood as there is now, many people died. Right now everyone has had someone that died, we have artists friends who died and they had nothing to do with anything, there are Muslim Brotherhood members who died, there are NDP members that died, there are people from the Ministry of Interior that died, people from the army that died, from every part of society, regardless of who is right and who is wrong, somehow you feel the city is so bloody (Sad Panda, Cairo, pers. comm., 28 April 2014).

This period suggested that the liminal moment remained, but, unlike the ones preceding it, was not imbued with a sense of hope, purpose and direction, but with a sense of defeat, loss and betrayal. That moment, and the sentiments it evoked, underscored the atmosphere my interviews were conducted in, as the shadow of Rab'a and its aftermath remained a source of trauma and a symbol of the end of the revolutionary process. As Armbrust notes, liminality "can be seen as both the beginning and the end of revolution" (Armbrust, 2017: 221). It was this temporality that structured the fieldwork and made me realize that addressing art and its role needs to take account of existential crises during this moment, raising questions of whether there can even be a revolutionary art in the apparent aftermath/defeat of the revolution.

8.1 The Process of Revolutionary Art: A Real and Tangible Legacy of the Revolution

It was clear to me through my conversations with those I interviewed, that they were in the throes of an existential crisis – a crisis that began with Rab’a. In this period, which saw a surge in repressive measures to establish Sisi as Egypt’s next strongman in the presidential elections of May 2014, many of those I interviewed were optimistic about the continued existence of revolutionary art which would. But Hanaa El Degham stood out amongst the other respondents in expressing optimism about the role of revolutionary art and whether it could continue to function even after the end of the revolutionary moment. As she said,

The future of the street in Egypt is that artists and people know that going to the street is influential and has an effect. In the past three years, people understand more about politics and how to say no, they know more about their culture, so there is no more fear. People will keep drawing on the street and may take different forms, and more artistic development, beyond the galleries. Our culture started with drawing on walls, it just took on a different form, and will come back stronger. People tried it and realized that it reaches faster to the people and to the world in regards to what is happening in Egypt, and there is no going back, only forward. It doesn’t matter who rules Egypt, what matters most is that people are more aware and that whoever rules Egypt they can go out on the street and say no if they aren’t happy with them (Hanaa El Degham, Berlin, 29 November 2013).

Others said that revolutionary art will continue to exist because of its location as part of the collective and the public and because it endured as part of the persistence of a revolutionary cultural aesthetic which attempts to democratize the cultural sphere. As Ammar Abo Bakr said: “Art should be for the people. It should be everywhere for the people. It has to be for the people, it’s not an option, it’s a necessity. The people have been isolated from everything beautiful in our country for

40-50 years. Can you imagine how much effort it is going to take from the artists to directly participate in returning to the people their original visual memory, which contains the form and hints of their identity?” (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).

Ammar was disdainful of modern art, an art he argued which is representative of the normative order that aimed at subverting Egyptians’ identity in the state’s aggressive push towards profits and gains. Ammar’s experience in the revolution with the collective, his involvement in countering the state’s media against claims of “foreign agents” disrupting the country by adopting a more Egyptian aesthetic murals in his revolutionary art, was an existential crisis, which informed his understanding that art can no longer be a practice created by the few for the few, but is essentially located within the collective, both in its creation and consumption. This is how he put it,

I am always preoccupied with extending the cultural heritage of Egypt from the past to the contemporary, and I do not feel like so-called enlightened academic contemporary modern artists are interested in this extension when they present their artworks in galleries...As artists we understood our role [in the aftermath of the revolution] was not to draw portraits and rush off to sell them in galleries – you as an artist who are drawing some random man in a café smoking shisha and then sell them in galleries for 20,000 pounds – this would make an artist a con man, because his art is not reaching the modest Egyptian man in his painting. You are using him. This was the opinion of the majority of artists who went down in the streets (Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo, pers. comm., 30 April 2014).

However, others felt that the enduring aspect of revolutionary art was in the act of making or creating art along with the organic participation of the wider public.

Mohamad Alaa told me that the widespread existence and creation of art in public spaces during the revolution was a necessary indication of a different form of thought materializing which would render alternative forms of cultural expressions in unconventional spaces more common, even after the revolution. Furthermore, he noted that regardless of the revolution's apparent end, the art of the revolution continues to be relevant because it emphasized the importance of accepting difference, in that the idea behind art is "to accept the Other, the Other which looks unfamiliar" (Mohamed Alaa, Cairo, pers. comm., 13 August 2014). Keizer also said that this concept was significant because the unfamiliar always scared Egyptian society, because it represented the unknown, which was unwelcome because he says Egyptians "like things that have worked, and I think that is one of the most dangerous sentences ever – it has always worked this way. And that is such a scary way of thinking, there is no progression or revolution in that" (Keizer, Cairo, pers. comm., 29 April 2014).

For El Zeft, revolutionary art was about delivering a personal message, and, as such, was about communicating feelings, akin to the way Bahia Shehab argued that art in the aftermath of the revolution was about translating emotions (2016). El Zeft repeatedly told me that during the revolution he felt that "real" art was raw, spontaneous, and occurred within the moment - he cared more about the doing than the actual image. Echoing Mohamed Alaa's sentiment, he said it was not revolutionary art that would endure, but the process of making art – in other words, what mattered was not the image itself, but the ability to create it: "revolutionary art can't do shit" (El Zeft, Cairo, pers. comm., 27 April 2014).

In times of revolution where the media was already highly regulated, it was this unmediated, spontaneous, visible, and most importantly organic form of communication that was significant. For El Zeft: “I like imposing my idea on people and telling them this is what I have to say. This is it. Revolutionary art in Egypt is not just stencils or beautiful murals, its origin was the people writing on the tanks coming into Tahrir on January 28 saying ‘Mubarak has to fall’ with spray, this is the real revolutionary art this is the right message. It is one of the forms of resistance, in a way” (El Zeft, Cairo, pers. comm., 27 April 2014). Both Mohammed Khalid and Ganzeer emphasized that revolutionary art was one of the most significant material gains of the revolution. As Ganzeer said,

a door has been opened and you can’t close it, and I mean whether it is a hunger to create art or a hunger to see art in the streets the hunger is there, and I think many people have identified revolutionary art as the one only attainable tangible kind of outcome of the revolution so far, and so I don’t think it will go away easily. I think it will remain and will probably evolve as it has been evolving, what it is now is probably not same as it was on January 25. The first revolutionary art that was done it was such a new thing that any small scribble would have an impact, now of course because so much of it has been created the past few years so there is this constant need to up your game, and it is easy for the viewer to ignore art on the street, so you really have to up your game and create something more impressive more powerful, and it has to go on that path forever. That’s the evolution you are creating, bigger better art, hopefully (Ganzeer, Cairo, pers. comm., 26 April 2014).

