IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
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MASTER'S THESIS

ARCHAEOLOGY OF DE-DEMOCRATIZATION: MOBILIZING THE PHARAONIC PAST IN POST-2013 COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY EGYPT

RAHİME SEYİT

THESIS ADVISOR
PROF. IRFAN AHMAD

ISTANBUL, 2025

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by
RAHİME SEYİT

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Sociology

THESIS JURY MEMBERS
PROF. IRFAN AHMAD (THESIS ADVISOR)
ASSOC. PROF. ABDULLAH AL-ARIAN
ASSIST. PROF. RAHIME ARZU ÜNAL

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THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been read by us, and it has been decided that it is sufficient in terms of scope and quality to obtain a master's degree in the field of Sociology.

Thesis Jury Members

Title – Full Name	Opinion	Signature
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
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It has been confirmed that this thesis has been written following all the standards set by Ibn Haldun University Graduate School of Graduate Studies.

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

DEMOKRATİKLEŞMEYİ TERSİNE ÇEVİRMEYİN ARKEOLOJİSİ: 2013 SONRASI KARŞI-DEVRİMCİ MİSAR'DA ANTİK MİSAR GEÇMİŞİNİN HAREKETE GEÇİRİLMESİ

Seyit, Rahime
Sosyoloji Yüksek Lisans Programı
Öğrenci No.: 224021008
Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORC-ID): 0000-0002-8362-7153
Ulusal Tez Merkezi Referans No.: 10687040

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Irfan Ahmad
Ocak 2025, 157 Sayfa

Sosyal bilimler alanındaki çalışmalar, anlatı üretimi ile iktidar ilişkileri arasındaki bağlantıyı incelemeye yönelik kapsamını genişleterek kentsel mekân, arkeoloji ve ulusal kültürel etkinlikler gibi alanları da analizlerine dahil etmeye başlamıştır. Bu tez, 2013 sonrası Mısır devletinin yönetim projeleri ve etkinliklerinde kullandığı Firavun tarih anlatısını eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla incelemektedir. Özellikle 2020'de gerçekleştirilen Tahrir Meydanı kentsel dönüşüm projesi ve 2021'de düzenlenen Firavunların Altın Geçidi etkinliği bu analiz kapsamında ele alınmaktadır. Stratejik ve bilinçli bir şekilde birbirleriyle bağlantıları olmasına rağmen bu iki olay genellikle birbirinden bağımsız bir biçimde çalışılmıştır. Tahrir Meydanı üzerine yapılan eleştirel çalışmalar çoğunlukla meydanın devrimci anlatısının ve sembolizminin silinmesine odaklanırken, 2013 sonrası sosyo-politik iktidar yapısıyla bağlantılı olarak meydana dayatılan yeni anlatı ve semboller üzerine yeterince çalışma yapılmamıştır. Benzer şekilde, Firavunların Altın Geçidi çoğunlukla uluslararası alanda turizmi canlandırma stratejisi, ulusal düzeyde ise kültürel gururu teşvik eden bir girişim olarak değerlendirilmiştir.

Bu tez; eleştirel söylem analizi yöntemini ve C. Wright Mills, Michael Mann ve Pierre Bourdieu'nün iktidar kuramlarından sentezlenmiş teorik bir çerçeveyi kullanarak bu devlet projelerini ilişkisel bir bağlamda ele almakta ve bunları, daha geniş bir hedef

olarak İrfan Ahmad'ın "demokratikleşmeyi tersine çevirme" (de-democratization) kavramıyla ilişkilendirmektedir. Bu iki etkinliğe dair resmi söylemler ve anlatılar; hükümet yanlısı haberler, devletin resmî web siteleri ve devletin sosyal medya hesaplarından alınan paylaşımlar üzerinden eleştirel söylem analizi yöntemi kullanılarak incelenmiştir. Mills'in askeri güç elit stratejilerinin kavramsallaştırması, Mann'ın otoriter yapı ve altyapı gücü anlayışları ile Bourdieu'nün sembolik güç kavramının sentezlenmesiyle; 2013 sonrası askeri rejimin, arkeoloji yoluyla Firavun mirasını canlandırarakdevrimci geçmişi marjinalleştirme ve bastırma gayreti içinde olduğunu savunmaktayım. Tahrir Meydanı kentsel dönüşüm projesi ve Firavunların Altın Geçidi mega etkinliğinde, devrim temelli tarih anlatısının somut ve sembolik olarak Antik Mısır temelli tarih anlatısıyla yer değiştirilmesi;rejimin geçmişi olduğu kadar geleceği de şekillendirmek amacıyla tarih anlatısını somut ve sembolik düzeyde demokratikleşmeyi tersine çevirmeye yönelik etkin bir girişimde bulunduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antik Mısır Geçmişi, Demokratikleşmeyi Tersine Çevirme, Firavunlar'ın Altın Geçidi, Karşı Devrimci Mısır, Tahrir Meydanı, Tarih Anlatısı.

ABSTRACT

ARCHAEOLOGY OF DE-DEMOCRATIZATION: MOBILIZING THE PHARAONIC PAST IN POST-2013 COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY EGYPT

Seyit, Rahime
MA in Sociology
Student ID: 224021008
Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORC-ID): 0000-0002-8362-7153
National Thesis Center Reference No.: 10687040

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Irfan Ahmad
January 2025, 157 Pages

Social sciences scholarship on the relationship between narrative production and power relations has extended to include analyses of urban space, archaeology, and national cultural events. This dissertation critically examines the Pharaonic historical narrative employed by the post-2013 Egyptian state in its governmental projects and events, focusing on the Tahrir Square urban development (2020) and the Pharaohs' Golden Parade (2021). Despite their strategic and deliberate connection, these two events have often been studied in isolation. While critical studies on Tahrir Square primarily emphasize the erasure of its revolutionary narrative and symbolism, little attention has been given to its newly imposed narrative and symbolism in relation to the broader socio-political power structure after 2013. Similarly, the parade spectacle has largely been analyzed as a tourism-boosting strategy internationally and a cultural pride-fostering initiative nationally.

Using critical discourse analysis and a synthesized theoretical framework drawn from three power theorists—C. Wright Mills, Michael Mann, and Pierre Bourdieu—this dissertation examines these state projects as relational, connecting them to Irfan Ahmad's concept of de-democratization, as their wider objective. Critical discourse analysis is used to analyze the official discourses and narratives of these two events drawn from pro-government news, governmental websites, and governmental social media feeds. By synthesizing Mills' conceptualization of military power elite

strategies, Mann's notions of authoritarian structure and infrastructural power, and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, I argue that the post-2013 military regime mobilizes the Pharaonic past through archaeology to marginalize and suppress the revolutionary past. Through the material and symbolic replacement of the revolution-based historical narrative with a Pharaonic-based historical narrative, as manifested in the Tahrir Square urban development project and the Pharaohs' Golden Parade mega-event, the regime is actively engaging in de-democratizing the historical narrative both materially and symbolically, to shape the past as well as the future.

Keywords: Counterrevolutionary Egypt, De-Democratization, Historical Narrative, Pharaohs' Parade, Pharaonic Past, Tahrir Square.

DEDICATION

To everyone who lived a dream and a moment of hope;

To the old, youth, and children of the Arab Spring who believed in change;

To the children who grew up witnessing revolutions, uprisings, and attempts at change;

To the children who lived and saw the two extreme opposites in their parents' eyes the spark of hope and the gloominess of despair;

To those whose hopes, dreams, and struggles to change were crushed by huge oppressive systems and harsh realities;

To those who lost their hopes, felt helpless, and failed;

To those who are about to lose their minds trying to understand what went wrong and why/how things came to these situations in their countries;

To those who doubted the possibility of change;

To those who became desperate and thought that everything was lost, and nothing left of the Arab Spring in front of the tyrannical system;

To those who gave up, whether out of despair or fear;

To the free souls of the martyrs of each revolution, uprising, and war that happened in the last fourteen years;

To the imprisoned revolutionaries, activists, and thinkers whose only crime was/is to dream of a better world;

To the lost souls in the diaspora who had to leave their homes and migrate;

To our repressive, tyrannical, dictatorial states;

To ourselves;

We are still here, we are still trying, we are still hoping…

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This dissertation would never have come to existence without the invaluable contributions of numerous individuals, experiences, and events.

Firstly, I owe my deepest gratitude to Professor Irfan Ahmad, whose dedication, time, and guidance were the primary factors behind the realization of this project. In moments of uncertainty, he believed in me even more than I believed in myself, showing unwavering commitment to my work. His support—through insightful discussions, detailed feedback, and his steady presence throughout the journey—has been an immense privilege, for which I will always be grateful. Prof. Ahmad's expertise in political sociology and political anthropology was invaluable in shaping and developing this research. Working with him was not only an enriching experience on a humanistic level, through his understanding and support, but also profoundly impactful on a scholarly level, advancing my knowledge and analytical approach. The printed chapters with his comments will remain a cherished reminder of this experience on my bookshelf.

Secondly, I am profoundly grateful to my family, whose material and emotional support made this journey possible. They have been with me in every moment of progress, doubt, perseverance, and passion. From intellectual discussions with my father, to emotional support from my mother, to the encouragement and joy brought by my siblings, they provided the foundation I needed in the course of finishing this dissertation. I can not imagine having survived this mentally and emotionally without their unwavering love and presence.

Thirdly, I would like to acknowledge the professors at IHU, whose contributions were pivotal to the development of this dissertation. Special thanks to Professor Alev Erkilet, who witnessed the birth of this topic in 2021-2022 as my graduation dissertation and provided constant encouragement and validation during the early stages. I am also grateful for the valuable feedback of Professors Ramazan Aras, Dr. Tesnim Khriji, Dr. Heba Raouf, and Dr. Diane Pranzo, whose insights helped me to refine my graduation dissertation topic for my MA. I also want to thank Dr. Mohammad Affan for his course of Comparative Politics of the Middle East, which

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Fourthly, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to my friends, who have been my companions through every academic and personal step. Though I may miss naming them all, they know who they are. The Sociology and Anthropology cohort at IHU—Sarah, Batool, Nour, Bilal, Mazen, and Ruba—provided not only emotional but also intellectual support, through hours of brainstorming sessions and lively debates. Their presence lightened the academic burden, sharing hard times and multiplying the fun of which I have warm memories. I am also grateful to the wider IHU family, including Radwa, Rawan, Kawthar, Sondos, Noor, Hasna, Alaa, and Batool, whose inspiring existence made the journey brighter. Special thanks to Julia, my teaching fellow and work partner during my final semester, whose cooperation were crucial to completing this dissertation. Beyond IHU and academia, I would like to express my gratitude to the family friends who felt like an extended family in *ghurba,* providing unwavering emotional support and warmth throughout this journey, including Ikram, Rehab, Aya, Habiba, Salma, and Radwa.

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Rahime SEYİT

İSTANBUL, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In December 2010, the spark for Tunisia's demonstrations was ignited when Bouazizi set himself on fire in protest against injustice and oppression. Bouazizi, a street vendor, was constantly harassed by the police and state authorities, who frequently confiscated his goods and disrupted his livelihood. After the state seized his merchandise, Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of a governmental headquarters, an act that sparked the Tunisian revolution and the Arab Spring uprisings (Grira, 2010). Within approximately four weeks, as the flames of the Tunisian revolution subsided following the escape of its dictator, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, another spark—like Bouazizi—ignited to signal the start of the Egyptian revolution: Khaled Said (The Guardian, 2011; We are all Khaled Said, 2011). A young man in his twenties, Said was brutally tortured to death by Alexandria police officers without any clear charge against him. He was merely a victim of a corrupt, oppressive, and brutal police system. To absolve themselves of any role for Said's killing, the police fabricated a charge, accusing him of possessing drugs. Images of Khaled Said's tortured body spread online like wildfire, leading to intensified calls for protests on January 25, the official Police Day holiday, to denounce the police brutality, expose their violence, and prevent future victims like Khaled Said. As expected, the police violently suppressed the demonstrations. This violence only fueled the protesters' determination to stand against the regime and insist on their demands for a dignified life –a life free of state terror, oppression, and injustice. However, these demands don't seem to be materialized if we look at today's Egyptian socio-political-economic situation.

In June 2013, amidst massive opposition protests, the Egyptian military seized power under General Sisi, ousting Mohammed Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood member and the first democratically elected civilian president, after just a year in office (Mandour, 2024, 1). The years 2011–2013 represent a critical turning point in the Egyptian political landscape, standing in sharp contrast to the periods before and after. In 2011,

protests swept across central Cairo's Tahrir Square and across other cities in Egypt, lasting for 18 days and challenging the thirty-year dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak (Brownlee, Masoud, and Ronalds, 2015, 20–21). This year marked a clear grassroots effort toward democratization, with the Egyptian public and civil society breaking years of fear instilled by state repression (Grimm, 2022, 25–26). The transitional period between 2011 and 2012 was defined by political upheaval, heightened socio-political activism, and an intense struggle by the Egyptian people against dominant groups from the old regime and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, SCAF (Droz-Vincent, 2019, 120–22). The slogans of this period centered on public demands, emphasizing the people's power and agency (Carle, 2016). After years of fear and oppression, 2011–2012 became a moment of open defiance, with people directly challenging the power structure of Mubarak's regime, security forces, and the army (Lahlali, 2014).

Despite this optimistic beginning, after the military intervention in 2013, there are no visible remnants of the democratization practices or materializations of the demands expressed during 2011–2012. Most country reports[1] on Egypt highlight a tightening authoritarian grip and a decline in basic living standards under Sisi's military regime (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024; Agarwal and Mazarei, 2024). Over the past eleven years, the country has witnessed widespread physical violence, arbitrary detentions, suppression of expression and activism, deteriorating economic conditions, pervasive poverty, intimidation, and the military's encroachment into nearly every civil sphere (Freedom House, 2023; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024; Sayigh, 2019). Yet, despite the severe socio-political oppression and economic hardships, Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi's regime appears to endure and persist. More significantly, this enduring authoritarian system follows a brief yet potent period of socio-political activism and democratic aspirations between 2011 and 2012. Understanding the survival and continuation of such a regime necessitates examining the legitimating discursive mechanisms employed by the post-2013 military government to shape both reality and future narratives (Grimm, 2022, 273).

[1] Country reports here refer to annual reports prepared by research institutions, advocating organizations, and think tanks that examine the country's policies in different fields and their implications on various levels.

1.1. Research Question and Scope of the Inquiry

The juxtaposition of Egypt's pre-2013 and post-2013 contexts highlights the stark contradictions within the socio-political landscape between hopes and realities. Against this context of discrepancies, this dissertation seeks to understand the discursive strategies employed by the post-2013 military regime to enforce, legitimize, and secure its power structure. To this end, I ask: how a relatively recent history of "revolution" and hopes for democratization have been systematically and structurally dismantled, erased, and replaced by a counterrevolutionary regime? To explore this, I focus on recent state projects and their accompanying discourses to uncover the nature of the official narratives. In particular, this study examines two interconnected state projects: the urban redevelopment of Tahrir Square (2021) and the Pharaohs' Golden Parade mega-event (2022). Zooming in on these projects, the dissertation critically analyzes the official historical narratives rooted in Egypt's ancient past, which are strategically constructed and deployed within the post-2013 state discourse.

This critical analysis of national projects is conducted by examining their connection to the power dynamics within Egypt's socio-political and economic structure. Establishing this connection enables a contextualized reading of these projects and their historical narratives within the broader dynamic interdependent relation of power structure and discourse production. The study investigates the official discourse and historical narratives by analyzing how the events are depicted in pro-government news platforms, government websites, portals, and social media accounts, as well as within the projects themselves. To theoretically analyze the nature of these produced discourses and narratives in relation to the wider power structure and context, I employ a synthesized theoretical framework that integrates the perspectives of three sociological power theorists. The first element of this syndissertation draws on C. Wright Mills' theoretical framework of the military power elite's ascendency and its impact on democratic practices. The second conceptual lens is Michael Mann's notion of infrastructural power under authoritarianism. Finally, the third analytical concept is Pierre Bourdieu's concept of state symbolic power and symbolic violence. By connecting Mills' and Mann's theoretical framework on democratic-weakening practices and strategies to Bourdieu's conceptualization of symbolic violence, I utilize

Irfan Ahmad's (2012) de-democratization to refer to the general process where the studied strategies and discourses are employed.

1.2. The Argument

Based on the outlined context and research question, I interpret the Tahrir Square urban development and the Pharaohs' Golden Parade as components of the political suppressive strategies of counterrevolution and counter-democratization enacted by the military regime. Accordingly, I argue that these are *de-democratizing strategies* in my dissertation. Maged Mandour (2024), an Egyptian political analyst, asserts in his book *Egypt Under El-Sisi: A Nation on the Edge* that Sisi's regime is not merely focused on centralizing power within the military; it is structurally designed to preclude any "prospect of democratization" in the future (Mandour, 2024, 4). Clearly, Egypt was not the first country, nor was Sisi the first military general, to subvert such democratic aspirations and experiments. As Irfan Ahmad (2011a, 2011b) has shown, post-WWII, the history of de-democratization and that of 'democratization' are nearly simultaneous. Building on this framework, I argue that the post-2013 military regime mobilizes Egypt's Pharaonic past through archaeology to suppress and marginalize the revolutionary past. By materially and symbolically replacing revolution-based historical narratives with Pharaonic-based ones—most visibly through the Tahrir Square redevelopment project and the Pharaohs' Golden Parade—the regime engages in a deliberate effort to de-democratize historical narratives. By *de-democratizing historical narratives*, I refer to the process through which the regime's constructed narratives centralize and glorify the military's post-2013 national role and achievements while simultaneously erasing and marginalizing the role of the Egyptian public and their revolutionary stories.

The section ahead is divided into two parts to review the relevant literature on these intersecting themes. The first part will examine the literature from various case studies to position my study within the broader academic scholarship. The second part will focus on literature specific to post-Arab Spring studies and the Egyptian context. Through these two parts, I aim to situate my research within the wider discourse on narrative production and power structures, as well as within the more specific studies on the post-Arab Spring socio-political landscape of Egypt.

1.3. The Question Vis-à-Vis the General Literature

In *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986), historical sociologist Anthony Smith examines the relationship between premodern ethnies and modern nations. He analyzes how premodern ethnic identities and histories were transformed and adapted to function within the modern national context. Smith argues that nationalism serves as the "legitimating principle of politics and state-making" that shapes and solidifies people's allegiance to the state (1986, 129). Although nationalism is a modern phenomenon, Smith contends that it cannot thrive without a "folkish" conception of the nation, deeply rooted in an ethnic past (1986, 137). This conception is based on an assumed collective identity shaped by myths of common origins and genealogies. Modern nations, according to Smith, are built on mobilizing, politicizing, and popularizing a particular ethnic group, along with its past and cultural elements (1986, 137). Thus, modern nations are a fusion of the state as a political structure and the ethnie as a socio-cultural one (1986, 149-150). A member of a modern nation, therefore, belongs to both systems: ethnic cultural solidarity and political citizenship (Smith, 1986, 149). In this framework, ethnies provide the state with principles of solidarity and unity, based on shared myths of origins, collective struggles, or both (Smith, 1986, 148-150).

The mobilization and popularization of these ethnic myths—such as shared descent, historical memories, territorial associations, and a sense of solidarity—cannot be realized without an intelligentsia, whom Smith refers to as "the new priesthood of the nation" (1986, 154, 157). In contrast to the premodern world, where priests transmitted and perpetuated communal memory and a sense of common identity, intellectuals and scholars in the modern world assume this role (Smith, 1986, 157). In the modern nation-state, the task of shaping collective memory and history falls to the intelligentsia. Smith argues that the formation and revival of ethnic identities rely on the "historical, philological, and anthropological research of scholars, as well as the literary and artistic achievements of poets, musicians, dramatists, and painters" (1986, 160). Intellectuals contribute a "romantic vision" of the nation, grounded in scientific fields like archaeology, history, anthropology, and sociology (Smith, 1986, 161). This vision is popularized through art, poetry, novels, plays, songs, and history or landscape paintings.

The romantic definition of the nation relies on dramatic narratives that emphasize an ancient past (Smith, 1986, 172). While these disciplines are not primarily intended to serve national political agendas, they often do so by enabling the political elite to legitimize their authority (Smith, 1986, 172). National archaeologists and historians provide scientific support for the ruling elite's heroic narratives of a shared past that forms the nation's foundation. In a modern nationalized power structure, these narratives present the glorious ancient past as always "waiting to be uncovered and celebrated" (Smith, 1986, 172). Smith explains that the political use of scientific and artistic fields to construct a celebratory, heroic image of the nation is based on selective historical narratives (1986, 177). This process is not about fabricating the past, but about highlighting certain aspects while marginalizing others, depending on the desired national story (Smith, 1986, 178).

The sense of “past” and how it is narrated and celebrated is crucial in constructing a national legitimating narrative. Selecting a particular past and deciding how to present it involves creating historically scientific mythologies through “epics, chronicles, documents of the period, and material artefacts” (Smith, 1986, 178, 182). The material artefacts and monuments of the selected past serve as visual and material evidence of the glorious history that political leaders seek to evoke. Smith notes that the common characteristics of the chosen past in different national contexts are its seamless unity, which asserts collective distinction and uniqueness (1986, 179-180). National intellectuals and artists play a key role in reviving the past, making it emotionally resonant, imagined, and aligned with the nation’s present needs (Smith, 1986, 180). Thus, the past is selected and narrated based on how the present is perceived and the problems it seeks to address. Smith refers to this process as a “historical drama” constructed by present-day romantic nationalism (1986, 179). Nationalist archaeologists and historians are central to this process, working with political leaders to define and glorify the nation’s “we” through archaeological discoveries and historical studies (Smith, 1986, 181).

However, the politicization of archaeological and historical efforts cannot succeed without being mobilized through artistic and cultural fields. Artistic cultural production helps popularize and mobilize the politicized narratives of the nation’s mythological past. This can be seen in national commemorations, such as the

construction of statues, naming streets after heroes, or organizing national celebrations (Smith, 1986, 192). These practices serve as constant reminders of a specific past and its connection to the present (Smith, 1986, 194).

Finally, Smith argues that the process of politicizing and popularizing a particular past by modern political elites is based on the concept of a "golden age." This idea creates a setting of heroic figures, virtuous traits, and grand achievements, through which political leaders define and portray themselves (Smith, 1986, 196). By immersing the nation in the myth of the golden age, leaders assert the continuity of the nation's history and their role in its evolution (Smith, 1986, 196, 201). The golden age serves as a model to celebrate, restore, and aspire to, with leaders portrayed as heroes whose efforts are framed as national accomplishments. The golden age narrative relies less on historical accuracy than on its capacity to stir emotions and inspire the populace (Smith, 1986, 199-200). Smith suggests that the myths, symbols, and values associated with the golden age serve to reproduce national sentiments and emotions, which are not grounded in rationality or science (1986, 201).

In conclusion, Smith emphasizes that modern nationalism is deeply connected to the ethnie's past. Modern nationalisms rely on historical narratives (historiography) and archaeology to position the nation and direct it toward an envisioned future. These narratives revive pasts as golden ages through the legends of heroic figures and material landscapes. They are popularized and internalized through institutions like education and media, passing from generation to generation (Smith, 1986, 207). Smith further argues that modern nationalism, like premodern ethnic identities, satisfies people's need for collective identity, belonging, and solidarity, especially in the face of external and internal threats (1986, 216). Although ethnie and nationalism share the same goals, nationalism differs in its means, incorporating broader membership and persuasive tools, such as science. This shift results in a "radical change in relationships between culture and politics, and between the ethno-national constituents of the inter-state political order" (Smith, 1986, 217). In the modern state, these means of imposing nationalism are intensified and more effective through bureaucratic power structures. Consequently, the historical narratives of powerful state elites become the official, legitimate narrative, marginalizing alternative historical identities and narratives from

minorities or marginalized groups, as they lack the power to be recognized nationally or internationally in a world system of nation-states (Smith, 1986, 222).

As a work of historical sociology that seeks to combine history's empirical approach with sociology's theoretical abstraction, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* is not based on a specific case study (Smith, 1986, x). Instead, it aims to theorize and establish a common pattern regarding the origins of modern nations in general. To do this, it draws on various historical examples of modern nation-states. For instance, when discussing the concept of a golden age, Smith refers to the Pahlavi regime's invocation of the Achaemenid past, the intellectual Egyptians' reference to their Pharaonic past in the 20th century, and the Norwegians' connection to their Viking heritage (Smith, 1986, 196-198). Regarding the relationship between landscape monuments (archaeology) and modern nationalism, Smith revisits the Egyptian example of 20th-century Pharaonism as well as the Greek case (Smith, 1986, 186-187). Finally, in explaining nationalism within top-down modernization contexts, Smith cites figures like Nasser, Mao, and Mohammad Reza, who combined Western modernity with ancient glorious continuity (Smith, 1986, 143, 198, 213). However, the literature also includes studies that explore similar intersections of archaeology and history in the relationship between narrative production and power structures through specific case studies.

One such study is by anthropologist and Palestine Studies specialist Nadia Abu El-Haj, who provides a detailed critical analysis of the fields of archaeology and history under the power structure of the Israeli settler-colonial project (2001, 2). In *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (2001), Abu El-Haj critically examines the scientific practices of archaeology and history within the context of nation-building and settler-colonialism. She explores the dynamics between these scientific practices and the power structure (Abu El-Haj, 2001, 4), arguing that archaeology played a key role in shaping a "colonial-national historical imagination" that legitimized Zionist territorial claims and the appropriation of Palestine beginning in the 1880s (Abu El-Haj, 2001, 2).

Under the Israeli settler-colonial project, archaeological efforts were focused on preparing space for colonial settlers by establishing a "spatial biography." Excavations served to materialize pre-established historical narratives while also facilitating the

physical colonial practices on the land (Abu El-Haj, 2001, 74, 100). Rather than simply excavating and discovering the past, these efforts sought material evidence and artefacts that fit into a prepared historical narrative, thereby marginalizing and eliminating alternative historical accounts of the space and landscape. Moreover, these excavations were not just about fitting artefacts into a written history; they were embedded in a "presupposed paradigm of and for history itself" (Abu El-Haj, 2001, 136).

In her analysis of the reconstruction of the Palestinian landscape, both verbally and physically, through archaeology under Israeli settler-colonialism, Abu El-Haj highlights the reciprocal relationship between historical narratives and archaeological artefacts—the story and the material object (Abu El-Haj, 2001, 145-146). Without a narrative, an archaeological object is merely a historical finding; similarly, without material evidence, a historical narrative is just a story. This "object-narrative" relationship establishes a continuity between the imagined past and the present, which serves to legitimize the Israeli colonization of the past (Abu El-Haj, 2001, 208-209).

Through her analysis of museums and their displays, Abu El-Haj demonstrates how historical narratives and the stories surrounding archaeological pieces are presented as the sole validated narrative, systematically suppressing and erasing alternative accounts (2001, 213). In the context of the Israeli settler-colonial project, Israeli archaeologists emphasize the "intimate linking of knowledge production with material-cultural objects and Jewish nationhood" (Abu El-Haj, 2001, 214). As such, the reconstruction of the city, the narratives in museums, and the tour guides' interpretations work together—verbally and visually—to propagate a single, official narrative. Furthermore, the historical narrative produced through archaeological excavations is not merely about the story of reclaiming the homeland; it also asserts the undebatable right to the land (Abu El-Haj, 2001, 219-220).

While Abu El-Haj focuses on the role of archaeology and history within a colonial context, other studies have made similar arguments in non-colonial national contexts. One such example is the 2500th anniversary celebration of the Persian Empire, held by the Pahlavi Shah in 1971. This event has garnered interest in various academic articles and dissertations. Under the secular, modernizing political rule of Mohammad

Reza Pahlavi, the revival of Iran's pre-Islamic Aryan Achaemenid heritage was framed as a national mission (Grigor, 2018, 121). The Shah believed that reviving this heritage would be realized through significant investments in archaeology and the history of this particular past. The 1971 event was conceived as a grand international spectacle, designed to glorify and display Iran's ancient history using advanced technology and monumental architecture, emphasizing the continuity between the Shah's regime and this ancient past (Grigor, 2018, 122; Steele, 2018, 31).

For art historian Talinn Grigor, the primary purpose behind such an event and the secular nationalist ideology it embodied was the Shah's desire to present Iran to the modern, colonial Western powers as an equally superior, civilized, secular ancient nation (Grigor, 2018, 122, 137). Robert Steele, a scholar of modern Iran, posits that the purposes of such celebrations include: "to create or enforce a national identity; to legitimize one's rule or defend the established order; and/or to trumpet the leader's power and authority" (2018, 32). While scholars may differ in their interpretation of the event's primary objectives—whether it was aimed at improving Iran's international image in the eyes of the West, enhancing the national image of Iran's people and the Shah, or both—it is undeniable that the Shah intentionally mobilized Achaemenid archaeology and art, viewing this particular past as the nation's "Golden Age" (Grigor, 2018, 131; Steele, 2018, 34).

The event was designed to stir national sentiments and emotions by bringing Iran's glorious past to life through performances, symbols, costumes, and speeches in front of international guests, thereby imposing the Shah's secular utopian vision of Iran's great civilization (Grigor, 2018, 131-132; Steele, 2018, 34-35). The central task of the national commemorations and celebrations—dating back even to the Safavid and Qajar dynasties—was to propagate the historical narrative of the favored past and to vividly narrate it for public consumption (Steele, 2018, 44). What distinguishes the Shah's case, however, is the focus on a secular pre-Islamic past and the accompanying vast mobilization of archaeology and historiography, which included radical architectural, technological, and urban transformations, as well as a cultural intellectual movement (Grigor, 2018, 133-134; Steele, 2018, 139). The event was planned to reawaken the Iranian people to their past, immersing them in a narrative where they could see themselves and the ruling elite reflected through this glorious

history (Grigor, 2018, 139; Steele, 2018, 45). According to both researchers, the Shah's historical narrative, grounded in the mobilization of Achaemenid history, functioned as a rhetorical tool for legitimizing his regime both locally, within Iran's authoritarian modernizing context, and internationally, within the framework of Western imperialism (Grigor, 2018, 139-140; Steele, 2018, 34-45).

While the Shah's spectacle was successful on the international stage—his efforts were recognized by Western elites and global media—it did not resonate in the same way nationally (Grigor, 2018, 142; Steele, 2018, 115-122). The Iranian public, for whom the event was ostensibly organized, was not allowed to attend. The audience was restricted to an international elite (Grigor, 2018, 138; Steele, 2018, 209). Moreover, the event failed to connect with the people's socio-cultural background. In other words, the event symbolized the gap between the Shah's Western, secular elitism and the public's socio-cultural identity, which associated him with corruption (Grigor, 2018, 142; Steele, 2018, 229). The Shah's vision and ideology were alienating to the public, who did not identify with his vision of modernity. Additionally, the event's exorbitant cost, set against the backdrop of widespread poverty, further exacerbated feelings of alienation. The suffering of the public was deliberately omitted from the event's narrative and excluded from its lavish locations (Grigor, 2018, 138; Steele, 2018, 87).

For many Iranians, witnessing an expensive, alienating spectacle that marginalized their socio-cultural and religious identity while ignoring their economic hardships sparked criticism and anger, rather than fostering national pride or appreciation for the Shah (Grigor, 2018, 142; Steele, 2018, 204). Figures like the ʿUlamāʾ and opposition intellectuals, including Khomeini and Shariati, criticized the event for alienating the people from their true identity and roots, while simultaneously denying their economic struggles. The spectacle, they argued, offered indulgence and celebration for the ruling elite and foreign guests while the suffering of the Iranian people was ignored (Grigor, 2018, 138-139; Steele, 2018, 195-196, 208-209).

Controlling, imposing, and propagating narratives by the state are not limited to the fields of archaeology, history, and media. Banu Karaca, a sociocultural anthropologist specializing in the intersectionality of politics, art, nationalism, museum, and commemorative practices, investigates the relationship between state violence and art

in her book *The National Frame: Art and State Violence in Turkey and Germany* (2021). In her work, Karaca challenges the common assumption that art is inherently good and emancipatory (Karaca, 2021, 2-3). Through an ethnographic comparative approach, she examines the exclusionary narratives in national art histories, the practices of censorship, and the state's regulation of art in the contexts of Berlin and Istanbul (Karaca, 2021, 3-7). Karaca argues that memories and narratives of state violence are often suppressed and marginalized in art because they do not align with the state's official narrative of progress, modernity, and civilization (Karaca, 2021, 7). She explores the dynamics between art and politics within the national framework, focusing on the remembering and forgetting of national histories (2021, 27). The modern nation-state enforces a taboo on incidents of state violence, resulting in the systematic silence, suppression, and marginalization of these memories and narratives in art production.

Karaca further examines how the state develops strategies to censor and control the depiction of historical narratives and memories in art through security policies and regimes of official memory. She argues that the systematic silencing and suppression of memories related to state violence relies on the assumption of art's autonomy and goodness (2021, 28). Importantly, Karaca emphasizes that her work is not intended to be "a horror story about art or an effort to deny its transformative potential" (2021, 7). Instead, her goal is to critically analyze art and artistic practices in relation to nationalism and the memories of state violence—an approach I intend to adopt in my dissertation as well.

