The Ultras in Egypt

Political Role Before and After January 25th, 2011

Thesis in Comparative Politics

Student Name: Amira Taha
Student ID #: 900030898
Thesis Advisor: Dr. Nadine Sika
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to use this opportunity to thank everyone who helped me accomplish the academic research for this thesis. To begin with, this research project would not have been possible without the guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Nadine Sika. I’m also forever grateful to several people who provided me with their generous loving support and motivation to complete my coursework and thesis, including my husband Mohamed Hassan, my parents Ahmed Taha and Amal Abd Rabou, and my daughter Alia. Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the young men who tragically lost their lives in their pursuit of joy, liberation and justice.
Contents
Chapter I .................................................................................................................................... 5
Introduction ................................................................................................................................ 5
  The Research Problem ........................................................................................................... 6
  Research Question ................................................................................................................. 8
  Hypothesis .............................................................................................................................. 9
  Theoretical Framework ........................................................................................................ 10
  Research Methodology and Research Methods ................................................................. 11
Chapter II ................................................................................................................................. 12
Literature Review ..................................................................................................................... 12
  Contentious Politics ............................................................................................................. 14
    Mechanisms and Dynamics of Contention ...................................................................... 14
    Performances and Repertoires of Contention .............................................................. 15
  Social Movements ................................................................................................................ 16
    Defining Social Movements ............................................................................................ 16
    Collective Identity Construction ...................................................................................... 18
    Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Processes ......................... 20
    Political Opportunity Structure ...................................................................................... 20
    Mobilizing Structures ....................................................................................................... 22
    Framing Processes ........................................................................................................... 23
  The Ultras as a Social Movement in Contention ................................................................. 25
    From Theory to Practice: Understanding the Ultras through Literature ......................... 29
Chapter III ................................................................................................................................ 31
  The Egyptian Ultras: A New Social Movement within a Global Context ......................... 31
    A Global Context ................................................................................................................. 31
      History .............................................................................................................................. 32
      Age, Education and Gender ........................................................................................... 33
      Attitudes, Value System and Collective Identity .......................................................... 34
      Structure, Organization and Financing ......................................................................... 37
      Activities .......................................................................................................................... 38
      Areas of Contention vis-à-vis the State ......................................................................... 41
      International Cooperation ............................................................................................... 44
      The Ultras in a Global Context ........................................................................................ 45
Chapter IV ................................................................................................................................ 46
  The Ultras as a New Social Movement in the Egyptian Context ......................................... 46
    Background ........................................................................................................................ 49
    Soccer and Politics in Egypt ............................................................................................. 49
Expansion of the Ultras Culture in North Africa and Egypt ............................................ 52
The Egyptian Ultras ............................................................................................................. 54
Identity and Collective Challenges .................................................................................. 54
Common Purpose and Key Activities .............................................................................. 58
The Ultras' Internal Organization .................................................................................... 60
Dynamics within the Movement ...................................................................................... 63
Inter-groups Relationships ............................................................................................... 65
The Egyptian Ultras Movement: Collective Challenge and Common Purpose ............. 67
Chapter V ................................................................................................................................. 69
The Ultras' Political Engagement and Repertoires of Contention .................................... 69
The Ultras' Views on Politics and Democracy ................................................................. 71
The Story of the Ultras and the State: Cycles of Animosity and Rivalry ....................... 73
Before January 25th, 2011: Setting the Stage Outside the Terraces ......................... 74
January 25th, 2011: Changes to the Political Opportunity Structure ............................ 76
After January 25th, 2011: Sustained Opposition to State Actors ............................... 78
The Port Said Massacre and Verdict: Group Solidarity and Contention ..................... 82
Prospects for Future Political Contention ........................................................................ 88
Chapter VI ................................................................................................................................ 90
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 90
What Political Role Was Played by Youth Social Movements .................................... 90
The Ultras History and Evolution ..................................................................................... 91
Political Role and Contention of the Ultras ................................................................. 92
Changes to Repertoires of Contention .......................................................................... 93
Future of Contention Vis-à-Vis the State ......................................................................... 94
References ............................................................................................................................ 96
Chapter 1

Introduction

“The key to understanding the Ultras phenomenon is to imagine it as a way of life for these youth – for them, becoming a football fan became a symbolic action that was both joyful and a means of self-expression. But the broader social, psychological, and cultural contexts were unable to adapt to the groups’ activities, by virtue of their rebellious nature and their defiance of the norms.”¹

- Ashraf El Sherif

Since the formal inception of the “Ultras” groups in Egypt in 2007, there has been a rise in the conflict between the Egyptian security apparatus and the soccer fans. And despite their anti-political stance in the early days, the Ultras began to participate in dissent and engage in a confrontational relationship with the state authorities ever since their inception. This was culminated in the critical role they played during the eighteen days in January and February 2011 and in more events to follow since. However, despite this important role and the support they have among Egyptian youth, the Egyptian Ultras have been the subject of fairly little academic research. This research seeks to study and compare the political role played by the Ultras before and after January 25th, 2011 through analyzing repertoires of contention, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities and threats through an examination of primary sources. These will include Ultras founder/member Mohamed Gamal Bashir’s (also known as Gemyhood) The Ultras Book: When the Fans Go Beyond the Normal, interviews with Ultras members and leaders, and analysis of key messages in Ultras’ produced materials such as chants, graffiti and banners that attempt to document the Ultras political engagement between 2007-2013; as well as project on the future role of the soccer fan groups in Egyptian politics and social change.

Using the political processes model of social movements as a theoretical framework,

this proposed research argues that the international ideological framework of the Ultras groups naturally drove them into dissent since their inception and placed them as a confrontational opponent to Egyptian security authorities, who always attempted to impose limits on the groups’ collective claim-making ability. However, it was changes that happened in several dimensions of the political opportunity and mobilizing structures with January 25th 2011 that rendered the political system as more vulnerable to challenge by the Ultras groups, and led to shaping their revolutionary and political role, change their repertoire of contention vis-à-vis state institutions, and allowed them to collectively act outside the stadia as a meaningful opposition to the repressive Egyptian regime and security apparatus in the years to follow.

The Research Problem

In the few days leading up to January 25th, 2011, the Egyptian public started to see the Ultras playing a key political role and collectively organizing themselves for political action outside the stadia. Their role whether in the fights against the Egyptian police forces on January 28th or in the Battle of the Camel, gained them particular attention and importance during the events of the 18 days. January 25th uprising presented the Ultras with changes to several dimensions of the political opportunity and mobilizing structures that rendered the political system as more vulnerable to challenge by them and as more receptive to their resistance against repression by the state’s security apparatus. Additionally, the Port Said

2 “Since early January 2011, many Egyptian activists had been using social networking and video streaming websites to call for mass protests on January 25th, Egypt’s Police Day. Naming it Egypt’s Day of Rage, internet activists used all available tools, such as intensely passionate interviews on international satellite news networks and emotionally-charged video blogs, to mobilize Egyptians to demonstrate that day. And their persistent efforts showed in the numbers of Egyptians that joined the call and remained determined not to leave the streets until their demands were answered. The Egyptian government aggressively countered those efforts through the use of violence against protestors, and the deployment of state-owned media to spread misinformation about activists and protestors and regain support. However, eighteen days after that date the people’s efforts were paid off with the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak.” - Excerpt from “Of Drama and Performance: Transformative Discourses of the Revolution” by Amira Taha and Christopher Combs, Chapter in Translating Egypt’s Revolution: The Language of Tahrir, Edited by Samia Mehrez, The American University in Cairo Press, 2012, p. 69.
massacre in early February 2012 and the consequent verdicts in 2013 presented changes to the political structure to further direct the soccer fans to present us with new repertoires of contention, and consequently to further shape and reshape their political engagement.

Yet, despite the importance that the Ultras gained in the Egyptian uprising and its aftermath, and the shifting perception of them among the Egyptian society, their collective political role and the dynamics between the fan groups and the Egyptian state’s security apparatus that shape that role have been rarely studied in an academic manner. This proposed research attempts to fill this research gap.

In this research, I will attempt to first discuss the theoretical understanding of the collective shared identity of the Ultras groups globally from the field anthropology, and how this collective identity evolved in Egypt and attracted members since the inception of the first groups in the country. I will then analyze how the concept of contentious politics applies to the political role of the Ultras since their inception and to their confrontational relationship with the state’s security apparatus, shedding light on the political opportunity and mobilizing structures that led to their inception and growth. Then, I will examine how that political role and the nature of contention vis-à-vis the state changed during and right after the January 25th, 2011 uprising and after the Port Said massacre, which are argued to have led to key changes in the dimensions of the political opportunity and the mobilizing structures. And finally, I will examine the Port Said verdict impact on the political role of the Ultras in an attempt to look into the potential for the Ultras’ political role going forward.

My choice to use the political processes model for contentious politics as a framework follows from my understanding of Charles Tilly’s concept of relational realism, where the Ultras are examined as a new social movement using a political mechanism and processes

---

3 The Port Said Massacre refers to the killing of at 74 people following a soccer match between Al Ahly and the hometown, Al Masry teams in the Egyptian city of Port Said on February 1st 2012. Some of the deceased were stabbed or beaten to death and others died as they were trying to escape the stadium. Many Egyptians, including the Ultras, held the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (the country’s ruler then) and the Ministry of Interior largely responsible for the massacre.
model. This model will allow the research to analyze how actors respond to opportunities and threats as they frame the contentious repertoire of their movement around their collective action. Using this framework, the Ultras will be analyzed as having sustained challenges to power holders in the name of a group of young people who collectively view themselves as done injustice by the state security apparatus. Additionally, applying the same framework, January 25th, 2011, and the Port Said massacre stand out as two clear turning points that created changes in the dimensions of the political opportunity structure and gave the Ultras groups the opportunity to innovate on known “scripts”, or forms of contention against the police authorities “as a result of accumulating experience and external constraints.”4

Research Question

Using this framework, I will address the following main research question:
What has been the role played by the Egyptian Ultras soccer fans groups in political contention and mobilization against state actors and institutions under authoritarianism in Egypt before and after January 25th, 2011?

In order to fully answer this research question I will attempt to answer the following sub-questions:
a) How did the Ultras groups, as a new social movement in Egypt, emerge in a historically specific context and attract a large supporter base?
b) What form of political activism and contention did the Egyptian Ultras groups engage in before and after January 25th, 2011?
c) How and why did the nature of political activism and struggle against state authorities change after January 25th, 2011?
d) How did the state perceive the political contentious role played by the Ultras and how did

---

it respond to their developing mechanisms of contention? And
e) What is the potential for the Ultras’ political role going forward and how will their relationship with state authorities look like in the future?

**Hypothesis**

Building on Tilly’s framework of political contention and its repertoires, I argue that the disobedient shared collective identity of the Ultras groups who oppose external authority at large and coercive state institutions in particular, has naturally placed them as opponents to state actors and institutions, with contentious mechanisms and repertoires that have largely changed since the January 25th 2011.

January 25th 2011 created key changes in dimensions of the political opportunity structure, including a) the relative openness of the political system for collective action, b) the mass public support in the fight against the state apparatus, c) the divides between political elites and shifts in the political power structures in Egypt, and d) the state’s swinging capacity and propensity for repression. The conflict between the police and the Ultras, which was hardly viewed as a political one, became increasingly politicized after January 25th. Consequently, the Ultras groups changed the mechanisms and repertories of their contention against the Egyptian state’s security apparatus, and openly spoke up about national issues and concerns inside and outside of stadia, including freedom, social justice, corruption and state repression. And in the years to follow, they have acted as strong opponents to the police forces, which was seen in the growingly critical language of their chants and messages of their graffiti that started filling up the walls of major cities. The Port Said massacre in 2012 further reshaped that contentious relationship and placed the groups not only as rivals to the security apparatus but to state institutions at large, including the Egyptian judiciary, military and presidency, leading them as key players in shaping the decision-making process of the
state. It is argued that with a changing political opportunity structure which emulates the structure present during the Mubarak regime and with the resolution of the Port Said massacre and convicting its "perpetrators", the Ultras will withdraw from the political scene and revert back to their natural seats in the stadia. Following the verdict, which was largely viewed as unsatisfying for Ultras members, they curbed their frustration with the hope that one day they will be able to get retribution with their own hands.

**Theoretical Framework**

This research will analyze and compare the political role of the Ultras groups before and after January 25th, 2011 using the political processes model of contentious politics as a framework. Charles Tilly’s understating of contentious politics is centered on “collective claim making and actually recognizes the social movement as a distinctive political form, but argues for explanation of claim-centered episodes through identification of similar mechanisms and processes across a wide variety of political forms having in common their public character and their relations to governments of one sort or another.”

This framework will be used to understand the Ultras as a new social movement, the contentious relationship between the Ultras and state institutions, the different rhythms and dynamics of contention used by the Ultras groups before and after January 2011 and after the Port Said massacre, and how the groups mobilized their resources on behalf of their claims. The research will attempt to focus on a longer period of conflict for the movement collective action, to shed light on mechanisms that specifically led to a period of heightened conflict and the long-term outcomes. Understanding these mechanism and the causes that changed the contentious relationship between the Ultras and state institutions will help us understand the nature of the new forms of contention and help us project on the future of such relationships.

---

and of social change at large.

**Research Methodology and Research Methods**

The proposed research will utilize a deductive methodological approach in which analyzing the topic at hand will be derived mainly from a solid theoretical framework that is believed to support the findings and the main conclusive remarks of this work. The works of Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, and Doug McAdam on contentious politics, political opportunity structure and repertoires of contention would be of great value and importance in framing the concepts used to analyze the proposed research problem. Additionally, qualitative research including in-depth interviews, as well as analysis of Ultras writings, songs, chants, graffiti and banners will ensure a reliable approach to understand the nature of the Ultras groups’ political activism between 2007-2013 and the nature of their contentious relationship with the state’s security apparatus.
Chapter II

Literature Review

The rebellious shared collective identity of the Ultras groups as a new social movement encompassing youth, has naturally placed the Egyptian groups as opponents to state actors and institutions, with contentious mechanisms and repertoires that have largely changed since January 25th 2011. This chapter will attempt to examine contentious politics using a political processes model as framework and outline the different elements of the political opportunity structure and the collective identity construction to understand the factors that influence mobilization and contention vis-à-vis state institutions. The second half of this literature review will explore the concept of new social movements, their evolution within the Middle East context, with an aim to highlight the evolution of the Ultras as a social movement, the opportunities through which it organized itself, the resources and dynamics needed to mobilize for actions on behalf of its claims, and then draw on the concept of repertoires of contention.

The rationale behind the choice of these themes is to shed light on mechanisms that led to the period of conflict between the sports groups and state institutions and to project on the long-term nature of this contentious relationship. Understanding how social movements organize and mobilize will help us understand their changing forms of contention and project on the future of their relationship with the state.

Contentious Politics

This research attempts to place the Ultras as a new social movement within a broader structure of contentious politics using the political processes model, and analyze changes into that structure over a historical timeframe. Hence, defining contentious politics is key to this research. According to Sidney Tarrow, contentious politics is “collective activity on the part
of claimants- or those who claim to represent them- relying at least in part on non-institutional forms of interaction with elites, opponents, or the state”\(^6\). Additionally, Tarrow, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly further define the broader term of “contentious politics” in Dynamics of Contention as “episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants”\(^7\). They place the term as:

“interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else’s interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared programs in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties. Within this arena, movements intersect with each other and with institutional actors in a dynamic process of move, countermove, adjustment, and negotiation. That process includes claim making, responses to the actions of elites – repressive, facilitative, or both – and the intervention of third parties, who often take advantage of the opportunities created by these conflicts to advance their own claims. The outcomes of these intersections, in turn, are how a polity evolves.”\(^8\)

The political processes model of contentious politics is proposed as a framework to analyze collective action through the interactions of the relationship between the Ultras and state institutions that impacted the nature of the groups’ political engagement since their inception and following January 25th, 2011. From this perspective, interactions will be understood via examining “the events and contexts that triggered them, how third parties intervened in their relationship, and how they were either regularized or repressed or, less commonly, produced major transformations”\(^9\). Building on Tarrow’s synthesis in Power in Movement, young people engaged in contentious politics when forms of political opportunities and threats changed, and then by engaging in a repertoire of collective action,

\(^6\) Sidney Tarrow, Social Movements in Contentious Politics: A Review Article, American Political Science Review, Vol. 90, No. 4 December 1996, p. 874.
\(^7\) McAdam, Doug; Tarrow, Sidney G.; Tilly, Charles. Dynamics of Contention. Port Chester, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p 5.
\(^8\) Sidney Tarrow, Strangers at the Gates: Movements and States in Contentious Politics. Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 3.
\(^9\) Ibid, p.227
they have shaped new opportunities, which were used by the larger Egyptian collective in widening the cycles of contention\textsuperscript{10}.