Mohammed Khaled also echoed this sentiment, noting that revolutionary art was a primary gain of the revolution and that it was “real”, in the sense that the revolutionary process was materialized through the existence of revolutionary art, “The one thing that was real and happened was that we did something that will remain [in reference to revolutionary art]. It has flourished, I thought it was just a wave and

would end. Especially during the Military Council's rule, I thought that it would run its course and would end. But currently I see what people still do and it is still on the walls and on the contrary it is increasing, and a lot of people are doing it, and this gives you confidence that it will stay alive and will continue (Mohammed Khaled, Cairo, pers. comm., 29 April 2014).

In this sense, although several of those I spoke to were deflated by what seemed to be the apparent close of the revolutionary process, many emphasized that the importance of revolutionary art – in the apparent aftermath of the revolution - was that this was a “real” (in other words, tangible) and felt outcome of the revolution. There was a dislocation in understandings of art – that it was not a private, formal endeavor but one which could be for everyone, by everyone, to challenge the discourse of power, narrate and respond to revolutionary events. This enduring legacy of what art is and can be will remain, according to many of those I spoke, even when all the walls have been whitewashed.

8.2 The Changing Meaning of Art after Revolution

It was interesting how many of those I interviewed were not concerned with how to interpret art or define it within previously-set-out conceptual frameworks. It was also interesting to hear the debate going back to discussions around the role of the state in the production of art, debates that marked the pre-revolutionary period. As Moussa writes: “While modernist art trends have subsided in many parts of the world and given way to post-modern or contemporary genres, they remain heavily promoted in Egypt by domestic and foreign art institutions. The effect of this global modern art movement's influx into Egypt has been selective marginalisation of works with

critical political or social meaning – meanings that are relevant to the realities of given localities within Egypt” (Mousa, 2015).

It was this type of thinking that came across in the interviews as most seemed to retreat from adopting a conception of art as an ahistorical, universal idea towards an understanding of art as located in narratives constituted within local socio-historical and cultural contexts. In this sense, then, revolutionary art would continue to exist even in the aftermath of the revolution because its foundation lies within the Egyptian culture and identity. As Alaa explained,

I am in Egypt, so I address the society through its culture and it’s political, cultural, and social situation. I have to express the society. Art that does not voice the whole society, politically and economically, does not exist. The artist cannot be separated from the world that they live in (Alaa Awad, Cairo, pers. comm., 28 August 2014).

However, “universal” versus “local” does not necessarily mean authentic versus inauthentic, binaries that have been challenged by the revolution as cultural producers “fuse[] the familiar and foreign, old and new” (Kraidy 2016: 16). In fact, the disillusionment with art, as many artists told me, does not only stem from the promotion of Westernized, modern, universal art disconnected from local realities, rather, it also comes because of the Ministry of Culture’s control, regulation, and promotion of abstract art devoid of action, or what Radwa, an artist and the Head of the Media Unit in the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR), characterized as art “before the revolution [that] was about a state of numbness, people being tired and dragging themselves” (Radwa Fouda, Cairo, pers. comm., 13 August 2014).

Under Mubarak's regime, the normative understanding of art was to "showcase" it to the public to make them more "cultured" or "raise their tastes," a common theme Winegar found among more formal artists who worked within government institutions and/or private galleries (Winegar, 2006). This depiction is taken to an extreme by the famous Egyptian singer Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab, who once was quoted as saying "the artist of genius, no matter what era God creates him in, is a unique creature. He believes firmly that his natural place is among the vanguard. He studies public opinion thoroughly so that he knows its desires and inclinations. This helps him to present his message of innovation as a "pill" which the people can easily digest. He can lead the new generation – can inscribe his name in capital letters on artistic history" (cited in Armbrust, 1996: 63).

However, revolutionary art produced in the intense creative – and communal – spirit of the revolution located artists not as unique, cultured being, but saw them as revolutionaries whose work in public spaces was the outcome of a public collaboration – the moment when publics went in unison to the streets to protest. As Radwa noted, the power of art in the street is not as a cultural form, but essentially in it being the only legitimate communicative tool and media form – she argued that even in the aftermath of the revolution, its existence acts as an important intervention within the formal understandings of art because its power stems from its "interactivity. This is the power of revolutionary art. If it is not interactive it will be just like exhibition art, nothing. It says what the artist wants but it doesn't say what people think of what the artists think, this dialectic kind of conversation going on between the art piece and the people, it shows how diverse the country is, or the society is. If that dialogue kept going, and it kind of pushes forward it will change

things...because we do not have an equivalent media, especially the media, we do not have a media that is interactive or intriguing” (Radwa Fouda, Cairo, pers. comm., 13 August 2014).

8.3 The Liminality of the Revolution and its Effect on the Creation of Art

One of the main findings of my research was that the connection between art and the revolution was one of process and context. Art was no longer seen as a private endeavor to be displayed in private spaces for display – it was seen as a continuous, organic process which should necessarily be located in public spaces and respond to revolutionary events in order to continuously reassert itself through participation and dialogue, and generate new understandings and ideas through discussion and debate.

As Hanaa El Degham said:

The idea is that you don’t just go down to the street and draw and that’s it. You went down because you had an idea, and when you go down you will find that people will ask you what you are doing and what is that, and you will find people disagree with you, and you will disagree back, and they will tell you something you never heard of, so there are nice conversations that occur between you and the people. Our role isn’t to draw something and leave, it is to make people understand what you are drawing and their input in turn will allow you to understand things you may not have before (Hanaa El Degham, Berlin, Skype Interview, 29 November 2013).

Most of those I spoke to noted that galleries were representative of the monopolization, regulation, and censorship of art (and culture) embedded within the political and social articulation of the state. The Ministry of Culture reinforced the normative, hegemonic order of the state by legitimizing a certain way of producing and consuming art, with consumers seen as passive viewers or economic consumers.