Over the last three decades, critical studies on narrative and power relations have expanded to include specialists in geography, landscape, and urban space (Alderman and Dwyer, 2008; Diener and Hagen, 2019; Azaryahu and Foote, 2008; Azaryahu, Foote, and Ryan, 2016). In a review of the literature addressing the intersections of politics, landscape, and collective memory/commemoration, urban space researchers Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman (2008) identified three conceptual lenses through which the politics of urban space are analyzed: text, arenas, and performance (165-178).

Firstly, researchers who study memorial landscapes through the lens of ‘text’ aim to understand the historical discourses that are represented and granted authority by the landscape (Alderman and Dwyer, 2008, 170). They analyze the landscape’s themes—both dominant and marginalized—as well as its memorial messages, media depictions, neighborhood types, associations with certain events, and how it either obscures or highlights specific pasts while asserting or rewriting the identity of the space (Alderman and Dwyer, 2008, 170-171). Secondly, the 'arena' approach focuses on the political struggles and debates surrounding the representation of the past through the landscape (Alderman and Dwyer, 2008, 170-171). This approach seeks to answer questions about which historical narratives and memories are emphasized or denied, whose experiences are highlighted or silenced, the power structures these representations serve, how historical narratives are embodied persuasively for audiences, and whether the memory is official or vernacular (Alderman and Dwyer, 2008, 171-173). Finally, the 'performance' lens analyzes the memorial space as an interactive space for various performances, such as historical re-enactments, marches, protests, pageants, civic ceremonies, and festivals (Alderman and Dwyer, 2008, 173). This approach examines the behaviors allowed within the space, the backgrounds of the visitors, the interactions and activities occurring there, the symbolism of the space for the public, its connection to activism, and the commemorative actions taking place (Alderman and Dwyer, 2008, 174-175). Through these three approaches, the reviewed literature critically examines the relationship between historical narratives, power structures, and the landscape of urban space.

The interdisciplinary relationship between geography and the intersectionality of narrative studies, power dynamics, and urban space continues to attract researchers. In *The City as Power: Urban Space, Place, and National Identity* (2019), Alexander Diener and Joshua Hagen present a comparative approach to these themes, incorporating case studies from various disciplinary backgrounds. The book argues that cities and urban spaces can be instrumentalized by modern nation-states as platforms for preserving, rebuilding, or creating revised or entirely new historical narratives through the construction of historic landmarks (Diener and Hagen, 2019: 43). In other words, urban centers can be (re)constructed to "propagate official narratives of national identity, history, and memory" and to "maintain social stability, existing power relations, and institutional continuity" (Diener and Hagen, 2019: 43-

44; Till, 2008: 292). Diener and Hagen emphasize the selectivity inherent in this process, which operates on the dynamics of remembering and forgetting—choosing one official narrative while marginalizing or eliminating others (Diener and Hagen, 2019: 45).

Similarly, Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote, and Maoz Azaryahu, specialists in narratology, geography, and cultural geography, respectively, underscore the importance of expanding narrative studies to incorporate space in *Narrating Space / Spatializing Narrative: Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet* (2016). "Spatial narrative" includes the study of narratives found in maps, the embodiment of socio-political-historical narratives in space and landscape, street names, and museums (Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu, 2016: 1, 12-13). These scholars emphasize the concept of space as a storyteller, where historical narratives and past stories are embedded in space to convey messages to visitors and interactors (Azaryahu, Foote, and Ryan, 2016: 3-4, 11-12, 160-163). As a result, spatial narratives reflect socio-political changes, such as the renaming of streets in Germany after the fall of the Nazi regime or the removal of Lenin's statue in Eastern Germany in 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Azaryahu, Foote, and Ryan, 2016: 154, 218).

While *Narrating Space / Spatializing Narrative* draws attention to the dynamic relationship between spatial narratives and socio-political structures, it falls short of providing a critical analysis of the power dynamics involved in narrative production. The book tends to adopt the official spatial narratives by describing their developments and stories, rather than deconstructing them. For instance, the authors frequently cite the case of Jerusalem as an urban space that narrates the Jewish struggle through archaeological and historical places (Azaryahu, Foote, and Ryan, 2016: 170). Under the subtitle "Landscape and Narrative," they reference Jerusalem and its Israeli museums as an example of an urban spatial narrative that unfolds the national story of the Zionist project, from the Holocaust to the "national independence" (Azaryahu, Foote, and Ryan, 2016: 169).

The book does not mention Palestine or Palestinians, yet it refers to Israel, Israelis, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Nazi, and the Holocaust over 30 times throughout (Azaryahu, Foote, and Ryan, 2016: 247-254). While the study promotes examining spatial narratives and

their link to political regime changes, particularly in Nazi and Socialist Germany, it fails to extend this critical approach to the Zionist settler-colonial project. Instead, it may even support and propagate the official nationalist selective narratives of that project. This discrepancy becomes clearer when considering that one of the book's authors, Maoz Azaryahu, is the director of the Herzl Institute for the Study of Zionism and holds positions on various public councils and boards of trustees for museums and organizations in Israel, as stated in his CV on the institute's website. I think the book itself represents an example of El-Haj's (2001) critique of the academic and scientific disciplines, knowledge production, and its relation to the colonial power structure that was discussed earlier. The book itself, through its language and narrative, serves as a device for denying and eliminating the Palestinian narratives of the struggle of displacement, ethnic cleansing, and sufferance under the settler colonialism of Israel.

In his study on the structural relationship between knowledge disciplines and nationalism, political anthropologist Irfan Ahmad (2023) explores how Islam and Muslims are otherized within anthropology discipline in India, ultimately aligning with Hindu nationalist ideology. Drawing on the works of several founding figures in Indian anthropology and sociology, Ahmad highlights the deep-rooted connection between these disciplines and nationalism, particularly in terms of ideology and practice of the discipline (2023: 1, 4). He argues that, since the inception of these disciplines, Indian anthropology and sociology have framed the narrative of Islam and Muslims through three primary catalogues: silence, alienness, and erasure (Ahmad, 2023: 3). The founding moment of Indian anthropology and sociology was rooted in an exclusive nationalist framework that defined Indian society and culture in terms of Hinduism's ancient past and civilization (Ahmad, 2023: 7). Interestingly, the founding figures of Indian sociology/anthropology were students and mentees of Patrick Geddes, who was recruited by the Zionist Commission as a city planner for Jerusalem (Ahmad, 2023: 7). Geddes' urban planning of Jerusalem emphasized the ancient Hebrew past and Jewish nationalism, erasing any competing historical narratives (Ahmad, 2023: 7-8). This exclusive vision of society and nation can be traced in the discourse and practices of India's founding sociologists/anthropologists (Ahmad, 2023: 9). The silencing, alienating, and erasing of Muslims' historical and contemporary narratives persists in Indian sociology/anthropology to this day, perpetuating patterns of symbolic and political violence that marginalize Muslims in

India (Ahmad, 2023: 3, 19). Similarly, Azaryahu's work reflects analogous practices of silencing and erasing the Palestinian historical spatial narrative of Jerusalem in academic disciplines, thereby continuing Geddes' exclusivist nationalist planning of the city.

Earlier, Ahmad critically examined the relationship between political narratives and power structures in *The Algebra of Warfare-Welfare: A Long View of India's 2014 Election* (2019) and Violence after Violence: The Politics of Narratives over the Delhi Pogrom (2022). In these works, Ahmad analyzes the symbolic violence embedded in the political and media rhetoric on violent incidents against Muslims in India (Ahmad, 2022: 251). Drawing on various incidents of state violence against Muslims, Ahmad argues that national state media and even anthropologists systematically erase the narratives of massacres and pogroms committed against Muslims (2019: xi-xii; 2022: 251). Ahmad explains that the Indian state's official media discourses and historical narratives deploy specific theoretical vocabularies and naming strategies that immunize the state and its democratic rhetoric from any potential critique (2019: xii, 19; 2022: 251, 260-261). For example, terms like "riot" are used to describe state violence, which implies a false equivalence between the aggressors and the victims. This choice of words constitutes symbolic violence, as it naturalizes the incident, presenting it as a clash between equally violent and powerful parties and thereby obscuring the painful and unjust narrative experienced by the Muslims.

In conclusion, before turning to the case study of Egypt, it is important to note that the relationship between narrative and power production extends beyond modern nation-states. While the modern nation-state plays a significant role in centralizing and monopolizing both physical and symbolic violence, as well as holding infrastructural power—which I will explore further in reference to Pierre Bourdieu and Michael Mann in the theoretical framework—narratives are also produced by the public, oppositionary revolutionaries, and resistance groups. For example, Lara Deeb and Mona Harb (2011) studied how sites of Israeli bombardments in Lebanon were transformed and maintained as memorials by Hezbollah. These sites were reimagined as cultural and historical spaces, commemorating resistance and constructing an Islamic milieu that reinforced Hezbollah's conceptualization of culture (Deeb and Harb, 2011: 10-12). Similarly, post-revolutionary Iran has witnessed widespread

practices of mobilizing Shiite Islamic history, commemorating revolutionary memories, and constructing a vast symbolic network of spatial and temporal celebrations (Intini, 2015: 5, 10-12). While one could argue that post-revolutionary Iran has simply become another producer of monolithic state narratives, Intini (2015) argues in his MA thesis *The Politics of National Celebrations in Post-Revolutionary Iran* that historical and religious narratives continue to be mobilized by opposition groups, as evidenced by youth protests between 2009 and 2010 (Intini, 2015: 47-49).

Based on the literature reviewed, and taking into account the various studies and accounts discussed, I position my dissertation within the interdisciplinary fields of political anthropology/sociology, narratology, and urbanism. My research focuses on the intersecting themes of historical, political, and spatial narratives in relation to the socio-political power structure and its context. This dissertation aims to critically and analytically examine the mobilization of the Pharaonic past in post-2013 Egypt within the context of counterrevolution. In particular, I argue that the military power elite deliberately draws on the ancient Pharaonic past to turn the historical narrative and collective memory to official narrative, marginalizing and erasing the revolutionary past and memory of 2011. This act of de-democratizing the narrative serves to efface the memory of the revolution, which poses a potential threat to the current authoritarian and military regime.

1.4. The Question Vis-à-Vis the Case Study Literature

This section of the literature review is dedicated to situating my study within the scholarship on Egypt, providing the historical context and positioning it within existing research. It is divided into three interconnected subsections. The first subsection will focus on studies that explain the historical context and background of Egypt's socio-political and economic structure. The second subsection will examine narrative and discourse studies on post-2011 and post-2013 Egypt. Finally, the third subsection will review studies on Tahrir Square and the Pharaohs' Golden Parade—two key events that will be analyzed in this dissertation.

1.4.1. Research on Egypt since 2011

Since the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011, scholars in social sciences and human studies have dedicated significant efforts to analyzing the socio-political events, their key actors, and the outcomes. In the case of Egypt, much of this research focused on understanding and explaining the democratic transition following the ousting of the 30-year autocrat Hosni Mubarak. Research on the democratization process began during the transition itself, in 2012. Irfan Ahmad (2011a, 2011b, 2012; 2013), who highlighted the role of de-democratization actors during democratic transitions in the Middle East. By examining de-democratizing moments of coups such as Syria's 1949, Iran's 1953, Bahrain's 1970s, and Egypt's 2013, Ahmad argued that Western powers played a significant role in hindering democratic transitions in the region to safeguard their ideological and economic interests. Ahmad urged scholars to shift their focus from exploring the synthesis of Islam and democracy in the democratization process to examining the internal and external actors and forces behind de-democratization in the Middle East (2012; 2013; 2016: 125-127).

Ahmad's warnings resonate with similar critiques from Yezid Sayigh. Sayigh, an expert on the economy, politics, and military relations in the Middle East, argued in 2012 that "the fate of Egypt's transition is at stake" (Sayigh, 2012: 1). Through a historical review of the armed forces' role in Egypt's political and economic power structure, Sayigh warned Egypt's first democratically elected president and civilian political parties about the threat of "military custodianship." He emphasized that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) held significant authority within the Egyptian political and economic system through a pervasive patronage network. Sayigh cautioned that the military would not easily relinquish its position of power, suggesting that it would continue to use its extensive networks within the state apparatus to obstruct government policies, impede public services, and "undermine the nascent democratic order" (2012: 1).

After the 2013 anti-Morsi mass protests and the subsequent military intervention in Egypt, scholars sought to conceptualize and analyze the shift from civilian revolution to military power, or from revolution to counterrevolution. Researchers have focused on various actors involved in these events. Some political science scholars have

highlighted internal parties such as the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the Muslim Brotherhood, and the anti-Morsi protestors, attributing the shift to concepts such as "passive revolution" and "Caesarism" (De Smet, 2013: 36). Other scholars have expanded their analysis to include both internal and external actors, including the SCAF, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the USA. These scholars equalize the power and responsibility of the three parties, portraying the anti-Morsi revolutionaries as defenders of democracy (Selim, 2015: 195-196). A more nuanced perspective views the Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power as a trigger for political and ideological fears, both domestically and internationally, prompting the military's intervention "with alacrity to abrogate a democratic experiment with which it had never been comfortable" (Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds, 2015: 4). According to this interpretation, both the Islamist and anti-Islamist civilian revolutionary parties "failed to construct a durable coalition that would finally enshrine the principle of civilian sovereignty in a country long bereft of it," thus providing the military with the opportunity to abort the democratization process (Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds, 2015: 9; Clarke, 2020: 202; Saidin and Storm, 2024: 5-6, 9-10; Sowers, 2016: 15).

Understanding the aborted democratic transition in Egypt included not only the analysis of conflicts and divisions within the revolutionary camp and state institutions—namely, between political Islamists, non-Islamists, and the military—but also the internal dynamics within the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). Abdullah Al-Arian (2014), a historian of contemporary Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood's social movement, delves into the internal debates and dynamics within the MB itself. Drawing on sources such as the movement's publications, journals, memoirs of prominent figures, and interviews, Al-Arian examines the Brotherhood's internal structure, its different camps, and their interactions within the broader political framework of Sadat's regime during the 1970s (2014: xviii-xix, 235).

Al-Arian highlights that many figures central to the post-2011 failed transitional period emerged from the political activism landscape of the 1970s (2014: 223). For instance, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh and Esam Al-Erian were prominent figures of the 1970s student movement, while Khairat Al-Shater and Mohammed Morsi belonged to the Brotherhood's conservative mainstream, shaped by an older generation that endured Nasser's period of repression (2014: 151, 113, 226). By studying the historical

interactions and debates among these figures and the camps they represented, Al-Arian argues that the cracks and disagreements within the Brotherhood, which became more pronounced in the post-2011 context, can be traced back to the 1970s (2014: 237-239). Crucially, these debates between the mentioned camps were not ideological but strategic, revolving around differing approaches to achieving the shared goal of da'wa—the call for Muslims to live in accordance with Islamic teachings (Al-Arian, 2014: 14, 224-226). Despite their common objective, contrasting strategies for realizing it deepened internal divisions, culminating in visible fragmentation during the post-2011 transitional period. Thus, the democratizing transition in Egypt from 2011 to 2013 not only revealed fractures within the revolutionary camp but also underscored the internal fragmentation of Egypt's most structured oppositional social movement—the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Arian , 2016)

The military wasn't the sole actor in its intervention; a substantial body of literature addresses the role of external actors, geopolitical interests, and the global capitalist order in the Arab Spring and its counterrevolution. The military intervention was supported by international and regional powers whose political, economic, and ideological interests were threatened by the rise of Islamists and the prospect of democratization in the Middle East. These powers included the US, the EU, Israel, and the Gulf authoritarian monarchies, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Their involvement contributed to the successful counterrevolution and the abortion of the democratization process, even after the ousting of the Islamists from power (Kandil, 2016: 343; Erdogan, 2019: 172-175; Stacher, 2019: 250-252; Kao and Lust, 2017: 3-4; Clarke, 2020: 207-223; Rivetti and Cavatorta, 2021: 512-514; Saidin and Storm, 2024: 11).

Political sociologists such as Hazem Kandil (2016) have analyzed the 2013 military intervention in Egypt through comparative historical analysis of the power structures and their actors in Iran, Turkey, and Egypt. In his book *The Power Triangle: Military, Security, and Politics in Regime Change* (2016), Kandil argued that the 2013 crisis between the Islamist and anti-Islamist camps represented a critical opportunity for the military and its ambitious leader, General Sisi, to sieze political and economic power. This occurred after an era of marginalization during Mubarak's rule, which prioritized the police apparatus and private businessmen (338-341). By historically examining the

role of the military in relation to other power actors in Egypt's political and economic structure, Kandil demonstrated that both Sadat and Mubarak relied on the paramilitary police system and the privatization of the economy to prevent military intervention, systematically undermining the military's interests and influence (2016: 288, 298-299, 304). Despite the weakening of the military's political and economic power under Sadat and Mubarak, the Egyptian military remained the primary holder of physical power, which could not be equated with the police system or the economic elites. This became evident during the 2011 uprising when the police system was paralyzed, and the army emerged as the only stabilizing force, seen as more acceptable to the people compared to the Interior Ministry (Kandil, 2019: 327-328; Droz-Vincent, 2019: 116-119; Kao and Lust, 2017: 7). Moreover, with its history of state-building through the 1952 coup against the monarchy and British colonialism, the Egyptian military has become a significant cultural symbol as both the nation-builder and the defender of Egypt against both external and internal enemies (Droz-Vincent, 2019: 118-119).

Since the military seized power under Sisi in 2013, there has been considerable interest in studying how the regime would establish its political legitimacy and ensure its survival in the context of ongoing political upheaval since 2011. In the early years following the coup, Sisi's regime primarily relied on physical violence, fear, and media propaganda. This included arbitrary arrests, the application of laws of suspicion, the prohibition of protests, and the use of extreme violence against Muslim Brotherhood protesters and any opposition (Sowers, 2016: 16-17; Shahin, 2017: 154-156). Sisi's legitimacy was described as "negative legitimacy," which refers to the population's acceptance of his right to rule in exchange for the security he promises in the face of imminent threats, particularly when compared to other similar countries (Shahin, 2017: 159). This strategy capitalized on the civil war outcomes of the Arab Spring in neighboring countries like Libya and Syria, framing the regime as the guarantor of stability, peace, and security amidst an atmosphere of emergency and terror. Militarism was justified as necessary to save the nation and enforce order (Droz-Vincent, 2019: 123-124; Yefet and Lavie, 2021: 12-13). However, this form of legitimacy is argued to be short-lived and unsustainable, as it is rooted in a state of emergency, the war on terror, and the threat of traitors and Islamists—conditions that cannot persist indefinitely (Shahin, 2017: 159; Droz-Vincent, 2019: 124; Mady, 2023: 12-17; Magdy, 2020: 175). More recent literature on Sisi's regime suggests that these

legitimacy strategies are not simply a restoration of Mubarak's regime but rather a "product of the 2011 uprising." In other words, Sisi's legitimacy is built upon rejecting democratic legitimacy and delegitimizing the 2011 revolution, positioning himself as the sole savior, resulting in a personalist regime (Yefet and Lavie, 2021: 9-11; Mady, 2023: 4).

Studies on legitimacy in post-coup authoritarianism have focused on state official discourses and narratives, examining the institutions that produce them, such as education, media, and religious institutions (including Azhar and the Church). Laurie A. Brand (2014) provides a comparative study of the development of official state narratives of national history in Algeria and Egypt. Drawing on textbooks, speeches, and official statements by political leaders, Brand demonstrates how national historical narratives serve as tools for the ruling power elite to shape the population's perception of the rulers, the nation, and themselves, thereby seeking legitimacy and perpetuating power structures and relations (Brand, 2014: 6, 8, 23). Through her historical review, Brand highlights how official narratives have evolved in response to socio-political changes since the 1952 Republican coup, from Nasser's Socialist Pan-Arabism and anti-imperialism to Sadat's peace with Israel and economic capitalism, Mubarak's incorporation of religion, and the legitimacy crisis of 2011 (2014: 27-49, 78-86, 100-108). In her conclusion, Brand suggests that further research should explore how the official historical narratives have shifted after the Arab Spring in Egypt and Algeria (2014: 201). She briefly refers to changes in textbooks during Morsi's one-year rule, such as the removal of non-hijabi images (2014: 210). The final remarks in her book hint at the new official narrative after the military intervention, which portrays Sisi as a national hero and savior (2014: 214-215).

Shifts in official media narratives and their roles have been examined in various studies, spanning from the period before the 2011 uprising, through the uprising itself, the transitional period under the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), Morsi's one-year rule, and the aftermath of the 2013 military intervention (Hassan, 2015). Prior to and during the 2011 uprising, media platforms circulated official narratives that demonized the protesters and portrayed anyone with alternative views as traitors, often accusing them of being supported by external enemies (Hassan, 2015: 31-32, 40-56, 56; Adel, 2020: 122-124). During the transitional period under SCAF in

2011 and 2012, media platforms became spaces for competing narratives between the authorities—represented by the military and Mubarak's associates—and the revolutionaries, creating a battleground of discourses (Hassan, 2015: 94-107; Grimm, 2022: 284). The year 2011 represented a liberating moment for Egyptians, as it provided a sense of ownership and the right to express themselves, allowing them to write their own narratives of both the past and future (Hassan, 2015: 115; Grimm, 2022: 15-16).

Since the 2013 military intervention, authorities have monopolized and censored nearly all media platforms, propagating narratives of the war on terror, national emergency, and national threat, alongside conspiracy theories about the Muslim Brotherhood and external agents, all in an effort to legitimize their power (Hassan, 2015: 184, 2011; Ismail, 2019: 3-4; Grimm, 2022: 276). Additionally, the image of the 2011 uprising has deteriorated, while the 2013 'revolution,' with Sisi portrayed as a hero, has been polished (Hassan, 2015: 196; Ismail, 2019: 2, 5). As a result, the media landscape has been transformed into a monolithic platform, circulating a single official narrative and leaving no space for alternative viewpoints through both physical and virtual censorship, including the suppression of journalists, filmmakers, and ordinary social media users (Hassan, 2015: 210-214; El-Khachab, 2017: 3-4, 8; Open Technology Fund, 2019: 3).

Research on media has also highlighted the close relationship between the military, economy, and media sectors after 2011, particularly under the 2013 regime (Sayigh, 2019; Hamoud, 2023). As the military's influence expanded across nearly every sector after 2013, military intelligence took control of most media outlets to regulate public discourse (Sayigh, 2019: 6, 9). The media market underwent a restructuring process under the military elite, disrupting the balance that had previously existed between civilian corporate elites and the military under Mubarak (Hamoud, 2023: 165). As demonstrated by the literature, the primary goal of this restructuring was to monopolize and control the production of narratives, including through TV dramas that solely presented the official military version of the 2013 events, while silencing any alternative narratives (Hamoud, 2023: 171).

The institution of education has also been a key focus for researchers seeking to understand how Egyptian students interact with official historical narratives and how these narratives shape their sense of identity and civic engagement (Abdou, 2023: 1). Similar to Brand (2014), Ehaab D. Abdou (2023) argues that socio-political discourse and historical narratives in curricula are designed to shape students' perspectives in ways that align with the interests of those in power, legitimizing their ideology and worldview (Abdou, 2023: 2). Since 2013, authorities have revised the curriculum to exclude early Muslim military leaders, perceiving them as part of a "violent historical narrative" (Abdou, 2023: 100). Additionally, the narratives surrounding the 2011 revolution and the 2013 mass coup—which is also referred to as a 'revolution' in official discourse—have been revised to position the military at the center of the 2011 uprisings, framing it as the historical and primordial guardian of the Egyptian people's will and aspirations (Abdou, 2023: 101). The revised official narratives of 2011 and 2013 reflect a nationalistic and militaristic definition of reality. Abdou's findings suggest that after 2011, the dominant socio-cultural discourses internalized by students are nationalistic and religious, which fail to generate a critical alternative to these two discourses and their historical narratives (Abdou, 2023: 237). Abdou concludes that these meta-discourses reflect Egypt's ongoing struggle over governance, cultural identity, and resources, a contest that has been underway since the late 1800s (Abdou, 2023: 238).

Finally, before transitioning to the final section on Tahrir Square and the Pharaohs' Golden Parade event, scholarship on narratives and discourses in post-Arab Spring Egypt has also explored the role of religious elites and institutions. Studies of religious discourse after 2011 have examined Muslim ulama from various affiliations, including those of Al-Azhar, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Salafist Call (Muzakkir, 2019; Al-Azami, 2020; Al-Daghistani, 2021; Mustafa, 2021; Yousuf, 2023). Research highlights the significant role of prominent Azhar figures, such as Ali Gomaa and Ahmed Al-Tayeb, in legitimizing the 2013 military intervention, drawing on Azhar's socio-cultural and religious symbolism (Muzakkir, 2019: 257; Al-Azami, 2020: 296). However, these stances are primarily attributed to Azhar's official higher circles and cannot be generalized to all its members, although the institution's influence on power relations is substantial (Al-Azami, 2020: 296-299). Other scholars have focused on Azhar's role after 2013 within the socio-political landscape and military rule. As a

religious authority mediating between the state and the people, Azhar's role post-2011 has been to revolutionize, renew, and moderate religious discourse against Islamic extremism and jihadism, as directed by the Egyptian state and Sisi in 2015 (Mustafa, 2021: 9-10, 14-21; Al-Daghistani, 2021: 110). However, research indicates a complex relationship between the post-2013 regime and Azhar, which seeks institutional independence while aligning with the political directives of the state, creating a mutually beneficial yet ambivalent relationship rooted in reciprocal legitimacy (Mustafa, 2021: 14; Al-Daghistani, 2021: 111, 113).

1.4.2. Received Wisdom on Tahrir Square & The Pharaohs' Golden Parade

Since the early weeks following the 2011 uprising, Tahrir Square has attracted the attention of researchers, architects, and social scientists. These studies have highlighted the pivotal role of Tahrir Square in the 2011 revolution, particularly as a public space that had long been neglected, segregated, and controlled by the state (Attia, 2011: 13; ElShahed, 2011). Under Mubarak's authoritarian political and economic policies, public access to such spaces was severely constrained, but 2011 marked a transformative democratic moment for Tahrir Square, where people occupied the space and shared collective sentiments (Attia, 2011; ElShahed,, 2011; Bar'el, 2017: 10). Other studies have focused on the historical symbolism and significance of Tahrir Square as a stage for both the power elites to express their ideology and national identity and for the people to express their resistance (Nassar, 2011: 2; Nassar, 2014: 1; Riphagen and Woltering, 2018: 120-122; Said, 2014). Examining the historical changes of Tahrir Square as a political space, scholars interpreted 2011 as a practical moment of liberation, produced through the collective experience of the people, which in turn generated new narratives and discourses surrounding the square (Nassar, 2011: 7; Salama, 2013: 128; Riphagen and Woltering, 2018: 123-126; Aboelzz, 2014).

Another critical element studied by researchers is the revolution's graffiti from 2011 to 2013. For many people and artists, the painted graffiti and murals in Tahrir Square served as powerful political symbols commemorating the people's revolution against oppression. Emphasizing the people's ownership of this art, most believed that the murals should be preserved (Coletu, 2012). During the transitional period under the

SCAF, the graffiti on Mohammed Mahmoud Street reflected a violent conflict, with the army's suppressive practices juxtaposed against the people's desire to commemorate their resistance (Abaza, 2013: 4-9). Research on this graffiti not only focuses on its revolutionary symbolic narrative but also on the identity embedded in these artistic visual expressions. Revolutionary artists drew upon Ancient Egyptian art, particularly scenes of mourning, arguably symbolizing a struggle against both local military oppression and international colonial legacies of Egyptian archaeology (Coletu, 2012; Lau, 2013: 55-56).

From 2017 onwards, studies began to explore Tahrir Square under counter-revolution and military power post-2013. Tahrir Square was described as a symbolic and abstract space, a transcendent memory of revolution and the people's will, even after the army's suppression of freedom of assembly and its use of the square for public expression (Bar'el, 2017: 22). As a symbolic space, Tahrir Square was used by Morsi, Egypt's first democratically elected president, as a legitimizing tool for his rule (Riphagen and Woltering, 2018: 126). However, from June 2013 onward, Tahrir Square was appropriated by the military and police as a legitimizing device for their authoritarian takeover, transforming the square from a symbol of the people's counter-space into the military's counter-revolution (Riphagen and Woltering, 2018: 127-129). Under military rule, Egypt systematically erased the symbolic and historical memory of the 2011 revolution, replacing it with official state discourses (Abaza, 2018: 183-189). Mona Abaza called for the search for alternative methods to record history, challenging the official narrative and its deliberate elimination of the revolutionary discourse surrounding the space (Abaza, 2018: 186).

After 2021, research on Tahrir Square began to focus on the new dynamics and identity of the square under counter-revolutionary rule, particularly in terms of its spatial practices and visuality. By 2020, Tahrir Square had been fully incorporated into the ruling power's sphere through urban beautification projects (Monfleur, 2021: 10). These projects replaced the revolutionary art and symbols with official national visuals of ancient Egyptian art, thereby legitimizing the authoritarian military regime through its glorification of Egypt's mythical past (Monfleur, 2021: 21). The new Tahrir Square in 2020 marks the death of the square as a dynamic public space, both in terms of its daily practices and its visual identity (Monfleur, 2021: 21; Abdelazim, 2023: 202).

Since 2020, Tahrir Square has become a platform monopolized by state authority to project and visualize its power, national identity, and vision, much as it was under Khedive Ismail, British colonialism, Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak (Abdelazim, 2021: 110-113). This new identity, centered on the glorious ancient Egyptian heritage, is embodied in the square's design and in the mega-event of the Pharaohs' Golden Parade (Abdelazim, 2021: 108-110). Heba Raouf Ezzat, a professor of politics, describes such urban planning projects as "military urbanism," where urban design is shaped by military security considerations, resulting in the militarization of urban centers (Ezzat, 2021: 772).

The Pharaohs' Golden Parade (2021) is a national spectacle and mega-cultural-touristic-archaeological event organized by the Egyptian government. It served as the opening ceremony for the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC), a grand project by President Sisi and his administration. The event featured a parade, complete with dance performances and songs, in which 22 royal mummies were transferred from the Egyptian Museum to the new NMEC. In the literature, the Parade has mainly been studied as a successful strategy for nation-branding, tourism promotion, and asserting socio-cultural identity following the political crisis of 2011 and the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 lockdown (Abd El-Hakim, 2021: 795; Fakhry, 2022: 245-246; Ragab and Ragab, 2022: 10-12; Amara, 2022: 153; Baalbaki and Zizka, 2024). Through economic and cultural assessments of the event and NMEC, researchers argue that the Parade and the museum contributed positively to Egypt's international and national image, economically bolstering the country's revenue streams (Aboulnaga et al., 2022; Sedek, 2023; Baalbaki and Zizka, 2024; Sidhom, 2023). These studies focus on the active roles of media, the government, and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities as organizers, while also highlighting the responses of national and international audiences. Notably, the 2011 events are often mentioned as a key factor in the decline of tourism and the economy, with the current government positioning its efforts as a means to recover from the damage done by the 2011 uprisings.

Another prominent direction of analysis on the Parade (2021) addresses questions of national identity. The Sisi regime's focus on ancient Egyptian heritage, archaeology, and symbolism has been interpreted in various ways. One interpretation suggests that

Sisi is shifting the Egyptian national identity from pan-Arabism to a more pharaonic identity in response to both domestic and foreign policies, a trend seen in other nations confronting globalization (Setiyono, 2023). These policies are said to include the banning of the Muslim Brotherhood and the recalibration of relations with Israel and the West (Setiyono, 2023: 309, 315). Accordingly, the government has sought to revive Pharaonism, de-Arabize Egyptian identity, and incorporate elements of ancient Egyptian culture into national discourse through architectural projects, major cultural events, and educational reforms such as the teaching of hieroglyphs in schools (Setiyono, 2023: 307). This weaving of ancient Egyptian civilization into national identity is believed to open new possibilities for Egypt in global cultural diplomacy, presenting the country as an authentically rich nation with a profound historical heritage (Guindi, 2023: 7).

Some scholars have analyzed the Parade and the broader acts of pharaonic revivalism by the Egyptian state through a colonial lens. Historian and archaeologist Dimitris Plantzos (2023) examined the national historical narratives of both Greece and Egypt, arguing that these narratives, when viewed through a crypto-colonialist perspective, remain paradoxical. Both nations, while striving to assert their national identities and reclaim their ancient heritage, continue to present their pasts in a way that aligns with Western definitions of culture and civilization (Plantzos, 2023: 113). Conversely, other scholars have interpreted the Parade and Egyptian archaeological initiatives as a powerful reclamation of Egypt's ancient heritage from the colonial legacy. In this view, the event symbolizes the Egyptian public's involvement in the discussion of its archaeology, heritage, and history, challenging Western colonial narratives that claim Egyptians mishandle their own antiquities (Abd el-Gawad and Stevenson, 2024: 345). Social media interactions by Egyptians around the Parade further underscore the sense of belonging and ownership they feel toward Egypt's ancient past, contrasting with the Western colonial perspective (Abd el-Gawad and Stevenson, 2024: 345).