Mechanisms and Dynamics of Contention

Charles Tilly studied contentious politics through a ‘relational realism’ perspective that looked at interactions and discourse “through causal mechanisms that change existing relationships and to weaving those mechanisms into larger historical processes” \textsuperscript{11}. Mechanisms, Tarrow defines, as “a class of changes that alter relations among specific sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations”\textsuperscript{12}.

Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel in Social Movements, Mobilization, Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa applaud this perspective especially when it comes to applying it to the Middle East context, because it “makes ‘interpersonal networks’ central to a dynamic model of mobilization, emphasizes challengers’ ‘perceptions of opportunities and threats’; ‘active appropriation of sites for mobilization’ rather than preexisting mobilizing structures; dynamic construction of framing among challengers; innovation in repertoires of contention; the description and analysis of ‘contentious performances’ rather than stable repertoires of collective action; and a broad processual understanding of mobilization”\textsuperscript{13}.

Looking at dynamics of contention allows us to further reduce the gap between structure and action. Building on the classical political processes model, Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam and Charles Tilly in Dynamics of Contention attempted “to design a relational approach to contentious politics by specifying the mechanisms and processes that

\textsuperscript{10} Sidney Tarrow, Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics. Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 19
\textsuperscript{11} Tarrow (2008), p. 227
\textsuperscript{12} Tarrow (2012), p. 23
\textsuperscript{13} Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel, Social Movements, Mobilization, Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa, Stanford University Press, 2013, p. 32.
appear not just in social movements, but in all forms of contentious politics.” They explored the following three types of mechanisms:

- Dispositional mechanisms, such as the perception and attribution of opportunity or threat;
- Environmental mechanisms, such as population growth or resource depletion
- Relational mechanisms, such as the brokerage of a coalition among actors with no previous contact by a third actor who has contact with both.

Performances and Repertoires of Contention

According to Charles Tilly, Performances are “learned and grounded ways of making claims on other people, which in the short run strongly limit the choices of available to would-be makers of claims. People make claims with such words as condemn, oppose, resist, demand, beseech, support, and reward. They also make claims with actions such as attacking, expelling, defacing, cursing, cheering, throwing flowers, signing songs, and carrying heroes on their shoulders.”

Recognizing the different types of contention, allows us to discover shifts of forms of contention over time, in other words changes in repertoires. Charles Tilly fully explained the concept of ‘repertoires’ in his writing, and defined it as “claim-making routines that apply to the same claimant object pairs: bosses and workers, peasants and landlords, rival nationalist factions, and many more.” He argued that “variations in repertoires occur for three main reasons, as follows:

- First, regimes permit some performances, forbid others, and tolerate still others; that constrains actors to shy away from some performances, choose others, and innovate between the two.
- Second, the history of contention constrains peoples’ choices.
- Third, changes in political opportunity structure encourage some actions, discourage

---

14 McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001), p. 23
15 Tarrow (2012), p. 125
16 Tarrow (2008), p. 237
others, and give people the opportunity to innovate on known scripts.”17

Hence, he elaborated that contentious performances change as a result of a combination of accumulating experience, opportunity, constraint, and innovation. This combination in the collective group's memory results in particular forms of contention in particular conflict circumstances, and in two particular rhythms in national profiles of contention: the short-term rhythms that are localized and particular, and the longer-term rhythms that are cosmopolitan and touch many localities. Additionally, he notes that contentious repertoires not only allow the regimes to shape how people are able and willing to contend, but also the range of performances “shapes and reshapes the regime … by inciting facilitation or repression, by creating or breaking alliances between claimants and other actors, and by succeeding or failing in pressing direct demands for regime change”18.

Tarrow, in studying the history of popular revolt in the 18th and 19th centuries, argues that demanding bread, asserting belief, claiming land, and mobilizing around death are four sources for collective action that have often led to repertoires of contention that are "violent and direct, brief, specific, and parochial"19. The death of friends or relatives when seen as an outrage or when they are violent, often trigger violent emotions, become a reason for solidarity, and a source of protest. However, he also argues that death is rarely the source for a sustained social movement, which would require other purposes for existence to sustain collective action.

Social Movements

Defining Social Movements

Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly use a political processes model to examine social

---

17 Ibid
18 Tarrow (2008), p. 21
19 Sidney Tarrow, Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics. Cambridge University Press, 2011, p.36
movements. They focused on “the interaction between contention and changes in political regimes; and to the broad canvas of political conflict and regime change”\textsuperscript{20}. Tilly defines social movements as a “series of contentious performances, displays, and campaigns by which ordinary people make collective claims on others”\textsuperscript{21}. Tarrow further adds that social movements are “sustained challenges to powerholders in the name of a disadvantaged population living under the jurisdiction or influence of those powerholders”.\textsuperscript{22} He adds that a movement is “an actor or a coalition of actors whose presence can be traced by observing the combination of collective actions which typify its interaction with its antagonists, allies, and publics, but one that is not reducible to or comparable to a particular form of action”\textsuperscript{23}. This definition has four empirical properties, namely: 1) collective challenge, which is manifested through disturbing activities of others; 2) common purpose, to express claims against opponents, authorities or elites; 3) social solidarity, through the movement’s members “recognition of their common interest, unity and commitment”; and 4) sustained interaction collectively with powerful opponents “through public campaigns of claim-making that extend beyond a single event, including marches, rallies, processions, demonstrations, occupations, blockades, and public meetings, in other words: the social movement's repertoire”\textsuperscript{24}. He goes on also to see social movements in a dynamic framework and relates them to all forms of contentious politics, as "sustained interactions in opposition to elites, opponents and authorities"\textsuperscript{25}.

According to Tilly in \textit{Regimes and Repertoires}, we can distinguish between three types of political claims that people make through social movements, namely\textsuperscript{26}:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Tarrow (2012), p. 21
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Tilly (2004), p. 1
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Tarrow (2008), p. 227
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Tarrow, Sidney, “Political Protest and Social Change: Analyzing Politics”, American Political Science Review, Dec 1996
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Tarrow (2011), p.5
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Charles,Tilly, Regimes and Repertoires. University of Chicago Press, 2010, p. 184
\end{itemize}
- Identity claims: declare that the claimants constitute a unified force
- Standing claims: assert similarities to other political actors
- Program claims: show support for or opposition to actions by the objects of the movement claims.

In analyzing youth social movements in the Middle East, Asef Bayat also looks at how "the moral and political authority impose a high degree of social control over the young" and how the contentious relationship between state control, traditions and youth social movements is ultimately about "reclaiming youthfulness". For Bayat, youthfulness means "a greater tendency for experimentation, adventurism, idealism, autonomy, mobility, and change" and countering or curtailing youthfulness, "is likely to generate collective dissent". Tarrow's definition along with Bayat's views on reclaiming the youth habitus will be used for the purposes of this research analyzing the Ultras as a social movement which mobilized collective action in opposition to the state security apparatus that attempted to curtail their claims.

Collective Identity Construction

Richard Giulianotti and Gary Armstrong argue that “anthropology enquiry needs to show how the idealized communion of being a football (soccer) player, spectator, or fan is attempted; and via this, to consider football (soccer) identity amongst the various other notions of selfhood”. They add that the players and board of management may be “the real holders of power” not the fans, yet, this would not stop those fans from enjoying “the feeling that they are important and belong”.

27 Asef Bayat, Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East, Amsterdam University Press, 2012, p. 116
28 Ibid, p.118
Identity construction and formation is a very important issue in the study of the anthropology of soccer. From an anthropological perspective, Philipp Budka and Domenico Jacono argue that collective identity formation “refers to qualities of sameness, in that persons may associate themselves, or be associated by others, with groups or categories on the basis of some common feature”\textsuperscript{31}. Additionally, they see soccer “as an activity that allows people to seek and create communities with people who actually do not belong to their private or professional social environment”\textsuperscript{32}. In this sense they argue that social relations within the context of soccer can form what they call an “imagined community”.

Budka and Jacono argue that the ultras member identity is strongly linked to the collective identity of his Ultra group. They refer to such collective identity of the Ultras groups as “community to which people wish to belong… in the minds of their members”\textsuperscript{33}. Additionally, they note that the Ultras member individual identity is not so much different from his everyday identity. They add that there are several aspects that further enforce such construction of a collective identity, including “the often conflicting representation of ultras in the mass media, and the repressions by police and football officials”\textsuperscript{34}. The Ultras groups’ collective identity is often manifested in their members’ emotions, which are often seen as an essential for fandom. They note that soccer “allows men to act out a diversity of emotions, from joy and cheerfulness to grieve and aggression…(and) for the manifestation of antagonisms which often develop in a ritualized manner… through the opposition of “the other”\textsuperscript{35}.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, p.5
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, p.7
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p.7
Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Processes

Across the literature of social movements and contentious politics, scholars have identified three broad set of factors that lead and shape the emergence and development of social movements and revolutions. These factors are “1) the structure of that political opportunities and constraints confronting the movement; 2) the forms of organization (informal as well as formal), available to insurgents; 3) and the collective processes of interpretation, attribution and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action”36. In the literature, these three factors are usually referred to as political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes and are explained below.

Political Opportunity Structure

The political opportunity structure is often considered a variable, yet it should be perceived as an aggregate of separate variables. The broad concept of political opportunity emphasizes not only formal structures, but also “informal ones that provide resources and oppose constraints external to the groups”37. In an attempt to define and bring more clarity to the concept, Doug McAdam in Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framings, sought to list the different dimensions of a given system’s political opportunity structure by four different theorists. He synthesized across different approaches the following list of consensual dimensions:

1. “The relative openness or closure of an institutionalized political system to a new actor
2. That stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a political system
3. The presence or absence of elite allies

36 Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald, Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 2
37 Tarrow (2012), p. 78

20
4. The state’s capacity and propensity for repression”\textsuperscript{38}

Charles Tilly in \textit{Regimes and Repertoires} adds two additional dimensions, namely: “the multiplicity of independent centers of power within the regime”, and the decisive changes of this factor to factor # 4\textsuperscript{39}.

Additionally, Sidney Tarrow defines the political opportunity structure as “consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national- signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements”\textsuperscript{40}. Also according to Tarrow, a political opportunity structure needs to be broken down into a smaller number of finite dimensions. Those, which are relevant to the case study of the Ultras include a) the presence or absence of influential allies, b) the opening of possibilities for legal collective action or political access, c) splits within or between elites, d) the importance of opportunities in triggering movements\textsuperscript{41}. January 25\textsuperscript{th}, 2011 and all the social and political movement that it generated in the Egyptian society will be analyzed as an opportunity in the political structure that impacted the nature of political engagement of the Ultras and the interactions that they had with state institutions particularly the security apparatus.

Tarrow in his chapter “States and Opportunities: The Political Structuring of Social Movements” in \textit{Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings}, also looks into the concept of dynamic opportunities, which is very relevant to the evolution of the political role played by the Ultras following January 2011. Dynamic opportunities “seem to impinge more on the decision making of social movements and permit them to create their own opportunities”\textsuperscript{42}. He argues that:

\textsuperscript{38} Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald (1996), p. 26
\textsuperscript{39} Tilly (2010), p. 44.
\textsuperscript{40} Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald (1996), p. 54
\textsuperscript{41} Tarrow (1996), p. 875.
\textsuperscript{42} Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald (1996), p. 41
“Movements arise as a result of new or expanded opportunities; they signal the vulnerability of the state to collective action, thereby opening up opportunities for others; the process leads to state responses which, in one way or another, produce a new opportunity structure.”43

Hence, once collective action is launched by a group, the confrontation between this group and its adversaries “provide models of collective action that produce opportunities for others”, including the following four: 1) Expanding the groups' own opportunities, 2) Expanding opportunities for others, 3) Creating opportunities for adversaries, and 4) Making opportunities for elites44.

Tilly adds that incremental changes in repertories are usually less dramatic but often critical on the long term, and they are mainly caused by incremental changes in 1) the political opportunity structure, 2) actors’ organization, shared understanding and interests, 3) accumulation of innovation under changes in the political opportunity structure in small scale crises and confrontations45.

Mobilizing Structures

The second factor that shapes the emergence and development of social movements and contentious action is mobilizing structures, which John McCarthy defined as “agreed upon ways of engaging in collective action which include particular ‘tactical repertoires’, ‘social movement organizational’ forms, and ‘modular social movement repertoires’…(including) the range of everyday life micromobilization structural social locations that are not limited primarily at movement mobilization, but where mobilization may be generated (such as) family units, friendship networks, voluntary associations, work

43 Ibid, p.61
44 Ibid, p.58
45 Tilly (2010), p. 45
units, and elements of the state structure itself\textsuperscript{46}. He contrasted the different mobilizing structures “by their degree of organizational formalization and centralization, as well as their formal dedication to social change goals”, as presented in the following table\textsuperscript{47}:

“Dimensions of Movement-Mobilizing Structures”\textsuperscript{48}:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-movement</th>
<th>Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>Friendship Networks</td>
<td>Activist Networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neighborhoods</td>
<td>Affinity Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work Networks</td>
<td>Memory Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Churches</td>
<td>Social Movement Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>Protest Committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Associations</td>
<td>Movement Schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Different mobilizing structures will vary in degrees of formalization, however groups will decide on their interests, goals, strategies through them nevertheless. Additionally, “the coordination between the separate mobilizing structures that make up a functioning movement is a key aspect” will determine the degree and variation of formalization, movement dedication and centralization as well as the form of contentious activity they will engage in\textsuperscript{49}.

Framing Processes

The third factor that shapes the emergence and development of social movements and contentious action is culture, ideology and strategic framing, which Mayer Zald defines respectively as:

- “culture: the shared beliefs and understandings, mediated and organized by symbols and language, of a group or society;
ideology: the set of beliefs that are used to justify or challenge a given social-political order and used to interpret the political world; and

- frames: the specific metaphors, symbolic representation, and cognitive cues used to render or cast behavior and events in an evaluative mode and to suggest alternative modes of action.\(^\text{50}\)

The political processes model of social movements recognized and gave importance to the notion of repertoires of contention and innovation in those performances by groups and social movements. Hence, studying the cultural construction and strategic framing of social movements became key to estimate and understand their forms of contention. “Social movements exist in a larger societal context”, Zald argues, and hence they draw on the society’s cultural stock for understanding for example what injustice is, what constitutes a violation, and what citizenship rights are\(^\text{51}\). Additionally, he argues that drawing on such cultural stock and adapting a social movement’s own repertoire will depend on its skills, orientations, styles, and backgrounds of group members and their leaders, which will cause each movement to have its own repertoires of contention. He also maintains that very often, political mobilization opportunities occur as a result of cultural contradictions and breaks that are brought into confrontation by active events.

Zald also argues that internal and external competition to define a situation and to decide upon the most suitable forms of contention impact the framing processes. Externally,

“movements and counter-movements not only are involved in mobilization contests to demonstrate who has the most support and resources at their command, they are involved in framing contests attempting to persuade authorities and bystanders of the rights ness of their cause.”\(^\text{52}\)

Additionally, Intramovement rivalry and competition among the different members and leaders also lead to alterations in the frames of the movement. Furthermore, he adds that

\(^{50}\) Ibid, p. 262

\(^{51}\) Ibid, p. 266

access to technology and mass media greatly impacts a movement’s ability into mobilizing not only its members but the general public, as well as changes the framing of the movement’s demands.

The Ultras as a Social Movement in Contention

Soccer in Egypt is a very popular sport and is followed by many fans. And as mentioned by Shawki Ebeid El-Zatmah in his 2011 dissertation on the social and cultural history of soccer, the sport in Egypt has been a “part and parcel of the political, social, and economic transformations that have affected the modern Egyptian experience. Furthermore soccer in Egypt represents an important site whereby numbers of vital issues such as colonialism, nationalism, social classes, state hegemony, and modernization were and continue to be contested.”

Judging from the very limited academic literature on the Ultras, they are a phenomenon that emerged in Latin America in the 1950s and then travelled to Southern Europe in the 1960s, where the phenomenon has developed to reach the shape it has been in until this day.