Mostafa El Hosseiny, an artist and member of the Mona Lisa Brigades told me that galleries are only relevant to the artist and their clique, “What do all the big artists do? He draws and presents in galleries and only his friends and family come to the gallery, and he is happy about it – it is wrong. Galleries are very fake” (Mostafa El Hosseiny, Cairo, pers. comm., 1 May 2014), whereas Mohammed Khaled said the streets represented reality: “I feel revolutionary art is real, compared to art in the gallery. I can draw a painting and put it in a gallery. It is a nice thing. For me to put a painting in a gallery is lovely. But people will come to it and ponder it and then walk away, and if someone buys it he will buy it to put it above a couch” (Mohammed Khaled, Cairo, pers. comm., 29 April 2014).

Mohamed Alaa said that art was a byproduct of a personal, historical and social process, and conceptualized his understanding of art as being tied to a process, a form of documentation, and an archive to be used beyond the particular place and time of the revolution. He added, “I see that the process of creating an art work is more important than the finished art work itself. So I document the process of creating my art work, which I think is more important than the image that ends up on the street. The process is more important because I can’t separate two things, the process of creating the work and the artists personal life, from the end product, from the art work. Because the artists personal life reflects and effects the art work that comes out in the end. Some things happen to me coincidentally. I am like this, I see this – the personal life and the process of creating the work are more important than the work, why are they important? Because they are everything. You put the art work in the street to be seen and it could be erased and gone and something else comes up to replace it but the process remains. The process remains for the future generations.

There are two things, documenting for the new generation, and for artists to create an archive, so that an artist could search for an artist and their process. It would be an important archive a lot of people should do it (Mohamed Alaa, Cairo, pers. comm., 13 August 2014).

When I asked Keizer how he understood art, it was apparent that his disillusionment with the formal cultural field and its preoccupation with “defining” art played a large part in the way he approached revolutionary art even after the revolution (and because of the revolution), in that he was against any “abstract art” and detachment from society, and instead, conceived of revolutionary art as a “visual” dialogue which should produce questions, not answers. Keizer commented,

I don’t believe in abstract art anymore after the revolution, I believe in hard pounding impactful art, it is way too late in the game to be pessimistic about life, maybe because we did that in the 70’s. Now you have to be pro-action, in a way that has to move people. We have been paralyzed and become passive observers, it is the paralysis of the human condition...revolutionary art to me is much grander than just art or just politics and all the other fields of life... I think it is the most powerful medium for me because of the visual dialogue between me or the piece of art and the person on the street, which makes them question the environment where they live in, and hopefully question reality through this art....The other thing that is powerful about revolutionary art, unlike the news which desensitizes peoples senses and their whole perception of the world and what it is and reality. I define revolutionary art as being consciously aware of social political issues and not just abstract art, which is very gallery oriented in that sense (Keizer, Cairo, pers. comm., 26 April 2014).

Most of those I spoke to emphasized the importance of revolutionary art as establishing an aesthetic form, which Ammar saw as a reflection of the everyday local ‘visualities’ seen in the most mundane of objects, such as food stalls and shoe shine

boxes, in the everyday. As Radwa put it, the recognition of such diverse banal societal forms, sensibilities, and discourses meant that art – even after the revolution – can relate, or speak to, the consciousness of people who had become accustomed to being talked down to by intellectuals and politicians alike. As she said: “Activism is usually an opposition, if I do not make the same mistakes as the current opposition that is around me, if I come down from my ivory tower, if I know how to get my message across. When you learn something, you have to talk to people, you have to learn how to get your message in a language that people understand (Radwa Fouda, Cairo, pers. comm., 13 August 2014).”

Most of those I spoke to saw intellectuals as co-opted by the state and therefore as detached from society while speaking a language obscure in its terminology, thus excluding the majority of the population are excluded from their discourse. As Quijano-Gonzales notes: “The overarching position of the ‘enlightened elites at the service of the ignorant masses’, institutionalized since the Arab Nahda, is thus subject to a criticism so radical as to reveal a lack of even the slightest consideration on the part of the young Arab underground artists for this role of gatekeeper, which largely stands for the symbolic power of institutional mediators... (Quijano-Gonzales, 2013).

During this period of the fieldwork, it appeared that the revolution, as a temporality, served to unravel the underlying tensions inherent in the cultural field in Egypt and that art gained strength and legitimacy because it acknowledged this reality. Keizer, who was instrumental in promoting revolutionary art in *sha’bi* (traditional, low income) areas during the revolution, said that it was the revolution

that opened a space to foster the notion of an accessible art and that even though the revolution was defeated, elitist notions of art would continuously be challenged. This was the reason, as Ammar said, why he adopted a different style altogether that embodied local narratives and visualities that one can find in the mundane, in the everyday, in the ordinary.

But it was also clear that the end of the revolution did not mean the end of revolutionary art. For several people, such as El Zeft, the revolution was still ongoing,

After the revolution” implies something ended, it is still going. Three years is nothing, if you see what happened in three years, too much happened we changed a lot in three years, we broke a lot of taboos in three years. Protesting in the street was a taboo, going down and distributing pamphlets or anything to people was impossible for it to happen, drawing in the street, making pages in Facebook and insulting whoever you want, all of these taboos broke. You will always do it with caution but you still do it. People still go down and protest all the time but the media doesn’t cover it because they don’t want to show that the country is still a mess (El Zeft, Cairo, pers. comm., 27 April 2014).

However, he also said he wanted to leave Egypt because he was worried about the return to the pre-revolution status. He said: “I have too much hate towards everybody, my friends my family the country the army, hate towards anyone because I feel I am suffering...All I can think is when I will take this certificate [from the army] so I can leave...where I don’t know. I want to forget everything. When you go in the army you feel how much we [the revolutionaries] didn’t do anything. You see all the people in the army and they don’t care what happened at all. When you leave

outside and talk to people you feel yeah they care a little but the army not at all as if nothing happened (ibid). For some, the three revolutionary phases I described in the preceding chapters and their consequences had now become a symbol of undesired chaos for the general Egyptian public which prompted some of those I spoke to talk about leaving the country because, as KIM put it, I cannot “stand the situation, people are walking and you feel like they hate each other, you might say barely a word to them and they will have your neck” (KIM, Cairo, pers. comm., 18 August 2014). Others called the clampdown on revolutionary art as a clampdown on critical thought, expression, revolutionary memory, and creative dissent. As Hala El Sharouny said, “the authorities don’t want us to think with our brains...didn’t I tell you that art can immortalize culture, it immortalizes a certain time, it immortalizes ideas...so they want to erase our memories” (Hala El Sharouny, Cairo, pers. comm., 18 August 2014).