In the academic literature, the only critical perspective on the event in relation to the socio-political context and power structure that I came across was in an MA dissertation on Middle Eastern Studies. While the dissertation studies the cultural heritage management in Cairo, the researcher referred very briefly to Sisi, who came to power through a military takeover, and to his heritage policy as controversial and

hyper-nationalist (Zwemstra, 2024: 60). Based on the reviewed literature on post-2013 Egypt, Tahrir Square, and the Pharaohs' Golden Parade, it is clear that while each of these elements has been studied individually, there is a lack of a comprehensive critical analysis that theoretically connects them in a manner this dissertation does. Most studies tend to examine these elements in isolation. Therefore, this study aims to bridge these elements by critically analyzing their discourses and narratives, specifically within the context of the counterrevolution.

1.5. Methodology

1.5.1. Archaeology

As a methodology, the term archaeology here refers partially to the Foucauldian archaeology of discourse. This study adopts Foucault's method of archaeology in a general sense. It examines the archaeology of the de-democratizing discourse by connecting socio-political-economic practices (non-discursive) with the discourses of the fields of history and archaeology (discursive) (Foucault, 2013: 75). Like Foucauldian archaeology, it investigates the moments of transformation within discursive formations by analyzing the rules and regulations that shape their emergence and development (Foucault, 2013: 6, 189-192). However, unlike Foucault, my focus is not on these fields as scientific knowledge disciplines and their discursive formations, though I will touch on them too. Instead, I am concerned with the political discourse produced through the mobilization of these fields: the de-democratizing discourse.

This study not only highlights the de-democratizing rules and regulations that govern the discourses on history and archaeology through socio-political-economic practices but also analyzes the messages, meanings, and producers of these discourses to understand the power dynamics underpinning them. It is essential to note that this aim diverges from Foucauldian archaeology, which explicitly does not concern itself with interpreting discourse content, producers, or meanings, focusing instead on the conditions and rules of its existence (Foucault, 2013: 155). To address this gap, I combine Foucauldian archaeology with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The term "archaeology of de-democratization" thus refers to the examination and investigation

of de-democratizing rules and regulations within socio-political-economic practices (non-discursive) and their governing and regulating influence on transforming the discourses on history and archaeology (discursive) in counterrevolutionary Egypt after 2013. By integrating Foucauldian archaeology with CDA, this study bridges structural analysis of discursive formations with an exploration of the power relations behind the messages and meanings they convey.

1.5.2. Critical Discourse Analysis and Narrative

Based on the reviewed international literature, the relationship between narrative production and power structure can be found in space, art, and the scientific disciplines of history, archaeology, and anthropology. This relationship is built on power relations, selective processes, and reproduction mechanisms. Narrative production and power structure serve each other: while power relations shape the produced narrative through dominance, the produced narrative legitimizes, maintains, and reproduces the power structure. This is the exact purpose of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodology, according to Teun A. van Dijk (1993). Van Dijk describes CDA as a sociopolitical methodology that aims to examine "the discourse dimensions of power abuse and the injustice and inequality that result from it" (1993, 252). In other words, CDA is applied to study the role of discourse in sustaining the power structure and power relations of elite groups and dominant institutions with access to the means of discourse production (van Dijk 1993, 252-255; Blackledge 2012, 616). Through certain representations of marginalized groups discursively and through their inaccessibility to the means of discourse production, the structure of unequal power relations is reproduced through modes of discourse, whether text, talk, interactive communication, or communicative events (van Dijk 1993, 250-260).

Based on this description, discourse is critically analyzed by examining its content, producers, central themes, aim, audience, and context. One of the primary institutions of discourse (re)production is mass media news. Van Dijk (1988) argues that news is structured with a specific way of narrating reality as a story. The narrative or storytelling in news differs from literary storytelling, as it is part of reality yet selectively constructed through deliberate patterns of selection of expressions, words, representations, topics, events, and sources (van Dijk 1988, 10-11, 73, 112-113).

Hence, structures of news embody ideological preferences, meanings, and social practices of powerful, dominant groups (van Dijk 1988, 1).

It's important to note the distinction between discourse and narrative. Narrative is one of the genres of discourse (Johnstone 2001, 635). It refers to a sequence of past events that are related, organized, and presented in a storytelling style, playing a crucial role in shaping and expressing identities and memories (Johnstone 2001, 639-641). Discourse, however, is more general, referring to "any instance of signification, or meaning-making, whether through oral or written language or nonverbal means," with a focus on the social, political, or ideological context and power structure in which a specific discourse is produced (Given 2008, 145-146; Blackledge 2012, 616). Within the national context of the modern nation-state, discourse is imposed through material and immaterial means of meaning production, shaping cultures, identities, and ideologies according to the vision of the ruling power (Brand 2014, 5-6). Narrative, as a more specific official historical narrative of a nation, is one of the political ruling power's discursive legitimating instruments, organizing and producing a national narrative based on the national past and national story (Brand 2014, 8-9). Official historical narratives in nation-states differ from collective memory. Collective memory can be produced by any group and may refer to a specific incident, whereas national narratives are produced by a specific group and deal with a set of past events tied together as a story, reflecting the identity, self-recognition, and mission of a nation (Brand 2014, 9).

By applying the definitions and purposes of CDA, discourse, and official/national historical narrative, I aim to critically examine the post-2013 national historical narrative of the Pharaonic past within the broader discourse of militarism. This will be done through CDA of the projects of Tahrir Square urban development (2020) and the Pharaohs' Golden Parade (2021). As demonstrated in the literature review on Egypt, these two events have not been studied interrelatedly nor critically examined within the broader socio-political context and power relations. By applying CDA to pro-government news, the state's official statements, and the events' speeches, I aim to critically analyze the official historical narrative and state discourse within these events. Therefore, the sources of data for this study include pro-government news

websites, international media websites, official government websites, and official state social media accounts.

Pro-government news websites will be used to analyze how these events are covered and described. These platforms are selected based on Egyptian political economist Maher Hamoud (2023) and his recent book, *The Political Economy of Egyptian Media*. The newspapers include Al-Ahram, Al-Masry Al-Youm, Al-Youm Al-Sabi', and Al-Watan. According to Hamoud, Al-Ahram has been a state-run newspaper since the establishment of the Egyptian republic in the 1950s (2023, 37). Al-Masry Al-Youm and Al-Watan are among the most circulated newspapers in Egypt. While they are private, they are known for their pro-military stance and closeness to the political and military power elites as part of the corporate power elite (Hamoud 2023, 48). Al-Youm Al-Sabi' is another private pro-government newspaper with a high-quality electronic website, which is useful for discourse analysis (Abu Youssef 2019).

International news websites such as BBC, *The Guardian*, Al-Jazeera, and *The New York Times* will assist with archived news and the critical contemporary events that have been ignored or not reported by local media. Official government websites primarily include the Official Portal of Cairo Governorate, ministry websites, the presidency's website, and other state institutions' websites. I will focus on the statements and announcements related to the two mentioned national projects to analyze their discourse and historical narratives. Finally, social media accounts of state institutions, such as YouTube pages and Facebook accounts, will be used as complementary sources to the official websites' statements and announcements, as well as sources for live streams and promotional videos of the studied national events. Through this data[2]—comprising posted news, statements, announcements, and videos from mainly state sources—I aim to provide a comprehensive critical analysis of the post-2013 official historical narrative of the Pharaonic past produced by the military regime. Before delving into the analysis, however, I will lay down the sociological

[2] Website sources, including news platforms, government protals, blogs, opinion articles, and social media posts, are cited with hyperlinks to facilitate easy access for readers and to avoid confusion due to the large volume of non-academic online media publications on the studied topic. Other sources, such as books, book chapters, academic journal articles, and dissertations, are cited in the traditional format without hyperlinks.

theoretical foundations for this analysis in the next chapter after presenting the dissertation' outline.

1.6. Outline of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters, drawing on the key events illustrated in figure 1.1. that took place mainly in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, as shown in illustration 1.1. The first chapter, the introduction, familiarizes the reader with the study's context, identifies the research question and scope, and outlines the dissertation's structure. It also situates the research within the broader body of general scholarship and case-study-based academic literature. Additionally, it details the research methodology and data sources. The second chapter, dedicated to the theoretical framework, focuses on developing and synthesizing the theories of three power theorists—C. Wright Mills, Michael Mann, and Pierre Bourdieu—in relation to the dissertation's case study.

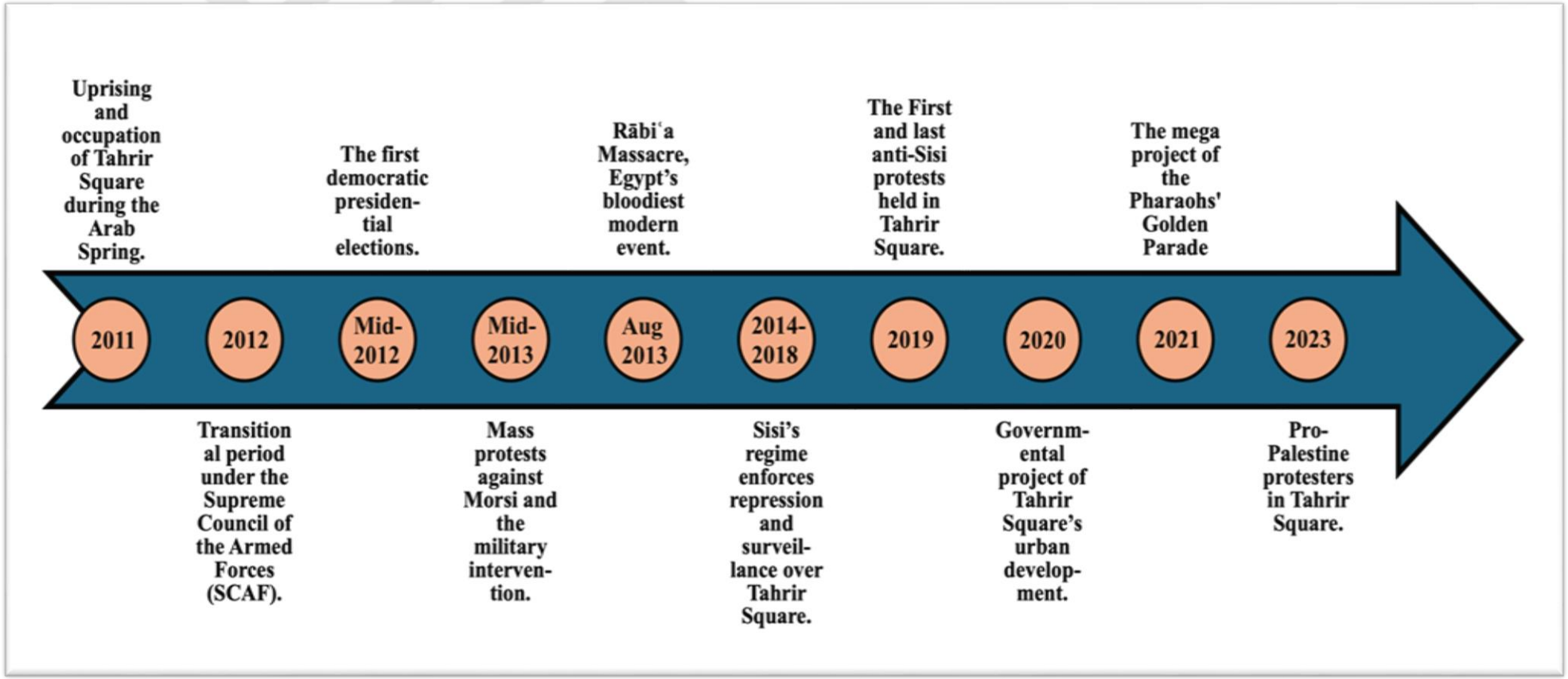

Figure 1.1. Timeline of Key Events in Egypt from 2011 to 2023

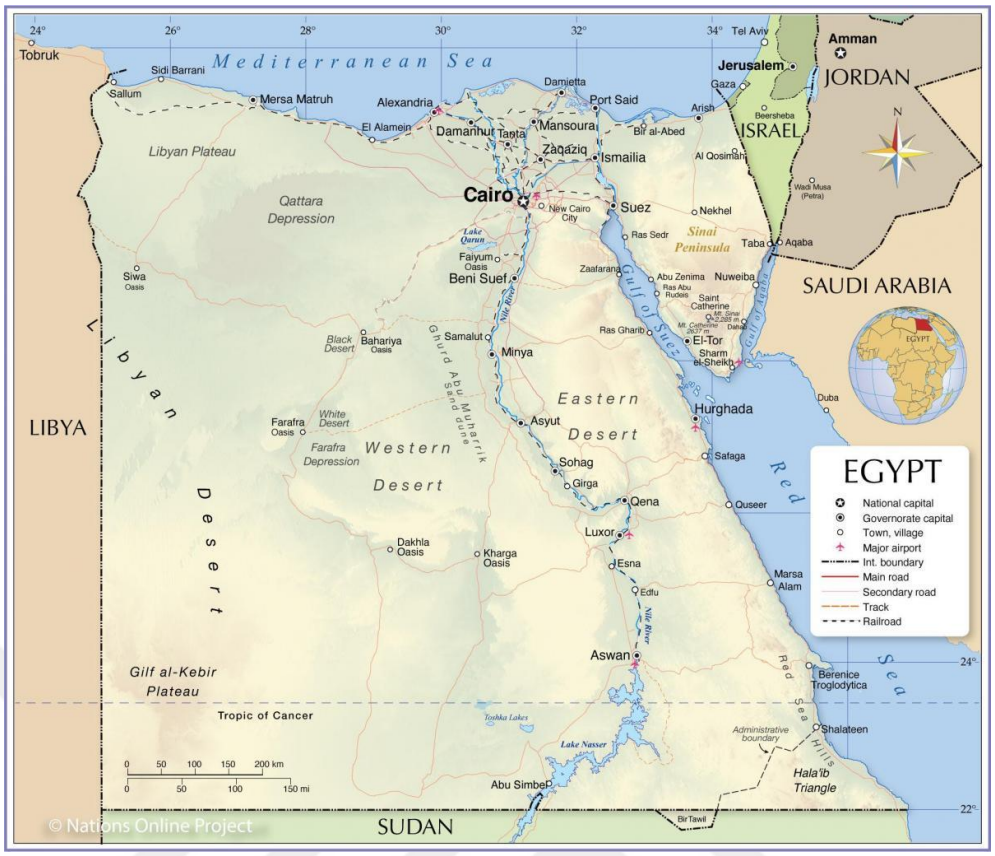

Illustration 1.1. A Map of Egypt Showing the Location of Cairo (Cairo Map 360, n. d.)

The third chapter is the first of two empirical chapters. It applies the methodology outlined in Chapter One and the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter Two to the national project of Tahrir Square's urban development (2020). This chapter critically examines the discourse on Tahrir Square and its project as presented on governmental websites and portals, focusing on the dominant centralized narratives and the marginalized, silenced ones. It then analyzes the project itself, exploring the spatial narrative embodied in the urban design and the pro-government media coverage of the project. The chapter concludes by connecting the urban redevelopment of Tahrir Square to the spectacle of the Pharaohs' Golden Parade.

The fourth chapter, which is empirically grounded, applies the same theoretical framework to the mega-event of the Pharaohs' Golden Parade. It critically analyzes the governmental discourse of the event and the historical narratives it invents. Particular attention is given to the event's dominant themes as expressed through

speeches, songs, visuals, and performances. The chapter concludes by linking these newly invented historical narratives to the political discourse of the current military regime, its power structure, and the broader context of counterrevolution.

The fifth and final chapter reinforces and substantiates my argument by reviewing Sisi's most recent statements on the 2011 uprising. I compare and contrast these statements with earlier ones, highlighting the significant shift in his discourse regarding the Egyptian Arab Spring—from framing it as a revolution to portraying it as a crisis. In the concluding discussion, I restate my argument and demonstrate how it has been substantiated throughout the dissertation. This is achieved through a critical discussion of the perspectives of Egyptian and foreign historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists on the two events, which this dissertation focuses on.

The topic of this dissertation explores various intersecting themes within the relationship between narrative and discourse production and power relations. These themes encompass a range of institutions and fields—such as art, urban space, architecture, history, archaeology, media, and politics—that are involved in both material and verbal narrative production. The relationship between these institutions, their respective fields, and the power structure has been a focal point for social scientists and researchers.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As stated in the introductory chapter, the main question I ask in this dissertation is how the Egyptian post-coup military power elite of 2013 enforces, maintains, and secures its domination, following a period of revolution and democratic hope from 2011 to 2013. What is the process of marginalizing once an empowered public? What are the strategies employed to transform an active public into passive, silent subjects, or to force them into such a position? Are these strategies based solely on physical violence and fear, or do they also rely on certain narratives mechanisms and rhetoric? If so, what are the manifestations and practices of these narrative- and rhetoric-based strategies by the current power elite?

To answer these questions, this dissertation aims to analyze the current power elite's practices, decisions, and narratives, focusing on two specific and interconnected state projects: the Tahrir Square urban "development" (2021) and the Pharaohs' Golden Parade (2021). To this end, the theoretical framework this dissertation employs is a synthesis of three power theorists, C. Wright Mills, Michael Mann, Pierre Bourdieu whose ideas I find complementary to this study. To begin with, for power and the concept of the power elite, I will rely on Mills' works, *The Power Elite* (1956) and *The Sociological Imagination* (1959). My theoretical analysis of the Egyptian ruling elite's power functions and strategies will also draw on Mills' analysis of the military power elite, the role of mass media and rhetoric, and the concept of mass society within the paralyzing democratization context of Cold War America. However, the historical context of Mills' case study—America—differs significantly from that of contemporary Egypt, the focus of this study.

In the case of America, we are discussing a colony that evolved into an independent state, established by the descendants of the original colonizers, based—at least theoretically—on capitalist liberal democratic principles (Mills, 1956, 175-180; Mann,

1993; 137). It then advanced a step further to become an imperialist world power in the 20th century. Mills' critical analysis questions whether America remained democratic in practice, as it was in its early days, or if its democracy became merely rhetorical and theoretical. Mills' short answer is no. To explain and support this, he analyzes the power elite circles, their practices, relationships among themselves and with the civil society, strategies, and rhetoric. Through this analysis, Mills aims to explore and demonstrate the shifts in power dynamics that, as he argues, have paralyzed the democratic process in America. The theoretical indicators of these power shifts and their relationship to democracy highlight a transformation from an active democratic state to a passive mass democracy. This transformation, and its theoretical indicators (such as freedom of expression, practicing active political agency, and accessibility to means of decision-making and history-making) is what I find relevant to my case study, rather than the different historical context. This will be further explored in the rest of the chapter. I am aware of the contextual difference that necessitates a clearer conceptual framework for the Egyptian power structure. For this, Michael Mann's work, "The Infrastructural Powers of Authoritarian States in the 'Arab Spring'" (2014), proves helpful and complementary.

In this article, Mann analyzes the outcomes of the Arab Spring using his previously developed concepts of Despotic Power (DP) and Infrastructural Power (IP). As we will see, Mann applies these two concepts to define four ideal types of state structures. The theoretical framework of this dissertation relies on Mann's definitions of different kinds of power and his typology of state structures to address the conceptual gap mentioned earlier, arising from the contextual differences in case studies. This conceptual gap is represented in the different contexts of the case studies. Hence, a theoretical framework that addresses the Egyptian case study as a post-colonial Middle Eastern authhoritian state is needed. In other words, this theoretical framework draws on Mills' works to provide the analytical lens for identifying and analyzing the transformative process of power dynamics, its relationship to democracy, and its manifestations. For the concepts and definitions related to the socio-political power pertaining to my case study, it relies on Mann's work. Having briefly explained the synthesis of my theoretical framework and its rationale, it is opt to elaborate on and discuss the ideas and concepts of each theoretician that contribute to the theoretical foundation of my analysis.

This study focuses on governmental mega-projects and mega-events that shape the public's mental perception of the state's power and its operation. Simultaneously, this perception is also imposed by the state itself. To analyze the state's ability to construct mental structures of meaning and perception, Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of symbolic power and symbolic capital is employed. The theoretical framework draws on Bourdieu's (1994) article, *"*Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field*,"* to explain how the state's power operates both on an objective, material level—through physical power—and on a subjective, mental level—through symbolic power. This dissertation adopts Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power to describe its mechanisms of operation. My framework thus integrates the state's symbolic power with various related concepts, including symbolic capital, naturalization and internalization, mental structures of perception, and social agents. These explanations are used to analyze how the Egyptian state's symbolic power functioned before 2011 and after 2013 through various imposed and maintained mental structures of visions.

2.1. Mann and Authoritarian Infrastructural Power

In his article, Mann seeks to place the Arab Spring within a broader historical-sociological pattern concerning the relationship between revolutions and state power typologies. According to Mann, the Arab Spring uprisings differed significantly from other historical revolutionary waves, such as those of 1848 and the socialist revolutions of the Twentieth century. Unlike those earlier waves of revolution, which sought to transform the entire socio-political-economic structure, the Arab Spring primarily targeted political power (Mann, 2012, 246). Here, Mann identifies two common patterns among revolutionary waves. First, waves of revolutions are often sparked by "hope," as "regimes could not block the transmission of hope" (Mann, 2014, 2). When people witness a neighboring uprising that appears successful, they develop hope for their own resistance against repression. Second, most later revolutions within a wave tend to be unsuccessful, as regimes become more aware of the potential revolutionary threat and act with greater caution and alertness. These two ideas—the people's hope for resistance or change and the regime's alertness to the threat of revolution—are crucial to the context of my study. As we will explore, my research seeks to understand how a moment of hope for change and resistance is marginalized and erased by the

regime's mechanisms and strategies, as this memory poses a threat to the ruling elite. It should be noted that Mann refers to the later revolts within a revolutionary wave rather than a post-uprising context within the same country. Nevertheless, this idea – that regimes become more alert to the threat of revolt– plays a critical role in shaping state power structures in the post-uprising and counter-revolutionary context. For now, let us return to Mann's typology of state power structures.

Mann (2014) distinguishes between two types of state power: despotic power (DP) and infrastructural power (IP). Despotic power refers to the authority exercised by the state elite through decisions and actions made without regular consultation with the public or civil society. In contrast, infrastructural power is the capacity of the state elite to implement decisions and exercise control by penetrating civil society through logistical management and the administration of the state's territory. Infrastructure, in this context, is not limited to physical elements such as roads, urban developments, or radios, but includes all the physical and social mechanisms the state uses to execute its commands and decisions across its territory, such as mass communication and education systems (Mann, 2014, 4–5). In brief, DP can be defined as the state elite's ruling power "over" civil society, while IP refers to the state elite's ruling power "through" civil society. However, Mann emphasizes that both types of power are strong. Differentiating between them does not suggest that one is weaker than the other; rather, it highlights that state power can be strong and exercised in different ways.

Mann's delineation of state powers was not introduced for the first time in this article. In fact, it was first presented in his 1984 article titled "The Autonomous Power of the State, Its Origins, Mechanisms." This 1984 work aimed to explain two general relationships of state power based on an empirical historical-sociological study. First, it addressed the relationship between state power and civil society, defining the two types of state power mentioned earlier. Second, it explored the relationship between these power types and the factors behind their autonomy, centrality and territoriality. Mann emphasizes that the autonomy of state power, in both forms, fundamentally depends on "the state's unique ability to provide a territorially-centralised form of organization" (Mann, 1984, 185). In other words, the state's autonomous power primarily arises from its centralized territoriality, or its control over a specific place

and arena. This centralized territoriality enables the state to exercise its authority through powerful actions, decisions, commands, and a monopoly on legal violence, institutional control, and authoritative rule-making. The question of how this power is exercised leads to the two types of state power discussed earlier. Thus, the question of the dynamics and relationship between the state elite, state territory/place/arena, and civil society give rise to various power structures within the state.

Mann establishes four ideal types of state power structures based on the varying degrees of DP and IP within each structure (Mann, 1984, 191). These ideal types are feudal, imperial, bureaucratic, and authoritarian. Feudal and imperial power structures are characterized by weak IP, relying primarily on ruling "over" the public and civil society through DP. Historically, Mann locates these types mainly in the early agrarian and medieval periods due to the weak centralisation and infrastructural control. The feudal structure exhibits both weak DP and IP, while the imperial structure is defined by high DP and low IP. For the state structure in the modern industrial era, Mann identifies bureaucratic and authoritarian ideal types. He argues that modern states have significantly developed infrastructural power through the creation of railways, telegraphs, and other mass communication and transportation systems. As a result, both bureaucratic and authoritarian state structures are characterized by high IP. However, the distinction between these two modern types lies in their levels of DP. In the bureaucratic ideal type, DP is weak and low, representing modern democratic systems. In contrast, the authoritarian ideal type features both high DP and IP, representing modern dictatorships. Authoritarian power structures are characterized by infrastructurally organized despotic power, where DP is exercised through means and institutions of infrastructure to manage, control, and enforce state power over civil society.

It is important to note that the infrastructural systems and tools represented by IP did not emerge or develop with the purpose of increasing state power. In other words, these systems were not political inventions by either the state or civil society (Mann, 1984, 194). Furthermore, IP can be utilized by both the state elite and civil society, as it has a dialectical relationship with both, according to Mann. Mindful of this historical and scientificity, certain questions about contemporary power structures cannot be ignored. When state elites with despotic power monopolize the means and systems of

infrastructural power within centralized territorial control, while denying civil society access to these means, what are the outcomes of these power dynamics? How do they function in such a context? Can we still speak of a dialectical relationship between the state elite and civil society concerning IP? When Mann wrote this article in the 1980s, the Soviet Union served as a real-world example of this theoretical scenario, though it was still too early to provide a definitive answer. As Mann acknowledges in the final pages of his article: "I am touching upon some of the central unsolved theoretical issues concerning contemporary societies. And, again, I offer no solution. Indeed, it may require a longer-run historical perspective than that of our generation to solve them, and so to decide whether the Industrial Revolution did finish off the agrarian dialectic I described" (Mann, 1984, 207).

Despite the unanswered questions due to the article's context, Mann provides some insightful concluding remarks on infrastructural power[3]. He asserts that IP is deeply rooted in centralizing and territorializing the power dynamics between social relationships. As IP increases, so does the extent of centralized territorialization in social life (Mann, 1984, 208). Another crucial proposition follows: IP can be exploited by despotic power (DP). In other words, state elites may initiate "infrastructural re-organization" when their DP is threatened or resisted by civil society. This highlights that the struggle between civil society and state power is essentially a struggle over access to infrastructural power and its means. Consequently, states develop territorialized mechanisms to suppress such struggles. Mann uses historical empirical examples from thirteenth-century Europe to illustrate this process, focusing on the development of infrastructural power in relation to military, socio-economic relations, and centralized territoriality. However, the framework Mann outlines can be abstracted and applied to different contemporary cases, as he would later do in *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 4, Globalizations, 1945–2011* (2012) and "The Infrastructural Powers of Authoritarian States in the 'Arab Spring'" (2014).

[3] These questions don't remain unanswered by Mann as we shall shortly see. As time passes and a "longer-run historical perspective" is developed, Mann provides answers to these questions in his fourth volume of Sources of Power and "The Infrastructural Powers of Authoritarian States in the "Arab Spring""

Theorizing the Russian Revolution and drawing on Theda Skocpol (1979), Mann argues that regimes following revolutions often enhance their infrastructural power by expanding "government administrative agencies," security services, and surveillance over both state officials and the public or civil society. In the case of the Russian Revolution, Mann notes that the state's despotic and infrastructural powers developed and expanded, which is not a very good thing as Mann describes (2013: 250). According to Mann's theory of revolution, in the struggle for infrastructural power between insurgents and state elites, both sides develop strategies to seize it. Both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces learn and employ different strategies and tactics using IP and their accessibility to it (Mann, 2012, 266). Also, drawing on the history of revolutionary waves, he argues that, in a relatively general manner, most revolutions aren't followed by happy victorious events due to insider and outsider actors. Successful revolutions are those who didn't have to deal with a violent struggle with counter-revolutionary forces. When faced with such violence, history shows two possible scenarios: either the revolutionaries fail, which is the more common outcome, or they succeed by imposing a higher level of coercion (Mann, 2012, 252–266). In the case of Egypt, the first scenario is evident. This dissertation does not focus on how this scenario unfolded because there is quite a good amount of literature on it. Rather, this dissertation is interested in studying how it is maintained by examining the IP strategies and tactics employed by Egypt's current state elite.

I conclude this section by revisiting "The Infrastructural Powers of Authoritarian States in the 'Arab Spring'" (2014). This section began with a brief reference to this article and its theoretical foundations. The development and application of these concepts were further elucidated through Mann's earlier works. In fact, Mann (2014) applies his theoretical framework of despotic power (DP), infrastructural power (IP), and authoritarian ideal types to the Arab context of the Arab Spring, building on its application to socialist revolutions and fascist regimes in his fourth volume mentioned earlier. According to Mann's typology, the pre-Arab Spring state power structure is described as authoritarian (Mann, 2014, 3). This indicates that the state power structure in Arab Spring countries was characterized by high levels of both DP and IP. Mann associates authoritarianism with the suppression of political and civil rights while allowing varying degrees of social rights, drawing on T. H. Marshall's typology of citizenship (Mann, 2014, 4). As the concepts of IP and authoritarian state power are

explained, Mann establishes a framework for understanding the IP of Arab countries and its relation to the outcomes of the Arab Spring.

It is emphasized by Mann that the Arab countries involved in the Arab Spring exhibited both high levels of despotic power (DP) and infrastructural power (IP). DP is evident in arbitrary actions and decisions made without consulting public or civil society agencies such as arbitrary arrests and detainings. Conversely, IP is reflected in well-equipped institutions of violence and the penetration of existing civil society, as seen in Mubarak's Egypt (Mann, 2014, 5). With at least 15-years-plus authoritarian regimes in question, state elites develop various infrastructural power strategies to sustain their dominance amidst competing elites and civil society. Mann identifies eight infrastructural strategies adopted across Arab countries, whether republican or monarchic. However, due to the specific focus of this study, three strategies are selected for detailed discussion below, as they are relevant to the case study of counterrevolutionary Egypt.

Firstly, Mann discusses the censorship and repression of material infrastructures, including mass media communication and mass transportation systems such as roads, television, and education (Mann, 2014, 5–6). Secondly, the repressive application of physical force institutions that maintain the repression and suppression starting from the judicial level to the violent level. Repressive judicial decisions and actions include arbitrary laws that constrain or marginalize civil society through arrests or legal bans. On the more extreme end, violent repression is manifested in physical harm inflicted by coercive institutions like the military and police. Thirdly, Mann highlights the role of ideological legitimacy in sustaining authoritarian state power with less reliance on violence. As an example, Mann refers to the post-colonial leaders, such as Nasser, who were considered the fathers of the nation in the face of colonial powers. Ideological legitimacy does not necessarily align with a specific ideology but may involve discourses such as fear of instability, national service, or economic benefits (Mann, 2014, 6). These strategies, grounded in IP, aim to marginalize, alienate, and exclude civil society from its political and civil rights, forcing citizens into passive subjects. This is very crucial as we shall see in the analysis and discussion part where these strategies are applied to the state elite's actions and decisions in counterrevolution Egypt. For a detailed exploration and analysis of these strategies, especially in the

context of military dominance over the socio-political and economic spheres, C. Wright Mills' *Power Elite* (1956) discusses on military ascendency and its relation to other institutions such as mass media communication and celebrity/celebration will be useful.

2.2. Mills and Military Power Elite

In his study of the 1950s American context, Mills examines the changes in power dynamics among the power elites, state institutions, and civil society following the world wars (1956, 27–28). He highlights how these shifts in power dynamics between the mentioned actors have transformed America from a civilian democracy in both theory and practice to one that remains democratic only in theory. He identifies several key manifestations of this transformation: the ascendancy of the military elite within the socio-political and economic spheres, the adoption of a military definition of reality, and the imposition of this definition through mass media and media figures such as celebrities. According to Mills, these manifestations illustrate the marginalization, alienation, and exclusion of the public from decision-making processes and power. As a result, the public shifts from being politically active agents capable of defining reality from a civilian perspective to becoming passive recipients of a singular, imposed definition of reality. Through utilizing the mass media and celebrities, alternative critical opinions and definitions of reality are marginalized (Mills, 1956, 206–222).

Based on the focus of this dissertation, this section of the theoretical framework relies on three central and interconnected ideas from Mills' *The Power Elite* (1956). Firstly, it examines the rise of the military power elite and the factors contributing to this ascendance. Secondly, it explores the rhetorical and practical strategies employed to enforce, justify, and maintain this ascendency. Thirdly, it considers the impact of this military dominance on the public's access to decision-making, power, and means of expression. Before delving into these interconnected ideas, it is important to clarify the concepts of power and power elite according to Mills.