In a study that was done by the Council of Europe in preparation for the International Conference on Ultras in Vienna in February 2010, authors Gunter A. Pilz and Franciska Wölki-Schumacher attempted to find some common elements for the term “Ultras” in Europe. Their definition closely matches the one proposed by Mohamed Gamal Beshir, one of the Egyptian Zamalek Ultras White Knights groups’ founders. They describe the Ultras as “particularly passionate, emotional, committed and – above all – very active fans who are fascinated by a south European culture of spurring on their team and have made it their job to organise a better, traditional atmosphere in the football stadiums in order to be able to support “their” team creatively and to the best of their ability… (what they) seem to have in common is simply their desire to support their club or team while enjoying the experience, the extreme pleasure they gain in providing that support creatively for a full 90 minutes –

54 Beshir (2011), p. 32-33
both acoustically and visually – in spaces that are as wide as possible”\textsuperscript{56}.\par

With its ability to attract many followers and supporters, the “Ultras” collective identity has been very appealing to young Egyptians, who have witnessed the spread of the Ultras movement to North Africa before it arrived in Egypt. The internet and social media activism of younger generations also contributed to the easy penetration of the “Ultras” shared identity in Egypt and the formation of Ultras groups who were ready to engage in this form of extreme support to their beloved sports due to following of the Ultras in Europe and Latin America on the internet\textsuperscript{57}.

Beshir divides soccer fans based on their level of loyalty to their teams and engagement into the cheering activities into the following categories\textsuperscript{58}:

- “Public Resultates”: fans that support their teams based on its results. They cheer it on and attend matches when it is in a winning season and let go when their team loses.

- “La Fedelite”: fans that support their teams irrespective of its results. These could be broken down into more categories:
  - “TV Fans”: these support their teams from the comfort of their homes.
  - “Normal Fans”: these attend matches and participate in chants organized by the Ultras at stadia. However, their level of engagement does not reflect an extremely high level of commitment.

On this scale, it can be obvious how the Ultras perceive themselves as the most committed, knowledgeable and organized groups of fans. They clearly also distinguish themselves from the “Hooligans” given their (the Ultras’) anti-violent stance, tactics and techniques. However, the accessibility to the groups is fairly easy and they don’t prevent any

\textsuperscript{56} Gunter A. Pilz and Franciska Wölki-Schumacher, Overview of the Ultra culture phenomenon in the Council of Europe Member States in 2009, Leibniz University Hanover, Institute of Sports Science, 2010, p. 5.


\textsuperscript{58} Beshir (2011), p. 18-30
fan from joining their activities that are often very creative “both visually and acoustically”\textsuperscript{59}. The Ultras groups in Egypt are very well organized, however, they should not be confused with official fan groups, which Beshir clearly distinguishes from the Ultras, given their official registration status, their close relationship to the management and boards of the sports club and consequently their engagement in the business and money-oriented “modern football”\textsuperscript{60}. Beshir also identifies three main rivalries that all Ultras groups across the globe share and these are mainly with:

1. the police,
2. the media, and
3. the “modern soccer institutions”, which he defines as the extreme commercialization of the sports.

The different groups have their own designated spaces in stadia, their own badges/slogans, and their often very well-managed social media networking webpages\textsuperscript{61}.

Despite the contentious relationship with the police forces, the Ultras have not been politicized along political lines of left- or right-wing stances since their inception in 2007. However, there have been some instances where they got involved in some form of political activity. For example, in 2009 and following their clear anti-Zionist stance during the Gaza War in 2008/2009, the Zamalek and Ahly Ultras’ leaders and key members got arrested on the night of Derby match between the two prominent teams due to their preparation of pro-Palestinian chants to commemorate the anniversary of the Intifada\textsuperscript{62}.

With their “All Cops Are Bastards” global slogan, which reflects one of their three rivalries, the Ultras have collectively perceived the state security apparatus as the oppressor of their claim-making abilities and of showing their ultra-strong support and love for their

\textsuperscript{59} Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2010), p. 13
\textsuperscript{60} Beshir (2011), p. 56-60
\textsuperscript{61} Beshir (2011), p. 56-60
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, p. 65
soccer teams. This contentious relationship vis-à-vis the state police forces took the form of chants and slogans placed on banners in matches that very often insulted the police forces, who, in turn, generally treated them aggressively inside and outside the stadia. And despite the official denial by Ultras Ahlway and Ultras White Knights prior to January 25th, 2011 of their participation as groups in the demonstrations, an anonymous video by some Ultras members called upon people to join the demonstrations and not to fear the police crackdown because the Ultras would defend them. The Ultras members fulfilled their promise and during the following 18 days joined forces with protestors against the police forces and showed tremendous knowledge of and experience in fighting techniques in clashes against the police.

Rabab El Mahdi argues that the Ultras soccer fan groups became a new important part of the political scene over the past decade and “they represented a new form of activism similar to ‘new social movements’ in the sense that their focus was on quality of life issues rather than finding identity in ideology, geography, or class.” Ashraf El Sherif emphasizes the joyful nature of the Ultras’ activism and analyzes it from the perspective of the “politics of fun.” He examines the Ultras interaction with the state’s security apparatus as a battle between “the paradigm of the depression, control, and normalization of apathy versus the paradigm of joyful liberation from the shackles of social and institutional norms to create gratifying chaos.” He argues that the Ultras have made major contributions to the revolutionary efforts since 2011 due to their characteristics, namely dynamism, flexibility, positive attitude, refusal of patriarchy and traditionalism, group mentality and rebellion.

---

63 Ibid, p. 96
64 Ibid, p. 65
65 Woltering (2013), p. 295
68 Ibid
From Theory to Practice: Understanding the Ultras through Literature

While academic literature on the Ultras globally remains very little and does not go in-depth into the different Ultras groups in the different countries, the growth of the phenomenon in Europe and North Africa has led to increased pressure to at least identify a definition and key elements of all the groups. As has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, the shared disobedient collective identity of the Ultras groups as a new social movement encompassing youth, has naturally placed the Egyptian groups as opponents to state actors and institutions, with contentious mechanisms and repertoires that have largely changed since January 25th, 2011. Having explored the Ultras through the lens of new social movements, will allow us to explore their evolution within the Middle East context, the opportunities through which they organized itself, the resources and dynamics needed to mobilize for actions on behalf of its claims, and to analyze their repertoires of contention vis-à-vis the state. And as shown in this chapter, similarities between the European Ultras and their Egyptian counterparts are very hard to miss in many aspects of the Ultras collective identity, membership patterns, structure and organization, their view on violence, and their rivalries with the state institutions and police. To understand the whole set of drivers behind the Egyptian Ultras repertoire of contention vis-à-vis the Egyptian state over the past years and the reasons behind some of their opposition strategies and techniques, Chapter III will explore the global context for the Ultras as a social movement, its origins in Europe, composition, organization, attitudes, activities, and areas of contention with state institutions. Then using Tarrow's four empirical properties of a social movement - namely: 1) collective challenge; 2) common purpose; 3) social solidarity; and 4) sustained interaction collectively with powerful opponents\textsuperscript{69}, the Egyptian Ultras composition and dynamics will be explored in Chapters IV and V through the eyes of the Ultras members.

\textsuperscript{69} Tarrow (2011), p.5
Essentially, this research aims to understand the dynamics and repertoires of contention the Egyptian Ultras groups presented vis-à-vis the state in order to project on the role they could play in the political life in the future. So, in addition to understanding what a social movement entails, it is essential to looking at the construct of collective identity and outline the different elements of the political opportunity structure to understand the factors that influenced the Ultras mobilization and contention vis-à-vis state institutions. These concepts will be used to examine and better understand the repertoires of contention presented in Chapter V.
Chapter III

The Egyptian Ultras: A New Social Movement within a Global Context

Situating the Egyptian Ultras groups within the global context, including studying their origins, beliefs, value systems, organization, and contention with the police forces worldwide, is key to analyzing the developing nature of their political role. To understand the whole set of drivers behind the Egyptian Ultras repertoire of contention vis-à-vis the Egyptian state over the past years and the reasons behind some of their opposition strategies and techniques, this chapter will explore the global context for the Ultras as a social movement, its origins in Europe, composition, organization, attitudes, activities, and areas of contention with state institutions.

A Global Context

In a study done by the Council of Europe in preparation for the “International Conference on Ultras: Good practices in dealing with new developments in supporters’ behavior” in Vienna in February 2010, Gunter A. Pilz and Franciska Wölki-Schumacher provide a preliminary outline of the Ultra phenomenon in Europe, its definition, structure, rivalry with the police, and a set of recommendations for member states to deal with the youth fan groups. A large part of this chapter is based on their interviews, research and findings, and in a research by Alberto Testa titled ”The Ultras: An emerging Social Movement” focused on the Italian Ultras groups.

Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher attempted to find commonalities that define those groups in Europe and elsewhere, despite acknowledging that the Ultras in Europe are not a cohesive fan group. According to their definition, the Ultras can be described as

“particularly passionate, emotional, committed and – above all – very active fans who are fascinated by a south European culture of spurring on their team and have made it their job to organise a better, traditional atmosphere in the
football stadiums in order to be able to support “their” team creatively and to the best of their ability. This Southern European culture includes not only visual support by means of choreographed displays in the curva (terraces), two-pole banners, hand-held flags, and the use of pyrotechnics but also acoustic support by means of drums or songs and chants led by megaphone/microphone.

What all European Ultras seem to have in common is simply their desire to support their club or team while enjoying the experience, the extreme pleasure they gain in providing that support creatively for a full 90 minutes – both acoustically and visually – in spaces that are as wide as possible and to prepare these activities in the week before the game, while at the same time always adopting a critical attitude to “modern” football.”

They also argue that the Ultras groups members regard their devoted and committed support to the club or team as far more important than the actual result of matches. They note that the commitment of the Ultras members is often reflected in their continuous cheering and support even when their team is losing, and in travelling to away games with their teams and promoting their team's image often in other countries not just other cities.

History

History of the Ultras could be traced back to one of the oldest supporters groups, the torcida organizada movement. It is argued that the torcida organizada have been formed and present in Brazil since 1939. The torcida organizada movement was fragmented at the beginning, however would later be forced to consolidate into larger registered bodies or leagues after cases of mass violence between the different groups. Some torcidas also then became well-known for their violence on terraces, which eventually led the state to disband

---


72 Beshir (2012), p. 29
some of the groups. In 1950, the Brazilian influence of supporting and cheering was spread into Europe through the Torcida Split, which is a formal association of fans of the Croatian Dalmatia region’s Hajduk Split team.

Another supporters group that largely emulates what is now known as the Ultras is the barra brava in Latin America. Their phenomenon originated in Argentina in the 1950s in poorer neighborhoods ruled by gangs, but it has spread throughout Latin America in the 1990s. Although their style of supporting is similar to the Ultras, some barras bravas have established a reputation for violence and hooliganism with 256 hooligan related deaths in the history of Argentine football up until August 2012. They could be considered the supporters group with the highest level of influence and control on their clubs.

Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher argue that “the Ultras culture phenomenon began in the vicinity of large towns and cities in particular and then spread across the country, as in the case of France, Denmark, Poland, Portugal and Spain”. With the different major soccer tournaments, such as the 1982 World Cup in Spain, the Euro 1984 in France, and the 1990 World Cup in Italy, the Ultras culture has been spread by the media and further developed by members and founders.

Age, Education and Gender

Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher argue that the Ultras in Europe have an “average age of about 20 and tend to fall into approximately the 16/17–25 years old age bracket”. However, in countries where the Ultras culture is old, such as Italy, some older supporters could be easily found. Additionally, through their research they found that Ultras members “are mainly

---

73 Gamble (2011)
75 Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2010), p.9
76 Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2012), p. 6
recruited from all social strata and many different occupations”\textsuperscript{77}. However, students constitute a large proportion of the groups.

While in Egypt, according to Interviewee 1, an Ultras Ahlawy member, the Ultras are largely males, in Europe Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher argue that their proportion “within the movement varies from one country and one group to another”\textsuperscript{78}. According to them a “sizeable” proportion of female fans exist in Switzerland and approximately 20\% of the French Ultras scene is composed of women\textsuperscript{79}.

Attitudes, Value System and Collective Identity

The Ultras perceive themselves as superior to other soccer fans. Such stance can be seen in their self-perception of the Ultras as the most devoted and “purest” fans. Their commitment and complete devotion to their team and group regardless if they win or not, their constant cheering during matches while standing, and traveling with their teams regardless of the destination make them feel truly different from other fan groups and similar to one another across countries and continents. Alberto Testa when studying the Italian Ultras argues that their

“feeling of superiority towards other hardcore supporters is evidenced considering themselves as ‘pure’ not polluted like the ‘others’ by the commercialized logic of modern calcio (soccer), where mercenaries (players) are idolized. In comparison to the ‘ordinary’ youth; they stress their ‘elitism’ and ‘superior’ values. They feel their ethical stance justifies and makes bearable the perceived social stigma; it is ‘morally’ worth it.”\textsuperscript{80}

Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher state that being an Ultra “means more than just being part of a fan culture. They say it is all about a specific attitude to life”\textsuperscript{81}. They also share the same

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, p.7
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid
\textsuperscript{81} Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2012), p.8
views on the Ultras self-perception of superiority viewing themselves as the “only ‘true’, ‘most loyal’, ‘most active’ and ‘best’ football fans”, for which they very often get criticized by other fans. Their feeling of superiority is often also reflected in them feeling entitled to influence soccer in a country including, the official associations, clubs, society, and on policymakers. And not only do the Ultras members feel superior, but they also like to assert their superiority through showing characteristics such as strength, power, fearlessness, and masculinity in their support to their teams. “Being hard”, acting "macho", sexist and homophobic in their songs and chants, form a very important part of the standard cheering repertoire of the Ultras groups.

Additionally, another very important element of the Ultras' value system and culture is the importance of the sense of community within and solidarity among the group. For some Ultras members interviewed by Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher, “the group is partly also a kind of surrogate family, which mainly consists of 'brothers'”. In an interview with a German Ultras member describing what the Ultras meant for him, he stated that:

“People should simply understand that of all the things said about the Ultras it’s only friendship and love that really count in a good group. These two factors are essential if an Ultra group is to function properly. Friendship towards one another, love of the Ultra scene and of this attitude, this feeling of being alive and, of course, love of one’s club. This feeling of being alive and this lifestyle cannot really be put into words; it simply has to be felt. When grown-ups fall into one another’s arms, cry, laugh and understand one another without a lot of words there must be more behind it than mere love of the club. Some people might dismiss this as unnecessary sentimentality but for us this way of behaving towards one another is very important, because if this isn’t right this automatically rubs off on the group as a whole. A group should give a person a sense of security and, ideally, act as a surrogate family. It is important for these interpersonal relationships to be heeded and respected because it is only the members’ respect for one another that will bring about the group’s cohesiveness and unity.”

---

82 Ibid, p.9
83 Ibid
84 Ibid
85 Ibid
86 Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2012), p. 6
Testa argues that the past 20 years have witnessed increased politicization of the Ultras movement in Italy, a phenomenon that can be seen in other European and North African countries, and that marks the development of their collective identity. He stresses that this process has been taking place mainly due to the Ultras' belief “in the possibility to resist and change things for a common cause”\textsuperscript{87}. These common causes for the Italian Ultras groups have been mainly their survival, and having common enemies as different groups, namely the police, media and official “modern soccer” institutions. When such common causes appear, traditional rivalries among the different Ultras groups are usually forgotten to counter and fight the perceived oppression by state institutions. In Italy, Testa maintains that recent escalation of state repression has largely supported a perception among the Ultras of injustice, inequity and grievance, which has lead the Ultras “to see themselves as societal ‘outcasts’ and foster conflict with the state and the media”\textsuperscript{88}.

And despite their non-violent nature, such conflict with the state security institutions has often fostered violence on the part of the Ultras groups in Europe, which Pilz see as reactive to state violence and instrumental for their resistance and persistence to mark their territories, namely the stadia\textsuperscript{89}.