8.4 The Symbolic “End” of Revolutionary Art?

In November 2013, a monument was unveiled in Tahrir Square to commemorate those who died during the overthrow of both Hosni Mubarak and Mohamed Morsi in 2013. For the revolutionaries, this was a clear indication of the authorities attempting to co-opt the revolution and its legacy, as well as an insult to those who died. As Ahmed Maher, one of the revolutionaries who initiated the protests in Tahrir in January 2011 said, a “Tahrir memorial was long overdue, but [] it should not have been built by the same people who had created the need for a memorial in the first place. It’s funny, they are the killers, and they killed our colleagues and our friends, and now they say they are very sad about what happened,

and they respect us” (Kingsley, 2013). Tahrir Square, yet again, was used as the site in which,

Specific meanings emerge in rhetorical performances, in efforts by particular political actors to invoke the symbolic power of Tahrir Square, to evoke a particular set of its potential meanings and to articulate the limits of meaning that Tahrir Square should carry for the specific context in which it is being used. At the same time, each of these utterances, once entered into public circulation, becomes part of the larger universe of meanings for which Tahrir Square can stand. The invocation of Tahrir Square is thus a communicative act through which a particular context is assigned a meaningful place in the revolution, but also an act through which the revolution itself is constituted in particular ways (Peterson, 2015b: 75).

Mosireen, which is a collective of filmmakers and activists, released a video (see Image 101) in response to this attempt to co-opt the meaning of the revolution by its perpetrators, at the time which mocked the memorial and ends with “Never forget” and “Always remember” the atrocities committed by the police and military forces). The memorial was defaced and destroyed within 24 hours, in light of the revolutionaries anger at the authorities attempting to co-opt the revolution and banalize their role in it, versus the reality whereby it was the violence committed by their forces which led to the death of so many revolutionaries.



Image 101: Screenshot of the video shown by Mosireen in November 2013.

Source: The Mosireen Collective, 2013.

8.4.1 The Pink Camouflage – November 2013

At the same time as the monument was unveiled was the second anniversary of the Mohamed Mahmoud Street clashes in November 2013, and, according to Ammar Abo Bakr, the atmosphere was tense, as “everybody had warned us not to go to Mohamed Mahmoud Street that day, the second anniversary of clashes there. Even the activists who supported the revolution! They said the military would catch us and claim we were Muslim Brothers – because everyone who opposed the military was being labelled an Islamist by the military regime and in the media. But we felt we had to go” (Abo Bakr, 2015). Abo Bakr said that as the memorial was destroyed, he decided to go to Mohamed Mahmoud Street and paint the entire wall in pink camouflage (see Images 102 to 108), with one message written on it: “You may kill people, strip them, arrest them, have fun after arresting them – but we won’t forget. We are prepared for you. We put glue on your back that won’t come off” (Abo Bakr, 2015).

Of the pink camouflage, Ammar said that they used vulgar words on it intentionally as the “Islamists never use vulgarity; they always try to express themselves in a very polite way. With these words we wanted to make crystal clear that we, the authors of this sentence, are not linked to the Islamists, even though we were criticizing the military. In part, we also painted this camouflage to fool the media. They had understood that the paintings on Mohamed Mahmoud Street were important, and on the second anniversary of clashes there, they had rented balconies to get a nice shot. But when they arrived at 7 am, they only found the pink camouflage: a sign they couldn’t explain to the audience. On TV they said it’s a piece on blood of the martyrs. They didn’t get it. And that’s what we intended” (Abo Bakr, 2015).

The pink camouflage was also intended to show that there was a “third way” out of the repetitive structural order cycle (from Mubarak, to SCAF, to the Muslim Brotherhood, to SCAF again) – that there existed those who were against the Brotherhood as well as military rule, and they wanted to illustrate that they were neither Islamists, through the use of crude language (as Islamists use more formal, proper forms of language), and that they were against military rule, through the revolutionary art which depicted the violence and injustices committed by military forces.



Image 102: Part of the “pink camouflage” mural – this image is that of the martyr Sayed Khaled, which Ammar Abo Bakr intentionally made in the image of the famous “crying boy” print made by painter Giovanni Bragolin.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 103: Image of a martyr of the revolution on the pink camouflage mural in Mohamed Mahmoud Street.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 104: Leonardo da Vinci's “Vitruvian man” amended to include a fish (the symbol of eye opening), as well as an injured protestor and an image of a Pharaoh with one missing eye, in reference to the eye sniper.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 105: Military forces seen above a pile-up of the skulls of revolutionaries, with the words “Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice” underneath the skulls. This was the legacy of the revolution, according to many I spoke to – unfulfilled promises, the return to the normative order, and martyrs.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 106: Revolutionaries fighting against security forces.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 107: Another part of the “pink camouflage” mural. It depicts the faces of several martyrs (such as 23 year old journalist Mayada Ashraf who worked for the private newspaper, El-Dustour) and the mother of martyrs mourning.

Source: Photo by Author.



Image 108: Graffiti on the left in reference to the “virginity tests” conducted by the military.

Source: Photo by Author.

8.4.2 Bassem Mohsen Portrait – December 2013/January 2014

Perhaps the most iconic piece of which represents the end of the revolutionary process was the portrait of Bassem Mohsen on the iconic corner of Tahrir Square and Mohamed Mahmoud Street, one of the final art works that symbolized the end of revolutionary art movement of the Egyptian revolution. Bassem Mohsen was representative of the “child of the revolution” (Frenkel, 2013) as he embodied the hope, strength, injustice, and struggle which sustained his belief that “the revolution, in its more basic configuration of justice and dignity, was a continuing business. It was a dream, and he labored for it” (Attalah, Elmeshtad, 2013).

Furthermore, as activist Rasha Azab wrote, “his story is the best abstraction of the revolution at large: An injury in January, a lost eye in Mohamed Mahmoud, a military trial in Morsi’s time and finally, a bullet in the head” (Attalah, Elmeshtad,

2013). Therefore, his death was emblematic of the rise and fall of the Egyptian revolution, and “highlighted the difficult times faced by many Egyptian revolutionaries, as they watch the former police state return” (Frenkel, 2013).