In *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), Mills states that power " has to do with whatever decisions men make about the arrangements under which they live, and about

the events which make up the history of their period" (40). Power pertains to those who have access to the means of interacting with historical events beyond human control, in addition to access to means of making decisions and shaping historical events that are within human control. In essence, power is about who is included in or excluded from the decision-making process to shape history and who decides this inclusion or exclusion. Since individuals are not equally empowered to contribute to decision-making and history-making, “some men are much freer than others” (Mills, 1959, 181). Moreover, those excluded from the means of history-making may become instruments or objects of those who control these processes. Exclusion is not always a result of a violent enforced process; it varies from one context to another. For example, in America of 1950s, Mills identifies reasons behind exclusion from the decision-making process such as apathy and lack of awareness and morality by the people and intellectuals in addition to manipulation by the power elites. Situations can be complex and may involve multiple factors behind exclusion. Civil society is not always a victim or marginalized masses by evil power elites, although in many cases they might be as we shall see in this case study. Yet, it is important to avoid overgeneralizations. As it is mentioned, in Social Sciences, each study has its context. This is said to assert the need to keep all the theoretical potentiality of different explanations open without dismissing any. Hence, it can be said that those lacking access to means of decision-making and history-making processes, regardless of the reasons behind not having it, may become tools for those who possess these means.

Based on Mills' definition of power, those who control decision-making and history-making processes, and who have the authority to include or exclude others, are the power elite (Mills, 1956, 3–4, 21). This elite power often stems from positions of running huge corporations, monopolizing means of violence, or commanding socio-political orders. In other words, Mills’ concept of the power elite encompasses the intersecting power dynamics among three key groups at the top of the power hierarchy: corporate, military, and political elites. Similar to Mann, Mills believes that with the modern structure of nation-states, the means of power have become more extensive, centralized, institutionalized, and routinized (1956, 7). What differed in 1950s America is the change of power dynamics between these elites due to the historical context of 20th-century world wars. This shift led to the emergence of certain elites who replaced and surpassed other elites in power, thereby redefining the overall power

structure and, more importantly, redefining the public's role within it (Mills, 1956, 23–24).

According to Mills, the dynamics of power were redefined in favor of the military elite in 20th century America (1956, 171). After a peak of civilians' upper hand in the fields of politics, economics, and even the military from the 18th century up until World War I, the "warlords" are coming back, not only in America but all over the world. Mills views this as a crucial shift in the power dynamics among elites, as the military, once relatively marginalized and limited to an instrumental role by the political power elites, is gaining prominence. Historically, the military was perceived with distrust and seen as a potential threat to political and economic domains with its power ambitions. As a centralized, standardized, and highly organized institution of monopolized violence, the military was traditionally kept under the control of political and economic elites (Mills, 1956, 173). Consequently, until 20th-century America, "economic forces and political climate, therefore, have historically favoured the civilian devaluation of the military as an at-times necessary evil but always a burden" (Mills, 1956, 176). However, this shape of power structure experienced a shift in the 20th century.

Within the context of the 20th-century world wars, the military found a way to maximize its share within the power structure. World War I, World War II, and the Cold War created a climate of constant threat, danger, and emergency. As modern wars, these wars introduced a modern form of warfare that blurred the traditional definitions of victory and defeat, creating an environment in which the political and economic elites could not foresee or define an end to the war (Mills, 1956, 184-185). In this persistent state of threat and war emergency, the military's definition of reality began to seem more reliable to American political economic power elites and even to civilians. At this historical juncture, the military elite and its definition of reality ascended the civilian diplomatic definitions of reality. The dynamics of power elites shifted from a civilian perspective's upper hand in politics, economy, and military to a military perspective's upper hand in politics, economy, and civil institutions. Mills describes this shift as "military ascendancy" (1956, 198).

For Mills, military ascendancy extends beyond the military merely being significant political and economic actors within the power structure. Military elites' domination

over the power structure represents an invasion of the civilian mind and mentality (Mills, 1956: 222). Under military ascendancy, the military's definition of reality and its outlook are propagated, often marginalizing and suppressing civilian alternative definitions (Mills, 1956, 222). The military's definition of reality heavily relies on rhetoric centered around emergency, threat, and danger to justify its dominance. With such rhetoric, civilians and other elites become more accepting of the military definition of reality (Mills, 1956, 198). Mills characterizes the military's definition of reality as "metaphysical," meaning that its perception of threats and danger may not always be accurate and true (1956, 195-196). In other words, the military elite employs rhetorical devices of danger and emergency to sustain and legitimize its hegemony over the power structure. Another key manifestation of military ascendancy is the blurring of boundaries between military and civilian roles. Under military ascendancy, individuals from the military elite may hold both military and civilian positions within the political and economic spheres, leading to further centralization and concentration of power (Mills, 1956, 199).

As the military emerges as the power elite and its definition of reality is adopted, its requirements become highly prioritized both economically and politically (Mills, 1956: 202, 215, 224). This can be seen in the Pentagon. Mills describes the Pentagon as “the most dramatic symbol of the scale and shape of the new military edifice” (1956: 186). The Pentagon, with its massiveness and mazes, can be seen as an architectural embodiment and material symbol of the new military power structure. Its high cost and high level of execution indicates the prioritization of military needs economically and politically. The maintenance of this prioritization and ascendancy relies heavily on institutions of mass communication and publicity. The military elite enforces its definition of reality through control over mass media and public communication channels. For instance, the Pentagon produces its own radio and television programs (Mills, 1956: 187). This control extends the military’s influence beyond politics and the economy into the realm of mass media, further embedding its ideology and definition of reality in the public sphere. Thus, the shift in power dynamics towards military elites results in a significant reduction of civilian power across various domains, including politics, the economy, and media institutions. This comprehensive military ascendancy represents not only a material invasion but also an ideological

one, where the military elite's worldview permeates and dominates civilian definitions of reality (Mills, 1956: 277).

As it was already mentioned above, military ascendency takes place in all military and civil domains. To justify and maintain this ascendancy, the military elite depends on different strategies that target the civil population and public through mass media, celebrities, and political rhetoric of threat and emergency. Mills critically examines the instrumentalization of mass media and its actors by power elites, particularly the military elite. He views mass media and celebrities as intermediaries within the power hierarchy. They serve as a mediation between the power elite at the top and the population at the bottom. The main reason that Mills describes them in this way is that he sees them as instruments of the power elite. They are "the middling units of power which neither express such will as exists at the bottom nor determine the decisions at the top" (Mills, 1956: 29). In other words, they aren't practically a part of the power elite because they don't have the power to decide. Yet, they aren't part of the bottom because they don't really represent nor express the opinions of the population.

Celebrities share the prestige with the elite but lack the decision-making power that comes with the power elite status. Simultaneously, they share with the population the common "ordinary" background that is not associated directly with the power elites. Hence, Mills considers them as means of distraction, individual persuasion, and providers of sensations within the communication institutions of the mass media that are used by the power elite (1956: 4, 74-84). They are distracting instruments in the sense that they occupy the public's attention and are displayed over and over under the spotlight of publicity (Mills, 1956: 92). Celebrities and their constant presence in the media crowd occupy the public's visual, mental, and emotional space, diverting attention from the power elite's power, decisions, and practices. The dominance of celebrity culture extends to the power elite itself, with elite members adopting celebrity-like behavior to gain publicity and integrate with the public's sphere. This blurring of lines between celebrities and power elites helps the latter avoid isolation and maintain a façade of shared publicity and power and relevance to the public (Mills, 1956: 71, 83). Conquestly, the power elite become material for the mass media and publicity besides the celebrities as it shall be seen in the case of Pharaohs' Golden Parade (2021) in Egypt. Furthermore, celebrities and mass media not only distract from

the power elite's concentration of power but also from individuals' reality and personal problems. By presenting a distorted image of reality and lacking in means to define the true reality, mass media production and its celebrities alienate the public and its individuals from understanding the true power dynamics and their own role within it (Mills, 1956: 315).

Despite highlighting the distracting role of celebrities, Mills does not confine the function of mass media to mere distraction. He argues that mass media also serves as a platform for expressing opinions, but under military ascendancy, this means of expression is controlled by the power elite, particularly the military elite (Mills, 1956: 305). In such a context, access to mass media becomes restricted to the power elite, resulting in a centralized and uniform opinion, definition of reality, and rhetoric that is favoured by the elite. Under military ascendancy, mass media becomes a vehicle for propagating a single, elite-favored narrative while marginalizing and suppressing critical alternative viewpoints. The media, thus, operates as a censored platform that only disseminates the power elite's perspective, stifling critical evaluations and opposition. Those who challenge the dominant narrative are often stigmatized as suspicious and inharmonious with the supposed national interests, further reinforcing the elite's control over public opinion (Mills, 1956: 220-222, 248). The strategic use of mass media under military dominance aims to manage and shape public opinion in line with the interests of the power elite, which are portrayed as aligning with the collective national interest. In this way, mass media not only distracts but also actively suppresses critical and alternative perspectives.

As a final strategy, Mills emphasizes the role of scholars and intellectuals, particularly historians, in shaping and maintaining the power structure. Through historians, nationalist history can be created, re-called, and celebrated to fit into the desired assumptions (1956: 358). Good historians are those who selectively re-interpret the past according to the conditions of the present to foster a sense of the optimistic national spirit. Similar to El-Haj's (2001) critical analysis of archaeology in the Israeli case and Ahmad's (2023) critical analysis of anthropology in the Indian case, Mills shows how the power structure under the military ascendency shape the role of intellectuals and the disciplines, especially history. Nationalist celebrations of history are not merely about commemorating and celebrating the past but about celebrating

the present through a lens of historical pride and continuity. The celebrators and those who are behind the celebrations celebrate the present based on a certain past that includes enthusiastic optimism and continuity of national pride. These past-based national celebrations can be done by the members of scientific institutions such as historians. A power elite member tends to think of himself as and believe that he is a representative and expressive of his nation with historically accumulated glory and pride echoing from the past (Mills, 1956: 357) That is why Mills believes that the nationalist American history becomes a common denominator that conserves and maintains the power mood of that time.

The impact of military ascendancy and its strategies on the civil public's position in the power structure is profound. Under such dominance, the public is increasingly excluded from decision-making and history-making processes. Furthermore, they become excluded from means of opinion-expression. As Mills argues, the public may experience terror and intimidation from the monocular propagated definitions of reality, which are framed within a context of danger, threat, and accusation of suspicion (Mills, 1956: 303). This environment creates a significant barrier to independent thought and critique from the power elite's perspective. Furthermore, the public becomes alienated from their own reality and problems, lacking a clear understanding of the power structure and their place within it (Mills, 1956: 321-322). Others become mere passive recipients of the official definition of reality that they can observe but can't be engaged with morally and critically (Mills, 1956: 337). In a context where rhetoric becomes a cloak and mass media becomes a means of military power elite, political activism by the public is marginalized and weakened (Mills, 1956: 91, 310, 335). Therefore, any debateability of the power elites' decisions and actions is not seizable mentally or materially (Mills, 1956: 355). Independent critical definitions of reality from the official definition are un-imaginable and unexpressed publicly. Structural marginalization and alienation of the critical active public are enforced and maintained. As a result, we have a society transforming from active public to passive masses: whether by force, voluntarily or both. The democratic process deteriorates into a facade of democracy, where democratic ideals are only a theoretical rhetoric rather than a living practice. Without active public who are allowed and able to form independent critical opinions, have access to express them publicly, expect their opinions to impact the decision-making process, and see the material

impact of their opinions on the decision-making process that creates history, we can't really speak of democracy (Mills, 1956: 353).

2.3. Bourdieu's Symbolic Violence

In his article, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field", Pierre Bourdieu (1994) rethinks the state by highlighting the mental and symbolic dimension of the state's power. One of the fundamental dimensions of the state's power is the power to produce and construct a mental structure that imposes specific categories of thought and perception (Bourdieu, 1994: 1). Building on Weber's description of the state, Bourdieu (1994) describes the state as a monopoly of "the legitimate use of physical and symbolic violence over a definite territory and over the totality of the corresponding population" (3). Physical violence manifests in the objective social structure of organizations and mechanisms while symbolic violence bases itself in the subjective structure of mental perception and thought. Hence, Bourdieu (1994) defines the state as a "culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital" (4). Species of capital are: physical force (police, army), economic, cultural or informational, and symbolic. The state's power lies in a pinnacle concentration of these different capitals.

Bourdieu argues that, within the state power structure, the three capitals of physical force, economy, and information are maintained and reproduced through symbolic capital that secures their recognition and legitimacy (1994: 6). Symbolic power constructs and imposes mental perception of the other capitals that make them recognized and valued by the social agents (Bourdieu, 1994: 8). In other words, the state's symbolic power produces a mental structure that enforces durable "principles of vision and division" of overall power structure that are recognized as natural and normal by the social agents (Bourdieu, 1994: 7, 9). This mental structure is shaped in a way that preserves the status quo of the state's power structure. Hence, the state monopolizes the means of production of perception and principles of vision and division. The significance of symbolic capital is its power to legitimize the constructed categories of thought and perception through naturalized and internalized recognition by social agents. For Bourdieu, the symbolic power of the state operates on a mental level through symbolic recognition of the state's authority by creating commonly

recognized and codified social rituals, values, and principles. The best manifestation of this operation is the bureaucratic communication between the state and the people. Bureaucracy symbolizes the state's power through its authority to validate and invalidate through certification, paperwork, and forms. In addition, bureaucracy mobilizes the symbolic capital of imposing a certain perception of itself and the state that associates it with symbolic values of neutrality, disinterestedness, and the public good (Bourdieu, 1994: 3, 17). This mental perception and these values of bureaucracy are paradoxical as they contradict their practices in reality that maintain the division and inequality of capital within the social structure.

In short, according to Bourdieu, the state functions through physical and symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is the monopolization of means of production of mental structure that impose categories of perception and thought that operate as mental frameworks for people to define their reality. This mental framework of perceiving is naturalized and internalized through social norms, values, and common sense within a situation of authority to regulate, certify, or deny. Therefore, this constructed perception is paradoxical and hypocritical as it serves its constructors and imposers through a symbolic recognition of the state's authority. Consequently, it maintains and reproduces the status quo with its power structure for the state, the culmination of all species of capitals, exercising symbolic violence. This theoretical analysis is conceptualized with the concept of symbolic violence.

2.4. The Power Theories and De-Democratization

While the three power theorists do not directly address de-democratization, their theories, as illustrated in figure 2.1., are relevant, particularity those of Mann and Mills. Both theorists explore the dynamics of power within modern democratic systems, how it operates, and its impacting factors. Mann argues that in a democratic power structure, the modern state's power functions through IP, which includes the means of IP accessible to both civil society and the state, creating a dialectical relationship between them. In contrast, under an authoritarian power structure, the state monopolizes the means of IP, consolidating both IP and DP. Therefore, when civil society has access to the means of IP, it reflects democratic practices within the power structures. Conversely, when the ruling state elite monopolizes these means and denies

civil society access, this reflects authoritarianism and authoritarian practices. The monopolization of the means of IP by the state can be understood as a key mechanism in de-democratization.

Therefore, I argue that Mubarak's 30 years of rule were authoritarian, during which the state monopolized of the means of IP to a great extent and denied civil society access. The period between 2011 and 2013, however, represents a democratization of the means of IP, as civil society gained access to these means. Finally, since 2013, we have seen harsh measures of monopolization and control over the means of IP by the counterrevolutionary military government, systematically excluding any critical civil society from these means. This is why I characterize the post-2013 counterrevolutionary practices as practices of de-democratization of means of IP. By consolidating the means of IP, centralizing them in the hands of the ruling elite, and denying access to the wider public after a brief period of democratization, I argue that the post-2013 counterrevolutionary government employs strategies of de-democratization.

Mills directly analyzes the threats to democratizing practices and the democratic process under the ascendancy of the military power elite in politics and economics. He critiques the strategies through which the power elites, particularly the military, maintain the alienation of the wider public and civil society from the means of decision-making, critical expression, and the construction of alternative narratives to the official one. Through mass media, celebrities, and uncritical intellectuals, the (military) power elites alienate the public from reality, excluding it from both the means of decision-making and history-making. Mills identifies strategies that weaken democratic practices, critical thinking, public engagement, political agency, and activism—strategies employed by the power elites to preserve and reproduce their position within the power structure. I refer to these strategies as de-democratizing strategies. These de-democratizing strategies, based on various institutions and actors within the fields of media and education, contribute to the structural alienation and marginalization of the public, undermining their active role in the decision-making process.

Finally, while Bourdieu does not examine democratic and undemocratic structures and practices as explicitly as Mann and Mills, he provides an insightful perspective on the operation of power in the modern state. Bourdieu conceptualizes state power through its monopolization of physical violence and symbolic violence. Symbolic violence, in particular, is deeply ingrained, justified, and reproduced through the daily interactions between the state's non-violent institutions—such as bureaucracy, mass education, and legislation—and social agents. This form of violence subtly enforces the recognition of state authority and its constructed visions of reality, perpetuating an unequal and unjust power structure. By integrating Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence with Mann's authoritarianism and Mills' militarization, we can argue that authoritarian regimes and military power elites instrumentalize and mobilize the state's symbolic capital and symbolic violence to enforce, legitimize, and reproduce their domination over the power structure. Under a counterrevolutionary authoritarian military regime, the mobilization of symbolic capital and the deployment of symbolic violence become deliberate strategies to produce and impose meanings and visions aligned with their power structure, systematically denying symbolic capital to others. This process of (re)producing mental structures, visions of reality, and symbolic meanings through the state's symbolic capital is what I refer to as the de-democratizing means of producing symbolic meanings and visions of reality.

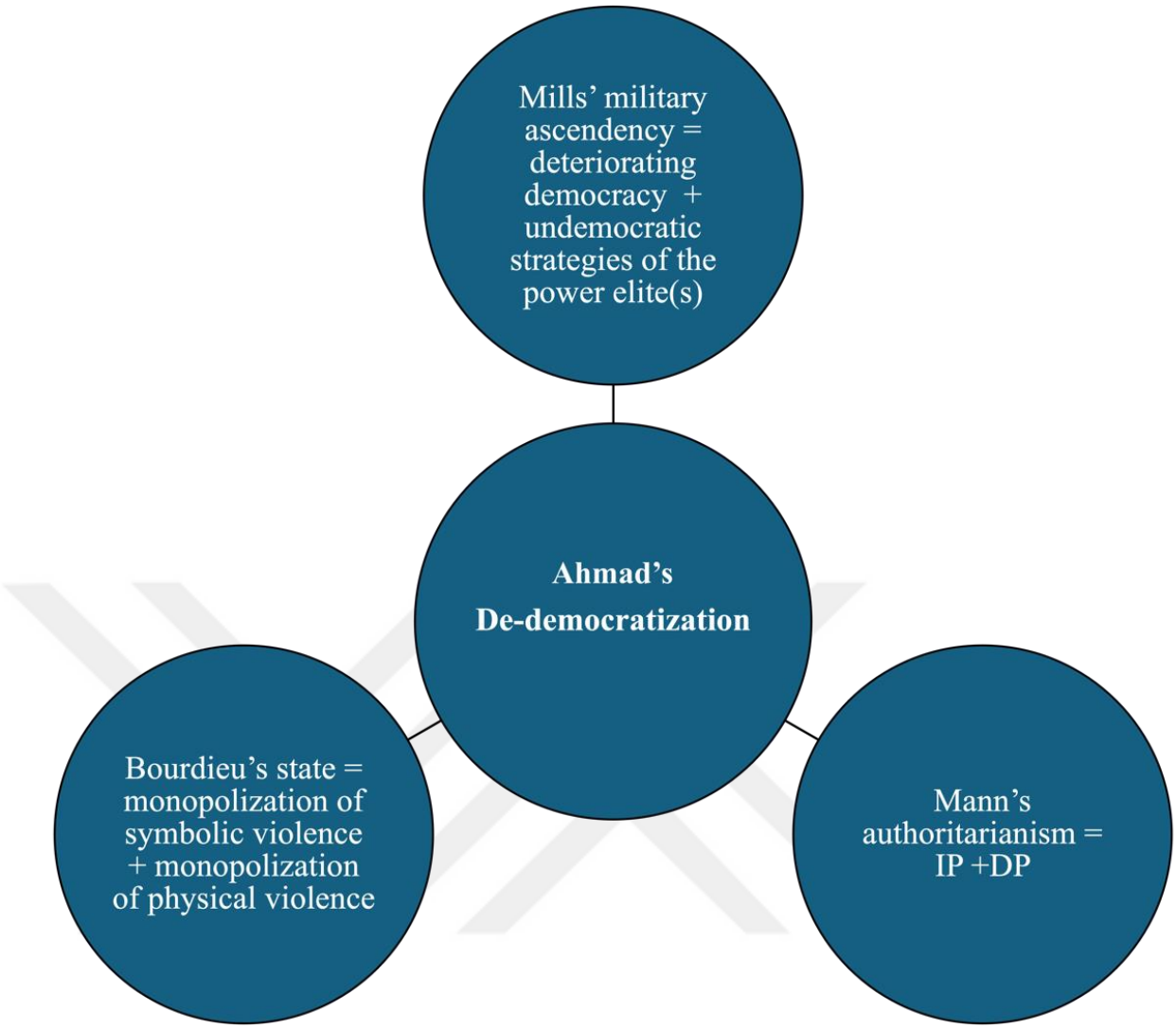

Figure 2.1. A Diagram of De-Democratization and the Three Power Theories

2.5. Synthesization and Application

Based on the theoretical discussions of Mann, Mills, and Bourdieu, the theoretical framework of this dissertation can be defined by synthesizing and combining their ideas. This framework is characterized by three pivotal themes that are common between Mann, Mills, and Bourdieu. The first theme is the conceptualization of the power structure. In Mann's theoretical discussion, we encounter state elites and the general authoritarian concept, which may or may not be situated within a counter-revolutionary context. For Mills, the focus is on power elites and the more specific context of military ascendancy. Finally, for Bourdieu, the main concentration is the mental dimension of the state's power structure. When these concepts are woven

together, we arrive at studying the mental dimension of authoritarian military elite power structure within a counter-revolutionary context.

The second common theme is how power within this structure is exercised and maintained. Firstly, according to Mann, power is exercised through Infrastructural Power (IP) and Despotic Power (DP) in authoritarian regimes. Secondly, Mills refers to more specific strategies employed by state institutions and actors. Thirdly, for Bourdieu, the state's power operates through symbolic violence and symbolic capital that construct mental structures of perception that justify and maintain the state's power. Mill's strategies can indeed be situated within Mann's general definitions of IP and DP and Bourdieu's definition of symbolic power. The three theorists address differently material and immaterial infrastructural means and capitals such as institutions of mass media and communication, education, architectural buildings and infrastructure, and bureaucracy which can fall under Mann's IP and Bourdieu's symbolic power. Additionally, Mann and Mills discuss the arbitrary exploitation and monopolization of these means—Mann in the context of an authoritarian regime and Mills within the framework of military power elites, which pertains to DP. While Bourdieu talks about modern states in general, specifically their historical development, his theoretical conceptualization of symbolic power is flexible to be applied to different contexts of modern states. Mills provides a detailed explanation of how the military power elite's strategies instrumentalize these infrastructural means and institutions, indicating a monopolization of symbolic capital. This aligns closely with Mann's broader theoretical conceptualizations of IP and DP and Bourdieu's wider conceptualization of state's symbolic power. In this regard, the theories of Mann, Mills, and Bourdieu complement each other within this theoretical framework.

Finally, the third theme is the impact of this power structure and its strategies on civil society, the active public, or the social agents, particularly in regard to their relationship to power and socio-political-economic decision-making. As discussed, Mills and Mann address the suppression, alienation, and exclusion of civil society and the active public by the power holders as a result of this power structure and strategies. Mann focuses on deprivation of social and civil rights according to types of citizenship. In contrast, Mills emphasizes the decline in democratic indicators such as free expression, active political agency, and access to means of decision-making and

history-making. On the other hand, Bourdieu provides another perspective on the state's symbolic power's impact on its citizens as social agents. The result of symbolic violence is producing social agents who naturalize, internalize, and recognize the state's authority symbolically and act based on it without the need for physical violence. This happens by monopolizing the production of mental structures of perception through state institutions of law, education, and bureaucracy. By combining these perspectives, we obtain a comprehensive theoretical framework for analyzing the counter-democratization process and its strategies. Based on these three common themes, the theoretical framework of this dissertation is designed to analyze the symbolic and infrastructural power-based strategies used to marginalize and eliminate the active public and to reinforce the power of the authoritarian military elite in a counter-revolution context.

Now the specification of the theoretical framework in relation to my study is in order. To analyze the governmental project of Tahrir Square's urban development, I will rely mainly on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of Mann and Bourdieu. By applying Mann's theoretical framework of the state's infrastructural power and authoritarianism, I will examine the role Tahrir Square has played as a physical and mental infrastructural center for both the Egyptian State and the Egyptian civil society, especially from the 2011 uprising onwards. Here, I don't refer to the infrastructural characteristic of the place such as the roads, rather, I refer to the power to control, enforce, and produce the place's narratives and symbolism through different institutions or organizations, whether belonging to the state or the civil society. According to Mann, infrastructural power is a two-way channel. It can be utilized by the state to rule through the society. On the other hand, it can be utilized by civil society to participate in the socio-political power structure. As mentioned earlier, under authoritarian regimes, infrastructural power is monopolized by the state to impose its despotic power. However, this changed with the 2011 uprising. The 2011 uprising represents a conflict between the authoritarian regime and the civil society over the infrastructural power, physically and mentally. This conflict is embodied in Tahrir Square as we shall see in the analysis part. In the early days of 2011, we see a violent conflict between the demonstrators and the state's violent institution of police to take over the square. We also see how the state utilizes its institutions of infrastructural power such as mass communication and mass transportation to obscure the protests

from communicating and reaching Tahrir Square (BBC Arabic, 2011) While the communication channels of social media were utilized by civil society to gather and spread the calls for protests in 2011, the authoritarian regime utilized the state's infrastructural power to ban the internet and all telecommunications after a couple of days of protests. Likemore mass transportation was used by the civil society to reach Tahrir Square and gather there for the protests, the state ordered the metro lines to not stop at Sadat's metro station, the leading station to Tahrir Square. As we shall see in the analysis section, I argue that the dialectical conflict over the means of infrastructural power between the state and civil society was present until 2013 with the 2011 uprising. From 2013 onwards, as the military elite seizes power, we see a restoration of the state's full monopolization of infrastructural power within the counterrevolution context. However, the monopolization of infrastructural power under Sisi's authoritarianism takes a different shape, yet, more despotic.

By applying Mann's theoretical framework, I aim to offer a review of the shifts of accessibility and monopolization of the means of infrastructural power between the state and civil society, through the case of Tahrir Square. In light of this critical reading, I seek to analyze the government's urban development project of Tahrir Square in 2021. I argue that "developing" Tahrir Square is another form of restoring the state's monopolization of infrastructural power by utilizing different institutions to materialize this massive reconstruction that included archaeological, urban planning, and security apparatuses of the state. While Mann's theoretical framework provides an assisting lens to analyze the process of infrastructural power dynamics shifts that are seen through Tahrir Square from 2011 to 2020, the outcomes of these shifts remain uncovered. This is where I find Bourdieu's conceptual framework of symbolic violence helpful.

Bourdieu's symbolic power is applied to comparatively understand how the Egyptian state enforces its domination and control over the city center of Tahrir Square before 2011, and after 2013, especially with the 2020 urban development project. As explained earlier, according to Bourdieu, states function through symbolic and physical power. While physical power refers to the monopoly of legitimate violence, symbolic power refers to the monopoly of symbolic violence that operates through symbolic capital. The symbolic capital allows the construction and production of

mental structures and perceptions that legitimize the state and its monopoly of legitimate violence. Hence, the state's physical and symbolic power have a complementary and dependent relationship. This symbolic capital is rooted within legislations, norms, and values that are socially and culturally naturalized and recognized as symbols of power and authority by the social agents. Bureaucracy with its authority to certify, validate, invalidate, and revoke, through the role of regulating and serving the people, is the best manifestation of the state's symbolic power that is naturalized and recognized. As shall be explained in the analysis part, Tahrir Square has been a centre of the Egyptian state's symbolic power since its construction, especially after the establishment of the republic in 1952. Tahrir's complex, known as Al-Mogama, the state's most massive centralized administrative building of all bureaucratic procedures and paperwork, was located in Tahrir Square. In addition to Mogama, various administrative buildings and headquarters of the Arab League and Nasser's socialism were established (Stewart, 1999).

Through the state's administrative bureaucratic buildings and governmental official headquarters, the state's symbolic power was centralized and embodied in Tahrir Square. Hence, the state's control over the city center was enforced through the constant presence of its symbolic power in the Square. With the 2011 uprising ousting Mubarak's 30+ authoritarian regime, control over the Square was shifted from the state to the Egyptian public. The people redefined the symbol of Tahrir Square materially and immaterially. Material redefinition of the square was through physical occupation and visual works. Immaterial redefinition was through the perception of the place as the center of people's power of will and revolting rather than the state's power to control and suppress. From 2013 to 2019, the state restored its power over the Square through the direct exercising of physical capital that can be seen in the violent suppression and dispersal of demonstrators. From 2020 onwards, the state's control and surveillance over Tahrir Square will depend on the state's symbolic capital. In 2020, the state redefined Tahrir Square and imposed a new mental and material perception of it through a governmental project of urban development. The new project reconstructed the square as an "open-air museum" that displays ancient Egyptian antiquities (Ahram Online, 2020) The state's power over the Square after 2020 doesn't rely on physical violence. It doesn't also rely on the symbolic violence of the constant presence of the state through official buildings and headquarters as was the case before

the 2011 uprising. Rather, it relies on a different form of symbolic violence that mobilizes and monopolizes the means of producing perception and mental structure. This produced perception and mental structure doesn't only redefine the square symbolically and visually to replace, marginalize, and eliminate its symbolism revolution. They also redefine the ruling elite and their legitimacy in relation to virtuous values of national glory, success, and achievements. This shall be explored in detail in the fourth chapter.

Finally, Tahrir Square project (2020) took place as a part of preparation for another mega event, the Pharoahs' Golden Parade (2021). According to the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities' official website, the mega event was about "22 mummies will gracefully roam the streets of Cairo from the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir to the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization" (Ministry of Tourism and Archaeology, 2021a) . The parade was prepared to be broadcasted world-wide through TV and internet platforms. In manifestations of glory and celebration of the ancient Egyptian past, 22 mummies were transferred from Tahrir's Egyptian Museum to the recently built, the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization. Between the two museums, the royal mummies passed through Tahrir Square as a milestone. The event was intended by the president, Sisi, along with different national and international ministers. The ceremony depended on the participation of the Egyptian celebrities of artists and actors and actresses. The event included costumes, songs, orchestra, media coverage, and speeches centered around the continuous glorious past of the Egyptians.

To connect the two mega events with each other and both with the bigger socio-political structure, Mills' theoretical framework of the process of military power elite's ascendancy in the power structure, their strategies, and their effect of the balance of the overall power structure is applied. More specifically, Mills' theoretical and conceptual framework of militarization, military-industrial complex, celebrities and mass media, and national celebrations will be applied to examine critically the relationship between i) the structural power relations under the post-2013 military power elite, ii) the mega-events and projects, iii) and the role of institutions of media, celebrities, and intellectuals of history and archeology. By applying Mills' framework of militarization, I aim to analyze the socio-political economic power structure of Egypt through examining different actors of power elites in addition to the Egyptian

public. Through this step, I seek to provide a context of the power structure in relation to different actors to understand where these mega-events are taking place. That is to say, I connect these mega-events with the wider socio-political and economic power structure to provide a critical analysis of them. To establish this connection, the role of power elites, Egyptian public, and other medium institutions and figures should be examined to realize who has access to the means of power structure to decide, plan, and contribute to the decision making process of these national events that are depicted as a representation of the whole nation. Conceptually, the established analytical dynamic connection between the socio-political-historical context, the studied projects, and the power relations of the participating parties, is what I call a de-democratization process and I refer to its manifestations as de-democratizing strategies.

CHAPTER III

URBAN DEVELOPMENT OR DE-DEMOCRATIZATION OF SPACE?

In November 2020, following nearly a year of global and local COVID-19 lockdowns, Egyptian media outlets celebrated the completion of the urban development project at Tahrir Square (Zidan, Shawky, Al-Youm Al-Sabi' , 2020). The project was initiated directly by the presidency and assigned to various ministries and state institutions in mid-2019 (Magdy, 2019; Al-Youm Al-Sabi', 2019a). This urban development effort was part of the broader strategic plan known as Egypt Vision 2030, which addresses economic and infrastructural planning projects, including the construction of the New Administrative Capital (NAC), overseen by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development to improve the daily lives of Egyptian citizens (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning, Economic Development & International Cooperation, n.d.). Alongside these announcements of urban development projects in the media's reality, Egypt witnessed one of its last waves of protest in September 2019 on the street's reality. This protest wave was triggered by Egyptian businessman Mohamed Ali, who accused the military of squandering millions on luxurious projects for the military elite, while the majority of Egyptians faced poverty under an economic austerity policy (BBC, 2019). Protestors sought to gather at Tahrir Square, as they did in 2011, but were blocked and dispersed while trying to reach it. This paradox between the celebratory media portrayal of national development and the street-level reality of struggle and anger raises a simple yet fundamental question: who do these projects actually serve?