The following is the Italian Ultra manifesto, vision and code of behavior, which reflects their principles and beliefs. It is adopted by many Ultras groups across Europe and it can be also noted that many of its elements have influenced the Egyptian Ultras groups including solidarity with one another, confrontational relationship with authorities and the police, and key Ultras activities such as traveling with the team to away game and displaying support after the team scores a goal:

\textsuperscript{87} Testa (2009), p. 57
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, p. 58
\textsuperscript{89} Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2012), p. 18
“THE ULTRA MANIFESTO

The Ultras should:
1. Refuse any unnecessary contact or help from clubs or the police.
2. Work better with one another.
3. Organize their own travel to away games.
4. Work with the Ultras of other clubs and make the “TV football commodity” less attractive.
5. Not let themselves be restrained by the authorities and always make their presence felt at matches.
7. Ultras per sempre (Ultras for ever)

Genuine fans want the following football rules:
1. Player transfers should take place in the inter-season break, not during the season.
2. Players should have the freedom to express their delight after a goal is scored. The time this takes can be added on.
3. There should be club rules for the promotion of young local players.
4. Players who have not fulfilled their contract because another club has offered more money should be suspended for one year.
5. In order to prevent “farm teams”, officials of one club should not be allowed to work for a second club.
6. The old European Cup should be brought back, with one automatically qualified champion from each association instead of a league in which a country’s fourth-placed side can win the Champions League.
7. There should be a ban on clubs or associations being able to pass on tickets for away games to tour operators on an exclusive basis.\(^{90}\)

Structure, Organization and Financing

The structures and organization of the Ultras groups are one of the most important factors behind the Ultras culture strength and continuity. However, the level of organization of the European Ultras groups differ significantly from one European country to the other; some Ultras groups have largely “formal structures with fixed rules, membership fees and a more rigid hierarchy while others prefer informal, fairly loose structures with unwritten laws.

\(^{90}\) Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2012), p. 10
or codes of behavior". Given that Italy saw the inception of the first Ultras groups, many European Ultras groups follow the Italian “Ultra Manifesto” while others have developed their own set of rules and objectives.

The decision-making process in European Ultras groups is also fairly organized. In many Ultras groups, “decisions are often taken by a kind of executive committee made up of three or four people, each of them with a specific responsibility, such as leading the singing on the terraces with a megaphone, handling the group’s finances, organizing the trips to away games, handling the internal organization or producing photographs, films or texts”. Decisions are also often voted upon by group members in a democratic manner.

Ultras financing is another critical element for the groups' survival, sustenance, self-sufficiency and independence. The choreographed displays during matches also known as tifos performed by the Ultras, which often are very costly to prepare for, and the constant traveling with the teams are financed in different ways: “some collect donations on the terraces, and others pay for them via membership fees or sell their own merchandising items”, such as t-shirts, jackets, or CDs with songs. They also note that self-financing grants the Ultras independence to take certain stances and positions against clubs' boards and policy makers without losing credibility for questionable sources of funding, as well as, shows their extreme level of commitment and devotion to their teams.

Activities

As discussed earlier, most European Ultras groups exist and function primarily to support their team creatively at all times. Winning the game is not what matters the most to Ultras members, but rather the action of supporting one's team in itself. Hence, preparation activities leading up to the day of matches just to manifest that intense level of support and

---

91 Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2012), p 10
92 Ibid
93 Ibid, p. 13
love is of critical importance to the Ultras group members. To them, the tifo is of the same level of importance as the time devoted to its design and preparation. In an interview, a German Ultras member describes the preparation process to be fairly lengthy and costly:

“The Ultras usually work for several weeks on preparing an intro choreography, for example, which may be seen for no more than 20 seconds during a game. They spend around 4,500 euros and might employ 200 liters of paint, 7,000 sheets of cardboard, 500 small flags or two pole banners, 90 meters of cash register roll and a 30 by 50 meter section banner.”  

Another activity shared across all European Ultras groups during matches is their use of pyrotechnics as a way of supporting their team, and as a manifestation of their own group culture, and not as a violent activity or threatening of violence. According to Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher, the Ultras groups mostly use Bengal flares, which provide for colored smoke; and they differentiate between them and “bangers”, which only causes a loud frightening noise and which they don't prefer using. For them, “pyrotechnics is a stylistic element of the Ultra culture comparable to a choreographed display or their creative singing – only more emotional and more eye-catching”.

In order to properly support their teams, the Ultras groups believe in the importance of their own self-presentation. Whether this self-presentation reflects itself through their banners, choreographed displays, their own range of branded merchandize, or continuously managed and updated website, the Ultras believe that these activities are necessary to project a collective identity and the group image to outsiders. Such collective identity manifests itself in many ways, including for example their use of incomprehensible scene codes at the terraces is often perceived by outsiders without background knowledge as an elitist attitude or as though the Ultras belong to a form of a secret society.

Despite their utmost support and love to their teams, most European Ultra groups do

---

94 Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2012), p. 13
95 Ibid, p. 16
96 Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2012), p. 13
not engage in organized support to their country's national team, at least as a group. They perceive their role as supporters for their teams not for the national team. However, they also note that when Ultras attend matches to support their national teams, they usually do so as individuals simply interested in soccer and not as Ultras members. Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher go further to note that some Ultras groups even boycott matches of the national team in an attempt to protest against their country's soccer association, such as in Slovakia. This gets often picked up by the media, further widening the gap between the Ultras and media institutions, who often accuse them of not supporting the national team and negatively perceive such decision without attempting to properly understand it.

Another important activity undertaken by the European Ultras groups is their active community engagement. Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher note that many Ultras members show compassion and engagement in charitable work in support of their home towns, an activity that has increased in Germany since 2005, for example often organizing “fund-raising campaigns for children, or sick, or homeless people.” It is not uncommon to see Ultras groups “selling biscuits during Christmas, collecting money or returnable plastic beakers (on which a deposit has been paid in the stadium) for children with leukemia, and organizing concerts for an association set up to support a youth center.” They also note that the Ultras are usually persistent and involved in community engagement work on a continuous basis until they perceive change, for example in their effort to combat discrimination in soccer, support refugees and asylum-seekers, “for example by organizing personal counselling, taking them with them into the stadium free of charge either as a group or as individuals or collecting clothing donations.”

---

97 Ibid, p. 12
98 Ibid, p. 15
99 Ibid
100 Ibid, p. 16
Areas of Contention vis-à-vis the State

Due to their rebellious fearless identity, their hate for injustices, and their strategy of opposition to outside authority, the Ultras across Europe often enter in conflict with the state. This conflict is usually affected by their three major rivalries (against the police, the media and "modern" soccer institutions) as well as further aggravates those rivalries.

- "All Cops are Bastards" (ACAB)

A striking element shared across the Ultras groups in Europe and elsewhere is the perception of police forces as enemies. Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher argue that in extreme cases as in Italy, “many Ultra terraces in stadiums are regarded as no-go areas for the police”\(^{101}\). For Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher, many European Ultras view police behavior as “disproportionate and arbitrary” treating soccer fans as “second-class citizens or people with no basic rights”\(^{102}\). They note that there are some European countries that are attempting to find solutions to this ongoing conflict, for example in Hanover, Germany, the police started to employ “conflict managers to mediate between the two sides when problems arise on match days”\(^{103}\).

Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher note that such tense relationship usually ends in violent confrontations between the Ultras groups and the police forces, when having to intervene, which often leads to mass demonstrations of solidarity against the police and to violent riots. They also argue that confrontations have often also led to casualties which have aggravated the situation between the Ultras and the police, such as the murder of a Paris fan in November 2006, of a Lazio fan in Italy in 2007, and of a 15-year-old fan called Alex in Athens, Greece in 2008\(^{104}\). Casualties can also be found on the side of the police, such as the death of a police

---

\(^{101}\) Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2012), p. 20
\(^{102}\) Ibid, p 21
\(^{103}\) Ibid
\(^{104}\) Ibid, p. 20
officer in Catania in February 2007. This also triggers non-tolerance and hatred on their side.

The murder of the Lazio fan, Gabriele Sandri, by a police officer in 2007 after clashes between Juventus and Lazio fans at Arezzo, spurred unprecedented levels of violence across all of Italy. Differences between the different Ultras groups were all forgotten, who came together in solidarity against the police and the repressive measures used against the sports fans across the country attacking the police forces and properties in many Italian regions. A common theme used in the Ultras' chants was “Polizia Assassini” (Police, Murderers) and graffiti was used on walls of major cities threatening of revenge upon the police. After disorder, police injuries and massive unrest, the police undertook a strategy to arrest Ultras members and charged them with offences pertaining to terrorism. Some players showed solidarity to the Ultras before matches and in commemoration of Gabriele, and in 2012 the police officer who murdered him was sentenced to nine years of prison, as sentence that was celebrated by some if not all.

- Political Engagement

Despite their confrontations with state institutions and their engagement at their communities in response to local issues and needs, the majority of Ultras perceive and position themselves as apolitical. Political tendencies of course exist but at the individual level or at the level of small sections within the groups, and leanings largely differ from one European country to the other. Nonetheless, Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher argue that in some European countries, such as Italy, Poland, Ukraine and Slovakia, the Ultras have clearer feelings of political

---

105 Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2012), p. 21
107 Testa (2009), p. 57
tendencies, mainly right-wing to extreme right-wing. They also note that the Ultras share a similarity across Europe of engaging in fan politics for free just societies and against commercialization of soccer and repression of the state, even when they don't present political allegiances as a collective.

Testa maintains that the Italian Ultras as a section of the youth in the country hold a high sense of dissatisfaction with state policies that are bling to young people. He notes that during his interviews there was shared sentiment of dislike for Italian politics and its incompetencies, which he regards as anti-political rather than apolitical “because it is not the result of indifference but of active and aggressive participation [against political parties and politicians], which is reflected in an Ultras member quote:

“When we speak about issues such as the Palestine Intifada and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq they do not like it; they do not like political topics at the stadium because they could create a consensus; this scares politicians who cannot control votes. This is the reason for this strong police repression.”

- Violence

The majority of Ultras groups perceive themselves as essentially non-violent never deliberately starting aggression, despite the clashes that eventually take place among the different groups and with the police. However, as Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher note fan culture is predisposed to violence and in many instances the media also reports on violence only and spurs negative reactions against the Ultras in countries where there is no official distinction between the Ultras and the Hooligans, such as Italy and Spain. However in spite of this, a statement on an Ultras group website describes on how Ultras perceive themselves with regards to violence:

---

109 Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2012), p 20
110 Testa (2009), p. 59
111 Ibid, p. 60
112 Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2012), p 17
“In any discussion about the defense and preservation of our freedom to do what we want, something has to be said about the issue of violence. Other groups are often being hypocritical when they dissociate themselves categorically from violence in texts on the subject but then ultimately do the opposite. On the other hand, it’s just not on when some people throw their weight around in the stadium and then wash their hands of all the aggro in the street afterwards. For us, Ultra also means not limiting ourselves to the hate-filled singing in the 90 minutes spent in the stadium but living the Ultra life 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and this has definitely not just been the case since this Poland/Eastern Bloc hype started. […] We don’t categorically dissociate ourselves from violence …. To be sure, violence as a way of solving problems may be the wrong path for some people to take. We only wish to point out here that there are different factions in our group and there are motivated people in all areas of activity, whether it be creative visual displays or ‘sporting activities’ in the streets. That’s actually all there is to say. Just form your own picture. However, what should be clear is we won’t let everyone verbally abuse and criticize us.”

International Cooperation

Despite the fact that there is no official network across Europe until this day, where different Ultras groups can participate and exchange ideas, there are individual networks between some groups and the high level of solidarity and the agreement over key identity principles allows for room for inter-Ultras groups relationship. For example, there is a network called ALERTA!, that was established in 2007 in Italy, Germany and Spain as a coalition against racist Ultra groups, which also cooperates with Ultras in Belgium, Scotland, and Greece.

As discussed earlier, it is hard to speak of the Ultras scene in Europe as one cohesive movement or entity, however when faced with external pressures, the different Ultras groups across the continent often unite in solidarity with each other presenting them as one front against perceived injustices, ultra repressive measures against the fans, negative reporting by the media, and the commercialization of the sports. For example, when in 2008 a group of

---

113 Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher (2012), p. 17
114 Ibid, p 12
around 5,000 Ultras protested on the streets of Rome against stricter checks in stadiums, Swiss Ultras groups, announced they will join forces in the protest and organize virtual pressure in solidarity. Another example took place in Austria, when the Salzburg soccer club signed a sponsorship deals with “the drinks manufacturer Red Bull, many German, Dutch, Romanian, Croatian, Scandinavian, Swiss, Belgian and even American Ultra groups took part in demonstrations of solidarity in their own stadiums against the commercialization of the game.

The Ultras in a Global Context

This chapter aimed to explore the global context for the Ultras as a social movement, its origins in Europe, composition, organization, attitudes, activities, and areas of contention with state institutions, in order to understand the drivers behind the Egyptian Ultras repertoire of contention vis-à-vis the Egyptian state over the past years. The chapter showed that despite the fact that the European Ultras are not a one cohesive group, there exist many striking similarities across the different groups. Due to the shared collective identity across European Ultras, the groups’ members share some intrinsic common rivalries against external authority at large and coercive state institutions in particular, whom they perceive as infringing upon their rights to cheerfully support their teams. Such rivalry is also often aggravated by the police attempts of repression of the groups inside and outside the stadiums culminating in the murder of several fans. The protest, cheering, and financing techniques are also shared not only by the European Ultras but also by the Egyptian Ultras which will be illustrated in Chapter IV.

116 Ibid, p. 9
Chapter IV

The Ultras as a New Social Movement in the Egyptian Context

Moving away from the European Ultras movement that has largely shaped the Egyptian Ultras scene, this chapter will attempt to explore the historical importance of soccer in Egypt and how it impacted the rise of the Ultras movement in the county, the collective identity of the Egyptian Ultras and the commonalities they share with their European counterparts, the groups' common purpose and activities, internal organization and dynamics, and relationships between the different Ultras groups. Due to the very little documented academic research on the Ultras, chapter IV and V will also rely on anecdotal evidence collected from individual key-informant in-depth structured interviews conducted with individual Ultras founders, leaders, and members.

During the month of January 2015, I communicated with a few Ultras members that I personally knew to put me in touch with members who may be interested to participate in this study. The process of finding Ultras members who would be willing to engage with a researcher and openly share their views on the internal groups' dynamics and the contentious relationship with the state's security apparatus was more than challenging. Hence, it was key to explain the difference between an academic research and an opinion piece in the media, which they utterly despise. A promise of confidentiality of their personal data was also made to each interested interviewee before even a consent form to participate in the study had to be made.

The Egyptian media has, whether deliberatively or undeliberatively, fallen into the trap of treating the Egyptian Ultras scene as one cohesive front with clear and unified political delineations and tendencies. Often ungrounded in documented evidence, this has largely shaped public opinion about the Ultras in Egypt, and after years since 2011, has also led to the perception of the Ultras as a cohesive anarchist group that has a political opposition
of the state agenda. In turn, the negative propaganda has aggravated the conflict with the media that the Ultras have, and has also further strengthened their position of not engaging with journalists and media people. And so, solidarity among members and their well-reasoned commitment not to engage publicly as individuals with the media are very important principles for the majority of Ultras members and ex-members. Hence, in my field work I had to emphasize the fact that this study will be used solely for academic purposes not journalistic ones, which at the end allowed me to locate 10 interested Ultras members. However, it needs to be noted that I made contact with several members, who either bluntly refused to participate or avoided my calls. Another challenge that faced me doing the field work was the killings of the Ultras White Knights members and Zamalek fans right before a Zamalek match on February 8th, 2015. Following the killings that some Ultras fans claimed it was due to the large numbers of fans entering the stadium through a cage-like entrance, and being fired at with tear gas by the police, Ultras White Knights members were accused of triggering the violence that led to the killings. This further complicated the mission to locate Ultras White Knights fans who would be willing to openly speak up about the group and their contention with the police.

The group of interviewees consisted of the following young men\textsuperscript{117} and were all conducted by the author of the thesis by phone:

1) Interviewee 1: An ex-Ultras Ahlawy Member, who first joined the Curva Red Venom 2010 (CRV) in 2010 upon its establishment, then left it and joined Ultras Ahlawy between January 2012 and December 2013. He left the group in December 2013 after disagreement over newly introduced policies for the members. The interview was conducted on March 6, 2015.

2) Interviewee 2: An ex-Ultras Ahlawy Section Leader, who joined the group in 2009. In

\textsuperscript{117}Due to the current sensitive situation of the Ultras groups in Egypt and based on the principal researchers’ agreement with interviewees, their names were not used in order to cover their real identity.
2011, he became a section leader covering five neighborhoods. He left the group in mid 2014 after disagreement over the group directions. The interview was conducted on March 7, 2015.