Bassem Mohsen was shot in the eye in November 2011 in the Mohamed Mahmoud Street clashes, arrested during military rule, tried, and later beaten by Muslim Brotherhood supporters in 2012, and in 2013 died from a gunshot wound to his head during a protest supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. Bassem was, as many noted, both a “product and victim” (Hamdy, Karl, 2013: 261) of the revolution – he was a teenager (sixteen years old) when the revolution began, and a teenager when he died (nineteen years old), towards the revolutions end. The location of the portrait – on the street where Bassem lost his eye, and in the area (Tahrir) in which he began his journey as a revolutionary – situates the life and death of a revolutionary throughout three years of struggle with the urban epicenter of the Egyptian revolution, where it all began. Ammar, who painted this iconic piece, said that he decided to paint Bassem’s portrait on the pink camouflage on 1 January, 2014, as someone who represented the “true revolution” (Ammar Abo Bakr, 2015), in that he was against all representatives of the structural order which re-emerged under different ideological guises, and revolted against them with the primary goal of achieving the dignity, security, and social justice that Egyptians fought and died for. The fish eye, according to Ammar, was a sign of eye-opening, and its intended message is that even if the revolution is defeated, even if Bassem is dead, he will still be watching, as a somber – and moral – reminder that many died for the revolution to live (Image 109).



Image 109: This is thought to be the “final” piece in Mohamed Mahmoud Street - an iconic portrait of Bassem Mohsen (who embodied, and fought for, the original goals of the Egyptian revolution of bread, freedom, and social justice throughout its three main phases), on the corner of Mohamed Mahmoud Street and Tahrir Square, symbolizing the apparent end of the revolutionary art movement.

Source: Photo by Author.

8.4.3 The Destruction of the AUC Wall – September 2015

The effacement of graffiti, the whitewashing of revolutionary art, and the destruction of the AUC wall in Mohamed Mahmoud Street on September 2015 – seen as one of the most iconic locations of revolutionary art during the revolution – was widely regarded as an imposition of “order” and the return to the status quo. As Mona Abaza notes, “the cleanup of downtown is about giving a sense of order in post-January 2011 Cairo...all of us are in denial. Tahrir is over, and the graffiti is part of it. We had four years of trauma – killings and euphoria – but humans need normalcy. And the normalcy is this order” (Jankowicz, 2015).

During the proposed destruction of the AUC wall (as part of a renovation plan), AUC held a conference on that campus entitled “Creative Cities: Re-framing Downtown”, graffiti artist El Teneen distributed a version of the event’s poster, overlaid with the phrase: “How creative is taking down revolutionary graffiti walls?” (Jankowicz, 2015), and argued that his prank was intended to highlight the irony of hosting a “creative cities” conference “in the same place they are going to knock down revolutionary artwork” (ibid.) (see Image 110), on the location of some of the revolution’s most iconic works, and the site of key revolutionary events which saw it being a space for collaborative efforts, martyr commemorations, bloody street battles, and protests. This was another major turn of events which marked attempts by the authorities to stamp out traces of the revolution on urban sites and spaces, and marks the symbolic end to the revolution itself and the revolutionary art movement – the destruction of the wall on the iconic street which was a key location for revolutionary struggle and revolutionary art.



Image 110: El Teneen’s Facebook Post regarding his “prank” poster regarding the Creative Cities Conference at AUC

Source: El Teneen, Facebook post, 2015.



Image 111: Ahdaf Soueif posts an image of the beginning of the destruction of the AUC wall on Mohamed Mahmoud (a site of both revolutionary art and revolutionary events), and writes “if they could, they would also destroy (or remove) the whole street and the city with it”.

Source: Soueif, Twitter post, 2015.

8.5 The Aftermath of Fieldwork – Creative Closures under the Rule of Sisi

In May 2014, General Abdel Fattah El Sisi won the presidential elections by a landslide against his opponent Hamdeen Sabahi. His win was predicted by everyone I interviewed prior to the elections, who said that the public's almost fanatic displays of support was an indication that he would definitely assume the role of Egypt's sixth President.

The fact that Sisi's landslide victory was a surprise to no one I interviewed is, perhaps, because he was portrayed as a national hero who would restore order and stability in Egypt. In an interesting analysis on liminality as being present both at the beginning and the end of a revolution, Walter Armbrust argues that Sisi – who, he says, defeated the 25 January revolution – is not representative of a counter-revolutionary force or a simple return of the normative order, but rather, was actually an “unintended revolutionary outcome” (Armbrust, 2017: 233). Armbrust argues that the “permanentized precarity” (Armbrust, 2017: 237) of the liminal crisis of the Egyptian revolution was “conducive to Trickster politics” (Armbrust, 2017: 222), because it is in the context of liminality – in both its creative and destructive contours – that the “exquisitely ambivalent: potentially powerful, ridiculous, and dangerous” character such as the Trickster thrives (Armbrust, 2017: 225).

Armbrust argues that a political Trickster's popularity emerges and gains strength during moments of crisis, when “social and political life are thrown into doubt” (Armbrust, 2017: 227), and they are widely seen as being a “solution to crisis...therefore, they have a direct stake not in closing off liminality, but in perpetuating it” (ibid.). In his application of liminality to political theory, Thomassen

also set forth the premise that the Trickster is at home in a liminal crisis, which he is not “really interested in solving...he simply pretends” (Thomassen, 2012: 696).

Therefore, Sisi’s role as “pretend politician, the lack of existential commitments befitting his half-way position between a civilian government and a military that puts itself above the state; a purveyor of false charisma, and above all, an outsider who presents himself as ‘a solution to the crisis’” (Armbrust, 2017: 227) has made him an ideal political Trickster, one who continues to triumph by navigating the interstices of the liminal crisis. However, this rule is predicated largely on violence to sustain itself (Armbrust, 2017: 228). Interestingly enough, this was described in a conversation I had with Ganzeer, who explained to me that the liminal crisis made Sisi’s emergence – and his rise to presidency – possible,

Of course the people didn’t want Morsi, would he have resigned, no he would not have resigned. However, I would have liked for there to be a legal process for him to be unseated, in the sense that the Army shouldn’t have come in and arrest him, that is not a legal process...once you have this illegal process of having the military say, alright, “coup”, simply so the military can rule and Sisi can get this huge public support. Through an actual legal process, Sisi would have never been in the picture because nobody really knew Sisi at the time. As soon as Morsi was unseated nobody would have taken to the streets and said “let’s go vote for Sisi”, but by Sisi being in the picture, by Sisi being the iron fist hero, he gets that support so that’s what he wants. It’s not about him unseating the President [Morsi] that people don’t want, it’s not about that, it’s about him becoming President. Yes of course [Sisi will win the elections end of May 2014], because of the atmosphere, not because the majority of the people are in favour of him. There isn’t a legal atmosphere to begin with, this is entirely done by force. There is no parliament and hasn’t been a parliament for a very long time, he has been the one pretty much issuing the laws and changing laws since the coup. This is not a legal environment, nobody who believes in a true real democracy will go and vote within this environment. The only people voting are people who actually think Sisi should be President - so I am not going to vote (Ganzeer, Cairo, pers. comm., 26 April 2014).