These national projects and achievements, such as the urban development of Tahrir Square and the NAC, are introduced, implemented, and celebrated within a contradictory and paradoxical reality, as briefly outlined above. Thus, a critical examination of these events and projects is required to gain a more holistic and alternative understanding of the Egyptian situation post-2013. This chapter focuses on

the governmental urban development project at Tahrir Square (2020) by addressing the following questions: What might be the government's motives for this project? Who contributed to its decision-making process? How does the government view this project? Who has access to Tahrir Square after 2013, and what types of activities, if any, are permitted there? What symbols, meanings, and narratives were attached to Tahrir Square prior to its "development" that began in 2020, and what new symbols, meanings, and narratives have been imposed since then? Lastly, how does this project reflect and relate to broader shifts in socio-political structure and power dynamics?

To answer these questions, this chapter critically analyzes the discourse used by the government and local media platforms in covering the Tahrir Square project, as well as their narrative on Tahrir Square's history during establishment, the 2011 uprising, and after 2013. Additionally, this chapter examines reported changes in public accessibility to Tahrir Square via transportation and roads during the 2011 uprising and after 2013. Changes in accessibility and allowable activities at the square serve as indicators of shifts within the socio-political and economic power dynamics. The chapter concludes with a visual analysis of Tahrir Square following its urban "development" project, linking it with the Pharaohs' Golden Parade (2021), the theme of the next chapter.

The central argument is that the urban development project at Tahrir Square is not merely a developmental initiative but rather a manifestation of the broader de-democratization process under the military regime. This de-democratization seeks to transform the square both physically and symbolically: physically, by limiting public access and restricting activities through symbolic violence or monopolizing the infrastructural power; symbolically, by stripping the site of symbols, meanings, and narratives connected to the Egyptian public and their 2011 revolt. In the context of the post-2013 counterrevolution, the military power elite has actively worked to marginalize and erase any historical narratives and memories that could challenge their authority. Consequently, the Tahrir Square urban development project is part of a broader de-democratization strategy, systematically marginalizing the Egyptian public, erasing their revolt narrative, and extinguishing the memory of their brief but exemplary period of active empowerment between 2011 and 2013.

This argument will be discussed throughout this chapter in three parts. First, a brief historical review of Tahrir Square will provide an introduction to its historical significance, including its history from its construction until 2011 and how this history is presented on official state websites. Second, I will provide a detailed analysis of Tahrir Square's pivotal role in 2011, focusing on the changes in power dynamics within the Square during the uprising, how it was occupied, by whom, and how it was later visually and symbolically transformed. Finally, the chapter will examine the shifts in power dynamics surrounding Tahrir Square after 2013, emphasizing the condition of public access, permitted activities, and the government-led reconstruction efforts through various projects and events. As discussed in the second chapter, these analyses will be conducted through critical discourse analysis of news, media platforms, and government websites. Local media platforms and newsagents, such as Al-Masri Al-youm, Al-Youm Al-Sabi', and Al-Ahram, will be used in analyzing the repeated discourse in the daily news on Tahrir Square during 2013 and onwards. International newsagents' data of news and reports will be included for the sequence of historical events during 2011 and 2013. Finally official governmental websites will be used in analyzing the state's discourse on Tahrir Square, its establishment, and its governmental projects.

3.1. Tahrir Square's Historical Narratives

On the Official Portal of Cairo Governorate, Tahrir Square is described as "the heart of Cairo" and Cairo's "gateway" in three articles that briefly introduce it as the governorate's center (Midan Al-Tahrir-Official Portal of Cairo Governorate ,Cairo's Most Famous Square-Official Portal of Cairo Governorate , Tahrir Square-Official Portal of Cairo Governorate). Described as Cairo's most famous square, it is considered the city's central hub, connecting its major streets and squares. It is also surrounded by notable governmental, touristic, and service institutions, including the Tahrir Complex, the Arab League headquarters, the Egyptian Museum, and Qasr Al Aini Hospital. The history of Tahrir Square dates back to the reign of Khedive Ismail in the late 19th century, a descendant of Muhammad Ali's dynasty. Khedive Ismail's rule is described as a transformative period marked by numerous urban changes inspired by Western architectural and urban styles. His goal was to shift the city center

from old Cairo, also known as Fatimid Cairo, to a new center of a more “modern” and “Western” style and architecture.

In the new city center, Khedive Ismail (1863-1879) sought to introduce modern Western architecture and infrastructure by constructing squares, wide roads, expansive public gardens, opera houses, palaces, and modern barracks (Cairo's Most Famous Square-Official Portal of Cairo Governorate). This new center became surrounded by neighborhoods of upper and elite classes, symbolizing the centralization of not only political and military power but also social and cultural prestige. In this sense, Ismail realized his goal of establishing a new city center that embodied Western modernism, both architecturally and culturally. Within the 19th-century city center of new Cairo, Tahrir Square was planned with specific reference to Paris’s Place de l'Étoile in 1869. According to the governorate’s official website, Tahrir Square’s location was originally part of a desert landscape during Ancient Egypt. After the establishment of Fatimid Cairo, the flow of the Nile altered, filling this area with water during floods. Over time, as the water receded, the area turned into military encampments under Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in the late 18th century. The area became more habitable during the time of Muhammad Ali, “the founder of modern Egypt” as he is referred to in the government website, through his infrastructural projects like dams to manage the Nile floods (Cairo's Most Famous Square-Official Portal of Cairo Governorate). Thus, it became environmentally feasible to build in the area under Ismail’s reign.

During its construction, the Square was not yet named Tahrir; instead, it was called Ismailiyah Square, in honor of its founder, Khedive Ismail (Midan Al-Tahrir-Official Portal of Cairo Governorate , Tahrir Square-Official Portal of Cairo Governorate). Plans initially included a statue of Ismail to stand at the center of the square, but these plans were interrupted by a whole power structure shift within the political system in 1952. The statue only arrived after the 1952 “revolution,” which saw the monarchy abolished and an “independent republic” established (Tahrir Square-Official Portal of Cairo Governorate). With the establishment of the republic, which marked the end of British colonialism in Egypt, the square was renamed “Al-Tahrir,” which translates in Arabic to “liberation.” According to introductory articles on official websites, Tahrir Square has consistently played a major role in significant moments in modern Egyptian history. According to the governorate’s portal, these include anti-British protests in the

early 20th century, the rallying of volunteer citizens to fight against the Tripartite Aggression in 1956, protests against Abdel Nasser's resignation after the 1967 *Naksa*, student demonstrations in 1972 against Sadat's delay in confronting the Israeli invasion, celebrations of the 1973 victory over Israeli forces, and the “two revolutions” of January 25, 2011, and June 30, 2013 (Cairo's Most Famous Square-Official Portal of Cairo Governorate).

The introduction to Tahrir Square’s historical background in these governmental website articles echoes Egypt's dominant discourse of the national historical narrative, a perspective commonly reinforced through media and educational institutions. Examining the language used, which is widely familiar, through a critical lens reveals a state-centric discourse in the historical narrative of modern Egypt. For instance, the term “revolution” is used to describe every political shift, including the 1952 transition from monarchy to republic. In fact, scientifically and historically speaking, it was a military coup led by a group of junior military officers called the “Free Officers” and headed by Abdel Nasser in the 1940s (Cleveland & Bunton, 2008: 303). The Free Officers were military bureaucrats without elite backgrounds in monarchy, aristocracy, or land ownership (Cleveland & Bunton, 2008: 304). However, as organized officers of the military, they held a position within the power structure. Their aims were twofold: a nationalist goal to end British colonialism and a social one to abolish the feudal social structure that perpetuated severe inequality between landowners and peasants. Thus, overthrowing the monarchy through a military coup became the means to fulfill these aims in 1952 (Cleveland & Bunton, 2008: 305).

The term "revolution" is also used to describe the events of 2011 and 2013 in the articles, which becomes problematic upon critical analysis. In scholarly discourse on the political transitions of these years, there is considerable debate over the appropriate terminology to describe these events. However, it is crucial to note that the two transitions are not equated due to several significant factors. Three crucial distinctions can be summarized as follows: i) the role of the public, ii) the role of the military, and iii) who was aimed to be decentralized and who was aimed to be centralized within the power dynamics of the political structure. In examining the Egyptian experience of the Arab Spring, which began on January 25, 2011, the pivotal role of the aggrieved public as the primary actor in the uprising cannot be overlooked, despite the subsequent

involvement of various institutional actors, including civil society groups that adopted supportive stances and the military which remained neutral. Setting aside the political implications of the military's neutrality and the potential for its instrumentalization of the uprising, it was fundamentally the Egyptian people who ignited the initial spark of dissent. The protests were predominantly led by Egyptian youth, who organized demonstrations on social media against the authoritarian regime and its violence, particularly following the torture and death of Khaled Said at the hands of police (Elshaheeed, 2011). The rapid progression from protests to marching in Tahrir Square, culminating in an 18-day sit-in, was both unexpected and unprecedented. The driving force behind this accelerating tension was, unequivocally, the state violence against the Egyptian public. It's clear that the aim was to overthrow Mubarak's regime and replace it with a democratically elected regime, even if there was no future agenda or alternative political leadership that led to fragmentation in the revolutionaries camp later (Kandil, 2016, 335). The events unfolded in such a way that led to the anticipated outcome of Mubarak's ousting, followed by elections in 2012, during which Egypt saw its first democratically elected president from the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohamed Morsi.

In contrast, the purity and genuineness of the collective action on June 30, 2013 are debatable. While it is true that Tahrir Square was once again occupied by an unprecedented numbers of protesters demanding the resignation of Morsi and his government, and that many anti-Islamist and anti-Muslim Brotherhood revolutionaries from the January 25 uprising joined these protests, another critical factor must not be overlooked: the role of mobilization by the military and Mubarak's regime men. The mobilization of the Egyptian public was not merely a rhetorical endeavor fueled by anti-Islamist media; some protesters were reportedly paid to participate by the old regime of Mubarak's men (Kandil, 2016, 336). In less than a month, Abdelfattah Sisi, who was the minister of defense under Morsi's government, personally called for mass protests on July 27, urging citizens to delegate him the authority to fight 'terror' (Kandil, 2016, 339). It is important to note that while protesters accepted the army's intervention to remove the Muslim Brotherhood from power, the opposition activists and anti-Islamist revolutionaries did not anticipate that the military would seize power for itself. Instead, they expected the military's intervention to result in the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood and the establishment of another democratically elected

civilian president (Kandil, 2016, 338). The aimed outcome wasn't to bring the military to power but was to remove the MB from power and to re-elect another civilian government democratically. However, the situation took a radical turn in 2013 after a very brief experience of democratization between 2012 and 2013.

Compared to the events of 2011, two main differences emerge between the political transitions of 2011 and 2013: i) the initiatives and spark of the uprisings, and ii) the expectations versus the actual outcomes. In 2011, the Egyptian public did not need to be mobilized to occupy the streets; the protests were sparked by Egyptian youths responding to escalating state terror against them. Their aim was to overthrow a 30-year authoritarian regime and ensure civilian access to the power structure by establishing a democratically elected government. This aim was partially realized with the 2012 elections, which marked Egypt's first democratic vote. In contrast, by 2013, while the Egyptian public remained active in the streets, their initiatives were not the sole drivers of the protests. There was a deliberate mobilization facilitated through media campaigns and, reportedly, financial incentives for participation. Notably, in the month following June 30, Sisi himself called for mass protests to demonstrate public support for his war against 'terror.' The concept of 'war of terror' was deployed excessively by Sisi to justify and normalize the regime's violence against its enemy, the Muslim Brotherhood, in the eyes of international and national audiences (Ahmad, 2013). The actual outcome of a military-led government aborting the democratization process was not what people had sought in 2013. Although many wanted the Muslim Brotherhood out of power, they did not desire a military general to replace them. This shift in power dynamics was not aligned with the Egyptian public's aspirations for democracy and active political agency, which had been fervently expressed in 2011 at Tahrir Square. The military seizure of political power in 2013 was not the will of the Egyptian public, despite how it has been framed in the state discourse within the historical narrative of Tahrir Square's significance as I shall discuss in the coming section.

The danger of generalizing the term "revolution" to encompass the 1952 coup, the 2011 uprising, and the 2013 mass coup lies not only in distorting history by imposing a singular narrative aligned with state discourse but also in fostering a misleading perception of public involvement and political agency in these events. When these

distinct political transitions are labeled as revolutions, readers may implicitly assume that the public played a decisive role as active decision-makers within the power structure during these occurrences and their outcomes. This assumption positions them as the true history-makers of these moments, which may not accurately reflect the realities of the situations, as previously illustrated in the contexts of 1952 and 2013. However, it remains essential for the state to construct and uphold a narrative that emphasizes the political agency of the populace. In the discourse on national projects and achievements, such as the urban and infrastructural development of Tahrir Square, the ruling elite, like Khedive Ismail, are credited for their initiatives. Conversely, when discussing significant shifts in power structures and dynamics—such as the events of 1952, 2011, and 2013—the narrative typically shifts from the power elites to depict the people as the driving force behind these outcomes. It is important to clarify that this does not imply the Egyptian public was entirely absent or passive during these events, nor does it suggest that the results of these transitions do not represent the Egyptian populace at all. Instead, my aim is to present a critical and alternative historical narrative by deconstructing the dominant discourse that is often taken for granted. A more nuanced understanding of these events can be achieved through a comparative lens that examines the primary actors, their roles and objectives, and the outcomes of each event, as briefly outlined above.

What is particularly intriguing is that not all uprisings that occurred in Tahrir Square are acknowledged in the historical introductory articles on the governmental website. While several protests are mentioned and described in various ways depending on the state's selective narrative, one significant uprising is notably absent: the 1977 Bread Riots. In January 1977, *The New York Times* reported: "thousands of Egyptian students and workers stormed through central Cairo and other cities today in an outburst of anger over price increases ordered by the Government on a wide range of goods" (The New York Times, 1977). The announced price hikes for bread and other essential commodities, implemented by President Sadat, sparked widespread outrage, leading to the occupation of Tahrir Square by students and workers. As was typical in such situations, the protests were met with severe violence, arrests, and the firing of tear gas. A review of the history of protests in Tahrir Square, from 1919 to 2013, reveals that nearly every anti-government demonstration faced violent repression (British Pathe, 1972). The only notable exception to this pattern of state violence occurred

during the 2013 anti-Morsi protests. In 2019, in a similar context of anti-Sadat Bread Riots in 1977 where “Down Sadat!” was chanted, the Egyptians went to the streets attempting to reach Tahrir Square while chanting “Down Sisi!” amid the worsening economic conditions faced by Egyptians. The 2019 protests against Sisi, like any other anti-government protest except for anti-Morsi protests, were similarly met with state violence and suppression, particularly to prevent demonstrators from reaching Tahrir Square (The New York Times, 2019). Notably, it was during 2019 that the coup government announced the urban development project of Tahrir Square. Despite referencing various protests such as those in 1919, 1972, 1973, 2011, and 2013, the official historical introduction of Tahrir Square omits any mention of the 1977 Bread Riots or the 2019 protests against poverty, revealing thereby a selective narrative that serves to obscure certain elements of Egypt’s protest history.

From this critical analysis of the discourse used to narrate the history of Tahrir Square on Cairo Governorate’s official website, we can identify three main ideas that aid us in examining the contemporary urban development project of Tahrir Square. The first idea is that urban transformation and development are deeply rooted in the socio-political structures shaped by power dynamics between elites and the populace. This implies that any urban development project cannot be divorced from the underlying political context that influences it. The second idea is that urban development initiatives, particularly regarding Tahrir Square, have consistently been associated with narratives of modernization and progress, which are portrayed as achievements of the government. This framing serves to legitimize the actions of the ruling power and to foster a sense of national pride. Finally, the place’s historical narrative, stories, memories, and events are always subjected to the ruling power elites’ discourse. A dominant discourse within a historical narrative decides two crucial processes. Firstly, the process of choosing which events to be centralized and which events to be marginalized within a historical narrative, even if we talk about contemporary or recent events. Secondly, the process of how to describe, label, and remember the event. As an example of the first process, 1972 Bread Riots and 2019 anti-Sisi protests aren’t referred to at all among events of uprisings and protesting. On the other hand, in the case of 1952 and 2013 political transitions, the events are mentioned and referred to. Yet, they are labeled and memorialized as “revolution.” These are the examples of the

second process. These key ideas are the bases of my critical understanding and analysis of Tahrir Square's project of urban development (2020) by Sisi's regime.

Before delving into Tahrir Square's role in the events of the 2011 uprising, the 2013 protests, and the aftermath of 2013, a short context regarding the power dynamics of the square helps to understand the significance of the events in 2011 and 2013. As noted previously, the Square was founded in 1867, embodying urbanization, modernization, and westernization under Khedive Ismail (Abdelazim, 2021: 28, 29). It became the new center of the city after the relocation from Fatimid Cairo. As a new center, neighborhoods of elites and upper classes developed around the area, reflecting their aristocratic and modern lifestyles. During the British colonization of Egypt between 1882 and 1952, the Square was occupied by British troops and used as military barracks (Abdelazim, 2021: 43). Accessibility to the Square under British occupation was limited to foreigners and their business activities (Abdelazim, 2021: 36). With the anti-colonial struggle beginning in the early 20th century and leading up to 1952, clashes with British troops occurred in Tahrir Square until the British evacuated following the Free Officers' coup and the transition to a republic. After the British left, the Square was nationalized and indigenized under Nasser (Abdelazim, 2021: 39).

According to Mariam Abdelazim, a researcher specialized in philosophy of urbanism and the case of Tahrir Square, Nasser was aware of the significance of Tahrir Square and subjected it to deliberate transformation that symbolized the new independent pan-Arabist national identity (Abdelazim, 2021: 71). This transformation included placing the Arab League building there, adding advertisements for national and international brands, and turning the Tahrir building (named Mogama) into the largest bureaucratic administrative building (Abdelazim, 2021: 72). Mogama represents the most blatant material manifestation of the state's authoritative power exercised over the citizens (Abdelazim, 2021: 73). Every document, permit, and paperwork procedure had to be obtained from the Mogama. It became deeply associated with the symbol of the exhausting, arbitrary, and inefficient bureaucratic system of the state. Under Nasser, the square evolved into a civic space that allowed complex dynamics between the people and the state. People had access to the square and engaged in various interactions and activities there, while the state's power and presence were enforced

through the different administrative buildings. Additionally, the square was redesigned to include modernized and globalized symbols, exemplified by the Hilton hotel's construction, signaling that Egypt was modernizing and ready to join the global capitalist system as an independent state (Abdelazim, 2021: 79-80). “Tahrir became a mixed-use, open space where you could find a tourist visiting the Egyptian Museum or staying at a five-star hotel, rubbing shoulders with a middle or lower-class Egyptian, finishing some paperwork or shopping nearby, or a government official whose office was located there” (Abdelazim, 2021: 81). Hence, the square became a landscape that gathered different classes and backgrounds, with visitors pursuing various aims.

Under Sadat and Mubarak, with the accelerating globalization and mass transportation systems, alongside Sadat’s policy of open doors (*infitah*), the nature of Tahrir Square changed. It became primarily a transportation hub. Yet, it didn’t lose its role as a platform for protests, public funerals, or public events (Abdelazim, 2021: 83-85). In the 1970s, Tahrir Square witnessed various anti-Sadat riots and pro-Sadat celebrations for victory against the Israeli invasion, as mentioned earlier. The Square became more populated and commercialized with the opening of international restaurants. It also served as a social interactive location for activists and intellectuals who occupied the Square’s cafes (Abdelazim, 2021: 87). As the infitah policy was adopted, downtown was gradually marginalized in favor of a new class of businessmen investing in the construction of prestigious cities and commercial malls beyond the downtown area, first under Sadat and even more so under Mubarak. During the 1980s and 1990s, construction and dust were ever-present because the main urban attention and investments were not focused on Tahrir Square (Abdelazim, 2021: 88). However, Tahrir Square maintained its political function as an expressive platform in 2003 to protest against the American invasion of Iraq and in 2006 to show support for Lebanon against the Israeli invasion (Abdelazzim, 2020: 89). The peak of Tahrir Square’s functionality as an expressive platform occurred in January 2011.

In short, until 2011, Tahrir Square functioned as a social, cultural, political, economic, touristic, and bureaucratic space. Through Mann's (1984) analytic lens discussed in the second chapter, Tahrir Square can be characterized as a central point within the infrastructure of the capital city, situated within the territory of the Egyptian State. Power over this infrastructural center was, to a certain extent, dialectical. In Bourdieu’s

(1994) terms, the state exerted soft and constant control over the square through its existing symbolic power, embodied in the imposing administrative building of Mogama. While less frequent, the public and civil society would occasionally access and occupy the square, utilizing it as a platform for expression. Most of the time, the state maintained control over the area; however, it still allowed space for daily social interactions among various social groups, including ordinary citizens, intellectuals, educated youth, and tourists. The state's control over the square was not absolute, as the public had access to it and could occupy it for protests. This reflects the dialectical nature of power dynamics between the people and the state during times of upheaval. In periods of stability, the square was predominantly dominated and controlled by the state through manifestations of symbolic power, yet it still provided opportunities for socialization and daily activities. This nature of power dynamics and the normalized state control over the square through symbolic power would undergo a radical transformation between January 2011 and June 2013, and again from August 2013 onward.

3.2. Democratizing Tahrir Square from 2011 to 2013

On January 14 and 15, 2011, in Tunisia, amid a radical escalated tension between the police and protesters following the police's cruel violence, prominent news agencies around the world reported that President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali had fled to Saudi Arabia (The Guardian, 2011; Al Jazeera, 2011c; BBC News, 2011). Tunisians took to the streets in celebration, the videos of which went viral on social media in the days following January 16, 17, and 18. One of the most widely circulated videos featured a Tunisian citizen joyfully shouting in the streets: "We are liberated! Ben Ali has fled! Freedom to the Tunisian people! There is nothing to fear anymore!" (Bin Ali harab, 2011). At the same time, in Egypt, the revolutionary clock was ticking down. On January 14, the same day as Ben Ali's flight, calls for protests in Egypt began circulating on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. These calls were primarily initiated by a page named "كلنا خالد سعيد" or "We Are All Khaled Said." In mid-2010, Khaled Said, a young Egyptian man in his late twenties, was dragged from a café in Alexandria by police, tortured, and beaten to death without any legal or judicial process (We are all Khaled Said, 2011). It was later revealed that Said had

posted a video exposing a group of police officers dividing up the spoils from a drug bust (We are all Khaled Said, 2010).

Egyptian activists established social media pages and groups called "We Are All Khaled Said," which began calling for protests on January 25, the National Police Day. On January 15, 2011, the page posted on Facebook and tweeted on Twitter, "Today is the 15th... the 25th of January is the National Police Day and an official holiday. If 100,000 of us go out in Cairo, no one will be able to stand in our way... Can we make it?" (Elshaheeed, 2011). The post and tweet went viral beyond expectations, attracting the attention of prominent Egyptian figures who supported the call to protest, including the renowned diplomat Mohamed El Baradei. On January 19, El Baradei expressed his support for the protest calls by tweeting, "I strongly support the people's call for a massive peaceful demonstration against oppression and corruption. When our demands are not heeded, what are our alternatives?" (ElBaradei, 2011). In the days leading up to January 25, the April 6 Youth Movement intensified its calls for protests through various organizations and influential figures. Numerous professional syndicates, as well as student and labor unions, announced their participation and support (Shenker, 2011). On January 23, the Muslim Brotherhood's spokesman announced their symbolic participation in the protests through syndicates and unions (6th of April Youth Movement - حركة شباب 6 إبريل, Dunia Al-Watan, 2011).

On January 25, protests and demonstrations erupted in various cities across the country. Videos of the protests went viral, showcasing the massive number of demonstrators and exposing the violence of the police in dealing with them (BBC News Araby, 2011b). The state violence escalated between the protesters and security forces, leading to taking down the government symbols, such as Mubarak's posters in public streets (BBC News Araby, 2011c). Eventually, by dawn, the protesters reached the heart of Cairo, Tahrir Square, after enduring clashes with the police throughout the day (Masry25Jan, 2011).

From the first day, Tahrir Square was occupied by the protesters and became their site for a sit-in until their demands were fulfilled. Throughout the 18 days of the uprising, the protesters never left Tahrir Square despite the state's attempts to force them out through violent clashes. From the beginning, Tahrir Square was a zone fought over by

the protesters and the government. In the early days, the Square experienced a conflict in its power dynamics, between the people represented by the anti-government protesters and the state's ruling elite represented by the police. Protesters continued trying to take over the Square through small sit-ins while the state reinforced its control by cracking down on these gatherings (BBC Arabic, 2011a). However, the conflictual situation in the power dynamics of Tahrir Square did not last long. On the 28th, known as "The Friday of Anger," people took to the streets in unprecedented numbers in Cairo as well as across the country. The most violent confrontations occurred on the Qasr Al-Nil bridge that leads to Tahrir Square, as shown in the illustration 3.1. (BBC News Arabic, 2011a). On both sides—the people and the state—the battle was clear: who would maintain control over Tahrir Square, center of Cairo and its connected streets. For the state, control over Tahrir Square and its streets was crucial for maintaining order in the city and preventing the protesters from gathering or settling. By the end of the day, the protesters had taken over the Square amidst a chaotic atmosphere of riots, attacks, fires, deaths, injuries, and detentions. From that day onward, until August 2013, the power dynamics of Tahrir Square changed radically. Tahrir Square came under the control of protesters for 18 days. During this time, the symbolism and functionality of Tahrir Square were redefined by the protesters and the Egyptian public, shifting the power dynamics from the state to the public as the decision-makers of the place and its symbolic buildings.

Illustration 3.1. Protestors on Qasr Al-Nil Bridge Trying to Reach Tahrir Square in 2011 (BBC News عربي, 2011)

When protesters took over the square after a violent suppressing attempts by the police, they intended to protect the Square and the people inside from any outsiders, including security personnel or armed pro-Mubarak supporters. Consequently, a system of civilian checkpoints was established by the protesters to check ID cards and examine the individuals entering the Square. Civilian checkpoints were set up at all entrances to the Square (Al Jazeera, 2011a). Although the aim was to protect the Square and protesters from any harmful outsider elements that were pro-government, the action itself carried symbolic power by controlling the infrastructural access to the city center of Tahrir Square. The people controlled access to the Square; they were the decision-makers regarding who to allow in and who to stop. For the first time, the checkers and controllers were the citizens, while the government, with all its elements and symbols, was viewed as the danger. It was not the protesters who would disrupt the peace and order of the place; rather, it was the state representatives such as police officers and pro-Mubarak thugs. The civilian checkpoints were not limited to Tahrir Square; they spread all over the country as police and security personnels retreated. People went out of their homes to protect their houses and neighborhoods (Al Jazeera, 2011b). This practice marks a shift in the power dynamics of the socio-political structure. With the temporary withdrawal of state representatives in the role of protection, civilian checkpoints replaced them as the checking and examining authority for safety. Elements associated with the ruling elite, security institutions, and their supporters became the danger that civilians needed to watch for. They were no longer symbols to be feared or obeyed to survive the brutality of the state. Instead, it was the state representatives who had reason to fear being caught by a group of protesters. Tahrir Square, as a crucial infrastructural center in the city, provided a venue for symbolic practices of power by controlling the area, deciding who to let in and who to expel, and maintaining its protection. Thus, the civilian checkpoints in Tahrir Square during the 18 days of the sit-in are a manifestation of the shift in the power dynamics of the place and the broader socio-political structure. This is a practice of liberation and power—liberation from the emotions of fear and terror imposed by the state, represented by the police officers and the political ruling elite under Mubarak and his businessmen. It is also a practice of power for the protestors in the sense of being centralized in the decision-making process after a period of suppression and marginalization, even if it was over the Square only.

The second practice by the protesters that indicates a shift in the power dynamics of Tahrir Square is the control of the adjacent buildings, including the governmental ones. As mentioned earlier, Tahrir Square houses one of the largest governmental complexes, Al-Mogama. It represents the most significant and centralized embodiment of the Egyptian bureaucracy. In the public consciousness, it is associated with the state's deliberate obstruction of people's interests through the tiring bureaucratic processes (Abdelazim, 2021, 73). It represents the state's symbolic power to grant or deny permissions, certificates, documents, and stamps. Furthermore, Mogama is linked to the inefficiency and corruption of the bureaucratic apparatus that complicates the lives of Egyptian citizens (Abdelazim, 2021, 73). Thus, Mogama's mere presence in the square signifies the state's enduring and oppressive power in the area, a power that is deeply resented by the people.

During the early days of the uprising in 2011, when Tahrir Square came under the protesters' control, the government announced the closure of Mogama. After a few days of the uprising, as the government lost all control over the area, it attempted to instrumentalize the symbolic power of Mogama. On February 8th, the government ordered its employees who worked in the complex to return to their normal daily duties at their offices in the building. However, the employees were unable to access the building, as the protesters prevented them from entering (DW, 2011). This clearly signaled the protesters' refusal to allow daily life to return to normal without their demands being met. The government then called upon military leaders and high-ranking police officials to negotiate with the protesters to permit the employees to enter the building, but all negotiations failed (BBC Arabic, 2011a). The fact that military and police negotiators could neither convince the protesters nor force them to open the building is another manifestation of the shift in power dynamics within the place and the political structure. It was the people who held the power and control to decide which buildings to open or close, even if they were state buildings. Mogama, as an embodiment of the state's insufficient and corrupt bureaucracy and a symbol of state power and domination over the citizens' lives, fell under the control of the protesters. It was no longer the state obstructing the citizens' lives through its symbolic violence; rather, it was the citizens who obstructed the state's process of symbolic violence against them. They seized this power and exercised it over the state by preventing the massive bureaucratic building from functioning. In this sense, it was both an act of

liberation from the state's symbolic violence and an assertion of power, as they claimed the means to decide and control the infrastructure.

Finally, the third practice I would like to highlight as an indicator of the shift in power dynamics within Tahrir Square and the broader socio-political structure is the graffiti on its walls. As the protesters camped in Tahrir Square for 18 days, the square became a testament to their struggle, power, and unity against a brutal dictatorship. To preserve their narrative of resistance against a monopolized power structure and to commemorate their martyrs, revolutionary artists created graffiti and slogans on the walls of Tahrir Square (Hebeishy, 2011). Graffiti wasn't limited to Tahrir Square. It was left as a memory and a hint in every place that the protestors controlled for some time (Ayyad, 2011). The Graffiti included drawings of the fallen regime exposing their terror and crimes towards the citizens. It also included portraits of the martyrs killed by the policemen during the uprising (Illustrations 3.2. and 3.3.). Chants, sarcastic jokes, and revolutionary symbols were also drawn on the walls (Illustration 3.4.). Beyond its artistic and rebellious nature, graffiti served as a visual memory for the people to commemorate their story of struggle, power, and victory—an account of their empowerment and liberation after decades of suppression and deliberate marginalization. It conveyed a message about the emergence of new actors within the socio-political power structure and the decision-making process.

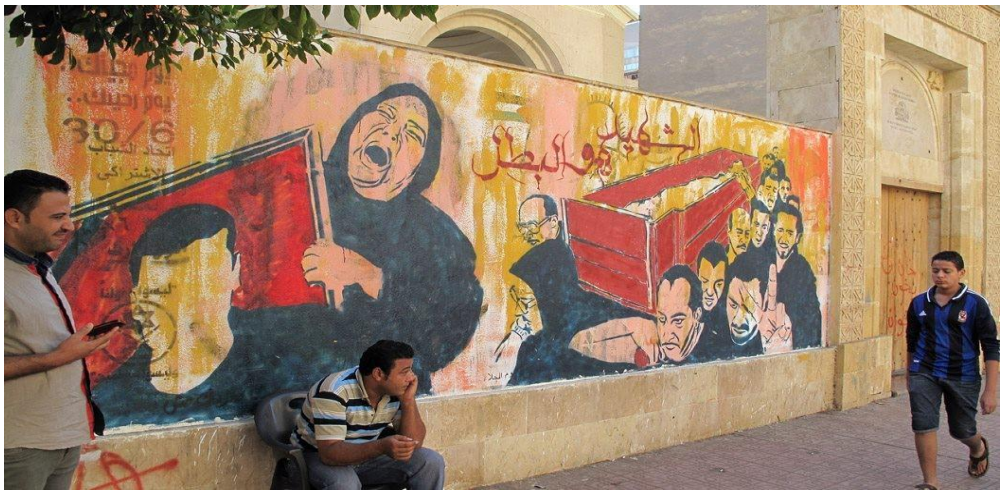

Illustration 3.2. A Mural of a Mother Carrying the Coffin of Her Martyr Son in Grief in Cairo (Revolution Graffiti-Street Art of the New Egypt, 2013)

Illustration 3.3. Martyrs in Mohammed Mahmoud Street in Cairo (Wikimedia Commons, 2014)

Illustration 3.4. Depiction of a Military Officer over a Heap of Skulls Who Chanted "Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice" in Cairo (Revolution Graffiti-Street Art of the New Egypt, 2013)

In summary, during the 2011 uprising, the shift in power dynamics within Tahrir Square can be observed through three main practices by the protesters. The first

practice involved the establishment of checkpoints to protect the square's entrances and exits from the state. The second practice was the control of surrounding buildings, including state administrative and bureaucratic ones. The third practice entailed the creation of a visual memory on the walls of the square through graffiti. These three practices symbolize a significant shift in the socio-political power dynamics, moving power away from Mubarak's regime, his businessmen who supported his regime, and police officers toward the people, including civil society, opposition figures, and movements from diverse ideological backgrounds. While the state's symbols of administration and bureaucracy had remained prominent and normalized in the square until 2011, their presence and control were significantly marginalized during the uprising. Instead, the protesters' power became centralized through these practices. Thus, Tahrir Square in 2011 served as an early embodiment of the structural shift in the power dynamics that would follow after 18 days in 2011 and 2012. For the people, it became the first place where the oppressive state fell, where all state symbols and elements were expelled, and where nearly the public's power was centralized while the ruling elite's power was diminished. For the first time, the people held the upper hand over the state in a place, its institutions, and its symbols. They became almost the decision-makers, determining who could access the square, which buildings to open or close, and how to visually commemorate their story. Tahrir Square transformed into the birthplace of their empowerment and liberation, with graffiti serving as a testament to their struggle and collective memory.