3) Interviewee 3: An ex-Ultras Ahlawy Member, who joined the group in late 2010 following his move to Egypt. He left the group in early 2014 after his detention for one month following clashed between the fans and the police at the airport when they gathered there to welcome the return of Al Ahly handball team. The interview was conducted on March 7, 2015.

4) Interviewee 4: An Ultras Ahlawy Member, who joined the group in August 2010. His love for Al Ahly led him to search for the group website and contact one of the leaders to join although he didn’t know anyone in the group. He left the group in March 2013 after the Port Said verdict, as he wasn’t able to take part in cheering activities anymore due to the hard memories he carried from the previous years of his late friends. The interview was conducted on March 10, 2015.

5) Interviewee 5: An Ultras Ahlawy Member, who joined in late 2010 and is still an active member until today. He had been attending matches since 2008 and made friends with Ultras members during matches. He communicated with them his interest in joining the group in 2010. The interview was conducted on March 12, 2015.

6) Interviewee 6: An Ultras Ahlawy Member, who joined the group in 2009. He is still an active member until today. A friend of his, who was an Ultras member helped him in joining the group. The interview was conducted on March 12, 2015.

7) Interviewee 7: An Ultras Ahlawy Founder, who has been active between 2007 and 2013. He had to leave the group due to an increasing workload at his job that he couldn’t accommodate with his Ultras responsibilities. The interview was conducted on March 12, 2015.

8) Interviewee 8: An Ultras Ahlawy Founder, who has been active between 2007 and 2013.
Just like Interviewee 7, he had to leave the group due to an increasing workload at his job that he couldn’t accommodate with his Ultras responsibilities. This interview was conducted on March 15, 2015.

9) Interviewee 9: An Ultras Ahlawy Member, who joined the group in 2011 and had to leave recently after, as his family was opposed to him being a member. The interview was conducted on March 16, 2015.

10) Interviewee 10: An Ultras White Knights Member, who has joined the group in 2007. Despite his current workload he is still an active member until today.

Using Tarrow's four empirical properties of a social movement, this chapter (and the following) will explore the Egyptian Ultras composition and dynamics after having situated it within the global movement context, through the eyes of its members and through the little literature written about the groups. Chapter IV will apply the first two properties of Tarrow's definition, namely their collective challenge and common purpose.

**Background**

**Soccer and Politics in Egypt**

Soccer is by far the most popular and practiced sport in Egypt, with youth, predominantly male, playing it practically everywhere from the streets, to schools, to sports clubs and youth centers. In his study of the historical evolution and development of soccer in Egypt over the 20th century, Shawki Ebeid El-Zatmah argues that the sports has transitioned from falling completely under state control under Nasser's regime, to being largely left to the forces of the global free-market economy of the game, which also came to be dominated by Western Europe's soccer leagues, under Mubarak since the 1980s. Despite allowing the soccer game and industry to function freely in the country with minimal direct involvement

---

118 Tarrow (2011), p.5
119 El-Zatmah (2011), p. 166

49
from the state transforming the industry to benefit only a small group of players, clubs, agents, officials, and television media corporations, the Mubarak regime came to celebrate each soccer achievement as achievements of the regime. The official media further supported this discourse in the absence of real impactful socio-economic or political accomplishments of the state, and went even further to link supporting the National Team to nationalism/patriotism and to the love of the country. Such discourse became even more apparent during the 2006 African Cup of Nations, a championship which Egypt hosted and won and continued the following years. Gamal and Alaa Mubarak are notoriously remembered after the National Team's victory at the 2010 final match chanting in the changing rooms with team members “Zay Ma’al El Rayes, Montakhab Masr Kwayes” – (Just as the President said, Egypt National Team is good)\textsuperscript{120}. Their ousted father, Hosni Mubarak, also went to the airport to meet and honor the whole team in an attempt to clearly tie himself and his regime to the major soccer achievement of winning three cups in a row marking the seventh win for the Egyptian National Team\textsuperscript{121}.

The 2006 championship marked dramatic changes in fan culture, and in supporting the regime discourse of linking sports to a sense of belonging to the country. During the 2006 championship a completely new trend in fan culture emerged, which was largely supported and encouraged by the official media and regime, where younger generations of males and females as well as whole families started attending matches at the stadiums. This was a slight shift from the previous official fan associations who were very much linked to management boards of the sports clubs and to the regime, and who dominated the fan scene and largely filled the stadiums prior to 2006\textsuperscript{122}. Additionally, following the 2006 and the subsequent 2008 and 2010 victories of the African Cup of Nations, Egyptians took to the streets in

\textsuperscript{120}“Zay Ma'al El Rayes.” Youtube. February 6, 2013. Accessed February 1, 2015. 
\textsuperscript{121}“The President Welcomes the National Team.” Youtube. February 1, 2010. Accessed February 1, 2015.
\textsuperscript{122}Beshir (2011), p. 24
massive *unprecedented* numbers to celebrate their National Team's win. The whole team and coach were idolized as Egypt's golden soccer generation, who got the country the highest number of won Cups in the African continent (7 Cups). Supporting and chanting for the National Team, and standing behind them in the terraces was further encouraged by the official media, who constantly reminded their audience that it is a national duty to do so. Consequently, the team's win marked a victory for all Egyptians across all socio-economic levels and from all educational backgrounds, who were either present at matches or simply just cheered for their National Team and perceived this action in fulfillment of a national duty. 2006 brought about a different and new generation of obedient and peaceful soccer fans supported by the state and by official media, a trend that has frustrated some young men who viewed themselves as the “true” supporters of soccer and their teams. Some of these young men would later go on to lead and become members of the emerging Ultras. Additionally, this period has caused soccer to largely become a site for young Egyptians to collectively believe in themselves as a nation, a feeling that would contribute to the 2011 events.

It became apparent that this new generation, a part of which would later contest the authority of the state, was becoming a threat to the Mubarak regime. El-Zatmah in attempting to explain the reasons why the Mubarak regime sought to support “peaceful” fans on stadia and official media, argues that the regime and consequently official media saw soccer as beneficial to them on two levels. On the first level, from the standpoint of the regime, soccer has provided a safe space for the masses where they can voice their opposition to the regime, “allowing the public to safely ‘blow off steam’”\(^{123}\). On the second level, the support, which the regime gave publicly to members of the soccer game and industry has turned some popular culture figures into “avid public supporters of and advocates for the

\(^{123}\) El-Zatmah (2011), p. 133
regime, President Mubarak, and his son Gamal”\textsuperscript{124}. And in spite of the very small percentage of Egyptian society this group of sportsmen was, they represented very important popular cultural icons for the public and granted the regime some form of public support and legitimacy.

Expansion of the Ultras Culture in North Africa and Egypt

Gamal Beshir traces the expansion of the Ultras movement in North Africa and Egypt, not the rest of the Middle East, which he argues to be unequipped and unprepared for the Ultras mindset of attending all matches and cheering throughout the 90 minutes nonstop. The soccer scene in North Africa has largely paved the way for the expansion of the Ultras movement, including the popularity of soccer, the won continental championships, and presence of the classical fan unions and associations. Such classical associations were, however, largely connected to the management boards of the sports clubs allowing them to attend closed meetings and eventually get financially supported in exchange for granting legitimacy to such boards when they speak in behalf of the fans\textsuperscript{125}.

The expansion of the Ultras movement in North Africa started off in Libya in 1989 due to its proximity to Europe and where soccer fans often travelled to Italy to attend matches\textsuperscript{126}. The formed group was very quickly crushed and disbanded by the Gaddafi regime who feared of the youth movement, Beshir argues.

Then it was Tunisia, where the Ultras movement started expanding effectively in 2002. They were countered by the police forces starting 2009 after several episodes of violence, which eventually led to the disbandment of all Tunisian Ultras groups in 2010. The Egyptian Ultras Ahlawy stood in solidarity with their Tunisian counterparts raising a banner with the slogan “Solidarité Avec Grouper Tunisiens” (Solidarity with Tunisian Groups)

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid, p.133
\textsuperscript{125} Beshir (2012), p. 38
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid, p. 40
during one of their matches, which further emphasized the sense of belonging to a trans-boundary movement\textsuperscript{127}. The Tunisian Ultras groups have continued attending matches in support of their teams but have been banned from organizing Tifos and using pyrotechnics, two of the most important activities for any Ultras group.

In Morocco, the expansion of the Ultras movement was pretty easy given the existing fan culture that have always moved the Moroccan soccer supporters behind and in support of their teams in all championships. In 2005, the first Ultras groups were formed and ever since were known for their very well-developed and creative activities and Tifos. Beshir argues that the Moroccan Ultras are relatively respected in the country, where the majority of Moroccans are familiar with the groups, their purpose, their activities, and their chants\textsuperscript{128}. Also, the use of graffiti by Moroccan youth and the popularity of music in the country prior to the expansion of the Ultras movement in Morocco, led to a very sophisticated level of graffiti and chants used by the Ultras. The Moroccan Ultras groups are also advanced and developed in the area of financially supporting themselves through the sale of Ultras-branded products. A peculiar characteristic of the Moroccan Ultras, that sets them apart from their North African and European counterparts, is their good relationship with the media, which usually follows the groups' news and offers positive coverage of them. Beshir links this to the popularity of the groups on Moroccan streets that led media outlets to follow news that is called for by their consumers.

The Algerian Ultras are relatively less developed than their North African counterparts, Beshir argues\textsuperscript{129}. The expansion of the movement in the country took place in 2007, but still faces major challenges with a relatively small number of members compared to other Ultras groups in the region, and consequently with limited available funding. This impacts their ability to create creative activities that in turn would attract a larger follower

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, p. 46
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid, p. 52
\textsuperscript{129} Beshir (2012), p. 43
The relative late expansion of the Ultras movement in Egypt in 2007 gave the Egyptian groups a head start to catch up with their North African counterparts. Hence, the start of the movement in Egypt has seen major successes and managed to learn from lessons of other countries in the region. The Ahly club fans started first organizing themselves in 1996 through a website and forum, which the Zamalek fans also did through an online website and forum. These forums allowed the fans to organize themselves and plan attendance and activities during matches, and led to the establishment of Ahly Lovers Union (ALU) and the AFC in 2005, which got established as a registered non-governmental organization. In parallel, Zamalek fans created the Zamalek Lovers Union (ZLU), which along with the ALU became the seed for the Ultras Ahlawy (UA) and Ultras White Knights (UWK) both established in 2007. These were followed by Ultras groups for the same two big Cairo clubs, such as Ultras Red Devils (RD) and CRV 2010, as well Ultras groups for other teams, such as the Yellow Dragons of Al Ismaili Team and the Green Magic for the Alexandrian Al Ethad.

The Egyptian Ultras
Identity and Collective Challenges

The Egyptian Ultras collective identity largely resembles that of their European counterparts. Loyalty to the group's team is a key crucial aspect of their mentality regardless whether their team is winning or losing. Supporting one's team throughout the 90 minutes of the match and traveling everywhere in support of the team in away matches are activities also shared by all Egyptian Ultras groups. Interviewee 1 described the Ultras as:

"a group that loves soccer and supports the team they love. They are very organized and don't need interference from the police to organize them at the base.

130 The forum was hosted on: www.zamalek.tv
terraces. They travel anywhere with their team and cheer for it throughout the 90 minutes in an attempt to make our team proud in Egyptian and international championships.”

Being organized and following orders from their superiors are key values for any Ultras member. As noted during the interview, Interviewee 1 said that being a member in the Ultras has had positive impact on his personal life, where he felt he became “organized, passionate and creative”, in general possessing key elements of what Beshir calls the “Ultras Spirit”\(^\text{131}\). However, he argued that joining the Ultras doesn't necessarily mean one would completely give up who he is and not be able to voice his opinions. But for him,

“it means simply that I must follow my leader's orders on the terraces, but any activities we organize outside the terraces, I'm always free to voice my opinion about them and oftentimes our opinions get taken. Being an Ultras member means I always have to be present in the activities organized by the group inside and outside the stadium, but it doesn't mean I have to personally participate in them. So for example, one the day after the Port Said verdict in March 2013, the groups marched towards the soccer association and suddenly some members started burning down the premises. I didn't believe in such action so I just stood there and didn't join the actually activity.”

It was also stated during interviews that the Egyptian Ultras, just like their European counterparts, do not engage in organized support of their country's national team, at least as a group. This is a very interesting element of the Ultras identity, which is an extremely passionate group yet focuses all its passion on their team not the national one. When attempting to understand why, Interviewee 3 cited that this is not one of their objectives and one argued that “we don't support the Egypt National team as a group, but could do so on an individual basis”.

Despite the shared commonalities between the Egyptian Ultras among themselves and with their European counterparts, Bashir notes that each Ultras groups has some peculiar elements in its personality that sets it slightly apart from other groups and that somehow

\(^{131}\) Beshir (2012), p. 89
reflects the team it supports. For example, he argues that the UWK in their graffiti, chants and banners mainly focus on the idea of loyalty to the Zamalek club, which has been seeing major defeats for over a decade. Their slogans include “Sanazal Awfeya’ ” (We will remain loyal) and “Khalfakom w Ma’akom men 1911 Ela Al Abad” (Behind you since 1911 and with you forever), which largely reflect the support of the fans despite the recurrent defeats (Beshir, p. 63). While looking at slogans of UA, one would notice the proud nature of the fans of their constant team's victories whether on the national or African level, such as “Al Ahly Fawq Al Gamee’ ” (Ahly above all) and “A’zam Nadi Fel Kawn” (The greatest club in the world). The Yellow Dragons rather focus on the discrimination their team faces, despite being one of the most popular and important soccer teams in Egypt, with slogans that reflect a more common revolutionary nature of residents of the Suez Canal region.

Caption: Ahly Slogan: The greatest club in the world132

A major identity commonality shared the Egyptian and European Ultras is their rivalries, which generally creates challenges for them in an attempt to fulfill their purpose, i.e. support and cheer for their team. As mentioned by Interviewee 2 “we stand against the media, modern soccer institutions, and any entity that attempts to stop us from what we love to do, such as the police.” In his statement he summed up all three rivalries all Ultras groups have worldwide, namely with the media, modern soccer institutions and the police. And according to Tarrow’s definition of the empirical properties of a social movement, the groups’ collective challenge is largely constituted of these three rivalries. Due to their rebellious fearless identity, their hate for injustices, and their strategy of opposition to outside authority, the Ultras often are challenged and do challenge their rivals.

The growing importance of the privately owned media corporations in the last two decades has often caused some corporations to monopolize the broadcast rights to international, continental, and national soccer championships. This in addition to the negative portrayal of the Ultras by the Egyptian media has largely impacted the negative

---

134 Tarrow (2011), p.5
135 El Zatmah (2011), p. 166
relationship and led to the Ultras mostly boycotting the media and the refusal of any relationship with media people. Modern soccer institutions in the Egyptian context largely refer to the Egypt Soccer Federation and the Management Boards of the sports clubs, two entities which the Ultras continuously have confrontations with. And finally, rivalries with state institutions, namely the police, that attempt to curtail the groups' key essence of existence, which is cheering for their team, constitute a major challenge for the Ultras.

Interviewee 5 said during an interview that the attitude of the police vis-à-vis the Ultras is “abusive and humiliating for absolutely no reason. On January 23, 2011 during an Ahly match, the police were searching every Ultras member entering the stadium individually and they would confiscate pyrotechnics and music instruments. They also insisted that we don't put up our banner; a battle which we won at the end.”

Common Purpose and Key Activities

As argued above of the common collective identity of the Ultras social movement, the Ultras groups have a unifying common purpose that transcends boundaries and connects them to other Ultras groups worldwide. The Ultras hold their role as supporters of their teams during times of victory and defeat as their essence for existence anywhere in the world. Additionally, they perceive themselves as superior to other soccer fans. Such stance can be seen in Beshir's categorization of fans referenced in the literature review, and his perception of the Ultras as the most devoted and “purest” fans. Their constant cheering during matches while they stand throughout the 90 minutes and traveling with their teams regardless of the destination make them feel truly different from other fan groups and similar to one another across countries and continents.136

Preparation activities leading up to the day of matches is also of critical importance to the Ultras group members. To them, the tifo is of the same level of importance as the time devoted to its design and preparation. As mentioned Interviewee 3, the Egyptian Ultras also

---

136 Beshir (2012), p. 78
“organize meetings and assign tasks and responsibilities in the weeks leading up to matches so that they manage to successfully pull a good show on the big day”. In order to properly support their teams, the Ultras organize themselves by interest and capabilities. As stated during by Interviewee 1, “those who paint well usually focus on graffiti and the design of banners. We all help each other and learn from those who have more developed skills, but they remain the ones responsible for their tasks.”