As Mostafa El Hosseiny also told me, he was not surprised when Sisi won, because “people are with stability, no matter who the stability comes with” (Mostafa El Hosseiny, Cairo, pers. comm., 1 May 2014).

As journalists Ghada Tantawi and Mariam Rizk note, “If Egypt’s cultural elite had hoped that the overthrow of Islamist President Mohammed Morsi in 2013 would usher in an era of creativity and freedom of expression, they must be deeply disappointed” (Tantawi, Rizk, 2016). However, an atmosphere of repression and intolerance to criticism of Sisi came into being even before his Presidency on June 8 2014. On May 9, 2014, Ganzeer was accused by a famous television personality named Osama Kamal of “terrorism” in his support for the Muslim Brotherhood after launching a revolutionary art campaign with the hashtag #SisiWarCrimes. The show, entitled “The President and the People,” was broadcast on a television station known for its staunch support of Sisi (Al Kahera Wal Nas, which translates as Cairo and its People). In response, Ganzeer wrote a blog post addressing the television host’s claims against him,

Dear Mr. Osama Kamal, I should point out to you that what you’re doing is in all actuality not in Mr. Sisi’s best interest. What you’re doing makes him come off as a man who is very afraid of the impact of art. Rather than see us as a threat to the State, critical artists should be seen as a source of information to the State. By paying attention to what we do, perhaps the State can better understand popular grievances and adjust its policies and governance accordingly, rather than invest so many resources into trying to shut us up (Ganzeer, 2014a).



Image 112: Ganzeer, “Who’s Afraid of Art?,”
Source: Guyer, 2014.

This blog post, published on May 15, 2014, in which he declares that Sisi is “very afraid of the impact of art” came several days after an official tweet [see Image 113 below] on May 12, 2014 by the @AlSisiOfficial Twitter account, which stated: “#AlSisi: Egypt needs its intellectuals and its thinkers and its writers to play a very major role during the upcoming phase, on the basis of national responsibility and judged by national interests” (my translation).



Image 113: Tweet by @AlSisiOfficial
Source: @AlSisiOfficial, Twitter, 2014.

Using social media to mobilise cultural intellectuals to “play a major role in the upcoming phase...according to national interests” (the phase referred to the lead up to the Presidential elections at the end of the same month the tweet was posted) is, according to Huda Lutfi, a Cairo-based artist, a familiar method used by the regime to make “strategic alliances with cultural élites to bolster national pride and to crack down on ‘undesirable’ and opposition art” (Lutfi, cited in Guyer, 2014). In the years since Sisi has been in power, cultural events have been arbitrarily cancelled, cartoonists, singers, writers and poets have been jailed, and prominent cultural centres such as Townhouse Gallery and the Merit Publishing House have been raided and temporarily shut down (Amin, 2015; Kennedy, 2015; Tantawi, Rizk 2016).

According to one journalist, “rights advocates lament that the space for free artistic expression and creativity has diminished in Egypt” (Amin, 2015), and public cultural events which were borne out of the revolution, such as El-Fan Midan (“Art is a Square”) which was initiated by the now defunct Independent Culture Coalition, was shut down by security forces in 2014 in a move which, according to the Arabic Network for Human Rights information, was indicative of the “the mounting police interventions and violations against the freedom of art and creativity” (Shoureap, 2014). Although El-Fan Midan was only one of many cultural activities initiated in the public sphere, it was one of the earliest initiatives in the immediate aftermath of Mubarak’s restrictive rule on the political and cultural sphere. As Lewis writes,

El-Fan Midan seemed to be an ambitious step to unfetter art from closed halls and elitist alienation to thrive in public spheres already bustling with revolutionary vigour. Organized in various public squares across Egypt by volunteers from the Independent Culture Coalition, and supported through donations from its members and other interested people, the monthly free-of-

charge event cracked a hole in a long-enduring cultural siege laid by the Egyptian government, whereby artists and intellectuals were subject to “play the game,” and the public sphere was largely inaccessible due to security measures (Lewis, 2014).

For some, the closure of such a celebrated—and public—cultural activity that was formed in the wake of the revolution is representative of a general and disturbing trend of completely subverting the independent cultural scene in the wake of the revolution. However, even more established cultural institutions that had existed prior to the revolution, such as Al Mawred Al Thaqafy (Culture Resource), closed down in the light of increasingly restrictive laws on civil society which led them to relocate their headquarters to Beirut “due to the increasing antagonistic state attitude toward civil society” in which “the fate of the programs and activities run and funded by Al-Mawred, founded 10 years ago by a group of Arab artists and intellectuals...remains unknown” (ibid).

For many, this indicates a trend since Sisi’s rule not only of using a heavy hand to restrict any oppositional voices and signs of political dissent for unpopular decisions, but also of severely restricting cultural production, halting creative practices and re-appropriating the public sphere back under the government’s full control. As Lewis writes,

...such events [the closure of El-Fan Midan and the decision of Mawred Al Thaqafy to close its Cairo office due to repressive new civil society laws] strike at the very core of the cultural scene. On the one hand, they have resulted in a complete takeover of the public sphere by the authorities, a space that had been forcefully reclaimed by the revolution. On the other hand, the recent laws intend to decrease the margin of cultural production, even inside elite circles, and to dry up the already scarce funding resources that have thrived in the past

decade due to the Mubarak regime's relatively liberal policy toward foreign funding....As it takes up the reins of the public domain — of political activism, the media, universities, economic activity and even religious institutions and civil society — the Egyptian state seizes artistic and cultural territory, robbing them of all potential (ibid).