The symbolism and memory of Tahrir Square as the first site of empowerment and expression for the people after 30 years of suppression were acknowledged by some governmental institutions, including the National Organization for Urban Harmony (NOUH). Two months after the uprising, NOUH organized a seminar titled "Urban Visions for Tahrir Square: Making the Unheard Voices Heard." The seminar's name, chosen by urban specialists, reflected Tahrir Square's pivotal role in the uprising as the first place where the unheard youth found their voice (National Organization of Urban Harmony, 2011). The symposium aimed to discuss the procedures for creating a competition to develop urban plans for Tahrir Square, symbolizing the revolution and its call for change. This competition underscored the primary goal of the revolution of involving the people and youth in the decision-making process within the power structure. Thus, the urban planning of Tahrir Square was intended to be shaped by the

contributions of the public through this competition, emphasizing the democratization of decision-making as a key outcome of the revolution. In essence, the initiative positioned the people as the architects of their revolutionary symbol and the narrators of their stories through urban development, rather than leaving those decisions solely in the hands of the state. With such an initiative that remained only verbal, the people aimed to be centralized within the power structure by having access to the means of decision-making and to history making as Mills (1959) puts it. Despite its brief existence and the unfulfilled ambitions, this seminar represented the democratization process that the revolution sought to achieve. However, as will be discussed in the context of the urban development project for Tahrir Square in 2021, this hope for democratization ultimately remained unrealized as it was crushed as I will explain in the coming section.

In the subsequent years of 2012 and 2013, Tahrir Square remained a contentious battleground between the revolutionaries and the transitional government, led by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). This ongoing conflict was evident in the same three practices observed earlier. The establishment of checkpoints, initially a tactic of the protesters, was adopted by SCAF as a means of control. Gatherings in Tahrir Square, aimed at protesting against SCAF, were met with violent dispersal from time to time (Amnesty Organization, 2012). In an attempt to restore its authority, SCAF ordered the facades of Mogama to be repainted and put back into operation (Arab Contractors , 2012). When Mogama was officially closed by SCAF due to anti-SCAF protests in the Square, the revolutionaries hung a banner on its gate declaring, “Mogama is open by the order of the revolution” (Rassd News, 2011). This action highlights the revolutionaries' ongoing assertion of control over deciding which buildings would remain open or closed, reinforcing their role as influential actors within the power structure. Furthermore, the revolutionaries expressed their dissent against SCAF's ruling practices through new graffiti artwork in the Square (Al-Youm Al-Sabi', 2012). In September 2011, SCAF ordered state institutions to erase what they deemed “abusive” graffiti, despite the American University in Cairo expressing a desire to preserve these works on their campus walls as a visual memory of the revolution (Biel, 2011).

The revolutionaries expressed their anger in response to the transitional military ruler's orders to erase the graffiti that commemorated the revolution and preserved its memories. In various news videos, the artists and revolutionaries articulated that erasing the graffiti was a deliberate attempt to suppress the memories and landmarks of the revolution (Akhbar El Yom, 2012). In the days following SCAF's decision to erase the graffiti, revolutionaries and artists demonstrated against the SCAF, beginning to redraw the erased graffiti (Abdelhalim, 2012). They chanted, "No matter how the regime keeps erasing, I will keep redrawing." This was a clear message that they would not allow their memories, stories, and histories to be suppressed or forgotten, regardless of claims about "urban development" or "restoring order and aesthetics" to the walls and streets of Tahrir Square (Ahram Online, 2012).

The power of Tahrir Square and its visual memory of graffiti remained in a dialectical relationship between the people and the state until 2013. The days of 2011 marked the peak of the people's power in the Square, demonstrated through various practices that signified their empowerment and centrality within the power structure of the place, manifesting the hoped contribution in the wider socio-political and economic power structure. During the military transitional government from 2011 to 2013, revolutionaries and graffiti artists engaged in a continuous struggle against SCAF to maintain access to the Square and preserve their narrative for future generations. However, this dialectical power dynamic and accessibility to infrastructural means underwent a radical shift after 2013. I argue that the dialectical access to infrastructural power ended with the military ascendancy in the political, social, and economic spheres. From 2013 onward, infrastructural power became monopolized by the military elite. As the military elite consolidated this power, their definition of reality began to dominate, while alternative definitions and narratives were marginalized, suppressed, and ultimately eliminated with sheer violence by the state. The decision-making process was taken over by the new regime ruling elite from the military, which initiated an "urban development" project for the Square. From my analysis so far, two sets of questions emerge. First, where are the people in this project? Where are their voices and decisions? What happened to their stories and memories that they sought to commemorate? Where is their graffiti art? What narrative of Tahrir Square and the 2011 revolution is being lost? Second, what does this project represent instead? What narrative does it impose? What memories are now invented with the Square through

the new urban development? And, more importantly, how and why is the memory of the revolution being replaced?

3.3. De-Democratizing Tahrir Square from 2013 to Now

As demonstrated earlier, in June 2013, Tahrir Square witnessed another significant gathering of protests against the Muslim Brotherhood and their member, President Mohamed Morsi, who had been elected in Egypt's first democratic elections in 2012. The motives behind these protests—whether genuine initiatives from anti-Muslim Brotherhood revolutionaries, mobilization by Mubarak's corporate and media elite, military generals, regional and international powers, or a coalition of these groups—led to Morsi's ousting. The protests in Tahrir Square during this time were markedly different. For the first time in nearly two years of constant clashes with SCAF and police during the 2011 uprising and the transitional period, revolutionary figures were seen protesting alongside police officers (BBC News, Qaraa, 2013). Adding to the unusual scene, military Apache helicopters flew over the Square, celebrating the army's announcement of Morsi's ousting by dropping flags on the crowd (Othman and Kassab, Hassan, 2013). Unlike previous protests in Tahrir, which were marked by state violence and repression, the anti-Morsi demonstrations of 2013 were protected by police and military forces (Reuters in Al-Masry Al-Youm, 2013). During the transitional period under SCAF, the slogan "Down with military rule!" was prevalent at various protests throughout 2011 and 2012 and appeared in the graffiti of Tahrir (France 24, 2012). In contrast, the chants during the June 2013 demonstrations shifted to pro-army sentiments, such as "The people and army are one hand" (Kingsley, 2013). Demonstrators expressed their support for the army and the military leader, General Sisi, as a savior from the Muslim Brotherhood (A. Sh. A, 2013b). The nature of these demonstrations was fundamentally different from past anti-government protests in Tahrir Square. State institutions, which had previously responded with violence, did not treat the June protests in the same manner as the anti-SCAF demonstrations in 2012, the anti-Mubarak uprising in 2011, or even the 1977 anti-Sadat bread riots. Police officers and military personnel actively participated in and supported the protests, providing protection and refreshments to the demonstrators (Al-Badry, 2013a). There seemed to be no difference between the civil society and the state apparatuses. They appeared as fused. From June 2013 to 2015, access to Tahrir Square

became increasingly limited to pro-army, pro-Sisi, and nationalistic celebrations. Expressions of anti-government anger were suppressed and effectively excluded from Tahrir Square after this point.

In 2013 and 2014, under military control, Tahrir Square became a tightly controlled stage, displaying only what the regime wanted the Egyptian public or international community to see. The space was accessible exclusively for celebrating and supporting the ruling power elite, and even these events were restricted to government-designated national anniversaries. Celebrations and displays of support were organized by state, represented in army and police leadership, and public access to Tahrir Square was limited to orchestrated events, portraying a narrative of national victory and unity between the public, army, and police. Following the ousting of Morsi by military general Sisi, backed by a coalition of anti-Islamist revolutionaries, religious elites represented by the Azhar Mufti and Pope Tawadros, and senior military officials, the square was filled with celebrations described in the media as a “victory.” During these celebrations, the Egyptian Air Force performed aerial shows over Tahrir Square (Othman, 2013). In contrast, pro-Morsi demonstrators opposing the mass coup were barred from reaching Tahrir Square by police and army forces under orders from the Minister of the Interior and military leaders (Al-Badry, 2013b; A. Sh. A, 2013a). While both pro- and anti-Morsi demonstrators represented segments of the Egyptian public, who shared an equal right to access the square and use it as a platform for expression, the military power elite selectively restricted this access. Tahrir Square was no longer a space for dissent or protest but was stylized solely for displays of harmony and the celebration of the military elite’s victory.

An additional observation on the local media's discourse surrounding Tahrir Square’s 2013 protests is the discriminatory and marginalizing language used to describe anti-Morsi versus pro-Morsi protesters. Local Egyptian media platforms, such as Al-Masry Al-Youm, labeled anti-Morsi participants as the "demonstrators" or "protestors" (example: Moghazy, 2013). In contrast, they referred to pro-Morsi protesters simply as "Morsi supporters." This linguistic distinction implicitly positioned anti-Morsi demonstrators as the majority of the original Egyptian public, while pro-Morsi participants were depicted as a minority, a "person-centered cult" of Morsi loyalists, rather than part of the broader public. This labeling suggests a dichotomy: one group,

the anti-Morsi demonstrators, is portrayed as the normative, majority voice of the Egyptian people, while the other, the pro-Morsi group, is cast as the outsider, unrepresentative of the Egyptians. Tahrir Square, as a result, became symbolically divided; the anti-Morsi camp was granted access and acceptance, whereas the pro-Morsi camp was marginalized, even excluded, from the space that had previously symbolized unified public will from different ideological backgrounds during the 2011 uprising. In the weeks following June 30th, Tahrir Square was transformed into a platform for supporting military general Sisi and the army against "terrorism" and the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Sharkawy, 2013a; Al-Sharkawy, 2013b). The square became a venue for gathering petitions to authorize Sisi and the army to "combat terrorism," with the military visibly present through air shows and tanks celebrating the perceived victory over the Muslim Brotherhood, which was framed as a national security threat. The police also played a supporting role, mingling with demonstrators as both protectors and participants. This stage in Tahrir Square's power dynamics stood in stark contrast to 2011. Whereas civilian protesters from different backgrounds once occupied the square autonomously, in 2013 it was the military that controlled the space, determining when and by whom it could be used, and for what purpose. Although physical violence was absent in the first few months of June and July 2013, control over the square was firmly in the hands of the military, as they selectively sanctioned gatherings and dictated the terms of protest.

At the end of 2013 and throughout 2014, Tahrir Square became inaccessible to any anti-government expressions. Even after the anti-Morsi protests had concluded, the army and police forces blocked access to the square for anti-military and pro-Morsi demonstrators who sought to protest the Rabaa massacre (Kassab and Youssef, 2013). Despite multiple attempts by these groups of demonstrators to reclaim Tahrir Square as a space of dissent, they were consistently obstructed by armed forces and police. Thus, Tahrir Square once again became a battleground of contested power between the state and the people, each vying to assert control over Cairo's infrastructural heart. However, through state-enforced restrictions and violence, anti-government protests were systematically barred from accessing the square, effectively turning it into a controlled space where opposition was stifled under military and police dominance.

Between 2014 and 2016, Tahrir Square was tightly controlled, its accessibility reserved only for pro-Sisi, pro-military demonstrations on each anniversary of January 25th. The annual commemoration of the "revolution" transformed into state-orchestrated celebrations where Tahrir was closed off with tanks and military officers, limiting entry to only those showing overt support for Sisi's regime (A. Sh. A, 2014a). On January 25, 2014, scenes reminiscent of June 2013 reappeared, with helicopters flying over the square, heavy police and military presence, and crowds gathered to celebrate, creating a display of supposed unity and victory (A. Sh. A, 2014c). Chants filled the square in praise of the military, expressing support for Sisi's campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood and other political Islamist groups and celebrating the unity between the people, the army, and the police (A. Sh. A, 2014b). Interestingly, this state-sanctioned use of Tahrir for gatherings was limited strictly to the anniversary of January 25th; other historic dates, like Mubarak's stepping-down, were notably absent from the commemorations. The restriction of access, even to supposedly "national" celebrants outside of specified occasions, demonstrates the state's firm control over Tahrir. This level of control went beyond what was seen under Mubarak, as the Sisi regime not only clamped down on anti-government expression but also imposed restrictions on everyday, spontaneous public interactions in the square, symbolizing a tightened authoritarian grip that extended into daily civic life.

On January 25, 2015, Tahrir Square was heavily guarded, with access points tightly controlled and infrastructure for public entry largely obstructed by army and police forces stationed at the square's entrances and throughout the city center (A. Sh. A, 2015). By January 2016, the square saw minimal civilian presence, limited to a small group chanting pro-military slogans that aligned with the state's messaging of unity and opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood, now framed as an "evil" terrorist entity. Despite the sparse attendance, a prominent display of army and police officers remained on guard, demonstrating the state's continued vigilance over the area (Hassan, 2016). By 2017, however, the square was completely devoid of public gatherings. Only state officials and police officers occupied Tahrir, ensuring no gatherings—whether in support of or in opposition to the government—could take place. The government preemptively communicated through media that any attempt to gather would be met with strict "safety measures," indicating a zero-tolerance policy for any public occupation of the space (Al-Masry Al-Youm, 2017). This approach

effectively signified Tahrir Square's transformation from a space of public activism and civil demonstration to a tightly controlled and surveilled militarized zone, accessible only on the state's terms. Through this control and surveillance, the square symbolized a consolidation of power where public expression, once integral to Tahrir, was not only monitored but essentially erased from its landscape.

From 2017 onwards, Tahrir Square underwent a deliberate process of depoliticization, stripped of its role as a venue for public expression or even pro-government gatherings. The state reduced its function to a transit hub, primarily for traffic flow between Cairo's major streets. However, this transformation was anything but passive or apolitical; it came with increased state surveillance, with heavy police and military presence continuously monitoring the area. Individuals near the Square who were deemed suspicious faced the risk of arrest, signaling a high-security approach to public space. What was earlier s civic space for public movement got transformed into a matter of sheer security. In other words, it was securitized. Infrastructural modifications reinforced this new regime and power dynamics. Iron gates, cement barriers, barricades, and barbed wire encircled Tahrir Square, creating physical obstacles and symbolizing state authority and control (Hanna, 2017). The graffiti that once expressed the spirit of the 2011 protests was erased, with no resistance or resurgence by the revolutionary artists as seen in 2012. By 2017, Tahrir Square had been rendered nearly inaccessible, both physically and symbolically, underscoring the military's consolidation of infrastructural and sociopolitical power. Notably, the visual narrative of the square that had once represented the people's revolutionary struggle was erased, leaving a void in its public identity. This void remained unfilled until 2020, when the government launched an urban development project aimed at redefining the Square's appearance and purpose. This project marks a new phase in Tahrir Square's history and hence future, signifying a controlled shift in its narrative under the state's vision.

Tahrir Square (2017) with its high surveillance, heavy police and army presence, and safety iron gates, fences, and barbed wire manifests and enforces the military's definition of reality. In this reality, danger and suspicion never end and military generals are the only savior. National threats are always present and only the generals can foresee them. Any potential alternative definition of reality is another source of

suspicion and danger to the "nation." Only the military definition of reality is safe, patriotic, and national. This definition is based on centralizing the military power elite within the power structure by monopolizing all means of decision-making and infrastructural power as the only savior of the nation. Hence, other power elites, and more importantly the publics, are marginalized within the power structure and alienated from their reality and past. Systematic marginalization and alienation of the public from means of power and their reality includes elimination of the public's active role, their stories of struggle and empowerment, and their narrative of revolting. This happens by instrumentalizing the infrastructural power of narrative production through the discursive media and reconstructing urban visual identity as we shall see with Tahrir Square's urban development project.

The last anti-government protests that reached Tahrir Square in 2019, marking the first since 2013, emphasizing the square's resilient symbolic power as a site of political expression. Sparked by Mohammed Ali, a former military contractor, these demonstrations were fueled by his allegations that the army was exploiting public funds for luxurious projects of palaces and resorts serving the military elite (BBC, 2019). Ali's revelations came at a time when Egypt faced significant economic challenges, with rising poverty rates affecting the wider public and the ordinary Egyptians life standards. From Spain, he released a series of live videos on social media, speaking as a former insider of the military power elite after 2013. Despite the protests reaching Tahrir Square in 2019, the police quickly dispersed them, making these the last anti-government demonstrations held there before the square's 2020 redesign. Attempts to approach Tahrir in protest between 2014 and 2019 were consistently met with violent suppression. For example, in 2015, during a march commemorating the 2011 revolution, a peaceful gathering by the Socialist Popular Alliance Party was broken up by security forces, resulting in the death of the party's leading member and activist Shaimaa Sabbagh (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Obviously, physical power and state terror were the adopted strategy toward protests since the Rabaa Massacre (2013) that left at least 800-1000 protestors killed by the police and army officers (Shakir, 2014). What is worthy to appreciate here is that, despite the excessive usage of state terror and violence against the protests and the extreme surveillance of Tahrir, people still tend to head there to express their anger against the regime such as in 2019. This persistence demonstrates that, although the

military regime has sought to strip the square of its revolutionary and political identity from 2015-2019, its symbolism remains deeply ingrained in the public memory as a place of collective empowerment and resistance.

With the 2020 urban development project in Tahrir Square, the depoliticization and de-democratization processes reached another stage. Until 2019, the Square was surveilled and militarized by the continuous presence of army and police forces, which suppressed any attempts at gathering in the area. The Square was stripped of any political and revolutionary symbols, effectively emptied from 2015 to 2019, but wasn't emptied from state violent elements and symbols such as armed vehicles and officers. Until 2019, the depoliticization and de-democratization of the place was limited to emptying the place of the public's physical accessibility and their revolutionary narrative. However, these processes didn't include emptying the place from the blatant state violent symbols.

These processes of depoliticization and de-democratization took a different shape with the urban project of 2020. This project was not only about emptying the Square and stripping it of political revolutionary symbolism, nor was it merely about restoring state power in the space through physical and symbolic violence. Rather, it aimed to replace the Square's identity, symbolism, values, functionality, and the associated stories of people's struggle. These were replaced with a new identity, symbols, values, and narratives that display the military power elite's definition of reality—a definition where people are not struggling because they are not included as active participants in this definition in the first place. This definition of reality suggests endless national pride, victory, prosperity, and achievements following the nation's salvation from terrorism. It is a definition of reality that is dissociated from the actual lived experiences of the people, as we shall see in the following passages.

In February 2020, the Ministry of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Communities posted a video on its official YouTube page titled "Development of Tahrir Square," which served as a promo for the ongoing "urban development" project (Ministry of Housing, Utilities & Urban Communities). The video showed scenes of construction, workers, traffic, and a few police cars, with no visible remnants of revolutionary memory. All graffiti, flags, and slogans had been erased as the facades of buildings and walls were

repainted to enhance "visual aesthetics." The National Organization for Urban Harmony (NOUH) supervised this repainting and redevelopment of Tahrir's buildings. This is the same institution that, two months after the uprising, held a symposium titled "Urban Visions for Tahrir Square: Making the Unheard Voices Heard" to discuss creating a competition for Tahrir Square's redesign as a symbol of revolution and change (National Organization of Urban Harmony, 2011; National Organization of Urban Harmony, 2020). NOUH's contribution to the project was to wipe out all visual ugliness and distortions and restore beauty and aesthetics to the Square. Ironically, in 2011, the organization (NOUH) was emphasizing the importance of people's active role in the decision-making process of Tahrir Square's urban plan as a symbol of their revolution and change through preserving its visual memory. In 2020, NOUH was supervising the urban development project of Tahrir Square as requested by the military general, Sisi.

According to NOUH, the aim of the governmental project for Tahrir Square's urban development—which involves several other state ministries and institutions—is to restore the Square's beauty. This restoration is intended to reposition Cairo as the "Paris of the East" by transforming Old Cairo into an open museum following the relocation of all administrative governmental buildings to the New Administrative Capital City. Thus, the project aims at "transforming the heart of the city into an open urban museum brimming with the wonders of civilizational heritage, which allows our children to take pride in it, deepening their appreciation of beauty and strengthening their sense of belonging to their homeland" (National Organization of Urban Harmony, 2020). This conceptual vision for the project was materialized and visualized by developing the Square according to a pharaonic theme. According to the Egyptian Cabinet, the estimated cost of the project is 150 million EGP, equivalent to approximately 9.5 million USD based on the average exchange rate in 2020 (Exchange Rates Org. UK, 2020). This cost includes the installation of a pharaonic obelisk "with a length of 19 m and a weight of 100 tons" in the center of the Square, in line with the decided pharaonic theme (The Arab Contractors, 2020) (Illustration 3.5.). The obelisk is surrounded by a fountain, in addition to four sphinx statues that were transported all the way from Luxor (Development Project of Tahrir Square-Official Portal of Cairo Governorate, 2021a). The pharaonic theme of the urban development project for Tahrir Square is further enhanced by planting of palm and olive trees, as well as the

installation of a lights system. The center of the Square is also surrounded by a few green areas and seating for visitors to enjoy the view of the obelisk, sphinxes, and fountains (The Egyptian Cabinet , 2020). Furthermore, to protect the developed state of Tahrir Square, the government has assigned a private security company with a constant presence in the Square to prevent any behavioral violations against the place's order and aesthetics as an open museum.

Illustration 3.5. Reconstructed Tahrir Square (2020), Cairo (The Arab Contractors, 2020)

In a short film posted on its YouTube page, the Egyptian Cabinet describes the urban development project for Tahrir Square as "a development that blends the ancientness of the past with the modernity of the present" (The Egyptian Cabinet , 2020). In other words, the project aims to enhance national pride of Egypt's ancient heritage on the national level, while serving as an attractive tourist spot on international level. The video presents the final version of the project as a national achievement under the leadership of President Sisi. It shows people sitting in the Square's seating areas, enjoying the view and socializing. It also features various citizens expressing their admiration for the project when asked for their opinions in the video. A recurring

theme throughout the citizens' feedback in the video was their emotions of pride and honor that they felt when they saw the new Tahrir Square. It can be acknowledged that, at least on the appearance and aesthetic standpoint, the urban development project of Tahrir Square has been successful, particularly for ordinary visitors, whether national or international. Upon viewing the new design of the Square, one can see that non-specialist tourists or citizens might find it pleasing. While specialists in architecture and archaeology have their fundamental scientific critiques to the project, the place still appears organized, clean, and impressive, with a large obelisk at its center, surrounded by sphinxes, water features, and greenery. However, the pressing question for me as a researcher in sociology and anthropology is: Where are the Egyptian people in the urban development project of Tahrir Square? I do not mean where they are now that the project is complete; rather, where were they when the project was being planned? Did they play an active role in deciding the urban plan for Tahrir Square, as they had demanded during 2011 and 2012? Where are those who protested against being marginalized and alienated from decision-making, especially under the transitional rule of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) between 2011 and 2012? Where are those who chanted against the SCAF, “erase my graffiti and I will keep redrawing,” when their graffiti was erased in 2012? Does the project really serve the ordinary citizen as it is claimed?

According to the Arab Contractors Company, the national construction company responsible for the project, the plan was supervised by the Ministries of housing, tourism, antiquities, and culture, as well as the Cairo governorate and the private architectural office of Engineer Shehab Mazhar (The Arab Contractors, 2020). There was no involvement of the real actors of the square -the people- in the decision-making process, either through institutional or individual channels. The only non-governmental institution involved was the private office of Eng. Shehab Mazhar, known for his projects of luxurious private compounds, villas, hotels, and resorts (Shehab A. Mazhar). According to a private contact between Abdelazim and Mazhar’s office, in 2019, the office submitted three proposals for the transformation of Tahrir Square to the government as the architectural consultants for the project (Abdelazim, 2021, 101). Given Tahrir Square’s symbolism for the Egyptian public, one of the proposed designs was “dedicating the square to the public by turning it into a people’s plaza with programmed areas and promenades where recreational activities such as

picnics and strolls could take place" (Abdelazim, 2021, 101). However, according to Abdelazim's contact with Mazhar's office, this proposal was eliminated, as the government did not want any design that would leave open the possibility of repeating the events of 2011 by allowing space for large numbers of suspicious or even social gatherings. Consequently, the plan for Tahrir Square's urban development project was designed according to the ruling elite's special requirements for security and accessibility (Abdelazim, 2021, 12).

Therefore, it's not only that the project was ordered by the presidency itself, ie Sisi; the entire plan for the project was designed based on the oppressive security measures of the military ruling elite and their definition of reality. This can be seen through the design, where the center of the Square is made unoccupiable due to the fountain's water, which covers the entire central area. The Square's center served as a location for protestors' tents during the 18 days of protests in 2011, providing a safe point in case of any attacks by the police or pro-regime thugs. The area was a flat garden, slightly elevated above the rest of the Square's streets, without any possibility of cars crossing over it. Therefore, it served as a shelter for the protestors and a spot for their settling and camping tents without the need for navigation dues to car routes. However, the circle loses all these qualities in the new design. With a three-tiered water fountain, antiquities, and a huge obelisk in the center, there is now no space for gathering, standing, or settling for sit-ins in the center of the square. We are left with the cars' route only, where nobody can stand.

What is unique about the power structure of Tahrir Square in the project is the visual absence of the state, unlike the square before 2011 under Mubarak and from 2013 to 2019 under the military regime. Although the Square is completely controlled by the state, its new design doesn't have any governmental or state presence as all administrative buildings are moving to the NAC. Yet, the design doesn't have any political or pro-governmental symbols. The state asserts its presence only through its supposed absence. Even the "revolution" of 2013, as the regime calls it, that brought the military to power in a way or another, doesn't have any hinting visual presence in the Square. Al-Mogama, the ultimate manifestation of the modern Egyptian republican state and its bureaucracy, has been decided to be transformed into a luxurious hotel. In December 2021, The Sovereign Fund of Egypt (TSFE) announced: "A US Consortium

wins the development and repurposing of The Tahrir Complex pledging investments in excess of US$200 million" (The Sovereign Fund of Egypt, 2021). Mogama's development plan is to transform it into "a modern luxury lifestyle hotel and mixed-use complex" named "Cairo House" (OHK Consultants, n.d.). According to the project's consultants and the Ministry of Planning, Economic Development, and International Cooperation, the aim of transforming Mogama is to turn it into a strong economic engine through investments and economic consumption by being a luxurious touristic spot (Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2021). For context, Egypt, the second borrower from the IMF, is experiencing a declining economy due to the huge national loans. As the military owns most of the country's material sources of lands, buildings, and infrastructure, the military general decided to sell out to overcome the economic decline that his own economic policies led to (FDI intelligence, 2024). That is to say, after a huge militarization of the national economy represented by a rapid rise in military-economic relations since 2013, the military is selling what has been militarized to international investors to overcome the economic crisis of national debt (Sayigh, 2019).

There are two critical questions regarding the transformation of Mogama into a luxurious hotel through a significant economic investment. First, who owns the country, its resources, its heritage, its buildings, and its economy? Is it the military, the international investors, or the corporate elite associated with Sadat and Mubarak? More importantly, what does an ordinary Egyptian citizen possess within this complex power structure involving the military, international actors, and the corporate elite? Secondly, why does the regime deliberately eliminate any state symbols? Why does it replace every political symbol, even those that are governmental?

Clearly, in response to the first question, it is the military power elite and Mubarak's corporate power elite who wield the greatest control over the country's economic resources. While Mubarak's economic elite owns a significant portion of the economy, the military elite holds the authority to make decisions regarding these resources, in addition to owning a considerable share themselves. The power to dictate international investment deals involving the country's buildings, infrastructure, and land is monopolized by the military elite, as they dominate the political and economic power structure. If the corporate elite of Sadat and Mubarak has the power to own, and the

military elite has the power to both own and decide, the ordinary Egyptian citizen finds themselves with little to own or influence within this socio-political-economic framework.

As for the second question, it appears that the state has chosen to enforce its control over public spaces without a visible presence, which could provoke resistance or insurgence, as seen in the case of Mogama during the 2011 uprising. The regime seems to envision the area as purely an economic and touristic site. Any symbols related to the political context or power dynamics are replaced by those reflecting tourism, culture, or economic interests represented in the Pharaonic theme that dominates the design. This approach allows the regime to impose a new vision and identity for the place that lacks political connotations, attempting to erase any memories that might threaten its authority, such as Mogama's association with a corrupt bureaucracy and people's control over it in 2011. Tahrir Square is being transformed into a cultural tourist spot for casual gatherings by citizens or tourists, and for investments and luxurious entertainment for affluent visitors. The imagined activities for Tahrir Square are being reshaped as its identity and function are reconstructed through governmental projects of Tahrir Square's urban development and the repurposing of Mogama.

What is common among these two answers is the absence of the Egyptian public in the decision-making process regarding one of the most pivotal locations in their political struggle against oppression in the contemporary history of Egypt. Both responses highlight a deliberate process of marginalization and exclusion of the public by the ruling military elite. The government perceives the public as mere passive recipients of its plans. The Egyptian populace is not envisioned as active participants in the power dynamics, whether collectively or individually. Instead, they are seen as subjects of governmental initiatives and projects, even though they are the primary affected majority by the ongoing economic decline.

The Egyptian public is deliberately marginalized and alienated from the socio-political power structure through two strategies evident in the case of the Tahrir Square project. Firstly, they are excluded from the power structure by lacking access to decision-making and infrastructural power in the present time. As it was argued throughout the chapter, the means of decision-making and infrastructural power have been

monopolized by the military elite since 2013. Secondly, common people are marginalized and alienated from the socio-political power structure by being excluded from the production of historical narratives and commemoration, both materially and discursively. This alienation from their reality (present) and history (past) occurs as their crucial powerful recent past is replaced with a more ancient nationalist narrative, effectively suppressing any potential material and immaterial threat to the ruling military elite. The memory of collective struggle and the seizing of power by the people from the state was visually and symbolically embodied in Tahrir Square. Until the 2019 anti-Sisi protests—the year the project commenced—the public memory still gravitated toward Tahrir to express their anger, even after more than five years of physical suppression and violence. Hence, the project was deliberately designed as a negation of the public's imagination, historical context, and symbolism of Tahrir Square. Yet, the urban development project is portrayed as being created for the Egyptian citizens, aimed at enhancing their experience as daily users of Cairo's heart, as explained in the Egyptian Cabinet's video. Through the critical analysis of this state claim and narrative conducted in this chapter, it's argued that the developmental project doesn't primarily serve Egyptian citizens. Rather, the primarily served group is the ruling power elite of the military. The project serves the ruling elite. It suppresses any potential threat of the public's insurgence through the physical reconstruction of the square and mental reconstruction of the associated historical narrative. In addition to that, it creates a legitimacy and propaganda of governmental achievements and national pride stemming from the nationalist past of the ancient Egyptian civilization.

The urban project of Tahrir Square was not merely about restoring state power by controlling the area, its dynamics, and its activities through physical or symbolic violence. Rather, it aimed to fundamentally change the place's identity and dynamics without necessitating the ongoing presence of the state, its symbols, and its physical power. The urban development project is not simply focused on emptying the square and reinforcing state control, as was the case under Mubarak, Sadat, or Nasser. Instead, it seeks to replace the place's political symbolism, value, and associated events with new socio-cultural nationalist symbols, values, and events. State control over Tahrir Square after the project is not evident in the symbolic presence of the state within the area; rather, it is manifested in the deliberate absence of state symbols. The previous symbols of the state within the square have been transformed into representations of

modernization, globalization, and city branding, erasing any political triggers, including the state's own symbols. The nationalist pride in the ancient Egyptian past is instrumentalized to suppress and obliterate a more recent past and prevent a future that the ruling elite finds undesirable—a past that reminds people of their revolt, struggle, and, more importantly, their power against the regime. The state's newly imposed historical narrative is not merely about a selective and selected past; it also seeks legitimacy by linking the current government to the greatness, prosperity, and pride of ancient Egyptian civilization. The military ruling elite attempts to reintroduce its state through the lens of ancient Egyptian glory, emphasizing continuity between the great past and the modern present. A dissociated definition of reality is being enforced, one that separates itself from the public's revolutionary history and the current socio-economic hardships faced by the populace. This official definition of reality will be further emphasized in the mega event of the Pharaohs' Golden Parade, which will be analyzed in the chapter ahead.