Another activity shared with the European Ultras groups is their use of pyrotechnics as a way of supporting their team, and as a manifestation of their own group culture, and not as a violent activity or even posing a threat of violence. For them, pyrotechnics is a very critical component of their tifos and their cheering mechanism. Without it, the support would not be complete. Hence, this partially explains the despite the Ultras members have towards the police who often prohibit them from entering the stadia with pyrotechnics and also often confiscate them. Interviewee 2 took extreme pride in the groups' abilities to hide the pyrotechnics, enter the stadium with it, and eventually use it despite the police attempts to search every Ultras member entering the matches.

Another important activity undertaken by the Egyptian Ultras groups is their political stances in instances they feel injustice. Such political engagement is linked to the high sense of solidarity felt among group members, which gets reflected on their engagement in topics of public matter. Long before their engagement starting 2011, the Ultras took some political stances albeit inside the stadiums, such as their opposition to the Gaza war in 2008 shown in their banner and match137. Such stances have become even more apparent following January 25, 2011 and the Port Said massacre of 72 Ultras Ahlawy members. Interviewee 4 cited that deviation from the main purpose, i.e. cheering for and supporting the team, was mainly due to the murder of their friends, whose murderers they wanted to bring to justice, and also due to

137 Beshir (2012), p. 27
the suspension of soccer activity in Egypt for some long and intermittent periods. However, this deviation still managed to bring all members together under one common purpose, namely: “Retribution for the Martyrs”.

The Ultras' Internal Organization

According to all interviews conducted as part of this research, Ultras Ahlawy members all referenced the same set up and internal structure. And despite the layered internal organization, they mostly acknowledged that they all feel part of the same family and hence, have direct means of communication regardless of the rank of the member. Since 2012 right after the Port Said massacre, Interviewee 5 noted that a sub-section of the Ultras called the "Secret Group" was formed and was only composed of the most dedicated members and leaders which were between 300-400 members. The secret group organized activities mainly related to mobilization round the Port Said Trial and verdicts. The structure of the group took the following form:

![Ultras Ahlawy Internal Structure Diagram]

Interviewees all agreed on the below structure and definitions for the different ranks. And
below is a summary of the main ranks within the group:

- Founders: Also called the "Active" or "Cappos" are the oldest founding members. These in 2007 have been estimated by interviewees to be 30, went down in 2011 to reach 13, and are predicted to stand now at 6. These are the ones who meet to discuss and determine the group’s strategy and directions and relay their decisions to the Section Leaders. Founders are usually the ones who set a role model for other members to follow, in terms of abiding by the group mission, their loyalty and love to the team, and their support of all members of the group in times of distress. During marches and demonstrations, they were cited to be the ones always on the front lines defending others; and during matches, they are usually the ones leading the chants.

- Section Leaders: As a largely Cairo-centric movement, Ultras Ahlawy's 40 sections are organized by neighborhoods, with some sections encompassing more than several neighborhoods. For example, the Maadi section, encompassed Helwan, 15 May, Maadi, Dar El Salam, and Masr El Qadima neighborhoods and was led by eight Section Leaders between 2010 and 2012. Section Leaders would usually get their orders through meetings with the Founders and relay those to their members. They usually are the ones responsible for the direct communication with the member not the Founders and act as the middle men between these two ranks. They don’t have to be the members with the longest years in the group, but those with the highest levels of dedication and loyalty to the team and group, and with the brightest opinions and lines of thinking that would benefit the Ultras group. When a member gets promoted as a Section Leader a form of ceremonial meeting is held with all other Leaders that would be promoted and with the Cappos, who explain to them their role and responsibilities, as well as approaches to communicate with different types of members to avoid internal group clashes.

- Members: Divided into Members and Junior Members, the Junior Members are those
between the age of 13 to 18 years old, while the Members are above 18 years old. The two groups are unrelated and hold separate meetings with their Section Leaders. The younger members do not engage in activities outside of the stadiums and their role focuses only on attending matches and cheering for their team. Older members attend meetings with their leaders as well as larger ones with the Founders usually held at the area adjacent to the entrance of the “third class seats” of the stadium by the “6th of October Panorama” area. Several members mentioned that they were attracted to the Ultras group after having seen their friends join, watched their performances during matches, or just loved the sports team so much that they sought any means to dedicate more time and energy to it. Some have asked their friends to introduce them to their Section Leaders so that they can attend meetings as members, others have communicated with the administrators of the Facebook page, and others looked up numbers of the Section Leaders on the web.

Despite how strictly organized the group seems to be from this described structure, Interviewee 5 argued that “we are all friends. The differences in ranks are only to help us organize ourselves better, but in no way it dictates who talks to whom or who does what”. This point was asserted by all interviewed members who argued that decisions get deliberated among the whole group and very often members share their thoughts directly with cappos and don’t have to go through their leaders. This is clearly linked to the feeling of solidarity and belonging each member has, which allows them to feel ownership of any decision and hence feel the need to be involved at all times. One interesting point to add here is the fact the Interviewee 2 argued that one of the reasons he left the groups, was the feeling of alienation from the decision-making process in 2013, which was not the norm before the verdict. However Interviewee 5, who is currently still an active member, noted that things are back to normal now and members discuss decisions among themselves before making any.
Dynamics within the Movement

Dedication to the Ultras cause could be seen in the very high number of meetings each member usually attends. In addition to the weekly meeting organized within the Section, which is mostly organized in a public space at a coffee shop, there are meetings for the Leaders with the Cappos, meetings only for the Cappos, and meetings for sub-committees within each Section prior to matches or major key political activity. Interviewee 1 argued that “cell phone messages and secret Facebook groups have been usually used to schedule and arrange for meetings, as well as disseminate background information on the Ultras movement worldwide and on the history of the sports club”.

After the Port Said Massacre, Facebook as a social media tool became even a stronger tool for the Ultras to mobilize the larger community behind their cause. Interviewee 2 argues that “using the official public page for the group, we were able to attract a large supporters base that joined us during marches, demonstrations and sit-ins, contributing to shaping public opinion and creating sympathy with our cause”. Yet the Ultras maintained their strategy of non-communication with the mainstream media and cited the fabrication of news about them as one of the main reasons for such a strategy. They argued that the media is always attempting to shape a negative perception among the public of them, with Interviewee 4 saying that very important sports media men “have called them names, allegedly claimed that they did drugs, and were a bunch of homosexuals who wanted to destroy the country”.

Tasks were usually assigned to members prior to matches according to each member's area of expertise. Interviewee 2 cited that within his section, he would categorize the members into: a) those that can draw/paint well (for the graffiti and banners, b) those that are good organizers, c) those that can lead at the stadium, d) those that are well positioned as assistants, and e) those that could support the group during times of distress, attacks and fights.
The above-discussed hierarchy might seem very militaristic and un-democratic, yet all members cited that their opinions are often discussed and well taken by their superiors and hence no hard feelings are taken. Interviewee 2 cited his outspoken nature and courage to voice his opinion and discuss decisions of leaders and Cappos as main reasons why he was selected to become a Section Leader despite the presence of older member with more years of experience in the group. Another member argued that he would always discuss decisions with his Leader and would have to be convinced before taking any actions. Yet, at times where disagreements arose, a member would eventually give up his personal opinion and take up that of the group. He would attend activities, such as marches and demonstrations but would not necessarily engage in confrontations with the security officers or in acts of vandalism if he is not convinced.

And despite the cohesive nature one could perceive on the outside, some interviewees such as Interviewee 2, 4 and 5 cited that internal strife and disagreements were not uncommon for the Ultras groups, especially after the Port Said massacre and the suspension of soccer activities in Egypt. Interviewee 2 felt that the Cappos and Leaders were not engaging them enough on the decision-making level and rather turning to political activists for advice and directions, which largely alienated them. Interviewees 4 and 5 argued that after Port Said, and while it brought more structural organization and strategic direction to the group as opposed to its old disorganized nature, it also caused some senior figures in the group to seek personal glory and attention-seeking behavior. These were attitudes which are largely frowned upon according to the Ultras culture, where everyone acts for the welfare of the team/club and avoids seeking praise for his own personal achievements. Finally, while Ultras members believe in the constant traveling in support of one's teams, Interviewee 1 noted that “the low socio-economic backgrounds of many of the members prevented them from affording to do international travels, which at some point led to their elimination of the
group.” This decision was largely disdained by several interviewed Ultras members who preferred to cheer for their team on the terraces without officially belonging to the Ultras.

Inter-groups Relationships

Interviewee 2 noted that prior to Port Said, there were inter-Ultras groups’ rivalry and in some instances wars; “we could not befriend members of other rival Ultras groups, such as Ultras White Knights members”. This was very hard for some people who could be friends with UWK members or supporters before having joined UA. Interviewee 1 noted that soon after the inception of Ultras Ahlawy and White Knights, several violent confrontations took place in 2007-2008 between the groups. However, rivalries did not only happen between Ultras groups of different teams, but they often also took place between Ultras groups supporting the same team, such as the case of Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras Red Devils. Interviewee 1 recalled Ultras Ahlawy stealing the banner of Ultras Red Devils after the murder of the group Cappo “Ghandour” in Port Said. The death of Ghandour has caused conflict to arise within the Red Devils and in an attempt by Ahlawy to properly commemorate his name, they decided to steal the banner and to raise it during the Ahly matches. However, it needs to be noted that during interviews all Ultras members said that this attitude has largely changed after Port Said, when all Ultras groups joined forces in support of the UA stance to attain justice against killers of their 72 members.

Another interesting dynamic is the relationships with other Ultras groups outside of Egypt. Beshir argues that such relationships took two forms, either a formal twinning agreement, or an unofficial friendly relationship. He argues that such relationships usually take place because of 1) a common ideological or social background for the fans, 2) Cappos of the different groups being friends, or 3) an attempt to achieve common long term goals.

138 Beshir (2012), p. 108
One Section Leader recalled the twinning effort that took place between UA and Ultras Supras Sud of the Tunisian Espérance ST team that started in 2009 after several visits between the groups. This relationship, however, was brought to an end in 2012/2013 when Founders noted that it started to negatively impact the focus of the UA group members. An informal relationship between Ultras Espérance and UA also grew after the Port Said massacre, where they have shown solidarity with UA and against Ultras Green Eagles of Al Masri who wanted to cheer for them at the 2012 CAF Champions League final match as reflected in the post below:

Caption: A post taken from the Tunisian Espérance Sportive de Tunis Ultras Facebook page\textsuperscript{139}. Translation:

“To our Egyptian Brothers: Thanks to those who support us and who will cheer for us at the final match. But we would like to tell you that Taraji does not need you to cheer for it. Ahly is the team representing your country and is more worthy of your support. Be brothers to one another and don't let soccer set you astray or else these revolutions would not have taken place. Cheer for the team from your country and for your brother and you will be thanked for this. Also, to the Ahly fans, we are brothers after all and no soccer or pitch can set us apart. The relationship between Tunisia, Egypt and all Arabs transcends all these matters; so hard luck to the loser and good luck to the winner.”

\textsuperscript{139}Ultras Espérance Sportive de Tunis. Facebook. Accessed March 1, 2015. 
The Egyptian Ultras Movement: Collective Challenge and Common Purpose

This chapter attempted to explore the historical importance of soccer in Egypt and how it impacted the rise of the Ultras movement in the county, the collective identity of the Egyptian Ultras and the commonalities they share with their European counterparts, the groups' common purpose and activities, internal organization and dynamics, and relationships between the different Ultras groups. It largely relied on individual key-informant in-depth structured interviews conducted with individual Ultras founders, leaders, and members. Using Tarrow's four empirical properties of a social movement, this chapter focused on the collective challenge; and the common purpose as well as embedded those elements into Tilly's theory on repertoires of contention 140.

A major identity commonality shared the Egyptian and European Ultras is their rivalries, which generally creates challenges for them in an attempt to fulfill their purpose, i.e. support and cheer for their team. The Ultras worldwide, not just in Egypt, mainly have three rivalries, namely they stand against the media, modern soccer institutions, and the police. And according to Tarrow's definition of the empirical properties of a social movement, the groups' collective challenge is constituted of these three rivalries. Due to their rebellious fearless identity, their hate for injustices, and their strategy of opposition to outside authority, the Ultras often are challenged and do challenge their rivals.

Additionally, when looking at their common purpose, one could note that prior to the Port Said massacre in February 2012, the Ultras' common purpose and their essence for existence anywhere in the world was mainly to support their teams during times of victory and defeat. However after Port Said, members cited that deviation from the main groups’ purpose of cheering for and supporting the team, was mainly due to the murder of their friends, and also due to the suspension of soccer activity in Egypt for some long and

140 Tarrow (2011), p.5
intermittent periods. However, this deviation still brought all members together under one common purpose, namely: “Retribution for the Martyrs”.
Chapter V

The Ultras' Political Engagement and Repertoires of Contention

Malevolence, frustration, and despair were all but a few characteristics that marked my interviews with Ultras members who were active during a peak time of rivalry and animosity between the state and the soccer fan groups. Young people, who seem lively on the outside, but showing extreme levels on anger and depression when triggered with questions about their relationship with the state security apparatus, were the highlight of this research. Conducting the interviews, I, naively I would say, had not realized the horrors those young men have gone through and persevered. Hence, often I found myself falling into a problem of sympathizing greatly with and internalizing my interviewees' fears, sorrows and pain, characteristics that academic researchers very persistently try to avoid. The interviews were divided into two sections, one focused on the Ultras' purpose, collective challenges, internal structure and main activities, and the second focused on their animistic relationship with the state, especially the police. It was always that second part of the interviews that was very loaded with emotions and memories.

As mentioned in Chapter IV, due to the very little documented academic research on the Ultras, this chapter will also rely on anecdotal evidence collected from individual key-informant in-depth structured interviews conducted with individual Ultras founders, leaders, and members. Sydney Tarrow argues that a movement is an actor or a coalition of actors whose presence can be mapped out by exploring the arrangement of collective actions which characterize its contact with its adversaries, allies, and publics; these are not equal to a particular form of action.141 This chapter will focus on two of Tarrow's four empirical properties of a social movement, namely the groups’ social solidarity and their sustained

141 Tarrow (2011), p.5
interaction collectively with powerful opponents. Chapter V will focus on these elements through the eyes of its members and through the little literature written about the groups, namely with regards to their confrontation with the state and media, and their repertoires of contention over the studied period of time.

This chapter also will look at this adversarial relationship through Tilly's theory on repertoires of contention. According to Charles Tilly, performances are “learned and grounded ways of making claims on other people, which in the short run strongly limit the choices of available to would-be makers of claims” And identifying different types of contention over time, allows us to recognize changes in repertoires, which Tilly defined as the routines and performances conducted over a period of time. These, however, may change due to three main reasons, namely: 1) regimes permitting some performances, and forbidding others forcing actors to choose from and innovate in performances; 2) the accumulating experience of actors and their history of contention; and 3) changes in the political opportunity structure encouraging some actions, and giving actors the opportunity to innovate on known scripts.

Building on Tilly’s framework of political contention and its repertoires, this chapter attempts to show that the disobedient collective identity of the Ultras groups, has naturally placed them as opponents to state actors and institutions, with contentious mechanisms and repertoires that have been largely shifting since January 25th, 2011, which shaped and was reshaped by key changes in dimensions of the political opportunity structure. Consequently, the Ultras groups changed the mechanisms and repertoires of their contention against the Egyptian state’s security apparatus, and openly spoke up about national issues and concerns inside and outside of stadia. And in the following years, they have increasingly used a critical language in their chants and messages of their graffiti that started filling up the walls of major

---

142 Tarrow (2011), p.5
143 Tarrow (2012), p.125
144 Ibid
cities. Later in February 2012, the Port Said massacre further reshaped that contentious relationship and placed the groups as rivals to state institutions.

**The Ultras' Views on Politics and Democracy**

With their thousands of committed members, their defined organizational structure and purpose, and the strong level of passion and solidarity connecting the groups, it can be argued that the Ultras groups are one of the most organized and powerful social movements in Egypt. And while their main purpose, as shown from the literature and interviews, is supporting and cheering for their beloved teams, the impact they have had and the role they have played on the Egyptian political life over the past few years cannot be overlooked.