As such, while Helmy El-Namnam, the current Minister of Culture, argues that “Egypt’s future is its cultural future” (El-Aref, 2015), cultural producers find themselves negotiating and operating within an increasingly restrictive environment. Although the current political climate in Egypt has not been conducive to the independent cultural scene, creative manifestations of public expression and unconventional cultural acts still continue under increasingly difficult circumstances (Alfred, 2014; Jankowicz 2016). Independent cultural actors continue to face severe intimidation yet the independent cultural scene still manages to maintain its resilience as there are “still the handful of artists, cartoonists and writers...willing to push the boundaries and to experiment and challenge the public with their creations” (Amin, 2016) and regardless of the fact that “revolutionary art is becoming more dangerous...artists are getting more creative” (Alfred, 2014). The lack of pervasiveness of the visibility of cultural expressions is not necessarily indicative of failure even if it is a sign of extremely difficult times for creative acts in all its forms - as Tripp notes, “the more vigorously the authorities try to put a stop to this by arresting artists and singers, closing down plays, raiding art exhibitions and seizing artworks, or blacking out graffiti, the clearer it becomes that they have failed to establish their own version of the truth” (2012: 261).

Keizer’s hope is that the continued process and existence of revolutionary art can lead to “alternative ways of thinking which can lead to alternative modes of

living, and maybe we are part of it now without realizing it as revolutionary artists, but I think that is a huge part of what we are doing” (Keizer, Cairo, pers. comm., 29 April 2014). The potential of revolutionary art as a fluid form of cultural expression may sustain new modes of engagement in the cultural field which may creatively constitute new ways of ways of understanding the sociopolitical potential of art and its role during a revolution.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

This research examined how cultural producers in Egypt understood and talked about their art during a particular historical moment in Egypt's political and cultural history, the Egyptian revolution of January 2011, a period that can be understood through liminality. I draw on this concept to ground revolutionary art within the historical process of the Egyptian revolution and to emphasise the relevance of the state of in-betweenness in examining creative cultural expressions and how liminal moments may frame understandings of revolutionary art within different liminal moments.

In this research, based on the fieldwork, I argue that there were different liminal moments in the process of the Egyptian revolution that produced different understandings of revolutionary art. Drawing on the conceptual understandings of liminal moments and on the fieldwork, the main findings are:

- Different liminal moments throughout the different phases of the Egyptian revolution structured experiences and framed our discussions and understandings of revolutionary art at different temporal registers. Revolutionary art was not thought of the same way from 2011 until 2013 – it significantly evolved according to the context within which the revolutionary process was unfolding.
- Many of the cultural producers I interviewed did not actually create revolutionary art during the utopian 18 days of the revolution. In those days, they were engaged in participating and experiencing the revolution and used scribbles on the walls and hasty stencils to show dissent, protest and warnings to other revolutionaries, especially when communications were cut in the early days of the revolution. During this time, revolutionaries managed to upset the

normative order and think of the street as the natural location for creative expression.

- The second and third phase of the revolution saw cultural producers, along with revolutionaries, attempt to reconstitute the experience of anti-structure that the first phase of the revolution brought about, despite being ruled by SCAF and then Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood. During this period, they used symbols of martyrs as well as sardonic art and satire to remind the public of the original goals of the revolution, countering the state's false narrative of the revolutionaries as being thugs and foreign agents.
- Most of the cultural producers I spoke to were not concerned with the form, function, or possible effects of “revolutionary art”, but rather, were more interested with the act of “doing” or creating art. It was in these acts that they sought to disrupt understandings of who could make art and where it is shown.
- The Egyptian revolution managed to produce a physical and symbolic space for meaning making in the social, cultural, and political realm. Yet this was not what is understood as formal politics, but a more “authentic” politics which Rancière speaks of and which is performed by “supplementary subjects” whose political and creative acts alike disrupt the space of consensus (Rancière, 2001) can disrupt the structural order which also leads to a liminal time. For those I interviewed, this liminal time was an ambiguous realm which permeates the cultural, political, and social realm but which was also a realm in which meanings are contested.

- I also found that the further away from the ideal moment of the 18 days, the greater a crisis this represented to my informants. The liminal moment was characterized as the way things “should” be versus what they are in the normative order. In the aftermath of the revolution, most of those I spoke to reflected on an existential crisis which provoked them to question whether revolutionary art could exist as the revolutionary process was unfolding during SCAF transitional rule, in the aftermath of the Rab’a massacre. Many argued that it could, as it was the process of creating that art – the doing – which was significant, rather than the art itself, which is transitory in nature.

9.1 Art for the Common Good: A Growing Discourse in light of the Egyptian Revolution?

In the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution, Hamid Dabashi argued that “Art must respond to a renewed Arab consciousness that is aware of what is happening in the Arab World” (Dabashi, 2011), and Downey argued that artistic practices must be thought of as adhering to the “common good” which “must remain precisely that: common to all” (Downey, 2013: 8), in order to sustain modes of civic engagement. Although revolutionary art—as a process—is but one part of the larger discourse which attempts to respond to this renewed consciousness and address the need to reassert that art and culture are not only for the elite but are for the “common good”, since I ended my fieldwork, iconic artistic events borne in the aftermath of the revolutions such as the celebrated El-Fan Midan was effectively shut down by security forces October 2014 (Lewis, 2014).

El-Fan Midan, which literally translates into “Art is a Square”, was a monthly art and culture festival in Abdeen Square, founded by the Independent Culture Coalition

in March 2011. Its aim was “to bring arts and culture to the streets of Egypt” and to “create cultural and political awareness through a street festival that would tour all governorates of Egypt” (Montasser, 2012a). The closure of El-Fan Midan symbolizes that the space for unconventional forms of creative expression constitutive of a political and cultural consciousness is gradually decreasing and is at risk. There have also been several raids by security forces against civil society organization and not-for-profit cultural centres such as Townhouse Gallery and its affiliated building Rawabet Theater (which were closed down for several months) in Cairo, which one writer described as being indicative of “a continuum of general cultural decay and state antagonism” (Jankowicz, 2016).

At the same time, however, several projects and initiatives focusing on promoting art and culture in the aftermath of the revolution have taken place, such as Mahatat for Contemporary Art, which hosts artistic projects in public spaces in more obscure residential areas and neighbourhoods areas and operates according to the notion that art should be open, accessible, and decentralized (El Shimi, 2014). Although they do not make any political demands or are focused on political awareness in the same capacity as El-Fan Midan, these initiatives are indicative of a growing discourse demanding a more accessible artistic and cultural field is being initiated and sustained by individuals, groups, civil society actors and not-for-profit cultural institutions alike.