CHAPTER IV

INVENTING THE PRESENT THROUGH AN ANCIENT PAST

According to Yazid Sayigh (2019), an expert of the comparative political and economic roles of Arab armed forces, the Egyptian military has expanded its presence since 2013. It maximized its control over civilian domains, including politics, the economy, and media. Egypt's civilian power circles in these fields are increasingly dominated by retired military generals (Sayigh, 2019, 1). As it was discussed in the literature review in the first chapter, the Egyptian army is considered to be the founder and ultimate defender of the Egyptian state (Droz-Vincent, 2019: 118-119). However, under Sadat' and Mubarak's political and economic policies, the army was relatively marginalized within the power structure in comparison to the police institution and their corporate power elite (Kandil, 2016: 338-340). Hence, 2013 represented an opportunity to seize power and reclaim the centralized position in the power structure.

After 2013, militarization in Egypt did not involve outright ownership of the entire economic, political, or media sectors. In fact, the military's share of the national economy is smaller than often assumed. However, militarization since 2013 focuses on monopolizing decision-making mechanisms within civilian fields by formulating and executing policies and strategies aligned with the military's vision (Sayigh, 2019, XV, 8). This trend is evident in the appointment of retired generals to key positions across these sectors and the acquisition of leading private companies, particularly in media (Sayigh, 2019: 175-176). This interchangeability of civilian and military roles within power elites highlights the blurred boundaries between military personnel and civilians in Egypt's power structure (Mandour, 2024: 120). Moreover, it underscores the dominance of the military's perspective across both military and civilian domains including fields of corporate, media, and politics. Consequently, the military has imposed its definition of reality on nearly all civilian and subjective arenas, particularly through institutions responsible for shaping public opinions and producing

discourse, such as the media (Sayigh, 2019, 6, 210). As the military power elite consolidates decision-making authority within the power structure—marginalizing other elites and excluding the public—all national projects and mega-events are conceptualized and executed under their influence. These projects, often costly and portrayed as national or governmental achievements, reinforce the military's official narrative and definition of reality by producing and disseminating favorable discourses.

The Pharaohs' Golden Parade, as named officially, serves as a vivid manifestation and representation of Egypt's new power structure under the post-coup government. While primarily framed as a cultural and touristic event, the heavy presence of national and international statesmen and officials was notable. The event was designed as a global spectacle, showcasing the greatness and glory of ancient Egypt in the presence of key figures, including the Egyptian president and both foreign and national ministers. Through this mega-event, it becomes evident that the development project of Tahrir Square was, in fact, a preparatory effort to transform the site into a central station along the mummies' parade route, as envisioned and directed by President Sisi (Abdelazim, 2021, 101). This connection between the two projects necessitates a joint analysis. In this chapter, the Pharaohs' Golden Parade (2021) is critically examined through its details of visuals, symbols, costumes, discursive speeches, participating and attending individuals or institutions, and musical elements. The event consists of four main units: i) opening and introducing the new museum, ii) official words and short movies, i) celebrities' speeches, iv) music and songs. These units with their details will be analyzed according to three themes: i) the heroic role of the state, ii) the continuity, and iii) religious inclusiveness. I will explain each in detail in the second section of this chapter. In addition to the event itself, governmental websites' announcements and introductory articles about the event are incorporated as data sources for analysis.

Based on an analysis of the aforementioned elements of the virtually broadcast event, I argue that the Pharaohs' Golden Parade reinforces the military's definition of reality—one that marginalizes, alienates, and suppresses the public and their resistance narratives by mobilizing a glorified ancient past, specifically the Pharaonic era. Furthermore, the coup government seeks to legitimize itself by aligning with and situating itself within the continuity of ancient Egyptian civilization, a symbol

resonating with national pride, prosperity, success, and celebration. In stark contrast, by late 2019, people were violently suppressed while attempting to access Tahrir Square—then undergoing reconstruction—to voice their opposition to Sisi, driven by deeply deteriorating economic and social conditions since the military's seizure of power (Sayigh, 2019, 134, 252; Mandour, 2023, 126–130). The promoted image of national prosperity and celebration through these events deliberately omits the public's recent popular struggles from 2011 to 2019 and fails to reflect their ongoing suffering and the worsening inequality that persists to this day (Mandour, 2023, 129–130). Thus, the national and governmental projects of Tahrir Square's urban development (2020) and the Pharaohs' Golden Parade (2021) carry an additional layer of symbolic violence and a monopolization of infrastructural power by the post-coup regime that must be accounted for. Through these national projects and mega-events, Egypt's post-2013 military power elite mobilizes the ancient Egyptian past to de-democratize the historical narrative of public resistance, alienate the public from their current reality and power structure, and establish legitimacy rooted in the glorified image of this national past. A past that is not lived but invented to shape the present and hence the future.

4.1. An Advertising Campaign

Preparations and planning for the mega-event began in 2019. *Al-Ahram*, one of the oldest state-owned news platforms, reported that the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities announced the transfer of 22 ancient Egyptian royal mummies from the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square to the new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization through a royal parade (Al-Kholy, 2019). In August 2019, another pro-government news platform revealed that the event was planned as a prestigious global spectacle involving the collaboration of various state apparatuses, including the Ministries of Antiquities, Defense, and Interior, as well as the Cairo Governorate and other state security bodies (Al-Youm Al-Sabi', 2019b). The event was further described as a grand "military parade" intended to highlight the preciousness and regality of these mummies. The mummies belonged to 22 mummified bodies of ancient Egyptian male and female rulers that were discovered originally in the temples of Upper Egypt.

Throughout 2019 and 2020, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities held a series of meetings with the aforementioned state institutions to discuss the details of the transportation process. These preparations included restoring and repainting the facades of buildings along the parade route, designing specially decorated armored vehicles for each mummy, and deciding the artistic costumes, songs, music, and performances for the event. In its statements about the event preparations, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities emphasized the state's efforts "to present this global event in a manner befitting the greatness of our ancestors and the unique antiquity of Egyptian civilization in a magnificent procession" (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2020). The discourse employed in these statements consistently underscored the state's role in preserving and enhancing the image of the great ancient Egyptian civilization—the civilization of "our ancestors" and "grandparents." According to the Presidential Spokesman, such cultural mega-events and projects align with Sisi's leadership and vision, which emphasize the importance of modernizing urban infrastructure and reaffirming Egypt's glorious historical position (Spokesman for the Egyptian Presidency, 2020).

From the state's statements, it is clear that the event is solely an initiative and order from Sisi himself. It is also evident that the primary actors and supervisors of this event are the Ministries of Interior (representing the police institution), Tourism and Antiquities (representing economic and cultural institutions), and Defense (representing the military institution). Thus, the event serves as a direct manifestation and visual depiction of Sisi's and the military power elite's projectism and definition of Egyptian reality. This not only refers to imposing how they mentally perceive and define this reality but also to imposing their vision of their own significant national role within it—essentially, how they wish to be mentally viewed and depicted by the Egyptian public.

The roles of non-state civilian actors are not evident at the planning and decision-making levels of the event. However, they were present, albeit in a very limited capacity, at the practical level. Students from the Fine Arts and Applied Arts departments of Helwan University painted murals on the walls of the streets surrounding Tahrir Square, through which the parade would pass (Francis and Shawky, 2020). These murals depicted various artistic symbols from ancient Egyptian

civilization, aligning with the general theme of Tahrir Square's reconstruction and the anticipated parade. Interestingly, these murals were drawn in Simon Bolivar Square, just a street away from the now-eliminated graffiti on Mohamed Mahmoud Street, a prominent symbol of the 2011 uprising, as discussed in Chapter Three. This contribution by the students may be the only civilian input from the public in the event. Other participating non-state actors, however, were not members of the general public. While state apparatuses and officials were the primary initiators and planners of the event, recruited celebrities emerged as the most visually significant participants. As we shall see, Egyptian actors and actresses played a key role as narrators throughout the event, each delivering brief commentary on ancient Egyptian civilization with a tone of national pride and glory.

Near the end of 2020, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities announced the date of the parade after more than a year of preparations and an international media campaign. On its official website, under the title "The Wait for the Royal Parade is Finally Over," the ministry confirmed that the event was scheduled for April 3, 2021. In the announcement, the event was described as a "once-in-a-lifetime, unrivaled experience" where "22 mummies will gracefully roam the streets of Cairo from the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir to the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization" (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2020c). Furthermore, a few days before the event, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities posted a prelude translated into several languages (Experience Egypt, 2021a). The prelude was a seven minute video with celebrities as narrators and presenters. The video is shot between two destinations, the Egyptian museum and the NMEC, the starting and ending points of the parade respectively. The presenting celebrities provided various technical and informational introductions to the event itself about the old Egyptian Museum, the participating royal mummies, and the new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization. The explanation was narrated while displaying the mummies in the old museum with epic-dramatic music in the background. The most emphasized theme was that of historical continuity—a continuity "of a story of the greatest civilization in mankind."

The prelude begins by introducing the Egyptian Museum, where visitors from around the world come to learn about the magnificent story of the ancient Egyptian civilization, which "taught mankind the meaning of being civilized" through its

advancements in science, architecture, medicine, and astronomy. This civilization is described as having provided humanity "with the first model of a strong state, built on knowledge and faith." Throughout the video, there is an excessive emphasis on Egypt as the first and greatest civilization and state in human history, with claims of its supremacy in science and art over all other civilizations. Historically speaking, however, this portrayal is not entirely accurate. While it's true that Egypt is one of the earliest civilizations, it was not the only one. In fact, according to historians and archaeologists, Mesopotamia existed a few centuries before the rise of Egyptian civilization (Scarre, Fagan, and Golden, 2021: 69-72). However, this scientific historical fact is often rejected at the national level. In Egypt's national history textbooks, it is consistently stated that Egypt is the one and only first and oldest civilization. Furthermore, on the official website of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Egypt is defined as "the world's oldest nation-state," with its unification around 3100 BC under King Menes (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities).

What is particularly interesting here is the heavily nationalistic historical narrative, where the tone of nationalism dominates clearly scientific facts. It's not just about the false claims that Egypt is the only first and oldest civilization. Rather, it concerns the conceptualization of Egypt as the oldest "nation-state." There are two possible explanations for this mistaken conceptualization. The first is that the term "nation-state" here does not adhere to the modern definition of a nation-state. Instead, it draws on the idea of continuity, where the people of this early civilization and early state are seen as the direct ancestors of the current Egyptians. This suggests that the current Egyptian population is composed of the same inhabitants as ancient Egypt, positioning them as the oldest nation—a claim that raises its own historical and scientific concerns. The second explanation is that this conceptualization deliberately neglects historical and scientific accuracy in favor of constructing and imposing a mythical nationalist image. Regardless of which explanation is more accurate, both highlight the dominance of the state's official national narrative of history, enforced by an authority that holds intellectual, scientific, and cultural power—the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. My primary concern is not only about which civilization came first. I problematize the whole nationalist epistemic foundation and the nationalist approach to history represented in the constant mobilization of national myths to drive a glorious narrative of continuity.

Another theme that underscores the discourse of continuity is the emphasis on the achievements of the great ancient Egyptian rulers. These include expelling foreign conquerors, establishing economic trade relations, demonstrating excellent military leadership, building massive monumental structures, maintaining stability and prosperity, creating artistic artifacts, signing the first-ever peace treaties, and protecting the nation from invasions. While these achievements may be historically accurate, the narrators connect them to the "achievement" of building the new museum under the current regime. The video introduces the museum as one of the largest and most technologically advanced in the world, designed to tell the story of the greatest civilization in human history, from prehistory to the modern era. Thus, the video presents the new museum and the anticipated event as parts of an ongoing story of glory and acclaim. According to the video, the purpose of these projects is to teach future generations about the history and immortality of their ancestors and their accomplishments. What is problematic here is not only the supremacist nationalist tone, but also the emphasis on the current ruling power elite's direct connection to this ancient past, which is tied to national pride and glory. This narrative strategically places the power elite within this imagined and constructed historical narrative, using it as a means to assert legitimacy and reinforce their own definition of reality.

The promo concludes with an advertisement for the mega-event, stating, "The event is a once-in-a-lifetime event… a historical event taking place on the beloved land of Egypt… Egypt, rich with its history, possessing the greatest civilization known to mankind… Egypt is presenting the Pharaohs' Golden Parade to humanity" (Experience Egypt, 2021a). These few concluding lines encapsulate the key themes that reflect the state's general discourse of continuity within its historical narrative. The parade is framed as a gift to humanity, similar to how the Ancient Egyptian civilization is depicted as having given science and art to mankind. This positions Egyptian history as a continuous series of remarkable achievements, from the ancient past to the present day. While these themes are conveyed auditorily in the prelude, they will be visually and symbolically materialized in the event, as will be analyzed in the pages ahead.

After more than a year of preparations and a global media campaign to advertise the event, the Pharaohs' Golden Parade took place on April 3, 2021. Nearly 400

international and national TV channels and internet platforms had agreed to broadcast the event live (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2021b). Amid an atmosphere of anticipation and preparation, with Cairo's central roads blocked to secure the parade's route, all TV channels and news agencies focused on the national mega-event. International and national figures, along with statesmen, were in attendance as the parade began at 7:00 PM on April 3rd (Al-Badry, Al-Komash and Dabash, 2021; The Pharaohs' Golden Parade - The Egyptian Museum, 2021).

4.2. Mobilizing the Past to Define the Present and Future

Illustration 4.1. A Map Showing the Parade's (2021) Route in Cairo (Official Portal of Cairo Governorate, 2021)

The event lasted for two hours, according to the live broadcasted videos (Experience Egypt, 2021b). It can be divided into two parts. The first part was primarily official and the second one was more performative and artistic. The first part lasted over an hour, and included official speeches from media presenters, the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, and a short recorded documentary showcasing the state's projects in the field of antiquities. This section focused on discussing the state's accomplishments and national developmental projects related to construction, antiquities, and heritage. The second part was more artistic and performative, featuring orchestral music, dance

performances, songs in standard Arabic, Egyptian Arabic, and ancient Egyptian, along with visual and acting performances. The main performers in this section included musicians, actors and actresses, models, celebrities, as well as military and police members. Although the second part, which involved the transportation of the mummies through the route showed in illustration 4.1., dance performances, and music, was the heart of the event, it was still shorter. The longer portion was dedicated to introducing the new museum, highlighting the state's national achievements, and delivering speeches praising President Sisi and the current state.

The entire event's narrative is rooted in the state's official discourse and its definition of reality, not only through the speeches but also visually and materially. One can draw clear connections between President Sisi's statements in his general speeches and the speeches made during the event, especially in the first part, as will be further discussed. Throughout the event, several central themes were consistently emphasized, while others were marginalized or entirely absent. The three primary themes that dominated the entire two-hour event can be outlined as follows:

i. The crucial role of the state in "saving" national heritage: This theme was repeatedly stressed, with particular emphasis on the state's efforts since 2014. Here, the state refers mainly to President Sisi and key state apparatuses, notably the army and the Ministry of Interior.
ii. Civilizational continuity from the pharaonic past to the present: This theme emphasized the glorious advancement and prosperity linked to ancient Egypt, portraying it as a continuous thread that connects the past to the present.
iii. An inclusive religious discourse: Faith was highlighted as a pivotal factor behind the achievements of ancient Egyptian civilization. However, this faith was not explicitly tied to any particular religion, maintaining a broad, non-sectarian appeal.

In contrast, the marginalized or absent theme was the presence of the Egyptian public or civil society. While celebrities and TV presenters were heavily relied upon for visibility in the parade, any rhetorical or symbolic representation of the public was largely absent. In the next sections, these themes will be critically analyzed. It is important to note that this analysis focuses specifically on the political layer of the event. The themes discussed here are linked to the power structure and its production

of discourse. While the event may have excelled (or not) in artistic aesthetics, historical accuracy, or musical performance, these aspects are not the focus here. This analysis is concerned with examining the socio-political implications and dimensions of the event.

Illustration 4.2. Jasmin Taha, a TV Presenter in a Dress Inspired by the Pharaonic Theme in the Parade, Cairo (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2021)

As explained earlier, the mega-event centered around the transportation of 22 mummies in a royal parade from the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square to the newly constructed National Museum of Egyptian Civilization under President Sisi's government. In this sense, the event also served as the opening ceremony for the new museum, led by the president. The procession traveled between two key locations: the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir and the new museum in Fustat, with Tahrir Square acting as a symbolic milestone along the route. The event began by briefly showcasing the reconstructed Tahrir Square, followed by an introduction to the parade and the participating mummies. The TV presenter (Illustration 4.2.), like all those involved in the event as performers, wore a costume inspired by ancient Egyptian themes. As she introduced the event, Jasmin Taha also provided information about each king and queen of the royal mummies. The descriptions of these rulers focused on their great

achievements: establishing powerful militaries, protecting the nation from internal and external threats, building strong states, constructing monumental structures, and ensuring prosperity, security, and stability. These themes align with the standards through which the current power elite, led by Sisi, frames its own authority and legitimacy. The narrative continues as the focus shifts to the new museum, with its vast space and massive construction awaiting the arrival of Sisi's presidential parade, signaling the start of the museum's opening ceremony. As Sisi arrives, he is greeted by the Egyptian Prime Minister, the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, the UNESCO Director-General, and the UN Secretary-General for Tourism. Throughout the event, the camera frequently highlights Sisi, ensuring his prominent visual presence until the conclusion of the ceremony, although he uttered not a single word, let alone make a speech.

Illustration 4.3. Gifting Tutankhamon's Replica to Sisi from the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities in the Parade, Cairo (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2021)

After the opening of the museum, the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities presented a gift to President Sisi: a replica of one of Tutankhamun's famous statues (Illustration 4.3.). According to the Minister, this replica was the first product to be produced by a factory dedicated to manufacturing Egyptian archaeological replicas, a factory that

was specifically ordered to be built by Sisi himself. The factory's purpose is to produce replicas of Egypt's ancient heritage's antiquities, which will be sold to tourists and visitors interested in commemorative items and souvenirs. This factory is state-owned, marking a significant intervention by the government into the capitalist realm of tourist commodification and the branding of Egyptian heritage (Konouz Egypt | Certified Replicas of Egyptian Artifacts, 2021). The state's involvement in this process demonstrates a clear effort to monopolize the commodifying and consuming market of Egyptian history. In presenting the gift, the Minister explained that the Tutankhamun statue, which depicts the young pharaoh engaged in fishing, symbolized his efforts to kill the evil in order to establish a strong state. According to the Minister, this particular statue was chosen as the most fitting and expressive gift to Sisi: "We thought this is the best and most expressive piece we can gift you" (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2021d).

In the same year, 2021, President Sisi declared the beginning of the "New Republic," emphasizing that it wasn't just about massive construction and infrastructural development projects, but about a republic that honors its citizens, their rights, and their standard of living (Hamza, 2021). The announcement marked the start of a new era, following a period of political unrest and "revolutions" from 2011 to 2013, and an era of national threat during the "war on terror" from 2014 to 2020. Sisi's declaration suggests that 2021 is the year he has successfully overcome past challenges—symbolically "killing the evilness" to establish a strong state, much like his ancestor, Tutankhamun, who was portrayed as working to establish a secure and prosperous state.

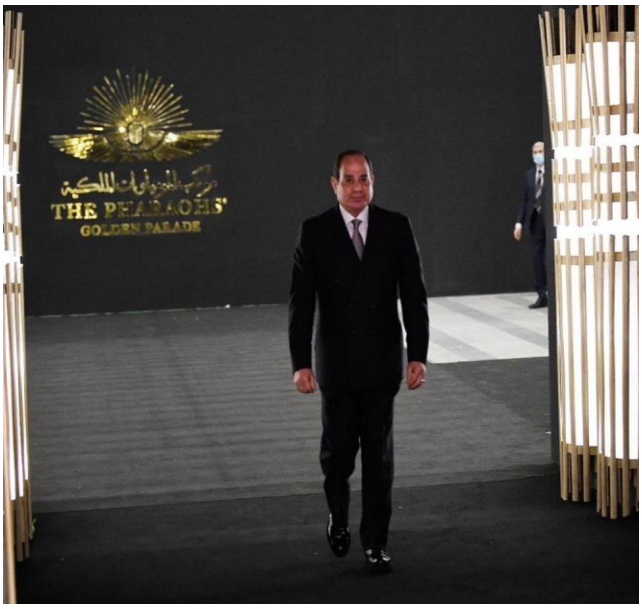

Illustration 4.4. Sisi Walking to the Hall Where the Parade is Displayed in Cairo (The Arab Republic of Egypt Presidency, 2021)

After opening the museum, Sisi heads alone to the main hall where the parade would be screened. For almost two minutes, the cameras record Sisi walking in the museum's corridors where its walls are decorated with a pharaonic theme and the event's logo (Illustration 4.4.). While Sisi remained silent the whole event, visually he occupied a relatively big and central part of the screens where he walked to the hall to start the parade and walked out to the museum's gate to receive and greet his ancestors' royal mummies, who ruled the country hundreds of centuries before him. With epic and emotionally charged music played by the orchestra, and with a stiff stand and serious proud facial expression, Sisi stands alone and centralized to greet the royal mummies amidst their arrival to the new museum that he constructed for them to suit their glorious position as it was mentioned in the event several times.

Illustration 4.5. Military Officers and Statemen Waiting for Sisi's Procession to Arrive in the Parade, Cairo (Al-Watan, 2021)

Most, if not all, of the attendees were statesmen, both national and international. Among them, several high-ranking military officials were present in their uniforms (Illustration 4.5.). When Sisi arrived at the museum, various members of the armed forces, including generals, were in attendance—not only for protection but also as key figures in the event. The visual presence of the military power elite as attendees was not the only reflection of militarization. Throughout the event, army symbols were present even artistically. From the outset of the parade, a military band, dressed in uniforms and playing drums, led the procession.

Illustration 4.6. A Military Band Leading the Parade, Cairo (Nogoum FM, 2021)

Illustration 4.7. War Chariots Standing on the Sides of the Route of the Parade in Cairo (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2021)

The soldiers of the Ministry of Defence, clad in Pharaonic costumes and riding chariots and horses, played a dual role: leading the procession and standing at its sides as a symbol of protection for the parade and the mummies (Illustration 4.7.). According to local pro-government media platforms, the military played a central role as both the

primary producer and director of the mega-event, through its Ministries of Defence and Military Production. The 22 vehicles used to transport the mummies, specifically designed for the event, were armored vehicles belonging to the Egyptian Airborne Corps within the Ministry of Defence. Additionally, the event featured 150 honor guard horses, three military bands with 150 members all from the Ministries of Defence, and 60 honor guard motorcycles from the Ministry of Interior. The parade also included 22 war chariots provided by the Ministry of Military Production (Taha, 2021). The whole parade with its initiators, executives, participants, and attendees indicates the ascendancy of the military power elite in various cultural, social, economic, industrial, and political fields symbolically and practically.

However, I find the ending scene of the parade quite representative of the power structure. As the mummies reached the new museum, an honorary military salute was performed by firing 21 cannons (Illustrations 4.8. and 4.9.). Consequently, Sisi was standing alone in the center in front of the Museum's gate while the mummies' vehicles entered the museum one after another (Illustration 4.10.). The last concluding scene was the military celebration of cannon firing, General Sisi, and the ancient Egyptian Royal mummies. No other symbols were there, emphasizing the militaristic definition of the reality visioned and imposed by the current power elite.

Illustration 4.8. Military Salute in the Parade, Cairo (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2021)

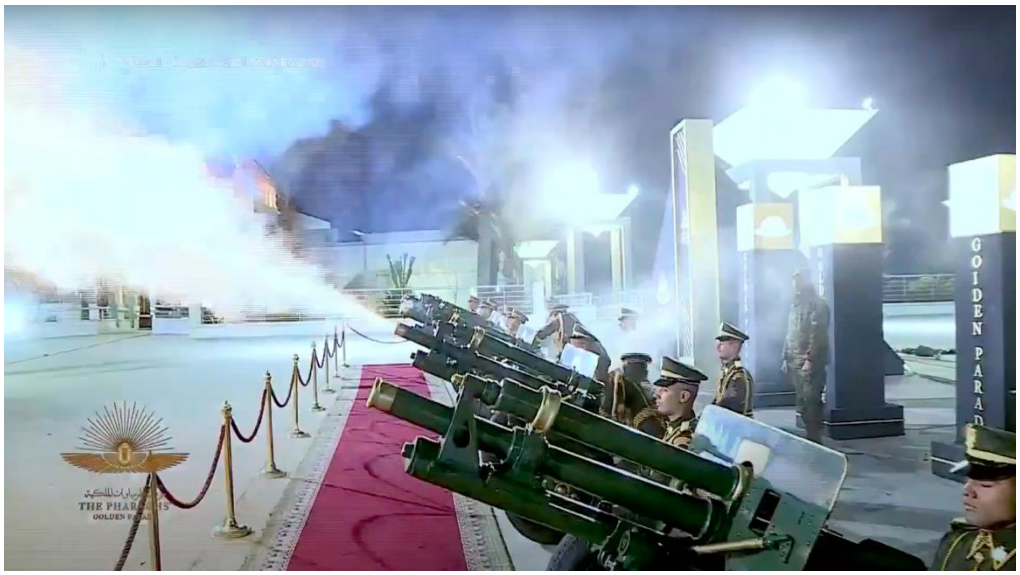

Illustration 4.9. Firing 21 Cannons Amidst the Mummies' Arrival at the New Museum in the Parade in Cairo (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2021)

Illustration 4.10. Sisi Standing Alone Recieving the Mummies in the New Museum in the Parade, Cairo (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2021)

The only non-state and non-military participants in the event, who enjoyed equal visibility like the military and state participants, were the celebrities. However, these celebrities aligned closely with Mills' concept of "celebrities" as a mediating group between the power elites and the public. They assumed roles that the power elite has

assigned to them, helping to perpetuate the state's discourse while maintaining their social prestige and social capital. In general, they do not have access to power in terms of making political, economic, or social decisions, they are not part of the power elite as decision-makers. However, similarly, they are not part of the broader public either, as they possess significant socio-cultural and economic capital compared to the wider public society. In this way, celebrities function as a mediating social group that voluntarily disseminates the state's narrative into the subjective domains of the public. This serves their own interests and helps maintain their position within the power structure of prestige.

Celebrities and prominent TV presenters acted as the narrators throughout the event, alongside a speech from the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities. The TV presenters framed the event as a national celebration, attributing its success entirely to the state, particularly to Sisi personally and the military institutionally. In the first hour of the broadcast, the presenters praised Sisi for the unprecedented efforts the state had made in national projects of urban development, antiquities restoration, and heritage preservation. These national projects were portrayed as major achievements of Sisi's government, celebrated during the parade. In a short documentary presented by the renowned Egyptian actor Khaled Nabawi, a list of state projects related to heritage preservation and antiquities restoration was showcased, covering the period from 2014 to the year of the parade, 2021. The film highlighted these projects as a direct result of Sisi's coming to power, framing him as the savior of Egyptian heritage after an era of neglect post-2011 and the challenges of terrorist attacks in 2014. The common theme throughout Nabawi's narration was that these historical sites were at risk of deterioration or loss if not for the government's actions under Sisi's leadership from 2014 onwards. The Minister of Tourism and Antiquities echoed this sentiment in his speech, emphasizing that the cultural, historical, and touristic sectors had never received such attention from the state before.

One of the major celebrated projects in the event, alongside the new museum and the parade, was the presentation of the newly reconstructed Tahrir Square to the world. The Minister of Tourism mentioned that the square had played a significant role in the public's experience and history, and its development was initiated by Sisi, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, neither the urban development project nor the parade

includes any representation or symbolism of the public's experience and history. The only reference to 2011 was to characterize that period as a time of confusion and hindrance to progress, which was remedied by the state's current projects. Tahrir Square was highlighted as the star of the event, on par with the mummies themselves. Its reconstruction was showcased prominently in several shots, portrayed as a great accomplishment. It was described as the key location in the parade route, where the mummies would be received by the four sphinxes and the obelisk before heading to the new museum. However, in the 2021 shots of Tahrir Square, the key absence was the people—not the state. This contrasts sharply with the events of 2011, where the square was filled with people. In 2021, the narrative of the people and their struggle was marginalized and eliminated, replaced by the dominant narrative of the power elite and the state through physical and symbolic violence.

The event also included explicit references to the military and the army as the protectors and saviors of Egypt, highlighted through statements by celebrities. Mona Zaki, one of Egypt's most renowned actresses, delivered remarks emphasizing the army's role in ancient Egyptian civilization. She described it as one of the strongest armies in the world, portraying it as the protector of the people and their honor. Similarly, the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities and the event's presenters frequently referred to Sisi as a visionary leader, a savior of Egyptian heritage, and a modernizer of infrastructure. They contrasted his leadership with the alleged obstruction of progress during 2011 and the neglect of previous regimes in areas like tourism, antiquities, and infrastructure. Expressions of gratitude and praise for Sisi personally and the state apparatuses were reiterated throughout the event, whether through the words of the presenters, the Minister's speech, or the celebrities' words. These verbal acknowledgments were further reinforced by the symbolic visual elements analyzed earlier. Collectively, the event underscored the centrality of the state as embodied by Sisi, the military, and the police. In essence, the event mirrored deeply the dominance of the military elite within the power structure, emphasizing their monopolization of means of infrastructural power and symbolic capital.

Two other central themes contribute significantly to the festive atmosphere of the event: i) the glorification of the ancient past and ii) the promotion of an inclusive religious discourse. The first theme, which was analyzed verbally and visually,

solidifies the state's legitimacy by linking the current power elite to values traditionally associated with national accomplishments—modernization, protection, and salvation—achieved through large-scale construction and infrastructure projects. On the other hand, the other two themes that the state's legitimacy bases itself on are highlighting a certain national past and producing an inclusive religious discourse This theme becomes particularly significant when considered within the socio-political context of 2013 and 2014, marked by allegations and supposed threats of exclusion and division. By emphasizing unity and inclusivity derived from a common national past, the state attempts to legitimize its authority, presenting itself as a stabilizing force that transcends divisions and protects all citizens. Together, these themes work in tandem to strengthen the state's image, constructing a narrative of legitimacy that draws on both historical trajectory and a tolerating inclusive national identity.

For the second theme, the historical narrative of the pharaonic past is strategically deployed in two key ways during the event. The first approach emphasizes the glory, greatness, and supremacy of ancient Egyptian civilization, highlighting its political, economic, military, scientific, and architectural achievements. This glorification establishes a narrative of historical continuity, wherein the current military regime aligns itself with this illustrious past. By situating its national projects as extensions of ancient Egyptian accomplishments, the regime constructs an image of itself as the inheritor and guardian of a legacy of glory and prosperity. This narrative, however, serves to obscure the socio-political and economic crises experienced by the public. The current challenges faced by Egyptian society are downplayed or dismissed, replaced instead by a focus on monumental achievements and state-led modernization projects. For instance, the Minister of Tourism present in the ceremony repeatedly emphasized that the new museum, equipped with advanced technologies, represents yet another chapter of success in the ongoing story of Egypt's historical greatness. By framing its efforts within this narrative, the regime not only legitimizes its actions but also seeks to distract from the realities of economic struggles and public discontent experienced by the people, projecting a vision of unbroken progress and national pride.

The second way that the pharaonic past is deployed is by emphasizing the uniqueness of the Egyptian character, shaping the imagination of the public about themselves according to the state's favoured discourse. For instance, in the introduction of the

event, the TV presenter started by mentioning that the Egyptian people have always been strong and determined to overcome any challenge and achieve whatever they want. In another scene by another presenter, it was described that the Egyptians have always believed in the values of hard work through patience and enduring hardships. Lines can be drawn between this imagined description of the Egyptian people and Sisi's direct requests to the Egyptians in his speeches. In 2018, in a speech given at an official opening ceremony of national projects in the field of electricity, Sisi asked Egyptians to be patient, and they will witness wonders beyond imagination happening to Egypt, referring to his projects (ON Live, 2018). In 2019, he had a similar allusion through Facebook where he stated that the true heroes were the Egyptian people who endured hardships, burden of economic reforms, and made sacrifices to build and achieve a better future for the coming generations (Abdelfattah El-Sisi, 2019). On the 25th of January 2020, in his speech on the 65th anniversary of National Police Day, Sisi reasserted that the Egyptians have been voluntarily patient and hardworking under economic stresses and hardships to overcome the national challenges. By 2020, the 25th of January has already become a commemoration of the National Police Day, marginalizing and eliminating any memory of the 2011 revolution (Maspero News, 2020). In another opening ceremony of infrastructural and residential projects applied by the Armed Forces architectural department of the Ministry of Defence, he blamed the Egyptians for not dreaming with him of a better future for future generations by complaining about the economic hardships (ON, 2021).

Sisi and the military power elite have been enforcing their imagination and expectations of the Egyptian public in their different speeches from 2014 to 2021. In 2024, on the occasion of Martyr's Day to commemorate the martyrs of the military, Sisi again referred to the number of challenges and hardships of national and economic threats where he encouraged the Egyptians to be patient and hardworking to overcome these conditions (Sada Elbalad, 2024). Based on this quick review of Sisi's speeches, an enforced theme that depicts Egyptians to be patient and hardworking is repeated. Aligning with Sisi's imagination and definition of reality, the Parade's discourse on the Egyptian character was constructed. In the military imagination and definition of reality, the public and civil societies are and should be merely submissive masses who are patient and trusting the leadership that knows and decides everything for them. This imagination of the power structure, its actors, and their roles is heavily militant.