As highlighted, always with pride during interviews, Ultras Ahlawy and Zamalek’s White Knights members played a very critical role during the January 25 events. Interviewee 2 argued that this was mainly “due to their years of experience in street clashes with the police”, and remembered how “the Ultras were always cheered for when they entered Tahrir Square and their presence always reassured protestors because they knew how to handle such confrontations”. Interviewee 2 also spoke of their notorious role during the Battle of the Camel, and how they managed to fight the vicious attacks on protestors and the square. It needs to be noted however, that officially, Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights took no stance towards the revolution. And despite the fact that the Ultras' leadership, according to all interviewees hadn't instructed their members to participate in the demonstrations, many did so on their own personal accord.

---


However, before delving into analyzing the conducted interviews on repertoires of contention and confrontations between the state security apparatus and the Ultras, one common opinion that was shared by all interviewed Ultras needs to be explored. This can be summed up in the following statement by Interviewee 2 when asked about the Ultras' political engagement and the purpose behind it: “We don't like politics. We are not interested in it. We never even wanted to get involved. They dragged us forcibly into it”. Several interviewees shared this opinion and noted that the political activity of the historically anti-political Ultras is merely perceived by them as an effort of their side to bring justice and achieve retribution, which in their minds, is very much differentiated from political activity that aims to seek power and rule. Interviewee 3 links this clear differentiation to their feeling of alienation by and disrespect of all political figures, whom they perceive as just working for private gains and seeking power and not targeting the common good of the country and its people.

When analyzing the group's collective claim-making cycles and their rebellion against any attempts by the state to curb their claim making abilities, one cannot miss noticing a combination in the collective group's memory resulting in particular forms of contention in particular conflict circumstances. And these can generally be categorized in two particular rhythms in national profiles of contention as highlighted by: a) the short-term rhythms that are localized and particular to their own cause and their claim-making abilities, which characterized their repertoires of contention and contention mechanisms prior to January 25th, 2011; and b) the longer-term rhythms that are cosmopolitan and touch many localities in the Egyptian society between 2011 and 2013. Additionally, and building upon Tilly's theory of repertoires of contention, we can note that contentious repertoires not only allow the character of regimes to heavily shape how people, and in this case the Ultras youth groups, are able to and wish to contend, but also the range of performances “shapes and reshapes the
regime … by inciting facilitation or repression, by creating or breaking alliances between claimants and other actors, and by succeeding or failing in pressing direct demands for regime change”\textsuperscript{147}.

**The Story of the Ultras and the State: Cycles of Animosity and Rivalry**

The cycles of contention by the Ultras using identity, standing and program claims, could be broken down in four, which will be further discussed below, namely a) before January 25\textsuperscript{th} 2011, b) After January 25\textsuperscript{th} 2011, c) After the Port Said Massacre, and d) After the Port Said verdict. Repeatedly, interviewees would argue that they haven't participated in politics and they don't consider their participation in the events of 2011 whether it was the 18 days, events of Mohamed Mahmoud Street, or events of Cabinet of Ministers, as political activity. Rather, such activity is cited to be done because of their love for Egypt and the desire to see it better one day that led them to joining the masses and organizing outside of the stadiums. Several interviewees argued that the reasons behind their participation was also their hate of injustice after seeing several Ultras members get killed or arrested during 2011.

However, the 2012 Port Said killings further aggravated the sense of injustice felt by the Ultras and let to a new cycle of contention where they mobilized non-Ultras members in support of their cause, i.e. retribution for those killed. And the unsatisfying verdict in 2013 eventually led to despair and withdrawal from political activity, which is clearly reflected in the following official statement by the Ultras Ahlawy Facebook page that was released after the verdict: “In the end we are not awaiting anything from the judiciary, because retribution for the blood [of those who died] will only come by our own hands”\textsuperscript{148}.

\textsuperscript{147} Tarrow (2008), p. 21
Before January 25th, 2011: Setting the Stage Outside the Terraces

In describing the animus relationship between the Ultras and the police during an interview with Ahram Online, Ahmed Gafaar, nephew of Zamalek old football star Farouk Gafaar and one of the White Knights’ founders, said that:

“If you went to a stadium and saw how some policeman riding a horse could lash Ultras members with a whip for no apparent reason, you would understand the nature of the relationship between the police and Ultras groups…This terrible relationship between both sides is the result of the constant brutality Ultras have long been subject to. They do hate the police and would engage with them on every possible occasion, and that’s by far justifiable considering the treatment they have been receiving."149

All interviewed Ultras members agreed on the aggressive and hardliner attitude toward dealing with the Ultras cohort since their inception in 2007. Prior to important matches, the police is argued to arrest Ultras Cappos often keeping them jailed for the duration of the match and in other instances threatening them that they would be held responsible if violence erupts at the match. Beshir notes that the “All Cops Are Bastards” slogan is also used by the Egyptian Ultras groups, who face an unjustified controlling attitude by the police forces.150 He argues that the police forces hopes are always to maintain the terraces for peaceful fans who sit still for the duration of the match and leave right thereafter. It could also be argued that from the perspective of the police, the Ultras were seen as rebel groups, and for the State Security Service they didn't seem to have a clear agenda. In this sense, not only did they pose a serious threat to the football status quo but also to the political status quo, an activity that for them definitely needed to be crushed.

Interviewee 1 noted that before January 25th, 2011, “the police forces would control the stadiums by their actual presence on the terraces among the supporters”, which often


150 Beshir (2012), p. 96
created much tension between the fan groups and the police. From the interviews, we could note that the contention dynamics and mechanisms between the groups and the police were very different from the period after January 25th. The Ultras before January 25th would still fear the power and authority of the police, who very often would use physical violence against the fan groups. Additionally, Interviewee 3 says that the police would conduct self-searching of fans for cheering tools such as music instruments, banners, pyrotechnics prior to them entering the stadiums. He notes that this process has often been conducted in a rather humiliating manner “to the extent that they would be stripped off their clothes in search of the tools in an attempt to show the fans who controls the terraces” and assert authority, which has further aggravated the rivalry between the groups and the police institution.

The media, which is one of the three rivals of the Ultras, also took part in the fight against the groups in Egypt. In 2009, one TV program aired a very normal video of some Ultras members casually celebrating one of their friends' birthday, however included the following loaded message as the headline: “These are the new soccer fans: drug addicts, homosexuals, and infidels”\textsuperscript{151}. The message from the regime seemed to be clear: the image of the Ultras groups was to be tarnished, among their families, friends and society at large. And hence following the airing of the video, massive arrests were conducted on Ultras members signaling the start of a massive fight between the groups and the state's security apparatus. In the soon to follow Cairo Derby between Ahly and Zamalek on January 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2009, the Ultras received humiliating treatment by the police, who also prevented them from attending the match with their cheering tools and from hanging their banner (as discussed earlier, both are key elements of the Ultras' mentality). Their reaction was to attend the match in complete

silence naming it the “Black Derby”, soon allowing the group to attract a much larger supporter base\textsuperscript{152}.

Moving on to January 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 2011, and during a match between Al Ahly and Masr Al Maqassa, the Ultras groups received the same treatment from the police entering the stadium. In addition to the self-searching, their music instruments were confiscated and they were ordered to put away their banner, an order that the police had been giving the Ultras for months already since an Ahly-Zamalek Derby in May 2010\textsuperscript{153}. During interviews, Interviewee 1 recalls that these orders were not followed and the group insisted on keeping their banner up on the walls of the fences of the terraces. This led to clashes between the Ultras and the police and “rumors were spread among groups' members that arrest warrants have been released for them. However, the police had very little time to put those warrants into effect, as January 25\textsuperscript{th} hit too soon.”

January 25\textsuperscript{th}, 2011: Changes to the Political Opportunity Structure

January 25\textsuperscript{th}, 2011 created a new context for social movements in Egypt. It shaped key changes in dimensions of the political opportunity structure, including a) the relative openness of the political system for collective action, b) the mass public support in the fight against the state apparatus, c) the divides between political elites and shifts in the political power structures in Egypt, and d) the state’s swinging capacity and propensity for repression. Such changes were shaped by and further shaped social movement and mobilization in Egypt, presenting new citizen-state dynamics and allowing citizens the opportunity to reclaim the public sphere, which has been monopolized by the state for decades. This was in turn

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid
reflected on the Ultras groups moving their presence out of the terraces and into the public sphere.

In his book, Mohamed Gamal Beshir shares a script of a video that appeared on Youtube on January 22, 2011 urging people to join the planned demonstrations on January 25\textsuperscript{th} and reassuring them that the Ultras will be able to protect them on the streets. The video also showed clips of clashes between Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights with the police, and a clip of Ultras members cheering "Tunisia… Tunisia!" at a match that was held a few days earlier in a clear reference to what awaits the police ahead\textsuperscript{154}. All interviewees noted that, officially, Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights took no stance towards the revolution. A statement issued by Ultras Ahlawy on their official Facebook page on January 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 2011, stated that the group is a sports group and has no political affiliation and hence, will not take part in the January 25\textsuperscript{th} demonstrations. The statement also affirmed that each individual member is free to take his own stance and that the stance of the individual members does not reflect the stance of the group\textsuperscript{155}. The same message was reiterated by the Ultras White Knights official Facebook group on January 24\textsuperscript{th}, 2011\textsuperscript{156}. However, despite this official stance, many members joined the demonstrations on their own personal accord and urged their friends in the groups to follow their course. Regarding this dynamics and the solidarity among the groups members, journalist Sherif Tarek argues that the:

“Ultras groups are based on friendship, even if you are a newcomer you have to be within that circle of friends. Therefore, when some members decided to go to Tahrir Square [the epicentre of the revolution] it was easy for them to persuade their peers to tag along. It was the same case with the White

\textsuperscript{154} Beshir (2012), p. 70

tومضيق-التراس-وايت-نيابة-نادي/182178341816319.
Knights… Each capo would have convinced around 75 per cent of his juniors to participate in the protests.”

On the Square, the presence of the Ultras members was always very noticeable with their organized entrances and well-prepared lyrics. Despite the different political preferences of individual Ultras groups members, as Interviewee 1 noted, they fully participated in the events of the 18 days because of their “love for Egypt”. Interviewee 2 especially recalls their critical role on January 28th and during the Battle of the Camel. Most of the interviewed Ultras members argue that their presence played a pivotal role through helping reassure protestors as well as protect them against police brutality. With these clashes happening outside of the stadiums and its perimeters, the contention dynamics between the fan groups and the police have dramatically changed moving the arena for contention to the public space and making claims that are not only those of the Ultras, but of the Egyptian masses at large, “Bread, Freedom, Social Justice/Human Dignity”.

After January 25th, 2011: Sustained Opposition to State Actors

In the months to follow January 2011, the Ultras and the state especially the police entered a new contention cycle, where as noted by Interviewee 4, “January 25th broke the wall of fear by the Ultras”. Ultras groups members were now no longer scared to act and react aggressively with the police. Interviewee 2 argued that after January 25th,

"we treat them (the police) in the same way they treat us. They're not better than us. If they insult us, we will insult them. If they beat us up, we will beat them up. If they kill us, we will kill them!"

---

158 The 28th of January is considered to be one of the most violent days of the 18 day demonstrations that led to the ouster of then President Hosni Mubarak.
And following the ouster of Mubarak and the transition of power to the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), the Ultras clashed many times with the police as well as the military forces often standing in the frontlines ahead of protestors.

Their fight against the security forces was also reflected not just in their violent confrontations, but also in their chants and graffiti which became increasingly political. The Ultras before January 2011 have used graffiti to spread and communicate their mentality, and beliefs, as well as affirm presence in the face of rival teams and their Ultras supporters.

Interviewee 1 argued that:

“the graffiti was one of the areas that developed a lot after the revolution in terms of creativity and technique. Each section would have a few members who can draw and paint and who would assume the role of graffitists. Others would also join to help and learn from them.”

The state was opposed to the new flourishing culture of graffiti that was developing among young Egyptians at large. Such a stance could be seen from the decision to paint all walls that had graffiti painted on them in Downtown Cairo following February 11th. The police also harassed graffitists, including the Ultras and in some cases such as in Qena, three members of Ultras White Knights were arrested and detained for painting graffiti that poses a stance against the government159.

Additionally, with the newly acquired courage and freedoms at the terraces, the Ultras chants became increasingly political and critical of the ruling regime. In September 2011, Ultras Ahlawy chanted against the Mubarak regime and his Minister of Interior, Habib Al Adly, during a match against Kima Aswan. The Ultras were faced with an aggressive reaction by the security forces present at the terraces. Interviewee 1, recalls that "the police forces chased us with batons through Salah Salem Road outside of the stadium" and hence several

Ultras members reacted by setting police cars on fire as shown in videos uploaded on Youtube\textsuperscript{160}. He also argued that not only did many Ultras members get injured and felt humiliated by such repression, but 16 of them, including seven juveniles, were also arrested following the clashes\textsuperscript{161}. This led the groups to officially announce their participation in planned demonstrations taking place later in September.

Their official stance from the police and the state security apparatus at large shared on their pages and their plan to participate at upcoming demonstrations, could be argued to present a major shift of the Ultras contention mechanisms vis-à-vis the state. Unlike January 2011, where all Ultras groups claimed that they didn't hold an official stance from the revolution and any participation by members happened on their own personal accord, this time the Ultras took a public confrontational stance against the state as a collective. And their voracious confrontations during the clashes of Mohamed Mahmoud Street and those happening by the Cabinet of Ministers later this year, showed a fearless contention cycle that had started in January 2011. And not only did this shift present a new contention cycle, but it also presented a shift in the purpose of the Ultras, the social movement. Activities, especially during the times of suspension of sports activities or the times matches were held without spectators (an inalienable right for the Ultras), could not revolve around supporting their teams, and rather shifted to fighting collectively against the political regime, which had been rising as a rival to the groups. Additionally, Ultras Ahlawy and White Knights were argued to have joined forces for the demonstrations in solidarity, putting sports rivalries aside, and have marched to the Ministry of Interior\textsuperscript{162}.


On the events leading up to Port Said, interviewee 2 recalls that:

“The murder of Karika, the first Ultras martyr since the two that died during the January 2011 revolution, happened at the hands of the military police during the demonstrations around the Cabinet of Ministers in late 2012. At this point they started setting us up, but we didn't see it. And even when we faced an attack by El Mahalla fans in January 2012, one week before the Port Said massacre, it was nothing like Port Said.”

Mohamed Mostafa Karika, who was murdered during the Cabinet of Ministers events, was remembered through a tifo and banners during a match on December 23rd, 2012, where the Ultras chanted against SCAF and urged people to revolt on January 25th, 2012 against it to bring down their rule. And during Al Ahly match against Al Moqaweleen Al Arab on January 28th, 2012, the Ultras also reacted by chanting “Down with Military Rule” constantly in addition to their chants against the police; thus taking their fight from a fight against one security institution of the state to a fight against the whole ruling regime.

Caption: A banner remembering Karika, an Ultras member who was murdered in December 2011.

---

165 Ibid
The Port Said Massacre and Verdict: Group Solidarity and Contention

On February 1st, 2012, a massacre took place in the Port Said stadium following a match between Al Ahly and Al Masry teams, in which 74 people were murdered, hundreds injured and many thousands traumatized. After the match, Al Masry fans and hired thugs “reportedly armed with knives invaded the pitch” to attack Al Ahly fans in all brutal ways possible. In recalling the events of the black day, Interviewee 2 says:

“When we arrived in Port Said, the Security Chief came to welcome us. There was very little security personnel presence. The lack of usual level of security as we travelled to the Port Said stadium was never the norm in the city. And during the match we could only see one line of security officers and soldiers lining up in front of the terraces. When Al Masry fans started running through the pitch, the security personnel gave them way. We then later discovered as we tried to flee the stadium that the gates had been sealed and locked in a clear conspiracy between the police, the military and Al Masry fans against us. I saw people get murdered in front my own eyes. I could also see dead people being robbed of their valuables, and others getting photographed by their murderers. Al Masry fans are not innocent. I have seen them, just as I have experienced the conspiracy we got trapped in.”

Interviewee 6 noted that “a conspiracy was pretty obvious, because Al Masry fans did not need to invade the match nor attack the supporters of the rival team, when their team had already won the game. This was planned beforehand without the possibility of predicting the results of the match”.