Another example of this growing discourse to de-centre art and culture from the controlled cultural field of the state was a campaign started in October 2012 by Al Mawred El Thaqafy (Culture Resource) entitled “A Culture For All Egyptians” in which they set out to “campaign for changes to cultural laws and policies, and make culture more accessible to all sectors of society” (Montasser, 2012c). Their primary

slogan, “Culture is not only for intellectuals but for all Egyptians” reflects their “aim[...] to produce a concrete policy that not only the Ministry of Culture but also the entire country can follow...the role of culture is to characterise a particular community or social group spiritually, physically, intellectually and emotionally. Culture is about art and ways of life and includes fundamental human rights and values, traditions and beliefs” (Montasser, 2012c). To promote the initiative they initiated a media campaign (with a second phase launched in March 2013) with distributed print materials (in downtown Cairo as well as popular neighbourhoods, Mansoura, Minya, Luxor, Port Said) infomercials on private and state television channels, a short documentary film, and a media campaign with billboards containing slogans such as “Culture is not in the Ministry, it is in the Neighbourhood and Street”, and “Culture is not just for the *Muthaqafeen* [intellectuals or “cultured people”] (Culture Resource, 2013) [see Appendix 2]. Although this campaign is currently not active (as mentioned previously, Al Mawred El Thaqafy halted all activities in Egypt and moved its headquarters to Beirut), it is indicative that the Egyptian revolution has opened the door for new ways of doing politics and creating art.

9.2 Contributions and Significance

This thesis is part of an emerging scholarship on Arab cultural production and visual cultures. While it focuses on the understandings of art in Egypt during and after the revolution as a liminal time, it is not concerned with causality, that is, a “cause-effect” investigation. Nor is it a study of the form or content of the art work. Rather, it offers a contextualized and historicized study based on what cultural producers say and how they think about - and approach - art within a particular moment in Egypt’s political and cultural history. By placing emphasis on interviews, personal testimonies, and lived experience, this research hopes to add another dimension to the ways in which

we think about art and culture within the historical moment of the Arab revolutions based on the standpoint of cultural producers themselves.

This approach, I suggest, provides a nuanced examination of revolutionary art away from descriptive accounts conceptualizing what it “does” or “represents”, what Yakein Abdelmagid dubs a “politics of representation” (Abdelmagid, 2013: 172), as it examines the ways in which cultural produces themselves articulate understandings of this art. Furthermore, this research discussed the revolution and its aftermath by using liminality which allows us to explore the ways in which cultural producers (artists and non-artists alike) involved in cultural processes ground their art within the historical process of the Egyptian revolution.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the major limitation of this thesis was that I was restricted to conducting my fieldwork in Cairo due to the unstable security situation at the time, and therefore it cannot be seen as a wider – and generalized - statement about the ways in which cultural producers in different parts of Egypt think of and approach art. In fact, it attempts to avoid generalization altogether, and emphasizes that understandings of art – within a particular moment in Egypt political and cultural history – should be looked at through a revolutionary process, in order to avoid compartmentalizing understandings of revolutionary art as being any one thing (such as a “representation of the revolution”). Instead, this research found that different liminal moments necessarily called upon different understandings, tactics, and strategies of art as they adapted to the events of the revolutionary.

In this research project, I have focused on a wide terrain of literature to familiarize myself with the many ways in which conceptualizations of art and culture in the aftermath of the revolutions have been addressed in the academic and non-

academic literature. However, given that the focus of the research - art as a process and understanding what arts means - is tied to a continuously changing context, I continued to follow the social media accounts (blogs, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.) of those I interviewed, kept up to date with how revolutionary art was discussed and negotiated and covered by local Egyptian and international media outlets and academic works which were published in the aftermath of my thesis.

It is impossible, however, to make sense of all these issues without having to do more research. Therefore, perhaps my thesis may act as a starting point for others, and maybe myself, to consider the continuous narratives around the production of art in contemporary Egypt, where it is produced, when, for which purpose and why. The emphasis on art as a (continuous) process can be extended in investigations looking into the role of the digital sphere in documenting and archiving the cultural expressions of the revolution, which has already begun to be addressed by scholars (Badran, 2014; Downey, 2015) and artists alike (Baladi, 2016). This research can also be used comparatively with similar studies looking at art production in other parts of the Arab World and examine the ways in which the case study of Egypt may parallel—or diverge from—these own case studies and what this may tell us about the rich and diverse ways in which cultural producers across the region are articulating different ways of approaching and thinking about art.

Furthermore, the continued visibility (albeit to a lesser extent than during the revolutions) of cultural producers and their creative acts presents a challenge—simply by their existence and occupying a different, unconventional form of expression—to the normative function of art and the monopolization of culture in Egypt. Although this extends beyond the current research, it sets forth the premise that it is even more

critical now to re-ignite the conversation many cultural players in Egypt have attempted to – and continue to – address regarding the role of art in a post-revolution Egypt, which touches upon crucial issues of control, relevance, and accessibility in the cultural field. The very existence of this discourse for cultural production in the Arab world is crucial, because it may “represent the prelude to a new phase in the cultural history of the modern Arab world, a phase that might enable new players to elaborate artistic propositions to new audiences, bypassing the mediation of ‘learned elites’”(Gonzales-Quijano, 2013).

Using liminality is not intended to provide clear cut answers, rather, it is used to unravel the historical process of the revolution through its art, and create a more nuanced lens in which to understand that art within a particular historical process (the Egyptian revolution). As Thomassen notes: “In a perfect world, the tripartite structure of van Gennep’s rites of passage would take political form via the stages of epistemic rupture and radical critique, followed by a playful liminal period of unlimited freedom and questioning of prevailing norms, reintegrated and normalized into realized political emancipation, protected by a constitution of legitimate order to the benefit of the general populace. It rarely happens like that. In effective history, the tripartite process more often resembles a long sequence of destruction that starts with desperate screams of alienation, hopeful longings for freedom and justice that continue into generalized despair, and ends in nihilism and neo-totalitarian grips of power, protected by a state of emergency. We have moved from rupture to permanent liminality (Thomassen, 2017: 303). What the liminality framework does, in the context of this research, is allow us to ground understandings of art within certain places, spaces, and events, and perhaps create a more nuanced understanding of how that art is framed within a revolutionary context.

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