In the army, only the commanders have the power to decide, while soldiers obey simply.

Finally, the third centralized theme in the event is inclusive religious discourse. The official speeches and celebrities' words on the ancient Egyptian past and the present revolved around the themes of state and army, the unique Egyptian character, and the role of religion or belief system. In the short movie of Khaled Nabawi that was broached earlier where the state's accomplishments in the field of archaeology and history were listed, inclusive religious discourse employed by the state was explicit. The list of archaeological and heritage projects covered various historical sites regardless of their religious background and the era they belong to. This included ancient Egyptian temples, Jewish synagogues, Christian churches, and Muslim mosques. The Minister of Tourism and Antiquities stated clearly that the state was devoting a huge budget and efforts to all historical religious and worship places equally without any discrimination. Nabawi in the short movie emphasized that: "civilization is the freedom to believe and practice one's faith while coexisting harmoniously with other beliefs and practices…On this land, the freedom to practice different worships is guaranteed for every human being" (CBC Egypt, 2021). A self-evident question here is, what about other freedoms? Political? Social? Economical? Intellectual? It seems that the only option of freedom that doesn't threaten the power structure and its elite is freedom of worship as long as they are limited to spiritual practice and don't transgress the boundary of politics.

Another manifestation of the adopted inclusive religious discourse is the central hall of the new museum. At the beginning of the event when Sisi was opening the museum, the Minister of Tourism took Sisi on a tour of the central hall of the museum. The central hall in the museum was designed to represent the richness and diversity of Egyptian history as the Minister elaborated. In a circular consecutive setting, the hall begins with antiquities from prehistoric Egypt, passing by the ancient Egyptian civilization, the Greek era, the Roman era, the Arab era, and the modern Khedivate. Each era is represented through various archaeological pieces including its religion. Simultaneously, the center of the hall and the middle point between all these eras and religions are the place of the transported mummies. This center of the big hall has another underground smaller hall designed like the original tomb of the mummies.

Therefore, the idea is to put the royal mummies in a place that looks like their original royal tombs in the center of the museum's main hall.

The proposed inclusive religious discourse is also verbally emphasized by the celebrities in their words and songs at the event. The event's presenter has asserted that faith and tolerance have been crucial key factors behind the ancient Egyptians' greatness that enabled them to build this superior civilization. In the words of Karim Abdelaziz, an Egyptian star actor, he elaborated that the secret behind the Egyptian civilization's supremacy was not only science but also the faithful heart that is full of values of love, justice, truthfulness, equality, and peace. These values come from the ancient belief of Ma'at that rejects chaos, evil, and injustice and instills beliefs in resurrection, accountability, and morality. Among the three songs, there was one that was claimed to be performed in the ancient Egyptian language. The song's lyrics are borrowed from an ancient religious script for Isis Goddess named "Isis Reverence Hymns" that was found in one of Luxor's temples (Egypt Today, 2021). Besides the historical and artistic significance of the song, it involves an inclusive religious discourse as it highlights a more general version of the belief system to all Egyptians. This, of course, doesn't mean to believe in the belief system of the ancient Egyptians. Yet, it replaces the need to choose one religion over another within the present practised religions in Egypt, mainly Islam and Christianity. The reason behind choosing the location of the new museum to be built is also decided by a similar inclusive religious cultural logic. According to the Minister of Tourism, Fustat was chosen as the location for the museum due to its significance as the first Muslim capital of Egypt while including a Jewish Synagogue, more than seven Christian Churches, and Egypt's first Mosque of Amr ibn al-'As (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, n. d.).

The word of faith or *Īmān* in Arabic, was present in almost every speech or word. However, this faith is not associated with a specific religion. Rather, it's a set of good and bad values that exist in every religion. Here, we have an inclusive spiritual concept of religion, which is *Īmān*. This concept avoids any exclusionary religious discourse, especially after an era of threats of exclusion for Christians and a discourse of Islamic extremism and terror. Whether these threats and discourses are true or not, the current power elite has maximized them to produce its religious discourse that depicts the state

as the saviour, protector, order maintainer, and stability enforcer after an era of exclusion and chaos. My point here is not to criticise the discourse itself. In fact, the discourse of religious inclusiveness and harmony through serious state attention to the diverse cultural heritage is needed and supported. It is the most tolerable central theme in comparison to the other themes of state and military. However, my critical analysis here aims to highlight how and why this discourse is instrumentalized and mobilized. In other words, under such an authoritarian military regime that has been using systematic and arbitrary physical and symbolic violence to suppress any opposition since 2014, why would it call for freedom of worship and inclusive religious discourse? The answer is simple, the same answer as mobilizing the Pharaonic past, this is how the regime attempts to derive its legitimacy in a context of economic crisis, repression, and anger and attempts to marginalize the recent revolutionary past by associating it with national threats, civil wars, terrors, and chaos. Such religious discourse claims that only the military is the peacemaker and guarantee of religious harmony and tolerance as if people in their everyday lives didn't coexist peacefully before. It operates symbolically on two levels by forcing a militaristic perception of reality. Firstly, it operates on symbolic emotions and values of national unity and harmony. Secondly, it operates on symbolic emotions of fear and threat. That is to say, the only alternative to the current oppressive power structure is terror and chaos.

4.3. The Eliminated Past

As the state with its apparatuses and the military power elite monopolize almost all means of the decision-making process; and celebrities occupy all the space of expression and representation, which is reflected in the parade verbally and visually, very few are left to the public in terms of decision-making, representation, and presence in the power structure and in the event. As it was stressed above, the only civil contribution of the public was through two faculties of one university, the University of Helwan. In the Parade, 330 students of the Faculty of Physical Education were models (Taha, 2021). This was the only truly civil group from the Egyptian public present in the Parade. However, they didn't possess any symbolic power or recognition visually or verbally like other groups of celebrities, Military, and state officials in the event who were centralized through camera shooting, unique individual costumes, or giving speeches. The only hinting scene about the public and their crucial role was a

few seconds scene where children ran towards Tahrir Square while holding lights in their hands to light up the Square in its new design (Illustrations 4.11. and 4.12.). Yet, even this inclusion is a very state-based perspective where the children are looking at the new Tahrir Square that displays the pharaonic past and reflects the governmental accomplishments with pride and admiration. That is to say, the only option for kids to see the future is through a past that is already annihilated (Illustration 4.13.). Also, after the conducted analysis of the real actors behind all these mega-projects and mega-events and their own discourse of it, this scene becomes a very cliche scene that doesn't reflect the true oppressive power structure.

Illustration 4.11. Kids Running towards Tahrir Square to Light It up in the Parade, Cairo (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2021)

Illustration 4.12. Tahrir Square in Its New Design in the Parade, Cairo (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2021)

Illustration 4.13. Kids Looking at the New Tahrir Square in the Parade, Cairo (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2021)

Through such national projects and events, the regime systematically suppresses the civil public, aiming to turn them into a passive mass society. When a civil society is deliberately alienated from all access to means of power to decide the present and narrate the past, the power elite aims to produce passive recipients of the power elite's decision, historical narrative, and state discourse. As Sisi has always conveyed in his speeches, the people should trust the leadership, be patient, and work hard. In fact, his own statements, as they were referred to above, contradict the imposed perception and narrative of the event. While calling for people to be patient and endure the economic crisis, the event depicts a very cheerful celebratory imagination of a prosperous reality that doesn't have any struggle of the major part of the people. The event doesn't represent only a marginalization, exclusion, and alienation of people from their present reality. Rather, it represents a marginalization, exclusion, and alienation from their past by eliminating their historical narrative that poses a threat to the coup regime.

The uprisings of 2011 and even 2013 were deliberately made absent from the historical narrative of the event. Furthermore, 2011 was mentioned several times as a hurdle in the path of the state's development plans. Years of 2013 and 2014 were associated with terrorist attacks, which might be true incidents. Yet, they weren't the only major incident as we have millions of people gathering in the streets and others were massacred. Even Tahrir Square, the only symbol of both uprisings of 2011 and 2013,

was reconstructed and redefined as an “open museum” showing the ancient Egyptian past only, eliminating any revolutionary public symbolism. Furthermore, it became associated with the festive “multimillion-dollar spectacle” of the Pharaohs’ Golden Parade, attempting to replace any other associated big events in the public memory and its historical narrative (Official Portal of Cairo Governorate, 2021b).

The mobilization of Pharaonism in the redevelopment of Tahrir Square and the Pharaohs’ Golden Parade serves as a key strategy for the coup regime to i) reinforce its legitimacy ii) and reinforce its official projection and definition of present and past. The interest in Pharaonic and Egyptian heritage in general alongside with finding a unifying harmonious national identity and religious discourse might be noble good initiatives on their own. However, an isolated perspective of these events where they are analyzed independently from the power structure and context is insufficient, at least for a social sciences researcher. While valuing their cultural richness and admiring their artistic efforts, they have to be analyzed critically according to the power structure and its discourse by searching for the missing puzzle part, suppressed voice, and eliminated narrative. In the case of these two projects, the pharaonic past is mobilized to define reality according to the favoured state’s discourse that serves and preserves the power elite’s position. Furthermore, this ancient national past is mobilized to suppress and replace another recent past that is undesired by the military power elite. This other suppressed past is the people’s narrative and memory of possessing power, uniting against the state and its apparatuses, and resistance. Therefore, a critical analysis of these events is necessitated to attempt to balance, diversify, and counter the dominant narrative and discourse that marginalizes and effaces other alternative ones.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: CONTINUITY OF TAHRIR SQUARE'S SIGNIFICANCE AMIDST ITS DEMONIZATION

In 2024, nearly 13 years after the Egyptian uprising of 2011, Sisi referenced the events of that year in speeches delivered on various occasions, both military and civil. On January 24th, during a celebration of the 72nd National Police Day, Sisi criticized the 2011 uprising and its consequences. By 2024, January 25th had become exclusively a commemoration and celebration of National Police Day, effectively silencing and erasing any memorialization of the January 25th revolution. During this celebration, Sisi referred to the revolution as the "2011 events" (Channel 1EG , 2024). He attributed the weakening of the Egyptian economy to these events, specifically blaming them for instigating a war on terror. He highlighted January 28, 2011, when the police system collapsed after attempts to suppress protesters using excessive physical violence. White-washing the severity of the violence inflicted by the police on civilians that day, Sisi stated: "The events of January 28, 2011, orchestrated by the Muslim Brotherhood, [were] part of a plan to destroy Egypt" (State Information System, 2024). During the same celebration, a short film was presented to depict the heroic role of policemen in countering the "terrorist" attacks allegedly carried out by the Muslim Brotherhood in January 2011 (CBC Egypt, 2024). This short film represented the first direct attempt to produce a completely new narrative of January 28, 2011. As discussed in Chapter Three on Tahrir Square, January 28, also known as "The Friday of Anger" by protesters, symbolized a significant victory for the people against police violence. It was the day they successfully took over the Square despite violent and terrorizing attempts by the police to disperse them. In contrast, the new narrative presented in the 2024 Police Day celebration reimagines the policemen as heroes who saved Egypt from a supposed terrorist attack by the Muslim Brotherhood on January 28, 2011.

Sisi's demonizing narrative of the January 25th revolution and its detailed memories does not stop here. In his speech at the same Police Day commemoration in 2024, he

described the 2011 “events” as an attempt to “stir public opinion against the state by achieving a division between the people and the government, [and] between the people and the Ministry of Interior” (State Information System, 2024). He elaborated that the 2011 goal of manipulating public opinion by attacking and undermining state institutions resulted in the negative consequences of the public’s actions in 2011. Here, Sisi rejects the characterization of the 2011 uprising as a collective act of protest by the people against an authoritarian state and its oppressive apparatuses. He no longer refers to it as a revolution, a term he used until 2019 (The Egyptian Presidency, 2019). Instead, he ambiguously and anonymously calls it “the events of 2011.” Silencing the revolutionary narrative was not enough for him; Sisi also replaced it with the official state narrative of national threat and heroification, distorting and suppressing the true history of these events and their memories. In this revised narrative, January 25th is solely a national commemoration of Police Day, while the “2011 events” are demonized and blamed for every national, economic, and social hardship.

Two years ago, at an event showcasing social development projects in 2022, Sisi accused the 2011 “events” of antagonizing the Egyptian state and portraying it as an enemy by blaming it for poor living standards, rather than holding citizens accountable for not working hard enough (The Egyptian Presidency, 2022). He emphasized that his primary goal is to ensure the safety of the Egyptian state and its apparatuses in the face of what he described as destructive moments like 2011. Sisi specifically referred to the movie *Terrorism and Kebab* (1992), an Egyptian film that critiques the exhausting, dysfunctional, and corrupt bureaucracy of the Mubarak era, as embodied in the massive administrative building of Tahrir’s Mogama’. He repeatedly stated that such movies and ideas antagonized “the state” in the eyes of citizens, a narrative he strongly opposes. There are numerous examples to cite from Sisi’s speeches up to the present day. However, the focus is not on the number of citations but on emphasizing the shift in his discourse regarding the 2011 uprising, from initially referring to it as a revolution to later demonizing it. At first, he derived his legitimacy as the savior of the revolution from the hands of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, recognizing the danger and threat of relying on such legitimatin discourse, he shifted to grounding his authority in other sources, such as national projects and the pharaonic past, while demonizing what he believes to be threatnining for his power.

By 2024, no material or rhetorical memorialization of the 2011 revolution remained within the general state discourse or the official historical narrative. As demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the government's projects for Tahrir Square's urban development (2020) and the Pharaohs' Golden Parade (2021) systematically erased and replaced the spatial and historical narratives of the revolution with a new narrative rooted in Egypt's ancient past and Pharaonic civilization. These national projects followed six years of physical violence and the surveillance of protests in Tahrir Square. While the material evidence of the revolution was eliminated, the 2011 revolution persisted rhetorically as a legitimating narrative within the official discourse of the military regime until 2019. However, after 2020, both the material and rhetorical symbols of the 2011 uprising were systematically erased, demonized, and supplanted by a new legitimating official narrative celebrating the glory of the Pharaonic past. Unlike the revolutionary narrative, the new official narrative of the Pharaonic past is associated with continuity in prosperity, safety, stability, progress, pride, and greatness. The official narrative of the revolutionary past was legitimizing within a discourse framed by national threat, the war on terror, and political upheaval driven by activism. Yet, after a decade, this discourse became fully exhausted. A new official narrative of an ancient national past, accompanied by a discourse of a "new republic" characterized by stability, progress, and prosperity, was adopted, signaling the end of one era (with its disfavored narratives and discourses) and the beginning of another (with its own preferred narratives and discourse).

The years between 2013 and 2024 reflect a wide variety of strategies of de-democratization employed by the counterrevolutionary military power elite, as reviewed in the third and fourth chapters. These strategies include exercising arbitrary state violence against opposition, surveillance, marginalization and suppression of activists, monopolization of means of expression, organizing propagandistic events, eliminating the revolutionary narrative and memory, and demonizing the 2011 uprising and its contributing actors. Despite the impressive array of strategies employed by Sisi's regime—operating through mechanisms of fear and persuasion—Tahrir Square remains the political epicenter for the Egyptian people.

In October 2023, amidst the Israeli genocide against Palestinians in Gaza following Hamas' attack on the settler-colonial state of Israel, Egyptians gathered in Tahrir

Square to show their support for Gaza and Palestine. According to *Mada Masr* (2023), one of the very few independent Egyptian news platforms still operating, the pro-Palestinian protests were organized by state-aligned parties with police forces present to prevent the spread of demonstrations. Protestors were asked to leave Tahrir Square and Mohamed Mahmoud Street, both ultimate symbols of the Egyptian Arab Spring. The aim of the state-allied organizers was to contain the protests by limiting them to designated areas, framing them as delegations to Sisi and his policies regarding Gaza, and broadcasting these images on state-controlled media (Mada Masr, 2023). However, for the first time in years, crowds began moving towards Tahrir Square, chanting that the protests were genuine and not staged to support Sisi (Mada Masr, 2023) (Illustration 5.1.). As the protestors moved toward Tahrir Square with such chants, "camera lenses on live broadcasts cut to other designated protest sites" where chants in support of Sisi were being shown (Mada Masr, 2023). According to *Mada Masr* and Human Rights Watch, dozens of pro-Palestinian protestors were arrested by police during the demonstrations and throughout October (Mada Masr, 2023; Human Rights Watch , 2023).

Illustration 5.1. Egyptians Protesting in Supporting Palestine in Tahrir Square, 2023

The 2023 pro-Palestine protests highlighted the Egyptians' determination to assert their agency by breaking away from the state's pre-decided plan and refusing to be instrumentalized by Sisi's regime. Despite years of fear, physical violence, and the state's efforts to strip Tahrir Square of its revolutionary memory both materially and symbolically, the people seized the first opportunity to raise their voices in opposition to the government's discourse. The rare scene of the 2023 pro-Palestine protests serves as a vivid manifestation of today's counterrevolutionary Egypt. In this scene, the suppressed public strives to express itself, while police and security forces work to control and suppress, and pro-regime media organizations selectively redirect the narrative to align with the regime's instructions and interests. However, this moment transcends the dominant official narrative. It delivers a powerful message: despite the state's imposed discourse, the 2011 revolution remains alive in the collective memory, and Tahrir Square continues to serve as the qibla for Egyptians seeking to express their independent voices.

In this dissertation, as explained in the first chapter of the introduction, I used the sociological framework of power theories and the methodology of critical discourse analysis to construct an alternative narrative that is both scientific and just. My aim was to critically analyze, explain, and document the current situation in counterrevolutionary Egypt and its de-democratization strategies. To achieve this, I examined the development of the official historical narrative surrounding the 2011 uprising, Tahrir Square, and the Pharaonic past, as reflected in the urban reconstruction of Tahrir Square (2020) and the spectacle of the Pharaohs' Golden Parade (2021). I collected data from pro-government news platforms, governmental websites, and the social media accounts of state institutions, including news, statements, posts, and broadcasts related to these two specific governmental projects. I also relied on international news platforms to include events and perspectives censored by local media.

By applying the synthesized sociological theoretical framework, crafted in the second chapter, and the synthesized methodology of archaeology and critical discourse analysis to the collected data, I argued that the post-2013 military regime under Sisi instrumentalizes Pharaonic history and mobilizes its archaeology to establish a new legitimizing official national narrative. For me, as demonstrated in the empirical

chapters three and four, the primary issue with this narrative lies not merely in the political instrumentalization of the Pharaonic past or the adoption of it as a national identity. Instead, the core problem is the socio-political context and power structure within which this new national historical narrative is introduced. In a context marked by oppressive counterrevolution, unequal power relations, the monopolization of means of expression by the military power elite, a severely deteriorating economic situation, and state violence, I asked: who and whose story or memory does this new national historical narrative and official discourse represent, serve, and centralize? Conversely, who and whose story or memory does it marginalize, alienate, and eliminate? More importantly, why and how is this narrative constructed?

By analyzing the collected data on the two national projects in the third and fourth chapters–on Tahrir Square and the Parade mega-event, respectively–I highlighted the pivotal role of military institutions and state ministries in constructing this narrative under Sisi's direction. This demonstrates the marginalization and alienation of the Egyptian public from the decision-making process and the production of narrative. As noted previously in the analysis, the ministries of Defence, Tourism and Antiquities, Interior, and other related state institutions were the primary directors, contributors, and decision-makers for these projects. The Egyptian public was excluded from both the decision-making and planning processes, whether through individual or institutional channels. This exclusion follows the failure of democratization and political activism after 2011, a time when Egyptians sought to commemorate their revolution, plan for the future, and contribute to decision-making. By monopolizing decision-making and discourse production within the power structure, the military power elite controls the means of infrastructural power, establishing an authoritarian power system.

Consequently, as the means of infrastructural power are centralized in the hands of the ruling elite, they also hold centralized symbolic capital. This symbolic capital enables them to exercise symbolic power and violence to produce and impose explanations of the power structure that serve and perpetuate it. These explanations of reality and power, manifested materially and symbolically through the studied projects, represent, enforce, and centralize the militarized definition of reality under the military regime. At the same time, they marginalize and alienate the people from the means of

expression and discourse production, replacing their narrative of struggle and resistance with a glorified ancient Pharaonic narrative that praises and legitimizes the current regime. Thus, I describe these national projects as de-democratizing strategies employed by the counterrevolutionary military regime under Sisi. They are de-democratizing not only by excluding the public from planning and decision-making but also by producing an exclusive official discourse and national historical narrative that silences the active role of the people and their stories of resistance in the face of state oppression.

Finally, a clarification is in order here, this dissertation focuses on state discourse and the official narrative as strategies that legitimize, serve, and perpetuate a certain power structure and power relations. The people's responses and interactions with the studied discourse and narrative fall outside the scope of this study. I do not claim to assess whether these strategies are effective or not, nor do I argue that the people view them negatively or positively. Such claims would require an examination of the people's reactions, thoughts, and sentiments about the state discourse and official narrative, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. My aim was to critically analyze the state's efforts at discourse production within the power dynamics and socio-political context. However, it is worth noting that the Tahrir Square projects and the Pharaohs' Golden Parade sparked widespread debates and discussions among Egyptian and foreign intellectuals, as well as opinion articles on social media and media platforms. To conclude this dissertation, I will briefly review some of these intellectuals' and writers' opinion articles on the studied projects. I believe discussing these different perspectives might resonate with readers and open new doors for future research.

The mega-event of the Pharaohs' Golden Parade (2021) received varied reactions from both Egyptian and foreign intellectuals. Egyptian historian of the Modern Middle East, Khaled Fahmy (2021), expressed his astonishment at the event's grand artistic details, noting the significant efforts and budget allocated by the Egyptian state to organize it. However, Fahmy criticized the priorities of the Egyptian state, specifically citing the suffering of Egyptians under COVID-19, the lack of vaccines, and the deterioration of basic social services and human rights in sectors such as health, education, and transportation (Fahmy, 2021). Fahmy's critique of the parade lies in the paradox between the government's claims of a budget deficit when addressing the people's

basic needs and its spending on such a mega-event. For him, the event reflects the state's actual financial and administrative capacities, which are used to prioritize grand spectacles over the fundamental needs of the people (Fahmy, 2021).

Fahmy was not the only critic of the event. Hussein A. H. Omar (2021), a cultural and intellectual historian of the Modern Middle East, also critiqued the Pharaohs' Golden Parade, but from a different perspective. In his description of the event, Omar (2021) stated, “Sisi’s spectacle of military futurism in pharaonic drag is merely the most recent iteration of an old propaganda stratagem.” He argued that mobilizing the ancient Egyptian past to suppress more recent history has been a common tactic employed by Egypt’s dictators (Omar, 2021). By referencing various historical instances where ancient Egyptian history was instrumentalized, Omar (2021) explained that the current regime’s focus on the Pharaonic past serves as a strategy to overshadow Egypt’s politically charged modern history, substituting it with myths of ancient grandeur. Omar also highlighted the contradictions the event exposed, particularly in its juxtaposition to the regime's destruction of Cairo's Mamluk and Ottoman-era homes and tombs (Omar, 2021). Concluding his critique, Omar pointed to the critical socio-political context in which the event was held, stating: “In the country with arguably the highest number of political prisoners and torture victims in the world, even the dead cannot be left undisturbed” (Omar, 2021).

David Kanbergs (2021), a researcher of Middle Eastern studies, also criticized the spectacle, focusing on two main points. The first was that the current regime used the military mobilization of ancient Egyptian history to redefine itself and legitimize its authority. Like Omar (2021), Kanbergs (2021) also emphasized the regime’s deliberate “erasure of the 2011 Revolution from the space of the city and from collective memory.” He described the mobilization of mummies as a metaphor for recruiting them into military service under the current regime. Regarding the first point, Kanbergs (2021) emphasized the military nature of the event, pointing out that the spectacle was planned within the military paradigm, featuring army figures and groups throughout. For his second point, Kanbergs (2021) discussed how the spectacle's chosen celebrities, technical elements, and speeches deliberately erased or replaced figures and symbols from the 2011 revolution. He further connected this to the redesign of Tahrir Square as part of the state’s ongoing efforts to erase

revolutionary memory and symbolism. Finally, Kanbergs (2021) highlighted the overarching militarization of Egypt under Sisi, which, he argues, leaves no alternative but military governance.

There were also supporters of the parade among Egyptian intellectuals. Monica Hanna (2021), an Egyptian archaeologist, expressed her happiness and joy at seeing Egyptians embrace their ancient Egyptian identity. Hanna (2021) explained that Egyptians had long been alienated from their ancient heritage due to colonial and post-colonial legacies. She argued that European colonizers appropriated ancient Egyptian heritage and archaeology, positioning themselves as the first 'discoverers' and 'scholars' of Egyptology. In this context, the Parade and the positive public response to it symbolize a reclaiming and assertion of ancient Egyptian heritage. Hanna (2021) defended the event, emphasizing that the right to heritage and cultural identity is a fundamental human right, on par with other categories of human rights.

However, unlike her supportive stance on the Parade, Hanna (2019) criticized the Tahrir Square redesign, particularly the display of the ancient Egyptian Obelisk and Sphinxes. While other scholars, such as Omar (2021) and Kanbergs (2021), criticized the reconstruction of Tahrir Square for stripping the space of its revolutionary and democratic symbolism, Hanna's criticism addressed a different dimension of the urban plan. When the Tahrir Square project was first announced in early 2019, Hanna (2019a), as an archaeologist, expressed concern over the proposal to move the sphinxes from Luxor to Tahrir Square. In a Facebook post, she voiced her frustration, pointing out that this proposal had already been rejected in the past (Hanna, 2019b). She also organized a petition gathering signatures to oppose this specific urban development plan (Hanna, 2019c). Hanna (2019a) argued that relocating the sphinxes from their original location in Luxor to Tahrir Square would be damaging to these valuable archaeological monuments. She stressed that archaeological monuments should not be reduced to mere artistic aesthetics or decorations but should be preserved in their historical context and original locations. Despite her efforts, the petition was not accepted, and the plan proceeded as designed, with any expert criticisms being ignored.

Based on my analyses and the study conducted throughout this dissertation, I would like to respond to Hanna's question and indignation. In my view, the military regime doesn't genuinely prioritize ancient Egyptian heritage and archaeology; rather, it is more focused on its own security measures and strategies against prospect threats. Hanna argues that it's crucial to decolonize and reclaim the ancient Egyptian heritage from the colonial power structures embedded in the disciplines of history and archaeology. I would extend the same argument to the current Egyptian authoritarian power structure. If the colonizers appropriated ancient Egyptian heritage by alienating Egyptians from it and falsely claiming that they were incapable of preserving it, then I believe the current oppressive power elite has appropriated this heritage to further alienate Egyptians from their present and contemporary revolutionary past. Therefore, if the decolonization of ancient Egyptian history is necessary, then, it is almost impossible without a thorough, critical account of de-democratization prosses unleashed by the counterrevolutionary regime – an ccount that this dissertation has furnished.

CODA

> The purpose of writing is thus to liberate: not just personally, but also collectively; not nationally, but humanly.
>
> –Irfan Ahmad

Writing this dissertation has been a turbulent journey, and I believe that is only natural. Like any process of intellectual production, there is always an intellectual journey—one that encompasses both the theoretical scientific and emotional ethical paths. For me, this journey has been an ongoing dialogue between my theoretical understanding of the scientific field and the emotions drawn from my own life experiences—experiences whose impacts are inescapable, no matter how much we try to neutralize them as social researchers. Born and raised in my homeland, having completed middle school within the national education system, and witnessing firsthand how resistance and uprisings are born, suffocated, instrumentalized, and forgotten—choosing this topic to study was neither a coincidence nor an easy decision.

On the theoretical and scientific front, it was a challenge to find a framework that could encompass the context of my case study, a modern post-colonial, non-Western context. Most sociological theories are rooted in Western contexts. Yet, thanks to my advisor's guidance, I realized that it was not impossible. As I began shaping my theoretical framework, I sought to identify common elements shared by my study and the general theories of power structure in the modern nation-states. This served as the foundation for my framework, a starting point, as it were. Then, I focused on the specificities of my case study to craft a framework capable of addressing its complexities. There were times when I nearly lost hope of finding a relevant theory, but eventually, I realized that as researchers from the post-colonial Global South, our task is to critically engage with the sociological canon, connecting the study of non-Western cases with the wider academic production, while being aware to their limits as well as opportunities.

On the emotional and ethical level—equally vital to the intellectual journey for me—the task proved endless, both literally and metaphorically. As a young woman who studied Egypt’s national history, who witnessed the 2011 uprising, who shared the hope for change with my parents and millions Egyptians, and who then witnessed the

political fragmentation, state violence, and the disappointment that followed—writing this dissertation was complicated on many levels. It felt like a series of challenges, ones I don't claim to have fully overcome. Yet, I hope that simply being aware of these challenges can awaken the scholarly caution as well as future avenues to judiciously grapple with them.

One challenge was being, to some extent, personally affected by the current authoritarian military regime in Egypt. Another challenge was being a direct participant in the moments of the Arab Spring in Egypt and its aftermath, despite being only 11 years old in 2011. The emotions I experienced during those moments were as contradictory as they were profound: fear, anger, unity, liberation, hope, fragmentation, and disappointment. The final challenge, ultimately connected to the first two, was my role as a student and researcher of social sciences. I wasn't writing a memoir or a creative work, but an academic, scientific one. The process of materializing this work into reality provoked many questions.

The first set of questions concerned my identity: my relationship to my homeland, its people, its culture, and its heritage. A country that I was raised by its love and hoped to change for the better. These questions were: Does writing such a dissertation make me unpatriotic? Am I distorting the image of my home country, as the current regime accuses its critics to be? Against whom is this dissertation written, and for whom? Is it for my own academic advancement? Is it an expression of anger toward a tyrannical regime whose oppression I've witnessed? Is it for "my people"—for the 60,000 political prisoners, the martyrs of the uprisings, and the current oppressed people? Certainly, there is a pragmatic dimension to this work: earning the MA degree. Yet, I could have chosen another topic if that were the sole motivation. Choosing this subject is not driven by pragmatism but by ethically scientific motivations. It seeks to offer a critical, ethical alternative reading of Egypt's recent past within the academy. This choice aligns with my view of social sciences' researchers as products of collective experiences and contemporary history.

I believe that offering an honest, fair documentation of what has happened—and what continues to happen—is the contribution we can make as engaged researchers, as those personally affected by these experiences. It's one of the crucial activities and acts of

liberation, *Taḥrīr*, that we can do as researchers of social sciences who have the privilege to write and expres. Unlike scholars whose writings on the Arab world, the Middle East, or Muslim societies are largely geared toward blocking or thwarting even the intellectual potential for freedom and democracy in non-Western and Muslim contexts[4], the words of knowledge production and writing in Arabic, writes Irfan Ahmad (2011b), are linguistically and practically connected to the word "*Taḥrīr*"—liberation. Through writing and knowledge production, writers and researchers intellectually liberate themselves and others from hegemonic and official discursive structures and dismantle them, whether they stem from broader imperialism or local national authoritarianism. If we still hope for change, if we still aim for liberation, if we still love "our people" and our "homelands," this is what we, as engaged researchers, can offer. I do not refer to the modern, nationalist, or authoritarian definitions of patriotism and nationalism, but rather to an appreciation of the struggles, sacrifices, and attempts of the humans to shape their reality, protect their past narratives, and make their history by attending to the present as a draft of the future.

The second set of questions was a challenging aspect of this task: the fear of falling into my own subjectivity, consciously or unconsciously. I was constantly concerned about creating yet another selective narrative, one that simply countered the dominant one, overlooking the values of truth and integrity. I would be less than honest if I said that such concerns disappeared. Even now, as I write the final section of my dissertation, such concerns still haunt me. To address these concerns, it required a long process of research, consulting diverse sources, and revising my formulations and documentation numerous times. I do not believe any researcher can completely neutralize their experiences and emotions, nor do I think it's possible to achieve what in truth is unachievable. However, I am aware of these concerns, and I consider them part of this study's limitations. I do not claim that my study offers a perfectly "neutral" reading, but I leave that evaluation to readers. In so far it is possible to attain "objectivity," it is best done by sharing one's own concerns and dispositions with the readers rather than conceal from them. I believe it is part of academic integrity to share

[4] Please check Kristen Kao and Ellen Lust's (2017) literature review section on Islam in "Why Did the Arab Uprisings Turn Out as They Did? A Survey of the Literature" in *Project on Middle East Democracy* to understand how Islam continues to be a key area of scholarly interest in both pre-2011 and post-2011 studies of democratization in the Middle East.

this with the reader, and I think this holds true for all studies in sociology, anthropology or for that matter in any human inquiry.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Full Name:
Rahime Seyit

Contact Information:
E-mail (1):
E-mail (2):

Education:

2018 – 2022	BA in Sociology, Ibn Haldun University, Turkey
2022 – 2025	MA in Sociology, Ibn Haldun University, Turkey

Work Experience:

2022 – 2025	Teaching Fellow in Ibn Haldun University