---

Following the massacre, on March 21st, The Egyptian Football (Soccer) Association, issued the following sanctions on Al Masry team:

- Elimination of the team from all games and official competitions for two years
- Suspension of all activities at the Port Said Stadium for three years

This came in addition to a few minor penalties issued for Al Ahly, such as playing with no spectators for four matches due to its fans' violence and misbehavior during the match in Port Said before the killings took place. Such sanctions and penalties were far from satisfying for the Ahly Management Board and also for the Ultras, who organized right after an open sit-in by the Cabinet of Ministers between March and April 2012 demanding 1) to consider the case at the Criminal Court, 2) to hold a fair and quick trial, 3) to hold all indicted parties accountable including the police officers and the Security Chief, Essam Samak, and 4) to consider the dead as martyrs and not victims of usual sports violence. Interviewee 10 argues that many non-Ultras, including political activists and key political figures, either participated or visited the fan groups at the sit-in in support of their cause. The same message was

---


reiterated by Interviewee 3, who noted that “we had meetings with activists to advise us on the best course of action to shape the decision of the state, such as Alaa Abdel Fattah”.

Port Said created yet another contention cycle, where the Ultras for a whole year in the lead up to the verdict changed their contention repertoires. Additionally, the objective of contention changed yet again. The Ultras were no longer interested in national public claims, such as justice for all and freedoms, but rather their claim-making revolved around the objective for retribution for their martyrs, as stated in most conducted interviews. Interviewee 8, notes that “since Port Said, we started mobilizing and rallying the public behind our cause. We were no longer participants in events organized against the regime. We were now the organizers and leaders of those events”. The level of persistence of the Ultras and the mass support they received from the public for their cause led them to eventually achieve the demands of their sit-in and get a schedule for the trial, which was to start in April 2012, which Interviewee 3 described with great pride. Soccer activity was also suspended and the league was cancelled as demanded by the Ultras Ahlawy group.

Many interviewees consider the marches, exquisite graffiti and use of social media to have played a critical role in achieving their demands. Interviewee 2 described their two concurrent rallies organized to the houses of the Interior Minister at the time of the massacre and the Interior Minister at the time, to have pressured the state and to have shown them that the Ultras constitute a power that should not be undermined. The marches to the Attorney General before the start of the trials and following the cancellation of the sanctions of Al Masry team in November 2012 was also another tactic by the Ultras to further press the state and public opinion. Several other marches also attempted to put a halt on daily life activities of Cairenes, including blocking the headquarters of the stock market, the Cairo

---

metro, and the Sixth of October bridge, one of the key important and most heavily used bridges in Cairo. Also, the use of social media, not through public not secret groups as they have done in the past to mobilize Ultras members, have also contributed to the mass support the Ultras received during the course of trial. Such support led the trial to be a case of public opinion, where Egyptians grew anxious to find out the verdict and judge if it is a satisfying one to the families of the martyrs.

Caption: “Retribution” – “Either we get their rights, or we die just like them”\textsuperscript{170}

Caption: “My Brother Stopped Cheering”\textsuperscript{171}


\textsuperscript{171}
Interviewee 10 noted that “the role of the Ultras was key to bring about a fair trial”. The same message was reiterated by Interviewee 1, who added that “We were satisfied with the verdict that came out on January 26th, 2013. 21 defendants were handed down death sentences. The majority of us were happy with the verdicts.” Indeed, the happiness of Ultras Ahlawy was clear through their celebrations on the streets, which many perceived as “naïve and premature, since the verdict was only preliminary and the police officers charged in the case had yet to be sentenced”\(^\text{172}\). Perhaps, the Ultras members saw the verdict as a good indicator for what was about to follow in the trials of the police officers and chief. This ruling, however, was mourned elsewhere. Sarah El Sirgany argues that one of the implications of the stance taken by Ultras Ahlawy and White Knights since the Port Said massacre,

> “has been the fueling of anti-Port Said sentiment in the course of advocating justice for the slain Ultras. The residents of the entire port city were vilified on the night of the massacre on 1 February 2012. And on the morning of 26 January 2013, when over 20 people were shot dead outside the Port Said Prison, the crowd in Cairo took it as cause for further celebrations with anti-Port Said chants. The number of casualties reached 40 as demonstrations continued in Port Said in protest of what was locally deemed an unfair ruling.”\(^\text{173}\)

However, the verdict that came two months later on March 9th, 2013, was all but satisfying to the Ultras. 73 defendants were convicted and received sentences ranging from death sentences, to 25 years, to one year, while 28 were acquitted including many police officers. Interviewee 1 recalled that

> “we found ourselves marching to the Egyptian Football (Soccer) Association without prior plan to protest the verdicts. Suddenly the march was escalated


and many members started setting the building on fire and the next-door club belonging to the police. I didn't participate in burning down the buildings, because I was not really convinced. My leader was ok with it as long as I participated in the march and join the Ultras crowds in their protest.”

This verdict, however, came as a complete shock to residents of Port Said who viewed it as a means to calm down and contain Ultras Ahlawy and the supporters they managed to rally throughout the previous year, and saw the massacre as a way for the police to get even with the Ultras who confronted them since the early days of the revolution in 2011. And hence, the celebrations and the acts of vandalism brought on the Ultras waves of criticism from the public, who stood by the fan groups throughout the previous year. It is also worth noting that the verdict was applauded by the Ahly club board, which created another divide between the fan groups and the club management and made the Ultras as themselves complex existential questions with regards to what and who they constitute and represent.

A few months later, the Egyptian public came to focus on a much different issue than the retribution for the Ultras Ahlawy martyrs. People were not following the updates of the localized Ultras claims and came to focus on much more pressing national claims through Tamarrod leading up to June 30th, 2013 and the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi. Following June 30th, the Ultras retracted from the public sphere back to the terraces (when spectators are allowed in during matches) or to their virtual forums. Interviewee 1 noted that the Ultras' withdrawal from the public sphere is a general trend happening to the Egyptian social movement and civil society scenes, where a culture of fear is starting to grow back in society. Additionally, he adds that “the March 2013 verdict showed us that retribution will not be achieved through courtrooms, but rather will happen by our hands”. Other interviewees added that one day the Ultras will pay back the police and the Al Masry fans, even if that day will not be very soon.

Prospects for Future Political Contention

Due to the very little documented academic research on the Ultras, this chapter relied on anecdotal evidence collected from individual key-informant in-depth structured interviews conducted with individual Ultras founders, leaders, and members; Sydney Tarrow's empirical properties of a social movement; and Tilly's theory on repertoires of contention to identify different types of contention over time, and to recognize changes in those repertoires. It showed that the revolutionary disobedient shared identity of the Ultras groups has naturally placed them as opponents to state actors and institutions, with contentious mechanisms and repertoires that have been largely shifting since January 25th, 2011 and led the Ultras groups to change the mechanisms and their cycles of contention against the Egyptian state’s security apparatus.

The period prior to January 2011 was marked with contention directed solely at police forces by the ultras, namely in stadia over who controls the terraces, what activities are permitted on the terraces, and objecting the occasional harassment and arrest of Ultras members especially before key matches and after any outbreaks of fan violence. After January 2011, the Ultras groups shifted the arena for contention outside of the stadia and covered issues, including freedom, social justice, corruption and state repression. And throughout 2011, the Ultras groups have acted as strong opponents to the police forces and the ruling regime, whether at major confrontations taking place against the state such as the clashes on Mohamed Mahmoud street and in the area around the Cabinet of Ministers. Later in early 2012, the Port Said massacre placed the groups not only as rivals to the security apparatus but to state institutions at large, including the Egyptian judiciary, military and presidency, however this time with a focus on a localized issue of importance to the Ultras group, retribution for the martyrs. Following February, the Ultras led marches, organized sit-
ins and rallied the public behind their cause, which eventually pressured the state into a quick trial and verdict.
Chapter VI
Conclusion

This thesis aimed to present a narrative of a contention cycle that is characteristic of several youth social movements that mobilized against the Egyptian state over the past four years. Since the formal inception of the “Ultras” groups in Egypt in 2007, there has been a rise in the conflict between the Egyptian security apparatus and the soccer fans. And despite their seemingly apolitical role, they began to participate in dissent and engage in a confrontational relationship with the state authorities ever since their inception. This was culminated in the critical role they played during the eighteen days in January and February 2011 and right after the Port Said massacre in 2012 in the days leading up to the verdict in 2013.

What Political Role Was Played by Youth Social Movements

The main research question in this thesis was concerned with the role played by the Egyptian Ultras soccer fans groups against state actors and institutions under authoritarianism in Egypt before and after January 25th, 2011. And in order to answer this question I attempted to answer the following sub-questions:

a) How did the Ultras groups, as a new social movement in Egypt, emerge in a historically specific context and attract a large supporter base?

b) What form of political activism and contention did the Egyptian Ultras groups engage in before and after January 25th, 2011?

c) How and why did the nature of political activism and struggle against state authorities change after January 25th, 2011?

d) How did the state perceive the political contentious role played by the Ultras and how did it respond to their developing mechanisms of contention? And
e) What is the potential for the Ultras’ political role going forward and how will their relationship with state authorities look like in the future?

The Ultras History and Evolution

While academic literature on the Ultras globally remains very little and does not go in-depth into the different Ultras groups in the different countries, the growth of the phenomenon in Europe and North Africa have led to increased pressure to at least identify a definition and key elements of all the groups. Similarities between the European Ultras and their Egyptian counterparts are very hard to miss in many aspects of the Ultras collective identity, membership patterns, structure and organization, their view on violence, and their rivalries with the state institutions and police. And despite the fact that the European Ultras are not a one cohesive group, there exist many striking similarities across the different groups since the establishment of the first Ultras group in Brazil in 1939, and its influence on the European culture of sports cheering through the Torcida Split in 1950s, a formal association of Hajduk Split fans in the Croatian Dalmatia region. And since then, the movement has developed and expanded throughout Europe.

And as demonstrated throughout the thesis, the protest, cheering, and financing techniques are also shared not only by the European Ultras but also by the Egyptian Ultras. A major identity commonality shared the Egyptian and European Ultras is their rivalries, which generally creates challenges for them in an attempt to fulfill their purpose, i.e. support and cheer for their team. The Ultras worldwide, not just in Egypt, share some intrinsic common rivalries against outside authority at large and mainly have three rivalries, namely they stand against the media, modern soccer institutions, and the police. They perceive the police in particular as infringing upon their rights to cheerfully support their teams. Such rivalry is also

---

often aggravated by the police attempts of repression of the groups inside and outside the stadiums culminating in the murder of several fans.

Political Role and Contention of the Ultras

Building on Tilly’s framework of political contention and its repertoires, this thesis has demonstrated, that the global disobedient shared identity of the Ultras groups has naturally placed them as opponents to state actors and institutions, with contentious mechanisms and repertoires that have largely changed since the January 25th 2011. The conflict between the police and the Ultras, which was hardly viewed as a political one, became increasingly politicized after January 25th. Consequently, the Ultras groups changed the mechanisms and repertories of their contention against the Egyptian state’s security apparatus, and openly spoke up about national issues and concerns inside and outside of stadia, including freedom, social justice, corruption and state repression. It was also argued that with a changing political opportunity structure which emulates the structure present during the Mubarak regime and with the resolution of the Port Said massacre and convicting its "perpetrators", the Ultras have withdrawn from the political scene and reverted back to their natural seats in the stadia. Following the verdict, which was largely viewed as unsatisfying for Ultras members, they curbed their frustration with the hope that one day they will be able to get retribution with their own hands.

And according to Tarrow's definition of the empirical properties of a social movement176, the groups' collective challenge is constituted of the three rivalries they have. Due to their rebellious fearless identity, their hate for injustices, and their strategy of opposition to outside authority, the Ultras often are challenged and do challenge their rivals. Additionally, when looking at the second empirical evidence, namely the common purpose,

176 Tarrow (2011), p.5
one could note that prior to the Port Said massacre in February 2012, the Ultras' common purpose and their essence for existence anywhere in the world was mainly to support their teams during times of victory and defeat. However after Port Said, members cited that deviation from the main purpose, i.e. cheering for and supporting the team, was mainly due to the murder of their friends, whose murderers they wanted to bring to justice and also due to the suspension of soccer activity in Egypt for some long and intermittent periods. However, this deviation still brought all members together under one common purpose, namely: "Retribution for the Martyrs".

Changes to Repertoires of Contention

Also looking at the Ultras’ changing repertoire of contention, this thesis analyzed the adversarial relationship between the fan groups and the state security apparatus. It demonstrated that the disobedient shared identity of the Ultras groups has naturally placed them as opponents to state actors and institutions, with cycles of contention that have changed since January 25th, 2011.

The period prior to January 2011 was marked with contention directed solely at police forces by the ultras, namely in stadia over who controls the terraces, what activities are permitted on the terraces, and objecting the occasional harassment and arrest of Ultras members especially before key matches and after any outbreaks of fan violence. January 2011 led the Ultras group to move their contention outside of stadia, and protest against issues of national importance such as freedom, social justice, corruption and state repression. And throughout 2011, the Ultras groups have fought voraciously against the police forces and protested against the ruling regime, whether at major confrontations taking place against the state such as the clashes on Mohamed Mahmoud street and in the area around the Cabinet of Ministers. The Port Said massacre taking place in February 2012 further changed that
contentious relationship and placed the groups as rivals to state institutions at large, however this time with a focus on a localized issue of importance to the Ultras group, retribution for the martyrs, for which they rallied the public behind. This eventually pressured the state into a quick trial and verdict in January and March 2013, which were largely viewed as unsatisfying for Ultras members, as it acquitted many defendants including police officers implicated in the massacre. When full retribution as they had envisioned it didn’t occur the Ultras curbed their frustration with the hope that one day they will be able to get retribution with their own hands.

Future of Contention Vis-à-Vis the State

Since the verdict in the case of the Port Said massacre, the Ultras have growingly detached themselves from politics and acts of contention vis-à-vis the state, which many perceived as unfair and unsatisfying as it acquitted many defendants including police officers implicated in the massacre. Such detachment could be argued to have come largely due to the injustice the felt they received from the state and hence, various forms of contention were believed to not lead them anywhere. Through the interviews, many Ultras members seemed to genuinely believe what was recently shared in an official statement by Ultras Ahlawy following the recent court verdict ordering a retrial after accepting appeals of the defendants: “In the end we are not awaiting anything from the judiciary, because retribution for the blood [of those who died] will only come by our own hands,” the statement said\textsuperscript{177}. As scary as this statement and the general sentiment felt by youth, who experienced the death of the close friends, is, it can actually be seen in action in the most recent killings incident that have taken place in February 8\textsuperscript{th}, 2015 before a Zamalek match. Unlike the Ultras reaction through their

---

organized collective action in the aftermath of the February 2012 killings, the Ultras White Knights and other Ultras groups for that matter only clashed with the police forces at the site of events and conducted a few incidents of vandalism in the week to follow. Stricter stadium bans were recently introduced where the premier league was announced by the Cabinet of Ministers to be resumed only one month after the incident, unlike the state reaction to the Port Said massacre.

And unlike the violent reaction of Ultras Ahlawy, when the premier league announced to be resumed, Ultras White Knights have not engaged in collective action of contention against the state following the resumption decision. This could be attributed to the general fear for collective action as several interviewed Ultras member put it, but it also could signal anger brewing under the surface that might erupt one day as another Ultras member noted. This remains to be seen. But what is now clear that the changes in the political opportunity structure following June 30th and the lack of retribution as experienced by the Ultras have acted as major elements that have not promoted collective contention against the police and state institutions for almost two years, and could be argued to continue to act a block on the road for some time to come impacting the groups’ abilities and willingness for contention. Additionally, in May 2015 the Court of Appeals ruled for the disbandment of Ultras groups and to categorize them as terrorist organizations, a ruling that will further impact the groups’ collective mobilization and engagement. Yet, it still needs to be noted that the current detachment does not by any means signal a complete withdrawal from contention, given that the majority of interviewees agreed that retribution from the police and from Al Masri fans will only come with their own hands not through trials and courts.
References


Bayat, Asef, Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East. Amsterdam University Press, 2012

Beinin, Joel; Vairel, Frédéric, Social Movements, Mobilization, Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa, Stanford University Press, 2013.


McAdam, Doug, McCarthy, John D., Zald, Mayer N., Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

McAdam, Doug; Tarrow, Sidney G.; Tilly, Charles. Dynamics of Contention. Port Chester, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2001.


